



# Understanding the self using embroidery

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## Approval Sheet

This project titled "Understanding the self using embroidery" by Harshita Bandodkar, 176450013, is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Master of Design Degree in Communication Design.

Project Guide:



Chair person:



Internal Examiner:



External Examiner:



Date: 18/6/19 .

Place: Mumbai

## **Declaration**

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/ data/ fact/ source in my submission.

I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been needed.

Signature

*Harshit.*

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Abstract**

Often one finds oneself adrift with thoughts, doubts and uncertainties, indecisive of how to proceed and filled with questions about how one got there. I found myself in a similar flux a couple of years ago, disconnected with myself, unsure of what I wanted, looking for an escape and procrastinating work. As I started trying to understand why I felt so, reading and looking up more information, I found that I was escaping from myself, avoiding spending time with myself and introspection.

This project is an exploration into the self, spending time with my thoughts, pondering on the topics I have hitherto been dodging, via the medium of embroidery. I hope that the project would provide some insight and encourage another who might find themselves in a similar plight to take a journey of their own.

# Contents

|    |                                |    |
|----|--------------------------------|----|
| 01 | <b>Introduction</b>            | 01 |
| 02 | <b>Embroidery explorations</b> | 03 |
| 03 | <b>Studies</b>                 | 18 |
| 04 | <b>Reflections</b>             | 23 |
| 05 | <b>Appendix</b>                | 26 |

# 01

## **Introduction**

*"Closing your eyes isn't going to change anything. Nothing is going to disappear just because you can't see what's going on. In fact, things will even be worse the next time you open your eyes. That's the kind of world we live in. Keep your eyes wide open. Only a coward closes his eyes. Closing your eyes and plugging up your ears won't make time stand still."*

**- Haruki Murakami**

The project is essentially a journal where I have pondered on problems, doubts, questions, pains, longings for truth, and acceptances, where I've tried to be honest with myself without convincing myself to think a certain way. It is a set of thoughts and questions embroidered with attempts at looking for insights, trying to grow out of needing approvals, inculcating ideas into my still budding personality on being plagued with questions about my career, who I am as a person, my

ideas on myself, the ideas I project on myself, my inadequacies, attempts at finding my place in the world.

The ideas or thoughts are represented in the form of poetry accompanying the embroidered pieces. The underlying theme of the project is flowers to represent growth and is inspired by spring which was when the project was conceived.



# 02

## **Embroidery explorations**

The process of embroidery helped me to stay mindful and observe my thoughts sometimes from the place of an outsider, sometimes in the form of a dialogue with myself listening to the multiple facets of myself and understand the reasoning or idea behind a behaviour or action.

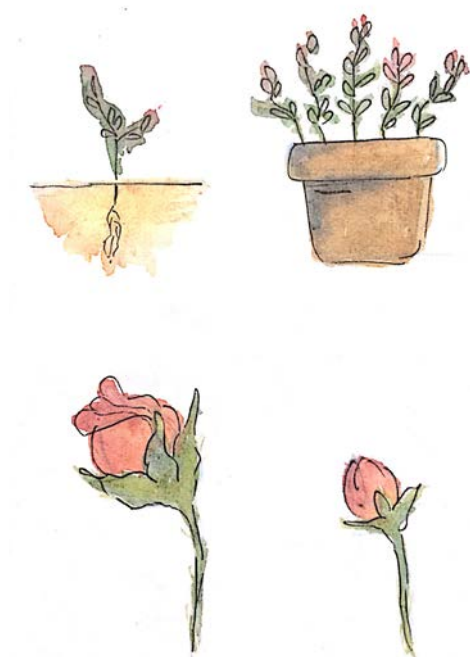
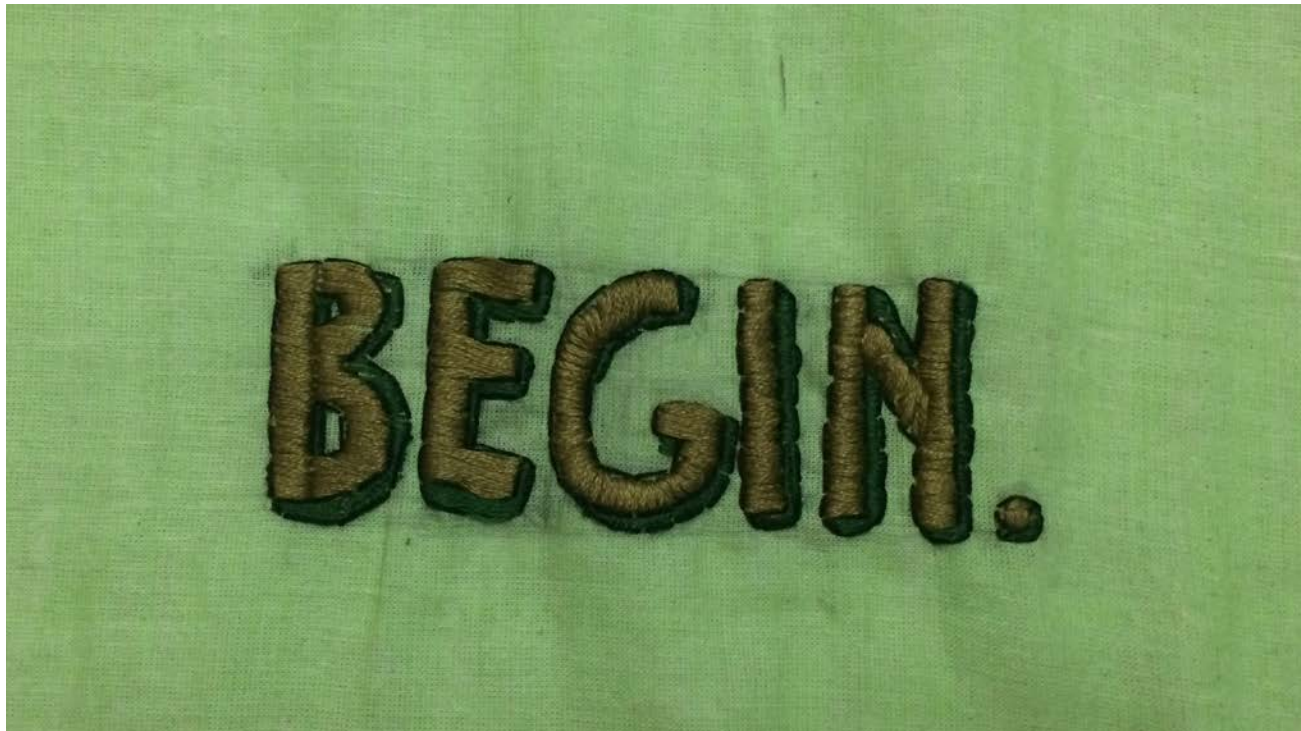
The process I followed was:

