Pocket Resistance
By Chitra Gopalakrishnan

Cover note: This story follows two small-time, illiterate pickpockets, JJ and TT, living on the fringes of society in slums. One is from Seelampur in East Delhi, a hub for e-waste segregation, where indoor factories release smoke and fumes throughout the day, often employing children without concern for their well-being. The other youth is from Mongolpuri in North-West Delhi, an area lacking basic sanitation and healthcare facilities, the reason for his mother's death and the neglect of his disabled sibling. Disconnected from society and overlooked by their parents, these two young boys seek to escape the harsh realities of their surroundings, only to confront the isolating challenges of urban life. The narrative, told in the first person by JJ, explores their journeys from home and surroundings (with sharp definitions of their place), as they morph from boys to men. It fleshes out their quirky adventures, their efforts to be small pockets of resistance through their pickpocketing exploits, and their peculiar brand of humour, which helps them form a unique kinship along the way.

Sky. Trees. Birds.

I never got to see these as a child living in the slums of Seelampur, in North East Delhi.

This is because our dry and dusty lands were forever spitting out fire, and our skies coal-dark smoke. Explosions, or dhamakas, occurred everywhere, and all at once, on our land that formed red and black clouds that hung over us, like a kavach, a protective armour.

There was no place for trees or birds.

When I looked up, at these fumes, that cast shifting shadows, and which rose and fell, their movements like a rhythmic dance, and asked about the sky, my father told me that those moving, sooty, pockmarked clouds were the sky and also heaven, the dwelling place of our many gods, and that there was nothing beyond it.

He slapped me for checking if our gods were dark like us, for I believed the smoke would have made whoever lived there blistered, dark and dirty like us.

Let me be clear: I'm not referring to living under an eclipsed sun or anything of that nature.

Born in 2000 into this dirt-scarred shanty in Galli Number Char, I was surrounded by burning wires wherever I looked. Like fizzling phooljadis (sparklers) we burn during Diwali that make sharp, kir-kir noises. Thick, black smoke bulged and billowed from these flames, twisting and turning all day. Like a swollen python swallowing a mongoose, similar to the one I had seen on my neighbour's television.

Our world looked like the burning end of a vast, broad cigarette, coloured in a furious red and rimmed with the deepest black.

This also explained why my face was always dark, resembling the god Shani Devata—who stood guard at the end of our lane—and shiny. My skin glistened with mucus from constantly swallowing balls of phlegm. My eyes appeared to stare all the time, similar to his, as that was the only way I could see. The other children around me shared my condition; we all looked like mini-Shanis, dark like him and the buffalo and crow he rode on. Yet, unlike him, we occasionally smiled. We believed that he had turned black because he lived on our land and wanted to be in harmony with it.

Everything I saw here had so much drama, so much colour, and so much sound, that even years later, they come to mind only as pictures, one after another, as you can see, almost like a Hindi fillum (film), or should I say like a bura sapna, a nightmare, punctuated by strange shors (noises).

The images that come to mind of the land we lived on are of our homes, their charred tin walls and roofs, snorting and shuddering from indoor cooking. I can picture our streets hissing with crackling heat, resembling red-hot tavas (woks) sprinkled with water droplets. And I remember how we, the barefoot children, jumped like scalded rats on the pavements, chittering like them in quick, frantic, high-pitched shrieks.

I can still picture the hot, thick, taanba (coppery) air outside, swirling with smoke from the bright flames of so many indoor factories. These places would dip discarded electronics in acid, and then burn the wires to get out precious metals like copper, iron, platinum, and lithium, which were later sold to scrap dealers. As kids, we had fun chanting the names "copper, iron, platinum, and lithium" in a playful singsong way, almost as if they were our friends, creating a cheerful little

If our streets were hot, they were also dirty. Discarded mobile phones, computer parts, broken circuit boards, and masses of tangled optical fibres, that resembled human intestines, were strewn everywhere, and our gutters made vomiting sounds as filth, faeces, and rotting metallic waste floated undigested within them. Together, everything smelled of our gaands, our forever stinking backsides. It was so bad that free-roaming goats, cows, dogs, cats, and marauding monkeys avoided our area altogether.

Our neighbourhood brawls were as messy; deep tensions ran through the community like live electric wires as battle-ready people fought over everything: food, water, electricity, soap, clotheslines, children, and all our homes became sites of violence. Our mothers, with narrowed eyes, furrowed brows, thin braids, and flesh caught between their petticoats and blouses, were strict, sharp, and unforgiving. Our bottoms bore welts from their brightly patterned wet nylon saris, slippers, tongs, and rolling pins. The spankings continued until we felt the uncomfortable pressure of bowel movements, and the turtle heads of shit began to emerge from our chaddis (underwear).

