

विज्ञान

कैसी ये माया,  
कैसा ये काल,  
आया हं मैं  
समझने विज्ञान,  
आश्चर्य हुआ मुझे  
यहां आके,  
क्यूंकि जो मैंने जाना  
वो तो मेरे भीतर ही है समा,  
लेकिन समझ मैं बाहर से रहा,  
यही है अनोखापन  
हम इंसानों का,  
कुछ हम समझ पाए है,  
कुछ की कोशिश जारी है,  
और बहुत कुछ हमारे समझ के बाहर ही है..

- शिव बंसल

## Samyuktha Rao

Young little Henry turned 9 but his father Abraham wasn't present this time too. Ofcourse, his mother knew it beforehand but Henry insisted this time for his father's presence before he would be sent off to boarding school. To his disappointment, his mother couldn't hurt him with the truth that Abraham couldn't turn up this time too.

Henry silently bottled up his feelings all these years but didn't give them a real chance to develop as he always thought of his dad as the superhero. Not just to him or his family but the entire world. I guess this time his father's absence made him forcibly confront the hard reality. It made him spiteful, more that he could realize. As days kept passing, he was keen on making his dad realize that there were familial duties he had to attend to once in a while and wanted to confront him on how his dad alone treated work like the only biggest thing in the world but his peers fathers, who were running largest of the factories seemed to be available for at least annual events that were significantly dear to all other human beings.

It was one year of Fleming's discovery, a literal savior to mankind, the penicillin, was found in a journal and the whole of Oxford couldn't stop rejoicing and researching let alone Abraham. Abraham being the egoistic chap he is, thought it's probably divine intervention that the vacation of Mr. Fleming was the causation event to the discovery of the mold on Fleming's petri dish had grown a self capacity to fight bacteria. There was something that could fight the bacteria but we just had to give it time he assumed.

When Abraham seemed to be obsessed about this invention, screaming around as the biggest breakthrough in mankind and was the only topic he ever spoke to, Henry could only think to himself that "Atleast he took a goddamn vacation!"

Henry couldn't talk back to his father even remotely on the concepts of rest or vacation or simply just be himself because Abraham's ideals as a firm believer of the church, discipline and everything by the word of God first, rest is science was incomprehensible to his own colleagues at times let alone his family but who could ever question big people doing bigger things.

What seemed as the start to the greatest invention yet was still not given a legible form or wordly credit like it deserved until a decade later. Henry was close to 20 now and built a relatively happy life for himself but his rage and agony wasn't still not healed whenever he had the sight of his father. He got over his void of having an absent father but couldn't let go of the suffering his mother had to face and will have to face till the very end. But nobody could smell the underlying threat. Henry had a sly smile to himself whenever he was enraged. Nobody really knew what he was upto.

Sooner or later, Oxford's research finally broke through and massive spreads of infection was controlled with the help of penicillin. The accolades kept flowing in for Abraham & team and were regarded as Gods in the community. While the world was celebrating Abraham, to much of Henry's surprise, his father did not seem to be joyous about it. "What else does this man want it life?" Henry couldn't stop being bothered but as predicted, more than Abraham and the Oxford

team who gave the actual form to the medicine, the inventor was celebrated. This came as a shock to everyone as the world knew Flemming as the saviour of mankind who won a Nobel and Abraham couldn't digest that he got the recognition for taking a vacation but he on the other hand put his blood and sweat everyday to make the medicine available.

As the world was celebrating Flemming then, Henry somehow felt a little empathy for his father. After all, he could see that the research his father dedicated his life towards, didn't give him the credit he expected. Henry decides to undo the mistake he did on his 28th birthday, two years later. He gets his family home and decides to give back the file labelled "Confidential" to his father that he hid it away years ago to make him feel distressed or rather pay for his personal absence. As soon as he enters the room with the file, Henry finds Abraham facing his back. On the table he finds the day's newspaper that read "Pencillin resistant infection found, killing 1 million people in England the last week". To his utter shock, he couldn't believe the headline and said with a shivering voice "Dad but you knew about this before.!". Abraham doesn't respond. Henry walks up to his chair and turns it around. Abraham's dead with a gun in his hand.

