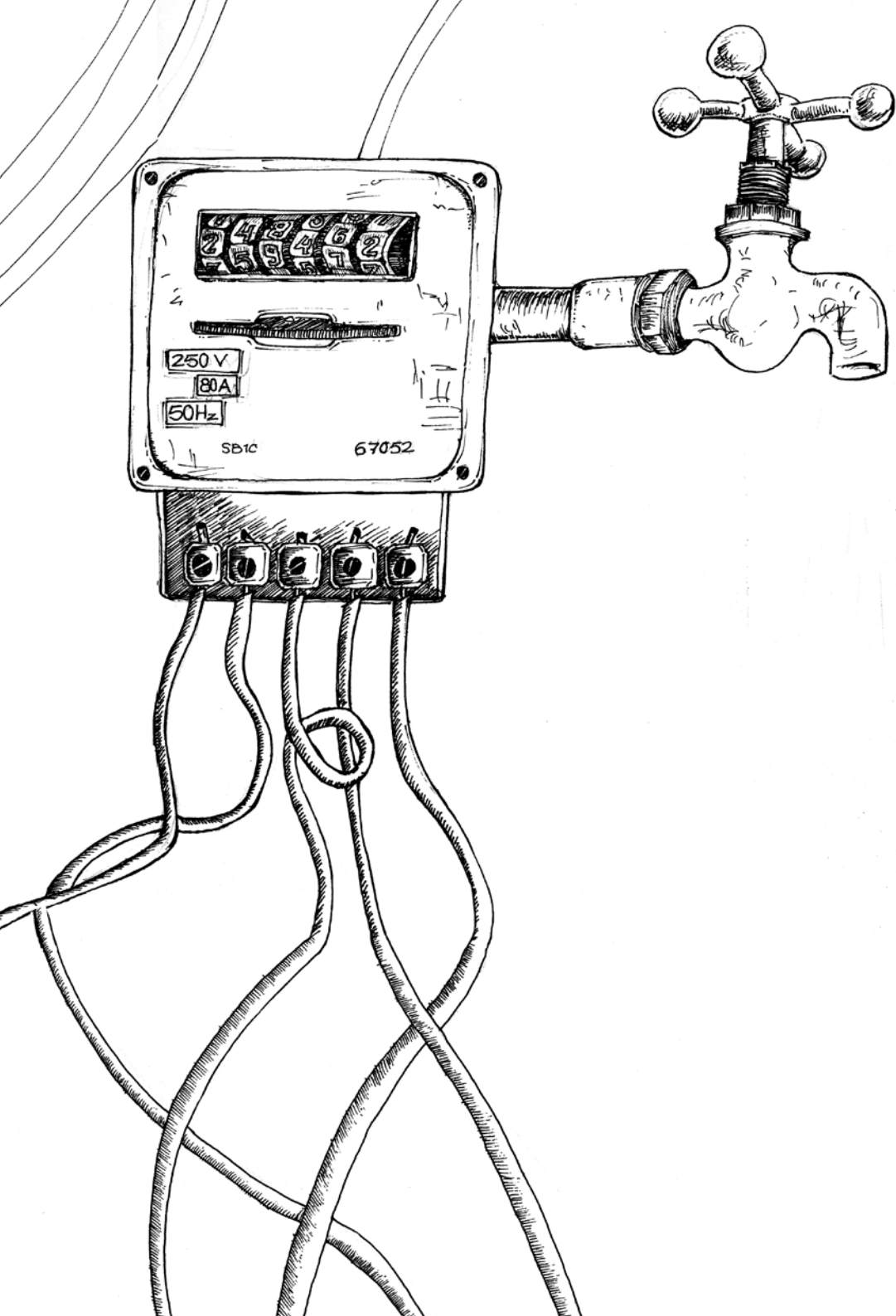


The Water Cookbook

