

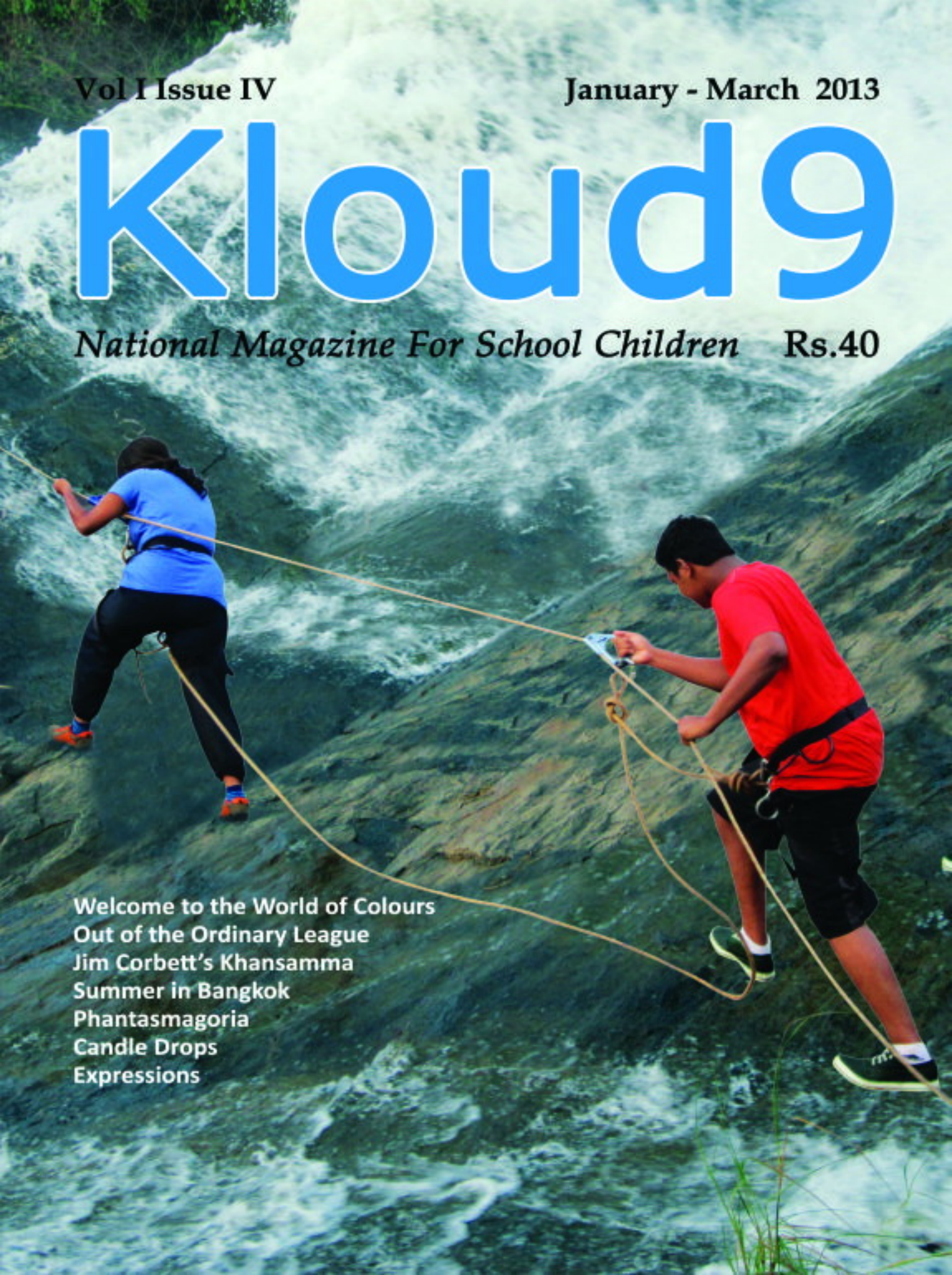
Vol I Issue IV

January - March 2013

# Klound9

*National Magazine For School Children*    **Rs.40**

Welcome to the World of Colours  
Out of the Ordinary League  
Jim Corbett's Khansamma  
Summer in Bangkok  
Phantasmagoria  
Candle Drops  
Expressions





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## Kloud 9

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**Founder:**  
Achyuta Samanta

**Chief Editor:**  
Ruskin Bond

**Editorial Board:**  
Dr. Mona Lisa Bal  
Surendra Mohanty  
Shyam Sunder

**Illustrations by:**  
Santosh Pattnaik, Geraldine T. Lane &  
Shobhit Sahu

**Page Layout by:**  
Manoj Kumar Samantara

**Cover Design by:**  
Geraldine T. Lane & Manoj K Samantara

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**Mailing Address:**  
The Editor, Kloud 9,  
KiiT International School,  
KiiT Campus-9, Bhubaneswar,  
Odisha – 751024

Email: [kloud9@kiitis.ac.in](mailto:kloud9@kiitis.ac.in)  
Phone: +91674 2725805  
Fax: +91674 2726115

[www.facebook.com/groups/304756082968916](https://www.facebook.com/groups/304756082968916)

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## From the Editor's Desk



With the successful release of the fourth issue of *Kloud 9*, the magazine has covered its first milestone - it is well on its way to complete the first year after inception.

The participation of students from far and wide is truly encouraging, and one can see this from the number of writings which we have packed into this issue. I am also pleased about the quality of stories and articles that are being submitted. We would love to publish all the writings that we receive, but unfortunately we are unable to, for want of space.

What makes *Kloud 9* so special and distinct from other magazines is that the old issues never really get old. A good story or poem, or for that matter any good piece of writing, never gets dated. Our magazine is like a story book (or a book of poems); one can pick up any issue, read it and add it to one's collection. It has a certain literary value.

Every week I meet one or two students who are writing stories or articles or poems, or even books! Their enthusiasm gives me a fillip. And there appears to be literary explosion going on all over the country. Literary festivals all over the place - Jaipur, Kolkata, Goa, Bangalore, Agra... Last June Bhubaneswar had its first Lit fest, at which your editor found himself mobbed by young participants; it was a bit like a rugby scrimmage. One of the highlights was the release of the third issue of *Kloud 9* which was soon sold out.

We look forward to your continued participation in *Kloud 9*, in particular, we want some enterprising students to interview well-known personalities such as authors, artists, sportspersons, actors, and send us their interviews along with photographs, for publication in future issues.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'Ruskin Bond'.

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# EXPRESSIONS...

## A token of friendship

By Anwasha Rath

**W**hat the hell!' I screamed as a huge suitcase tumbled over me. I landed hard on the floor. 'Oww...' I moaned as I brushed the dirt off my hands and looked around. 'The room's a mess,' I murmured.

'Duh! What do you expect? It's supposed to be all messed up! It's a store room after all!' I muttered to myself again. If I could make a list of all the things that I loathe doing, I'm sure this would top the list – hauling out junk on a nice, calm Sunday. This morning, I decided to watch an old movie and so I visited the store room in search of the DVD. But the room's condition was pathetic. It was as if every corner of the room was yelling, 'Hey! Clean me up!' So I decided to spend my holiday cleaning this junkyard.

I opened an old wooden wardrobe. Inside it was an enormous carton. I coughed as I dusted the big cardboard box. I noticed an inscription on it in black marker pen, which read 'Neha's Things-Lucknow'. Lucknow was where I had spent all my childhood, and had completed my secondary school, before we shifted to Mumbai. It was Ma's work, I knew it from her handwriting. She had kept all my cherished childhood memories enclosed in this carton for so many years.

I enthusiastically ripped open the carton. The first things I saw were my clothes – my frocks, skirts, tops and my favourite black party dress. It also contained all my medals and certificates from school. When I was a kid, I used to participate in all

competitions. I excitedly dug into the box to find all my birthday presents. There was a charm bracelet, a Disney pen set, a book about friendship, a puzzle game, a poster of my favourite celebrity and many other things that used to interest me when I was a child. I also found a video game set that my parents had gifted me once on my birthday. I was thrilled at the sight of all this.

I dug in deeper and I found a stack of greeting cards. They were all from my friends on different occasions – New Year, Diwali, Friendship Day, Christmas and also there were some get-well-soon cards. Every card had a different emotion hidden in it. I was elated as I flipped through the stack. I found an autograph book which had been filled by my friends just before I left Lucknow. I felt a pang of guilt inside me for not even bothering to contact them for such a long time. The carton was almost empty now. I peeped inside to check if I had missed anything else. Nothing, except a few bits of paper lying here and there. I was about to put everything back inside when I discovered a white envelope inside the box. I picked it up to open it but it was sealed. 'Mmm...strange! How come I had never opened this when I was in Lucknow?' I thought. The face of the envelope read 'To Neha'. Realizing that the envelope was addressed to me, I tore it open.

Inside it was a sheet of paper worn out from the sides. I unfolded it to see a magnificent painting of two beautiful girls holding hands standing in the lush green meadows. The background had clouds and a



breath-taking rainbow which covered the frame. The painting was slightly faded, yet it looked so lively and picturesque. I tried to recollect if I had any painter friend in Lucknow. I also found a letter inside the envelope. I quickly opened it.

The letter was titled 'A Token Of Friendship', it was addressed to me. My eyes shifted to the end of the letter where it was written 'Your friend forever, Vrinda'. My head started pounding once I sensed who this letter was from. I sat down on one of the cartons lying on the floor. The letter was dated 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2000 which happened to be my birthday. I recalled that day when I had been hurt by my closest friend. You can never be my friend, ever, Vrinda; you could do nothing but hurt my sentiments; you ditched me, Vrinda; I still regret the fact that we used to be great friends.

I closed my eyes as I drifted back to 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2000, the day I turned sixteen...

## 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2000

*'Wow! Neha, you're looking so fabulous!' one of my friends appreciated me. 'And your dress is so elegant!' said another friend touching the drape of my navy blue dress.*

*'Thanks guys,' I said modestly, but I was barely paying attention to what they were saying. I was anxiously waiting for my best friend Vrinda. Usually, she was always the first to wish me on my birthday. But the day was almost over, and she*

*hadn't shown up yet. And what's more, she hadn't even called me yet. I was really annoyed with her.*

*'Vrinda, Vrinda! You can't get away with this. Let me see your face once and I'm going to pounce upon you! And I'm not listening to any of your excuses this time. Height of negligence - forgetting her best friend's birthday!' I kept muttering to myself.*

*'Happy Birthday, Neha!!' A voice screamed behind me. 'I'm sorry I'm late.'*

*'Finally, She has arrived,' I thought and turned around, but I couldn't see Vrinda anywhere. Instead, I saw Meghna, a friend of mine who was known to be the gossip-monger of the school. In a flash, my excitement drained out. I managed to go up to her and accept the bouquet.*

*'Thanks for coming,' I said in a bit too sugar-sweet voice.*

*'Wow! You really know how to accessorize yourself Neha! You look great!' she said as she looked at me from head to toe. Obviously, she was jealous of my outfit. Meghna was also jealous of Vrinda because of her deep friendship with me. She wanted to be my best friend, and I didn't care much for her. So she never missed a chance to vent her frustration on Vrinda.*

*'Neha! Shall we cut the cake?' my father disturbed my thoughts abruptly.*

*'No Baba. Vrinda hasn't come yet. I don't know what's taking her so long?' I said softly.*

*'Don't worry. She'll be here soon. Tell me when you're ready to cut the cake,' he said and marched off to look at the other party arrangements.*



---

'Vrinda hasn't come?, She's your best friend right? Don't tell me your best friend hasn't been invited to your birthday party!' Meghna said in a hyperactive voice.

'No, no, I invited her, of-course. She must've got stuck somewhere. Will reach here any minute,' I said as my voice trailed off. I wasn't even sure of what I was saying.

'Have you tried her phone?' my friend, Astha, asked me.

'Switched off.' I said.

'Is Vrinda really going to come, Neha? Do you know for sure?' another friend questioned me.

'I hope so.' A whole hour went by and no sign of Vrinda. I was mortified. The whole party was waiting for Vrinda, and she was nowhere to be found. I tried her landline, but no one answered. I was beginning to worry about her.

'Neha. I understand your situation dear, but your guests are waiting. You'd better cut the cake now. Maybe Vrinda has an appropriate reason for the delay. Ask her when she comes,' my mother said calmly.

'It's ok Ma. I've given up my hopes. I don't think she will turn up. It's been two hours. She could've given me a call, at least. She'll have to face me tomorrow at school. I'll demand an explanation then. I'm sorry, let's cut the cake.' I said, trying to sound convincing, as I plastered a smile on my face and made my way to cut the cake.

## 13th February, 2000

'Hey Astha! Have you seen Vrinda?' I asked anxiously. I looked for her in the whole school campus the next day so that I could give her a piece of my mind, but I couldn't find her anywhere.

'Nope. I haven't seen her,' she replied innocently. Then she looked at my face and sensed my anxiety. 'Hey, don't worry. Everything's going to be fine,' She said. 'I know what you can do. Why don't you ask Tamanna Didi? She must know where Vrinda is.'

My eyes lit up! Tamanna Didi was a senior in our school and Vrinda's neighbour. If anyone would know where Vrinda was, she would!



'Hey, thanks Astha!' I said as I rushed towards the senior classes.

'Tamanna-di! I'm so sorry I'm disturbing you at lunch time. Do you have any idea where Vrinda is?' I asked her all in one breath.

She just stared at me for a minute then came to me and said, 'Where is Vrinda? You mean she didn't tell you? Nothing at all?' she asked astonished.

I shook my head.

'Vrinda and her family have moved to Delhi, Neha. Her father got transferred there. They moved out last night. I can't believe she didn't tell you...' she seemed genuinely surprised.

At first, I thought that Tamanna-di was joking but her serious expression told me I was wrong. I felt the ground beneath me was shaking.

'A...a...are you sure about this, Di?' I regained my voice and spoke again.

'Of course, Neha. Vrinda told me herself,' she said in an honest, concerned voice. 'Are you ok?'

'Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks for the information.' I managed to say this before I ran away from there. I still couldn't believe what I had just heard. I felt as if someone had punched me in the stomach. Vrinda went away on the day of my birthday. She left me without even telling me once... without even wishing me once... without even saying a goodbye to me once... she had the pluck to inform her neighbour but not her best friend...! A huge lump formed in my throat and no matter how much I tried to control myself, hot tears rolled down my cheeks

---

*uncontrollably. This was what I got after six-and-half years of my friendship!*

I slowly opened my eyes and sat still for a minute, reminiscing that day. 'After what you did to me, you still expect me to read your letter! Stop coming in my thoughts, Vrinda... go away,' my mind screamed and then I stared at the letter in my hand. I realized that if I wouldn't read this letter, I would be restless and wouldn't be able to concentrate on anything else. Further, I was also curious to know what more she had to tell me before going away like that. I began reading the letter promising myself that I would throw it away as soon as I finished reading it.

12/02/Y2K

My Dear Neha,

I think this is the first time I am writing a letter to you. We always believed in talking face to face. But this time, I didn't have the courage to face you and tell the truth of my life...

If you can remember, once when I was upset, you came to me and said that at every stage of our life, a new challenge awaits us and we can't ignore or run away from that; we have to face it. But today, these words seem so worthless. This time, life has thrown quite a challenge upon me and I don't know how to face it. So I'm going somewhere to find an answer to my question. After a few days, everyone will know that I've moved to Delhi with my parents, but only one person will know that I've gone to fight against my fate, and that person is you.

I'm going to miss you Neha. I'm going to miss calling you up every morning as your wake up alarm, teasing each other, playing pranks on each other and debating on our favourite celebrities. I'm going to miss our arguments upon butter scotch and chocolate ice cream, our disagreements on blue-looks-better-on-you-or-black, our

race to get the window seat in the bus, our disastrous cooking, our conflicts on comedy and action films, our silent walks in the garden, our fights over small issues, then discussions on whose fault it was, and then the final apologies to each other.

My friend, today I apologize to you for leaving without even letting you know. That's because I didn't want to upset you on your birthday, and because, your best friend here was not so brave to tell you all this face-to-face.

Neha, my fragile body has been attacked by cancer, which is gulping down my life every second. Doctor's have given up hope, but my parents haven't. They are taking me to Mumbai for better treatment. I don't know whether they will succeed or not, whether I'll live or die.

There is so much more to say but so little time. This letter encompasses all our cherished memories and everything I wanted to tell you. These words are my last 'Expressions'; retain them with you.

Your Friend Forever,  
Vrinda.

My mind was unable to absorb and comprehend the depth and gravity of these words. All these years I had misunderstood her. I felt suffocated with guilt and rushed out to get some fresh air. I went to the drawing room and opened the window. Just then, a gush of wind scattered all the newspaper pages from the table. As I began reassembling the newspaper pages, one page caught my eyes. In the memoriam column I noticed the picture of my best friend, beneath it was written 'In Fond Memory of Vrinda Shah (24 June 1984 – 18 April 2002).

I sat and sobbed helplessly. 'Forgive me, Vrinda... It's been eight years you are gone!'

**kloud 9**

**The author is a grade 12 student in  
Apeejay School, Kharghar, Mumbai**



# A DALIT & HIS GRANNY

By Saswat Das

Lalit reached home in disarray.

Anger was coursing through his body. He had tears in his eyes - tears of sheer pain and rage. He ran to his grandmother. Since his parents had been killed in village riots when he was three, his good old grandmother Annapurna Devi took care of him. He complained, 'Aaji, why do people treat us as if we were criminals? I didn't do anything wrong and why did the priest throw me out of the *mandir* today? They said I defile the holiness of the temple, why?'

Grandmother caressed him with tears in her eyes and croaked out, 'Lalit, my dear child, we cannot object. We are *shudras* (outcastes). We are much lower in social standing than they are...'

'I don't accept!' Lalit interjected, 'How are we lower than them just because we are born *shudras*? They make much bigger mistakes than we do. That *brahmin* boy, Ravi was found in a tavern along with the other boys. When I reported this to his parents they rebuked me as if I was the culprit. For heaven's sake please tell me why they claim themselves superior.'

'Don't speak like that Lalit. What we are was made by God. Come eat your parched rice.'

Lalit stormed out of the house. He hated upsetting Grandmother but his emotions now were in another direction. He went down to the pastures to roam. Suddenly, Ravi, Keshav and some others came into view. Ravi chided, 'Hey garbage boy, fetch

us some water,' and then laughed.

Keshav choked with laughter, and then said, 'Wipe our sandals clean dung face, we are in a hurry. Sorry I can't pay you, son of a puny mouse.'



Usually Lalit would have burst into tears and run away; but no more. In a sudden fit of anger he tightened his fist and cuffed Ravi hard across his face, which sent him reeling on to the ground. In a split second, Lalit pounced on his shocked opponent, clawing at his face and screaming, 'Drunkard! High caste trash of a *brahmin*. Take this you big mouthed donkey!' Lalit was unstoppable until some elders were called and Lalit was beaten up mercilessly. His assaulters then abandoned him by the side of the road and left. Lalit, bruised and injured all over, took a bath in the river and then ran away without looking back.

