



**Beyond Circuits, Beyond Codes
Engineering builds the world; literature builds the soul.
Where Ideas Ignite and Words Inspire**

Annual Literary Magazine

Department of English

(GITA Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar)

Academic Year 2024-25

About the Department

The Department of Humanities & Sciences serves as the academic cornerstone of engineering education, fostering the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of students during the formative years of their academic journey. By integrating disciplines such as English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, and the Social Sciences, the department provides a strong foundation that complements technical education and prepares students for the challenges of an ever-evolving global landscape.

The department is committed to developing not only technically proficient engineers but also effective communicators, critical thinkers, ethical professionals, and responsible citizens. Through an innovative curriculum, interactive teaching methodologies, research-oriented learning, and a wide range of co-curricular activities, students are encouraged to cultivate analytical reasoning, creativity, leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Special emphasis is placed on enhancing communication skills and fostering confidence, enabling students to excel in both academic and professional environments.

Beyond the classroom, the department actively promotes literary, cultural, and intellectual engagement through seminars, workshops, debates, guest lectures, language enhancement programmes, and creative forums. InkSpire, the department's annual literary magazine, is one such initiative that provides a vibrant platform for students and faculty to showcase their literary talents, share original ideas, and celebrate the power of creative expression.

Guided by the philosophy that innovation flourishes when knowledge is combined with imagination, the Department of Humanities & Sciences continues to inspire students to think beyond conventional boundaries. By nurturing curiosity, creativity, and lifelong learning, the department plays a vital role in shaping engineers who are not only competent professionals but also compassionate individuals capable of making meaningful contributions to society.

Editorial

It is with immense pride and great enthusiasm that InkSpire—a platform created to celebrate the creativity, imagination, and literary talent of our students and faculty. While our institution is widely recognized for nurturing future engineers, innovators, and problem-solvers, this magazine serves as a reminder that every engineer is also a thinker, a dreamer, and a storyteller.

Engineering equips us with the knowledge to design bridges, develop technologies, and solve complex challenges. Literature, on the other hand, enables us to understand people, appreciate diverse perspectives, and express emotions that transcend equations and algorithms. Together, these two disciplines cultivate individuals who are not only technically competent but also compassionate, imaginative, and socially responsible. InkSpire has been envisioned as a bridge between these worlds—a place where scientific curiosity meets artistic expression and where ideas are transformed into meaningful words.

Every page of this magazine reflects the voices, experiences, and aspirations of our college community. The stories, essays, poems, and creative pieces featured here represent the thoughts of individuals who dared to imagine, reflect, and share their perspectives. Behind every contribution lies a journey of observation, creativity, and dedication. We hope these pages inspire readers to pause amidst their busy academic schedules, rediscover the joy of reading, and appreciate the beauty of thoughtful expression.

The theme of InkSpire goes beyond literature alone. It celebrates curiosity, innovation, resilience, friendship, hope, and the limitless possibilities that emerge when creativity is encouraged. In an age driven by rapid technological advancement and artificial intelligence, the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and empathize with others remains more valuable than ever. Through this magazine, we aspire to nurture these qualities while fostering a vibrant literary culture within our engineering campus.

The publication of this inaugural issue has been a collaborative journey, made possible through the encouragement and support of many individuals. We express our sincere gratitude to our respected Principal for inspiring and supporting this initiative, the Head of the Department for providing continuous guidance, and the faculty members for mentoring and motivating our contributors. We are deeply thankful to every student who submitted their creative work with confidence and passion, enriching this magazine with originality and diverse perspectives. Our heartfelt appreciation also goes to the editorial team, designers, proofreaders, and volunteers whose dedication and meticulous efforts transformed this vision into reality.

As you turn the pages of InkSpire, we invite you to embark on a journey of imagination, reflection, and discovery. May every story spark curiosity, every poem evoke emotion, and every article inspire fresh ideas. We hope this magazine becomes more than just an annual publication-it should serve as a platform where creativity flourishes, conversations begin, and young minds continue to explore the world beyond textbooks and technology.

May InkSpire inspire every reader to write fearlessly, read passionately, think deeply, and dream without limits. After all, every great innovation begins with an idea, and every unforgettable story begins with a single word.

With Best Wishes,

Prof. Pritish Bhanja, Editor-in-Chief

Prof. Lyndon D Thomas & Prof. Rasabihari Mishra, Executive Editor

Prof. Pritesh Mohapatra & Prof. Sudhir Panda, Senior-Editors

**Department English
(GITA Autonomous College)**

Principal's Message

It gives me immense pleasure to present the inaugural edition of InkSpire, the annual literary magazine of our college. This publication marks the beginning of a meaningful tradition that celebrates creativity, imagination, and the power of words alongside academic excellence and technological innovation.

An engineering institution is often recognized for its pursuit of scientific knowledge, technical expertise, and research. However, true education extends beyond classrooms, laboratories, and examinations. It is a holistic process that nurtures intellect, character, creativity, empathy, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively. Literature has always played a vital role in shaping thoughtful individuals by encouraging critical thinking, emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and a deeper understanding of the human experience.

InkSpire is a reflection of this broader vision of education. It provides a platform where students and faculty can express their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and aspirations through stories, essays, poems, and other creative forms. Every contribution in this magazine represents not only literary talent but also the confidence to share one's unique perspective with the academic community. Such creative pursuits complement technical education by fostering innovation, imagination, and effective communication—qualities that distinguish exceptional engineers and future leaders.

Our students possess immense potential that extends far beyond their academic achievements. They are innovators, dreamers, artists, and storytellers who view the world through diverse perspectives. I am delighted to see this magazine bringing together these talents and providing an avenue where ideas can flourish without boundaries. I hope that every reader finds inspiration in these pages and discovers the richness of thought that exists within our campus community.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Department of Humanities & Sciences, the editorial board, faculty mentors, student contributors, designers, and everyone whose dedication and hard work have made this publication possible. Their collective effort has transformed an idea into a beautiful literary expression that will undoubtedly inspire future generations of students.

