



Together

As

One



The International Human Rights Art Festival

presents

**Youth Creativity on Human Rights
and Social Justice/Change:**

*The Power of Storytelling
and The Uniqueness of Art*

Conceived and edited by

IHRAF 2022 Youth Fellow

Mahbubat Salahudeen

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It is with great hope and honor that the International Human Rights Art Festival publishes this anthology of youth creative work, collected, curated and edited by IHRAF 2022 Youth Fellow Mahbubat Salahudeen. This collection of work highlights youth voices from around the world, using their creative powers to imagine and work toward a brighter future.

As a member of a generation of people who did not take matters such as geo-political violence, climate change, social unrest, human rights and economic inequality and make them better — in some cases (such as climate change), we made things much, much worse — I believe that our only hope lies with the youth. They are open to each other, understand the pressing matters which most threaten us and are focused on global solutions, rather than winning economic and military battles.

Perhaps, finally, there is a generation of humanity who has learned from their parents many mistakes?

I also want to acknowledge the passion, dedication and talent of our 2022 IHRAF Youth Fellow, Mahbubat Salahudeen. Part of this generation of hope, she embodies this internationalist, far-seeing and open-hearted point of view. Really, the only thing that can save us!

With humility and appreciation for these powerful voices of hope and positive change.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Block". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Block
Founding Executive Director
International Human Rights Art Festival
New York City
April 2022

As I read these pieces filled with imagery and observed the creativity of the artists, I was struck by the enthusiasm and passion of young creatives, supporters and advocates of Human Rights who, through their creative works have demonstrated much zeal in raising awareness and creating a diverse community devoid of hate and bigotry for humans irrespective of race, sexuality, religion or gender.

With different themes some of which include gender equality, climate change, racism, political unrest all aimed towards addressing a precise topic, as curator and editor of IHRAF 2022 Youth Anthology, I am particularly thrilled by the level of creativity displayed by young human rights supporters as they birthed their ideas and imaginations through poems, art pieces, essays and short stories.

When a speaker of a poem asks why it matters to be a male or an artist tapes together fragments of a broken mirror, we may not know if it fictional or based on reality. But we are often left wondering of the contributors state of mind as they created these pieces, their loss, their hope, their inner turmoil.

These are intriguing but powerful pieces.

Mahbubab Kanyinsola Salahudeen
IHRAF 2022 Youth Fellow
South Western Nigeria
April 2022

In Solidarity With The Army

not once

not ever did we imagine life would find us like this

did we not think we would be the ones to stand and fight for what we must

we had thought we would be the ones to find it

the values, equality, dignity and decency coupled with respect

once a shore of possibilities

now a scorched ground with dissected hopes carted away

and now you are the battle front line

red-blooded

thick-skinned

armed with expectations of humanity

articulations of suffering

hopes raised then crashed

the guns may stay silent but you will not

for many upheavals

of yesteryears you made with mirth

we stand with you

we cry with you

we dream and scream with you

for you remain the strength

in the noises that our life makes and because of that
we can still hold hands and talk quietly about the kindness of hearts

and the goodness that

lies within

because of you we can still become the remainder

to rules that human rights exist and belong to us all

because of you we soar

high like the eagle

the wind

the strength behind our wings

dare to live it out!

we stand by you

as you prevail through stumbling blocks of yonder

so also these trying times you'll conquer

Mahbubatu Kanyinsola Salahudeen, 18, Nigeria

Part 1

Poetry

Unreasonable World

Why is life more like a play?

Are not we all made up of clay?

Then why does it matter to be a male?

If we ask these questions or fight for our rights we are called unreasonable and lame.

Good things remain unread and darkness is where they stay.

Why are the men of our society walking untamed?

How dare I talk am I not a dame?

This is not happening in a single country, it is happening all over the biosphere.

Whoever stood for right was slain.

Should I stand too, I will die anyway.

This is not the only thing I want to say.

This world is famous for always being a baseless game.

Washam Waseem, 18, Pakistan

Unveiling

We need to be wary when Lord Cromer in British-ruled Egypt, French ladies in Algeria, and Laura Bush, all with military troops behind them, claim to be saving or liberating Muslim women.

-Lila Abu Lughod

The Imperialists came a while ago.
They lodged themselves into the cities,
snaked themselves into their politics.
First the British, then the Soviets,
and now the Americans.
Take off your burqa, take off your hijab.
coaxing, manicured hands clench the fabric
Take it off.
Guns click to green camouflage as soldiers
defend the pale, manicured hands.
Unveil the face, see the smiles.
the hands belong to a woman
who turns to smile at the flickering cameras.
Look at what we've done! We've saved them.
a thousand shots sear the bared face
Blind.
strong hands grip frail arms and lead
them away. The cameras

Ignore

the bombed

City.

Where is your family? Your friends?

the hands ask.

Hands clench veil. They are dead

(because of your men).

Charlotte Yeung, 19, USA

Canary Freedom

The canary trills a song -

Butter yellow feathers catching

The off-white rays of morning

refracted off the metal bars

of its cage.

The canary hops around,

Its chicks watching from a delicate

nest. A child comes around,

sees the canary then looks to the sky

at the birds swooping around

in lazy loops within the delicate glass

walls of the greenhouse.

The child opens the cage, scoops

the canary out.

The canary hops around, flies a little.

Then returns to its cage-

not because it fears the world but because

it is all it knows. And all it knows is

that its children are here, and maybe

even that the cage is an

imperfect place,

but that no place is perfect.

Charlotte Yeung, 19, USA

Hijabi

Your fight is an excuse to control our rights

Your hatred, a manifestation of decades of propaganda, telling you that Muslim women have no autonomy.

The hero of this nation once said, "Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilization."

A test we seem to be failing for,

Hatred is the language that you speak,

Your desire is to take and not forgive.

I promise you, if we wanted you to support us, we would tell you,

I promise you, just because you're a man, doesn't mean you're our saviour,

No, today just like every other day, you are the man I look at suspiciously on the road as you accusingly stare at my hijab as if it is a gun.

The blood of our bodies

Has watered your fields for as long as I can remember,

This country thrives on our disposal,

This country is full of hangers and lynchers

This country is full of those who would see us fading us, who would see us forgotten.

Who would blame yesterday's ideologies for today's present.

This country is the sign of your birth certificate, my death certificate.

Don't tell me you're giving Muslim women rights,
When you standby and watch your friends catcall the girl who runs outside,
Don't tell me you're giving Muslim women rights,
When you laugh at rape jokes,
Don't tell me you're giving Muslim women rights,
When i haven't seen you at a single anti-rape protest.

Tell me: did you mourn Gulnaz Khatoon, Farkhunda Malikzaada, Sunawwar Khatoon, did you
grief for her daughters?

As loudly, as fiercely, as you celebrate the ban on my religion, my culture, my body, my hijab?

No, you did not, because You can't even be bothered to learn their names.

Tarini Shivani, 16, India

This Body I Hate

My body is jungle that I want to chop,
body hair you demand I shave it of,
Because hair on a woman is unsexy to a man
And that's all a woman's body is worth anyway
That is what you have taught me

My body is a river I wish I could built a dam on
Flowing with a stream of red every 28 days,
That you have taught me to hate. PERIOD.
To be ashamed of, not to talk about. PERIOD.
To stuff in black bags as I buy pads and tampons from a shop.PERIOD.
Not to visit temples as if God Herself did not give me the gift of bringing new life. PERIOD.

My body is an ocean that I wish I could drain.
It has rolls and waves, ripples and curves,
Depths that can not be discovered
A containment of life that you have taught me to hate.

My body is Mother Earth herself,
She gives me life, she keeps me alive,
She holds me in the cradle of her warmth,
She gives generously, unselfishly,
That too you have taught me to hate.

In my mind I know it's all bullshit
But my mind can't stop your taunts and remarks,
those are like arrows aimed straight at my heart,
I can't ignore the anxiety of eating in public,
A million judging eyes staring at me,
that's what you have taught me.

“just love yourself” “your body is beautiful” “you are perfect”

Screaming in my ears, clambering in my mind,
If I don't love myself somehow I'm fatphobic now.

If I don't forget everything society has taught me for a dozen years in a dozen weeks, I'm the one
who is in the wrong now?

I wish I could stop apologizing for my body,

My color, my wife hips and fat belly,

I wish I could stop obsessing over tv ads telling me

Of Ayurvedic syrups that will reduce my weight and somehow fix my relationships

Of Face creams that will make my skin glow,

And DO NOT pretend that by glow they do not mean WHITEN, to take away our colour, our
culture that our ancestors so proudly defended,

Beauty just a hundred rupees

Happiness two hundred

But With every ad I watch self love drifts immeasurably away.

Tarini Shivani, 16, India

The Message

She observed the movements
And tried avoiding some things.

She tried running very fast
But they were more faster,

She tried fighting them off,
But they were stronger,

She tried hitting and kicking,
But all to no avail.

She watched herself helplessly
As she was torn apart,

She cried helplessly as her
Cloths was town,

She wept thoroughly as
She saw herself defied.
She even fainted in the
Process of her being defiled.

She tried walking home,
But found it difficult to do.

She kept crying as she saw
Herself roughly stained with blood.

She could not even walk,
So she tried crawling home.

She later met a good Samaritan
Who took her to the hospital.

She don't even have a dime to
Pay the hospital bills.

She was assisted by this same
good Samaritan on the bill payment.

She was then examined by
The medical personnel

She came to realise when the results
Were out that she has been infected.

She cried and wept even after the

Assurances from the Doctor,

She couldn't even bear the pain and

Disgrace after she's been discharged.

She was avoided and ridiculed

By her friends and colleagues.

She was left with no choice than meeting

A new friend called 'DEPRESSION'

She was advised by her new

Friend to commit suicide,

She did, and her existence

Came to an end!

She messaged me to tell you'll to please;

"SAY NO TO RAPE"

Rasim Chigozi Goodness, 17, Nigeria

The Tempo Of Once Upon A Maid

A child was she when in her mother's tummy,
birthed, she became a maid
In her father's house,
her mother...sent to the realm of the dead by bashing,
a maid scattered in homes,

She is one...yet dispersed around the corners of the world,
she is one, subdued with neglect and failure,
her tone is narrow,
Lo, high above is not her worth,
so between the walls of her father's building, it dissolves,
not heard outside the gates, not heard in her lifetime.

Her room, inscribed with the paintings of freedom,
shaded by fear, and snatched hope.

In her father's house
her moves are slow, for she dares not to walk,
her heart is shattered, broken, and forlorn.

Complain once and be twice as dead,
rebel a little and centuries of slavery will dine with her,

for he considers her a tool for his lust,
Her dead mother...a garbage with no utility,
She...a bin where ills and anger are kept,
a THING that should accept all and question not.
No! high above is not her worth.

Her tempo... slow, weary and dead like that of her mother's,
ties its fault to the lip of my pen,
begging for a voice when mine has lost its rhythm.

Hafusat Oluwabusayomi Ogundele, 21, Nigeria

White Pawns

I heard the world

And, now I know; it despised me.

Did I bring such disgrace?

Those menace eyes and woeful expressions

What was the difference when both spelled disgust?

My hand on the bitter glass

it was just as numb as I was.