As most children in our area did not attend school—it was pointless, our elders said, because it stuffed children’s heads with gibberish while leaving their hands idle with no skills—our mothers were, understandably, always upset with us. Mastikhors (mischievous louts), they called us, and were bitter about how they had to endure our daily nuisances till we reached the age of ten, when all of us local children were put to work. We were treated like stray animals till then, with an easy brutality, with threatening words, and with a thappad (slap) here, a laat (kick) there. It is a wonder that many of us still live, considering the abuse we suffered daily. Was it legal to employ children? No, it happened regardless. When advance news of ‘secret’ inspections were leaked, children were sent to play.

Our fathers, when home, their faces flushed with tharra, idly watched us from beneath thickly lidded eyes, smiling mildly, like our wax-faced gods in our home temples, unmoved by the daily breaking of our skins, our bruises, swollen veins, or by our expressions of alarm. Their already sticky, red lips were coloured further by fresh paan (betel leaf) filled with elaichi (cardamom), chuna (quick lime), dried supari (areca nut), flakes of nariyal (coconut), gulkand (rose-petal jam), tutti-frutti, pearls of mouth freshener, and sugar-coated saunf (fennel). Once the beatings stopped, they spat out red, gluey jet strings that made intriguing patterns on our walls and floors, as if to signal the end of warfare.

Then there were those days when our parents themselves clashed and pulled each other’s hair, sometimes even twisting each other out of shape. I remember my father calling my mother useless for having only one child, who was scrawny and sickly. In turn, my mother accused him of being a whoremonger who couldn't even support his one legitimate child and claimed that he fathered many half-breeds, doglas, from other women. I, too, had anger within me. My revenge on my father came from stealing slyly from his purse, and on my mother by quietly giving away her brass bangles to a beggar. Their screeches like railway engine whistles gave me such delicious merriment. I smile even today thinking of their twisted agony.

I also have many memories of my many aches and pains. I remember the strange sensations on my tongue, which always felt like I was licking rusty nails. There was a persistent smell of burnt garlic in my nose all day. I recall the dark circles under my eyes that stung like bees. I can still feel the constant fizzing in my ears from the rustling and breaking of wires every day. And then there were the shocks that ran under my skin, day and night, leading to itchy scabs.

My life was all about pungas, troubles of one kind or another. The lives of others, children and adults, were no different. Fumes. Black. Bitter. Sour. Acidic. Metallic. These were not words for us. They were living, breathing sensations that defined our belonging to the slum, they were proof of our poverty, and the branding of our status in society.

This was, of course, long before I understood that our country has various social classes: low, low-middle, middle-middle, upper-middle, rich, super-rich (with "super" akin to a supermarket), and uber-rich (with "uber" like the Uber taxi service). I also didn't realise that while some people believed the solution to inequality lay in sharing the wealth accumulated by the rich with the poor, others argued that individual initiative was the path to growth. These were issues on which I would form my own opinions in later years.

Twenty-six years later, in 2026, my quick, secret visit showed me that our skyline is the same, sputtering and smog-filled, and so are our neighbourhoods and homes. Our parents, too, wear the same kind of baniyaans, stained undershirts and pants, work within iron-clad routines, and, with their hands, in the same airless, windowless indoor factories, without gloves, protective glasses, or any gear. They walk on the same paths, shuffling their feet, their rubber chappals going chap-chap. And their breaths continue to be air-hungry, and metal-soaked and still sound like whistles down a narrow tube as they wheeze, splutter, and choke. And I see they have the same rage within them as their bloodshot, drawn and haggard faces show; and their worst natures continue to remain hidden from themselves. They and their warmth, and approval remain as difficult to reach as people, as parents. The familiar sheesha pe ari sensation invaded me. I felt like a piece of glass being cut with a handsaw, knowing what it is to be homeless within one’s home all over again.

But my life is different now.

I escaped at the age of ten, moving far away from my parents before they could force me into a life of labour, toiling like the mules we used to gather metals. The mules were the only animals in our locality, and their captivity captured the life my parents wanted for me.

