

Anak Sastra, Issue 4

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Having a taste for the exotic, **Kim Farleigh** has worked for NGOs covering three conflicts: Kosovo, Iraq and Palestine. He takes risks to get the experiences required for writing. His stories have appeared, or are forthcoming, in 27 different journals, including *Southerly, Island, Whiskey Island, The Battered Suitcase*, and *The Red Fez*.

Kevin Jay Hinaloc is an alumnus of the University of the Philippines Diliman. He graduated magna cum laude, earning a Bachelor of Science in Tourism degree. He has traveled to a lot of destinations throughout the Philippines, providing him many opportunities to immerse himself in different local cultures.

Daniel Emlyn-Jones is passionate about Singapore: its complexity, turbulent history, and inspiring journey from the dark days of World War II to the present. When not writing, Daniel works in the healthcare industry in the UK, but tries to visit Singapore at least once a year. He is even trying to learn Cantonese, the family language of his Singaporean friend!

Sneha Subramanian Kanta is a poet, writer, and a visiting faculty member in two colleges in Mumbai, India. She holds a master's degree in English literature and has worked with MiD DAY Multimedia as a sub-editor and also as a special educator with an NGO. She has also written for magazines like *Chitralipi, New Quest*, and *Muse India*. She loves traveling long distances via rail, exploring cultures and people, and reading too. She has published several poems and short stories. Her principal inspiration remains her mother, from whom she believes to have received her creative gifts.

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June 2011 featured author interview with Kim Farleigh

Q. Why do you write? And what are some of your inspirations?

I write because it helps me find out what I really know, like a sophisticated form of thought. I'm inspired and interested by things that produce extreme emotions, such as war, women and bullfighting. The job is to decide precisely what the details of these events are that cause the emotions.

Q. Tell us about your writing process. Do have any unusual writing habits?

I can write anywhere: on trains, buses, planes, metros – even when I'm walking down the street. I try to convince myself that I haven't finished a story when I think I have. Usually, I should have listened to myself.

Q. You have worked for NGOs involved in war zones in the Middle East and the Balkans. Do you find it easy to write about your experiences with the people suffering in the conflict zones?

Conflict zones aren't just about suffering. You see every type of emotion; you hear astonishing stories; you see great solidarity and amazing beauty. Experience gets packed in so tightly that it rapidly gives a writer of a wealth of things from which to draw.

You get to experience terror and relief which gives you a very good picture of what your real needs are and what sort of character you possess. In other words, being in war zone does wonders for accurate self-analysis, something that's more open to subjectivity in safer situations.

I find it easy to write about my experiences in conflict zones because the victims of war want their stories told.

Q. You have published short stories in a wide range of journals and magazines. What is it about the short story format that appeals to you?

The short story gives a writer the opportunity to say something profound with few words. If it's done exceptionally well, then each sentence can convey two or three meanings simultaneously, like poetry. It's also like sculpture as you labour over each word and each

change feels like a giant step towards something closer to whatever it is that you're trying to say.

Q. What is your most memorable experience about having traveled in Southeast Asia?

I've fortunately had several, but the one that really stands out was a trip to Mount Bromo in Eastern Java. We arrived at the nearest village at midnight while a celebration was taking place – a funeral for the headman of the village who had recently died. The locals fed us some wonderful food and then we took off to climb the volcano. We reached the inner lip just as the sun was rising over the outer lip, orange clouds below us between the two lips. The next volcano along in the chain had a minor eruption, throwing up a mushroom cloud of smoke after a loud explosion. When we got back to the village we discovered that it's very narrow, perched on the volcano's outer lip, the slopes, running away from the crater, terraced with rice paddies that fall down the volcano's sides for a distance of about 2,000 metres. Utterly incredible.

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"Reassurance"

A distant island in a blue lake sat before purple summits, the peaks like monuments to achievement. Mauve, vaporous epaulettes adorned summit serenity.

Conical-hatted men were guiding water buffaloes through paddies, heat's languor gripping the world.

Supremely impartial vines, trunks and leaves, shameless with impulse, surrounded the fields, the reflected sun flashing like bright ideas.

Light irises, like diamond flowers in greenery, gazed, with brilliant curiosity, at the toiling creatures.

A man bus-station screamed: "YOU WANT ISLAND?"

"You bet your sweet butt we do," David replied.

Confusion: "Yes" hadn't been spoken.

"Yes," John said.

"Take bimo," the man screamed. "Bimo go to boat."