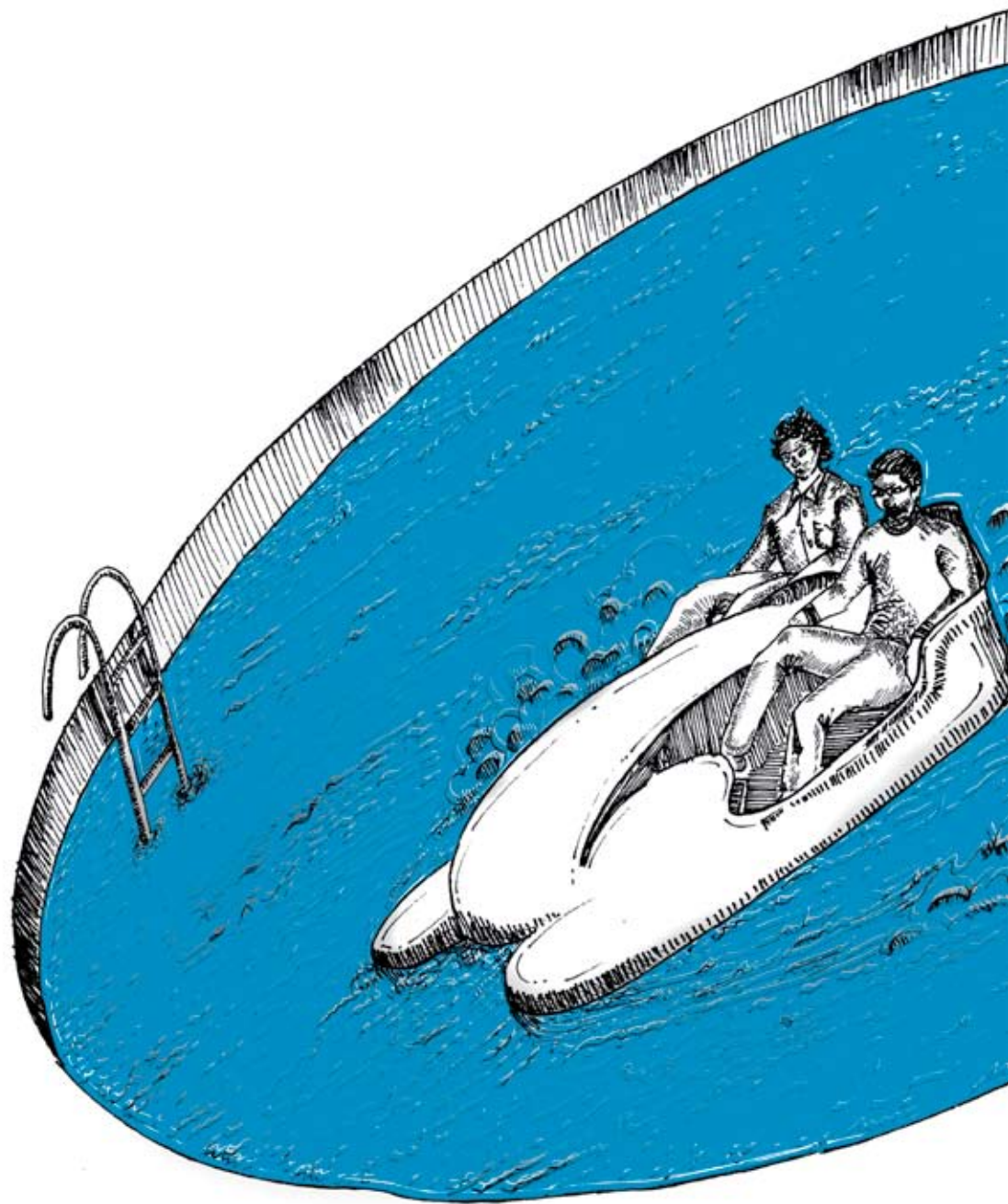
