highway. Salim often took long-haul

fares to supplement his city taxi income. One early morning, just past the Ajmer bypass, he'd pulled

into a roadside dhaba near a cluster

of makeshift tents, a notorious, tem-

porary settlement of the village of

prostitutes, Baner Sindri. He had

राष्ट्रदुत

### **#VELOSO SALGADO**

# Vasco da Gama Before the Samorim of Calicut

Salgado's composition is rich. Vasco da Gama is depicted at the center of the scene, clad in the finery of a European emissary





oil painting from 1898, the Portuguese artist Salgado vividly reimagines one of encounters in the history of global exploration: the moment when the famed navigator Vasco da Gama meets the Zamorin (Samorim) of Calicut on the Malabar Coast of India. This pivotal scene encapsulates the beginning of a profound shift in world history, the dawn of European imperial presence in Asia.

Salgado's composition is rich with symbolism and theatrical tension. Vasco da Gama is depicted at the center of the scene, clad in the finery of a European emissary, exuding a sense of resolve and authority. His posture is upright and assertive, a figure embodying ambition and national pride. He is flanked by attendants bearing gifts banners, and richly adorned textiles, markers not only of wealth but of a burgeoning empire's self-perception. The Portuguese flag is prominentv displayed, asserting both identity and intention

In contrast, the Zamorin of Calicut is rendered with serene composure. Draped in luxurious fabrics and seated in an elevated position, he projects calm detachment, his expression unreadable. Around him are Indian courtiers, similarly composed, suggesting a court that is not easily impressed. The atmosphere is charged, not with overt hostility, but with a subtle and palpable diplomat sizing each other up through ritual, symbolism, and cere-

While the painting may suggest a moment of respectful exchange, history tells a more ambivalent story. When Vasco da Gama pre-



sented the Portuguese gifts, modest by local standards, they were reportedly met with disappointment. The Zamorin and his court, long accustomed to dealings with wealthy Arab, Chinese, and Indian merchants, saw little reason to be impressed by these newcomers. The negotiations during this first vovage in 1498 ultimately fal tered, and it would take future vovages, some marked by force, for the Portuguese to establish a more permanent foothold in India.

tures is more than a diplomat ic encounter; he depicts the symbolic birth of empire. The painting freezes a singular moment in time when two great cultures meet, not vet as conqueror and conquered, but as warv strangers attempting to interpret one another. It is a painting of beginnings, of ambition, misunderstanding and the complex legacy of cross-cultural encounters that would shape the centuries to

Yet, what Salgado cap

Through his masterful use of light, composition, and gesture, Veloso Salgado elevates this historical scene to some thing mythic: a visual meditation on the forces of exploration, colonization, and cultural collision that define the

Age of Discovery.





invisible vibration of fear.

Dr. Goutam Sen

Sitting on the high

curb across the busy

road. A doll-like figure

looking overdressed in

a thick pink cotton sari

with a dark broad bor-

der. Her head full of

thick jet black hair par-

tially covered. She

here she was.

looked uneasy. The thick cotton was

uncomfortable and too stiffly

starched. It was her mother's wed

ding gift, bright pink, smelling

faintly of turmeric and old lavender.

Mausi had made her wear it tonight;

calling it 'good for business,' as if

the rough weave could somehow

erase the grime of the street. It only

made her feel heavier, duller, more

small, dusty balcony of his rented

room, a cup of lukewarm chai cool-

ing in his hand. He picked up his

Olympus binoculars, ostensibly

bought for bird viewing but used

more often to satisfy his voveurism

He loved to peek into all the scenes

on the road and buildings across the

road visible from his roost in the

balcony. He imagined stories for his

muted invasion of privacy. He'd

seen a multiple scenarios like this

but never with this girl. She was

new. Her pink sari, though heavy

and too bright, was surprisingly

clean. Her face was a smooth

unblemished oval that seemed to

belong on a calendar rather than

this busy street corner. The close up

revealed a flawless fair skin of a

teenager with a tiny mole at the left

corner of her well shaped lips. She

still had the bloom of youth and her

features were indeed very attrac-

tive. The scourge of her profession

the stool at the tea stall a few feet

away. She was a fixture. Hard-eved

heavy-set and a sour expression.

utterly devoid of pity! Mausi was

the lock on the cage, the finality of

many a young girls fate. To her, they

were a commodity that came and

were later disposed off like an old

Today, though, something was

different. The pink sari girl, Mr.

