

POCKET DIARY BOOK CLUB

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

EDITION 25

(x, y, z, t) = (Akshat Drama Group Studio, 26 November)

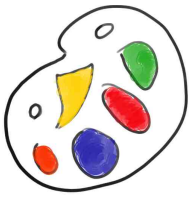
2023 A.D.

ATTENDEES

Jasmeet, Shanker, Yogesh, Ashwathy, Ruchi, Jay, Sambhav, Nikhil, Shwetha, Hardik, Hanil, Navshin, Nija, Nirali & Bharath

A momentous occasion lay before us, **the 25th Edition!**
An extraordinary memory had to be conjured up, befitting of this jubilee.

Yogesh Ji, PDBC's very own activity coordinator, ever ready and enthusiastic with new plans and things to do, had a wonderfully soul-stirring, introspective journey in mind:



Yeh kaun chitrakaar he?
Who is this Artist?

Yeh kis Kavi ki kalpana ka chamatkar he?
Of which poet's imagination is this miracle?



(Bharath's Note: I am also writing while listening to the song central to the activity, to transport myself back to the mood in the Edition!)

Not to be left behind as (selfish!) moderators, me and Nirali brainstormed quite a bit, pulling from books and memory lanes of yesterdays... to put together a "**Poetry v Prose**" battle of sorts, which was *in memoriam* of all the words, characters and stories that have been brought—and will keep coming—to PDBC.

The session began with this "**Poetry v Prose**" battle to set the mood, and the session was culminated with (and was interspersed by) Yogesh Ji's ideas.

"The Martian Chronicles" by Ray Bradbury – read by Jay

With the first reading itself, we were all of us whisked away to the Red Planet, where we took part in the fourth expedition to Mars.

Jay introduces us to the brave new world and its current (and only?) inhabitants, and without breaking a sweat takes us right into the action. Spender walks into his four crewmates having a hearty meal ... and poses the question that makes us all gasp (along with the four at the table).

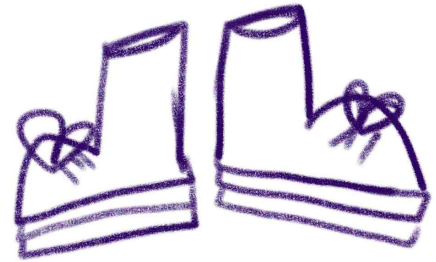
"What would you say if I said I'd found a Martian prowling around?"
(pause for dramatic effect!)

Cherokee explains exactly how he'd feel, with his Cherokee blood in him, but he is unable to see the impending doom ...

Spender tells us he has found a Martian "up in a dead town", and how over the past week has been learning to read the Martian language from ... wait for it ... a Martian!

The Martian, clever fellow that he is, asks for repayment from Spender in a style that closely resembles the Terminator's. As Spender put it:

The Martian appeared before me and said, "Give me your boots." ... And I gave him my boots and he said, "Give me your uniform and all the rest of your apparel." and I gave him all of that, and then he said, "Give me your gun." and I gave him my gun. Then he said, "Now come along and watch what happens."



Remember that impending doom I was talking about? We all said hello to the little friend that was the twist in the story at this point, and all (except Cherokee) didn't live to tell the tale. A blow-by-blow (pun intended) account followed as Jay took us forward without skipping a breath, as the alien commanded Spender's body and took him (and poor Cherokee with the Cherokee blood) around like a marionette, ending with a struggle (and apparent victory?) for Spender's body and mind.

"Old Man and the Sea" by Ernest Hemingway – read by Yogesh Ji

Ah, the Old Man and the Sea returns, this time in the caring hands and masterful voice of Yogesh Ji! With ocean sounds in the background, and the patient carefreeness found in a lifelong friendship, Yogesh ji took us to the Old Man's boat and into his thoughts.



(Nirali notes in this moment, that he is the Young Man, and we are the sea!)

He talks of the Sun, the Moon, the Stars and the Old Man's meandering thoughts interweaving all of these and none of these together. And darting from there, he expresses remorse for the big fish he has caught, but knows that it was necessary.

(Nirali also notes that in reading this, Yogesh ji has given his answer to the question the song posed... The Creator is the Painter, and in this way the lyricist was our very own desi Thoreau!)
Yogesh ji finishes with the passage, and fondly recounts how this book is very close to him ... especially so since it reminds him of his fisherman friend, and of his stories of the Sun, the Moon and the stars.

"It is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers."

"Dark Star Safari" by Paul Theroux - read by Sambhav

The Old Man dreams of his trips to the shores of Africa ... and of the prides of lions he sees from the stern of the ship whenever he is taken by sleep.

