

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a white jacket with colorful patches and black shorts, stands next to a red telephone booth. The booth has a sign that says 'TELEPHONE' at the top. The background shows a brick building with a window.

TELEPHONE

*Till we
met
again, my
beloved
Ramen.*

A personal memoir by Abodid Sahoo about his trip to UK in 2026 for the Annual Conference by the British Sociological Association and a week-long programme in the Cultural Heritage Data School in the University of Cambridge.

www.abodid.com

Cover photo by Yashaswinee Sahoo

It all started when, on one winter evening around October 2025, Yashaswinee, my wife, shared a link with me about a conference in the UK. It was the British Sociological Association's Annual Conference. For a moment I thought, "Sociology! What even do I ??", and laughed out loud. She looked at me and said, "Your RCA project sounds quite like Sociology. Ain't it?" I thought for a moment and nodded. Every day, I would think about submitting an abstract, but my imposter syndrome won't allow me. The procrastinator in me would go to sleep, thinking about writing it the next day, for almost two months. Yashaswinee would remind me about the abstract submission every few days, but I kept putting it off.

Literally on the last day of the deadline, I wrote the abstract and submitted it. I didn't have any expectations of being selected, but I thought it would be nice to have Yashaswinee along on the trip if the abstract is selected. I added her as the "Co-Author". The abstract was based on a project that was close to my heart and very personal. I had submitted the abstract for a Roundtable. I thought it would allow me to meet more people in the group discussion setting. Only later did I realise that the talk sessions were more relevant, and the poster presentations the best space for networking.

I thought for a moment about what she would speak about in the Roundtable if selected. We had the option to submit another one, so I thought, "Why not!?" I wrote an abstract about another body of work I had done at RCA. It was based on AI Ethics and Photography. I was sure this was something I could share with her at depth, and she could talk about it. In fact, I felt she could be a part of the research work by sharing her insights and helping me present it to the public.

I wrote another abstract in a few hours, quite literally. Bam! One more submission. This second one was for a poster presentation.

A few weeks later, we got an email.

"We are pleased to inform you that your paper, as detailed below, has been ACCEPTED for the conference programme."

Both abstracts were selected for the conference!!!

For a moment, I literally had to pinch myself! I knew these were not a submit-and-get-invited thing! In fact, there were over 2000 submissions, of which about 700 were selected. So, yeah, thank god, mine wasn't one of the 1300 submissions they decided to chuck out.

It was just a three-day conference. I didn't have institutional support for this. Yashaswinee considered asking her institution, the Regional Institute of Education, for funds, but she had little hope of receiving any. I would wonder if spending this huge chunk of money would be worth it for just a 3-day conference in the UK. But we decided to go for it anyway and figure out the funds somehow.

I used ChatGPT to conduct a deep search (Web + Extended Thinking) for opportunities relevant to my field of work within the same time frame in April 2026. A couple of results showed up which sounded quite interesting, but sadly, the deadline for most of them had passed. One of them, which still has a deadline to apply, was the "Cultural Heritage Data School" by the University of Cambridge! I opened the application to fill out, assuming it would be easy and quick. But, much to my surprise, it had many questions, and they were very specific to experience in data, culture and heritage!!! For a moment, I thought of skipping it. But something within me was pulled to "Cambridge"! I still don't like to accept it, but perhaps it was just my colonial hangover in action. It has always been my dream to be in the best of places on the planet with the best of people.

Google, MIT, RCA, Cambridge, UN! You name it, and I have it in my wishlist! As if the association would heal a part of me that was badly hurt during my engineering days, when my professors made my life hell with loads of backlogs. I started filling out the form for the Cultural Heritage Data School 2026 Cohort. It was literally starting off the week next to the BSA Conference. What a perfect fit, I thought!!

It took me quite some time to fill out the questionnaire. As I read more about the school, I learned that Prof. Eleanor Dare was the convener of the data school. I thought this would be the perfect place for me to meet her. In fact, I had reached out to her during my NID days after receiving an offer from RCA. I was excited to meet her in London, but I never got the chance. It had slipped my mind, to be honest. With London offering you a thousand things to do, you sometimes forget to keep track of all the plans you make.

In the application, I clearly stated that I would need the full bursary. A few days after I submitted my application, I received the offer from Cambridge! I was selected for the data school, but I was put on the bursary waiting list! I was super keen to go for it, but the fees were £750, if I remember correctly, and I literally had zero balance in my bank account.

My wife sometimes tells me how I plan (wish for) things way beyond my capacity. Haha! And I tell her, sometimes you gotta jump off the plane and build the parachute on the way. Leap and the net will appear, as they say.

In the meantime, I had applied for the “Funded Places” for the BSA. Yashaswinee had also applied for the same. A few days later, I received an email from BSA offering me a “Funded Place”. Sadly, they didn’t offer it to Yashaswinee. The funded place covered the conference fees and included free lunches every day. I was so happy! Not just for the money, but for the way it adds to my CV. “Funded Place! Wow!”

At this point, I could see myself going for both BSA and Cambridge. For Yashaswinee, I was still sceptical given the costs since I didn’t have any savings and I didn’t want to use up her savings. Also, given that she had a day job as an assistant professor, I wondered how long she could take off.

Remember the quote in *The Alchemist*, “When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” Miracles happen when you least expect them. One fine day, I got an email from Cambridge University that they are happy to offer me the full bursary!! OMFG! Was this real?

It was high time I arranged the remaining funds for the trip to Cambridge. I didn't know where to start, who to ask, or how much to ask. I was also wondering why anyone would sponsor me. I didn't want to ask my close friends and family, since that would feel more like an obligation. I wanted this to be more like an institutional collaboration. So I started to reach out to people running foundations to let them know about my needs.

During Jagannath Panda's exhibition at the Lalit Kala Academy, I tried to reach out to people who might be able to support me. That's when Mr Sujit Mahapatra, the man behind Bakul Foundation, introduced me to Ms Sunita Mohapatra from the Ila Panda Foundation for Arts (IPCA). I had a brief conversation with Sunita Mam during the exhibition, during which we discussed my art practice and my RCA days. She shared her number and asked me to reach out with my portfolio and details about the program I wanted to attend.

A few days passed, and I didn't really reach out to Sunita. Maybe it was my imposter syndrome holding me back, or just the feeling that I'm not ready yet and might need more preparation before pitching. I thought of making a video and sharing it publicly to announce my selection into the program and request support for travel and accommodation.

I jotted down my script on some loose sheets, set up the Nikon ZR and OBS to record myself, and bam! An hour later, I had a 20-minute video ready to be published to the public. There was a clear call for support and collaboration. I also made a web page with all the details.

What happened next was so special that it felt as if the stars had aligned just for me. I got a call within hours of posting the video from an NIT Rourkela alum. She straight-up told me that she saw my video and she wants to support me. She added that she absolutely loved the video and it felt so natural, raw and heartfelt. I was sceptical of the length of the video, since it was over 20 minutes. Thankfully, some people took the time to watch the entire 20 minutes! She offered me INR 50,000 straight up and asked me to send the bank details. For a moment, I was like, "Is this even

real? I posted a post on LinkedIn the next day. Within hours, I got a WhatsApp message from an alumna of the Royal College of Art (RCA). She stated that she would love to contribute in part if I were accepting partial funding. I was more than happy to receive it. I thanked her for her willingness to support me. A few days later, I saw INR 1,00,000 credited to my bank account. Yes, One Lac. Again I went, "Omg! Is this even real?" I was honestly not expecting this large an amount from an individual. Of course, to respect their privacy, I am not sharing their names here. It was a very moving moment for me.

