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Sixth Form Academic Journal

Photography by Roma H

Contents

Editors' note

DAYA N, GRACE P, CASSIA B, ED H, SAMIT N, ELISE P, BERNICE W, ALEX G

We hope you are excited to read our first Academic Journal as editors and designers! As always the Journal is created entirely by upper school students in order to showcase what the Sixth Form are capable of beyond the classroom. We welcome all submissions from artwork and compositions to pages of essay material regardless of the subject. So, please email us to be featured in the next edition and enjoy the Magazine!

To What Extent was the Legacy of the Battle of Plassey positive For the the short-, medium- and long-term fortunes of the East India Company?

AN EPQ EXTRACT BY TOBY M

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

In my EPQ, I focused my dissertation upon the gradual militarisation of the East India Company, following from the Battle of Plassey, 1757, and the implications that it had for the economic and territorial fortunes of the Company in India.

Here, I have included a short extract from my dissertation, which outlines a brief history of the East India Company and the events leading up to the Battle of Plassey, followed by a summary of the battle. This short section should give an overview of my dissertation, and explore the themes and factors which I discussed.

BACKGROUND

The East India Company (EIC) was created in 1600 (Thomas, 2014) by a Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I, granting it a monopoly of sea-borne trade between England and Asia (Thiessen, 1994). The Company had the right to make law, coin money and conduct war (Stern, 2008): designed to protect its commercial interests, while the EIC was ultimately responsible to the British Government, the Company had independent and unchecked power in India.
In the pre-Plassey period, Buchan (1994) claims that the EIC had "maintained the character of mere traders, under the protection of the native powers" (Buchan, 1994, p.53). This suggests that the Company's main priority was commercial success, including the profitable exports of textiles, gold and silver from India (Chaudhuri, 1968). By 1720, the Company had obtained coastal settlements in India such as Bombay and Calcutta (Moll, 1732), which had been acquired by peaceful negotiations (Ghosh, 1950) to secure and enhance the Company's commercial interests. This objective was enforced by the EIC's directors in London, who wielded the paramount authority (Buchan, 1994) and decided that the Company's policies would remain focused on trade. However, the physical strength of the EIC in the pre-Plassey period was limited because it had a relatively small military, including an army of 545 men at Madras (Reid, 2012). The sole purpose of these troops was to defend the Company's trading outposts, since this small force would have been incapable of waging offensive warfare.
Despite occupying several coastal areas, the EIC's position in India was in constant jeopardy because of India's volatile political and military climate. Following the decline of the Mughal Empire (Pearson, 1976), India had fractured into numerous feuding states with unstable borders and relations. While this allowed the EIC to assert its presence in the area, it also created political uncertainty, including strained relations with Indian rulers and the competing French East Indies Company (Cross, 2020).

This hostile atmosphere facilitated the fall of Calcutta in 1756 (Sil, 2005), which served as a trigger for the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Calcutta was a prominent settlement belonging to the EIC and was situated near the large and powerful state of Bengal (Dasgupta, 2000). Whilst their relationship was usually peaceful, the leader of Bengal, known as the Nawab, Sirãj ud-Daula launched a violent attack on Calcutta in June 1756 (Oturkar, 1953), during which the EIC lost £2,250,000 (Robins, 2012). The Company's ill-arranged and decaying defences (Cardew, 1903) facilitated the catastrophe, humiliating the Company in front of the residents of Calcutta and to global investors.

The EIC recovered Calcutta under the leadership of Robert Clive (Lenman & Lawson, 1983) after the Nawab's forces fled without fighting (Cardew, 1903). However, this absence of combat exposed the Nawab's initial assault more as of an attack rather than an engagement of warfare, since he had no interest in retaining Calcutta. This further insulted the reputation and integrity of the Company. It can thus be assumed that the Battle of Plassey was a retaliatory war in response to this.

Additionally, the EIC was coming to an economic standstill in the years preceding Plassey, which was reflected by the Company's poor performance in the stock market (Bowen, 2006). This suggests that the EIC's trade monopoly between England and Asia (Vaughn, 2019) was proving unprofitable and unsustainable, which was compounded by the fall of Calcutta in 1756. Without major intervention, the EIC may have faced a further economic crisis and ruin. Therefore, in 1756, the commercial security and reputation of the EIC was blatantly under threat. This implies that the Company would have to assume a more dominant military presence in India, or face being ousted from the region entirely.

BATTLE OF PLASSEY

The Battle of Plassey was fought in 1757 between the East India Company and the state of Bengal (Derks, 2012), which was led by the Nawab of Bengal, Sirãj ud-Daula (Green & Deasy, 1985). The conflict took place in the historic region of Bengal, which encompassed the modern-day areas of Western India and Bangladesh (Roy, 2011) and was fought regarding the authority of the region (Oturkar, 1953). The Battle of Plassey is commonly considered amongst historians to have been orchastrated by the EIC, through conspiracy with influential Indian authorities such as Mir Jafar and the Jagat Seths (Sil, 2005). While the Nawab's forces numbered approximately 50,000 men, the EIC's army was composed of only 3000 soldiers, led by Colonel Robert Clive. Two thirds of the Company's army was made up of 2000 Indian troops (Thatcher, 1907), known as sepoys (Johnson, 2013), which had been trained to perform advanced Western military tactics on the battlefield (Bryant, 2000). Furthermore, the EIC's conspiracy meant that Mir Jafar, who was supposed to be allied with the Nawab, withheld his forces from the battle (McGinty, 1947). As a result, the Company inflicted about 500 casualties upon the Bengal Army, whilst only suffering 22 themselves (Thatcher, 1907). Subsequently, despite the odds stacked against them, Robert Clive led the East India Company to a historic victory (Whitehead, 1935).