Was it my wits?

My brawn?

No, my race.

It was what I was told.

Told to shiver in front of a white.

Told to satisfy their needs, not demand.

Told to plead.

I thought it was only them; but they weren't.

I dwelled and I pondered; why must the white pawns begin the game in Chess?

Why not the black?

They say it's the rules, but I don't abide by them.

Spiteful glances and tangible agony at me

They tortured us like they say, checkmate.

One dawn stalked another, and yesterday became history.

Just the miserable one it always was.

I fathom it, I obey it and I fulfill it.

What more could the world desire?

A faded childhood and forced smiles.

It was all that came to vision.

‘Wake up.’ I told myself.

December 1, 1955

She refused to give up her seat in the bus; Rosa Parks

I contemplated it

Murmuring wary assertions to one another.

My ancestors were witnesses too, nothing more.

But I was.

I rekindled like a flame.

Even if the world doesn't appreciate me.

The violence wounds me inside.

My entitlement and my voice are robbed.

I will be Rosa Parks.

Be someone, my foe's haven't seen.

Be my dictator but you can't reign over me.

I will paint those bleak sights of one's who find black's filthy.

Find me filthy. Call me vulnerable, but I won't change.

Bring me weak to my knees but I won't curtsy.

Take my everything but you know what they say

An ember never extinguishes rapidly and neither will I.

They will bestow me rights, even if loathe is what it is.

Krishangi Oberoi, 13, India

Time

mode time

time mode

the musical scale of time

turns into the musical clef of death

regime time

time of the regime

the human body becomes unnecessary

the human soul in the crypt was not found

time of war

time war

people become useless

eras change and wars continue

and this last person on the planet

where did he come from

and where will he disappear

why is he still alive

everything has its time

you lost your home

I die for you in the transition in the body

of a stray dog

Mykyta Ryzhykh. 20, Ukraine

Part 2

Art Works

Life In A Pandemic



The sketch work symbolizes the importance of the use of preventive face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic

Sanika Ugale, 21, India

Save The Girl Child



The artwork offers symbolism of the inner turmoil of a girl child. The sketch work created from light shades depicts a forceful yet agonizing will to break free.

Sanika Ugale, 21, India

COVID-19



Aleenah Huneef, 8, India

Save the Environment



Aleenah Huneef, 8, India

Lend Your Hands To Educate



The art work is a depiction of education as a fundamental human right.

Sanchi Bansal, 13, India

Don't Choke Their Childhood



The artwork symbolizes the right to freedom from slavery and torture and depicts the effects of child labour on the growth of a child and the community.

Sanchi Bansal, 13, India

Brown Lines



A paper mosaic self portrait that shows how young hispanic people can be silenced. The artist intends to bring awareness to immigrants who are kept in cages by the United States ICE, how the topic is brushed over and not seen by many. The lines become blurry. They become brown.

David Onofre, 19, USA

As It Should Be, As It Is



The art work represents on the left side what human rights transmit and how society should be with people with the allusion to “heaven.”

Karla Susana Camola Bobay, 16, Portugal

Justice



Ketanji Brown Jackson will be the first African American woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Angelica C. Gary, 11, USA

Acceptance of Neurodiversity



The hand prints in different colours portrays the spectrum of autism and neurodiversity. The tree symbolizes growing awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity, looking at the ability and not the disability.

Seyon Rajanikanthan, 7, Canada

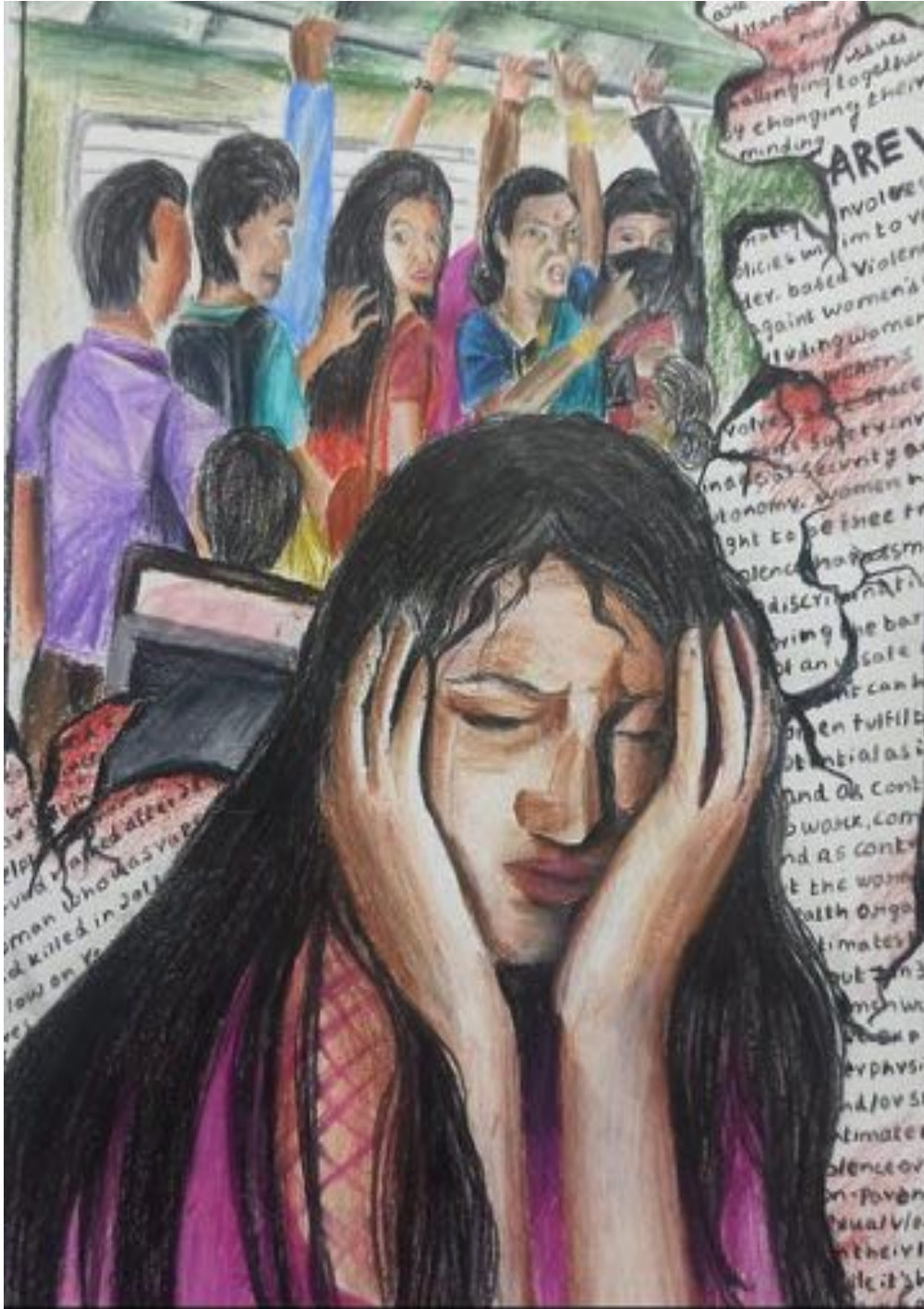
Celebrate The Spectrum Flag



The rainbow symbolizes different colours of autism spectrum, meaning that there are different levels of autism and every individual is unique with different abilities. The infinity sign also symbolizes autism and this flag is created to celebrate the spectrum.

Seyon Rajanikanthan, 7, Canada

Women Protection



Harshini Sangeetha, 17, India

Women Safety



Harshini Sangeetha, 17, India

Fragments of Abuse



A piece of Art carved out of the fragments of shattered glass with images of people going through domestic violence which is something that can also scar one for a very long time mentally. It also reflects the mental state of a certain individuals.

Serena Moon Birkett Leech, 21, Spain

Censorship



The artwork represents the restriction the Media has in regards to LGBT+ relationships. Display of affection among members of the LGBT+ community is regarded as "inappropriate" and such relationships are kept hidden from children. "Pride" smeared in crimson red represents the struggle of the LGBT+ community to be accepted and treated as equal.

Paula Nino Torres, 20, Columbia

Equality



Though our faces, our shapes and sizes may not appear similar. Our habits may differ but our souls are the same. We are all beautiful. Love and acceptance are all we need not hate and rejection.

Adyaashree Rout, 8, India

Let's Follow Their Path



Humans, irrespective of race, religion or caste must follow the path of Gandhiji of India who practiced respect for all religions, Nelson Mandela who fought for the freedom of South Africans and Malala Yusufzai of Pakistan who supports education for the Girl Child.

Adyaashree Rout, 8, India

Stand For Human Right



The artwork is a representation of different people from different parts of the world, it however highlights equality of every human irrespective of religion, race, caste, gender etc

Denis Avdic, 17, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Part 3

Prose

My Happy Place

I drawled on the phone, tracing my fingers on the rough surface of my skin while fiddling with one of the scars on my left shoulder. Each scar held a memory and even after all these years, they still hurt a little. A sweet painful kind of hurt.

My momentary blackout from reality made me miss Auntie Kunbi's previous statement. Long hours on the phone, especially with her, tends to have that effect on me.

"Mii gbo yin (I didn't hear you)" I stammered. I had not been paying full attention but subconsciously, I heard what she said. I just needed her to repeat it.

"Your mother is sick" she echoed faintly in Yoruba, our native language.

An awkward pregnant silence filled the air, seconds seemed like an eternity as snippets of my childhood flashed before my eyes. All the while, I could hear Auntie Kunbi's lungs struggling to breathe on the other side of the phone, a side effect of her Asthma.

"You still don't want to see her?" She added when I didn't respond.

"She saw your invitation, Sade. She's asking for you"

Took her long enough, I thought. But I wasn't in the right frame of mind to voice out. I'm in my teens all over again. My lips felt sealed, my throat tightened and my heartbeat quickened. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath as Francis advised.

"Think of your happy place" my fiance would say. My happy place was anywhere far away from Mother's terrifying smacks and Father's intrusive hands.

"Sade?" "dear?"

Auntie Kunbi's call brought my consciousness back to the current conversation. She was aware that I tend to get lost in my thoughts. Sometimes it gets so bad that I lose touch with reality.

"Are you taking your meds?" She asked.

I nodded slightly and felt ridiculous after realizing she didn't see me assure her that I was fine.

"Francis forces them down my throat" I replied with a big smile.

She laughed in her usual heartwarming way.

"One of the perks of getting married to a doctor abi?" She quipped, in between quick, labored breaths.

I smiled. Auntie Kunbi always referred to Francis as the universe's way of compensating me for my unpleasant childhood. This thought led me to reconsider the conversation she steered us away from for my sake.

"Auntie..." I whispered, "I don't want to see her"

I paused and sat on the pavement, leaning on the granite wall. I fought off an oncoming panic attack as I have practiced with Francis numerous times. I took two long deep breaths, affirming to myself that I am no longer that weak little teenager. I'm a grown, fulfilled woman.

"My dear, I understand. I shouldn't have brought it up," She said after realizing the havoc she might have caused.

"Should I call Francis to pick you up from work?"

"I'm good, Auntie. I'll talk to you later" I said and ended the call abruptly.

