



Raw Whispers



SOMETIMES THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT.

-Rinchen Angmo



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An Open Letter on Behalf of All Those who've been Having It Rough Lately

It's been pretty tiresome lately. Each day gets progressively tougher and with each battle that we fight, we lose a little bit of our strength and a little bit of ourselves.

When we do mention as a passing statement that things haven't exactly been sailing smooth for us, the first sentence that we hear is "Hey, you can call me **whenever** okay? I'm always there for you." Hasn't this sentence been thrown around a little too casually these days? But even so, I guess it's okay, there's no use blaming someone, because maybe that's what they feel they can do best in their shoes and that's alright.

However, what they fail to understand is, even with someone on the end of the other line, we don't always know how to explain our emotions because more often than not we ourselves don't exactly understand the cause of our restless behavior, our uncontrollable temper and our sleepless nights. Amidst all this emotional turmoil, hearing about how they too (or someone that they know) are going through the **exact same** problem, and that we're just **overthinking** it, does not really help.

Such standardized responses for all our problems lead us to wanting to run away from our phones, from having to reply to texts and attending calls wherein we'll be required to answer (while painting a fake yet polite picture of regular normalcy) the customary questions such as "How are you?" "How is everyone at home?" "What are you doing these days?"

As much as I abhor them, sometimes I end up asking the very same questions for lack of a better subject to talk about. Living in these times of discord is really not easy. On the one hand, we want to talk to people and share our emotions, but then we run away from conversations, since they take place either as a mere formality, or require us to paint a picture of ourselves that others want to or rather, expect to see. Anything that isn't aligned with their perception of us simply becomes unacceptable.

The sentence that I've hated hearing the most in my futile attempts to share my problems with someone when they ask me what's wrong is "Oh! But you look so happy/cheerful/bright all the time. It doesn't look like you'll be going through something so painful at all!" To all those who say this in their attempt to console their companion, is it your friend's attempt to try and be happy despite their tough situations that disturbs you or is it the discord between your perception of the limited emotions that your friend can feel as opposed to the wide span of emotions that they've been going through, that doesn't align with the picture of them that you have painted in your mind.

Maybe now it would make a little more sense for others to understand why some of us don't respond as often to our calls and messages as we would honestly like to, because truth be told, we don't have the energy left to paint the picture you want to see. And we've already heard most of the standard replies that we know will come our way when we share a problem. It's funny when I hear how people have a problem when I don't pick their calls or don't respond to their messages immediately. Does keeping a phone necessarily mean that we must all be available 24/7, 365 despite our mental health and our own emotions. Do you not find it unreasonable to push someone to share something personal with you and then get offended if they don't do so? Is actively listening to someone's problems so that one can give their two pence as they allow themselves to indulge in the savior complex, the only way we feel we can provide support? Maybe that's why it's easier for us to mindlessly scroll through social media while liking each other's posts and viewing each other's stories as we create an illusion of being 'in touch' with people through these platforms, without offending them with our inability to communicate. But it's okay, I will text back soon enough and tell you that nothing much has been going on with me as I ask you in turn how you've been doing. Till then, please don't be offended as I try and take some time off to figure out my emotions for myself.

Yours Sincerely,

A person whose been having it quite rough lately.

-Amla Srivastava

Am I me or you?

Are you you or them? Am I me or you? What am I, but the experiences I had through you? Am I just another extension cord, leading to you? Is there a me at all? Am I “I” or am I just an artificially induced you?

We do not often realise it, even as it happens. Every second, the edges of our “self” are grated off by the abrasive gaze of the other . Even as I write this, the grated edges of my “self” *may* be falling like snowflakes , on the cold hard marble flooring of my room . Whether they *are* actually falling, I cannot say for as I said we often do not realise it, even *while* our self is disintegrating into mere dust. The marble floor *may* be covered with tattered coils of translucent glitter - the remains of my “self”, invisible to my own naked eye. I cannot yet see the glitter, so, for now I think my “self” is intact. The fragility of my assertion is something that I don’t as yet believe in or rather choose not to believe in.

My “self” is adept at the game of hide and seek. I haven’t yet found it, even as I embark on a journey to finally collude with it, as it is me and I it , so there is no reason why “we” should not unite in perfect harmony . Many of us have not yet found ourselves. I wish for me to say peekaboo to my lost self and finally tempt it to withdraw from the obscurity of its hiding place , but I never am quite able to spot it , for It consistently evades me - my “self” hiding from itself , even so I wish to finally coalesce my “self” into me .

Perhaps, I haven’t yet put my arms into the depths of my being, and felt about the dark void, to grapple and hold the form of my original self, buried deep under multiple visions , perspectives and constructs Visions, perspectives and constructs which are not products of “me”.



As I look into the mirror my mirror seems to baulk at me. It seems to want to say something. I gaze at myself. My “ self” gazes back at me . Finally my “mirrored” self speaks . It tells me I'm not it.