Quiet Night Thoughts - Li Bai
靜夜思 - 李白

A TRANSLATION BY ELISE P

床前明月光，
chuáng qián míng yuè guāng
疑是地上霜。
yí shì dì shàng shuāng
舉頭望明月，
jǔ tóu wàng míng yuè
低頭思故鄉。
dī tóu sī gù xiāng

.....

There is a bright moonlight shining before the bed,
uncertain whether the moonlight is frost on the ground.
To appreciate the moon over the mountain I raise my head,
and lower it to think of my hometown.

Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators: French to English Translation Prize

ENTRY BY ABIGAIL H

C'est lui, c'est sa voix qui nous parle, qui est là. Mais comme elle est loin ! Que de fois je n'ai pu l'écouter sans angoisse, comme si devant cette impossibilité de voir, avant de longues heures de voyage, celle dont la voix était si près de mon oreille, je sentais mieux ce qu'il y a décevant dans l'apparence du rapprochement le plus doux, et à quelle distance nous pouvons être des personnes aimées au moment où il semble que nous n'aurions qu'étendre la main pour les retenir. Présence réelle que cette voix si proche - dans la séparation effective ! Mais anticipation aussi d'une séparation éternelle ! Bien souvent, écoutant de la sorte, sans voir celle qui me parlait de si loin, il m'a semblé que cette voix clamait des profondeurs d'où l'on ne remonte pas, et j'ai connu l'anxiété qui allait m'éteindre un jour, quand une voix reviendrait ainsi (seule et ne tenant plus à un corps que je ne devais jamais revoir) murmurer à mon oreille des paroles que j'aurais voulu embrasser au passage sur des lèvres à jamais en poussière.

.....

It's her, it's her voice that speaks to us - that's there. But from how far away! For so long I couldn't hear her without torment, as if when faced with this impossibility of seeing, except after long hours of travel, her whose voice was so close to my ear, I understood better the disappointment in the gentlest pretence of time spent together, like in the moments where we can be so far from loved ones while it seems they're just within arm's reach. That voice - so close, with such real presence – in effective separation! But, beyond that, the promise of an eternal separation! Very often, listening like that, without seeing she who spoke to me from afar, it seemed that her voice called from depths from where you don't return, and I knew the anxiety which would one day suffocate me, when a voice would return (alone and no longer belonging to that body which I should never see again) to mutter in my ear words which I would have wanted to kiss, in passing, from those lips forever turned to dust.

Is the issue of pollution in our world giving you anxiety?

BY MARIA G

Well, in the 1970s to the 1990s, lead released in vehicle exhausts was associated with neurological and behavioural harm, among other neurological issues, in children and young adults during this time. This was all due to a chemical called tetraethyllead (TEL), used as an additive to gasoline that increased the octane rating of the gasoline.

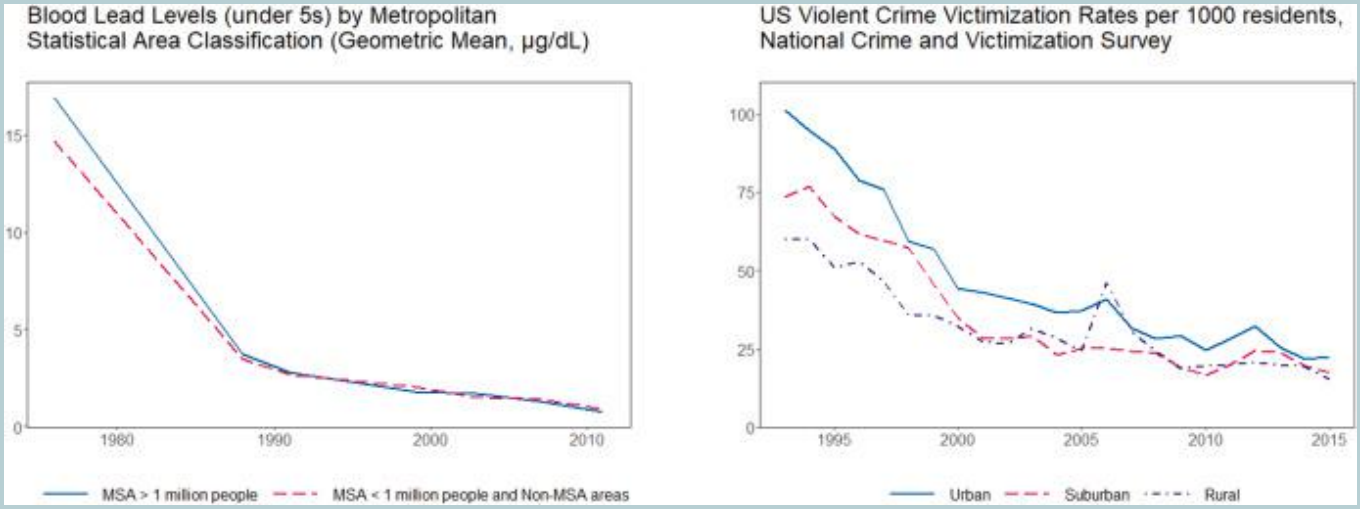
A fuel's octane rating is its ability to resist premature ignition when in an engine. Knocking is when a small pocket of the fuel in the car's cylinder ignites prematurely or unevenly, out of sync with the engine cycle. This is a cause for concern for many drivers, as knocking can often lead to damage to the engine of the car and its emission system. TEL was an effective and cheap solution in reducing knocking as it decomposes into lead oxides, which chemically inhibit the chain reactions that cause the uneven ignition, meaning that knocking was less frequent and people were more likely to opt for the new, leaded petrol.