Sharma decided to call her Gulab

(Rose), was trembling. Not the sub-

tle shiver of cold, but a deep, almost

The older woman, Mausi, sat on

was vet to affect her looks

visible and most painfully bereft.

Who was she waiting for? Mr. Sharma, watched from the She sat on the curb, the cold

stone biting through the thin soles

of her slippers. Her head was

bowed, the sari pulled partially over

her face, not for modesty, but to cre-

ate a tiny, dark world where she did-

n't have to see the faces of the lustful

men. They were all the same to her:

a blur of stale perfume, indifferent

eyes and brief, transactional

The man was young, barely an

adult, wearing a cheap nylon jacket.

He spoke to Gulab with a kind of

casual arrogance. She shook her

head. He insisted, leaning closer.

Gulab's 'no' was silent, just a slight.

decisive movement of her chin. The

young man spat on the ground and

bus stand bench. Her movements

were deliberate and her intent was to

administer a rebuke, which was like a

swift, sharp stab of a knife. She

walked straight to Gulab and didn't

loud, physical confirmation of

Gulab's powerlessness. You don't

refuse. The words that followed

weren't a warning; they were a

mantra of her captivity and dis-

the city noise, still made Mr.

Sharma wince. He could imagine

hissed her voice a low growl that

carried no further than Gulab's ear.

"You don't have a choice here, beti.

rub her cheek. She simply nodded, a

mechanical, heart-broken move

ment. Her fate had been sealed a

long time ago in Baner Sindri, the

village of the prostitutes on the

Ajmer Highway. She nodded, not out

of obedience, but because any fight

she had left was reserved for sur-

vival, not for open rebellion. Her

false marriage to a pimp was a long

passed through many dirty groping

hands quickly before Mausi

in a hurry, cheap and usually uncar-

ing and crude. They stopped, their

engines rattling the air, their voices

Motorcyclists who stopped were

acquired her.

past dreadful memory. She had

Gulab didn't cry. She didn't even

This is your life and work now."

Mausi's stern words!

The sound, although muffled by

'You don't refuse." Maus

in the air, thick and decisive.

Mausi rose from her seat in the

revved his engine, speeding off.

A scooter sputtered to a halt.

moment of malice.

across the window and sat down at his desk. He took out his ledger, the one he used for his accounts and his fountain pen. Under the 'Expenditure' column, he wrote a date. Then, he paused: What was the cost of a clean conscience? What was the price of simply watching? He closed the ledger without making any entry. He knew, as the city hummed its indifferent song, that his inaction was not a single, definable cost, but an accumulated debt that would haunt the quiet solitude of his old age.

Mr. Sharma went inside,



# **#THE PRICE**



How much? How long?

She could feel the negotiations with Mausi happening over her head like flies buzzing around a wound. Her job was to sit still, to be the silent, passive merchandise. When the young man on the scooter spat, a tiny victory had bloomed inside her. A moment of

speak a word. Her approach was silent, yet the ground seemed to tremble ominously beneath her heavy sliprefusal! A line held. If she was to be pers. Gulab didn't look up, but she knew. She knew the anger that hung a commodity, she was at least better priced. A tiny victory, a pyrrhic Mausi lifted the end of the heavy moment! That winning moment of sari cloth and delivered a brutal. stinging slap across Gulab's cheek An old, battered Ambassador The slap wasn't just pain; it was a

car, the kind driven by unlicensed taxi-wallahs, juddered to a stop. The driver, a middle-aged man with a graying mustache, had a resigned air. He gestured towards the backseat. When the car stopped, Gulab's heart didn't race; it simply froze. This time, there was no choice. Mausi's fingers were like iron band around her arm, guiding her, pushing her forward.