1. First I listed a set of initial thoughts from my previous journals or questions I had had off late in any form, sometimes in just bullet points or words
2. Then I would choose one of the thoughts and represent it visually. I initially tried starting out embroidering directly which I later figured didn't work very well.
3. After I had a visual of the idea and a colour scheme in mind, that I felt fit best, I would start embroidering. Here I would choose what type of stitch would look better.
4. During the embroidery stage, I would take up the idea and ponder about it. If during the course, I found my thoughts had refined, I would

modify the embroidery.

5. I would note down the thoughts later as reflections and check if I had been able to answer my questions or accept what I sometimes already knew, if I had found a way to actively try to implement or if I had gotten even a step further from where I started.

The following are the pieces of embroidery along with a gist of the thoughts that helped conceive the piece and also answer some questions or raise more to myself.

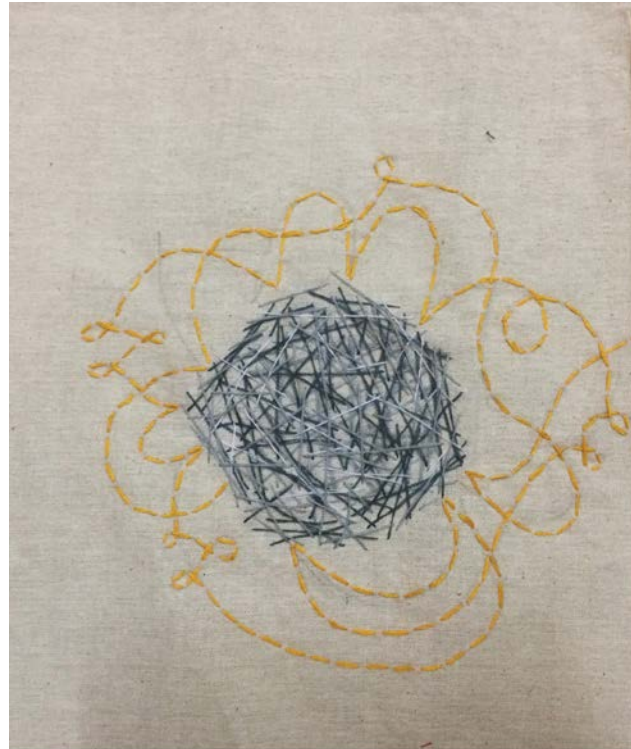


## BEGIN

I've taken up this project full of unknowns, firstly discovering yourself which in itself seems like a mammoth task and secondly, doing so using embroidery which again is an unknown has left me unsure of how to begin. That's always been an issue with me, getting started. Why am I so afraid of starting something new, is it the fear of the unknown? Fear of change? Or fear of failing? It's a little bit of all the three I suppose.

I try to find some inspiration to just get started and think that I would figure out as I go. But what am I to embroider? What am I to think about? What questions do I ask? How does one "understand" oneself? Well, I know who I am, what I like and dislike, what I think about or talk to myself but I do know that I don't really understand myself. I don't know why certain things bother me or why I react or respond the

way I do in situations. Where do I start? Maybe I should give meditation another chance. People swear by it and I didn't try hard enough. I tend to drift off or fall asleep and then get frustrated that I'm incapable of sitting still. Sitting and observing one's thoughts, turns out isn't as easy as watching clouds pass by like I pictured and instead it seems like being hit by waves repeatedly as you try to stay afloat.



So I settle, having had no other idea, to embroider the word BEGIN deciding that done was better than perfect and I just needed a boast. Being new at embroidery, it gets messed up a couple of times and takes longer than anticipated. I watch a few tutorials eventually getting a hang of it and resting in the satisfaction of the mundane repetitive stitches, I start thinking of the times I've been afraid to try something new and the lost opportunities.

I try to commit in my memory to remind myself when such a situation comes up, to not hesitate and try new things in spite of being unsure. A bad piece of embroidery is better than nothing at all, I tell myself. Also, procrastinating will only add panic at the end and I would have to settle for substandard outcomes due to a dearth of time that was caused because I spent all my time worrying about failing.