## Anirudh Nema

### Warmup

It certainly was a nightmare come true. All the chemical structures hung on the wall, pungent smell lingering in the corridor the way phenyl reeks in the corridors of government hospitals. Nine years ago, he had run away from a lab after getting slapped and beaten by his science teacher for setting a small portion of the lab on fire. That was the end of science in his life. Today he was back again in such a setting where his cheeks started to redden with a burning sensation spreading like wildfire around the left side of his face, reaching to his torso, and a ringing sensation around his left ear. Yet he smiled. He knew it was in his head which was materializing due to the agency effect of the latest hardware implant he had undergone to experience the periodic psychedelic experiences that he longed for during those lonely days.

### Main

“द्वैत-अद्वैत की बातें हैं। ऐसा जंजाल जो दर्शन के आधार पर बना गया है। द्वैत यानि जिसका गुण जीत भी, हार भी; सुख भी, दुःख भी।” गुणशेखर विचारमग्न था की तभी उसकी तन्द्रा टूटी और वो वापस वहां आ गया जहाँ वो था, शरीर से।

उसने अपने 15 साल ब्रह्म की खोज में बिता दिये थे। ब्रह्म, जो अब एक अपवाद से ज़्यादा विवाद था।

गुणशेखर की बेचैनी अब दिनों दिन बढ़ती चली जा रही थी। इतने साल हो गए थे और वो किसी निष्कर्ष को निकलने में असमर्थ था। बावजूद इसके कि आज उसके पास दुनिया भर की तकनीक और कौशल था। अगर नहीं था तो स्थायित्व।

AI और डाटा साइंस ने जेनेटिक एक्सप्रेसन को हार्नेस करने की sci-fi वाली बातों को सच कर दिया था। परन्तु ये भी एक सच था कि वो आखरी मनुष्यों में से एक था। अब महामानवों का ज़माना था, जो ज़्यादातर अपनी डिजिटल आभा के ज़रिये जीवन में कायम रहते थे, सदा के लिये। जो ऊब जाते, वो वोलंटरी euthanasia के रूप में डेटाबेस से उड़ जाते। एक अजीब तरह का एनलाइटनमेंट था। जहाँ आभा थी, बुद्धि थी, पर चेतना नदारद थी।

गुणशेखर की परेशानी भी यही थी, सेंपल साइज कम था, विषयात्मकता या subjectivity को demographics के आधार पर पुष्ट करना अब कठिन हो गया था।

उसने दिति की आभा को लोड किया। दिति, जिसने महामारी के समय आभा के रूप में रहने का निश्चय किया था, गुणशेखर की पत्नी थी और अब शरीर स्वरूप में cyborg की तरह ही आ सकती थी। पर उसने आभा रहना ही ठीक समझा। यह आर्थिक रूप से भी किफायती था।

“दिति, क्या अब मैं इसको जाने दूँ? जब इतना ताम झाम शुरू किया था तब सेंपल साइज के बारे में सोचा ही नहीं था। सोचा था की मेरा शरीर है, MRI है, ब्रेन वेव रीडर्स हैं, और भी नाना प्रकार के उपकरण हैं, ब्रह्म को सिद्ध कर दूँगा। फिर सब वापस चेतन होना चाहेंगे।”

“पर तुम भी अभी इस बात को लेकर पक्के नहीं हो, तुम बस सेंपल साइज और डाटा की आइ ले रहे हो। तुम अब तक ASC में दाखिल नहीं हो पाये हो।”, दिति ने जवाब दिया।

“वो कोई *altered state* नहीं है, ब्रह्म है !”, गुणशेखर ने चिढ़ कर जवाब दिया। “और हाँ, मैं नहीं कर सकता क्योंकि मैं स्थिर नहीं हूँ, मैं पागल हो रहा हूँ। कौन है जिससे मैं मनसंगत बात करूँ और वो मुझे *probability* नहीं, चेतना से जवाब दे? तुम तो नहीं.. जीवन भी बस अब एक मिशन सा होकर रह गया है..”