I made myself comfortable on the pavement, praying that none of my coworkers would come outside and see me in this condition.

I sprawled on the cold floor allowing memories of my teenage years to invade my thoughts. A particular incident stood out, the straw that finally broke the camel's back.

It happened when I was 14, in my early years of puberty. Father had arrived home earlier than usual, which was always a bad sign for me. He seemed to coincide his early arrivals with days Mother would tarry in her shop. Those were the days he committed his atrocities. Nobody was there to witness them.

I remember lying down in the tiny sitting room that doubled as my bedroom when I heard his stern voice. I immediately regretted not staying back in school for after-school lessons. My brain

rummaged every possible way I could avoid an encounter with him: I could jump out of the window or crawl into the cupboard at the other end of the room. As my poor luck would have it, he lunged the door open before I was lucky enough to hide. I sat up on the worn-out sofa and knelt to greet him like I'm culturally supposed to do. He acknowledged me with a brisk nod and asked in a thick Yoruba accent.

"Are you the only one around?"

I nodded and rose from my kneeling position. He ushered me into the only room in the apartment—the one he shared with Mother. It was strange but I knew what to do; I pulled off my dress, lay on the mattress, and endured gruesome minutes of father having his way with me. Till now, I still can't get the harsh scent of his camwood soap out of my nostrils.

When mother came back from her shop that night, I approached her while she sat in the kitchen tidying the remnants of dinner. I narrated the events of the afternoon, emphasizing that I wasn't delusional when I said it had happened three times before. I was old enough to know when a member of the opposite sex was touching me inappropriately.

Her calloused hands landed flat on my left cheek, confirming that she didn't believe me yet again. Before I could recover from the shock, she landed two more heavy slaps on both sides of my head.

"You shameless thing" she spat.

For some reason, Mother's judy stare was the scene that haunted my nightmares, not father's invasive hands or the punishments I suffered. I always wondered why she never confronted him, regardless of whether Father would deny the atrocities he committed.

That night, Mother decided the usual beating I suffered was not enough. I was possessed and as she said, the seductive spirit in me needed to be sent packing. After several lashes of belt strap tearing into my skin, she sprinkled my wounds with grounded bell pepper. I can remember praying that the punishment would at least exorcize the seductive spirit so the whole family can finally live in peace. After that incident, Mother sent me off to Kaduna to live with her younger cousin, Auntie Kunbi. I never got to see either her or father again. It was in my final year at the university that I was informed that Father passed away from a heart attack.

"You can finally go home" Auntie Kunbi mused but I didn't consider that hellhole my home anymore. I was riddled with more guilt than pain and several questions ran through my mind. Questions that I've always wanted to ask the woman that gave me life. Although I've heard the answer from my therapist a gazillion times, I needed to hear it from the horse's mouth.

Still relishing the coolness of the cold pavement, I picked up my cell phone and dialed Auntie Kunbi's number. She answered on the first ring. I realized she must have been waiting for my call all along, reprimanding herself for reminding me of the past.

"Are you okay?" She inquired.

I sighed and spoke softly into the phone, unsure if the words I was about to utter were the right ones.

"I'm ready to meet her".

Akinola O. Marian, 19, Nigeria

Perhaps Damaged, But Not Beyond Repair

I used to stare at the school gate a thousand times in a day, but that had been before I got the admission. Now, my fantasies about these four walls that make a school have been dashed to dust, like whence fine marble meets its peril. I still gawk at the school gate, seeking an escape route. The thirst for a certificate has got me fettered, restrained by lead-like shackles. I do not see colours anymore because every day in here has taught me that people only have two colours; Black and White.

I do not know why, but I have never been apt with alphabets. I could cruise with the numbers, adding, subtracting and doing all sorts of numeric operations. I would be fine with 'x' and 'y' and using superscripts and subscripts, but I just can't understand homophones, idioms, grammar and how to make those essays fine. I subsequently failed in English grammar. I thought my archangel had descended when Sir Larry called me into his office, but I realized then what it means to sink from the pot to the fire. He wanted to use my weakness against me and proposed an illicit pact, which made my hair stand on edge, in alarm. You would be appalled that I agreed. I gave up on trying and placed my faith in him. I agreed to let him play with my body and desecrate the fort of my soul. He defiled me and kidnapped my pride and dignity alongside. I resigned to silence, keeping my woes to myself. I had no tears left to cry, since I had dashed all of that to my pillow.

Yet, whence the neighbors visit, asking to see that vibrant child they had known, I hear mum say, "she is fine. She must be doing her homework or having her fair share of fun inside there."

She complains that I am losing weight and still offers a riposte saying it is because I love skipping my meals. She says she would not cook any more food for me, if they continue to go to waste. That is what matters. The hike in the price of gas and fuel has been draining her pocket. I understand her and I don't mind that she cannot read me. Dad stares at my report card wearing a proud smile. The daughter of a renowned ambassador like him can do no less than acing English. Even though my score sheets wear these silly, excellent numbers, I cannot find any strength in me to smile. I was devoid of peace. I had that much when I still had to resit English exams.

Then during summer holidays, mum signed me up for a volunteers' camp. That was cliché, since I knew she does that because the highbrow kids of her friends are attending too and she wants me to join their clique. I went still, heeding her. This time however, the setting was different as it was hosted by a missionary and we were not taken to a resort or something of that sort, but to an IDP (internally displaced persons) camp. We were there to assist the nuns and fathers in gifting

food and medicines to refugees. We lived amongst them, and were made to understand how traumatic their experiences were, by listening to their heart wrenching stories of how homelands were raised to dust. Some of the kids –spoilt rotten by their parents– could not withstand the environment. They complained about everything.

At first, I found it hard to survive in there, especially with the toilet. After the inhabitants were tested by the medics who had tagged along, it was discovered that some of the women had toilet infections, which was inevitable, bearing in mind the ratio of toilet facilities to the persons in residence. They drank water from an aged, artesian well –the only available source of water– which was not clean enough. The water had these impurities floating in it, alongside catfishes. Drawing water from the well proved to be a chore on its own. Whilst we stayed there, the missionary supplied water tankers which could provide healthy water for cooking and drinking for all. They helped sanitize the well water with chlorine and made it strictly for doing chores and bathing.

We did not only assist the medics as they offered the necessary services to the people, we also taught the kids school lessons. We were given the freedom to choose whichever subject we would be able to handle and I chose physical and health education, because I felt the need to educate the kids about the dangers of microbes around them. I had been doing well at this, until the topic I had to teach became ‘Puberty Awareness and Sexual Abuse’. I had braced myself scaling through mentoring them on the signs of puberty, toilet and menstrual hygiene. When it came to abuse, words seem to fail me however, and I had to bring the class to an abrupt end.

I settled into a chair, trying to fight the memories that were resurfacing. I tried to blank my mind out, but it just was not working out. My head began to ache, as if something had overrun it. I yelled out loud in frustration and the tears just gushed out, as if they had a life of their own and I could not stop them from flowing. I was in this depressing state, until I felt her palms pat my back. I raised my head to stare into the nun’s eyes. I knew it was redundant since she had seen me, but I still made an awful attempt at wiping the tears.

“What hurts? What is broken? I won’t ask.” She said, as she caressed the borders of my eyes with her thumb. She cupped my cheeks in her palms, as she reassured me.

“I saw what transpired with the class today and then how the scene played out afterwards. As I have promised I would not probe you. But you have some repairs to make and until you don’t let out all those wrecking memories, you can’t bury the hatchet.” She held my hands in hers. Her hands warmed mine, just as her words did my heart.

“You guys aren't just here to help the needy, but yourselves too. Last year, some other kids were here too –kids with stories to tell. Sometimes, we'd discover that volunteers need more help than those we consider as the needy.” She wiped away the rest of my tears.

“You see, last year I met a kid. I'd leave her identity as anonymous, because I know she'd want it so. She had this flair for God's work. She was jocose, diligent and vivacious. But you know what? Beneath that entire exterior was a child suffering from insomnia. This kid has nightmares –fragments of her memories tormenting her– because of a crime she had committed in self defense.” She shook her head. I could see empathy written in her expression.

“Her dad was hurting her mum –hitting the poor woman like one would do a rugby ball– and the little thing could not take it anymore. On one occasion, she had snapped and grabbed the glass jug. She slammed it at his head, from behind. The glass shattered and soon he was lying amidst the jagged pieces, with blood oozing from his injury. He did not die immediately, but in the hospital. The mum made up a story and they covered it up. The kid is there still suffering from the aftermath. She should have seen a Shrink and gotten all of those hazardous thoughts, of her being evil out of her mind, but she didn't.” She hissed, as if she had been the one in those heavy shoes.

“Now she is recuperating; learning to forgive herself, taking psychotherapies and placing all of her fears with God, which is most important. The last time we met, she told me that her sleeps have been uneventful, peaceful.” I shook my head, still finding it hard to let it out. My trust was beyond borders.

“We are all perhaps damaged, but with God, no one is beyond repair. Do not let your faith wander.” She held my hands in hers and as much as I wanted to withdraw my hands from her hold, I just had to ease into the warmth, because the wind had been throwing chilly strokes at me all along.

“I don't think God loves me.” I blurted out with bitterness. “He has watched me suffer in silence. He let me choose to ruin myself. I thought you guys preach that God is kind, merciful, wonderful and loving, but why has he not shown any of that to me?” She smiled, and I thought she had taken my words for a joke.

“Dear, I had thought you would say God does not exist. You think you do not believe, but accepting his existence shows that even in your subconscious, you are a believer.” She ruffled my hair, as she sipped in the expression on my face. I was aghast. I could not accept her conjecture, but I had no riposte.

“What if I tell you? You can’t hurt him. You cannot make him suffer for all he did to me.” I was already shedding another round of tears. She rubbed at my temples, caressing the soft skin of my face. Then she brought my head closer, to rest on her bosom and loosening all of my defenses, I wept like a baby.

Rocking me in her arms, she said. “My sweet, whoever he is would suffer for whatever he has done to you. The ministry would support your cause and we would not rest until you find peace.” She didn't mind that I rubbed my tears and mucus on her white dress, as I raised my head.

“Would you tell my parents? They would be disappointed in me.” I hesitated.

“We’d have to. We don’t want you to keep any more secrets from them, or you would not be able to find much needed peace.” I nodded.

“I want to be happy, so even though you did not pester. I think I want to tell you about what is driving me insane.” I stared into her eyes feeling anxious and she smiled reassuringly. I wanted repair and I knew I had to trust in someone, if I really did. Although, I had let my anger overshadow my judgment, deep down, I knew God was the one whom I had bestowed most of my trust upon.

Oyelele Mahmoodah Temitope, 16, Nigeria

Exploring the Dynamics of Race and Gender based discrimination through Sophia's Journey in Alice Walker's 'The Color Purple' .

Sophia's character in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* poses to be one of the significant narrative tropes through which Walker attempts to deconstruct several notions as far as the representation of African-American women is concerned. Breaking out from the archetypal stereotypes that locate a Black woman in a doubly marginalized realm, Walker forces the reader to question such norms. Through Sophia's journey, an enquiry has been made into the gender dynamics and degree of agency women can exercise with underlying aspects of race and class.

