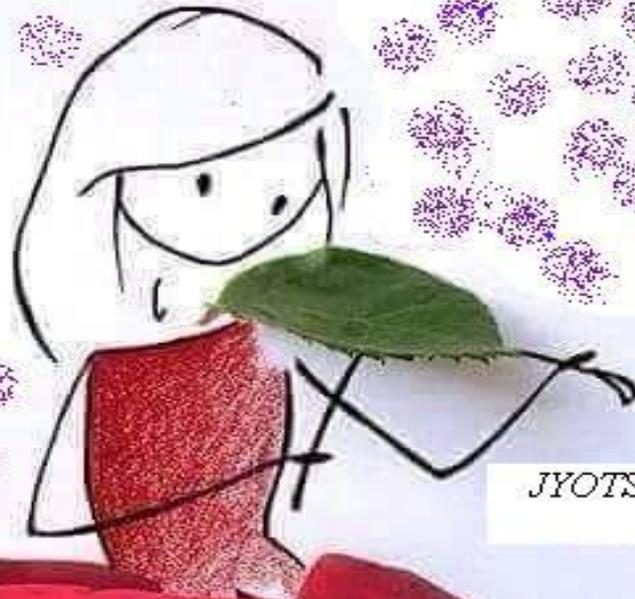


La'Chica Bahar
A GIRL called SPRING
FINDS LOVE



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A GIRL called SPRING FINDS LOVE

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PROLOGUE

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CHAPTER 01

SAM HIGGINBOTTOM

I'm Bahar Fakhraie, an Iranian teenager, I'm the only girl in the family among many brothers hence I was named Bahar meaning spring. My Dad Karim Fakhraie, a translator for European firms, affectionately calls me La'Chica Bahar meaning my girl Bahar.

Girls don't have the right to choose the major they like to study. The government decides for them based on the score one gets from the overall exam for the university admission entrance.

Since there are more applicants than actual spots in the colleges, the government will determine what who will study and therefore the government will decide what the person will become. Everybody studies hard to get into the university and then get accepted to the major of their interest. Thanks to my uncle Farzad Taghaboni's relations in India. I came to know about the foreign student cell in Sam Higginbottom Institute of Technology and Agriculture a deemed University, uncle Farzad Taghaboni's son who lives in California, his father-in-law was the head of chemistry department before he migrated to US. I have got admission in Sam Higginbottom Institute of Agriculture and Technology for Masters in physics session. I celebrated my birthday June 14 in Tehran and took the Emirates flight via Dubai to Allahabad, international port was Delhi.

I was received at the airport by Rita Richards and her

husband Edwin in early hours of the morning at Allahabad airport.

Allahabad named by mughal emperor Akbar as the city of Allah , you can see here the Triveni sangam the confluence of the rivers Ganges , Yamuna and underground river Saraswati . nearby is the old fort built by Akbar .I visited the museum and learnt a great deal about the ancient history of india. The ancestral home of the Nehrus where Mr Gandhi [Father of indian nation] often stayed who had adopted Feroz Gandhi

One of the best things about Allahabad is that it is a very laid back town quiet and life here is much more comfortable ,less traffic and ample greenery.The new Yamuna bridge is a great place to hang out on a cool evening when the cool breeze just blows through your hair .You can sit on the sandy beaches and enjoy a great sunset. Allahabad is the hometown of "Amitabh Bacchan" The star of the millenium.

The Sam Higginbottom university is away from the hustle bustle of the city, situated on the bank of Yamuna , right opposite to it on the other bank is the Ewin Christian college.River Yamuna which flows down from the city of Agra and Delhi meets the river Ganga in a grand merger at Sangam in Allahadad

If you happen to visit the old city of Allahabad which is called sheher (Ironic ! Isn't it?) by people living near the university campus, you can know it yourself that bad state and poor maintenance of infrastructure and basic public amenities have reduced the city to a little over a village. In contrast, the roads, drainage system and proper town planning do really exist in and around the University area.