वो लैब से बाहर चला गया।

बाहर का गार्डन biosecure था फिर भी मास्क पहन कर जाना ही हिदायत थी। वो मास्क लगाये सिगरेट रोल करने लगा और अपने रोल करने के अनुभव को तथ्यस्टता के देखने के कोशिश करने लगा। पर उसके सुलग रहे वेग ने उसपर हावी होना शुरू कर दिया..

और वो उस मंज़र में खो गया जब anti-microbial resistance ने मौत को एक वरदान बना दिया था। लोग दम तोड़ रहे थे। चारों ओर जहाँ मौत ही मौत थी, दुनिया अलग-अलग cults में विभाजित हो चुकी थी।

जिनके पास साधन न था उनमें ज़्यादातर अपनी आभा को digitally लोड कर रहे थे, कुछ प्रार्थना करते करते स्वाहा हो गये, कुछ विज्ञान और इंसानियत को आधार लेते हुये consciousness या चेतना की खोज में सालों quarantine रहे।

गुणशेखर की तन्द्रा फिर टूटी, जैसे कोई समय-समय पर वापस उसमें आज फूँक देता हो..

वो सिगरेट को वापस रोल करने लगा। मौजूदा वातावरण में सिगरेट फूँकना संभव न था परन्तु रोल करना उसका तटस्थ का अभ्यास और जीवन का अनुभव तट पे जाने का चेतन ज़रिया हो गया था।

जैसे की एक श्लोक के हिस्से: “पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते “

## Sailesh Mishra

*It was a hot day. And Shambhu was thirstier than The Thar. He should have known that settling his desperation for a borrowed bottle of water would awaken the trolls.*

*The upsetting taste should have rung the alarm bells. But it didn't.*

"Look over there, would you?"

"Where?"

"I don't know. I sense something. I am not aware of it's direction."

"Yeah I sense something as well."

The two guards stationed at the second Toll gate in the Approfrurio(The Immunity fort) sensed something was wrong. They just could not see it.

"Hey look over there? Are they one of us?" One of them said pointing towards the north.

"They do seem like the good ones." The other replied.

As they looked downwards, standing on the doors at the Entrance of Shambhuvan were two individuals. They seemed broken. They seemed foreign. And they seemed hungry.

"Should we do something?"

"Absolutely freaking not. Our Job is protecting Shambhuvan from invaders and not public service."

"But look at them. So frail. So needy."

"Shut up and do your job. Hey fellas!"

The two individuals looked up. They looked scared, shaken and alone.

"This is a private property. No trespassing. You don't seem like you belong here. Please read the sign. It states trespassers shall be castrated."

"Please. Help us." One of them spoke as loudly as it possibly could. Their voices were even worse. They sounded like they could die any moment.

"Why are you here?"

"The rest of our kind was killed on the way. There were so many of us. Now it's just us two. Please we beg you. Help us."

"This is the Shambhuvan. This is a private empire."

"We are aware. All we need is some food and a place to lay low. We ask nothing else. I am sure, the empire can provide enough for a measly two of us."

"I know you freaks very well. Two of you. Huh . That's how you always begin."

"Hey," the other guard interjected. "Don't stereotype them. What is the point of being a human kingdom if there is no humanity left."

The guard sighed in response.

"pfft. Fine. Just a meal and some shade is all they are going to get. If anything happens, It's your head that will be sought out first."

"My friend. Kindness is a gift that keeps on giving. And my head is nothing compared to that gift. Let them in!"

Famous last words.

