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Monsoon Equations

Dr Manvi Singh

The monsoon arrived at Delhi University with mathematical precision, transforming the campus into a verdant tableau that belied the city's reputation for dust and clamour. Raindrops pattered against the colonial architecture of the arts faculty building, where Arjun stood, watching rivulets trace labyrinthine patterns down the windowpane. He traced one droplet's journey with his fingertip, a habit from childhood that now served as a momentary respite from the chaos of his final year.

Behind him, students shuffled papers and whispered anxieties about the upcoming literature examinations. Professor Mehta's voice—sonorous yet somehow simultaneously soporific—droned on about the postcolonial implications of Rushdie's metaphors. Arjun should have been taking notes. Instead, he calculated the diminishing distance between two raindrops sliding inexorably toward collision.

"Mr. Mathur, perhaps you'd care to illuminate us with your interpretation?"

Arjun turned from the window; his reverie punctured. "I'm sorry, Professor. Could you repeat the question?"

A ripple of subdued laughter traversed the classroom. Professor Mehta sighed with the theatrical weariness of a man who had been teaching longer than his students had been alive.

"I asked for your thoughts on the convergence of magical realism and historical narrative in *Midnight's Children*. But clearly, the meteorological drama outside holds greater fascination."

Before Arjun could formulate a response that might salvage his academic dignity, a voice from the far corner of the room interceded.

"If I may, Professor—I think what makes Rushdie's approach so revolutionary is that he applies quantum theory to historiography. Like Schrödinger's cat, his narrative exists in multiple states simultaneously: myth and fact, memory and history, personal and political. Perhaps that's what has captured Arjun's attention in the rainfall—the way each droplet contains reflections of everything around it, yet remains singular."

The voice belonged to Noor Sharma. Arjun recognised her immediately, though they had never spoken. She was a transfer student from Kolkata who arrived at the beginning of the monsoon semester. Rumours about her intellect had preceded her like heralds before a queen; she had

published poetry in journals that Arjun only pretended to read and was said to be writing a thesis comparing chaos theory to contemporary Indian literature.

Professor Mehta's eyebrows ascended toward his receding hairline. "An intriguing perspective, Noor, though I suspect you're extending considerable charity to Mr Mathur's window-gazing." He turned back to Arjun. "You're fortunate to have such an eloquent defender. Perhaps some of her enthusiasm for our subject might prove contagious."

When the class concluded, Arjun lingered, gathering his books with deliberate slowness. Rain continued its percussive symphony against the windows, a sound that had always calmed the anxious fluttering of his thoughts. He waited until Noor approached the door, then fell into step beside her in the corridor.

"Thank you for that rescue operation," he said, offering a smile that felt suddenly unpractised on his lips. "It was elegantly executed."

Noor glanced at him sidelong, her expression appraising but not unkind. "It wasn't entirely altruistic. I've wanted an excuse to talk to the mathematics prodigy who inexplicably switched to literature in his third year."

Arjun nearly stumbled. "You know about that?"

"This university runs on gossip and chai, in approximately equal proportions." She paused at the building's entrance, watching sheets of rain transform the courtyard into a temporary lake. "The way I heard it, you were destined for research positions at prestigious institutes until you abruptly changed course. Some say you had a nervous breakdown; others claim you discovered a fundamental flaw in an established theorem and were silenced by the academic establishment."

Despite himself, Arjun laughed. "Both theories attribute to me far more drama than I deserve."

"So, what's the truth behind your academic apostasy?"

He considered deflection but found himself strangely compelled toward honesty by her direct gaze. "I realised I was pursuing mathematics to satisfy my father's ambitions rather than my own. After he passed away last year, continuing seemed like maintaining a conversation with a ghost."

Noor's expression softened. "I'm sorry about your father."

“Thank you.” He nodded toward the deluge beyond the doorway. “We could wait it out in the coffee shop? I’d like to hear more about how quantum theory applies to Rushdie. It might salvage my literary reputation with Professor Mehta.”

“I have a better idea,” Noor replied, reaching into her bag to extract a compact umbrella. “The English department’s poetry reading starts in twenty minutes. We’re already damp—might as well make the journey worthwhile.”

The umbrella proved woefully inadequate against Delhi’s monsoonal determination. They arrived at the venue—the university’s intimate amphitheatre—with Arjun’s shirt clinging translucent to his shoulders and Noor’s hair transformed from sleek cascade to riotous curls. They found seats in the back row, slightly separated from the primary audience, a small puddle forming beneath their shared bench.