## SOLUTIONS

When I decided on starting to understand myself, I pictured myself sitting and writing down all the questions I had and finding solutions to each of them. when I proceeded to doing that was when I started to realize it wasn't as linear or as simple. I couldn't just write down questions and answers. Firstly, I couldn't



articulate out the questions or doubts I had. If I were able to put them down into words, I probably would've known the answers already which meant I probably didn't fully understand all the doubts I had.

A large number of my problems come from my being unsure or confused about things because I always wanted to be perfectly sure and secure. I do know that I cannot always expect myself or others to be sure of everything. Life is constantly changing and it will continue to do so. Trying to hold on to thoughts and answers when it's bound to change seems like trying to block the wind when you know it's nature is to keep moving. There have been so many ideas and beliefs I used to stand by and defend wholeheartedly a couple of years ago and now I don't even recollect half of them. In spite of that, I seem to be doing exactly the same now. Trying to cling onto things, trying to have everything cleared out with no doubts or uncertainty.

That doesn't mean I could be passive and ignorant, saying to myself that it will pass and I needn't do anything. I also came to the understanding that a lot of things are understood implicitly after pondering on it for days and not by asking explicit questions, by quoting facts and sayings. They could give one a direction maybe but just knowing the right things doesn't necessarily clear out doubts. So my quest of



finding answers might not be successful by the end of this project and I might not have a single answer but it certainly has been giving me time to stay by myself and allow myself to think without guilt.

## PAIN

It's said that everything is a choice and I used to completely agree with that. I liked being the master of my life, being in charge. I didn't believe in fate or destiny as I attributed that to someone who was defeated. I chose what I wanted to be and do with my life and that was what I did when I chose to come to IDC. I knew making it here would be hard but I was up for it.

What I had not anticipated was how different IDC would be in comparison to my previous experiences. I had the freedom to decide what I wanted to do but I had no idea what I wanted. I started fearing that I was disappointing people. I started wondering if coming here was a mistake. Everyone else seemed to know what to do. Why was I lost? Whatever scarce ideas I did get, I would dismiss them as being too silly or unworthy of pursuing. I wasn't prepared for this was what happened when you break free from the norms and venture out. I felt bitter and annoyed at myself for putting myself in this situation, away from home.



I got myself a fish to keep me company, a bright blue and purple Betta fish whose fins shone when hit by sunlight. I would talk to him all day long, voicing my fears to him hoping he would give me some answers. Little Ryuk just swam on. Then one day he died when I was asleep and I felt miserable. I was convinced I had done something wrong and killed him. Maybe I hadn't clean his bowl well enough or hadn't fed him enough. I had chosen to get him but I didn't take care of him. But I hadn't chosen for him to die. I knew that but I couldn't help feeling responsible. Maybe everything was not a choice. If I could choose to feel less upset then, I would.





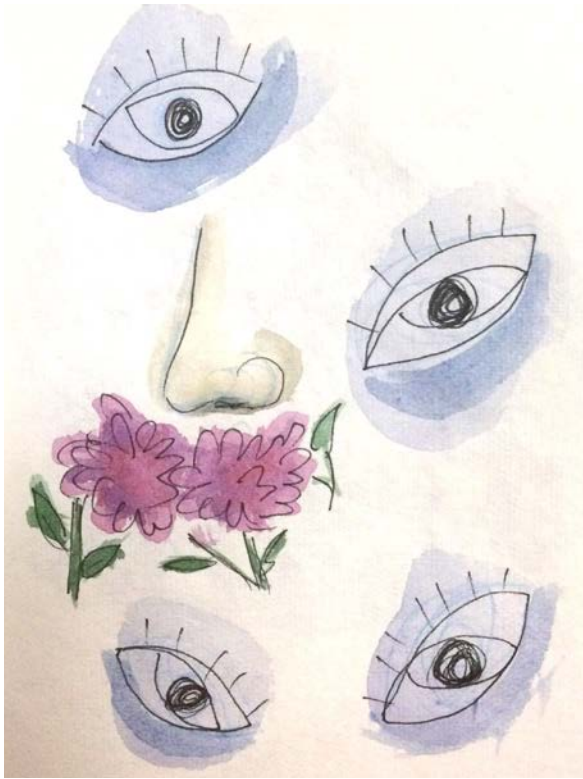
I moved his fish bowl out of sight, so it wouldn't remind me of him. Maybe I could choose certain things. I could choose to help myself feel better. After a couple of weeks, I put up a picture of him on my desk and it didn't hurt as much.

On impulse I got another fish, little Elmo. He was a bright shade of reddish orange. He met the same fate within a couple of months. I watched him gasp a twitch and sink to the bottom. I felt a little less miserable because I was there and knew I was helpless but that upset me more thinking I'd grown cold. The conclusion I reached was that I would inevitably feel pain when I chose to invest myself in something or someone but at least I got to choose whom I let myself feel pain over. Knowing or realizing something doesn't make it any easier to accept it but after a while it seems foolish to dwell on and fight things out of my control. I do not regret getting either of the fishes but I would think twice before getting another one and do so only when I'm prepared to bear the inevitable pain that would accompany it.



