

OCTOBER 2020

DREAMING IN PINK AND ALL  
THE COLORS OF **THE SUNSET**

- BY VATSAL PATEL, SEM 5, USLM



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# KHANSA AAPA

- BY Nandish Shah, Sem 3, USLM

**This piece is out of a conversation with an old lady whom I came across during a shoot. She was fondly called 'Khansa Aapa' by the people around her.**



I met this lady in June 2018. It was before Ramzan. I was to shoot a conversation with the Maulavi Sahab in a dargah. The shrine also acted as a shelter for the homeless and the old of a local community. I started exploring the place with my camera when I heard a voice that drew me towards it. The source was this very kind lady. We got into a conversation and I got to know about her life story. Here is what I learnt about her during the conversation:

**The way she sang. It has to come out of a passion. Was there a story behind it?**

She said she was a community singer and she used to sing for gatherings that used to be held at her local masjid. She was fond of singing since childhood and was heavily influenced by the Sufi poets and qawwali singers. She was a keen follower of the Sufi teachings by Syed Marwandi. She discovered her profound love for devotional music from her father who himself used to sing and play during Muharram processions, weddings, and other masses.

**What did she do before coming there? What was her life like?**

She did not belong to a family one would call 'stable'. Her father suffered an amputation when she was 18 and she became the one who had to make sure her family survived.

Women were not allowed or encouraged to work in her community and her mother preferred to abide by it. She believed that the will of God allowed her to provide for the family of three by the means of her singing. Being a person with staunch Sufi beliefs and being under the influence of Sufism, she decided to sing ghazals and qawwali. This was a bold move considering that these forms of music rarely ever tend to have female performers. Even though women were barred from entering a masjid's prayer hall, the local mawlawi did not mind her performing at all. This is one of the reasons why she believed that her life was solely based on khuda ki marzi.

**How did it all change? How did she end up without an identity inside a dargah?**

Everything was going well till she was young, hale and hearty. Things were still fine until she became terminally ill. Eventually, she became a burden for the household. She lost all the say or stand she had in her own house. She was practically ousted from her house by her husband. One day, she decided that she had enough and decided to leave her house for good. She escaped her house in the dark of the night and made her way to a dargah far away where she decided to settle until she figured out something for herself. As this was a place she could sing again, she realised that this was her calling. Allah Tala wanted her to be there to help others through the hardships of their lives. She told me that was what she would be doing for the rest of her life. She said there, at that moment she was richer than she could ever have been or felt around her husband. "When Allah intends, He says, "Be!" And it is!" she quoted the Quran-e-Sharif and continued with her day.

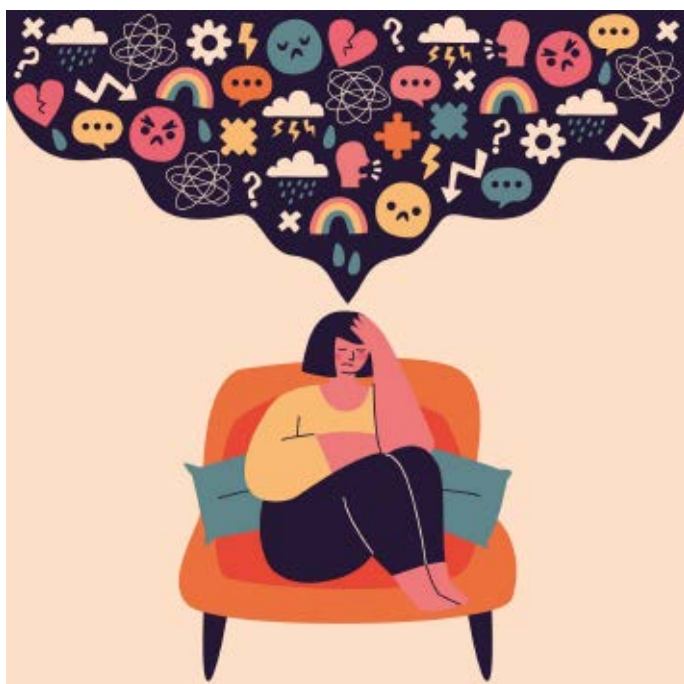
Meeting her was one of the most surreal experiences I had in my life. I was there working on a shoot I was doing something I am passionate about. And she was there doing the same. There was little difference between both of us, but there was a stark one in our lives. She had fulfilled it and I did not. I tried to get in touch with her before writing this to brush up on some facts about her life. It was in vain. Wherever she is, I hope she carries the flame still.