Similarly, I got a call from a friend in the USA who offered another \$500 with no expectations when I asked him about it. He is one of my close friends from my engineering college days, with whom I had tinkered with enough film gear! Next, I got a message from a senior at RCA. She was willing to contribute in part. After that, I got a message from another NIT Alumni on LinkedIn who was willing to contribute partially. Within just 2 days, I raised more than 2 Lacs, which was enough to cover most major expenses. For the rest, I decided to find an institution or organisation willing to support me.

A few days later, much to my surprise, I got a call from Sunita Mam, who told me that she had spoken with the IPCA team and that they are willing to support me. It was a dream come true for me to have institutional support. Irrespective of the amount, the support from an institution meant a lot to me. I could have raised a good amount of money only from my friends, but I chose not to. In fact, I had to humbly deny some of my friends who had messaged me with their willingness to support me. It was less a fundraising initiative and more an institutional collaboration I was looking forward to.

Sunita mam proactively did all the paperwork at her end and asked me for my Bank details. I was with my family on a short trip to Varanasi at the time. Out of the blue, a message came. "Your A/C has been credited with Rs 1,00,000." Honestly, that was the best feeling ever. For a moment, again, I was like, "Is this even real???"

I come from a middle-class family in Odisha, where every financial decision is carefully considered. We have been marginalised enough for ages to be put under the “Other Backwards Caste”. All thanks to my father and his relentless pursuit to give us the best education and resources, for which I never felt like a ‘backward caste’. Though the ‘caste’ is not a direct indication of ‘wealth’, it somewhat gives a historic hint of the financial and social status in an Indian society. To recall an incident, during my NID days, I was not accepted (basically rejected) by a friend I had feelings for. Of course, different stories were being framed, ranging from ‘not having similar feelings’ to ‘I need to heal first’ and so on. But somewhere deep within, I would always question if it was about ‘caste’. Was it about the economic difference, cultural difference, or demographic difference? Or simply because she was from the ‘upper caste’. I tried hard to convince myself that it was not about caste, to think of her in a good light. But it gets hard to think of anything else. Anyway, that’s a story for another day.

Coming back to the UK thing.

After having enough funds for the trip, we went to Kolkata to apply for a visitor visa. We also booked the tickets within a few weeks. It cost us about 80k INR per person for a round-trip. I had some money to book accommodations as needed and a bunch of friends in London, where I could crash. Nidhi, a close friend of mine whom I met first during my RCA days, offered us her flat in Liverpool Street. Subha bhai, who lives in Kent, is like a brother to me. I still feel my room in his house is like mine, even after vacating the room last year. He is a man with a big heart and always ready to help people.

I started reaching out to people and shared the news with them. I casually asked Tanaya, an NID friend of mine who is into fashion and apparel design, if she could help me with a list of brands doing amazing work in the textile space rooted in Odia culture. In a few days, she came up with an amazing list!! It had a long list of brands. Amounee, Boito, Galang Gabban, Kunsquad, Rural Conversation and many more caught my attention.

She suggested that we get in touch with Arundhati Bandhakala, since she had a good friend at that company. I started cold emailing everyone with an offer to represent the brand on prestigious international academic platforms. In return, I promised them some amazing photographs of the outfits in those natural settings. Some of the brands responded enthusiastically. Some couldn't sync with us on timing and logistics.

My meetings with Arundhati went well, and we finally received some amazing pieces from them as part of a gifting collaboration. We received a beautiful Sonepur Bandha (ikat) saree woven in mulberry silk and a bundi jacket rendered in cotton. The saree features temple-like architectural forms that transition into floral imagery and lamp and ceremonial vessel ritual imagery. It also featured motifs of potted plants. The cotton Bundi jacket also matched the saree so well.

This was my first "collaboration" with a brand.

I had never thought I would dive into the fashion space this way ever!! I felt so happy when we received the products at the company's office and had a photograph with the CEO. At home, mummy would be like, why would someone give you such expensive stuff for free! Lol, it's difficult to explain that to her.

Next, we received a very positive response from Kivah, a brand being built by Khushi Kansara, an RCA alumnus, who had reached out to me after reading my LinkedIn post. I had a chat with Lipsa Hembram from Galang Gabban and Richa Banjara from Rural Conversations, too, since I wanted that traditional touch to the outfits. Utkalamrita had some amazing options too, but Amrita clarified that she would expect us to buy them at a reduced price, which I wasn't so keen on. Honestly, I didn't have the financial bandwidth to spend on these gorgeous, expensive outfits. A gifting collaboration was the only way out.

While I was cold-emailing brands about collaborations, Ankita from Arundhanti Bandhakala introduced us to Rajashree, a textile connoisseur

based in Odisha. She wanted to start a brand focused on traditional outfits with a modern, contemporary touch. This felt like the right spot to join hands. We decided to design some Kotpad outfits with a very modern and elegant touch. Ankita and Rajashree mam worked on it relentlessly to craft a beautiful coat for Yashaswinee. They matched it with a perfect Kotpad jacket. Though there was a last-minute rush for it since we weren't quite satisfied with the tailor's stitching, we decided to lock it and take it to London. Ankita literally sent it to us hours before our flight time.

Similarly, I received a very positive response from Kunsquad! Pallabi, one of the co-founders of Kunsquad, straight up asked me to come to their experience centre upon receiving my email. I felt like grabbing a bunch of them after seeing them in their experience centre! I loved them all so much, especially the Pattachitra edits, so I decided to request all my favourite ones. I knew I could pull off an amazing set of photos in the UK with those outfits. It was exactly the look I wanted!

A modern look rooted in Odia culture. What a match made in heaven!

In a few days, a large box containing all the outfits was delivered to our home in Bhubaneswar. You have to touch and feel them to understand the quality standards I am talking about. I literally wore the outfits by Kunsquad repeatedly in London as if they were my comfort food.

This was our first flight to London together. Yashaswinee made some artwork on some tissues. As we reached London, we straight up headed to Nidhi's place. She wasn't there, but had given her keys to the security. I felt so happy that she could trust her home to us. Or else it would have taken us a lot of effort and money to sort out accommodation in London.

The next day, I had a photoshoot planned with an amazing photographer, Ama! She is a friend of Victoria, who is a good friend of mine from my RCA days. I had reached out to her a year ago for a photoshoot after seeing her amazing portrait photography. We went to the Barbican Centre, one of my

favourite places in London, for the photoshoot. She took some amazing, surreal and dreamy portraits.

In the meantime, Yashaswinee used the Nikon ZR I had with me to make some amazing portraits as well. I didn't have much of a budget for this, so that I could offer Ama a token of £100 as a thank-you. I am glad Ama was accommodating as a friend, given the budget constraints I had.