“I should warn you,” Noor whispered as the first poet approached the microphone, “I respond to mediocre poetry with involuntary facial expressions that have ended friendships.”

Arjun leaned closer, inhaling the scent of rain and jasmine. “Consider me forewarned.”

The poetry was, for the most part, precisely as undergraduate poetry tends to be earnest, derivative, and occasionally surprising with moments of unintentional brilliance. True to her warning, Noor’s expressions proved more entertaining than most of the readings—a symphony of subtle winces, raised eyebrows, and the rare, genuinely delighted smile that transformed her scholarly countenance into something incandescent.

During a particularly tortured extended metaphor comparing love to various dairy products, Arjun found himself watching the rain through the amphitheatre’s clerestory windows rather than the performance. Water streaked the glass in patterns that reminded him of the differential equations he had once found so absorbing—natural phenomena expressed in elegant mathematics.

“You’re doing it again,” Noor’s whisper tickled his ear. “Finding more meaning in rainfall than human expression.”

“Not at all,” he responded softly. “I was thinking that the rain follows mathematical patterns you could plot with the right equations. It made me wonder if human emotions might someday be similarly quantified.”

“What a terribly unromantic notion.”

“On the contrary. Isn’t there something beautiful in the idea that the most chaotic-seeming experiences—like falling in love—might follow discernible patterns? That doesn’t diminish the mystery; it adds another layer to it.”

Noor studied him with renewed interest. “Perhaps you haven’t abandoned mathematics after all. You’ve just applied it to literature.”

The poet finished to polite applause, and Noor straightened in her seat as the next reader was announced. “This one’s actually good,” she whispered. “Shweta Kapoor graduated last year but still comes to these readings. Listen.”

The woman at the microphone was slight, with close-cropped hair and eyes that seemed to fix on some point beyond the audience. Her voice, when she began, carried a quiet authority that immediately silenced the shuffling and whispering of the crowd.

Arjun felt a strange tightening in his chest as the poem continued, each line excavating emotions he had carefully buried beneath equations and analysis. When it concluded, the silence held for three heartbeats before applause erupted. He turned to comment to Noor, only to discover she had vanished from her seat.

He found her outside, standing beneath the amphitheatre’s concrete overhang, watching the rain intensity diminish from deluge to steady patter.

“You disappeared,” he said, joining her at the edge of the shelter.

“I needed air.” She didn’t look at him. “That poem always affects me.”

“You’ve heard it before?”

“Shweta was my senior when I first visited Delhi University three years ago. She mentored me during a summer program.” Noor hesitated. “That poem was about an almost-love. The kind that exists in potential, like Schrödinger’s cat—neither alive nor dead until observed.”

Arjun leaned against a pillar, studying her profile. “Did you ever observe it? Make it real?”

“No.” She finally turned to face him. “The program ended. I returned to Kolkata. We exchanged letters for a while, but eventually... entropy prevailed.”

“And now you’ve returned to Delhi.”

“With a different purpose.” Noor’s smile held a complexity that intrigued him. “The universe rarely offers perfect symmetry.”

The rain had softened further, transforming from a percussive sound to a gentle susurrant. Noor stepped out from beneath the overhang, tilting her face toward the sky. Water beaded on her eyelashes, caught the fading afternoon light like prisms.

“I have a theory,” she said without looking back at him, “that the monsoon changes the ionic composition of Delhi’s atmosphere, temporarily altering the neurochemistry of everyone who breathes it. That’s why so many love stories begin during these months.”

Arjun followed her into the rain. “Is that empirically documented, or just poetic speculation?”

“Both, perhaps.” She turned to face him, rain plastering her kurta to her collarbones. “Like Rushdie’s narratives—simultaneously fact and myth.”

“An elegant hypothesis,” he said, conscious of the diminishing space between them. “Though it would require testing through repeated trials.”

“Are you volunteering as a research subject, Mr Mathur?”

“I’ve always believed in the advancement of science, Ms Sharma.”

Their laughter mingled with the sound of rainfall, and in that moment, Arjun felt the strange sensation of his carefully constructed world shifting on its axis—like a mathematical model reconfiguring itself around a new variable.

The monsoon semester unfolded with a rhythm dictated by cloudbursts and sunshine, examinations and poetry readings, cups of chai in the university canteen and long walks beneath gradually clearing skies. Arjun and Noor’s friendship evolved with similar organic inevitability—conversations about literature that deepened into philosophical debates, shared silences in the library that became more comfortable than solitude.

