



NAGRIKA

legacy of hope | calendar 2024



NAGRIKA

CALENDAR 2024

legacy of hope

The 2024 calendar, Legacy of Hope, collates some of the heartfelt and inspiring stories from Nagrika's Fourth Annual Writing Contest. Every year, Nagrika looks for writings inspired by original ideas and personal experiences that are capable of shaping fresh opinions and catalysing actions. This year, we had asked the youth to speak with senior citizens around them, about the vision for their cities. This vision was nourished by the experiences of the senior citizens who had seen their cities in a different era. One of the threads that tied many of the stories was of hope- the hope to balance the authentic soul of their cities while providing for the expanding aspirations of future generations. We are excited to share this calendar, capturing the snippets of this hope in the form of these stories and poems.

The 2024 calendar features the winners, special mentions, and some of the other interesting writing pieces from 11 different cities all around India. You can read the full stories on our website.

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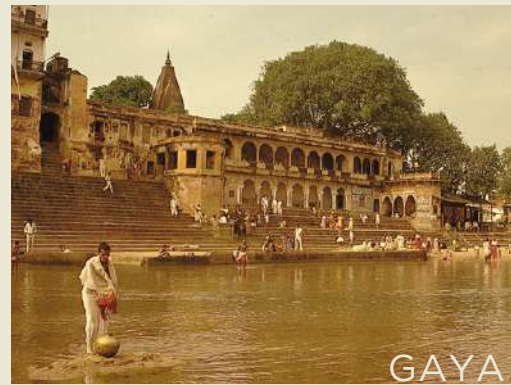
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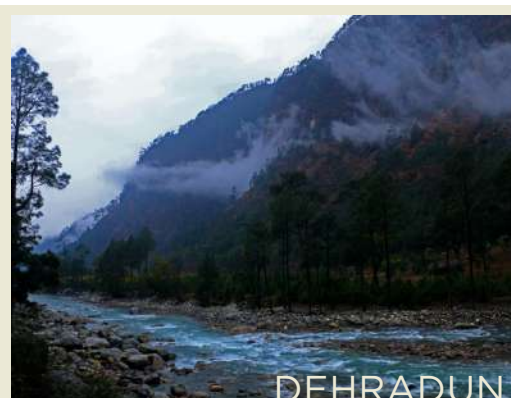
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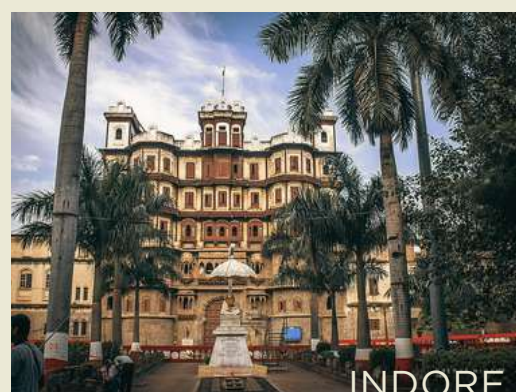
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That's the curse of falling in love with your home place. It never stays the same; whether it gets better or worse, time will decide. But make sure you have at least one person with whom you can climb the Srigiri hill and stare at the changing, rather emerging skyline once in a while.

The Dance of Shifting Landscapes and Cultures

Pavan Karthik | First Place Winner

For the past ten years that he had been retired, Ramu found solace in a leisurely routine of waking up around 07:30 AM —alone though, for the past six years. Reaching the balcony as soon as the hour's hand of the wall clock hit 8, he'd get lost in the newspaper world for another hour. But today he did not reach for the newspaper. Instead, he sat in his designated chair on the balcony, absorbing the bustling activity in the

building and on the streets below them through the spaces offered by the safety grills. The dream he had right before waking up was too beautiful to not think about again. As he looked out, he recollected that he was dreaming about this very city: Ongole. But the Ongole in front of his eyes did not match the one in his dream. The aesthetic and beauty of the city, he realised, did not match.

In his dream, from this very spot, he was able to see the Srigiri hills, the road that led to the hill, and the temple on each side of it, in its entirety. Looking lost into the Sirgiri hill that is now only half visible because of the tall new apartments, on top of being covered with an equal number of houses as the trees, he shook his head in grief. This shouldn't be happening!

"I think Canada," Ramu heard his twelve-year-old grandson talk to someone inside the house but he focussed on recollecting the dream. Transcending to another state now, he could see the dream clearly now.

Listening to the sparrows chirrup, hurriedly swallowing the grains his wife left on the sill purposefully, Ramu put on his chappal. As he stepped on the supposedly dirt road, Ramu realised its transformation into a muddy one was because of the rain last night. The shopkeeper adjacent to their house shouted that it poured down so heavy that her breakfast items are left unsold; a rare case.

"I have my granddaughter's marriage in a few weeks and the rains are not helping," she added, referring to the sixteen-year-old Ramu has often seen around.

He knew that it wasn't the age to get

married but he also knew not to meddle with another family's decisions. For he had to get married at a similar age. Pitying her situation but not crossing either his limit of selflessness or boundaries, he bought one extra plate of dosa and idly.

"Only for you, Devi," he said, paying her.

"This extra ginger chutney is only for you too, Ramu," she replied, packing it all in a thin plastic bag.

Walking towards the cycle rickshaw spot, he greeted a few people back and rejected a few requests from people to drop him on their bikes. A group of middle-aged men in their unofficial rickshaw wala uniform: a shirt with the top two buttons undone revealing their banians, coupled with a lungi that barely hid the shorts they wore inside it. The lungis only came down to their original length occasionally. As Ramu approached them, one such guy threw away his unfinished bedi, waved the smoke away and lowered his lungi.

"Come, let's start, Ramu garu," he said as he bid his byes to the other rickshaw wala.

"When will you quit that godforsaken habit, Krishna!" Ramu knew it was a rhetorical question and there was no use

bringing up the same old conversation they had on a daily basis for years now.

Chattering about trivial topics only stopped once they arrived at the destination. Krishna received the food packet on top of his fare.

"But, the USA has..." This time it's his daughter-in-law's turn to disturb Ramu from reminiscing about his dream. Before he could listen to what she was talking about, a crow cawed out loud close to him, startling him. Adjusting himself in the chair, concentrating on the crow, Ramu understood that the crow had landed because of the grains he left on the sill; a habit he picked up from his wife. *Whatever happened to sparrows?*

Taking up the first offer to drop him home, Ramu headed back home as a pillion rider. The people that greeted him in the morning acknowledged him again. Some asked why he was home so early.

"My wife's cooking fish curry for me today," he repeated to everyone with a child-like smile. Dragging the guy who dropped him into his house, Ramu made sure the guy enjoyed his wife's fish curry as much as he did.

Content with the work he had done in the morning, and the delectable fish curry, Ramu decided to nap. Noticing his wife beside him on the bed only after cutting

one in the air, he asked her why the curry tasted better that day.

"I switched coconut with cashew today. Guess that's why you're having gas trouble."

"Tatiah! Tatiah." The grandson's screams pierced his ears and put an end to his reminiscence. *"Mom is not agreeing to take me to the mall."* Tatiah is the Telugu word for grandfather. *"It's the opening day; it will be too crowded,"* the mother replied.

Knowing that the grandfather is easier to convince rather than his parents, the grandson kept pushing. Ramu didn't budge this time and kept promising to take him after a few days. *"Why are you so obsessed with it anyways?"* he asked finally.

"Because malls are awesome. It will make me happy, I guess."

"The more theatres, buildings, malls, and restaurants, this world builds, the less happy, humans are going to be," rubbing his varicose veins, explained Ramu.

"Tatiah, if I can see more movies, buy more houses, relax in air-conditioned malls and taste new cuisines, it would make me nothing but happier, I guess."

Chuckling behind the Deccan Chronicle

newspaper he has been reading, Ramu's son chipped in, *"It will boost employment and help your Ongole, won't it?"*

"This isn't my Ongole anymore. My Ongole was a town; not a city," looking out, Ramu muttered to himself.

"Imagine you are the constructor of all those things. From the thousands of gated communities to restaurants that are springing up every year. If you have something to do with all of them, how crazy would you feel? How many new diseases would you catch trying to maintain pace with all of them? The ultimate creation or God as people refer to, is bothered with all this on a single planet. Imagine how frustrating it could be to take care of all the creation. It affects the buildings: us, too. Look at how weak people are right now. Because we are and we all share a part of that creation. That's why even after having the most number of comforts and remedies, even more than a King in earlier times, an average person is sadder than they've ever been," Ramu spoke his deepest thoughts out loud to no particular person.

Understanding what Ramu is referring to, the son stopped him. And moved his eyes from Ramu to the grandson and was able to communicate. *I told you no such talk in front of him. "What Tatiyah's saying is that if we have no empty spaces to build all these, you will run out of space,"* the son

explained to the grandson.

"Hmm. Like how five years back I and my friends fought every day over which ground to play cricket. Some places favoured hitters, not the bowlers, some favoured left-handed batsmen, some were compact and suitable for summer and some were big, only to be played in winter. And, and, all these were just around our house, you know. Now, we can only play in either ABM or PVR ground. If an event is happening there, simply no cricket for us, you know!"

"Start playing something you can play in the USA as well then," the words from Mother's mouth revealed what the earlier chatter was about to Ramu. Not a word after that coming out from the three mouths around him succeeded in reaching his ears.

I moved from my birth village to this town for a job opportunity and basic healthcare. My kids moved to bigger cities for much better opportunities. And now my grandkids want to move to different countries for much much better opportunities. Did I take the wrong step back then? Am I to be blamed for this? How can I stop them when that is exactly what I did and am happy that I did it? If I knew this is where it would end though, I wouldn't have done it! Isn't it better to die with less Medicare but surrounded by your people rather than living with world-

class Medicare amongst strangers?

The grandson and son left Ramu alone, assuming they've lost him again. Ramu has been zoning out of conversations frequently and they assumed it's part of ageing. And the possibility of having thousand more such conversations with their father and grandfather stopped them from continuing the current one.

Being one of the rare 70-year-olds who can commute on their own, Ramu set out to visit his old workplace where he still has connections. As he stepped onto the cement road that looked flawless even after a downpour from last night, Ramu appreciated the mud from his dream. Unconsciously, he stared at the new restaurant that took the place of Devi's small shop. Only if anyone inside cared about him would they have noticed him staring. But out of the unnecessarily frenzy crowd that filled the restaurant, no one even for a second noticed him.

Walking alone to the auto stand, he reasoned why that dream was the most impactful dream he had in recent days. After getting rejected by a couple of auto drivers, Ramu was on the verge of walking furthermore when he found one more.

"I have to come back alone," pretending to be disinterested and accelerating away, the auto driver replied without

even looking Ramu in the eyes. *"Old man, understand. The service rate applies only when it's a shared auto."*

Comfort brings arrogance with it. That's when Ramu realised that the dream was beautiful because it was true. It was just his daily routine once upon a time he was viewing from a third-person view. To think that his greatest dream was once his routine, brought a curve to his lips and water to his eyes.

The bass from the speakers was vibrating Ramu's back seat entirely, hinting at him not to initiate a conversation. Even the driver did not utter a single word, confirming this. To overcome the relay of information between each person, we invented variety of technologies capable of connecting anyone from anywhere but barely call or text anyone anymore. To overcome not meeting people afar, we invented different modes of transport but do not use them to meet people but to get to work and show off. The auto-driver's worried about coming back alone only for financial burden reasons, without realising that if he doesn't try to converse with people, he or his family might end up alone when shit hits the fan. All those restaurant customers and staff too were constantly hurrying to better their futures without enjoying the present.

After hours of conversing with the current employees and old friends around, Ramu

started his return journey of finding another auto. No one offered to drop him unlike in the dream and the older days. Calling out for them, bargaining with them, he was glad to have found one middle-aged auto-driver.

"I don't want to be rude but back in time, the rickshaw walas treated people better than auto walas. Today's generation thinks cabs will take over as they don't have to deal with the bargaining and shouting," halfway through the journey and conversation, Ramu expressed his thoughts.

"We did discuss this amongst ourselves," replied the driver, turning towards Ramu for a brief second. *"No matter what we do, once someone can afford cabs, they will choose them over us. Development is inevitable. So they act like that to make as much money as possible right now."* Development is inevitable! Thinking about that one line, Ramu stepped out of the auto once his stop arrived. Walking the last half-kilometre of his journey, he mulled over many things.

"I'm an outsider to my birthplace but a resident to a city I only got to and stayed in for a better life," thought Ramu about his grandkid's desire to study and settle abroad. Looking around, reminiscing about the dream and comparing it to the present, crushed his heart. The narrow road through which not more than a

single auto can pass, allowed neighbours to sit in their own homes but talk to each other. The widened road allowed for cars to fit—not one but two at a time—but distanced the neighbours. Caged greenery around the roads that's limited to certain dimensions felt forced and a half-hearted reparation. People seemed to contain themselves inside their houses, reasoning that the weather is not suitable whether it's winter or summer. Every inch of what Ongole looked like had changed.

Looking at his house from a distance, he could make out his grandson's body moving around on the balcony. He was torn between trying to stop his grandson from leaving the country one day or letting him live his dream. Mentally making a note to at least talk something about it, he took a deep breath when he heard the loudest female scream.

"They should not mess up again. Tell them if they do, I'll cut their entire pay this time instead of percentages," a young woman who Ramu guessed to be in her mid or late 20s screamed at a grocery store delivery person.

"Ok, Ramya ma'am," said the delivery person.

Behind all this drama, Ramu could see the name of the restaurant that he never really bothered to register in his mind:

Ramya Tiffins.

"Uncle, can you move a little forward!" Ramya addressed Ramu who was blocking her scooter unconsciously.

Obedying her in dismay, Ramu quickly shook his head and asked the question that popped into his mind, pointing to the board, *"Are you the Ramya?"*

Chuckling with what seemed to be a mixture of pride and happiness, she nodded. *"Your father or husband owns this place?"* asked Ramu, assuming that one of them is the obvious answer.

The chuckle disappeared from her face. *"No, uncle. It was my idea, my recipes, my passion, my business model. I brought in the investors, bought the land off of an old lady, designed the whole thing, and made sure it complied with the codes. Absolutely everything's done by me."* *"What a different but great world we live in,"* was Ramu's immediate response. Maybe communication with others is hampered because the inner selves are healed or vice versa. *"Make sure to come and eat at our hotel once, uncle,"* she replied while leaving, now her face only filled with pride.

"We are going up the Srigiri hill for sunset," declared Ramu, shocking his son and grandson. Following the lead without asking any questions furthermore, the trio

got onto two motorcycles. Ramu got lost in observing the ever-increasing houses to his right as they rode up the hill revealing the modest skyline. As amazed as they were and eager to ask why they were there, the grandson and son fell silent for five minutes as they all watched Ongole below them. Once they all came out of the trance-like experience, Ramu spoke his mind out; everything that he has been thinking of lately which they called zoning out.

"That's the curse of falling in love with your home place. It never stays the same; whether it gets better or worse, time will decide. But make sure you have at least one person with whom you can climb the Srigiri hill and stare at the changing, rather emerging skyline once in a while. And remember that those people are home anywhere you go. I, unfortunately, lost one such person of mine six years ago," concluded Ramu.

Now the other two seemed zoned out for quite a bit of time before the son asked an important question.

"If you can magically control everything, what would your Ongole look like?" *"More and more,"* chuckling because he has an answer ready, Ramu continued. He thought about it on the way and the answer felt obvious. *"More companies, more restaurants, more gyms, more jobs, so much more, that Ongole becomes the*

greatest city in this state, country and the world."