# DECODING STRESS

- BY PURNIMA GUPTA, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR- PSYCHOLOGY, USLM

Stress is an inevitable part of human existence or I can say, an inevitable part of existence. No one escapes this, not because they cannot, but because they fail to find the gateway. Stress has gripped our minds like never before. Each one of us uses this particular word to explain one's condition and expects to be understood from the frame. From a clinical standpoint, stress is something that challenges one's state of equilibrium or one's state of homeostasis. It affects an individual's ability to think, analyze and process critical information in a clear manner. It makes one feel a heightened state of emotions even when there is no apparent situation or trigger for the same. Stress impacts our behavior and pushes us on a defensive path unknowingly. We feel victimized and misunderstood along with an inability to take responsibility for our own lives in our hands.

Stress dampens our spirit to take on challenges and face them head-on. Stress makes us look for an easy way out, it raises a question mark on our capabilities. More often than not, one realizes about stress after it has considerably cast a negative impact on one's resources (physical as well as psychological).



Stress is invisible but present everywhere. Every task that we choose, voluntarily or involuntarily, to perform, is bound to put some stress on us. We cannot not feel stressed if we are into action (both physical and mental). So, naturally one feels pushed to ask about ways to deal with stress. Along with age-old wisdom of how to live life, psychological help is something that helps one go into deeper aspects of stress. Psychological aid supports a person in finding out the exact cause of his stress and then chalk out a strategy that would yield desired results in terms of coping with stressful situations and triggers.

Generally, given the cultural set-up and its limitations in India, psychological help is not the primary choice for many people when they think about asking for help to cope with their stress. Although, in the urban environment, the scenario is changing slowly with a greater number of people approaching a counselor or a psychologist to help them get control of their life.

Counseling or psychotherapy is a structured form of talking cure where an individual decides to open up about his personal problems to a trained psychotherapist to seek relief. Psychotherapy has a systematic and structured way of conducting sessions with the individual depending upon the intensity of the problem and the availability of resources like time and family support etc. In cases where the individual has got the support from his family members, the recovery is faster and stable compared to those situations where the individual has to fight a lonely battle. The family environment plays a major role while chalking out strategies that will help the individual fight stress in a healthy and successful manner.

In many cases, it has been observed that behind the apparent symptoms of stress, the individual carries a history of trauma or abuse in his past. Such revelations demand that the psychotherapy be customized to enable the individual so that he can resolve his past trauma through careful attention and insight development.

Sometimes, stress can be a result of a long-standing physical or psychological illness. During such cases, a thorough understanding of an individual's personality, family environment and his genetic predisposition guide the psychotherapist to develop a customized intervention plan for the individual.

In young children and growing teens, stress can be more due to the pressing demands of academics and social performance. In situations like these, the psychotherapist might need to conduct sessions with the entire family to help them develop empathy and acceptance towards the child or the adolescent.

One might want to say that stress cannot be helped through anything since it is everywhere. But as a psychologist, I feel, one must never refrain from taking help from an expert like a counselor or a psychotherapist.

### **Some thoughts to remember while feeling stressed-**

1. Life will never be free of stress. So, it is unreal to expect and think that after psychotherapy, there will be no trace of stress of any type.
2. Just like, mental stress is real, so is physical stress. More often than not, psychological stress is felt because our body is exhausted. So, ensure that your body is well taken care of before you complain about psychological stress.
3. It helps to have some reality orientation. While it is good to stretch oneself beyond perceived limits, it is equally important to realize when to say "NO".
4. It is good to expect your friends to help you cope with stress but one must be careful in understanding that one's friends, too, have their own troubles and challenges. Instead of burdening them down with expectations, it is healthy to take turns to some active listening.
5. Learning to be responsible for one's life, choices and decisions is the ultimate solution to all troubles of life. No one gets to choose it for you.

# INDICATIONS

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- BY NIKOI NABISEE, SEMESTER 5, USLM

I sat with you when you were calm, you looked at me while my eyes poured the weight down.

Containing, holding, rumbling and rustling;

You too poured galore!

No indications preceded;

With calmness I left you, what brought that storm?

Did you take mine or is it me?

These undulant visitors have now created a void;

Look at us, you and me, me and you; mirrored!

Are we one?

An eerie feeling of connection flows through me.

I hear the roar, who else would be pouring?

I see, we are all holding, containing and pouring in the same void.

You in me, me in you?

Who am I? You? Us?

So stymying, how do I understand?

“Travellers of the mystic unknown” the void, the you, the me, the us replied!

# THE INDIRECT VICTIMS OF THE COVID-19 VACCINE

- BY RIVA PATEL, ADJUNCT FACULTY, USLM

The race for the Covid-19 vaccine development is indirectly threatening the ocean ecosystems. Experts and conservationists are warning that about half-a-million sharks are in danger of being slaughtered.

