Manan Mrig

The Chronicles of Mrig: The test, The sweat and Sushma

Look in the eyes of the guy standing, yes that one, the one admiring the sky, the one breathing in the fresh air of victory, look at his pose. That is a man who has spent a millenia in search of something that he finally found and much to his sorrow- it wasn't even worth it. This utmost wholesome image was taken just 45 minutes after the events of E-Day.

When it comes to writing memories, I don't have a lot that comes to mind. Wait, just one, just one that stands up and starts shouting inside me. A memory that I swear I sometimes think about when I'm sleeping. A memory that will probably flash in front of my eyes when I inevitably die young. Now it's not a bad one, neither is it a good one but it is THE one.

The day was 18th March 2020. Now to my American peers this may seem weird but all of the ‘schooling’ in my home country of India leads to this one exam that is said to be one of the most stressful experiences in a brown life. It's the grand finale to the show that they call school that has lasted longer than both *F.R.I.E.N.D.S* and *The Big Bang Theory*. I was all set to go and as my father likes to say “fadh” (tear; in a good way) the test.

I held my breath as I saw the people right in front of me getting their question papers. Finally, that teacher, her name Ms. Sapna (Dream in english), ruins all my ‘sapnas’ (dreams) and hands me an astonishingly long piece of paper with nothing but, I swear, a manuscript with the prayers sung in hell. Everything was going fine, I was on time, I was pacing myself properly and finally a 2000, yes you read that correctly, A FREAKIN 2000 word essay came up. I was like pish-posh this is fine, this is alright, all is well, I'll do this at the end and that's what I did. I completed the whole exam and returned to the ‘cursed’ essay just 22 minutes and 36 seconds before the end. I was feeling good about myself(as good as someone can feel after not sleeping for 3 days) all I had to do was choose one of the 5 topics and write till someone snatched the paper away from me, cry for 20 minutes after, then bribe Lord Krishna (Jesus to brown people) for good marks and then shout something inappropriate like “WHO CARES ABOUT TESTS!” and never think about that sucker ever again.

Oh lord oh was I wrong!.

Now a bit of context is needed: I am the most indecisive person ever! I am not talking I can't decide my university or my major indecisive, NO! NA A!. I have not gotten a sandwich from Subway in about 4 years now because it, OBJECTIVELY, takes me too long to decide what dressing I want. So finally I narrowed it down to 5 topics, yes I narrowed it down to all 5 of the topics that were given. I couldn't decide so I did what any successful, sane, not-intoxicated, well educated, well groomed adult in a situation like this would do i.e. gamble. I decided that whichever color pencil I take out from my pouch would determine the essay I write. For example: If the red one comes out I will write my essay on the first prompt, if green comes up I will write my essay on the second one and so on. Now my long in the tooth brain doesn't really remember what color I picked but the corresponding prompt went like: You are Sushma and your friend is thinking about ending her life. Explain her briefly in about 2000 words the beauty, the meaning and the colors of life. Yes, English in India is a joke but all I could think about in that exact moment was the AUDACITY of these people to write briefly in front of 2000 words. Who are these people, what color are they made of, what do they breathe, can they even describe the beauty, the meaning and the colors of life.

Now I can express, or rather rant about these people in 2000 words or more but explaining to Sushma's friend was beyond the furthest reach of my naive brain. (If you don't believe me, google "CBSE Class 12 Board Examination English Core Paper 2019-2020" and see for yourself.) But slowly and steadily I dug my way through the essay and within those 22 minutes believe me I felt like Milkha Singh but for writing. I

felt like that essay was Loki to my Thor, In my head it felt like I was breaking a huge rock with a toothbrush. On any usual day It might have easily taken me about 7-8hrs to write, re-write and beg for approval from at least 12 family members, friends and/or stranger I met 20 minutes ago but in those 22 minutes I just wrote whatever came from my heart and needless to say, if sushma's friend still wants to end her life, sure.

I honestly feel that the whole experience took at least 2 to 4 months off of my life. Needless to say, it was one of the best experiences of my whole life and people better believe this that I've told this story about 20-30 times in its entirety. The feeling of accomplishment I got after finishing it was beyond extraordinary. I feel like it was one of the best essays I've ever written in my adult life. The thing is my teacher absolutely did not share my beliefs, under my essay there was a sad little note that read "Expected Better". Irrelevant but on the day I got my results back, I discovered a new corner to cry in.