

SPRING SPECIAL

Demeter's
Daughter

AGNI
KANYA

...and more!

From the
Land of
Sita.

AVS
through
frames

The
Balladeer
and his
Muse

Assam Valley
Express

ISSUE 207



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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

What does one call it, that interim between the dead silence of browned pastures and the first breath of a newborn bud? What of the seconds in between the last flicker of yellow stars and the sound of painted doors being locked? By what name should one address the period between the last farewell and the first time the Room learns to accommodate a new absence? How does one digest the realisation that the faces you've grown up with are faces you will never recognise again, at least, not in the way you always have.

Spring is when you learn to say goodbye, and hello at the same time. When Persephone begins her ascent, when she bids her husband farewell and when she greets her mother's embrace with a familiar warmth, we know that Spring has set in. It is when Joy comes riding on a quick breeze to blow away Winter's dreary melancholy. When Orpheus is mid-journey with the hope of being hand-in-hand with his Eurydice, the knowledge of her loss blends into the hope of seeing her once more, if only for a split second. Spring is when grief only just begins to ebb with time. Spring is a love letter to memory.

To all those who have once sat where we now do, to all those who have watched the walls shapeshift, to all the people who we know as legends, and to those who will come after, we await you as Demeter awaits her daughter, as Orpheus awaits Eurydice — we long for you as the bard does his muse

The Room Above the Library will change as the seasons do. The walls will shift the hues in which they are covered, the issues which change the names in which they are known, but change does not mean erasure. The hand clenching the key will always hold it in reverence. The eyes gazing at the ink will always stare until the letters bleed. Lucy will. The Room will always remember.

- Rianna Lingjel Irom, Editor-in-Chief, XII



Tales from the Hills

i. into deeper waters

- Nayanika Borah, X

Behind seven hills and a mighty river lies a story of pernicious nature. Many want the ability to shapeshift but they would be surprised to know that it already exists in a few run down villages of Assam. Joni, is a malevolent creature who has the ability to change its form and nature to those of others, as it pleases. It is an evil-minded, baleful creature who leads people into a world of misconception and madness.

This incident occurred in the village of Howajan, whose inhabitants depended on the fishmonger lifestyle. Pawan and Dhruba, the sons of a low-income family, earned their daily bread from selling fish on a regular basis. One uneventful Friday, Pawan inquired whether Dhruba was willing to go fish with him that evening for the market the next day. Dhruba, being well acquainted with the fact that their family needed all the money they could get, agreed without hesitation. Upon reaching, Pawan encouraged Dhruba to come deeper into the water to catch more fish. As the dark waters and eerie winds nudged Dhruba on, he remembered something. Pawan, who was quickly swimming

into the dark, was terrified of the deep waters.

As realization hit, he looked up with unease. He saw not his brother but a malicious creature with glowing eyes and a body made not of bones but rancorous motives. That night, a missing report was filed for Dhruba and he was later pronounced dead. His household was filled with chaos and frantic members who were not able to wrap their heads around his disappearance. While attending his brother's memorial, Pawan chanted "I will find whoever did this to you, trust me", unaware of the fact it was the trust Dhruba had for his brother which led him to his luckless death.

"It was the trust Dhruba had for his brother which led him to his luckless death."

ii. Nishi Daak

- Sreestee Paul, X

Horror stories are woven deep into the fabric of the Bengali imagination. Our fascination with the supernatural beings that exist just beyond the edge of reason is as much a part of our lives as a steaming cup of laal cha in the morning. Almost everyone has, at least once, been warned: if someone calls your name from behind at night, do not turn back. Do not respond. It is said that there are spirits who lure you with familiar voices, and answering them can be dangerous, especially if the call comes only once. In Bengali folklore, this eerie presence is known as “Nishi Daak.”

The term refers to a spirit that calls out to people at night, often mimicking the voice of someone they know and trust. What makes the Nishi particularly unsettling is its limitation: it cannot call out more than twice. In many villages, people are taught a simple rule for safety: only respond if the call is repeated three times or more. Anything less, and you walk on.

