

THE MONTHLY ASSENT



MUMBAI'S 3RD GENDER

BY MIHIKA KAPOOR

Social stigmas surround the Hijra or Kinner clan. They are perceived and treated differently in our conservative society. They are our country's 3rd gender. They are insulted and physically and verbally abused and this clan of people have become the outcasts of our Indian society. We can not talk about gender equality when we don't even consider them as a legitimate gender. We have ruthlessly forgotten about our country's third gender and I believe it is time for us to welcome them back with loving and accepting arms

Did you know a long time ago they were loved by society, we have texts from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata where they were showered with respect? The hijras held religious authority as the Hindu deity Shiva merged with his wife Parvati to create Ardhanari (which literally translates to half a woman.) When a religious ceremony was held a hijra would bless the occasion. They held authority in Mughal courts from the 16th century to the 19th. The Mughal queen's quarters could be entered by her husband or her female servants but never by a man.

This left them vulnerable and unable to defend themselves. In order to protect them, the male guards would disguise themselves as women in order to enter and protect their queen. This was viewed as a sign of great respect and honour. Sadly in today's society, they are viewed as cruel abominations of the two genders. But are they not human too? If their families accept them then they are quite lucky however if not they are banished from the family in order to protect the family name. They have grown up knowing that they were rejected by their own flesh and blood and society would never truly accept them. These hurt people have come together to create a beautiful culture that we should learn to love. They are treated as jokes are the targets of unneeded hate. They aren't even considered as human beings.

"I was a normal child, but it's the world that made me feel different"- Laxmi Narayan Tripathi (a human rights activist who has given speeches at the UN.)

This remarkable individual has helped the world recognise India's third gender as a community that deserves respect. She has used her inspirational words and helped the hijra community believe that there is hope for them. The government has recognised the hijra community as an official gender in 2014 and has allowed them to use any bathroom of their choice and Tamil Nadu and Kerala have given them free access to SRS (sex reassignment surgery where they can change their genders.) Since India is

nation, the government has declared them an economically backward community which insures them 2% of the reservations in government jobs, legal aid and pension. If they interview for a company they will be selected/rejected because of their capability not because of their gender. These people should be given the love that every other individual has received.

It is time to create a change in our country. With establishing some form of support for this community we can create a more accepting and open India, where we can be who we truly wish to be without feeling pressured by society

HAPPINESS

BY ANYA DAFTARY

A feeling of love
A feeling of joy
A story of years
You'd never know why
Words you may whisper
Words you could cry
Spirits which rise
Going through a joyride
Tears which fall
Days standing tall
Days go by in reverse
Or meteors across the universe
But through hold just a simple smile.

Note.

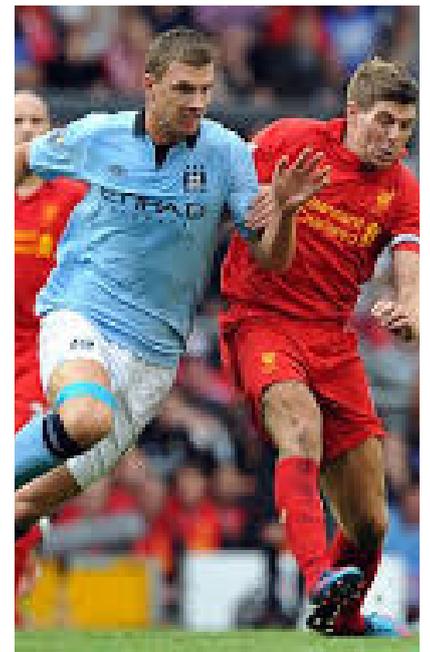
Sorry for the delay. As Ascend slowly ventures into new avenues so do our students. This meant I was temporarily the only one left. Thank you for your unwavering support through this journey. Although this isn't exactly a month, (more like 4) I do promise more content before the end of the year. I cannot express my gratitude enough to everyone. Firstly, thank you Mr. Amit for spending those long recesses with me going over the formats or editing the 10's of articles that arrived. Thank you, Mr. Piyush for editing all the articles. And thank you! to the ascend families, who have come up to me daily for paper updates. Thanks to you I've had the motivation to fish this up! I would like to my fellow classmate Tejas Chakrabarti for listening to my endless rants and laments and for filling any articles gap wherever. This journey has certainly been a long one with more than a few bumps in the road. I can promise more content for the paper. Until next time! ~ Anya Daftary



LIVERPOOL AND MANCHESTER CITY'S UNBEATEN RUN

BY SIDDHARTH PIRAMAL

Manchester City have had a stunning season, of going unbeaten for 30 consecutive matches (all competitions). They are sixth place for most games unbeaten in the premier league. Their record was ended by Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool F.C. The game was a highly entertaining seven-goal thriller. Liverpool got a great start when Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain known as "The Ox" hammered a shot from outside the box.



