

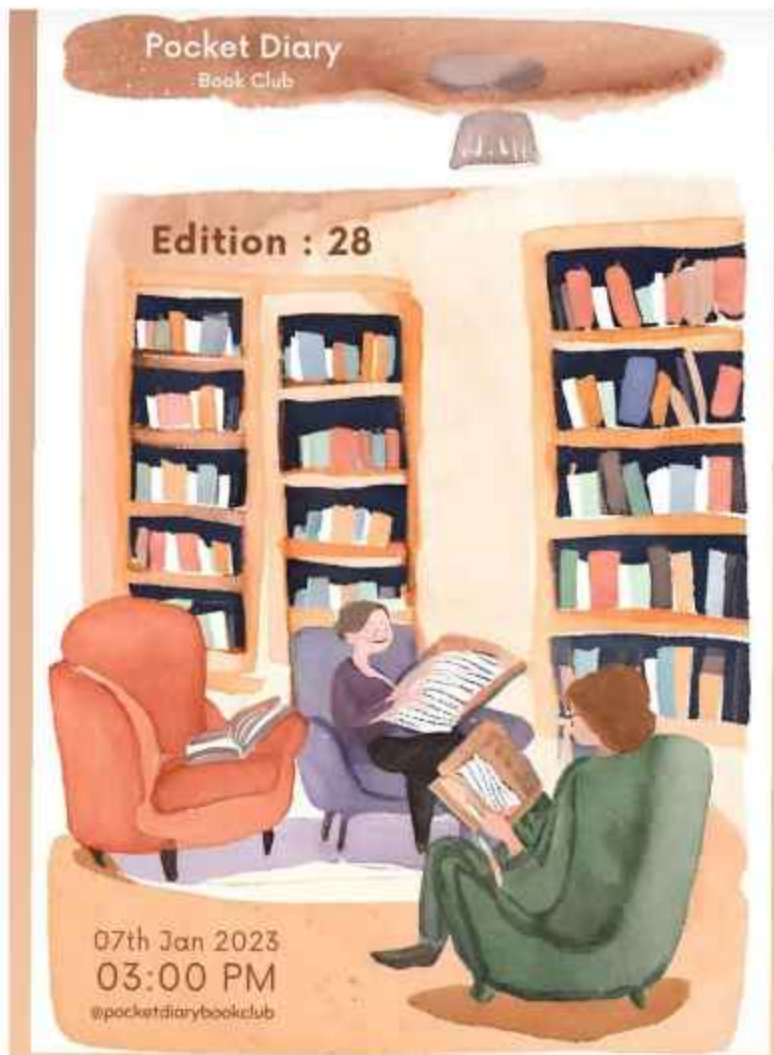
POCKET DIARY BOOK CLUB

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Edition : 28th

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Written by: Nija



Meet the moderators:

Ah, the moderators!! the unsung heroes of literature, gracefully shepherding us through the riveting debates about whether the protagonist's choice of shoes accurately reflects the novel's underlying existential themes. How lost we would be without their discerning taste in literary fashion!



Nirali Trivedi
Smit Vavadia

Attendees and the books:

No.	Attendees	Book	Author
1	Jay Thakkar	Tigana	Guy Gavriel Kay
2	Shankar Achari	One is Wanderer	James Thurber
3	Sambhav Suktankar	Man's Search for Meaning	Viktor E Frankl
4	Jay Laddha	The Handmaid's Tale	Margaret Atwood
5	Pruthviraj Gohil	Sapiens - The brief History of Humankind	Yuval Noah Harari
6	Nija Jivarajani	Priyajan	Vinesh Antani
7	Naveen	The Republic	Plato
8	Soumya Kohli	Know My Name	Chanel Miller
9	Bharat Saiguhan	Usefulness of Useless knowledge	Abraham Flexner
10	Rajesh Singh	Shoorvir - Paramvir Chakra Stories	Rachna Bisht Rawat
11	Ruchi	Twenty Love poems and a song of Despair	Pablo Neruda
12	Smit Vavadia	October Junction	Divya Prakash Dubey
13	Maria Chandiwal	To kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee
14	Nirali Trivedi	Life is Elsewhere	Milan Kundera

2024 Kickoff Shenanigans!



Happy New Year, fellow bookworms! It's time to shake off the dust of last year's reads and dive headfirst into the uncharted literary lands of 2024. Can you feel the excitement? It's like cracking open a brand-new book, sniffing the fresh pages, and wondering, "What amazing stories await us this year?"