You are not you. You are an apocalyptic form of an alien’s gaze. You lost yourself to them. You let yourself become an extended projection of their selves, annihilating the original you. You killed yourself. The slaughtered remains of the murder you committed are stored within the depths of your unconscious self. At times , you feel like diving into your own deep sea to reclaim your lost parts , but you don’t take the sacramental plunge because the sea is black , wild and deep dotted with Medusa-like seaweeds embedded onto its floor, You’d rather let your corpse be tossed about by the black waves inside you . You’d rather carry on the way you are - a murderer and a charlatan. The words “ deep” and “ black” are immensely repellent to you . You also don’t like diving and splashing about . Peace and tranquility are more your things.

So, you let the corpse that was you float upon the surface of your own deep, Black Sea.

Your actual self is trapped under the sordid glass of the mirror in your wardrobe. You cannot rescue it because the sea was too black and deep.

All this my mirror in my wardrobe tells me.

The projection of their “selves” were projected and thrust upon your nimble shoulders , but you did not realise it while it was happening ,Even as you doubled under the weight of their vision , shuddering under its weight , struggling to hold your own - but failing miserably and not realising that you lost your “self” to constructs that you played absolutely no hand in constructing . The mirror does not stop speaking.

Slowly, their tendrils wound around you, slowly, they tightened their grip like elastic nooses around your neck and before you could make an attempt

to rescue yourself , the air had been wrangled out of you leaving you gasping , spluttering and choking , Blocked , stunted ,Restricted , inhibited , Caved in , boxed in , “mirrored in” .You were trapped in the mirror of your wardrobe .You are actually me , but you didn't know that till now . Your clipped wings are now a nebulous mixture of mangled veins embroiled in a thin veneer of shimmering gossamer, quivering violently as the last traces of life escape from within their purple walls.

I shudder at my reflection in the mirror. I want to smash it into pieces. The mirror does not stop to pause, it continues to talk ..

Only you did not realise it, while it was happening.

You don't realise it, now that it has happened, now that the free thinking YOU has been placed in a coffin that you did not build. Things happen slowly, overtly, like evolution. Your today is a result of millions of milliseconds that made up your past. History is not our past, it is our present.

Before you knew it, you became so many things - an amalgamation of multiple people. Right now, so many people are settled down, huddled and nestled in the dark, musty corners of the precincts of your soul. So many people made you their home and made you inevitably forget your own address.

Everything is somebody else's .

Nothing is yours.

The names on the title deeds are not yours.

You are not your own property, anymore.

Like an army of soldiers they pursued their imperialistic agenda, they became the colonisers, you became the colonised. But you did not realise it, while it was happening.

Now that it has happened, you think it is the new normal. That's what we do, to reconcile with our predicament, We annul it's incongruity by calling it a “new normal” , whereas in fact what's happening is anything but normal .

Bit by bit, they built the fortress of their will around you. Your self shrank and shrank and shrank, until it was nothing but a speck of your former self upon the new you - the new, novel, normal you.

A you that is not you but them.

The mirror minces no words.

On the outset, it was "nice" to be a part of the whole, a cog in the wheel, a clone that fit neatly into everybody's plan. It was "simple, sweet and convenient", falling thus into everybody's scheme of things. What you did not know was that you fit into nobody's plan in particular, least of all your own. Before you knew it, you became the ripe apple of everybody's eye - to be plucked and devoured.

In retrospect, you were just a withered apple core.

Only, you did not realise it, when your red luscious self-transgressed into a golden fibrous skeleton.

Your own scheme of things was a myth.

Your own line was a broken, fading segment that faded into the pale whiteness of the paper on which it was drawn.

Which fool said that complete democracies exist?

Who said dictatorships cannot co-exist with democracies?

Who said democracies do not harbour mini apocryphal dictatorships within their liberal folds?

We are all little autocratic dictatorships,

Each of us is each other's Hitler,

Each of us is the others gulag,

The precincts of the constructs built by our industrial units are the renegade's / lunatic's tickets to our Auschwitz ..

Whoever does not fit into our binaries is banished and tarnished - he is either a lunatic, a renegade or an anarchist: all doomed to suffer the same fate.



Every act of lunacy is a precursor of a new normal.

This we do not know, or even if we do know, we do not say it explicitly, for fear that we might become “that precursor.”

Believe me, we do not realise it as it happens - the murder, the annihilation, the negation and the elimination.

Even as I type these letters, I try to overcome the urge to press the backspace button because the fear of the blade of your guillotine culling my neck looms like an ugly shadow upon the screen of my phone. What you might think makes me think “ twice” about what I'm thinking .

But for now I will push you and your version of me off the cliff and into the abyss below and venture to tell you to preserve yourself, irrespective of what anybody might think

I will also proceed to tell you to BUILD, to build a fortress around your souls, construct it immaculately, Leave no crevice or crack, collect the dismembered patches of your tremulous soul, patch them together and preserve them in a jar . Let nobody steal that jar from you.

think as per what you think you should be thinking, irrespective of what they might think about you thinking about what you might want to think. In other words let your thoughts be free thinking individuals who could not care less about what other “ thoughts” think about them .

