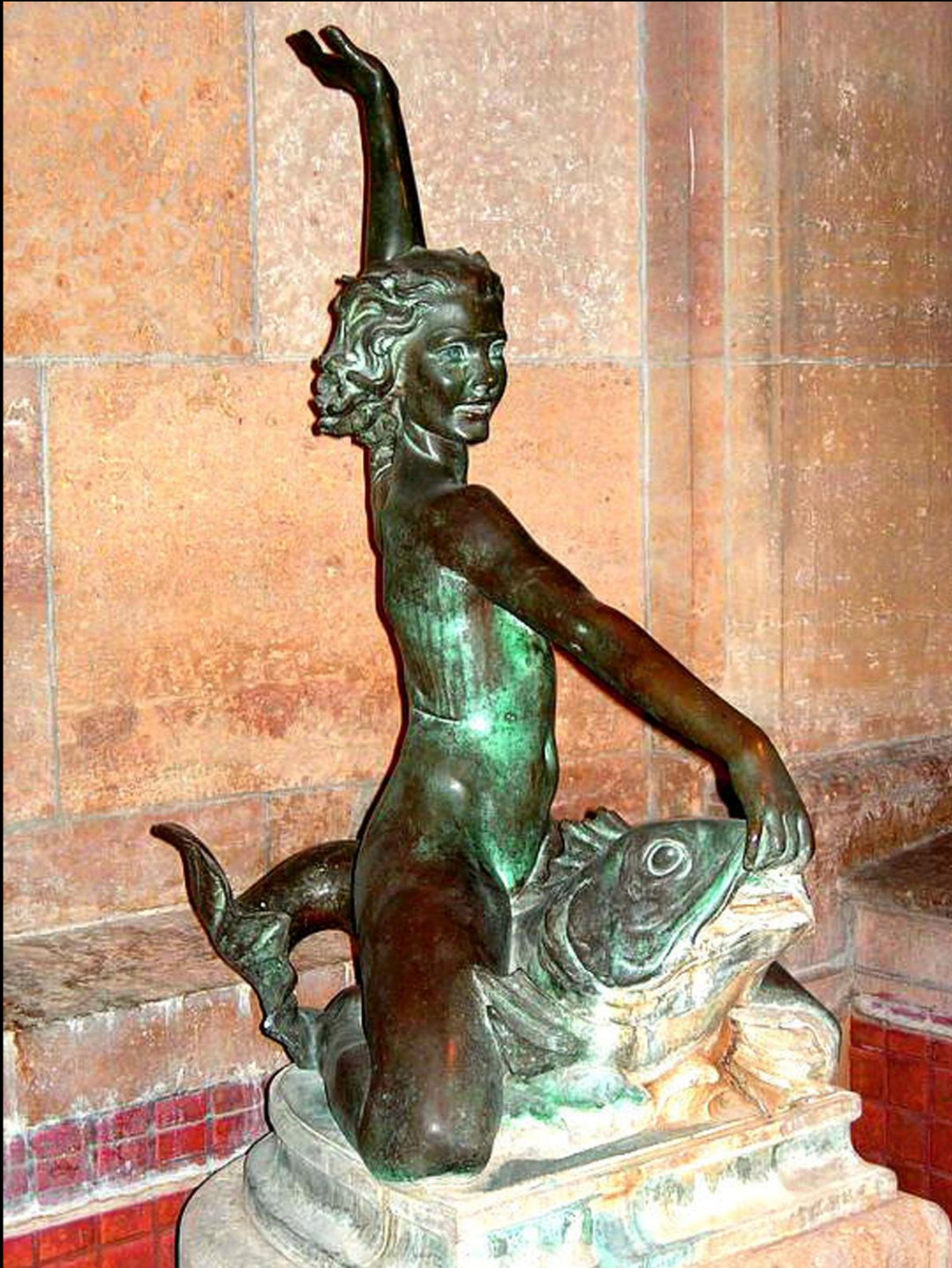

THE EXHIBITIONIST

XZBT5 | DECEMBER 2012

THEXZBT.WORDPRESS.COM



THINK. ACT. XZBT.

THE EXHIBITIONIST is a monthly online magazine dedicated to the cause of creativity.

