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SLAICE

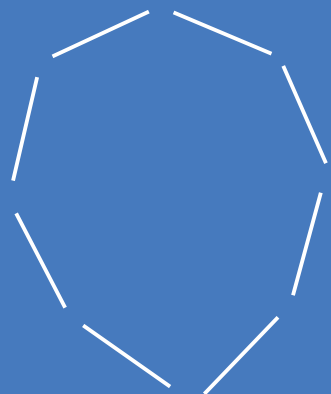
A Slice of SAICE



Editorial



We present to you the 6th edition of "SLAICE, a slice of SAICE". This year's issue has a theme - Expressions. After a 2-year hiatus, we shall see how people across all age groups express themselves through articles and stories, poems, personal projects, handmade crafts, and photos.



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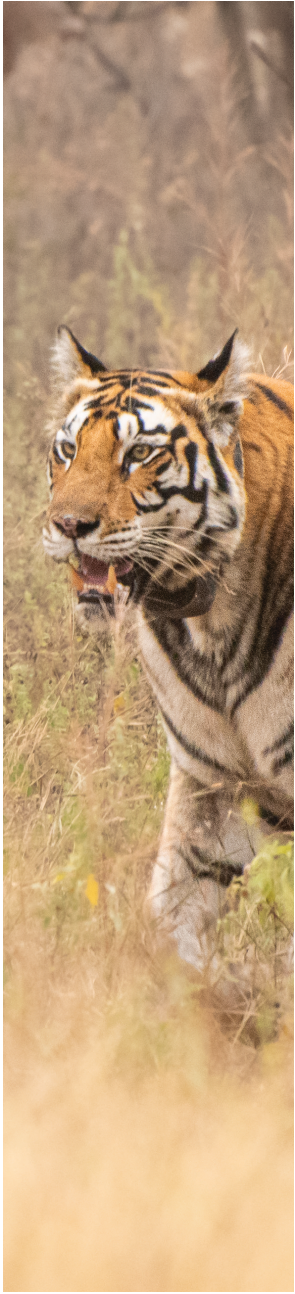


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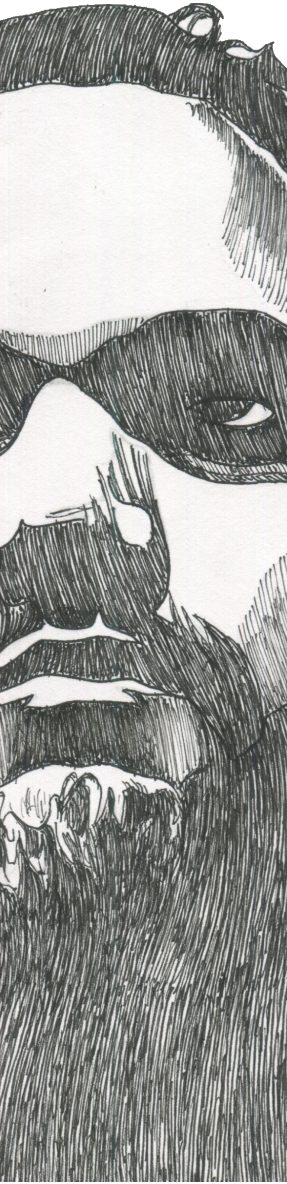




Photo by Ramyak S

Speaking to Ranganath Da

The Press, the Ashram, and Life in Pondicherry

Ramyak S | K2

Can you briefly talk about how and when you joined the Ashram?

My father came to know about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo before independence in 1943, while we were in a small town in Hyderabad state.

Nizamabad was small then, now, obviously, no more. My father worked under Nizam's government. Due to his work, he knew Urdu because all the official records were written in Urdu. While he was working there, he was in touch with a Maharashtrian man called Kanta Rao. He gave my father the book, 'The Mother', and when my father read it, he was fascinated.

He told my mother, "I'm going to the Ashram. It's entirely up to you whether you want to come or not. I'll make all the arrangements if you choose to go with me. But I am definitely going."

I think my father came to the Ashram in 1943. At the time, he met with a good deal of resistance because, in those days, nobody was allowed to come to the Ashram without permission. You could come to Pondicherry, but you couldn't come to the Ashram and expect an interchange with ashramites. Such an exchange was frowned upon in the Ashram because 'outside' influence could disturb the sadhaks.

Fortunately, he met a Telugu family and they fed and lodged him. When my father had a darshan of the Mother, he asked her if he could stay in the Ashram and the Mother allowed him and the entire family too.

In 1945, my father brought us all here. By then, my mother too had been convinced to come here. She must have been around 25 years old when we moved to Pondicherry. We were three siblings; my elder sister, four years older than me (Nirata Di), myself, and a brother four years younger than me. We joined the Ashram school in 1945, but there was hardly anybody. The Playground had already been constructed - we would have some games and simple exercises etc. During that time, only the kindergarten existed. The senior classes had not begun yet. I remember that Pavita, an English lady, was our kindergarten teacher.

In 1952, I think the present school building was bought. You must have seen a picture of the Mother on the inauguration day, cutting the ribbon near the front gate of the school. By the time we were 17-18 years old, the Higher Course as you now know it began and we were the first batch to be introduced to it.



Photo by Ramyak S

I graduated in 1962. I was in the Higher Course for four years. We were allowed one more year. When I finished my schooling, I wrote to the Mother and she said that I could work in the Ashram press because it needed more workers. I had already been in touch with workers from the press. I suggested that I could work there but I also told the Mother that she could send me wherever she wanted me to work. In the end, I was sent to the press in 1962 and was put in charge of the 'Job Work' section. My particular work consisted of printing letterheads, visiting cards, invitation cards, notices, etc. I worked there for about 40 years.

Could you elaborate on your work in the press?

In 1962, the Mother bought a groundnut godown for 2,35,000 rupees. We now

know it as the Ashram press. Under me, there were about 25 to 30 paid workers. The ashramites mainly worked in the binding department.

Before the Ashram press was established, if there were any books to be published, they were all sent to Hyderabad. When it was decided that the Ashram should have a press of its own, the Mother called Pillai, the manager of the press in Hyderabad. He came in 1945 to set up the Ashram press and helped buy the first printing machines. At that time, there was no composition and no binding machinery. We would sit down to fold and stitch by hand. Until 1950, everything was hand-operated, then came the automatic machines and the monotype machines. You had to tap the keys on a keyboard and for each key that you pressed, a roll of paper would be punched and that would determine the position of the

letter. The letters were monotypes. Later, Linotype printing also began. This way, we could print an entire line instead of changing each type by hand. Now, of course, everything is done digitally; you can either print out a hard copy or have a soft copy.

In 1972, 'The Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library' (SABCL) was published. What was the atmosphere like in the press at that time?

In the early days, Naren Das Gupta, Manoj Da's father, was in charge. He had been a professor of philosophy at Calcutta University and here, the Mother made him manager. But keep in mind, the Mother was the real manager. Each department would report to her and she would follow up with them daily. Every department was guided by Her. It is very well known that she was an excellent manager because she was managing, not with her mind but with her spiritual capacity.

In 1962, as I said, new machines were brought. Sri Aurobindo's birth centenary was approaching and for the first time, his works were to be released in a set of 30 volumes.

Jayanta Lal then began the Ashram archives department and said that he would supply all the material for the publication. Their work was to collect the material and put it in order following the sequence of articles that had been published by Sri Aurobindo in the *Arya* magazine.

We would start at 5 in the morning and go on till 8 at night. At the time, it was a

big challenge for us. Jayanta Lal handled everything and the Mother too kept a constant eye on the work.

We published two editions - the deluxe and the popular. The popular edition was cloth bound and made of ordinary paper. Whereas, the deluxe edition, bound in silk with gold symbols of Sri Aurobindo, was published on special paper.

What was the work done for the Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo?

Sri Aurobindo used to publish one chapter from *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, etc. for the *Arya* magazine. The chapters were later compiled into books with the aforementioned names. As a lot of new material was found, such as Sri Aurobindo's letters to sadhaks and articles written by Sri Aurobindo in Calcutta for the 'Bande Mataram', these were later compiled into books.

When the SABCL set got completely sold out, for Sri Aurobindo's 125th birth anniversary, it was decided to bring out the Collected Works of Sri Aurobindo (CWSA). The work is not yet fully completed.

The 125th year of Sri Aurobindo's birth anniversary was in 1997. The work for the CWSA started in 1995. Though mind you, the work is still not finished. The Index has still to be issued. Anyway, 37 volumes were published for the CWSA, whereas the SABCL has only 30 volumes.

What was your role?

By 1985, I was put more or less in charge because by then Jayanta Lal and Robi Da had withdrawn. So, I was left with holding the fort. From 1985 to 2000, I was never the manager but I was doing all the actual work of one.

Anything else you would like to add about the press?

Just after I left the press in 2000, there was a proposal to publish a book on flowers and their significance. The earlier publication was in black and white and this time the Archives decided to print it in color. Therefore, I had to go to Singapore to get the print done. That type of quality color printing was still not available around here and not certainly in our press. We had single- or two-color machines but we needed a four-color one. Now, we do the reprints of that in our press because now we have got a four-color machine.

What did you do after leaving the press?

After leaving the press in 2000, I started reading Sri Aurobindo intensively for about 4-5 years. I used to study in the morning and work in the Archives in the afternoon. It was about then that I was asked to teach in Knowledge. I was hesitant about it. I didn't want to - I was quite happy with my life. But the suggestion to teach in Knowledge came in constantly and one day it struck me that why not follow this up and see what could happen? Therefore, I went and spoke to Jugal Da and he said, "Han,

khub bhalo hobe, esho." (Yes, you come to Knowledge - it will be very good)

So, in 2006, I started teaching in Knowledge. I first started teaching Indian philosophy because all the Indian philosophy teachers had either passed away or were not active anymore. I told Jugal Da that I didn't know anything about the subject and his response was, "Podbe, pode shekhao." (You will read, read and teach!)

Jugal Da had enough confidence in me to teach the subject. In time, I started teaching 'The Life Divine', and 'The Synthesis of Yoga'. Later, 'The Secret of the Veda' was added too. I continued this work for up to 14 years. I don't officially teach in Knowledge anymore but I take classes for some students at my place. So, that brings everything up to date.

Can you imagine yourself living in the outside world?

No. After I finished my studies in 1960, I was like in two minds we can say. I wanted to maybe have a taste of the outside life. I applied to some places. We had to first give a written exam. I wrote the exam for one of the particular companies. There were about five hundred participants and I was called in first. They asked me many things. I said that I was from the Ashram and they asked what work I was doing there. They further asked me if I would be able to fit in the outside world. So, I said that it was possible that I might not. I was frank. Later I realized that it worked against me (laughter) - fortunately! I remember, one day I was praying to the Mother to fail

me in that exam (laughter) because I needed to be here (referring to the Ashram) internally but my mind, body, and life wanted 'the outside' and I wasn't aware of it. After a while, I realized that this was my place. So, yes there was a phase of hesitation but now it is impossible for me to imagine a life outside Ashram.