And so Sambhav took us to Africa, albeit with lesser rose-coloured glasses!

Paul Theroux's riveting account, and Sambhav's intriguing recounting, takes us on a rusty, dusty, musty trip from northern tip to the southern extremes of Africa. And all throughout the journey, we are a companion to the Author's discomfort and general disdain for the state of affairs.

He talks of the corrupt politicians being indistinguishable from witch-doctors, and the sleight-of-hand which either of them had to master to stay relevant.

"I got sick, I got stranded but I was never bored: in fact, my trip was a delight and a revelation"

At the end, I ask if there is any explanation for why the book was named the way it is ... but that is a mystery that Mr. Theroux leaves unresolved.

"Catch-22" by Joseph Heller - read by Shanker

Shanker shows us all the cover to this classic, and explains as to why this particular edition was specifically chosen by him (apart from the book being a hilarious read :D).

The aluminium rivets embossed on this cover, were there to evoke the feeling of being in one of the fighter planes which are so central to the story itself.

(Bharath's PS: As I write this, I realise that between this special edition of Catch-22, and that one special edition of Fahrenheit 451 which was made with a flammable strip on the side (so that one burns that book after reading; IYKYK), *physical* books offer an infinitely more visceral reading experience than a Kindle or any other device could hope to offer!)

Following this, he takes us on a crazy loop-de-loop exchange between Yossarian and Doc Daneeka, as the former begs to be let out from regular flying duty and the latter showcases his ingenious system for deciding who gets to be benched, and who does not.

Spoiler Alert: Being sane meant being crazy meant being sane, which means you fly ...



The almost neck-breaking logical gymnastics of Doc Daneeka's system leaves us all feeling whiplash, but Shanker's patient recounting allows us to appreciate the crazy clarity in it, and laughter breaks out as we realise the "Catch-22".

(Bharath's PS: in discussing with Shanker before the edition to zero in on the passage and the context etc., he mentioned to me that he was going to "wing it". This, in fact, was not only an expression of confidence, but also a much intended pun!)

"Mister God, This is Anna" by 'Fynn' (Sydney Hopkins) - read by Jasmeet

We, as moderators, knew the passage which was to be read, of course ... but we had forbidden ourselves from delving deeper into the book because we wanted to experience the precious exchanges between Fynn and Anna, *along with the other members*.

Jasmeet brought to life the innocent conversation between Fynn and Anna, on Mister God (as Anna called him) and his wonderful ways. Like any child, Anna's questions and answers were simple and loaded with as much (if not more) wisdom than most learned people. I remember that with each realisation brought on by this passage, smiles broke out on everyone's faces and were passed around like they were candy.

*"Fynn, that's the difference.
You see, everybody has got a point of view, but Mister God hasn't.
Mister God has only points to view."*

"The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy - read by Ruchi

This book was an instant transmission onboard a KSRTC bus back to Kerala ... which is what Ruchi's words took us on when she described the setting of the scene with its cozy rain, trees, frogs, jackfruits and mangoes, moss, creepers and fish.

However, there was trouble in paradise for us all along with the characters, as the complicated questions of who should be loved ... and how much were unravelled. The tragically poignant tale of Rahel and Estha was lovingly taken off paper and invited into the room with us by Ruchi, and one could palpably feel how much their "forbidden" love, and subsequent loss, weighed heavily on all characters fictional and non-fictional.

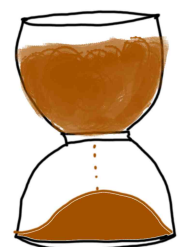
"Kindred" by Octavia Butler - read by Shwetha

This one was a journey through spacetime, involving (uncontrollable) time-travel back to one of the darkest hours of human history — the era of Slavery.

Rufus and Dana meet in 1815 Maryland, but the latter doesn't belong to that timeline. This first journey back in time leaves us with more questions than answers.

How was this happening? Is there any way back?

Shwetha explains that all these piqued her interest, and the audience agrees as continues to read with gusto. Eventually, Dana does manage to make it back to her time, but is whisked away a second time! Shwetha explains, that Dana is thrown back in time whenever it seems that Rufus is in danger...