Shark squalene, which is a natural oil produced in the liver of sharks, is being considered as a component in at least five of the Covid-19 vaccines under development. As reported by the WHO, squalene will be used as an adjuvant; an adjuvant helps vaccines work better by creating a stronger immune response, thus, making them more effective.

The well-known British pharmaceutical GlaxoSmithKline already uses squalene to make traditional seasonal flu vaccines. But advocacy groups like California-based Shark Allies sounded the alarm when the company announced that it would make half-a-billion doses of such an adjuvant for use in the Covid-19 vaccine. To produce one tonne of squalene, one will need between 2,500–3,000 sharks. Shark Allies speculate that approximately 2,50,000 sharks would have to be slaughtered for everyone to receive one dose of the vaccine – and the figure would obviously double if two doses are administered. This would amount to half-a-million shark



“Harvesting something from a wild animal is never going to be sustainable, especially if it’s a top predator that doesn’t reproduce in huge numbers,” Stefanie Brendl, founder and executive director of Shark Allies, told the Telegraph (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/09/27/half-million-sharks-could-killed-covid-19-vaccine-conservationists/>)

She is part of the wider advocacy circle that is pushing for adjuvants to be produced from plant-based sources. Other scientists are suggesting to use fermented sugarcane to make synthetic squalene as an alternative.

Environmentalists claim that around 3 million sharks are killed annually just for their squalene, which is also widely used in to make other vaccines and cosmetics. In the long term, it would be the entire ocean system at risk and not just the sharks who are already teetering on the edge of being endangered. Sharks specifically are vital for ocean function and health – they are an important part of sustaining life systems.

“There’s so many unknowns of how big and how long this pandemic might go on, and then how many versions of it we have to go through, that if we continue using sharks, the numbers of sharks taken for this product could be really high, year after year after year.” – Brendl



# OUR MORAL STORIES AND COMPLEXITIES OF THE WORLD

- BY PRANSHU KUMAR, SEMESTER 3, USLM



Nothing is morally right or wrong. I believe that there is no value in moral science. Ironically, we spend a significant part of our formative years of education reading moral stories.

Most of us have read or heard Panchatantra stories. They put a great emphasis on being morally right or how immoral actions and feelings like greed, dishonesty and cheating can lead to disaster.

But people with moral nihilism think differently. They believe that nothing is morally right or wrong. It may seem antithetical to the established belief system, but there is a need to discuss how realities of the world agree to moral nihilism.

The textbooks of primary schools overflow with moral stories. They intend to promote certain behavior — considered appropriate for society — in children. I feel it isn't what moral stories give us in our childhood, it is about what it takes away from us when we grow up. Life becomes more complex as we move forward. Most of our decisions are centered on 'what is good for us' even though those decisions

might be morally wrong. I want you to take a moment and think about the most immoral decision you ever made in your life. Let us say, you were greedy at one point, you cheated on someone or you lied to your parents. Now go back to the thoughts that were going on in your head before you made that decision, the circumstances that you were in, lack of knowledge that you had of all the events happening around you. When we ruminate over this, it becomes hard to judge whether the decision you made was morally wrong. Our guilty heart can accept that some of our decisions were immoral, but our brain can verify the fact that those decisions were right for us if not for the people around us. Hence, the weightage of moral nihilism increases when we move forward in our life.

Before we go back to the moral stories of our childhood, let's peep into a child's mind. Children, more than learning, observe and absorb what happens in their surroundings. Remember the first time you used a swear word and your mother asked, "Where did you learn that from"? Yes, you never learned. You observed and absorbed it. Similarly, when a six-year-old toddler absorbs moral stories and lessons of moral sciences, it is imprinted in their subconscious brain and that is where the problem starts when we face further challenges in life. If we show greed or cheat our way out of some situation, it becomes immoral. We feel guilty because it is in our subconscious mind that such actions are wrong; where if we are antagonised, there is a need to tell the world how irresponsible people are morally; and when there is a relationship break-up, there is a need to make our whole love story a moral story where one person is right throughout and the other person is wholly wrong; where sometimes when we fail to take tough decisions, we give the excuse of our moral values. The moral stories we all read eventually become a source of annoyance and we start being frustrated. We don't think about morals. We act on them because they are in our subconscious minds and we never pay attention to them.

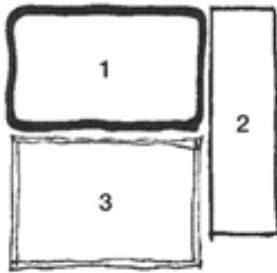


According to architect Mathew Fredric, there are three levels of knowledge,

Simplicity, the child's view

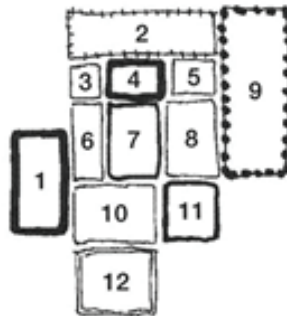
Complexity, the adult's view of reality

Informed simplicity, the enlightened view of reality.