Sophia is brought into the picture as Harpo's love interest, someone who he wants to marry. Since its inception, Sophia comes across as a very independent and assertive woman. She is starkly different from the protagonist of the novel Celie, who unlike Sophia is timid, shy and fearful. Sophia knows her rights and emphasizes the need to express one's own identity. Such outlook, however, is not accepted out of a Black woman living in the South. She certainly does not fit the patriarchal structure defined by the society.

Critiquing the societal construct of the 'true women' Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* states, "*she [the true woman] is an artificial product that civilization makes, as formerly eunuchs were made. Her presumed 'instincts' for coquetry, docility, are indoctrinated, as is phallic pride in man.*"¹ (480) It is embedded in the consciousness of the society that women and especially women of colour possess certain feminine essence and should be located in the domestic sphere. Sophia in *The Colour Purple* stands in opposition to such conventions and constantly fights her way out of them.

Post her marriage with Harpo, one can notice a constant clash of personalities between the couple. Sophia maintains an upper hand over Harpo and takes a strong stand against domestic violence meted out to women as can be seen when Mr.---says "*Wives is like children. You have to let them know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.*" (p.35) Wife beating and the husband's total control over her life is not something she believes in. It can be traced in the text that she seeks companionship and equality in her relationship however, because of the nurturing Harpo has received from the patriarchal society he develops an urge to control her. While he loves Sophia, he is not able to accept her outright behaviour. Sophia has a greater presence in the traditionally defined 'public space' thus reclaiming agency. Gayatri C. Spivak says "*The deconstruction of the opposition between the private and public is implicit in all feminist activity.*"² (p.30)

The dynamics of Sophia and Celie's relationship is also explored in the novel. As stated earlier, both of their personalities are poles apart. The instance where Celie advises Harpo to beat Sophia in order to control her, exposes the kind of effect patriarchy can have on the thought process of a marginalized woman. On discovering this, Sophia confronts Celie and says "*A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath. I loves Harpo, she say. God knows I do. But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me.*" (p.39) It is then, Celie regrets her actions and the two women bond with each other. Marc-A Christophe in the essay '*The Color Purple: An existential novel*' says "...she [Celie] does so not out of meanness or simple evilness but because she envies Sophia's will and freedom...Sophia was Celie's only model of the indomitable woman."³ (pp.285-286) Hence, it can be inferred that Sophia's assertive personality certainly leaves a mark.

Although Sophia's character is a strong-willed one, the novel also explores the ramifications of such 'deviant' behaviour and the ways in which the society reacts to it. One of the significant instances of this is the confrontation of the mayor's wife and Sophia.

Miss Millie finger the children some more, finally look at Sofia and the prizefighter. She look at the prizefighter car. She eye Sofia wristwatch. She says to Sofia,

"All your children so clean", she says. "Would you like to work for me, be my maid?"

Sofia says, "Hell no."

She says, "What you say?"

Sofia says, "Hell no."

Mayor looks at Sofia, pushes his wife out the way. Stick out his chest, "Girl, what you say to Miss Millie?"

Sofia says, "I say, hell no."

He slap her. (p.p.81)

This excerpt from the novel reflects on the multi-layered understanding of the socio-economic structure of the oppressive society. One can look at how Miss Millie envies Sophia because of how clean and proper her children are. The oppression takes place not only at the level of gender but also at the level of race. The white woman however much dominated in her society becomes the dominator when it comes to a black woman. The cost of saying "*Hell No*" is twelve years of her life in service, away from her family. The police are called and she is beaten up heavily. Ultimately, she is put behind bars. A Black woman who tries to assert her dignity and defy the suppressive norms is subject to extreme cruelty and dehumanization.

Referring to the 19th-century Literary concept brought to the fore by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in the preface to 'Madwomen in the Attic' they talk about how women are "*Enclosed in the architecture of an overwhelmingly male-dominated society*"⁴ (p.xi) The concept of the '**Madwoman in the Attic**'; is borrowed from Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. Gilbert and Gubar use this to critique the rigid categorizations that have been formed to define women. On one hand, we have the '*Angel*' figure who is timid, well-behaved, looks after her children while on the other hand, we have the '*Madwoman*,' who is essentially considered uncontrollable, defiant, full of anger. It can be argued that Sophia falls under the latter category. Like the Victorians, the society of Sophia also tries to appropriate such distinctions to fit their traditional structures. They lock her up in Jail in order to punish her with an intent to control her attitude. The metaphor of the 'enclosed entrapment' seems to be working here as a form of schooling women who dare to speak up.

Her days in the confinement break her spirit. She endures brutal treatment and adopts the style of Celie to obey the authorities. The sentence is reduced and as part of the punishment she lands up as a maid in the mayor's house. She looks after their daughter, Eleanor Jane. While she performs her duties there is hardly any maternal instinct that she develops for the child. The deconstruction of the black nanny figure is apparent in this episode. Her lack of attachment to Eleanor reflects her resistance to the forced oppression by the White community. Linda Selzer in her essay '**Race and Domesticity in The Colour Purple**' says "*In subverting the plantation model of kinship in general and the role of mammy that it assigns to black women in particular, then, Sophia's position as an unwilling domestic in the mayor's household underscores the importance of the personal point of view to the novel's political critique of race relations.*"⁵ (p.74)

Eleanor Jane was very sympathetic with Sophia however, the feelings were not mutual. Sophia's rough attitude annoys Eleanor but it is after the close understanding of Sophia's past life that she realizes the true reason. They reunite and Jane engages in affirmative action. "*Miss Eleanor Jane subsequently comes to work in Sophia's home...Clearly, an improvement in the domestic relationship between the two women, this new arrangement expresses Miss Eleanor Jane's new understanding of their domestic history together;*"(p.11) says, Selzer. This can be understood as Sophia's successful fight against class and race discrimination. Walker not only depicts a positive bonding but also makes a very important political statement.

Sophia's final getaway is when she is employed in Celie's dry goods store. Considering the gender dynamics, Sophia moves from the domestic to the public arena yet again. She actively engages in economic activities that are otherwise considered to be male pursuits. She finally restores her dignity and is able to live life on her own terms not dictated by the society. She is

able to relieve herself of the pain and insults she had faced. Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" can be placed here to understand the way in which Sophia emerges as a much stronger woman than she already was.

"...Did you want to see me broken?/ Bowed head and lowered eyes?/ Shoulders falling down like teardrops,/ Weakened by my soulful cries?... Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,/ I am the dream and the hope of the slave./ I rise/ I rise/I rise." (13-16:39-43)

The above lines reflect on the fact that Sophia's journey is not that of rebirth but of a triumph over the regressive social structures. Her journey is full of roadblocks but she fights her way through it. Her belief in equality and independence is ultimately accepted. The struggle and extreme brutality that Sophia had to go through expose the bitter reality of racial discrimination. Through Sophia's journey, Alice Walker portrays the spectrum of resistance and the need to reclaim agency over one's existence.

Arpita Chowdhury., 21, India

Fantasy of the Birth of Human Beings.

Isis, the beautiful lady who lived on the sun was always feeling lonely which is why she slept all the time. One day she woke up feeling cramped up so she thought to herself, “Why not take a stroll and look at my garden for once. I have been sleeping for ages.”

She stared at the garden as there was nothing to look at. “Ah...I am so bored.” when she was about to leave, she saw an army of ants working really hard. Isis thought, “Hmm... why not create my own world.”

She created a beautiful world called Earth. But she was still unsatisfied with what she created. It lacked something. She went to her bedroom, upset that there was nothing she can do. There, on her table she saw a lump of white clay lying there.

Once again Lady Isis got up and started to create something. Isis rolled a number of small round clay on her palms, sprinkled some magic, painted it with different shades of colors and scattered it all over the beautiful world she created. Isis named the clay as human beings.

Isis looked at the world she created and saw that some clay would roll down the cliff, some would sink into the water and some would just bump into thorny bushes. Therefore to help the clays she gave them legs to walk and hands to help each other. Isis laughed, “Hohoho, now I don't have to roll the clay back to its shape again.”

The next day, she thought that she made a beautiful world yet, she was the only one who could enjoy the magnificent scenery. That is why she gave the humans something called eyes.

Thinking that the garden must have grown something by now she went to look at the garden again. The once empty garden was filled with exotic flowers. She leaned over the flowers and enjoyed the sweet fragrance. “Oh! I should give the humans nose so that they can smell these various scents”, said the lady.

Later Isis saw that humans were fighting with each other and destroying the world she created. This made the Lady extremely furious that the heat of the sun became excruciatingly hot. Due to the heat humans were solidified and their colors were darkened. When Isis was calm she gave them mouth so that they can drink water to maintain their shape, eat fruits and vegetables to bring the original colors and to negotiate with each other.

Human beings were all happy again however, happiness didn't last long as human beings started to use their mouth to hurt each other even more. Watching the humans hurt one another, Lady Isis decided to make two different kinds of humans as companionship called male and female.

Still there was no changes at all. Isis felt like giving up, she felt sad so she hid behind the clouds. As she was crying, rain poured down on the earth, melting all the human beings.

After a while Isis thought that it was too silent. When she saw all the humans became a muddy puddle, her heart ached so much. She then realized that those humans meant more than a lump of clay to her. She exactly knew what to do, she quickly brought them back to life, and made them something called hair and gave them a magical power called emotions. Due to the complicated emotions between humans their population grew day by day that it was hard for them to fit in the small world she created. Therefore she came up with a solution called 'fate'.

She hoped that all the humans would be kind to each other no matter what and show love and care to everyone as she knew that love was boundless. Wishing that all her creations will live in peace and harmony she went to sleep for eternity.

Sonam Peldem Norbu, 19, Bhutan

The Tale Of The Peepal

With its branches dangling like a hanged man's rope, the Peepal tree proudly sprawls out its roots across the loamy earth that it holds. The oddity about Peepal trees is not the enormity of their skeletons, but the stories often associated with them. A conglomeration of stories revolves around the Peepal. The funny thing about stories is that no matter how amusingly genuine they sound, they're mere fancies of one imagination...

until they aren't.

I today, will tell you, for one of them. One that not only resonates, but quite frankly, belongs to me.

Whiffs of warm wind hit me at regular intervals, as I circled the Peepal tree in search of any life. The aura of the lifeless husks swinging from the Peepal made it the coldest day of summer. The once sacred Peepal tree lost all its sanctity and had become a shrine of death.

I snivelled, making my way through the bunch, one hitting me as I shoved another aside, looking for my brother.

Ankit was a strongly built person, a real man he was labelled by the villagers. He was the heart of the village, an eligible bachelor, my father's pride. All day, he toiled in the fields and came back home to father nagging him to marry. His green eyes, even though content, had a bluish hue to them. I remember the day when we pulled out mother's Sarees for washing. Upon seeing them, his eyes gleamed like emeralds. He forked through the heap, admiring each one, eagerly. I was ecstatic to see him pleased. I went to the village courtyard, where the Peepal tree jutted out of the concrete, I offered prayers to the Gods for my brother's long life. I prayed to the tree, where my soulless brother now hangs.

I returned to discover a crowd outside my house talking in hushed tones as my father distraughtly banged his head to the wall.