A SUMMER WITH ZAYA LEARNING LABS

BY ANYA DAFTARY

It was looking like a long boring summer, either watching TV mindlessly or helping my grandmother out at her nursery school. Until of course my Dad and his friend, Neil decided to volunteer my services working at Zaya for the summer.

My job was to make voice overs (voice clips) for the educational software English Duniya (ED). At first it seemed very exciting and as I spoke to people everyone around me who thought what I was doing something cool. In a few days, I learnt how exhausting life can be and within a week I was ready to put my feet up and go back to my boring holiday.

My parents felt I needed to finish a task once I had decided to take it on even if I felt bored and so I was sent promptly back to work. I went back fearing the worst. Marisa from the team was assigned to me.

This was a Godsend because she was patient, funny and became my close friend over the next few weeks. And together we finished a lot of work!

Besides translating the English into Hindi and using the online dictionary, I was also involved with choosing the artwork, giving inputs on what interests kids my age and in my class, how to make the app more fun for my friends. Some of the things I did were to tell them to make the headmistress' hair be open rather than in a bun because that made her look more friendly and less like a boy, I tried to use different tones in my voice to make some parts sound more exciting (these were usually in the afternoon when I was at my awake best.)

When the app was finally out, I couldn't wait to install it and see how it looks. I felt really good that I was part of this project but I didn't really realize what an absolutely amazing thing this was until I was teaching my 80 year old aunt how to use it. Since then I've gone back to Zaya to develop more content from the #TeachAClass Campaign and more!

I guess this experience really helped shape my life and give me future goals to attain.



WILL IT EVER SNOW IN MUMBAI?

BY PRITHA NAG

Will it ever snow in Mumbai, I think to myself. Probably never, but never say never. Funny things happen without knowing. Yet Mumbai is beautiful in its own way. Stray dogs roaming, the smell of food cooking. Vendors on the street saying "two for the price of one, come fast". Yet its feelings are never taken in Why do you think the rain comes? To punish us... We could make Mumbai beautiful. Mumbai an abandoned unhealthy dog but if loved and cared for would be beautiful. The weather, scorching But then the rain comes, yes, a relief But the rain pours. Poor Mumbai, she's crying.....And the sidewalks flooded with dirty rain

For the next 30 minutes Liverpool dominated the game not letting City touch the ball. Manchester City players finally seemed to have some energy, and one the ball and started keeping the for themselves. Their energy paid off, in the 40th minute Kyle Walker played a great ball to Leroy Sane who thrashed the ball into the near post. After his goal the energy levels went down and the game slowed down.



"RECORD" FEDERER

BY TEJAS CHAKRABARTI

Roger Federer won his 20th Grand Slam Title as he beat his opponent, Marin Cilic, in a five set match. The two opponents met for the first time in a final in the Wimbledon. finals, when Roger Federer beat Cilic in straight sets. After that victory, the two did not meet in a single grand slam final until the Australian Open men's singles final. The 36 year old Swiss tennis player, who is currently ranked number 2 in the world, has won the most number of grand slams won by any player ever, with 20 grand slams to his name. His rival, Rafael Nadal, closely trails behind him with 14 grand slams won by him. Federer later spoke to the press about his puzzling, mid-match struggle. He said "I think I kind of froze through the tie breaker of the second set, therefore resulting in me losing that set. I wanted to get lucky in the fifth set. For some time, he (Marin Cilic), had been pulling all the shots. I needed to get lucky, and I think he could feel it too." Federer has had his own good share of ups and downs as the Swiss faced multiple problems throughout the beginning of his career, with multiple outbursts of rage on and off the court. He changed his attitude and therefore was able to focus much better on the pitch. The father of four, who lifted his sixth Australian open on the 28th of January on the court named after the legendary rod laver, will be seen in upcoming grand slams. We certainly hope to see more from the Swiss legend.