Though, sometimes due to the press, I often had to go outside. Some of us had to attend conferences, seminars, and exhibitions of the latest machinery to learn about the latest technology and equipment. It was important to keep track of the new machines coming into the printing market and to keep in touch with our suppliers for their best service. People used to say that I was going outside too often but it was always with the Mother's permission. But I was not willing to permanently live away from the Ashram. When I had written to Mother about my dilemma, she said, "If you want to, you can go out and experience but do not go out of India." But finally, I decided to stay.

My father didn't want me to live or work in the outside world. One day, he asked me very hesitantly about my decision - all my classmates at that time were going to Lycée Francais and to universities to get a degree. When I told my father I wouldn't be going, he was so happy. He started shedding tears.

Do you think that you have been an ideal sadhak of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram?

Very far from it. We are all struggling to reach this level where there is no desire and no ego. How can I claim that I have

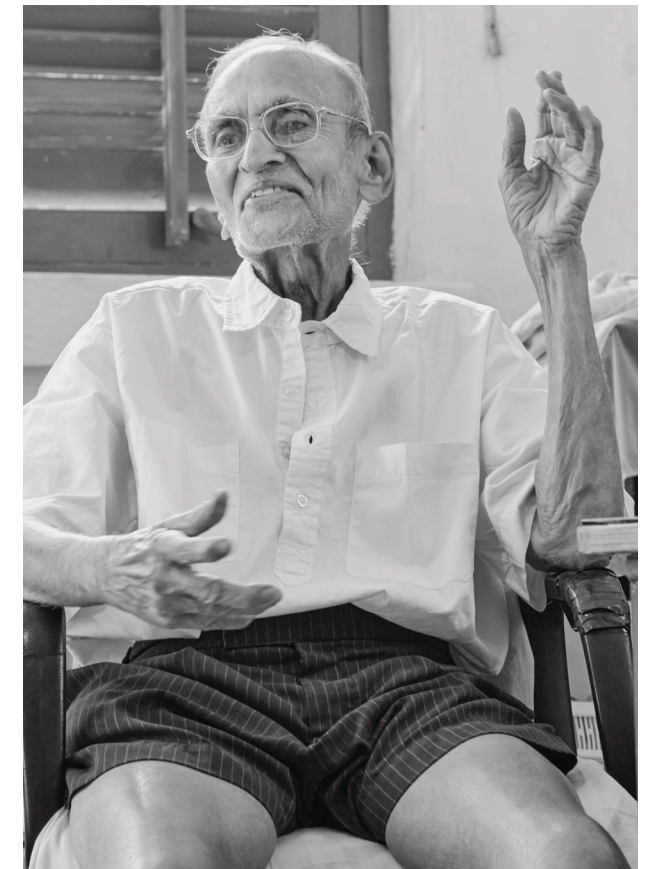


Photo by Ramyak S

reached that - that's impossible. It's an ideal that we are all trying to reach. And that doesn't mean that we are ordinary people because we are trying; others don't even try. If it were me, maybe I could have reached a certain level with other traditional yogas, but Sri Aurobindo's yoga is not simple. It takes a long time. But there are indications that you are on the right path. I am happy that I am on the right track, but I have not reached the goal yet at all. For me, it is still very far (laughter).

What do you value the most?

Physically and ideally, the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's contact has the maximum value. Those who come here nowadays don't have that physical

experience anymore. That is the most valuable thing that could happen to you in life.

In 1970, I received a ring from the Mother. My father got this ring made and gave it to Champaklal to give it to me on my birthday. The Mother gave it to me and I took it in my hand, but Champaklal was there, standing and he said, "No, no, no. Ask Mother to put it on your finger."

The Mother smiled and she put it on my finger. This physical touch has so much value. That is the highest value you can get here. The contact with them and the pursuit of life in the Ashram is more valuable now. And that must bear fruit. If it doesn't, then life has no meaning.

This may sound like a childish question - if the Mother would have been still alive, physically, what would you have asked or told her?

I would have told her that I was a damn fool all these days (laughter). I never understood your value. Now I am beginning to understand and I am trying to follow your words that you have given us. I would have asked her to help me follow her words in a better way - though I know that she has been helping me, I want concrete help from her.

Her protection and guidance were always there but now I can feel them more consciously. I can feel them.

What has been, or is, your approach to reading the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo? And has it evolved?

I keep reading them because I feel that every time I read, I am understanding more and my knowledge is also increasing.

There is not enough time to read everything, but I want to. I am just about to re-read the 'Letters on Yoga'. There are four volumes of that and there is immense guidance there. Therefore, when you read it the second time, you understand much more.

So, my approach is that I try to constantly keep in touch with their works. And that happens, to a certain extent, automatically. I am teaching, though it has become quite less now. But other activities, like teaching to those who are not students, ashramites, or people from outside the Ashram, have increased. I am also having discussions with Narad and he is putting up videos of these discussions on YouTube.

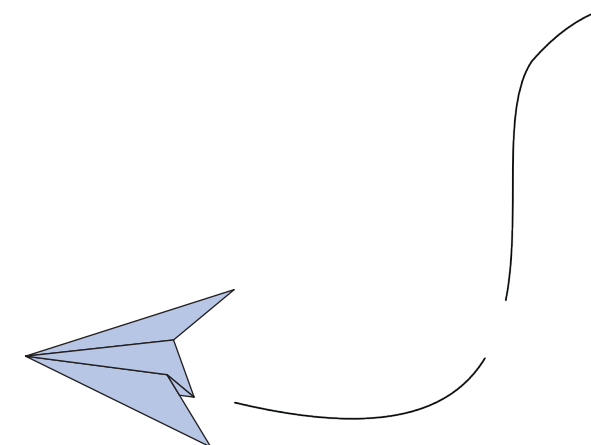
For the students who are enthusiastic to read the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, what would be your advice to them?

To those who are particularly interested, the advice I give when they graduate from Knowledge is to keep in touch with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo throughout. If you want to read Sri Aurobindo's books, read. But I don't insist that they should, though they should keep in touch with Them - understand their value and try to remember them wherever they are. Even if they want to lead an 'outside' life, it's fine. But I will never advise them to start living in the Ashram and lead a yogic life. That's a bit of advice over which I have

no authority because they have to choose on their own. I would never look down upon someone who opts for a life outside the Ashram because that person may need that 'outside' experience.

So, I can't tell everybody that they must read Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's books. Each one is free to decide what they want to do, but if they opt for it, nothing is better than that. Even if you are living in the outside world, don't lose contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It is a piece of advice that I can always give because that's the best advice one can give and it's not an imposition.

Be in contact with the Mother and Sri Aurobindo - that's the greatest gift that life can offer. You may not realize it now but you will realize it at some point.



A Love For Paper-Folding

Aadya R | EAVP 6

I was first introduced to origami by a childhood friend when I was 8 years old. The thin, beautiful Japanese paper and the delicacy and precision of the folds were what drew me to this craft. I started by folding simple models every day until I developed the dexterity to move on to folding tougher models, which now take me much longer to work on (up to 5-8 hours a day).

Over the years, practicing origami has played a big role in my self-development. It has developed my patience, sharpened my focus, and made me as tenacious as ever, especially when the models I work on for hours don't look the way they were supposed to. And the best thing is that I am now immune to cramps of all kinds and soreness from sitting in one place for too long!



Origami by Aadya R





Peace Through Art

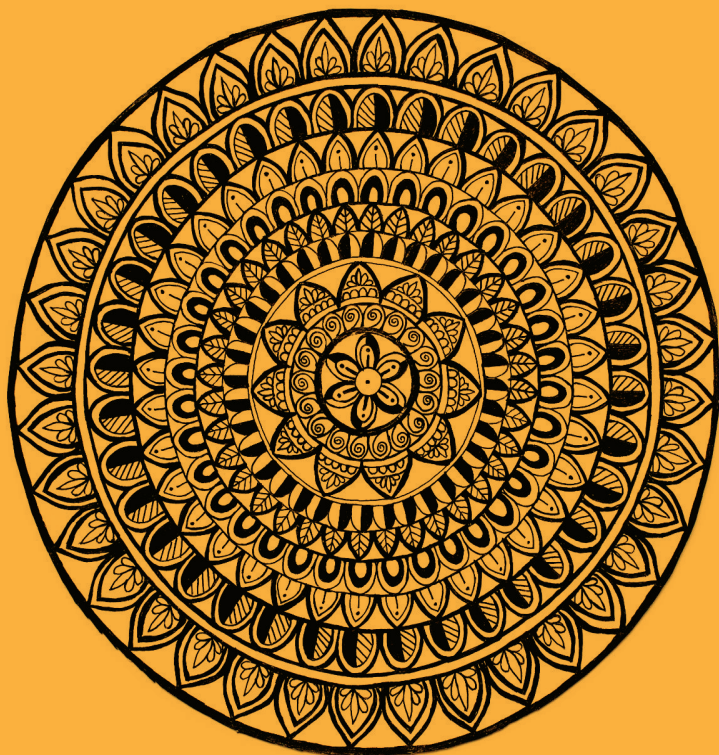
Meera J | K2

When I first came across a Mandala drawing on the internet, I found it to be beautiful and couldn't suppress the urge to draw it myself. The word 'Mandala' in Sanskrit means a Circle or Center. Beginning from the central point and working my way outwards, I drew layers of radiating patterns around it.

When I tried drawing Mandalas for the first time, I realized it was not as easy as it looked and required a lot of patience which I didn't have. Hence, I decided to start with small Mandalas and as I got better at drawing them, I attempted bigger ones.

When drawing Mandalas, I attempt sometimes to replicate the image of a Mandala I have in mind and on other occasions, I don't think about it and go with the flow of my pen. Earlier, I often found myself drawing even when I wasn't fully concentrated, which resulted in me making unwanted mistakes. Now, when I am aware of losing focus, I stop for a while and continue later.

It has been about a year since I started drawing Mandalas and I find the process to be soothing and peaceful.



Artwork by Meera J

Digital Creativity

Anahita S | EAVP 4



Illustration by Anahita S

Ever since I had the opportunity to use an iPad with an Apple Pencil, I have been drawing on the screen more often than on paper. Not only is it easier to adjust and manipulate drawings on the screen but one can also create drawings more quickly.

Unfortunately, I didn't have enough time to dedicate to digital drawing apart from the occasional Sunday. Recently, however, I had a project for my class and spent over 2 weeks making 60 drawings. This process enabled me to learn new techniques to draw. For example, when drawing digitally, one can use different brush widths, colors, and textures at the same time. As a result, I got more comfortable using the iPad itself.

The challenge of using the iPad for digital drawing is that my eyes get physically tired. Moreover, I would often get lost browsing during 'short breaks', which always resulted in me wasting a lot of time.