## TOMORROW

I've been collecting flowers from all around the campus lately and been pasting them in my journal so it can serve as a memory of my time here. I like looking for all kinds of flowers with different fragrances and colors. What started out as a fun activity has now become a bit of a fixation that all I've been doing is hoarding them. I don't stop to smell them or notice their texture.





They all go in the journal that I could open some day to look at and remember IIT.

I have noticed for a while that I tend to live more in tomorrow than today. In some cases that's good I suppose, for things that need planning and setting goals. What I've been doing isn't planning. It's holding my breath now so I can breathe tomorrow. I like getting things on time but over time I think it has become a mechanical process. I've become a box checker without realizing and am constantly planning and preparing for the next day, next hour and even the next couple of minutes reminding myself of things to get done or making to-do lists and sticking it everywhere. I now keep reminding myself to stay in the now and no fret about the future. The whole idea of preparing in advance was so that I would get time to make modifications and adapt if needed. Instead the whole business of planning seems to have made me more anxious about things not working out the way it was planned. I do feel compelled to hoard any flower I see but now I do so after I've stopped to admire it first. I still make lists and plan but I try not to fret over it or obsess on all the little details of how it should all pan out. I make plans and try to stay flexible. It hasn't been easy but I'm giving myself credit for trying. I'm making a lot of changes in my life off late and understanding about myself and I do not want to overwhelm myself and end up quitting the whole thing.

## SILVER LININGS



A year ago, I started feeling very uneasy. I couldn't put it into words but I knew I felt different. I would constantly feel lonely when I was the one choosing to be alone and distance myself from others. I started feeling homesick but I did not want to go home or talk to my family. I was sleeping around 12-13 hours a day and overeating too. I would avoid work and then



start panicking when I couldn't meet deadlines. I had no interest in work at all and would look for excuses to not do it. I would prefer going to meals alone and hope I couldn't accidentally meet a friend or an acquaintance. I would take longer routes for the same reason. I lost interest in reading too which has been my solace since



I was ten. I felt like I was just drifting aimlessly. I wanted someone to know how I felt without my having to explain it to them. I knew it was unreasonable to expect that but I felt helpless.

That was when I finally decided on seeking professional help. I was diagnosed with depression. I started feeling worse. I had always considered myself to be strong and independent and having to seek counsel and medication made me feel weak. I had thought that depression was for people that were unhappy in their lives. I wasn't unhappy, I was doing alright. I felt scared and even more alone when I confided in some friends and they advised against therapy. I eventually noticed that I had started to feel better. I could speak my mind to this kind lady and she would know what I felt and suggest on how to deal with it. It helped bring up a lot of suppressed and unresolved issues to the front. I could start to identify why I felt certain things. This wasn't an overnight process and it still isn't complete but that marked the beginning on my soul seeking ordeal, the start at understanding myself. What I thought was the worst period of my life, helped improve my bond with myself and my family, changed my perspective on things, taught me patience and to be kind to myself. The previous such instance where I felt unworthy was when I was working. The two years left me feeling defeated, unsure



as I was naïve and let people take advantage of me. That too paved my way for a better step towards IDC. The cliché saying 'every silver cloud has a silver lining' does hold true sometimes. it felt like empty claims made up to console a person in tough times, like 'whatever happens, happens for good'. In both the experiences, I termed to be my tough times, there have been good things that came out of it and I've been able to look at it a little more optimistically.

## SEEN AND UNSEEN

I've always wondered what others saw me as; an outsider's perspective, just out of curiosity. It wasn't a way of seeking validation or approval. Well, that's what I thought until I started looking into it. I saw seen as a model in some ways when I was younger. A model student that was well mannered and got good grades, a model daughter that never demanded for anything or caused trouble, a model sister that took care of her younger brother and cousins, a model friend that helped everyone out. Any behavior out of this track was seen as erratic and unlike me. Not because there were restrictions imposed on me but because they weren't used to seeing me that way or ever misbehave.



Harshita was a good girl. I suppose I was but sometimes I didn't want to be. Sometimes I wanted to have that last piece of chocolate and not give it up for my cousins, sometimes I didn't like a subject and didn't feel like studying it, sometimes I didn't want to listen to my friends' problems but do something for myself instead. I was too afraid to stand up though. They might not have got as upset as I thought they would but I was afraid they wouldn't find me reliable or responsible anymore. I had got attached to those labels and tried to fit into it. Where I went wrong was in trying to balance it all. I could've been a good girl, reliable and been myself too if I'd only dared to express how I felt. I'm sure they would've understood and even helped me remove some of the pressure I put on myself. They probably thought I liked being a model-everything and they made sure I felt appreciated. Another label that stuck was happy Harshita. It started in a class with having to introduce ourselves with alliterative adjectives that described us and being a kid I chose the first word I could think of and my name also meant the same. I did go around reciting jokes as a kid so the title stuck. If I wasn't smiling, where was happy Harshita? I didn't always have to be happy! I believe one can't always be happy and that's not a bad thing. At most times, one is neutral but well, I wasn't neutral Harshita so

too bad. Again, people didn't probably know how I felt and most of it was said in jest. I was too scared to open up and say something about it. I used to be a shy kid. So shy that once my foot got stuck in my grandpa's bicycle when he was taking me around and I kept quiet until someone on the street pointed it out to him.

So, people saw me as a happy and obedient child that had no complaints and grew up to be the same while I saw myself as a push over that had to stick to these labels because I was too scared to speak up and too scared of losing them.