THROWBALL & CRICKET

BY TEJAS CHAKRABARTI

Today in the world, sports have taken centre stage, and amongst them is cricket. The International Cricket Council recognises one hundred and twenty-five countries, of which ten are full members, thirty-eight are associate members and fifty-nine affiliate members. Another emerging sport in multiple communities is Throwball. Governed by the International Throwball Federation, this sport is a favourite amongst kids and adults, and is played across most of the school. Our school is one of the many that promote these sports, and what better way to do it than having your own parent Throwball and Cricket teams. Often, the parents of many children belonging to all the different grades, come for practice and training. The training takes place at the school grounds. The team's practice hard for tournaments that take place between the schools of Mumbai, where parents fight hard for the wonderful title.

The parents are provided with specialised coaches, top-notch and specialists in their sports. The equipment provided to them is also brand new and good quality. Brand new nets were attached and fields were flattened in order for the players to get the most realistic experience of the game. Each side has seven players on the field and five substitutes. The matches are not mixed gender and are played with three sets. The first team to reach twenty-five points wins the set. If your team won two sets your team wins. The height of a net is 2.20 meters. The equipment required by a throw ball team is not very fancy. All they need is a court, team kits and throw balls. A typical throw ball is slightly larger than a volleyball. The service in a match should be done five seconds after the referee's whistle. There is also a neutral side of the court, which is at either side, and the ball cannot be thrown there. A player must catch the ball with both of their hands, without making any noise.

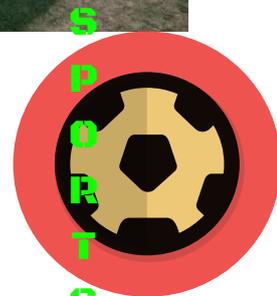
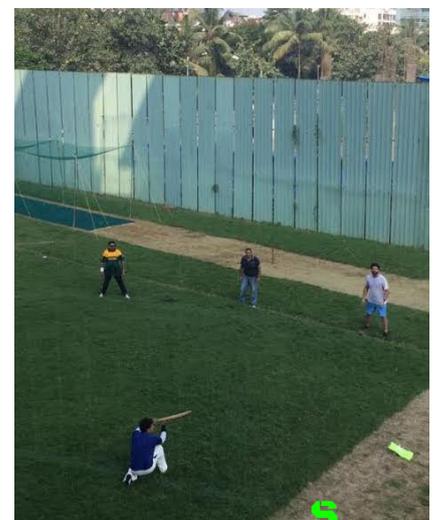
The sport is said to have originated in England and brought to India by the YMCA in the nineteen-forties. The rules of this game were first written by Harry Crowe.

ANOTHER WIN FOR INDIA

BY MR. AMIT

The Indian Under 19 boys team won the ICC trophy for a record fourth time in New Zealand in February 2018. They defeated Australia in the final and lifted the trophy with their proud coach Rahul Dravid, himself a former world cup winner with India. However Rahul was quick to point out that the road to success had just started and that the boys now needed to build on this achievement by going on to play first class cricket, something only one player from the U19 winning team of 2012 managed to do.

In any case it is time to celebrate an amazing achievement by the youngsters, and a new record which will be hard to beat.



WRITERS(UN)BLOCK

The pun is mightier than the sword...