In the spirit of new beginnings, allow me to share a few lines that beautifully captures the essence of stepping into a new chapter:

*In the dance of the New Year, grab a book,
Let's waltz through pages, take a second look.
Stories twirl and characters prance,
In our book club, it's a literary dance!*

*At the Bookworms' Ball, the dance begins,
New year's cheer, as the party wins.
With books as partners, and stories to fling,
In the book club circus, let the festivities swing!*

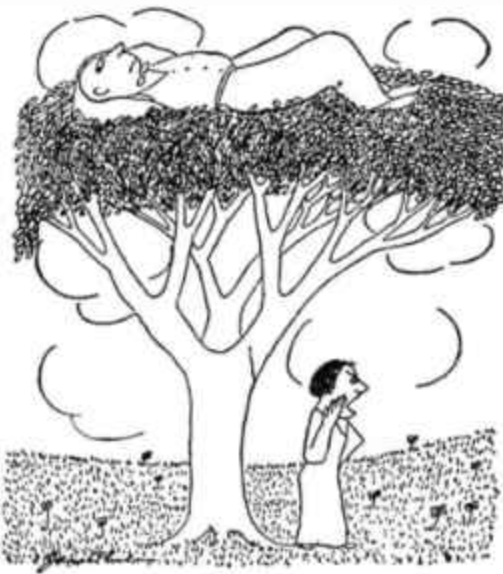
*In the paperback jungle, a year unfolds,
Where bookworms swing from tales untold.
Let's embark on adventures, with laughter to share,
In the book club safari, where we're all a bit rare!*



The meeting started a little late, like a typical winter afternoon.

The first read was by **Jay Thakkar** - Book called "**Tigana**", written by **Guy Gavriel Kay**. The story is set in the Peninsula of the Palm, a land divided into nine provinces. The land was once known as Tigana, but a powerful sorcerer, Brandin of Ygrath, conquered it and erased the name from the memories of its people. The book seems to be based on revenge theme, and Jay's hoodie has "Existence is pain" written on it.. Coincidence?

Next was **Shankar** - who shared a short story title as "**One is a Wanderer**" from the book "**The Thurber Carnival**" - authored by **James Thurber**.



As interesting as the book cover itself is, the book is a compilation of essays and short stories that explores themes like the mundanity of life and societal expectations. Shankar shared that the author mainly writes short stories, mostly published in the New Yorker Magazine along with his cartoons and doodles. The story "One Is a Wanderer" portrays a lonely middle-aged man in New York City who lives alone, drinks too much, and has alienated most of his friends. It talks about loneliness when being among people. This story struck a chord with him as he happens to travel a lot, being away

from home for a longer period of time and amongst strangers results in the feeling of melancholy and homesickness. Taken from Thurber's situation during his first marriage, when he lived alone in New York City while his wife and daughter lived in the country, the story ends with the revelation, "Two is company, four is a party, three is a quarrel. One is a wanderer."



And the infamous bell made its debut appearance in today's edition as we were running out of time and had to hop on to the next reader.

Next was **Sambhav** with the book - **“Man’s Search for Meaning”** by **Viktor E Frankl**. In the book, the author recounts his experiences as a Holocaust survivor. He shares the brutal conditions of the concentration camps, the daily struggle for survival, and the psychological challenges faced by the inmates. Despite the extreme suffering, Frankl observes that those who found meaning and purpose in their lives were more resilient and had a greater chance of survival.