*“if someone calls
your name
from behind at
night, do not
turn back.”*

*“The Nishi Daak,
as the stories go,
is not just
a caller in the dark,
but a hunter
waiting for you
to answer.”*

The Nishi is believed to be the restless spirit of someone who did not receive proper last rites, or pind-daan, leaving their passage to the afterlife incomplete. Bound to the in-between, these spirits are said to wander, seeking the living.

A friend’s brother, Jishu, once came face-to-face with this legend. His daily commute involved a lonely half-hour drive along a highway. One evening, as he was returning home after work, he heard his name being called. The voice was unmistakable; it sounded exactly like his grandfather. For a moment, instinct must have urged him to stop, to turn around. But Jishu, being a Bengali, knew the stories well and knew better than to turn around to heed the call.

He did not slow down. He did not respond. He kept driving, eyes fixed ahead, heart pounding, until he was safely home. And perhaps that is why he is still here, because the Nishi Daak, as the stories go, is not just a caller in the dark, but a hunter waiting for you to answer.



S O A N A
I L L U S T R A T I O N S

Demeter's Daughter

- Aahil Faraj, VIII

The myth of Hades and Persephone is one of the most enduring tales of Greek mythology, symbolising love, loss, power, and the eternal cycle of life and death. To tell this story, we must also turn to a few others: Zeus, Demeter and Hera.

Persephone, the goddess of spring, was renowned for her beauty so much so that it drew the attention of both gods and mortals alike. Before her story with Hades, there exists a darker and lesser-told tale involving Zeus, the king of the gods and her own father. True to his nature, Zeus was drawn to Persephone's beauty. Disguising himself as a serpent, he lay with her, leading to the birth of Zagreus, a child he cherished deeply and even named as his heir. However, this did not go unnoticed.

Hera, consumed by jealousy, persuaded the Titans to kill Zagreus. Though they succeeded, Zeus managed to recover the child's heart. In a strange twist, he later gave it to his mortal lover Semele in the form of a potion. From this, Dionysus was born, often believed to be the rebirth of Zagreus, Zeus' heir.

And now begins the more familiar, yet no less unsettling, story of how Persephone became the queen of the underworld, how life and renewal came to be bound with death and eternity. Hades, often misunderstood, was in many ways a just and dutiful ruler, especially when compared to the impulsive and often reckless Olympian gods. Yet, he was also isolated, dwelling in the underworld with little company beyond the souls of the dead.

When Hades saw Persephone, he fell deeply in love. But instead of courting her, he chose a darker path, he abducted her. The earth split open beneath her feet, and she was taken into the underworld. When Demeter, Persephone's mother and the Goddess of Harvest, realised her daughter was gone, she was overcome with grief. In her sorrow, she withdrew her blessings from the earth. Crops failed, the land grew barren, and famine spread. As mortals suffered and died, they could no longer offer prayers and sacrifices, weakening the gods themselves. This forced Zeus to intervene and demand that Hades return Persephone. But the underworld does not release so easily.

Before letting her go, Hades offered Persephone a pomegranate seed. Unaware of its consequences, she ate it. That single act bound her to the underworld, ensuring she would have to return.

In the end, a compromise was reached. Persephone would spend part of the year with her mother and part with Hades. Thus, an uneasy balance was formed. When Persephone returns to the world above, the earth blooms, spring and summer arrive. When she descends once more into the underworld, Demeter mourns, and the world turns cold and barren. And so, through this myth, the changing seasons find their story, written in love, loss, and the quiet inevitability of return.

The Balladeer and his Muse

- Rianna Lingjel Irom,
Editor-in-Chief, XII

Tartarus thrummed,
As the balladeer's steps
Seemed to drum
In the vast void that lay
Behind where he had crawled
Into the Jaws of the Reaper.
Down he went,
Son of Colliope
Into the world
Underneath, where not even air
Grazed the skin, where the
afterlife unfurled.