Your free soul was god's greatest gift to you. You entered the world with it and by all means it should be yours when you leave the world. Don't let somebody else's vision, shape yours. Your perceptions and visions are the only things that are yours .

Preserve them. Do not sell yourselves to the harbingers of an artificially induced homogeneity ,for if you sell your soul you will not be paid for selling it , rather you will pay for selling it.

-Harsahej Mann

All of me

*There are sides to me,
I adore.*

*There are others,
I do not want to call mine.*

Do you take all of me?

-Stanzin Lhadol



*“Come to the orchard in Spring.
There is light and wine, and sweethearts
in the pomegranate flowers.*

*If you do not come, these do not matter.
If you do come, these do not matter.”*

-Rumi

-Kriti



Women's voice within the Folk Songs of Ladakh

The songs which are influenced by the culture, lifestyle and tradition of a certain place -where they are sung- are called folk songs. The songs may differ as per the place, culture and religion. Folk songs represent the culture of contemporary society just as they represent the culture of past generations. How can they do both? Folk songs are most often written to tell a story about the human condition, and many of these stories are about finding or losing love, deceit, war, and natural disasters. A cheating lover is something that contemporary composers write about, and it is a popular subject of folksongs around the globe, as is star crossed love. War is still a lose-lose proposition for all sides just as it was centuries past. These common themes tie us to our ancestors through song.

It is said that folk songs represent contemporary society; taking the case of Ladakh, contemporariness extends to as early as 11th century till 1980's, spanning the geographical regions of Mustang, Guge, Tolly Bazaar in Skardo, Baltistan, Lahore, Jammu, Udhampur, Lhasa, and Kaza which neighboured the once famed 'Ladakhi kingdom'. It still is but names and rulers have changed.

Ladakhi people have always been considered peace loving people and tranquil through songs. The folk songs have been an emissary of history, struggles and elegies. But, what I was looking for in such a set up was a common voice of a woman, her struggles and her questioning the status quo. Or generally speaking a voice of a common man and his narrative since rigid feudal structures killed the voices in medias res. Through whatever research I could do in this field and material I could gather apart from my cultural memory, I have realized that caste, class and gender played a major role in their existence or propagation which makes them no different than what we have in today's modern society.

In this presentation, we have a series of folk songs mostly sung by women. I wanted to think that they might have been the writers of the song as well but I was pulled from this thought with an eminent song writer and song collector of Ladakh, Azhang Morup Namgyal who says, "Unless you were a king or a queen who commissioned writers to write about them which deliberately left out any negative aspect about them. Then, the song was given to a woman singer from the Beda community who would make it famous while she will go on to her begging entourage. Depending on the song and the family, she would be rewarded accordingly and that's how some of the songs have managed to pass on". In that way, she despite belonging to an alleged lower caste and class would become an ambassador of songs except without recognition or acknowledgement.

Here goes our first song by the title of "Nubchogs la ta Urgyan ling la" i.e., "the Southern land of the Dakinis or Land adorned with Udumbura Lotuses". This song tells the tale of Queen Nilza Wangmo who was the wife of King Sasyong Namgyal and her prayers to stay together instead of going for a divorce. This song is her prayer or wish to the deities and Gods to keep her with Sasyong because he had decreed to divorce her on account of loss of his favorite turquoise which the queen was wearing. She had come to Phey to wash herself and had kept the auspicious turquoise on a rock.

While washing, a crow took away her precious turquoise to Tibet. The king demanded that either his precious gift be returned or the queen leaves for her maiden house in Mustang. Nilza Wangmo is reminded of her Godfather or protector deity father, Father, and mother while leaving finally; yet, the last stanza on her memories of her son, Deskyong has to be heard.

The southern land of Dakinis (or Udiyana)
 Resides the lotus adorned protector deity
 The humble woman I am
 Bless me so that I would never have to return south
 Humble Nilza Wangmo I am
 Prophesize me against any return towards south

I am trying to step out of the palace
 Yet my heart is left behind in the palace
 The son born out of this mother
 Is sitting unaware inside the palace
 The son born out of Nilza Wangmo
 Is left behind in the palace

Then comes the story of Queen Zilzom who is hailed today as a powerful voice and symbol of agency of a woman in the era of Kings. King Deldan Namgyal, who was the son of the Lion king of Ladakh Sengay Namgyal lost his heart on the beauty and elegance of one of his most dutiful minister's wife. The minister's name was Kalon Chosnyit, who hailed from Saphut village of what today is known as Saboo. King Deldan is allegedly believed to have proposed to the Minister for his wife's bargain with position and titles. Minister Chosnyit refused the proposal and returned home. After a planned conspiracy to kill Chosnyit, King Deldan plotted on stealing away Queen Zilzom. Minister Chosnyit was called to court and while entering the Leh Palace, he was stoned in the dark alley of the palace. He managed to ride back on his horse till Saboo and was washing the bloodstains at a brook on the way home, but was stoned to death there by the Kings' men. After hearing about the unprecedented death of Chosnyit, Zilzom knew about King Deldan and she agreed to be his bride/concubine on a condition. The condition was kept that unless the King builds a long Mani Wall resembling the Queen's perak (Turquoise headgear), she won't get married. It took two years to build the Mani Wall and when it was finished, Deldan sent his marriage proposal to Zilzom. Zilzom disagreed saying that her headgear had an attachment of a pair of braids with them. She demanded that those braids be emulated in the Mani structure. Today, that Mani goes by the name of Chuti Maney situated near the AIR office or it is called Maney Ringmo till Housing Colony. When it was finally done, Zilzom was invited to see the resemblance and she sang this song remembering Chosnyit at the Maney. Mind you, this song already reveals her intention to turn her attention towards spiritual and religious practices which is eventually what she does. When the Kings' men reach Ebgü village to fetch her as a bride, she had already left the village with the proof of her hair and dresses left for them offered as a sign of celibacy.