Looking at the confused faces, he realised he only shared his lamentations of the modernisation until now but hadn't shared his new opinion that he knew he would stick to forever. *"If only Ongole becomes the greatest city, none of its residents have to leave to other places for better opportunities. Because dying in the same place you're born is not the sign of a loser or of cowardice who didn't make it or explore the world but of the ultimate blessing that a person is born in the right place. Only a few people get that lucky in this world."*



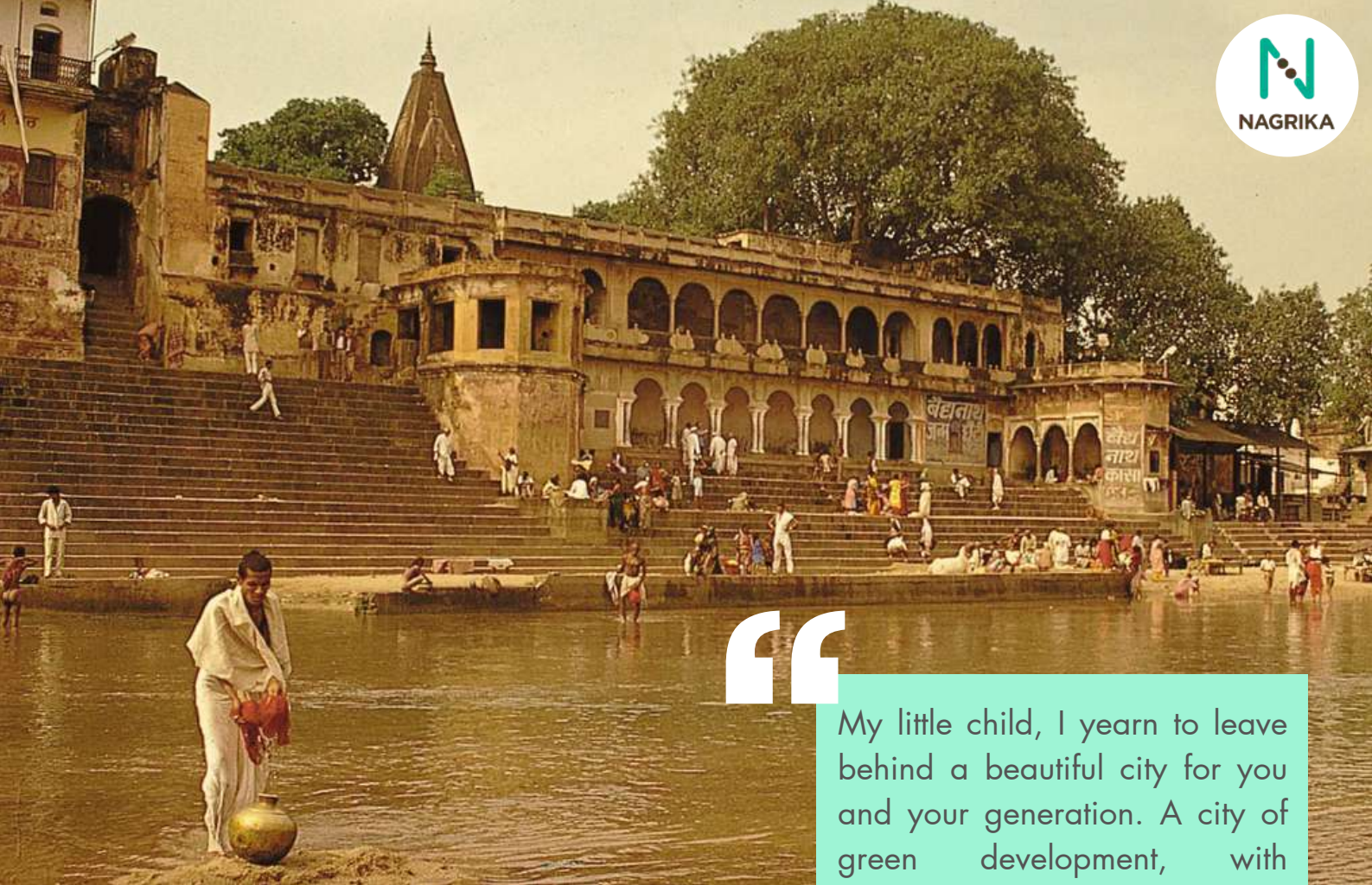
Ramu moved to his village in the later stages till his death and remains there to date, unified with the land.

The son acknowledges that he is that lucky person Ramu referred to and isn't scared of death anymore.

The grandson is working in the USA and makes sure that he donates part of his earnings to an Ongole based NGO that works to make sure that development doesn't scatter the beauty of Ongole.



legacy of hope



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My little child, I yearn to leave behind a beautiful city for you and your generation. A city of green development, with improved infrastructure, better connectivity, flourishing tourism, and diverse income-generating sources. But not at the cost of what we already hold dear.

Threads of Legacy: Nani's Wishes for Gaya's Future

Roma Kumari | Second Place Winner

Once upon a time in the city of Gaya, Roma, a young and curious girl, rushed to greet her grandmother, Nani, who had arrived home late.

"Nani, what happened? How did you get so late? Where were you stuck?" Roma asked with concern.

Nani replied with a sigh, "Oh, my little child, the whole city is drowning in water

just after two days of rain. The roads are flooded, making it difficult to move around. Autos and buses are struggling to navigate through the water, so I had to walk, which made me late."

Surprised, Roma exclaimed, "But Nani, how did you get so wet and dirty?"

Nani chuckled and said, "You see, my dear, I have traveled these roads for the

past 40 years, but I never realized when they turned into waterlogged paths. Amidst the flooded streets, I stumbled and got drenched. Luckily, I didn't get hurt. The city hasn't changed much, Roma. When we used to go to school, there were no proper roads. We had to ride our bicycles for five kilometers. During the rainy days, we had to swim through those paths, carrying an extra pair of uniforms. Now, there are roads, but they are inadequate and don't connect every corner of the city."

Roma sighed, "Oh, Nani."

Nani, lost in her thoughts, continued, "My little child, during my school days, I wished for proper roads. But seeing the current condition, I wish for a well-developed road system and an efficient drainage system for the future generation. I hope they don't have to suffer due to infrastructural issues."

Roma then changed the topic, excitedly mentioning her friend's birthday invitation for the following day.

"Tomorrow is my friend's birthday, Nani. She invited me to her home," Roma said cheerfully.

Nani smiled and replied, "That's wonderful, dear. Enjoy the celebration."

After returning from her friend's birthday

party, Roma shared her experience with Nani. "Nani, I had so much fun today. But guess what? I saw something different at my friend's house. They have a room filled with machines used to knit towels and bedsheets. All the freshly made clothes were drying on their terrace and angan. Oh, Nani, it was such a picturesque sight. We played hide and seek with the curtains fluttering in the breeze."

Nani nodded, her eyes gleaming with nostalgia. "Yes, Roma, our city has an area called Patwatoli, where every house is like a small-scale industry. They have been weaving bedsheets, towels, and chaddars for a long time. Unfortunately, they are confined to those small congested lanes. Our city has the potential to become a textile hub, providing more employment opportunities so that our breadwinners like your father and grandfather don't have to migrate to other cities."

As the evening approached, Nani reminded Roma about her uncle leaving.

"Roma, don't forget your uncle is leaving this evening. So come back early from playing," Nani gently reminded her.

Roma's face clouded with sadness and anger. "Why, Nani? Why is Uncle going? First, Dad left, and now Uncle is also leaving."

Nani sighed and explained, "Yes, my dear. Your uncle has to leave to pursue his higher studies. Our city lacks better colleges and universities for higher education. You know, during ancient times, our city was a renowned educational hub. Students and scholars from different parts of the world, like China and Tibet, came here to study in Nalanda and Vikramshila universities, located a few kilometers away. These institutions were known for their exceptional education. But now, we have only Magadh University, which fails to meet the needs of the modern world."

Roma quietly left the room, her thoughts filled with a mix of emotions.

Nani, watching her leave, thought to herself, "I wish, my child, that by the time you grow up, our city would have abundant educational options and better facilities, so you can pursue any field of study while staying close to your family."

Nani decided to share more about their city's heritage and culture, hoping to instill a sense of pride in Roma.

"Oh, Roma, come sit beside me. Today, I'll tell you more about our city," Nani called out.

Gaya, their city, had a rich cultural heritage. Nani enthusiastically shared, "We have the Vishnupad Temple, which

we visited last time. It holds immense significance as it houses Lord Vishnu's footprints. The Falgu River flowing beside the temple is known to the entire world. People from miles apart come here to perform Pinddan, a ritual to honor their ancestors. This tradition started when Lord Rama and Sita, during their 14-year exile, performed Pinddan for Lord Rama's father's liberation. Our city is blessed with spiritual vibes, with numerous temples and small mountains adorned with lush greenery."

Roma's eyes widened with curiosity. "Nani, is that the same river we cross on our way to school?"

Nani smiled and replied, "Yes, Roma, it is."

Roma continued, "But Nani, I often see garbage spread along its banks near the pool we cross, and it smells terrible."

Nani's expression turned serious. "Yes, Roma, it is indeed strange. People from different parts of the world consider the river sacred for their ancestors' last rites. We perform our rituals and festivals there, worshiping the river. Yet, we also use it as a dumping ground for waste. Our city lacks a proper waste management system. The water waste from drains across the city flows into the river, and solid waste is dumped into the Falgu itself. It's a grave concern where

our youth is heading. They seem to be forgetting their culture and heritage. You can also see with an increase in the number of motorcycles and cars in recent years, our city, with its limited space, is struggling with traffic congestion and pollution. Our air, once clean, is now polluted, posing serious health risks. If this continues, I worry about the future of our city."

Nani paused for a moment, her eyes filled with concern. "I wish our city to be as green as it can be. I hope our youth understand their responsibility towards the environment, develop a proper waste management system, follow traffic rules, and preserve our culture and the pristine beauty of the Falgu River. I wish to leave this city as pure, clean, and green as it once was."

As Nani spoke those heartfelt words, Roma listened attentively, understanding the importance of their city's future and the role they must play in shaping it for generations to come.

Next evening, Roma's voice filled with excitement as she shared the news of their neighbors planning a trip to Bodhgaya, a place she had recently visited with Nani.

Nani's eyes lit up with a spark of recognition. *"Oh, yes! We were there last month, weren't we?"*

Roma nodded eagerly, her face beaming with joy. *"Yes, Nani! I loved that trip, especially sitting beneath the magnificent Mahabodhi Tree. It was so serene and peaceful."*

Nani smiled, her voice filled with a mix of nostalgia and hope. *"That tree, my dear, holds great significance. It was beneath its branches that Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment. Bodhgaya is a spiritual sanctuary for Buddhists and a center for learning about Buddhism. It's truly a treasure and an ever-developing hub for tourism."*

Roma's eyes widened with curiosity and listened to Nani talking *"In our time, there were only a few temples near the Bodhi Tree. But now, the government is expanding and enhancing the tourism potential of the area. I've always imagined our city experiencing similar development as it is doing in the case of Bodhgaya, while preserving its natural beauty and spiritual heritage. Bodhgaya's growth inspires hope for our own city. We have so much to offer as well. We can develop other sources of tourism, showcasing our rich cultural heritage and inviting people from far and wide to experience the beauty of Gaya."*

As Roma and Nani immersed themselves in memories, their conversation took a poignant turn. Nani spoke with a hint of longing in her voice, *"You know Roma,*

these trips we used to take in the past were different. Nowadays, it seems like every family plans their own outings, and we hardly interact with our neighbors. The social connections we cherished seem to have slipped away in the busyness of our modern lives. In the past, every evening, our entire society would gather. Children would play together, laughter echoing through the streets. The women would engage in heartfelt conversations, and the youngsters would discuss the world's affairs, dreams, and aspirations. The elders would share their wisdom, and we would all come together to savor delicious meals, prepared with love and shared without a care."

Roma's voice filled with wonder as she imagined the scenes painted by Nani's words. "It must have been magical, Nani. Everyone is like an extended family, living in harmony and support."

Nani's expression grew solemn as she continued, "Yes, my child. It was more than just enjoyment. We found strength and security in those connections. Whenever anyone faced a challenge or needed support, we were there for one another. Incidents like theft or robbery were unheard of in our society. We had a sense of social security, knowing that our neighbors would stand by us. But with time and the rapid pace of development, people have become busier, and those social connections have

weakened. It saddens me deeply when I recall those days. I worry if this trend continues, the future generations may not even know who lives next door. We need better connectivity, ways to bring people closer and foster a sense of community."

Nani's voice quivered with emotion as she spoke her silent wishes aloud. "My little child, I yearn to leave behind a beautiful city for you and your generation. A city of green development, with improved infrastructure, better connectivity, flourishing tourism, and diverse income-generating sources. But not at the cost of what we already hold dear. Not at the expense of our rich cultural heritage, nor by harming our precious motherland and its green environment. Above all, I wish for a city that doesn't lose the social connections we have cherished. A city where neighbors are not strangers but friends, where bonds of community are strengthened, and where the love and compassion we once shared are revived."

As the weight of Nani's words settled upon them, Roma's eyes glistened with a newfound understanding. She embraced Nani tightly, her heart filled with a deep sense of responsibility. In that moment, Roma vowed to carry forth the legacy of love, unity, and connection that Nani held so dear.





One day as Shiva was browsing on the internet he came to know about 'plogging' which meant picking up litter while walking or jogging. So, he started taking action by himself... in the hope that people will notice and start using dustbins...

The Changing City

Sandeep Mishra | Third Place Winner

"Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when they are created by everybody." - Jane Jacobs

It was the early summer of 2022 when Shiva decided to quit his 9 to 5 corporate job and get away from loud noises and metro lifestyle of New Delhi. He moved back to his beloved hometown "Gorakhpur". On returning, he was excited to explore his city just as he did in his childhood. When he stepped out of the railway station, he was astonished, he

wasn't able to recognize the chowrahas. There were construction going on each street on his way to home. He saw many new shopping malls and complexes, etc. and many still under construction. *"The city was changing"* he had a thought in his head. After ensuring a work from home job opportunity and creating a schedule, he thought of visiting parks and other places in the city where he used to go with his friends and family. He was pretty excited to observe what changes would have taken place. But he was once

again shocked seeing the situation, though the city was on the path of infrastructure development and the parks were restructured and redeveloped, but there was littering and garbage everywhere, even the beautiful Ramgarh Taal was filled with plastics and the trees were being cut down in the name of development and those left were not in good condition.

This shook his soul and he discussed it with his friends and also complaint to the local authorities. The authorities informed that they are doing their job. The daily littering frustrated him and when he saw plastic bottles in the Taal, he said *"That's it!!!"*. He knew that the problem is with the mindset of the citizens. One day as he was browsing on the internet he came to know about "plogging" which meant picking up litter while walking or jogging. So, he started taking action by himself, each day he woke up early and went on a morning walk with a dustbin bag and a pair of gloves and started plogging in the hope that people will notice and start using dustbins for their waste and not just litter in the parks, streets and Taal.

He also created an Instagram page "Gorakhpur Ploggers" and posted his concerns for the present and future of the city. As days passed people started noticing his work on Instagram and a group of 4 friends also joined him. One joined him in the park in litter picking.

From 1 they became a group of 6 people willing to show and aware people about the condition of their city and what would happen if they won't change their habits. They started organizing "Cleanliness and Awareness Drives" in parks, lake and riverside on weekly basis in which they did plogging and tried to aware people why cleanliness is important and also the harmful effects of throwing garbage in the open and how it can cause various diseases and effect other life forms.

On a Sunday morning, while the group was cleaning the lake side, an old couple both near the age of 60, who came there for morning walks noticed them and asked who were they and what they were trying to do, listening to Shiva's story, they were inspired seeing the love and perspective of the young man for his city. It almost brought a tear in their eyes. After picking up litter and placing it in the dustbin. The couple invited them for a cup of tea. They stopped at a tea stall nearby and order "Masala Chai".

With a sip of the refreshing masala tea, the old couple introduced themselves as Rajesh and Savita. Rajesh was a retired professor of Physics, while Savita was a housemaker but in her free time, she helped Rajesh in an NGO which works for economically weak women in developing skills so that they could earn their living. Shiva asked them *"Don't you have any children?"*, to which Savita

replied, *"They had a son whom they lost in the pandemic. He was a doctor and a social worker. Passionate, enthusiastic and kind."* This brought a moment of silence in the group. Seeing this, Rajesh broke the silence and said, "You see those buildings on the other side of the taal, 40 years ago, there was just water, trees and wildlife. This place where we are sitting was an isolated area and no one dared to come here after dark. Now it's just people, loud honking noises of their cars and bikes and the litter you pick up.