As you turn the pages of InkSpire, I encourage you to appreciate not only the creativity reflected in each contribution but also the spirit of curiosity, perseverance, and collaboration that lies behind them. May this magazine inspire every student to cultivate the habit of reading, writing, reflecting, and expressing themselves with confidence. Let it serve as a reminder that while engineering builds the structures of the future, literature shapes the minds and hearts that will create them.

I congratulate all the contributors and the editorial team on this commendable initiative and extend my best wishes for the continued success of InkSpire. May it continue to inspire, enlighten, and become a cherished tradition of our institution for many years to come.

With warm regards,

Prof. Dr. M. K. Roul
Principal

Dean's Message

It gives me immense pleasure to see the publication of *InkSpire*, our college's literary e-magazine. Beyond academic excellence, a vibrant institution nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and effective communication—qualities that shape responsible professionals and compassionate individuals.

This magazine reflects the imagination, talent, and intellectual curiosity of our students and faculty. I congratulate the Department of Humanities & Sciences and everyone involved in bringing out this wonderful edition. May *InkSpire* continue to inspire young minds to express themselves with confidence, creativity, and purpose.

I extend my best wishes for the continued success of this initiative and to all our budding writers and contributors.

With warm regards,

Prof. (Cdr.) Dr P K Routray

Dean Administration

Head of the Department's Message

This publication marks the beginning of a meaningful tradition that celebrates the creative spirit, intellectual curiosity, and literary talents of our students and faculty.

The Department of Humanities & Sciences plays a pivotal role in laying the academic and personal foundation of every engineering student. While technical education equips students with scientific knowledge and professional skills, the humanities enrich their ability to communicate effectively, think critically, appreciate diverse perspectives, and understand the human values that underpin every technological advancement. It is this harmonious blend of technical excellence and humanistic understanding that shapes well-rounded professionals capable of making meaningful contributions to society.

InkSpire has been conceived with the vision of providing a vibrant platform where ideas, emotions, experiences, and imagination find expression through the written word. It encourages students to explore their creative potential beyond textbooks and laboratories, reminding them that innovation begins with curiosity and that every great achievement is inspired by the ability to think differently. The stories, essays, poems, and creative works featured in this magazine are a testament to the remarkable talent, sensitivity, and originality that flourish within our campus.

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, where artificial intelligence, automation, and digital transformation are redefining every aspect of our lives, the importance of communication, empathy, creativity, and ethical thinking has become greater than ever. Literature nurtures these qualities by encouraging reflection, imagination, and meaningful dialogue. Through initiatives such as InkSpire, we strive to cultivate not only competent engineers but also responsible citizens, effective communicators, compassionate leaders, and lifelong learners.

This inaugural edition is the result of the collective efforts and unwavering dedication of many individuals. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to our respected Principal for constantly encouraging initiatives that promote holistic education and

student development. I sincerely congratulate the editorial board, faculty coordinators, student editors, designers, and every contributor whose enthusiasm, commitment, and creativity have transformed this vision into a beautiful reality. Their hard work has produced a magazine that reflects the vibrant intellectual and cultural life of our institution.

I hope that InkSpire inspires every reader to cultivate the habit of reading, writing, and expressing ideas with confidence. May it motivate our students to explore new horizons of creativity, embrace diverse viewpoints, and continue contributing

to the rich literary culture of our college. Let this magazine become a cherished tradition that nurtures imagination, celebrates talent, and inspires excellence for years to come.

I extend my warm congratulations to everyone associated with this publication and wish InkSpire every success in its journey ahead. May it continue to ignite minds, inspire hearts, and reflect the enduring spirit of creativity that defines our academic community.

**With Best Wishes,
Prof. Dr Lyndon D Thomas
Head of the Department
Department English
(GITA Autonomous College)**

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The Smoke That Would Not Rise

Sk Abid, Sayed luful bari, Smruti Ranjan sahuo

Rahul Verma returned to ichapuram the way a ghost returns home—head shaved, a bone necklace knocking against his sunken chest, straw clenched between cracked lips.

He had walked barefoot from Riverfall City after completing his penance for killing a sacred bull by mistake. He believed the penance would free him. It didn't.

The villagers stared at him from doorways as if he carried a plague. Inside the village square sat Benjamin Cole, the cremation master—a hulking man with opium-tinted eyes, draped in a soiled dhoti, his heavy cremator's staff resting beside him.

Benjamin said loudly, "Rahul, you look like sin walked out of the fire pit." Rahul winced. Fear of hell still clung to him like a fever. Nightmares of horns, hooves,

and boiling oil chased him each night. He had walked home hoping to rebuild life—but

Meadowridge had nothing left for him.

His fields were ruined. His house half-fallen. His wife starving at her mother's home. And the landlord wanted him gone.

That same evening, a battered bicycle rolled into the square. The rider, Ryan Parker, whistled like a man who feared nothing, not even the police. Behind him, panting, came

Tim Dawson, a paan-seller from the city, clutching a cloth bag.

"Ryan!" Tim shouted. "How many places will you roam? My shop is not your adda."

Ryan winked, "Relax, Tim, fresh air keeps a man young."

Tim's eyes dropped to the bicycle. A Hero model. Left handle slightly bent. Exactly like the one stolen from him two months ago.

A tremor went through him.

He had recently testified in court—lied—claiming the thief’s bicycle belonged to someone else, exactly as the lawyer instructed him.

And now the same bicycle stood in front of him.

His bicycle. His lie. His mistake.

Tim swallowed hard.

Night fell heavy. Lightning cracked across the sky like torn metal.

Rahul sat on the temple steps, trembling. Benjamin Cole smoked by the banyan tree.

