



<http://www.theuniversejournal.com/index.php>
<http://www.theuniversejournal.com/edboard.php>
<http://www.theuniversejournal.com/submission.php>
<http://www.theuniversejournal.com/archive.php>
http://www.theuniversejournal.com/join_us.php



“The Dog in Pink”

Deepti Mittal

India,

deeptimittal1083@gmail.com

We had thought of asking the Ola driver to wait for another few times. Good that we didn't.

She had sent her address at the Green Park at Bandra on my WhatsApp and the driver, who with his big mustache and studs did not look like a Mumbaikar but a settler from somewhere in South, had little trouble in locating the turn towards Street 14, Pali Hill. It was a quiet leafy wide lane lined with big trees that looked out of the pattern of the flora of the Mumbai city.

A few leaves, some green and some still yellow, hung in the air before falling on the lane as we stood there looking around to figure out which apartment in the alley was hers.

She came down to greet us and emerged from the shadows of the stairwell. The initial, un-missable, feature of hers was her strong and healthy way.

She kissed and hugged Rhythm as they had been friends and colleagues for a couple of years. I had been briefly introduced to her once in Kochi more than a year ago when I passed by the craft foundation where she worked.

Once Rhythm asked her if she remembered me, she smiled broadly. She had an array of strong pure white teeth. Her tiny eyes narrowed within the frames of her thick spectacles. She offered her lithe right hand.

‘sannaya’

Her hair, completely black, was parted in the middle. We dropped our luggage at the stairwell and climbed the stairs which had no railings. She made way for us as we stretched our tired legs towards the first-floor office space where she worked almost the whole night and day. Her days, like she said, had no end and beginning. ‘Mostly I work all the time — sleeping when I am sleepy and waking up, whenever I wake up.’

The apartment with an unimpressive facade seemed to be a column of silence — with a somber breeze about it.

The UNiverse Journal

(A Quarterly Refereed Open Access Multidisciplinary e-Journal)

The five-story building was owned by Mittal's, a renowned, globetrotting artist, whose kinetic installations and sculptures had evoked rave reviews and triggered interest in some collectors with deep pockets. With its off-green paint and glass-and-wooden windows and doors, the building was out of sync with the chaos of the city. The stairs led to a long hall with a wooden bookshelf running from one end to the other. There were two Mac computers and some novels and papers of schedules were strewn across the tables. On the wall, hung a board on which pinned fool's cap sheets of Mittal's upcoming travels and shows.

'I have been out of this place only once,' she said as we settled down in wooden sofas. Rhythm sat next to her. 'I have no buds here except for a batch-mate at Colaba.' Ah, that's why she had offered to take us out to Colaba if we could come early. 'Will take you to Colaba Society, where you guys can have a beer and we can talk.' She had sent a message before noon but we couldn't make it as we were with Ubuntu discussing ways to improve his business of selling art online. Ubuntu, who spoke five languages and swore in seven, drove us around the city after we had had bland tender coconuts in front of Mannat Classic on Link Road. He cursed all-girls drivers. 'Dumbs! They cause all the troubles on the street.' When I asked him if his remarks weren't a bit too abusive and discriminative, he smiled at me and said he meant what he said, and he faith that no woman on the planet knew how to drive appreciably. Hans raj took us to just Kerala for rice and beer. As I crushed crisply fried sardine heads, the woman at the next table stared at me. When I winked at her involuntarily, risking a volley of expletives, she smiled and looked back at her plate. I didn't know what in her look prompted me to wink. 'Are there invisible threads of connection between strangers? Spirits that jammed and clicked?' I finished off the remaining rice with curd.

'That was the only time I went out,' Sannaya said, offering us some hot milk in terra-cotta cups. As I was sipping it, Rhythm and Sannaya said they would be back soon and went up to Mittals third-floor studio where he had been working on a terracotta 'pink dog', which was a departure from his more popular and characteristic works of defining passage of time through kinetic fragments and installations of classical poetry — measuring time with momentum and stillness, interplaying with collected, mystery and myth facts.

I walked beside the bookshelf, running my eyes across the bundle of the novels, most of which were on philosophy, folklore, and culture. There were clay miniatures placed on the top of the bookshelf and jugs, small domestic animals, and plates from one end to the other. I had chosen up a collection of Ramanujan's articles on spiritual poetry, Rajasthan folklore and. The Cambridge University Press publication was put together by the late poet's colleagues and literary buddies. I looked for a piece of poems as if I was thirsty for a drop of good quotes. The critical expositions on folklore and culture failed to quench my thirst.

Sometimes, the longing to understand amazing poetic words left your throat parched. One line of it could be a stream in the desert. I ran my eyes through the text which analyzed the temple imageries and references to Rajasthan folklores, still longing for a line of sheer poetry. The little chunks of stanzas, lacerated for scrutiny and academic, lay across the white pages like the divine flow of seawater. The poetic words in them was with the poet — in a spiritual manner.

'What could they be doing upstairs?' This thought crossed my head. She had been living by itself in the studio, in a big room on the third floor. As Mittal was mostly traveling, she had to prepare his work structure and look out that his stay and travel had been taken care of. Mittal had a big art exhibition coming up, which he was curating, in Japan.

'My father had played with the spelling,' she said. He should have kept the real one. The real spelling of the Hebrew word was S-a-n-n-a-y-a. sannayah, Sanaya is an Arabic name which means noble, admirable, or praiseworthy.