Rajesh asked, *"So how are you planning to change this city?"*, to which they all replied that they have a future plan to build an organization which can work with local authorities to educate and change people's mindset and move towards sustainable development. Rajesh said taking a deep breath, the first thing we should learn quoting Mahatma Gandhi *"Be the change, you want to see in the world."* Shiva was quite impressed by his words and asked him, *"Sir, you've spent your lifetime in this city, what was the city like in your times?"* Savita interrupted and suggested that if you all have time, we could move this conversation to our home over a healthy breakfast.

As it was Sunday and the group was free and also excited to hear about their city so they could know things better, they

agreed. On the way home, Rajesh told that in his childhood around 1974, the only urban area or say the main market was Golghar, rest were all rural region. We didn't even have toilets at our homes, so we had to go out early in the morning for defecating. It was GDA (Gorakhpur Development Authority) and Nagar Nigam that started developing the city. Constructing roads with street lights, parks, markets, etc.

Stuck in traffic, Savita said, *"the biggest positive in our times was there were no traffic. Mostly there were rickshaw pullers, cycles, city buses and only a few people had personal transport. The roads had trees on both sides, so people also walked to their destinations."* After half an hour drive, they reached home. Rajesh and Savita had a beautiful home with huge garden area. It seemed like they loved gardening.

As they entered inside, Savita went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast while Shiva, his friends and Rajesh went on with their conversation in living room. Shiva's friend Navin asked about what were or are the best places in the city according to him. Rajesh told that, there are many now, but 30 years before there were only few, like the famous Gorakhnath Temple which serves as a centre for spiritual and cultural activities. Famous for the teachings of Guru Gorakhnath, focusing on self-realization

and inner transformation, continue to inspire and guide the followers of the Nath Sampradaya. Its rich history, architectural beauty, and social contributions make it an important cultural and religious landmark in today's time too.

He told, that he also visits the famous Geeta Press once a month, established 1923 known for its meticulous approach to publishing. The texts go through rigorous scrutiny and verification processes to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The publishing house employs eminent scholars, editors, and proof readers who meticulously review the manuscripts, making sure that the essence and teachings of the original texts are preserved. He further told that, the Vindhyavasini Park was still back then that has variety of plants and flowers, which gives so much to know about gardening.

All the plants you saw outside, I got it from there. But in today's time Nauka Vihar is the centre of attraction in the city. It gives you the feel of the Marine Drive of Mumbai. You can also pay a visit to the newly constructed Rajghat and Ramghat beside Rapti River. Shiva listed down all the places in his small notebook.

During this time, Savita entered with breakfast and they all took their seats. Navin immediately went to have a bite,

but Savita stopped and urged to thanks and pray for the farmers for providing us this food. After the prayer, Shiva asked, *"Savita, what do you hope about the future of this city?"* Savita had a sip of water, and smiling as always said, *"You see that portrait on the front wall, that's my son Ravish, when he was alive, I had higher hopes for working in various sectors of the society. But with him gone I lost my hope."*

Shiva said, *"It's very sad to know that but if you can share with us maybe we can work together on it."* Savita then further continued that she hopes of a city where people are aware about cleanliness around them and also treat nature with respect. Development and technology is good for us but we should not forget our roots. People of this city should know about their rights and duties, so they could participate actively in the growth of the city. There should be an area in each part of the city where there should be only trees, which can be called "Lungs of the City."

"I know so many women with dreams but they don't have any income to support themselves or their family, these people must be provided a platform, so that they could develop skills. Oh! Shiva, I have so many ideas, but if we don't act on it, then this city will soon become a modern developed city but also a concrete jungle with landfills, dust in the air and diseases

due to unhygienic surroundings would be common."

With her words and breakfast, the group was boosted with confidence and full of energy. Navin asked Rajesh that what is his biggest concerns about the future of the city? Rajesh replied smiling, "this feels like an interview now, well my biggest concern is the health of the people. Due to construction of new buildings trees are being cut down at a very high rate and if this continues there will only be a few trees left within the city, it will become a gas chamber like Delhi, harmful not only for humans but also for animals.

Plus, I also worry about the generation spending a lot of time on laptops and mobile phones, sitting and doing no physical activity, this has increased the number of diabetic patients in the city. In our time we walked to places or used cycles, so most of us were fit. I think people should add yoga and meditation in their daily routine."

Arun, the youngest one in the group asked in excitement, "what advice would you give to young people of this city to make a difference?" Rajesh said, "well my advice is simple, instead of leaving the city for bigger cities they should try to work on opportunities, start-ups and on entrepreneurship in their own city. The youth should give few hours of their week to community service too as this will help

them to know their citizens better. Many leaders are born like this only in the past. The most important thing we can do is to engage and educate school and college students about their city's environment, wetlands, forests, waste management system through various activities on constant basis. Practice moral education with school kids. This will for sure bring a slow but still definite change in the city for future generations."

The clock struck 12:00 PM, Shiva said, "it's getting late now, I think we should stop the interview now," smiling. Rajesh said, "if you have ideas, they can work together on it, he also has some connections in the local authorities which would love to hear the voice of a youth for his city." They exchanged numbers and shook hands.

Shiva was excited meeting such a couple, so as Rajesh and Savita meeting such a group of people. Days passed and together they identified the problems like why people throw waste on streets and empty plots, they also prepared a workshop session on waste segregation. On meeting the authorities Navin presented the idea as few streets and slums areas are too narrow, it was not possible for the garbage van to reach everywhere, so they designed a vehicle of the size of an e-rickshaw operated on electricity with two different containers for dry and wet waste. They also proposed

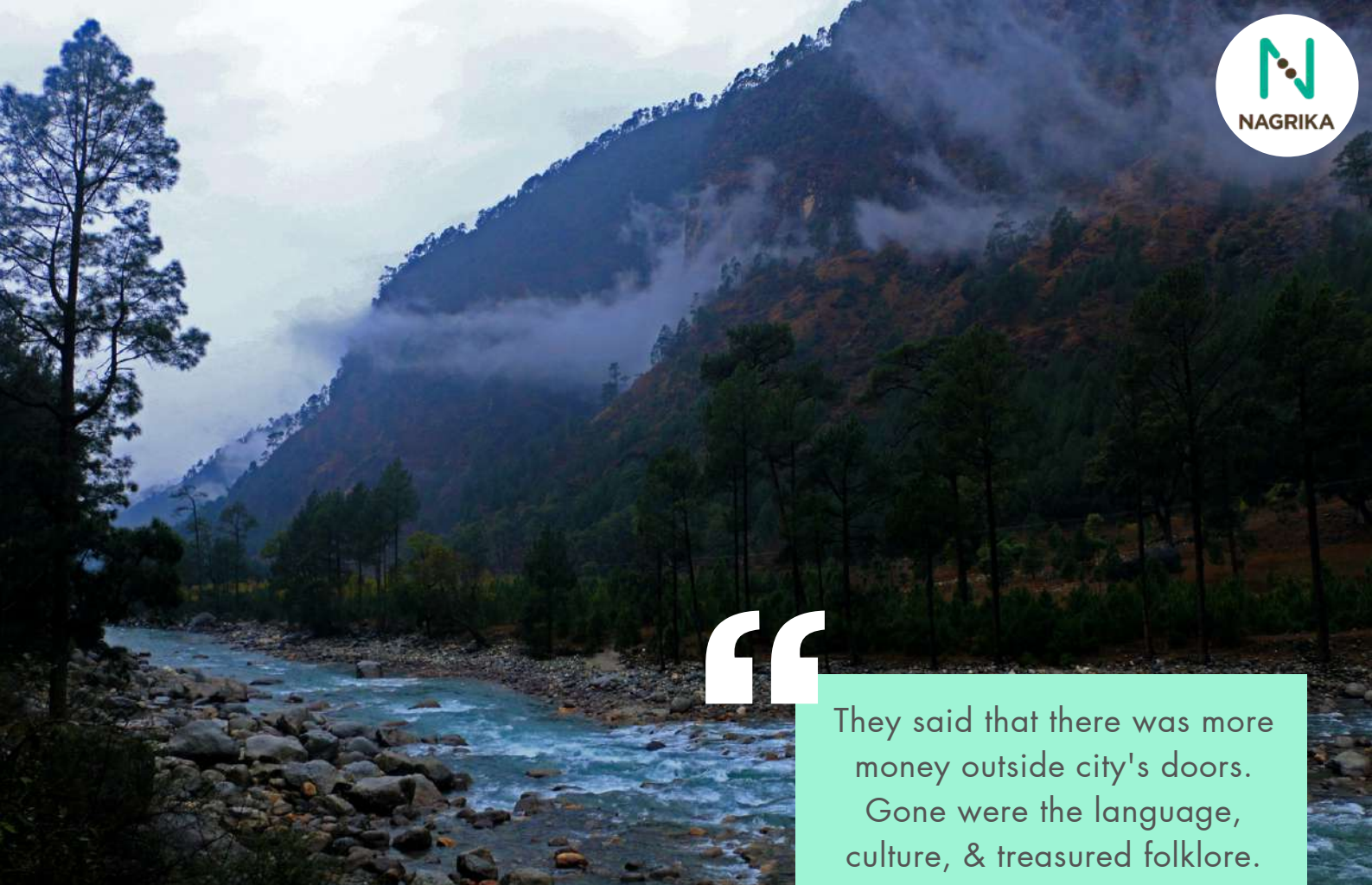
the idea of Reuse and Recycle Centre in each colony, where residents could place their things which are waste to them but can be reused or recycled by anyone else. The ideas were accepted and implemented. Joining with the local authority they did campaigns in a number of societies and wards, explaining why waste segregation is important and distributed dustbins with two different colours for wet and dry waste. Savita and Rajesh also started a workshop on how to make compost from kitchen waste and use it for gardening. Gradually many people started joining their organization and the workshops started reaching to almost all wards of the city.

In spare time, Navin and Arun prepared a "90 minutes to Nature" program for schools and colleges which included topics phases of Gorakhpur over the years, it's rich history, how climate change and global warming is affecting their bio-diversity, importance of waste management, information about wetlands, rivers and forests in Gorakhpur, teaching circular economy with 7R's: Repair, Reuse, Reduce, Refuse, Recycle, Recover, Regift with fun and creative activities. Savita and Shiva with other team members also focused on providing employment to the women of weaker section of the society, by teaching them stitching and designing cloth bags which provided them a fixed income. They worked, worked and worked. The clean-

up drives which started a year ago, had started showing few results, the parks had less litter than before. To give an example what waste can do, they also collaborated with a local artist and produced a portrait of freedom fighters from waste kulhads, a beautiful example of Waste to Wonder. This gained attention of many others in the city and with a team of 8 members they became 800 over a year. The city was on the path of accepting and practicing sustainable lifestyle.

Year 2023, same date on which Shiva, his friends and Rajesh, Savita met. Sitting on the same dining table they had breakfast together, Rajesh raised his glass of water smiled and said, *"Look at the past year and look forward to continue what we started. Our dream of creating a city which holds on and embrace its roots alongside with development looks more possible. The hope he had, that the current and future generation should know their city and its beautiful history is alive and it makes him happy."* He further quoted *"A great city is made by the great ideas and great act of its citizens!!!"* They all raise their glasses in unison and smiled.





They said that there was more money outside city's doors. Gone were the language, culture, & treasured folklore. You spoke with an air of sorrow; there was worry in you head, every time you watched a grandchild of yours leave.

Dehradun of an Old Man's Dreams

Samishta Bhatt | Special Mention

Lunchtime was always reserved for stories
Aspirations were talked over our
breakfast,
The older days, the difficult hills and their
fables,
But since you've passed, I've been eating
alone on the dinner table.

You always said that you had a difficult
life,
The hills with its disasters were never
really kind,

So the valley became your new home
soon,
Thus, my grandfather stepped foot in
Doon.

A single college was all that the town had
The air was clean but the roads were bad
Mussoorie surrounded with grace to
make the valley look pretty
And as the village folk migrated, the town
soon turned into a city.

You reminisced about how the city
grew with you,
Till it became the place your
grandchildren can grow into,
Now there are numerous universities and
even more schools,
Cafés beside colleges, professional
stadiums and pools.

But while the air was still clean and water
fairly pure,
People left the city to make a foreign land
home,
They said that there was more money
outside the city's doors,
Gone was the language, the culture and
the treasured folklore.

You spoke with an air of sorrow, there
was worry in you head,
Every time you watched a grandchild of
yours leave.



legacy of hope



खाली भूमि पर वृक्षारोपण हो,
स्वच्छ सुन्दर पर्यावरण का आरोहण हो,
वृक्ष हमारी सुंदरता में चार चांद लगाएंगे,
हम पर्यटन से ही गिने जाते थे,
पर्यटन से ही गिने जाएंगे ।

काश से विश्वास तक

गौतम कुमार | स्पेशल मेंशन

शहर हमारा कैसा होगा?
जवाब कोई कठिन नहीं,
उत्तर की कुछ पंक्तियां खंगालिनी होगी,
बुजुर्गों की अमिट सी यादों से,
और आनेवालेकल की वादों से,

"दादा जी प्रणाम" सुनते ही,
चमक उठी झुराई सी आँखें,
पलकों को मसलकर,
यादों की जवांदिल के सरीखे,

कुछ कौतूहल सी सवालों से,
विस्तारित जवाबों की आस लिए,
"मगध" की पहचान समेटे हुए,
"गया" शहर का गौरवपूर्ण इतिहास लिए,

"दादा जी अब आपकी बारी,
इतिहास सा जीने की तैयारी,
कैसी रही यात्रा हमारे शहर की
बुद्ध के यगु से वर्तमान की?"

