

BY SAIGOPAL RANGARAJ '23

QATAR 2022: THE WORLD CUP THAT ENTANGLED DISPARATE ASIAN NARRATIVES.

The 2022 FIFA world cup broke many records. It was the first to be held in a Middle Eastern country; it was the highest-scoring world cup; and it was the most expensive sporting event in recorded history. After a final described as one of the greatest contests of all time and one that reaffirmed Messi's GOAT status, the world seems to have moved on from Qatar and forgotten about the World Cup and what it has meant for people in Asia. For the people of Asia, this world cup will hold two very different meanings: for some Asians, it was a moment of pride and jubilation, while for other Asians it is a symbol of suffering and loss.

On one hand, a record number of teams from Asia qualified for the 2022 World Cup. According to FIFA, five teams from Asia—the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, the Korean Republic (South Korea), Qatar, and Saudi Arabia—participated in the tournament. The Samurai Blue (Japan's national team) put in impressive performances—defeating European powerhouses Germany and Portugal—to make it to the quarter-finals against Croatia. Although they lost, the Japanese team received a hero's welcome when it returned home. This world cup saw Asian soccer reach new heights and this will likely continue as the world cup expands to 48 teams in 2026, allowing for more competition and new teams to play in the tournament.

The glamor and glory of the world cup conceal the lived experiences of the people that made it possible for Qatar to host this competition. When Qatar was selected to host the 2022 World Cup in 2010, many were skeptical of its ability to host what is arguably the world's greatest sporting event. At that time it had neither the infrastructure to accommodate large crowds nor the arenas. In addition, there were concerns that the excessive heat would take a toll on players and spectators alike. All the naysayers were proved wrong, yet the costs of Qatar's "I told you so" moment were astounding. To host the 2022 World Cup, Qatar is said to have spent over \$220 billion on stadia, infrastructure, hotels, and other vanity projects. This eye-watering figure too conceals the human toll of the world cup: the exploitation of a vast army of temporary workers from Asia that built the infrastructure, stadia, and luxury hotels to house the global rich. It is estimated that

since 2010, approximately 6,500 migrants lost their lives working at various construction sites in Qatar.

The majority of the workers who built Qatar's infrastructure were recruited from countries such as India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Despite its popularity in the region, South Asian teams have been absent from the World Cup and other global soccer tournaments because the sport is relatively underdeveloped. It was not the love of soccer that led the hundreds of thousands of South Asians to sign up to go and work in Qatar. Rather, it was the prospects of a better future for themselves and their families. To Qatar's credit, studies have shown the scale of the positive impact that migration has on migrant workers. One study claimed that migrant work in the Persian Gulf does more to reduce global inequality than the combined welfare states of the rich world.

Qatar and FIFA's hubris led to a much better life for people, but their tone and response to criticisms of the plight of migrant workers leave much to be desired. Qatar and FIFA should have worked to improve migrant worker rights when they signed the contract in 2010, yet it took countless deaths and international scrutiny for positive changes to be made; there were some huge changes like the removal of the Kafala system or the institution of a minimum wage but they did not go far enough. The erasure of migrant workers' voices and identities was crucial to ensure a smooth world cup as the focus needed to be on soccer and not on the coffins being sent back to South Asia. The removal of a mural created on one of the stadium facades serves as a stark reminder to many of how expendable migrant workers were to Qatar.

Qatar 2022 was Asia's world cup. It brought together people from all corners of the continent; bringing fame and fortune to some while erasing the existence of others. The world cup led to lasting changes in Middle East labor policies and contributed to significant reductions in poverty, yet it also exacerbated the inequalities and power dynamics that exist on the continent. As the world's focus moves away from the tiny peninsula, the only question that matters is whether we will see the same triumphs and tragedies repeated again when the rulers of another oil-rich Arab state decide that it is their turn in the spotlight.

BY UTSHAA BASA '25

NOVEL REVIEW: FLUIDITY IN AMRUTA PATIL'S "KARI"

The 2008 graphic novel "Kari" by Indian author Amruta Patil, follows the titular character, a young woman attempting to navigate Mumbai alone after the departure of her lover and soulmate, Ruth. This follows after their failed double suicide. Kari as a protagonist is largely alienated from her surroundings, occupying space on the sidelines as a queer person in the heteronormative landscape of Mumbai, and as a self-proclaimed boatsman. Kari's failed double suicide, that plunges her into a sewer, functions as a sort of a rebirth, resigning her to drift in the fluid space between life and death.