She said her father wanted her to be the cuteness in someone's dry world. 'He loved the plan of exploring good streams in the middle of nowhere. Kind of serendipity or epiphany. She said, though she liked her name, she would not have minded Radiant Joseph or Fortunate. 'The Arabic is full of name changes,' she said, looking at Rhythm, a Christian who had never read even a line of the Arabic or bible. 'There's no sense in telling him all this,' she said, and poked Rhythm ribs with her bony elbow.

The UNiverse Journal

(A Quarterly Refereed Open Access Multidisciplinary e-Journal)

‘It should have been Sannyahh I said. ‘With ah’. ‘Ah, no,’ she said and punched Rhythm on his foot for his support to my suggestion. ‘Do you speak to yourself?’ I asked, wondering how tough it would be to live by itself in a three-story studio, giving company to half-done craftworks and reference novels on Oriental philosophies and medieval mythologies. ‘Sometimes, I find this peace and calmness too noisy,’ she said, taking the empty cups back to the kitchen.

‘Sometimes, Mittal comes with his singer wife, and close the main door of the studio,’ she said, running tap-water on the cups. She came back, with a tint of smile. ‘I doubt they do sing together among the half-done craftworks.’ She winked at us.

‘Why do you think so?’ Rhythm asked. The array of white with a tint of cream teeth flashed as she smiled. ‘It’s my prediction. A strong intuition, and I’m curious.’

‘The Dog in pink in the making must have closed its eyes not to see its designer doing singing.’

Mittal’s main studio was somewhere else in the city where she had never been to. ‘It’s said to be big with a number of workers,’ she said, crossing her legs.

‘But, I’m fed up with the craft world.’

Why, why as I thought it should be an envious job to work nearer with an artist whose works were a passion, and whose interviews themselves were monograph on modern-day art. Being a good creative artist is inescapable. It’s not their mistake. It’s been like that always,’ she spoke like a bitter, seasoned art critic. Her eyes became smaller as the thickness of her spectacles grew thicker. Her black hair reminded me of a rough season with the deep-saffron flames of wildfire. It reminds me of a long exile and of racial exploitation and undefined loss.

An Engineering drawing graduate from a National Institute of Technology campus, she had given up on engineering drawing as a career. ‘I can never be a good architect. None of my seniors or classmates was a good one,’ she said.

‘I’m confused.’

I wanted to comfort her by saying that mediocrity was the feature of the young generation born into Rediff and Gmail accounts and multiple possibilities. Some of them made wealth and careers out of the mediocrity. ‘There’s nothing in there,’ she touched her chest. Her fingers shone oily in pink light. It was well past dusk and the night had begun to fall. ‘What about a cup of coffee at Udipi Cafe?’ She looked at both of us. ‘We can walk.’

She walked with the elegance and lightness of a model on the ramp.. Her each step was feline and light. As she and rhythm picked their way through the undisciplined crowd on the pavement, skilfully avoiding legs and shoulders, I watched them from behind, as the aroma of camphor spread in the air and the temple bells rang intermittently. At Udipi Cafe, elder couples, with shivering hands, tore away pieces of idli and sipped coffee from steel saucers. ‘When I don’t cook curd curry and rice, I order through OLA Chef,’ she said, bringing the cup of hot coffee gingerly to her red lips. The steam from the coffee cup misted her glasses.’ These Apps, she shook her head, ‘how do we live without them?’ That was worrying her as she was going to Japan the following week.

We walked back to the studio at the same pace and through the same melee, stop briefly for sweet pan, which she carried home to have later in the starry night. ‘What if I felt numb? You guys have to carry my house.’ Yes, I said, like the lion on the shoulders of Elephant. For a moment, I wondered if Ramanujan had written anything on Elephant.

The big shape trees on either side of the boulevard had grown dark. In the front yard of the house just before turning towards her apartment, a person was washing his violet car. He dipped a dry cloth in a water bucket and wiped the bonnet. His old silver chain caught the streetlight and shone like a glow band.

‘Can you check the plane timings?’ I asked her. She sat on the couch, curled down, and searched on a Phone App. ‘Here you are,’ she said, offer me the mobile phone. ‘Ah, can’t faith we’ve spent eight hours here,’ I said, look out of the floor-to-ceiling window door.

‘Eight hours!’ Rhythm rose to his feet. ‘Take some photos,’ he said, leading her towards the bookshelf. As I clicked their pictures, in each of their mobile phones, I was thinking of the loneliness we were leaving her to. The noisy peace in an artist’s studio.

As I booked an Ola cab, she thanked us for the visit. ‘Sannayaah suits you...more than Sannaya,’ I told her. ‘Can you give me a water bottle?’ What Ramanujan’s article could not do, perhaps, a glass of plain water filled up in bottle could. She kept a glass under the water on the table. Drops of water in the bottle filled the empty glass.

‘It’s so good and tasty.’ Not flattering. It indeed was.

As we walked down, led by me, followed by Rhythm and then she, we were silent. Pick up the luggage from the stairwell, we walked out into the dark starry night. The driver opened the door and carefully placed our heavy bags.

‘Wait,’ she said. She ran upstairs and soon came up with a grey bag. ‘It’s for you,’ she said, offering it to me. ‘Open it only when you’re home.’

I opened the grey bag before the car had moved out of the lane and interestingly pulled out a terracotta sculptor. I quickly turned back, but she had already disappeared into the apartment. You’re Sannaya, I said to myself.

The Dog in Pink sat shaking in my hands. Unfinished.