A mob burst open the door and hauled my brother out the door. Draped in one of our mother's sarees and her jewels, he was a sight for sore eyes. In a flash, he jolted towards the fields, he tripped and fell as the mob caught up to him and thrust his face down to the dust. I saw as he clenched to the now drab fabric and how it was wrenched away from him. With the saree, in the moment he was also stripped off of life. Deprived of his shortly found joy, his mind yet again yanked to senses. Senses are solely made of fear, hatred, toxicity. The vociferous Sarpanch yelled,

"You are a disgrace to the village, you are a kinnar (eunuch)".

My father, in the thrall of the society, stood in silence and I protested as I chalked through a way to save him, only in vain. Ankit never did have a funeral, his body marked with a whip, alongside twelve others rotted in the tree for three whole days and were thrown into the nearby river.

The Peepal tree remains, with ropes swaying from its branches, it still proudly stands, but now whoever nears it, falls to their death. Death surrounds the village now. Often enough, screams of utter anguish are heard from the land. The unheard cries of innocents now have turned into bellows of rage. Screams and cackling laughter harmonizing in agony fill the air every night. But it is only a ghastly nightmare...

until it isn't.

Prateeti Das, 17, India

Orange and Green

The aroma of hotly brewed tea, the punctuatory ‘aahs’ from my father and the background music of a news channel was the perfect introduction to a classic Sunday in our household.

My mother was busy reading out the grocery items to be brought and my father was busy not giving any heed to it. I was but five years old, trying to tie my shoelaces with a scrunched up face and utmost concentration. As I finished my difficult task, I looked up at my father with a grin so big, my face was lost behind it.

“I did it myself!!!”

His grin matched mine “ Very good beta! Chalo let’s go then”

It was daddy’s day out with me. We were going to go shopping and I was going to pick out the vegetables !!!

As the bike jerked forward, both me and my father clutched the handles. The engine roared and off we went on our little trip to the sabzi mandi. I pretended to drive the bike as he actually rode it.

It was around eight when we reached the mandi. My father picked me up and we pushed our way through the mass of skin, cloth and sweat. Unfinished conversations lay hung in the air, “taazi taazi sabzi ” and “ aloo tamatar baingain lelo” was loudly emanated from different corners. The crowd buzzed along as we reached near our old sabzi wala.

The ‘sabzi wala uncle’ as I could not seem to remember his name, was nothing but white and draped with wrinkles. He allowed us all the time in the world to pick out vegetables, something scarcely found in the mandi and let loose a barrage of incidents from his early life. Entertainment for both sides alike.

Old customers had a special place in the mandi and we were amongst those.

He handed me a different basket to put my choice of vegetables in and began up a conversation with my father.

I began a critical inspection of the ‘sabzis’ with all seriousness, slowly picking out different colours, one vegetable from each.

Other customers came and went, I was too consumed in my task to pay attention to them but suddenly, the crowd went silent.

“Who allowed these people to come here today?!!”

A man pointed his finger towards us.

He was tall and huge. His saffron scarf fluttered in the air, and a long red streak donned his forehead. Contempt reeked from the man’s voice as he shouted these words.

But what scared me was his stare. All I could see was unfound, unwanted burning hatred. It seemed I had personally hurt the man, for why would someone hold such amounts of despise?

The air was thick with tension, I clutched onto my father’s kurta as fear clutched onto me.

The next few minutes were a blur of movements.

I was hiding behind my father, the next moment I was yanked away from him, carried away behind a broken pillar. Someone had pulled me to safety, tried to protect me

But he couldn't save me from the screams or the blood, the sight I saw was burned into my soul forever. My father was engulfed into a crowd of men shouting slurs and cries of ‘Jai Shri Ram!!’ ‘Gou Mata ki Jai!!’

Other men and women stood around and gawked at the scene, not a single muscle moved for help, not one person tried to stop it. Soon the clothes of the mob started turning red and I could hear my father screaming, pleading with all his might

His voice quivered with the blows he received but he kept shouting

“Chod d- chod do mujhe..AAHH!!!! ha-hath jodta ho-AAAHHHH AH MAT MARO!!! k- kya- kya galti hai.... Meri, bacchi de-dekh dekh rahi h-AAH!! AAH AH!! chod do...”

“ABBUUUU !!!! ABBU KO MAT MAROO!!! AB-“

The “sabzi wala” covered my mouth, stopping me from shouting, he was scared I would invite the mob on me.

But my tears... they never stopped, I kept trying to strangle away from him. My abbu was hurt, he was crying. Those men were killing him could he not see!!!

I kept bawling my eyes out, I screamed for so long I could no longer hear them, minutes went by and fatigue enveloped me. My body was too weak to handle my emotions.

I fainted.

I woke up, in a room, sweaty and breathing like a maniac.

“Abbu? ABBU!! ABBU KAHAN HO?!!”

I had lost him.

I had lost him to that crowd, to that red flowing all over his body, all my wailing and crying and pleading had convinced no one.

But ...if I had lost him why could I hear his voice?

I dashed towards the voice to find him half sitting on his bed, my mother feeding him while her eyes sprouted tear after tear.

I jumped onto the bed, crawled to his side and latched onto his forearm. My mother wiped away her tears and he started smiling a little, not saying a single word.

I looked at our clock, it was five in the evening.

Slowly I realized there were other people in our room. Mahesh uncle from the kinara shop, Sarla aunty and her daughter, Rahim chacha and a few of my father’s colleagues.

Some were comforting my mother, some were engaged in a heated discussion, Sarla aunty’s daughter sat in the drawing room. I could only see one side of her from our room, but the loud voices emanating convinced me a news channel was switched on.

This sudden crowd scared me a little and I crawled further into my father’s arm.

Abbu took a sharp intake of breathe as he pleadingly said “ Aaramse Beta”.

It took me a few seconds to realize my father had become fragile.

My stomach made little knots as I drank in his state, a bandaged forehead with huge red spots on the side, bruises all over his body and the right hand in a sling.

As I moved away from him to not hurt him unknowingly, he gave me a sad smile and held my hand.

“Abbu, why did they beat you? Why were those men beating you? Did they not understand they were hurting you?”

I couldn't stop my tears as I barged him with questions.

The room fell silent, faces turned away from each other.

I could see the pain and hurt on his face. How do you explain to a five year old the Laws of Hatred? How do you tell her that the orange and green of our flag don't go hand in hand?

How will a child understand that human beings fight each other in the name of unknown, imaginary powers only to praise those powers as being benevolent the next day?

He never gave an answer, but his eyes warned me.

I understood I couldn't get an answer to a question that was asked everyday only to be reciprocated with blows.

Prateeti Das, 17, India

Take the Lead

I love going for walks, and I love my lead – it smells of old leather, earth and damp leaves, and the sweetness of little Anichka’s hands – my owner. Usually, I have to beg to be taken for a walk this in the morning, excitedly jumping up beneath the hook it hangs from; whining until finally a sleepy Anichka, rubbing her eyes, pulls on her fur-lined boots and her warm winter coat, and trudges out into the snow-covered fields with me. But this morning is different...

It was heard just after the cockerel had crowed, along with the first rays of the rising sun peeping over the horizon came that sound – like a low growling sound, and then a harsh snarl – like some mad giant wolf. I started to bark, like all the other dogs in the neighbourhood. Everyone in the house was running about, grabbing a few things and shoving them into plastic bags. Anichka grabbed my lead, and we ran out of the house – her dragging me for once... I was not sure about this wolf...

Instead of heading off across the fields as usual (which in summer are full of gorgeous sunflowers), we instead headed towards the village square. There were already lots of people there already, squeezing tightly into the five or so buses. We queued up. All the time my ears were pricked up. I could hear that rabid wolf getting closer and closer...

I could hear his vicious claws lashing out at everything in his way – destroying people’s homes, cars, gardens. Everything they had worked so hard for with their bare hands. But he was not going to hurt my family as long as I was alive.

I started to growl, but Anichka placed her warm little hand on my head and murmured something to me to calm me down. We were nearly there now; nearly at the front. A Ukrainian soldier was standing by the door to the bus. He blocked our way. He was talking to father, I noticed a blue and yellow flag patch on his uniform. It reminded me of our holidays at the ‘dacha’ in Dnipropetrovsk; the golden fields of grain under the clear, bright blue sky.

The soldier was looking down at me waving his arm towards the people already on the bus and shaking his head sadly. Father turned to look at me too. I could see a large crease appear between Anichka’s eyes, the kind her older brother Artem would fold when he used to make one of those paper planes I loved to chase and snap at with my jaws as a puppy. I miss Artem.

Her eyes grew wider and wider and then suddenly her whole face crumpled, like when Artem would make a mistake with a plane and scrunch it up in frustration. She collapsed and put her arms around me. I felt the wetness of her tears on my fur, like the first icy drops from the roof

when the snow melts in the spring. Father touched my head and tickled my ears. I could see tears in his eyes too.

He then put his hand on Anichka's shoulder and whispered gently in her ear. She hesitantly unclipped my lead and then father led her onto the bus, the other passengers shuffling on the wet floor to make room. I tried to follow, but the soldier's hand was holding on tight to my collar. Normally, I would have bitten him - but something in Anichka's eyes told me not to.

Looking up, I could see her face pressed against the window. The doors of the bus slammed shut, and the bus started to pull away, splashing through the icy puddles. The soldier let go of my collar, and I ran after the bus. It started to speed up, but I am a fast runner.

Maybe this was a game of chase...? Perhaps the bus would stop? Maybe Anichka would jump off, smiling, and I would run to her and lick her face? But now it was heading to the main road, speeding up still more. It was getting away. My heart was bursting, my breath making clouds of steam in the cold morning air.

As I was starting to tire and slow, I suddenly saw Anichka's face pop up at the back of the bus, and I found new energy and put on a rejuvenation. But the bus with still getting further and further away. I looked at Anichka for one last time and saw the tears running down her face as my lead hung limply in her hand.

It is now getting dark...but I will keep heading West, into the sunset... I will keep heading West, until I again find my warm and loving family.

Matvey Spencer-Sokirzhinskiy, 14, British /Ukrainian

Burning

The ruins were smouldering, but the wounds still burned.

Closing her eyes didn't help. The smell of leftover petrol was like a noxious blade, cutting across any pretence she could form of the burning embers being the coals over which, once, the most delicious naan of all north-east Delhi was cooked.

But opening her eyes was worse. So, deeply, worse.

Razed remains of wooden shafts jutted sharply out of fallen hoardings. Half-broken rods and dowels, which had held up the entire foundation of her home, now formed a bizarre obstacle course of poignant memories. The hearth that used to feed the choicest delicacies of Mughlai cuisines, charred in an ironic reversal of its former glory; refusing to rid itself of flames even when it was consumed by them. Symbolic, thought Yasmina bitterly, of her city's very history.

Dawat-e-Ruh. Feast of the Soul. That had been the name of their family restaurant; culinary traditions, secrets and recipes passed down over generations, dating back decades.

All gone in a wisp of smoke. An explosion of violence, an eruption of hate.

She could just about make out the faint remains of the word 'Ruh', soul, on one of the blackened boards- shattered into three pieces, each as scorched as the other. How cruelly true.

