



# cybermohalla diaries

*Mohalla* in Hindi and Urdu means neighbourhood. Sarai's Cybermohalla project takes on the meaning of the word *mohalla*, its sense of alleys and corners, its sense of relatedness and concreteness, as a means for talking about one's 'place' in the city, and in cyberspace.

One can approach the Cybermohalla project from many directions. One can begin with a critique of the technological imagination and the expressive universe of the dominant mediascape, and then go on to map a counter strategy which grounds itself on access, sharing and democratic extensibility. One can see it as an experiment to engage with media technologies and software 'tactically', and create multiple local media contexts emerging within the larger media network that the Internet seems to engender. Still further, one can see it as an engagement with local history, experiences, modes of expression and creativity.

In its broadest imagination, one can see Cybermohalla as a desire for a wide and horizontal network (both real and virtual) of voices, texts, sounds and images in dialogue and debate. 'Public'-ation modes are and will be as diverse as wall magazines, books, posters, stickers, web pages, audio streams, animation etc. The present technological juncture provides a possibility – the point is to actualise it.

The present selection of writings is culled from the diaries maintained by young people working at the Compughar in the LNJP *basti*, Delhi. A working-class settlement constantly threatened by dislocation, the *basti* is in the heart of the city though invisible to Delhi's many millions. Compughar, started in May 2001, is a small media lab running on free software and low-cost media equipment. It is a collaborative effort between Sarai and Ankur, an NGO experimenting for the last two decades with alternatives in education.

The young people (mainly young women) who come to the Compughar are between the ages of 15 and 20. Most of them are school irregulars and dropouts. Their writings can be seen as a database of narrative, comment, observation, word-play and reflection. To us this selection evokes a sense of the everyday that gestures towards an intricate social ecology.

We invite you to enjoy and engage with this specific mode of writing the city.

JEEBESH BAGCHI

- > 6.00: There is quite a crowd at the tap, people are screaming. Five or six children and three to four women are standing there, each with three to four utensils in their hands.
- > 6.15: Now there are many young children and two women whose children are hurriedly carrying the filled utensils to their homes.
- > Time: When there is no water in the tap, time halts for many people. For instance, work stops. The movement of people into, and out of, the lane stops. Household chores stop. Without water, the time for taking a bath stops. Etc.

A Z R A

Time stands still when water runs out and the tap is dry. Time stands still when electricity goes. Time stands still when one sleeps in the afternoon. Time stands still when one sits in class in school. Time stands still when you can't afford to go out and have a good time.

A Y E S H A

A window has four eyes. Two eyes on the inside, and two on the outside. The window looks at those inside. For instance: The house, you, guests, she listens to what they say. And watches their work. And watches the utensils, the cupboard, the refrigerator, the television, the stove, children, foodstuff, machine, cot, chair. She watches food being eaten, people sleeping, dancing, children and husband and wife fighting. She also watches marriages, as also death. Watches children being fed. Watches them being hit. She sees pictures. She sees the clock. She sees people studying, people teaching. The door is visible. Can be seen the light, the fan, the cooler, the earthen pot. She sees cleanliness and filth. Many people working.

S H A H J E H A N

The electricity went. He said, "Oh!" and looked up towards the fan. My eyes also strayed towards it. We removed our gaze from it and looked at each other. I smiled and got up. First I opened the door. It was made of iron. When I unbolted it, there was a loud noise. The sound happened, and then suddenly ceased. But when I opened the door, it seemed a jumble of sounds came into the room from the outside.

The sound of cars. The sound from the cluster of six to seven houses opposite ours, where some 35 people live together. Seven rooms huddled around a tiny courtyard. At this hour, the men had all gone out to work. But 10-12 children were sitting in front of the houses, some on a cot, others on the floor. From among them, some were sitting near their mothers, crying, while the mothers themselves were busy with their handicraft chores. The children sported nothing on their bodies other than shorts. Maybe one or two did.

The main gate of that cluster was right in front of the door to Shabeena's house (where we were). I opened the door. Then opened the window. When there was electricity, and the fan and the cooler and the light were on, I didn't feel the need to open the door and the window. But without the light, the room was dark. Only a little light was streaming in from where the stairs were. After opening the door and the window, I moved towards the bed, looking all this while at the stairs...

A Z R A

Sometimes our eyes get fixed at one point so that even if we want to see something else, we can't!