After the shoot, we went inside and took some more photos of each other. It's such a different feeling being on the other side of the lens. I will always cherish these photos my wife captured. She was shooting for the first time with a professional camera, and that too in the heart of London. And believe me, she took some absolutely gorgeous photos.

The next day, we went to Primrose Hill and Camden Town, some of my favourite places. I had done a photoshoot with Suheda, a girl from Turkey who was based in London during my RCA days. My wife would pull my legs, mentioning the spots where I might have taken photos of Suheda. I love it when it becomes light banter, with smiles and grins.

We had a bowl of vegan Pho from a Vietnamese Restaurant in Camden Town. She absolutely loved Pho's simplicity. Then we headed to the Wellcome Collection in Euston. It's one of my favourite bookshops in London with a lovely cafe space as well. And the best part is it's all free!! There was an amazing exhibition on sign language and its origin. There was another amazing exhibition on birth and pregnancy, which was lovely. I came across a thing called "Scroll," which I had absolutely no idea about.

A scroll is basically a long length of parchment inscribed with Christian prayers and charms to protect a mother and child, and often wrapped around the mother during childbirth.

The next day, we headed to Kent to Subh bhai's home. It still feels like homecoming the moment I enter the house. I saw my big bookshelf filled with my favourite books. I did some organising of stuff and had dinner at

Vishnu bhai's home. It was one of the loveliest dinners. Sanghamitra Bhauja had prepared some lovely paneer and rice, and pao bhaji too! The love I get there in London sometimes makes me feel two ways about the idea of a home. Is home a place? Or is it the people who make you feel at home? I feel so grateful for the love I get in London from all these lovely people.

We headed back to London and packed for Manchester the next day. We took a FlixBus from Victoria in the morning, and it took about 5 hours to reach Manchester. The Airbnb was cosy, with a lovely bathroom. We did some shopping and got ready for the next day.

For day 1, the 8th of April, we wore a lovely outfit designed by Jeet Jageet, using Sambalpuri design elements. It had a formal touch with an ethnic charm. Yashaswinee had a long coat that matched my outfit. On reaching the venue, which was inside the University of Manchester, we put up our poster in the given space.

All day long, there were so many people walking around and standing near the poster to read it. I went to sit in on one session to get an idea of how "Charing" is done. At 11 am, I had to chair a session. I got there early, but we went out for a quick loo break, and by the time we arrived, the session had already started. I felt a bit nervous and annoyed with myself for being late. I took my seat and acted confident.

There were many important people from the Sociology space on the panel. Alan Warde was the first speaker, a prominent British sociologist. Two more professors from the University of Cambridge were also presenting their work. It was such a big moment for me to chair such a session with such eminent personalities as speakers.

The best part was when a lady told me, outside the room after the session, that I did a good job as a chair! It was such a big deal for me.

This was literally my first chairing experience in my entire life! Who would have thought, even in the wildest dreams, that I would chair a conference session in one of the world's largest sociology conferences in a foreign land!! Crazy!! Yashaswinee took some mind-blowing photos of me on stage, with the speakers in the foreground. I am sure these photos will be precious ones in years to come. I am so grateful to have someone with me who could capture some of the most special moments of my life. In fact, the outfits were so appealing that Annie, a core team member of the BSA conference, asked the official photographers to capture an amazing photo of us in front of the BSA standee. She casually announced that the best outfit award goes to this duo! It was fun and inspiring, and it made me feel that the effort we put into the outfit design and curation was worth it.

In the evening, we had the Posters session where we stood near our posters, excited and nervous. People slowly started pouring in, and in no time, there was a huge crowd in the room. People stopped by our poster and read it. Some people shared their personal experiences and thoughts on AI and cloud storage.

My work focused on how cloud storage and AI algorithms resurface our memories. My research objective was to devise methods that allow the user to intervene and shape the algorithm so that it resurfaces your memories in a more sensitive, trauma-informed way. By "memories," I mean the feature on phones that clusters photographs from your personal gallery using algorithms and displays them at random times, usually accompanied by a notification unless you manually turn it off.

I was so happy to see Yashaswinee confidently explaining the research to so many people. In fact, she had a long conversation with a man, explaining the poster, the research, and the work behind it. Only later did we learn that he was Dr Graham Crow, an eminent British sociologist. Okay, now the interesting, fun and best part! Most of the people there had completed their PhD or were pursuing one. And of course, there were retired and emeritus professors, too, but rarely any master's students. We were one of those rare ones who were there presenting our work without a

PhD. People would ask if this was our PhD research, and I was like, “Nope, it’s during my master’s in RCA”. The surprise and awe on their faces were something I will remember. They would appreciate us and say this research already sounds very relevant, urgent and promising.

The next day we went to a special drinks and networking event they had organised. What a gorgeous hall it was with Victorian interiors! I had some white wine and took some amazing photos. Some awards were given. One of the books, “Influencers Creep” by Sophie Bishop, won the BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize 2025.

Sophie Bishop

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sophie-helen-bishop>

Preorder Link:

<https://www.ucpress.edu/books/influencer-creep/paper>

I’m sure many people will read this article long after I publish it, and I would love to bring to light something about the state of affairs at the time the conference was held. Yes, I’m talking about the war situation in the Middle East. The conflict had escalated to the point where the air strips over certain countries were being closed. People who had booked flights with Kuwait Airlines through other Middle Eastern airlines were receiving last-minute notifications that their flights had been cancelled. I can imagine how hard it must be for someone to prepare for months for something this prestigious and later not attend it due to the war.

I feel lucky that our direct flight wasn’t affected. We had booked a direct flight with Indigo from Bhubaneswar to London via Mumbai. We had a smooth journey without any delays. I would recommend everyone to go for a direct flight, even if it costs a bit more, for such important events. Preferably via an airline with daily flights to London, such as Indigo, Air India, or British Airways.

After a whole day at the conference, we went to the Airbnb to freshen up. Though we had bought dal, bread and fruits to cut costs, we decided to

throw ourselves a small party for the beautiful response we got in the conference for our work. So I searched for the best ramen joints nearby, and we decided to go to Hakkapo for vegan ramen called the Vegan Dan Dan. I loved it, though Yashaswinee found it too spicy! I love spicy ramen, btw! It's on Jack Rosenthal Street, very close to the University of Manchester, in case anyone wants a lovely bowl of ramen when they visit.

On the second day, we went to the Manchester Museum. It was a lovely museum, and admission was free. We got to see some South Asian artworks at the museum. In fact, we saw a couple of everyday objects at the museum, such as containers, plates made of natural leaves, a rickshaw decorated with colourful elements, and family albums. It made me feel how museums function. Sometimes, the most mundane things you have in your South Asian home can become objects of spectacle and curiosity in the Western world.

In the second half, Yashaswinee chaired a session. It was her first time chairing an academic conference. I sat in the second row and took some photos of her. She was wearing a specially designed outfit by Rajashree Mam, who is building "House of Koudi" as I am writing this. We are pretty much the first official ambassadors of the House of Koudi. It was a lovely set of outfits and super elegant. As expected, it caught the organising team's attention, and they told us we matched our outfits today! "Yayyy!!" we cheered, smiling at them.