As she stood up to duck into the grimy backseat, her eyes lifted, drawn by some involuntary pull of light. She saw the man on the balcony, the quiet one with the tea cup. For a single, agonizing second, their eyes met. It wasn't an accusatory look or even a plea for help. It was the look of someone confirming that the world was watching. Also, that the world knew her situation and that the world had decided not to care. It was a look of cold, final resignation.

And at that moment, she didn't see a saviour. She didn't see pity. She saw a witness. A comfortable man. wrapped in his own silence, watching a play he would never star in. His inaction wasn't a crime to her. It was the natural order of the world. He was the world: distant, judgmental and utterly unmoving. Mr. Sharma felt the heat of the chai cup returning to his skin, a small, selfish comfort.

He thought of Gulab. He thought of the slap. He thought of the silent, judging finality of her gaze.

Mr. Sharma went inside, drew

the tattered curtain across the windevoid of pity, that was how Mr. dow and sat down at his desk. He Sharma saw her. But Mausi knew that pity was a luxury she had shed took out his ledger, the one he used for his accounts and his fountain decades ago, a useless currency on pen. Under the 'Expenditure' colthese streets. Pity was what got you killed, or worse, left you dependent umn, he wrote a date Then, he paused: What was the on someone else's fragile kindness. Her history wasn't a secret to the

cost of a clean conscience? What was the price of simply He closed the ledger without

making any entry. He knew, as the city hummed its indifferent song, that his inaction was not a single, definable cost, but an accumulated debt that would haunt the quiet solitude of his old age. He knew the girl in the pink sari would be back in another brightly coloured sari tomorrow. And he knew that he would be there, watching, again, The guilt was the only fee he would ever trulv pav.

Mausi collected the payment, a crumpled 500 rupee note, with the practiced efficiency of a cashier. Gulab stepped into the car, the pink sari snagging slightly on the door frame. Click. The lock engaged. The finality of the sound swallowed the last flicker of hope. As the car pulled away, she folded her hands tightly in her lap, focusing on the simple, private fact that even in this borrowed, temporary space; she was still, technically, alone. The only escape left was the small cold corner inside her mind, where nobody

could follow. Mausi sat back down on her lov stool, the crumpled five hundred rupee note from Salim, the taxi driver. now folded neatly into a worn leather pouch tucked into her waistband. She watched the Ambassador drive away, her face a mask of stone. She had slapped the pink sari girl,

Gulab not out of passion but out of

necessity. They all had to learn to

other girls. It was just a lesson whis-

pered in the darker corners of the

brothel. Mausi's own life began not

on a curb, but in a small, suffocating

room on the outskirts of a small

town. She had been one of them,

years ago, a girl brought in, sold and

given a new, cheap name. But unlike

Gulab, Mausi hadn't been bought

directly from the 'village of prosti-

tutes.' She had been abandoned

dust the blinding sun and the man

who claimed to be her uncle. He had

of finding work for her in a spice

factory. He sold her for a handful of

silver coins and a bottle of liquor

Mausi, whose real name no one

remembered, had spent the next ten

vears navigating the brutal, shifting

She learned quickly that the

most dangerous thing you could be

was being passive. She learned to

spot a corrupt officer from a mile

away She learned which customers

were merely cruel and which were

the value of money and the power of

control. When her body began to fail

her, when the years of hard use

made her unprofitable to the men

wasn't discarded. She had been too

smart for that. Instead, she used her

who owned the settlements, she

Most importantly, she learned

truly dangerous

hierarchies of that roadside settle

driven her there under the pretense

She remembered the endless

Hard-eyed, heavy-set and utterly

abide by the rules.

the city. Her job: to be the middlewoman. She was to manage the girls, enforce the rules and ensure that the fee was collected instantly upon agreement. Mausi wasn't a victim turned survivor; she was a survivor who had turned into a gatekeeper. Her origin on that highway meant she knew the misery the girls faced and that knowledge was her greatest weapon. It allowed her to inflict pain precisely where it hurt the most, the loss of hope, because she knew that pain was the only thing that kept the girls compliant and earning. Her slap on Gulab's face earlier

accumulated knowledge and

She struck a deal with the origi-

nal handler who controlled the flow

of girls from the Aimer route into

small, hoarded sum of cash.

was a cold, calculated act of business maintenance. A refusal meant lost revenue and the potential for chaos. Mausi would not let Gulab's individual spirit jeopardise her hard-won security.