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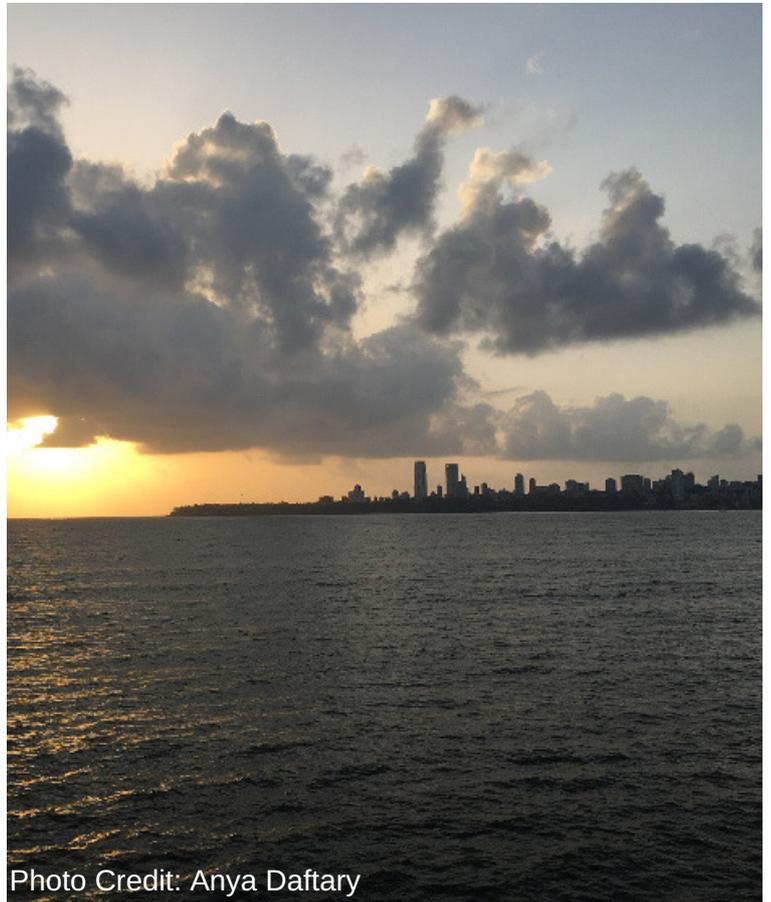
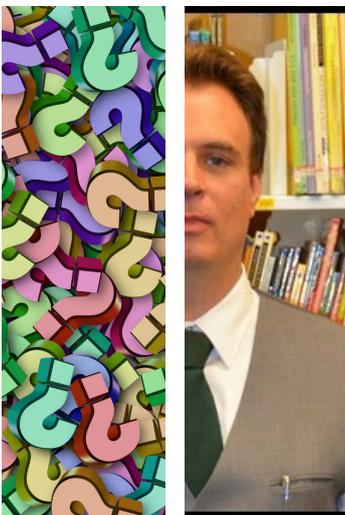


Photo Credit: Anya Daftary

NEW!!



TEACHER INSIDERS!

Is Mumbai one city, or is it actually two

BY NAYANTARA PIRAMAL

Mumbai, an iconic, diverse and cultural city in India is simply overflowing with wonder. You can be sure to expect mouth-watering street food, experience unique modes of transport, and look at a new and fascinating way of life. Mumbai is one of the most cosmopolitan populated cities, holding a population of 18.41 million. Within this huge mass of people, lie numerous cultures, each one being divergent in it's own way. People from all over India's many parts reside in Mumbai, bringing so much diversity and uniqueness in culture. As well as the vast range of cultures, religions, and heritages of the citizens of Mumbai, there is a huge division between the people of Mumbai. In simple words, I mean to say the rich and the poor. People who have, and who have not. When I talk about people who have I mean people like you or me. People who get to go to schools, who get access to facilities and public services. Usually people who have jobs of high authority, and importance. The have nots, are usually people who don't have jobs of too much importance. In Mumbai, wherever you might go, the slums are a sight you would never lose. Usually under-privileged live here, and unfortunately they don't get access to proper facilities, and modernities. Mumbai is one of those countries that can be sharply divided into two, and be accurately labelled the haves and the have nots.

The slums of Mumbai can be considered as a second country within Mumbai itself. The slums provide sanctuary to over a million people. Seeing the spectacular city of Mumbai and its pleasures truly show what Mumbai is all about, but the slums are a whole new side which we rarely explore and choose to assimilate. Mumbai is a country where we experience inequality. Inequality in Mumbai, can stretch across basic things such as sex ratio, morbidity rate, caste, religion, poverty and wealth. It is said that city planners and decision makers should take the problem of inequality into serious consideration, as it can affect opportunity and mobility greatly. It holds the power to cause social disruption, followed by urban disintegration. Other than these reasons we should give thought to the idea of having inequality present in our city. Is inequality what we want? How are we affecting inequality.

In my perspective, Mumbai is a city of two. Being home to billionaires, very successful company CEO's, and people who are extremely fortunate is one side. The other is a new city, comprised of people who are underprivileged, who don't consider it common to use wifi, electricity, eat a filling meal, or get access to upgraded public facilities. This is considered unequal. Equality is when everything is balanced, everybody gets the same, and no one has something others don't. While one 'city' suffers each day for a small thing like a meal, the other simply sits down at a table, snaps their fingers and gets a plate full of what they please without thinking about when they may get it next. From two cities, Mumbai must become one in which its people flourish, thrive and live pleasant lives.