## STRUCTURE

Part of the labels was also the 'always organized' and that was what I have been throughout. Be it in organizing my physical surroundings, my work or studies or even my behavior. I enjoyed the stability it provided and I liked knowing that my work got done on time that things stayed in their allocated places. Structure was good. Rules were good. Structure told me to study well, to take science for my 11th and 12th in spite of being inclined to the arts, to take up engineering because that was what everyone was doing, to work hard and get placed and that after all this, I would be settled. I promptly followed the instructions and crossed each milestone but they never told me what to do if I didn't like my job. I was told to just keep going, it wasn't necessary to like my job. You had hobbies for that. I was officially settled now and the next steps would follow.

I had known the counterpart of Structure and didn't care for it much; breaking out of the structure. It seemed to only the rebels that broke out and no thank you, I did not want that. I looked at others who were stuck like me. Some continued down the road always taken begrudgingly. Then I met some that had chosen to break the rules. I must say I didn't completely because I didn't know what I wanted and wasn't



brave enough to choose something and then regret it. So I stuck with it for over two years till I made up my mind. There was a possibility of it failing completely and the thought of not having a backup scared me but i was extremely unsatisfied with my work and couldn't picture myself being there for years.

In the end I realised these were restrictive ideas I had enforced on myself based on my exposure and surroundings and had stuck so rigidly to it without realising I was repressing myself to be free and be impulsive at times or makes decisions intuitively. I followed the rules to a tee as though it were a formula to live life by and breaching it would be blasphemy. I had to find a way to balance between following rules and needing to plan and know everything in advance and understanding that it was okay to not know for certain always, it was okay to take longer to work on that project and stay up some nights and it was necessary to let go of rigid ways and ideas.

## THE PATHS



I believe inevitably we as a society have been conditioned to follow an approved time frame for our lives. We start school at a particular, then get into a college, then find a job and get settled, followed by marriage at a set age and then have children and this goes on. I believe this clock was set up according to our biological clocks and I do agree that in certain cases it makes sense. One of the ideas from this schedule that I disagree with is

the settling down part. It seems to mean that once an individual starts working, they have reached some sort of a finish line. I understand that being financially self-sufficient could be considered as being secure and settled but financial security could be achieved in many different ways.

Michelle Obama quotes in her book *Becoming*, "As if growing up is finite. As if you become something and that is all there is." This line stuck with me as I completely agree. Meeting one's goals shouldn't be the end of learning or achieve more. At every stage of my life, I've had different ambitions and though I haven't achieved all of them, I've continued to add more of them when I came across something that sparked curiosity or interest in me. When I was younger, I wanted to be a doctor. Later I wanted to be a teacher. After I became an engineer and on the way to being a designer, I still have lots of goals and lots of things I would want to be. I might not achieve all of it but I like the idea that I can continue to do what I wish without an age limit thrust of me. It has taken me so long to allow myself to let loose sometimes and take time to understand what I want and I do not want an added burden of following the ideal and conventional routes and guidelines.





# 03

## **Studies**



During the course of the project, I was plagued with a few doubts about whether my project was self-indulgent, if it was design, and what made a project self-indulgent. To understand it better, I studied a couple of similar works including embroidery from across the country and imagery.

The project is also undertaken with the intention of understanding the self and being helpful or to encourage someone who might want to take up a similar journey. There have been design decisions made for the embroidery to convey the right mood and the message with multiple iterations and with intent to reach to the viewers.



### **The applique craft of Pipli, Odisha**

The craft was started as a tradition to supply decorated fabric for the Jagannath temple which extended to a trade undertaken by family members along with being gifted as a part of a young woman's wedding trousseau. After finding a supply for the craft, the craftsmen started incorporating colours and patterns preferred by the customers to appeal to them.

Inference: This is a craft that was done out of devotion and then affection of the daughters. At that stage, it could be categorized as being self-indulgent. When it got extended to a trade where they do consider a customer's choice, it could be said to include design.



### **Phulkari embroidery, Punjab**

It was started as an art for family. Women would gather and embroider as gifts for their daughters and daughters in law for their weddings and as heirlooms. It has now become commercially available because of fashion designers.

Inference: solely craft and was done out of love for family. It cannot be called design as there is no consideration for the user.



### **Kantha embroidery, Odisha**

The embroidery was done for household applications and identified wearers by their caste and their village. It was used to convey stories and was mainly used as a dowry tradition for daughters.

Inference: it's an art form that could be considered design because of its storytelling aspect.



### **Zardosi embroidery**

This craft was patronized by the Mughals. It is expensive and is solely done by the men of the family as trade.

Inference: it's a trade and means of support. It can be considered as design as they look for patterns and colours to appeal to customers as they art is expensive.





### **Kashidakari embroidery, Kashmir**

This craft was also patronized by the Mughals. It is passed down to the young men in the family as hereditary ownership. It was made to be gifted as part of the wedding trousseau for daughters and worn on special occasions.

Inference: it's a form of craft and cannot be considered design.



### **Shisha work from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana**

It's a craft that's undertaken by women and passed down to daughters. It is also an influencer in the matrimonial aspects of young women and was part of the dowry gifts and decorations in festivities.

Inference: it's a form of craft and cannot be considered design.



### **Warli paintings**

These paintings are done on the walls of the houses by women of the Warli tribe marking special occasions like weddings or harvests. They depicted everyday life and used simple shapes.