She stood up against all odds, her heavy body not tired, but alert. The city lights cast long, distorted shadows on the street. Mausi had made her own exit from that dusty highway. She had clawed her way up from being bought to being the one who sold. And she would protect her position fiercely even if it meant drowning a girl wrapped in a clean, pink sari in her first taste of the city's lascivious darkness. The Ambassador smelled of old

vinyl, diesel fumes and the faintest whiff of cheap incense Salim kept taped under the dashboard. It was a smell that had become synonymous with his evenings. He was not a man of great morals, but he was a man of routines. One of the most miserable routines was the pickups from Mausi. As Gulab bent to slide into the backseat, a flash of recognition. a sharp, cold jab, struck him. He'd seen that face before. Not her, but her kind, the particular, wide-eyed look of a freshly plucked flower that hadn't vet learned to wilt. She was young, too young. She moved like a sleepwalker being guided by a powerful hand, propelled by Mausi's

greedy intentions. He pulled up the old car, the suspension sighing under its weight. He didn't look at the girl from the curb, not directly. He didn't want to see the pink sari or the terror that often hid behind the cloth. If he saw them as people, the years of driving them would crush him. He pre ferred them as parcels: short trips,

cash payments, no questions. He put the car into gear, his mind instantly dragging him back six months, to a dustier, darker

stopped for tea, waiting for the dawn mist to burn off. That day, he saw a jeep and a battered truck pull up. And a crowd of girls were being moved. It wasn't a raid; it was a transaction. He watched a woman, a thinner, slick-

er version of Mausi's, shouting orders in a sharp dialect from the eastern side of Rajasthan. They were loading the newest arrivals onto the truck, girls bought from destitution, from debt, by sheer, brutal coercion. He remembered seeing a girl

struggling against the man's grip. She was wrapped in a simple, faded blue cloth, but her face, it had the exact same geometry of fear as the one in his rear-view mirror now. The same unbearable innocence. He'd tried to ignore it, to focus

on his tea. But then, he saw Mausi. She had been there, standing near the ieep, directing the loading, her purse heavy, her eyes calculating the worth of the trembling young stock. Salim had recognized her instantly, the pimp-turned-madam whose routes occasionally crossed

He realised now: the girl in the pink sari was one of that batch. She nad been bought from that dusty roadside village; brought into the city's dark interior like a sack of grain. Her life measured only by the comeliness of her body and the price she could fetch. She would even go through a mock marriage with the person who deflowered her

The revelation settled like a heavy stone in his gut. He realised that he was not just a driver; he was part of this hideous pipeline.

He was now driving to the man who would take her for the night. He had been instructed to make the deal and pick him up at the traffic light down the road.

He glanced at the rearview mirror. Gulab was sitting stiffly, her hands clutched so tightly that her knuckles were white. The new customer in the backseat, a non descript government clerk by the look of his briefcase, was already leaning in close, murmuring some thing she couldn't escape.

Salim pressed the accelerator, focusing on the road ahead. Be fast. Be quick. He had a wife and three children waiting for him. He needed this money. He absolved himself from any guilt by the opaque logic that if he refused, another driver would simply take his place and the girl's fate wouldn't change. He pulled up to the dingy hotel gate. The customer fumbled for the car door handle. The clerk's fifty rupees tip for bringing a customer felt heavier than lead in Salim's hand.

As Gulab stepped out, her pink sari catching the weak yellow light of the foyer, she looked back at the car. She wasn't looking at the man or wasn't the look of resignation Mr. Sharma had seen; it was the look of total erasure of a soul going deliberately blank to survive.