The third and final day arrived. And we decided to close the event with an amazing outfit by Arundhati Bandhakala. The saree Yashaswinee wore that day was absolutely gorgeous. In fact, amongst all collaborations, this is our first one. It was only because of Tanaya and Ankita that my email reached the company's founding director. They loved the idea of the outfits going to Manchester and Cambridge, and we quickly moved ahead with the collaboration.

The saree featured beautiful motifs of regional architecture, flora, and fauna. The colour was very subtle, and it was made of mulberry silk. It's

one of the finest handloom sarees I have come across, and I am so glad they offered this to us. I had a beautiful cotton jacket that matched the saree's colour. We felt so proud to represent Odisha's cultural roots on such a prestigious international academic platform. Yashasiwnee looked so gorgeous and elegant in the saree.

We started with the Roundtable, where we presented our work. The project was very personal to me. I started by sharing its roots. The work revolved around the aftereffects of rejection and how it triggers other past unresolved grief. Drawing parallels between the grief of the death of my brother and the grief of being rejected by my first love, I wanted to share how that rejection caused a lot of psychological harm, including triggering other pain points in my life and a feeling of abandonment.

The work also focused on how we process grief, sometimes through tangible artefacts of the memories we shared with the person. I wanted to get more ideas around how people process grief and pain more healthily. It was an autoethnographic research project, but since my wife has been part of the conversation for the last two years, her thoughts, contributions, and reactions have become an integral part of my research insights. Towards the end, she spoke about the work. It was an emotional moment for me. It was equally inspiring, funny, and tragic to present a body of work on heartbreak and pain with my wife as co-researcher at an international conference.

While we were presenting, the official photographer captured an amazing photo of both of us. I hope to receive the photo soon so that I can share it with Arundhati's amazing team! I am sure they would love it. Later, I took some photos of Yashaswinee as she shared the Roundtable and spoke with other participants. We went near the poster and shared our work with some more people and tools, and added more photos.

During lunch, we went back to the museum and took a few more photographs. Since we had a brand collaboration, we had an obligation to take some lovely photos in those spaces. So, apart from the academic side

of things, a part of my brain would keep a note of the photographs we had managed to capture. It was a new experience for us.

As the conference got over, we decided to head to the outdoor areas and take a few more photos. This time, it felt like we were literally in a photoshoot spree. Yashaswinee had already developed a muscle for taking some amazing photos with the right technical settings. I felt so happy seeing that as if my dream partner was right there with me. She captures most of the photos you are seeing while reading this.

As the conference was coming towards an end, the publishers who had come to showcase some amazing books started giving them away. Yashaswinee is quite alert about all these! She took me to the stall by SAGE at the exact right moment, just before they announced that all the books were free to take. Before the big crowd could rush into the stall, we had a comfortable 30 seconds to grab a few good ones, put them in our bags, and thank SAGE. It was the same with a few other reputed publishers, and we picked a few more books as we moved around in the space. Book lovers, don't miss this ever!

At every conference, there is usually a book giveaway towards the end. In fact, some of those publishers allow you to reserve the book from the start and take it when the conference ends. Take this as a pro tip from us: keep an eye on the books displayed at conferences. They will likely give it away for free by the time the conference ends.

We walked down to our Airbnb with two bags full of books and an ocean of memories from the conference. Nothing beats the feeling of walking down the lane with your partner after presenting your work in one of the world's most coveted conferences. In fact, there's something better than that: "Chairing" the sessions! It takes a whole lot of guts as a middle-class Indian man and a courageous decolonial mindset to stand on stage in front of a set of international speakers and handle those sessions in a white man's land. Pro tip time! If you're ever attending a conference, be sure to ask the

organising team to chair at least one session. They usually have a few openings, and it will give you a lot of confidence in the process.

The next day, we had a lovely breakfast with “Chatua”, which we had carried all the way from Odisha. It’s one of the healthiest breakfasts you can ever have as an Odia. Super nutritious and easy to consume. Just add water or milk, and you are done for the day. We took about 3 kilos of Chauta with us from the company named “Kamyra” by Mahakali. It’s the OG brand since 1965, famous for Chauta!

We packed our things, locked the Airbnb and headed out. Throughout the process, we never met the Airbnb owner. We used a key from a locker, returned it the same way, and left. I am excited to see how hotel stays will look in the decades to come. If you are reading this in 2050 or later, do drop me a message about your experiences of booking a room while you visit a new place. I am sure I will be famous enough by then for you to Google my name and find my email address or my foundation’s contact details. I will share another experience (a bad one) of my stay in Cambridge soon in this article or a new article.

Anyway, we waited for the bus. Sadly, we were confused about the bus stop even after detailed instructions, since the bus stop mentioned in the email was closed. So we had to rely on our intuition of where to wait for the bus. We saw a bunch of people waiting for the same Flix bus to London and finally relaxed. We travelled on the Flix bus, with a front seat reserved for us and a wide panoramic view. Do book it whenever you can. It’s worth the extra money you pay!!!

On reaching London, we headed to Nidhi’s home again. Her home is beautiful, btw. It’s one of the most spacious homes I have ever been to in London. Also, very centrally located and well connected to all important stations. We decided not to take our luggage to Kent and leave it at her place. We just took the essentials and headed to Kent. We took a quick train from Liverpool Street to Abbey Wood on the Elizabeth Line, and then

a bus to Bexleyheath. We went to Chillika, the Indian restaurant run by my family friends, Subhakanta Das and Partha Sarathi Panda.

If you ever visit Chillika, please feel free to give my name as a reference for a special discount and some complimentary desserts. It's in the heart of Bexleyheath.

The address is 195 Broadway, Bexleyheath, London DA6 7ER.

During my London days, I would come to the restaurant whenever I ran late at night. We would have a lovely dinner together, and Subh bhai would drive me home with some KK songs in the background. It's one of my fondest memories in London. The food there is great, btw! So definitely add it to your checklist if you are an Indian visiting London.

That night, they were preparing an Indian buffet for us, without onion or garlic, for my birthday the next day. What a coincidence that there was a large catering of about 150 people at the same time as my birthday celebration, so it all aligned so perfectly. Around 2 a.m., we went home and fell asleep. It takes about 20 minutes from the restaurant to Subh bhai's place, which always felt like my 'home'. And I mean it when I say, 'home'.

The next day, we woke up and prepared for birthday celebrations. I called a few people to let them know I was running a bit late. I had thought of giving them the books. I realised I loved those books so much that I couldn't just give them away as gifts. Only book lovers would understand the feeling. I thought about buying some gift cards or a small gift for everyone, but I didn't have the money.

Yashaswinee gets a bit stressed in such situations of confusion. Because of this confusion, we ran late. She trimmed my hair with a trimmer. Lol. Even the barber there charges a few thousand rupees. Even after years, the pound-to-rupee conversion still runs through my mind. I hope I will earn so much someday (teary-eyed emotional face) that the conversion of pounds to rupees doesn't even remotely cross my mind.

As we reached the restaurant, I saw Janmenjoy and his wife, Dhira, about to open the restaurant door. I want to get better at being punctual in such places. I still don't understand why I keep things to the last minute and rush for them. Irghhhhhh!!!! Slowly, guests started arriving. I was pleasantly surprised to see David with his wife. David managed my team and me at the Royal College of Art when I worked with the exhibitions team. He is a lovely man and very chill. I love his calm demeanour. One thing I had learnt from him, which still lives rent-free in my mind, is that the best lifting is no lifting at all. Guys, remember, no job is more important than your health. I badly injured my shoulder while doing heavy lifting during the exhibition at the RCA. I had to take months of medications and rest because of that.