Now, my skills exceed anything my parents ever achieved. I don't disassemble electronic equipment manually as my father did, nor do I clean utensils in others' homes like my mother. I've risen above

the gruelling work of loading metals onto mules for the Kadabi Bazar, a fate that my neighbours and their children still endure. My hands are strong, unblemished, slim, smooth, tapered even, and free of calluses, untreatable infections, or signs of wear.

I am now known as Jai, or JJ, to myself and only myself—Jebtarash Jai. Let's consider it my stage name, much like how superstar Shah Rukh Khan refers to himself as SRK. I'm no longer called Gadda (Donkey), nor Nikkamma (Useless), Badmash (Scoundrel), Lafanga (Wastrel), Pagal (Mad), Kutta (Dog), or any other colourful names that people have thought of, often involving private parts. You guessed it right; I am a pickpocket, self-taught, drifting from place to place on a whim and remaining largely invisible. My modest face, shy charm, lanky frame, and crew-cut hair make me inconspicuous, which is essential for my craft that requires me to linger in the shadows. However, my discerning gaze, keen as a jeweller's, and my nimble fingers, moving with the blur of a magician's misdirection, allow me to relieve a person of nearly all their possessions—except for guns. I have a healthy disregard for those.

Life was not simple when I broke out. Recovering broken routines never is. When I reached Shahdara, an area close to my home, to my ten-year self, it felt far away, as if I had crossed many worlds to get here. Though the place felt familiar, and even wondrous, it was also frighteningly different. Life on the streets was a daily battle for survival; it was an adda of intimidation where heightened emotions were the norm; it still is. Sodden with heat, cold or rain, depending on the weather, and heaps of cow dung, always, the world outside can be remote, confusing, and threatening by turns.

At that time, I wondered where to go in the maze: there was a tumble of temples, mechanic shops, food and sweetmeat outlets, fruit and flower seller corners, key makers, chemists, shops that stocked furniture, coolers, clothes, and eyeglasses, mobile phone shops that were spaces of glass and cool, and beauty parlours with mirrors crowded with tiny bulbs. Some merchants showed me small kindness, and gave me food and money, some drunken others, with thin, anxious eyes and vicious scars in various parts of their body, who walked sideways as if going down a slope, offered me alcohol, tobacco, ganja and heroin, and the scents of the forbidden: inhalants such as glue, ink eraser fluid and paint thinners, and the majority of the others nothing at all. In fact, they shooed me like halwais (confectioners) brush away flies and insects from their mithais, from their sweetmeats that cannot be dirtied by their nimble feet, using harsh voices meant to sound like truth.

Solitariness, self-doubt, self-reliance, hunger, and exhaustion are not easy companions, and I almost lost my nerve, and wondered if I should return home when a bellied, middle-aged, dark and sunburnt, tea-stall owner, employed me in return for housing and food. A half-life was better than starvation, I thought to myself. Even so, I eyed his beady eyes, fat lips, thick moustache and stubble, and his open shirt and hairy chest, warily and wondered at my fate.

His stall, called Shyam Lal Chai Bhandar, after him, thrived under a tree's knotty truck and its slender branches that held together fleshy leaves. It served the best tea in the neighbourhood, a rich brown soup of potent tea leaves, water, elaichi, aadrak (ginger), and sugar that frothed and smelled of burnt sugar and heaven at the same time. It could cause a revolution in one's stomach, joyfully urging those with insides made of iron into action while reducing others into runny inaction.

On his wooden counter were huge, transparent glass bottles filled with fragrant rusks, atta biscuits, namkeens and mathris (salty savouries), but no one, other than him, was allowed to handle them. My room, one I shared with seven boys of varying ages, who worked fourteen-hour shifts without wages, like me, on the other hand, smelt of stale food, unwashed clothes, cigarettes, sweat, and piss, "cockroaches in their gutters, and servants their musty servant quarters," as my owner said contemptuously. Our staple meal was dal and chawal, but the rice and lentils were always runny; wholeness came from the raw onions thrown in, and it was cooked by each of us, taking turns through the week.

But none of us had any bargaining power. We had to fit into a social world not made for us by being self-effacing, deferential, and ready to take the blame for everything, even if it had nothing to do with us. "Ghar ka bhedi, Lanka dhai" is what Shyam Lal often said, with a breath that smelt of rotting eggs. He meant that we were all betrayers like Vibhishan, brother of Ravan, who caused his downfall in the great epic of Ramayana. Those closest to him caused him the most damage, according to him. In his world, he was the sun, and everyone existed by his light.