Apollo's heir,
With his blessed lyre,
Had come to make his plea
Before the Dis
Pater, the Carrier of Men
Who sat before the mortal man
Next to the Queen Persephone

And how amusing,
Did Her Majesty
Find this mortal man—
Whom, to her, was much like
An oxymoron
As he stood, so lively
Where not even life could breath
Let alone whisper.
—So amusing,
That she would delay even her return
To the abode above,
Where her mother's embrace awaited.
Intrigued, had she been,
When the winds told her of
the Darling

Of the Ancients
Who now stood before them,
Unwavering even in his desperation.

Orpheus' melody
could tame even the wildest tigers,
And even leviathans
Would rest
As long as it was to his lullaby
That they slept.
So it was of little surprise
That the grieving tune
Of Apollo's protege,
Touched even the lifeless heart
Of King Hades.

He stood before them,
A mortal man,
But his life had long been
Gleaned from within his body,
Beneath his bones
His soul
Had been drained from his flesh, a while ago
When his beloved, his Eurydice fell
Into the arms of the Realm Beneath.

Persephone,
Utterly pleased,
Had urged her husband
And the King himself,
Known for his hospitality,
Sent back his guest
With a granted request.

With a boon in his hand,
Orpheus trekked through Tartarus
Once more, this time rewarded
With a divine promise.

He did not know it then,
But he would turn
Defying the conditions he had set
If only for a lone glance at Eurydice's hand—
And she would fall
From the desperation
that arose from his affection.
She would fall,
knowing she'd been loved so desperately
That he would race back down
Chasing after her disappearing wraith—
In this lifteime, and the next.



AGNI

KANYA

- N. Chingkheinganbi, Associate Editor, XII

As the tormented King Drupad prayed for vengeance against his rival, Acharya Drona, the sacred fire of the yagna answered him. From its blazing depths emerged his long-awaited heir, a warrior son. Yet, alongside him arose another: a woman no one had asked for. As she stepped forth from the flames, a divine voice declared, “She shall be the cause of the destruction of evil.”

She was a vision, dark eyes like lotus petals, hair as deep as the night sky, a beauty destined for legends. Born of fire, she grew into it, radiant, fierce, and unyielding. She was Panchali, princess of Panchala. In time came her swayamvar, where her husband would be chosen through skill. The challenge was formidable: to pierce the eye of a golden fish suspended high above, guided only by its reflection in water. Kings and warriors gathered, yet one after another failed. In despair, King Drupad cried, “Is the earth devoid of a warrior worthy of my daughter?” Then stepped forward Karna, son of the sun. Yet his birth became his barrier.

Under Krishna’s quiet influence, Draupadi rejected him, and humiliation burned within him like a storm. From the shadows emerged Arjuna. Before anyone could comprehend the moment, the arrow had flown, and the fish’s eye was pierced. Draupadi left with him and the Pandavas to their humble dwelling. There, in innocent habit, Kunti instructed her sons to share whatever they had brought. Bound by duty and fear of adharma, Draupadi became the wife of

all five brothers. She gave herself wholly to their lives, their honour, their destiny.

Yet destiny was cruel. In a fateful game of dice, Yudhishtira lost everything, his kingdom, his brothers, and finally, her. Dragged into the royal court, clad in a single garment, her pleas echoed unanswered. Before the silent elders and powerless husbands, Duryodhana ordered her disrobing. In that moment of utter despair, she called upon the one who had never failed her, her ‘sakha’, Krishna. As her garment was pulled, it became endless, preserving her dignity and defying those who sought to break her.

Rising from that humiliation, Draupadi stood transformed. Her eyes blazed with the fire of her birth. She swore never to bind her hair again until it was washed in the blood of those who had shamed her. For thirteen years of exile, she carried that vow like an open wound. She was no longer a shadow beside her husbands, but a voice that would not be silenced. She refused to let time or diplomacy extinguish her fire. The world would call it war, but Draupadi knew better. The Mahabharata had begun in that sabha long before the first arrow was ever loosed.

Chāhār Bāgh

THE MUGHALS AND THEIR CULTURE OF GARDENING

- Viraj Kumar Gupta, X

The remarkable Mughal dynasty ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It is well-known for its architectural marvels, prosperity and cultural legacy. Among this was the tradition of building Mughal gardens, introduced by Babur, the first ruler of the Mughal Empire.