जो शायद किसी संग्रहालय में नहीं,
पूछे ही जा रहा था मैं,
भविष्य की मानचित्र बनाते हुए,
सोचे ही जा रहा था मैं,

दादा जी -

"अच्छा तो ठीक है,
जब तुमने सुनने को ठान लिया,
गया की भूमि है वैसी,
दुनिया को अहिंसा का ज्ञान दिया,

दुनिया को सहिष्णुता का पाठ पढ़ाया,
सिद्धार्थ को गौतम बुद्ध बनाया,
शहर हमारा प्राचीन हो मगर,
बदल सकते हैं सोच नवीन हो अगर,
अब आगे की बागडोर तुम्हारी,
शहर हमारी सोच तुम्हारी।"

"ठीक है दादा जी, आपके और मेरे सोच का,
शहर हमारा मेल होगा,
स्वर्ण यगु सा था पहले,
हीरे सी तरासने का पहल होगा,

जब बात करे हम शहर की आने वाले कल
की,

स्वच्छता हमारी प्राथमिकता होगी,
साफ सफाई व्यवस्था चौबंद मिलेंगे,
कचड़े कूड़ेदानों में बंद मिलेंगे,

पर्यावरण संरक्षण का पहल होगा,
स्वच्छ सुन्दर हमारा कल होगा,
जहरीली न हो हवा हमारे शहर की,
प्रदुषण नियंत्रण सरल होगा,

अस्पतालों की नियमित साफ सफाई,
गरीबों को स्वास्थ्य उपलब्धता की भलाई,
सस्ती स्वास्थ्य और दवाई का भरमार होगा,
अब न कोई और महामारी का प्रहार होगा,

नारी सुरक्षा अचकू मिलेंगे,
सीसीटीवी हर चौक मिलेंगे,
मानसिकता का पाठ होगा,
समानता का ठाठ होगा,

स्कूली शिक्षा का मजबूत हाल होगा,
बालिका बालक शिक्षा का भौकाल होगा,
अज्ञानता का डोर कमजोर होगा,
बुद्ध से वर्तमान तक का जोड़ होगा,

सड़क चौड़ीकरण से नवीनीकरण तक,
जाम मुक्ति से लेकर ट्रैफिक आचरण तक,
हर व्यवस्था पंचकुअल मिलेगा,
पुलिस से लेकर म्युनिसिपल कोरपोरेशन तक,

आपसी भाईचारे का नाम होंगे हम,
गंग-जमुन तहजीब का संगम होंगे हम,
मानव मूल्यों का ही नाम करेंगे हम,
मानवता के लिए ही काम करेंगे हम।"

दादा जी -

"पर ध्यान में रखना इस बात को,
खो न देना कहीं पिछले प्रयास को,
आनेवाला कल में हम मानव ही रहेंगे,
खो न देना लक्ष्य 'सतत विकास' को,

कोई मानव भूखा न सोए,
ऐसी पहल हो हमारी,

फल्गु के शीतल सी,
पीने को उपलब्ध जल हो हमारी,

बेगारी और लाचारी का नाम न हो,
रोजगार गारंटी ही हमारी पहचान हो,
कोई और पलायन हम न झोले,
हम चाहते हैं हमारे अपने लोग,
अपने शहर में खाएं,
अपने शहर में खेलें,

महिला को मुख्यधारा में लाना,
इस प्रयास को सफल बनाना,
तभी विकास गिनी जायेगी,
जब लक्ष्मी सरीखी महिला नेतृत्व में आएगी,

गर जो बात हो शहरी विस्तार की,
शिक्षा, स्वास्थ्य को ध्यान में रख करना,
रोड साइड में कोई ठेले न दिखें,
उचित दुकान उनके लिए,
बस ये बात ध्यान में रखना,

कचड़ा प्रबंधन सफाई का समुचित उपाय,
बारिश में कोई कूड़ा बहकर आ न पाए,
तभी तो सर्वजन स्वस्थ रह पाएंगे,
स्वच्छता में अक्वल आ पाएंगे,

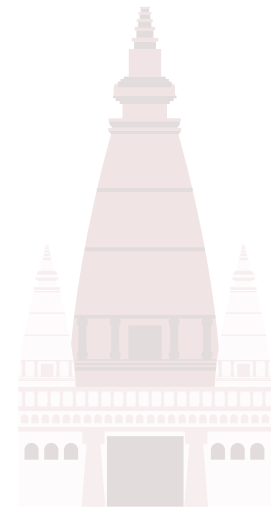
खाली भूमि पर वृक्षारोपण हो,
स्वच्छ सुन्दर पर्यावरण का आरोहण हो,
वृक्ष हमारी सुंदरता में,
चार चांद लगाएंगे,
हम पर्यटन से ही गिने जाते थे,
पर्यटन से ही गिने जाएंगे,

फाह यान हो या हुएन त्सांग ,
ज्ञान और विचारों में उत्तम हैं,
कायम हो हमारी ऐसी परंपरा,
तुम युवाओं की जिम्मेदारी ही प्रथम है।”

”ठीक है दादा जी,
जब अनुभव और जोश का जोड़ होगा,
शहर हमारा जो सपनों का,
असलियत से बढ़कर भी बेजोड़ होगा।”

देख उम्मीद अपने आने वाले कल की,
उन वृद्धों की आखें चमक उठी,
जो काम अधूरा उनका था,
पूरी होने की आस जगी,

हम युवा शक्ति हमारी कर्म ही भक्ति,
हम इस शहर से हरदम जीते हैं,
कुछ कर जाएं हम कुछ आस लिए,
चलो आज से शहर को जीतें हैं।।



legacy of hope



Lady Punekar

Adit Chandrachud | Special Mention



My people have put their faith in me, just like their ancestors did and just like their children will. I (Pune) am their past, present and future and hence, I must evolve according to the world. But I must do it my way.

Today's a very important day for me. What happens to me depends on how today goes. A part of me has always wanted today to happen, but a part of me wishes I could sink into yesterday. But I've burnt that bridge. There's only today, tomorrow and day after tomorrow and so on. But who says tomorrow can't resemble yesterday? Don't we have days when we take what's best from the past and blend it with the optimism that we pump out of the future to make the best present? I think I want that for me. I want my tomorrows to mirror my yesterdays but

have new prospects of their own as well. That's not what most of my people would want, though. And that's definitely not what Big Sister would want, either.

I look at my younger, lesser influential sisters. They seem happy; they seem young. But they're dull. We all want friends and sisters who can be intellectual, agile, attractive, and astute, but we also want them to care, have faith, and help in the time of need. Which qualities override the others? Hard to tell. Would I rather want a hyper-pragmatic

and ever-dynamic friend who would enhance my position and ameliorate my stature in the real world but wouldn't lend a compassionate ear if needed, or would I want an average, naive, and downtrodden one who would offer a shoulder to cry on during adversities? Not that those qualities come in those definite sets and are strictly set in stone, but those are the two distinct combinations I've seen. I would like to believe that I am the best of both. But if I had to pick only one, which side would I select?

What if I want both? What if I can't choose?

But a choice must be made. And it must be made today. Nagpur reads the letter thoroughly. I can listen to her pronounce each word in her head in her addictive nasal accent as I look at her distressed face, decoding the contents. She looks up at me and smiles weakly. She always smells of orange peels and she's quite a poet. Amongst all the sisters, she is quite liked. She's younger than me, but not too young like Nanded, Ratnagiri, and others who I often meet. Satara and Nashik are around my age, but they don't quite agree with me on a lot of terms. Kolhapur is another sister I have picked bones with. But at the end of the day, I suppose, we don't keep glass shards in our skins; we pluck it out and we live, as we infinitely have in peace. No grudges, no squabbles. Only sisters.

So the valley became your new home soon,
Thus, my grandfather stepped foot in Doon.

A single college was all that the town had
The air was clean but the roads were bad
Mussoorie surrounded with grace to
make the valley look pretty
And as the village folk migrated, the town
soon turned into a city.

I play the conduit between Big Sister and the rest in my direct family. One can say I'm the second eldest. Mumbai doesn't have time at all for anybody. She's far too burdened and I understand. That's exactly why I have to help Big Sister. They all say I've come of age and that I must take responsibility. I'm not afraid of responsibilities; I'm afraid of what these responsibilities will make me in time. It's a process. A metamorphosis for a sealed fate, irreversible in nature. And these 'responsibilities', as the Big Five like to put it, lay the first stone.

I have responsibilities of my own, you know. I am the ancestral home of all the rulers of my state. In my early days, when the Council of the Five didn't exist, I was a regal blessing. I was the chosen one. The beacon of culture and heritage. Had I hit the geographic jackpot of having the shores, I would have been on the council today. But I was never ambitious. Even now, when I have the chance to sign the

contract to nominate myself to be the sixth member, I contemplate. What will happen of my annual parades? Ganpati Dholkis? Elaborate authentic festivities? Pandharpur yatra? What of the peculiarly nasty boards and hoardings that I am known for? What of my green sensitive parts, my trekking spots? It will soon vanish, that I know for sure, or worse, get commercialized. Don't get me started on how my food is slowly going extinct.

But then I was the one who was responsible for that. I did demand that my outskirts have better clubbing culture, western eateries and pubs to dance in. But I blame Big Sister too; has she no sense when to stop? Really, sometimes I feel like she's going to be the end of me. She's already had Holi ruined for me, along with some other festivals. Every Rangpanchmi, I used to be soaked in the vivacious transcendence of organic pasteles and cool, refreshing water, like a turmeric-bride, like a paradise fly-catcher. Now I've become a pit of chaotic sludge, thanks to the ideological brainwashing by Big Sister's people. There's too much music, heart-thumping music in every festivity ever. Children used to titillate me, putting their little hands in my soil and carving mini-castles they call 'killas' in their backyards every Diwali. Mumbai was so jealous that I used to get that treatment from the children. But now that's gone too. I don't entirely feel like a flycatcher anymore; I feel like a pigeon

hanging upside down on a wire, choking on plastic stuffed within and without.

Not that I want to derogate someone on the basis of their complexion, but Big Sister looks old. Older than she should look. She looks like one of those actresses who abuse the skin-care industry by applying excess make up to look good but end up looking terrible. Big sister tries her best to hide those wrinkles and dark circles, that acute hairfall, and those coarse, dry lips, but she isn't always successful. The capital sister, who's my cousin, not my direct sister, looks terrible too, but she doesn't bother. I like that about her. She doesn't care if she's flamboyant or if she's shining. Mumbai is like a rotten apple that keeps on polishing herself to present a shining apple. Delhi doesn't do the polishing part but that does not change the fact that the core is rotten.

But you know what they say, if you want to reach the top, you must get your hands dirty. I know that's unfair but it is what it is. My sisters have done bad things, yes, but somewhere that was out of obligation and they did it for us so we could live. Of course, from time to time, they made personal decisions that I do not approve of, like those sky-scarpers Big Sister had herself constructed besides her slums or the forest named 'Aarey' she had slaughtered because she fancied a metro on her birthday. But those were her

choices and some of them made her the economic pivot of the entire nation. They made her one of the best there is out there. I'm proud of her, I truly am, but the question is, do I want what she has? She says everyone wants what she has. Everyone wants to be her. But I'm not sure if that's even true.

Talegaon, my sweetest darling, comes to send me off. She's still budding; she's purely innocent. She reminds me of a younger me. She adjusts my saari for me from behind and puts a tikli right in the midst of my forehead. I thank her and I take the wind.

I must reach the capital on time. I have a reputation to maintain. On my way, I fly across my cousins. I don't interact with a lot many of them. I don't have to, because Big Sister handles it all. She's very flexible and astute. She doesn't discriminate as many of our cousins do. She's very multilingual and she makes friends across the country. Her popularity has no bounds. Yes, I am jealous of her from time to time; there is no denying that. Her extroversion is a boon, I admit, but that boon comes with a price to pay. A price I'm iffy if I want to pay. I'm not very out-going. I'm reserved but open to change, as you might have noticed. I don't know if I'll be able to grow out of my shell, that is if I decide to upgrade to the next level.

As I reach the gates of the Capital Cousin, I release some of my own air around me so I can breathe. I'm sorry but I simply cannot tolerate the smog and that sort of cold. I need things to be fresh and clean. That's why I feel sorry for Big Sister at times for the horrendous rains she has to endure that dampen her quite literally. She says she likes it but deep down, I know she doesn't. And she's too proud to ask for validation, let alone be pitied.

I reach my destination five minutes ahead of schedule. I'm not surprised to see that Big Sister and Capital Sister haven't arrived yet. Just a few minutes later, I encounter Southern Cousins.

Bangalore and Chennai, who are part of the Big Five as well, are distant, friendly cousins who I want to interact more often with but can't. One, because they are super busy in their own worlds and two, we have boundaries after all. They don't smile much and they talk only when necessary, but when they do, it's always something sharp and witty. Bangalore and I vibe on some levels. Bangalore's older than me, but not as old as Big Sister. She's neat and she's young. But the type of young that's strict and organized, disciplined, and more focused. She presses a lot on education these days. I admire her for that. But she's recently become so restrained. Ironic considering her nightlife and drinking culture has expanded so much. But I've

seen her unpredictably 'fun side' in her youthful days. She has great food and lovely gardens, I tell you.

We make small talk, the three of us, until Kolkata arrives, right on the dot of the hour. I've always adored the big red bindi she wears on her forehead. She's the oldest member of the council but lately she's taken a retirement of sorts. She has her own fair share of problems to handle. I feel a bit awkward when the three of them begin interacting about some high-end, convoluted stuff. They're talking about our relatives abroad, I sense. Sisters that I have never really seen but only heard of. I mean, I know a lot about them but not the way the larger council does.

I want to get to know them. I want to trade with them. I want everything that they offer my other elder sisters. But I also fear if they're unfriendly and if I fail to handle and negotiate with them. Unfriendly. They can't be, can they? But they can; after all, they are not 'our' sisters really. They're not part of the family.

Mumbai and Delhi arrive five minutes late, as expected, and break my chain of thoughts. I stand straight as they arrive and they take their respective seats. Big Sister smiles at me as she passes by me and wishes me luck. She looks tired but hopeful, as always.

I am asked to sit outside the hall for a few minutes. I'm a bit stressed. Look, I love what I am right now. I'm smart and I'm up to date, but I'm also young and I'm happy. I'm the perfectly toasted bread, and I'm the perfectly bloomed flower. I'm not too much and I'm not too less. I wish I could freeze time right now. But I know I can't. If I agree to become a 'Big Sister', then I might lose my youth; I might become all upright like Bangalore and frustrated like Mumbai. But if they can deal with the challenges of the global world, why can't I? I don't deem myself any weaker than them. After all, I have everything that they had when they were of my age. In fact, I have more space, I have more resources, and I am privileged in so many ways. I understand that I have to evolve; I see no choice around that problem, but how I evolve should be my choice. Right?

I am called inside. I stand before the Five. At first, they ask me a few questions. I answer correctly. They test me on my factual and practical abilities. I prove my worth. Then I pitch my thoughts. I try my best to convey what I want to say. I try to show them the equilibrium that I have and wish to maintain. I try telling them that every fiber of my landscape wants to grow without letting go of the roots. That I want what's best of all and I want to get rid of what's worst of mine.

I don't think I do a great job. I don't

articulate it well. They seem confused, as they should. It's a simple question they ask. Do I want to be a Big Sister or not? Do I want industries? Do I want fame? Do I want speed? Do I want luxury and comfort? Do I want larger-than-life spirits? Do I want to feel the thrills of urban zeniths? Do I want to get high on metropolitan tendencies? Do I need more and more of everything? Simple 'yes or no answers' I fail to give. Most medium cities would die to be in my position. Hence, the Big Sisters find it odd that I am unable to make such a presumably easy choice.

I walk out of the hall, requesting the Five for a few minutes to make a decision. Big Sister follows me as I expected her to and calms me down. She says nothing's going to change instantly, if it's the sudden shift that worries me. She narrates how she felt insecure when she went through this phase. She tells me how lucky I am that I have her as my guide. In her time, she had nobody. I sympathize. She says that it's a slow change, one which I would completely be in charge of.

"Really? Will I?", I ask her.

Will this change really be under my control? I've seen this 'change' change everything. In both good and bad ways. It's like a fire that we start consciously. At first, we have this fire regulated and

maintained, and the burner switch is accessible. But later, there's no stopping it. It is only an illusion that this 'radical revamping' is something we have a lid on. Once this fire spreads, it burns everything. But it also purifies the intoxicated. Fire provides warmth, it provides comfort, and it emblemizes immense power. But this power might turn everything to ash. And I will not let my tomorrow be a pile of ash. Neither will my tomorrow be a never-ending ice-age. You see how I'm caught up in this paradox?

My people have put their faith in me, just like their ancestors did and just like their children will. I am their past, present, and future, and hence I must evolve according to the world. But I must do it my way. So I must choose wisely for them. I see that it won't be an easy path to walk on surfaces the edge on the brink of yesterday and tomorrow in order to survive through today.

I know it won't be easy to become something that has never been before- to let go of your Big Sister's hand and imprint footsteps of your own instead of walking on hers. It'll be challenging to manifest myself in my own way, protecting myself and putting myself out there, taking long leaps but landing safe. But at least it will be my choice to do so. And I'll have no one else to blame or no one else to credit for the things that'll

happen to me.

I know, I seem headstrong and stubborn, even a little arrogant and ungrateful. But I suppose that is me being me. Don't worry; I'll work on it sometime soon.

I decide to leave.

"Where are you going? Are you not signing the contract?", Big Sister asks. I nod sideways.

"What will you do then?", she asks.

"Build my own tomorrow", Pune says.



legacy of hope



The Glass City of India

Smriti Gautam | Special Mention

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I (glass) know one day I will be broken and become useless for everyone but not for my city and I will come back here. That time I wish I can see my city to be more developed but always connected to its roots where I am never a waste. That's why it is called as 'The glass city-Firozabad'.

Hi! I am a broken bottle and useless for everyone. Now, I am in a truck, after a long time, I am returning back to that city. Thinking of the city, which changed me completely from which I was early.

I was a sand before. But what I was going to become, I don't know. The journey continues from a desert, which was my home earlier and after that, in a truck, willing to know where it goes. And

the truck reaches to its destination. It was a city called "the city of glasses-Firozabad".

And, the truck took its turn, I reached in a factory where the glasses were made. Thinking, now I will be one of them. In me (the sand), they mix soda ash, lime and put me a furnace which has a temperature nearly 1200-1300 degrees, that was much! But still, they all do it.