In her sexual identity, Kari leans towards ambiguity as well. She attributes her confusion to labels, stating that the "circus is in her head." Largely, the novel does not concern itself with politics, labels, or "burning issues". Rather, Kari grapples with isolation: learning to navigate and come to terms with her fluid identity in a heteronormative, hostile city-scape without the support of her partner. Kari's fluidity becomes at odds with the straight, dark lines and edges used to capture Mumbai.

"Kari" leaves a lot unsaid: the origins of their double suicide, Ruth's departure, and in large part, how Kari is feeling at any given moment. The novel is deeply internal, solely told from Kari's perspective, drowning in descriptions of her surroundings. The panels twist

and distort and flash with bright colors according to her shifting mental state. But little account is given of Kari's feelings. Just like its titular character, the novel has few words to offer, instead choosing to be largely visual in nature. The result is gripping, expansive panels that take up pages, the heavy, often uneven lines feeling organic and human-made. Kari herself is drawn as stone-faced but soulful, her features androgynous and sharp.

"Kari" diminishes the trope of the city and its anonymity, one that is particularly used in Western queer media. Mumbai, for all its metropolitan advancements and booming queer scene, becomes a hostile space in "Kari", the magical realism of the novel permitting it to become a grotesque, living thing, attempting to choke Kari out. Her own home, Crystal Palace, is also a heteronormative space filled with her heterosexual roommates, serving as a reminder of the female intimacy that Kari, as a queer person, is unable to access.

Ruth's absence echoes throughout the novel; it resonates in its grim lines and flashbacks and the ways in which Kari navigates the city around her, lost and wandering. "Kari" is an intense, poignant read, made especially for those who find comfort in the unstructured, the fluid, those flickering on the cusp of confused identities.

BY SAARANG CHARI '26

ALL THAT BREATHES: HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS IN DELHI

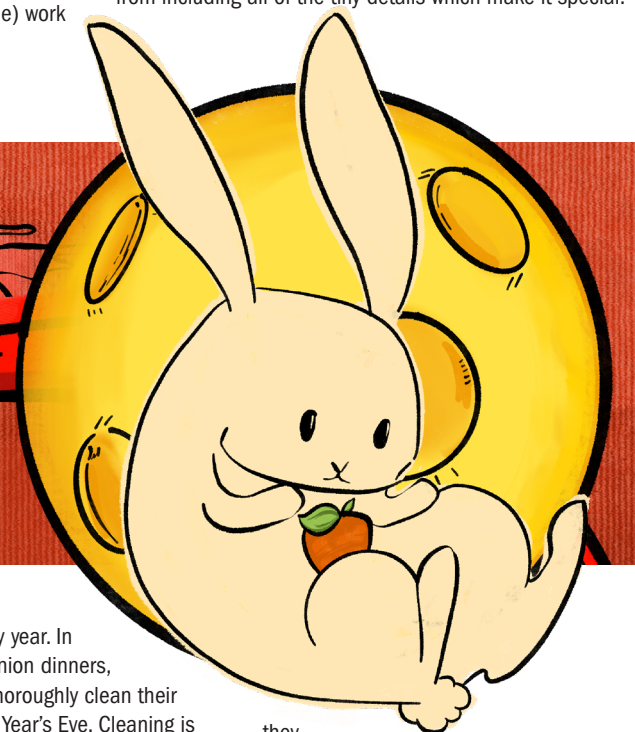
About 20 minutes into Shaunak Sen's Oscar-nominated documentary "All That Breathes", I had to pause just to make sure that I was, in fact, watching a documentary. It depicts a sincerity so poetic that it feels like it has to have been scripted. The film follows the lives of two siblings from Delhi, Mohammad Saud and Nadeem Shehzad, who have been rescuing and taking care of injured black kites since they were children.