Ink to Emotions

Prachi P | EAVP 6

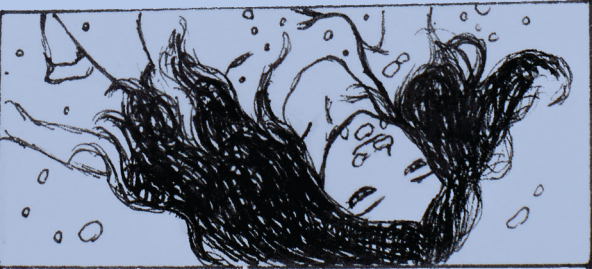
I have chosen drawing as a medium because that's something that always came naturally to me. My father, my grandfather, and my sister are all good at drawing; perhaps it runs in my blood.

During the lockdown, I used to draw almost every day, and spend at least a good hour on it. As a person who doesn't have much patience, my drawings end up being completed within an hour. Recently, I have shifted to making quick sketches of people, during breaks or when I feel bored. They usually finish within 5 minutes.

A challenge that arises often is when I don't get a person's features right. Like all things that improve with practice, the more I draw, the better I shall be.



Illustrations by Prachi P





ARTWORK

Meditation, My Way

Ritaja M | EAVP 6

In Sanskrit, a Mandala means circle or chakra. The term Mandala is derived from the root sound "manda", which means to decorate. Hinduism and Buddhism both use Mandalas as spiritual symbols to represent the universe. These circles with intricate designs symbolize wholeness, harmony, and the cycle of life. Mandala designs, which have geometric shapes and a focal point in the center, are believed to represent different aspects of the universe. They are used for meditation, rituals, and worship.

As a beginner, I knew nothing about this form of art. To escape boredom during the lockdown, I watched a video on YouTube titled, "Things to do when you're bored". That's how I learned about Mandalas, became interested in the art, and began drawing them. The first Mandalas I made weren't perfect, since the patterns weren't symmetrical. However, the pieces did improve with practice. On the other hand, I had not realized how much of an impact drawing Mandalas had on my body and mind.

After trying to perfect every shape and learning how to design a Mandala for 2 to 3 weeks, I was exhausted and stopped drawing them for a while. However, within a few days, I noticed that I was able to concentrate for a longer period of time. I was not bored as frequently and could feel a certain silence in my mind.

While studying the effects of Mandalas on the mind and body, I learned that these are effective tools for containing negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, or anger, and that there exists a Mandala therapy that helps people experience solace. Every symbol and pattern has a different effect on the mind. I was able to calm myself whenever I needed to by overcoming the unnecessary activities of my mind. As a result, for the rest of the lockdown, I wasn't bored and did not need to find activities to occupy myself. And unknowingly, I had learned to meditate.



Artwork by Ritaja M

The Mosquito of Kokura

Vibhu D | K2

A mosquito settled on the crown of a black chess king piece. The piercing gaze of two Japanese road construction workers shifted from the arrangement of the chessboard to the stationary mosquito. Without a second's delay, Yoshida, who was playing black, brushed his fingers on top of the piece, skimming its crown just enough to wobble it. The mosquito was gone. A smug smile formed on his opponent's face. Some of the workers who had gathered around them understood the meaning of this smirk and stared at Yoshida, who had covered his mouth in dismay.

"We are playing with the touch rule. You *have* to move your king."

Excitement and disappointment erupted in the group around them. If Yoshida moved his king, he would lose his queen, and would therefore lose the game from a clear winning position. Even he couldn't help but chuckle embarrassingly, as he picked his king up and placed it horizontally on the board.

"We'll be laying the asphalt today and not tomorrow, gentleman," said Yoshida in a mock enthusiastic tone. His opponent raised his fist in a victorious gesture.

Under a clear summer morning sky, the group set to work on the streets of Kokura, a coastal town in Japan that remained humid throughout the summer. Some still teased Yoshida on his anticlimactic game, but soon began

working briskly to escape the hot and humid air. The Mitsuba road construction project deadline was three days away, but the morning's game of chess meant that they would be excused much earlier. The hot tar and gravel soon carpeted the mud streets, and a pungent odor of petroleum filled the streets of Kokura. The sun baked the new asphalt cement into place, and the workers set the road rollers in motion by sunset. By nightfall, the new asphalt roads were a part of Kokura. With their sweaty and coal-smeared faces, Yoshida and his team deemed the task complete.

The evening sea breeze blew in to welcome the fresh, hot asphalt. In return, the roads released the heat they had absorbed during the day and passed it over to the humid wind blowing above them. Large volumes of humid sea breeze were warmed in this manner, which consequently led to their expansion. Having their density reduced, these volumes of air teeming with water vapor now rose in turn, and once they reached a sufficiently colder altitude, their vapor condensed and created tiny droplets of water. The continuous heat emission of the new asphalt and the incessant flow of the sea breeze throughout the night meant that by the next morning, Kokura had a thin blanket of white clouds as its lid.

The date was 6th August 1945. Yoshida and his team regrouped in their atelier to wind up and sat down afterward for some more games of chess. High above

them, above the thin sheet of clouds, an American plane named 'Bockscar' transmitted the following message back to its base: "Cloudy weather. Visual confirmation of target not received. Setting course for the secondary target, Nagasaki."

Afterword

The primary target of the 'Fat Man' bomb was indeed Kokura, but as mentioned above, the secondary target, Nagasaki, was chosen instead due to Kokura's unexpected cloudy weather. The causation of that unforeseen cloudy weather which saved Kokura is my fabrication.



Illustration by Harumi M

The Spirit of a Writer

Jayati B | EAVP 5

Golden light pierced the soft skin of the clouds that hung in the sky. The rising sun breathed life into the sky once again. She smiled at the fading moon, bidding goodbye for the day.

Looking down at her paper, she read her words again. She spoke her words into existence in the shape of soft whispers ringing out in the otherwise silent room. Writing and rewriting, you'd find her editing over and over again. The first draft could never bleed perfection, but would it be so bad to hope?

Whenever she'd bring her cup of coffee to her lips, the taste of instant coffee and soft foam would flood her mouth. The caffeine would electrify every nerve of hers with newfound energy. Newfound energy that'd turn her even more sleepy when it wore off.

Her papers would be sprawled everywhere. These papers would include countless marked-up, scrawled-out first drafts, pages with drawings and doodles shaded in the color of distractions, and numerous pages filled with dialogue and life.

Finally, she'd give her work to get an opinion from others. She'd try her best to read her critic's face, looking for a small, humored smirk or a pressing of lips in amusement, maybe the widening of eyes in shock or the worst, the poker face that'd primarily translate to boredom.

Scrutinizing every review and every criticism, there would be no end to analyzing and overthinking. She'd fear mediocrity and replacement, manifesting out of the desire for greatness and success. To be the best writer to not only 'the outsiders' but also to herself.

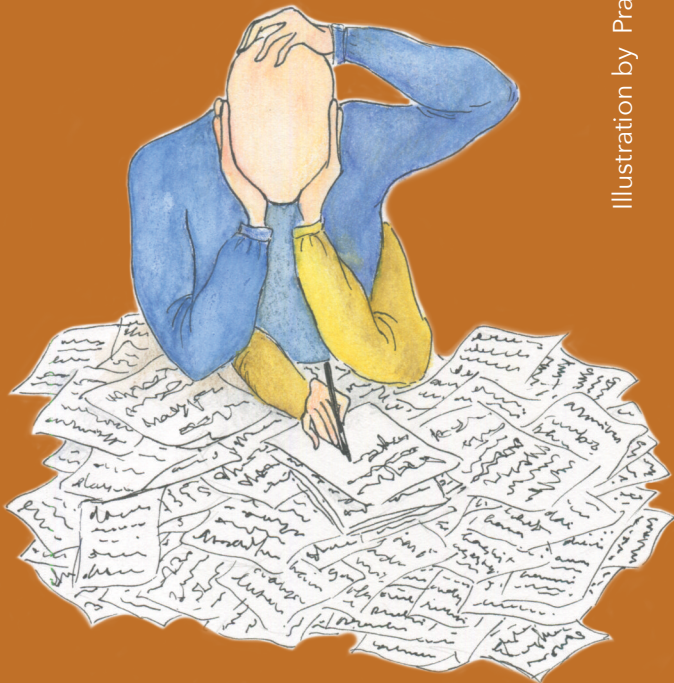
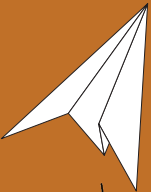


Illustration by Prachi P



Ouroboros

Narendran K | K2

His eyes bore a timeless scar, far older than the body they belonged to. They narrated stories that the body seemed too young to have experienced. They had loved, grieved, suffered, and hurt. But now, and for far too long, they bend underneath the yoke of guilt.

Chiranjeev sat alone, head immaculately shaved except for the small tuft at the end and ash spread over his forehead; the image of a devout worshipper of Shiva. With the magnificent temple of Rameshwaram a hundred kilometers behind, and the ruined buildings of the ghost town Dhanushkodi surrounding him, he seemed set in some ancient bygone era. Except for the time-machine whirling behind him.

In his mind, he filled up the missing parts of the ruins with lively images of Dhanushkodi that he had known and lived in. But as soon as he did that, the incident that had caused him to run away flashed into his mind, blinding him, refusing to let him think or recollect. His face stiffened with horror, before the memory wore off. He returned to his usual expression of calm.

“It’s time,” he decided. He got up unhurriedly, walked towards the time machine, and through the humongous ellipse that took him to another era.

The difference was immediate. The air was sweeter, the sky donned a lighter blue, the soft hustle-bustle of Dhanushkodi could be heard in the

background. It was almost as he had remembered it. A plan based purely on his memories was bound to have faults if the memories were faulty themselves.

“I guess relying entirely on a hundred-year-old memory was not the best idea,” he chided himself.

But still having faith in his plan, he walked into the jungle bordering Dhanushkodi.

Chiranjeev went through the advice and information given to him by a chronophysicist named Jason. Jason had advised him to do the smallest and least disruptive action that would change the event he wanted to. An action by an object out of its time, if too impactful, could completely change the timeline. Chiranjeev had constructed his entire plan around that principle.

Grimy and sweaty, he trudged on through the forest. He had about a day left for the hunt, but it seemed more and more hopeless. His legs were sore, his arms bore multiple scratches from hostile thorns and his watering eyes were failing him due to the lack of sleep. His trapping net begged to be placed down, but nevertheless, he resisted and carried on. One more night of work would be well worth multiple lifetimes of happiness.