Each one of her senses burned. The toxic air laced with loss and arson, singeing her skin; the smoke choking her breath, the vision searing her eyes. The incessant police sirens, shrill enough to ring in her ears forever. The taste of resentment on a tongue that had savoured sugar-coated treats just days ago. This piercing, unbearable ache in her heart, as if a knife was being twisted inside with the sole intent of tearing her apart.

She knelt down, touched the ground. Dust and cinders, ash and earth. Burying her face in her sooty hands, she couldn't help the memories of that day, distorted into nightmares till the point that she couldn't tell reality from feverish fears, flitting across her mind as they had been doing for all of last week.

Yasmina, doing her homework as the delicious aroma of kebabs wafted from the restaurant-kitchen below, preparing for the afternoon rush. Distant sounds of a raucous crowd had reached her open window, though she knew little of where they came from. The next moment, Abbu bursting into their lodging on the second floor, yelling at them all to run, run for their lives. Like a hazy dream, her elder sister grabbing her hand, even as Ammi screamed at the sight of rioters

and mobs, wielding Molotov cocktails and torches; appearing from the corner of the street like Shaitan, the Devil, himself. Her father clutched her baby brother in his arms while her mother rushed to shut down the cooking stoves. All of them, holding each other somehow, holding on as if, if they let go, they would be ripped apart forever. Running for what seemed like aeons, although it was just three streets over. Finding sanctuary in the house of her father's childhood friend, who ushered them in and promised them shelter. Barricades being constructed outside the area, keeping out the mob. One week of uncertainty, trepidation, grief, stupor- never stepping a foot outside. And now, after the who's who of the nation had visited and called for and declared peace, a tentative end to the communal riots, the protests sweeping the country- here she was. Despite her parents' express orders to not venture into their old home, because one could never be too safe- here she was.

Yasmina couldn't help it. She gravitated towards home, what was left of it, as if pulled by an invisible string of belonging.

And yet, now that she was here, she wished she had never come. That she might, at least, have maintained a fool's paradise of her home, kept an image still intact; not shattered into fragments as she beheld it now.

A child's voice, high and fresh, but mellowed with care beyond his years, floated to her ears.

"Didi?" came Madhav's soft call, intoned with a slight hesitation, posed as a question. "Ma asked me to look for you. I guessed you might be here. It's time for lunch."

Yasmina got up from the rubbles; turned slowly, with a smile that took less and less effort as she finally looked at the young boy who'd just addressed her as 'elder sister', who had offered her his favourite toys in the hope of providing comfort. Who had gone to the temple and come back with the holy offerings and excited chatter of having prayed for her family, having no idea of the very divisions between their religions which had wrecked devastation on her home.

Communal riots could destroy her home. They could hurl stones to dent the pillars which bolstered her roots, they could brew a tempest of enmity to ravage, in mere minutes, the hopes of generations.

But they could never take away the simple compassion of the children who were raised in the midst of ruin and fury.

She had watched the familiar faces of her childhood perish. She had watched this inferno claim the lives of the elders who would give her sweetmeats and conspiratorial smiles. She had seen the most unflinching mothers and fathers weep. Grown children turn to stone as they looked back, running. Young children scarred for life as they asked their parents, "Why are we leaving?"

Where are we going?"; or sometimes, "Where is Mama? Baba?"- only to receive barely suppressed tears in response.

She would not forget. But she would not weep for what was lost, either.

Not when she had hope and kindness left to value; as an innocent child tugged at her hand, leading her to his house, where his parents had given her family shelter at risk to their own safety.

"What do we have for lunch today, Madhav?"

"Ma wanted to surprise you, but I already saw her asking your father for the recipe of your favourite dish. She's never touched meat before in her life, but she took Uncle's and Aunty's help and prepared seekh kebab. I don't suppose she'll let me try it, do you? Oh well, you can tell me how they taste. We have some kaju barfi for sweets later, though! Now that's a rare treat. Didi, why are you crying?"

Yasmina smiled through the solitary drop gliding over her cheek.

"Nothing, it's just the dust. Let's go home."

Saundarya D. Nair, 15, India

The Palette of Missing Colours

Dear World,

The first time you saw me in the newspaper, you were disgusted. The second time, you were afraid because what if you were next?

Life is fragile that way, easy to break, and end.

You saw the drawings, didn't you? Painted grey all over. It was just a glance, maybe, when you switched channels. I sent it to the cops, but they couldn't crack the code.

Oh, well. It wouldn't have mattered if they did.

You saw the blood splattered all over the floor and the walls, and you thought, "What kind of monster would do that?"

I have encountered enough monsters in my life to turn into one.

The first one: Mr Matthew. You have seen him—in that pixelated photo in the newspaper. Remember? The owner of that orphanage. The one below the headline: "*40-year-old man murdered in his home.*"

You read about him, and you thought, "*Bad things always happen to good people.*"

You believed the story, the dice rolled, and you forgot there were other sides to it. You turned the page, and the story should have ended there. The World is full of contradictions, and monsters, and you were too busy reading the scandalous article about some model to worry too much about it.

The second one: Ms Mace. "*Shit.*" You thought this time. She was smiling in her picture, and the sunlight was like a halo over her head. The dice rolled again, and you thought the same things, and you read, "*36-year-old woman killed in daylight.*" You were scared, weren't you?

Monsters only hunt at the night.

You glanced at the door, you double-checked the lock, and you slept haunted by my crimes. The media painted me with a mask of evil, and you didn't care to inspect the scars beneath it.

In a World of constant contradictions, you chose your battles—painted them black and white. I am a shade of grey, torn between my past and present, but your palette never had that colour.

"Bad things always happen to good people." You kept thinking. Bad and good. Angels and demons. Hell, and heaven. There is no in-between, is there? No space for the truth—you read what you believe and believe what you read. Monsters are just that. Monsters.

I have seen the words they write on that Facebook page for Mr Matthew.

He was a good man.

He didn't deserve this.

He was an angel.

I hope they catch the person who did this.

Bad things always happen to good people.

I wonder what it's like to live with prejudiced ignorance such as yours.

Mr Matthew wasn't the saint they painted him to be. I was a victim of my circumstances, and he was a victim of his crimes. Ms Mace wasn't an angel, for she stayed quiet and didn't let me speak, either. I hid my scars, so, they wouldn't add more to them.

Though, they are gone, now.

I killed him with the belt he hit me with, and her with the knife she slashed me with when I tried to speak. When I tried to leave. Now, he can't hurt any other orphan, and she can't silence anyone else from telling their story.

Tomorrow, you will read another article in the paper. *"25-year-old commits suicide."*

I am my last crime.

"What kind of monster would do that?" You will think when you glance at the scars all over me, the faint remnants of a word carved into my right shoulder. Liar.

You will feel sorry for me until you find out who I am.

"A monster," you will call me.

"Good riddance," you will think, and the liar carved onto my right shoulder (Ms Mace's masterpiece) would colour your opinions.

I don't deny being a monster in your palette of missing colours.

Now, they can't deny it either.

P.S. I know what you are thinking. She could have gone to the cops. (I did, no one listened.) Told someone. There is always a way out, right? When God closes a door, he opens a window and all that. Well, mine was a house without doors and windows.

Yours,

Indiana

Asmi Aggarwal, 16, India

Expression to Evolution

The suffering whisper under the sheets of domination let out in a muffled scream, *'The marks you left on my skin, left an imprint on my life when you coloured my body under the dark shades of ascendancy.'*

This muffled scream belongs to every woman who has been subjected to the brutality of physical abuse. For centuries, we have been writing the scriptures of unlawful sexual assault, precisely rape which we now identify as a culture. Rape victimise not only women but also men, women to the rape and men to their desires. From catching a shadow follow her to a man looking at her with lust would take her back to the time when both her mind and body was dominated by a will that was not hers, a will of fulfilment.

Rape begins with a command, a command that comes with authority that most men assume on themselves. The authority which should be conferred by consent but is assumed to being bestowed on men with regard to their sex.

Every man who considers this authority belonging to him shouldn't question a woman's charge against him. Every woman who voluntarily surrenders or is made to submit, dispossesses herself of her power to take an action against him.

Every tear that she sheds is the shedding of his character, every mark on her skin is a darker mark on his personality, every driblet of blood that drops out of her is the dropping of his disposition and when all of that exuviate, it is not a woman but a man's honour that is wounded.

An embrace of love by your significant other surrounds you in an atmosphere of warmth and softness. The tenderness attaches itself to you like a slow rhythm of the leaves on a spring evening. These same leaves produce a rasping sound against a sudden gust. The embrace no longer is conclusive of love but of a hateful storm.

Isn't love more pleasant than hate? And, isn't making love with a girl more beautiful than raping her?

The finger of blame continues to be pointed at the woman regardless of the fact that her body is her canvas to style. A painting always remains to be a painter's possession, a possession which comes to life with the choice of his or her shades. It persists to be a woman's choice to adorn herself with clothes that she perceives would radiate her beauty as bright as her soul. Every painter aims to achieve a masterpiece with his palette, the same way a woman dresses herself to

stare at herself in the mirror for a little longer. The intentions behind her selection of clothes cannot be judged the same way that one cannot perceive an artist's intention behind his art.

If you have to compare your thoughts when you look at a mesmerizingly beautiful sculpture or a girl wearing a body con dress, what would it be? To most people, the intention to look at the sculpture for the second time would be because the art would unfold an atmosphere of serenity for them but to stare at the girl would be an action incited by thoughts like raping her or putting her in a position of shame only because she wanted to dress herself up like she wants to.

'We talk about how many women were raped last year, not about how many men raped women', a fact mentioned by Jackson Katz rightly frames the accusation to the reality, not to a picture that is merely to foment fear and shock. Being an Indian, I'm well aware of the consensus that highlighted that one woman is raped every 15-16 minutes in India but there has been no spotlight drawn on the men who commit rapes. A woman is brought to the fore enunciating that she was raped accompanied by details of the location and her miserable physical condition. It isn't a rape story until you've covered the depth of the wound that doesn't lie on the surface of the skin but to the core of the thought and emotion and it isn't a rape story until you've not shared the action to the lime light, an action not only consumed by women but also perpetrated by a man.

The concrete pavement under the moonlight in a lane drowned in darkness, echoes the voice of the descending footsteps. As the clock ticks deeper into the night, the moon begins to hide behind the clouds. The walls of the lane grow darker and the echoes slowly reduce in momentum, getting dragged in a nightmare that the girl saw and felt with her open eyes...

How many of you have felt this, walking through a dark street at night with your palms sweating as you fidget with them looking around with fear packed in your eyes?

The fear in a woman's eye when a man follows her, opens the man's vision to use his body as a weapon to suppress her.

If the woman never walked through the lane at night, she wouldn't have been raped but what if the man was educated enough to realise the consequences of his actions, then he wouldn't rape her.

Wrong questions never lead to the right answers. If a woman is the axis of the questions, her orbit of existence gets restricted in a vacuum of trepidation, cravenness, excessive constraints and repression.

It is only when we question the man's awareness of the repercussions of his actions that we can broaden our orbit of education.

