

ECOOCTOBER

-2020-

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY

SAUMYA JOHN



Ecoctober 2020

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FOREWORD

Years back I was chasing the quintessential checklist of being a millennial; great scores, good job, politically and socially opinionated, and most importantly finding my calling. We often talk and think about things that matter, seldom only a few have the courage to live through them. To me, I had the chance to meet Saumya John, who found her calling that breaks from the selfish, self-contained methods, in fact is for the betterment for all. She is on her path of discovery as an environmentalist, breathes about minimalist living, voices about the wrong, and mightily makes it easy to do so.

This book is undoubtedly a mirror image for Saumya's values and thoughts. It resonates with her creative-explorer-seeker self that questions the existing stereotypes, reestablishes a definitive future, jerks the bygone norms, and sheds rays of hope on what we can still do. It will give you a reality check into what you perceive is true or what you vouch to be blinded by.

If you care about vulnerability more than validation, belief more than rules, and future more than the past; this is a must-read. For you, I hope reading it will be as well.

- *Apoorva Bhatnagar*
(*Development Consultant*)

PREFACE

Every year, artists world over participate in *Inktober*, a month long event in October to practice and explore different mediums and expressions of art. A list of prompts is provided, which becomes the guideline for artists.

It was in this context that *Ecoctober* was started, as a way to practice art and bring attention to environmental issues, environmentally sustainable choices and mental health. Every prompt has been expressed through a sketch or a watercolour painting, along with an interpretation of the prompt. The interpretations are also accompanied with Instagram handles of individuals and organisations from whom one can learn and be inspired by. I would suggest that this not be seen as an exhaustive list of references or learning. The reader may build their own understanding of each prompt, read up on the links and also discover new people and places.

The daily use of social media had been getting on to me during the lockdown, with hours being spent on random surfing through social media apps. With the onset of *Ecoctober*, there was a sense of purpose to create. Every prompt was an exercise in stepping out of my comfort zone, facing my imposter syndrome, accepting the results of my creativity, and fighting the urge to gain validation online.

Ecoctober also opened doors to networking and learning more about environmentally sustainable alternatives; organisations working with ocean conservation, environmental activism, etc. were new information for me.

The suggestion to compile *Ecoctober* into an e-book was a boost to my confidence and a push to ensure that I completed the challenge. Sometimes, the whole process would feel tiring in its routine, yet the end of '*Ecoctober 2020*' also left me feeling empty.

I hope the reader connects to, and finds this offering as useful as we did while working on it.

- All representations, thoughts, and expressions of and by Saumya John

1. FISH

Trawling, continent sized garbage patches, oil spills etc. are destroying the marine ecosystem. The microbeads in our facewash to the cleaners we use, everything washes off into the oceans. Avoid the use of single-use plastic and whenever possible send it to organisations that upcycle or recycle these.

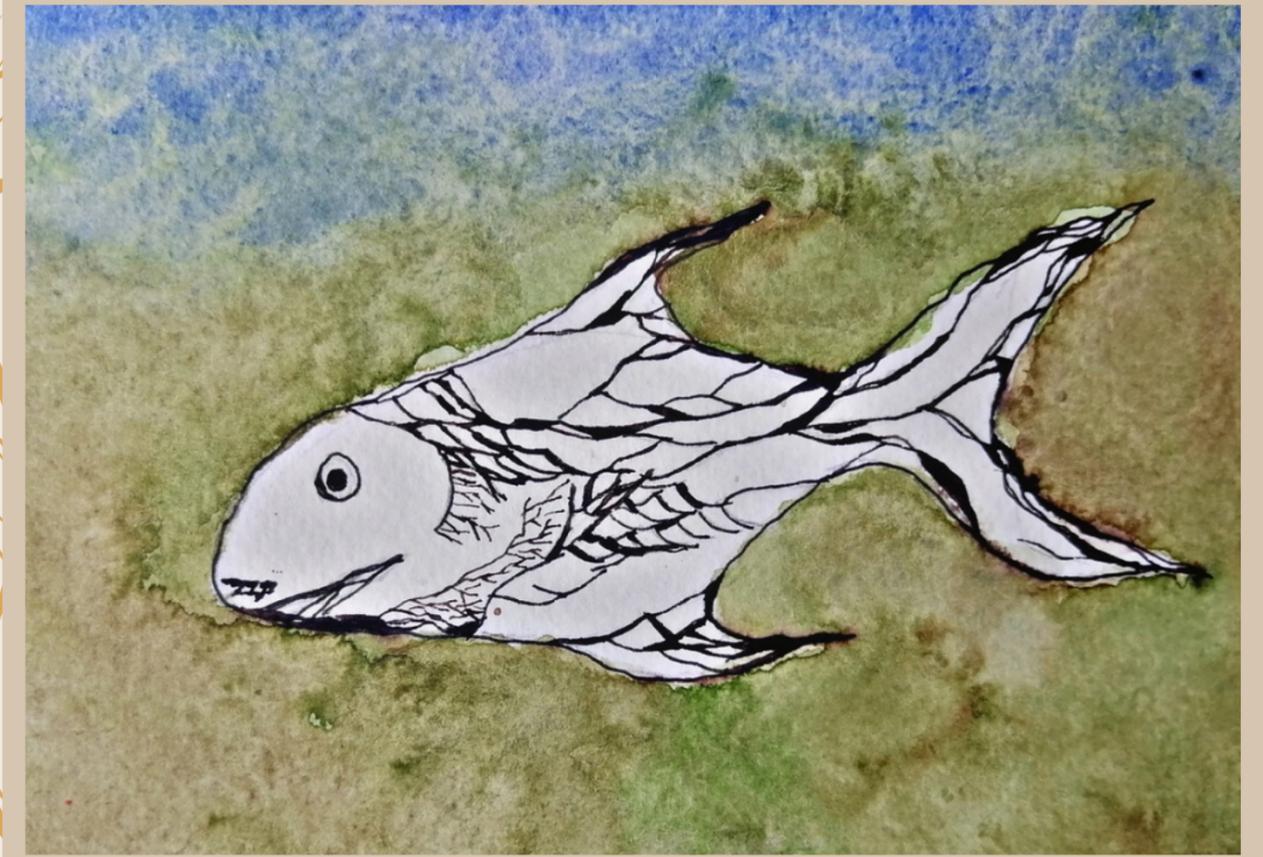
Follow [@knowyourfish](#) to know which fishes you can consume and which ones to avoid during breeding season.

Follow pages like [@indiawasted](#) and [@wastetowonder_india](#) to send recyclable waste.

If you have eco-bricks get in touch with [@manusatva](#). They reuse the eco-bricks for construction projects in rural areas.

Check them out. Learn.

NB: The point is to not dump our waste on others, and at the same time, also see the amount of waste we create and reduce it as much as possible.



2. WISP

We are but the wisp of the breath of a cosmic force.

Yet, we believe humans are the representation of perfection.

The ego that grows out of the man-centric approach in policy making has destroyed the planet.

Every decision we make, from the food we buy to the person we vote to power, impacts nature on multiple levels.

Nobody is perfect but there is always scope for improvement.
If only you choose.

Start by doing a waste audit of your life.
Get help from [@thehappyturtleindia](#) and [@thelowwaster](#)

Change what you can.



3. BULKY

We are so used to the trope of 'packaged is healthy': bacteria-resistant, virus-resistant, refined, safer, pasteurised etc.

I would rather eat and drink from what nature has taken a share of: from the tree that the squirrels play around, the birds build nests on, and the land the worms crawl on.

Buy from shops that sell 'loose' or package-free. Mindful buying it is! Touch, smell and see the product you are buying, not the plastic design created in a machine.

Else, buy in a bigger quantity, at least 5 kgs, to last you for at least two months. I have always felt the package-free, bulky shopping easier on my budget. Also because I don't use a refrigerator, I am careful about the storage.

[@ullisu.official](#) has a green map [the-map-project](#) that shares a map of stores that sell products in bulk and also provide package free options. It lists stores like [@greenmantrastore](#), [@7to9greenstore](#) that make package free shopping accessible in different parts of India and across the world.



4. RADIO

Memories of a slowly fading world that valued love.

Remember the Akashvani wafting out of tea shops early in the morning?

Remember the delicacy of time that passed slowly in your village?

When was the last time you paused and asked yourself:

"Do I need _____ or am I buying _____ to console myself that I am worthy in a capitalist world?"



5. BLADE

The shame associated with body hair, especially on female bodies is said to have started only after a Gillette ad campaign that sought to sell this idea.