EDITOR & DESIGNER Khadija Ejaz khadijaejaz@hotmail.com

COVER PHOTO *Look At Her* Khadija Ejaz

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR	4
Drugs and alcohol: the final verdict	
GUEST EDITORIAL	5
A is for Amanda, B is for Ball, C is for creative conduit.	
XZBTs	
The South, the North, and My Freedom : <i>anam naqvi {non-fiction}</i>	8
November Rain : <i>madhavan nayar {non-fiction}</i>	12
Curiosity : <i>lance hawvermale {poetry}</i>	20
A Yankee Doodle : <i>sonal mehta {non-fiction}</i>	23

FROM THE EDITOR

I have spent many years figuring out my stance on mind-altering substances. It's true that drugs and alcohol can help you perceive things differently, creatively. I seem to be particularly sensitive to the caffeine in Mountain Dew; a few sips and I'm the most wired person in the room. It makes me feel invincible and brilliant. My mind starts racing, I feel alert, and for the next few hours I become a creative demon. I also get that way after listening to fast-paced dance music.



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In my experience, external substances are ultimately not responsible for turning out a coherent product. That takes introspection, planning, execution, and revision. Discipline and reliability. It actually feels like work. Sure, some of the widely-accepted creative geniuses of our time were users, but many of them had a team (and PR machine) to help them enhance their work (and marketable public image). Many creative people use mind-altering substances, but many do not. Many non-creative people use too. Usage is not essential to creativity, and insistence is immature and tiresome.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khadija Ejaz'.

Khadija Ejaz

GUEST EDITORIAL

I was listening to a speech once, when the speaker said that without art, life is nothing.

I hadn't thought of it that way. But what would life be without the beauty of music; the entertainment of movies; the diversion of a book; without the expression of poetry; without the visual aesthetic of art?

What would life be with just work and the mechanics of life? A life without beauty would be no life indeed.

But, what is it - to be the one chosen to bring the arts to life? When one is given a gift of talent and uses that gift to connect to other people (in any way) - that is an amazing achievement.

I live my life in pursuit of creativity. It started off in music. As soon as I could talk, I told people I wanted to be a "country western singer." It branched out from there, into learning many instruments, learning to sing, and it grew from there: songwriting, music business, publishing, producing, arranging, etc.

When I started college, I wanted to write. I tried and tried and tried. It took me 10 years to figure out "how to pull a book out of a human," but when I was 29, I completed my first manuscript. When I was 35, I was offered my first publishing contract.

Then, along about when I was 36, out of the blue, and with no warning, I was sitting with a dear friend in a bar, eating a blue cheeseburger, and I announced that I had decided that I wanted to direct movies. I remember it vividly. It was in January, and the Sundance film festival was going on, and I wanted to be there so bad, I could taste it. The friend, Don, knows me pretty well. I expected him to laugh, thinking I was telling a joke. He didn't laugh. He seemed intrigued. He made some innocuous comment. I (thinking I was making a joke) popped off and said, "You wanna make movies with me?"

I got to the word 'movies' and didn't even finish the sentence before he was nodding and said yes.

From that moment forward, it was full steam ahead. Any form of creativity, anytime, anywhere.

I try to treat these gifts as reverent. To be one of the few who has been chosen to bring art to the world. It's special.

I wish for you all joy as you share your gifts and talents with the world.

Amanda Ball lives for creativity. She is a musician, author, filmmaker, actor, photographer, dancer, artist, foodie, crocheter, quilter...the list goes on and on and on. In her spare time (what spare time?), she enjoys watching movies and scripted television shows, travelling, and

figuring out new recipes and things with motors. To learn more about Amanda, visit her website at <http://www.amandaball.com> and her blog at <http://www.livingforcreativity.wordpress.com>.

XZBTs

The South, the North, and My Freedom

Anam Naqvi

I grew up in a town in South India where time was plenty. We would come back from school after a sports session or a play rehearsal and still have time to do our homework, play, watch TV with Mum, and read books. The sea breeze would carry the pungent smell of drying fish towards the land, and the constant screeching of white-necked eagles and grey-necked crows would intertwine with the shouts of bus conductors asking the driver to speed up after all the passengers had got in.