*As his symptoms started to show, he visits the doctor.*

*"Let's see," the doctor read out the report, "persistent cough, nausea, weakness, bad gut problems and your poop has been terrible. How long has it been?"*

*"A couple of weeks doctor."*

*"And now is when you thought would be the right moment to get a check up." The doctor sighed. " These are anti biotics. Since we have been past the avoidance stage. I want you to start taking them. Am I clear?"*

*"Yes Doctor" he replied meekly.*

"Everyone gear up!" the colonel stood at the base of the fort and screamed. "This is not a drill. This is not a drill. This is an invasion. The wall has been breached. I repeat the wall has been breached! Everyone, assemble at the base of the Approfrurio!"

The walls of the fort have started to crack. The two guards at the second toll were found beheaded moments after the trespassing. Apparently they let two aliens in. Now there are millions of them. The wall was breached from inside. According to reports, they lied about their mates being murdered, only to take the opportunity and open the gates from outside to let them in. The invasions usually have three levels of breach. And this one seemed like an effortless level one breach.

"Comrades!" The colonel stood at the top of a dais and addressed the assembly of soldiers. "Listen carefully for this is the last time we will ever speak. We shall launch our defence on multiple fronts. The War borne commandos(WBC). Guard the gates. There are more coming. We need all of you. The Tubemen need to use their network for gathering support. Forget everything else. Use everything you have. You need to communicate with everyone. Nobody

can reach places where you can. Disperse your assembly at all fronts. The Thymen needs to keep track of the transportation and the fluids. Shambhuvan needs to keep going! This is not a new enemy. We have fought them before. Follow the gut. Damn it where is the gut.”

“Within us? Colonel.” One of the troops questioned.

“Not that Gut! You dim witted piece of shit.” the colonel screamed. “We need folks who think like our enemy. We need recon from the ones who understand our enemy. And for that, send a message to the gut. All clear?”

“Yes” the dimwitted piece of shit replied.

“I said, all clear!”

“Yes colonel!” they all said in unanimous as they geared up for war.

The cracks got bigger. The enemy multiplied. Their camps had a network so complex yet so powerful. The leadership was multiple ended. Strategically they had entered into Shambhuvan. The general stood on top of the now broken Approfrurio and looked proudly at what they have accomplished. As he looked up, a body of mass fell down on its feet. It was the colonel from the other end. The general smiled as it planted its foot on the colonel’s chest.

“It’s over now little mister. Shambhuvan is mine.”

“That will never happen, Culio.” The colonel groaned. “Shambhuvan is stronger than you think.”

“Oh I did my research. My army had been in their once. Shambhuvan was pretty protected in its formative years. I don’t think your walls have what it takes for what we have to offer. Admit defeat, colonel. Or the deaths won’t be merciful.”

They all felt a shake. A thud. Something was coming. And General Culio wasn’t anticipating this.

Hahahahahah the colonel laughed with all the life he had left. “You said we weren’t strong enough. I guess the gods heard us. Culio. In a few moments when you are going to get thrown out of this empire as nothing but mere waste, know this. This is the moment you lose. DO you know why?”

“No.”

“That’s correct. We got reinforcements. ”

A new set of gates opened as the Anti Alien squad marched in. The rhythm of their footsteps created a wave of new hope. shambhuvan finally had a fighting chance. Culio stood at the fort as it saw its army being wiped out by this new army. Their arrows and spells eliminated its troops one by one. They missed no shots and they fired every single one. The wave of the war has started to turn around. Culio looked around. Is this the end? A promise was made as they

entered. That promise has to be kept. Something was needed to be done. There is no other way left.

All except one.

There is only one small group that could face off against the anti-alien squad. And it was time to invite them in.

As the trolls stayed dormant in their caves, they heard someone come in.

"We need your help." Culio sounded desperate.

"Our help!" One of them responded in an instant, "You banished us. We suffered. Our kind died because you needed shields. And what did we get in return? Absolutely nothing. Look at us. We have forgotten how we looked like before. Our kind. Died. And mutated. And died and mutated by them and now we have become this monstrosity. This horror. DO you know what they call us? No The super bugs. We aren't even bugs! And now you want our help?" its voice broke down.

"You are the only ones who can help us. We need you." Culio was persistent.