The Mughals were greatly influenced by Persian and Central Asian traditions. Babur mentioned his disappointment with the gardens in India in his memoir and decided to establish them himself. He built the first Mughal garden - Aram Bagh, along with several other gardens in places like Dholpur and Lahore. In his will, Babur wished to be buried in a simple grave, not in India, but in Kabul, under a pear tree which was overlooking the Hindu-Kush mountains. A significant feature of the Mughal Gardens is the use of the 'Charbagh' layout, meaning "four gardens". The garden is divided into four quadrants by intersecting four water channels, which represent the four rivers of Paradise in the Quran. The Gardens are filled with fruit trees, trees for shade and blooming, fragrant flowers like roses and jasmine.

Mughal emperors like Shah Jahan and Jahangir often used these gardens as places of relaxation and leisure. Gardens were also designed as sites for mausoleums such as the Taj Mahal as well as Humayun's Tomb. After Babur,

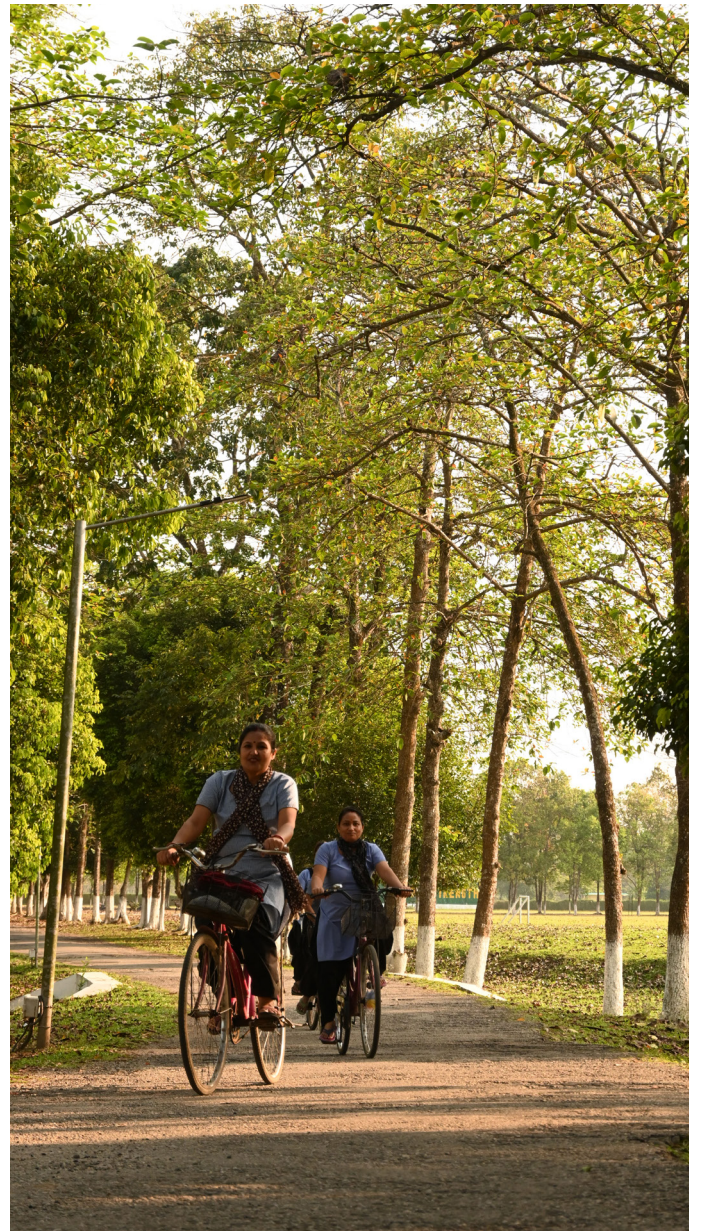
and several successive emperors, such as Akbar and Shah Jahan, continued to spread the tradition of Mughal Gardens. Mughal gardens reached their golden age in Shah Jahan's time, who was a great patron of the art of architecture. He also standardised the use of marble, fountains and precise symmetry. Today, even centuries later, the Mughal gardens remain, a remnant of the Mughal Empire's architectural genius and a place where culture meets nature.