It was a town slowly moving towards modernization in terms of lifestyle, but the feeling that it was already modern in its thoughts was evident. Freedom had a different meaning in this coastal town in Karnataka. Although women were still not exactly 'on top' in terms of their place in society, I felt like I could breathe easy. I could walk to the store at night or maybe even ask a stranger for help.

Male dominance was felt only in a few places, and the women were not just educated to prepare them for the 'marriage market'. I saw women working in banks, selling fish, or just doing a good job making a home. They roamed about freely on two-wheelers too, even on Royal Enfield Bullets - a rare sight in Delhi.

Most people kept to themselves. Some still interfered in the lives of others, but judgments were mostly not made and prejudices remained undeveloped.

North Indians generally consider the South different. And they are right, it is different. I learnt this when I first made my way to Delhi, the country's capital, on a summer vacation. Delhi is in the northern part of India and perhaps embodies most of the ideologies that have made North India infamous.

My brother and I remember every summer and winter vacation that we spent in Delhi with our grandparents before Dad passed away. Whenever the train made its way into the city, smells and sounds of a different kind would emerge. I would hear airplanes making their way to the runway in quick succession and see slums under the bridges, humungous amounts of traffic, and two-wheelers and cars of every variety.

When we would get out of the railway station, taxi and auto-rickshaw drivers would wrap around us like a swarm of bees, demanding to know where we wanted to go. Making one's way around them was a task. We would then rent a vehicle from the pre-paid taxi booth in which we would take in the heat and humidity in the absence of an air-conditioner. This would brace us for what would ensue the rest of the month in the capital.

For me, each place has its own smell. I remember what Delhi smelled like. It was like a pot of burned sweat garnished with diesel and petrol

fumes. I felt like the city never slept - although now I know that it does with the increasing crime rate. People seemed enraged about something or the other. Even the school-kids with their huge bags spewed abuses at each other and fought over little things. All this seemed unreal, hateful.

Every other day there was an accident on the road in front of Grandpa's house. Men would slap each other; they would be hurried and always ready for a good fight. Anger seemed to be the pulse of the city. It was nothing like the friendly South Indian town I lived in.

While I was a teenager, I also realized that women were treated differently in Delhi. For instance, I wasn't allowed the joy of taking a walk there by myself. I still don't know if it was just the city that had made this difficult or if it was because I was part of an orthodox Muslim household. All I was told was, "you can't leave home without your brother here." "This is not Mangalore," they told me.

My female cousins seemed very timid, while the male ones had the world at their feet. We were told different things, and the rules for the boys and the girls were poles apart, not only amongst the Muslim community but more so among the dominant Hindus and Punjabis.

I am grateful to my parents that I did not grow up in Delhi. If I had, I would not have been half the person that I am today. I have been working here for more than 2 years now and living alone for the past one. I find freedom in my work, in making my own decisions, but I still don't smell the freedom. I want the freedom to laugh, to walk

without a care in the world, to do what I can without a sneer. The pollution, traffic jams, rapes, and honor killings are a metaphor for the smothering feeling I wake up with almost every day.

Anam Naqvi is a thinker from New Delhi who finds liberation in words. She currently works at the Deccan Herald as a Sub-Editor and has also been a Junior Producer with NDTV. Growing up Muslim in India was not easy for Anam; the country was like two very different worlds for her. From that experience she created her own ideology.

One part of her is free and the other is trying to be.



November Rain

Madhavan Nayar

I woke up today to an unusual morning. The sky was overcast, and my avian friend who is normally perched on the light assembly on the porch was missing. There was the heady smell of that earthy nature one yearns for, when the first drops of rain soak the parched earth. The eastern Hajr Mountains, usually silhouetted against the bright sunlight coming from the east, were a hue of blue. A few dark, ominous clouds with silver linings were playing hide and seek with the peaks.

By the time I reached the gate, the road in front had become a veritable stream. It was a holiday, and I hesitated over whether to venture out or curl back into the comforts of my bed. As I had, by then, been fully awake, the latter seemed like a folly. Easing the car out of the garage and deftly maneuvering through the shallow parts of the now submerged road, I joined the sparse traffic on the expressway.

The radio crackled and came to life. There was a low pressure area over the Persian Gulf, and squalls and rough seas with chances of isolated thunder showers was the prediction. No wonder the sky is overcast, I thought.