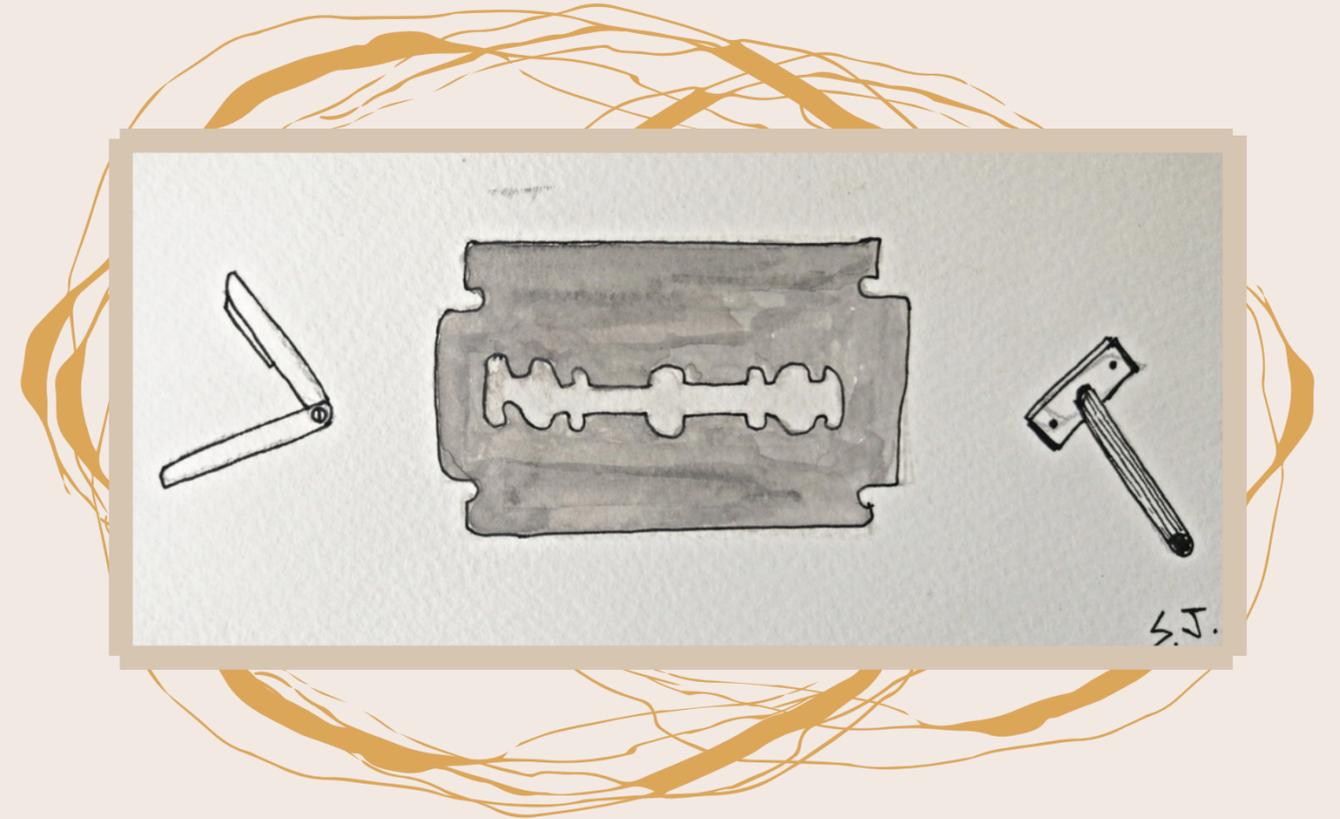
Since then countless womxn* bought into this idea that hairless bodies were beautiful and hygienic in a world where the male gaze had to be catered to (it's still the same somewhat). At the same time, Men were told to shave to look professional and 'human'.

The tricks of capitalism!!

When you do choose to shave out of your own choice, may I suggest you do it in an environment friendly manner? Instead of single-use blades, use multi-use steel razors that last longer.

To shave or not to shave should be your personal choice, like everything else. Tell the parlour person that it is hair and you know how to clean yourself- your body hair is not unhygienic.

** The term womxn is used, particularly by intersectional feminists, to avoid perceived sexism in the standard spelling and to explicitly include or foreground transgender and nonbinary people.*



6. RODENT

How do you rid your house of rats?

Do you use the age old rat trap? And then when the rat is caught, do you throw it out or kill it directly?

Or do you use the new-gen sheets that have a sticky substance on one side? The problem is the sheets are single-use and the rodents die horrible deaths. The rodents stay stuck to the sticky sheet even after you throw the sheet out, and it is entirely possible that a stray animal, part of the fauna, gets stuck to the sheet unawares.

I mean, if I was looking for food at the wrong place at the wrong time, I would like some mercy.

Either kill me in one shot or let me go.



7. FANCY

"The most sustainable product is the one you didn't buy."
- fellow conscious human.

Don't fall for green washing traps because you think all products labelled environment friendly are actually that.

A steel straw imported from a foreign country has a big enough carbon footprint to negate your efforts.

Don't buy glass jars just because they look cool. You might have enough vessels at home.

And don't jump the eco-friendly wagon to look cool. You'll do more harm in the process than you did with your pre-woke life.



8. TEETH

Teeth are not supposed to be bright white. Having white teeth is a sign of erosion of teeth enamel.

Your breath need not smell like a deodorant to woo somebody or grab a job. You don't have to wipe the taste buds off your tongue with a tongue cleaner every day.

Advertisements and corporations have ruined perceptions of beauty and hygiene.

Break away from plastic tubes and plastic handles. Use a bamboo toothbrush. Try tooth cleaning powder or *umikari* for a start. Try out dental tabs.

Check out local organisations that produce bamboo toothbrushes in India: [@bambooindia](#) (also sells dental tabs) and [@bhu_ecosensitives](#)

Still, a better option would be a neem twig though.



9. THROW

Nothing is a waste, it is only 'wasted'.

Try making eco-bricks and see the amount of plastic waste your household brings in.

Try composting your food waste or ethically dispose of it in soil.

Donate or repair your old clothes.

Check out [@recharkha_ecosocial](#), [@kuppai-freeindia](#), [@kabaadey](#), [@dopolgy](#) and [@ohscrapmadras](#) to know how they have managed to upcycle 'waste' we are used to throwing away.



10. HOPE

We have learnt in school that lands were 'discovered' by white invaders yet we are not taught of 'how' the land became theirs to inhabit.

In India, Adivasis or tribal communities face the same invading tendencies from mainstream 'developers'.

It will be good for us to understand that most biodiversity around us is maintained and protected by the Adivasis of different parts of India. From ethical mindful consumption to environment friendly architecture, they have been the pioneers of 'eco-friendly' lifestyles.

Their existence is the hope for the survival of future generations. You can read up on initiatives like [@budafolklore](#) and [@schoolofnatureodisha](#) who are trying to conserve tribal lifestyles and support communities in preserving the natural biodiversity maintained by their ancestors.

You can also be an ally by reading up and listening to stories by [@adivasilivesmatter](#), shared by Adivasi youth from the grassroots.



11. DISGUSTING

About 1.6 million square kilometres. That is the size of the great Pacific garbage patch!

It is disgusting to think that part of what contributed to it was my lifestyle. My first plastic toothbrush, all the sanitary pads I have used, my shampoo bottles, toothpaste tubes, chips packets, and more!!!

Everything I disposed off without washing, thinking that it would be recycled.

Everything I bought to feed my cravings or because I was too ashamed of the alternatives.



12. SLIPPERY

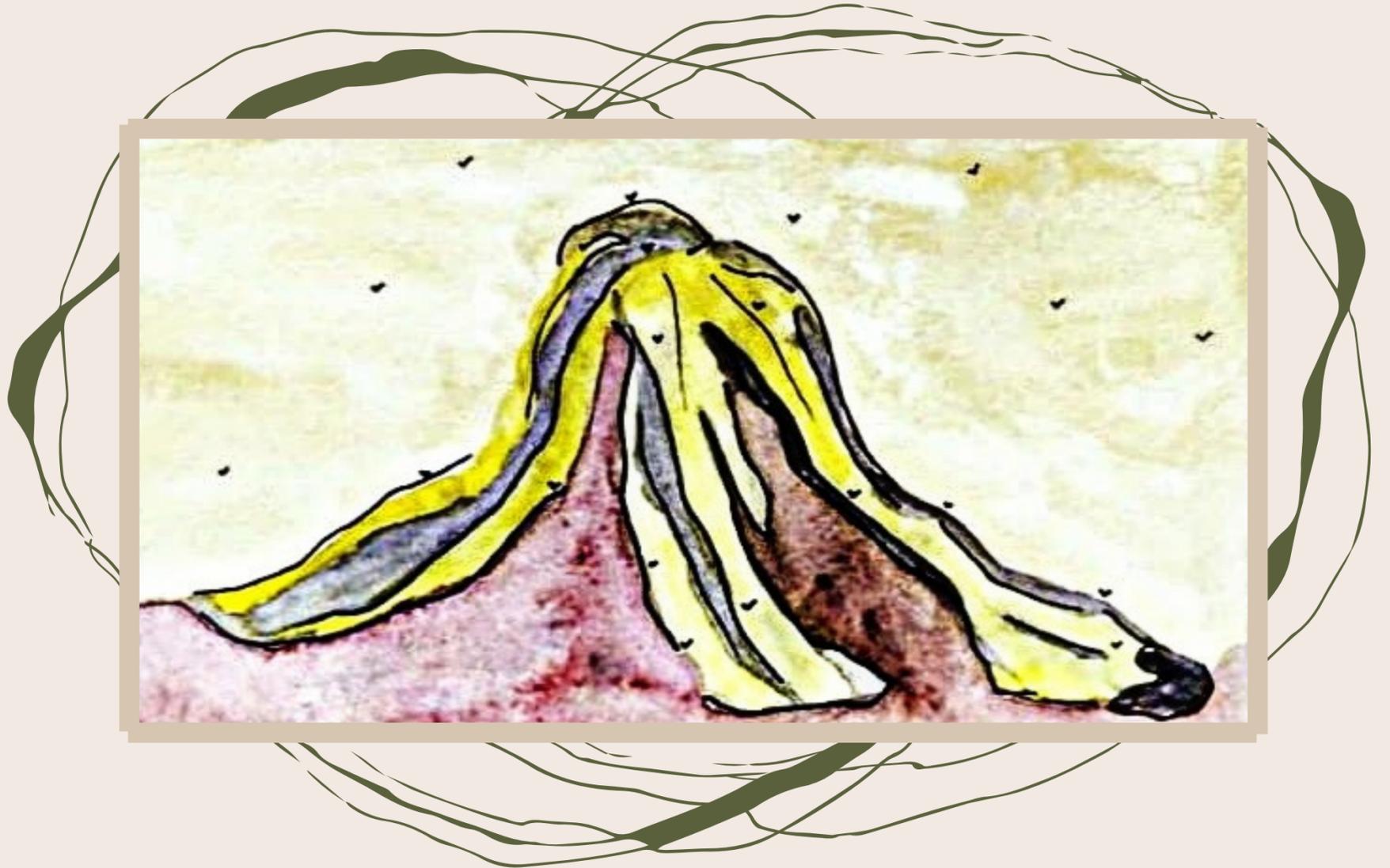
Banana peels are supposed to be slippery. It's worse when left on streets or in a plastic bag or sent to landfills, anaerobically creating methane gas.