The incentive behind any development is a cause, a cause that leads us to evolution. It is the curriculum of education that needs to be extended not the length of a woman's skirt or the extension of her restrictions. Considering the lack of education on sexual assault as a cause will evolve the juvenile minds to structure the community on the foundations of safety and responsibility while inculcating women wouldn't only make their minds oblivious to sexual assault but also lead them into a time loop of unfair treatment and irresponsibility.

The beginning of this long awaited change needs women's expressions, expressions that will turn their pains both into an evolution and a revolution.

Jeeya Balwani, 18, India

Cursed Birth of Gender Stereotypes

The clock struck six and then she knew she had to wake up to another day of losing her femininity. The scent of dominant stereotypical assumptions summoned her morning. The weights of discrimination that she had slept over hung heavier on her shoulders every morning.

Most of us wake up with these weights that prescribe the rules of our masculinity or femininity. Bound within the questions of our identity, we experience gender stereotyping, a culture reflecting these rules.

Identifying the popular misconception of masculinity and femininity being the determined traits of a man and a woman respectively, we walk ourselves into this culture every day.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie had emphasized on the fact that, *"The problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be, rather than recognizing how we are."* Gender stereotypes challenge our individualistic identity and suppress the very soul of our personality, questioning the equality between the two genders in not just some but all realms of life.

Ever viewed a parliament meeting and zoomed in to find only a pair or two of women sitting amongst the majority of men talking about a woman's issue like rape laws?

Recently, a male Indian politician on the issue of rapes had remarked, *"When rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it."*

Analyse the meeting again, is it justified for more men to be in that room talking about rapes?

An issue that needs to be treated with sensitivity by a woman is being asserted on with a casual joke. The power of sensitivity within a woman is being overpowered by the apathetic nature of a man's persona. A matter that should be represented by a woman in a strengthening and empathetic way is being enjoyed as a laugh.

A woman's representation makes her expression echo in the ears of every person being so magnificent that each will want to make it louder with every echo but the sad truth is that these voices lack in numbers. Our governments lack these expressions, expressions that give meaning to a policy.

A policy becomes an action only when it backs the representation of women on issues that address her.

These expressions don't find their way into the public eye, the same eye that viewed women and men differently. While men were groomed to be confident, assertive and outgoing, women were taught to be reserved, unassertive and coy. The stereotype towards women taking a back seat in expression while men being the front runners in representation made them not only the representatives of their gender but also for women leading to the grounds of numerical inferiority in leadership.

"I am not sure how we got to this place, where a girl's only value is in what kind of marriage she has, how capable she is of keeping a man happy", a statement by Amy Engel suggests the devaluating role of gender stereotypes. The construct of society on the foundations of these stereotypes leads to the deconstruction of our human potential. The strength of a man is measured by the amount of millions in his bank account while a woman's strength is measured by the number of smiles she can lighten up on her man.

Take a train down your childhood and reminisce the family game you played with your friends where the boys used to play the role of fathers who assumed the task of business while the women portrayed the role of mothers and housewives. The game which is observed as an imitation of the responsibilities of parents is actually an imitation of gender roles.

For a woman, childcare is parenting but for a man is babysitting. For a woman, cooking is a job but for a man is observed as a support to his wife. For a woman, household management is a mandated responsibility but for a man is his skill.

A man remains to be paid for his choices while a woman who is devoid of her choices remains to be unpaid for her assumed obligatory responsibilities.

The narrowness of most minds fail to pave an open ground for one half of the population to exercise their potential with a choice.

The first cry of an infant that fills the room with curiosity awaits the nurse's identification of the gender. The birth of a boy becomes an armour on the family while the birth of a girl only takes their armour off. The birth of a boy is attributed to the showering of treasure in the family's casket while for a girl it is attributed to the emptying of the casket for dowry.

Even before a boy sheds his first tear, he is placed in his mother's arms but the moment a girl sheds her first tear she is dropped in a pail of water that chokes her to death leading to her abortion.

While a boy calmly lays in his mother's lap as her tender hands caress his face, a girl's position is always presumed as a weight hanging on the shoulder of her parents...the same weight that increases on her shoulder as she wakes up to another day.

Only the beginning of gender stereotypes at birth can mark its end because the determination of gender only suggests if you are a boy or a girl not how you transform as a man or a woman.

Jeeya Balwani. 18, India

Greed or need?

What is change and momentum if not contributed to by youth? Short-term.

Which benefitted group will continue to change communities the longest? Children and youth.

My country, Mongolia, is small and the capital city is cramped. We say ‘everyone knows each other’, but truth be told, everyone here knows only what they want to. No one disagrees how it’s more convenient and it’s more blissful to believe that: there is a fairness to who the sun touches.

The very conception of the project was an idea moulded with my two other friends. A plan to face our community ‘head on’. To shed what light we could at our age on the claustrophobic and cramped parts of the city; the groups that were convenient to simply look past.

The trivial decisions came first and we named ourselves ‘**CharitAble**’; to enAble the brightest futures. Then, we came to finding the cause. Would it be okay for us to "**pick**" a cause?

To deem one problem too big and another too small?

I found that in the context of aid, it’s sadly not enough to want to have more to give or to want to tackle a bigger fish. I had friends and together we had our limits, however, the limits of age were not something we were ready to wait out.

Without a rope long nor strong enough, we couldn’t move the sun into a fairer spot for more people to enjoy the warmth of a new morning. So we planned excursions out to seek a single cause ourselves. Setting out in the mornings, then calling, emailing, messaging, and travelling to multiple locations everyday back-to-back. Directors, managers, and adults said It was too homemade. Too wishful and unsourced teen dreaming. All three of us are sixteen and they didn’t want to bother going through the trouble of directing us on how to help.

This small city has too deep of crevices and too dark of cracks for my ideas and solutions to ever reach, let alone brighten.

These squashed spaces have created concentrated needles of problems. They’ve probed and pricked for generations but we’re content with merely accommodating them. Our organs morph around them, they absorb into the very asphalt and sidewalks of normality, and we walk atop them everyday.

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“They've been taking turns using the phone. We'll also share the one computer throughout the day so they can keep up with their work.”...

Raising kids is hard. Not only in the financially sound sense, but also in the sense of nurturing an inspired and happy person. *'Erdem Tuv'* is the name of an orphanage in my city. It is a single-storey building with a bubbly yellow sign of its name. *Erdem Tuv* houses twenty-three orphans; separated into big rooms by gender, they sleep in bunks with one another.

I live in the *“Land of the Eternal Blue Sky”*. Our year round lack of clouds are in part due to the belt of mountains at our borders. Clouds swept by winds will perish once hitting these encompassing ranges, filtering the valley inside to be a total blue. The sun had no sheath that day and the temptation to give in to the heat's resistance was strong. But before spirits wavered, a cab was called and my friends and I set off for a thirty-minute ride out of the city.

The orphanage was our last spot for the day. It was summer in Ulaanbaatar, which meant an unshaded, dry, and dusty afternoon. The call before we arrived was reassuring. The lady who picked up was named 'Udur'. She saw no harm in sitting down and giving us her time.

Covid had hit the Erdem Tuv orphanage hard, and as we sat outside under a gazebo which was also being used to shade their clothes drying rack, Udur spoke with apologetic fear,

“I just can't risk the hospital bills even if one of them were to get sick.”

She wore summer colours with a small straw-weaved hat and her skin showed sun spots, smile lines, and crows feet,

“It's no problem in the slightest. We were the ones wanting to talk anyway.”

We took in one another's presence and Udur's pace showed a patience that was relieving to feel; an adult that hadn't made up her mind yet.

“So, you are offering to help?”

We nodded our heads enthusiastically and Udur's crows' feet flexed deeper into her grin.

I asked the questions we had asked every other adult we sat down with, "What kind of help would be best? Are you willing to accept our ideas? What are the biggest problems or shortages you are facing currently?"

There is a boy with a cochlear implant who will soon run out of batteries. The children haven't been in school and share one computer amongst twenty. The babies and toddlers of the

orphanage are constantly low on diapers. The orphans have had no outdoor experiences or activities ever since the first lockdown two years ago.

From that summer (2021), to this year's fall (2022), we would go on to visit inside the orphanage many times along with hosting three different events for Erdem Tuv under the watchful eyes of more found support.

Intention, planning, and meditating forethought is key in effective help. But sometimes unforeseen luck and a stroke of fortune will increase your product by ten fold.

If Udur hadn't been by the phone to pick up when we called, we may have given in to that day's blistering heat. If we hadn't found 'Erdem Tuv', the prospect of our non-profit could have dissolved, and if this project hadn't been coincidentally conceived during calls to submit for a UNESCO grant, our help would have never been as effective.

It was a soberingly exciting day when the congratulatory email of having passed both application and interview came from the Mongolian Commissioned UNESCO; "*Response to The Socio-economic Impacts of COVID-19*". Their aid would be a thousand dollars disbursed via wire transfer.

We were kids being given a greenlight and the monetary resources needed from the adults. But with wielding this new weight of another entity's reputation and recognition, '**CharitAble**' had to be heaved up to reach expectations.

The events that we put forward to orchestrate were: a workshop, field trip, and a fundraiser. In those coming months, these goals expected us to not only plan every step of the day hour by hour, budget costs of food and transport, find venues, safety risks and logistics, paired with having to lead a group of other teen volunteers, but to pull it all together with no other leader than ourselves.

Once again, though it buffed our bodies to the bone by the end, I was adamant on being the change that my motherland needed.

I appealed the 'Workshop' to my school's teachers and explained at their staff meeting that the day entailed lessons like beginner English, Science, PE and personal finances for the older bracket of orphans; a school's day of learning vocabulary, decorating cupcakes, and firing rockets. Then, more of the adults in my life stepped in and showed their own support.

On the day off, we labouredly hauled the two dozen boxes of donations into the school, briefed our volunteers one final time and filled gift bags with candy, sticker pages, and stationary. We planned also for recess, outdoor break and lunch.

Once reaching the halfway mark, my bodily exhaust was keeping my energy at a heel and the constant cranks of unexpected problem resolving blurred my nerves; an impatience.

As my partners and I flurried around in our own clouds of rush and panic, I stood overseeing the children's after lunch potty break and the volunteers helping to switch their masks to new ones. Then while in the midst of formulating a command to bark out, I felt a damp palm softly tap three times on my left leg. A boy with a chunky knit vest and glossy hazel eyes looked up at my frazzled dark face. After tapping three times, his undried hands latched onto my pants with a weak tug.

On the one side of his temple was a white device that connected under the shell of his ear to his crown. I smiled down at him, but only my eyes were not covered by a mask and he kept his hand unmoving and unwavering.

I bent down and steadied my hands on both knees. I smiled once again and asked him if he needed something. The tiny boy jumped and hooked his hand to the back of my neck, bringing my mouth up to the side of his head. Though taken aback, I repeated the question and he then moved my head to direct my ear up to his mask,

“My hands are too wet. Can you help change my mask for me?”

This boy knew I wouldn't be able to hear him and knew that he couldn't hear me. To be acting for yourself. To demand someone's special attention. To pull them down from their heights and to have them listen closely to your words. Is this greedy or selfish?

After the success of our workshop, we still had two other events to give just as much time and finesse to. Was it selfish to ask the three museums of our 'field trip' to partner with us and provide free entrances and tour guides?