It happened once that one of the daughters of my neighbours and her family members were going to attend someone's wedding. When that girl got dressed and stepped out of her house, I couldn't get my eyes off her! She was looking so beautiful! I just couldn't see any of her family members. My eyes were firmly fixed only on her. Her father also got ready and came and stood outside, because everyone else was still getting ready. As soon as he came, the girl covered her head properly with her *dupatta*. This shows she had shame (born of respect) in her eyes.

NEELOFER

The window sees many things on the outside. For instance, plants and trees, fights, some donkeys, electricity cables and poles, birds in the sky. She sees lanes. She sees a park, roads, dogs and cats. She sees people coming and going. She sees houses being constructed, people on roofs, kites being flown, pigeons flying. She sees water coming into the tap. She sees the tap run out of water. She sees rain. The moon and the stars. A street lamp being repaired. Men walking around in a drunken stupor. Children returning from school. Things displayed in shops. The ice cream vendor. The juice vendor. The shops selling biscuits.

The window sees on the outside two women fighting over water. And one is pulling the other's hair. And the window also sees two children walking past, singing songs. They are singing this song: *yeh dosti hum nahin todenge*. The window laughs out loud. Then she keeps singing this song. Then she sees, suddenly, four to five girls are going somewhere.

SHAHJEHAN

It was five in the evening. Time for water to start flowing from the tap. There was quite a crowd at the tap. After some time, the water came. Everyone started filling water. Just then one woman threw the utensil of another woman who was filling water, and started to fill water herself. When the woman brought back her utensil, she asked, Why did you throw it away? The other woman replied, It was my turn, how were you filling water? On hearing this, the first woman got really mad. She also threw away her utensil and said, It's my turn. Then said, Let me see who fills water when it's my turn. And started filling her utensil. Meanwhile, some other woman put her utensil there. Seeing this, the first woman slapped her. This started a fight between them. But the water was flowing from the tap into the drain nearby. Already, something in the drain was obstructing its flow and causing water to fill up in it. The water was filling up, but their fight was not coming to an end. It went on, and finally it was time and the tap ran out of water. And in this time water overflowed from the drain onto the lane. That was the only path people could use to move around. It got blocked with the water. In the end, they themselves had to suffer because of their fight. For two or three days, walking in the lane proved to be a hassle. Nobody cleaned the drain. Later a sweeper came and pulled out the garbage from it and unclogged it. Then water came in the evening and that day everyone filled water without any trouble. If one filled two buckets, then another filled another two. Everyone filled water that day...

SHAMSER

the noise of money falling  
the noise of boxes  
the noise of the kut kut of tube lights switching on  
the noise of handicrafts  
the noise of pearls being strung together  
the noise of a whistle being blown  
the noise of the dhud dhud of spoons on plates  
the noise of rocks breaking  
the noise of a slap  
the noise of a cupboard opening  
the noise of children screaming  
the noise of someone selling fruits and vegetables  
the noise of chana being sold  
the noise of spices being ground  
the noise of clothes being stitched  
the noise of a cooler  
the noise of a fridge  
the noise of a machine  
the noise of utensils  
the noise of a stove  
the noise of etc.  
the noise of etc.  
the noise of things being made  
the noise of a stove being lit  
the noise of people attending a wedding  
the noise of a nail being hit  
the noise of the pages of books being turned  
the noise of the whistle of a cooker  
the noise of houses breaking  
the noise of a door or window being made  
the noise of people around  
the noise of clothes being washed  
the noise of utensils being cleaned  
the noise of bangles and anklets  
the noise of a box being opened  
the noise of songs  
the noise of a television and a deck at seven in the morning  
the noise of a television at two in the afternoon  
the noise of t.v. sets that are switched on in every home at five in the evening  
S H A H J E H A N

Lanes there are several in our colony. The lanes in our colony are narrow. Scooters and cycles don't pass through easily. And also, the lanes stay very dirty. Sometimes they are cleaned. We were told this by a woman. She said she didn't like these lanes. That's because they have become narrower as people have constructed houses along them. So it's a problem for everyone. No cars can pass through these lanes...

Actually, I'm not scared to go into the lanes. But one thing that frightens me is men who get high on drugs. I feel very scared of them. And in my colony during Ramzaan I'm scared. This is because cats move around at night.

S H A H J E H A N

Morning: From every house can be heard the noise of children screaming. And on the tap, the noise of buckets and utensils.