They discovered complementary perspectives, where Arjun sought patterns and structures, and Noor perceived nuance and ambiguity. He helped her organise her chaotic research notes into coherent categories; she challenged his tendency to reduce complex emotions to their component parts. Together, they explored the university’s forgotten corners—the botanical garden’s hidden gazebo, the astronomy department’s rooftop at sunset, and the archaeology museum’s basement archives accessed through Noor’s uncanny talent for befriending gatekeepers.

They developed private rituals. Wednesday afternoons spent in the coffee shop near the north gate, sharing a single piece of chocolate cake while dissecting Professor Mehta’s increasingly

bizarre lecture metaphors. Sunday mornings in the university library's rare book section, where Noor had somehow secured them access to first editions of Tagore and Premchand. Rainy evenings beneath the banyan tree near the arts faculty, where they took turns reading aloud from dog-eared paperbacks while storms raged beyond the canopy of leaves.

Yet for all their growing intimacy, a curious hesitancy persisted between them. Their hands might brush while reaching for the same book, lingering a moment too long before withdrawing. Conversations about love remained safely academic, analytical, as though both recognised the precipice before them and carefully maintained their balance on its edge.

"Do you believe in mathematical destiny?" Noor asked one evening as they sat on the steps of the university's administrative building, watching lightning illuminate the Delhi skyline. The monsoon was entering its final phase, thunderstorms replacing the steady downpours of previous weeks.

Arjun considered the question with characteristic thoroughness. "Define 'mathematical destiny'."

"The idea that certain combinations of people are statistically inevitable—that given enough variables and time, specific individuals are bound to intersect."

"Like the raindrops I was watching the day we met." He smiled at the memory. "Sliding down different paths but destined to collide."

"Exactly." Noor hugged her knees to her chest, her profile silhouetted against the next lightning flash. "But here's the philosophical question if such intersections are predetermined by the mathematics of the universe, does that make them more or less meaningful?"

"Neither," Arjun replied after a moment's contemplation. "The meaning exists independent of the mechanism. Like how understanding the optics behind a rainbow doesn't diminish its beauty."

Noor nodded slowly. "A surprisingly romantic position for a former mathematician."

"Perhaps I've been influenced by excessive exposure to literature." His tone was light, but his eyes remained fixed on her face, memorising its contours in the storm-shadowed evening. "Or perhaps I'm simply calculating the probability that—"

The sky split open above them, rain suddenly pouring in vertical sheets. They scrambled to their feet, academic papers hastily shoved into bags, and raced across the courtyard toward the

nearest shelter—the university’s clock tower, its ground floor an empty chamber used occasionally for small seminars.

They burst through the wooden door, breathless and drenched, to find the space illuminated only by emergency lighting—dim blue bulbs that cast everything in submarine hues. Their laughter echoed against the stone walls as they shed their dripping outer layers and attempted to salvage the sodden books.

“Your thesis is waterlogged,” Arjun observed, carefully separating pages of Noor’s manuscript.

“The universe offering literary criticism.” She wrung water from her dupatta, creating a small puddle on the flagstone floor. “Perhaps it objects to my comparing T.S. Eliot to chaos theory.”

“More likely it’s offering a practical demonstration.” He gestured to their sudden circumstance—the unexpected cloudburst, their unplanned sanctuary. “Chaos theory embodied: small changes in initial conditions leading to wildly different outcomes. If I hadn’t asked about mathematical destiny...”

“We’d be considerably drier?” Noor suggested wryly.

“We’d be separate,” Arjun corrected, his voice dropping to match the hushed acoustics of their shelter. “You in your dormitory, me in mine—both contemplating the storm alone.”

Something shifted in the atmosphere between them—a subtle recalibration of charged particles, like the air before lightning strikes. Noor took a half-step closer, close enough that Arjun could see individual droplets of rain still clinging to her eyelashes.

“Is that preferable or not?” she asked, her typical eloquence condensed to this essential question.

“I think you know the answer.” His voice emerged steadier than he felt. “I’ve been calculating our trajectory since that first day in Mehta’s class.”

“And what does your mathematical model predict?”

Instead of answering, Arjun reached out, gently brushing a strand of rain-dampened hair from her cheek. The touch was tentative, questioning—a hypothesis offered for either confirmation or refutation.