Well, after melting some of us (molten glass), was now turning into a plane glass, glass bowl, and many more glass item. Wow, how cool or may be hot to see it! I was turned into a glass bottle and then taken out from there with those who looks alike me.

I was in a truck, seeing the city inside from the truck. The chandeliers in the shops, how beautiful were they? The shops were few. Every one of them was unique, have it's own vibe. I wish I could be one of them. The beauty mesmerized me but I can only take those only in my memories.

I thought that was an end in this beautiful city, but wait. When I was broken, I thought that I am useless now on, but I am returning back to my birth place (as a glass), Unbelievable. I am wondering now what will happen with me, I am a broken bottle now, how will the city recreate me or redesign me?

Thinking of it, I reached to my destination, the glass city. Looking around and the city is completely changed. Back then, when I came to this city, before entering in, the people knows that they reached over there because to the smoke coming from the chimnies and the smoke covers the sky, turning in black, causes an increase in temperature. Due to increase in temperature, a heat wave always comes from the city. But

now, the city is cool then before, and a clean sky.

When I entered in the city, I see the market of beautiful chandeliers. The city is more developed back then before. Now, the city is having more shops, more security cameras, more cleanliness-greenery and the parks where the kids are playing together and smiling happily. But I am waiting of what I will be and the truck took its turn, my life changing turn once again, I am again in a factory. This time I am going to become a glass bangle. I saw that process earlier when I was before in this city. But there is something change.

The process of manufacturing glass bangles starts, the batch for it was preparing. There was sand, just like me before..... In sand soda ash, lime stone, borax, etc are added with other additives and coloring materials and is poured into pot furnace in which me and, alike me, other broken bottle pieces are added. But this time they are doing with more safety. We are heated up to the temperature of 1300-1400 degrees for melting us.

Again, I am a molten glass. I am now taken out from the furnace and with the help of iron pipe. Before, when they used to do this there was no safety but now at the holding site there are safety buckle which protect there hands. Because earlier, many accidents happened where

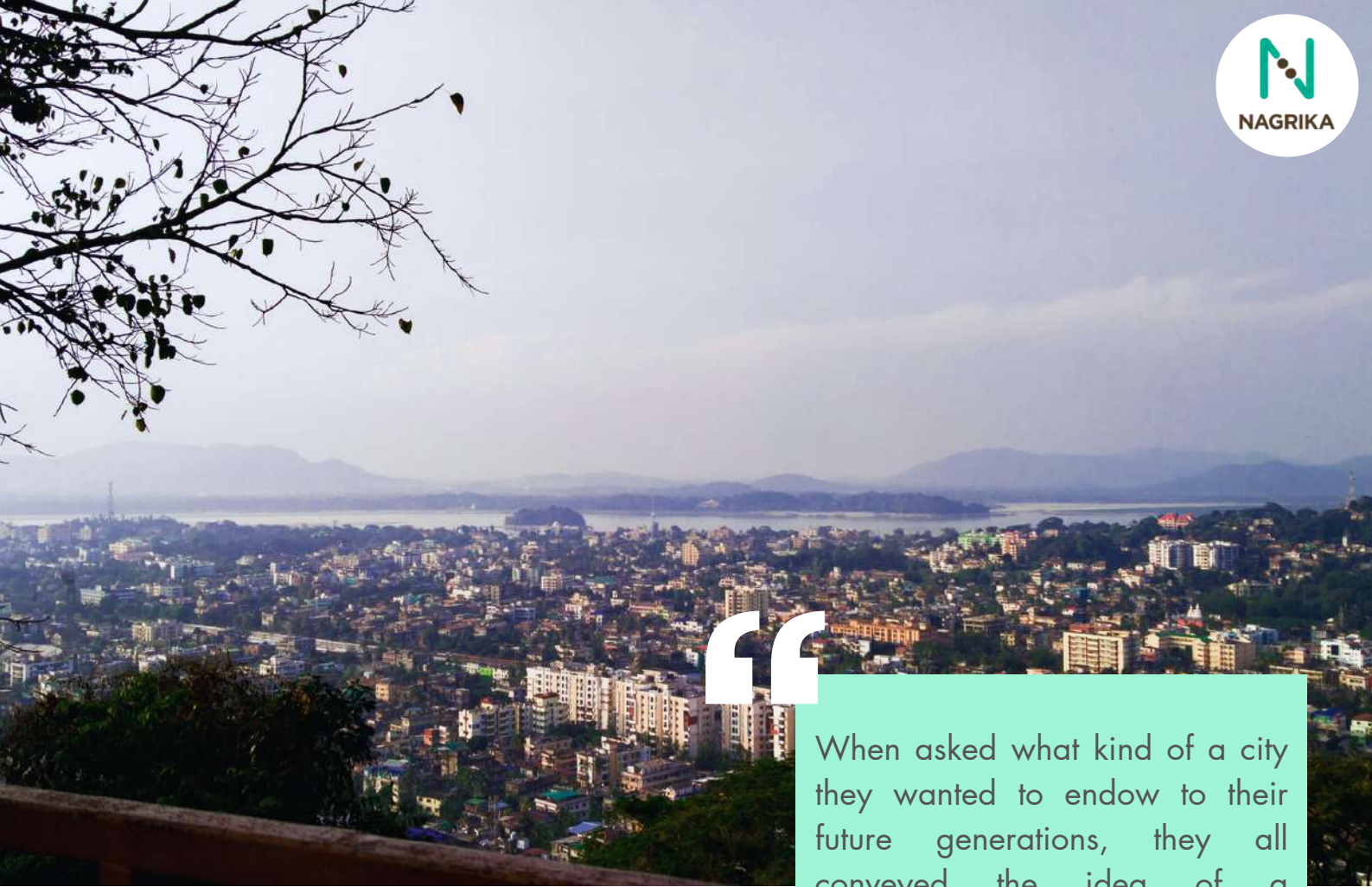
many of the workers were burnt from fire of the furnace or from the molten glass. But still need to take more precautions from any further accidents, even from the smoke coming. After many processes, we are further drawn into spiral/coil of bangles. I am a bangle spiral now. I am taken out from the spindle and cut with the help of a pencil cutter to separate out the single piece of bangles from spiral.

I am finally a single glass bangle but with a cut. Now, like me, other uncut bangles are sent to the workers for joining of end. Once after, we all are joined the worker string us together and in the stock, were like me, many bangles are tied in strings. They were really many. I really understood that why this city is a bangle city, every street through which I passed, I saw bangles of different design and of different colors, which make them very beautiful. I also wanted to be beautiful, like them but for now I am here in a storage.

I remembered this place before; many places on the roads were filled with water, many people was suffering from dengue and malaria and there was no facility to throw the garbage. But now, the roads are clean, the municipality truck is spraying medicine for the mosquitoes in each street, and municipal workers are taking garbage from each house. The city is changing, I am happy that my favourite city is getting better.

And one day, one person came and took all the bangles over there with him. Once again, I am seeing the city. The man takes us in a go-down where many workers are already working on bangles. I am excited to see how will I look like now. I am waiting and listening to the workers who are talking that how many other cities are rewarded for their cleanliness, development, better education and many more. But none of them is given to our city. After going through many processes, I look so pretty. Now, I am getting packed and leaving the city.

In the truck when I am leaving, I am thinking about the city how it changed so much and getting better day after day. But still, many things are needed to happen as the workers didn't use safety glasses for their eyes and in the houses where small kids are playing, the small pieces of bangles are there and almost all workers are female in the houses, they make their kids to work. I know they are working hard to make this city and I wish their hard work pays off and one day the city is also rewarded for its beauty, which I can see and I can feel. I know one day I will be broken and become useless for everyone but not for my city and I will come back here. That time, I wish I can see my city to be more developed but always connected to its roots, where I am never a waste. That's why it is called as "The glass city- Firozabad".



Porous Pockets of Guwahati— Striving for Memorable Cities

Arundhati Chowdhury | Special Mention

Witnessing the transformational journey that my hometown – Guwahati, has undergone in the last two decades, it is as if I have grown up with a childhood friend whose history I have been curious about and a future that I am in anticipation of. My inquisitiveness about my city and the urban experiences of the

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When asked what kind of a city they wanted to endow to their future generations, they all conveyed the idea of a ‘memorable city’ where people across generations can acknowledge their environment’s history while simultaneously being open to newer configurations of urban space.

generations before me led to the discovery of a YouTube video; a song sequence from the Assamese movie *Manab Aru Danab* (1970), titled “Moi Kun?” (Who Am I?), that unfolds a fascinatingly different image of the city that young people like me would be unfamiliar with. While present day

Guwahati is a densely packed urban space with high-rises and private vehicles, the music-video provides a glimpse into the dwindling Assam-type houses, public transportation, lush green covers, and open public spaces that are faintly present in small pockets within the city.

Known as the "Gateway to the North East," Guwahati is now the fastest-growing city and largest metropolis within India's North-East Region [NER], emerging as a hub for commerce, communication, education, and healthcare. Although the city landscape and its economy continue to grow post-Liberalization, the population within the metropolitan region has stabilized since 2001 due to economic and geopolitical developments.

While several reports indicate that Assam's population has risen to 3.5 crores in 2021, there is a decline in fertility rates and improvement in life expectancy, which has increased the population of older people (60 years and above). It has been predicted that this age group will grow three-fold from 19 lakh in 2011 to 53 lakh in 2036, making them 13% of the state's total population.

Evolving with the presence of a prominent elderly demographic, I began wondering how Guwahati has transformed from the

nostalgic evocations of the residents from the heart of the town. In a quest to learn more, I came across W.W. Hunter's (1990) account of revenue collection which noted the "Gauhati Municipal Board's" jurisdiction of 2.95 square miles in 1892 by and large comprising of Panbazar, Paltanbazar, Uzanbazar, & Fancybazar.

While the city expanded radially, my family stayed put in Uzanbazar for almost six generations! This triggered an opportunity for me to reach out to older people from these places and understand how they were coping with their hometown changing.

Although these notable localities are not without transformation, they hold what many nostalgically refer to as "the old-world charm" which seeps into the present, giving them a "porous" character.

Through the course of these interviews, I realized how it is not only the city that changes but simultaneously its people and their ways of perceiving their environment. The change that has occurred is not only in terms of 'seeing' (visual infrastructure) but also more profound in terms of 'feeling' (perceptual experiences). What emerged were narratives related to the natural environment, commuting, public spaces, and community.

Metamorphic Infrastructure and Urban Ecology

Discussing their presence in the city, Mr. Tapan Dutta Chaudhuri (69 years old) narrates how his family had moved from the countryside to Dighalipukhuri, Uzanbazar around the 1930s during his father's boyhood. Mr. Chaudhuri became reminiscent of the archetypal Assam-type infrastructure that has now metamorphosed into high-rise RCC buildings.

An amalgamation of the Assamese way of living and modern British intervention, this form of architecture was developed by colonial engineers who extensively studied this region's topography in the aftermath of the devastating 1897 Earthquake to create sustainable infrastructure.

With the rising density of people and pressure on land resources, these dwellings have gradually become obsolete in favor of commercial, rent-based constructions [Fig.1 and 2]. A steady rise in housing and land prices has resulted in widening class distinctions that has edged out the lower-income groups to the periphery and the gentrification of central urban areas, which only the old elite population has managed to survive.

With the haphazard concretization of



Figure 1 and 2: Metamorphic presence of Assam-type houses with the new RCC high-rises

spaces, the presence of nature has begun to fade away from the urban. My grandmother, Mrs. Santana Chowdhury (82 years old), wistfully recalls the sounds of birds and crickets chirping around dusk.

She even states that her children growing up were fascinated by junaki poruwa (Fireflies) in their backyard, but unfortunately, they have become a rare sight. Light and noise pollution within the city has also triggered the disappearance of birds such as the ghonsirika (House-Sparrow) and many other insects. While sounds of construction and traffic now dominate the city's aural landscapes, people associate pockets of green spaces near the riverfront and ponds in the old neighborhoods [Fig.3] with tranquility that evokes a sense of closeness to nature.



Figure 3: Sights of nature in old Guwahati

These evocative memories of the natural the natural environment have led to

residents nostalgically recalling Guwahati's past as being more habitable for all life forms in the context of a disappointing present. Mrs. Chowdhury says that the city now feels like coarse concrete that has "swallowed the softness of agricultural lands" that she had witnessed in abundance during the late-1950s when she moved to Uzanbazar after her marriage. Now, much of the city's flash floods arise due to traditional waterbodies such as wetlands being buried by landfills and settlements. A tributary of Brahmaputra, the Bharalu running across the city annually chokes during the monsoon. People are no longer able to fish or bathe here as it has turned highly toxic over the years. This has also led to diminishing aquatic life, negatively impacting the urban ecology.

This disappointment with the urban environment is also triggered by the tactile discomfort associated with heat, dust, grime, sweat, and stickiness due to the changing climatic conditions that have rendered the summers unbearable. A recurring complaint in the conversations was that Guwahati's weather used to be pleasant, but it isn't anymore. Such sensorial memories cannot be seen in isolation from the sprawling gated communities built by real-estate developers in the nascent parts of the city. While these manicured landscapes recreate the natural environment within closed walls, they

remain inaccessible to the larger society. For the sake of the public, green spaces within the old porous localities of Guwahati require protection from the bulldozing tendencies of neoliberal capital.

Hustling around Town

Recalling his family history, Mr. Arup Kumar Das (74 years old) narrates how his grandfather moved to Panbazar in 1891. Now in the same plot stands his two-story RCC dwelling that houses the fifth generation. Mr. Das fondly remembers the glory days of his childhood when the streets used to be their cricket turf and football grounds. Despite the streets lined with “smelly open drains,” exploring the locality and traversing its boundaries used to be a thrilling endeavor because “the town used to have a sense of openness.” Apart from the business establishments, he distinctly remembers that the locality had only seven houses which multiplied drastically after the state administration shifted from Shillong. With the formation of the new neighboring state of Meghalaya in 1972 and the relocation of Assam’s capital to Dispur, population inflow triggered the growth of Guwahati in the late ‘70s and ‘80s.

Similarly, Mr. Das’s son remembers how he used to run home from school to immediately pedal around the street on

his bicycle. While he did not loiter around town as much, he was familiar with the neighborhood’s nooks and corners [Fig. 4].



Figure 4: Streets of Panbazar

While many invoke the rhetoric of progress, there is also an underlying hesitance towards change. A sense of fear emerged among the old when asked about the brand new ropeway. Built by the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority [GMDA] in a joint venture with a Swiss firm, the ropeway over the Brahmaputra connects the North and South banks. Despite the scenic view that the ride offers, the idea of dangling above the river’s swift currents makes many feel uneasy. It is also expensive: crossing the river costs Rs. 100 one-way compared to the traditional ferry, which charges Rs. 5-10! The ferry is still a popular mode of transport, and the river has remained an essential route of connection for many. My father, Mr. Atanu Kumar Chowdhury (62 years old), holds fond memories of riding ferries during his boyhood and reiterates that inland water transportation has served as

the working class's cheap and efficient commute to the city from North Guwahati [Fig. 5]. However, he laments that the authorities have neglected the public transportation systems, such as ferries and city buses, which have the potential to solve multiple urban afflictions.



Figure 5: Sourced from my father's family album
- M.V. Lachit Ferry

Transformation of the Consumer

Mr. Ujawal K. Deb (82 years old), the owner of Panbazar's old sweet shop—Gauhati Dairy (est. 1928), was found to be in an animated conversation with his lifelong friend, Mr. P.K. Banerjee, whose wine shop – B.N. Dey & Co (est. 1861) was just a two-minute walk away. Their afternoon ritual was to keep the tradition of “adda” alive. This basically indicated a culture of leisurely chit-chat to a passionate exchange of ideas. These local shops bubbling with conversation in the yesteryears now remain a vestige of nostalgic memories. Nevertheless, the association of Panbazar with the smell of

books and freshly baked bread has remained intact for many as it continues to be a hub of bookstores and inexpensive eateries.