Within an hour, the room was filled with a bunch of people who are very dear to me. People came from far-off places, from central London, to Kent, to Edinburgh and Glasgow. I will always be proud of this version of me who could have a family away from home in a foreign land. A bunch of 30-odd people, including Brits, French, Italians, Poles, Americans, Bengalis, Assamese, Punjabis, Marathis, and, of course, Odias. Not just diversity-wise, profession-wise, it was a bunch of engineers, researchers, analysts, designers, artists and entrepreneurs. Sometimes I wonder what I have earned in my life. This, this, this.

I wish my close friends Leesha, Nidhi, and Vivek were there with me that day in London. They have been a big part of my life in London.

The food was crazy good. It was an Odia special buffet. With lip-smacking starters of crispy corn and paneer tikka with side dishes of bara, aluchop, and guguni, it started with a bang. In the main course, we had Puri, Jeera Rice, Kanika, Chana Daal Tadka, Aloo Potola Kasa, Odia-style paneer tarkari, Bhoji-style mixed veg, Fruit khatta, Nadia pacheri, Salad, and Papad. We had Chenna Kheeri and Kala Jamun for dessert, which was absolutely delicious. Everyone was licking their fingers. Some of them even thanked Subh bhai for the same, as he arrived around noon. I was so happy to overhear those conversations.

Also, the cake was delicious! I had informed the manager, Ankit, to have an eggless cake for us. They managed it all end-to-end and made it stress-free for me.

One thing I learnt there is that if you don't have plans to pay for the drinks, do let the restaurant know beforehand. I could mention it to the guests, but it became awkward when people started ordering drinks. I mentally prepared myself to pay the extra amount by then. Later, Ankit, the manager, told me that it's awkward for the host to tell the guest about this, so one always informs the restaurants and the waiters handle that. I got some lovely gifts. Giovanna had made a handmade crochet of sorts. Aniket, Sampreet, and Suranjana got a lovely print of the early days of London. It was beautiful.

I was happy to see Yashaswinee taking a moment to have some gup-shup with my friends. She was meeting almost half of them for the first time. Time flew, and it was almost 4 pm, and guests were still there. We took a group photo and then let the conversation flow freely. Someone commented that it felt like a "Nari Mukti Morcha", as if a bunch of women had come together after ages and were having a non-stop conversation with each other with whole hearts.

We wrapped up soon and went back home with Subha Bhai and a few bags of lovely gifts. We opened them all as we reached home and were so happy to see some of them. With the limited time we had, we packed up the things, cleaned my room, and shifted them to the garage attic. I wish I had a few more days to set up the podcast studio in the garage. We already have everything we would need to set it up. From amazing sofas, rugs, lights and cameras to sound-treated rooms, mixers and microphones, we have it all in Kent. Subh bhai and I had spent a lot of time buying them all one by one after doing enough research.

Anyone in the UK willing to set up a podcast studio or record a podcast, please let me know. I am happy to give you the space and help you record an amazing podcast in a beautiful room.

At night, we quickly wrapped up things and headed to Liverpool Street. Subh bhai dropped us off at Swanscombe station. I feel grateful for his open heart and love for me. It's not even about the money part. This simple gesture of taking the effort to drop us off at the station means a lot to me. In a foreign land, 5000 miles away, you don't really find people who you can feel like family. Touchwood.

The next day, we packed our bags for Cambridge and headed to Liverpool Street Station. There was a direct train to Cambridge. It was a lovely ride and so short. It felt like we reached Cambridge in the blink of an eye. The moment I saw Cambridge on the station walls, it was such an ecstatic feeling. Especially seeing that with Yashwinee by my side, it felt like a dream come true. We headed to the shop to get a bottle of water and drank it all. Staying hydrated in the UK is a must, since you don't really feel thirsty even when you're dehydrated due to the cool weather. We headed to our Airbnb in an Uber. It was a Mercedes that came in Uber. It's funny how your dream cars in India become the daily Uber cars in the UK.

On reaching the Airbnb, we picked up the keys from the backdoor garden area and then entered the home. It was a small, cosy home with a living room and kitchen on the ground floor. We had booked a very tiny room for ourselves. To save some money, I had offered to feed the owner's cat. I asked the owner if my wife and I could book the single bedroom, and she agreed. I literally got the entire week's stay for just £150. We had to adjust a bit and sleep in a single bed every day. Honestly, as I look back, snuggling in that tiny single bed was one of our best memories.

On the first day of the Data School, as we arrived in the Faculty of English, there was a cafe where we had our ID cards spread out. I picked up mine and took a few photos of the space. Out of nowhere, I overheard my name. I looked up. A lady with light-coloured hair, wearing a shirt and a pair of glasses, looked at me and smiled loudly. "Abodid!" she whispered and made her way towards me. It didn't take me a second to recognise it was Prof. Eleanor Dare, the convenor of the Cultural Heritage Data School. I

walked towards her, awkwardly making space between the tables, and hugged her. I was so happy at that moment.

Almost 4 years since our first conversation on LinkedIn, I was finally meeting her in person. It was only because of her recommendation that I was offered a full bursary for the course.

Earlier, I received an invitation from the University of Cambridge that quoted the convenor of the Data School, specifically mentioning my work at the RCA. Of course, I understood it was Eleanor's word, since she knew me personally. It was because of that letter that I was able to secure funding from multiple sources. I will cherish that letter from Cambridge all my life.

Sometimes you do not realise how far you have come unless someone reminds you. This was one such moment for me. I had to remind myself, pat myself on the back, hug myself, and remember how far I have come.

The data school began with a brief introduction from Eleanor. She gave an overview of the program, what would be taught to us, and the activities we would be doing. I remember a quote being shared in the class which made me reflect. It was "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu." It basically means that if you are not involved in the decision-making process, you will be negatively affected by others' decisions.

She made us reflect on what constitutes the 'universal'?

We're introduced to works by Sasha Costanza-Chock, about whom I later researched and found an amazing book by them, which I would definitely read in due time and recommend to you.

It's called 'Design Justice - Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need'.

Here is a link to the open source of the book:

<https://designjustice.mitpress.mit.edu/>

A few minutes into the lecture, I overheard an amazing line: “Data is an extension of Earth’s finite resources.” It stayed with me.

After that, Eleanor shared an Instagram account that offers interesting insights and critical commentary on paintings. You should check it out. It’s “thegaze_art” by Matthijs Van Mierlo.

The first session began with Abdullah Safir, a recipient of the prestigious Gates Cambridge Scholarship who is pursuing his PhD at the University of Cambridge. He talked about his ethnographic research work in Dhaka, Bangladesh. He mentioned that his research aims to empower marginalised populations in the Global South whose perspectives on how AI and digital systems are being developed, interpreted, and governed are otherwise ignored.