He ran away, far from home and far from his grandmother. There was a burning desire in him

to rise high and conquer.

From then on, he channelized his anger and frustration into a new energy, which he focused entirely on his studies and graduated from high school and then from an NGO funded university, with flying colours. He knew that empowering himself with education was the only way towards changing his humiliating social status imposed upon him by an ignorant society. And he did exactly that with vengeance and, in a couple of decades, became one of the most successful industrialists in the country.

Lalit often remembered his grandmother. Was she in good health? Was she even alive? These questions haunted him. Still he acted happy and contented. He often thought of his miserable childhood too. He regretted his fate not to have been able to live happily with his family in his childhood.

As a philanthropist, he was involved with the activities of a cancer fund foundation. While reading the names of the current needy patients, one name arrested his attention. His eyes welled up with tears, whether of joy or sadness, he couldn't tell. Then, to make sure he was reading the correct name, he spelled it thoroughly. A-N-N-A-P-U-R-N-A-D-E-V-I. Yes, yes the name was of his grandmother.

He dashed towards his car without waiting for his chauffeur to take it out of the garage. He drove at a ridiculous pace, neither caring for the safety of others nor his own and reached his destination in less than half the time that a wise driver would have taken. For once he did not care. His car came to a screeching halt at the parking lot of Amravati Medical College and Hospital where his grandmother was. He elbowed his way through the throng of doctors, nurses and patients and dashed into Room 117, the room where his grandmother was.

For a moment he hesitated. His grandmother might accuse him of being a runaway and never forgive him. But he gathered courage. If she rebukes me, he thought, it's okay, since I had left her. He entered the room where a doctor asked him, 'Mr. Lalit, do you know her?' 'She is my grandmother. How's she?' Lalit said.

The doctor greeted him, 'Well, congrats, we

detected the tumour at stage A and luckily it is not malignant. She would be discharged in a week. You can talk to her sir.' Then the doctor left the room.



Lalit knelt beside his grandmother's bed and with great difficulty choked out, 'Aaji, y-your Lalit is here. I want your blessings Aaji.'

Aaji replied in a rather soft voice, 'Lalit? Are you really here? My child, I've missed you so much. Where did you go?' Though she struggled to express her feelings, her eyes glistened in utter disbelief.

Lalit replied, 'Aaji, see what your outcaste Lalit has become. Aaji, we shall live happily. Now rest and rejuvenate yourself.'

'Lalit, don't leave please.' his grandmother said in a desperate voice. Lalit assured her that he wouldn't leave her.

Days later, grandmother and Lalit had a leisurely conversation.

'Aaji, have I not proved your words wrong?'

'Yes Lalit, I give up. Oh, Lalit my little great child'

'Aaji, won't you sleep?'

'I'm not in a mood but I think you must sleep.'

Lalit laid his head on his grandmother's lap, feeling like a child again and dozed off to the tune of his grandmother's familiar lullaby.

**Cloud 9**

**The author is a grade 7 student in DPS  
Kalinga, Cuttack**

# PHANTASMAGORIA VERBALISED

By Mehran Sultan Wani

**T**he clog of paraffin weeps, its light flickers,  
and so does its shadow,

Little tears trickle down from the candle's brim,  
and form the same,  
I cup my hands to steady the yellow flickering  
flame,  
And realize what's candid beneath its darkness,  
All bad is dark.  
The wick is cut off to make the hideous unseen.  
It's tears of shame.

The Second time I cup my hands to steady the  
yellow flickering flame.  
For the first instance, my mind reminisces;  
I'm in the sand now.  
He hears a bark; its dark outside his tent, his dog  
brings a lantern.  
He sets the holy book on the table and connects to  
the Lord, his hands elevated.  
For the second instance, the son of a wealthy miser  
slips out of his house with a candle at night,  
Slips a slice of bread to the hag who lives in rot,  
her back always bent;  
Charity-a deed so innocent and humane;  
The comforting hand reminds her of her son.  
It's tears of faith and awe.

Third time I cup my hand to steady the yellow  
flickering flame.  
Now my mind is a sailor, who lies in his bed  
wounded.  
A man with a light descends down to him to tend  
to his wounds.  
It's tears of comradeship.

A man travels across a vast parched desert  
Half dead with thirst, at last his heart throbs  
When he sees the oasis of his dreams lit bright!  
It's tears of success.

People come together for a cause so noble,  
Float luminous boats downstream, they make the  
night sparkle yellow!  
They pray in their hearts for peace, which they  
have always dreamt of,  
For the loved ones they combine their melodies  
and say;  
"God give peace to your soul; May god give  
peace to your soul."  
It's tears of solidarity.

A boy at night walks in the woods with a lantern,  
Through the boughs of birches and rosewood,  
Where they lie lumbered; stacked up high.  
His heart cringes by the sight!  
It's tears of pity.

At night the parents come to their child's cot,  
The little weasel is crawling in his comfort  
They pick it up and kiss it. It's the loveliest sight  
To see their happy child in the yellow candle light.  
It's tears of love.

The candle is blown out by a strong gale, signify  
the morning's chip and dale.  
The candle has wept. Its smoke is its last remnant.  
Its teachings are its essence.

**Kloud 9**

**The poet is a grade 10 student in DPS  
Vijayada**

# IT HAPPENED LAST HALLOWEEN

By Jahnvi Jairaj

Up from bed again, Elizabeth?' asked my mom.

'Yes' I replied.

It's becoming a routine for me now to wake up every night and that too because of the same reason. I went downstairs to get a glass of water. I washed my face and looked in the mirror; nothing usual. I looked at the wall clock, 4:00 in the morning. Just a few more hours left and then it was time for school. I whispered and ushered myself back to sleep.

My life is pretty messed up. Ever since I went to that dilapidated palatial structure, I've been having nightmares nearly every day.

Fifteen years ago, one day, one of my closest friends Tania and I were on our way to her new house. As we approached the house, we noticed an old house which looked haunted. It was adjacent to Tania's new house. We wanted to explore as we both had an instinct for exploration. Tania's mother wanted us to help her dust the new furniture. We pleased her with our dusting skills and obtained her permission to sleepover in the abandoned house at night. And it was the day before Halloween, the 30<sup>th</sup> of October. Our parents allowed us because they knew that the house had been unoccupied for over 30 years and that it wouldn't hurt us if we slept in the house for just one night. Their rationality and our mature insistence supported each other and allowed us have our way. There were no electronic gadgets in the house. So we decided to explore the place the whole night. Tania and I never usually slept on our sleepovers and this house would keep us occupied because it was huge



and it would take the whole night for us to explore it from one end to the other. Everything was planned and we were carrying our sleeping bags, popcorn, candies, some extra pillows as we enjoyed pillow fights and, of course, a variety of food.

As we walked over to the house, it looked like one of those haunted mansions of olden time black-and-white movies. That just made our excitement meter burst. The door creaked just like in films, only the cameraman and his crew were missing. We went upstairs and chose the room facing Tania's new house. We kept our sleeping bags aside and our snacks with it and we settled down to eat our dinner. After we were done I went to the bathroom alone to freshen up a little as we had a long night ahead of us. In the bathroom I bent down to wash my face at the basin and looked up in the mirror and I thought I saw some white shadow behind me. I screamed the very minute I saw it. I looked back and there was nothing. Tania came running to the

bathroom and asked me what had happened.

'I think I saw something behind me,' I said

'The mirror is shattered Liz and the background behind you is blurred, must've been something else,' Tania said looking at me like I had just disturbed her from something important.

I believed Tania; just my imagination I kept telling myself. We went back up and decided to 'explore' the place. I wasn't that keen on exploring the house after what I had seen in the bathroom; but how could I ruin the spirit we both were so strongly driven by? We went downstairs and went to the rooms. The house was way bigger than what it looked from outside. It had so many rooms and the living room was like the entrance of some mistress's huge fantasy castle. Yes, it took about an hour for us in each room as we spent the first half an hour standing awestruck and staring around. When we went back to our room it was two in the morning.



Then Tania and I just sat and started talking. I said I wanted to have something to eat. I stood up and pulled the bag from under the bed. All of a sudden Tania screamed. I turned around and she was not there! It sounded as if her voice had come from the bathroom; I ran as fast as I could and there lay Tania on the bathroom floor and in red was written 'Happy Halloween' on the mirror. As I turned to run out, I felt a shadow circling around me.

I went down and I tripped, sprained my ankle but kept running. I ran to Tania's new house as I knew that her mother had decided to stay there that night and rapped on the door. Her mother opened the door annoyed at the disturbance at that time of the night. I



told her what had happened and we rushed back to the old house. She followed me to the bathroom and Tania was still lying there unconscious but there was no 'Happy Halloween' written and no shattered mirror. Everything was perfect but only Tania was in need of immediate help.

We carried her back to her house and when we sprinkled cold water on her face she came round. She drank a glass of water and we asked her what had happened. She said that when I had turned to open the bag she felt something sitting next to her and the next minute she realized that she was standing in the bathroom next to a lady covered in blood and the words 'Happy Halloween' had been written on the mirror. After that she only remembered opening her eyes and seeing us there. The phase when she lay unconscious on the bathroom floor had been completely erased from her memory. I told Tania's mother that I too saw the words 'Happy Halloween' on the shattered mirror. Tania's mother didn't know what to say.

This whole incident didn't become known to the public as we didn't report it to the police, who, we thought, would not have believed us and would have thought we were crazy. Tania had high fever due to the shock she suffered and screamed almost every night ever since that day. A few days later my best friend left the town to live with a relative. And ever since that night I've had nightmares about the bizarre incidence, nearly every day.

A year later, as usual I woke up one day at two in the morning. I went to the bathroom to wash my face and freshen up a little. I bent down to wash my face at the basin and as I looked in the mirror there it was! I was standing next to a lady in front of a shattered mirror with 'Happy Halloween' written in blood. It was once again the 31<sup>st</sup> of October.

**Kloud 9**

The author is a grade 9 student in Paramakkavu Vidya Mandir, Thrissur

# MY MOTHER- MY INSPIRATION

By Soumya Nayak

Mother! O Mother!  
You have bestowed upon me  
All I ever wanted,  
You have given me  
All I ever cherished;  
But never asked for anything in return.

Mother! O Mother!  
You have always come to my rescue  
Whenever I was in dilemma,  
You have always encouraged me  
Whenever I worked hard.  
You have done everything for my well being.  
But never asked for anything in return.

Mother! O Mother!  
I wish to have your blessings upon me,  
I wish to have your character in me,  
I wish to learn your virtue of unconditional love;  
Devoid of any vice,  
And live on the ideals of selfless sacrifice.  
Mother! O Mother!  
You are my idol, my ideal inspiration.

**Class 9**

The poet is a grade 9 student in  
DAV Public School, NTPC, Talcher

# A GHOSTLY REWARD

By Jahnvi Rahal

**I**t was nightfall. The moon was nowhere to be seen. The dark thunder-clouds had shrouded the moon's light. The sky was dull and scary. Occasional flashes of lightening illumined the narrow paths that snaked their way up to the mountain top.

It started raining. Soon a white off road vehicle was spotted on that scary narrow path. Two friends, Alex Carter and Herman Thornton, were heading for the mountain top on a leisure trip – an untimely adventure at an unsuited terrain. A pair of headlights was the only source of light that guided their way up. The wipers of the car struggled against the heavy rain that lashed relentlessly on the windscreen. The car inched its way up and Alex in the driver's seat seemed extremely cautious in maneuvering the machine.

As Alex negotiated a hairpin bend, he noticed that the path was blocked by huge pieces of rocks that they thought might have slid down due to landslide. The two friends got out of the car.

'This is what the fate has planned for us,' said a frustrated Herman.

'This is a natural process, Herman. Don't blame your fate here. You stay here and I will find another way to overcome this problem.' Alex walked down the same path they had driven up, careful not to slip. He treaded down about hundred meters and to his surprise saw someone standing on that lonely path. Alex thought he would ask for help. The figure stood facing the valley, looking down the

path with his hands in the pockets of his raincoat. He was wearing a pair of heavy rain boots. The man moved a step backward. As Alex approached the mysterious figure from behind, he felt a chill down his spine. But he pretended that he was not scared.

'Hello, I want your help!' His voice quivered slightly.

The man started walking down without looking back. Alex shouted again, 'Hey, man, can't you hear? I want your help.' The man abruptly stopped and turned around to face Alex. In the next instant a flash of lightening revealed the figure's face and Alex couldn't believe what he saw. He had the head of a wolf on a human body!

Alex sprang back and started running up the path towards Herman. As he struggled upward, he could sense the figure chasing him close behind. He kept wiping his face and shouted at Herman, 'Herman, get into the car and start the engine.'

Alex thought that he was very loud and Herman could hear him clearly. But that was not the case. The voice in the torrential rain reached Herman's ears just as the sound of a pin drop from a metre height. Herman screamed back, 'Is everything okay, Alex?' Herman was not so loud and so came no answer. Soon Herman saw Alex running towards him. Alex saw Herman and shouted loudly, 'A wolf is chasing me. Get into the car now and keep the door open.' As soon as Herman saw the strange figure running madly after Alex, he got into the car, turned the ignition and kept the door open. The

moment Alex scrambled into the car and closed the door, Herman stepped on the accelerator and the car leapt forward with a loud screech. Missing his prey by a few yards, the wolf furiously pounced on the vehicle, landed on the rear glass and slid down. The glass fragmented into an enormous spider-web.

Herman reversed the car violently in a few seconds and accelerated the engine to full throttle a few times to scare the beast away. By this time the man-wolf had risen to his feet, ready to pounce on the car a second time. When Herman found the creature standing in front of the car, he stepped on the gas pedal once again and hit the creature hard, throwing it sideways. Herman started driving down the narrow path, peering through the darkness. 'Keep your eyes wide open, Herman.' They saw in the rearview mirror the man-wolf chasing the car, though the broken glass partly obstructed their view. It chased for a few minutes, and then disappeared. The two friends were safe. They reached the foot of the mountain and heaved a sigh of relief.

The rain had stopped. They drove down to the town and got out of the car. They sat on a bench by the side of the road. They were drenched in the rain. A man sitting beside them noticed that and said, 'You must have climbed that mountain. I am sure.' Alex and Herman asked how he came to know of that.

'Ha... ha...don't you know, people call the mountain the Ghost Mountain?'

'Why?'

'I know a strange creature haunts the mountain. You must have returned because of some obstruction on the path caused by boulders and you thought it was caused by a landslide; but actually it was the Ghost Wolf's work.'

'But why?' Herman could not conceal his child-like curiosity.

'On the slope of the mountain, not far from the peak, there is a house. It belongs to the ghost. He lives in it.'

'I am really keen on visiting the house.' Alex's curiosity obliterated his fear.

'If you are so keen on visiting the house,

then let me tell you a very interesting thing. There is a reward to anyone who would be so brave as to go in that haunted house and click the photographs of the house and the ghost.'

'What reward?' asked the friends in unison for this was an extra incentive to the adventurous duo.



'One who does that will be handsomely rewarded by a wealthy man who believes in the existence of ghosts. And if you are going there, then do not wait for fine weather. The weather is always bad over there.'

Alex and Herman, without asking the name of the wealthy man, got into the car and retraced their way up the mountain. A couple of kilometers up the slope they found boulders blocking the path. Herman asked, 'What should we do now?'

'Hm.. There's a crowbar in the trunk of the car. Take it out. Alex was determined to overcome the hurdle.

Using the heavy crowbar, they moved the boulders one by one off the path and cleared the way for their car. A few hundred metres up the mountain, it became foggy and the visibility became very poor. They kept looking around anticipating the man-wolf to pounce on them any moment. Then they saw the abandoned mansion tucked among tall trees on their left. When they reached near the house, they got out of the car. The house looked odd with no roof on the top. There was only one window and that too was very small. The window glass was broken and the entry door was locked.

Alex said, 'This door is locked by that man-



photographs. Once again their jaws dropped when they looked at the picture the camera had captured. Only the dusty floor and a part of the cracked wall were visible in the photo – the man-wolf was missing!

The dumb-founded friends stared at each other and both in their own way tried to reason out how the image of the creature missed out from the photo. Had the man-wolf slipped away from the frame when Herman clicked the photo? Was the beast only an apparition without a tangible body?

It started raining heavily again. As the car passed a gigantic banyan tree they noticed a figure standing under it, which exactly resembled the man-wolf they had encountered up the mountain. It grinned at them and quickly walked down a dark alley and disappeared. The friends shivered and quietly drove home.

**Kloud 9**



**The author is a grade 8 student in Uttam School, Ghaziabad**

# LOOKING AT THE BRIGHTER SIDE

"Be the change you want to see"  
– Mahatma Gandhi



By Guduru Nikhita

**M**any of us think that trends change only in the fashion industry, but our vision is often myopic and is unable to see and recognize the present trend in our society.

This trend eases up our lives and has become an integral part of us. This trend is to blame the government for anything and everything. For any small problem in the society we tend to blame the government. I do accept the fact that our political system is not all that good and needs a lot of improvement. But concluding that the entire system is irreversibly rotten is wrong on our part. Before blaming the governments for everything just stop and think: "If I were in the position of the person I am blaming, would I have done what I expect him to do?"

We all first tend to blame the prime minister. But have we ever thought what a noble, educated and fair person we have for our prime minister? Aren't we luckier than many nations that are still struggling for democracy? Adding fuel to the fire are the opposition parties whose sole duty seems to be to hinder the functioning of the government, pointing out mistakes in everything the government does. Instead of doing their bit for the society, they are hindering people who are at least trying to do something for the country. The ruling party, on the other hand, instead of making the welfare of the country their main objective, invests a huge chunk of their time and energy in countering the opposition,

leading to the degradation of our country's political and economic system. This is one of the sole reasons why India is still a developing country. This is the reason why many of us regard our political system inefficient and our leaders, ineffective.

The five year term of a ruling party ends in fighting, countering, abusing and blaming the opposition. And then corruption is wide-spread which spoils our nation's future. So don't you think it's time for us to take the nation into our hands? And by the expression 'taking the country into our hands' I don't mean running the government by ourselves: what I mean is that we, the people, should unite (irrespective of our political affiliations) and help our government to function smoothly and help them improve with constructive criticism. Our traditional tools of protest – bandhs, gharaoes, strikes and vandalism – are not only ineffective but also primitive and destructive.

We should make our government strong enough to withstand all challenges from all quarters. Media should discard their political loyalties and work to inform and educate people, instead of misleading them with their biased reporting.

So let's take a pledge that we will live united and progress united.