Noor's response was neither. Instead, she smiled with unexpected mischief. "Your experimental approach lacks rigour, Mr Mathur. Insufficient data points for meaningful analysis."

Before he could process her meaning, she had closed the remaining distance between them. For years, he had approached emotion as something to be deconstructed, analysed, and contained within the safe boundaries of intellectual appreciation. Now, with Noor's hands tangled in his damp shirt and her heartbeat palpable against his chest, he experienced the limitations of that approach, like trying to understand an ocean by studying a single droplet of its water.

When they finally separated, breathless for reasons unrelated to their earlier dash through the rain, Noor rested her forehead against his.

"Well?" she whispered. "Has your hypothesis been confirmed or refuted?"

"Neither," he admitted, echoing her smile. "The experimental results suggest I need to develop an entirely new theoretical framework."

Outside, the storm continued its atmospheric rearrangement of Delhi, washing away accumulated dust and pollution, revealing the city's true colours beneath. Inside the clock tower, Arjun and Noor remained in their accidental sanctuary, discussing new equations to describe what was developing between them—a mathematical poetry of shared breaths and intertwined fingers, of futures suddenly recalculated around the variable of "us" rather than "I."

The end of the monsoon season at Delhi University arrived with ceremonial predictability. Campus gardens emerged from months of deluge, vibrant with improbable shades of green. Students migrated from indoor shelters to lawns and courtyards; textbooks and dreams spread beneath a sky that was, finally, resolutely blue.

Arjun and Noor sat beneath their banyan tree, no longer seeking its shelter from rain but rather its shade from the emerging autumn sun. Between them lay the scattered evidence of their academic lives—his comparative literature notes, her thesis draft, and shared marginalia documenting their overlapping intellectual journeys.

"I've been accepted to the comparative literature program at ANU," Noor announced, the statement falling between them like a stone disturbing still water. "For my master's research."

Arjun absorbed this information with outward calm, though his mind immediately began calculating new variables—distance between campuses, scheduling complexities, reduced probability of spontaneous encounters. “That’s excellent news. Their program is exceptional.”

“And you’ll be starting your MPhil here.”

“Yes.” He traced the outline of a leaf that had fallen onto his notebook. “Different universities, different schedules.”

“Different trajectories”, Noor added softly.

Around them, the campus hummed with activity—students traversing pathways that would carry them toward divergent futures, some intersecting again, others permanently separate. The mathematics of human interaction, playing out in infinite combinations.

“I’ve been thinking about your question,” Arjun said after a long moment. “About mathematical destiny and meaning.”

Noor tilted her head. “And?”

“I think I was wrong before. Understanding the mechanism does change the meaning—but it deepens it rather than diminishes it.” He turned to face her fully. “If we met because of statistical inevitability—the product of every choice and circumstance that brought us to that rainfall, that classroom—then our connection represents something profound about the universe’s structure.”

“Poetry disguised as mathematics,” Noor observed with the hint of a smile.

“Or mathematics revealing itself as poetry.” Arjun reached for her hand. “Either way, it suggests that separation is equally temporary. Different campuses are just another variable in the equation.”

“A solvable problem?”

“Precisely.” He squeezed her fingers gently. “And I’ve always been rather good at solutions.”

Above them, the banyan’s leaves rustled with the season’s first dry breeze—a sound entirely different from the monsoon’s liquid percussion, yet equally rhythmic, equally specific. Noor leaned against Arjun’s shoulder, her weight both substantial and ephemeral, like a theory proven yet still somehow miraculous.

“I suppose we’ll need to develop new algorithms,” she murmured. “For calculating meeting points between campuses. For maximising our intersections despite divergent timetables.”

“For sustaining our particular mathematical improbability,” Arjun agreed, pressing his lips to her temple.

Around them, Delhi University continued its perpetual transformation—students becoming graduates, questions becoming answers, and then giving rise to new questions. The monsoon’s equations had been solved, giving way to autumn’s different mathematics. Yet Arjun and Noor remained constants in each other’s calculations—variables discovered, values determined, significance proven beyond statistical doubt.

Short Bio:

Dr Manvi Singh is an Assistant Professor at Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi. She is a recipient of an Erasmus+ scholarship from Charles University in Prague, supporting her doctoral studies. Her scholarly endeavours encompass the continuum of classical and contemporary Indian literary traditions, contributing significantly to the ongoing academic discourse on subcontinental aesthetics and poetics.