The leaded petrol was first introduced in 1921, and reached a maximum during the 1970s, where (in 1971) 400,000 tonnes of lead was being released into the atmosphere per annum [1]. When the 1976 – 1980 Second National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey took place in the USA, it was found that 2.5 - 4 million children less than 5 years old had blood lead concentrations in excess of 250 µg/L [2], keeping in mind that the UK average level for under 16s is 50 µg/L [3]. Evidently, there was an issue.

The mass producer of TEL in petrol was Octel. Octel closed in 2004, after many employees left the company. However, there were bigger issues for the company surrounding their loss of employees. People knew that lead was very bad for your health, so to appeal to the masses, it was renamed ethyl gasoline, instead of lead gasoline. While they managed to hide the use of lead from the public, Octel could not avoid impacts on their employees due to working so closely with the product. There quickly began to be a plethora of health issues within the company. There were alleged reports of workers suffering serious physical and mental health issues. When one man got home from work, his sister called the police because he was 'acting irrationally', taking 4 policemen to subdue him. [4]

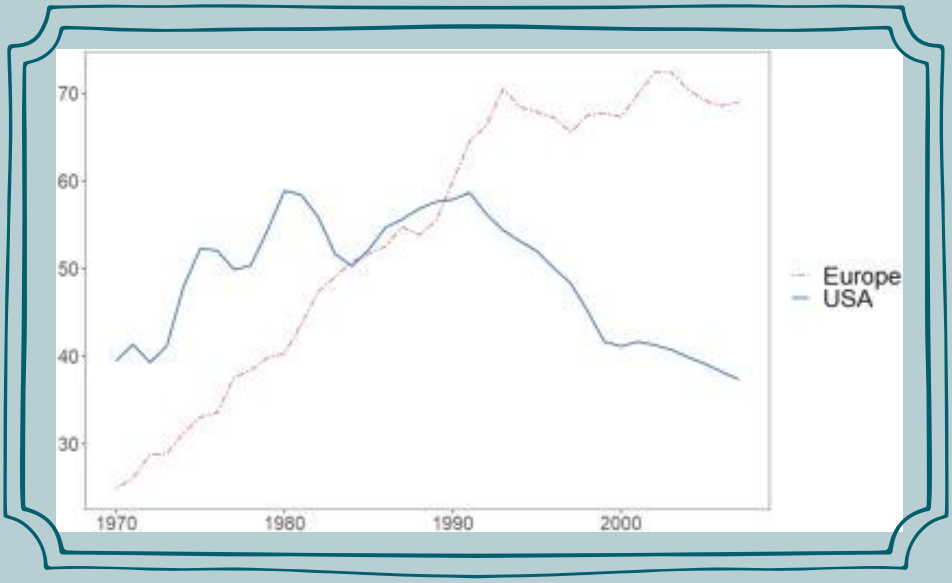
While many things can cause mental health disorders, researchers have debated a link between TEL and its effects on the brain. When in the body, the TEL undergoes a dealkylation – a process where alkyl groups (general formula CnH2n+1) are removed – and it becomes Triethyllead (TrieEL). TriEL is a neurotoxin that inhibits mitochondria and disrupts ATP production. In turn, that leads to neuronal dysfunction. [5] This is even more impactful for children as their brains are still developing. Hypothesis about the link between the two were soon established, some even arguing that lead pollution was causing increasing crime rates.

Many (US) studies have looked at the correlation between falling lead levels and a decrease homicide and general crime rates. Granted, it is not an even decline, but a decline nonetheless that appears consistent with the lead levels graph.



[6]

However, this may be correlation without causation, as in Europe it was found that where the USA crime rate decreased, the European crime rate increased:



[6]

So while it cannot be said there is a direct link in crime rates and lead pollution to the atmosphere, remaining an on going debate, there is clearer evidence that lead poisoning had an impactful effect on the minds, IQ and wellbeing of many young children in the 1970s-80s and onwards.

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To what extent does gender bias affect contraceptive development and availability?

BY YOUKIE H

For decades, contraceptive research has been predominantly focused on women. Due to gender bias and societal norms, the responsibility of pregnancy is placed on a woman, whilst male accountability in reproduction is neglected. Gender bias refers to the preferential treatment or negative attitudes towards individuals based on their gender [1]; it stems from historical beliefs and promotion of contraceptive options being primarily focused on women. This reinforces the idea that creating a family is solely a woman's obligation, not a shared responsibility. Cultural and societal stigmas surrounding male contraception also deter men from contributing to a shared decision regarding family planning and instead focuses more on male pleasure and comfort, thus further pushing reproductive responsibility onto women. By doing so, women's contraception becomes more normalised, which creates a vicious cycle where men's contraception becomes researched less as a result of increased demand for female contraceptives.