**Cloud 9**

The author is a grade 9 student in DPS,  
Vijayawada

# WHEN THE CLOCK STRUCK NINE...

By Sakeena Tayebji



On a cobalt blue starry chilly night,  
There came a young couple, holding each other tight,  
They kissed each other on a bench under the sparkling moon light,  
And on them god showered heavenly light that was dove white.

Tom and Susie loved each other deeply,  
Like in romantic stories they settled merrily,  
They had no money and Tom took up a job that was very creepy,  
This bought danger to their lives they once spent happily.

On a dark creepy night a car drove all over town to find Tom's wife,  
There came out a man with malicious eyes holding a knife,  
And stabbed Susie, she lost her life,  
A cruel solution to an unsettled strife.

Tom was at the winter of his age,  
His eyes were red and he looked like a savage,  
He remembered the day of his marriage,  
When he took Susie away in a decorated carriage.

He decided to go to Susie and he ended his day,  
He cut his throat with a broken bottle of wine,  
Next thing we knew Tom reached Susie and beneath the ground they lay,  
And this was when the clock struck nine.

Klud 9

The poet is a grade 10 student in  
Activity High School, Mumbai

# THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD

By Sashank Rao Palety

**M**any changes are taking place in the world, in the social, economical and scientific spheres. We keep hearing about new developments and achievements in some part of the world or other, every day. In the process of globalization, the world today has become an arena for rat race and cut throat competition. The survival of the fittest seems to be the norm of the world. This norm is visible everywhere - from people standing in a queue to board a metro train to getting admission to a reputed college. There seems to be no end to it.

Schools are temples of learning. It is at school that a child gets prepared to face the real world. However, the present education system in countries such as India doesn't concentrate on developing children's personality, their communication and interpersonal skills, their research and innovative skills, and their creativity, which are much needed to enable them to be truly successful in today's world. But, rather it encourages learning by rote. This attitude of a majority of schools all over is seriously denting the child's potential and the ability to think outside the box.

Let us consider in particular the case of Japan. Japan is the fastest growing economy in Asia. Technological breakthroughs in Japan are motivating India and other countries like China to excel in the field of science and technology. This involves facing many challenges, and hence, the role of education becomes all the more important.

At the moment the sole aim of education in India is to make people knowledgeable. This attitude needs to change. Education is not about memorizing facts and figures. Education is the process by which an individual is encouraged and enabled to develop his or her potential to the fullest.

Educating a person should be simply equipping and enabling him or her to face today's challenges. Keeping in mind the socio-economic changes taking place in the world, I feel that the goals of education should be as follows:

**Education should empower people to stand up for their rights and instill in them civic sense.**

Recently in Tunisia, Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries, people successfully rose against their largely autocratic governments, demanding democracy. This was brought about by making the people aware of their rights and the fact that they can rise to their potential if given freedom, like any other successful democracy in the world. This awareness made people stand up and fight collectively against oppression and dictatorship.

Moreover, civilians can make use of the government machinery and judiciary for their welfare only if they are on familiar terms with them. And this, in turn, is possible only through a strong civic sense of the people. Therefore, education should seek to make people familiar not only with their rights but also with the working of the government and its bodies.

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### **Education should make people broadminded.**

It is very common for people from both developing and developed countries to be biased and discriminate others on the basis of gender, race, nationality, appearance, etc. Educational systems should help people to rise above all the man-made petty divisions and discriminations and help them to accept the fact that others, with all their differences, can be better than themselves as humans. Hence one of the goals of education should be to focus on developing tolerance in people and enable them to ignore differences. Moreover, education should inculcate certain moral principles in youth that foster sensitivity and conscientiousness in them.

### **Education should enable people to face the challenges in life.**

In 21st century, we face many challenges - from global warming to shrinking land resources and food shortage, to providing people with basic amenities and infrastructure and inventing vaccines and cure for cancer, AIDS, etc. Both governments and scientists are working round the clock to solve these never ending problems. The role of education here is to give the much needed problem solving skills and sufficient knowledge to the young generation of scientists, engineers, bureaucrats, politicians and so on so that they can resolve any difficulties whenever they pop up.

### **Education should make people health conscious**

Statistics suggest that over 60% of the diseases can be totally eliminated if people recognize the need for cleanliness, hygiene and immunization. Thus, another objective of education should be to make individuals aware of the need for personal hygiene, health and importance of keeping the surroundings clean.

### **Present scenario of education in India**

In my country, the condition is not very satisfactory at any level of formal education, be it primary, secondary, senior secondary and higher. The large dropout rates, scarcity of the required infrastructure and resources, including lack of trained teachers are to be blamed. There exists a disparity between the dropout rates of boys and girls. People tend to give preference to boys over girls for education. The concept of equality of

genders seems to be alien.

The dropout rates in my country are quite disheartening. At the primary level, the figure stands at 25.7, 48.8 for secondary and 61.6 at tertiary levels.

However, things are changing for better now.

Media, NGOs, social workers and the government bodies are campaigning to make people realize the importance of education. Several schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abiyan, Mid Day Meal, Madrassa, Teach India and so on have been largely successful to encourage kids to join school. Moreover, the cinema industry has also produced films and documentaries high-lighting the role of education in today's world.

Thanks to all these efforts, enrollment is rising both in schools and universities. There has also been a steady rise in enrollment for diploma courses. There are 490 universities, 20769 colleges and 205634 schools in India.

Personally I rejoice in the fact that my domestic help's daughter is pursuing engineering and children of most of her relatives go to school.

### **My vision for the future**

The government of India has realized that the country can excel internationally and become developed only if education is given the top priority. Recognizing this fact it has launched its VISION 2020. India expects to become developed and achieve 95 % literacy by 2020, by heavily spending on education, science and technology.

With the appointment of Mr. Kapil Sibal, as the human resource development minister, India has seen many radical reforms in education sector.

Our national curriculum has been modified to focus on lateral thinking, communication skills, and co-curricular activities and also promotes stress-free education. Common curriculum and entrance tests for all disciplines are also in the pipeline.

As mentioned before, the government also increased its spending on education by almost 20% to 43,324 crores per annum. Emphasis is being laid on research and development. The funding for

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research at universities and the budget for the ministry of science and technology has also been considerably raised.

In the near future I hope to see India as a developed country and a world leader in the field of education, science and technology.

I also expect to see a number of world class universities in India that will be ranked among the best in the world. At the moment India is not focusing on improving the quality of its educational institutions as much as it is focusing on the development of areas such as engineering, computer science, space research etc. In future I think India will take up emerging fields such as biotechnology, nanoscience, medical research, alternative fuels and so on.

India is slowly gaining distinction in the field of academics internationally. This, coupled with the fact that the Ministry of Education is considering the proposal of letting foreign universities to set up their branches in India, will, I believe, lead to an exchange of the best of both the worlds. This will largely benefit those Indians who could not afford to go abroad. I also believe that highly prestigious school diploma programs such as International Baccalaureate (Geneva), European Baccalaureate, GCSE (London) etc will come up in the country.

In our country, people mainly choose between two career options: engineering and medicine, irrespective of their personal interests and ambition. I think with the kind of awareness being spread about pursuing one's own aspirations, this trend will stop in the near future. However, as

new universities come up, and with a wide range of choices available to students, they will begin to opt various courses of studies, which will, in turn, bring about unprecedented developments in various fields.

There will be better schools and colleges, better and more efficient teachers and as a result, better learners. More schools will go techno savvy and more and more classrooms will be digitalized. Our school already has computers and projectors in every class to make learning fun and to bring lessons to life. The government is at present developing efficient low cost software in the best interests of the students. So, a few years down the line we may have to write tests, take notes and submit assignments on the computers (although this is already happening in some schools, including ours, I expect to see this in all the state run schools as well).

As more and more people are taking on to education these days in my country, I anticipate a complete change in the employment graphs and charts. Primary sector, which is the biggest employer, will soon be over taken by secondary and tertiary sectors.

To sum it up, education has a very important role to play in today's ever changing world. The aims and objectives should change to make our generation and the posterity capable of facing the challenges from time to time.

**Kloud 9**

**The author is a grade 12 student in  
DPS, Vijayawada**

## **LIFE IS NOT A JOKE**

It was my first day in class 8th. My teacher went around the classroom and asked each student what they wanted to be when they grew up. When she asked me I told her that I wanted to be happy. She told me I was missing the whole point of the question. I looked at her smiling for a moment and said that she was missing the whole point of life.

And the whole class became quiet. I politely added that Life wasn't about just being successful or achieving one's goals. Nor is it measured in the number of years one lived. It is the moments of happiness one enjoys that make life worth living.

**By Suman Saurav Prusty, a grade 9 student of Venkateswar English Medium School, Bhubaneswar.**

# WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF COLOURS

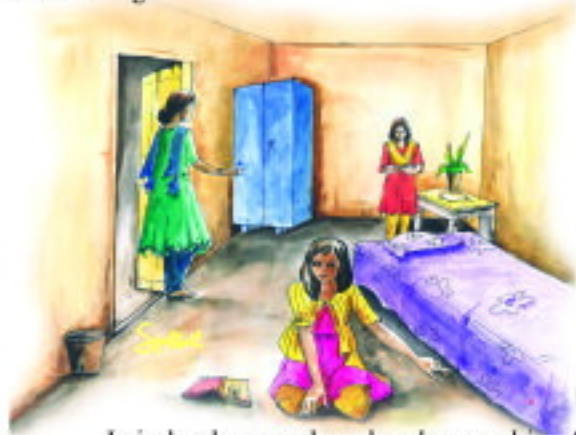
By Harsha Pattnaik



**M**om!" Mary shouted happily, "I finished my homework. Can I go and watch T.V?"

"For an hour, yes; and then you'll have your dinner and go to bed," said mom, stirring the stew on the cooker. I was sitting on the sofa, reading my book.

"Isabella, how do you read this book full of dots?" Mary said, snatching my book. I didn't see that coming.



I aimlessly waved my hands, searching for the book. "Stop flapping like a duck." Mary said and threw the book on to the floor. I heard a crashing sound. Without saying a word, I got up with my white cane and began to 'look' for it. She giggled as I searched the book on the floor.

"Oh please, Mary," Mom came near me and handed me my book. "Stop troubling your little sister."

"This blind pup is not my sister." Mary

retorted.

"Enough! I won't tolerate this kind of behaviour towards your little sister. Go watch TV for some time or go to your room." Mom raised her voice, "Now!"

I heard footsteps running up the stairs. I tugged Mom and she wiped the tears which trickled down my eyes.

"Is my face blue now," I asked curiously, "because water is blue?"

"No dear." She hugged me, "Your face is a beautiful shade of rosy red with cute freckles on your nose."

"How do I look, mamma?" unconsciously I was fishing for compliment, "Am I pretty?"

She held my hand and softly wrote something in my palm with her finger. Then she held me close to her and whispered, "You'll know soon!"

"Mamma, does Mary look like a witch? You know they are very ugly with long crooked nose and wrinkled skin. And their hair is really dirty!" I giggled "Because Mary behaves like one?"

Mom softly patted my back and said, "No, sweetheart. She is as pretty as you are."

I never got disheartened when someone belittled me or treated me badly because that's the way I had always been treated for as long as I could remember. I tapped my white cane and climbed up the stairs. Mom had told me that there was a mirror on the wall outside Mary's room and that we could

see what we looked like in a mirror. I felt along the wall and slowly moved towards the mirror.

I found it soon. I touched the smooth surface of the mirror. I knew my reflection was in it. What did I look like? My hair was brown and my eyes were blue - mum had said so. Then what did 'brown' and 'blue' look like? How were those colours different from 'white' and 'pink'? I smiled in contemplation as the witch entered the scene.

"What am I seeing?" she said stressing the word 'seeing'. "Is our blind pup looking at herself?"

I felt my cheeks burn. I was blushing in helpless fury. My cheeks must have turned red. I turned around and hurried to my room. I locked the door and jumped into my bed. I didn't know whether the light in my room was on or not and I didn't bother to check. Light made no difference in my life. I felt my eyes burn and tears rolled out of them. I tried to wail but I heard Mary talking to someone on phone. I pressed my face into the pillow and let the tears flow.

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"Isa" I heard my Mom's kind voice, "Happy Birthday!"

I got up quickly and rubbed my eyes. Was it my birthday? Yes, it was. I had completely forgotten about it. I was turning 10 that day. A big girl. I smiled and stretched my arms to touch my Mom. She hugged me, "Quickly get ready, I'll give you a surprise gift today."

I quickly got ready and rushed downstairs. Mary was snoring in her room. I giggled as I ate my club sandwich. Mom was talking with Dad over the phone. She switched the speaker on, "Happy Birthday my princess!" he wished me happily. "Sorry, I am on a business trip. I've sent you a gift for your birthday!" I thanked him. After talking for a long time, Mom hung up the phone and asked me to wear the dress Dad had sent me. I rushed to my room along with Mom and opened the box that Mom gave me. I caressed it gently. It was satin soft and had silk laces. I asked, "What colour is it?" Mom giggled and said, "It's a secret." She braided my hair and we ran downstairs.

She helped me get into the car and started driving. After an hour or so, we stopped. Mom helped me out of the car and held my hand. She helped me climb a

few flights of stairs and guided me into a room. They made me lie on a bed and covered me with a cotton sheet, crumbling my dress completely. I could hear a bustle of activity and a gruff male voice giving instructions to some women. I felt anxious. Mom held my hand and then I felt something prickling me.

"Ouch!" I exclaimed and in a few minutes my body became lighter and lighter and I drifted into total oblivion.

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I was feeling dizzy. I tried to get up. My head was hurting and my eyes were burning. Mom grasped my hand and helped me sit up. I tried to feel my eyes, but balls of cotton were stuck to them.

"Mom, what is happening to me?" I cried, terrified by the strange sensations I had never experienced before.

"Lie still for a while, darling. You had a surgery in your eyes and you are going to the beautiful world very soon. Later I learned that I had what they call a corneal transplantation that my parents had arranged for me.



My whole body shivered with excitement and gratitude for my parents. A couple of hours later the senior surgeon and a few assistants walked into my room. The surgeon with the gruff voice slowly removed the cotton balls from my eyes. Then the kind doctor softly asked me to open my eyes slowly.

The light in the room was too intense for me



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bear and it stung my eyes. He patted me on my cheek and asked me whom I wanted to see first.

“My mamma, of course. I cried out instantly, forgetting all the pain and irritation I felt in my eyes.

Then the images in the room became clearer, particularly of the one who was sitting on the bed right in front of me. I burst out in tears and hugged my mom with all my might.

“So, is my little princess ready to enjoy the world?” I heard Dad’s voice. He was always kind to me. Every time I heard his voice, I felt a surge of happiness.

In a few days I began to identify people and objects and also developed a clear sense of distance between me and them. One day a long mirror was fixed in my room and my mom led me to a point in front of it and I saw myself for the first time. It was me! I looked very much like my sister! Mom, Dad and Mary were standing behind me. Mom was a really pretty woman who looked a lot like me. She

had golden hair, shining brightly and blue eyes which looked like mine. She was like an angel, as described in story books. Dad was a tall man. He somehow looked handsome to me; even though he was the first man I had ever looked at. He had brown hair and light brown eyes. At first, I didn’t recognize the colours, but later Mom explained them to me. Mary didn’t look like a witch at all. She was as beautiful as Mom. She winked at me and said, “Every princess needs a villain like me. Sorry Isa that I used to tease you. You are truly my little sister and ever will be.” She was angelic. How could I ever imagine she was a witch? She blushed hard as she hugged me. I hugged her back.

“Mom, what did you write in my palm the day before my birthday?”

Her eyes brimmed with tears of joy and she said, “I wrote: Welcome to the world of colours.”

**Kloud 9**

**The author is a grade 8 student in DAV Public School, Raja Bagicha, Cuttack**

# SUMMER IN BANGKOK

By Manav Varma



I truly believe in what Mark Twain had to say about Travel. "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you did not do than the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from safe harbours. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover." There can be no excitement greater than travelling and I am one of the fortunate few whose family believes in the same.

Bangkok, known in Thai as "Krung Thep Maha Nakhon" or "City of Angels" was our summer destination this year. It was truly a remarkable, one of a kind experience that I will never forget. Bangkok quenches the thirst of everyone, providing wide-ranging attractions for people like pilgrims, tourists or the new generation tech savvy guys. We took a little bite from every platter, savouring the varying experiences - visiting temples, cultural fests and so on. During my short stay there, I realized that there was much more to this truly cosmopolitan city than meets the eye. We had a very comfortable stay at Holiday Inn, but we hardly spent time there as we were rushing around like headless chickens to cover all the famous hotspots in the limited time we had!

Think Thai and what pops into anybody's mind is its unique cuisine. Chinese and Indian influences are prominent but they still have an individuality of their own. Every dish is a combination of flavours - hot, sour, tangy, sweet, and salty and there's enough variety to satisfy any palette. I could not get enough of it, in spite of



having it coming out of my ears, by the end of my holidays. Street food is at its peak and extremely popular.

We kicked off our tour with a predictable tour of temples. There are a number of Buddhist temples scattered all over the city but we opted to see the most famous ones. The Temple of the Reclining Buddha is just awesome where we walked in to see Buddha in a relaxed posture depicting his entrance into nirvana. The solid gold figure, about 46 meters long, is definitely worth a visit and I was amazed by the sheer size of his feet,

each of which is around 3 meters in length. The Emerald Buddha carved out of a single piece of jade is one of the most revered idols here and is truly majestic in appearance. It is located inside the Grand Palace which is the official home of the Kings of Siam. The traditional Thai architecture caught my eye, with its intricate carvings and beautiful murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana in Thai style! My personal favourite was the one of Kumbhakaran in deep slumber!



The temple of the Golden Buddha is made of solid gold weighing around 5.5 tons and it is amazing to see that there is no armed security or people frisking us while entering it. All the temples have a similar kind of design, with its carved jewels and sparkly finish, and are all breathtakingly beautiful!



Since my cousins and I belonged to the 'bacha' party, our parents had decided to do some of it for us and some of it for themselves – I mean the holiday itinerary there. After a whole morning of visiting temples, it was our turn to have our share of fun! It was time to visit The Siam Ocean

World, at Siam Paragon which happens to be a posh mall and one of the biggest malls in Asia. It stretches over a large area and is packed to the brim with fun activities. It is divided into zones and each has a particular theme like The Deep Reef, The Living Ocean Zone, The Rocky Shore etc. Underwater tunnels where you can see the marine creatures staring at you through the glass, rides on glass bottomed boats where, if you are lucky, you can see a shark underfoot, and shark feeding sessions where the divers show off their daring (where, if you are brave enough, you can dive in and swim with rays and other fish!) were just another few highly exciting and exhilarating experiences. An evening full of fun and, of course, educational too!