Shaikh Brothers (est. 1885) and Diamond Bakery (est. 1977) carts persist as another symbol of the past [Fig. 6&7]. Among the sea of Swiggy and Zomato delivery personnel, these men cycling around the old neighborhoods hold fond memories for people. Interestingly, they do not purely maintain a detached transactional relationship with their customers. Mr. Shaikh M. Nawaz, the owner of Shaikh Brothers, emphasizes how working around the same routes regularly for years has made their deliverymen familiar to the neighborhood folks. A bond of trust has been nurtured over time in a way that sometimes if they are unable to return the exact change for the money they are paid, it would be adjusted in future transactions. It is now rare to establish such a relationship in the current gig economy, where the consumer remains estranged.





Figure 6 and 7: Deliverymen with Bakery Carts in Panbazar

Meanwhile, Mrs. Anuradha Borooah (77 years old) wistfully recalls the joy she derived by going around Fancybazar to watch films and shop. Now disabled by a knee injury, she states that she is unable to cope with how intensely city life has transformed. While several malls in the city are comparatively accessible to disabled individuals, Mrs. Borooah feels like these spaces are unfamiliar. On the pyres of single-screen cinemas like Fancybazar's Kelvin now lies multi-level car parking plazas. The elders certainly miss the charm of the "old talkies", where entertainment was more or less accessible to all. In contrast, the youth in Guwahati

visit malls and cafes where they get to have an otherworldly experience curated through the "ambiance" of the place.

While the elders did complain about the young losing touch with their culture, Mrs. Chowdhury conveyed that she is glad that her granddaughters have more independence than she did to explore and enjoy city life. Although she does not relate to their globalized tastes, she notices an increasing presence of women in public and appreciates how society is gradually becoming "open-minded." This throws light on how the past is remembered in multiplicities, especially when viewed from varied intersections such as gender, class, or caste. While the past translated to enmeshed and robust community life for some, for others, it also meant greater constraints on their freedom. Although globalization has ushered in diverse choices for the public, many of these multicultural spaces remain exclusionary as they mainly cater to the privileged consumer.

Tenacious Ties: Fields & Festivals

When asked about their concerns regarding Guwahati's future, the elders mentioned the lack of open spaces. Going down memory lane, Mr. Chaudhuri recalls playing football at Judges Field every morning with boys from his locality [Fig. 8]. Ranging from the ages of 9 to 26, they used to call

themselves the “Morning Club”. Others also remember spending their leisure time at Church Field and Lataasil. According to Mr. Deb, boys from different communities played together back in his days. But the feelings of solidarity with the neighborhood have presently disintegrated due to a growing socio-economic divide. While a portion of the area now remains with the Christ Church (est. 1844), the rest of the Church Field has partly been constructed into a ticketed recreational space called the Nehru Park.

On a separate section of this ground stands Food Villa, a food court with international fast-food chains such as Domino’s. While this is an expensive place that remains inaccessible to many, a line of carts outside the park offers all



Figure 8: (Bottom row, left) Mr. Chaudhuri with the Morning Club

passersby a range of street food at a reasonable price.

Although utilized differently, the other fields remain intact. Run privately by the Gauhati Town Club, Judges Field is exclusively for sports training and organized matches. Retaining its flexible character, Lataasil has remained a historically significant space.

This field was created in 1899 to assert the public’s rights when the local Ekata Sabha was denied access to the Judges Field by the European Club. Furthermore, Lataasil is considered the birthplace of urban Bihutoli, as the Rongali Bihu celebrations from the rural settings were first recreated on a stage here in 1952.

Recollecting their memories of festivities, elders narrated their sensorial experiences of attending Bihu and Durga Puja: people dressed up in colorful traditional attires, celebratory songs and dances, and food stalls lined up around the perimeter of the field.

Interestingly, porosity in terms of culture also exists in the Bihutoli – the indigenous folk forms [Fig. 9] continue to be presented along with new-age singers. While there has been a growing cacophony of traffic during festivals in recent times, these localities have retained an unwavering essence.



Figure 9: Rongali Bihu at Lataasil - folk dancers performing Bagurumba, the indigenous dance form of the Bodo Tribe

In discussing tenacious traditions, Mr. Chowdhury presented a picture of Durga Puja celebrations. He mentions, "Unlike the Bengali Dhak, the Bor Dhul is played with the Taal by Kamrupi Dhuliyas here" [Fig. 10]. The Visarjan (immersion) of the worshipped deities during Dashami (Dusherra) in the ghats of these old localities is also another tradition that lives on. While festivals are celebrated with fervor, sites such as Lataasil also remain politically significant for the community as it has historically been a site of protest. Open spaces like these have now begun to dwindle, with newer parts of the city rarely having spaces for recreation. The dense occupation of land has created pressure on public spaces, which are already meager and poorly distributed. When compared with the rise of neoliberal spaces of consumption, it reveals the story of rising estrangement within the community where only those who are privileged enough are given

access to privately owned communal spaces.



Figure 10: Kamrupiya Dhuliya - folk drummers from indigenous ethnicities such as Kaibarta, Rabha, Koch

Endowing Memorable Cities for Children

Through the conversations with senior citizens, I came across the sensorial experiences of their urban way of life, which have shifted over the years. These lived experiences reveal a growing generational gap, instances of loss, weakening community ties, mounting socio-economic disparity, but also emerging visibility of women in public spaces and technological advancements. In the backdrop of such transformation lies globalization that has catapulted intense, unplanned urban growth, shaping the contemporary story of

Guwahati as a city in motion.

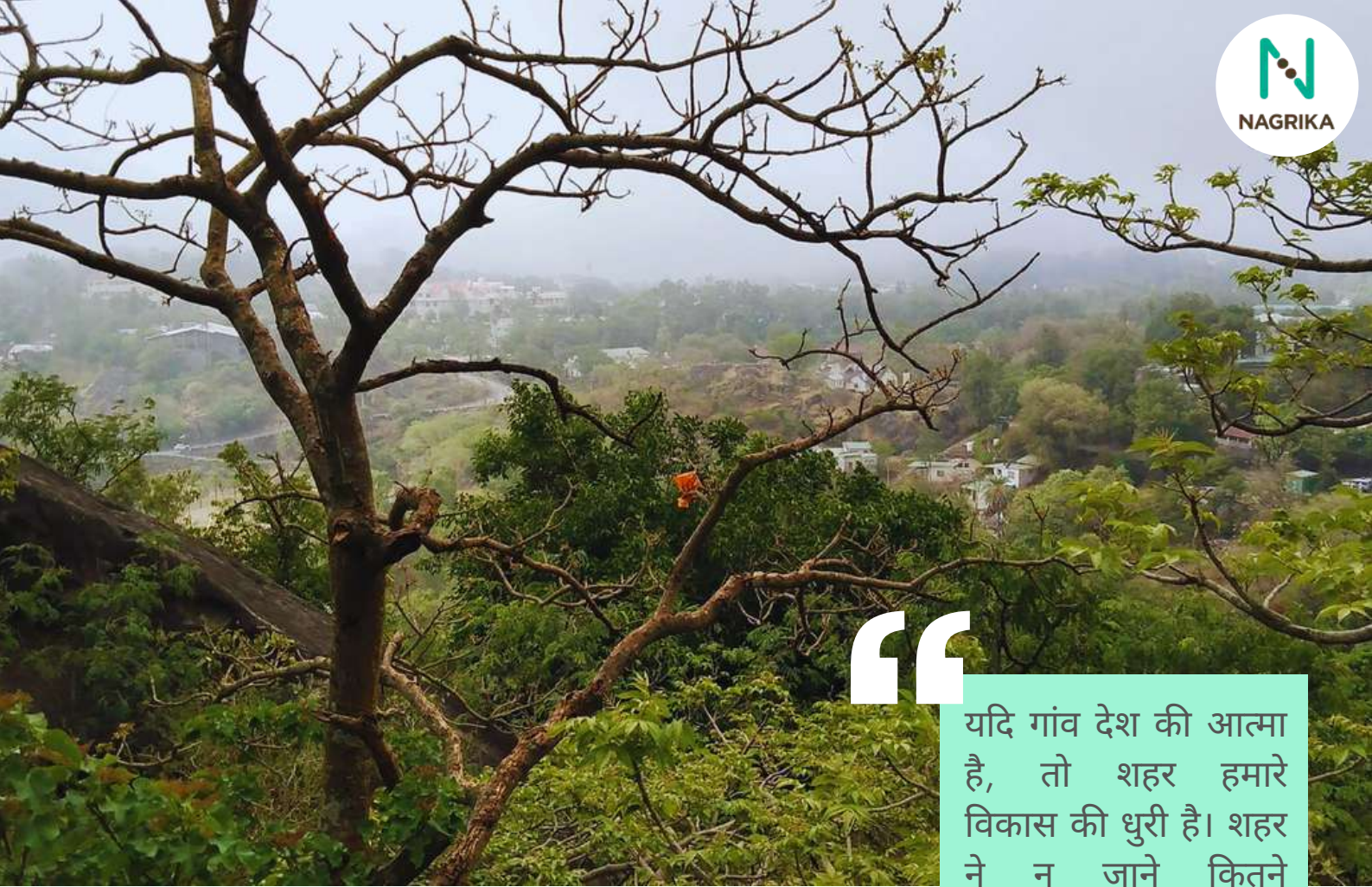
Looking back in time and dissecting the nostalgic memories has undoubtedly helped me discern certain layers of place memory. Since the past can be remembered through varied perspectives, it is essential to understand that “going back to the old ways” doesn’t always mean the same thing for all. Fascinated by the German-Jewish philosopher – Walter Benjamin, I applied the idea of “porosity” to the older localities of Guwahati, as the remnants of the past here continue to live alongside developments of the present time. While change, especially for Indian cities, is inevitable, nurturing and revitalizing the porous pockets like that of Guwahati may prove to be a fruitful effort in memorializing the character of a city. Interestingly, when asked what kind of a city they wanted to endow to their future generations, they all conveyed the idea of a “memorable city” where people across generations can acknowledge their environment’s history while simultaneously being open to newer configurations of urban space.

Therefore, cities around India must strive to be memorable and livable, where the relics of time alongside the current innovations aid residents in remembering their history. This exploration through conversations with senior citizens of Guwahati throws light on the porous

character of old neighborhoods that continue to thrive even under the pressures of the standardizing instincts of the neoliberal, global world. Knowledge about such localities should be made more accessible by according recognition to key establishments and by installing neighborhood maps and signage. Streets should also be made to be more pedestrian-friendly to encourage the exploration of such localities. Moreover, protection and development of open public spaces is the need of the hour for a thriving community life in the city. Cities must ultimately be planned in a manner that is sensitive to the neighborhood’s history, culture, and most importantly, its people in order to be memorable.



legacy of hope



“

यदि गांव देश की आत्मा है, तो शहर हमारे विकास की धुरी है। शहर ने न जाने कितने ज़रूरतमंदों और भूखे पेटों को आश्रय दिया है और उन्हें आर्थिक रूप से सक्षम बनाया है।

हमारा वो शहर जिसे हम अपनी आने वाली पीढ़ी के लिए चाहते हैं

देवेन्द्र कुमार | स्पेशल मेंशन

शहर के मायने मेरे जीवन में बेहद खास है। शहर या गांव की हवा, मिट्टी और पानी से ही हम सब अपना जीवन विकसित करते हैं। जन्मभूमि के रूप में मेरा शहर माँ की गोद जैसा है। जिसने हमें खिलाया भी है और खेलाया भी। शहर की सुख सुविधाओं ने हमारे जीवन की कांटो जैसी जटिलता को दूर कर हमें फूलों का स्पर्श दिया है। अतएव शहर हमारे शरीर की हर कोशिका में या यूं कहें कि

हर सांस में खुला हुआ है। शहर हमारे जीवन की आधारशिला है। प्रकृति के सारे संसाधनों और भौतिक सुख सुविधाओं को मुक्त हस्त से लूटने वाला शहर हमारी आशाओं और आकांक्षाओं में बसा हुआ है। मेरा शहर मेरा गौरव है। यह केवल भूमि का विस्तृत भाग नहीं है, जज्बातों से जुड़ा हमारा जेहन है। मां की कोख के बाद शहर की छत्रछाया में ही हम पले-बड़े और आगे बड़े हैं। इसके

सामाजिक-सांस्कृतिक परिवेश ने हमें जीवन मूल्य सिखाए और हमारी सोच को दूरदर्शी और भविष्य अनुकूल बनाया है। इसकी आर्थिक समृद्धि ने हमारे घट कभी खाली नहीं होने दिए। हमारी संपन्नता को सदैव सौभाग्यमान रखा। इसने हर हाथ को कम देने के साथ खाली हाथों को भी कौशल का अभयदान दिया।

वरिष्ठ नागरिक एवं पेशे से वरिष्ठ शिक्षक रामचंद्र शर्मा का कहना है कि गांव की सदैव प्रशंसा होती रही है और आगे भी होती रहेगी, इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं है। लेकिन इस मायने में हम शेरों की खूबियों को नहीं भूल सकते। यदि गांव देश की आत्मा है, तो शहर हमारे विकास की धुरी है। शहर ने न जाने कितने ज़रूरतमंदों और भूखे पेटों को आश्रय दिया है और उन्हें आर्थिक रूप से सक्षम बनाया है।

शहर इच्छा, कामना, आशा और आकांक्षा से जुड़ा वह ठौर है जहां पर हर कोई अपना ठिकाना ढूंढ ही लेता है। 'सबका साथ सबका विकास' शहर के बुनियाद के बिना निरर्थक ही नहीं बल्कि आधारहीन है। मेरा शहर मेरे लिए प्रगति का द्वार है यहां रहते हुए मैंने अपने जीवन में बदलाव होते देखा है, जबकि मेरे पूर्वज ग्रामीण पृष्ठभूमि से आते हैं। यहां अफसर की प्रचुरता ने जीवन में कभी खालीपन को जगह नहीं दी।

शहर के बारे में अपनी पसंदीदा बातों पर प्रकाश डालते हुए एक अन्य वरिष्ठ नागरिक

और पेशे से बैंकर भंवरलाल परमार कहते हैं कि हमारे समय में शहर और आज के शहर में बहुत अंतर है। हमारे समय में शहर, शहर नहीं बल्कि एक बड़ा गांव था। लोग काम थे और सुविधाएं गांव से अधिक थीं।

पहले शहर में साधन के नाम पर हर किसी के पास साइकिल होती थी। शहर के एक कोने से दूसरे कोने तक, या दूसरे नजदीकी शहर तक जाने के लिए लोग साइकिल का ही इस्तेमाल करते थे। इससे पर्यावरण और स्वास्थ्य दोनों स्वस्थ रहते थे। ना तो वायु प्रदूषण का नाम था और ना ही ध्वनि प्रदूषण की कर्कश आवाज। यह सचमुच बहुत अच्छी बात थी। जिसकी शहरी जीवन में कमी या शून्यताओं ने चिंताएं बढ़ाकर कई समस्याओं को न्योता दे दिया है।

दूसरी चीज जो मुझे अपने शहर के बारे में प्रिय थी वह था- हमारे शहर का तालाब- जो हमेशा साफ सुथरा रहता था। तलाक के कारण बरसात में शहर की सड़क और गालियां कभी पानी से लबालब नहीं रहती थी। सारा पानी नालियों के माध्यम से तालाब में चला जाता था।

तीसरी चीज, शहर में आवारागर्दी और भीड़-भाड़ का नामोनिशान नहीं था। लोगों में बहुत प्रेम और भाईचारा था। दुख-सुख में साथ रहते। बाजार में पार्किंग व्यवस्था की जरूरत नहीं थी शहर शराब और पान मसाले के सेवन से अछूता था। गंदगी कम होती थी क्योंकि नागरिक बोध और नैतिकता का भाव मौजूद