The book focuses on love, hope, responsibility, inner freedom, and the beauty to be found in both nature and art as means that help one endure and overcome harrowing experiences. The book also talks about “Logotherapy” which literally means “Meaning therapy” that Frankl had already started working on before he got arrested and was sent to the concentration camps. It revolves around the idea that what matters is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment. To put things in perspective, he further gives an illustration about asking a chess champion about the best move in the world in the

game of chess. There is simply no best or even a good move except the move which is best in the given situation at a given point of time.

A quote worth noting from the book - *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."*

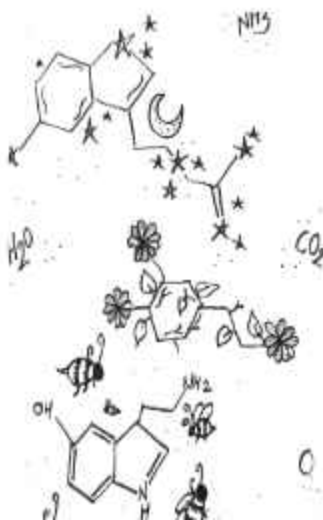
Then it was Jay's turn, who read from the book "Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood. It is a dystopian narrative set in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic society born out of the ruins of the United States. Atwood's novel introduces readers to Offred, a Handmaid whose existence is defined by the oppressive social order dictating her role in procreation. Offred is the narrator and the protagonist of the novel, and we are told the entire story from her point of view, experiencing events and memories as vividly as she does. She tells the story as it happens, and shows us the travels of her mind through asides, flashbacks, and digressions.

The story unfolds through the eyes of Offred, a Handmaid whose name derives from the possessive usage "Of Fred," the Commander she is assigned to, signifying her total subservience to him. Stripped of her individuality and reduced to her fertility, Offred is subjected to strict surveillance, constant indoctrination, and ritualized sexual encounters called the "ceremony." One particular quote that stands out to me from the reading was -

"But remember that forgiveness too is a power. To beg for it is a power, and to withhold or bestow it is a power, perhaps the greatest."

Next was Pruthvi, who read the book Sapiens - A brief history of humankind by Yuval Noah Harari. The author shared that human history has been shaped by

three major revolutions: the Cognitive Revolution, the Agricultural Revolution, and the Scientific Revolution. These revolutions have empowered humans to do something no other form of life has done, which is to create and connect around ideas that do not physically exist.



The author further talks about happy biochemistry vs. gloomy biochemistry. According to the author, human happiness conditioning systems also differ from person to person. On a scale from one to ten, some people are born with a cheerful biochemical system that allows their mood to swing between levels six and ten, stabilizing with time at eight. Such a person is quite happy even if she lives in an alienating big city, loses all her money in a stock-exchange crash and is diagnosed with diabetes. Other people are cursed with a gloomy biochemistry that swings between three and seven and stabilizes at five. Such an unhappy person remains depressed even if she enjoys the support of a tight-knit community, wins millions in the lottery and is as healthy as an Olympic athlete.

While discussing the book, an interesting concept came up - called The Paralysis of Analysis explained in the illustration below:



Next was Yours truly, Nija, who read a Gujarati book named “પ્રિયજન (Priyajan)” written by Vinesh Antani.

જીવનને ભરપૂર જીવી લીધું હોય,
બધું જ સભર હોય
છતાં પાછલી જિંદગીની એક નમતી સાંજે
એકાદ ચહેરો મનમાં છલકાઈ જાય.
એવું બને ત્યારે પ્રશ્ન થાય
કઈ ક્ષણ સાચી?
કે પછી બને જ સાચી ?

One of the best books I've ever read. Priyajan is about two long lost lovers who bump into each other completely by chance in the dusk of their lives, having lived fulfilling and happily married lives where neither was a part of the other. Once the initial awkwardness of meeting after many years and without being in touch was over, they slowly opened up to each other, catching up on the lost years and the lost possibilities. It raises some very thought provoking questions on whether life can still feel incomplete on the basis of what could have been, when what has been is impeccable and complete in itself. The pain of having to live without each other did not shadow their respective lives.