One morning, at the break of dawn, Mom pulled us off the cozy bed. Bleary-eyed, I wondered what was in store for us and, though I wasn't too happy at being up that early, I must admit that the floating markets of Thailand were worth visiting before the crowds came in. Colourfully clad merchants chattering away in their high pitched sing-song voices, paddling canoes laden with tropical fruit, vegetables, fresh coconut water and loads of local food navigated their way through congested canals. People are expected to bargain and create a lot of noise. It is a colourful sight but one needs to turn a blind eye to the filth and chaos around.

And now for the best part of our holiday! Dream World, a theme park, was one of my



favourites. Stretching as far as the eye could see in all directions, it never ceased to offer enjoyment during the whole day we spent there. A place to unwind

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where children go haywire and adults let the little child in them take over! A few rides, like the Hurricane and the Sky coaster, Super Splash and White Water Rapids were visited over and over again. There was also a mini train that took you on a panoramic tour round around the whole area.

My kid sister loved The Giant's House where everything was "giant sized". There were cartoon characters strolling around. Another attraction was a miniature versions of the 7 wonders of the world. The day ended with a grand finale where we saw a spectacular Hollywood action sequence packed with live stunts and a lot of stage effects. I wonder why we cannot have such a place here in India. Imagine a typical Bollywood action scene with a catchy item number thrown in for effects!

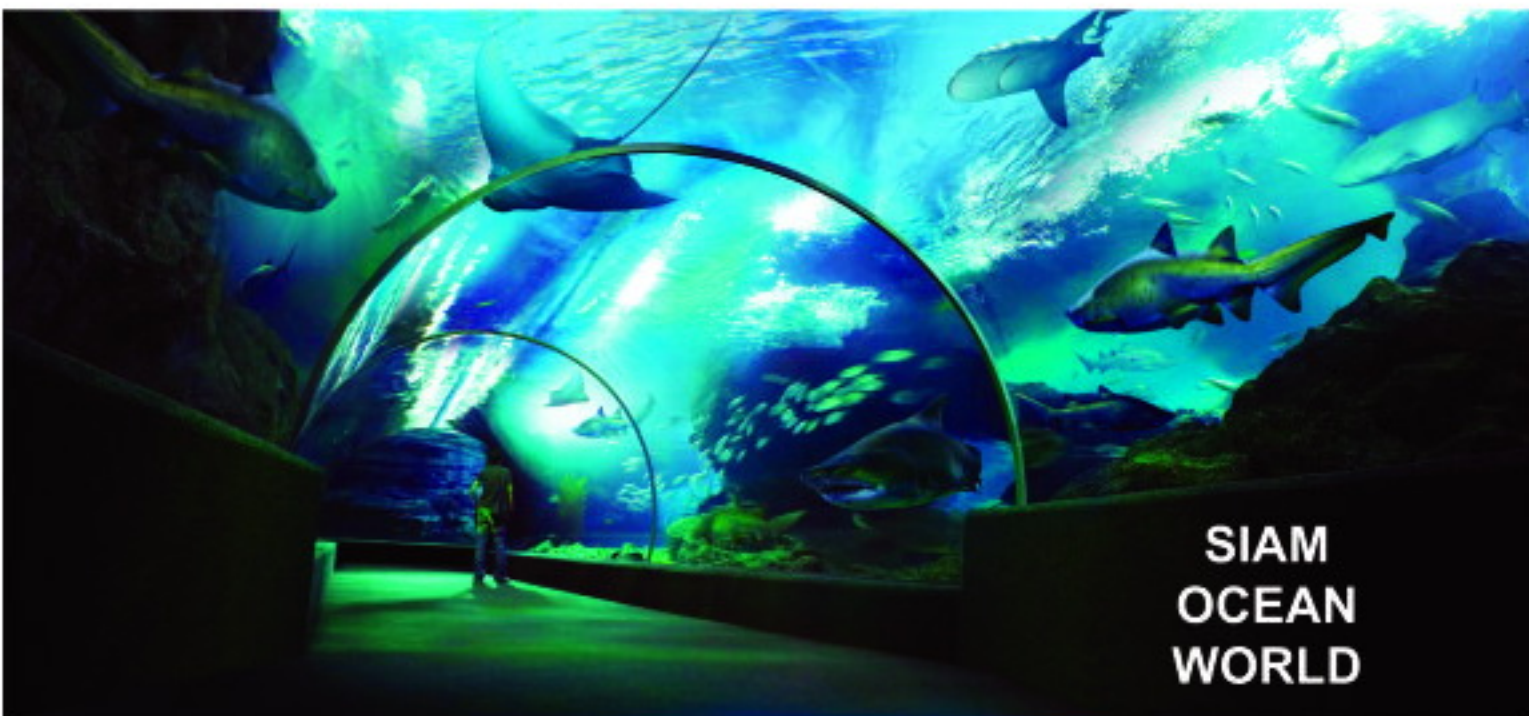
The icing on the cake was a spectacular stage show in the night at Siam Niramit. One portion of this place had models of the olden Thai houses where we could walk around and get a feel of Thailand of the past era. The cultural light and

sound show awed the audience at every turn with its breathtaking special effects, creating an overall magical ambience. It depicted the history of Thailand in a unique blend of graceful dance and lilting music staged by over 150 performers and included history passing down through many generations of Siam - The enchanted Kingdom! There was even a live elephant walking down the aisle for effects.

All in all, Bangkok was a fantastic experience for me. It has always been famous for its nightlife and shopping. But I must say that it not only caters to grownups but also to the demands of the younger tourists. So the next time your parents ask you where you want to go, shout out "Thailand" as you will never regret visiting this colourful place, made all the more vivid by the multi-coloured taxis and *tuk-tuks* in neon green, bubblegum pink, aquamarine blue etc!

**Klout 9**

**The author is a grade 10 student in Bhavans Rajaji Vidyashram, Chennai**



# WAR

By Amita Rachel Thomas

They say it's for the good, they say it's for the unborn  
They say it's for our pride, they ask us to take it on.  
They say though it brings cold winds, it won't last that long.  
They say it's for peace, but they are so wrong.

They- those asinine people, who are not so very immune,  
Tend to catch that "WAR" flu and dance to its tune.  
This argus-eyed virus once afoot makes the host run --  
Run around spreading the flu until what has to be done has  
been done.

In all the commotion some desperados rise  
Saying that by killing others we can preserve our own lives.  
Rather if these grownups listen to us kids- no, future leaders,  
Like the ancient times, there would be more peace believers.

They ought to know that it is worthless -- absolutely stupid.  
They ought to know not to hate, oh please come to earth  
dear cupid.  
They ought to know to know that they are tearing the  
wonderful memories of our childhood  
They ought to know our feelings, if only they could.

Kloud 9

The poet is a grade 9 student in Padma Seshadri Bala  
Bhavan School, Chennai



# LIVING IN THE DIGI-WORLD

By Devapreeti Sharma



**I**magine billions of people living together on a tiny planet- the earth must be a friendly place.

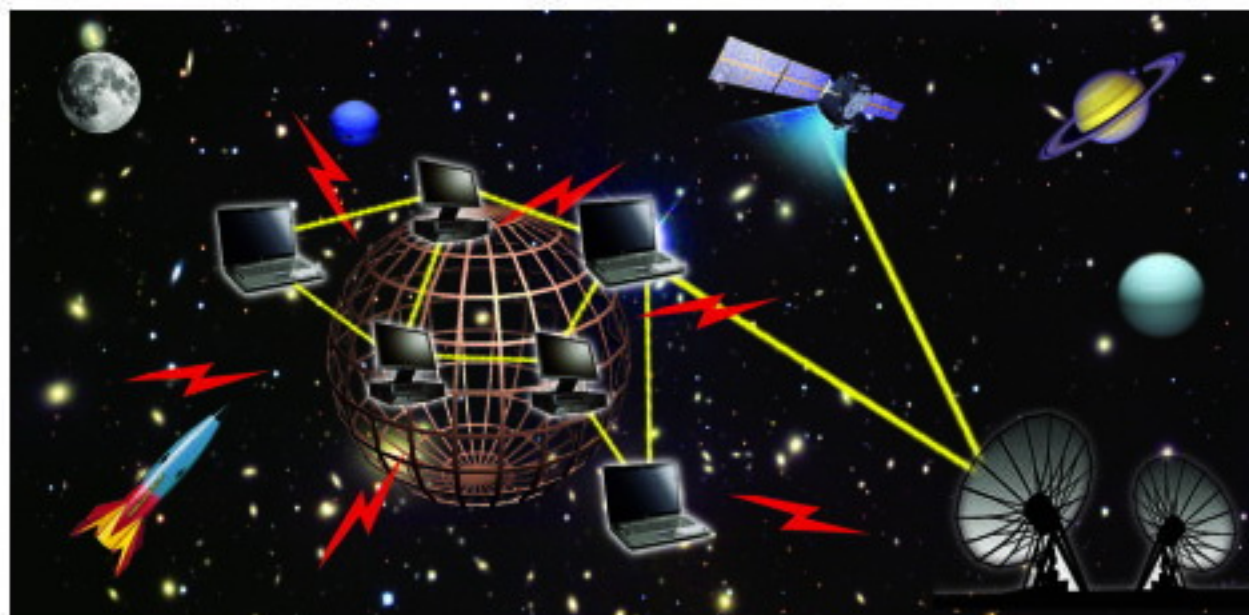
But no, it is not that friendly. Rather, it is digital. My explanation is that the 21<sup>st</sup> century globe is ever more ordered as a 'network' where all can be connected. There was a time when they used pigeons for sending messages. And it took ages for letters to reach their addressees.

Celebrities would make public appearances to communicate with the mass. Nowadays, they 'tweet' – and the world knows.

Computing isn't computing anymore; it is living. This is exactly what Digi-world is.

'Digi's start our day today. Every morning, we wake to the Digi-Alarm, not to the cuckoo. Breakfast isn't really mum-made anymore; it is microwave-made. At school, it is the computer that aids the librarian ma'am in lending us the books. During history, it is the projector in the Digi-Class that introduces us to the French Revolution. When notes are to be exchanged, it is better to use the pen-drive than to carry volumes of note-pages to school. And what can be better than to submit our assignments in soft copies?

This is digi-living. Digi-living is collecting and storing all our intellectual assets in bits and bytes. It doesn't mean people abandon all their



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material possessions and become monks. It does put stuff in its place and make the world more orderly. Instead of regarding the collection as useless junk, digi-living sees our possessions as functional necessities- not as fillers for a boring life.

On second thoughts though, digi-living, convenient as it is, may not be a healthy living. Indeed, it saves time and, let's say, energy as well. But it costs us our health. All kinds of physical ailments, starting from simple irritation to tumors, can be caused by excessive use of the 'digies'. This apart, digi-living tends to make people robotic. Get up, gather the 'digies' and start work. If there's time left, get some sleep. This is the mantra in today's modern society. People don't have time to visit their friends and relatives. Why visit when you can call them and exchange pleasantries in a few minutes?

Many people don't even write anymore. Why write when you can type? What about the art of longhand writing? What about the pleasure of hugging your friend after a gap of ten years? When someone is sick, they need your presence and moral support, not your impersonal, bone dry e-get-well-soon cards. Doesn't a sweet smile, a friendly pat or an embrace from a loved one enrich our lives? Hang-outs with school buddies and then, fifteen years later, get-togethers with them are that which add meaning to our lives.

Because, at the end of the day, it is more about people, not about wires.

**Kloud 9**

**The author is a grade10 student in St. Mary's English High School, Guwahati**



# MY SOUL OTHER HALF

By Purmasha Mishra

Sometimes on some fine day  
I wonder, standing at the bay  
About the reasons the Almighty may  
Have made my life your way.

It may have been that you descended  
Down to this earth because God intended  
To make one pure soul fragmented  
And send one half down to  
flourish until the other ascended



It seems like his little idea was fruitful  
'Cause it's you who made my world beautiful  
Since the day I was an infant, innocent and truthful  
And for that I feel elated & grateful.

**Kloud 9**

The poet is a grade 9 student in DPS Kalinga, Cuttack



# THE INSEPARABLE TRIO

By Raj Kumar Sah



In a remote village in Arunachal Pradesh, in north-eastern India, there lived two boys, Golu and Dholu. They were the best of friends.

One day, Golu and Dholu went to the river near their village to have a bath. Suddenly, they spotted a big brown snake in the water. At once they took to their heels, for it was a very poisonous snake.

Golu rushed into the nearby forest. He feared that the snake would follow him, so he ran as fast as his legs could carry him. The forest was very dense, and vast. Golu had never ventured deep into the forest before, and so, before he knew it, he had lost his way.

Dholu waited for a while at the edge of the forest, hoping that Golu would emerge soon. But when there was no sign of Golu, Dholu went into the forest to look for him. Night fell and still Dholu was unable to trace Golu, so he settled under a large tree and fell asleep.

It was only the next morning that Dholu was able to find Golu. How relieved was he to be able to locate his friend! He had almost given up hope of finding him. The two friends then walked back to their village. It took them several hours to reach their homes.

It so happened that a few days later a new family arrived in the village. They had a boy called Pelu, who was roughly the same age as Dholu and Golu. Pelu knew nobody in the village, and so when he met Dholu and Golu, he said to them, 'I have no friends here. But I love being with boys my age. Will

you be my friends, please?'



'Of course,' said Dholu and Golu in unison.

Dholu, Golu and Pelu soon became an inseparable trio. They did all things together. They went to school together, and there they sat at the same desk. After school they played together in the village field and bathed in the village pond. On week-ends, they would go up into the mountains together to gather fruits and wild vegetables.

One day, when they were ambling through the forest they spotted a giant yellow fruit hanging from a large tree. They had never seen this sort of fruit before. The moment their eyes fell on the fruit

# DIAMANTE

By Karubaki, Neha & Sampad Nanda



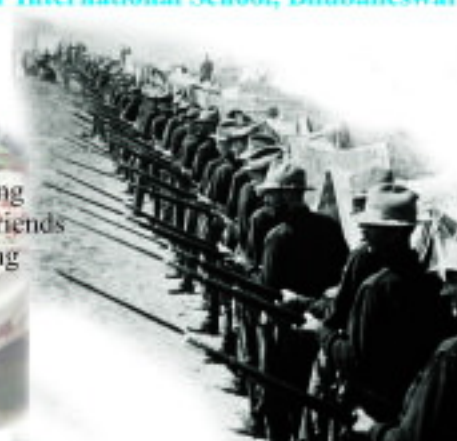
Baby  
Small cute  
Laughing crawling playing  
Climbing falling then walking running  
Thinking learning growing  
Big smart  
Adult

The poet is a grade 8A student in  
KiT International School, Bhubaneswar



Attack  
Fearful, dangerous  
Seeking , fighting , annihilating  
Defeat your enemies, shielding friends  
Preserving , restricting , caring  
Brave, protective  
Defence

The poet is a grade 9B student in  
KiT International School, Bhubaneswar



Diamante is a 7 line poem having one, two and three words in the first, second and third lines respectively. The last 3 lines have three, two and one word/s (as if they are a 'mirror reflection' of the first three lines). The fourth line (centre line) may have four to seven words.

Usually, the words in the top and bottom lines are nouns, those in the second and sixth lines are adjectives and the ones in the third and fifth lines are all verbs. The poems usually show a reversal of emotions or images as one reads from the first to the last line.

kloud 9

# A LITTLE PRINCESS

*A Little Princess*



FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Reviewed by Aparna Anandan

**A** Little Princess' by Frances H Burnett remains one of the most popular children's fiction even a century after it was first published in 1905. A Little Princess is a dramatic, heart wrenching tale that revolves around the childhood of Sara Crewe the protagonist of the novel. She is a child full of imagination and whimsical thoughts and she always dreams or thinks. Her mother passes away after giving birth to her and she is close to her rich, petting father 'Captain Crewe' who fulfils all her wishes without a second thought. At the age of 7, she leaves India for England for her education and is forced to live away from her doting father. Nevertheless she is treated as if she were a princess. She is given fine clothes, the largest room in the seminary and even a personal attendant since she is very rich.

Her dream-like life is suddenly torn apart by her father's sudden demise. After her father's death, her seminary headmistress, Miss Minchin, has to pay for her expenses out of her own pocket. As a result Sarah begins to be ill treated at her own boarding school. She is shabbily dressed and is never given enough to eat and she is forced to discontinue her. And from a pampered, well-protected, well looked after daughter of a millionaire, her status descends to the level of an errand girl who has to do all sorts of menial work and does not have a penny in her name. To get away from her miseries Sara often fancies herself as a princess and her experiences teach her that it is who she is on the inside and that counts much more than anything else.

Years pass by and Sara is finally rescued and transformed from rags to riches. The astounding twist in the tale at the end is one of the most well written parts of the book. The only debatable development in the plot is when Mr. Crewe sends off his 7 year old daughter away from his personal custody to live in England because he thinks that Indian climate is bad for children to grow up in. The pretext the writer invents to wean out a helpless child from her loving parent is not very convincing. The Little Princess is considered an extended version of 'Sarah Crewe' which was also written by Frances H Burnett. The only difference between the two books is the fact that several new characters are introduced in 'The Little Princess'. The narrative style that sustains readers' curiosity to know the fate of poor Sarah Crewe is one of the main reasons that leaves you hooked to the book. Frances H Burnett's ability to connect with her readers and portray deeply emotional scenes is truly remarkable. It is perhaps due to these reasons that she has carved out her place in the hearts of avid readers of English classics.

Based on a 2007 online poll, the National Educational Association named 'The Little Princess' one of its "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children." It was also chosen as one of the "Top 100 Chapter Books" of all time in a 2012 poll by School Library Journal. The 266 page book comes in hardcover as well in paperback, and the first edition published by Warne has an attractive cover design showing a shadow of a young girl holding a doll.

Kloud 9

Aparna is a student in grade 9 of Our Own English High School, Sharjah, UAE

# CANDLE DROPS

By Amal Prashand



As I was studying,  
I decided to take a break,  
I watched the candle drops,  
Dripping down the candle.

After it fell into the stand,  
I watched it as it was;  
It was hard and cold,  
And dead.

My imagination took flight,  
As I saw the candle burning;  
Struggling to give light,  
With all its might.

I began to think of the light,  
In the darkness of night.  
Life is a representation,  
Of the wax candle.

We should keep burning,  
To remove the gloom around.  
Bringing joy to others' lives,  
Till we burn out and extinguish.

**Kloud 9**

The poet is a grade 8 student in  
Our Own English High School, Abu Dhabi

# FRIENDS

By Tanvi Kandalla



Friends are kind,  
If you're mean they don't mind;  
They're always by your side,  
Even if the gap between you is very wide;  
Whether far or near,  
The message is clear:  
Friends are always there by your side.

By Tanvi Kandalla

# HOBBIES

Whether it's reading books  
Or hiding in small nooks,  
A hobby is a hobby;  
Even playing in the lobby.

Watching trains  
Or playing games;  
Playing in the park  
Watching dogs bark  
Even playing in the lobby with Bobby  
Is a hobby...