Inference: it is an art form done as a community activity and cannot be considered design.



### Two Fridas by Frida Kahlo

It's a famous painting of Kahlo's that depicts two versions of her according to how she sees herself, one loved and one unloved. Kahlo quotes that she painted herself as she knew her best and these were the frankest expressions of herself. She found painting self-portraits therapeutic and they were a projection of her anguish.

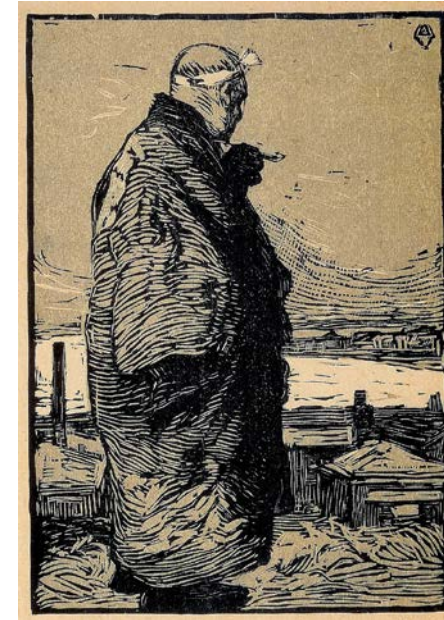
Inference: the paintings were self-indulgent and reached out to people who were in similar scenarios and found it relatable.



### Desperate man by Gustave Courbet

This was undertaken by the artist while searching for his identity after multiple rejections in a literal bid to insert him in art history.

Inference: The painting shows the desperation the artist felt and could be found to be relatable to many but it can't be called design.



### Fisherman by Kanae Yomamoto

This print was made as part of the sosaku-hanga movement where the artist was the sole creator depicting self-expression which was self-drawn, self-carved and self-printed.

Inference: it can be considered to be self-indulgent because of the artist's desire to have done it all by himself and to express himself.

# 04

## **Reflections**

The course of the project has been introspective and healing, if I can say, in so many ways. Coincidentally and yet unplanned, during the course of the project I had to spend quite some time by myself which turned out to be a blessing in disguise. It left me with no choice but to write down my thoughts and not count on anyone else which finally led me to realise I had to depend on myself. I needed to learn that. Not that I won't have anyone to help but that they won't always be available and it's perfectly fine.

I have always enjoyed being by myself but that was when I chose to or when I knew I could make a phone call and or walk out of the room if I needed someone and they would be there or that I could always count on someone if I forgot something at home or if I needed someone to pick me up. I knew if I wasn't feeling well, my parents would drop their work or plans and take me to a doctor, make sure I ate, make sure I got home on time and was safe and without my asking for it or having to think about it. Here, I realised help was available but I had to ask for it. I couldn't expect it but could try. Being shy, I never felt comfortable asking for anything and thought it would cause people inconvenience. So it took me a long time to realise that it was

okay to ask for help and it was also okay if they couldn't help.

As a perpetual planner, it was frustrating when things didn't go as planned. With known places and people it was easier to anticipate how things would pan out. When hurdles popped up, it felt like failure, like loss of control and if nothing would go as expected, what was the point of planning? It was like Murphy's law; things would go wrong if you let it. So I couldn't let it go wrong! But try as hard as I could, things did go wrong. There was nothing I could do about it. I could accept it or try to change it to the way I wanted it to be but again, I couldn't be certain and it was okay. All I could do was know that I tried my best and maybe the unexpected change wasn't so bad, it wasn't as though it was the end of the world.

Another lesson is that there aren't any deadlines. This idea of doing certain things at the right time and having everything figured out that I had seeing others wasn't true. I didn't have to have a job as soon as I graduated or I didn't need to buy a house by the time I was 30! I could take my time to figure things out and I don't have to compare myself with someone else. The grass

is greener on the other side. Maybe they don't know what they're doing either, maybe it looks all set from the outside and they have their own struggles. Everyone is just trying to figure out their journeys, same as me. I just need to be patient. Things take time and effort and if I wanted something to work out, I had to give it time. Another huge learning was that time heals everything. It sounds cliché but it's true. If I wasn't sure or happy about something, I needed to give it time and eventually it would get better. And most times I would make it seem worse than it was by over-thinking and over-analyzing everything. I'm still learning to let go of things.

I've noticed that sometimes I can be too self-righteous. I tend to jump to conclusions about others without weighing everything and this often leads to frustration as I tend to believe my way is the right way and judge others harshly.

Striving for perfection, though ideally a good thing, most times leads to disappointments in my case. I would tend to never be satisfied with my work or myself and would keep dismissing good ideas because they weren't good enough or redoing things that were well done and in the

process feeling bad about myself and not giving myself credit for the effort. In the end i would lose heart and completely give up the whole idea and feel even more miserable for giving up. I've realised that good enough is good. Perfect is preferable but good enough is better than incomplete ideas or giving up so henceforth it is, strive for perfection but know when to stop and accept the result.

Probably the biggest learning of all was that it was not selfish to think of oneself. Maybe not all the time but when it came to health, it was okay to think of myself before helping others and it was also okay for others to think of themselves before helping me. It didn't mean i was relinquishing someone or they me, but that I needed to be in a state to help before I could and I could do so when I could. There have been times when i've felt guilty for not being of help to a friend when I chose to work on myself and felt disregarded when a friend wouldn't help me. Now I understand that it isn't so.