Tim watched Ryan lean casually against the lamppost.

Ryan whistled at a girl walking by and laughed. Then he walked straight toward Rahul.

“So,” Ryan said, voice dripping with mockery, “I heard you killed a holy bull. What were you trying to do? Feed yourself?”

Rahul’s face drained of color. His hands shook violently. The nightmares rushed back—horns in the dark, shadows chasing him, demons waiting to drag him.

Benjamin stood up slowly. His big voice echoed: “Ryan, leave the man alone.”

Ryan scoffed, “Or what, Benjamin? You’ll smash me like those dead bodies?”

Some boys nearby gasped. Benjamin rarely lost his calm.

Rahul suddenly screamed—a raw, animal sound—and backed away as if Ryan had grown horns. He ran into the fields, shrieking, “Don’t take me! Please! Don’t take me!”

Ryan burst into laughter.

Tim, terrified, whispered to Benjamin, “He’s not mocking... he’s torturing a broken man.”

Benjamin gripped his cremator’s staff.

For the first time, Rahul’s trembling reminded him of the pregnant corpse he had cremated months ago—the only corpse that had ever shaken him. Her swollen belly, her lifeless lips, the gold nose-pin he refused to steal... something about her had stuck to him like an unwashed stain.

Benjamin’s grip tightened. He had spent years turning flesh into ash, but tonight something human resurfaced in him.

He stepped toward Ryan.

The wind howled. The rain threatened.

Ryan put a foot on the bicycle pedal, still smirking.

Benjamin raised his voice, “Enough of your talk. Don’t put your filth on others.”

Ryan chuckled, “You’re suddenly a saint? Did opium purify your soul?”

Benjamin swung.

Not with full force—just enough to hit Ryan on the shoulder and send him crashing into the mud. The bicycle toppled with a metallic cry. Tim froze.

The dented handle. The half-rusted back chain. The torn seat cover.

It was his bicycle. His stolen bicycle.

His voice cracked with shock, “Ryan... this... this is mine!”

Ryan spat mud, “Then come take it, coward.”

He kicked Tim in the stomach. Tim fell to the ground, wheezing. Ryan tried to scramble up, but Benjamin grabbed him by the collar and slammed him back down.

“Behave,” Benjamin growled.

Ryan roared, “I’ll have you arrested! I swear!”

Benjamin laughed—a low, dangerous laugh.

Tim crawled to the bicycle and touched the seat, trembling. Two months ago it was his.

Two months ago he had stood in court and unknowingly helped the thief escape.

Now fate had brought him face-to-face with his own stupidity. Lightning cracked again.

Rahul could be heard screaming somewhere in the distance: “The horns! The horns!

They’re coming!”

The three sins of Meadowridge stood exposed under the storm:

A man crushed by guilt. A man drowned in death. A man trapped in lies.

Villagers gathered with lanterns.

Ryan tried to run. Tim blocked him with the bicycle. Benjamin held him by the scruff of his neck. Finally, they dragged Ryan to the police outpost.

Tim filed a fresh complaint—this time with every detail he remembered.

Officer Harris asked, “How do you know this is your cycle?”

Tim pointed desperately, “The dent... the broken bell... the scratch near the chain... sir, it’s mine. I swear!”

Ryan shouted, “He’s lying! They’re all lying!”

Benjamin slammed his staff on the floor once. Everyone went silent.

By morning, Ryan Parker was in a lock-up charged with three pending theft cases.

But Meadowridge still wasn’t quiet.

A villager found Rahul Verma unconscious near the cremation ground, shivering violently, his face buried in mud. They carried him back. He survived—barely.

Benjamin sat by Rahul’s cot that entire day.

Tim offered him water and said softly, “He needs help... not punishment.”

Benjamin nodded slowly. For the first time, he felt the weight of every skull he had smashed. He had burned hundreds of bodies. But the only pain he remembered was of those still living.

In the evening, a group of villagers whispered:

“The sinner has returned.” “The cremator raised his hand.” “The bicycle thief is caught.”

“This village is doomed.”

But nobody knew the truth:

They were all sinners. They were all broken. And Meadowridge was already doomed long before tonight.

A week passed.

Benjamin stopped taking opium. Tim reopened his small paan shop near the banyan tree.

Rahul’s screaming reduced with each passing night, though the shadows in his eyes never fully left.

One afternoon, Ryan’s mother arrived crying at Tim’s shop.

She asked him, “Did my son truly steal your bicycle?”

Tim sighed deeply. “Yes,” he said. “But I also lied in court. I helped him once. I wronged myself.”

She looked at him with broken eyes. “This village destroys its own children.

Benjamin, overhearing the conversation, added quietly, “This village burns people long before I do.”

Rahul slowly walked toward them, clutching his bone necklace. He whispered, “Sin followed me... but cruelty followed all of you.”

No one argued.

The three men—a sinner, a liar, and a death-worker—sat under the banyan tree as dusk fell.

A faint smoke rose from the cremation ground.

Tim murmured, “Smoke rises from bodies... but the smoke inside a man? That never goes.”

Benjamin nodded, eyes fixed on the horizon.

Rahul whispered, “I hope it does. Someday.”

The three remained silent.

Because they knew the truth:

In Meadowridge, the smoke never rose. It only stayed trapped. Inside the living.

And that was the worst death of all.

The Path of Shadows

Ravi Kumar

The sun was beginning its slow descent behind the jagged hills, painting the sky in hues of blood and amber. In the small village of Jharikhand, life moved to a rhythm dictated by nature's whims. The Sal forests surrounding the village cast long shadows across the dusty pathways, as if warning intruders of the wilderness beyond. The villagers, hardened by the seasons and trials of the land, moved about with cautious urgency. Among them was Ramu, a young man whose curiosity often led him deeper into the forests than anyone dared to venture.