The blue sky spread above me
The dragon shaped clouds keep floating towards right
Oh those are not dragon shaped clouds towards right
Those are the Dharma wheel of my teacher
Oh those aren't dragon shaped clouds floating right
That is the wheel of Dharma of my revered teacher, Guru Mipham

My teacher rides above the golden bridge
He rides the windhorse on the golden bridge
But the fish swimming below,
Oh the poor fish swimming below the golden bridge
Does not possess the fortune of choosing/differentiating between the black and
white of the mundane world

Let us circumambulate around the long Mani
Contemplate and walk from its right
If we can put it in practice
Our bodily impurities might vanish
If we keep circumambulating from the right
We might be able to revisit our gratitude for our parents

She eventually runs away to Hemis and spends her life in celibacy.

Now, let us travel towards the West of Ladakh to the land called Baltistan. Let us
all go to the land of sarcastic humour, of a spurned lover or a woman asking her
lover or a ruler about her rights.

The name is Fatima
I am washing the copper pot from the shelf
I brew tea out of sandalwood
Oh the budding rose, the red rose covering my face

I have been going to the beginnings and ends of this village
Looking for some water for the rose bush
The rose bush was not fortunate enough to get some water
Oh the budding rose, the red rose covering my face

You claim to be as the Tehsildar of the town
I am a woman who is a farmer
How do you think of using your dominance?
Oh the budding rose, the red rose covering my face

Wakhay Dakbu is a song of dissent and lampooning of the rule by ministers and
Wazirs. Here, the author and the singer sounds familiar to the voice of a common
individual. The second stanza is something so relevant in today's 'democratic'
times too.

The hilltop of Wakha is worth watching
 The gushing winds are to be heard from the hilltop of Wakha
 When one stands and watches below from the hilltop of Wakha
 I could see the front garden of my home's compound

In the front yard visible from the Wakha Hilltop
 Flowers are blooming at a beautiful pace there
 In the front garden of my compound
 Yellow roses are in bloom at a beautiful pace

I beseech you to care for the flowers
 Since those flowers will be used for the minister's son head decoration
 Yellow roses need special care
 Since they will be used to decorate the Wazir's son head

In the front yard of my house
 Young people of my age are playing with water
 In the front yard of my house
 People of my age and thoughts are playing with water

But people who envy my progress in life
 Instructs me not to play with water
 Why must not I play with water?
 How many lives does a human have to not play with water?
 How many lives does this young man have to not play with water?

I wanted to bring in inclusivity by representing songs from all the four regions of Ladakh but time and preparation did not allow us that privilege. And any translation error is my own since this is my first attempt at translating folk songs.

-Namgyal Angmo



Creating Fragments of Pain

Small thoughts sometimes injure the brain,
Creating fragments of pain;
I wonder,
Can such trivial abstractions turn me
insane?

As far as I can retain,
The noises, which poured through the
walls of my parents' room were so
inhumane,
That even I can't explain,
But an unwanted childhood I have
attained.

In my domain,
Each pitter patter of rain
Tells a story, so dark, so mundane
That I can't refrain,
But recollect the threads of diabolical
evocations that my heart contains.

Through these years,
The memories I have gained,
They Leave behind unswerving stains
For this is all part of a chain.

I try to annihilate the emotions that
remain,
But however these thoughts still sustain;
I wish these aren't the last ones that
pertain
As my soul leaves its membrane.

-Tavishi Agarwal

A Day in the Life of Worn-Out Earphones

Entangled in her world of chaos,
 I peeked out of the purse for a breath of fresh air.
 For the fifth time in a week, she stepped out to see him.
 She stepped out at the bus depot,
 And walked as fast as she could,
 She hadn't missed her chance right?

But there he was, tied to a leash, with his usual crooked smile,
 At the table his new owner had a strange attachment to.
 All she could do was stare into his dark brown eyes.
 She could go and stroke his head perhaps,
 But that wouldn't do any good to her
 already terrible heartache.

It had been 5 long years,
 Since the three of us lay in her backyard garden,
 Looking up at the cosmic infinity.
 We were the only two things that never left her side,
 In this cruel, cruel world.
 That was until the summer of 20___.
 When her world came crashing down,
 Along with the high rise buildings,
 And the crumbling hopes of an entire town.
 She was all alone, helpless.
 She never saw her parents again.