Kloud 9

The poet is a grade 5 student in Birla Public School Doha, Qatar

# OUT OF THE ORDINARY LEAGUE

By Poonam Jangir

**A**t dawn, she sat near the window admiring the beauty of the rising sun. She had another life growing inside her—a life that the doctors had advised her to destroy. But she was determined not to let go off the fruit of her love for her husband. The doctors said that the child in her would be a burden, would be abnormal, retarded for life, would not live long, and would be 'different'. But she entertained no thoughts of aborting the foetus and gave me birth.

My very beginning could have been my end, but I chanced to survive. The only hindrance to my survival was what made me different from the majority. Immediately after I was born, I was diagnosed with Down syndrome and had a hole in my heart. I don't know what impact it had on the feelings of my parents then, but when I looked at them later, I felt like they saw their whole life in mine. I grew up like a normal kid, but at a slower pace. The hole in my heart got closed as my organs enlarged. I began to talk at the age of 3.

My world revolved only around my parents. They never took me to our relatives or neighbors. They would always say that they simply wanted just three of us. My mother left her job to look after me and she would play with me and make me laugh all day long. My father would come home and entertain me with his playful behavior. Their unconditional love for me kept me

on. With them time just flew away. My mother would tell me bed-time stories every night and my father would enact them. They taught me to be a humane and helped me to be positively different from ordinary people. They kept me warm with their hugs all night.



My parents loved me so much that they didn't want to send me to school. They thought that people would hurt my feelings. But they had to let me go to be independent. So I was sent to a nearby Special Needs School where I found children like me I had rarely seen. That was the moment when I realized that it wasn't just me, but there were many others who wanted to be out of the light, away from the so called normal people. Normal people can be abnormally hurtful. They would stare at me like I was the only thing their eyes could see; they touched my face and some of them called me 'retarded'. And I could never explain to them that I was just different and that I was

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only relatively slow at tasks.

I used to sink into the depths of sorrow for being different and for being unacceptable to the normal people. I would envy their lives like ordinary girls do. They looked their best and people did not stare at them the way they stared at me. They had their best friends, close friends and good friends. They could do things I wished I could do with a lot more ease. But I would console myself thinking that there was a reason for being called 'Special'. And I waited to discover that 'special' thing in me.

After a few days at school, I made friends with a boy called Mahim. He was a hyperactive kid who enjoyed jumping like crazy on the trampoline all day long when I sat quietly building blocks. We would scribble on sheets and draw each other's faces that would resemble oranges with black spots for eyes and squashed strawberries for lips. We always skipped the nose because we had discovered Voldemort of Harry Potter. After being my only friend for three years at school, one day he suddenly left for another town. I couldn't even bid him goodbye.

When I was seven years old I had a deeply hurting encounter with a woman. I loved to apply make-up to my face and my parents bought me tiny makeup kits. One day a friend of my mother visited us. When she noticed my painted face, she remarked that one needed to be pretty to wear makeup. The moment she left, I burst into tears and threw away my makeup kit. I often ran into people who would hurt me mentally. They made me spend my childhood crying almost every night. My parents never knew this - I never told them for if they had, they would have been deeply hurt. I kept my feelings to myself till I was 14 because till then I barely had any friends.

My education moved on to a higher level now. I shifted from playschool to Crafts room. It was specially for girls. I had 5 girls learning with me there. Two of them named Ayeen and Labeena

became my close friends, when the other three, Isabella, Nadeema and Zeena became our good friends. We were taught how to make pillow covers with beautiful embroidery and jewelry with beads and metals. We also learned to print designs on clothes, to make attractive book covers and delicious cookies and traditional sweets. Our work was what represented us. We would sell what we created in fares and those items were always sold out.

I was being prepared for my future at the Special needs school. When I was 17 I had completed my education at school. I had only choices in front of me but no options. Employers wouldn't employ people like me very easily. They hesitated at the thought that I was not normal, instead of smiling at the fact that I was 'special'

It was a deeply frustrating phase I was passing through but with the support of Ayeen and Labeena I was able to control my emotions and stay sane. We started our own baking shop where we didn't sell the items to the customers directly. We employed one person who would sell those items to the customers. We carried out the baking in the preparation room. None of us liked people staring at us and treating us any different. The shop was a huge hit in the locality. We were able to make enormous profit but we had to sell our business after three years. Ayeen left for England with her family. We never met again. Labeena got married to Salim, a close friend of hers, who was a normal person. He accepted her for what she was. I attended their marriage. People there behaved normally with me because they knew I was Labeena's friend and knew how to treat me. After her wedding I became lonely. I had no close friends around. I was at a loss and wondered what was in store for me.

I spent most of my time with my parents. I got a marriage proposal from Rafat Aladeen Sultan who was Ali Hafzar Hameez's son. They knew that my father had a daughter of marriageable age. What they didn't know was that I had been diagnosed with Down syndrome which, at that time, I myself wasn't aware

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of. My parents never explained the gravity of my condition to me. If I had known how different I was from those normal people, I would have rejected the marriage proposal right away.

Rafat wanted to meet me because according to him a photo wouldn't say it all. He came to my home with his father to meet me. He saw me and he kept staring at me. I was starting to lose my temper but I was trained enough to try and control it. Both the father and son could not conceal their disappointment and complained that they had been tricked. They left without accepting our hospitality. I took all the food that had been served for them to my room and locked myself in. My parents understood that I needed to be alone for a while. I ate when I was depressed and so I ate all the food that was to be eaten by the guests. Next day morning my parents came to my room and tried to console me and cheer me up, but that was not necessary because I had almost completely forgotten the previous day's humiliation due to my short-term memory.



A few days later I went to an Art Gallery where one painting arrested my attention. It was a painting with a colorful background and a smiley face that had no nose. I ran my hands over it when someone touched my shoulder from behind. I turned around to see a young man gazing at me, with whom I sensed some strange resemblance. I learned that it was he who had created that painting and to my surprise I found myself gazing back at him. But then I apologized to him and walked away. I looked around at a few more

paintings and then went home.

There was an organization of people diagnosed with Down syndrome created by the parents of a kid who had the disorder. Here different people with this problem met regularly in order to support one another and to try to find life partners for themselves. One day my parents took me to the meeting where I met the young man I had encountered at Art Gallery. I was able to recollect it because he was painting a face without a nose, there too. This time he was painting Voldemort. I asked him if I could join him and he was more than happy to allow me. We painted an abstract piece with colors splattered all over the canvas. He said that his name was Malin or something. I began to like him and, I guess, so did he me. My parents took notice of that silent bond between us and decided to get us married.

We got engaged. On the day of our engagement my mother showed us a few pictures. One of those was of my only childhood companion and me throwing pieces of cake at each other's face, taken on my birthday. Our names, Mahim and Ayah, were written behind the photograph. My fiancé and I pointed at each other's name and laughed. Both of us were thrilled by the fortunate stroke of serendipity. So his name was not Malin. He was the only guy friend I had ever known and would ever know in my life! It was an overwhelming moment for us. And we rejoiced in our togetherness like any normal people could possibly do in theirs.

Our wedding was solemnized on a grand scale; it reflected our fairy-tale like story. The most precious gift I received on my wedding day was the diary my mom had been keeping with meticulous accounts of the series of unforgettable episodes in my life, most of which only made me cry - episodes that had been completely erased from my memory. It was the words my mom had scribbled in the diary that later enabled me to write my story. And that diary is my only window to my past. We received the blessings of our parents and settled down with my parents.



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My mother passed away a week after giving me the diary – the chronicle of my miserable life until I was married to Mahim. He admired my love for my mom who always sheltered me under her wings and counted the moments of my life the way one would count diamonds. After the parents of both of us passed away, we still had each other. We never had a child. Well, it is not that a couple with Down syndrome

could not have one. But we did not want to. I did not mind not having one. Mahim's love made me discover how 'Special' I was - my life was. I had everything I wanted and much more...in his soul.

**Kloud 9**

**The author is a grade 12 student in Sharjah Indian School, UAE**

## **SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS BEAUTY**

I was standing on my terrace on a Saturday evening watching the sun faint behind the russet western clouds. The sky looked like a painter's palette splattered with different colors. It looked absolutely beautiful.

Suddenly, in the beautiful natural setting a factory started puffing out clouds of black smoke which covered half of the sky from my sight. Annoyed, I looked down at a gurgling and choking drain which had once been a beautiful stream full of fish and cool, refreshing water. I yearned for those days when I was little and used to play in this very stream.

I closed my eyes for a minute and thought of the culprits who caused this horrifying disaster and realized that it was we, the humans, that were destroying it. Even now the garbage I had thrown away would be dumped into this little stream or burnt to add to all the smoke up there in the sky.

We should make a difference.

We should change our ways or we would leave behind our beautiful planet a ruined mess for our posterity – an ugly disgusting mess that they will never be able to clean up. We know our mistakes, but do we do anything to mend our ways? We must save and protect this life giving planet which suffers a lot as we drain and destroy it. Each and every one of us should do our own bit to preserve this planet and revive it to its former glory and splendor.

Let us think about all this and about what we could do to save the earth. If you feel that whatever you do would be insignificant, think again as each and every raindrop is necessary to form a beautiful rainbow.

**By Desdemona Praylin Durai, a grade 8 student of Aga Khan Academy, Hyderabad**

# LET THE LIGHT SHINE ON

By Laksmipriya Venkatesan

**E**mbarrassment. Humiliation. Shame - these were the essence of my life. A short, plump, slightly overweight girl in hideous clothes. My entire life has been a series of disgraceful incidents which left me deeply sensitive to the feelings of others around me. I attended an educational institution that modern people call a school where I was part of the walls and other inanimate objects, unnoticed and ignored till I was targeted by the popular crew, who derived immense pleasure from scorning and teasing me, treating me with contempt and derision. I was always the Odd Kid Out whom nearly everyone saw as 'peculiar'. Clearly, never accepted, I remained a misfit - an outsider.

One of the most magical and extraordinary days in a girl's life is her sixteenth birthday, and it was on that day my life turned upside down. It was magical in a way I had never imagined. It was the day I acquired a new ability - a mysterious vision - to see people, not as what they presented themselves to be on the façade, but what they truly were: I could see the Light in people. The purer their soul, the whiter was the glow of their spirit.

I had always loved reading. Fantasy is my favorite genre. Unsurprisingly, my obsession with fantasy caused me to see monsters and devils lurking in every shadow. But my new vision

taught me that evil is not a colossal, hulking creature with slobbering fangs and unholy screeching. A universal force it is, entrenched in all of us - in every living being created. It twists the mind of the weak that yield and fall prey to it, while those of strong minds resist its pull. I could see those few pure unstained souls whose essence shone white, and those dark murky souls burning with hatred, jealousy, rage, greed, revenge.

I felt the evil slowly overwhelming the good. With the passage of time the white souls dwindled. I sensed them struggling against the lure of evil, but not many prevailed. Darkness left none unscathed. The world was a mixture of good and evil, present in all in different proportions, providing a dark undertone to the Light of their life. My power developed and I felt the aura of evil pressing around me, loathing my presence, considering ways to exterminate me.

Then one day I had an incredible vision. Being used to the presence of the Darkness around me, I was startled to see an apparition glowing pure white amidst the servants of evil. His entire being seemed to be composed of pure light. The very air around him lit up with the innate goodness which I felt emanating from him. Instantly the Light in the people around me flared brighter, overwhelming the Darkness for a moment. I stared at the figure who felt quite familiar, though I knew there was no earthly way I could have met him before. He met my shocked

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gaze with a kindly smile and said, 'We have work to do, my little friend.'

It was such an extraordinary pronouncement that it riveted me to the wave like quality of his voice as though his words floated in air.

'Who are you?' My voice came out in a whisper.

'Don't you know?' he asked. He chuckled at my bewildered expression and said 'I am the Light.'

'Kind of obvious' I muttered. 'Uh ...Mr. Light, are you like sunlight or moonlight or...'

He chortled and spoke majestically 'I am the Light, the good in all. I stand for hope, love, ethics, morals, honesty and everything that is good.' His form wavered. 'This is just a manifestation. Light and Darkness are two forces of the Universe. Once in a while, Darkness threatens to swallow the Light. It has to be pushed back. The Universe works on a balance between Light and Darkness, the good and evil. Neither can be destroyed nor contained.'

'So evil is essential for the proper functioning of the Universe?' I asked, confused by this analogy.

'You hit the nail right on the head. Well, at least as long as both are in proportion. But the present dark times signify the tipping of the scales in favor of evil. It has to be subdued. It has to be surmounted for achieving a balance.'

'By me?' I choked.

His luminous eyes glinted compassionately as he nodded, 'You have the power of my daughter, who was a victim of Darkness. Channel it. Use it to gather the Light, to defeat evil.'

'I am possessed by a victim of Darkness. Wonderful!' I muttered sarcastically.

'No, not possessed. You have the powers of my daughter; her life-force is in you too. She

was the apple of my eye. Alas, her fate had other plans for her. Evil succeeded in eliminating her. It couldn't tolerate her pure presence. Darkness has no offspring. It just multiplies itself, feeding on despair and hate. Nevertheless, Light doesn't die, so she still lives on. Her spirit lives on, spreading good where it is most needed.'

'Oh!' I mumbled, not knowing what to say.

'Anyway, good luck,' he wished and vanished, melting into tiny beams of Light.

I had no inkling as to how to go about my quest. After Mr.Light's appearance, the Light in everyone grew stronger. I used it to augment the Light and shield them from the Darkness infiltrating into their minds. Evil sensed my intentions and I felt its rage. I was terribly frightened but did not let it stop me. My existence was for a reason. If I let fear conquer me and failed the people, it would be worse than death.

The day I anticipated and dreaded soon arrived. Darkness decided to confront me. I was standing alone in a small garden where moonlight cast dream-like shapes in the fog of tiny droplets driven by the wind from dancing fountains. The forces of evil surrounded me but I repelled them with my Light. The whole world had gone eerily silent, watching a battle raging between a sixteen year old girl and the forces of indestructible Darkness.

As good and evil clashed, the way it has for eons and will for eons, and as lightning cackled and thunder cracked at evil's will, I perceived only malice and hostility encircling me. I tried to suppress them but I was exhausted after a few hours. Darkness did not relent and pushed further, extending tendrils of malevolence from its dark cloak to swathe the earth, as I tried to shrink and contain it. Hopelessness loomed inside me, endangering my chances of overcoming my foe.

Mr.Light's voice suddenly spoke, making me jump. 'I am hope.... Use it to gather the Light, to defeat evil....' I realized that my subconscious had scoured my brain and come up with the very words I

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needed to save the known world. Perhaps it had a little help from the daughter of Light. My despair was aiding the Darkness. I resolved to give evil a taste of its own medicine, but in my own style. I thought of all the remaining goodness, the bright Light in people, in my effort to fortify the light in me. I thought of what made Light stronger than Darkness, the way the sun erased the darkness with his dazzling rays and the moon kept even the night bright. I thought of how new hope was born with the arrival of light. I felt a fresh power surge through me. The strength of all the good left on earth charged me, boosted me. I experienced the Light course through me, blazing against the Darkness. I was the mediator who wielded the Light. I tapped into the potentials of the daughter of Light, really feeling her presence for the first time, using it to illuminate the world and lead it out of the dark. I blasted the evil with all the strength of my virtues- sacrifice, hope, truth, faith, belief, love - the things that supported the Light, the stuff that light is made of.

The evil slowly dissipated, its manifestation breaking into wisps of Darkness that vanished, unable to withstand the full force of Light. I looked down and saw I was aglow, radiant in the quiet garden, set ablaze by my sentiments. The Light faded gradually with the ebb of the passion that sparked me. I was left standing alone in the deserted garden, just having thwarted the Darkness that was about to engulf the world. I turned and saw my omnipotent benefactor, Mr. Light, smiling at me through the misty screen of spray around the fountains. He was glinting sharper than ever and I felt his gratitude and jubilation as he dissolved bit by bit.

The world shone vividly, the Light bold and optimistic after the combat. The world was not rid of evil but good definitely had the upper

hand, atleast for a while, if not for eternity. Nature herself seemed to rejoice at the downfall of Darkness with chirping birds fluttering about and flowers blossoming out of season, their sweet fragrance a reminder of the wonders good could work. It was common to see intense white souls now, with the weakening evil battering them feebly. Black spirits still wandered about but with Light working its magic, I had no doubt they would be better off than they were. Darkness still breathed evil thoughts into the minds of men but didn't do any lasting harm. With evil banished, it looked like the world was born again, anew, fresher and more glorious.

My life took a new turn after my confrontation with evil. Of course, people still found me jittery and unnerved and I was not given the credit for saving the world, but I have learned to be content with what I have. I appreciated the good things about my life and was much happier than before. I found a new friend, the daughter of Light, whom I named Melissa. She was my constant companion and I could feel her emotions and even speak to her, within the confines of my mind. She had chosen to make me her temporary home as I was sensitive to the feelings of others around me even before I could see the Light. My receptive mind could use her powers. She had to wait till I was old enough to understand and strong enough to withstand. Now, my life had started again and I was determined to make the most of it.

Now I am experienced enough and strong enough to say to all, 'Never let the Darkness vanquish the Light in you. You may determine the fate of the world one day, as I did, when I was just sixteen'.

**Kloud 9**

**The author is a grade II student in Emirates Future International Academy, Mussafah, UAE**

# ONE on ONE WITH RAHUL DRAVID

By Shyam Sunder Rajaram

**Q** *You started playing amateur cricket at the age of twelve and rose to be one of the greatest batsmen in the history of international cricket. What kind of efforts did you put in when you started playing cricket as a school boy?*

**Rahul** Well, I started playing cricket just like any other boy, for fun. I started playing with my schoolmates and as time passed I discovered that I could be a good bats man if I tried harder. Then I grew more and more interested in the sport and started devoting more time practicing and playing. By the time I was 16, I used to practice about four hours a day.

**Q** *Who all were your early inspirations when you started playing amateur cricket?*

**Rahul** My parents always supported me right from the beginning and their support and encouragement were great motivation to me. Then a little later I was lucky to have been noticed by the former cricketer Keki Tarapore who taught me the fundamentals of the sport on a professional level. His personal guidance was a tremendous inspiration to me.

**Q** *You've had a series of high points in your career. Would you briefly mention some of the crises you have gone through in your career and how you overcame them?*

**Rahul** Dropping catches always terribly

frustrated me. Whenever I dropped a catch it hurt me beyond description and the pain often stayed with me for a long time. To me dropping a catch was far more frustrating than getting out as a batsman. Then I tried hard to pacify myself thinking of the element of unpredictability in the sport and of the fact that anyone could drop a catch anytime. Every time I dropped a catch, I tried harder to be extra cautious not to make that mistake again.