"What do we get in return. We have already lost everything."

"You get Shambhuvan. Plain and simple. Its resources are yours to your heart's desire. It's my promise that you will be treated with respect and no doors shall ever be closed off to you. I made one promise before. Its time I make one more. And I intend on keeping us both. Come with us. And we shall have this empire for the rest of time."

The super bug smiled. IT was the endgame.

The Anti alien squad felt the terror as they saw an unfamiliar army approaching them. Their arrows could not pierce them. Their spells deflected off their bodies. The new found army of Culio marched in with everything that they had. Burning their way and flooding the streets of shambhuvan as they passed. The troops began to lose, one by one. The superbugs eliminated everything that stood on their way. Those mutants fought and tore of their enemies like they were paper. Culio marched in along with them, swords blazing.

As Culio stood on the pile of bodies to a now conquered Shambhuvan, its looked around. They had finally won. SHambhuvan was theirs. He knew it won't be for long. But it never mattered. For nature chose them. What could be a victory greater than that.

Shambhu Shrivastava's now dead body got covered in a sheet as the mortuary attendants pulled it into a truck over the sounds of his wailing and sobbing family.

**Harshit Vaish**

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June 27, 2023

Dear July,

I know you're not here yet, but I'm expecting this letter will find you well in the future. I want to share with you this incident and I'm not bickering about June here because this incident is literally associated with you. So today, I was in my boring basic microbiology class and I was scrolling through my Instagram feed to kill my boredom. Now, don't start lecturing me about discipline and concentration, July; I'm not as composed and serene as you are. I need to do what I need to do to even attend this lecture. Sorry for digressing. So, when I was scrolling through my Insta feed, I saw a post by CCMB painted in yellow and red. I immediately knew that it was about a Superheroes Against Superbugs event. Even though I don't follow SAS on Insta, I was unknowingly aware of their peculiar color palate and design format. The uniqueness had left an imprint. I stopped scrolling and started reading. No, not the eubacterial taxonomy, July... ugh... the post. I started reading the post and there it was, the familiar header Superheroes Against Superbugs top and middle. Then I noticed a scientist's photo in the middle and the name of Rockefeller foundation at the bottom. I got a little uneasy, the good type, July. I already imagined a plan to skip college and attend whatever activity it was. But then I saw something new. It was a logo I have never seen before. Charminar inside a designer nonagon. It read Write Club below the logo. I was a little confused. The title of the post "Pen meets petri dish" did not relieve any confusion. Below that "Unveiling science through creative writing" made me a little uneasy, the bad type. I am interested in biology and CCMB, but I'm not a writer. But then I figured that the event is on a Saturday. So, after all, I don't need to bunk classes and I will get a chance to interact with a CCMB scientist. My biology is okay. I can write something about anti-microbial resistance. I have registered for the workshop. I am going to CCMB. See you there, July.

July 1, 2023

Dear July,

HELLO! What a great entry! I'm very happy today, July. I usually welcome you to cloudy gloomy days, but this year, there is sunshine to greet you. I don't know if it's you, or the effect of sunshine, or my day at CCMB, but my day went fantastic. The workshop was scheduled at 11 and I got in the metro at 10:30. I thought that I'd be late. I got down the metro at 10:50 and met with a surprise. As I was walking down the metro staircase, I saw CCMB entrance right at the foot of stairs as if the universe knew that I was running late and it dragged the stairs to my destination. It relieved my anxiety. Even though it took more time at the security than I expected, I reached the conference hall in time. I received a notepad, a pen and a folder, all with SAS branding. It gave me a reality check that this

workshop is real. I am here and I do have to write. The scientist arrived after 5 min and god, he was cute, much attractive than he looked in the Insta post. His salt-and-pepper hair shine was matching with the shine of his specs frame. After his introduction by the co-ordinator, he spoke. His voice was understanding and authoritative at the same time. I was able to pay attention with occasional disturbances when people keep trickling in. I was not the only one who was running late. One such person was Narayan. He came in when the introduction was going on. His gait was humble but so confident as if he belonged there. I felt a tug towards him. When his turn came, I got to know, in addition to his name, that he was associated with Hyderabad Write Club and supposedly coming to CCMB for the first time. Even though I knew almost everything in the first half, I could see that the talk was captivating for most of the people. But, Narayan was struggling. I learnt a lot in the second half. When I glimpsed at Narayan, he had given up the struggle. I thought that this could be a good excuse to talk to him whenever I would get a chance. The talk was so fulfilling that when the lunch was announced, I found out that it had been 2 hours. But it made me realize that I was actually hungry.