In 2016, researchers conducted a trial, the findings of which were published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism and detailed a new hormonal injection that could prevent sperm production in males. The drug was tested on 320 men across 7 countries, and it was deemed mostly effective. However, after 3 years of research, scientists agreed to terminate the study early due to side effects the participants reported which include acne, pain, mood disorders and depression[2]. This decision demonstrates the double standard present in research due to sexual discrimination, as the female contraceptive pill (which also causes similar side effects) was still declared safe for use. Women's hormonal pills have been proven to increase risk of blood clots, breast cancer, weight gain, migraines and more[3] on top of the side effects recorded from the trial. A study showed that 79.2% of women have reported side effects from taking oral contraceptives and out of these participants, 58.4% reported mood swings and 41.9% of women have reported that they are depressed[4]. Moreover, despite over 75% of men that partook in the trial who stated that they would use the hormonal injection if it were to be made publicly available, plus the lack of further research into whether or not the drug truly caused depression in the participants, the trial was still stopped due to safety concerns[2]. Clinical trials for male hormonal contraceptives are held to different standards[5] than female contraceptives and in comparison, they are underfunded and deprioritised, so the options remain limited to condoms and vasectomies. Whilst changes in sex drive could be a strong force in withholding male hormonal contraceptives, this should not be considered a valid reason when women are expected to tolerate the harmful side effects of hormonal pills and IUDs[6][7], further highlighting the double standards stemmed from societal norms. Many men are also reluctant to use non-hormonal contraception, let alone hormonal contraceptives because they are concerned about the "effect[s] on their performance"[8] and their ability to feel sexual pleasure. A survey by the Parsemus Foundation – a non–profit organisation that supports neglected areas of medical research – found that 20% of men refused to take clean sheet pills

(a non-hormonal contraceptive that prevents release of sperm whilst still allowing ejaculation)[9], which further illustrates the refusal of contraceptives among males. This significantly contributes to the limited pharmaceutical investment that restricts the market availability for new contraceptive options.

Among women in the UK, 84% have switched their contraceptive methods at least once and 1 in 7 females are suffering side effects of their current contraceptive[10]. This showcases the injustice women still face when it comes to reproductive management which originates in traditional roles placed on women by culture and religion. Even now, a woman is still judged on how sexually active she is, if she lost her virginity too 'early' and the consequences that come with unprotected sex – including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies. In contrast, men are not held responsible for the consequences of their sexual activity, nor does society judge a man for being sexually active, instead they are praised for their natural sexual desires which are considered to be 'masculine'. The impact of this damaging mindset, which is deeply rooted in misogyny, is particularly prevalent in the first release of oral contraceptives by the NHS in 1961, where the hormone-based pill was available for married women only. It was not until 1967 when it became more widely accessible because men feared that if it were to be available for all women, there would be changes in "sexual power dynamics"[11]. Furthermore, in 2017, the major pharmacy chain Boots, refused to reduce the cost of the morning–after pill because they claimed to be avoiding "incentivising inappropriate use"[12] by women, highlighting the stereotype that women who purchase the morning–after pill are promiscuous. This breeds the negative mindset that needing emergency contraception is humiliating. Boots' comment clearly demonstrates the lack of bodily autonomy women have over their reproductive rights and that women's options are actively being limited by major companies, based on their financial status and ability to access free healthcare. Over 31% of women have reported being too embarrassed to talk to their pharmacist about the morning-after pill and a further 1 in 8 women would rather travel to another town to buy the pill because society makes them feel shunned and irresponsible[13]. The morning-after pill is intended to be more accessible than other forms of emergency contraception as it can be issued to under-age people without parental consent[14], therefore it is incredibly important to create greater availability and easier access to this medication to prevent unwanted pregnancies – especially in minors who may be too scared to talk to their parents about it. A study on pregnant young people revealed that 47.7% of them did not tell their mother and a further 55.2% of people did not reveal the pregnancy to their fathers when they initially found out[15], which suggests that there is a stigma around teen pregnancies. This leads to young women in particular who are "perceived to be guardians of their reproductive capabilities"[16] to feel shameful because female sexual desire is still frowned upon by society and therefore, they may be reluctant to seek medical advice and support.

Alternatively, some researchers argue that preventing the release of an egg in the menstrual cycle is scientifically easier than preventing sperm production[17]. The production of sperm (otherwise known as spermatogenesis) takes 64-72 days in humans[18], which requires a high concentration of intratesticular testosterone to support healthy sperm production[19].

Scientists can use one of the three methods to create a male contraceptive – preventing sperm from reaching the egg by using a physical barrier (such as a condom) or a vasectomy, inhibiting spermatogenesis, or killing the sperm before ejaculation or when it is inside of the female reproductive system[18]. Currently, the most widely available contraceptive is a condom which is 98% effective when used correctly. Yet, it is unlikely that condoms are used perfectly, so in reality condoms are around 82% effective[20]. The other more permanent option of contraception for men would be a vasectomy, which is a surgical procedure that prevents prevents sperm from entering the semen during sexual intercourse. Whilst this surgery can be carried out for free under the NHS, there is usually a waiting list and therefore it is not easily accessible[21]. The challenge with preventing spermatogenesis is that men can produce millions of sperm per day, hence both hormonal and non–hormonal methods would take approximately two months alongside continuous treatment after the initial stage to remain completely effective, a reversal would take a similar amount of time[17]. Driven by the length of time required to achieve the desired result, the current methods in development are unfavourable, thus female contraceptive methods may therefore appear more practical given that it is effective within the first 7 days of use[22] and ovulation begins within two weeks to six months after a woman stops taking hormonal contraception[23]. Therefore, this demonstrates that the predominance of female contraception comes from biological feasibility rather than gender bias because in terms of science, preventing ovulation is more achievable than suppressing spermatogenesis.