The CD slid into position, and the melancholy voice of Jagjit Singh filled the cabin.

sham-e-mazaar thhee na koi sogwaar thha

tum jispe ro rahe thhe wo kiska mazaar thhaa

(No flame had been lit at the mausoleum nor was there a mourner,
Whose tomb was it at which you had cried?)

tarhpoonga umr bhhar dil-e-marhoom ke liye

kambakht naamuraad larhakpan ka yaar thhaa

(I shall suffer my whole life for the departed,
That damn person had been my friend in childhood)

jaadoo hai ya tilism tumhari zubaan mein

tum jhhoot keh rahe thhe mujhhe aetabaar thhaa

(Is it magic or wizardry upon your tongue?
I knew that you had lied.)

kya kya hamare sajde kee ruswaeeyaan huyeen

naqsh-e-qadam kisi ka sar-e-rehgazaar thaa

(Our prayers were for nothing,
Someone else's footprints were on the road we
took.)



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My mind pondered over the meaning of those lovely words. How do
you measure your own sorrows against the suffering of others?

Just then my cell phone rang: could I come to the hospital? As soon
as possible? I turned the car around and headed to the pediatric
emergency room (ER), a good 15-minute drive away.

I arrived at the ER, and at once noticed some of the familiar faces. The youngsters in their pristine white coats and the now familiar iPads in their pockets were busy attending to one child or other. The last cubicle was strangely quiet yet had somber-looking relatives standing around. One or two of the faces looked familiar.

“*Tabeeb*,” one of them called out to me. *Doctor*. “Could you please go into the cubicle? Mohammed and Zainab are waiting to see you.”

I gently opened the curtain and peeked in. Yes, indeed: Mohammed and Zainab were sitting around a covered body and sobbing softly. Upon hearing my footsteps, both got up. Mohammed embraced me the Arabic way, greeting me in the process. From behind the veil, Zainab too whispered her greetings. I reciprocated and asked Mohammed the usual question - “what happened?”

Mohammed poured the tragic story of that holiday morning. He had set out with his young family - his beloved Zainab and their three children - in their car for the 100-kilometer drive to the beach. Abdulla was the youngest, the darling of the family. The road wound through the eastern Hajr Mountains, crisscrossing through treacherous *wadis* (mountain rivulets) that are prone to flash floods. They had not been listening to the radio and were among the first few vehicles in the *wadi*. The first one, a four-wheel-drive, crossed the *wadi*, leaving in its wake muddy water, now flowing even more swiftly. The second was a saloon car, much like what Mohammed drove. The driver got into his car and began to drive. The exhaust pipe of the car briefly disappeared from view into the flood water,

and the car wobbled a bit for the next minute or so, but he too made it to the other side.

It was Mohammed's turn. He eased the car into the water. The first few feet seemed alright to him, then he felt a sudden thud under the car, and it lurched. Within seconds, Mohammed realized that the car was floating and rapidly moving sideways. Before he could even say a prayer, the car rolled over and over again and disappeared under the water. A few minutes later, the doors of the car somehow opened and soon he found himself, Zainab, and the two elder kids in shallow water. Abdulla was nowhere to be seen. Frantically, he called out for his youngest son; soon Zainab too joined the frenzied search, her veil lifted over the head, her eyes darting here and there.

Minutes later she noticed the familiar color of a shirt her son had been wearing...a few meters downstream by the side of large rock. By then the water had started ebbing. The sobbing parents collected the limp body of Abdulla and waded their way through muddy water and the many other people who had jumped in to help. Someone in the crowd tried CPR but of no avail. The family got into the car of a Good Samaritan and arrived at our ER only a half hour earlier. The doctors in the ER tried their best to revive the poor child, but by then matters were far too gone beyond anyone's grasp.

I gently moved forward and lifted the white shroud covering the limp body. There he was: angel-faced Abdulla, his cherubic face now a shade of deathly pallor. His little eyes were closed; the long, thick

eyelashes caressed the lower lids and cheek. He almost looked asleep, without a care in this world.

My hand cradled his head, and my other hand gently stroked the curls away from his forehead. I closed my eyes for a minute, and then gently laid him down on his bed. My mind rushed back to a fine day some 3 years ago.