When we were coming out of the conference hall for lunch, other attendees had already surrounded the scientist. So, I tried to find Narayan. I could not find him ahead of me, so I tried to look behind making it not obvious. I just caught a sight of him looking at me. My heart raced. I slowed down so that he can walk up to me. I was even expecting him to start the conversation. It worked in that he caught up to me and we walked side-by-side for a few seconds. But when he didn't speak up, I started thinking for my first lines. Within a second, I decided the line and gathered up the courage.

"Hi!", I said.

My voice did not come as loud as I expected. In the noise of so many conversations, he seem to have missed my voice. Before I could try again louder, an organizer asked loudly to gather for a photo and the bustle quieted down. There was no chance that I could talk now without turning everyone's head. We huddled in front of a mural. I was in the back and he was perched in the front. Within a minute, the photo was done and we started moving towards another building to have lunch. I tried to get noticed by the scientist. Still, many people were walking around him trying to be part of the conversation with him. It felt like I was a bee in the swarm without any identity buzzing around the hive.

When I reached the lunch room, many people have already taken the food and started eating. The food looked good which exaggerated my hunger. Without paying attention to Narayan or the scientist, I jumped for the food. When I took the food and I was looking for a place to sit, I noticed that there is a place on a table next to Narayan. I moved towards it in an expectation of having a long discussion with him. But then the scientist loudly announced in his loud likable voice that there is another room available for sitting. He then moved to that room with his plate. I figured my priorities and followed him. I got a chair right next to him. As I was sitting, the scientist greeted me with my name. I was overjoyed and highly impressed by his memory. Even though his name was there on the Insta post and

it was announced at the beginning of the talk, I was not sure of his name. Thankfully, even if I remembered his name, I was not gonna greet him by his name anyway. I greeted him back with sir. Other people were coming fast to our table and in less than a minute, the table was full. But I got his focus already, so I got to ask a question. When he was replying, some guy interjected and drove the conversation tangentially. But then, many people asked their question and we had a wholesome conversation.

When I came out of the hall after having a meaningful conversation with the scientist, I peeked into the other room to find that Narayan is still sitting in his place. I thought for a second but I was not able to come up with any sane reason to interject. I started walking away for the next session. I met a CCMB student who directed me towards the building. I tried to discuss about his work, but he was too uptight. He said that he would prefer to talk about creative writing only. I had no history or interest in that. So, as soon as I reached the destination, I parted ways. This place was an actual CCMB lab. This not at all looked like the lab I had imagined with neat segregated spaces with large touchscreen machines operated by people in white apron, formal shoes and lab gloves. The lab was cluttered with many small machines I could recognize from my college lab. Cables of multiple instruments were tangled. The benchtop was full of glass bottles, white boxes and tip boxes for pipette. I was amazed by how anything meaningful could come out of this place. When I was in my thoughts, an authoritative voice called us to assemble. I looked around searching for Narayan and found him far away talking with one of the organizers. I let go the thought of talking to him for a while and lunged towards the student who was about to demonstrate something. I knew from personal experience that if you are not in front, you will not be able to see anything. I got a position right next to the student. Even though I am not a front bencher in the college, here, I wanted to be in the front because I wanted to learn from the people who actually do science. The student started teaching about the techniques used in the lab. I understood the details initially, but within 5 minutes, she was failing to hold my attention. I looked back for Narayan. He was not even the part of the crowd. He was standing far away chatting to one of the organizers. I gave one more try to understand what the student was teaching. I failed. I was waiting for the session to end. It felt like ages, from bench to bench, machine to machine, we were hovering, unsuccessfully trying to suck some nectar of knowledge. When it finally finished, I was super tired and fed up. I didn't have the energy to start a conversation. I looked around and my heart sank. Narayan was nowhere to be found.