Whilst biological differences have undeniably influenced contraceptive development, they do not fully account for the persistent imbalance in availability of female and male contraception. Historical gender bias has significantly shaped how contraception is prioritised and normalised by emphasising the expectations that women should manage fertility. These social projections have not only dictated the direction of contraceptive research but also marketing methods, making female contraception appear more convenient and socially acceptable, despite all the burdens that come with it. The limited availability of male contraception also reflects the decades of normalisation of who should take on the responsibility of reproduction. In conclusion, although preventing ovulation is more straightforward than stopping sperm production, convenience does not excuse the lack of comparable investment into male contraception.

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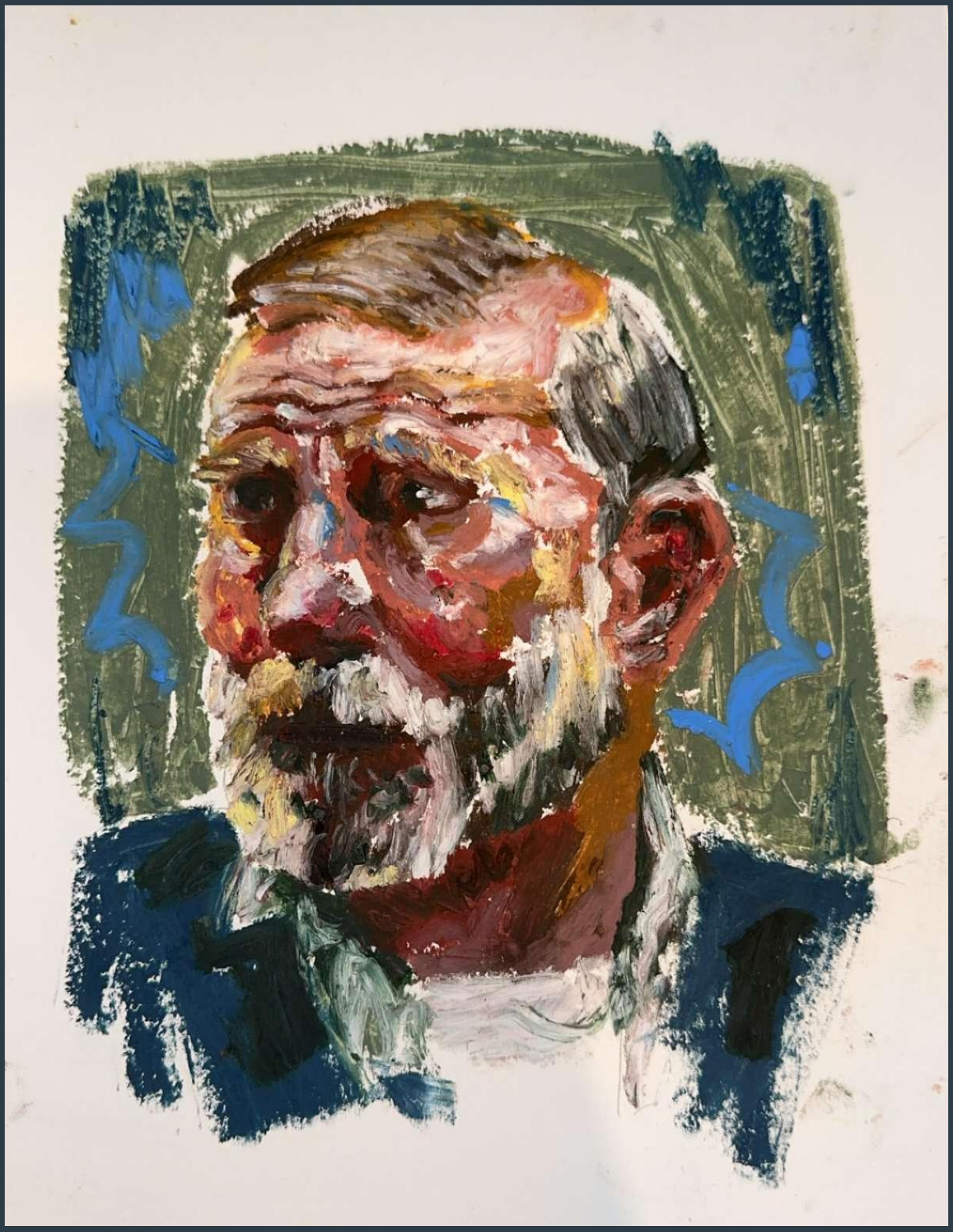
Oil Pastel Drawings

BY ELIZA W



To what extent are white European women's rights the most weaponised gender-based factor shaping immigration rhetoric?

AN EPQ EXTRACT BY ERICA G

The following is an extract from a section of my EPQ titled 'To what extent are white European women's rights the most weaponised gender-based factor shaping immigration rhetoric?'. This extract forms part of the argument that white European women's rights are indeed the most weaponised gender based factor. However the other factors in consideration are ethnic minority immigrant women's rights and ethnic minority immigrant men as a threat to these rights.