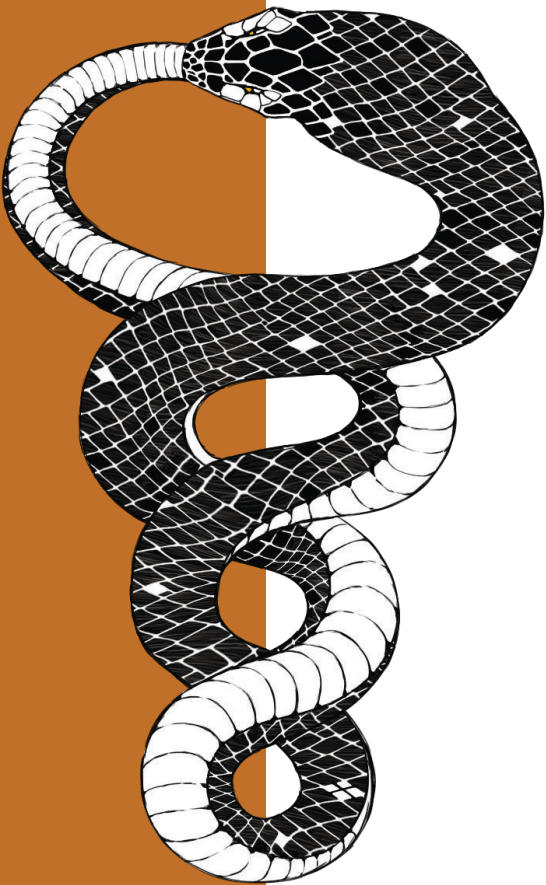
As he trudged through the forest for about an hour, the same old soreness from that night sprouted up his legs, the

same old scratches reappeared on his shoulders, and the same old thorns embedded in his arms. Unfortunately, his destination was deep in the forest. Sweaty and grimy, he carried on. He had a day left to change his past, and with each step, he became more and more hopeful.

Chiranjeev finally relented a little to his body and leaned against a tree. After a few minutes of rest, he willed himself to get up, but his knees collapsed under him and he sat down again. And this time, his eyes closed.

He sighed with relief as he finally reached his destination, a small glade, lit up by silver moonlight. The ground was covered with thick bushes and grass, perfect for the placement of traps. He tried to remember clearly. There were many traps in the clearing. And if he was correct, this was the one that activated that night. He cautiously tiptoed to the area of his trap and parted the grass with his hands. And there lay the trap, its jaws wide open and waiting. From the folds of his veshti, he pulled out a packet and emptied it onto the spring of the trap.

Illustration by Harumi M



"This should do it," he thought to himself. The powder will rust the spring, so that when it activates, the trap won't close properly, allowing the victim to escape. No one would suspect interference and would assume that the trap was just defective. He looked at the trap, taking a moment to inspect his work. Suddenly, as if he was transported into a nightmare, the man he had hunted appeared in front of him, the trap gripping mercilessly onto his leg, one of his eyes slashed, and his shaved head bleeding. He looked puzzled and baffled. Chiranjeev scrambled away from the vision as it dissolved. And then the jaws of a hidden trap closed around his leg.

He woke to the jarring sound of the jaws of his trap closing. He scrambled up and followed the sound of his victim struggling. He picked up his pace, his eyes and head cleared. He nimbly moved through the forest that he knew so well. He stopped at the border of a glade, panting and waiting a minute to catch his breath. In the dim moonlight, he could see a figure struggling, hands gripping his leg. Chiranjeev slowly stalked his unaware prey, and when he was close enough, he flung his spiked hunting net at his target. The victim screamed in agony as the serrated threading of the net slashed him all over. Chiranjeev moved closer to him as he thrashed about, one eye gashed out, his once smooth head now defiled by a myriad of scratches. He looked utterly baffled. With his remaining eye, he stared into Chiranjeev's soul. It seemed to know him in and out, every thought, every dream, and every action. Fearing that he would lose his nerve, Chiranjeev unstrapped the iron baton from his waist and swung at the head.

He woke up with his mouth stuffed and his eyes covered. His hands were tied in

an eagle position, and the stone chair grated slightly against his naked back. Chiranjeev immediately knew where he was.

"It cannot be..." he thought desperately. "This does not make any sense."

Jason's final words of caution crept into his mind. He had warned him of the possibility of the self-consistency principle, that the action of a person who goes into the past was part of history all along. It is impossible for the traveler to change the past in any way because it was his actions that created the present he was living in. As he sat there, arms spread, eyes covered and mouth tied, as all victims of the ritual were, Chiranjeev feared that he had fallen into a mischievous and vicious cycle of time.

He entered the room. Its walls and floor were made of a grey stone that absorbed the horrible sounds that were to follow. At the entrance was a statue of the Goddess Kali in her eternal, fierce pose. Legends narrate that she had passed down the secret of everlasting life to his clan. But, it required a sacrifice and a gruesome ritual. Chiranjeev swallowed nervously. He readied himself and slowly opened the door.

The grinding sound of the door opening centered his thoughts. His heart paced and his breathing became more ragged. Fingers clumsily reached for the cloth around his eyes and took them off. However, darkness prevailed. Finally, a torch was lit, and a young face appeared in the light. The suspicion that had been sprouting in his heart finally confirmed. Apart from the lack of wrinkles, every curve of that adolescent face imitated that of Chiranjeev's. But those youthful eyes did not share the same recognition. Of course, with his face all slashed up,

there was no way the child would recognize him. As the boy nervously muttered some mantras, Chiranjeev went from shock to relief and then to peace. The guilt of having sacrificed an innocent life was finally lifted off his back. Although a century had passed since he had lived through that day everyday until it furrowed itself into his mind. A scar that would last forever. He took a deep breath and withdrew within himself preparing for the end, as the schwing of the knife reverberated onto the walls.



Life Goes On

Diya P | EAVP 6

"Hello grandma," I say as I give her a hug. She stiffly reciprocates the hug, and I feel a lump grow in the back of my throat. I pull back and smile forcefully at her, and I see sadness etched with solemnness in her eyes. She tries to smile and her eyes crinkle. I feel bad because I had not listened to my mother. She had told me to visit my grandparents because my grandpa was sick, but I had told her I was too busy and that I would come later.

Of course, that never happened. And now my grandpa was gone.

I could have been there, but I wasn't. I could've held his hand for the last time, but I didn't. My stubborn self didn't listen.

A few days ago, my grandpa fell sick, but the doctor said it was nothing serious. But my mother perhaps felt it in her bones and asked all of us to come to the village. My dad and sister heeded her call and everyone was there to help take care of him.

I, on the other hand, told my family that I wouldn't be able to come because of work. I was busy trying to make a good impression on my new boss to get a promotion and I thought to myself that since everyone was there, my grandpa wouldn't need my help.

And when I got the news of his passing, I grew resentful. I rushed to the village as

fast as I could, but the last rites had already been done.

It's been four days since the cremation. Sitting outside my grandma's house with a cup of chai in my hands, the smell of petrichor is strong in the air. The rain has stopped, but the evening is cloudy and gloomy as if it's mourning my grandpa.

I can't stand to see my joyful grandma so quiet and sad. She is a strong woman, not only mentally but physically too. She is 85 years old, but she doesn't look a day older than 60. But today she sits slouched against the wall opposite me, bringing her chai up to her thin lips with trembling hands.

I wonder what my grandpa would've said, had he been here. Something funny for sure, like "You're shaking like a leaf! Have you seen a ghost or something?"

I need to do something to cheer my grandma up and I announce that we're getting out of the house. She protests weakly, but I am firm in my decision. We walk slowly around the village. I need to adjust my steps. I remember how as a child I couldn't keep up with my grandma's quick and strong steps. Today, she's barely able to walk without faltering. But I am patient, and I hold her hand and guide her steps.

We stop at my grandma's friend's house. Her grandchildren come running to greet us. Both my grandparents were

much loved in the village. I chat and play with these young kids, while my grandma and her friend sit in silence. Then when my grandma's friend goes into the kitchen to get some snacks, I sense what my grandma will ask me and I really hope she doesn't.

"When will you give me great-grandchildren?" she asks as her brows lift up. I see a spark of her old self.

I sigh. There's the question I have been dreading.

Great, how do I tell her that I don't know if I will even have children! I don't want to disappoint her, and luckily for me when I look around, I see my grandma's friend's son pull up to us on his bike. I get an idea.

"Grandma, if you can take your friend around on the bike, I'll give you my answer."

She chuckles and says "Dear, is that a bet?"

Who tells their old grandma to drive a bike? I curse myself but I turn to my grandma and say, "That task



Illustration by Prachi P

seems absurd, right?" Did I just tell my grandma that she is too old to drive a bike? This was not what I wanted to say.

She looks at me and smiles. And I know she's onto something. She beckons her friend with her fingers, and they walk to her son, my uncle. She takes the bike keys from his hands. I look at him with surprise as he lets her take it. I rush to stop her, but she is already sitting on the bike and her friend climbs up behind her.

I beg her to get down as my uncle stands behind me with a hand covering his mouth trying to control his laughter. Then my grandma takes off.

I look at him with my mouth agape; he bursts out laughing. I stand there dumbfounded. After a few minutes, I hear the engine and look to find my grandma driving back. She is smiling at me and I see a slight twinkle in her eyes.

I hit my uncle jokingly on the back and exclaim, "How could you not tell me that she knew how to drive? Now see what you did, I lost the bet!"

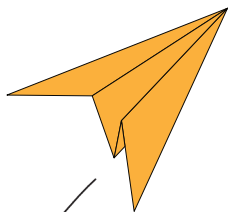
Later that night we sit on the terrace after dinner. My whole family is there.

My grandma snuggles up to me quietly. "So, what's your answer?"

"Soon," I say, "soon. But first I need to find a man like grandpa! And you know how difficult that's going to be, right? He was one in a million after all."

She hugs me, but she isn't crying anymore.

After a while, I hear humming and turn towards the sound. My grandma is humming grandpa's favorite song. I join in, and pretty soon we are all humming and swaying and looking at the night sky. I see my grandpa's face in the stars looking back at us. I feel a cool gentle breeze and let it wash over my face. I feel at peace. I wish I could stay in this moment forever.



Alaska

Sayuri M | K2

Haynes didn't know how spooky his girlfriend was until they started living together. By the end of the first week, he decided that he didn't want to marry her at all. She would often spend hours on end just staring into blank space or slouching in front of a canvas filled with random blobs of blues, greens, and yellows.

"I thought you used to paint flowers, you know, orchids and all. Those looked very real; they were marvelous," Haynes told her one day when she came down to eat some cheap noodles that he cooked for her. The red blotch of paint on her cheek stood out as she turned pale. She didn't say anything. She rarely did. After a while she said, almost to herself, "I want to go to Alaska." They never did.

Two months went by and they began noticing significant changes in themselves and each other. Haynes attended social gatherings more frequently, sometimes coming back only after midnight, his clothes smelling of alcohol and unfamiliar perfumes. At home, his partner's art was going through a revolution, as it took even stranger forms and darker hues. Haynes thought she was painting stuff out of hell. One day she would paint a drab landscape or so he guessed, with dark ugly clouds and equally ugly outlines of hilltops which would still look like ugly clouds and hilltops if you turned it upside down. On another day she would be slapping broken bits of color on the canvas which sort of looked like a dog

with a human face if you looked at it well from afar. It scared him.