Ramu's fascination with the forest was more than a pastime; it was an obsession. He had watched ants march in precise, tireless lines for hours, noting their cooperation, their relentlessness, and the strange way they seemed to operate with a silent, collective intelligence. In the morning, he followed their trails from the anthill to the decaying trees, observing their meticulous division of labor. "There is a world within a world here," he thought, "a kingdom beneath the soil, unnoticed and unyielding."

One evening, as a storm threatened in the distant hills, Ramu noticed the ants carrying tiny grains of sand, more frantic than usual. He followed their trail to a hollow under a great Sal tree, where a small opening in the earth led to a subterranean chamber. Rain began to drum against the canopy, and the earth around the tree softened. Ramu crouched near the entrance, watching as the ants disappeared into their hidden refuge. He wondered, not for the first time, what it would mean to live entirely within a shelter, safe from storms, predators, and the outside world.

That night, the storm broke. Torrential rain flooded the village streets, uprooted saplings, and drove villagers to seek higher ground. Ramu's own hut, perched on a slight rise, offered little protection. From his window, he saw neighbors huddled together under makeshift roofs, faces pale with fear. Among them was an old woman, Parbati, who had lost her home years ago and had never fully recovered from the memory. She had taught Ramu once that survival depended on foresight and solidarity, yet even her advice could not calm the raw panic in the storm's roar.

Ramu stepped out into the rain, his clothes soaked instantly, and joined a group that was moving toward the only communal shelter available: the temple on the hill. The shelter was crowded, the air thick with the smell of wet mud, incense, and human anxiety. Children clung to mothers, men tried to keep spirits high, and the elderly shuffled about silently, their faces etched with worry. Yet in the chaos, Ramu noticed small acts of grace: a young man offering his dry cloth to a shivering child, a woman sharing her meager ration of rice with neighbors who had none, a quiet prayer

whispered into the storm.

The night passed slowly. Thunder rolled over the hills like the echo of ancient drums, and lightning illuminated the anxious faces in stark relief. Ramu found a corner and sat silently, watching how people adapted to the shelter's confines. He remembered the ants he had watched earlier: their meticulous order, their cooperation under pressure. Perhaps the villagers, too, were like ants, responding to a threat with instinctive coordination. Yet the ants did not fear; they acted without thought, without hesitation. Humans, Ramu realized, were burdened with fear as much as hope.

Morning arrived with reluctant light. The storm had passed, leaving the village battered but alive. The shelter emptied slowly, villagers returning to their homes to assess the damage. Ramu walked through the mud-laden streets, noticing the small tragedies left behind: broken rooftops, a dead goat, a tree snapped in half. He paused by the hollow under the Sal tree where he had watched the ants. The chamber was undisturbed, the ants continuing their march as if the storm had never occurred. Ramu knelt, feeling both envy and awe. They were survivors in the truest sense, untouched by sorrow or longing.

Weeks passed, and Ramu's thoughts returned persistently to another village legend — the Bed of Arrows. It was a relic from ancient times, a ceremonial ground where warriors had lain down, surrendering themselves to fate, each arrow representing a vow, a sacrifice, or a lesson learned through suffering. No one remembered why the tradition had begun, but it endured in stories and whispered fears. The Bed of Arrows was located in the heart of the forest, marked by a grove of twisted Sal trees, their roots entangled like ancient serpents. Some villagers claimed that spirits lingered there, punishing those who dared tread too closely.

Despite the warnings, Ramu felt compelled to see it. He journeyed alone, guided by the faint trail worn into the undergrowth. As he walked, he noticed small signs of life: an abandoned bird's nest, a stag drinking from a hidden stream, mushrooms sprouting after the rain. The forest seemed alive, observing him, testing him. He finally reached the grove, the Bed of Arrows revealed in solemn clarity. The ground was littered with rusted arrowheads, some embedded in the earth, others fallen in disarray. The air was thick, almost reverent, with the scent of damp leaves and decay.

Ramu stepped cautiously onto the site. The legend had described a test: anyone who lay upon the Bed of Arrows and survived the night would gain insight into the human condition — courage, resilience, and the fragility of life itself. With trembling hands, he pressed himself against the ground, feeling the sharp intrusion of rusted metal

beneath him. Pain radiated across his back, yet he remained still, breathing deeply, listening to the forest's heartbeat. Hours passed. Darkness enveloped him. Fear rose, but so did a strange clarity: he understood the cycle of life, the constant tension between danger and shelter, action and inaction, survival and surrender.

When dawn arrived, Ramu emerged from the grove, bloodied but awake, carrying a profound understanding. Life, he realized, was a series of shelters and storms, of small actions that cumulatively determined survival. Just as the ants built their chambers and the villagers sought refuge, humans had to navigate threats both visible and hidden. Every moment of fear and every act of courage were arrows in the bed of existence, shaping the soul and defining character.

Returning to the village, Ramu noticed subtle changes. The villagers spoke more gently to one another, shared food more readily, and repaired damaged homes with a renewed sense of unity. Even Parbati seemed lighter, as if the collective endurance of the storm had shifted something deep within. Ramu himself felt altered, no longer merely an observer of life's minutiae, but an active participant, attuned to the fragile beauty of cooperation and the quiet heroism embedded in ordinary survival.

Months passed, and the forest began its slow reclamation of the village's edges. New shoots of Sal sprang from broken roots, streams carried away the detritus of the storm, and the ants continued their relentless march, oblivious to human concerns. Ramu often visited the hollow under the great Sal tree, watching the creatures work with an almost spiritual reverence. He also revisited the Bed of Arrows, not out of compulsion but to honor the lesson he had learned: that life's pain, endured with mindfulness and courage, could cultivate wisdom and resilience.

One evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon in shades of crimson and violet, Ramu stood at the forest's edge, reflecting on the interconnectedness of all life. The village hummed behind him with quiet activity — children laughing, women preparing meals, men repairing fences. And yet, just beyond, the forest remained indifferent, alive in ways that humans could scarcely comprehend. Ramu understood that survival required both respect and engagement, a balance between sheltering oneself and confronting the storms that life would inevitably bring.

He smiled softly, thinking of the ants and the villagers, the Bed of Arrows and the shelters. Each existed as a testament to resilience, each a symbol of the choices that shaped existence. And as night fell, with the first stars pricking the sky, Ramu felt a deep, unspoken gratitude — for life, for struggle, and for the lessons hidden in the smallest corners of the world, waiting to be observed, absorbed, and carried forward.

THE BILLIONAIRE CONSPIRACY

Aryan Raj

CHAPTER ONE -THE STORM OF KINGS

The storm didn't just strike the city that night—it swallowed it whole. Thunder cracked like the sky was ripping apart, and lightning illuminated the skyline in savage flashes that vanished as quickly as they came. It was the kind of night when secrets moved freely, and truth crawled out from under graveyards of lies. Crime journalist Arvind Kapoor sat alone in his car outside an abandoned textile mill, his fingers cold against the glow of a single message on his phone: "Two Kings. One Empire. Warehouse 17. Midnight. Come alone." It felt less like an invitation and more like a death sentence wrapped in curiosity.

The rain hammered the windshield like a warning, but the two photographs on the passenger seat refused to let him turn back. One was of the infamous "Stock King," a financial genius whose scam decades ago had shaken the entire country. The second was the flamboyant "Luxury King," the airline magnate whose grand lifestyle drowned under mountains of unpaid debt and fraud. Two different eras. Two different empires. Two colossal falls. Yet someone wanted Arvind to believe they were connected. He stared at the mill and whispered, "Alright. Let's see what's worth dying for."

Warehouse 17 loomed in the darkness like a rusted beast. Inside, the air was stale and cold enough to freeze thought. Water dripped rhythmically from broken rafters, echoing like a countdown Arvind couldn't ignore. The deeper he walked, the heavier the silence grew—until a metallic crash sliced through it. A shadow stumbled into the open under a flickering bulb. A man, soaked not from rain but from sweat, clutched a briefcase so tightly it seemed fused to him.

"You're late," the man whispered, his voice trembling.

"You sent the message?" Arvind's voice stayed firm despite the chill crawling up his spine.

"I'm the one who survived," the man said, eyes darting around the warehouse. "Survived both kings."

Arvind stepped closer, cautious. "What do you mean, both?"

The man swallowed hard. "The Stock King... he wasn't acting alone. He built a system—one so perfect, so hidden, that when he fell, everyone thought the empire died. But it didn't. It just went underground. And years later, the Luxury King sat on the same throne. The same financiers. The same silent operators. The same shadow empire pulling every string."

He opened the briefcase, and papers spilled out like the ghosts of two eras confessing together—fake securities from decades ago, forged bank receipts, shell-companies tied to modern loan

diversion, confidential bank memos, secret transfers that spanned twenty years. Arvind's heart hammered. "This... this ties both scams together. But why bring it to me?"

The man slid a cracked envelope toward him. Inside was a single line scratched in angry ink: "Greed is a kingdom. Kings fall. The throne survives."

Before Arvind could absorb the meaning, he heard a soft click—a sound no one ever mistakes. He froze, then slowly lifted his eyes. The stranger was pointing a gun at him, hands shaking violently.

"What the hell are you doing?" Arvind whispered.

"They told me what happens if you walk out alive," the man said, tears forming. "They said I wouldn't live to regret it. I'm sorry. I can't—"

He didn't finish. Floodlights exploded through the warehouse windows.

"POLICE! DROP THE WEAPON!"

Officers stormed in, tackling the man and disarming him as he screamed—not out of resistance, but sheer terror. "You idiots! You don't understand! The throne still stands! He's not the last king!"

Hours later, when the storm finally died, Arvind sat in his office surrounded by evidence that connected two eras no one imagined were linked. Two kings had fallen, but one invisible empire had survived both. On the stranger's envelope, Arvind wrote beneath the old ink: "And the next king is already rising." When he hit "Publish," somewhere in the city, a phone buzzed. In an anonymous room, a silhouette leaned back in a leather chair, a faint smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

"Let him think he's exposed something," the figure murmured. "The game hasn't even begun."

CHAPTER TWO — THE ARCHITECT OF SHADOWS

Arvind stood frozen long after the footsteps disappeared. The business card in his hand felt heavier now, like a declaration of war disguised in paper. The crown symbol wasn't just a threat—it was a signature, a mark of a system that had existed long before either king rose and fell. The kings were puppets. The throne was real. And someone still sat on it.

He walked back to his car, his mind racing through every lie, every scandal, every missing piece. As he reached for the door, his phone buzzed violently. The message was brief, anonymous, and cold: "You published a story. We are publishing a warning."

Before he could react, the entire street went dark—every lamp, every building, every vehicle swallowed by sudden blackness. It wasn't a power outage. It was precision. It was intention. Someone had cut the feed to isolate him.

Arvind's headlights flickered twice, then died. The only thing still visible was the faint moonlight reflecting off the crown symbol pressed against his palm.

A kingdom built on greed.

A throne built on silence.

And now... it had turned its gaze on him.

Arvind shut his eyes for a moment, steadying his breath. When he opened them again, the fear inside him had changed—hardened into something sharper.

“The kings are gone,” he whispered to the empty street. “But now I know who sits on the throne.”

He stepped out of the car, facing the darkness without flinching. The storm in the distance rumbled like the promise of a war he had no choice but to fight. The shadow empire thought it could silence him.

But they had made a mistake.

They had shown him their symbol.

They had shown him their fear.

The throne survives...

but it also bleeds.

And Arvind Kapoor would make the world see it bleed.