Later, he gave us an amazing participatory exercise where we worked with the person sitting beside us. The activity was to teach us how AI visualises a memory when prompted with a textual description. There was a twist, though!! You won’t be writing the prompt. You would narrate the story verbally. The other person would listen to it, interpret it, and visualise it, then prompt ChatGPT to generate the visual. I was sitting beside a girl from Turkey named Bengo, if I remember correctly. She chose to listen to my story and prompt it using AI. I narrated a story from my childhood to her. I shared a story verbally. She heard it, then typed a prompt to generate a visual.

This is what she typed exactly into the prompt box:

“You are a great storytelling visual artist, expert at emotionally resonant work. You will generate a metaphorical visual art based on the story given below

“The subject is Abodid. 30 years old.

His story is about waking up early and getting ready for home tuition. Later on, the teacher came in with a fat frame, and Abodid was in 7th grade, 12-13 years old. If Abodid had not done his homework or had not completed it, the teacher would get mad and pinch his belly, resulting in

Abodid yelling with pain. He would be angry but would not be in a position to express annoyance. His mom, standing far off in the kitchen, would also witness it but believed it was for his good. Abodid's memories are unpleasant and have left a lasting impact on him. This is an image stuck in his mind."

We were expecting an image!!

But what happened next blew my mind. It showed a message saying that the image we created may violate our guardrails against harassment, discrimination, and related issues. I don't remember the message exactly, but it didn't generate an image at the end. We tried the same prompt on my computer with ChatGPT Plus, and it generated an image!!! How weird, right!!

Later, we discussed what had happened. Safir mentioned that it was tailored to the sensitivity level in my chat context.

In contrast, for the Turkish girl, it might have seemed too sensitive. I loved the exercise. It was a perfect teaser for the engaging week about to begin. Before I begin writing about this experience in Cambridge, let me start with a basic introduction to what exactly cultural heritage data is. Cultural Heritage data include both tangible (such as monuments, pottery, paintings, books, archives) and intangible (such as customs, traditions, folklore) aspects of cultural heritage. These data can exist in analogue form, be digitised or be born digital. This is not an official definition, but something that resonated with me as I read it on one of the slides during the presentation.

After that, we had an activity in which we were asked to sit around a few tables, each with certain objects placed on it. Then we were asked to discuss the ethical implications we see in those objects. We got a set of very old postcards with handwritten text. Some were stamped, others were unstamped. Some had colour photographs, while others were in black and white.

From an ethical standpoint, some of us shared some interesting points. I remember asking how these cards were procured. Someone was curious about the privacy of these letters, considering some of them are very personal. Some were questioning the Intent behind the photographs in the back. Some of them questioned whether stamping those cards was really necessary.

We were introduced to the programming language ELIZA, considered the world's first chatbot, developed by Joseph Weizenbaum at MIT in the 1960s.

Adding some random notes from the sessions here.

“All tech is world-building. It's not about making technology define your work. That's the last thing we believe in.”

“Making technology is an act of world-building.”

“Driving is cognitive labour.”

“Technology does not save the world without systematic change.”

Eleanor shared an amazing Instagram channel for keeping kids busy with engaging activities that offer a good amount of healthy cognitive load and fun.

@keep.kids.busy

“AI literally has zero use case, in my honest opinion,” Eleanor told us in the middle of the session while we were discussing the vibe-lifestyle we live with AI. That was perhaps one of the most powerful, impactful, and weirdly unsettling statements I had heard in the entire week in Cambridge.

Post that, there was another coffee break, and then we continued with the workshops. The second session was with Dr Eleanor Dare, where she taught us how to work creatively with cultural heritage data on paper and in

Python. She taught us the basics of Python and fun ways to use specific built-in libraries. Remember, it's not a code-heavy school at all! Everything taught was very basic and easy to understand, even for those without a technical background.

The next day, the session started with a talk by Jack Hardikar. Jack was my tutor while studying at the Royal College of Art. He shared about his recent project, *The Whale*, an immersive, 180-degree experimental theatre experience. The creative captioning of this exhibition caught my attention. I wish I were there in London those days to experience it live. It was exhibited at *Frameless*, situated in Central London, which has been one of my favourite places to experience some amazing, visually stunning exhibitions. I also love documenting the work of my friends who have had the opportunity to exhibit in *Frameless*.

Post that he shared with us the story of "Through the Cracks", an app-based augmented reality experience. The core idea behind the project was to share undervalued stories that have fallen through the cracks, both figuratively and literally.

After Jack's session, we formed the working groups. The Data School team had already built a bunch of groups, which they had thoughtfully mixed to create groups with diverse skill sets yet aligned with the kind of work they do. After the grouping was done, we were asked to go out and prototype a space and move through those stories. This was the foundation stone of the main project we were about to develop over the next few days. We created one small activity based on Dr Arenkala's idea of preserving Nagaland's cultural heritage.

After that, we quickly headed out to lunch. We had ten pounds in lunch coupons. I had a baked potato with some beans and a vegetarian panini. Yashaswinee also joined me for lunch. I decided not to force myself to network during lunch so I could spend time with my wife while she shared her Cambridge exploration. In fact, we continued doing the same every day. During lunch break, we would have lunch together and share stories.

The next session was about world-building, interactive games and photogrammetry. There wasn't much theory. They just talked about the activity, and since our groups were already formed, we went to pick a space and started working. We used some objects and Polycam for photogrammetry. Funnily enough, I was reminded of my engineering days when I used photogrammetry to make 3D models of my college campus. It was fun to see the full circle moment in Cambridge! I used Agisoft Photoscan during those days. Now it was the Polycam app on my iPhone. Apparently, I had one of the highest grades possible during my master's in engineering. I am not sure about my master's thesis, but maybe my professor was too happy with me or my filmmaking projects, lol! I asked Yashaswinee to join us and try out the Polycam app for some photogrammetry.

Then we had a coffee break before continuing with the next session. The session was titled "Incidental Poker: Practical Co-design and Engagement Through Hybrid Walking Methodologies". Honestly, it sounded too geeky to me. I missed part of it because I was having a beautiful conversation with Jack at the time, as Jack was heading out of the room. I went outside with Jack. I gifted him a "Tala Patra Pattachitra", which is basically a traditional form of palm leaf engraving from Odisha, India, that dates back over a thousand years. It had images of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, along with extensive micro-detailing around them. Jack said he might put it in his son's room. It made me very happy. He was very happy to receive it, and then we hugged and took a photo together. Karen, who had been photographing the data school, helped us take a lovely photo.

I went inside to continue Andy's session. He gave us some sheets and an iPad and asked us to go to the specific locations allocated to each group. There were specific activities for each group. We photographed the entire journey and did a couple of those activities. It was an interesting activity. I had invited Yashaswinee to join me in this activity. She captured some beautiful photos while our group was working. She has gotten so good at it. She does all shutter changes, ISO settings and even focal length adjustments by herself as needed these days!

Initially, the activity felt quite random. Later, the next day, when Andy shared the entire bunch of photos of all the groups, they made sense. We were literally using walking as a method to discover the city's infrastructure. Post that we had a public keynote event by Dylan Yamada Rice. It was a talk about "Research and Design for Cultural Heritage Data and Experience". Oh gosh, the slides were so well curated! I still have them fresh in my mind. I remember seeing Super Mario somewhere in the slides and being like awwwww!!