The lush green Sam Higginbottom campus is a visual treat for morning walkers/joggers who are found strolling/jogging/running on the campus roads. I often practice in the early hours before anyone wakes up as I staying with the Richards



BAHAR THE NINJA GIRL

CHAPTER 02

HOSTEL FUN

I felt at home with the Richards . I was introduced to some seniors who immediately took me under their protective wings. Sonia Saluja who was pursuing her masters in chemistry , became my pal ,helping me with hindi. Ragging is now officially banned in most educational institutions but it hasn't ever existed at Sam Higginbottom for ages. Though, a milder form, fondly known as “Intro” has been prevalent ever since . The rules of “Intro” were quite clear: No physical assault, Abusive language prohibited, and Room-mates can't ask you for an Intro. It used to be mostly around word play and sense of humour. A little bit of leg-pulling on etiquette (Tradition) was sure to happen.

Even before I got an admission, my host Edwin Richards used to intimidate me of “Intro” stories, basically how a Lion could be turned into a Chicken by a mere command – Ban Murga... I would hilariously laugh at it and find it amusing, until I found myself within the boundaries of girls hostel. On a random night, when I felt an uncomfortably silent atmosphere in the corridors, I was reminded that it's - The Saturday Night. Hurry up! Find a hiding place! Either go for All-Night study in the Central Library or get away with your fellow freshers for any damn movie where you wouldn't even be spotted. Another resort could be to spend the night with the Local Guardians... Then someone told me – You can't run away. If you are found absconding, you will be called for a Suppli (supplementary) Intro on Sunday afternoon. It is more

dangerous because you are alone and there is pack of hungry 'Seniors' ready to feast on you. I got so petrified. Besides, for how many Saturdays, would I be able to beat the inevitable... I decided to face it. There I was, dressed in a night-pyjama, waiting in my lonely hostel room, awaiting the horror of my life. Knock-Knock.. Bang!! Opened the door... And, to my surprise, I found my saviours and not the predators! My friend Sonia and her gang had come to take me along in their shelter... Looking at me, she just had one question: Intro dena hai kya.. Why are you dressed in a night suit? :

Well, Not everyone was lucky enough to have a friend like mine... I heard gory stories week after week and everyone prayed for the day when it would stop. Here is what people had to go through...

You would have to wear a kurta-pyjama unless you are hunted down while trying to run away

- * All freshers lined up

- * A pack of Khaiyyad seniors (5 years +) seated across on chairs, stairs

- * A group of Not-so-seniors (3+) also present there

The first question: Introduce yourself (Name, Class, Father's name, Place of origin, Hobbies)

The twisted part: Introduce yourself or describe a day's life by including a prefix or suffix for each sentence like -

Darwaza khol ke, Naada bandh ke, pajama utaar ke etc.

One should be able to use the right prefix and suffix for father's name, for example Dr., Mr., Janab, saheb. If one fails, he must squat and become a "murga" when a senior shouts – Ban Murga...

Another question/task could be:

What was the recent movie that you watched? Narrate the story by addressing the lead actor as your “papa” or brother .

Questions/Tasks on hobbies:

* Singing: Sing a song in a male voice, sing one song on a different song’s tune

* Reading: Take a book and read it aloud until asked to stop

* Sports: Play the game using imaginary sports gear with other freshers as players

* Telling a joke: Asked to tell a joke and no one would laugh at your jokes. They would rather laugh out loud at the most unexpected places to embarrass you. I remember some seniors only by the pitch, tone, and variation in their animated laughter. I never dared look at them to recognize them. Well! That reminds me, all through the Intro sessions, you should only be looking at the third button of your shirt or kurta. If you would be wearing something didn't have buttons then look at the imaginary 3rd button. ;)

Give a pelvic thrust (thumka, of course) to your right when the senior says chawanni (25 paisa), to your left on Atthanni (50 p) and forward when he says – Rupaiyya. Every time, you are wrong, you know what you are supposed to do... Don’t you? Very simple! Right?

When you say Right, it’s wrong. It’s never wrong when the senior says the same thing.

What else you could become, apart from a “Murga”[rooster] ? The answer could have been: Go, stick to the

wall, and be a Lizard.

Slowly, things became bold... In a boys hostel intro, a fresher was asked to yell a movie dialogue from the cafeteria rooftop. In a separate session, a fresher was being asked to dance on the ground floor... The fresher at the terrace shouted – “Basanti, in ke saamne mat naachna...”

Sunday morning scene:

The scene at the wash basins would be like a typical jungle water-body scene, where the chickens would avoid a brush with the Lions and some of these chickens had been Lions a night earlier... ;-)

For Indians, Tea is the drink of all moments and times. If they want to celebrate, they have Tea. If they are unhappy about something, they have Tea. If they want to tell you something, it will be over a cup of Tea. If two disputing parties want to reach a consensus, it will happen on a Tea table. Even if they are very busy, you can catch them catching up with their cup of Tea.

