

ENCHANTED GEOGRAPHY #16

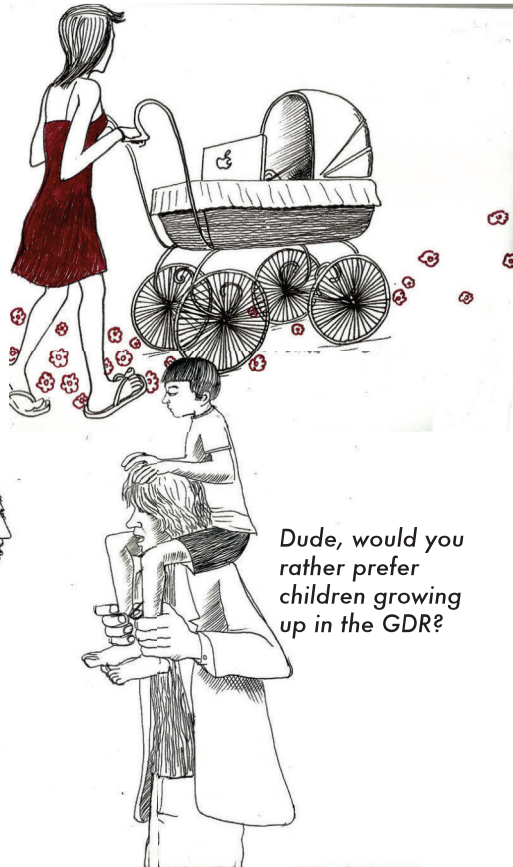
MANDARIN

By Sarnath Banerjee

They say Prenzlauer Berg, a neighbourhood in Berlin, has the fertility rate of Gaza. Children here are precious, numerous and sometimes brought up like art projects. There's a children's playground every few metres and shops selling vintage prams every few blocks.

Allen, a New Yorker who has moved to Berlin with his two kids, asked Brighu to move into the empty apartment upstairs. Brighu declined:

I am hesitant to move to an area where adult life is built around kids.



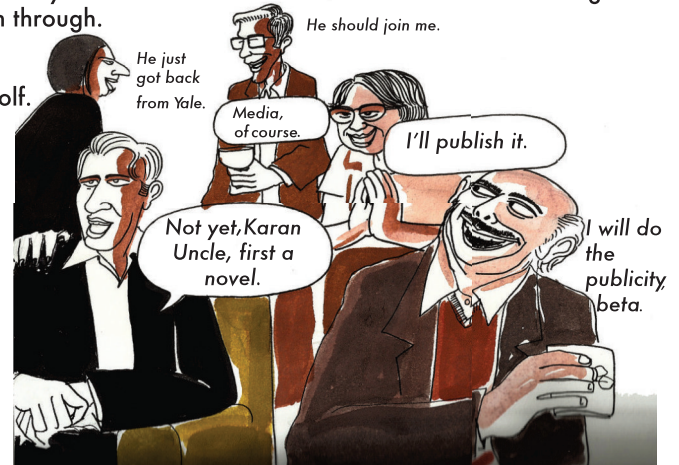
Dude, would you rather prefer children growing up in the GDR?

Brighu had met some who grew up in the GDR, they seemed okay. Prenzlauer Berg itself was part of the erstwhile East. A writer friend once told Brighu that having a baby quells the inner narcissist. He needs to come to Prenzlauer Berg – the narcissism stays intact, only the perimeter expands. And along with narcissism comes the need for social mobility. It was tennis once; now, it is Chinese classes.

Social mobility is an age-old practice and is perfectly legal. Not only is it prevalent among the growing middle classes of India and China, it also exists among the classless liberals. Even famous people, previously thought to be free from the shackles of name-dropping, succumb to tweeting about their travels to exotic lands where they ate adventurous food and drank cocktails with fellow celebrities.

Delhi itself has always been an Uncle/Aunty kind of city. Lines of privileges are always clearly drawn and maintained. One needs a social sledgehammer to smash through.

Therefore, golf.



South Delhi parents want their children to become amateur golfers, Bombay wants to become Shanghai and smart Europeans want their children to learn Mandarin. Except golf doesn't prevent early onset of Type II Diabetes. By the time Bombay becomes Shanghai, the world would have shifted its focus to Nairobi and, when Europeans finally master Mandarin, the Chinese themselves would be learning Swahili.

Brighu has a better suggestion for parents who aspire for their children to become global leaders. Forget about Mandarin and golf. Save some money and make your child travel in business class, just once. It is a far better investment than sending them to boarding schools or expensive liberal arts colleges in New England. Once the child gets a taste of the biz class, he will realise that travelling in any other class is absolutely ridiculous. The sheer joy of walking past a queue of economy-class passengers, wondering why they even bother to dress well, can give them a very satisfying high. Sailing through security, four-course meals, single malts, a flight attendant who smiles, and gliding into the VIP lounge. You get a certain look on your face.

Pretty soon the whole world seems like a VIP lounge and you feel mildly annoyed when no one hands you a glass of Prosecco when you sit on a bench in Alexanderplatz. This will make your child work hard, grab all the opportunities, suck up to the right guys and elbow himself to the top. And life will be one big biz-class lounge.

Meanwhile screw that Mandarin s**t already.