THE MESSAGE ON THE MOONLIGHT KITE

Satyajit Roul, Soumyaranjan Sahoo, Sk Farhan Ali

It was a cold, windy night in Bonku Babu's quiet village. The moon was hiding behind thick clouds, and the trees in the mango grove whispered in the wind.

Bonku Babu, a shy and lonely schoolteacher, walked home slowly after dinner. He sighed,

Bonku Babu: "Every day is the same... students laugh at me, the headmaster scolds me. When will anything exciting ever happen?"

Just then, the wind stopped. The sky turned purple for a moment, and a strange humming filled the air.

Bonku Babu (nervously): "W-what is that sound?"

He looked up — a shining silver sphere was descending from the clouds! The ground trembled as it landed in the grove. A small door opened, and out came a figure — Ang, a tiny alien with silver skin and golden eyes that sparkled like the stars.

Bonku Babu (frightened): “Oh God! Is it a ghost?”

Ang (smiling softly): “No, my friend. My name is Ang. I come from another world — far beyond your sky.”

Bonku Babu: “B-but... how are you speaking to me?”

Ang: “Through your thoughts. You are not afraid, are you?”

Bonku Babu (gulping): “A little...”

The air was still and cold. A shooting star streaked across the dark sky.

Ang: “I wish to send a message of peace to my people — something simple and beautiful, something humans will not fear. Will you help me?”

Bonku Babu thought for a moment, then his eyes brightened.

Bonku Babu: “A kite! Everyone loves watching kites in the sky. They won’t be afraid of that!”

Ang: “A perfect idea, wise teacher.”

They hurried to Bonku Babu’s small hut. The moon came out, bathing the village in silver light. Bonku Babu brought out his best kite — made of white paper and tiny mirrors that twinkled like stars.

Bonku Babu (smiling): “Here it is — my finest kite.”

Ang (taking out a glowing pen): “Then let me write my message.”

Ang drew shining blue symbols on the kite — each stroke glowing brighter than the moon.

Soon, they climbed the small hill outside the village. The night was quiet except for the whispering wind. Bonku Babu held the string tightly.

Bonku Babu: “Ready?” Ang: “Let it fly.”

The kite soared high into the moonlit sky. As it rose, the glowing symbols shimmered — blue, then silver, then gold. The whole sky glowed softly.

Bonku Babu (amazed): “It’s beautiful... like the stars are dancing.”

Ang (smiling): “My friends have received the message — a greeting of peace from your world.”

Bonku Babu: “So they know about Earth now?” Ang: “Yes. They know kindness lives here.”

A gentle wind blew as Ang stepped into his silver ship.

Ang: “Farewell, Bonku Babu. You are braver than you think.”

Bonku Babu (quietly): “Will we meet again?” Ang: “Look at the stars... I’ll be there.”

The ship lifted silently and vanished among the stars.

The next morning, villagers talked excitedly — Villager 1: “Did you see that glowing kite?”

Villager 2: “Must be some magic!”

Bonku Babu only smiled. He looked up at the clear blue sky, whispering,

Bonku Babu: “They’ll never know... but I sent a message to another world.”

For the first time, he felt proud and fearless - holding the kite string that once connected his small world to the vast universe.

Translate by

Satya Prakash Das Satyajit Roul Soumyaranjan Sahoo Sk Farhan Ali

The Phantom of the Riverbank: A Manor Mystery

Hariom Kumar Sah, Devyansh Kumar, Dinesh Mahapatra, Anshu Raj

On the riverbank stood a big old mansion called “Riverbank House”. It was famous because people believed the “ghost of a young girl” lived there. She had died long ago after rebelling against her cruel masters, and her spirit was said to guard the house. The villagers respected her and even left food for her during feasts. But the house was falling apart, and something strange was happening in Manor. “Lion the Glorious”, the animal-like President, had been tricked out of power by his old minister, “Jackal the Senior” who now ruled loudly as the new Minister. Jackal loved microphones and control.

As an investigative journalist, I was sent to uncover the truth behind Jackal’s sudden rise. My investigation led me to “Maharana”, a wealthy, ambitious man who owned Riverbank House. He wanted political power and seemed very close to Jackal. When I visited the mansion, I felt uneasy. It had been freshly painted and repaired—too perfectly. The villagers whispered that the old house keeper, who once helped the ghost rebel, had known a deep secret hidden inside the house. I decided to watch Riverbank House at midnight. Under the dim moonlight, I saw Maharana’s nervous deputy—a fox—hurrying to the river with a small, heavy trunk. Hiding behind tall grass, I listened. “It is done,” the fox whispered. “The money is secured.” Suddenly, the ghost’s soft, sad cry filled the air. The fox trembled before he could speak again, a new voice answered from the shadows—low, old, mysterious and dangerous.

It was “Jackal the Senior”. He wasn’t supposed to be here. Jackal explained the truth: The ghost had been protecting the house not out of love, but because “a hidden treasure”, the source of Manor’s oldest corruption, was buried in its foundations. With Maharana’s and Jackal’s support, the leaders had created silence to hide their plans. Now they wanted to tear down the house, destroy the ghost, and take the treasure. Jackal ordered the fox to enter the mansion and find the old keeper’s records, where everything had been written down. The fox obeyed, though terrified, and walked inside. I finally understood: Maharana’s repairs were just a cover-up. They were trying to erase the ghost and her secret forever.

As soon as the fox disappeared inside, I searched the river wall for an old hidden entrance mentioned in village stories. The night was silent-too silent.

Then it happened.

A scream came through the air. Not a gentle ghostly sob, but a scream of pure rage. The villagers had said such a sound was heard only once before—right before the ghost killed her first oppressor. Jackal froze in fear. A crash echoed from inside the mansion. The fox burst out, scratched and shaking, holding a “rusty iron box”.

“The records! I have them!” he cried.