Things were very different when Haynes had first met her in a sunny classroom in school, as she drew the flowers on an apple tree that blossomed outside the window. He had asked her if she could draw his portrait and she had smiled. Haynes was not bad looking, and the flowers were especially fragrant and beautiful that summer day, but both the flowers and he looked much more beautiful when she drew them.

Haynes wondered what went wrong as he walked into her room filled with somber canvases.

"Hon," he said, "stop it. You're wasting your time and energy... and money." He looked at the paint tubes. "We can look for a job that might suit you. You won't hate it, I promise." He wanted to continue telling her how it was better for her to go outside more often, and how it would open up her views about the world and so on, but he stopped when he saw her face. She looked tired. He wondered if he did too. "Your birthday is coming," he said, "is there anything you want?" "Yes," she said. That surprised him. "I want a new bag, a little bigger than my previous one."

There was no real celebration on her birthday. He wished her just before he left for work, not knowing that was the last time he would ever see her. When he came back later that day she had

packed everything in the new bag that he had gifted her that very morning and had left home... everything but the canvases that he had trouble discarding later. After a month, when he was almost completely certain that she was not coming back, he had the interior of his house repainted, not long after which, he got married too.

Three years later, while on a certain business trip, he recognized her paintings in the foyer of a hotel. The brushstrokes and the signature in the corner were unmistakably hers. He didn't want to look at the canvases but he found himself slowly passing by each one. There was a beautiful sunlit landscape labeled 'Alaska' in vinyl letters below. He felt terrible. Another was a scenery of a seashore with little boats, then a smiling gentleman, white apple blossoms, abstract art, and more abstract art. Among these was a picture of a strangely disfigured man with little hair and twisted limbs and a twisted expression. His big eyes seemed to stare right into Haynes' soul and he felt oddly terrified of the atrocious creature. But he couldn't stop staring back at it. His eyes went down to the label. "Haynes" it said. He nearly gagged.

Illustration by Harumi M



My Heavy Heart

Tapomagna B | EAVP 6

My heavy heart
Goes round again
Stuck in a loop
Tight on my neck
Little mistakes and
weighty regrets
Stay in my chest

The future is coming closer
The closer the scarier
If I try to wait for her
I'll keep waiting forever

But I have nowhere to run
Nor is my past forgotten
Then I met you all of a sudden
I tried to open but

My heavy heart is too much for you.

Silence

Arijit P | K1

I had borne the zeal for my early dreams
To wade the winds and see the world
I had carved my path for the pleasures I sought
And lived my prime without a stall
But my heart, an enigma, sparked a light
And I stole a glance towards another path.
A crack formed on my nescient mind
And that is when I heard the silence call.

A thoughtless world, drowned in peace
And now silence is all I desire.

Hope for Change

Amrita H | E4

The boy on the roof cried
"Please help me out!"
The people on the street
Did not think upon his shout.

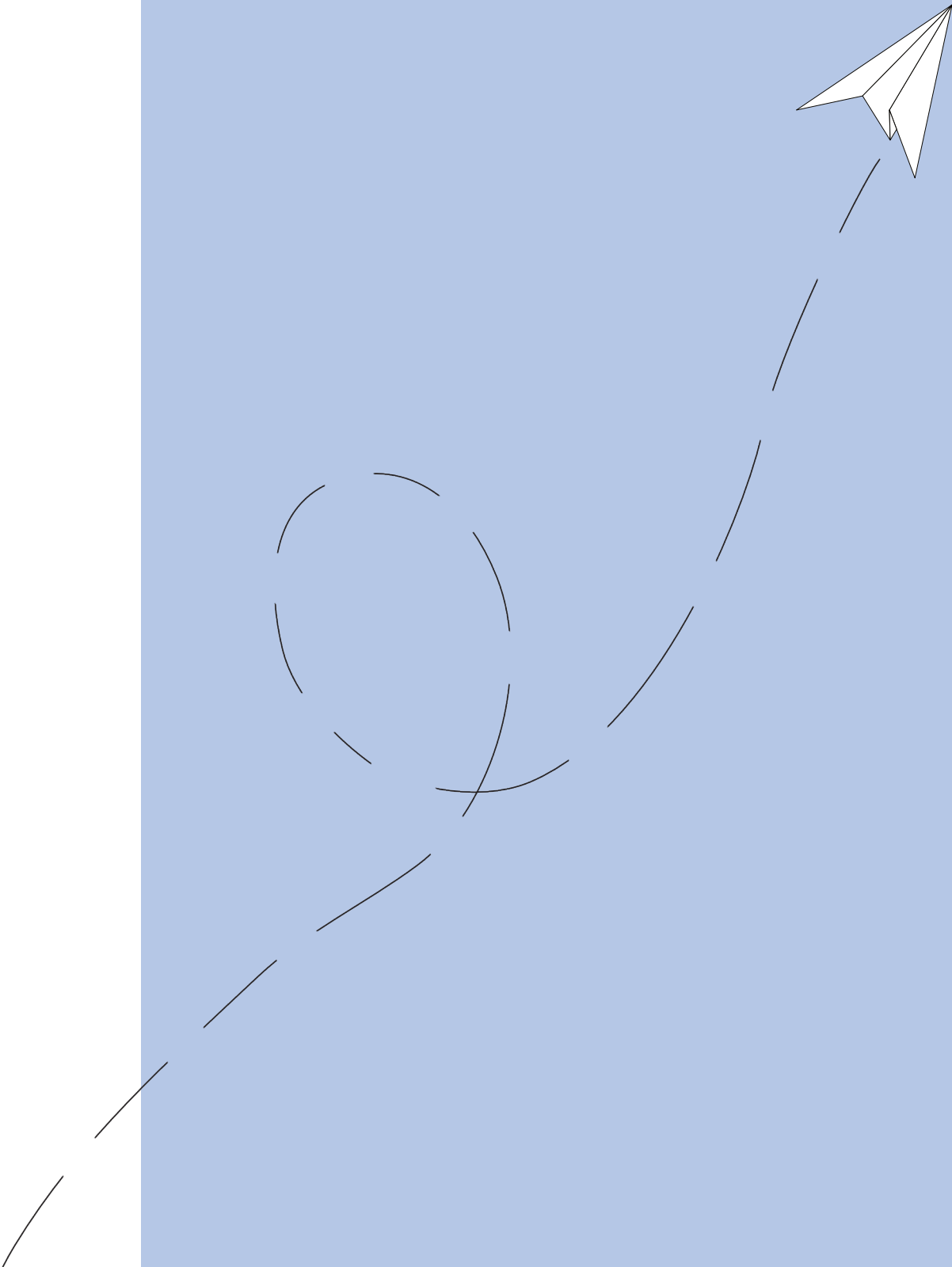
No one came to his aid
As they thought he was dramatic,
He was always left out
For society saw a lunatic.

It's sad how we never help
Those who need it most,
We only realize their value
After they turn into ghosts.

We must all live with the hope
That the ways of life are changing
And who can change them, save you and me,
For time is never waiting.



Illustration by Prachi P



Bio-enzyme

A project by the students of EAVP I

What is bio-enzyme?

It's an organic soap made without any artificial substances. The soap is made from natural ingredients like:

Jaggery - 0.5 kilograms

Lemon peels - 1.3 kilograms

Water - 5 liters

Used for: Washing and cleaning

Regular soap affects the water and clogs the drainage system but bio-enzyme will not, as it does not create foam. It cleans well, and can be made simply with ingredients available at home.

How to make:

- Take a bucket.
- Add 5 liters of water.
- Add 1.3 kilograms of lemon peels. (Orange and other citrus peels work too.)
- Add 0.5 kilograms of jaggery and stir it.
- Stir it once or twice every day.
- It will be ready in 3 months.

Photo by Skandan K



Photo by Ramyak S



Photo by Ramyak S

It was not an attraction towards cameras, photography, or cinematography, but the diverse riches of the Indian wilderness that first drew me into their alluring clasp. My first contact with the inner heart, my first pure and passionate impulse, my first and truest love, – the forest, whose penetrating soul pierced the shadowy veils and struck the perfect chords in the unfathomable depths of my being. This first contact has resulted in the awakening of an inspiring creative impulse that throbs to express itself outwardly every time I find myself in the heart of the forest. A sustained development of my photographic skills during the lockdown has resulted in the creation of a medium that can partially satisfy and satiate this impulse. Such is the power of this creative drive that even the slightest of inspirations urges me to work towards the idea in mind. For the moment, photography serves as a convenient medium for me to bring into reality those aspects which are for me intuitive and sensuous. It continues to remain a rather personal facet of my life, which I intend to pursue and perfect, at least at the moment, for my own sake.

Wildlife

Arunaditya Das | EAVP 6

Photos by Arunaditya D









Expressions

Abhipsa N | EAVP 5

I have always wanted to learn photography but as I didn't have a camera, I decided not to pursue this subject further. However, an opportunity came my way when I learned that SLAICE Magazine was looking for student submissions and the theme for this issue was "Expressions". With this in mind, I decided to shoot portraits of some of my friends. I took on a challenge from Shashwat Da, who was willing to teach me the basics of photography in five minutes to see what I was able to achieve on my own thereafter. The results are before you.

Photos by Abipsa N





An Unprecedented Time

Auro Krishna S | K2

It is Purnima. My phone pings a few hours after sunset. I am out on my terrace looking at the patch of sky above my head, gazing into the deep, scattered with faded glitters. I read the notification. A friend has sent me a couple of photos.

One is of the full moon rising from serene waters into the vast azure, spreading its peaceful pink. The other is a town lit up during dusk. I can remember the blue waters of the Bay of Bengal and the busy town of Pondy, but I cannot relate to them anymore. Every time I try to imagine them, I feel uneasy in my stomach. I can see the falsehood conjured up by my mind.

I have forgotten Pondy; what it looks like, what my life here used to be. Living in the town, I have forgotten what it feels like. Residing by the shore, I cannot picture the sea.

I remember my room; the table by the window, the scattered books, the colorful pens. Even that photo on the wall, the calendar next to it, that heavy metal cupboard in the corner; everything comes back to me except Pondy, the town, and the sea.

During the weekends, I used to see the unseen mysteries, hear the unheard melodies, inhale the unbreathed fragrances, explore the unexplored secrets and sing along with the myriad spirits, the unsung airs. Cycling through the avenues, I used to ride the winds and surf the waves of Pondy. Each time I

passed by the fruit stand, the vendor smiled at me, with her dimples deeper even than the love she expressed. The French buildings shone bright chrome under the golden rays of sunlight. The streets were mesmerized with delicate aromas from cafes. The soothing sea breeze freshened every soul.