The sound of utensils being washed *sur sur sur...*

Of clothes being washed *ghar ghar ghar...*

Of televisions being switched on and channels being changed *tuk tuk tuk...*

Of clothes having been washed and being swung in the air to be dried *jhut jhut jhut...*

From motor cars *suur suur suur...*

Of stoves being lit *tun tun tun...*

Of water being drunk *gutuk gutuk gutuk...*

Of walking *chut chut chut...*

Of rotis being made *thup thup thup...*

S H A H J E H A N

Many travellers come on this road, go on this road. And travellers of all kinds. For instance, poor people, rich people, very poor people. All kinds of travellers come on this road. You can hear the sound of brakes and horns. On this road are the sounds of all kinds of cars. Here the smells of petrol, smoke and the scent of perfume from humans can be smelt.

S H A H J E H A N

> Turkman Gate: Here accidents mostly happen on roads. What I am about to tell you happened eight years ago. There is a school near Turkman Gate, G.G.S. Sec. School, Buli Khan, Asaf Ali, New Delhi. A terrible accident occurred here in which one *rickscha walla* and three to four school children were injured and one child died as well. On seeing the accident, one woman had a heart attack and she also died. People stopped sending their children to school. Fear had filled their hearts.

> Gandhi Market: Here there is a place where if there weren't a red light, people would become used to seeing accidents. But one happened here as well. Many years ago, the daughter of our *pradhan* Roshan met with an accident that shook everyone's heart. This accident happened with a bus. People say that on coming under the bus, she died, but pieces of her brain lay fluttering, jumping around. Even today people tremble when recounting the accident.

> Opposite here: This road asks for one sacrifice every year, people say. Ten years back, there was a woman who was pregnant. She was crossing the road with her daughter when

a bus came and the girl was run over. She came under the tyre of the bus. She pulled hard at her mother and she fainted, screaming. And why wouldn't she have, I saw this with my own eyes. When I saw the girl, she didn't have eyes and her head had become flattened against the road. I can still see that face clearly and then the whole incident gets replayed in my head. Then police arrested the bus driver and friends and relatives of the woman broke the bus.

A year back, two boys were listening to music while driving their car. They too met with an accident with a car. They lived in Turkman Gate. This had caused quite a sensation.

It was during Ramzaan, before Eid. A young man was going towards Delite (cinema hall) after his evening prayers when he got run over by a truck. Lots of blood flowed out of his body. My younger brother had gone to see it. He told me.

Whenever there is an accident around here, silence descends upon the colony and for many days, it is all that is discussed.

A Z R A

The bus came. I got in.

The bus was crowded.

Buying the ticket proved to be a problem.

Bought it while being pushed around.

Couldn't get a seat.

Travelled standing.

A boy pushed me.

I collided with the girl standing next to me.

You scoundre! Stand properly.

Again someone pushed me.

The woman didn't say anything.

"It's okay, son".

I apologised.

The bus stop arrived.

Some people got off.

I got a seat.

I heaved a sigh of relief and sat down.

Looked out of the window – Wow! India Gate

I saw...

An ice cream vendor.

Children playing with balloons.

Children playing badminton.

Some people were rowing boats.

It was nice to look out.

The bus picked up a little speed.

I was sitting on my seat.

Chin on hand, I started to think.

Wish I had a car.

Then I wouldn't have to go through all this trouble.

Would have gone out, some, with family.

To India Gate as well.  
 My wife and kids would have played there.  
 I would also have been with them then.  
 I was lost in my thoughts.  
 A girl came up to me and said.  
 "Ladies' seat, please".  
 I snapped out of my thoughts.  
 Got up without saying anything.  
 But in my mind the thoughts stayed.  
 Car, India Gate, children, wife, me.  
 Then I heard the conductor's voice.  
 And realised...  
 I have reached my destination.  
 I got off the bus.  
 And took a *ricksha* to office.  
 I looked around while sitting in the *ricksha*.  
 Looked at the *ricksha walla* and thought...  
 How hard this man works.  
 He must also have dreams.  
 But he doesn't even have proper clothes.  
 And thought of other things as well.  
 Looked at the people on the road.  
 But I couldn't get the *ricksha walla* out of my head.  
 Or the other *ricksha wallas*.  
 Wish I could do something for them.

MEMORY GAME # 16, PLAYED BY ALL

I was on my roof today. I heard many types of noises. Of birds, songs from a deck, children crying, laughing. Then I climbed down. I heard the water running in the tap, someone was taking a bath. Someone slapped a boy. I heard the slap. The sound of the television could also be heard.