When asked about the kind of Tea they would prefer, one can get a common answer - "kam shakkar, tez patti" which means strong Tea with less sugar in it. That's when they have a choice but in times of Tea crisis, they can get along with anything that is hot, looks and tastes like Tea but may not be Tea, actually.

This Indian love for Tea is best visible on the campus. Wherever you go, you can find a Tea outlet close by. Famous hangouts for Tea-guzzlers are - central canteen,

Hostel canteens and Cafés like Café-de-phoos and Café-de-laila. Apart from these, one can find ample roadside dhabas on . These dhabas are removed every year but they come up like mushrooms soon after. Not just this, their comeback is coupled with some quality improvements like good quality Tea and Hi-fi music system.

Then there's See-off tea very vital part in a student's life. Whenever a student is planning to set-off on a journey, he should be ready to treat his friends with See-off Tea. It's called so obviously because you offer this Tea to all those who have come to see you off.

CHAPTER 03

JAMES BOND

I Bahar looked at the morning paper in disbelief. A hero at my doorstep, but surely a fallen one. Here he was, one of the first Hollywood stars I had admired for his small screen presence, but selling something that Indian government should have banned long ago. Pierce Brosnan, who first came into our living rooms as the lively Remington Steele in the US TV drama that took close to a decade to reach India, was staring at me, white beard and all, selling Pan Bahar on the front page of a national daily. James Bond, it seems, has decided to bond with the best. Hollywood star, Pierce Brosnan aka James Bond, has been given the rather unbelievable task of convincing Indians about the power of Pan Bahar, a pan masala brand.

A heavily bearded Brosnan appeared on the front page of Indian national newspapers and TV advertisements earlier this month to promote pan masala, a preparation that can contain tobacco, lime, spices and nuts.

But selling a pan-based product, even if it takes you to hoardings staring down at India from pricey vantage points, should be something that you do in times of desperation. Yes, even if you have sold everything from underwear to over-priced whiskey in the years before. But then he is not really doing that badly, with at least a couple of releases this year and a few listed for next year. There is one saving grace though. During the one-minute ad, set strangely to the tunes of some techno-style sapersa music, Bond uses the “stylish Pan Bahar can” more as a weapon and not once flings the powder in his mouth. Bond’s small

mercies, I guess.

Also, the one thing I would like to know is if Mr Brosnan had any clue what he was selling? I just hope he didn't think he was selling a popular Indian pan masala Also, how does he like his pan masala? Shaken, but not stirred?

CHAPTER 04

BOLLYWOOD AND HOLLY WOOD

Here is my conversation with young Iranian taxi driver:

Him : Young Banu , Where are you going ?

Me : India

Him : India very good. Amitabh Bacchan, Salman Khan, Aishwarya

Me : haha, yes!

Him : Gabbar Singh Midooni? (you know Gabbar Singh?)

Me : Yes I know!

Him : I have seen Sholay 7 times. (Sholay - Popular indian movie)

Then he starts singing " Mehbooba Mehbooba ooooooo ooooooo ooooooo"

The only connection Iranian people have with India is bollywood movies(I am talking about people living in Iran) and they love bollywood movies.

People singing and dancing in garden, rich girl falling for poor boy or rich boy falling for poor girl, Jay and Veeru fighting Gabbar singh for Thakur; this is how they see India.

I like Mumtaz immigrant iranian the bollywood actress of 1970's . ,

yes, Iran invaded India some 400 years ago (incidentally, the last time that we were engaged in an aggressive war) and we got lots of jewels from that campaign which you can still see in the national bank museum in Tehran (and in the Tower of London since some of them found their way into British hands). You have good relations with

Israel and are Hindus. Now none of these facts are in the forefront of an Iranian mind when he thinks of India.

When iranians think of India, we think Bollywood (generally, Amithaab Bhachan, Shahrukh Khan or Aishwariya Rai), we think shared history, we think great food (obviously not as good as Iranian food but a close second and we think awesome temples and forts, and of course peacocks, cobras, tigers and elephants. we also know India to be a great and important to economic partner and we consider Indians to be hard working, educated, stoic, family oriented and frustratingly unable to get fat.