I began to know a kind of rage, almost the kind bottled up within my parents, while facing slights and rejection daily, and also began to feel the arithmetic of the 'other' as the truth about being unpaid pressed upon me. My mind, puffed with the possibilities that this new world could offer, through my ten-year-old's mind's-eye, maybe a lovely home, cemented car parks, lush gardens, frangipani trees with birds, and shiny green grass, things I lacked in my childhood home but saw in some places when I was given time to wander, now began to shrink like a deflated ballon. As no one took responsibility for my daily abuse, and society carried on with its daily living, and I continued to be a complete unknown, unloved and unwanted, I felt hatred towards everyone, and grief, hollow and deep. And my new world and my old world, and their realities, folded into each other.

Until, I came upon freedom, one that evaporated my fears of people, of life. I cannot pin it to single moment or a defining incident. One day, four years after my employment, I decided I had enough of work here, of being fearful and resigned with life. That it was time to give my time and attention to something else. Each shop and person had a corner carved out for themselves in this city. I wanted my own corner. I decided to rip open the blackness that covered my life to find my space. There was immense relief in this realisation and release when I acted upon it. When I decided to choose a life, yet again, rather than wait to be chosen or bossed over, I emptied Shyam Lal's cash box that compensated me for my wages, and much more, and left him a chit with a smiley face as just the thought of leaving him made me feel lighter, freer and happier. He was right: "Ghar ka bhedi, Lanka dhai"

You might say pickpocketing…hmm, crooked fingers, for crooked work. Ganda hain. Par yeh mera danda hain. (I agree it's dirty work. But filthy as it is, it is my vocation.) My theory is that you work to help yourself, and if it means easing the rich of their riches, so be it. I rob them of some of their riches, not futures. I can say that I ride upon both the theories—right and left—in the knuckle-clenching, heart-racing trade that I pursue.

I manage to take everything from cell phones to wallets, rings, chains, wristwatches, credit cards, cash, and even eyeglasses—from my victims' pockets, whether in the front or back of their pants or within the inner pockets of their jackets. I can say that my actions change the reality for many. I continuously refine my technique, learning and observing to exploit not only people's pockets but also their minds. If they consider one way to protect their valuables, I devise another way to take them.

I work from several bus stops, never loyal to one. In this profession, it is important to be invisible. I haunt the Anand Vihar, Shahdara, and Kalu Sari Khan bus stops in East Delhi, and Nangloi, Paschim Vihar, and Maya Puri in West Delhi, and each bus I board has a signage on the side that, funnily enough, says 'Beware of Pickpockets'.

I feel less claustrophobic in these areas than Seelampur, even though these areas too palpitate with as much activity, even though I have to fight my way through broken roads and illogical intersections that throng with people, animals, and mounds of garbage, even though I have to swerve through incessantly honking, whizzing traffic with vehicles of all manner shapes and size that travel at insane speeds, and even though I have to cover my face against gritty sandstorms that attack without warning. I enjoy the freedom of these spaces that don't cough up smoke every minute, and, more importantly, don't contain my parents, their ill grace and humour. If I face hate, I face it from unknown people, whom I don't care about. It is when the unresponsiveness and hate came from my parents, who are supposed to love me and provide for me, that it hurts.

The COVID-19 years were hard on everyone. I fell on hard times too, as public transport came to a standstill, yet survived by ferrying oxygen cylinders very much in need. "You are an angel," people said. "Maybe, I was to some, to me, primarily, it was a way to survive. In 2022, when I turned twenty-two, after six years in the danda (trade), I recruited a sixteen-year-old boy named Tinnu to teach him the ropes of the trade. After working solo, I decided it was time to increase my earnings. My expenses—grocery bills, rent, electricity, and water—were rising. My desire for finer things like good food (giant momos, slurpy noodles, pasta, and pizzas), liquor (rum and whiskey), clothes (branded wear), perfumes (available in malls in tempting bottles with aromas that set my heart pounding and turned it dishonourable, beiman as we say), gadgets (latest mobile phones and ear plugs), and entertainment (films and live music shows) had also intensified. Moreover, I was lonely. I faced the complexities of loneliness: sadness, emptiness, and a sense of being and feeling invisible and unseen. I needed a team member, my second arm, which in pickpocket parlance we call thekbaaz.

Tinnu was a gangly youth with uneven, patchy skin, a sparse moustache, and tamed, short hair that sat close to his scalp. His eyes were clear and bright, almost as if he had applied kohl, and his long hands hung easily at his sides. He always wore a dull white shirt, grey trousers, and a patterned scarf. I would regularly meet him at a tea stall at the Anand Vihar bus terminal, and my mind was quick to interpret that he would be an eager learner. He looked like he was on the cusp of change.