The book reminded of these beautiful lines written by Shri Tushar Shukla ji -

દરિયાના મોજા કંઈ રેતીને પૂછે તને ભીંજાવું ગમશે કે કેમ? એમ પૂછીને થાય નહીં પ્રેમ

- તુષાર શુક્લ

Naveen was next in line, with the book **“The Republic”** by Plato. He shared an interesting anecdote about how he missed his class 10 English exam and ended up taking humanities, sociology, psychology and philosophy for further studies. The central theme of the book revolves around the question of justice, both at the individual and societal levels. The text is structured as a series of discussions exploring the nature of justice, the role of individuals in a just society, and the characteristics of an ideal state. Naveen shared that it took him a couple of years to finish reading the book given the complexity of the subject the book is based on.



This led all the members to confess about how they all have such books on their bookshelves which takes a months and years to finish reading, the same way some of us take time to fulfill their new year resolutions :P

Soumya brought the book called **“Know my name - A memoir”** by Chanel Miller. Through the book, the author recounts her experiences surrounding her sexual assault, the legal proceedings and the aftermath. Soumya read Miller’s impact statement, which Miller had read during the sentencing of the defendant. In the statement, Miller detailed the impact of sexual abuse on her life, expressing emotional and psychological toll of the incident. The speech gave such a strong and emotional narrative about how she felt that we all were trembling inside, including the reader of the book. Sharing few lines from the speech here-

“You don’t know me, but you’ve been inside me, and that’s why we’re here today.”

“I wanted to take off my body like a jacket and leave it at the hospital with everything else.”

Next was Bharat (aka our science bro) who read the book **“The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge”** by Abraham Flexner. Abraham Flexner, the founding director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, defends “the unobstructed pursuit of useless knowledge” and the search for answers to deep questions, motivated solely by curiosity and without concern for applications. In this work, Flexner explores the importance of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, without immediate or apparent practical applications. He argues for the value of pure scientific research and curiosity-driven inquiry, suggesting that many discoveries and advancements that have proven to be highly useful in the long run originated from seemingly useless or esoteric knowledge.



Next in line was Rajesh, who read from the book **“Shoorvir - Paramvir Chakra stories”** written by Rachna Bisht Rawat. The book narrates the stories of recipients of the Param Vir Chakra, which is India's highest military decoration awarded for acts of valor in the presence of the enemy. The book provides a detailed account of the extraordinary courage and bravery displayed by the recipients of the Param Vir Chakra. The book delves into their backgrounds, the circumstances surrounding the

acts of bravery, and the indomitable spirit that led to the awards. Rajesh ji read a passage about a soldier, on the Kargil War front - narrating about what is going on in the mind of a soldier who lost his life at the mere age of 24 years. Allow me to share few lines on our Armed forces -

"जहाँ तू और मैं, हिन्दू मुसलमाँ के, "फर्क" में मर जाते हैं.!!!

वहाँ कुछ लोग, हम दोनों की खातिर, "बर्फ" में मर जाते हैं.!!!

And now what came as a surprise were these tiny little jars with personalized labels and sweet messages for all the attendees. Just look at them - how precious they are! These are meant to be used as piggy banks for book memorabilia for the year 2024. What a thoughtful gesture!



And just when I was thinking about why Ruchi is not reading anything today, she starts with a bright smile and with one of her witty one liners - which I bet all will agree with - "Naukri is a Mockery!"



She started reading this beautiful poem by **Pablo Neruda** from the book called "**Twenty Love Poems and a song of despair**" The title of the poem is "Tonight I can write", which is one of Pablo Neruda's most famous poems. The poem explores the themes of lost love, memory and passage of time. It narrates the lingering impacts of past relationships and entailing emotional pain, which is depicted in the poem very skillfully using vivid imagery and emotions to convey the depth of his feelings. The bittersweet sentiment of their passionate relationship are evident in the lines -

*"I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long."*

After this, Smit ji started reading a passage from "अक्टूबर जंक्शन" (October Junction)" by **Divya Prakash Dubey**. The very first line was अकेलापन अच्छी बिमारी है, कभी फ़ायदा करती है तो कभी बहुत नुकसान - that was something to think about even after the edition was over.