The only negative thing that any Iranian would say about India is that its big cities are dirty, everyone talks about people relieving themselves in the street, in full giew of everybody else; now I have been to India so I don't know how true these stories are but that seems to be the most striking feature of Indian cities in Iranian minds.

All that you said is true India has friendly relations with the entire international fraternity, its open to tourism and international trade. Thats the reason it has to face terrosist insurgency everyday , be it the Tamil Tigers ,

CHAPTER 05

DELHI TRIP

Dr Rita Richards had a meeting in Delhi ,so she decided to take me along for some sightseeing. From Allahabad we headed to Delhi by overnight train. I was surprised to find that despite the fact that it took almost 18 hours to get to Delhi . I actually quite enjoyed the train ride. We were in the third AC class, and each had a sleeper bunk. The beds were three high, with the middle one folding down to become a seat during the day. I slept surprisingly well though the night. The train was about an hour and a half late, which was not bad as they are pretty frequently delayed a lot longer than that. We spent the early afternoon touring around Delhi, stopped by the house of Rita's college friend of from high school in Connaught Place, and then took the metro to Old Delhi.

We walked along Chandni Chowk, an old market street that they found rather crowded with a lot of people hassling us as foreigners, stopped by by a Jain temple, that housed a bird hospital. It was rather odd walking around the bird hospital without shoes on (you took them off entering the complex) but there were some pretty interesting birds, along with some quite sick birds, that were being housed there.

I saw Jama Masjid which is apparently the largest mosque in India. As it was Friday they were actually there during the call to prayer Namaz , and it really reminded me of Tehran seeing hundreds of men bow down to pray. The crowd exiting the mosque after prayers

The Mosque was huge, but unfortunately didn't get to go up the towers since I were carrying cameras and didn't want to bother getting tickets to take them in. We did get more stares than usual, and people trying to sneak pictures of us which was rather annoying.

From there we drove around the Raj-Path, Parliament, Presidents residence and the giant India Gate. they were staying with an iranian family who are friends of Rita's family's from allahabad . I must say it was incredibly nice to in some ways step back into an iranian lifestyle for a couple of days. We had a delicious spaghetti dinner complete with Garlic Bread.

I went to the Gandhi Museum, had lunch in Kahn Market and saw the National Museum, saw the ashokan peace symbol at the Gandhi museum

I really need to read more about Mr Ghandi, I know very little about him but he really was an incredible man. The museum is in the house that he spent his last 140 odd days before he was assasinated in the back garden. Although there was really too much to read it was a pretty cool museum. There was kind of an odd interactive section on the top floor- but there were guides that led you though and ended up doing most of the inter-active stuff for you which was rather odd. Dr Rita and I had lunch in the upscale Kahn Market, really great Pizza and pasta. I ended the day at the National Museum of modern art which had some cool exhibits along with a few odd Indian touches. There were several main exhibits that you had to

walk through empty rooms to get to, and then several exhibits you walked through in succession, and then had to walk back through them all to get out. The third floor also didn't really have lights turned on in the hallway, but there were some cool exhibits. They had a bunch of old coins and did a good job of explaining the different methods of coin making. There was a massive collection of miniature paintings, some stunningly beautiful crafts and decorations, an exhibit on the history of the maritime force/navy and a cool exhibit on textiles. I was surprised to see a Egyptian statue of a pharaoh from 2,000 bc chilling in the hallway, and some random French and Thai stuff. Beautiful chariot outside the National Museum in Delhi
The local guide informed me that Delhi had once been the a part of the ancient Mughal kingdom , the Red fort was the imperial residence . He told me the Red Fort in Agra is more impressive and I should go to see the Qutubh Minar which we did,situated in the Mehrauli area and saw ancient wonder.

I feel like I am starting to get to know Delhi a little bit- and am still incredibly impressed with the efficiency and wide reach of the Metro. It's a really great way to get around the City. I don't know if I'd want to spend a whole lot of time there, but it wasn't a bad place to visit, and there are still a couple of things I'd like to see there. I also liked old Delhi even though it was extremely a crowded ,noisy and the most polluted city

Well, that's it for travel week- although it was a great trip it's also nice to be back home in Allahabad. This week I have a couple of papers and presentations to finish up, It will be busy but interesting. Time has really been flying-

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