

[OPEN PAGE](#)

# A beautiful mind

MAY 26, 2019 00:00 IST

UPDATED: MAY 26, 2019 04:00 IST

Haran Da had retired by then. He was a bachelor. Every day on our way to school and back, we saw him sitting in the balcony of his single-storey ancestral house in front of a chess board spread on a small table and play chess with himself.

Sometimes he hurried through the moves, but most of the time he would just sit motionless and ponder and smoke, and if it were not for the smoke curling out of his two nostrils at regular intervals, we would have thought he was cat-napping. And then without warning, he would lift his hand, slowly and deliberately caress the head of a Queen or a Horse, take it off the board, circle it twice in air and then thump it down on the desired box with a satisfied smile. This went on for hours. After doing with fondling a white piece, he took to fondling a black one.

## Solitary play

We never saw anyone taking the seat on the other side of the table. Many times I thought to go up to him and ask who the winner was. Whether it was black or white that won most games? Was he cent per cent neutral or had he a favourite to whom he always would clandestinely reveal the other's machinations? And if not, if indeed he was impartial, then how was it possible for him to plan his moves for one army and then start counter-planning in favour of the other without ever disclosing the secrets of his hidden intentions to either? Was it at all possible for anyone to function in a manner that one section of his brain will wilfully refuse to know what the other section is thinking of? I also wanted to know what his feelings were in the end since both the victor and the vanquished were his slice only. He was renowned for his fiery temperament. So I did not dare to approach him.

Haran Da had long since stopped playing chess with himself. His chess-table, chess board, his small cane chair and the ashtray are gone with the wind. His one-storey house is now an evening club where young men play carom and cards. But today I know what it is to be both the 'sieger' and the 'sieged' at the same time; to be the speaker and the counter-speaker in one; to identify with a group and fight for it tooth and nail and then quickly cross over to the opposing camp and take on arms. Nothing is impossible for the human mind to achieve. It's only a matter of perspective. The world is still full with people like Haran Da and that astonished school-going child.

palash213@gmail.com