Was it selfish of us to host a fundraiser with a donation goal? With talks from Udur herself, a performance from a prodigy orphan on the violin and an auction of which proceeds would go to the orphanage and the artist who needed a life-saving surgery.

Social justice, human rights, and righteousness starts at a core or root. Social justice then initiates when the conventions of 'selfishness' and 'laziness' cease to be connotated with asking for help. Yet when 'help' still can't hear you, justice is also being able to speak up loud enough to be heard through a barrier. I bent down to be on level with the boy's voice. My head was

sandwiched between his hands as he directed my voice closer to himself. This wasn't a 'greed' to be heard, it was a right.

In the deepest parts of shade, so much that it's practically darkness, we grope and feel out for allies to give comfort and direction, and in this darkness is when we find who they are. The adults that ran UNESCO helped us and the adults that came to the fundraiser helped to raise seven thousand dollars that night.

I could talk again about the bodily exhausts and the mental exhausts that pounded at my being for the several weeks leading up to both events, but that's encapsulated neatly in the past and the results of this work are being lived now in the present.

In February of 2022, CharitAble delivered multiple laptops, ipads, and kindles to the orphanage.

Looking back after having crossed through this tangible threshold, it brings us three teenagers immense closure and pride. One of these dark syringes of ignorance has been eradicated. But we are only three and this is only one. One from a city full of them. How could I not be overwhelmed, there is still so much to be done.

Ninjin Battsengel, 16, Mongolia

Biographies

Washam Waseem: She is an 18 year old lady from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan who has ICS - Physics as her major in 11th grade. She began writing in her 6th grade and she has written up to 90 poems. As a poet, she sees writing as a therapeutic outlet.

Charlotte Yeung: She is a best-selling author, illustrator, and 2022 Indy Youth Poet Laureate. She is the author and illustrator of *Isabelle and the Magic Bird*, *Verge*, and *Coloring Climate Justice*. She is a 2022 IHRAF Youth Fellow. Her poetry has been recognized by Carnegie Hall. In her free time, she studies different cultures, reads funny news, and speculates about futuristic tech.

Tarini Shivani: She is a 16 year old who resides in India. In her fifth grade, her teacher read her class , "*Gregor The Overlander*" and ever since, she became an avid reader. She is an intersectional feminist and activist who loves nothing more than cuddling up with her dog and reading a crime novel.

Rasim Chigozi Goodness: He is mostly known as Rasim Chigozi is a writer who hails from Port Harcourt City of Nigeria. Being the last out of six (6) children, he has been blessed with writing skills which has enabled him to become a one time winner of PWAC Best Writer Of The Year. He is a student of University of Port Harcourt, a poet and a motivational speaker / writer.

Hafusat Oluwabusayomi Ogundele: She is a Nigerian creative writer, poetess, quote blogger, and storyteller. Her writings explore love, nature, art, artifacts, lifestyle, and lifecycle. When she is not writing, she is drawing, sketching, or painting. She says "hi" on Facebook: busayo busayomi, Instagram: busyink_ and Twitter @busyink

Krishangi Oberoi: She is a enthusiastic teenage reader, writer, and artist from India. Since her childhood, books have always accompanied her. It makes her plummet into an infinite abyss with just words and nothing more. Her most adored novels/series are Arc of Scythe, Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Divergent etc.

Mykyta Ryzhykh: An Ukrainian with works featured at several journals including "Dzvin", "Ring A", "Polutona", "Rechport", "Topos", "Articulation", "Formaslov", "Colon", "Literature Factory", "Literary Chernihiv", on the portals "Literary Center ” and “Soloneba”, in the “Ukrainian literary newspaper”, the almanac “Syaivo”.

Sanika Ugale: She is a 21 year old from Maharashtra, India. She is a supporter of gender equality and an advocate of mental fitness.

Aleenah Huneef: She is an 8 year old from Srinagar Kashmir, India. She has a deep passion for painting and creating images and aims to become a leader.

Sanchi Bansal: She is a 13 year old Indian who has a passion for Art and she aims to use her creativity to spread awareness about topics of communal importance.

David Onofre: He is a 19 year old born in 2002 in Sioux City Iowa and moved to Nebraska when he was 5 years old. He is American Latino and grew up in Grand Island. David has a passion for art such as creating digital illustrations, drawings, and paintings.

Karla Susana Comola Bobay: She is a young but enthusiastic artist with great goals in the area of Art, she is currently studying at a professional Art school and she likes to enter contests to gain more experience.

Angelica C. Gary: She is an 11-year-old African American artist. Her artwork of Ida B. Wells-Barnett was displayed at the White House in 2020. She intends to attend Harvard University and use her art to help promote justice.

Seyon Rajanikanthan: He is a grade 2 student with autism who has a very huge passion for the Arts and Sciences. He is working really hard to fulfill his goals with the help of his family and is trying to spread awareness on his behalf to show that inclusion is very important in schools and in the workplace. He believes that they also have a right just like everyone else to be successful and be productive members of society if opportunity is given to them.

Harshini Sangeetha: She is a 17 year old Indian with hearing impairment who has developed an excellent talent in speech. She has a special interest in Art, her aim is to prove to the world that children with special needs aren't disabled.

Serena Moon Birkett Leech: She was brought up in Spain in a house in the middle of a forest, she has a deep passion for Art which is something she intends to pursue. She currently study in UCA (Canterbury) Illustration and animation.

Paula Nino Torres: A 20-year-old Colombian student currently studying Illustration and Animation at the University for the Creative Arts in Canterbury, England. Paula has been creating illustrations for quite a long time and most of Paula's work include a lot of symbolism and double meanings.

Adyaashree Rout: She has been a creative kid since she was 3 years old. With calmness she sat at the windowsill and drew nature and doodled caricatures. Today, she is 8 years old and is smart enough to paint with minimum elements exhibiting maximum expression.

Denis Avdic: He is from Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is 17, a student of the second grade at Richmond Park College in Sarajevo. He views painting as a medium of self expression and gets the opportunity to ‘talk’ about human rights, people, tradition, protection of environment, his fascinating country and nature. He feels that art unites and connects people all over the world and we have to strengthen our connections and raise awareness on human rights and justice. His works were presented worldwide and he had an honor to receive ten international awards (from USA, Japan, Azerbaijan, England, France, Turkey).

Akinola Opeyemi Marian: She is an introverted writer currently in her final year as a Law student at OAU. At leisure, she either reads fiction, sleep, or watch movies. She has a few writing and accolades to her name including the: Osun State Young Writers merit award, 2015 and a finalist in the Funmi Roberts essay competition 2021. Her works have been published on Kalahari review, Dansabe magazine, and several blogs. Whatever the future holds for her, there is no doubt that Marian will never relinquish her pen.

Oyeleye Mahmoodah Temitope: She is a 16 year old Nigerian. She delights in freelance writing and is a member of Hilltop creative arts foundation, Nigeria. She is a student of Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. She is the author of Faded blues.

Arpita Chowdhury: She is a Third-year B.A. English Honours student with a minor in Journalism at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi. She is presently working as the President of the Department of English Union. She is the founder of Jazbaat Foundation, Delhi based project to uplift underprivileged students. An avid writer with numerous publications on National and International-level platforms such as International Journal for Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS), International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research (IJSSHR) That University Student UK, Feminism In India (FII), Hindu College Gazzette and Jabberwock, LSR and Live Wire.

Sonam Pelden Norbu: She is a 19-year-old resident of Bhutan. Currently she is studying in Chandigarh University in Punjab, India opting BSc optometry. She is the eldest daughter with two younger brother. Being an introvert, writing serves as her easiest means of self expression, her short stories convey her thoughts and wildest imagination which makes her really happy.

Prateeti Das: She is a creative writer who enjoys writing and sees it as a means of self expression. She looks forward to sharing more of her creative pieces with her audience.

Mamali Mishra: She is a high school graduate currently preparing for college entrance examinations. Her articles have featured on Odisha Bytes, a news portal headed by her school magazine. She is also a content writer at "*Prachi Story*." She is a humanities student with a special interest in literature, history and political science. She loves dabbling in art, music or dance and has learnt quite a few styles in all.

Matvey Spencer-Sokirzhinskiy: He is a half British and half Ukrainian who resides in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He considers himself to be a "*third culture kid*" as he has been living around the world for most of 14 years of his life.

Saundarya D. Nair: She is a high-school student and youth leader from India. Having been raised in one of the most underdeveloped areas in her country, witnessing the inequality permeating society has fuelled her passion for social activism. As a Girl Up Leader under the United Nations Foundation, and a member of various projects and organisations, she has been part of various campaigns to advocate for and contribute towards gender equity, focussing on girls' education, menstrual hygiene and combating xenophobia amongst other issue. In her free time, she can be found engaged in sports, reading, art and music. She firmly believes in the power of words in channeling change, and actively engages in public speaking and creative writing.

Asmi Aggarwal: She is a passionate and enthusiastic 16-year-old writer residing in India. She has written short stories for various anthologies in the past and participated in various writing competitions like WRITING HAT (Took the first position).

Jeeya Balwani: She pursues her passion for writing in various genres specifically activism and feminism. She started writing when she was 13 and completing 100 quotes in 2020, she got my first book published in 2021, titled as ‘Heart Unfolded’. She writes to put forth realms like gender inequality and gender stereotypes that she disapproves of and her writing drives on the idea to change it. A quote by Maya Angelou remains in her conscience every time she express change – ‘If you don’t like something, change it’ and that’s exactly what she does.

Ninjin Battsengel: A Mongolian studying in a British school for ten years now, she really enjoy writing and is proud to say that she is a quarter way through her first novella. Hand-in-hand with creative prose and writing, she tries to be as involved as she can with various UN related extracurricular activities; perhaps just a sort of affinity she developed.

Editors' Biographies

Mahbubab Kanyinsola Salahudeen: She is a genre-bending writer, Girl Up Leader and human rights activist from South Western Nigeria who has a great interest in fictional prose and confessional poetry. She enjoys writing and sees it as a therapeutic outlet. Her works have featured / forthcoming at several literary magazines some of which include Spillwords, Brittle Paper, Ice Lolly, Arts Lounge, SprinNG journal, Litround journal, Aayo Magazine, Nanty Greens, Cathartic Review, Northern Otter Press, Konya Shamsrumi, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Confetti, Fterota Logia, Borrowed Solace, Terror House Press, Euphoric Musings, Ninshar Arts and elsewhere. She is a winner of IHRAF 2021 Creators of Justice Literary Award, a Girl Up 2021 Scholarship Fund winner, IHRAF 2022 Youth Fellow and curator of IHRAF 2022 Youth Anthology.

Tom Block: IHRAF founding Executive Director Tom Block is the author of six books, playwright, 25-year visual artist and producer of the first Amnesty International Human Rights Art Festival (2010, outside of Washington DC) He developed his activist work into a model, published as *Prophetic Activist Art: Handbook for a Spiritual Revolution* (Centre for Human Ecology, Glasgow, Scotland, 2014). He was also a Research Fellow at DePaul University (2010), has had his plays performed over the last decade in numerous NYV theaters, and exhibited his artwork more than 200 times around the US. He has spoken about his ideas throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Turkey and the Middle East. For more information about his work, visit tomblock.com

Cover Art By Salina Guo