Did you know you can make fertilizer with the peels? Fill a bottle with chopped peels, add water to cover it. Keep it for a week then spray or water the plants with the liquid.

Alternatively, you can compost the peel with the rest of your food waste. Check out [@dailydumpcompost](#) for composting kits.

Another alternative is ethical littering. Put your vegetable food waste in a pit in the ground and cover it.

Feed the non-vegetable food waste to animals around you. We give the non-veg food leftovers to stray canines around our area and they have become our guardians during late night walks.



13. DUNE

How is the landscape of the place that you live in?

How many trees can you count in one kilometre radius of your residence?

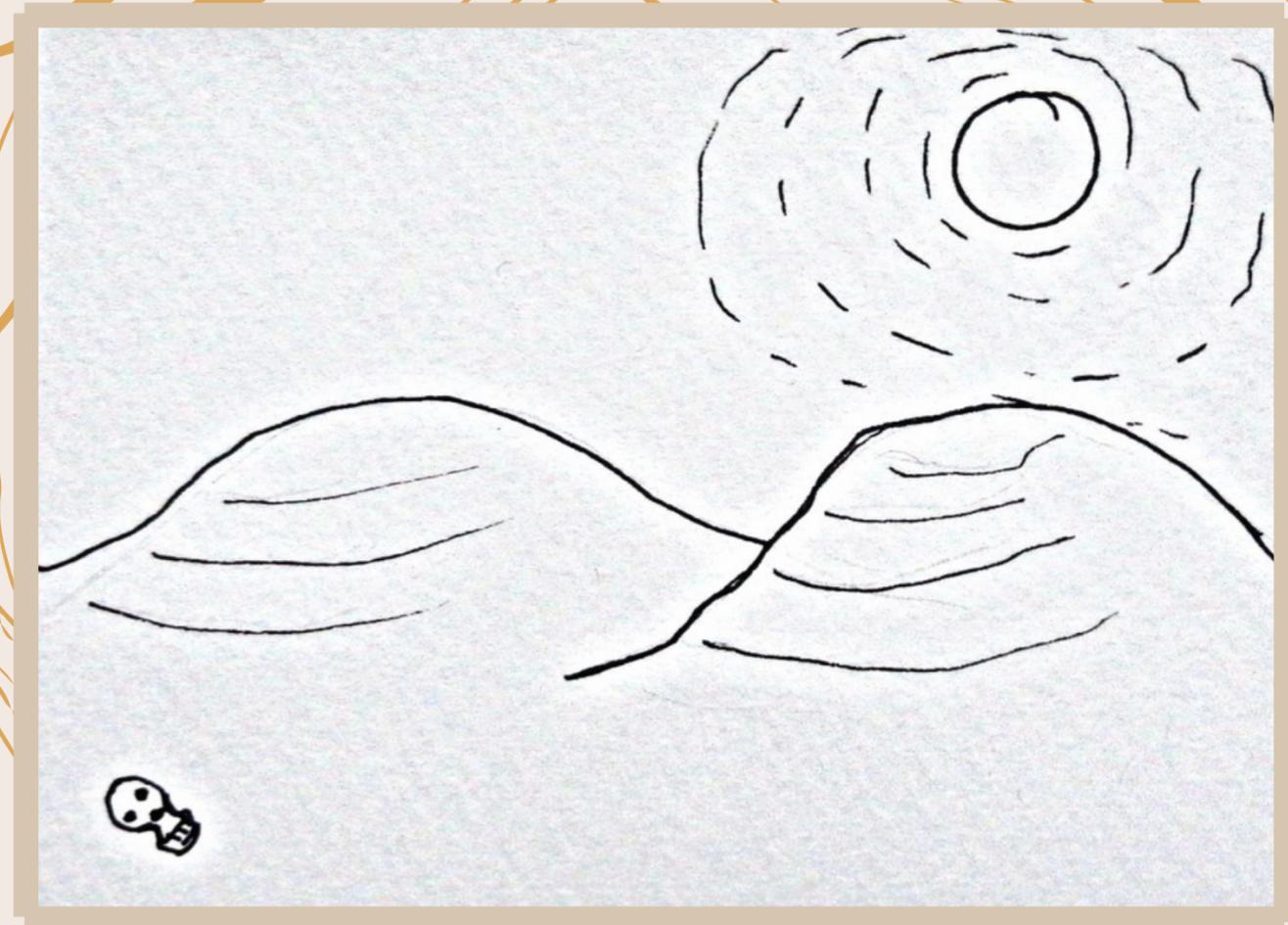
Do you live on a floor close to the earth or do you live in an apartment overlooking what was once a green area?

If you had to imagine the future of the world, how would you visualise it?

Do you see any relation between humans and nature?

What do you wish to do to improve in your relationship with nature?

If you wish to know about traditional and ecologically sensitive architecture that is also suitable for urban spaces, check out [@thannal_mud_homes](#) and [@dhirtyhands](#).

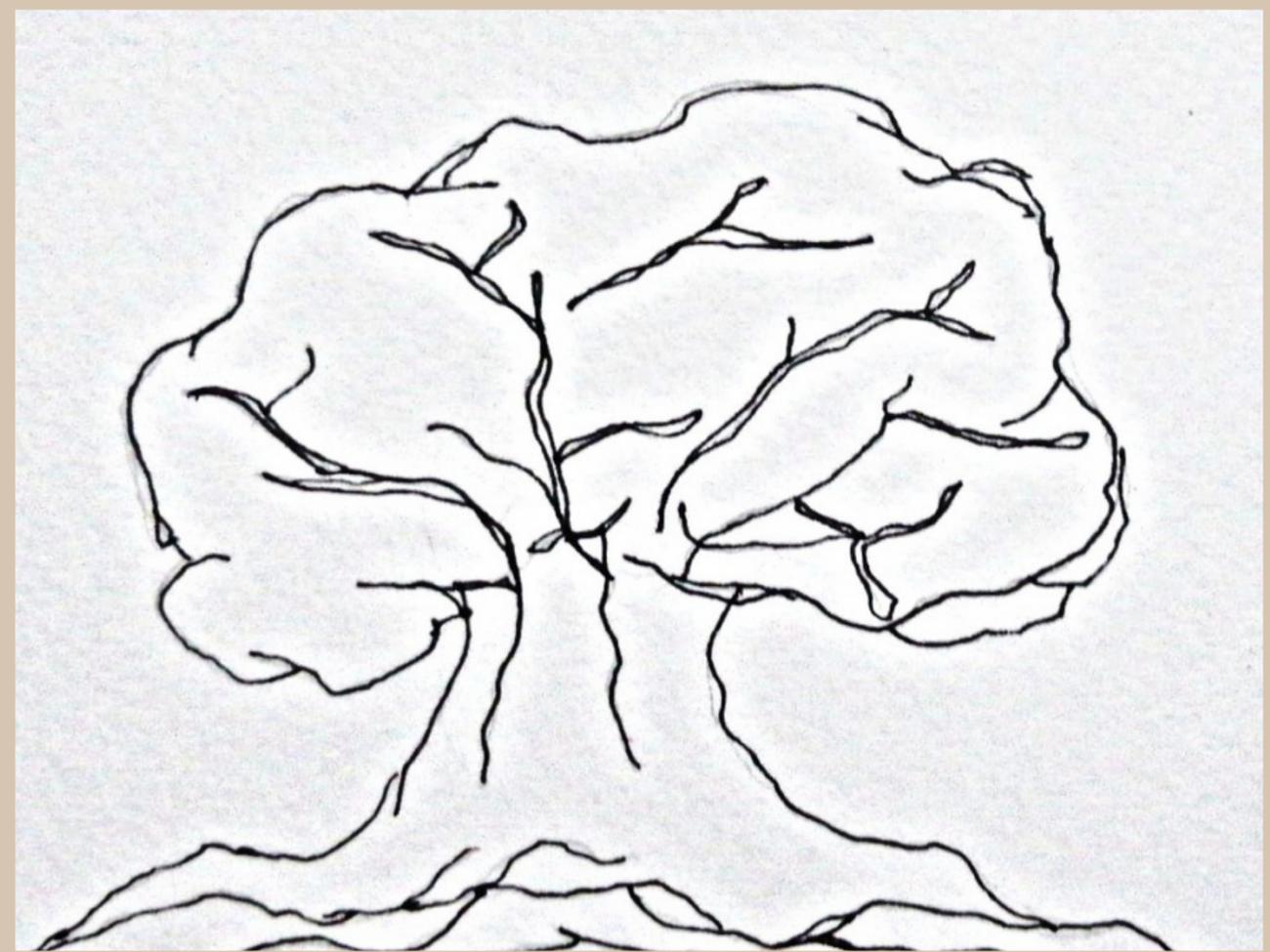


14. ARMOUR

From holding the ground stable to bringing in rains;
from being home for animals to helping humans build homes;
from supplying us with means of survival to being undemanding;
trees have been protectors of civilisations with their armour of
roots, leaves, fruits and undying love.