Fiery confidence again blazed in the man's eyes.

David's head followed the man's waving arm – the most significant arm for miles.

"I'm mesmerised," he said.

Pleading corn-cob sellers with desperate eyes were facing a bus's windows, the passengers groggy with ambivalence.

Men in cafés provided the audience for the screaming boatman negotiator who never pleaded, a man altogether different from the corn sellers.

Horses' hooves clip-clop clattered. Wearing a ten-gallon hat and a red tunic, a man on a white horse, charged towards them, raging: "Take bimo! Bimo go to island! Take bimo!"

The audience's sword grins slashed in titillated-lip lacerations.

This Mountie bent down from his steed and whispered into David's ear: "Only pay one hundred."

Epauettes adorned the Mountie's shoulders. Such generosity was rare in a man so powerful. His voice hushed with assuring authority.

"Okay," David whispered back. "Thank you."

The Mountie rode off, thoroughly commanding.

"Reverse up against that fence," he ordered a bimo driver, whose waiting passengers cackled.

"Yes, sir," the driver said, saluting.

The driver smacked his right knee, a wallop of bliss after the Mountie had past.

The Mountie enlivened an unnecessary role. Confidence could make this role necessary.

*

The rocky slopes' red flowers, above the island's horn-decorated rooftops, were like lush ambitions in scepticism's hard face, the blue lake beneath. Vapours swathed the mainland's peaks; wind rattled trees.

David asked: "Are you okay?"

"Yes," John replied.

A palm swayed. A bird croaked "guacccc", like a falling tree.

John put on his running shorts.

Waves, like doubts, were attacking the shore. Leaves swished in the wind's swishing.

John started running. People were carrying harvested rice stalks towards an effigy of Jesus Christ. Golden fields glowed under a sky that resembled a blue door to an unfathomable mystery that created vast interpretations.

People's smiles exuded a hope made possible by collectivism.

John's father's voice slashed through his head, like a garish explosion: "Giving up the thing you do best! You could have been the greatest athlete this country has ever produced! Incredible!"

Irretrievable possibilities chewed at John's soul. The wind blustered like a restless spirit.

A wooden wheel spun a horizontal tree trunk that was spiked with short rods that struck other rods that were protruding from uprights that bounced within timber bowls, crushing coffee beans. Women sifted the powder through sifts made from animal skins. Their hands and aprons were stained brown. Their laughter sang with the rhythmical beating of the uprights. A rustling swish of water emerged from the stream that spun the wheel, a soundtrack to a scene unchanged for centuries. Brown's prevalence highlighted the whiteness of the women's teeth, exaggerating their smiles, epitomising freedom born from lack of choice.

Was this too easy, John wondered, this thoughtless contentment? This submission to collective hope? Or was it a denial of evolution? AM I RIGHT!?

A girl swung her arms in imitation of his running. She flung her head back and stomped. Her brothers' gleeful mouths were wedged into the doorway of their home, like packaged hilarity.

Splicing anger erupted in John's head; it was sacrilege to mock Western Man, that creature of performance! He glared at that wall of mocking teeth. Fury propelled his legs, as if they had received an inspiring bolt.

"Much to see?" David asked, when John returned.

"A fantastic coffee grinder," John replied, "and kids I felt like throwing rocks at."

"Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you. Running is considered to be ridiculous here."

"And so is riding a white horse dressed as a Mountie."

*

Upturned mountains lay in the lake that had turned into rose-tinted silk, the silence without pain and loneliness.

They entered a restaurant beside the lake. A rooster and a hen strutted in through the door. Chicks were pecking the floor.

"The poultry," David said, "looks fresh."

Three skinny cats then stepped warily into the restaurant. Their wide, alert eyes, and their pricked ears, and their howling meowing failed to elicit sympathy from the locals who continued eating and chatting, unconcerned about the lower species.

One of the scrawny cats stopped at a table and looked up at the diners. A leg kicked out from under the table, the cat scurrying off with a meowing howl.

Was there a type of malign fate, John thought, that deliberately creates permanent, unfulfilled desire? Am I a starving cat as ludicrous as the screaming boatman? Is this the price for breaking free from collective hope?

A cat darted towards a chick. A cock, perturbed by feline culinary preferences, attacked. Darting animals, with panicked eyes, fled. A screaming woman, waving a frying pan, came out of the kitchen and attacked a cat at the same time as children walked in through the door, blowing whistles. Shrilling notes pierced ears; the cats howled; birds squawked; children blew; David guffawed: A gorgeous light of satisfaction radiated out of his face. The noise was as unbelievable as it was unnecessary and tremendous.