“In his will, Babur wished to be buried in a simple grave, not in India, but in Kabul, under a pear tree which was overlooking the Hindu-Kush mountains.”

Photography by
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AVS through frames







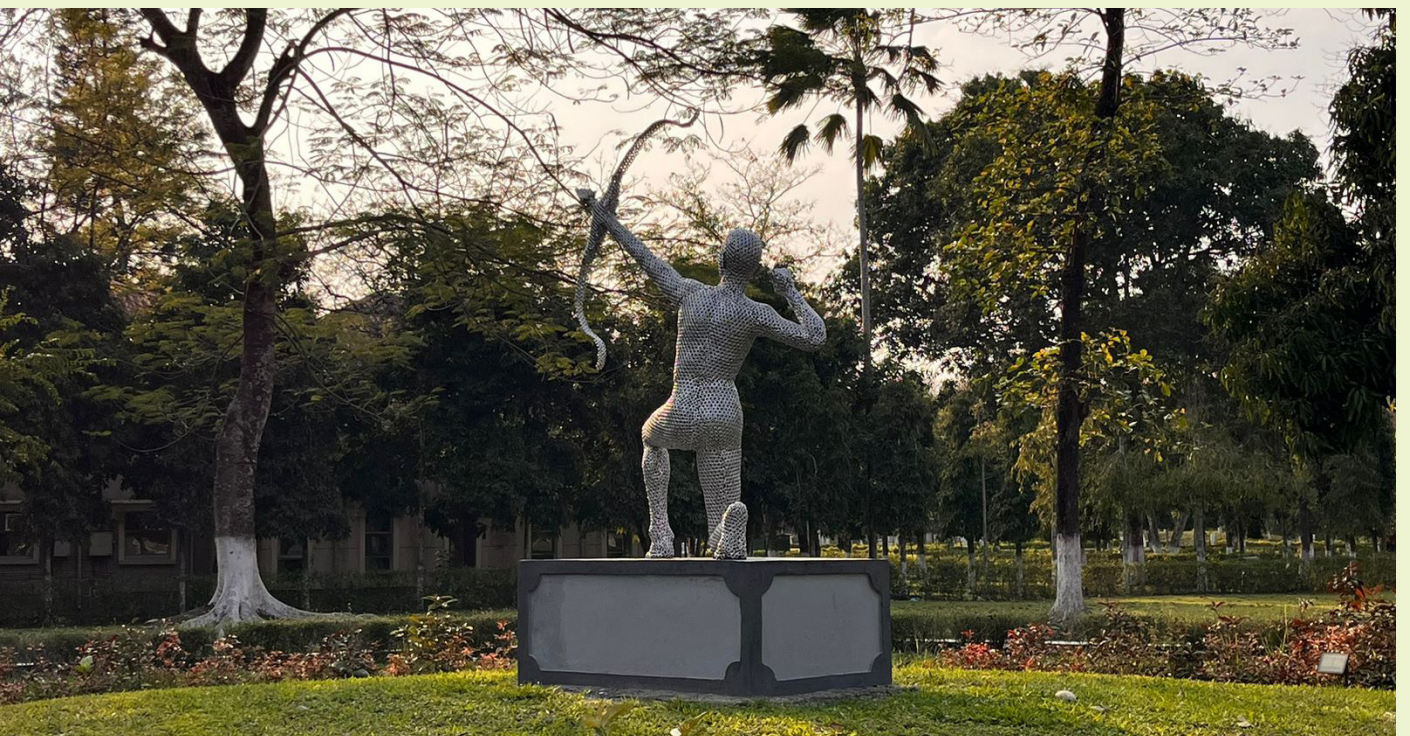
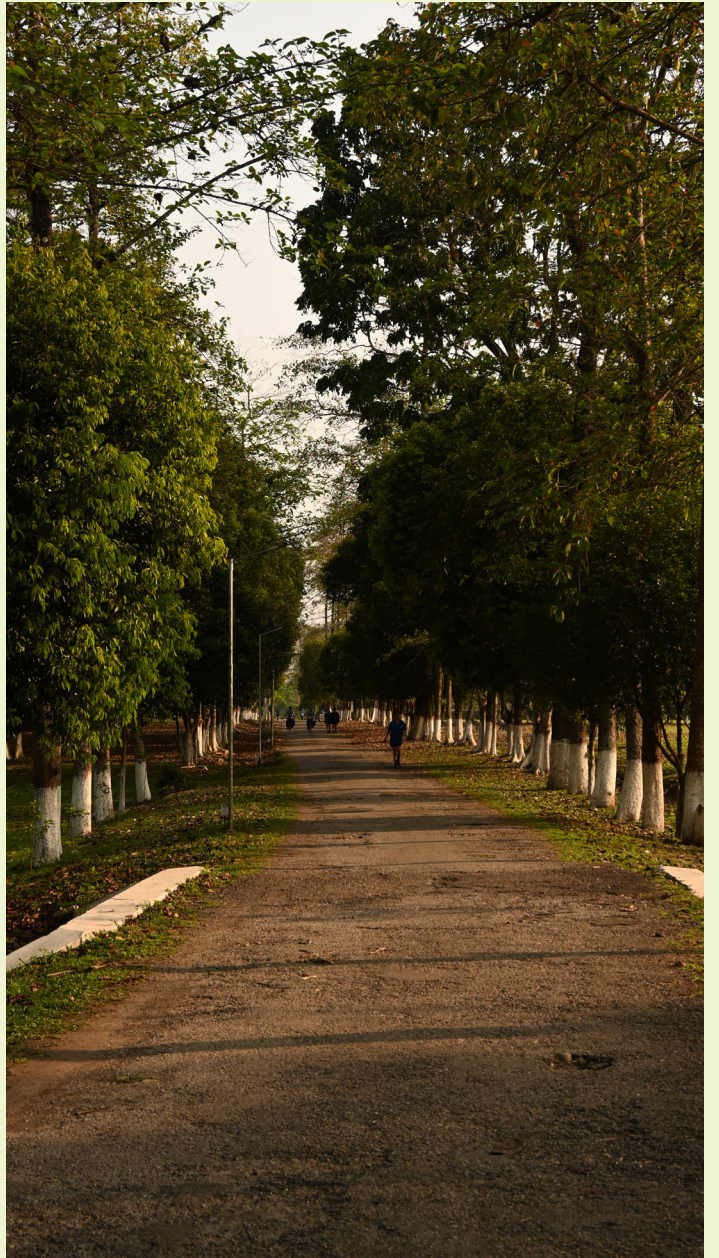