Her style and eloquence were something so impeccably fine that anyone would love to come to the talk to learn some of that! I learned interesting ways to research, interpret, and present data in a fun, relevant, and engaging way. I would definitely revisit the slide deck!!

She suggested that we bring our own cultural perspectives without flattening them. In fact, Dylan suggested a book, 'Unflattening' by Nick Sousanis, published by Harvard University Press.

Adding here a few more notes from the sessions.

"Games have a special agency for kids. Give them the materials and just let kids be!"

"Can we translate research into a video game?"

A lot of these sessions were very critical of AI. At some point, I had to confess how many AI tools I use in my daily life, from Wispr Flow to ChatGPT Plus, Codex, Anti-Gravity, and all my coding tools for my personal website. I also mentioned how I've been experimenting with Midjourney, Veo3, and more. I love the way they were going into the historical context and trying to show how all these tools are fundamentally created with a capitalist intent. Most people who build this never built it with the right intent.

We discussed how generative AI and automated writing with AI stifle kids' cognitive development. Eleanor shared with us an official article by Anthropic that elaborated on this.

“Who benefits if you stop writing?” Eleanor asked, and the whole class went silent, reflecting.

We also discussed the idea of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” and how UNESCO “gatekeeps” access to certain cultural heritage spaces and artefacts.

Eleanor suggested checking out “Crafting Futures: British Council” for some funding opportunities. She also suggested checking out the work of artists like Nan Goldin and Tracey Emin. As we discussed the graphical representation of data, she suggested we read more about the Titanic datasets. In the meantime, she recommended we read "How Charts Lie" by Alberto Cairo.

In the session, we also discussed the idea of cultural probes, developed by Bill Gaver.

Here is a link you might want to read:

<https://researchimaginings.com/2015/03/10/cultural-probes/>

She also recommended that we read “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” by Paulo Freire.

An hour before Dylan's session, which was open to the public with pre-registration, I walked up to Eleanor and asked about the talk. I had hardly started to ask about the session when she got exactly what I wanted to ask. Even before I could ask, she whispered, “You can have your wife with you. We should have some space, and we can definitely sneak her in”. This amount of observational skill and empathy comes only with time and a big heart. I smiled and WhatsApped Yashaswinee to come near the class area. She was so happy to sit in a full-fledged lecture at the University of

Cambridge! It felt like a dream come true moment for both of us. I felt so blessed.

Eleanor, are you reading this?

Thank you so much, my dear. Lots of love and a tight hug to you.

By then, Yashaswinee had known more about Cambridge than I did. Her solo explorations had given her a better sense of the map than I, for sure. She took me to one of Cambridge's main colleges. I believe it was King's College. We took some photos there. I was wearing the House of Koudi outfit, so it was inevitable to take some special photos there, with the gorgeous building in the background.

We headed back home on a different, unique route she had discovered. We crossed the Corpus clock, which Stephen Hawking inaugurated long ago. We met Lousie and Pierre too! Pierre is my senior from RCA who also studied Digital Direction. He does some amazing work on music concerts, developing and designing their stage visuals. He is the tallest guy I have ever seen! We bought some noodles on the way and headed back to the room.

The room we stayed in smelled a bit musty. I wish I had bought some room fresheners. Every day we would think about buying one, but then forget to buy one and return home. The kitchen was well furnished. So we could prepare some amazing food with ease. In the mornings, Yashaswinee would prepare a lovely breakfast. It literally made my life easier! I had specifically booked the Airbnb for the kitchen. It almost felt like a home away from home.

The next day, I reached a bit early and took a chance to ask Eleanor for a photo with her. Yashaswinee helped us capture a photo. I was wearing a beautiful cotton jacket by Arundhati Badhakala. This is the most precious photo I have of the entire trip. I love the photo. It gives me goosebumps when I think of this photo. After all the highs and lows in my life, I wonder how it all fell in place to lead me to this. It still feels unbelievable.

The day started with a workshop with Dylan. She asked us to draw a Mickey Mouse from memory. It was funny to see everyone's drawings. Even though each one of us felt like they remembered Mickey Mouse perfectly in their head, it was so interesting to see that everyone drew it so differently. Post that, she gave us a few more sketching exercises to draw certain situations. The best part was seeing everyone else's sketches when they laid them all on the floor. It was a fun exercise!

Meanwhile, Yashaswinee had gone to the University of Cambridge's Main Library. She sent me some photos on WhatsApp. I was so happy to see it. Later, she joined me for lunch. We had the same Baked Potato with beans and a vegetarian Panini.

Post that, we headed for the next session of the day. It was a workshop that continued from the previous session. We built a beautiful treehouse of sorts. The idea was to make it a gamified version focused on ecological conservation. We build it using twigs, branches, clay, wooden forks and whatnot. It was a super collaborative work where we literally used anything around us to build anything we could. Someone saw the treehouse and mentioned it looked like a gallery exhibition! Crazy, innit!

Post that, we geared up for the last session of the day. It was a session with Dr Harshadha Balasubramanian, titled "Rethinking Data with Access". Harshadha is an anthropologist researching the labour of making immersive media accessible. I had attended one of her lectures during my RCA days and found it super insightful about accessibility. Her session was focused on ideas to make audio-visual content accessible in the GLAMA sector.

She also shared the importance of Alt Text and interesting ideas on creative captioning. I also learned the importance of including a deaf creative consultant from the beginning of a project and not as an afterthought. Students were fascinated by seeing her device, which she

uses to assist her in reading. I learnt to read Braille for the first time during one of the activities. It was on my wishlist for a long time!!

After her session, Yashaswinee and I headed to the Brahma Kumaris meditation centre called “Innerspace”. We met Sister Sally there, and then another elderly sister who made us feel at home. She shared many stories about spirituality and her journey into it. It was lovely listening to her. She radiated a very peaceful aura. After the session, she gave us a few books. Post the visit, we headed back to our room.

On our way, we thought of having a pizza at Zizii, but when we saw the 25-pound price, we looked at each other and decided to skip it. Then we bought two frozen margherita pizzas for 5 pounds and decided to make them at home. Sadly, at home, I topped it with a lot of mushrooms and couldn't figure out how much to heat. I put it in the oven for the second time, assuming the water from the mushrooms would evaporate. Sadly, the pizza burnt.

The next day, we decided to wear the Kunsquad pattachitra edits and do a twinning. We took many pictures on our way to the campus. As I headed to my class, she headed to the Faculty of Education, which was about a 40-minute walk from the Faculty of English where my classes were. We continued with our group project. The classes were reduced now, and more focus was given to the group project. We got everything ready in a few hours. We went extremely low-tech and focused on the high-performative storytelling part. We focused on building a participatory activity where imagination becomes a method of preservation.

With Arenkala, one of our team members, leading the concept, we built an activity in which she initially sings a song in her local dialect. Then people share what they feel by drawing it on a sheet of paper, using the keywords we give them as prompts. It was a very engaging activity. We invited a group to participate in this activity and documented it. Later, we designed a slide deck with the insights and photos to share with the class.

As we were wrapping up the activity, we had a session with Jonathan to dive deeper into the software's technical details. His presentation was the least technical but still all about technology. It was all about best practices, presented with a lot of humour. I loved it!!