WHITE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Each reference to white European women throughout this dissertation refers to white women who are considered native to their country and more generally to Europe as a whole, as these are the women whose rights are depicted as threatened by the presence of ethnic minority immigrant men in Europe. The femonationalist narrative is given rise to by the notion that white women are at constant threat from sexual violence at the hands of immigrant men and specific incidents are capitalised on to justify this narrative. One example explored by feminist scholars Sager and Mulinari is the sexual harassment of women in Cologne, Germany at New Years Eve celebrations in 2015, whereby migrant men and cultures as a whole were villainised as sexual predators (Sager and Mulinari, 2018). Though the attacks were serious, but scholars argue that they were subsequently generalised to entire migrant populations and cultures. Such incidents generate reactionary responses and, in the most extreme cases, have led to the establishment of neo-Nazi vigilante-style groups who operate with the stated intention of 'protecting' white women from immigrant men (Sager and Mulinari, 2018). Whilst incidents such as in Cologne are isolated and uncommon, they serve as fuel for far right racist agendas to overstate the genuine threat to white women's safety. In order to legitimately do so, women must be depicted as vulnerable and in need of protection from a masculine figure. As will be examined, the way this operates requires the conformity of white women which ultimately has detrimental impacts on women's health (McMahon and Kahn, 2017) and reinforces the patriarchal structure of society. This will demonstrate the hypocrisy of femonationalist parties claiming to defend women through their anti-immigration rhetoric.

BENEVOLENT SEXISM

The manner in which the aforementioned infantilisation of women occurs is widely known as benevolent sexism, a term devised as part of Glick and Fiske's Ambivalent Sexism Theory. It argues that women who conform to gender roles and societal expectations of character, such as purity and domesticity, are considered deserving of male protection (benevolent sexism), whilst those who don't fulfil these criteria are met with more overt hostile sexism (Glick and Fiske, 1996). On the surface, it might appear that benevolent sexism is at least somewhat beneficial to recipients of this treatment. However, various studies have revealed that benevolent sexism impedes cognitive function of women (Dardenne et al., 2013), undermines educational aspirations (Montañés et al., 2012), and condemns women who engage in consensual pre-marital sex (Sakalh-Uğurlu and Glick, 2003) amongst other negative outcomes. The clear hypocritical nature of benevolent sexism as shown by these studies further reinforces the idea that white European women's rights are weaponised in immigration debates rather than used legitimately given the harm caused by benevolent sexism. One relevant study found that men who read about violent crimes (particularly when committed by immigrants) experienced a heightened desire to protect women. Despite this study being conducted in America, it can be suggested that the findings apply in a European context too (McMahon and Kahn, 2017). Crucially, the construction of supposedly external threats allows for the depiction of white European men as champions of women's safety, playing heavily into an 'us' versus 'them' narrative from which societal divisions can emerge. This manifests as a core mechanism in the use of white women's rights in immigration arguments, whereby far-right nationalist actors are able to externalise the threat to women's safety and project it onto migrant men, subsequently villainising them (McMahon and Kahn, 2017). In doing so, they portray themselves as saviours, a framing that can also obscure sexual violence committed by men within majority populations.

Taking it from the theoretical to the actual, these ideas are central in far-right political discourse. For example, the 120 Dezibel campaign in Germany (created with the intention of addressing the threat to women's safety which they see immigrants as posing) accuses European states of being complicit in the murder of and violence towards female citizens, thereby constructing themselves as the sole advocates for women's rights (Nieves Camacho, 2021). It is therefore evident how benevolent sexism, in this case specific to white women, plays a huge role in enabling anti-immigration rhetoric, laying the foundations upon which far-right parties can construct the idea of a threatened and helpless group requiring safeguarding. Importantly, this is a clear example of weaponisation because of the clear degradation of women through benevolent sexism as it essentially forces conformity to patriarchal ideas, with any non-conforming women being subject to hostile sexism.