Set in one of the most polluted cities in the world, exploring themes of ecology and wildlife conservation, the film affirms that it is not simply a "nature documentary". If the subject of the film is the brothers Nadeem and Saud, it does not observe just them. Rather, it is a meditation on human-animal relations, on the fraught politics of Delhi, the uneven impacts of our climate catastrophe and the act of survival in the midst of violence. Although it portrays the brother's relationship with the animals and with the injured kites within this broader socio-political context, to describe Sen's film as a political intervention would be reductive. Nor is the film overly sentimental or celebratory of the brothers' (admittedly admirable) work

and lives. Sen has stated that he did not want to make a "sweet film about good people doing good things", a film that is "NGOised and sanitized".

These multiple themes, instead, work together to present a rich portrait of Saud and Nadeem, of their ethical commitments and of their love for the city and its human and non-human inhabitants. As stated before, their interactions and thoughts are extremely poetic. In a recent interview, Sen has described them as "organic intellectuals" guided by experiential wisdom. Over the three years of filming, Sen would take note of the brothers' philosophical musings. He said that this collection quickly became very big, and he managed to convince the brothers to record a stylised voiceover for the film. The stylised voiceover is the only part of the film where the dialogue feels (intentionally) engineered, yet its sincerity is unquestionable.

While being thematically broad and fluid, All That Breathes is not reticent or self-effacing. The beauty which it portrays is so captivating that I have to hold myself back from including all of the tiny details which make it special.



BY ESA CHEN '25

LUNAR NEW YEAR: THE YEAR OF THE RABBIT

Lunar New Year, also known as Spring Festival, is the most important and widely celebrated festival in Asia. People in countries such as China, Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, etc all celebrate the Lunar New Year but in different ways. The Lunar New Year festival begins on the last day of the lunar year and ends with the Lantern Festival, which is the 15th day of the first lunar month in the following year. Because it is based on the lunar calendar, the date of Lunar New Year on the Gregorian calendar varies. The tradition of celebrating Lunar New Year is very old and its significance is rooted in several myths. Chinese legend spoke of the wild beast Nien, which is the word for "year" in Mandarin,

that appeared at the end of each year, attacking and killing villagers. Loud noises and bright lights were used to scare the beast away, which then became the New Year celebrations. The Korean New Year is also known as Seollal. The earliest records of Seollal are excerpts of celebrations during new year's day in the Silla kingdom, which are included in the Chinese 7th-century history works: Book of Sui and Book of Tang. The Vietnamese Lunar New Year is known as Tết, a shortening of Tết Nguyên Đán. According to the historical archaeological relics, the celebration of Tết can be traced back to the early Vietnamese settlements in Red River Delta, when Tết meant a new cycle of wet rice cultivation.

On the last day of the lunar year,

family members gather together and have a New Year's Eve dinner, which is also known as reunion dinner. Elaborate meals with a large number of dishes are shared and it is an occasion for family members to catch up on each other's life. Different places have unique dishes that are served at reunion dinners. In Taiwan, there must be one dish with a whole fish on New Year's Eve dinner. Usually, this dish is never consumed in its entirety because the word 'fish' and 'surplus' are homophones in Mandarin (yú). We call it "Nián nián yǒu yú," which means "May there be a surplus year after year." Nian Gao, also known as sticky rice cake, is one of the must-have foods of the Lunar New Year celebration since it has the symbolism of increasing

prosperity every year. In addition to reunion dinners, family's also thoroughly clean their homes on New Year's Eve. Cleaning is meant to symbolically get rid of the old and usher in the new.

At reunion dinners, it is not uncommon for children and unmarried adults who are not employed to receive monetary gifts in red envelopes. Adults who are single and employed a job, are expected to give a gift to younger members of their families. However, not all communities practice giving monetary gifts. But, the rules or norms of giving red envelopes vary in different areas and countries. One of the traditions is to pay New Year's call, which means people say special phrases to wish other people good luck when

they go on visits and wear new clothing in red color, which denotes good luck, fortune, happiness, and love. Another famous tradition is to paste the Spring couplet, which are a pair of poetic lines vertically pasted on both sides of the door, written in black ink on red paper. Sometimes, there will also be a horizontal pasted Spring couple on top of the door.

The Lunar New Year celebrations of 2023 began on January 22nd and lasted until February 5. According to Chinese tradition, 2023 is the year of the Rabbit.