“I’d love to see this in a Michelin, five-star restaurant,” David said.

“Poor pussies,” John replied.

*

John approached the lake’s edge. The mainland’s peaks were covered with cigar clouds that seemed like permanent fixtures, smearing summits. Fishing boats were silhouetted in the silver the sun had inserted into the water, the glinting lake’s allure irrepressible.

John put his face mask on and looked at his destination – a rocky island whose highest point was topped by a tree that had a white trunk. The tree’s leaves were stationary above the aisle’s weathered, rocky skin that looked unbreakable, like an everlasting feature.

Apprehension on the lake’s shore disappeared; he dived in. The chill quickly passed. Ripples’ shadows writhed like intertwining thoughts.

The island’s submerged boulders were half hidden through a smooth, opaque sheath of transparent, liquid film. He touched the rocks. Moss fragments drifted off in three dimensions – surprise! – boulders with a skin as soft as silk!

Prosaic objects produce unexpected revelations.

He floated in discovery, arrested from churning dreams.

A gliding angel fish, like a thought obscured by the surface, floated by.

He plunged into a seaweed rainforest at the rocks’ base – into fear and delight. A black fish, frightened, shot away. Angels, like music, moved like a conductor’s staff. Green freshness swayed, like hope, above and below. Not the hope that luck exists; but the hope that talent can reveal a special knowledge.

Plants waved – like aspiration.

Back on land, he felt a positive emptiness, the rock now a monument for which to pay homage.

David's eyes were behind sunglasses. Water dripped from John's body. John felt drained of doubts.

"Imagine travelling around on a white horse dressed as Running Bull," David said.

"And turning it into a cult through persistence," John replied. "Never underestimate the persuasive power of the big P."

The lake's centre had become chrome.

A cult, John thought. Turning fantasy into a cult. That's the first step away from mockery.

*

John re-entered the water, brief apprehension getting eliminated by desire. The initial chill departed to reveal hope's tenacity. Not the dream of patronage, no, but a faith in the production of diamond revelations that could surface like the rock that he now floated towards that had arisen in outbursts of liberation. He waded in the dream that a presently unjustified creative consciousness could end up being vindicated.

Was this as bizarre as hoping for a return of the Messiah?

At the island's base, the rock's skin went from gold orange yellow red rust brown at the top to a sandy green below that merged into a cream-green wall of water that, like the sky, comes no closer, a fabric visible, yet invisible, the observer unable to rest an eye upon single points in this fabric's sheen, these concentrations on single points more difficult than the easy graces of imagination, and much riskier than having a belief in something that can never be tested, in something that you will never have to face, much easier putting faith into something that doesn't have to yield a result: But I have to find places to rest my eye on and this is a lot more difficult than hoping to see a fantastic creature – and so much riskier!

He climbed up the rock. The tree waved; the sun's hand cast jewels across the water. Pinnacles of whitish quartz, that resembled morality and candour, sat below the leaf-flame of hope that was being fuelled from below.

He arranged photographs taken by his eyes into sequences: Could he take these sequences through the tunnel of mirrors, twin brother to their eternity, producing consciousness from unconsciousness, transforming the always transformed?

No one is going to try harder than me, he thought. That's for sure.

"Tomorrow is the day," he told David later. "I want to be in Medan tomorrow."

“Suits me,” David replied.

*

“Fine by me,” David repeated later. “We can even take off tonight if you like.”

A village’s lights made golden spikes in the lake’s ebony. The depths the spikes descended to depended on perspective.

They were facing the lake’s black crater, the island the cone of an ancient volcano.

The air was warm with the texture of silk. Black velvet, covered in diamonds, lay over the lake’s infinity, like a representation of the unseen splendour below. Vast dimensions are soothing, conducive to sound, thought and possibility.

“I’m facing,” John said, “a black crater of possibility.”

“Rex can do it,” David replied. “Don’t you worry about that. He can make Henry the Fourth look like a stuttering moron.”

Rex was a believer; he smashed obstacles.

“This experience,” John said, “has been electric for self-analysis. I’ve had to think about what my unconscious motives might be for wanting to do this. Rationality doesn’t appear to have anything to do with it. I appear to have complete disdain for probability.”

“And?”

“Maybe I want to standardise interior lives – to give the world a guiding aesthetic it lacks. I must be even madder than I think.”