'Being home to billionaires, very successful company CEOs and people who are very fortunate'



Camping!

BY TANVI MITTAL, SHREYAN GORANTALA AND MS. EMMMA

Today we finished the first day of camp. It was a lot of fun and a great experience. First we were welcomed into the resort with a yummy breakfast and straight after that, our day started. Obviously, first we were shown to our dorms. The dorms were a fun and lively area. We were sorted into groups and in those groups we started the activity maze. In this there were eight different activities and in our groups we had to try do as many as we could. This was a nice experience as we got to work in our teams to do puzzles, logic games and much more. After that we played a few games altogether. We had a delicious lunch that got up our energy level again. We had time to run around the huge open field down stairs and time to freshen up. After a lot of fun and action packed games it was finally time for the star gazing. We gazed up into the beautiful night sky and saw hundreds of stars floating around. We learned how to identify north, east, south and west and even got to see another galaxy through a telescope! It was an amazing day.

The next day, after a good sleep we had our breakfast and got straight to the activities. We did some warm up exercises and then went on to an interesting lesson on composting. Here we learned how to make a compost bin and also got to make our own basil plants. After this we went for lunch followed by some free time. Then we had two really fun activities, rock climbing and Jacob's ladder. I was a bit scared for rock climbing, but then I realized it was nothing but fun! Jacob's ladder was awesome. I really enjoyed it because we could work in a team and we could all help each other to victory! (a.k.a climbing up five logs) We then ate milk and biscuits and then had free time. Then we had dinner. After that we had an exciting talent show. A lot of the fifth graders performed poems they had been working on. (Including me) Others did dances, skits or magic! It was a lot of fun. We also had s'mores with roasted marshmallows which was awesome! The next day we started with breakfast followed by an interesting nature trail. We walked around the large property and learned about how plants can protect themselves, trees used for different purposes and more! After the nature trail we had free time, lunch and then had to leave the camp. We were all so sad to be leaving. But we enjoyed it. 💎💎

"Camp was a fun experience. You are doing everything without your parents, like making sure you eat well, making decisions for yourself, getting ready on time, sleeping on the right time and getting up in the morning. These things help for when you grow up. There were a lot of activities like untying ropes and talking about nature, which was very interesting. We saw the night sky and all the different stars and learned their names. We had a treasure hunt which taught us how to look for things on a map and make decisions to go the quickest route!" -Shreyan Gorantala

"Everyone brought their sense of adventure to the Grade 3-4-5 overnight camp! From 7-9 November, we ate our meals together overlooking the treetops, and learned how to share our space with nature. Each day we did fun activities, such as Jacob's Ladder, low ropes course and rock-climbing, and inspired each other to be courageous and determined to try our best. We practised traditional art forms like Warli painting and pottery-making, and potted our own Tulsi plants. On the last evening, we celebrated with a bonfire, "s'mores" and a talent show! Well done to everyone for coming together and making it an unforgettable experience!" "Everyone brought their sense of adventure to the Grade 3-4-5 overnight camp! From 7-9 November, we ate our meals together overlooking the treetops, and learned how to share our space with nature. Each day we did fun activities, such as Jacob's Ladder, low ropes course and rock-climbing, and inspired each other to be courageous and determined to try our best. We practised traditional art forms like Warli painting and pottery-making, and potted our own Tulsi plants. On the last evening, we celebrated with a bonfire, "s'mores" and a talent show! Well done to everyone for coming together and making it an unforgettable experience!" - Ms. Emma



TRENDS

IF EVERYONE DOES IT, THEN IT'S RIGHT. RIGHT?



BY MANAVI NAG

Trends are all around us nowadays. Varying from fashion trends to political trends, they play a big role in our day to day lives. But why has it become habitual and a part of our everyday life? Is this good for us? What makes us follow them blindly sometimes?

People follow trends set by eminent or even normal individuals blindly, good or bad, more than cultural trends these days.

With the rise of social media and how it has become a quotidian part of our life it is very straightforward and simple to become prominent. With the introduction of labels like "social media influencer" and "public figure" people can have a wide platform a lot faster. Individuals like the

Kardashians/Jenner, Miley Cyrus, Youtube Vloggers and Instagram models all have a large fan base. The Kardashians and Jenners are renowned all over the world for all the wrong reasons. They promote the need to be perfect, plastic surgeries and botox. In 2017 there was a trend called the "Kylie Lip Challenge" where people went to all sorts of extents to get their lips like Kylie Jenner.