Of lately, there have been several citizen led protests and
movements to protect these armours from State led (so-called)
development projects.

The irony is that the State which is supposed to protect its citizens,
the environment and resources, buys into corporate needs and
definitions of development.



15. OUTPOST

Outposts serve to police borders of landmass, invaded by humans to exert power over other humans.

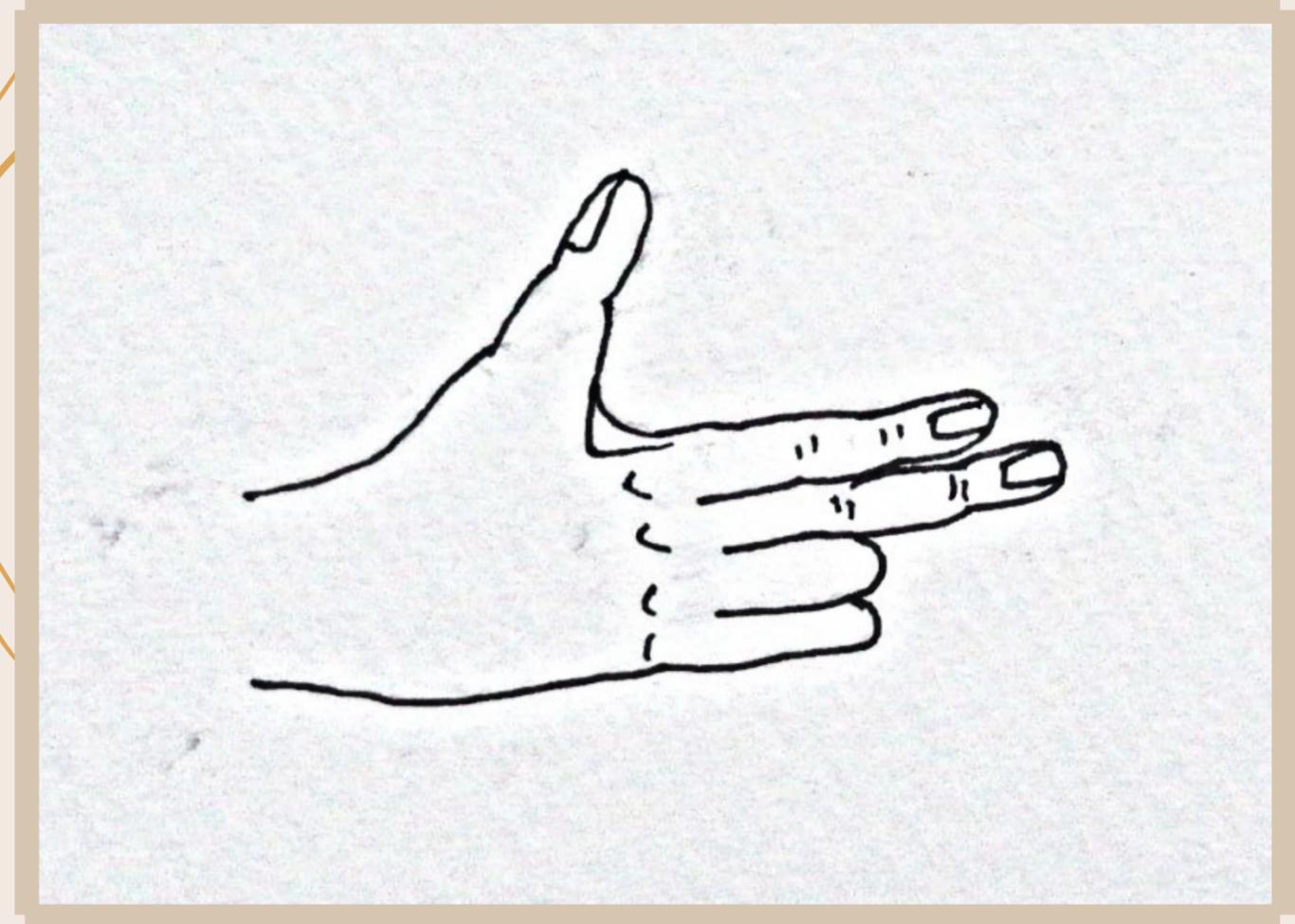
The effect of militarisation on countries goes beyond control over humans. It reaches down to exploit land, water and air of occupied countries.

The examples are visible in several Central Asian and African countries, where the repercussions and trauma is passed down to generations who are forced to carry the anger forward.

If we counted not just dead humans but also the murdered animals and plants of an occupied country, would we still justify war?

Is the temporary satisfaction of ego and testosterone fuelled anger worth the destruction?

[@karwanemohabbat](#) supports individuals who have been affected by hate crimes and also makes short films to sensitise the general public regarding this and the right to dissent.



16. ROCKET

Prices of goods are skyrocketing, while public ethics are falling.

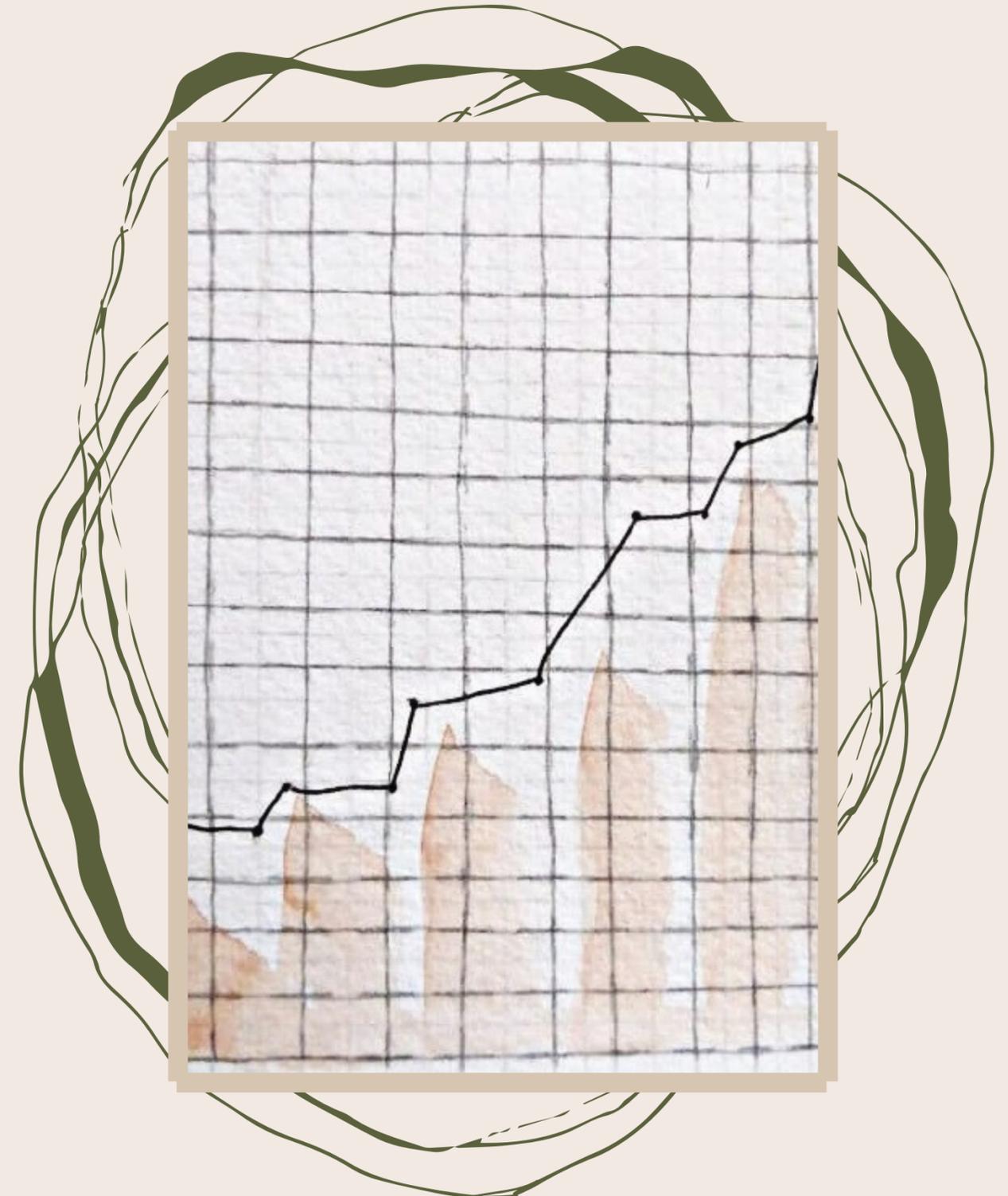
Food items are getting costlier and dissent is a risky process for initiators. Yet, everyone has found their own way of doing it.