I used to visit the beach every evening. I would walk on the tiled pavement and breathe the placid air and listen to the crowds. After sunset, there would be people selling pinwheels, candyfloss, and strange plastic toys that shot up into the sky and spun back to the seller's grasp. There would be groups of aged men gossiping about local politics. There would be children playing with balls and toys. The lighted Goubert Avenue was not less than the golden path to heaven.

These things are very clear in my head, but I haven't been out in town for months. It has been a long agonizing period that I haven't breathed the air of Pondy. It has been a long time, a very long time.

Now that I look around, I see concrete giants looking down upon me. I have been living between four walls and a patch of sky above, all to myself. No neighbor to wave at, only an emulating friend of mine to interact with, who meets me every time I comb my hair. Like a pigeon in a rusty iron cage, I am

immured between walls, robbed of my freedom and bereft of my liberty: confined.

(...only a reflection that meets me...)

(I have forgotten Pondy.) I don't know what Pondy looks like now. Are the dimples of the vendor as deep as before? Do the buildings still shine as bright? Does the same fragrance waft through the cafes? I don't know whether the aged men still gather around, or whether the candy floss still tastes the same; I don't know. If the pinwheels still spin in the same direction that they used to, I don't know. It's been a while since I last went out, but I would like to think nothing has changed.

I haven't explored any new secrets, I haven't discovered any uncharted corners, but I have brought to light a city grander than that of the universe.

"Oh, how peaceful it is to be with that inner self, what bliss! - Ananda"

Sweeter than the sweetest nectars, I have realized the divine in this instrument, the master of this

Illustration by Sayuri M



chariot, the Immortal in this mortal, and the Infinite in this finite: the Soul.

The moon rises above all, shining brighter than ever, pouring its silver upon the earth. I am on my terrace, engrossed in supreme Ananda, chanting my prayer:

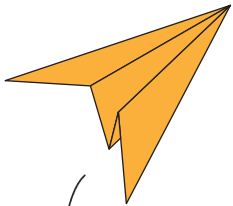
“O Divine Love, supreme Knowledge, perfect Oneness, at every moment of the day I call to Thee so as to be nothing but Thou alone!

May this instrument serve Thee, conscious of being an instrument, and may all my consciousness, merged in Thine, contemplate all things with Thy divine vision.

O Lord, Lord, grant that Thy sovereign Power may manifest; grant that Thy work may be accomplished and Thy servitor be consecrated solely to Thy service.

May the “I” disappear for evermore, may only the instrument remain.”

- May 3, 1914. *Prayers and Meditations.*
The Mother.



Process

Ritam M | K1

Well-defined processes are an efficient way to undertake tasks consisting of multiple steps. It is sometimes tough to follow one that treads through complicated intermediary stages. However, it is harder to express one in simple, brief, yet comprehensive instructions. A process that achieves a given goal does not necessarily have to be a set of precise directions. In many cases, it can be a rough guideline allowing a significant margin for deviation.

To begin expressing a process, you must have its objective definitively pictured in your mind. If its purpose is too general and can apply to more than one case, it is essential to decide and set the parameters of its application. The more precise the mental visualization, the easier it is to proceed with the following steps. Try to form this definition such that it does not include complexities since simplicity is a great aid. Once you clearly know the result of this process, you have to figure out a method.

This stage is the more challenging part of creating a process since there are no rigorous instructions to pursue. It is impossible to determine the duration to find the method. Commonplace proceedings of our day-to-day lives do not require much thinking at all. But, for other complicated matters, one could even take several years to discover a viable approach to the issue. The possibility of finding a method depends on several factors. These include the

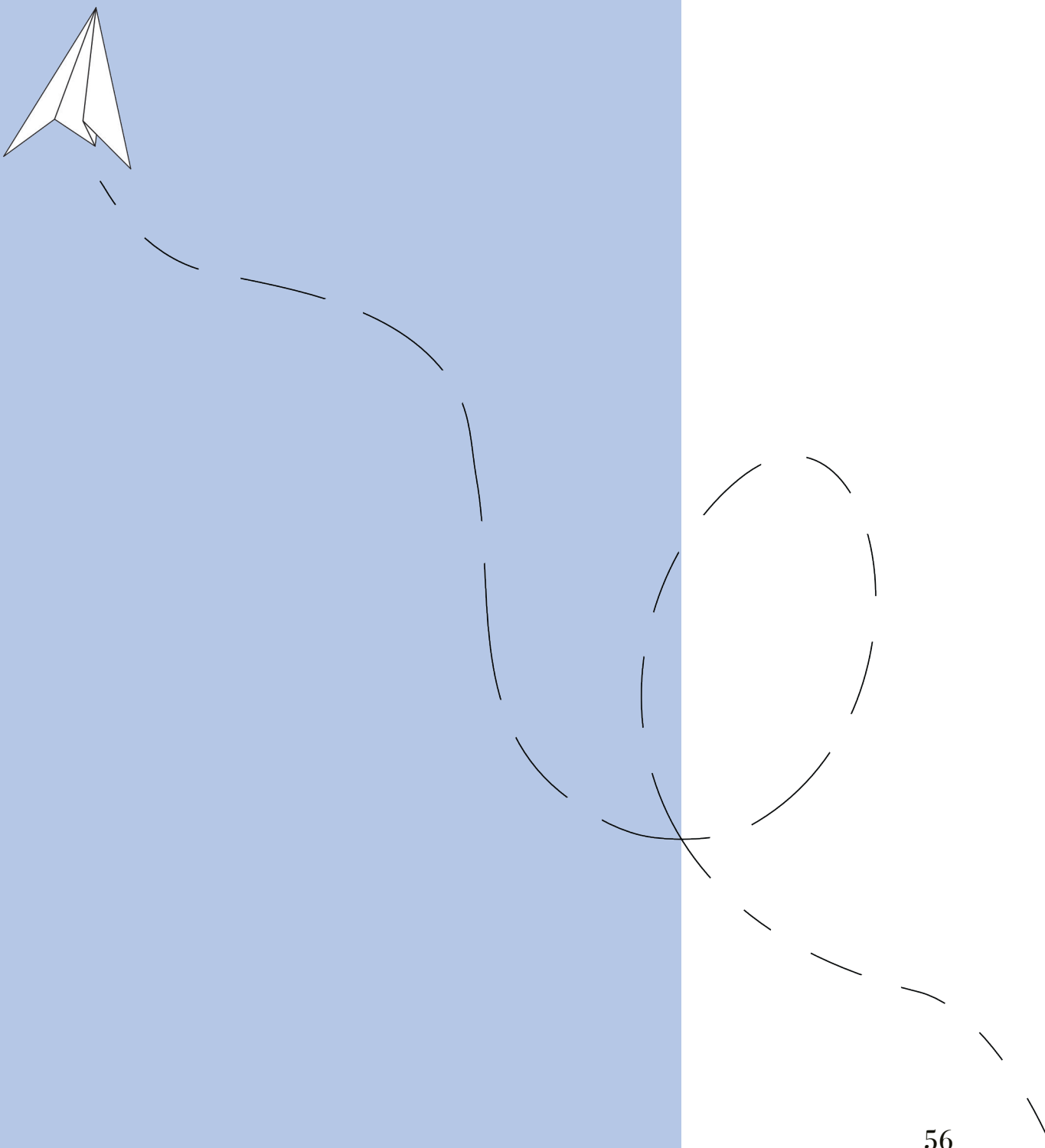
clarity of the purpose of the process and your knowledge of that topic. The more your background knowledge on the problem you would like to solve, the easier it will be to find a solution.

Furthermore, your creative and imaginative approach to the problem could be helpful due to the lack of instructional specificity. How often did revolutionary figures of history tackle a challenging issue with a solution upon which their contemporaries laughed? Sometimes, it is the idea that seems most unexpected and unbelievable that provides the most elegant method that one can imagine. Hence the phrase, "Think outside the box." Once you have a strategy to follow in your mind, you have to formulate it as a straightforward procedure.

To do so would require breaking the scheme into smaller intermediary steps, which themselves might be necessary to subdivide into smaller steps. The necessity of the analysis is not only to verify that the method is correct, but also to support it with logical reasoning. After reducing the entire solution to numerous irreducible steps, remove any redundant ones and reassemble them in their proper groupings. Doing so also ensures not having left out any part of the process which may be essential.

Eventually, you should revisit the process you have just established once again while verifying that you have not made any errors. If it is a general one, try it out

with a few cases to see that it works with the change of variables. Remember that: more often than you think, the process is more important than the solution it provides.



Why rectangles?

Amit V | K3

Over 170 companies make smartphones, and all of them have a standard design. A rectangular screen with a home button at the bottom, started off by Apple. Do all smartphones have this design because they just copied Apple or does the wide usage of this design have a deeper reason? Except for making calls, smartphones are meant to display content. Their predecessors, the computers that did and do the same job are also rectangular. The painting frames and books which preceded the computers were also rectangular. Their common predecessor, the paper, and the clay tablets of Mesopotamia and palm leaves of India which preceded it were all rectangular too. Why was the rectangle the preferred shape for a writing surface out of all the other basic shapes like triangles, circles, squares, or polygons?

Rectangles are one of the easiest shapes to make. Earliest mediums of writing were clay tablets. The easiest shapes to make with clay are spheres followed by cubes. To maximize the amount of writing on one side of the cube, we need to flatten the cube. To further economize on using the space of these slabs, we need the slabs to have a parallelepiped shape. This is because we write in straight lines. We probably don't write words by arranging them in a circular pattern for it is much easier for our arms to make linear movements. Therefore as our writing is in a linear sequence, a collection of many lines of writing would resemble a rectangle or square and hardly a circle, triangle, or any other

polygon. Evidently, a rectangle or a square maximizes the surface used of a clay slab or a palm leaf while writing in comparison to a circle or a triangle. This economization of space is still very valid in the age of smartphones. If squares too are good at this economization, then why don't we have squares also as the preferred shape for writing surfaces?

We do have many squarish books and the earliest computer screens were also very squarish. Squares aren't very much behind when it comes to widely used shapes, but still they are behind rectangles in usage due to two reasons. The first evident reason, which would make a lot of sense in the prehistoric times or early civilizations, was that to make a rectangle you need only have three of the edges have a 90-degree angle but for squares, you need this requirement and additionally the squares need to have all sides to be of equal length. This means that for a rectangle you need one measure of precision but for a square you need two. Probably in an age where precision was tough to attain and maintain, the rectangle automatically rose to be the more preferred shape. The second reason is related to our frame of vision. Our eyes have a limited range of angle in the horizontal and vertical planes. Considering these two ranges, our frame of vision has an aspect ratio between 1.87: 1 and 1.6: 1, and not a ratio of a square which is 1: 1. Therefore, rectangles are better at displaying data in our frame of vision than squares which may require our heads to move vertically

to see all of the displayed data or leave unutilized some of the peripheral space of our frame of vision, making rectangles better suited for watching videos and other similar activities. But even then, why do smartphones have to be longitudinal rectangles and not any other type?