PRESERVING THE FAMILY AND THE NATION

The image of the family, specifically the women and children who are seen as vulnerable, is another component utilised in femonationalist rhetoric. To many far-right parties, the traditional family is an ideal which they seek to uphold (Kamińska-Korolczuk, Piotrowska and Kamińska, 2025) given how it contributes to maintaining patriarchy and capitalism, leading arguments supporting it to be naturally deployed to support their narrative. Sager and Mulinari make the case for 'care racism', whereby parties don't necessarily articulate their prejudice through dialogues of hate, but instead through the lens of caring for the safety of the family and community (Sager and Mulinari, 2018). By putting foundational structures such as family and society centre stage, their argument seems credible and appealing to many, unlike one built upon hatred and xenophobia. Sager and Mulinari consider the idea of 'care racism' in the Swedish context, but this can be seen in other countries too despite the fact that research doesn't specifically identify it as 'care racism'. Examination of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Alternative for Germany) party and their political advertisements shows how they seek to present themselves as concerned for the safety of women and children in the context of threats posed by immigration and feminism. In doing so, the party positions itself as one capable of defending women from these threats which otherwise obstruct women from fulfilling their maternal roles (Kamińska-Korolczuk, Piotrowska and Kamińska, 2025). Constructions of masculinity is pertinent to mention here to understand how this idea is mobilised and gains traction. The idea of immigration posing a threat to the family extends to posing a threat to men's masculinity due to the patriarchal narrative that good men should be defenders of their family (and by extension their nation). Hence, far right leaders such as Björn Höcke (a leading AfD politician in Thuringia) invoke ideas about 'rediscover[ing] manhood' to ensure the nation is 'well fortified' against the threat of immigrant men who supposedly pose a risk to white women (Roth, 2021) and in doing so risk emasculating white men. Crucially, the desire is not to protect all women, but white women specifically, as the traits eliciting benevolent sexist attitudes are historically associated with upper-class white women (Schloesser, 2005). This attitude means that not only is white men's protection motivated by a desire to defend white women but ultimately also to preserve the purity of the white race (Wood, 2009). As Colella articulates, it is sexuality which is seen as the "main vector of racial – thus cultural – contagion" (Colella, 2021). With benevolent sexism in mind, it is clear how a desire to control women's sexuality by equating it with the reproduction of the nation originates. Arguably, this constructed parallel sits at the heart of femonationalism, whereby women's bodies and reproductive capacity become symbolic of the nation's boundaries (reinforced by terms like 'motherland'), subsequently othering those perceived as belonging outside of this constructed and physical space (Colella, 2021). She goes on to point out that a sort of reverse colonial narrative is deployed, whereby European countries (with their colonial histories) normalise the acquisition of land and its inhabitants in order to legitimise the idea that the nation might be threatened by others, requiring anti-immigration policies (Colella, 2021). Kulz and Rashid argue that the primary intention behind such discourse is the reduction in the birth rates of ethnic minority immigrants, marking a move towards racial pseudoscience seen in conspiracy theories such as 'The Great Replacement', a racist conspiracy theory outlining the belief that the white populations of European countries will increasingly become a minority in the light of higher immigration levels and greater birth rates of ethnic minority individuals. In their research, Kulz and Rashid explore Germany's stress on the historical importance of blood lineage as the central factor for citizenship, highlighting some of the context upon which beliefs in ideas of racial purity might blossom (Kulz and Rashid, 2025, Ahmed and Pisoiu, 2020). It is evident therefore why far-right parties utilise the principle of motherhood and emphasise the importance of the (white) family, enabling them to promote reproduction of the white race - ultimately motivated by ideas of white supremacy. This demonstrates how far-right nationalists espouse the idea that white women's reproductive capacity plays an integral role in preserving a nation's racial purity, which elicits anti-immigrant sentiment on the basis of preventing ethnic minority immigrant men from reproducing with white women. By establishing white women as cornerstones of racial and national boundaries, they are deemed as threatened and in need of protection, showing how this outlook goes hand in hand with benevolent sexism to fuel anti-immigration rhetoric.

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French Flash Fiction: French Creative Writing Competition

ENTRY BY CARA M

Quand je faisais mon stage, j'ai rencontré un immigrant iranien. Il est venu pour chercher de quoi manger. Il avait le désespoir dans ses yeux, et son manteau pendait mollement de ses épaules. D'une voix qui chevrotait, il m'a dit 'Please, help'. Mon estomac s'est noué à la vue de son corps maigre. Il fallait que je l'aide. Mais, ma patronne s'est mise devant moi. Elle m'a repoussé. Je l'ai entendue dire d'une voix douce «Désolée... On peut pas t'aider». Je ne vais jamais oublier son visage quand il partait. Ce n'est pas souvent qu'on voit un homme adulte pleurer.

.....

When I was doing my work experience, I met a man who was an Iranian immigrant. He came looking for something to eat. His eyes were full of despair, and his coat hung limply from his shoulders. In a hoarse voice, he said to me 'please, help'. My stomach dropped at the sight of his hollow body. I had to help him. But, my boss stepped in front of me. She pushed me away. Quietly, I heard her say 'sorry, we can't help you'. I will never forget his face when he was leaving. It is not often you see an adult man cry.

To what extent are cannabinoids a viable treatment for neurodegenerative diseases?

AN EPQ EXTRACT BY AUSTIN L

Neurons in different regions of the brain are each involved in a unique and specific purpose. Those attributed with movement are in the precentral gyrus and the frontal lobe [1], whereas neurons essential for memory are in the frontal and temporal lobes [2][3]. Although they are relatively close in proximity, their function is worlds apart. As a result, when one tiny region of the brain becomes damaged it can have catastrophic consequences on the body. One small slip of the scalpel during cerebral surgery can lead to lifetime of paralysis. Perhaps the loss of 15 years' worth of memories, or even the inability to process the colour red. Our brains are fantastically complex and fragile, but also incredibly difficult to access. Of course, this naturally raises the question: 'How are we supposed to treat neurological illnesses?' Underneath the porcelain of our skulls lies the potential for a million different life-altering mistakes at a flick of the wrist. Hence why a neurosurgeon will seemingly never have the capability to cut open a patient's skull and intricately, delicately repair the dopaminergic (dopamine-producing) neurons in the substantia nigra to cure someone of Parkinson's Disease [4], no matter how much they practice beforehand. It's just not that simple. What remains is the potential for drug therapy in combination with nanotechnology and stem cell therapy [5][6]. But first, we have to pinpoint what triggers each disease before we can treat it.

What appears unanimous in neurodegenerative diseases (NDs), be it Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis, is neuroinflammation [7]. Although neurodegenerative disease is a broad term, neurodegeneration in practice pertains to a series of neurological disorders with "heterogenous clinical and pathological expressions" [8] meaning that each individual disorder has different biological markers, causes and symptoms to another. Although the cause of the inflammation differs from condition to condition, the brain's automatic immune response seems to have a detrimental self-sabotaging effect of which remains constant in all of these disorders. Thus, one naturally concludes that if we stop the inflammation, we solve the illness.

