



PHOTO: NAVID ANJUM

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mornings would leave me reeling further into my mind. Once gazing inward, I would think back on Iyer's lines: "We travel, then, in part just to shake up our complacencies by seeing all the moral and political urgencies, the life-and-death dilemmas, that we seldom have to face at home."

The haor managed to shake me from my complacency. There were many wonderful moments in between my raving descent to madness. I remember the walks on uneven mounds, watching fishermen in pink shirts float by, silently gliding through the water. I ate elaborate lunches with the conservationists. They talked of their days on the field, the perceived romanticism of a life in the wild against the very real loneliness of being away from home and family. Sometimes, when the conservationists had a good day, they would talk excitedly, animatedly of new conservation plans but on the bad ones,

the conversations would often turn to the depressive realities of an anthropocentric world, where every action is decided based on economic value. My time, spent in the confines of one landscape and watching it change so violently every day, only to keep reverting back to its old forms, comforted me. I spent many an evening in the haor, watching the sun set, and made friends with a girl named Hadisa. She was the most boisterous of the lot and would follow me around, singing out of tune songs and eating sugary treats. Some days, I would climb upon the watchtower, and look out on the entire landscape. Small villages stood on one side of the river. Men played carom board at the small shops by the village. A small locality was growing up around the watchtower. The people who have been visiting this area for many years told me how the shops came here only recently. But now the shops were growing, so were its customers. The electricity lines would come soon too. And

watching on from the tower, I thought of the inevitability of change. I watched the sun set, turning the entire landscape a crimson gold. It was during these times, watching nature's golden sunsets, that I relearned (little by little) to appreciate the beauty of stillness, and of endings.

When I started this trip, I went with a foggy mind and returned with one even foggier. Maybe, that's what great journeys do to you. They take you on an inward journey too, sometimes into thickets in the jungle, where everything is a little hazy, a little unclear.

*"Journeys show us the sights and values and issues that we might ordinarily ignore; but it also, and more deeply, shows us all the parts of ourselves that might otherwise grow rusty. And this strange descent into madness while being out in the wilderness has taken me into moods and states of mind and hidden inward passages that we'd otherwise seldom have cause to visit."*



## Above the clouds in Meghalaya, India

Iqra L Qamari

"I rolled down the rain-splattered window of the red Maruti Suzuki and sniffed the crispy air. We were snaking our way towards Nohkalikai—a supposedly haunted waterfall—with a series of mountains on both sides. I felt a tinge of euphoria as I breathed in the moment as much as I could. The overwhelming lushness, my father chattering away enthusiastically to our guide in Hindi and the classic Bollywood song playing on the radio made me recall a line I had read somewhere—it's more about the journey than the destination."

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