**Q** *Cities such as Bangalore and Mumbai have produced a lot of talented cricketers. Why do you think young cricketing talents from states such as Orissa and Kerala fade out and very rarely make it to the national level?*

**Rahul** That scenario has already changed now. With the kind of money that can be made in the sport, more and more young players are coming up from small towns and they do make it to the top. If one is naturally talented and is hard working, irrespective of where he comes from, he will be noticed and will be given opportunities to prove himself.

**Q** *Which is the match that you would always cherish?*

**Rahul** (Smiles): Oh, it's very difficult to say when you played so many matches. But my debut in test cricket against England at Lord's when I scored 95 runs excited me unspeakably.

**Q** *Some people seem to think that our players put in all their efforts when they play for the lucrative IPL and that they don't often show the same dedication when they play for the national team. What's your view?*

**Rahul** (vehemently protesting) That judgment is totally untrue and unfair. Professional players are always dedicated to the sport and they try to

give their best whether they play in IPL or for the national team. In that regard the integrity of players can never be questioned.

**Q** *In spite of your specialization in test cricket and the titles "The Wall" and "Mr. Dependable" bestowed on you, you scored an amazing 50 runs, not out from just 22 balls, with a strike rate of 222.27 against New Zealand in the ODI played in Hyderabad on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2003. Does this mean that if you had opted, you could have fared equally well in the shorter formats of the sport?*

**Rahul** (Smiles) I have scored over 10,000 runs in ODIs. When I started my career, India needed consistent defensive batsman in test cricket and therefore I concentrated on the area.

**Q** *One last question, sir. What would you advise children who work hard with the dream of one day becoming a legend like you or Sachin Tendulkar?*

**Rahul** Never give up. There may be setbacks and frustrating moments, but they must be tenacious in their efforts and they will scale great heights.

**Q** *Thank you very much for your time, sir.*

**Rahul** My pleasure.



# JIM CORBETT'S KHANSAMMA

By Ruskin Bond

## CHAPTER - 5

Camping in the jungle was full of danger', I remarked, 'You must have felt much safer working in the house.'

'Well, cooking was certainly easier,' said Mehmood. 'But I don't know if it was much safer. The animals couldn't get in, true, but there were ghosts and evil spirits lurking in some of the rooms.'

I changed my room twice, but there was always someone – something – after me. I don't know if I should tell you this, Baba. You have your own small room and you may start imagining things...'

'I'm not afraid of ghosts, Mehmood.'

'That's because you haven't seen one. Although I'm not sure it was a ghost. And I did not actually see anything. But I felt it all right!'

'You can't feel a ghost, Mehmood. At least not in stories.'

'This wasn't a story. It was my first night in Carpet-Sahib's house in the jungle. It has a big house with many rooms, and I was given a room of my own. But there was no electricity in that out-of-the-way place. We used kerosene lamps or candles.'

I had brought my own *razai* and blanket, but the mattress was a strange one, and so was the pillow. Not a pillow, really, but an old cushion, very hard and lumpy. It was my first night in that bed, and I was very uncomfortable. The candle burnt itself out, and I was still wide awake, but I could see very little, there was just a small window allowing a little moonlight into the room. I was almost asleep when I heard someone groaning

beside me. Groaning loudly, as though in pain. But there was no one else in the bed and no one beneath it.

'The groaning stopped for a time, and then, just as I was about to fall asleep, it started again. Groan, groan, groan. And now it seemed to come from beneath my pillow.'

I turned on my side and slowly, carefully, I slipped my hand beneath the pillow.

I encountered a hairy face, a gaping mouth, hollow sockets instead of eyes. Horrible to touch! Not the face of a human, Baba – the face of a *rakshas*!

I tried to pull my hand away, but it was seized by that terrible mouth. A mouth with long sharp teeth – teeth like daggers! It would have bitten my finger off if I hadn't screamed and shouted for help.

'Carpet-sahib and his sister and the other servants came running. As they rushed into the room with torches and a lamp, those awful teeth released my hand.'

'"Under the pillow!" I screamed. "Under the pillow!"'



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'They looked under the pillow, but there was nothing there. I showed them my fingers – they were bleeding badly.

'A rat must have bitten you, said Carpet-sahib's sister. But she knew it wasn't a rat. And she gave me another room to sleep in.'

'And were you all right in the second room?'

'For a couple of nights, Baba. And then it happened again.'

'You put your hand under the pillow again? And the face was there?'

'Not the whole face, Baba. Just something soft and squishy. I thought it was a snail under my pillow. So I got up, lit my lamp, and looked under the pillow.'

'What was it, Mehmood? Tell me quickly.'

'It was an eyeball, Baba. An eye that had

been removed from its socket. It was staring up at me. Just an eyeball, staring! I picked it up and threw it out of the window. I threw the pillow away too. Something terrible had happened upon that pillow, I'm sure of it.'

'So it wasn't the room?'

'It wasn't the room. It was the pillow, Baba. Next day I went into town and bought a new pillow and from then on I slept beautifully every night. Never use a strange cushion or pillow, Baba. Terrible things have happened on pillows. So remember – when you return to school next month, take a new pillow and don't use anyone else's!'

After listening to Mehmood's story, I was always careful to use my own pillows. Even now, many many years later, I carry my own pillows wherever I go. No hotel pillows for me. You never know what might be lurking beneath them!

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## CHAPTER-6

'Why did you leave Jim and his sister?' I asked Mehmood one day. 'Didn't they like your cooking?'

'I did not leave them, Baba. They left me. That is, they left the country, said goodbye to India. Went to live in Africa, where they shot lions instead of tigers. They gave me a certificate and some money, and I went home to my village near Shamli, sold guavas and mangoes. Very dull, after all that excitement with Carpet Sahib. Oh, yes – and he gave me this.' Mehmood unbuttoned the top of his shirt and showed me a large tiger's claw in a locket that hung round his neck. 'It came from the last tiger that he shot before he went away. The claw of the last tiger!'

'Were you present when he shot it?'

'Yes, Baba, I was there. It was the most exciting day of my life – if you don't count my wrestling match with the king-cobra.

'Did you wrestle with a tiger?'

'No, Baba, I'm no match for a tiger. If I see a tiger, I run – I have strong legs. But on that particular day, I couldn't even run, I was alone in the bungalow and the tiger was coming for me!'

'It was a man-eater all right, and I think it had come to take its revenge because of all the man-eater that Carpet Sahib had shot. It was a big fellow, the largest tiger I have ever seen, and it walked right up to the verandah steps, raised its head and let out a terrible roar – it was like a challenge!'

'What did Corbett do?'

'He wasn't there. He and his sister had taken the jeep and driven into the town to see someone who wanted to buy the property. The rest of the staff were out too. I was alone, setting the dining-table for lunch, when I heard this roar. I ran to the front room and looked out of the window, and there it stood, glaring at me with its yellow eyes, ready to pounce and have me for its dinner. Believe me,



Baba, it was even licking its lips!

I closed that window in a hurry. And then I ran to the front door and made sure it was bolted. What next? Close all the doors and windows, there were so many! Every time I looked out of a window I saw that tiger outside, circling round and round the house, just taking its time before leaping through an opening and pouncing on me – making a *korma* curry of me! It's nice cooking a *keema* or *kofta* curry, Baba, but not so nice to be curry for a tiger!

'At last I had all the doors and windows shut. Let that tiger roar! I was safe from its claws and jaws. Or so I thought...

I was standing in the middle of the front room, trembling with fear, when – thump, thump – its heavy paws began pounding on the front door.

That door was strong – but not strong enough to stand against the strength and weight of an angry tiger. It would give way any minute. And then I would be mincemeat.

There was a small skylight high up on the wall, opening out on the roof. If I could reach it and get through, I'd be safe on the roof.

I pulled a table across to the wall, placed a chair on the table, climbed on to it and reached the skylight. I squirmed through it and emerged on the roof. Then I looked down through the skylight just as the front door gave in, and the tiger rushed in, ready for dinner.

'But dinner was on the roof, out of his reach. That made him very angry. He ran round the room, smashing chairs, upsetting the table – charged into the other rooms, smashing and grunting – came back, angrier than ever, tore up a couple of rugs and bit right through Carpet-Sahib's tiffin carrier! And then, with an angry roar, it charged out of the house and into the garden.'

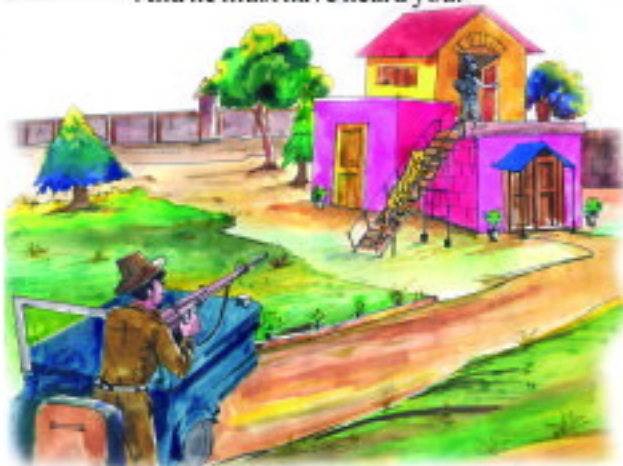
'But you were safe in the roof, Mehmood.'

'So I thought, But when I stood up and moved to the edge of the roof, I saw the tiger looking up at me, judging the height from the ground to the rooftop. It was a distance of some twenty feet. Could a tiger leap that high? Even worse, there was an iron ladder – a fixed ladder – leading from the verandah to the roof. The tiger had noticed it. He approached the ladder and began slowly, carefully, to climb up, rung by rung. In a few minutes he would be upon me. What could I do?'

Mehmood paused for effect, and all I could say was: 'Hide in the water tank?'

'There was no water tank. All I could do was send up a prayer to the almighty.'

'And he must have heard you.'



'He did indeed, Baba. And so did Carpet-Sahib. For he returned just in time to see the tiger almost at the top of the ladder. He stood up in his jeep, raised his gun, and fired. Just one shot! Down came that tiger – all in a heap – Carpet-Sahib's last tiger.'


'It was yours too', I said. 'You were very brave. Jim Corbett must have been pleased with you.'

'Oh, he seemed pleased, but his sister was upset because of all the broken furniture and the smashed tiffin-carrier. I told her they wouldn't need it if they were going to Africa, but she wasn't amused, memsahib was a bit fussy about furniture.'

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Well, these weren't the only stories I heard from Mehmood, but they are the ones I remembered best. He was with us for a couple of years before returning to his village, in order to get married – before he grew 'too old', he said, although he was only thirty. We heard later that he had settled down in his village, preferring the life of a cultivator to that of a cook. And working in our kitchen must have been pretty monotonous – no tigers came calling!

He was a wonderful cook, and I missed his cutlets and curries, his patties and pies, his sauces and stews, and his mango milk shakes. But most of all I missed his stories – even if they were a bit on the tall side!

A portrait of an elderly man with glasses, wearing a grey checkered blazer over a blue shirt. He has his arms crossed and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a red railing.

Face to Face with

Ruskin Bond

... Part - 2

Ruskin Bond's first novel, **The Room on the Roof**, written when he was seventeen, won the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. Since then he has written over 500 short stories, novellas, poems and articles that have appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1993 and the Padma Shri in 1999. His short stories "**The Night Train at Deoli**", "**Time Stops at Shamli**", and "**Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra**" have been part of the school text books in India.

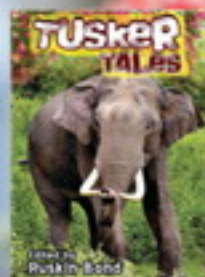
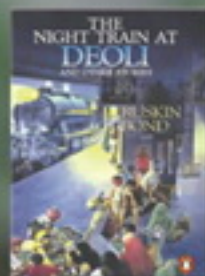
His story **A Flight of Pigeons** was about the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and was made into a film by Shyam Benegal with the title **Junoon**. Vishal Bharadwaj made films based on his stories **The Blue Umbrella** and more recently the film **Saat Khoon Maaf** was based on Ruskin Bond's short story "**Susanna's Seven Husbands**".



Interview by  
**ARYA VEDANT**  
Class - VI



**DELHI PUBLIC SCHOOL**  
Kalinga, Cuttack, Odisha  
e-mail: aryavedant@gmail.com





Ruskin Bond with Actress Priyanka Chopra

**Arya Vedant:** You grew up on movies. Whatever you wanted to do and be when you're in your early twenties is now coming true. Isn't it?

**Ruskin Bond:** Well, it's for just a few minutes. I have a scene with Priyanka Chopra, the heroine.

**Arya Vedant:** You have also been to Pondicherry recently?

**Ruskin Bond:** Oh yes! Some scenes in Vishal's film, we shot there. In fact part of the scene I did was shot at Pondicherry and part in Bombay. I went with Rakesh and Bina (Bond's extended family). I don't like to go alone now because if you don't feel well or if you need something, you like to have somebody with you.

**Arya Vedant:** Did you like the Pondicherry seafront?

**Ruskin Bond:** I did but I like the beach at Puri better. In Pondicherry it's rocky, whereas Puri is sandy. Pondicherry is not a big place, that's what I like about it. It's not overrun as Goa is by people running naked all over the beach! It's more sedate and conservative, you might say.

**Arya Vedant:** So has there been any change in your sleeping habits because of these increasing demands on your time?

**Ruskin Bond:** Now that I'm getting older, I'm inclined to have a nap, especially in the afternoon. I now sleep more than I used to. Well, it's better than not sleeping or better than having insomnia, I suppose! I'm lucky to be able to drop off and have a good sleep whenever I want to.

Also once in a while I take nocturnal walk around midnight. I rather enjoy it. At that time it's quiet generally. You might meet the odd drunk stumbling home. Or you'll meet an animal- a fox or an owl- they come out at that time. I'd like to watch the progress of the moon and the stars. I get ideas there. So I might get up late the next morning.

**Arya Vedant:** The stories you penned when you were younger were shot with a persistent melancholy note. Has there been any change in your approach with the passage of time?

**Ruskin Bond:** May be in the recent time, a humorous note has taken over. I see now more the lighter side of things. The melancholy note is not so strong now. I guess it's now more philosophical rather than sad. Then I was very much on my own, alone. I have more people around me now, surrounded by family and family situations.





**Arya Vedant:** Do you feel the need of company sometimes when you are done with your work?

**Ruskin Bond:** When I'm done with work, I like a long walk to be by myself. In the house there's companionship. It's nice to once in a while sit with a friend and talk about books and talk about the world at large and have a gossip. Now and then, one needs a bit of change, you can say, from the monotony of daily routine.

**Arya Vedant:** Could you now increasingly detach yourself from the external existence?

**Ruskin Bond:** Not completely. No. To some extent, yes. But I can't detach myself from people I care about. There I'm prone to anxiety or worry, or thoughts of what might lie in store for them in the future, especially if they are to some extent dependent upon me.

As far as the external world goes, for instance, if there's a natural disaster for one thing, or political upheaval in some part of the world, there's nothing I can do about it, then there's a certain amount of detachment, although I have feelings about it. I'm apolitical and I don't get into political issues, if I can help it. I read my newspaper everyday and I put on TV and follow the news. I like to be up to date with what's happening. I might have views, but I'm not the sort who writes fiery letters to the editor! There're plenty of people to do that.

**Arya Vedant:** You have all along been very disciplined as a writer, haven't you?

**Ruskin Bond:** In the sense that I don't work harder than other writers. Perhaps, in a way I'm a lazy writer. If I write a couple of pages,

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I tell myself: "That's enough! Let me read or do something else." So I don't force myself to produce a certain amount within a particular time. Then it inhibits me. I'd like to do things in my own leisurely way. That way I do quite a lot, simply by doing what I feel like doing.

**Arya Vedant:** Any new book in the pipeline?

**Ruskin Bond:** Well, it's a collection called Secrets.

**Arya Vedant:** Something like *The Sensualist*, which dragged you to court?

**Ruskin Bond:** Not on that line so much. These are studies on lonely individuals, their unhappy, at times tragic tales. It's not so explicit in sexual terms as in *The Sensualist*.



**Arya Vedant:** Fresh ideas still strike you?

**Ruskin Bond:** Ideas keep coming. As long as you're interested in people, you won't run out of ideas. If I run out of people, there are always ghosts stories to write. I cook up ghosts at will!

**Arya Vedant:** Mussoorie can hardly be called now the queen of hills, for the denudation is there for all to see. The flow of traffic has multiplied manifold. The roads are being blasted out all over. It has almost become a concrete jungle. The trucks are roaring up the road past your cottage throughout the day and night. Do you feel the heat of it all?

**Ruskin Bond:** I've got used to it. The only solution at least for me is to move to the next mountain! In Mussoorie, you can't get a place now. Rakesh and Bina (members of his extended family) have got a small plot of land outside Dehradun in the forest area, outside a village on the outskirts. We hope to have a cottage there, at least for winter, because it gets cold here, and at my age I feel it. For summers up here, and for winter down there.

**Arya Vedant:** Three generations of your family have lived their lives in this country.

**Ruskin Bond:** How does it feel to have your roots in India? I have loved India and it is very fascinating to be a part of its history of the last hundred years. I can easily visualize my parents and grandparents as an integral part of an important era in India's history and can identify with them better.

**Arya Vedant:** What were the circumstances that led you to go away to England, all alone at the age of 17?



Ruskin Bond with Indian Army

**Ruskin Bond:** My family, especially my mother, believed that I had no future in India. The British Raj had come to an end and all Anglo Indian and British families were going back to Britain. It was a difficult phase and strange feelings filled my head. I, a confused boy of 17, who passionately wanted to carve out a career in writing, left too, more so to see 'what else' was out there for me.

**Arya Vedant:** What brought you back to India ?

**Ruskin Bond:** I realized that England was not the place for me, soon after I reached there. I was young and very lonely and was haunted by the childhood memories of my father, my friends here, and of the sights, sounds and smells of India. My attachments were so deeply rooted in India that I could not find comfort in England.

**Arya Vedant:** What have you liked most about India ?

**Ruskin Bond:** Human contact- you experience it everyday here. Human interaction is a way of life here, and that lends the vigour that is so essential. People have patience and tolerance for other people's preferences and style of life – that is, if you don't offend them! They usually don't interfere if you don't incense them.





**Arya Vedant:** Your book, 'The Room on the Roof' that you wrote at the age of 17, received the 'John Llewellyn Memorial Award' and was published in London, soon after you returned to India in 1955. You became famous as a young talented writer at the age of 21. Do you feel things would have been better and bigger for you today, had you been there at your moment of triumph?

**Ruskin Bond:** I knew my story was going to be published any time, but the need to get back to the warmth here was so strong that nothing mattered. I had waited almost a year, after submitting the manuscript.