As she endured life's hurdles with her beloved Oscar,
 It wasn't too long before she exhausted her little fortune.
 That is when she had to give him up.
 Give up the only reason she had to live.



The man said he had found him a new home,
With kind and benevolent owners.
They would take really good care of him.
What mattered to her though, was this.
She'd never see him again.
She'd never play catch with him again.
She'd never watch him plop himself on her lap, as she buried
her head in a pile of books.

But the heavens had something else in store.
A sort of trade off, perhaps.
On her way to college, there was a cafe.
A cafe that served coffee good enough for Oscar's new
owner to come back, every second day.

This was her only chance, to see a little piece of her soul.
A piece she thought she'd lost forever.
So there she was, catching a glimpse
Of her only reason to live.

But time doesn't like to see people smiling for too long.
So she had to leave.
As she popped me back in her ears, she played the one song
that she found solace in,
For the millionth time, perhaps.
The familiar Beatles track made a tear trickle down her
cheek,
"Take a good look; you're bound to see
That you and me,
Were meant to be."

-Anushka Saha

Of lies.

I am constantly devoured
 By jabs of pain-
 A you- sized hole in me.
 (I am not lying)

I switch back and forth
 In dreams and reality
 Awake. Asleep. Awake. Asleep.
 Awake. Asleep. Awake. Asleep.
 Awake. Asleep.
 Awake. Asleep.
 (I am not lying)

I search for words
 Like pebbles along a dirty beach
 To weave you into a story.
 (I am not lying)

I stay sober
 Or try to, in my head
 In case I see you
 Camouflaging within a crowd of my thoughts
 (I may be lying)

I wish I metamorphosed
 Into a giant insect
 Devoid of thought and being

(I am not lying)
 (I am lying. I cannot deal with losing memories of you)
 (I am not lying)

I have had enough
 Of you and you and you
 I float away.
 Missing you is an inconvenience.
 (I am lying)
 (Lying)
 (Lying)
 (Lying)

-Niangthianmuang S. Ngaihte



Let's hear the Almighty's Hypothetical Quandary

I built a house
I thought it was perfect,
Could never accommodate a defect
One of the best,
Unfortunately, unable to harbor the desirable effect
Its inhabitants were being put to test
between them emerged a colossal unrest
So, they left.

Searching for the adversity
With a deep disconcerting disposition
In an upsetting curiosity
Meandering my way to its origin
Found the mishap!
Well it is just the widening gap
In the work that
The feeble man can't handle anymore....
Everything is too hard to reconcile
The recent overindulgent freedom has made the mind sore
Too many options,
Which one should I secure?
With my twisted ways
Finding the ideal one to lure.....ouch

So getting back,
Do I think the house is perfect...
Yeah...will always be
After all it's made by me
(Being said
At the risk of sounding too ahead of myself)
However, it cannot self-sustain
The bricks need to learn to maintain
Their cement with one another,
And if the folk within falter,
It hopefully should be something
The house I built can alter

-Ananya Singh

Abstract Notes to Myself

Faint memories, often repressed ones

Appear bluer than usual

On some blue days.

-my past self

Nomo,

Sometimes we do not have the courage to speak or reprimand ourselves at the thought of doing something outrageous. In those times, we think to ourselves about the way society has nurtured us to become such dependent beings.

During such strains, we begin to blame the society, sometimes a lot more than required.. We forget how much positive energy could be harboured and channeled in various ways. More often than not, these manifest to become heavy emotional blots, often transgressing boundaries and safe spaces in our memory lanes. By the time these memories re-emerge, we have already made the mistake of feeling comfortable in our emotionally-blotted personalities.

When we realise the implications of our deluded comfort, it becomes too late to change this mirage to its original self. The delusion becomes real then. It's a cycle. Everything revolves in a cycle including the concept of time. The psychological traumas, memories, the process of socialising, energy levels in our environment- everything is troubled and secured, just like that. Freedom and independence from these troubles is perhaps our goal without us realising the possibility of it. When will we begin to live without any worries of such kind? It's difficult to procure this state of mind, maybe because suffering is a part of surviving this so-called life. The only way to minimise this suffering is by balancing ourselves in the context of everything. The trick, perhaps, is to be aware of our behaviour at every step and putting ourselves back in position when we feel like deviating to the extreme.

*-constantly revisiting
the past and present
until they appear one.*

At times, there will be a yellow meandering in the blue sky

Looking for space and perhaps some effort to expand,

Give it a chance, perhaps, it will outgrow the blue tides someday.

-the present day

-Sonam Chhomo



My Heart is on the Edge

I think I'm always going to crave pain
in the form of love.
I wait for an excuse to
throw bombs,
while I prepare myself to dodge bullets
because all I've ever known is warfare,
and all I've felt is wounds.

My heart is on edge,
waiting for the next time
it trips and falls into disappointment,
but the real disappointment is
how I am expecting all of this
from you.