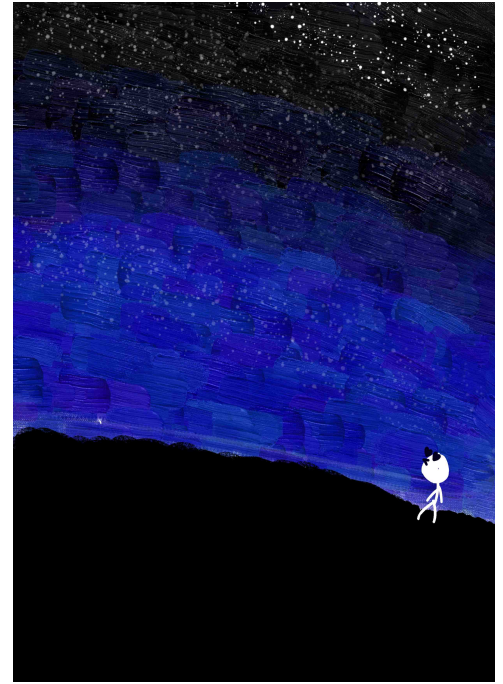
And so we realise this is not only a tale of science-fiction, but more importantly, it is a tale of two souls linked by belonging, friendship and the unfortunate danger one of them finds himself in.

"To Infinity and Beyond?" by N. J. Therattil - read by Aswathy

Although Buzz Lightyear does not make an appearance in this book (or does he?), Aswathy explains that she was intrigued by the big, imminent questions that this book raises.

Where does Space begin?
Who, if at all anyone, owns it?
Who decides who else will be at the table?

Aswathy delves into the "Tragedy of the Commons", the conundrum associated with property that is held by many people. She elucidates the intricacies involved in handling the collective rights of us all, in matters pertaining to the uses of outer space. Her careful reading, and frequent contextualisation, bring to light the enormity of the problem in trying to wrap human boundaries around something essentially limitless.

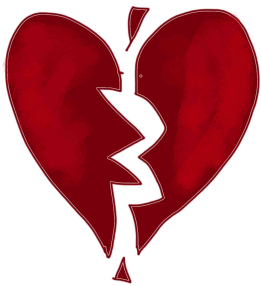


"Yaadavri" by Dr. Jitendra Kumar Soni - read by Nikhil

Nikhil began with his book closed. As he effortlessly began to weave the story together without so much as glancing down at the words, one by one we all fell into a trance.

Were these his words, or were this the words of the author?

Never you mind that, his golden voice seemed to coax, before pulling us along for the ride.



Before long the curtain was pulled and he confessed this was indeed the story itself, and he was putting a bit of his spin in there too. But all agreed that much of the mesmerizing immersion came from his almost lyrical narration and dramatisation.

He brought to life (in all senses of the phrase!), the story of the author's tragic love, which was the tale of how a mutually shared love was expressed in a subtle call to action by the beloved, but was unfortunately neglected.

Though the message of love had passed into oblivion like tears lost in rain, the tragedy resonated within us all for far longer than the retelling itself.

"Ikigai" by Hector Garcia, Francesc Miralles & Heather Cleary - read by Hardik

Before he started reading, Hardik took a moment to emphasise his deep connect with Ikigai. He then took us on a wonderful journey through stress management, and how the seemingly simple decisions that one makes every day have far reaching impacts on one's psyche and levels of stress.

His personal resonance with the book also shone through in every word he read, and this made for a fabulous listening experience.

(Bharath's PS: I loved how Hardik passionately said the following lines, and I'm taking the liberty to paraphrase here: Find your purpose, manage your stress, take your time. It is never too late in life to be exactly where you need to be to do all of these three.)

"A Ride of a Lifetime" by Robert "Bob" Iger - read by Hanil

Q: Why do we read Biographies?

A: Reading about other people's stories may answer some of the questions in our personal lives that one is not able to answer so easily.

No, this was not a quote from the book itself, these were Hanil's own words as she contextualised her choice of passage + book!

With this ingenious background, Hanil took to the stand and recounted the story of Bob Iger's rise.

She emphasised how his attention to detail, and of his ability to pick up even the most minute of things from as far back as his early career both inspired and awed her. Her excitement was infectious. Though she said she was feeling nervous in taking us through the passage, it was us who were left breathless after she finished reading!

We all were extremely fortunate this edition to have had wonderful discussions about greatly cherished stories, even more so because we also had with us Mrs. Nija, who had so **graciously donated over 170 books** to grow the compendium of stories, characters and words within the PDBC library!

She said that she hadn't picked out a passage or book to bring to the edition, but nonetheless left us all awestruck when she recited an impromptu poem about the sheer pleasure of finding travellers who travel the same path, and cherish stories far beyond they do life itself.

The evening ended with everyone recalling the song played at the beginning of the session, and with Yogesh Ji's direction, everyone penned down their thoughts about the quintessential concepts of **"Art, Artist and Admirer — The Creative, the creation and the creator"** in the form of art, poems, words, doodles ... keeping also in mind all the stories that had washed over us in the past couple of hours.