This challenge was dangerous because according CBS New York people did the challenge and were in pain for days. Doctor Francesca Fusco said that "The idea is they are sucking and creating a vacuum, and that vacuum would result in swelling because it is trauma to the lips, breaking of blood vessel lacerations, cutting of skin that requires stitching in some cases and leave marks that could include pigmentation scarring". One teenager who said she did this because she was bored and it looked like fun. This shows that people blindly follow what one eminent figure promotes and spreads it throughout the world.

Famous youtube vlogger, Logan Paul. Late in 2017 December he visited a suicide forest, with a rolling camera, he showed a dead suicide victim and cracked jokes. If a fan follows this blindly then that would be bad. As a previous fan of him myself this spread a completely wrong message and showed a huge lack of knowledge on important issues.

On the contrary there are people like Malala who use her amazing story to start a trend (that I hope will last) that girls have every right to study. Celebrity endorsements are there because the brand knows sales will increase. On an article in Forbes it said that 0.25% of sales increase which is pretty notable (Olenski). Tarama Burke started an amazing # called "Me Too" that became an amazing trend. Me Too promotes women who have experienced sexual harassment or assault to understand they are not alone. In conclusion people do blindly follow trends. May be because they want to fit in, or may because they are a fan of the trendsetter. In a world like ours we should think like trendsetters and not followers. Cultural trends do have a role in our life but not as much as the the age before social media and the kind of technology we have today. Trends will always be around us and we will always be around trends. Let's use trends for the good.

HIP HOP AND IT'S EVOLUTION!

BY BURHANUDDIN TURRAH

Did you know that according to the Time Magazine and the Grammys, hip-hop/rap is the most listened to genre in the world? Hip hop is a genre which can be controversial at times, but is still very influential. Innovations throughout hip-hop history have had an influential impact on the hip-hop's listeners' aesthetics. So let's delve into the history and innovations for hip-hop! Hip hop began in the 1970s with Afrika Bambaataa coining the terms rapping, DJing, b-boying/girling and graffiti art though the first person to actually start making hip hop music was Clive "Cool Herc" Campbell. He built on the Jamaican tradition of toasting. Then hip hop blew up in the 1990s with recognition and many new artists like JAY-Z, Snoop Dogg, Eminem and Tupac Shakur. Many of them are still producing today, except for Tupac, who died in 1996. (May he rest in peace.)

When hip hop first started, the DJs recorded in their homes and production of songs was rare, occasional. The melody was intense and sometimes dark, because it reminded the listeners about the empowerment and struggle of the blacks against the whites. The beat was rhythmic and made on classic drums, with a standard bpm (beat per minute) of 110. The lyrics talked about equality and future ambitions while the flow was basic. The present Now in present hip hop, the are whole albums of hip-hop songs and they are recorded in major studios. There are even music videos to accompany the songs. The melody is now varied, with moods ranging from dark to cheerful to suspension. The beats can still be the standard 110 bpm drums or it can also be electronic beat sequencer kits and electronic drums ranging from slow (80 bpm) to standard to fast (180-200 bpm). The lyrics were mainly about anything without much purpose like their bling, status, anything that came to their minds. The flow of lyrics was better, having fast rapping on a slow beat. When songs with this kind of flow are heard, it sounds weird at first, but believe me, you will get used to it. There are more collaborations and features in hip-hop. Something that is common between then and now was that there was a lot of cursing in hip-hop songs and many offensive words, the main one being the N-word. There was also lyrics about reproductive body parts, violence and drugs. Since music channels did not like this massive amount of cursing in hip-hop, they either did not play that song and if they did, they would put a bleep sound over the curse word, or they would mute it out completely. In my opinion, this would have been frustrating because when people would listen to a hip-hop song, they would hear these annoying mute-outs or bleeps in between the song.



So what happened ultimately? Well hip-hop has gone a long way. From recording in homes and standard drums to collaboration in major studios and electronic beats, it just goes to show how much hip-hop styles and music have changed over these past 5 decades. It is now one of the most listened to genres in the world. But the question remains: What will happen in the future? What paths will hip-hop lead? Will it attract more and more listeners or not? Well this question will remain, and there is only one way to answer it- wait and see what happens!