We have all cut open other people,
and you have stitched me up so well.
You've healed me from the scrapes
and bruises that you did not inflict,
but here I am,
weapons raised,
waiting for a reason to attack.

I have found I do not tread lightly in love.
I have my knife in my back pocket
ready for the fight, instead of the flight.

So please,
when you find yourself bleeding
don't say I didn't warn you...

-Dhruv Gupta

Artistic Confessions in BTS *Black Swan*

It is the 7th year of BTS as artists. Amidst the anticipations surrounding their comeback album, *Map of the Soul: 7*, BTS drops the orchestral version of *Black Swan* (2020). The music video is an art film performed by MN Dance Company. This collaboration is part of CONNECT, BTS the global art project of experiments with multimedia art, and in effect, blurring boundaries to connect with different genres of art.

The title of the song points to Darren Aronofsky's movie *Black Swan* (2010) which derives 'inspiration' from Satoshi Kon's anime *Perfect Blue* (1997). Both of these movies are reflections on artistic identity and the process of artistic creation. As the protagonists, Nina and Mima immerse themselves into their respective arts, in the pursuit of perfection, they navigate through the world with reality unearthed from beneath their feet. These intertextual references set the tone for BTS to talk about the engagement with their art.

The music video begins with a quote by Martha Graham, American modern dancer, "a **dancer dies twice** – once when they stop **dancing**, and this **death** is the more painful." This functions as an epigraph to the meaning art holds for BTS. Artists build their lives and identity on their art. In a profit and production oriented social framework, artists gamble with fate to live for their art. To create means to be. By extension, ceasing to create means ceasing to be. Artistic anxieties like losing passion or a creative burnout equate to a painful death of the self. Breaking the promise of lifelong commitment to art would imply the betrayal of the artist's own self. *Black Swan* is an introspective meditation on the fears of the artist if their heart no longer races or resonates when music is played. The remnant self of the first death is an ungrounded wanderer as they have lost the passion that anchored them. This self cries out a 'silent cry', struggling, sinking. The artist is stranded in a bewildering spatial dimension of the vast ocean floor and a temporal realm of time suspended into eternity.

The artist delves deeper into themselves as an aimless seeker. The artist's encounter with their shadows is illustrated in the choreography where the main dancer is controlled, restrained and dragged away by the shadows in a prison of light. "Let my own feet carry me, I'll go in myself." In Carl Jung's map of the soul, the shadow archetype describes the repressed or denied facets of the self. This is similar to the theme of temptation BTS discussed in their *WINGS* album, a coming of age text. Conventional didactic narratives seek to moralize and

purge temptation from the self. BTS talks about temptation as the soul's voice that one must listen to rather than try to suppress, for temptation is the door to self-realisation. The same can be said of shadows. According to Jung, shadow integration refers to the process of assimilating the hidden aspects of the self into consciousness. This suggests that one must make peace with one's darker sides rather than enter into conflict with them. In the movie *Black Swan*, this is depicted in Nina's inner conflict between her persona (white swan) and shadow (black swan), and her eventual perfection of the role of the black swan, the inner journey into accepting her shadows.

BTS undertakes a similar inner journey and encounters their artistic selves. As they open their eyes, they find themselves in their workroom, the studio. Their inner journey of shadow integration indicates the rebirth of their artistic selves. A determination to create and to exist, guide them. "Film it now" becomes a soulful entreaty to record them in their elements, as a testimony to their art. Towards the conclusion of the music video, the shadows no longer inhibit the main dancer, rather they facilitate the main dancer's movements. The shadows hold up the dancer who arms are outstretched in graceful flight. The shadows are in harmony with the self.

Kim Namjoon, the leader of BTS, talks about the pain embedded in the image of an unread book, thereby suggesting the significance of the audience who engages with their art. In the subtext of *Black Swan*, there is a silent request to not be dissected for a message or deeper meanings. The soul of the songs flaps its wings defiantly in the critic's hands, a struggle against being analyzed, a refusal to be put down into standardized binary boxes of meanings. Instead *Black Swan* asks you to feel. Feel your own self in relation to the art. Feel it deeply with the artist. Art becomes a space of active interaction. Connect yourself to the art and ask, what feelings does it evoke in me?

-Afnan

An emotional hut for an artist

Life is dry,
And the paper will absorb the ink best now,
The world is silent,
My words will cry louder now,
The burden of curious questions in my head,
squeezes something productive - poetry - an emotional
hut for an artist to discover solace in.

-Deepanjali Verma

Moonlight



It would have been an entirely different story if the sky had been crystal clear with a deep sapphire blue hue, and bright stars adorned the sky as lustrous, liquid moonlight kissed the flowers of the lone plant.

But does the perfect beauty of the aforementioned statement require us to believe that the moment captured in time and presented before our eyes is not worth our appreciation? Does the story of the cloudy grey sky, with the moon struggling to radiate its milky gleam, sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding, and all the while gently grazing the flowers with its soft yet brilliant moonbeam; deserve no credit at all?