“Sounds reasonable to me,” David replied. “Art rebels against history’s manicuring.”

“But what gives me the right to put myself in this exotic position?”

“It’s not a question of rights. Fate chooses. You have been chosen. So has Rex.”

The quietude possessed contemplation’s passion.

“It’s made me realise,” John said, “that rebellious individuals expose what society should be tending towards. I’m attempting to unify all experience for a destiny that has religious intensity. It’s nerve-wracking being close to freedom.”

“I know,” David said, “that Rex is going to take them apart. He’ll have them begging for mercy. He’s no doubt pacing up and down now, itching to get at them. In the changing

rooms before football matches he was like a supernova. You underestimate him and it's like nuclear fusion."

John's chortles complimented the silence, harmonious opposites that exposed the beauty of each other.

"Rex's confidence," John said, "comes from motivating revenge. He just oozes it. He embodies what I'm trying to do. Like all rebels, he's trying to bring the future forward by emphasising certain realities that best predict a future where virtue is laid bare. He probably doesn't know it, but he's battling against injustice. He's one of the inspirations for the main character in the film he's trying to sell. Let's hope he manages it."

"He will."

*

John was used to nerves, to taking the brunt of both known and unknown. Now he was doing it again – and once more in pursuit of victory.

Medan's traffic churned. John's sleep had been restless, his subconscious having forced him to experience every possibility that may have been required to perform the task. Through the emotional swirl, like rain with wind while the sun still shined, he felt the zing of anticipation.

The sun, reaching its pedestal, had beckoned the resumption of the city's frantic music. The tranquillity in John's head was a counterpoint to the turmoil in his stomach, the anxiety a part of the preparation for the tentative-delight probe into unknown country, the extension through experience of all that can be analysed.

If he wanted to see a future bereft of histrionics he had to behave like that himself.

Hope and fear surged when the email appeared. He had tried to convince himself that anguish couldn't be included in potential responses. Everyone, he thought, has setbacks.

Absolutely everyone. And anguish has already been scaled on the climb towards realisation.

.....CHANNEL SEVEN RAISING ONE MILLION.....MEETING NEXT WEEK IN SYDNEY. GET YOUR ARSE BACK NOW. REX."

Each reading was as fresh as the first. Everything stopped. He wandered in zero-gravity care.

"I told you," David said, "I told you! I fucking well told you!"

Disbelief's overture made John float. Thinking and thinking, it begins to have depth and shape and form, like mental sculpture. You see complimentary layers coming like waves, the whole body re-shaped by the deepest layer. And the feeling of self-affirmation that comes from creating universes means that experience can be used for profitable escape from the world's parts that I want to reject so that absurdity can't get me.

"Rex," he said, "you burrower! You absolute burrower!"

He was free from shame's threat.

* * * * *

"Mountain Breeze"

The wind howled strongly in the mountains where he resided. He felt the sublime touch this intangible material brings. He couldn't see it, but it had been a part of his life. Twenty years of existence was long enough to create a special bond between him and this familiar mountain breeze.

As he stood near the cliff, he was greeted by the same old view. Beautiful! Wonderful! Amazing! It was as if He chose this place to manifest His grandeur and omnipotence. The crystal clear river perfectly wound on its banks surrounded by the usual tropical vegetation. The trees stood tall boasting their majesty above. Nevertheless, these did not undermine the small shrubs below which also pressed their right to belong in His creation. But wait!

"What was that?"

A gentle moving flesh was caught by his sight. The limbs moved so tenderly as if dancing to the same tune he had known since he was young with the hair swinging, being blown by the same breeze that caressed him. The lips pouted as if inviting the fruit to be illicitly consumed. He ran down with his pulse beating faster as he drew nearer to her. "Who are you?" he asked, panting.

"Oh! I'm just roaming around I hope it's not offending you."

"Where are you from? What's your name?"

"I'm Rita. I just live by the next village." She offered her hand to him however...
"Sorry I think you should be lea—"

"This is a beautiful place!" Her eyes continued to survey the area with great awe evident in her eyes. "Perfect!" She smiled lovingly at him.

"Y—yeah, i—it really is."

"If you don't mind, can you accompany me around? I bet you live here. I want to explore more if it won't be bothering you much." Her eyes were smiling but at the same time pleading. He couldn't help but be persuaded by her innocent character. He tried to resist but to no avail. It happened so fast, but he had to submit.

"Sure. I can show you around. I won't be doing much, and I just live nearby."