At that moment, the second-floor balcony glowed with a strange green light. No one was visible, but the air shimmered like heat rising from metal. A sad, heavy sound like someone crying thick golden tears filled the air. A cold wind swept across the riverbank, Jackal panicked. He ran into the forest, abandoning the fox and all his plans. The ghost had chosen her time to strike. The fox stumbled toward the river and fell. The iron box slipped from his hands and rolled across the stones—straight toward me. The wind pushed him back as if the ghost herself was guiding his fall. The spirit had chased away the oppressor. Now he was delivering the one thing that mattered—the truth.

I picked up the heavy iron box. It was freezing cold, as if the past still clung to it. Inside, I knew, were the old keeper’s records: the truth about the ghost, the hidden treasure, the corruption beneath the mansion, and the political greed connecting Maharana and Jackal. Everything Manor needed was in my hands. The ghost had protected the secret for a hundred years. Now it was my turn to reveal her story—and save Manor from the darkness beneath the grand painted mansion.

The Last Dawn of Devadatta Ray

Simanchala Bisoyi, Swayam Prakash Behera, Chinmaya Ghansham Nayak

The Curse of the Ray Bloodline

Devadatta Ray was born into a family that carried an ancient curse, older than the cracked temple stones that lined the riverbanks of the city. Every man in the Ray lineage—without exception—died the moment they crossed their fortieth year. No disease, no accident; fate simply folded their lives shut like pages of a manuscript, always on the same line, always at the age of forty.

Priests, scholars, tantrics, even modern physicians had failed to explain it. Some called it genetics, some called it the wrath of Time, some whispered it was the debt of a forgotten ancestor who had once bargained with the gods.

Only the women remained, many widowed early, living like shadows moving through verandahs and prayer rooms.

Devadatta, now thirty-nine years and seven months, lived a life half-burdened by fear and half-numb with resignation. He was a literature professor by profession but a wanderer at heart—yet he had never wandered far. A man who knew his death with calendar precision developed a strange intimacy with time.

But an even stranger thing had entered his life.

His son.

Born ten years ago, Anantya Ray had begun to age rapidly, his childhood dissolving into wrinkles and silver hair. Doctors named it a “degenerative syndrome”; priests called it “a karmic rebound.” But Devadatta felt something no one else did— a presence inside the boy, ancient and watching.

Sometimes Anantya spoke words no child could know. Sometimes he whispered chants in sleep that no priest in the city recognized. And sometimes he stared at Devadatta with eyes that felt older than the mountains.

The Actor of Forgotten Crowns

Across the city, in a cramped greenroom behind the Kalashree Theatre, an old actor rehearsed his lines before a cracked mirror.

Raghav Mishra... A legend once. A ghost now.

His body had collapsed into itself like a building eaten from inside by decay. Yet in his drooping eyes burned a fire that had once lit up kingdoms on stage—when he played emperors, warriors, kings of gods and demons.

But tonight he felt something different.

A man—short, disheveled, with a red-and-white cloth wrapped around his head—had visited him that afternoon. He did not speak; he only looked. And in those eyes, Raghav had felt a pull, the kind he had felt only once before in life— in the eyes of his rival.

Mahendra Soren.

His friend, enemy, shadow, inspiration. A man he had feared and loved in equal measure.

Mahendra had died fifteen years ago—vanished from the stage, drowned in the currents of a river under mysterious circumstances. Some called it an accident. Some whispered murder. Raghav never spoke of it.

But the man with the red-and-white cloth... His eyes belonged to Mahendra.

Raghav's hands trembled as he touched the gold medals pinned inside his box—ninety-nine of them, each earned through thunderous applause. The hundredth medal had never come.

“Mahendra...” he whispered, “Have you come to finish the last act?”

The Boy Who Spoke Like an Ancestor

Devadatta's mother, a widow for two decades, slept on a wooden cot in the prayer room, her silver hair tied in a lonely knot. She believed the boy was possessed—not by demons, but by ancestry.

“Your child is not just your child,” she often told Devadatta. “He carries someone else too. Someone older. Someone unfinished.”

Anantya's body became frailer each week. His teeth loosened. His back bent. His skin folded like parchment.

Yet his voice remained the same—thin, soft, but filled with an eerie authority.

One night, Devadatta found the boy drawing symbols on the floor using sandalwood paste.

“What are you doing?” Devadatta asked.

“I’m trying to leave,” the boy said simply.

“Go where?”

“To return what I borrowed.”

He looked up. His eyes were not ten years old. They were centuries old.

Devadatta knelt, trembling. “Who are you?”

The boy’s smile was ancient. “You will know,” he said. “When the river calls your rival.”

The Rival From the River

That same night, the red-and-white-clothed stranger appeared again—this time near the old actor Raghav’s house, standing under a lamppost, his shadow wavering like a torn flag in the wind.

Raghav could not breathe.

“Mahendra...” he whispered.

The stranger took a slow step forward.

Raghav’s wife screamed from inside. Raghav did not hear her.

He felt something deeper— a cold stream running down his spine, a familiar scent of riverwater, and the whisper of a drowning scream.

Mahendra had come.

But why?

Raghav felt the answer forming in his chest.

Unfinished rivalry can echo louder than life.

The Convergence

Three places. Three fates. One night.

The theatre lights went dark. Devadatta's house lamps flickered. The stranger's shadow lengthened.

A storm gathered.

Devadatta carried the frail Anantya in his arms, rushing out as the boy gasped for breath.

"What's happening?"

The boy whispered, "Your time... my time... his time... are tied."

"Whose?"

Anantya's pupils shrank, as though seeing something far away.

"The Emperor." "The Rival." "The Cursed." "All must meet."

A tantrik ancestor had cursed his own blood through a misguided ritual—a curse that demanded a blood sacrifice every generation.

But the curse had not been completed.

The final vessel had to return the power it had stolen.

That vessel... was Anantya.