Illustration by Baibhao Dutta, VII



Monet under the sky

- Aastha Potsangbam, X

Claude Monet was born on 14 November 1840 in Paris, though he grew up in the port town of Le Havre. Baptised Oscar-Claude, he was simply called Claude. His artistic ambitions were encouraged by his mother, a singer, while his father hoped he would choose a more practical path. From a young age, Monet showed a rebellious streak, sketching caricatures of teachers and townspeople and even selling them by the age of fifteen.

A turning point came when he met Eugène Boudin, who introduced him to plein air, or painting outdoors. At first reluctant, Monet soon discovered the magic of natural light and open skies. "It was as if a veil had been lifted, he later said. This approach would shape his entire career. After moving to Paris, Monet struggled. His work was often rejected by the official Salon, and money was scarce.

Yet, alongside like-minded artists, he challenged tradition. In 1874, he exhibited a hazy harbour scene titled *Impression, Sunrise*. A critic mocked the painting using the the word "Impression" to describe it, and unknowingly named a movement. Thus, impressionism was born.

However, it was not as if Monet's life was without hardship. He married Camille Doncieux, who often posed for his paintings. One of his most tender works, *Woman with a Parasol*, features Camille and their son in a breezy field, sunlight dancing around them. Camille died young, leaving Monet deeply shaken.

In his years at Argenteuil, Monet became fascinated with water and reflections. He even used a small boat as a floating studio, painting scenes like *Regatta at Argenteuil*, capturing the shimmer of light on the Seine. He

was no longer just painting objects ; he was painting moments. Monet later settled in Giverny, where he created the garden that would define his legacy. He designed it himself, complete with a pond and a Japanese bridge. This became the subject of his most famous series, *Water Lilies*. These paintings were not just studies of flowers; they were meditations on light, colour, and reflection.

As his eyesight weakened due to cataracts, his style grew softer, almost abstract, as seen in the later panels. Another remarkable series was the *Rouen Cathedral* series, where he painted the same cathedral façade at different times of the day. The structure remained the same, but the light transformed it completely, morning blues, golden afternoons, and dusky greys. Monet passed away in 1926, leaving behind not just paintings, but a new way of seeing. He taught the world that art need not capture reality perfectly, it could capture how a moment feels.

Grimm & Grimmer

- N. Chingkheinganbi,
Associate Editor,
XII

Who were the Brothers Grimm?

“Es war einmal”, or “once upon a time”, there lived two brothers in a small town in Germany, named Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Growing up in harsh poverty, both worked hard in their studies as a means of escape. Along the way, they

discovered a shared passion for strengthening German culture by collecting local folklore during a period of French domination in the 19th century under Napoleon Bonaparte. Fortunately for Germany and for the rest of the world, their story had a happy ending. The work of these brothers became the foundation of many of the fairy tales we hold dear, whether as bedtime stories or for the sheer thrill of reading them. From Little Red Riding Hood to Cinderella, they are often credited as the authors of the tales we know today. In truth, however, they were much more: librarians, scholars, linguists, as well as cultural historians.



Illustration by Mashunsingh Keishing, XII

Why were they famous?

Over two hundred years ago, the Brothers Grimm published the first edition of *Children's and Household Tales*. Between 1812 and 1857, seven editions appeared, each different from the last, until the final, best-

known version barely resembled the first. Initially, their stories were far darker, filled with gore and grim realism, as their name might suggest. Yet these tales also reflected deeper truths about human life. The brothers spent nearly forty years refining and collecting these stories, and this lifelong work secured their place in history as authors of some of the world's most beloved fairy tales. We all grew up listening to these stories. Over time, they became guides, revealing a universal truth about the human experience: that others have endured similar struggles, and that we are never truly alone as we sometimes believe we are.

What are some of the symbolisms in their fairy tales?

Under Adolf Hitler, the Nazis turned the Brothers Grimm's stories into tools of propaganda by making them required reading for families. Childhood tales were twisted to promote ideas of "racial purity." For instance, Cinderella was portrayed as the ideal "Aryan," while the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood was recast as a Jewish villain. Some of the original Grimm tales already contained troubling elements, such as "*The Jew in the Brambles*," where a Jewish character is mocked and abused under the guise of humour. By the time Hitler rose to power, these stories were easily manipulated to serve the regime's ideology, transforming innocent bedtime tales into lessons of division and hate. The impact was so

“a universal truth about the human experience: that others have endured similar struggles, and that we are never truly alone...”

Many of their tales carry hidden meanings beneath their “happily ever after” endings. For example, in Cinderella, the sisters and Cinderella herself can be seen not just as characters, but as different aspects of a single personality. Similarly, Beauty and the Beast does not suggest that women must patiently reform ill-tempered men; rather, it points to the need for each of us to confront and transform our

own inner “beast.” Another recurring symbol is the forest.

In Grimm tales, a forest is never just a forest; it is a symbol which represents confusion and uncertainty, a place where one can easily lose one's way. Yet it is also a space of necessary transformation. Within this darkness, heroes encounter trials, often in the form of a “witch”, and emerge with the wisdom needed to return.