REFLECTION ON RELIGION

ANYA DAFTARY

As a kid, I often found myself alone. I needed something to seek refuge in and really provide me with the sort of depth and understanding that I would only understand later. I soon found my refuge on the office chair that stood in my room at my grandparent's house. The house was like my safe haven but the old Hindi music was my wonderland. Better yet were the endless debates I would have with my grandfather about Indian epics. It is a memory I cherish. It made me want to learn the facts and the history behind these so called myths I learnt from. Growing up now it is a part of me and is a time of my childhood that made me into the woman I am today. It is the very fibre from which I was cut out making an impression on my goals beliefs and understanding of the world as I see it.

In my middle years I went through bullying and severe isolation/ loneliness which was hard on me being an outgoing social extrovert. In that span of time, I once again looked to my grandfather and his tales of migrating from a small village in India to being the first one to scribe my family name in English. Those moments made me feel like a human and helped me get through my struggle which I constantly go through each day. My family is not religious. While we do have certain beliefs which adhere to our principles, our lives are not devoured by the power of god. This means I neither believe in god nor do I believe that there is no higher power. Yes, its rather contradictory! The idea is that my faith in humanity made me grow as a person affecting my decisions of my way of life. It even broadened my thinking and my philosophy as a person. Moving on, going through that phase in time where I felt like my world was just crumbling before me, I wrote. Frequently, constantly. It was my home away from home (all while I was at home.) writing became my cathartic released from the abundantly messed up life I was living. I was able to unleash a creative beast on the world. The beast could control my mind in a song or a poem. Or perhaps even a twist on the oldest tale I knew.

Furthermore, what makes me feel special was sharing my experience with individuals so similar to me, yet again so different. Whether it was the circumstance or the family or perhaps the faith. I am able to connect so well with different people and try to grasp where their coming from. It's like meeting another misguided soul and navigating the way back together. As I said, going through the isolation, I felt disconnected, I lost touch with the world I knew and found love in a person I had met just once. Maybe it was a friend of a friend or perhaps my father's old colleague from Iceland's daughter three years older than me. Making the connect really made me feel something. Maybe it was being back in sync or maybe it was simply a strange connect. It's what I felt and I think this course could and can help me to connect with these human on a deeper level.

'TO STAND OR NOT TO STAND THAT IS THE QUESTION'

BY AMIT BHANOT

I was just settling into my seat with a large tub of salted popcorn when everyone around me stood up for no apparent reason. In a state of confusion I looked around and realised that everyone was staring at the cinema screen. They were standing to sing the Indian national anthem before the start of the movie and to be honest it was a slightly awkward and strange experience for me. I also reluctantly stood up but if I was being authentic at the time I didn't feel inclined to stand up at all. The reason was simple; I was visiting the cinema to watch a movie and not attending a national sporting event such as a cricket match involving India. I would have preferred to continue my usual pre-movie ritual of watching trailers and indulging in unhealthy snacks. I do possess an Indian passport, albeit an overseas one which is slightly different to the real thing, but at that particular time I felt no overwhelming sense of patriotism which would have created an urge to stand and join in the singing of 'Jana Gana Mana'. (Not that I actually knew the words!) I would also feel a similar sense of reluctance if the national anthem of Great Britain, 'God save the Queen', was played in the cinemas of my native country England. In the past I have attended football matches at England's

national stadium and stood with thousands of other fans for the playing of the national anthem. At times this too has felt a little forced and inauthentic on my part. Maybe the wider question is; 'Why should everyone in the cinema or in a stadium have to stand for the playing of the national anthem?' This question was recently addressed by India's Supreme Court judges when they were asked to debate the issue and there was a unanimous decision in favour of reversing the law previously passed in 2016. A decision that I found reassuring and proving that rational thinking can be more powerful than other ways of reasoning. In the US there has recently been a lot of controversy about American football players who have not been standing for the pre-match national anthem. Most of these are African American players who have felt a sense of unfairness about the way that black individuals has been treated by some of the country's police officers, acts of 'police brutality'. The players have been given a hard time by some fans of the sport and also by their president.