Our pant pockets which have the curvature of our thighs have a steeper lateral curvature than longitudinal curvature, and therefore objects with shorter widths but relatively longer lengths are more likely to fit into them. It is also easier to wrap our fingers around objects which have a shorter width but as people do like to see big screens, the smartphone screens compensate for the short width by the long length. This again makes the rectangular shape of smartphone screens better at displaying a lot of content with more portability than devices of squarish shape.

Smartphones are just an example to start talking about the advantages of rectangles, for if you go through the points above you would have noticed that most of these advantages of rectangles are also applicable to TVs, computers, laptops, and tablets.



When you look beyond the world of electronics, you would notice that the rectangle has infiltrated all our human creations. And yet, surprisingly it isn't very much visible in Nature, who undoubtedly is a better architect than humans. If you draw the frame of vision of our eyes a bit more precisely, you would notice that it is more of an oval than a rectangle. All this makes me wonder whether the abundance of rectangular shapes is a sign of some primitiveness in us that we have yet to surpass.



Behind the Screen

Ritaja M | EAVP 6



What could be more enjoyable than watching a movie under the starry night sky with our best friends as company? This is probably the primary reason why students in the Ashram eagerly look forward to Saturday evenings. They get to watch a movie on the big screen, in the open! On Friday, students usually receive an email with a description of the film; this helps them decide whether or not to attend. Then, some of them form small groups to enjoy the movie. For some students, going to the movies is about good reviews; for others, it's about the synopsis; and for some others yet, it's the actors and directors, or genre. And finally there are those for whom it's about their friends. For example, 10-year-old Ahaan says that he often goes to the movies on Saturdays because he doesn't have anything else to do and he enjoys watching movies with his friends. When asked why he attends the movies in the Playground,

13-year-old Arya first replies that he enjoys watching them on the big screen. Moreover, he says that during the screening he doesn't sit with his friends but rather with his uncle who explains the movie to him. Dharini, a student in EAVP 6, recalls that as a kid she went to the all movies to hang out with her friends, but now due to time constraints, she only goes to movies she wants to watch. According to her, it is the actors and directors of the movies that influence her movie choices. She adds that the trailers and reviews often help her decide. Aurosri, another student in EAVP 6, chooses to go to the movies in a very interesting way. He chooses to watch a movie based on its duration. He prefers going to movies that are longer than an hour and a half. He also has a preference for English movies.

After a busy week, as Saturday approaches, most children start thinking about how they want to spend the evening. Following the announcement, everyone decides whether or not to attend the movie screening based on their criteria. And if they choose to watch the movie at the Playground, then Saturday evenings begin with an early dinner, then bags are hurriedly stuffed with bottles, carpets, jackets, and finally, the movie begins at 7:45 pm. The Playground is filled with laughter, claps, tears, curiosity, and questions during the screening.

For the next few hours, the film captivates everyone present in the Playground. While students enjoy watching movies on the big screen, most of them have little idea of what happens behind the scenes. Selecting a movie for the students and the ashramites involves a lot of work. Additionally, there is an interesting history of how the Ashram started showing movies.

At first, movies are selected based on recommendations from children, teachers, and ashramites. These recommendations are reviewed against several parameters, including whether they would be of interest to all, language restrictions, violence, etc., the panel also tries to select from a wide range including biographies, mythologies, and documentaries. Following the selection of the film, the censor board – Batti Da and Swadhin Da – watch the movie and decide on cuts. The editing is then done by Sushil Bhai. Then, Ravi Da puts up a printed copy of the synopsis on the notice board every Friday; children surround him eagerly to find out which movie will be screened the next day. The synopsis is also sent to older students, teachers, and ashramites.

However, one might ask, how did the screening at the Ashram begin? Batti Da, a former student and captain at the Ashram school, recalls that similar to today's guidelines when he was a student, they were not allowed to watch movies in theatres. Nevertheless, the Mother let them watch safe films such as Tarzan and Robin Hood upon request. But this too happened very rarely, maybe once or twice a year.

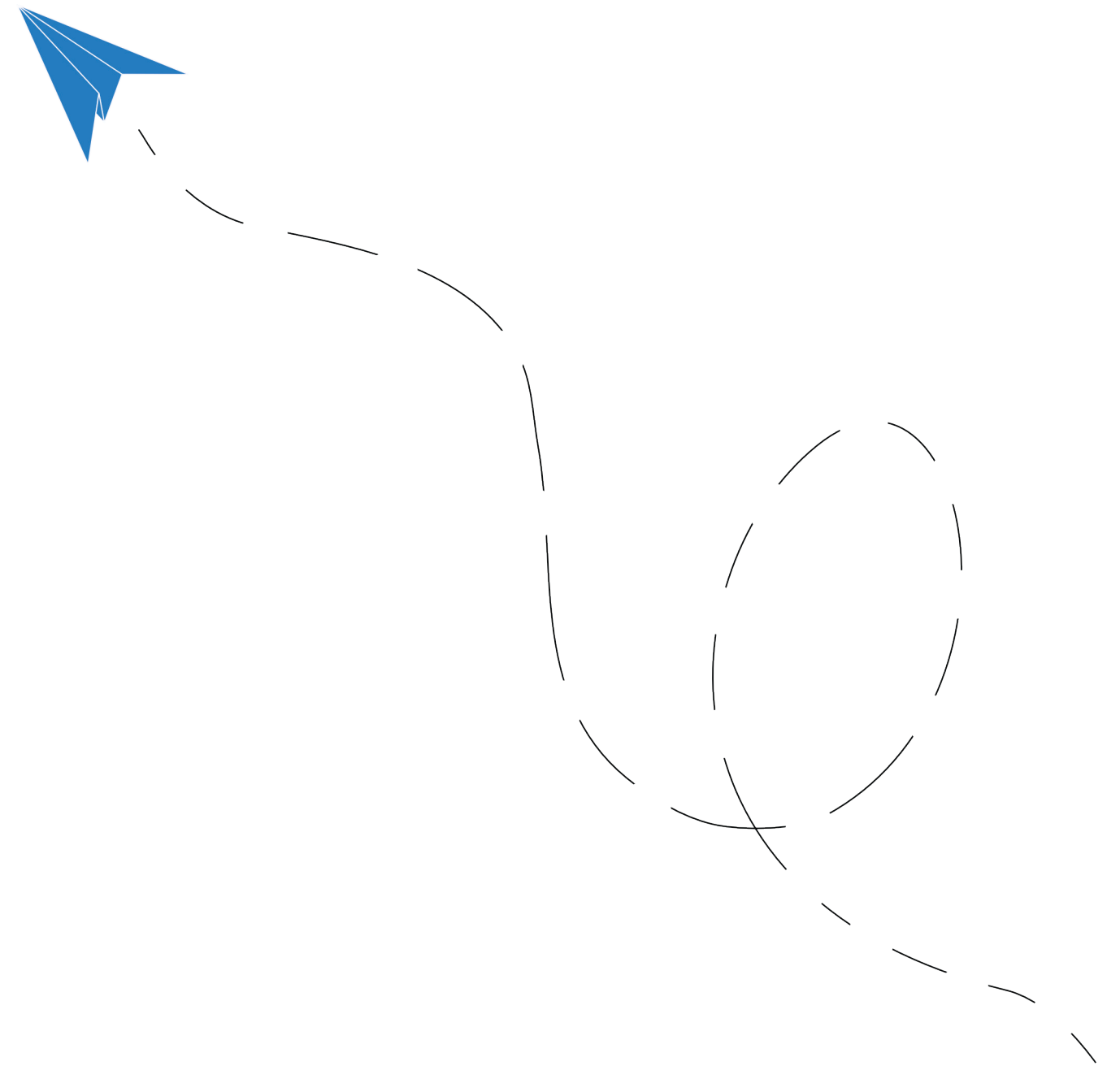
However, sometime between 1948 and 1950, there was a private screening at

Olympia Theatre on Duplex Street, where the Mother and her students went to watch a film. Having enjoyed the experience, the Mother considered arranging something similar in the Ashram. Pranab Da's father, Dakshinapada, brought a 16mm silent projector to show films in the Ashram in December 1950. Mahi Da, an ashramite who handles the projector to date, recalls that 6 years later, in 1956, the Ashram acquired a 35mm Bauer film projector. Ajit Bose, the producer of Satyajit Ray's film 'Pather Panchali' wanted the Mother to see the film and as there was no way to show her the film, he gifted the Ashram a film projector. Since then, regular film shows were held in the Playground till the present day, although the film projector has now been retired and replaced with a newer LCD projector. Initially, films were projected on a wall in the gymnasium hall, but sometime in 1963, a big wall was built in the Playground, and movies are projected there.

From silent films to regular ones, from documentaries to films in different languages, the genre of movies has expanded over the last 70 years. In the early years, the Mother herself made selections and even came to watch the movies, sitting amongst the children and ashramites. The last film she saw was on the 11 October 1958; it was a Telugu film. According to the information noted in the projector room, she watched more than 450 films.

The Ashram has been screening movies on the big screen for the past 70 years. But things are changing. It is a little sad to see how students prefer to watch movies on their own outside the Ashram

environment, rather than enjoy them collectively.



Made By Design

An Interview with Shashwat Da

Agastya N | EAVP 6



After attending his long and boring design classes for almost an entire year, and off-topic discussions about everything under the sun, we felt we should ask Shashwat Da to explain a little what the fuss was all about. You know just in case we get asked what we learned.

[Yes, we are joking. Learn to take a joke, people!]

Alright, so why design?

Okay, let's take a step back to make sure that we all mean the same thing when talking about 'design'. People understand very different things when they hear the word design itself. For most, design is kind of a visual representation of something so if I wanted to get a cupboard made, a carpenter would ask me for a design, or if I wanted a house made I would ask my architect to give me a design. That's not the way I like to use the word. For me, it's more like in the phrase: something is "by design" as opposed to "by chance". In other words when something is done on purpose. So if you think of design in that

context, design is a way of meeting a very specific purpose.

Because of that, you can also talk about things like: is the design effective for a given purpose? Is there a design that suits those requirements better than another design? For example, is the design of the Hall of Harmony any good? If the primary requirement was to make a beautiful space then yes. If, on the other hand, it was meant to serve as an excellent acoustic space, then I beg to differ. The acoustics there is terrible. Could there have been a better design that served both those requirements better? I would like to think so.

In this way, the term design implies solutions to problems, rather than just visual representations. If you think of design as a methodology used to solve problems in different domains, the definition allows the domains to be anything. That's why you have Interior Design, Fashion Design, Web Design, Identity Design, Graphic Design, and Sound Design. You can take any word and put design behind that because similar concepts can be applied in any discipline to arrive at a solution. Design isn't just a visual art form.

Back to your question: So why design?