“Oh! That’s so kind of you.” And without any warning, her arms wrapped around him leaving him astonished.

“So shall we?”

They strolled over the hills covered with green grasses, moist with the morning dew that settles on them. Butterflies hovered above them as they ran to the meadows with Rita laughing aloud trying to catch the small insects. They ran down, back to the stream so he could show her where the small falls were located. They splashed water at each other as if they were little children who had just discovered freedom. Her giggles sounded so lovely to his ears as if they were hymns of cherubim surrounding the whole place.

Holding hands as they strolled was a memorable moment for him. He couldn’t help stealing glances at her. Her almond-shaped eyes were just too perfect. Her nose, though not so prominent, exuded elegance that only she possessed. The lips were also notable, being so sensual without deliberately trying. Oh how her perfection blended with this paradise!

At noontime, using a long stick, he stabbed through the stream and into a large fish, as if showing his prowess as a skilled villager. Maybe every man needed to show what he was made of, all the more so to a woman who was so dear to him. Everything happened in a very short time, however, he couldn’t do anything but surrender. After all, it was not a fight; rather it was a delight for his mind, heart, and being. He offered her the grilled fish he made by the banks, an offering that signified submission of his heart. All day long, all they did was laugh, stroll, and enjoy the company of each other.

They then took a rest on the cliff. The view was so lovely with the fields, the stream, and the resigning sun that gleamed like a ruby in the sky. They didn’t have any conversation; he was more than satisfied to have her by his side. Then, the mountain breeze blew gently on them, caressing their tired bodies. When he faced her, he saw her looking at him too. She gave him that familiar loving smile and then, without any warning, she stood up and ran down. Her image was slowly disappearing from his sight. However, he didn’t feel anything ill. What he felt was the security that she gave him, a promise that told him that she would come back.

The wind howled strongly on the mountain where he resided. He felt the sublime touch of this breeze that had been with him for years, especially during this blissful moment of his life. Wind, it was so good having you beside me. He was so excited, and it was something that could not be taunted. He ran to the cliff with his pulse beating faster as he got closer. But as he stood by the edge, he saw four beings. He saw a couple holding hands with the man carrying a small angel in his other arm and a perky little girl splashing on the stream. They looked so happy, so contented, and so complete. He glanced upon the familiar woman with the same smile that melted his heart yesterday but punctured him now to his soul. He had nothing to do but surrender, he had lost. He laid down alone in his bed. Solitude and grief loomed over him, eating every bit of worth his past restraints gave him.

The casement moved and creaked as the mountain breeze entered his room. It caressed his

face subtly reminding him of his companion for twenty years. Then, he bent his knees forming a fetal position, alone, in this paradise yet dreary milieu.

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"Punggol Road"

Dedication: in memory of the victims of the Sook Ching massacre killed on Punggol Beach, 28th February 1942.

Leaving today's Singapore down Punggol Road is like falling off the edge of the world. One minute you are surrounded by whizzing traffic, bustling families and towering apartment blocks echoing with the happy screams of playing children. The next minute you are walking past the growing skeletons of new apartment blocks amidst the cacophony of hammers, machinery, and the shouts of Sri Lankan workmen. The road then disappears into the jungle, deserted except for the occasional fisherman on a bicycle. In this forested hinterland between concrete and sea, the only immediate evidence of the modern city is a single bus route, and the tentative beginnings of a suburban light rail line.

Down this road, on the afternoon of 28th February 1942, a truck had sped, and on that truck was a young Chinese man named Ah Meng. He shook with fear as the vehicle carried him further from his home and from his family. He looked into the eyes of the other men crammed in with him and he knew. Japanese soldiers had arrested him that morning and dragged him off for questioning amid the protests of his mother and little sister. His mother had got a rifle butt to her head; thank the gods it had not been more. He didn't understand what he had done wrong. During his interrogation the Imperial Guards had shouted at him, but he couldn't understand their interpreters, and so remained silent.

As the truck hurtled on through the jungle, he looked up at the blur of trees passing overhead, and offered a trembling prayer to Kwan Yin, heavenly goddess of mercy. He longed above all else to be with his family again. Who was going to look after his mother and little sister? Unusually, his little sister had a shock of red hair which earned her the nickname "Ang Moh" meaning "Red Hair". He whispered the name softly to himself.