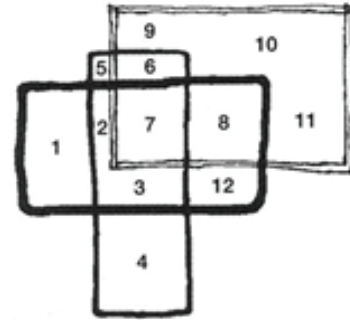
**Simplicity**

3 elements used to  
create 3 spaces



**Complexity created through  
excessive agglomeration**

12 elements required to  
create 12 spaces



**Complexity created through  
informed simplicity**

3 elements combined to  
create 12 spaces

Mathew Fredric talked about different disciplines and knowledge of different courses in his diagram. But we can use this diagram to test our knowledge when we think about morals and how narrow our worldview becomes when we simply put our action in either a good category or in a bad category. As we move forward, we can see the complexities in the world. One realizes that the complexity of the world can't be categorized in moral or immoral actions because there is more than one perspective and our simple reality is simply complex.

French philosopher René Descartes tested his beliefs when he gave an analogy of his basket of apples, where the basket was his brain and apples were all his beliefs. At one point, he emptied his basket and made sure that no apple is rotten. What can we learn from Descartes? It means that there is a need to read those moral stories and chapters again and this time consciously decide for ourselves because there is no concept of balance when we talk about morals. You either believe in it or you don't and there is a need to decide this again, consciously.

# MAKEUP

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- BY ANUSHKA SHAH, SEM-3, USLM

It all starts with a dream. But for me, it's something more than that, which can't be simply explained through words. People use makeup to enhance their beauty or hide their scars, but for me makeup is how you manage to enhance your eternal beauty. Makeup is an art through which one can spread awareness and inspire people into breaking stereotypes. Every look has its own concept and story behind it. Beneath the makeup and behind the smile I am just a girl who wishes good for the world.



# BEING A FRESHER IN COLLEGE

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- BY SHIKHA GURNANI, SEMESTER 1, USLM

A fresher in a college, as the word denotes, is a student in her or his first year at alma mater. For me, to come this far is an achievement, as it feels that one has crossed many hurdles as one moved on.

Keeping aside a high-level pressure any typical Indian parents put on their children as far as education is concerned, going to college is a normal course of action. However, everyone comes a long way to start afresh.

Every high school student wishes to join a college as soon as possible to get new experiences. Since high school started, everyone would ask me which college I'd be going to and which course I would be pursuing. How a high school graduate is so eager to go to college!

But thanks to COVID, this year's school pass-outs are not able to experience campus life. Being a fresher is fun. One gets to meet new people, batch mates, seniors and teachers. It is like entering a new world one has always been waiting for.

Since college is a new beginning, everyone wants to stand out and be known, which I appreciate. Everyone is unique and has their own ways of portraying themselves. A college is a place where no one is judged and I think that is one of the main reasons why people eagerly wait to go to college.

College, the new world for us freshers, gives us a platform to take part in clubs or societies, be a part of various committees, talent hunt, newsletter or magazine, etc.

Being a fresher is about many memories too. One may be flamboyant, and one may be shy, but with time, things go well and college becomes a place hard to leave.

# LIFE HAS MUCH TO STORE

-BY NISHA PATEL, SEMESTER 1, USLM

*When you have cried so much  
That you can't even breathe properly,  
Your head aches so much  
And you just can't get to sleep.  
When you feel so weak  
And you don't want to get up;  
You want to find a cocoon  
And leave yourself there wrapped up.  
When the world seems a dark place,  
All the fairytales you believed in, a lie;  
You don't know why you want to give up,  
So just lie down and look up at sky.  
That million-year-old sky  
Has seen so many fall like you,  
Has seen so many people waste their life like  
that;  
Those who could get up and create history were very few.  
Don't let those dark thoughts,  
Take your fairytales away from you;  
The world is still a tremendous place,  
Don't let those arch fiend cloud your view.  
I know sometimes they're are brawnier than you,  
And you can't help but give in to the murkiness;  
I also know you can be brawnier if you want to be,  
So fight them off for you happiness.  
Because it's your life  
And you decide how you want it to be;  
Stop thinking so much about the world,  
Just give your wings the space to spread freely.  
And the fairytales will seem true again,  
And the darkness, weak,  
And the moment you stop trying to search so hard,  
You'll have all the answers you were trying to seek.*

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