In instances such as those above should our personal prerogative and individual freedom to choose be compromised, especially in question to standing and singing a national anthem? After all what is the actual purpose behind these anthems? They can bring people together under a flag to feel a sense of belonging and national pride, but also feel like a part of forced or coerced nationalism. An attempt at making nationals into loyal and subservient individuals who do not raise questions. In any case do we need to have 'loyalty' to anyone or anything, be it a country, religion, leader, monarch, political party, family member or friend? Invariably the nature of things is to change over time, including our ideas, beliefs and opinions. Meaning who or what we agree with, believe in or value may also change. If being 'loyal' to any of these requires us to be anything other than who we truly are, then we may be betraying the one who deserves our unreserved and utmost loyalty the most.



I am a number with a couple of friends,
quarter a dozen, and you'll find me again.
What am I?

A: 3
I am beautiful, up in the sky.
I am magical, yet I cannot fly.
To people I bring luck, to some people,
riches.
The boy at my end does whatever he wishes.
What am I?
A: Rainbow

Meet Mr. E-L



Name: That's a complicated question.

A person will acquire many names in their lifetime, and who is to say which is "real" and which is not? Why are we so attached to letting our parents decide who we are? Or do you want to know my government name, the one that's in all the official documents, that immigration and tax officials use when they want something from me. Or perhaps the name my friends use, or the one I chose on my own, which reflects my truest self? Or to keep it simple, we'll use my professional name: *E-L*. It's a mononym, like Japanese royalty, or a narcissistic pop star.

Age: The slowly decaying body I am currently trapped in has been extant for thirty nine years this December 26.

Something I'm Not Proud Of: Just, so many things. I was, as an adolescent, quite unkind to my family at times, and I think those incidents are the ones that haunt me. But I'm glad it happened, because that memory is like a ghost, always watching, always reminding me not to be that person again.

Secret Ambition: As my ambition for world domination is hardly a secret, I'll have to go with to open my own restaurant.

Favorites: I don't do favorites. How can I pick one thing and say it is the best, for all times and situations? That's hubris. However, I can give you a top five, with the understanding that this too is subject to review.

Movies: Nolan's Batman Trilogy (one long movie), The Fountain, Conan the Barbarian (Arnold, not Jason), The Crow, Fury Road

TV Show: Justified, Arrested Development, Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends, Mr.Robot , Daria

Song: I refuse to pick songs. I'll do Albums instead.

Albums: The Fragile by Nine Inch Nails, Blast Tyrant by Clutch, Leaving Babylon by Covenant, Interstellar Soundtrack by Hans Zimmer, Hel by Allseits

Books: Iron Council by China Mieville, Feet of Clay by Terry Pratchett, House of Leaves by Mark Danielewski, War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning by Chris Hedges, The Wind up Girl by Paolo Bacigalupi

Places on Earth: The Olympic Peninsula, the Oregon Coast, London, Istanbul, Main Street Sushi in Half Moon Bay

Random Facts:

- I am the youngest person to solo fly and receive my pilot's license in the Philippines, and due to the fact that they changed the law shortly after I did so (unrelated?) I will remain so (legally).

- I took me almost six years to graduate from college because I kept finding new things to study; they forced me to graduate because I had too many credits to remain an undergraduate.

- I'm actually a very good cook. The first fancy dish I prepared was for a debate viewing party I threw for some college friends in 2004, and now I have to do all the cooking for my family.

Life lessons: Though we often hear sweet nothings about how we need to help each other, the truth is that most of what we see in the world is people looking out for themselves. We see it every time someone waves off a beggar, or inconveniences someone else so they can have their way, or doesn't listen because we think our own nonsense is more important, or doesn't share, or doesn't take the time to think about others, or yells, or whatever. We're told we should be rich and famous and adored, but all of those things are solipsistic, atomistic, concerned only with this tiny thing we think is the center of the universe. All roads lead inwards - give money to me, attention to me, praise to me, importance to me - and so ultimately go nowhere. We all like to think we're good people, and so we tells ourselves that, and just assume that means that what we do is good and generous and kind, and frankly, I'm not sure that's very true. I wonder whether, when we help someone, we do it for their benefit or for our own.

I'm not a good person, but I would like to be. Every day I remind myself of the selfish, thoughtless things I've done, and contemplate the great gulf between the person I am and the person I want to be. Every day I remind myself that I am a very small thing in a very big universe, that when I am gone only echoes will remain, all the things I have done, slowly expanding outwards, forever. Tiny ripples that will bounce off other ripples, joining each other, each little ripple lost in the larger, ever growing wave, in the vain hope it might one day become a tidal wave.

I am not old yet, but neither am I young, and in my life thus far the only thing I have found that matters is what I do for others.