Lightning split the sky.

The Last Act on the Riverbank

Devadatta ran toward the old riverbank—the same river where a rival actor had drowned, where curses were whispered, where gods demanded what was owed.

On the ghats, Devadatta found someone else already waiting: Raghav Mishra.

The stranger stood between them, rain lashing against his still form. His red-and-white cloth was drenched.

The stranger's face wasn't a face. It shifted and blurred— a tantrik, a king, a rival, a drowned man, a child, a father.

“There. That is who I am,” the boy whispered.

The face settled into Mahendra Soren.

“I was denied my end,” Mahendra said. “So I was reborn... here.”

Anantya’s voice weakened: “Let me go... only then you can live.”

Devadatta sobbed as the boy dissolved into dust. The curse shattered.

Mahendra’s ghost faded. Raghav screamed. Devadatta collapsed.

The Aftermath

Devadatta lived. He crossed forty, then fifty. The curse ended the night the child died.

Raghav Mishra died a year later onstage, mid-dialogue.

People sometimes said a child-like shadow roamed the ghats at dusk.

Devadatta felt small hands tug at his shirt while asleep.

And sometimes, when the river was still, a red-and-white cloth floated briefly before sinking again.

History called it a miracle. The city called it folklore. Devadatta called it justice. A father called it memory.

And fate called it the final closing of an ancient circle.

Blooming in Silence

Saroj kumar Das, Aslesha Dash, Somya Ranjan Mahapatra,

Abhinandan Barik , Dibyajyoti Parida.

In a quiet village surrounded by fields that swayed gently in the wind, there stood an old house that had seen many years pass by. Its paint had faded, the windows had grown dusty, and the tiles on the roof had begun to show cracks. Yet, despite its age, the house had a kind of peaceful charm-especially because of this small patch of land in front of it, which people called a garden. For years, that little garden had been neglected: the ground had hardened, weeds took over the edges, and the whole place looked as if it had forgotten what it means to host life. Nobody cleaned it or planted anything new; the garden existed simply because it had nowhere else to go.

One spring morning, with the dew of night still clinging to the earth, a small red bud appeared, fragile, almost afraid to open up to the world. No one knew how it came there. Perhaps a bird dropped a seed, or perhaps the wind carried it from some faraway place. But whatever the reason, the bud slowly developed into a delicate flower. It stood there like a small flame against the dullness around, its petals bright and soft, aglow when sunlight touched it. But even as it flowered with quiet pride, no eyes ever turned toward it. Every day, people passed by the garden: farmers carrying tools, schoolchildren running toward class, old villagers walking slowly with sticks-but their eyes were always fixed elsewhere, somewhere else. The flower waited in silence, almost with hope, for someone to pause, if only for a second, and notice it.

Days passed, and the flower lived a life of beauty, carved by nature itself. It drank sunlight, invited the coolness of night, and gracefully danced with every breeze that passed. Yet, the world kept ignoring its presence. Sometimes, beauty has an odd destiny-it blooms where it is not appreciated. Slowly, the flower began to wilt. The sun became harsh and burned the fine edges of its petals. The nights grew chilly and sucked the softness out of it. It tried to stand tall, but its stem was weakening. One evening, when the sky grew orange and birds flew back home, a strong gust of wind blew through the village. The flower shivered once, and its last petal fell, gliding to the ground like a little forgotten memory. The next morning, the flower stood there, nothing but a dry stalk-lifeless, unappreciated, and alone.

That afternoon, a boy named Aarav was trudging home from school, his feet carrying him through the dust-covered road. He was tired, and his mind churned around the

homework waiting for him and the usual worries of a schoolboy: unfinished notes, difficult chapters, a teacher's scolding. As he passed the old garden, something pale against the ground made him pause. It was a dried petal, neatly curled like a small folded leaf. Curious, Aarav bent down and stroked the dead flower. It crumbled instantly, smearing a faint stain of red on his fingertips. And looking closer, he saw the flower was still standing on its fragile stem.

A strange sadness filled him, something that he had never felt before. He imagined how the flower must have looked when it bloomed-bright, hopeful, full of life. He imagined its silent waiting for a little appreciation. And then he imagined how it died without anyone ever knowing it existed. This thought settled heavy on his heart. For the first time, Aarav understood how easily people overlook small beautiful things in life simply because they are too busy looking elsewhere.

The next morning, Aarav came back to the garden holding a small metal mug filled with water. The soil around the dead flower was dry and cracked. Aarav knelt down and cleaned away the dead leaves, the weeds, and the dust. And then, very slowly, he poured water, showing the soil how to breathe once again. He didn't expect the dead flower to magically return. But he felt that giving it water was a way of honouring something which tried to live beautifully in silence.

Days passed, and every day Aarav continued to water that spot. Nothing changed for quite some time; the dead stalk remained just that. But Aarav never gave up. Then one bright morning, something caught his eye-a small, green shoot pushing bravely through the soil. It was so small that anyone else would have missed it the very instant it appeared, but Aarav noticed the very moment it did. A smile overspread his face, a smile filled with warmth and quiet joy. It almost felt that the earth had whispered back her thanks for the care shown to her. The new plant grew slowly. Its leaves widened, its colour deepened, and soon the small buds appeared. When flowers finally bloomed, they were even prettier than the previous one. Aarav felt pride; not the loud kind, but the silent kind which fills the heart slowly and stays for a long time. People in the village started noticing the garden. Some villagers brought small pots. Some planted new seeds. Even children who ran without stopping earlier, now bent down to see what new colour had appeared. Aarav's small act of kindness changed something that the whole village had forgotten: how to pause, to see and feel the value of little things. The dead flower was gone forever, but in its place grew a lesson that stayed alive in everybody's mind: beauty may fade but the effort to care never goes to waste. Sometimes even the tiniest acts of attention bring life back to forgotten places.