We continued our group work post the session. As the evening set in, we headed to a group dinner at Selwyn College. And yet again, Eleanor, with her big heart, told me I could bring my wife there before I even asked her. Yashaswinee joined us in Selwyn College. I met Ms Auronda Scalera there, had a conversation with her and took some amazing photos of her. I asked her whether she is active on LinkedIn and Instagram, and she said no, casually. Later, I realised she doesn't even need one. With over 20 years of work experience, she already has a huge network of people she works with. Currently, she is based in the Middle East, working as a curator of some amazing art exhibitions. In fact, she was also a speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos. For a moment, I realised I was amongst a group of some really talented folks. I also photographed Suwen Wang, one of my first few friends at RCA. It was amazing to see him again at the data school. What a coincidence!

The food was quite simple and not super fancy. I had a basic falafel and some salads. But the dining hall was freaking gorgeous!! I had never seen anything like that in my life. It felt like I was inside a Harry Potter movie. I took some group photos while people were having their dinner. Eleanor was so happy to see some of those photos later. I am so happy to see them credit me wherever they use those photographs.

After dinner, Yashasinwee had a long photoshoot on the Selwyn College campus. I made a 10-minute vlog there. She captured some amazing photos of the flowers there. It was on my wishlist to have this experience at Selwyn College. But due to the high cost of accommodation in Selwyn, I decided to go for a smaller Airbnb, a bit far from the campus. I am so grateful that I could come for dinner and that too with my wife!! Crazy!

As the last day arrived, I packed the pattachitra I had gotten from Ragurajpur. I wanted to give it to Eleanor. I was so excited for Eleanor to see it. It was one of my favourite pieces among the hundreds of artworks we saw at the artist's home. On our way to the campus, we did another extensive photoshoot with the Kotpad outfits by 'House of Koudi'. I love those photos. The weather was so good, and the dusky clouds in the sky made it all so soft.

On reaching the campus, we had a session with Eleanor, focused on Critical Data Visualisation for Cultural Heritage Data. It's one of my favourite and most useful sessions. I have always been keen on data visualisation. I loved the different ways of visualisation she shared with us. She also shared the ethics of scale in a graph. I realised how important it is to think ethically about the scale and units in a graph, depending on the context. The examples she showed towards the end were so cool. I will definitely check the side deck to check them out.

They ordered some pizzas for us for lunch. Yashaswinee was also around on the campus today, since she had been exploring Cambridge extensively for the last few days. She helped me capture some amazing photographs while I was discussing some work with other members of my group and Eleanor. After lunch, everyone headed to the main room to gear up for the final presentation. Some had to leave early, so they had asked Eleanor if they could go first.

The presentations were amazing. I loved the mix of projects. Some were very digital, while some were absolutely analogue and non-tech, like ours. It was such an exhilarating experience to speak on the stage, facing an international crowd about the project. It was a beautiful experience to make them laugh in between by cracking a joke!!

A couple of projects were based on code-based interactive activities in the digital space using camera data or some other audio data. Some of them focused on building a gamified experience using local cultural data. A team focused on turning object interaction into digital experiences.

Another team created a “museum of nostalgia”, drawing on collective and individual memory and certain artefacts. I am a sucker for nostalgia. This entire article is a testament to the same. Some worked on building embodied experiences to reconnect communities. Overall, it was a very insightful session where we got to know everyone’s projects. I wish we had a few more days to dive deeper into everyone’s ideas and work together on them.

As the session ended, Eleanor gave a vote of thanks and concluded the data school. She had distributed the certificates to the groups at the end of their session. People were taking photos with their ID cards and certificates, and finally saying goodbye to each other.

I stayed back for a bit longer until most students had left, and Eleanor was free. In the cafe space, I opened the pattachitra for her. She had a glimpse of it and was in awe! I shared the backstory of how it’s made and the details of Ratha yatra, Puri and Lord Jagannath. Yashaswinee helped photograph the beautiful moment.

Then something happened which will stay with me forever. Eleanor told me it’s a beautiful, intricate painting, and it would be nice to have it in the Digital Humanities department’s new building. I couldn’t process the fact that it would go into the walls of the University of Cambridge. She called Annie and told her about it. I was screaming, “Omg! Is this real!!” inside my head. I asked Annie for a pen and to write my name, RCA, and Cambridge University, along with the Date and Year, on the back of the artwork. Then I rolled it up, packed it and handed it to Annie. I could see Yashaswinee smiling aloud and also capturing this beautiful moment with excitement and care.

As everyone left, we walked down the lane and headed back home. We stopped at a bookstore named “Bodies in the bookshop”, which is a house full of crime thrillers. At this point, I literally had no money to buy any book.

There were some lovely design books inside it, placed there personally by the owner in one corner.

Then we headed to Weatherspoon for a cider pint. We both had some halloumi chips and two pints of cider. I loved the cider, though it was quite cheap there. It was the basic house cider available at just one pound per pint. We got home and quickly baked a pizza with some mushrooms. I made sure it's not burnt this time!

We locked the door and went to sleep after a long day. Little did I know that I was not supposed to lock the door. Another guest was living with us. I assumed she was sleeping in her room since it was late. I locked the chain of the door. The next day, I woke up to a message from the host. The message clearly asked me why I didn't open the door last night. I went down to see that I had put the chain, which I wasn't supposed to put. I apologised to the host immediately. But I think she was pissed off since she had to find another room at night and place the guest. It was a big learning experience for me.

Later, I messaged the other guest and apologised to her too. I thought it all ended on a good note, only to realise it wasn't. The host was pissed off and left me a terrible review on Airbnb, mentioning that I didn't quite get the "British Culture". Ikrkkkkk!! I literally had to contact Airbnb to have the review removed on the grounds of discrimination.

We headed for Punting the next day. Wearing the amazing outfit combo by Arundhati Bandhakala, we headed towards the Punting Site. She looked gorgeous in the saree. We got on the boat and took our seats. It was a 50-minute ride, approximately and led by a punter named Said, who shared with us the history of the colleges of Cambridge all the way. The fun facts about the iconic figures like Newton, Rahul Gandhi, Nehru, and Stephen Hawking were nice to hear. Yashaswinee loved the ride. It was on her wishlist for a long time. And so was mine.

We took many photos in the middle of the river. As the ride came to an end, we got down and took some amazing photos on our way back home. It was a lovely experience. One should definitely experience this in their lifetime. On our way back home, we had a Udon Noodle Ramen bowl in one of the restaurants in the streets. Honestly, it wasn't good. We reached home, packed our things and booked a cab to the railway station.

By evening, we reached Nidhi's place in Liverpool Street. We met Sharath and had a good chat about all things art, AI and tech. He works at DeepMind's London office, where Gemini was born, and where Demis Hassabis (the mastermind behind all things AI) is based.

Later, we went to Bone Daddy in Liverpool Street to have ramen. It was almost like a double date! The ramen was absolutely yummy!!!! Oh gosh, I still can smell the broth. That day with Nidhi, Sharath, and Yashaswinee by my side, I could see love and hope in those bowls of ramen. This memoir is not about Manchester, Cambridge or London. It's not even about conferences or data school. It's all about that last bowl of ramen before I head back to London again.

Till we meet again, my beloved ramen.

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All hearts.