In the present scenario, growing one's own food is a protest against price rise and artificial fertilisers in your consumables.

I am all for putting funds into Research and Development, but if it is being used to provide invasive and genetically modified crops that put public health at risk and reduce soil fertility, then defund it all. The common people have better R&D abilities for survival.

On another note, do you know where India ranks in the World Hunger Index? Read up. Statistics can be manipulated. Critically analyse what you can. And if you can't, seek help.

If you wish to build your understanding and perspectives on your relationship with the system(s) you are part of, check out publications from [@banyantreebookstore](#) and [@leftwordbooks](#).



17. STORM

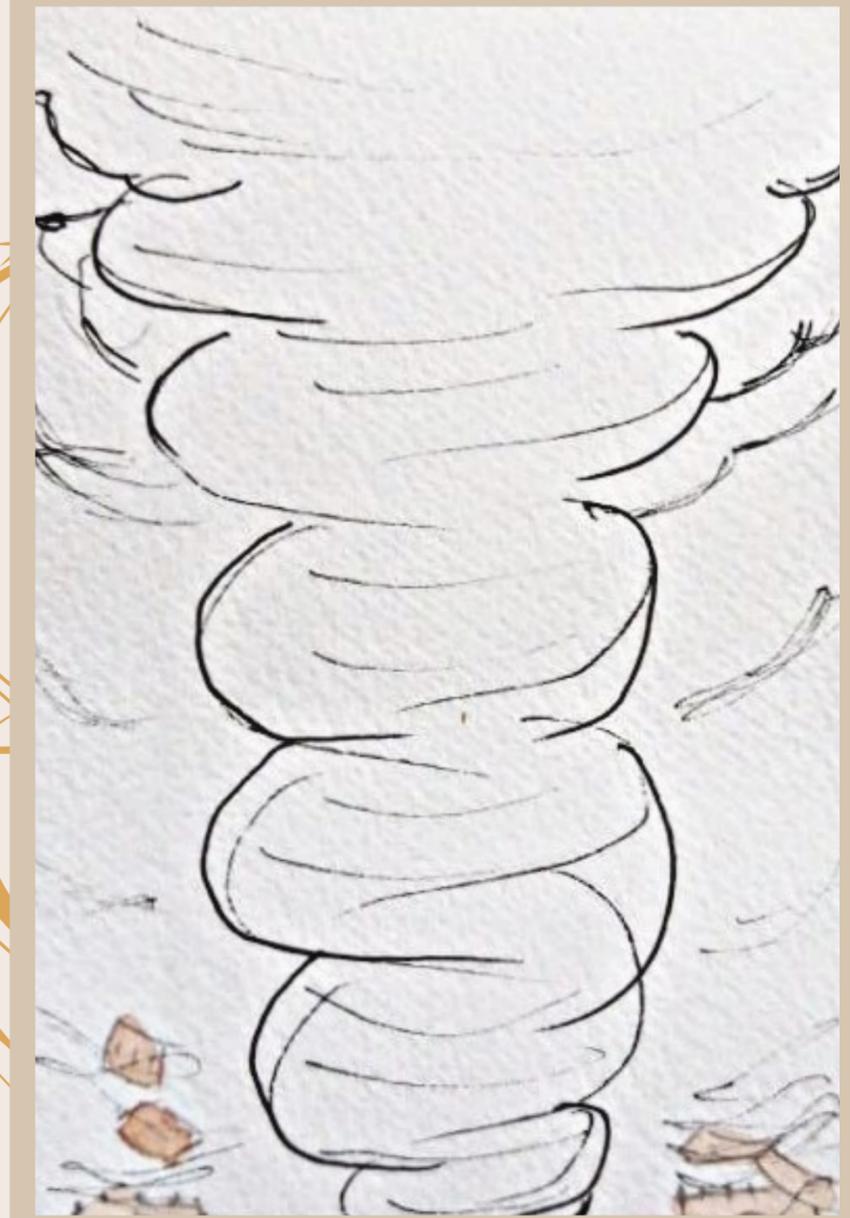
Storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, floods; call them what you will.

Natural disasters are supposed to occur periodically. But lately, they have been occurring much more frequently.

Natural disasters and man-made disasters. The line that separates both is the cause and the possible mitigations after each.

Do disaster management plans take into account the environmental impact?

Do disaster management plans ensure a reduced impact of the disaster or do they reduce the accountability of the authorities?



18. TRAP

Every competition you are knowingly or unknowingly a part of, is a capitalist trap.

General competitions that we all grew up participating in:

- Whose child can swallow words and regurgitate them as it is annually?
- Whose child can imitate an art form for the sake of societal rewards?
- Which family has more extravagant products for public display?
- Which family has maintained toxic relationships at the expense of individual mental health?
- Which individual has been forced into fitting into societal beauty standards to please the male gaze?

And so on. What more can you think of?

Several alternate learning initiatives like [@shikshantarandolan](#), [@aaroхи life education](#), [@bhoomicollege](#), etc. help people come out of this trap and also not fall into one, by re-thinking and reforming education.



19. DIZZY

There is so much going on around you.

There are moments when you feel like your head is spinning with all the information about things going wrong. Every silence and voice expressed becomes a political expression.

In the middle of all this you end up feeling helpless.
And chocolate cakes are not financially viable every week.

Take a break. Take a deep breath and choose your wars carefully.
It is not selfish to take care of yourself.

Talk to mental health professionals. There are helplines run by psychology councils and associations of different states and colleges. Get in touch with friends studying psychology.

Pages like [@unbottleemotions](#) and [@yellowclubofficial](#) conduct workshops regarding socio emotional learning and are also resources to connect to mental health professionals.

It's okay. You are valid and your concerns are valid.



20. CORAL

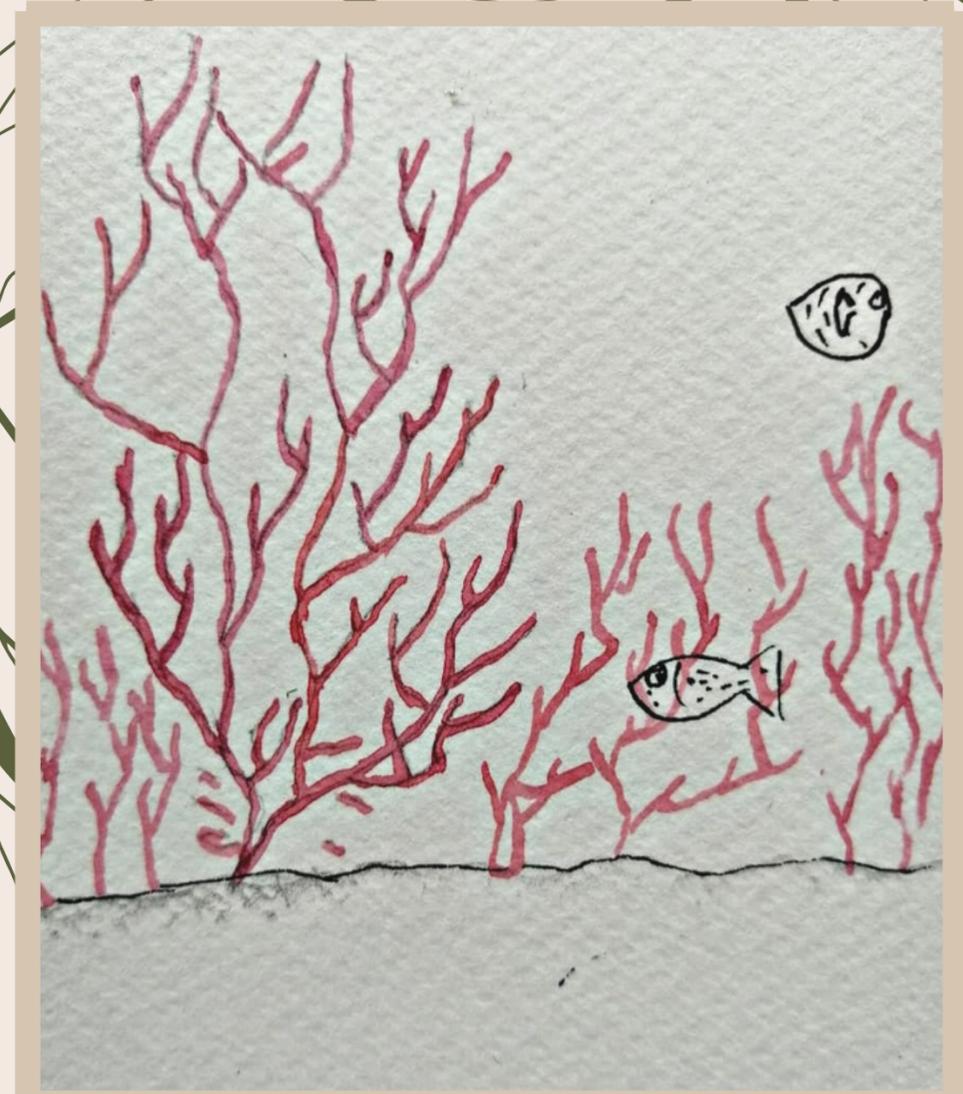
Coral reefs are large underwater structures composed of the calcium carbonate exoskeletons of marine invertebrates.