Does the effort of at least trying, even when surrounded by dark times, not stand a chance against the sparkle and glamour of perfection?

-Amla Srivastava

Each of us grows like the periwinkle
of the sky unfolding in a new sheen
with the sun rays falling flat on our
face, welcoming us out of our circle
of concern.

-Saanvi Hissaria



I wanted to ask her if she were okay, if the world had yet poisoned her soul, and merely looking through her eyes I could see, she was everything but okay.
It made me realize, back then, how pathetic and weak I really am, for I remember a day not too far where I stood high and promised to bring the world at her feet, and here I am now, on my knees, watching helpless as the world slowly ravages the only soul I've truly loved.
Oh life, how cruel in your judgement you are, how clever in your cruelty, for you have not broken her soul once, but mine twice.

-Dhruv Gupta

'Periods and the Mosquitoes'

Many stories are already getting buried in my laptop. But these stories are special... not only for me but the people who are reading it right now. I hope it will compel them to reimagine the society we are living in. Personally, I don't feel comfortable posting these stories... but posting these stories is necessary for me, you, and the world as well.

It's time to *whisper* aloud whether it's your *choice* or not. We need to be *stayfree* for a better future.

So here it is in front of you.

'Periods and the Mosquitoes' is from some of the incidents of my life which made me think about the world and its people again and again.

It's been around one year.

Just a random evening of my college days, I was going to Amba Cinema to watch a low budget Ayushman Khurana type good movie. Before leaving, I had to give a book to one of my friends at Rudra Hostel which is on the way to one of the legal exits of my St. Stephen's college. Went there and called her to collect the book. She came and took the book. She had a smile on her face but she was looking unwell. She saw the book and the chapter which I previously advised her to read. We had a little conversation. In between, she told me that she was suffering from stomach pain. I was like... okay, it happens with everyone. The only thing I could do was to say "Take rest!"... & I did the same. In a few minutes, I was at the Green Cafe which is in front of St. Stephen's Rudra Gate. I had Maggi-Chai at that roadside cafe. I planned for Amba but I came back to my hostel, Mukh East. I have no idea why I did so.

There was an overexcited Punjabi boy in my hostel, I went to his room and we watched something online and it wasn't related to UPSC Exams.

In the evening, I inquired about my friend's health. She WhatsApped me "I'm fine, it was just period cramps."

Cramps... it was a new word for me. Googled it. Got a little idea about the word from the internet and I just replied: "Ohhk...Take care!"

It was the first incident in my life when I was unable to say anything like "Have a speedy recovery." or something similar to it.

SPEED IS PREFIXED.

Neither from any human, any teacher nor from my RSS wala school did I get to know about 'Menstruation' ; I learnt about it from the Internet... that too at the age of 21 after a WhatsApp message. But wasn't just me... there must be thousands of people who really don't know about it and some of them who do know, use black polythene to carry it along with their black thoughts.

After this incident, I read many related articles and watched many documentaries. Meanwhile, I realized that there was a Sanitary napkin vending machine recently installed on our campus. On the same night, I went there to see what it was all about. It was already out of stock, I couldn't see the white beauty. For real...

At the same time, there was a collection drive by our college. I decided to buy only Sanitary Napkins as much as possible. Collected money in various ways. In some days, there were around 150 packets of Sanitary Napkins in my room (S-14) of MukhEast Hostel. From 2-3 people who visited my room that day I got very good comments which made me feel happy that I became acquainted with it from the internet, not from people with crab mentality who know about it but still criticize it. Yeah... the same people who gave those very good comments.

Learning something is not enough until you have a good realization of the same.

You ask the woman to bleed for a few days in isolation and clean up their own mess.

Also, there is not a single solid reason in Manu Smriti... why the presence of a menstruating woman makes any religious ritual unsuccessful. If we believe such baseless theories... we should also skip five-six days a month of practicing rituals in Goddess's temples. As far as I could understand 'menstrual isolation' is a boon for the daughters of our country.

Menstrual-Isolation is pure misogyny.

Chalo... Koi nhi... I haven't lived in Manu's era. Maybe... It might have been helpful for women to keep them sanitized. But is it relevant in today's era?

On the one side of the coin India keeps a woman on the top of its civilization and on the other side of the coin, it compares the same woman to a dog when she is menstruating. We should really look deeper into it.



Adding one more story from my life's collection...

"Please don't kill the mosquitoes of Himachal Pradesh. We live together. Just capture them in your cupped palm and set them free outside of your room. You will definitely be happy by doing this."
(These lines are from one of my friends, A Nun from Himachal Pradesh. It was August 2019, we had a medical camp in the Kee Monastery, where I was living. I too was there in the medical camp to get basic health checkups. BP and Pulse Rate were extremely high, but it was normal according to my situation. They gave me some headache, fever and high altitude sickness pills. Cough syrup was also there... and it was my permanent companion.
My hands and face were full of invisible rashes, they said it is because of the tiny mosquitoes of the Himalayas. On the other hand, one of the nuns requested me not to kill the mosquitoes.
I was like "Wait.....What?"
"OMG...Ahimsa on this level."