# 05

## **Appendix**



I looked up ideas and books that might help me with the project and came across a few concepts that helped me get some apprehension.

### **Escapism**

It is the avoidance of unpleasant, boring, arduous, scary, or banal aspects of daily life. Escapism allows us to numb ourselves to a reality that we do not want to accept. It can come in different forms. Some people escape by seeking out alternate activities, such as sleeping and playing or by drowning themselves in work. Some immerse themselves in addiction, like binge eating, smoking, alcohol or even drugs. It is a way of attempting to negate our personal responsibility and to avoid the discomfort of existential angst that we all must deal with.

### **Consciousness**

It is the state or quality of awareness of an external object or something within oneself. It is also called the ability to experience or to feel, wakefulness, having a sense of self, "having" or "being" and the executive control system of the mind. When the consciousness is lower, one resists more strongly to staying in the present and seeks avoidance behaviours strongly.

### **Attention**

It is the behavioural and cognitive process of selectively concentrating on a discrete aspect of information, while ignoring other perceivable information without having to be conscious. Attention often operates in the background, allowing us to interact with the environment without much thought. When one's brain wants to be distracted, it can feel almost impossible to force oneself to pay attention especially if the task at hand is boring or difficult. Some studies view it as sort of muscle that can be strengthened with practice, certain techniques such as mindfulness, a form of meditation that cultivates the brain's ability to direct its attention to specific cues.

### **Conscious attention**

Is the "reportable" form of attention that is part of conscious awareness. Whilst attending to a particular object or thought or event that we are experiencing, if one can report that we are attending to it, we are exhibiting our use of conscious attention. Self-awareness, self-reflection and self-narration come under conscious attention.

### **Flow**

Is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is completely absorbed resulting loss in one's sense of space and time. It was named by psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. Flow is reported to provide knowledge that one's skills are adequate to the task, a sense of serenity with no worries about oneself, a feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of the ego and intrinsic motivation leading to personal development.

### **Escape mechanisms**

People escape by seeking out alternate activities, such as sleeping, playing games, drowning themselves in work, addiction like emotional eating, smoking, alcohol, drugs or other activities they enjoy. The gratification is derived from a change of mental state, a sort of detachment. To select a game, watch a movie, sleep or read no investment is required no thought or intention, but merely the urge. Smartphone games are generally simple and easy to understand, and requires no cognitive resources, so children and adults alike can easily understand the basic principles.

**Incentive salience**

A cognitive process and a form of attention that motivates, or propels, an individual's behaviour towards a particular object, perceived event, or outcome conferring a desire or want attribute to a rewarding stimulus.

**Dopamine**

Is one of the brain's neurotransmitter that ferries information between neurons. It enables us not only to see rewards, but to take action to move toward them. The dopamine release helps to change behaviours in ways that will help them attain more of the rewarding item or experience leading to habit forming or addictions. This molecule helps us in pattern recognition and it alerts us — by dropping to low levels — to a deviation from the familiar pattern. They always want to know which actions foretell a reward. From the dopamine cells' standpoint, the virtual world is no different from the real world. These cells are more excited at unexpected rewards.

**Mindfulness**

Is being fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us. It is also called moment to moment non-judgmental awareness. The four components of Mindfulness are attention regulation, body awareness, emotion regulation, and change in perspective on the self. Attention regulation is the task of focusing attention on an object, acknowledging any distractions, and then returning your focus back to the object. Body awareness refers to focusing on an object/task within the body such as breathing.

Emotions can be regulated cognitively by having control over the attention given to particular stimuli or by changing the response to those stimuli or behaviourally by inhibiting the expression of certain behaviours in response to a stimulus. All of these would lead to a change in perspective of the self.

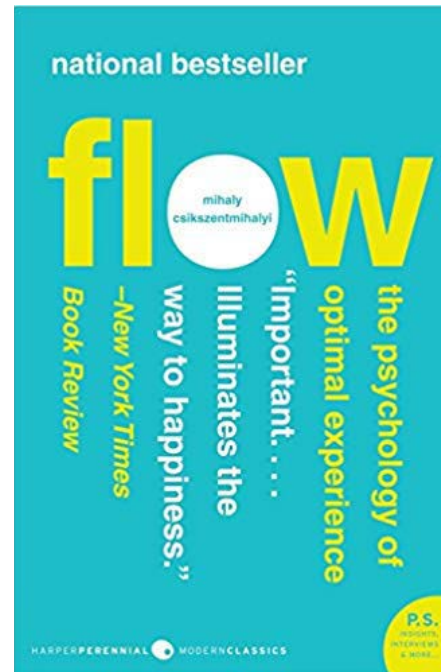
**Mindfulness using embroidery**

Attention regulation with the task at hand being embroidering a certain thought or idea and bring back the attention if it drifts. Body awareness being the task of sewing each stitch with a rhythm to match my breathing.

Emotions regulation by paying attention to the task, pushing away any other thought or distraction and noting down any relevant thought or idea that could be sown next.