About 25 percent of all known marine species rely on coral reefs for food, shelter and breeding and are also referred to as "the rainforests of the sea".

Water pollution, agricultural pesticides, fertilizers, oil spills, gasoline, sewage discharge, and rising temperature of the ocean can kill a thousand year old coral in minutes through the process called coral bleaching.

What can you do ?

- Follow [@dakshin_seas](#) and [@terraconscious](#) to learn about marine lives and conservation activities.
- Petition policy makers to make environment centric development plans.
- Replace harmful cleaners, fertilisers and pesticides with natural, DIY products at home.
- Support local groups and organisations like [@dhanaknaturals](#), [@naturallywildideas](#) and [@golisodastore](#) that sell handmade cleaners and self-care products.
- Stop Dry cleaning your clothes. The chemicals used are washed off into water bodies.



21. SLEEP

What is the last thing you see before you sleep?

What is the first thing you see after you wake up?

If it is a light emitting machine that fits in your hand and has you addicted to the knowledge it possesses, then it is time to re-think priorities. The lockdown might have made you depend on it for comfort, but make sure it is not the sole respite for your soul.

Knowledge is also in books, humans, plants and self. Though the lockdown has reduced opportunities for exploration, try to find time for yourself outside of the screen.

If you are unable to do that, it is also okay.
We all have our own journeys.

For a start, you can check out [@lifebeyonddevelopment](#) to understand how development and consumption can be redefined.



22. CHEF

What is your relationship with food?

Is food a mindful addition to your existence or a poison taken at regular intervals? Do you touch, taste and smell your food or do you distract yourself while eating?

Are you conscious of the process undergone by produce before it ends in your plate; from seeds, to soil, to transportation, to being cooked?

[@forgottenfoodindia](#), [@ahimsagram](#), [@forgottengreens](#) and many more are rebuilding forgotten farming practices, supporting livelihoods of farmers and re-connecting people with food and land in a natural way.



23. RIP

Some clothes hold memories: an heirloom, a saree, a shirt, a tie passed down from parents, cousins, grandparents or friends.

There used to be a time when a person would have just 3-4 pairs of clothes. They would take care of it, repair it and use it till it's life ends.

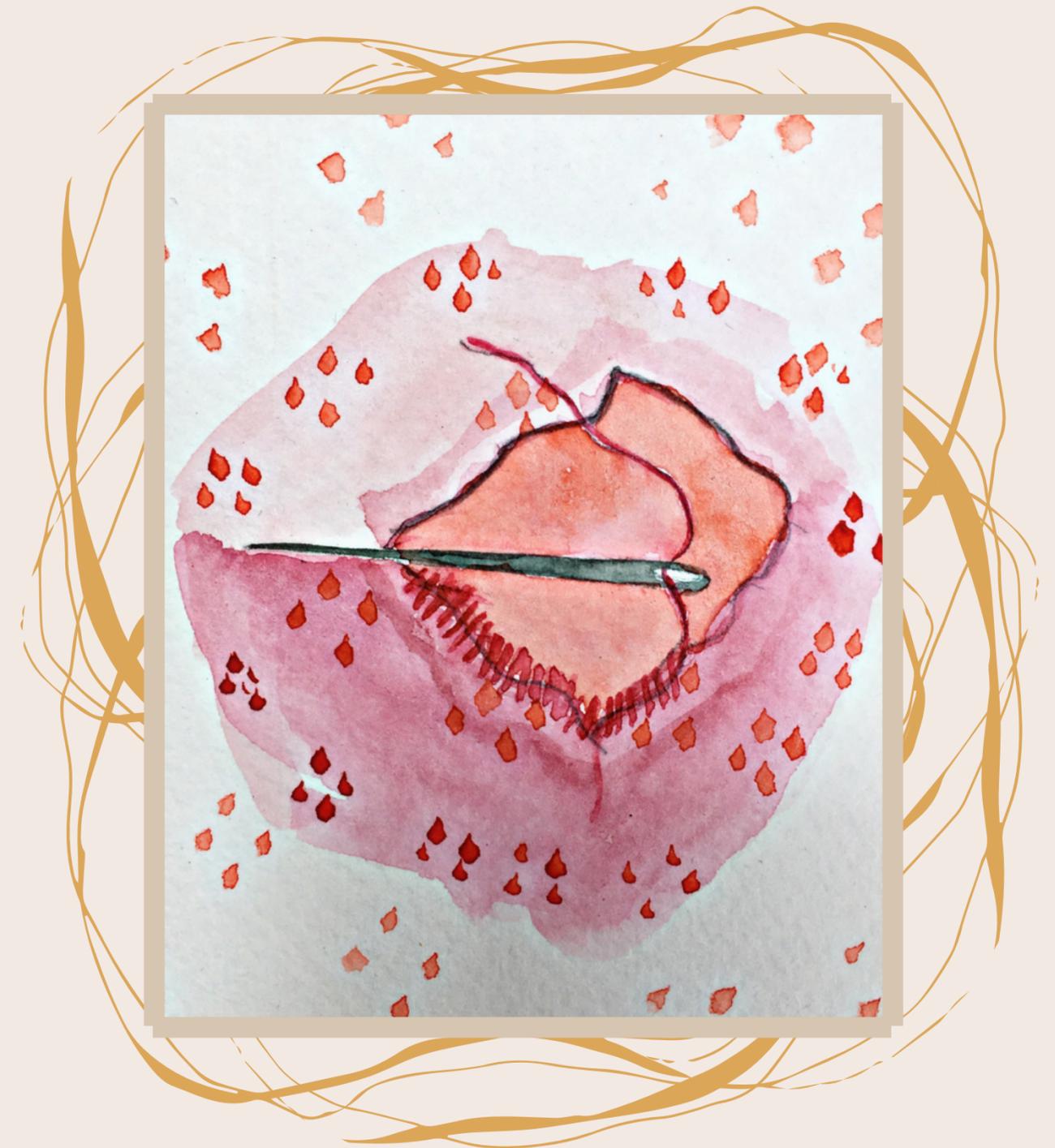
The industrial revolution changed everything: increased production, lessened prices, seasonal sales, etc., became the norm. And traditional weaving techniques lost the race.

Next time you shop, think:

Do I absolutely need to buy that trending design knowing fully well that it will be obsolete in the next few months? How much do employees in the fashion and retail sector earn? Can I repair, restyle or repurpose my already existing clothes? Is my sense of beauty being defined by a photoshopped model and corporates murdering the environment?

And when you have a moment go through [@desi_trust](#), [@bodhoday.society](#) and [@indiahandmadecollective](#) to know how you can support artisans.

Also see [@saadgi_upcycled](#), [@ohscrapmadras](#) and [@wewearequal](#) to know how local organisations upcycle wasted fabric.



24. DIG

When was the last time you touched the soil ?

When was the last time you dug the land to plant something?

The joy of growing your own food is inexplicable. An upcycled container, a plastic bottle, a plastic bag; anything can be a plant's home if you will.

Even a tea infused with the sole mint from your garden will lend you satisfaction.

Microgreens are the current trend because of their low maintenance.

Try it out as a start and learn from [@village_story_india](#), [@farmersshare](#), [@thenaturalfarmer_](#), [@kugoorfarms](#) and [@aranyaagriculturalalternatives](#).



25. BUDDY

So many relationships around us are tangled in romantic contexts solely because the media told us "a boy and a girl can never be just friends".