था। चौथा, त्योहारों के दौरान हर्षोल्लास का माहौल रहता था। होली दहन के समय रावण चौक पर लोगों की भारी भीड़ होती थी। लोग होली और दिवाली एक साथ मनाते थे। शहर के एक छोर पर रहने वाला व्यक्ति शहर के दूसरे छोर पर रहने वाले व्यक्ति को नाम से जानता था। अब हर कोई आत्मकेंद्रित हो गया है। दरअसल, दूसरों के साथ मेल-मिलाप और पहचान बढ़ाना अतीत की बात बनकर रह गई है। रामलीला, रासलीला, कठपुतली नाटक जैसे शिक्षाप्रद मनोरंजन कार्यक्रम अब शहरों से गायब हो गए हैं।

आधुनिक दौर में शहर के सुखद एवं सुरक्षित भविष्य के लिए हमें किन-किन चीजों या बातों पर ध्यान देना चाहिए, या वे कौन सी चीज जो आप हमारे लिए चाहते हैं? इस सवाल के जवाब में वरिष्ठ नागरिक डूंगाराम भारद्वाज कहते हैं कि वर्तमान समय में कमोबेश हर शहर की संरचना में काफी बदलाव आया है। ज्यादातर शहर प्रदूषण की गंभीर चपेट में है। परिवहन के साधनों की बढ़ती संख्या और जनसंख्या के असहनीय भार का शहर पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव पड़ रहा है।

इसीलिए स्मार्ट सिटी की अवधारणा के साथ शहर का सुरक्षित भविष्य भी जरूरी है। मेरा मानना है कि आर्थिक प्रगति के साथ शहरों में सामाजिक, सांस्कृतिक और पर्यावरणीय मूल्य के विघटन की ओर ध्यान आकर्षित करने करना आवश्यक है। हमें उनकी आकांक्षाओं और सपनों का शहर अगली पीढ़ी को सौंपने के लिए कुछ सुधार करने होंगे। इन सुधारों को

शुरू करने के लिए हमें व्यक्तिगत स्तर पर पहल करनी होगी।

उदाहरण के लिए, हम चाहते हैं कि आने वाली पीढ़ी स्वच्छ हवा में जीवन यापन करें, इसके लिए हमें परिवहन के निजी साधनों का उपयोग कम करके सार्वजनिक परिवहन की आदत डालनी होगी। शहर में पैदल चलने के अधिकार के तहत फुटपथों के निर्माण के साथ-साथ साइकिल लेने का भी निर्माण किया जाना चाहिए, ताकि पर्यावरण प्रदूषण को काम किया जा सके।

तालाब संस्कृति को पुनर्जीवित करना होगा, ताकि वर्षा जल संग्रहित हो और शहरों को बरसाती नालों में तब्दील होने से बचाया जा सके। स्वच्छ शहर को सुरक्षित एवं स्वस्थ शहर कहा जाता है। इसलिए हमें भविष्य का आदर्श शहर बनाने के लिए शहरों की साफ सफाई पर ध्यान देना होगा। सुलभ शौचालय और कचरा प्रबंधन पर फोकस करना होगा। निसंदेह इसके लिए नागरिक बोध आवश्यक है। इसके बिना हम आने वाली पीढ़ियों के लिए सुरक्षित शहरी भविष्य की कामना नहीं कर सकते।

शहर के बुजुर्ग रामलाल कहते हैं कि शहर वह जगह है, जिससे हमारा सीधा भावनात्मक जुड़ाव है। शहर की समृद्धि हमारे व्यक्तिगत समृद्धि है। शहर का आर्थिक, सामाजिक, राजनीतिक और पर्यावरण की दृष्टि से मजबूत होना हमारे भविष्य के सुरक्षित होने का संकेत है। हम शहर में मजबूत कानून व्यवस्था और

अगली पीढ़ी को उन्नत तकनीक हस्तांतरित होते देखना चाहते हैं। शहर में सुख सुविधाओं के साथ-साथ शांति सद्भाव भी रहना चाहिए। इसके लिए शहर में सेमिनार या स्नेह मिलन कार्यक्रम का आयोजन किया जाना चाहिए। बुजुर्गों और वरिष्ठ नागरिकों के साथ-साथ किशोर और बाल पीढ़ी के विचारों को जानकर शहर नियोजन का मार्ग प्रशस्त किया जाना चाहिए।

शहर में शिक्षा के लिए उचित स्कूल व्यवस्था, बच्चों के लिए पार्क, महिलाओं के लिए अलग-अलग अस्पताल आदि पर ध्यान दिया जाना चाहिए। हमारे समय में ज़रूरतें कम थी, लेकिन आज के दौर में जरूर का कोई अंत नहीं है। इसलिए सभी की महत्वाकांक्षाओं को पूरा करना और हितों की रक्षा करना एक जटिल और चुनौती पूर्ण कार्य है। हमें भविष्य के शहर के लिए अतीत की उन सुखद और सामाजिक रूप से लाभकारी परंपराओं और रीति रिवाज को पुनर्जीवित करना होगा, ताकि शहर के विकास में नागरिक नैतिकता सुनिश्चित की जा सके।



legacy of hope



The City I Wish I Could Leave For My Future Generations

Ritika Chand | Top 12 Entry

Bhadrak, a small city in the heart of Odisha, exemplifies the profound intertwining of mythology and history. It is the sacred abode of the mighty goddess Bhadrakali, whose legends have been passed down through the ages, and is an integral part of Odisha, also known as the Land of Lord Jagannath.

There is one thing that all senior citizens agree on and something we all can definitely fulfil: they want their future city to be as full of life, as it is today. For, a city devoid of people is like an ocean devoid of water: barren and empty.

As a young kid caught in the whirlwind of changing cities and schools, the arrival of summer vacations always ignited a rush of excitement within me for it would mean I could visit my hometown – Bhadrak. With lush green fields full of cows and little kids— probably on their lunch break— enjoying a dip in the vast flowing river,

Bhadrak was nothing short of a paradise.

As a curious kid who lived far away from my hometown, I would bombard my father with questions about his childhood and our hometown. With a proud smile, he would start by giving a brief about Odisha and its ancient roots in history. Odisha, formerly known as Kalinga—the very realm that bore witness to the illustrious reign of Ashoka the Great and celebrated as Utkal in our National Anthem, this sacred land has embraced various names throughout history. However, for him, it will forever remain as “Orrisa”—the Land of Gods.

For a state adorned with a myriad of names, it is heartbreaking to know that very few are aware of the existence of this remarkable land, let alone its rich history and captivating myths. Even fewer are aware of my district i.e. Bhadrak.

In my father's nostalgic tales of childhood, one adventure stood out as the most thrilling, which was skipping tuition with his friends to enjoy a swim in the nearby river. However, that same river was chosen for Visarjan—the immersion of idols during religious festivities. As fate – which my father describes as “karma” – would have it, he injured his head with a floating piece of a broken idol and had to get 10 stitches as well as a stern reprimand from my grandfather. I had listened to this tale

with an envious look, for I too wanted to experience an adventure of my own. My mother too reminisces about climbing trees, plucking out fresh fruits hanging on the tree branches and munching on them right there like a monkey, something most city kids have never done.

My parents and the elders want us to have their city—the city of their childhood that was filled with trees so huge that they would hide the skies, rivers and soil so soft that they could walk barefoot, the air so clean that you could watch all the constellations – even at daytime – and playgrounds so huge that fielding in gully cricket would be a nightmare. Sure this seems more like a town or village than a city but who says a city can't have this?

My grandparents too have similar tales and aspirations about the city but this is just one side of the coin.

Ever listened to your father exaggerating about how he had to cross a river, climb mountains, fight a bear— maybe not the last one— all in order to reach school? Sure it might not be all true but the situation surely was grave and surely not as convenient as it is for us. We just hop into our buses or cars and tada we reach school. My father's school was a walk of 2 kilometres from home and they never had enough money to buy a cycle like other kids. So every day he had to walk this distance, come back for lunch and

then once again go to school. He walked a total of 8km every day! As you can guess my father came from a not-so-wealthy family.

My grandfather once told me he saw my father studying under the streetlight! during a power cut. And did I mention the lack of private washrooms? Sure there have been a lot of improvements but not enough. My mother remembers their medicine store being the only one in their village and people from all over the village used to line up to buy medicines.

So you see my father and the other senior citizens I talked to, also want us to have a city with good transport facilities, a stable electricity connection,—electricity stealing thieves are quite common in the city— a good network, hygienic public bathrooms, better higher education facilities as well as better medical facilities and stores for the future generation. Conflicting views right? Sometimes they want the “kaccha” roads to walk barefoot and sometimes they want better transport facilities that would only be possible with the cemented roads.

If Rome, a city so ancient with its roots buried deep in mythology could have a drainage system so complex that rivals today's modern-day sewage systems, why can't we be buried in nature's embrace while having technology at our disposal?

Ultimately, senior citizens in Bhadrak desire a city that encapsulates the best of their heritage while embracing progress and change.

Speaking of heritage, as a wide-eyed child with an insatiable thirst for stories, I have been a huge fan of adventure and mythology and one of my favourite childhood books was *The Adventures of Vikram And Betal*. Maharaja Vikramaditya was known to be a huge devotee of Maa Durga (Chamunda) as well as Maa Bhadrakali. Both goddesses hold a special place in the hearts of people in Bhadrak. Durga Puja is celebrated with great splendour. Beautifully crafted idols of the goddess Durga are installed in pandals across the city and devotees line up just to get a glimpse of her. I remember Pandal 'hopping' – visiting multiple pandals one by one— as a kid and trying out the delicious finger-licking food in each of them.

That's not all! A grand fair is set up during the festivities that attracts a huge crowd of children— their eyes brimming with joy— as well as adults. From colourful stalls selling a multitude of handicrafts, jewellery and clothes to thrilling amusement rides, the fair has it all. The senior citizens want us to preserve the culture, the art, and the heritage and keep it alive for future generations to enjoy and appreciate it. All senior

citizens expressed a desire for recreational parks for both the elderly and children as well as better connection with other cities, especially Bhubaneswar—the capital city— which, 3 years ago used to be 4 hours away—taking into consideration various stops for tea and snacks break – both by car and train.

I remember being annoyed about how half the day was spent just travelling. First, the aeroplane— no that is recent, as a young girl I remember travelling by train making new friends along the way and spending the whole day in the car to reach Bhadrak. Not much has changed now. Only the train journey has been replaced by a plane and the quality of the roads has become better. Bhubaneswar can now be considered a city but Bhadrak is still a town. Although the distance between them might have decreased due to better transport and road networks, the gap in technology, education and mindset remains.

The next thing that the elders want is a safe and secure city.

In my mother's memories lies a haunting chapter where fire threatened to burn her house. As a young girl, she witnessed the terror of riots when she and the others hid in the storage room. All they could hear were screams and with it the thumping of their hearts, which grew loud with each

scream and louder in the silence after. No senior citizen would dream of a city that is vibrant and beautiful, relaxing and modern, but rampant with crime. A future without peace is no future at all.

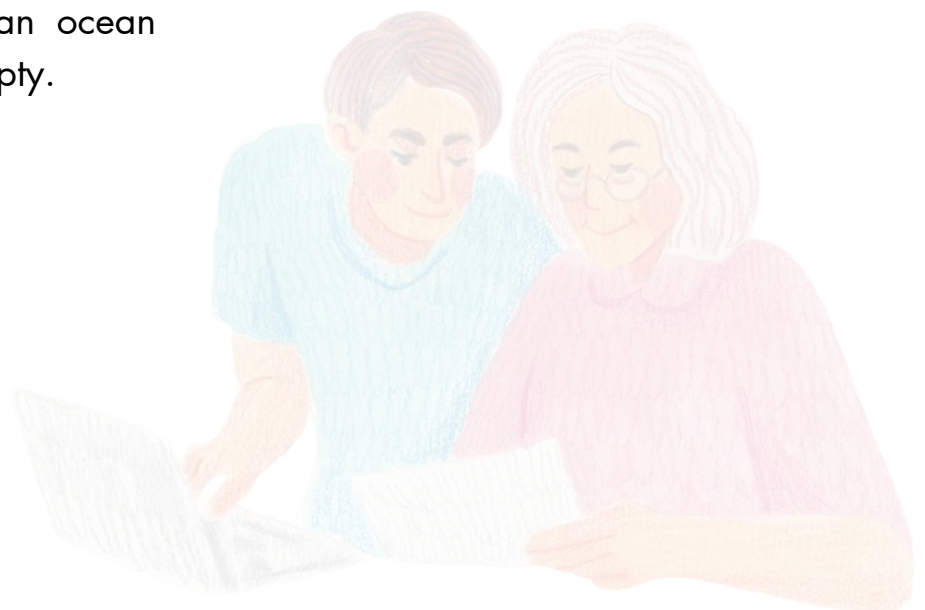
Just like everyone, all the elders in the city want what they think is best for their children as well as themselves. Their experience and wisdom are like no other and with them lies the secrets of our heritage, culture and history. Just like how Rome was not built in a day, one cannot expect to build the city of their future in just a mere day. It may take years but the senior citizens promise to work towards building the city they want their grandchildren to cherish and they have faith that the government will do the same.

Lastly and most importantly the senior citizens wish to leave behind not just material wealth or physical structures, but a community where kindness reigns and compassion overflows. Since a city is defined by its inhabitants, the most important piece in this puzzle or rather time capsule is the people they leave behind. They wish their grandchildren to live in a city where the streets are filled with laughter. Upholding the saying “Atithi Devo Bhava” they wish to leave behind a city where strangers are still treated as God and neighbours are cherished like family. They hope to impart their teachings, values and morals to the

generation that is to come so that they too can do the same and foster harmony as well as form close bonds with one another. They want us to remain as a close-knit group of friendly people unlike the megacities of today, where everyone is a stranger, distant and busy.

To make our future city a reality, we as citizens should work together to improve the city, preserve and promote our culture and take steps to build the city we wish to leave behind for future generations.

Sure, the senior citizens of Bhadrak might have different opinions on the kind of city they want to leave behind and one might not be able to fulfil all their hopes and dreams for the future of our cities, but there is one thing that all senior citizens agree on and something we all can definitely fulfil: they want their future city to be as full of life, as it is today. For, a city devoid of people is like an ocean devoid of water: barren and empty.



legacy of hope



We want Dangiwacha to be an example, we want its younger generation to flourish, we want it to be a hub for the people of surrounding areas, we want it to be an accessible place with warming people.

Dangiwacha: A place that allows you to borrow the ideal from Nostalgia, the present assessed, and the future imagined

Durdanah Masoodi | Top 12 Entry

Dangiwacha is situated in the district of Baramulla in the North of Kashmir.

Honestly not long back, the sight of Dangiwacha made me fill up with joy. This does not mean that it longer does so,

it does. But I see the joy fade with each generation. My place still welcomes one with those roads surrounded on either side by lush green fields. Each field carries with it the essence of beauty and the work of the people involved. The

'Naala Hamal' (river Hamal) popular local river known for its freshness in the past days still exists.

The striking rays of the Sun during the month of June-July compels children to take a bath in this river. What has differentiated it from the past is its freshness. Because the river had multipurpose usage ranging from drinking water, using water for cleaning purposes, and being a relaxing site spot. But it is no longer suitable for these purposes. The water is filthy, filled with plastic wrappers and child diapers. The river which earlier exclaimed one to murmur 'AWW' now pushes you to murmur 'EEW.'

Though the only activity that continues from the existence of the river is children enjoying the bath. That too in a few parts of it in comparison to the space availability in the past. The other factor that added to the liveliness of the place is its playground named '*Baagh e Firdous*.' When I was growing up I saw the playground with more hustle and bustle, young boys and girls living the moments, balls being lost to knees being injured, small fights and crowded ground, and much more. But the space is restricted now for certain games and certain audiences.

Earlier it was a place for all locals to gather and play, now due to a lot of reasons they are witnessed less. But I still

see parts of it resonating in various incidents and I keep my fingers crossed for it to be the same but not worse. However, the story does not end here. If I am keeping my fingers crossed, my elders including my grandparents, uncles, and aunts have less hope for anything that would make the present feel like their past. But they certainly have ideas that could make the place more sustainable for future generations.