The book was about two characters Chitra and Sudeep who met at a cafe in Banaras on October 10th and then kept meeting on the same day at the same place every year. We all have two kinds of lives. One that we live daily and the other that we want to live. This book revolves around the second type of life.

Maria read a passage from the book **"To kill a Mockingbird"** by Harper Lee. She picked up a passage that addresses the racial discrimination and how difficult it is to understand for the young kids. The father - Atticus explains to them about the racism in the best possible way that he could, putting it in simpler words. She further reads a para depicting how Atticus treats even kids as adults and expects others to do the same. It goes like this -

"Jack! When a child asks you something, answer him, for goodness' sake. But don't make a production of it. Children are children, but they can spot an evasion quicker than adults, and evasion simply muddles 'em. .."

The title of the book is symbolic, referring to the idea that it is a sin to harm innocent and defenseless beings, just as it is considered a sin to kill a mockingbird. The plot and characters are loosely based on Lee's observations of her family, her neighbors and an event that occurred near her hometown of Monroeville, Alabama, in 1936, when she was ten years old. Despite dealing with the serious issues of rape and racial inequality, the novel is renowned for its warmth and humor. Lee has stated that the novel was essentially a long love letter to her father, whom she idolized as a man with deeply held moral convictions. Atticus is clearly the hero of the novel, and functions as a role model for his children.

Lastly Nirali picked up a book called **"Life is Elsewhere"** by Milan Kundera. The book delves into philosophical and existential questions.

The story follows the character Jaromil, a young poet who struggles with his identity and the expectations placed upon him by his mother and society. The novel is known for its exploration of the complexities of artistic creation and the tension between personal expression and societal demands.



Finishing with all these gems as food for thoughts, from this book -

- ★ *"In the end, we only regret the chances we didn't take,"*
- ★ *"We are all stories waiting to be told."*
- ★ *"Hope is the flickering flame that lights the darkest corners of our soul."*
- ★ *"Life is a canvas, and we are the artists who paint our own destiny."*
- ★ *"The greatest power we possess is the power to change ourselves."*
- ★ *"Sometimes, letting go is the bravest act of all."*
- ★ *"Happiness is a journey, not a destination."*
- ★ *"The heart wants what it wants, even if the mind disagrees."*
- ★ *"Freedom is not given, it is earned."*
- ★ *"Life is a fragile balance between chaos and order."*
- ★ *"The path to success is paved with failure."*
- ★ *"The past is an anchor that can only hold you back if you let it."*

- ★ *"Every ending is just a new beginning in disguise."*
- ★ *"The pursuit of knowledge is the ultimate form of rebellion against ignorance."*
- ★ *"Regrets are the ghosts that haunt us in our sleep."*
- ★ *"True love is a rare gem, cherish it when you find it."*
- ★ *"Childhood is the most precious time, don't waste it growing up too fast."*
- ★ *"The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life unlived."*
- ★ *"Art is the only escape from the harsh realities of life."*
- ★ *"Love is a cruel and unforgiving mistress."*
- ★ *"Life is an endless search for meaning."*
- ★ *"Yes, it's crazy. Love is either crazy or it's nothing at all"*
- ★ *"The worst thing is not that the world is unfree, but that people have unlearned their liberty. If we cannot change the world, let's at least change our lives and live them freely."*
- ★ *"You think that just because it's already happened, the past is finished and unchangeable? Oh no, the past is cloaked in multicolored taffeta and every time we look at it we see a different hue."*

If you have read till now, you might also notice that all these quotes mentioned above are related to all the books read in today's edition in some or other way. This is how spellbound we feel every time, in every edition.. It feels like a beautiful journey coming to an end. Now, we take our time to cherish all the stories beautifully curated by our moderators and concluded with a book that so magically covers everything that was discussed today!

On that note, I leave you with a quote from Victor Hugo -

"Lire, c'est rêver les yeux ouverts." - manjhe



"To read is to dream with open eyes."

Happy reading to all!

Until next time folks!!