S H A M S H E R

There was a boy who had taken to frequenting our lane. He would come whistling and singing, and peep into our house while passing by. This had been going on for several days.

A man was distributing *sharbat* in our lane. The boy also took one glass from him. And started gesturing (with his eyes) to the girl who lives opposite our house. It looked like he was asking her to drink some *sharbat*. I found this very funny and laughed. I showed this to my elder sister and she also laughed.

Seeing us laugh, Mohataram *bhai* asked us what we were finding so funny. We pointed towards the boy, still laughing. He saw the boy, and went to him and slapped him really hard. Seeing this, the girl, who had been standing in the lane opposite us, disappeared. Mohataram *bhai* gave the boy a good beating. But in another two to three days, he was

back to his antics.

An elderly man is our neighbour. He goes out to work in the morning and comes back in the evening with his food. He is from Pakistan. His name is Mirajo, but we call him *chacha*. The people here really trouble him. And boys make so much fun of him that... Once the boy I was just telling you about brought some more boys with him. They had two eggs in each hand. They passed by our lane. *Bhai* Mirajo had just returned from work. He washed up and was sitting down to eat when those boys started pelting eggs at him and his house. Poor *bhai* Mirajo didn't do anything. Yesterday when he came to our house, he was weeping as he was saying, "If I do something wrong, you can all hit me. But I haven't done anything. Why do all of you needlessly bother me?" He had tears in his eyes. Seeing him, we also wanted to cry. Then he left.

After this conversation, my mother spoke with *bhai* Syed and he asked *bhai* Mirajo to file a complaint with the police. But *bhai* Mirajo refused. He said, "It's no use. I have gone to file a complaint many times. But they reduce everything to a laughing matter". But when *ammi* asked *bhai* Syed to go and file a report, he played his role as a brother. (Actually every one calls *bhai* Syed '*bhai* Syed', but we call him *mamu*).

When *mamu* accompanied *bhai* Mirajo to the police station, the complaint was lodged. But there was no follow-up from the police. Our *mamu* also let the whole thing pass.

Some days later, I saw from the roof, *mamu* coming towards our house. He was saying to a woman, "When will you return my money? It's been so many days. Will you return it after I die?" That woman replied, "Why do you speak this way? Am I not your sister? I'll give you back your money tomorrow". The woman went to her house. *Mamu* was coming towards our house when he saw the same boy sitting on the cot that was lying there. He said, "You scoundrel, you've been at it again!"

Hearing this, the boy pulled out a knife from his pocket and stabbed *mamu* in his stomach. *Mamu* was only slightly hurt. So the boy stabbed him again on his arm. Seeing this, I got scared. I was sitting there, writing. The pen fell from my hand. Lots of people came and grabbed the boy. Police came and took him away. Suddenly the lane was alive with noise and activity and women pulled their children off the lane into their homes. One could also hear a lot of male voices. If I had a camera, I would have clicked a snap.

All of *mamu's* relatives came and took him to the hospital. The incident upset everyone. People said unkind things about the boy. They wondered, "If a sixteen-year-old boy can do this, then, oh god, so can our children! Will our children also behave like this?" *Bhai* Syed became the talk of the colony.

MEHRUNISSA

There was a boy whose name was Sonu. Even after the show was over, he refused to step out of the cinema hall because he had seen in the film that acid rain was pouring outside. This had got entrenched in his heart. And even though people tried to explain to him otherwise, he refused to leave the hall. Everyone thought they should force him out now. But he wouldn't budge. His parents were distressed. Finally, people used physical force to get him out. Incidentally, it was raining outside. The boy was mortified and started howling. Everyone decided it was time to find a solution to this.

His uncle explained to him and said, Son, come, otherwise Kilwish will come. On hearing this, the boy got even more scared. Then one man thought, if this boy is scared of Kilwish, then perhaps if Shaktimaan were to appear before him, maybe our problem could be solved. One man was made to appear before him dressed up as Shaktimaan. The boy did reach home, but the thought of acid rain wouldn't leave him.