We were suggested to sit anywhere in the campus and write a piece. The search for a suitable place to write was a good excuse to look for Narayan. On my way out of the lab building, I tried to peek in the other labs. Outside the building, I roamed for 2-3 minutes in the hopes to find him, but I did not have the idea about the layout, so I failed and gave-up the hope. I sat on the grass somewhere. I toyed with the idea of writing. I took out the pen and pad from my bag. I tried to focus on AMR, but my brain was flooded with the hypothetical imagery about my first conversation with Narayan. After trying for 10 min, I gave up and closed the pad. I started roaming again around the campus. I told myself that I

want to see the campus, but somewhere in, I had the hope that I will see Narayan sitting. I was walking slowly but my body and mind were disconnected. I was not able to focus on the CCMB buildings and flora.

I must have been dream-walking for half an hour or so when I noticed Narayan-esque figure in the distance. I discerned that my pace increased involuntarily. After a few metres, I was able to resolve that it was indeed Narayan. He was talking with the same organizer he was chatting in the lab. I slowed down my pace to a normal walking speed so as to not look like a freak. My dreamscape again took over. Given the situation, I was thinking about the polite ways to interject their conversation. When I got close, the organizer saw me. We made an eye contact. I immediately looked away. My heart rate doubled. I was sure that I had taken too much advantage of the freedom and been to areas I'm not supposed to. When I looked up, he was still looking at me. He then started walking towards me. I was ready to get scolded. When I reached closer, he said

“Have you finished your story?”

“Yes.” I lied nervously.

“Let's go inside the building and discuss. I'll assemble other people too.”

He put his hand around my shoulders and directed me towards the building away from Narayan. We walked slowly towards the entrance and he asked me about my college background. I got a bit relaxed, relieved from the worry of getting scolded. I answered his questions to-the-point like it was my *viva voce*. When we were close to the door, he directed me to go inside and he walked towards three people sitting on the benches in front of us. All three of them were writing silently unbothered by the surroundings. I went inside.

After crossing the reception area, there was some space which I did not notice in the morning while going to conference hall. Many people were sitting there, a few writing, others on their phones. One person looked up from their notebook and greeted me. I greeted back. I took that as a sign and sat next to them. They did not speak any further and got back into their notebook. More people started coming in slowly. In 3-4 minutes, the person next to me finished and introduced themselves. The organizer came in with Narayan and asked in the general direction who wanted to go first. I looked here and there as if this was school and the teacher could ask me to reply. One person started to read their story. I understood that it was in Hindi. I don't know how good the story was, but it was orated very well. Next person's story was thankfully in English. It was presented much better than the previous one. The author used other authors to play characters in his dramatic presentation. I enjoyed it a lot. But there was an anxiety sprouting in me. It was rooted in the fear that I will be exposed as a fake writer. Everyone will know that I did not put any effort to write and then lied about it. As more and more people were presenting their stories, I was able to pay less and less attention to their stories in fear that I will be called to present next. After five presentations, I was so afraid that I practically stopped listening.

I was very nervous. I decided to flee. As soon as the sixth story finished, I picked up my bag, didn't look towards anyone and headed straight to the door. While I was walking, I was hoping the organizer would not stop me and ask to present. He didn't. When I reached the reception area, I relaxed, but kept my pace until I reached the metro platform.

So July, this was my action packed day. I had a great time having conversation with the scientist during lunch. But I can't believe that I was such chicken shit that I didn't talk to Narayan. I don't know if I will ever get a chance to see him. July, you need to help me.

**[July 6**

**Phone vibrates.**

**It is an Instagram post by Hyderabad Write Club.]**