The jungle canopy opened, and the truck bumped to a halt; the road had ended. Amid the shouts of the guards and the jabbing of bayonets, Ah Meng was forced with the other men from the truck and onto a beach where a firing squad was waiting for them. He stood facing the sea, and watching the beckoning waves, he wondered how much it would hurt. The man next to him reached out a trembling hand, and Ah Meng clasped it. The last thing he saw was the edge of the sun disappearing behind a cloud.

It is 5th April 2010, the festival of Ching Ming, and dusk is approaching on the Punggol road. An old Chinese woman is returning from a food stall to her apartment block close by. She is bent low over a walking frame laden with shopping bags and shuffles slowly along the pavement. After a while she stops to catch her breath and peers down Punggol Road towards the square of jungle just visible between buildings on the edge of the city. The sky

is a blaze of crimson. A tear wells in her eye, and she slowly bows her head. Her hair is arranged into a bun, grey except for some loose strands of the previous red which waft and glisten like a halo in the last rays of the evening sun.

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"Stony Pathways Are Pathways Too"

The clock ticked mercilessly. At the stroke of midnight another day arrived. Thousands of corpses lay dead in pools of blood. The entire floor, with its once marble sparkling glitter, now was drenched in red. Hundreds of "cleaners", as they were called, kept sweeping the blood away.

Monday arrived and the final trace of blood was now wiped away. The echoes of pain from the merciless killings had almost been wiped away as well. A plethora of sorts engulfed the momentum of the entire area, which was now a ruined fort. Tourists hardly came to this spot, as there was nothing to see, except for ravages and dried trees and tubers.

In a century rife with corruption, war, and power politics, the cries of thousands of such people go unnoticed. The ruined fort began to collapse, the sturdy roofs that had stood testimony to storms and winters, had now given way and were crumbling down. There were only a few inhabitants of this rural area who were "survivors." They ate dried plants and drank water from a nearby flowing stream. Epidemics such as cholera, typhoid, and jaundice were not uncommon.

Lata was a woman raped during the fierce and intense agitation of the lower caste farmers. There's some mysticism, however much one may deny, taking over lands and raping the women of the breed of humans one fights against! Lata, with her almost painful and melancholic eyes, spoke in volumes. However, no one bothered much about what she underwent.

She always looked at the sky the moment an airplane or a helicopter flew overhead, thinking that it was God's own call to her. She burned with spiritual passion and rebellion, but lay meekly sitting as the toll of the rape which happened forty years ago still sent shivers down her spine. One painful Sunday evening as she sat next to the temple, she could see a hut. From within the hut, painful screams emerged time and again. She limped her way to the hut, jolted the door open, and saw a young girl being raped by a man. She always kept a stick with her, a strong stick that helped her walk. She raised it and from behind hit him hard. He collapsed with three to four blows. This meek lady had shown her gusto.

Meanwhile, in a corner was Ramlal. He was one of those many farmers who had lost all—their farms, their wives, and children. Ramlal did small chores such as drawing water from the well and bringing equipment for richer land owners and earning from hand to mouth.

One day, as he passed towards the city, an amalgamation of the evening air and the swift rains came over him. It was over two years that it had rained as much. Memories of the agricultural surplus, his wife cooking sumptuous hot food for him, and the children singing "La-la-la- *saawan aaya*" and making paper boats in puddles overtook him.

Memories, sometimes, can be the only basis of survival for many. Abject circumstances and intense human suffering can shackle the strongest of creatures. Loneliness killed all of them in this rural habitat and the only way of surviving was memory; it allowed them to live, to one day hope that they would overcome it, no matter how difficult it was. Many others, though, fell into a depression of wallowing self rejection.

Kantilal, a rich landlord, stood at the balcony of his bungalow. His was perhaps the only wealthy household in the entire settlement. He looked at places around him, the condition of this settlement, and sighed as a mere silent spectator. Many people here were at the most remote corner of the forgotten village. All embodied forgotten pains, agonies, and intricacies.

The village had a name, though maybe it did not. We all have names, don't we? Maybe this place had a name too! But who knew? Who cared? The identity of this rural habitat, for whatever significance it had, came from the ruined fort, the one that didn't shine gloriously, but remained in ruinous shackles. Any sense of community here could not pervade that image now, at least not for many years to come. The memory gripping them all of the bloody reverie was too much to fathom.

People do move forward from their memory lapses, and maybe even some day I will. Maybe I will successfully name the village one day. Such is the impact of the name of a place, giving a sense of identity on maps!

Glossary

Saawan aaya—a welcome phrase symbolizing the first drops of rainfall, often a joyous occasion for farmers.