One day, all of them (mother, father and Sonu) went out. Suddenly, the sky was overcast with clouds and it started to rain. The boy was visibly shaken and he started to run. He reached the same hall where he had seen the film. Everyone was struck by his reappearance. The boy felt safe on seeing them all. But he was so scared of the rain... as if it was going to eat him up. When it stopped raining, Sonu's parents took him to a doctor. The doctor asked for some medicine to be brought, and asked him what he was scared of. The boy said, Acid. The doctor asked, And are you scared of water? The boy said, No. The doctor said, What rainfall has is water. Why don't you go out and see for yourself? Shaktimaan will be right there.

The boy went out. At first he was very scared. But then, all his fear vanished. His parents were very happy.

S U R A J

What is today this beautiful Haathi Park used to be a colony. In that colony lived my best friend Rukhsana. I used to go often to meet her. But I don't know where she will be now. I had asked her where she would go. Now I think maybe I'll run into her in a market. The colony was pulled down a year ago. No one knows where everyone was sent away... At that time we had heard they were being shifted to NOIDA. Everyone was cursing [those responsible] for sending them so far away. So far away, now what will happen to our men's jobs? How will they come so far? We lived a life of comfort here, now we'll always be scared.

A Z R A

I saw the frame of a door being made, a window being made. **Thuk... thuk... thuk...**

Then I saw a shop. Just then a motorcycle sped past. It looked brand new. A man was sitting on it. **Grrr... grrrrrr...rrr...grrrr.**

Here a man was starting his two-wheeler. The motorcycle had gone far away so I could hear it much less. And the sound of the scooter starting could be heard. **Turrak... turrak...kkk...kkk...**

I was passing by a lane when I heard the sound of water. **Jhur... jhur...** Up ahead, some people were speaking with one another. I could hear them talk. I went ahead a little and saw two or three people buying things from the sweet shop. Just then, a bottle of cold drink slipped out of a child's hand and broke. **Kun... nnn... tus...** So the boy has to pay the shopkeeper the cost of the bottle. In the shop also sat its owner, whose name is Ramdas, whose age must be 40. In his shop you get flour, pulses, rice, oil, soap, painkillers and also cold drinks etc.

S H A M S H E R

----- basti... stone -----  
----- line -----  
----- you -----  
----- children -----  
----- computer -----  
----- mad -----  
----- medical -----  
----- sound -----  
----- imagination -----  
----- electricity -----  
----- cupboard -----  
----- incident -----  
----- man -----  
----- filth -----  
----- school -----  
----- living -----  
----- shop -----  
----- i -----  
----- gutter -----  
----- report -----  
----- children -----  
----- lanes -----  
----- water -----  
----- playing -----  
----- lines -----  
----- tap -----  
----- relationships -----  
----- drains -----  
----- pipes -----  
----- honesty -----  
----- house -----  
----- memory -----  
----- neighbour -----  
----- woman -----  
----- elderly -----  
----- employee -----  
----- wire -----  
----- barking -----  
----- tap -----  
----- dishonesty -----  
----- carelessness -----  
----- you -----

MEMORY GAME #07, PLAYED BY ALL

But there was one person whose death had really saddened me. This person, who was very old. Don't know if she had any relatives. This happened during days that were ordinary. That is, it was neither too hot, nor too cold. I was going to the Arvind Hospital with my younger sister. When, on the way, where there is a bus stop where no bus ever stops, and where no one even waits for one, there lay the dead body of a very fat woman. She had probably died due to lack of food. When I was walking past, I smelt a horrible stench, a stench quite different from all the others that lingered there. I couldn't stop myself, so I decided to go closer and see. What I saw made my hair stand on end. I saw a woman, without any clothes on, lying there, dead. There were maggots all over her body. And flies were sticking to her...

We were asked to come back [to the hospital] after three days. I was waiting to go back. I hadn't told anyone about the dead body. I was getting impatient. I wanted to see the body again. I wanted to ask the people around there about the woman. I wanted to get the body buried, or cremated. Instead of going to the hospital, I walked towards the bus stop. My sister implored me to come straight to the hospital, or we'd get delayed like the other day. I told her to quietly come with me, that I had something important to do. I returned to the same place, but the woman wasn't there. I was distressed and ran up and down looking for her...

Nearby was a barber's shop. The barber was very old. (Maybe he too has died. Now I see some other man at the shop). That old man was fair skinned; he had white hair, short stature and was wearing a *kurta pyjama*. I ran up to him and asked him, Till a day back there was a woman lying here who was dead. Where has she gone? He said, A government vehicle carried her away with the garbage...