The delay in their decision had already disappointed me so much that I had lost interest in the outcome of my endeavor. I never wanted bigger things. I am a very simple man. My only passion is writing- and I did that here, quite well. Yes, at that time, writers and publishers in London had wanted to meet me. I may have got lot of support and encouragement from contemporary writers there. I may have found a mentor, but you see, I was too young to be in their constant company. I would not have found comradeship with them due to the age difference. So I would have still been a lonely writer, I think. I am a quiet writer, and these hills suit me just fine.

**Arya Vedant:** Do you have any fond memories of London ?

**Ruskin Bond:** Yes, now when I look back, I do remember those days of struggle, and they don't seem so bad now, as they did then, when I was so young and anxious. I had some well meaning friends there who helped me in many ways. The city taught me life's good lessons- struggle and hard work. That is where I wrote my first novel and got due acknowledgement, though it came late – late for my young and impatient self.

**Arya Vedant:** Two of your books have been animated as movies. Shyam Benegal's 1978 film 'Junoon' was based on 'A Flight of Pigeons' and 'The Blue Umbrella' was recently filmed by Vishal Bharadwaj. (still to be released) Do you think both are good and fair interpretations of the books or one is better than the other?

**Ruskin Bond:** I wouldn't want to compare them since both are very different kinds. 'A





'Flight of Pigeons' was a historical romance for adults, with strong characterization, and so was its movie, 'Junoon'. Shyam Benegal did a magnificent job. 'The Blue Umbrella', on the other hand appeals to children. Vishal has used his creative genius to add to the story, and has done well. Both have their own place

**Arya Vedant:** 'A Flight of Pigeons' is a very different from your other stories . What inspired you to write it?

**Ruskin Bond:** The book is based on a true story of a girl named Ruth Labadoor who lived in Shahjahanpur in the 1850s and witnessed the massacre of a congregation in a church in northern India . My father, who had heard it from my soldier grandfather, told it to me. It had a lasting impact. The story had stayed with me possibly because I imbibed it as a story of humanity of common people in times of conflict. I decided to research it. Yes, that massacre finds mention in old records and accounts of the Mutiny of 1857. I wrote almost all of the book based on real facts and historical accounts of the Mutiny. I have used my imagination only to write the dialogues.



Ruskin Bond with Bollywood Producer Vishal Bharadwaj

Face to Face

## Ruskin Bond



**Arya Vedant:** You have written many episodes about panthers and leopards. Are all these based on real sightings?

**Ruskin Bond:** Yes, all of these are true accounts and real life experiences- mine or other people's. Leopards and panthers still roam these hills. They never harm. We should be sensitive and protect them. I want to develop this awareness in children, for I see some hope in them. Only children can guard our wild life heritage now.

**Arya Vedant:** There's a passage 'The Peanut Vendor', in one of your books. Is the young vendor in the passage, who you gave shelter to, really Prem- the teenage boy you adopted?

**Ruskin Bond:** Yes, it's him, though he was not a peanut vendor. The passage is a combination of reality and imagination. Actually, I had found him standing outside my house one cold winter night. He had come looking for work in this city.

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**Arya Vedant:** Which of your books or short stories are your favourite?

**Ruskin Bond:** 'The Room on the Roof'— I have a special feeling for it. There is so much of the intensity of a young me in it. I rediscover young Ruskin in it. It is my reflection as a young rebel. It is spontaneous, fresh, still in print and people are still buying it.

**Arya Vedant:** Which ones are popular with children?

**Ruskin Bond:** Children's Omnibus by Rupa Books is doing very well- probably because it has many stories in it together. 'Night Train to Deoli', 'The Room on the Roof', and 'The Best of Ruskin Bond', are among other children's favourites.

**Arya Vedant:** What do you enjoy writing more, prose or poetry?

**Ruskin Bond:** All three at different times. I used to like writing fiction more and now I find myself writing poetry. 'Book of Verses' is my recent book.

**Arya Vedant:** Now you have a thriving adopted family- Prem's and Chandra's kids Rakesh and Mukesh and their 5 kids. You are a great grandfather now, without having to marry! How does it feel?

**Ruskin Bond:** I feel humbled by their love. I may have adopted Prem, but they all have adopted me. They have looked after me so well, for so long. They made it possible for me to write. They took care of the worries of keeping a home, all I did was write. My grandchildren are my joy.

**Arya Vedant:** Tell me something about your family from your parents' side. Where are they now?

**Ruskin Bond:** My mother and stepfather both have passed away. My real brother William now lives in Canada . My sister Ellen lives with Premila, my step sister in Ludhiana . My two step brothers were killed in road accidents.

**Arya Vedant:** You adored your father and lost him when you were just 10. This loss, the biggest loss that you have suffered. Do you still feel the pain as strongly?

**Ruskin Bond:** His loss was immense. Though time is a great healer, I still feel the void. I did not get a chance to say goodbye. I was at school and one fine day, was given the news of my father's death. That was it. To me it was not a 'death' but a 'vanishing'.

**Arya Vedant:** Why do you say that?

**Ruskin Bond:** It was just two sentences saying something about him 'gone', and it was all over! No one took me home. I didn't have a closure, not until 2001, when I finally located my father's grave. **I remember him as the best father in the world.**

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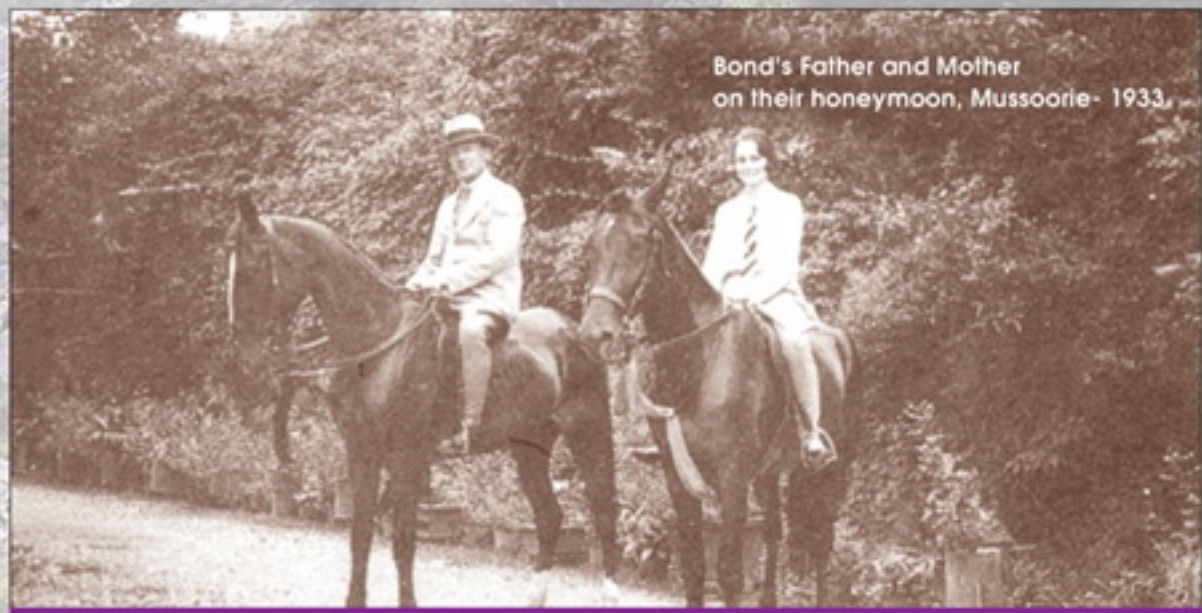
I often think of him- and more fondly each time. He taught me to love books and respect nature. He took good care of my inner voices and he spoke to me deeply. How can I forget our walks and things that we did together? I derive inspiration from him even today. It was a brief but the happiest period of my life. It is still so vivid, so real.

**Arya Vedant:** In your books, you speak about the pain you went through due to your parents' divorce. It is quite evident that you blame your mother, yet you also make an attempt to console yourself by trying to justify her choices. Have you really been able to forgive her?

**Ruskin Bond:** She caused my father a lot of pain. Yes, of course I have been able to forgive her. Looking back I feel their marriage was a mistake. They were completely incompatible. They should not have married. Back then, I used to feel she didn't love me. I lived with my mother and stepfather after my father's death, but I didn't feel like a cherished, loved child. But



now I have understood that she was not the expressive kind. She loved, but was aloof, into herself more... Perhaps her love was silent. Father showed the love evidently, and that used to kindle my spirits.



Bond's Father and Mother  
on their honeymoon, Mussoorie- 1933.



**Arya Vedant:** What was it about your father, that made him the best father in the world and that you would tell other fathers to emulate?

**Ruskin Bond:** Spend quality time with your children. Give them your comradeship as they grow. Don't grow like strangers. Your children look up to you. Don't disappoint them. Talk to them deeply. And express your love openly. It is not enough to just feel the love yourself, it's equally important to make your child feel it.

**Arya Vedant:** How does it feel to be called 'resident Wordsworth'?

**Ruskin Bond:** I think they call me that because I write about nature and Wordsworth did too. But no, I wouldn't want to be called that. I'm not a fan of Wordsworth. There were other poets of nature I like more. Besides, attachment to his name will make me sound like another poet who you have study at school and NOT someone you enjoy reading. Call me 'resident Ruskin'.

**Arya Vedant:** Your favourite poets ?

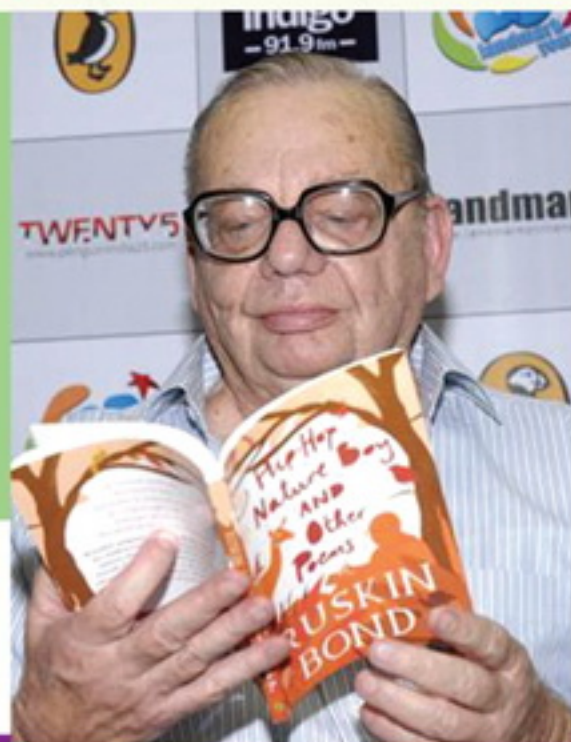
**Ruskin Bond:** I like Rabindranath's poetry. Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling are my favourite.

**Arya Vedant:** Any desires that you'd like to fulfill? Any dream that you are still pursuing?

**Ruskin Bond:** My greatest desire is to keep writing more, creating something better and different, every time. Yes, I do have a dream- to have some space to create a bigger library for myself and a thriving garden like granny's in Dehra. My grandfather had a natural zoo in that garden, which I enjoyed very much.

**Arya Vedant:** What message would you like to convey to the world about reading and books?

**Ruskin Bond:** Those who get a chance to be around books are a fortunate few. Books can give us so much comfort, companionship and love. I would personally be lost without them. Books give us appreciation of life, an understanding of people and understanding of ourselves. They are the perfect friends.



**Arya Vedant:** Is nostalgia a better trigger for you than the reality of today?

**Ruskin Bond:** I was nostalgic even as a young man. Preferred listening to Opera not Bing Crosby. I read Hugh Walpole, Jack London, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Evelyn Waugh, Richard Jefferies and Louise Imogen Guineyas a young man. I watched a lot of movies. I was deeply influenced by movies. I was in Dehradun with my mother and step father. Neither had much interest in what I did.

**Arya Vedant:** Do you feel unhappy when you see your stories on celluloid?

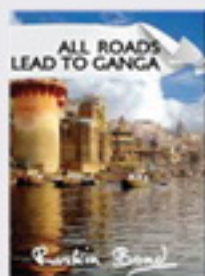
**Ruskin Bond:** Film is a different medium. So you have to change settings, characters etc to suit the medium. Sometimes the ending may have to be different. Junoon was very close to what I had in mind. So was Blue Umbrella. Saat Khoon Maaf was a black comedy. Not sure if the comedy through.

**Arya Vedant:** Where do you find triggers for your stories?

**Ruskin Bond:** They could be about people or incidents that have happened to you or to others. A lot of my stories are portraits of people.

**Arya Vedant:** Does the media hype bother you?

**Ruskin Bond:** I like talking to visitors, especially children. But, an unexpected visitor once got very upset with my refusal to meet her. She threatened to tell Khushwant Singh about me. Go ahead, I told her, I've always wanted to get into his column. (Khushwant Singh hasn't done it yet!)



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**Arya Vedant:** Some books and authors children should read?

**Ruskin Bond:** R. L. Stevenson, John Buchanan, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, though it is a bit scary, Alice in Wonderland, a simplified version of Dickens and I'm not too sure that we should grade fiction as suitable for specific age groups!

**Arya Vedant:** How has the Indian literary scene changed over the last few years?

**Ruskin Bond:** There were no lit fests and launches in India till the eighties when we had the first World Book Fair. In the '50s and '60s newspapers also published fiction especially short stories. So I wrote short stories. We did not have many publishers. But many writers have been forgotten – like Kamala Markandeya, Mulgaonkar or Mulk Raj Anand.

**Arya Vedant:** How would you describe yourself?

**Ruskin Bond:** I am a storyteller from a personal viewpoint. When I run out of people I invent ghosts. (chuckles) I don't believe in ghosts. Never saw one.

**Arya Vedant :** So hills and trains are the two threads that run through your stories?

**Ruskin Bond :** Trains, you see, were in the early stories, because in the '50s and early '60s, I travelled quite a bit by train and spent a lot of time at railway stations. If you sit down on a railway platform for an hour or two, you'll have a story.

**Arya Vedant :** I know it's an unfair question to ask a writer. But can you describe the process of a story brewing in your mind?

**Ruskin Bond :** It's a fair question. Before I write a story, I really got to see it happening in my mind, almost like a film. And that helps me when I sit down to write it. And I then think of the right words, the right sentences, the dialogue. I don't get a writer's block, because I have already written it in my head. I'm a very visual writer.

**Arya Vedant :** Can you give me an example?

**Ruskin Bond :** **The Night Train at Deoli - a very early one. This train used to come from Delhi to Dehradun, and very early morning, it would pass through this tiny station which was called Deoli. In reality, it had another name. And I used to see a girl on the platform with a basket selling fruits and she was very attractive. I wove this little story into it of how I would deliberately make the journey sometimes just to see her. I always wanted to know her but never had the guts to get off the train and do anything about it. So, very often stories emerge from little incidents. Sometimes, they are partly autobiographical, but when I sit down to write them, they run away from me and become fiction.**



**Arya Vedant :** So do you remember the stories that your mother told you?

**Ruskin Bond :** Mother didn't tell me stories. I started reading very young. Books were put on my way by my father and he would take me for walks in Delhi in the early '40s. He would take me to Humayun's tomb, Purana Qila, down those steps where Humayun fell and killed himself. He would tell me stories about these monuments and old places.

**Arya Vedant :** Yet as you grew up, there was a father-sized hole in your life. Now with your stories for children, are you filling the hole somehow? Are you playing father?

**Ruskin Bond :** I'm playing grandfather because very often, I tell stories as though they were told by grandparents. And I bring grandparents into stories. Not because the grandparents told me stories. They died when I was young. But I've invented stories about them or told by them. So I may be filling the parental gap not with parents but with grandparents.

**Arya Vedant :** And your choice of India over going home...?

**Ruskin Bond :** Well after school, I was packed off to England. No sooner did I get there, I was longing to get back. The pull of friends, relationships, attachments more than anything else. I'm a sentimental person. I have always given priority to friendships, to relationships.

**Arya Vedant :** You have never gone back since...?

**Ruskin Bond :** Never been out of India since 1955, which was when I came home to a little flat in Dehradun...



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**Arya Vedant :** You never felt like or you never had the time ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I just started banging out stories, articles for magazines, newspapers. We didn't have many publishers then of general books or fiction.

**Arya Vedant :** You even wrote Hollywood gossip once ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I did for The Leader of Allahabad, a paper long gone. I was always interested in films, so I would gather information on pictures that were being made, on the activities of the actors and actresses in theatre and films. So I wrote this little column for The Leader. Though I sent it from Dehradun, they would say, 'from our Hollywood correspondent'.

**Arya Vedant :** Talking of Hollywood and popular culture, I bet people have asked you about your relation with James Bond, the other famous Bond ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I did have an uncle called James Bond. He was a dentist, not a secret agent. His grave is here in the cemetery. I wrote an epitaph for him: "A stranger approached this spot with gravity, James Bond is filling his last cavity."

**Arya Vedant :** I bet your uncle had a sense of humour. You might have to do some answering ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I hope he had. I never met this uncle but had heard about him. I have brought in uncles and aunts to stories whenever I have run out of ideas. When I run out of relatives, I invent ghosts.

**Arya Vedant :** Well, we stand outside St Paul's church, the oldest anywhere?

**Ruskin Bond :** It was built in 1840 or so.



**Arya Vedant :** You are not a particularly religious person. You are not going to be found in a place of worship often ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Very rarely, and more out of interest in the historical importance of a church or some place of worship. It's not that I am irreligious. I would rather look for god in a forest or on a hillside.

**Arya Vedant :** Talk about some of your discoveries when you thought you found god looking at hills and forests ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Well, you just get a feeling of uplift or the feeling that we are so temporary and these mountains are permanent. The moment I remember the best was when I was in Jersey in the Channel Islands, leaving India as a boy. I was very unhappy and unsure of my future. I wanted to be a writer and I walked along the seafront. There was a storm brewing and the waves were crashing in and there was nobody else on the seafront. Then I suddenly felt within me that I am going to do what I want to do. I decided to go back to India, make a living



out of writing and make a name for myself. That was the sort of promise I made to myself. It was with the help of natural elements around me.

**Arya Vedant :** That will be a great commercial for god ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I don't mind if god takes the credit.

**Arya Vedant :** Did you fall in love ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Several times. In fact, there is a title of one of my story collections, *Falling in Love Again*, and again, and again.

**Arya Vedant :** Did that take you closer to having a family of your own? And then something did not work out ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Yes, sometimes, things did not work out. But no regrets. I'm not a person who has many regrets. You can say, *I'm a writer without regrets.*

**Arya Vedant :** Many people don't know you write poetry ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Oh yeah. Sometimes, the mood comes upon me, particularly when I'm close to nature or say, after a walk like this with you...that's what sets off a poem. A flower or a bird or just wind and the trees.



**Arya Vedant :** You have become a storyteller to children. Is it more coincidental than by design?

**Ruskin Bond :** Yes, a lot of my stories which were written for general readers found their way to textbooks or school books. They were considered suitable for children, though they were not written specifically for I occasionally did write stories that were, maybe, directed at young readers.