"I ran away from my home in Mongolpuri so as not to be a burden," he told me, his voice thin and almost girl-like. "My mother died two years ago, and my father takes care of six children while also working. My youngest sibling, who is three years old, has bowed legs and will never be able to walk. My father takes him to sadhu sants for a cure because he can't afford a private doctor; the government hospital in our area has neither doctors nor medicines. I used to work as a waiter in a restaurant, but the hours were long and the pay was poor, so I quit last week after emptying their cash box, and I have arrived here in search of work. I work as a luggage loader on buses that travel interstate from here."

Dirt poor. Unlettered. Closed doors. Not bothered by middle-class values of misdeeds and karma. Willing to break rules. His story could be mine. I see hunger and desperation stamped on his face, and I see his junoon, his fiery zest with earning independently.

When I broach the subject with him, Tinnu agrees to work alongside. We decide to split the earnings when they come in. "Eighty per cent mine, twenty yours," I say. "And, we will never work in areas where we live." He tilts his head, gravely, but untroubledly, from left to right to show me he agrees. "Remove that scarf, sytle-vyle nahi chaaiye," (I need you to tome down your appearance) I order. "I have good clothes, but I dress down. We don't want anything on our bodies that identifies us."

We clamour onto a bus in Anand Vihar in East Delhi, choosing one that is crowded.

“See, how I get close to my victim without raising his suspicion,” I tell him. “I find working on city buses very easy. They are so crowded that you can be in anyone’s space,” I whisper in his ear.

“Let’s move closer, Tinnu, but we won’t stand right in front of our victim. That would make him uncomfortable.”

Tinnu drinks in my every word. His face is sharp and awake, his expression deferential, and his eyes focused.

“Remember, we don’t know each other,” I caution him.

When we get close to a man standing and scrolling on his mobile, I deliberately drop a coin, bend down to pick it up, and make sure to avoid eye contact. The man shifts a bit and gives me some space. He is still scrolling his phone. I step forward and am in his space. Tinnu inches close behind. I am now shoulder to shoulder with the man, and our heads are facing the front door. Tinnu is behind us. He notices how, within the flick of an eyelid, I hold the man’s wallet firmly between my left index and middle fingers, and prize it out with my left hand. I gradually shift sideways, rocking my body in rhythm with the bus, and place my right hand slowly and deliberately on the handrail to distract his attention from my left hand. Then I shift his wallet into my left trouser pocket. Each of my movements is casual and flows into the next, with no jerks or hesitation.

"Did you notice how I used the movements of the man to remove his wallet from his pocket rather than making furtive movements, or forcing any action from him, or myself?" I ask him as we move towards the exit. "Our movements should look as easy as inserting a pin through a banana," I explain further.

Tinnu's face expresses admiration, and his eyes are wide as Shyam Lal’s tea saucers.

"You have to divert attention from yourself. Think of attention as if it's water. You have to let it flow towards what you don't want the person to see," I add.

As we descend the bus, Tinnu says, "I think you step out yourself, and think like the victim."

I know I am right about this boy. I have chosen wisely, as thieves should. He will be a fast learner. He is a natural like me.

“What’s your real name, JJ?” asks Tinnu.

“Does it matter?” I ask. “I am no longer that person.”

“What will happen if I get caught?” Vinod asks me, worry in his voice.

“The first couple of times, the police will let you off with a warning. If caught repeatedly, they will use third-degree methods,” I say.

“What’s that?” he asks, his eyes wide.

“They will make you stand with your legs apart,” I explain.

“What’s painful about that?” he demands to know.

“When they make you stand like that for six hours, the burning sensation in your thighs will be unbearable.”

Tinnu looks shocked.

“They will eventually send you to an Observation Home where you will have to stay indoors and obey the rules,” I say.

Fear creases Vinod’s face.

“If such things happen, you are never, never to divulge my name or my association with you,” I remind him yet again sternly.

“Will there be girl inmates in the Home?” he asks hopefully.

I lift my eyebrows. “Abe, kamineey (rascal)”, I say under my breath. He has the grace to look downcast.

"Soon, these buses will become your second home. They will become what bars are for drunkards. You will get addicted, feel the nasha. Don't worry, you will pick up the tricks of the trade with ease, and keep out of the clutches of the police and law," I say reassuringly, with a laugh. It eases his tension.