It was the fourth pregnancy of Zainab, a beautiful girl from one of the Bedouin tribes that inhabit the Hajr Mountains. They had been told that their newly-conceived fetus had some malformations. They were advised to come to our hospital for delivery because an in-utero transfer would be safer for the baby. I had been called in to counsel the family. Mohammed, a high school graduate, was working in the city in the private sector. As per the common traditions of the Bedouin tribes, the joint family was heavily involved in looking after the offspring within the extended family. Zainab was his uncle's relative. She had not had any conventional schooling, but the transformation of the country into a modern nation and the knowledge gleaned from television and life around her had made her adapt well to the changing lifestyle. She had looked after both her children well.

I spoke to both Mohammed and Zainab about the baby she had been carrying. He had esophageal atresia, and I could see a single bubble in the abdomen. She had polyhydramnios. I explained the possibilities and options. She eventually delivered a 1.8 kilogram baby that would need multiple surgeries and a staged reconstruction. I performed an

esophagostomy and gastrostomy for feeding and then a gastric pull-up procedure as an esophageal replacement.

Some months later, Abdulla was feeding normally, and the family came to meet me. After the visit, as they were about to leave the room, Zainab turned around and lifted her veil. Those of you who have lived in this part of the world know that women in these countries never expose their faces to strangers. The only ones they expose their face to are their husbands.

She had the loveliest of eyes. They were lined with kohl, much like the yesteryear heroines of Hindi films. She must have been in her twenties. Her eyes were sparkling with joy, and the smile was one of gratitude. She extended her hands to me from beneath the black, embroidered *abaya*. They were pretty hands, well-manicured, with two glistening, gold bangles adorning the wrist. She was clutching a bag in her hand. "*Tabeeb*," she said, "I have made this for you; please accept this as my token of love for the support you gave us and my little Abdulla."

She held a rough, cotton shoulder-bag with a strap, and the front of the bag had the words 'Dr. Nayar' embroidered in golden thread. She had painstakingly made the bag from home-spun cotton and had asked one of the nurses to write down my name in English on a piece of paper during one of her previous visits. Her husband nodded his head in agreement when he saw me looking at him in question. I collected the bag, thanked them, and patted the head of Abdulla, now sleeping in the crook of Zainab's arm. Soon they disappeared through

the door, and my memory of them retreated to one of the corners of my heart.

Until today.

As I drove back, I remembered the Guns N' Roses song 'November Rain'. The video is about a rock star mourning the death of his girlfriend; the visuals suggest that she had killed herself. The song is said to be one of the longest in its genre, and the video itself is haunting to say the least.

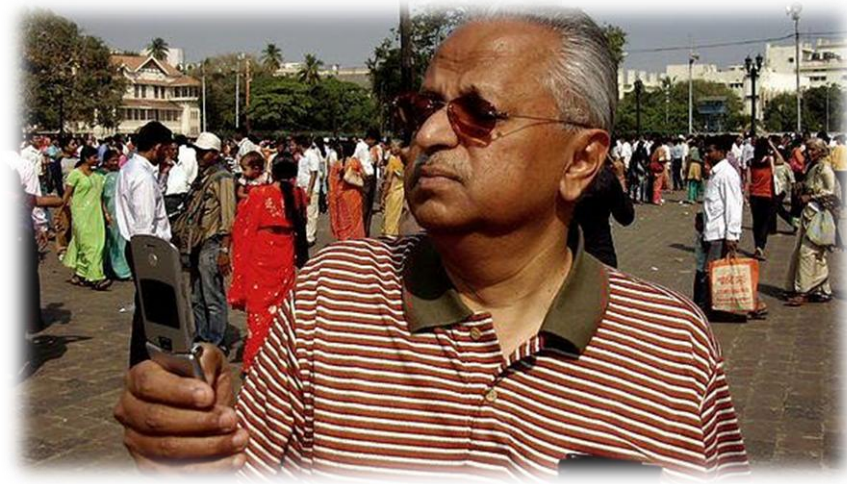


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As I neared my drive-in, the road that had been a torrent a few hours ago had become a large puddle. The water now seemed crimson red.

Disclaimer: All the names are fictitious and do not represent anyone living. Any resemblance is a mere coincidence.