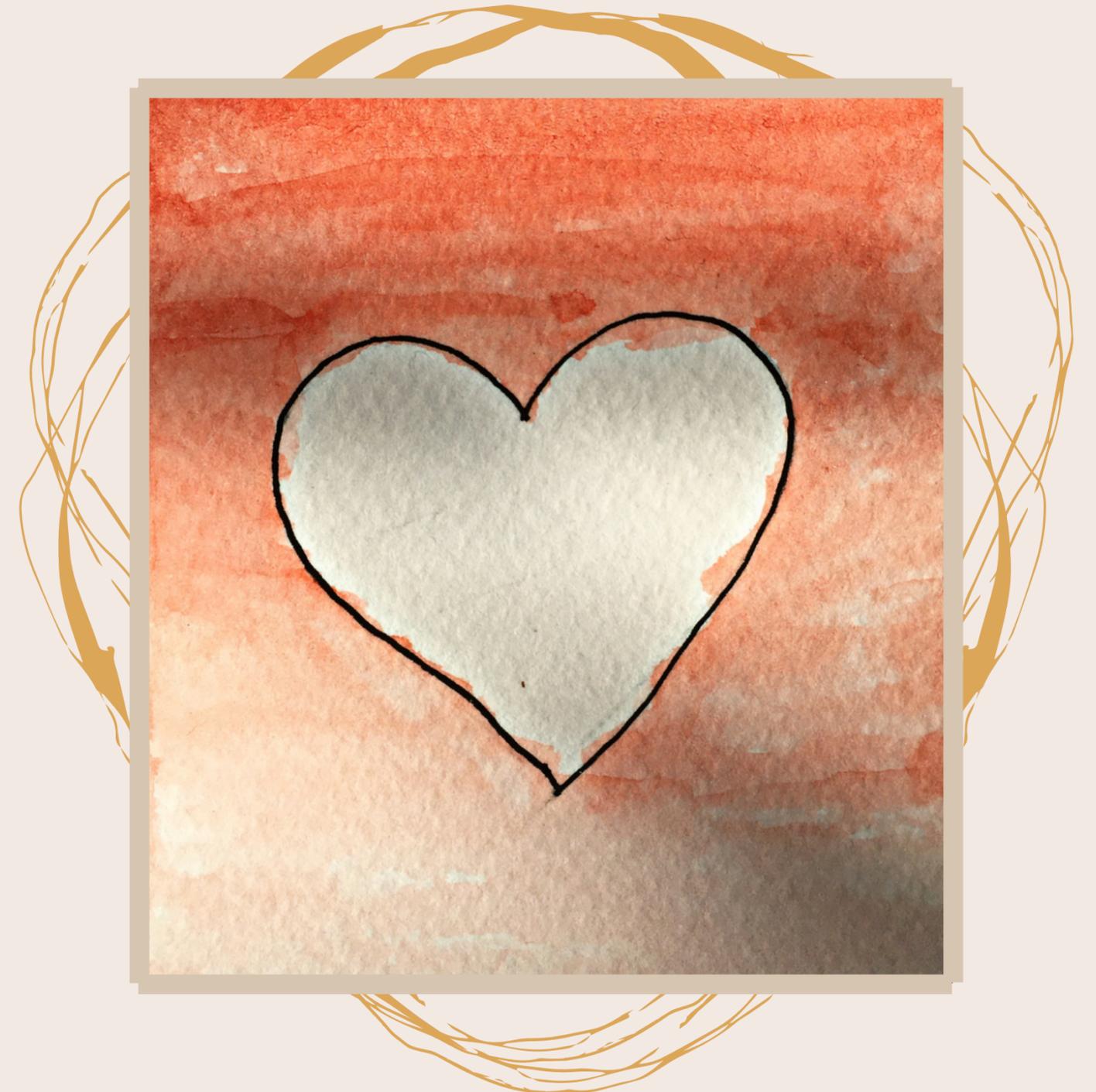
So many people believe they have been wrongly 'friend zoned' because they have been taught to believe decent behaviour makes them entitled to a romantic relationship.

So many relationships remain unexplored because of stigma, bias, peer pressure, and whatnot!

So many relationships are based on proving to the world of its strength even though it is rotting inside.

So many relationships exist solely because of the fear of loneliness, shared properties and societal pressure.

[@ecosinglz](#) looks at relationships beyond just romantic ones, and tries to redefine human connections.



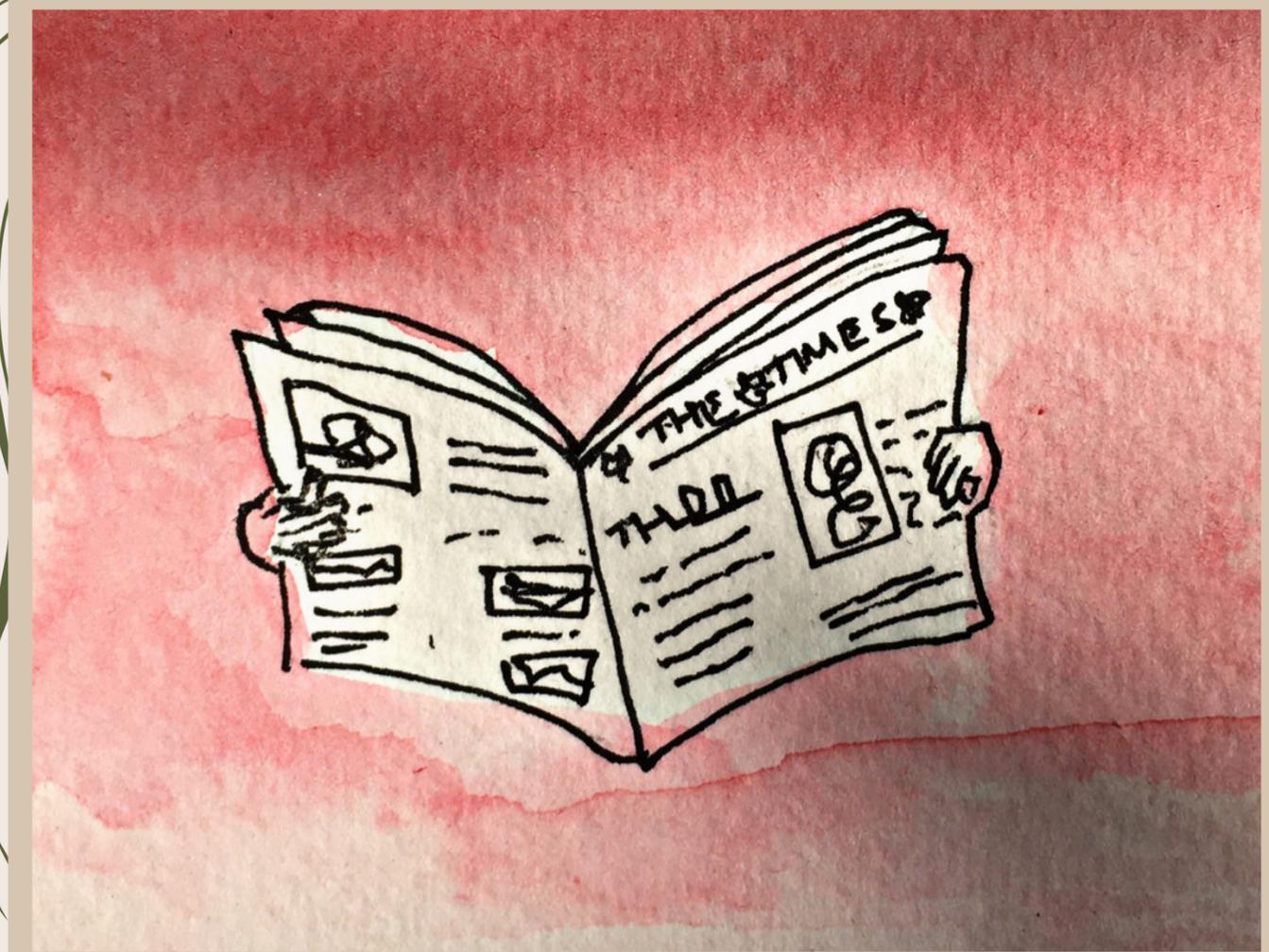
26. HIDE

Ignorance is bliss, till what you ignored enters your home and you have nowhere to hide.

We might deny climate change but we can't deny the toxic air, water, and land around us.

We can't deny that everyday we give out more pollutants and waste than what nature can bear.

It's not long before we'll have to accept that we have left only trauma and toxicity for future generations.



27. MUSIC

Pass on the mic; to places and people unheard of, to intersectional feminists, to indigenous tribes, to the protectors of nature, to policymakers who care, to artists and those who never tire of feeling.

[@vikalpsangam](#), [@pari.network](#) and [@navayanabooks](#) are working towards passing on the mic to unheard thousands.

In the same manner, make a choice to never let mainstream media choose whose voice you hear, make sure your viewpoints are unbiased and built after ample research.