A Z R A

I was going to my friend Tanzilla's house. Because she had called me up the day before and said, "It's been so many days since you came to my house. Does it never occur to you to come? You've forgotten me". I said, "No, that's not true. Fine, I'll come day after tomorrow". So Tan said, "Yeah. You'll come on invitation, not otherwise. You're very selfish".

I: Don't you lecture me. It's been so many days since you came to my house.

Tanzilla was silent. After some time she said, "You'll come, won't you?"

I: Yes my dear, I will come.

My younger sister was with me. Tanzilla's house is towards Ajmeri Gate. If I wanted, I could have taken a bus. But I wanted to take a *ricksha* because the buses were quite crowded. So I asked a *ricksha walla*. When he asked for too much money, I asked another, and then several *ricksha wallas*. But either they would ask for too much money, or they would outright refuse to go that side. I got angry. I started to walk. It was around 11 in the morning. I climbed onto the footpath in front of the shops. I saw the shops were closed. I wondered why. My attention shifted from the *rickshas* to the shops. After walking a little, I saw written on a shop: "Sunday Close". I suddenly remembered, Oh! It's Sunday today! Tanzilla's father and all three brothers will be at home. I feel a little hesitant speaking with Tanzilla in front of them.

My first thought was to return home. Then thought, Tanzilla will be waiting for me. I got off the footpath. The sun was beating down on me now. My sister said, "Let's take a

*ricksha*". I stop a *ricksha walla*, settle a price and we sit in it. The *ricksha walla* seemed old. But this man, he really speeds! Whenever there was a pothole, the *ricksha* would jump and along with it, the two of us would too. I told the *ricksha walla*, "Baba, move a little slower". He was looking at his watch repeatedly. Maybe he didn't even hear me. A huge pothole comes, the *ricksha* jumps violently, the gift I was carrying for Tanzilla falls from my hand. The three-wheeler from behind us moves over it, and the gift turns to dust. The *ricksha* stops. I say in a slightly high-pitched voice, "Baba, I told you, didn't I, to move slowly. Now see, you've broken my gift". The *ricksha walla* looks a little ashamed, says, "Beti, I didn't hear you. I'm in a rush because I have to pick up children from a school, and I am a little late". Then we move at a slower (right) speed.

Ajmeri Gate comes. I get off near Tanzilla's and start to pay the *ricksha walla*. He says, "Let it be, *beti*. You suffered a loss because of me".

I: *Arre baba*, what had to happen, happened. Now take the money".

After much argument, he accepts the money. Then takes off, the *ricksha* moving at a great speed, as if flying in the air, because he had to reach the children to their homes from their school.

I ring Tanzilla's doorbell. It's Tanzilla herself who opens the door. She says, "So madam, you have arrived. I have been waiting for you so long". I step in...

N E E L O F E R

Sadia's friend, 14 years: Yes, once it happened with me. I was going to a doctor's to get my sister's check-up done. It was nine at night. There were four to five boys, don't know whether from this colony or another. There was no electricity in the whole colony that night. The boy I knew was right in front, followed by two others. They were walking very slowly. I wanted to quickly walk past them, so I increased my speed and overtook two of them. The ones in front of me turned around and saw me. They reduced their speed to a crawl. And the boys behind me were very close to me now. My heart was beating violently. I cursed the street for being so narrow that not more than one person can walk in it at a time.

A Z R A

It was five-thirty in the evening. I climbed onto the roof. My younger brother Rehan was flying a kite. Our roof is the lowest in our colony, and everyone else's is quite high. And some even have two to three storied houses. I spread a sheet on the roof and sat down. Our neighbouring house is two-storied. On its roof, a boy was doing his work from school. He is Raju and studies in the eighth class. I didn't use to speak much with him. And he also used to stay aloof. Because in my house, they are very strict about such things. Sometimes, when it couldn't be helped, or when we had some work with one another, we would speak, but he always addressed me as his elder sister.

My brother's kite was flying in the direction of his roof. A wind was blowing. Many people, boys, children, were on their roofs. The sound of decks playing in different places could be heard. Also could be heard the sound of girls chatting and laughing.