Salim nodded once, a tiny almost imperceptible gesture of acknowledgement, of shared knowledge of the abject helpless apology It was the only act of rebellion he could afford

He watched them enter the dark lobby. He waited mandatory three minutes for the customer to return. just in case they needed to go to another seedy hotel. He never did. Salim didn't wait longer than protocol required. He drove away, the smell of vinvl and incense his only comfort. The guilt of the Aimer highway and daily routine of nicking up girls to be pawed by 'customers' now riding silently with him in the empty backseat.

All four of them, Gulab, Mausi Salim and Mr. Sharma, knew very well that tomorrow would be no different. The wheels of destiny would grind on ruthlessly and relentlessly!

rajeshsharma 1049@gmail.com

# **#DID YOU KNOW**

# Wild Facts

# 10 Wild Animal Facts That Will Blow Your Mind





Ever seen a raccoon dipping its food in water before eating? While it looks like they're washing it, they're actually using water to stimulate the nerve endings in their paws, enhancing their sense of touch. It's more about feeling the food than cleaning it!

3. How Animals Drink

Herbivores, like deer and horses,

drink water by suction through

their mouths, much like humans.

Carnivores, such as cats and

dogs, typically lap water using

their tongues, a much messier

but equally effective, method.

**Differs by Diet** 



4. Hippos Are Natural

Despite their bulk, hippos are

surprisingly agile in water.

They don't exactly float or swim

like fish; instead, they bounce

off the bottom of rivers and

lakes, gliding gracefully with

# 2. Dragonflies: Living

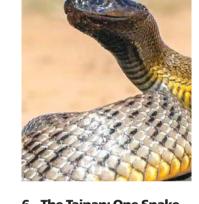
Dragonflies have been around for a staggering 300 million years, far longer than dinosaurs! They've evolved very little in that time, making them one of nature's most efficient and enduring predators

Fossils



### 5. A Group of Flamingos Is Called a "Flamboyance"

Could it be any more fabulous? A group of flamingoes is officially known as a flamboyance and with their striking pink feathers and synchronized movements, the name fits per-



### 6. The Taipan: One Snake, 100 Lives

The inland taipan, also known as the 'fierce snake,' has venom so potent it could kill up to 100 people with a single bite. Thankfully, it's extremely shy with humans.



Instead, their eyes are covered by a clear protective scale called a spectacle. That's why snakes never blink, their stare is per



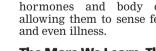
The Australian horned devil lizard can absorb water directly through its skin. Specialized grooves on their bodies channel water from any part of their body straight to their mouth, a brilliant survival trick in the desert.

8. Horned Devil Lizards Drink Through Their Skin



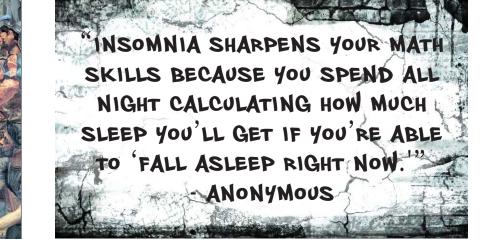
## 9. Peregrine Falcons See Like Superheroes

The peregrine falcon is not just the fastest animal on Earth, it also has incredible eyesight, capable of spotting small prey from over 2 miles away. That's equivalent to reading a newspaper headline from across a city.



sensing pets, the natural world is full of incredible adaptations and behaviours. These facts are just a tiny peek into the genius of evolu tion and the endless curiosity that

# THE WALL



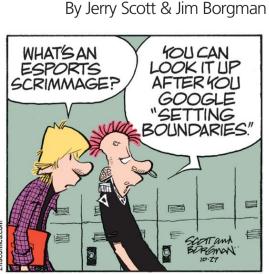
## **BABY BLUES**



### By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott ZITS







# and rarely comes into contact

### 10.Dogs Can Smell Your **Emotions**

Dogs don't just smell other animals they can smell how you feel. Thanks to their powerful olfactory systems, dogs can detect changes in human hormones and body chemistry, allowing them to sense fear, stress

### The More We Learn, The Wilder It Gets

From ancient insects to emotion animals inspire in us.