Madhavan Nayar is a pediatric surgeon who has been living in Muscat, Oman, for 27 years after spending 13 training and teaching in the Le Corbusier-designed 'City Beautiful' - Chandigarh, India. Madhavan's day time is spent among the children he treats, and his nights are reserved for reading and for watching and listening to anything on the web or television with music occupying the center of his attention. Most would call him a liberal but not necessarily a non-conformist.



Curiosity

Lance Hawvermale

If I were the Martian rover with silicon
marrow and fake fingernails of carbon

fiber then I would not cry on the toilet.
The search for tears on Mars has begun.

Never mind whose boot will first crimp
the sargasso soil or what wise crap

he'll speak across sixteen minutes of
silent gulf to reach us, dying to cheer him.

Tell me instead who weeps the first
lava tears at the base of Olympus Mons,

whose eyes sting so much for a mom
60 million miles away and the shape

the falling drop makes in the rusty sand.
Or for a husband. Or even a lost dog.

Shut in my bathroom where it's mostly
dark I can shudder with the force of them,

breathing sadness in lieu of air on shores

where being first matters more than love.

Lance published his first two novels under the pseudonym of Erin O'Rourke. He released his third novel, a murder mystery titled *The Tongue Merchant*, under his own name - and he hasn't looked back since. His writing has won over 20 awards. His novel *Fugitive Shoes* was named to the University of Oklahoma's "Books That Inspire" exhibit. Currently an Assistant Professor of English at Ranger College in Texas, Lance teaches film, poetry, and creative writing courses.

Visit his website at <http://www.lancehawvermale.com>.



A Yankee Doodle

Sonal Mehta

"Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free..." says the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. Who can turn down such an invitation? Well, so here I am. Tired from a year of studying for my USMLEs, broke from having paid my exam fees, and definitely a huddled mass yearning to be free! (A considerably larger mass than I ever envisaged myself to be, but a huddled mass, nevertheless.)

America. *Amrika*. The US of A. The land of opportunity. The land of the free. The home of great people like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Henry Ford, Donald Trump, Walt Disney, George W. Bush, Paris Hilton, and Angelina Jolie. The land of which I have read about in all sorts of places from history books to Archie comics. The country whose TV programs (rejected, delayed, old, rerun - whatever) we have been watching since Mr. Murdoch conquered India. The place where Ross met Rachel, and where Kramer always got Jerry into trouble.

This was my first ever trip abroad, and hence I had a lot of fears, some justified, and a lot of them quite unwarranted. The foremost among the latter being that I would feel like a village idiot, a complete *dehaati* when I left India. I was pleasantly surprised to see that I didn't (except on one or two occasions like when I couldn't figure out how to lock or unlock the door to a restroom somewhere, and when I had no idea what some of the things offered to us for

lunch at our exam center in Philly were, or how they were supposed to be consumed).

There were a few things that struck me about this place in the few days that I've been here. The cleanliness is undoubtedly one (except when I went to Jersey City, which is a totally Indian and predominantly Gujju hub - it reminded me of Ahmedabad on a bad day). The orderly and patient way everyone drove their cars was another thing. On our way from the airport, my uncle must have driven at least 20 miles before I could hear a single person honk (even then it was a rather exuberant Sardarji who broke the silence). Another impressive aspect of the American lifestyle is the sheer magnitude of doing things. Everything is on a scale nearly as grand as the average Punjabi wedding. The buildings are tall, the cars are big, and juice is sold by the gallon. Despite all this I am still yet to see what the big deal is. Why are people from all over the world drawn to the US like Mika to Rakhi Sawant? What is it that has made the US a dream for people for generations now? The promise of a 'better' lifestyle and the US dollar is the answer I guess. There really is something about the US dollar. The very first time I put messrs Jackson, Hamilton, and Washington in my wallet at the Forex shop in Delhi, I felt a sense of power that the US currency brought to me (I felt totally powerless a few days later when I saw a slot machine at Caesars Casino in Atlantic City rob me of Mr. Jackson in under an hour).

Whether I will ever see what the big deal is or not, I can't say for sure, but I'm pretty sure I won't stop seeing what the big deal about India is.

Sonal Mehta is originally from Delhi and has also lived in Ahmedabad for five years where he went to medical college. He came to the US for residency training and since then has lived in multiple cities. He tries to write about life, the universe and everything, when he gets some free time from his day (very often day *and* night) job as a vascular neurologist.



XZBT