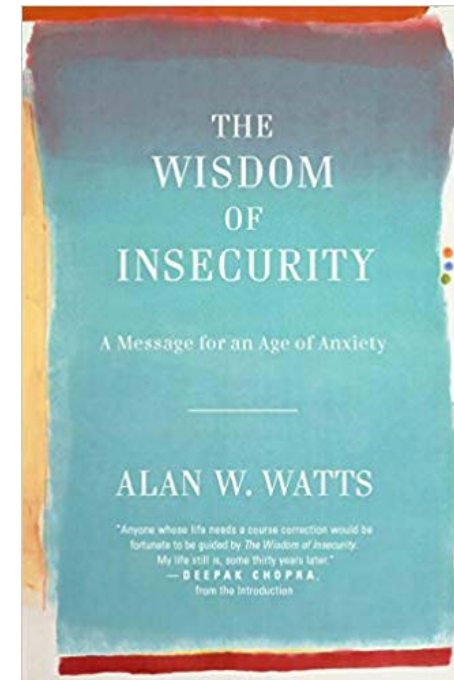
## Books

To understand about how the mind works, how one overcomes these feelings of being stagnant and unmotivated I turned towards books to see what psychologists, philosophers and anyone who had experienced the same had to say. These books gave me great insights and a nudge towards getting started with the work and maintaining a journal for my thoughts and the writers' words.



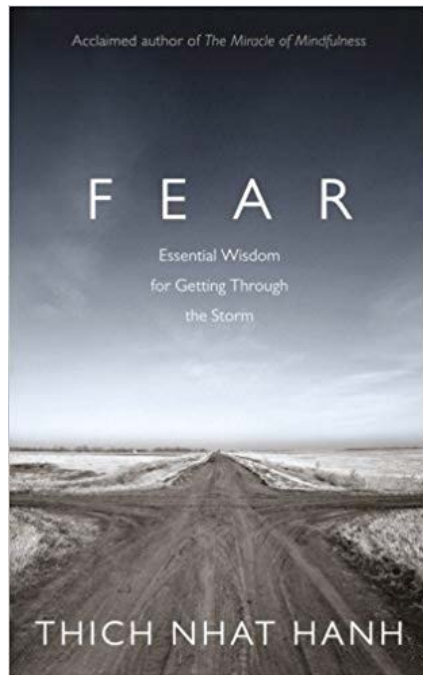
**Flow**  
by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi

The author defines happiness, then proceeds to explain in detail how we can attain it every waking moment of our lives by “losing yourself” and experiencing self-actualization. The author defines the state of flow as the process of achieving happiness through control over our inner life.



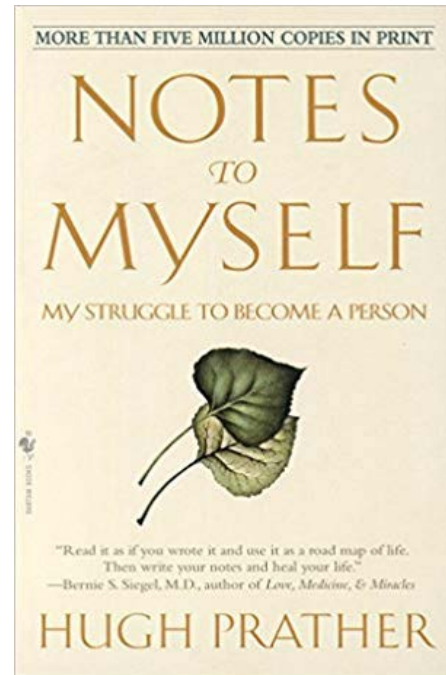
**The wisdom of insecurity**  
by Alan W. Watts

The author explores man's quest for psychological security and our efforts to find spiritual and intellectual certainty and stability in an age where human life seems vulnerable and uncertain. He argues that our insecurity is the consequence of trying to be secure and that salvation and sanity lie in the recognition that we have no way of saving ourselves.



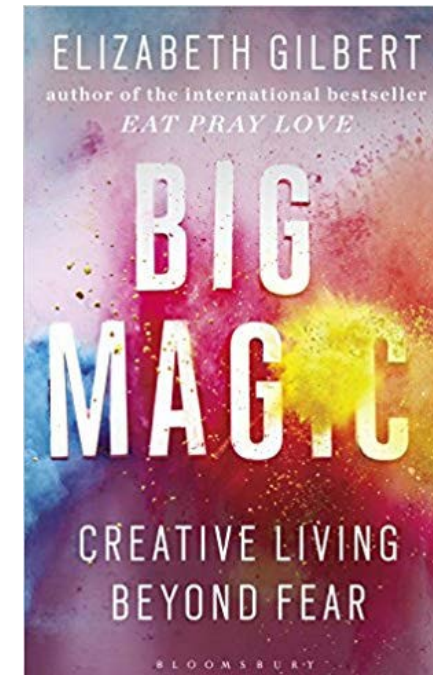
**Fear**  
*by Thich Nhat Hanh*

The monk explores the origins of our fears, illuminating a path to finding peace and freedom from anxiety by offering step by step meditation to achieve mindfulness. From this place of mindfulness we can observe the fear, embrace it, and then allow it to dissolve “working with” rather than “fighting against” it.



**Notes to myself**  
*by Hugh Prather*

It is a collection of observations and thoughts from Prather’s journals on the struggle, confusion and chaos of an individual en route growth and maturity. The book maintains a deeply personal feel laying emphasis on overcoming problems through acceptance.



**Big Magic**  
*by Elizabeth Gilbert*

The author offers insights into the mysterious nature of inspiration. She asks us to embrace our creative process and curiosity and let go of needless suffering urging the reader to embark on a long deferred dream by infusing our everyday lives with more mindfulness and passion without fretting about whether or not you can make it perfect.