How did the Nazis weaponise their fairy tales for racial propaganda?

severe that Allied forces later felt the need to ban them. And yet, these tales endure, reminding us that stories themselves are not fixed, but shaped by the perspectives through which they are told.

“...stories themselves are not fixed, but shaped by the perspectives through which they are told.”



Illustration by Nishtha Potsangbam, X

From the Land of Sita.

- Aastha Potsangbam, X

Madhubani art, also known as Mithila painting, is a vibrant and deeply rooted style of folk art practised in the Mithila region of Bihar and parts of Nepal. Named after the Madhubani district, it remains most actively practised in villages such as Jitwarpur, Ranti, and Rasidpur.

Traditionally, this art form was carried forward by women, who painted on walls and floors using simple tools, fingers, twigs, brushes, and even matchsticks, bringing everyday life and mythology vividly to life. The origins of Madhubani art are closely tied to mythology. It is believed that the tradition began in the ancient land of Mithila, the birthplace of Sita.

According to legend, when her father King Janak, arranged her marriage with Sri Ram, he asked artists to decorate the walls with paintings capturing the joy and grandeur of the occasion. What began as a celebratory gesture evolved into a rich artistic tradition passed down through generations.

Madhubani paintings are known for their striking use of natural dyes and pigments, such as ochre for earthy reds, lampblack for deep blacks, and plant-based colours for vibrancy. The style is instantly recognisable for its bold outlines, intricate patterns, and the absence of space. Every inch of the canvas is filled with flowers, animals, birds, and geometric designs, creating a sense of abundance and rhythm. The themes are deeply connected to both nature

and spirituality. Artists often depict scenes from epics, gods and goddesses, the sun and moon, and sacred plants like tulsi. Alongside these are glimpses of daily life, weddings, festivals, and village scenes, making each painting both personal and universal. Over time, Madhubani art has moved beyond mud walls to paper, canvas, textiles, and even urban spaces. Today, it appears in murals, fashion, home décor, and public art projects across India.

From metro stations to government buildings, its presence in modern India reflects both continuity and adaptation, allowing this traditional art form to thrive in contemporary settings. Several artists have played a key role in bringing Madhubani art to global recognition.

Sita Devi was among the first to gain international acclaim, known for her bold compositions and vibrant colours. Ganga Devi introduced new themes and even documented her personal experiences through her work, including a remarkable series painted during her illness. Baua Devi and Mahasundari Devi have also been instrumental in preserving and evolving the tradition, each bringing their own distinctive style. Madhubani art remains a powerful link between India's past and its creative present. As long as these intricate lines continue to be drawn, the stories, beliefs, and spirit of the Maithil people will endure alive in colour, pattern, and imagination.



afterword

- N. Chingkheinganbi, Associate Editor, XII

Spring has returned, faithful to her eternal vow of renewal. Withered flowers rise again, like ghosts made flesh, and bare trees dress themselves in tender buds that line each reaching branch. The school, too, becomes a vast forest, mesmerising in its changing colours. Familiar corners catch the light differently now: the quiet gold of early mornings, the lingering warmth of dusk. Pathways we have walked a hundred times seem, somehow, new again. Here, time does not pass; it circles.

Months evaporate, years begin afresh. Friendships are forged in laughter and long conversations, while others quietly fade, leaving behind only echoes. The rush of footsteps is broken by the stillness of luggage waiting, lined up, patient, before being carried away into a world beyond these verdant greens. And yet, every spring

carries both presence and absence. Glimpses of springs gone by return unbidden, even as we feel the weight of what is no longer here.

There is an ache in remembering, but there is also a quiet, enduring comfort. Spring reminds us, unfailingly, that we may begin again. Even in the shadow of absence, we learn to continue. Just as grass returns to soften the imprint of what has passed, and sunlight finds its way to the forest floor only after a great tree has fallen, we, too learn, slowly to be whole once more. So, dear reader, as you drink in the very nectar of these pages, remember this: begin again. Bloom again. Even if it is for the hundredth time. Even if you carry the weight of every absence within you. For that is the quiet, defiant promise of spring; that life does not ask you to forget, only to grow.



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