We live in a world where everything around us is manufactured and somebody has decided certain things for us. Like the drinks we drink, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the movies we watch, and the things we use every day. Everything has been crafted or created by other people and we can be happy with that or we can question the thoughts that went into creating those things. So in a world where everything is designed by other people, what hits you is how little is actually designed well. Depending on the way your mind is wired, you start to see things breaking down more often than actually functioning the way they should. I like the way Steve Jobs puts it: "Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works." The way something looks should be driven by the core functionality of the thing you're trying to create and not just be beautiful in form without much regard to how it works.

So, again, why design?

I believe we can sensitize students to recognize great design, which is well thought out and has a greater sense of being able to serve the purpose for which it was built. Maybe the things that we create could also match those standards of aesthetics and functionality.

How did the design class come about?

That's a much easier answer to give. It started with Satya asking me if there was a way to revive the earlier students' magazine called *Vers L'Avenir*, which for some reason got shut down. Was there a way we could get students interested in taking up this work, to learn enough and

be able to make a magazine? So, I said, that's a good starting point but honestly, it was not something too interesting for me because you can always learn just enough to do a very specific task. What's more interesting is if you understand the underlying principles and the founding ideas of something. It's a bit like this Chinese proverb: give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. So I tend to believe that if we can get children to fish, then they can feed themselves for the rest of their life. So the magazine became really, for me, a very secondary, immediate motive.

I was more interested in being able to, again, sensitize students to the larger context of design. I keep telling all my students that going down this path is going to change their life. You can no longer look at the world around you and be neutral or unaffected as you were before. You cannot but think about design and the lack of it in all things around you. I'm happy that many students have come back and said that "you were right, we just can't look at things the way we used to anymore." I feel, at least that way, what I've been trying to do with the students has been fruitful. Whether you become a great designer or not, at least you understand that we live in a world that has so much apathy toward design.

Who should join the design class?

Well, actually, my answer would be the same for everything I teach. In fact, I started the computer lab with the basic idea that I didn't want to have any fixed classes here. I'm happy to give my time.

Children should decide what they want to do, and we should be there to help them. So very honestly, my answer to this question would be that people should join the design class because they have an inclination towards it, definitely not because they are expected to. On one hand, we see things that are created so beautifully, and yet side by side, some things are horribly designed. What's going on? If that basic curiosity or questioning is already there in children, I think that's the starting point for anybody to take this up.

You train your mind to first see that there is a problem. If you don't see the problem, then I don't see how doing a design class is going to fix anything. Yes, there are things that you will enjoy doing. Typography is a wonderful subject by itself. We live in a world where everything has something written on it and if there's something written on it, it can be done badly or it can be done beautifully. So, you can definitely benefit from even just the basic ideas and elements we cover in the design class. But I would say that a basic curiosity, a dissatisfaction with the world around you, is really what the starting point should be for somebody who wants to learn about design in detail.

If there was no magazine made for one

year, what would be a project you would like to do with the students?

If the magazine was not the goal of the class, if that pressure was not there and we had a class focused purely on design, maybe then I would explore purer forms of design thinking and problem-solving. We could work on applying principles of good design to the electrical wiring in school, for example, or managing queues in Dining Hall and Darshan days. Designing a better Hall of Harmony perhaps? Because all of these are design problems even if they don't appear to be. How does a queue not wind up intersecting itself? Does a single queue fanning out to multiple counters work better than multiple queues? There are very basic things that you would have to solve when you're dealing with these problems.

So again, yes, our preconceived notion of design always being a visual thing is a very limited way of looking at the larger scope of what design or design thinking actually entails. That would be one thing that I would try exploring, although I don't know if students might find it interesting.

We are all visual creatures. We like building things that have some form of visual aesthetics to them. But, for example, information design has almost no visual element to it.

Yet, you know, when a book that has been laid out properly, not just the typographic layout, there's a structure to how

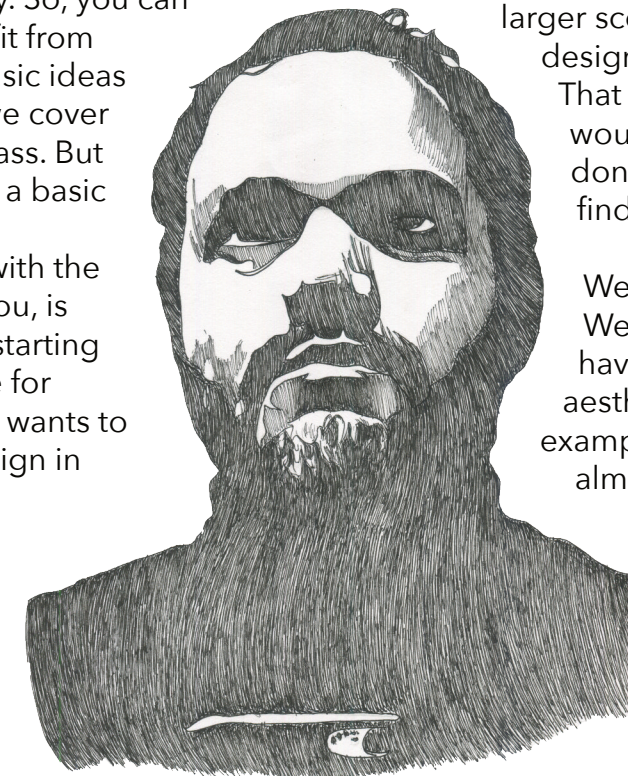


Illustration by Prachi P

something is expanded. It's not a visual thing, but when it's done beautifully, you just know.

What method or methods could a student use for overcoming a creative block in design?

A lot of what goes into good design is not creative in nature at all. In fact, it's applying very solid principles. One of those things is to defer actual creative decisions to later stages of a project. So, for example, when you build a website, most people want to see how the end result will look. It took me a while to understand that that's usually the worst way to build a website because you limit your vision to the first version that you've created. It's like making a beautiful wooden box without much regard for what you will put inside.

Often you come up with a design before you have a solid grasp of the structure or the complexity of the content you are dealing with. Be it a website, a magazine, an E6 or K program. So, yes, I would say the best way to fight your creative block is not to engage with your creativity too early in a project. I know it's completely counterintuitive, but it works.

You should start doing the really mundane things, the really boring stuff, the brass tacks, and wait for something to open up in your mind, wait for that moment to actually happen. I assure you, it does. You say, okay, now I understand the structure, I understand the flow of information, now let me see how I can design something that serves that flow best. It is only then that I would start playing around with colors, shapes, and forms.

Another misconception is that information is just textual – it is not. For example, one of the core issues Apple was trying to solve with the original iPhone was that no matter how deep you were within an app, Steve Jobs wanted a way to be able to get out of the app and back to what Apple called the Springboard, the view where you see all your apps at once. That is the reasoning that went into the iPhone having the Home button and as it turned out, the only physical button that was actually needed. Apple didn't start out thinking "let's make a phone with a single button" and the iPhone was born.

And there's a lot to be learned from the concept that often 'less is more'. The Mother says it beautifully: there is great beauty in simplicity. Yes, the simplest solution is not the most intuitive solution at all, but once it is there, people think, oh God, why didn't I think of it myself? And that's how simplicity works. It's so obvious when you see it, but it's not easy to get to it.

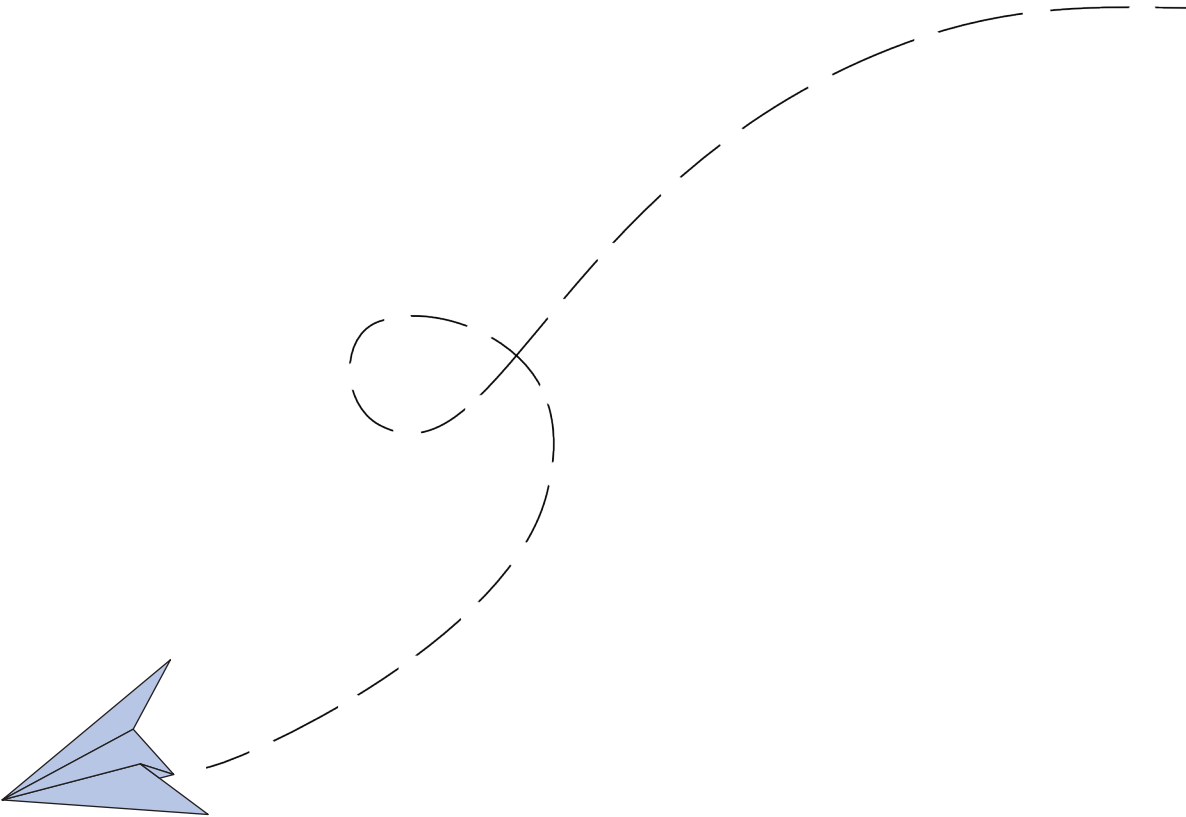
How do you define success as a designer?

I suppose you are asking how a designer would determine if a design is successful. Every human system is constrained by a set of compromises and the best designs are the ones that make the best compromises. That's how Tim Cook put it. Time, cost, size, power, or performance – those constraints are usually the same no matter what you are trying to build. Whether you are designing the Hall of Harmony or a drone to showcase at Maker Fair in the Hall of Harmony. Everything you create

is going to be bound by these constraints of design.

Above these, there are distinctly intangible qualities that are extremely hard to quantify, like how delighted something makes you feel when you use it. You know, the things you want to go back to, over and over again, because they make you feel happy. A room? A book? A movie? A music track? An app?

Can you create something that makes your users or yourself, for that matter, feel this way? I would call that success.





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