Perhaps one of the best ways to understand the concept of neuroinflammation is to imagine an inflammatory response in another part of the body. Take for instance you ran headfirst into a door and split your lip. Almost immediately after it begins to swell up and throb, it becomes inflamed. This is the body's natural response to damage in the area, or something foreign entering the blood stream. When a cut forms, chemical messengers (histamines and cytokines) are released into the blood to attract white blood cells (macrophages and neutrophils) to destroy any foreign objects that may enter the bloodstream and clot the wound to stop the bleeding [9]. Same thing happens in the brain: a foreign object is detected, white blood cells (macrophages in this case, known as microglia – brain resident phagocytes [10]) move to the site of the irritation and trigger an inflammatory response [11]. The only difference is that unlike running into a door, you may not feel any physical pain [12]. Normally, this process results in clearance of foreign objects, and the inflammation ends shortly after. However, inflammation persists over a prolonged period in neurodegenerative diseases. This causes a domino effect of detrimental consequences.

Firstly, to trigger inflammation in the brain there must be a primary cause. If we use Parkinson's disease as an example, the dopaminergic (dopamine-producing) neurons located in the substantia nigra become blocked by insoluble protein plaques, known as Lewy bodies (often triggered by a mutation in the SNCA gene) [13]. They're made of a protein known as alpha-synuclein [13]. When these plaques form at the precipice of an axon, they interfere with synaptic transmission [14]. The aggregation of a misfolded protein has a detrimental effect on mitochondrial function, in that they inhibit it [14]. Neurotransmission relies on processes known as exocytosis and endocytosis [15][16]. These are the bulk transport of substances into and out of a cell using secretory vesicles. This process is active and requires energy in the form of ATP (adenosine-triphosphate) produced by mitochondria [17]. Hence, when mitochondria become damaged by alpha-synuclein deposits and experience severe dysfunction, it leads to the death of dopaminergic (dopamine-producing) neurons [13]. Ultimately, dopamine insufficiency disrupts the brain's ability to co-ordinate body movements, resulting in symptoms like tremor and slowness [18].

Likewise, in the brain these neurons 'switch off' per se, resulting in impaired cognitive function. In response to the now limited levels of neurotransmission, the resident immune cells known as microglia are activated in attempt to counteract the problem. This is known as the inflammatory response [19]. Mast cells in the area release histamines and cytokines (chemical messengers) into the capillaries which attract macrophages. In doing so, blood vessels in the brain become more permeable, causing tissue fluid to build up in that area, triggering the 'swelling'/inflammatory response [20]. The microglia then initiate the immune response by releasing cytokines, predominantly IL-1 (interleukin-1), TNF-a (tumour necrosis factor-alpha) and chemokines to attract other microglia to the area in an attempt to clear the blockage by phagocytosis [21]. However, due to the nature of Lewy-bodies, microglia are unable to break them down [22]. The persistent lack of dopamine in the substantia nigra, and as a result the lack of neurotransmission means that the microglial activation will persist [22]. In normal neuroinflammation, microglia will start out in their pro-inflammatory and aggressive M1 phenotype, producing neurotoxic chemicals to break down any foreign objects and get rid of potentially harmful material. Shortly after they switch to a neuro-protective and anti-inflammatory M2 phenotype to minimise damage to nerve cells themselves [23].

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Anthea Bell Prize for Young Translators: Spanish to English Translation Prize

ENTRY BY ESTHER M

'ESCRITO CON L'

ORIGINAL POEM BY GONZALO ROJAS

Mucha lectura envejece la imaginación
del ojo, suelta todas las abejas pero mata el zumbido
de lo invisible, corre, crece
tentacular, se arrastra, sube al vacío
del vacío, en nombre
del conocimiento, pulpo
de tinta, paraliza la figura del sol
que hay en nosotros, nos
viciosamente mancha.
Mucha lectura entristece, mucha envilece
apestamos
a viejos, los griegos
eran los jóvenes, somos nosotros los turbios
como si los papiros dijeran algo distinto al ángel del aire:
somos nosotros los soberbios, ellos eran inocentes,
nosotros los del mosquerío, ellos eran los sabios.
Mucha lectura envejece la imaginación
del ojo, suelta todas las abejas pero mata el zumbido
de lo invisible, acaba
no tanto con la L de la famosa lucidez
sino con esa otra L
de la libertad,
de la locura
que ilumina lo hondo
de lo lúgubre,
lambda,
loca,
luciérnaga
antes del fósforo, mucho antes
del latido
del Logos.

'I WRITE WITH L'

ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY ESTHER M

Too much reading ages the eye's imagination,
releases all the bees but kills their buzz
of the invisible, it runs, it swells
tentacular, it slithers, it scales the abyss
of the abyss, in the name
of knowledge, octopus
of ink, it paralyses the light of the sun
that is in us, it lewdly
obscures us.
Much of literature depresses, much debases,
we reek
to the ancient, the Greeks
were the young, we ourselves are the remnants
as if the scrolls were to say something different
to the angel of the air:
we are the arrogant, they were the innocent,
we those of the hivemind, they were the wise.
Much of literature ages the imagination
of the eye, releasing all the bees but kills the buzz
of the invisible, it finishes
not so much with the L of the famous lucidity
rather with that other L
of liberty
of levity
that illuminates the depths
of the lugubrious,
lambda,
lunacy,
Lampyridae
before the phosphorus, long before
the lifeblood
of Logos.

Photography in India

BY ROMA H