Speaking to one of my neighbors aged more than 50 years, it was nothing less than hearing a bunch of painful words. He said, 'Our place is no longer the same, earlier we used to eat and drink in each other's house, meet people to relieve ourselves of the burdens we felt, and move around with more sense of security, Ah, it is no longer the same.' My uncles and Aunt put forward ideas of the place they lived in but can only imagine it anymore. For them, Dangiwachha was a place filled with hope. The hope to help others live, to raise those who can't, the hope that someone else would enjoy someone else's success and not envy. Knowing that the above ideas reflected more nostalgia about what made the place lively, it was interesting to know the observation of elders in this matter.

'You have put forward a nice question' said Grandma while I asked her about what kind of place she would want to leave for future generations. 'What fun is

to have these concrete cemented houses, excess windows, wooden floors, and all present house enhancing techniques.’ ‘Do people not have a slight understanding of how the climate of a place determines housing schemes, do they not grasp that it impacts our health, Kashmir has a different climate, and everything for us is determined by it, we are natives of the place, it's we who live here and have to survive here, why shall we run after the designs and structures engineered for different places.’

Overall her point was to convey that the minimal temperature persistent in a place like ours needs structures and equipment that can help us in coping with that but present engineered structures are not like that, ‘We run after styles not comfort, said Grandma.’ All of the above statements advanced the idea of what it was like in the past, memories or buzz of a place that made people feel nostalgic. But if that style was embedded in the memories of the people, they certainly wished for a place that should have some if not all tinge from the past and more new things required.

Starting from what I would wish I could leave for the future generation includes a place that attracts the young because of its liveliness, competition that is healthy and does not infuse anxiety, house planning that is sustainable and livable, and infrastructure that is essential for

human necessities. One such necessity that I strongly vouch for is the establishment of the public but maintained toilets, especially for female folk. This may not have been a requirement in the earlier days when the population and the travel frequency both were less. But in present times both have increased. Not just inter-town/city movement but people from other areas out of various necessities need to travel. And the female folk in all this suffers. Not having the presence of public toilets marks a lack of facilities that is profound for the maintenance of a basic human standard of living.

What elders wish the place to be is an accessible route predominantly for educational purposes in the long run as it has always been. The land of Dangiwachha has given birth to strong personalities for ages ranging from the fields of teaching, medicine, literature, and others. They wish it to continue for ages making it a remarkable place in education. The place has also hosted various government offices such as Tehsil, Judicial office, etc making it convenient for the neighboring areas to access such services.

‘We wish it to be an ease for those who reside in far-off areas’ said one elder. Others commented, ‘We faced and are still facing hardships when it comes to transport services, that causes hindrance

to a lot that could be otherwise done on time, We hope the service improves for our children, for our old aged people.'

While this was being processed, one of my uncles said, 'Look we want improvement in services that we did not have, we want a better market for you, accessible transport and official services, but we do not want it at the cost of our environment being destroyed.' The balance needs to be struck between upgrading our places, towns, or cities, and caring about nature. When I heard this point it struck me deep somewhere.

I paused for a moment and wild thoughts crossed my mind. I could imagine buildings, transport, market, and everything else that I could with fallen trees, with climatic changes, with abrupt weather changes, and much more. 'You don't worry' was the voice that I was patted with. It was one of my aunts smiling and looking closely at my paper and pen for a while.

'We know what we needed, we also know what we had and had not, living the human life requires a lot, it is not only your home but a society that we live in, whatever comes and goes impacts us all collectively; But if we have our younger generation who at least know the value of this pen and paper, we are sure you would welcome change, as 'change is the only constant' but we are confident

that you would use your brains to ensure that you 'live' in a place and not merely 'survive' and this would require an effort out of you to comprehend the difference between the two and make steps for the establishment of the former. While I was absorbed in these lines, I fathomed out of all the conversations I had about 'what city would I want to leave for my future generation.'

The answer was: A place that gives them a sense of security, where they feel loved and would reciprocate the same, where they know the importance of infrastructure and nature, traveling and strolling define them, exploring their area for better use of resources, knowing to balance between more access to facilities and environmental protection.

Grandma ended it sweetly: We want Dangiwachha to be an example, we want its younger generation to flourish, we want it to be a hub for the people of surrounding areas, we want it to be an accessible place with warming people.





The Quest for Development & the Question of Identity in a Transforming Indore

Tanishka Goswami | Top 12 Entry

“Maa, what do you wish Indore to be like for future generations?”, I asked my grandmother. Her eyes gleamed through her glasses as she listened carefully, wondering why I was acting like a news reporter early morning. She smiled as she told me about her journey from a small village to Indore; an arduous journey

which began more than half a century ago. My grandparents came to Indore with a small bag and little money, but hopes and aspirations aplenty. Through this essay, I wish to describe the city of Indore through the lens of my grandmother and other senior citizens. The essay reflects on their emotions,

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While we seek betterment in its infrastructure and public facilities, we do not seek such development at the cost of its identity and essence.

concerns, and hopes associated with Indore.

What the City of Indore Means to My Grandmother & Other Senior Citizens

Today, Indore is known for being the cleanest city and food capital of the country, as well as the commercial capital of the state of Madhya Pradesh. However, for my grandmother who continues to run her business at the age of 76, the city of Indore symbolises much more. For her, the city signifies opportunities for growth and meaningful transformations. Soon to have its own metro network, Indore is truly the economic nerve centre of central India. It boasts of both traditional agro, and modern corporate and information technology industries. From Sarafa Bazar and Rajawada which glow in the night to Chappan Dukaan, which acts as the nucleus for foodies from all over the country, the city has something in store for everyone.

My grandmother recalled the hustle-bustle in the streets heading to the textile factories in the city; factories which have been long shut down today. She told me about the tall and dense trees which used to surround the streets from both sides, giving the appearance of a blanket of greenery. She reminisced about the community culture of the city, and the love and harmony between neighbours

who were more like family members. In a race to become “smart” and industrialized, small cities like Indore have lost some elements which made them welcoming for many like my grandmother.

Later in the day, I met Mr. Sharma* in our neighbourhood. Even in his 80s, he symbolizes youthful spirit and humour. I asked him what the city meant to him, and what role it played in the course of different stages of his life. Mr. Sharma joyfully replied, “Once you’ve lived in Indore, no other place is as good enough.” He spoke to me at length about how his neighbours rushed to his house whenever “Chitrahaar” on Doordarshan was telecasted. He beamed with pride while telling me how he was the only one among his friends to be able to afford a Television Set back in the 80s. I could sense him turning emotional as he continued speaking about riding his old Bajaj ‘Chetak’ around the neighbourhood where he earlier lived. When Mr. Sharma visited the same area recently, the building he lived in for 25 fulfilling years of his life had been razed to the ground for the construction of an apartment building.

Kavita *didi* who works at our house is in her late-60s. She portrayed a totally different picture of Indore; for her, the city is expensive, and governed by insensitive politicians who are harsh to rural

migrants. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the municipal authorities allegedly misbehaved with her when she was on the lookout for work, and provided no medical assistance to one of her relatives. For her, the city's "development" ambitions ring an alarm bell. Not long ago, her husband had been forced to relocate his food stall on grounds of encroachment.

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What my Grandmother & Others Identify as Hindrances to a Sustainable Indore

The 'Elderly in India' Report (2021) of the National Statistical Office indicates that India's elderly population is set to increase by 41% from 2021 to 2031. While this indicates improved health outcomes, most cities do not provide infrastructure or outdoor spaces designed to suit the needs of older populations. In addition to concerns regarding the well-being of their age group, my grandmother and other senior citizens I interacted with highlighted five critical

issues which they seek Indore to improve upon:

a. **Unsafe Walking Tracks:** Ever since I was a kid, I saw my grandmother religiously follow her morning walking routine. Sometimes she took my brother and me along, sharing stories about the surroundings, family, and work. While several aspects of our lives continued to change over years, my grandmother's walking routine did not. Today, several walking tracks in my city are either crowded as vehicle parking spots, or used as cycling tracks. With an increase in the number of buildings, apartments, and other infrastructural facilities, many walkers are often hindered by heavy construction machinery in the middle of roads, poor signage, puddles and other obstructions. Furthermore, the menace of stray dogs has only worsened the situation.

b. **Poor Traffic Management:** My grandmother highlighted the increasing traffic in the city as a concern for safe travel. While India's roadways network has grown at an annual rate of 4%, vehicle traffic has grown by 11%. In fact, half the vehicles on roads in recent times are privately owned. As a fast-paced city, Indore has been a victim of poor traffic management. The same has been exacerbated by the presence of the Bus Rapid Transport System (BRTS), widely alleged to be a "saga of wrong designs"

and “failed deadlines”. Even today, my grandmother prefers to travel independently, and the increasing traffic congestion prevents many pedestrians like her from doing so in a safe manner.

c. **Growing Pollution:** Linked to the previous issue is the concern surrounding pollution. Though Indore might be the cleanest city in India, a recent survey by the Union Environment Ministry has noted that it is one of the 37 cities in the country whose air quality has declined in the past four years. The slow rate of replenishment of tree stock via fresh plantations has been an additional contributor. Given how the “electric vehicle revolution” has still not penetrated small cities like Indore, fine particulate pollution emissions from old vehicles have led to a surge in cases of respiratory illnesses. Summers have also become unusually hotter owing to the urban heat island effect.

d. **Lack of Affordable Healthcare:** The old household help I interacted with focused on the absence of affordable healthcare. During the pandemic, one of her relatives passed away owing to the non availability of oxygen in a government hospital. She lamented how a handful of quacks, and a small number of government and private nursing homes have been unable to keep up with the rising demand for affordable quality healthcare. In Madhya Pradesh, Indore was one of the worst sufferers during the

Covid-19 pandemic, with reported mishandling and underreporting of cases, as well as a large number of deaths.

e. **Absence of Public Knowledge-Sharing Institutions:** All respondents emphasised the need for public libraries and other knowledge dissemination platforms for all citizens. Not only for senior citizens who are retired and have more time to spare, but also for students, public libraries act as more than repositories of books. They act as vocational training centres providing information on topics ranging from spirituality to medicine, constitutional rights to the economy. Unfortunately, Indore, like other cities in India, does not have a robust public library system.

What can Indore change in the Respondents’ Views?

“Say what you may, Indore should not become a ‘big’ city like Mumbai.”

This response was consistent across my conversations with different senior citizens. For them, the city of Indore is an emotion, tampering with which would mean tampering with their way of life. Many residents including me, are discomfited when someone compares Indore with metropolitan cities, or calls it “Mini Mumbai”. While we seek betterment in its infrastructure and public facilities, we do not seek such development at the cost of its identity and

essence. The senior citizens I interacted with described the changes they wish to see in Indore in the future similarly. Apart from the issues highlighted in the previous section, they expressed a need for:

a. Making Higher Education a Priority:

While I was contemplating different universities/colleges to attend for graduation, my grandmother often asked me if similar opportunities were not accessible in Indore. It is paradoxical that despite being the only city in the country with both, an Indian Institute of Management and an Indian Institute of Technology, higher education in Indore is not appreciable. The city lacks educational institutions offering quality courses in fields such as law, social sciences, management, technology, and so on.

Several youngsters are compelled to leave the city and settle in different regions of the country for career-related pursuits. These individuals rarely return to Indore – among other things, this distance transmits into the relationships they share with their grandparents. While some argue that this is part of the continuing cycle of life, better educational institutions in smaller cities result in equitable and accessible learning outcomes for all. They also enable a transmission of a diverse set of opinions and thoughts among families of students, and ultimately better employment opportunities.

b. Defeating Communal Tensions: Until a few years back, violence due to communal tensions was hardly heard of in peace-loving Indore. However, from protests against stand-up comics like Munawar Faruqui to movies like Pathaan, and instances of communal hatred during the Covid-19 pandemic, circumstances have certainly changed. A few respondents from my grandmother's friend circle indicated how such instances were rarely reported when they were young. This change in atmosphere has negatively impacted political campaigns during elections, and even penetrates general discussions that residents have on a day-to-day basis.

c. Equity in Growth & Development: The Pravasi Bhartiya Divas organized in Indore early this year displayed two sides of the city. While visitors from all over the country and abroad saw a perfect melange of the old and the new in a welcoming Indore, they were prevented from seeing the costs borne by the poor for the city's beautification. A number of makeshift shops and arrangements to live in were removed by the municipal authorities to portray a picture-perfect smart city before visitors. A 35-year-old mechanic whose makeshift shop near the venue was removed in an encroachment drive committed suicide a few days before the event. His family alleged that the deceased took his life because he was evicted without support. On her

evening walks, my grandmother noticed several how several tiny shops disappeared within days, and how sheds/temporary living arrangements were painted to hide poverty. This prompted her to emphasise the need for equity in developing Indore.

d. **More Trees for Better Living:** “Beta, do you know why Vijay Nagar in Indore is so green?”, asked Mrs. Kothari, a senior member of the Residents’ Welfare Association. I nodded my head signalling no, after which she burst into laughter and told me about an endearing environmental initiative in the city. “The grass was spray-painted before the Investors’ Summit! That’s the secret behind our city’s greenery”, she answered. While all of us had a good laugh discussing this comical blunder, the underlying issue continues to be a serious one. Mrs. Kothari and other members of the RWA highlighted the escalated pace of deforestation in Indore since work on the Metro Rail project was set in motion.

More than 30 lakh trees are annually cut in the country for construction and development projects. Compensatory afforestation following such ruthless deforestation is hardly satisfactory. Tall, dense trees that lined the streets of Indore have now been replaced by frail ones that are very often not taken care of by municipal authorities, complained Mrs. Kothari and other senior members of the

RWA. They urged a renewed focus on afforestation so that their grandkids and generations ahead are able to breathe clean and avoid a range of health complications.

e. **A Safe City for All:** Another consequential issue that has gripped Indore off-late is the rise in the number of crimes. Senior citizens living alone often find their houses exposed to the risk of robbery. In fact, such an instance was reported in the colony I live in! The house of an elderly couple was robbed; jewellery and cash were stolen despite them being present in the house. Similar instances of housebreaking have increased by over 14% in the city over the past few years. Minor incidents like chain-snatching and serious crimes like murder and rape are both rising rapidly in the city. An efficient, organized, and quick-to-respond police and administrative machinery is essential not merely for senior citizens, but residents in general.

Concluding Remarks: What Indore Means to Me, and Where it is headed?

Apart from a few years of my undergraduate studies in Delhi, I have spent my entire life in Indore. Be it gorging on poha-jalebi and dahi bhalle in Chappan, walking around in the Sarafa market, or visiting the Bada Ganpati temple before any auspicious

occasion, I thoroughly cherish every aspect of what a vibrant Indore offers. With time, the city has formed a large part of my identity. In fact, the diversity of people and cultures in Indore saved me from varied cultural shocks in Delhi, many of which were experienced by my peers from other small cities and towns.

Among other things, the comprehensive transformation of the city's waste management system is an inspiring milestone to a young individual like me. It is one of the many examples of sustainable growth in the country, that convinces me of the power of strong policy-making and well-intended implementation. While there are several concerns associated with the administration's working, there is a beautiful uniqueness in which Indore is growing over the years.

Recently, my parents' efforts in creating compost using waste from their terrace garden was acknowledged by the Municipal Corporation. They were awarded a certificate of appreciation and provided with a discount on the waste collection fee. Such community engagement initiatives are rare in many big cities of the country!

Over the past few months, I have seen the pace of change in Indore increase manifold. The drive from the airport to my house has become less familiar. I see big

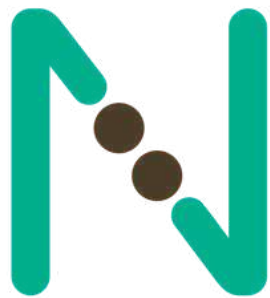


Figure 1: The Terrace Garden at my Home: The Rising Sun Heralds a Brighter Future for Indore.

and heavy construction machinery of the Indore Metro Rail Corporation everywhere, apprising me of the transition my city is undergoing. From being a role-model for striking a healthy balance between tradition and modernity, Indore is tilting faster towards the latter with each passing year. As I seek to spend the next year at home, all I hope is for this transformation to be sustainable, unique, and rooted in its essence. I wish for my city to grow, but not superficially.

**Names have been changed on request of the respondents.*





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