**Arya Vedant :** I overheard someone asking you *Kaise Hain*, and you said *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*. But that's not the way you have led your life. You have actually looked for surprises ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Although I have led a fairly quiet life and I haven't looked for thrills or taken physical risks, I have taken risks in the sense of career, or writing, or making a living. Because I stuck to writing and nothing else. So that's been a risk in its own way.

**Arya Vedant :** You have looked for creative thrill. And I presume there is a new one coming up ?

**Ruskin Bond :** There is always something coming up. It might be stories.....

**Arya Vedant :** Because your mind is only getting younger ?

**Ruskin Bond :** I hope so. The mind keeps clicking away as far as writing goes.

**Arya Vedant :** It is such a privilege to spend time with a writer whose first book, written more than 50 years ago, is still being reprinted. Congratulations and good luck ?

**Ruskin Bond :** Thanks



# MEET THE YOUNG CHANGE MAKERS - An Interview

By Surendra Mohanty



**Y**oung Change Makers (YCM) are making waves. Students from various schools, from classes 7 to 10, who are joining this movement, are bringing about an awareness among the youth as well as general public, about different social, economic issues of our country and our people, especially our student community.

Two YCM activists, Ojas Sahasrabudhe (from Seva Sadan English School, Pune) and Madhumita Acharya (from Dr. Kalmadi Shamrao high School, Pune) visited KiiT International School and interacted with the students. They kept the audience spellbound with a one-hour presentation in which they talked about the projects they have undertaken and the kind of social awareness YCM is bringing about.

Surendra Mohanty talked to them and their mentor Dr. Parag Mankeekar who is the founder of YCM.

**Q** *Madhumita, please let us know how your first experience was as a Young Change maker.*

**MA:** My first experience was when I visited the street kids on 26th January; it left a lasting impression on my mind. We spent a good amount of time with the kids and learnt much beyond what we could have learnt otherwise. It is a wrong impression that street kids like to make a living begging. They are like any of us and like to live a dignified life.

**Q** *Why did you choose 26<sup>th</sup> January?*

**MA:** We had the day off from school, and we knew they sell flags at signals at crossroads and junctions. So we considered it would be nice place to start the interaction and utilize our free day.

**Q** *(To Ojas) What is your most memorable experience as a young change maker?*

**Ojas:** My most memorable experience is the first YCM Conference I attended in 2010. I was only in the 7th standard then. It was a good learning experience where I interacted with students and leaders from many places. I gained a lot of confidence from such an exposure.

**Q** *What were your feelings after your interaction with the street kids?*

**MA:** Besides interacting with them, we talked to their parents and their neighbours. We realized that they do hard work - some work in *dhabas*, some sell odd items and many of them take care of their families. They would like to earn their livelihood rather than beg. And, contrary to general opinion, they have no bad habits. Unfortunately, they have no homes, but shattered families instead. They live on the footpath or under bridges like the Z Bridge, where we met them. Later, we collected clothes and bags from various schools and gave them.

**Q** *(To Dr. PM) How do you assign YCM projects to various schools?*

**DrPM:** As a general guideline, we provide some themes from which individual schools select its own

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project. Themes are from areas of general interest and concern. For example, disposal of garbage, ban on the use of polythene, education for the underprivileged etc. Students need to do some field work, carry out authentic research, do proper calculations and arrive at practical and quantifiable solutions. To give you an example, a project study was taken up by a school on discontinuance on the use of brown paper for covering books and notebooks in schools. This practice is still compulsory in many schools. The study found it an unnecessary exercise as the covers of all school books and notebooks are quite good and sturdy enough to last one school year. Besides it is an added cost that could be gainfully utilised for some other cause. The study brought out the cost benefits to each school if a ban on brown paper covering were to be implemented. This project study was highlighted in the DNA News, following which 25 schools banned the practice. Similarly there have been many positive outcomes of our project studies.

**Q** *Are these students (who join YCM) especially smart or talented in some ways?*

**Dr.PM:** No, they are like any other normal students. Students of standard 10 and above have their board exams and need more time to focus on their studies. Their parents are also concerned about their academic performance. So we engage students of standard seven or eight who can work with YCM for about two to three years, before they get busy with their board exams. That doesn't mean students who work as Young Change Makers lose out on their academics. We have had students who worked with us, whose parents complained that their children were not likely to do well in exams due to their involvement in YCM. But the same students managed to score above 90 per cent.

**Ojas:** No one needs be extraordinarily smart or talented. We learn by experience here. When I first participated in the conference, I found that the research work by other students were far better than ours. In the next conference we improved by learning from our previous experience. We did carbon foot-print study of our school which was

received very well and gave us a great deal of knowledge and experience.

We develop four abilities at YCM - Listening skills, Communication, Presentation and Leadership skills. Children from many schools all over the country participate in it, they mix and get an opportunity to be friends and learn from each other.

**Q** *(To the students) What are your plans for the future?*

**MA:** Get a good education, pursue higher studies in Humanities. After I finish my studies, I would like to turn to the society. I have thoughts about working hand in hand with the less privileged people and help them.

**Ojas:** With the exposure that YCM has given me, I am confident of getting a good job. After my studies, I will continue to work to deliver something meaningful to the society.

**Q** *Will your experience with the YCM help you to pursue your dreams?*

**MA:** Our association with YCM has been a turning point in our lives. Our interaction with Cap Gemini Centre, meeting with the kids at shelter homes, meeting with the Additional Commissioner of Police have all added to our experience and outlook.

**Dr.PM:** We do not expect these students to carry on with YCM activities after their school. They should rather focus on a career, for which we have prepared them. But wherever they may be, we would like them to remember what they have learnt here and give back to the society. As a small child, I had seen Baba Amte working selflessly for the needy, which influenced me greatly.

**Q** *We have heard about YCM staging street plays. Can you tell us something about it?*

**Dr.PM:** Students at YCM are encouraged to form theatre groups, and enact street plays to convey messages that are meaningful and thought-provoking to the audience. Such messages are better communicated through plays rather than through presentations. Students write their own script and act it out. Students are differently talented - some are artistically oriented while some are research oriented. The former category takes to the theatre group and performs street plays.

**Q** *How was your first experience in KiiT?*

**Ojas:** It was simply amazing! We visited KISS (Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences) and saw the paintings on the walls done by the tribal children. Beautiful works. I saw children of nine and ten years of age painting like professionals. The kind of work you are doing in KISS is truly great.

**MA:** I liked the huge campus of KISS. The campus provides complete life and stay for 12000 children! Everything is provided in a single campus. It is a marvellous setting and a commendable job.

**Q** *Have you had any experience of working with underprivileged children raised in charity organizations?*

**Ojas:** We have worked with many underprivileged children, mostly with unorganized street children. We also have worked with many needy children in government schools. But at KISS, it was an eye-opening experience.

**DrPM:** They have also worked with three blind schools, and another school called 'Ankur', a school for children who have special needs. These are project based learning schemes where the students' outlook towards life changes. While working with special needs children, they realize that there is no such thing called language barrier.

**Q** *What is your purpose of your visit to Bhubaneswar? Do you have any plans in mind?*

**Dr.PM:** I have a dream that there should be a

YCM organization in every city. I came in search of a local partner to start this project in this city. KiiT is one philanthropic organization which I am sure will partner with us. Dr. Achyuta Samanta was very enthusiastic when I mentioned my idea to him.

**Q** *(To the students) What about your exams? Are you able give time to your studies?*

**Ojas:** I don't think we will do badly in the exams. Studies become very easy when we apply what we have learned here. We develop a technique called mind mapping which helps in grasping and retaining our class work more easily. We learn research skills which help in understanding our subjects in depth. There are examples of YCMs doing exceedingly well in exams despite missing many classes. Yash Baral secured 90 per cent in Maths and a hundred per cent in Sanskrit. Another two boys got selected for a special scholarship in the U.S. last year.

**Q** *How do you feel meeting with important people such as Pachauri, in the course of your YCM activities?*

**Ojas:** We feel very excited and happy when we meet with such distinguished people. I was so fascinated when I met Dr. Achyuta Samanta.

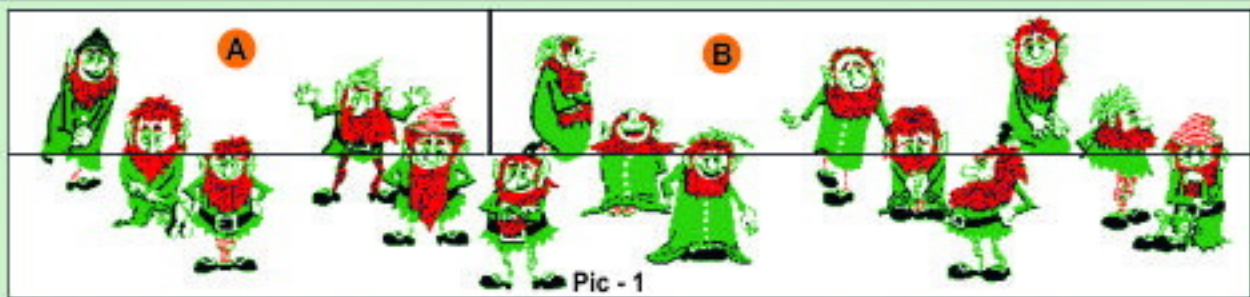
**MA:** I felt very happy when I met Dr. Samanta. I felt blessed in being able to meet such a simple and selfless person doing so much for the society.

**Q** *Thank you, all of you for sparing your time for Klood 9.*

**Ojas:** We are very honoured to be interviewed by your magazine. It's all because of YCM and what it has done for our lives.

**Klood 9**





Pic - 1

Look at the picture above (Pic-1). There are 15 leprechauns in it. Cut out the two rectangles marked A and B. (Cut along the lines on the picture.) Now reposition the two cut-out

rectangles so that their positions are interchanged. What you will get is Pic-2 (below). Count the leprechauns. There are 14 of them now. How come? Well, one of them has given you the slip.



Pic - 2

# MAEVE MAGEE & THE LEPRECHUAN'S POT OF GOLD

## An Irish Folktale

Retold by Surendra Mohanty

**W**hen the Danes invaded Ireland, they left behind a lot of treasure, buried away at many places in the country. Now Leprechauns, who are little fairy men (at most two feet tall), know where these pots of gold are buried, and are now the custodians of these riches, and are guarding them from being stolen by humans. If you catch a leprechaun you can always force him to show you the place where his treasure lies, in exchange for his release. But they are the smartest tricksters and will somehow give you the slip.

The Danes also left behind their recipe for homemade beer, and the leprechauns have learnt the art of making beer. So if you see a leprechaun you will find him drinking beer and making shoes. They are shoemakers, and make excellent shoes and other leather products.

Tom Fitzpatrick, a young boy, and Maeve Magee, a young girl, knew all this about leprechauns.



Tom was walking through a meadow one day, when he heard the clickety click of a small hammer. He found it odd that such a strange sound should be coming from the middle of nowhere. He looked within the tall grass, and lo! he sighted a little old man with a red beard, wearing a bright red-and-green suit and a cocked hat, pounding away with a little hammer on a little shoe.

He never believed in leprechauns. So to make sure this indeed was a leprechaun Tom struck up a pleasant conversation with the little old man. 'Why may you be working on a Sunday, neighbour?' asked Tom.

'That's my business,' replied the little man and offered to share his beer with the big man. Tom tasted the homemade beer and knew for sure that this was a leprechaun. He also knew if he could catch him, he would get very rich, because once a leprechaun is caught he has to lead his captor to his pot of gold in order to secure his freedom.

So, in a flash, Tom caught the leprechaun by his arm and said, 'Take me to the place where your gold is hidden, and I will then set you free.'

'All right,' said the leprechaun. 'Come with me, it lies just a few fields away.'

And off they went together to where the leprechaun led them. They crossed miles of fields, swamps and rocky terrain, but Tom held the little man tight in his grip and never letting him slip out. He knew the imp was only waiting to play the mischievous trick.

At last they arrived at a large open field full of boliaun plants. The leprechaun pointed to one of the plants and said, 'There it is. Dig under that plant and you will find my pot of gold.'

But Tom had no spade. He also had to set the leprechaun free as promised, so he set him free. After the leprechaun had left, Tom tied a red garter that he removed from his stockings, to the boliaun plant and ran home to fetch a spade. He picked up a spade from the barn and ran back to the field as fast as he could.

On reaching there what does he find? A red garter tied to every boliaun plant all over the large field! Tom knew he had been fooled, for there was no way he could dig up a whole field.

Now Maeve Magee was a confident girl. She had a mop of red hair and a freckled face. She heard of this tale of Tom Fitzpatrick, and decided that if she ever caught a leprechaun, she would never get fooled by him for want of a digging tool; wherever she went she carried a spade. Her home was in a meadow – the Glen of Cloongallon, which was in the town of Thurles in County Tipperary. Her meadow was just the place where everyone believed the leprechauns lived. Maeve always kept her eyes open and remained watchful to find one of those little people.

And finally she found one. Maeve was hiding in the branches of a tree on the lookout, when she heard clickety click of a little hammer. She quietly climbed down the tree and looked down the glen, and there she spotted him – a little old man with a red beard, wearing a bright red-and-green suit and a cocked hat, pounding away with a little hammer on a little shoe. And he was drinking beer from a pitcher.

Maeve tiptoed close and grabbed him tightly by his arm. 'Got you,' she cried out. 'Now take me to where you've hidden your pot of gold, if you want to be freed.'

The leprechaun was shocked, at first. Then he collected his wits about and asked, 'You want my gold, but why?'

'I want your gold,' said Maeve confidently, 'and I want it to share it with everyone who is in need of money.'



This leprechaun had been caught many times earlier and every time he had tricked his way out. He considered humans, just as every fellow being of his did, to be greedy people who want all the treasure to themselves – to build mansions, to buy land, jewels or something special for themselves. He had never come across a pretty little girl as Maeve who wanted to share his pot of gold with others.

He happily led Maeve to his pot of gold and even took her spade and dug it out himself. For her part, Maeve was true to her promise and shared the treasure with everyone.

**Kloud 9**

# GAPPU & KRISHNA

By Malavika Roy Singh

Gappu's mother had a beautiful idol of Lord Krishna. She used to worship the Lord every day. Gappu always looked forward to it as he knew that mother would always have laddoos to give after the ritual.

One day, when Janmashtami was around the corner and mother got busy preparing different types of sweets. Gappu got excited.

He was about to eat one, when he was stopped. 'Not now Gappu!' mother said looking stern. 'You can have them after the Janmashtami puja.'

'What is Janmashtami Ma?' asked Gappu. 'It is the day when lord Krishna was born, dear!'

'Oh you mean it's his birthday!' he asked looking excited. 'Will you bake a cake too ma?'

'No dear, he likes laddoos more than cakes.'

'Oh, is it so? That's funny! So do we also give him gifts?'

'Oh yes we do. We give him all that he likes', said mother. 'We dress him in new clothes, ornaments, offer him sweets and milk products.'

Then mother got busy but he felt sad. Mother did not allow Gappu even to stand anywhere near the freshly made the sweets!

'That is not fair grandpa!' he complained.

'But dear, it's only a matter of a few days and then if you behave properly, you'll be rewarded on Krishna's birthday!'

Gappu suddenly became alert. 'Really, but how grandpa?'

'Well, you just need to do as told. If you do well, then Lord Krishna blesses you or else he gives you a tail!'

Gappu touched his bum. 'Oh no grandpa! I don't want a tail. If I get one the entire school will make fun of me!' he said looking alarmed.

'Then just behave yourself. Be polite and well mannered. Eat properly, get up on time, do your homework, help doing a little household work and listen to your mom and dad. I think that should help'.

Gappu was annoyed. That was a lot to do. But then he did not want a tail on Lord Krishna's birthday either, so he decided to follow grandpa's instructions.

Next day onwards, Gappu was bang up at everything that was expected of him, dressed well for school and did not fuss over food, no not even for that glass of milk!

Mother was a little puzzled with Gappu's 'no-fuss' behavior, but still it kept her delighted for some time.

However, just the day before Janmashtami, he made a mistake.

The sweet meats were prepared and kept in front of the idol neatly in mother's finest brassware. The sight was tantalizing. Gappu caught a glimpse of it.

'Oh, wouldn't it be nice to have one!' He could not resist the temptation and picked up one.

As he finished eating it, a strong sense of guilt started haunting him. 'Oh, what have I done?' He thought aloud looking nervous. He quickly touched his bum and let out a sigh of relief.

'What if he punishes me later?' He thought as his mother came over to him.

'Gappu did you eat any laddoo?'

'No ma!' he said sheepishly.

'I kept ten of them and now there are only nine! Where did one go?' Mother looked upset.

Gappu felt bad. He now had two sins in his



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account - he had not only stolen a laddoo, but also lied about it. He looked at Krishna's idol, which he thought was staring at him with a mischievous smile. The expression made him even more nervous and he quickly looked away.

'Does he know about it?' he thought in his mind.

The day passed, but Gappu's guilt and his fear of his tail bone growing into a recognizable mature tail did not subside. He touched his bum every now and then.

'Oh, why did I eat it? I am sure he will give me a tail by tomorrow!' he said looking scared.

He walked up to the idol folded his hands and said, 'Please forgive me for stealing your laddoo. I shall never do that again nor will I ever lie to my mother.'

He gulped. 'I don't want any reward, but please don't give me a tail! My friends will make fun of me; please!' and he bowed in front of the idol pleading and requesting. Grandpa saw him and smiled.

The night of Janmashtami arrived. Gappu's house looked and smelled nice. Fresh flowers adorned every space. Everyone in the house was in new clothes and so was Gappu, but he looked sad. 'I will not get any reward!' he thought sadly.

'Gappu come quickly!' shouted grandpa. Gappu ran into the Puja room. Grandpa was pointing at a neatly wrapped packet at the idol's feet. 'Lord Krishna left you a gift!'

Though hesitant, Gappu's face soon broke into a smile. He quickly opened the gift and found a box of chocolates with a letter.

The letter read, 'Next time if you do it, you will have the longest tail that anyone has ever seen!'

'Oh no! I shall never do it, never do it again Lord Krishna!' cried Gappu. Grandpa laughed and hugged him.

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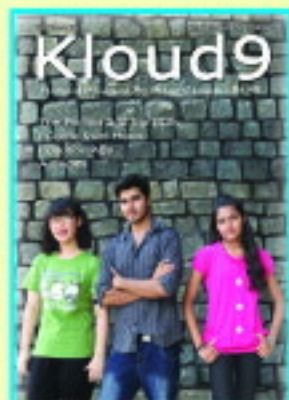
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5. Suitable pictures and photographs may be scanned and emailed in JPG format for travelogues, other articles and stories. But do not download from the Net and send it. Scan resolution should be 300dpi
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