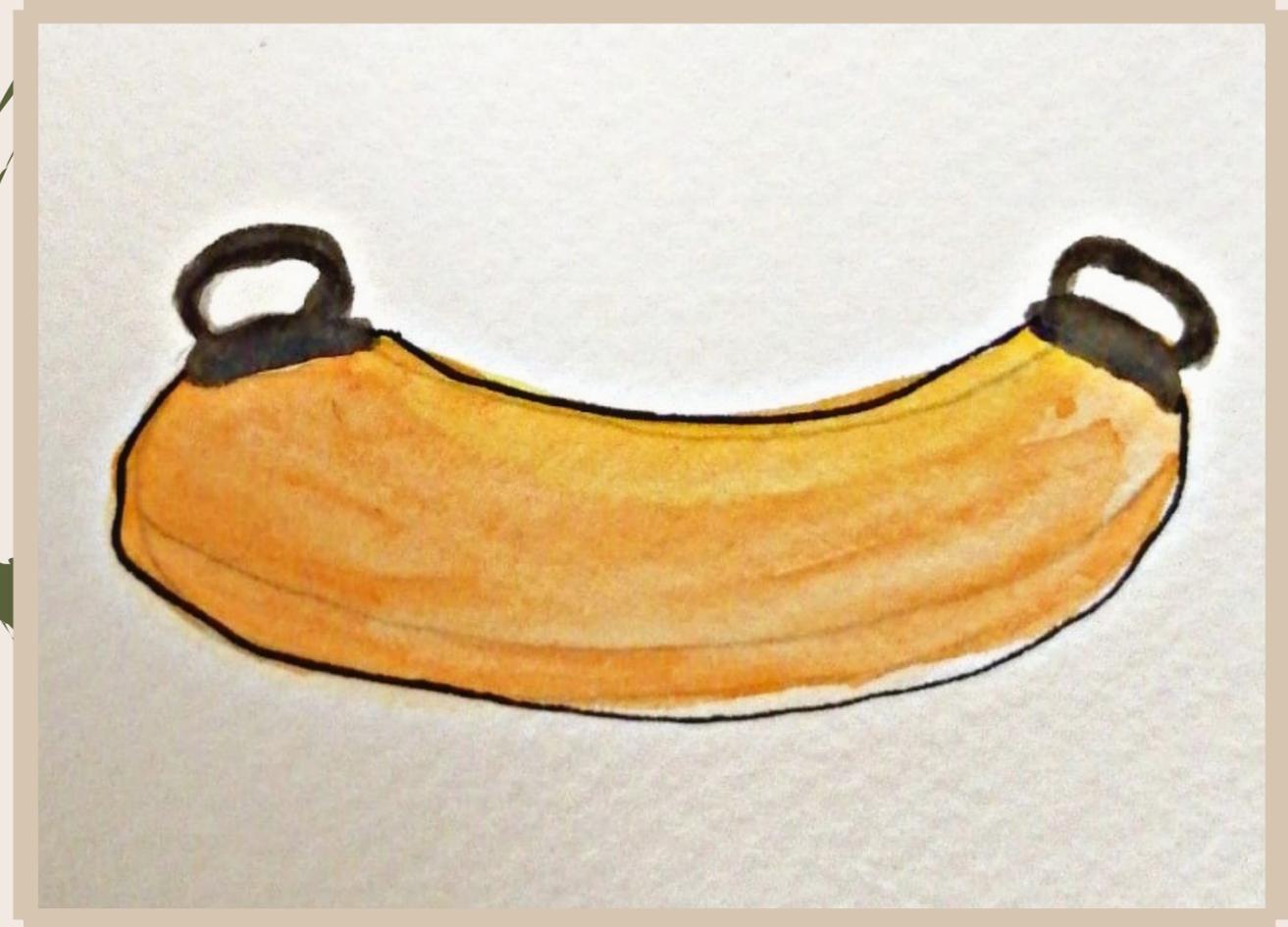


28. FLOAT

When I was studying in school, I remember being taught that global warming was causing the glaciers to melt and the sea levels to rise.

Recently, in different parts of India, floods have become a regular occurrence.

I see jokes about people thinking of buying boats and floats to survive floods. There is so little discussion on taking responsibility for reducing waste thrown on streets, planning construction ethically and holding the governments accountable.



29. SHOES

Millions of animals are killed every year to make shoes and purses to show off privilege.

Ideally, a slipper can be repaired for years till it actually wears out.

Another option is to buy footwear from organisations that make it from upcycled or recycled materials.

Check out [@paaduks](#) and [@greensole](#) to know more about footwear made from upcycled materials and cork.



30. OMINOUS

I cannot hide from the realisation that future generations will have to live off polluted resources.

The ominous threat of dead rivers, bleached corals, extinct wildlife and lost tribes is near.

The blue of the earth will be replaced by the red of the blood of all generations born to suffer the consequences of our selfishness.

As a step towards calling for climate action you can check out the non-violent activities by [@fridaysforfuture.india](https://www.instagram.com/fridaysforfuture.india), [@xrebellionind](https://www.instagram.com/xrebellionind) and [@letindiabreathe.in](https://www.instagram.com/letindiabreathe.in).



31. CRAWL

And Ecoctober crawls so slowly that it extends to November to reach its destination.

This was a slow and fun process. I wanted to explore my imposter syndrome and whether I would surpass it to be confident about sharing my ideas and art. And I would say the results have been great.

Mainstream definitions of art sometimes makes us feel that only popularity works. Now I feel it is my own satisfaction that matters, for everything.



ECCOCTOBER

A hand-drawn illustration of the word "ECCOCTOBER" on a light-colored background. The word is written in a stylized, bubbly font. The letters "E", "C", "C", "T", "O", "B", "E", and "R" are yellow with orange outlines. The letter "O" is replaced by a snail with an orange shell and a brown body. The letters "C", "T", "O", "B", "E", and "R" are green with black outlines. The entire illustration is framed by a thick, orange, scribbled border.

ABOUT THE WRITER-ILLUSTRATOR

Saumya John grew up with the feeling of not belonging anywhere, and gradually realised that the world is her home.

Saumya studied History, and later Social Work, worked in a NGO and realised her vocation does not fit into an organisational space, but in a farm.

She has been practising urban gardening since the lockdown and plans to resume her travels, and meet fellow environmentally conscious humans soon.

The lockdown reduced her connection with the world to only through Instagram, and that is where she built networks and learned about eco-friendly enterprises.

'Plastic Free July' was her first month long campaign for environment friendly choices, followed by *'Ecoctober 2020'*.

Saumya is vocal about the relationship between mental health, intersectional feminism and environment conservation. She is also a selective animal lover, especially the *bow-bows* and *meow-meows*, and dreams to have her own garden decorated with upcycled materials someday.



ABOUT TRAVELLERS' UNIVERSITY

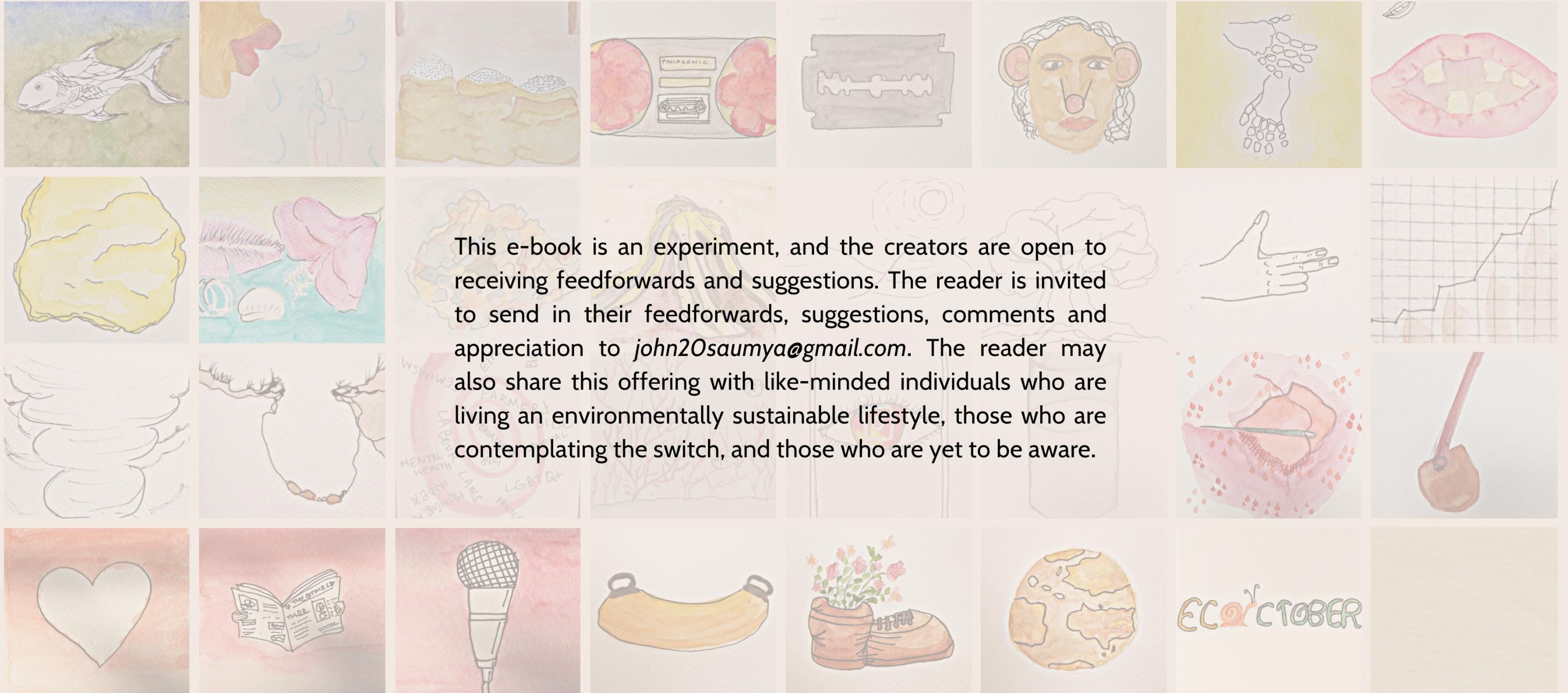
At Travellers' University, we believe the whole universe is a learning ground and that experiences invoke one's innate curiosity which is fundamental for one's education. Travellers' University is a platform to build learning communities, and to facilitate individuals who are interested to travel and learn to deepen their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world, and are looking for alternative choices in learning. We encourage individuals to venture outside their academics and work life to engage with questions that perturb them, and work together to find their answers.

With the same intention, we are extending our work to publish content that promotes critical consciousness in the topics we engage in, which includes reimagining education, rethinking development, ecological sustainability, and social justice. With the upcoming series of publications through Travellers' University, we aim to support individuals by providing them a platform to express, and to share their work with the world.

'*Ecoctober 2020*' by Saumya John is an array of reflective writings that brings together plural perspectives on the mentioned topics, and also, necessary ones. It lays out the interconnectedness of various elements in a candid manner, such that it nudges the reader to self-reflect. We are excited to share the experience with more people through this digital publication.



AN INVITATION TO THE READER



This e-book is an experiment, and the creators are open to receiving feedforwards and suggestions. The reader is invited to send in their feedforwards, suggestions, comments and appreciation to john2Osaumya@gmail.com. The reader may also share this offering with like-minded individuals who are living an environmentally sustainable lifestyle, those who are contemplating the switch, and those who are yet to be aware.



SAUMYA JOHN