N E E L O F E R

Almost on his death bed. > > > But an evergreen heart. > > > And in love. > > > Meaning, oldie saw old woman. > > > The heart fluttered. > > > Song: *tumhe dekha to yeh jaana...* > > > *Dekha hai pehli baar...* > > > He winked. > > > Song: *aankh maare...* > > > Writes her a letter. > > > She can't read. Off to a friend for help. > > > The friend's eyes also open to a whole new world. > > > The beginning of yet another love story. > > > Meanwhile, the oldie is bread winner for his family no more. > > > For he is busy fulfilling his lover's heart's desires. > > > The old woman is crazy with love. > > > She dyes her hair black. She's young again! > > > The lovers go roaming around, beaming with delight. > > > The woman runs into a friend. > > > Her glasses were broken. She sees the oldie. > > > Thinks it is the woman's husband. > > > The oldie buys her (the friend) glasses. > > > Eyesight back, she gets the shock of her life. > > > *Arre*, this husband is MINE! > > > She faints. The woman (lover) is troubled. > > > Oldie picks up his wife. Lover is jealous. > > > Thinks to herself: "Oldie, a young woman in front of you, and an old one in your arms!! > > > "Oh, okay, she can be the sister-in-law. > > > "Oh no! A sister-in-law is half a wife!" > > > Oldie sprinkles water on the old woman's face. > > > The old woman comes to, and says, with a heavy heart, "*jijajee*". > > > The woman is happy. > > > The other is heart-broken. She sings a song. > > > *Is dil ke tukde hazaar huwe.* > > > *Dost dost na rahaa.* > > >

MEMORY GAME # 23, PLAYED BY ALL

It was summer. We were all feeling hot. Shabeena pulled out a *punkha* and started to fan herself with it. She handed me the bottle. I said, "I want only half of this". But she said, "There are four of us. If we all take only half a bottle, who will we give the rest to? It's hot. Just drink up".

Their backs were to the door. So there was very little light on their faces. We thought every person passing by the door was going to come in. So at every slight sound, we would look in that direction. When they would turn their heads, the light from the door would sharply define their profiles.

Light was streaming in from the window as well. But very near the window was a wall, which is made of bricks, which was made only recently. It was the light reflected from this wall of bricks that was coming in through the window. So the light near the window looked red.

They finished drinking their bottles. Then chatted, reminisced over their school days, talked about their teachers and friends. I was sitting right there, unable to force the cold drink down my throat.

They said they should leave. Shabeena and I asked them to stay a while longer. They stayed another two minutes, then the woman said, "We should go now. We have to go visit a relative as well".

As soon as they left, the house seemed empty. As it is there was no one else in her house. Within a minute of their leaving, I told Shabeena, "I should also go now". Once again, she asked me to stay. But I left.

Our houses are not far from each other. When I stepped out of her house, there was no electricity. I cast a glance at the house opposite and walked on. Right up ahead was the

road. Vehicles were plying on it. I was looking at them as I turned towards my house. Two minutes before my house is a tap where I saw yellow and green utensils, buckets etc. lined up to be filled in the evening. I saw them and thought, if water doesn't come in the evening, so many people will be troubled.

Right in front of the tap is my house. It has yellow walls and a green door. The room right in front is four yards wide. And on the door is a curtain. I removed the curtain and entered. *Ammi* was sewing clothes on the sewing machine. (*Ammi*: dark skinned, parrot green clothes, thin lips, big eyes, reading glasses, a black *dupatta* around her neck). I went in the door and started to take my slippers off. *Ammi* looked up at me from over her glasses and said, "What happened? What took you so long? If you're given a little freedom, you start misusing it. Why have you come back? You should have stayed there. Why don't you take your clothes with you?"

A Z R A

To dream is to imagine. Dreams are of two kinds. One, that we see when we're awake. And the other, which we see while asleep. The world of dreams is an altogether different world. For instance, I once dreamt I was at India Gate, playing with balloons. And I got tired. So I sat down right there, on the grass. There was greenery all around me.

All of a sudden, the weather changed. A cool breeze began to blow, and with that it started to rain. The rain drops on my face felt like dew drops on leaves in winter. I felt like I was in heaven. My heart felt at peace, calm. Oblivious to reality, I was lost in a world where I even forgot myself.

Just then my sister shook me and said, "*Nanhee*, when will you get up? It's eight. Till when will you sleep? Now get up. Wash your hands and face. I'm making tea". I was livid with my sister and started to fight with her. "Why did you wake me up? I was dreaming such a beautiful dream. You shook me awake and shattered my dream".

My sister replied, "Silly, a dream is a dream. Dreams shatter when you awaken. Why mourn them?" I thought, that's also true! Dreams are after all dreams. I apologised to my sister and went to wash up.

Y A S H O D A