So now, if I say her lines changed my life... Noo, it is not enough. Her thoughts and their implementation in the real-world changed my own way of thinking. It took me many weeks and uncountable conversations with different people from the same place to have a genuine realization of her words.
Humanity shall rise again!

One day a year is not enough to celebrate the wisdom, compassion, strength, courage, and determination of women.
Happy International Women's Day today! Let's empower women and girls every day. <3
Thank You!

PS: Written on 8th March 2020, on International Women's Day!

-Aditya



THOUGHTS AND RANDOM POEMS FROM THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN SOUL

Of Mountains and skies

Skies so blue
Stories of mountains

Will it renew
like sparkles in fountains?

But impermanence is the word,
What a treacherous yet beautiful truth..

Like a bird
Who can fly yet fall in sooth ..

Tell me what is the meaning of it all?
Sometimes I fly, sometimes I fall
sometimes I sit on the faraway knoll

But it's tough to really see the light right?
I mean you've gotta give it a fight
Or maybe it's all about the flight

When you see the sky before you
not a single cloud, not even one inch by one inch
And you know that having once seen this sky.. even if you never again see this..
you know. You know
You know you will fly..
No.. you will dive into the sky because you know that the sky is not the limit,
It's the beginning of another summit...

Blue skies, you will live forever ...
mountain highs, my saviour...
Together we see Rewa ..
this time, forever and ever

The mind speaks

Like a known soul but it isn't

Like a flash,

Yet can't dare to look,

How can this be?

It's odd because it's not me yet, is it?

Questions and the answers trail somewhere in the clouds of a hill afar

Yet there aren't clouds,

But blue skies.

A constant yet not so constant sea,

how ...

Do the bonds of yesterday count the ones before yesterday?

if not..then what..

like the reflection of the tree... when you see the reflection, you know

there's a tree but what if the curtain is drawn over the tree

when the curtains rise..

maybe I'll realize

I'll smile

*The wind blows
The sun sets on Maryul's mountains
Words flow by like a song,
A song so familiar, yet something is new..
Can the same song sound different with a oh-so-happy tune?*

*Sometimes I think...
And remain thinking and thinking and thinking,*

*But the tune has changed
I think..*

*Aren't we all lost souls floating on atoms unknown
Sometimes crying
Sometimes smiling
Sometimes smiling at the sky
Sometimes, sometimes, sometimes ..
The rest should remain a mystery right?*

*So that's life: transient, sorrowful and beautiful..
But from this fleeting story I will remember the sun sets
And the words that flowed like music,
Am I just floating with my thoughts?
Even so, how does it even matter..
I'll smile, I will,
why..
should remain a mystery*

-Rinchen Angmo



Hope this edition too was cathartic and brought solace.

-Rinchen Angmo

If anybody wants a printed copy (of any of the three editions) to be delivered to them, please leave a detailed message with your address at:

[http://rinchen.mountainwhispers@gmail.com](mailto:rinchen.mountainwhispers@gmail.com)

or dm on the Raw Whispers Instagram page:

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Feel free to send your pieces for the fourth edition of Raw Whispers before 27th August 2020 at:

[http://rinchen.mountainwhispers@gmail.com](mailto:rinchen.mountainwhispers@gmail.com)

You can follow our website: <https://rawwhispers.com/>

More about Contributors

Ig:

@theimpulsivefinger

@artalogues

@ink.splash.in

@spitivalley

@jojoandporky

Blog:

<https://sayingdotpress.wordpress.com/>

<https://rewasum.wordpress.com/blog-feed/>

Initiatives you can contribute to:

<http://www.hamaripahchan.com/>

About the Sukhad Project

-Poorvi Parakh

Only 30 percent of women in India have access to sanitary napkins. Not only is affordability an issue but also the lack of awareness and most importantly the taboo and the stigma put upon menstruation, by the society. The Sukhad Project is an initiative of Hamari Pehchan, a non-governmental organization based in Delhi, to make this necessity more accessible for the women of our country along with creating sensitivity and awareness. Amidst the ongoing pandemic, the project aims to expand its reach furthermore and create a deeper and greater impact on the lives of these women.

My Role: Working as an intern for crowd funding and social media marketing for the NGO.

The pandemic has made many of us realize that although a lot of things in life have come to halt, we have still got more to be thankful for than others.

Every woman I had an opportunity to interact with agreed to experience some sort of pain or discomfort during their periods. It might be considered something more natural that can be tough to change but not having a pad is what can be changed. It is a necessity but comes at a price not everyone can pay for. This however should not end here. Even though period pain is natural, it should be talked about more often and aloud. It is not something to be ashamed of or hushed about only in the corners of the house, specifically with women.

The pandemic has shown, more than ever, that we can stand up for each other and help each other out so that when we are back to life, it is not normal but "better."

We must not forget that the power to change, both, the wellbeing of others and the idea of what is considered an ideal behaviour rests with us. We can break the taboo and we can make the difference.