"That's the only lesson I learnt from my mother," I tell him.

"What is that?" he wants to know.

"She told me to steer clear of men in three coloured coats—white, khaki and black— and by that she meant doctors, police, and lawyers."

Vinod laughs; his teeth on display, they are surprisingly clean and pearly.

“Once you play crooked, you can never play square. The thrill of the game won’t let you. I am telling you this right away,” I say.

“I have tried the straight way. It did not work for me. Theda raasta hi reh gaya hain,” he says.

After several false starts, Tinnu has spent four years mastering the art of pickpocketing. He has become a skilled and ingenious pickpocket, exuding confidence, charm and an easy smile that reaches his eyes. As my loyal partner, he is gaining a deeper understanding of the daily realities of this trade, particularly the important skill of patience, as nothing can be rushed in this line of work.

He is taller now, and far more athletic, with a fine moustache and trimmed beard, and he steers me clear of bheels, police as others call them, with simple eye gestures. He has also learnt to run. When Tinnu runs, he is a whirl of brown, like a dust storm; he becomes a wall of dust and debris and nothing else. And, he has mastered the art of punching. When he hits, minus any weapon, as he did once when we were threatened randomly by a large man on the street, there was pain, a lot of it, but no broken nose, no crushed bones, no twisted elbows, or bloodied backs. It is as if he had a deep knowledge of the human body. And, now, he calls himself Thekbaaz Tinnu, TT! Of course, only the two of us are privy to what it means.

We both know that we have lost the direction to our childhood homes. We have now rented a room together. We tell our landlord and neighbours that we work on construction sites, and heal together in kinship.

“Those harsh, unforgiving lands where we grew up in the darkness are unimaginable, and going back is out of the question,” Tinnu often tells me, regret lacing his voice. “I simply send money home through a shopkeeper, but I never let my father know where I am. I don’t think he cares anyway.”

“Yes, I can say the same of my home and parents. I don’t think they searched hard for me. We must bear the existence of our old homes in our hearts, but live with their absence, however painful that may be, and we must be content in our half-selves, our half-human lives,” I say. “Sometimes, we don’t choose memories; they choose us.”

We are silent for a while.

“I went back to Seelampur hoping to pull out some love, a place for myself. I still yearn for it in some inexplicable way. But it showed me it was best to leave it behind,” I confide in him. I tell him everything.

He places his hand on my wrist, steadying its pulse. I know my ache is familiar to him. “We have to let go of our pasts but hold on to our futures. We cannot abandon it. We have to continue to do what we are doing; we don’t have the freedom to not do it. Morality is a luxury we cannot afford. We have to remain JJ and TT,” he says with tenderness and affection.

Those are the feelings we have for each other. Our regard for each other is clear in the vulnerabilities we confess to one another. In the courage we lend each other quietly. Belongingness to one another feels like the home we never had. We are each other’s support and each other’s buffer against stress, loneliness and ill health. As we were not born into kinship but have acquired it, we will build our brotherhood over time and hope that it will last a lifetime.

“JJ, should we set up a thak thak gang and target people in cars. I mean, employ deceptive tactics by knocking on their car windows and stealing their valuables? Or turn into a thala chabi gang, survey locked homes, and put our learnt key-making skills to use?” TT asks me one day. “We will make more money.”

"No, TT. Let's just be what we are. Chindi chors—small-time pickpockets who survive the system. Let's continue to be small pockets of resistance against the sarkar (government), who ignore the needs of the illiterate and unemployed like us. Let's not form gangs, as gang wars are certain to break out. We are enough for one another. We have climbed from low to low-middle class; we will soon reach middle-middle, upper-middle, rich, super-rich (super as in supermarket), and uber-rich (uber as in the Uber service). It will happen one day," I say with confidence.

“Jahan saach na chale, wahan jhoot sahi. Jahan haak na mile wahan loot sayi,” (Where truth does not prevail, it is okay to lie, and where there no rights for people it is okay to wrest by force), sings TT, in a comical voice, linking his hands through mine, making the bruised ditty, a fun song.

We smile at each other; showing straight teeth and crooked grins.

“From tomorrow, I will our split our earnings equally between us; fifty-fifty,” I promise him.

Bio:

Chitra Gopalakrishnan, a writer based in New Delhi, uses her ardour for writing to break firewalls between nonfiction and fiction, narratology and psychoanalysis, marginalia and manuscript, and tree-ism and capitalism.

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