Bhagwati Prasad

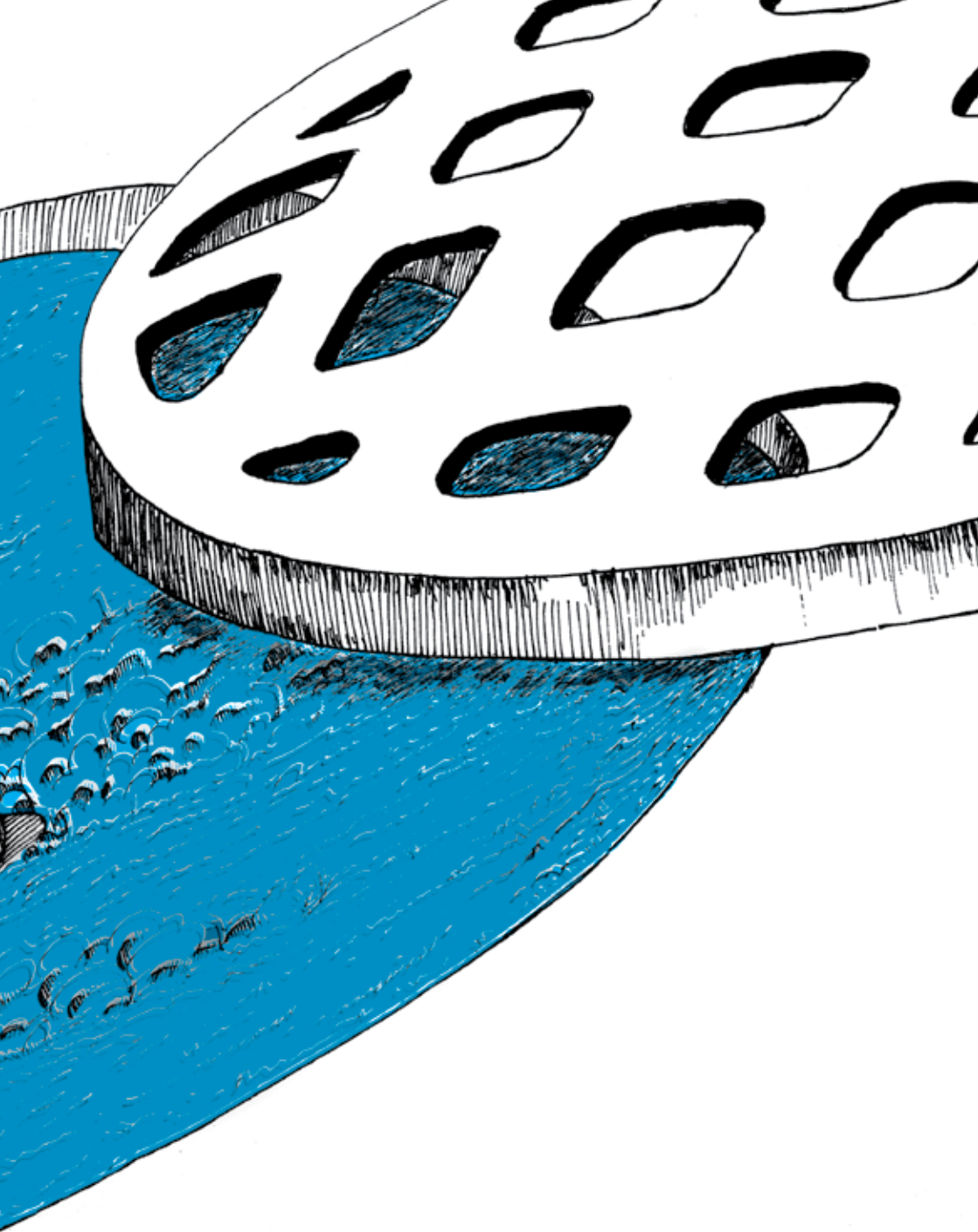




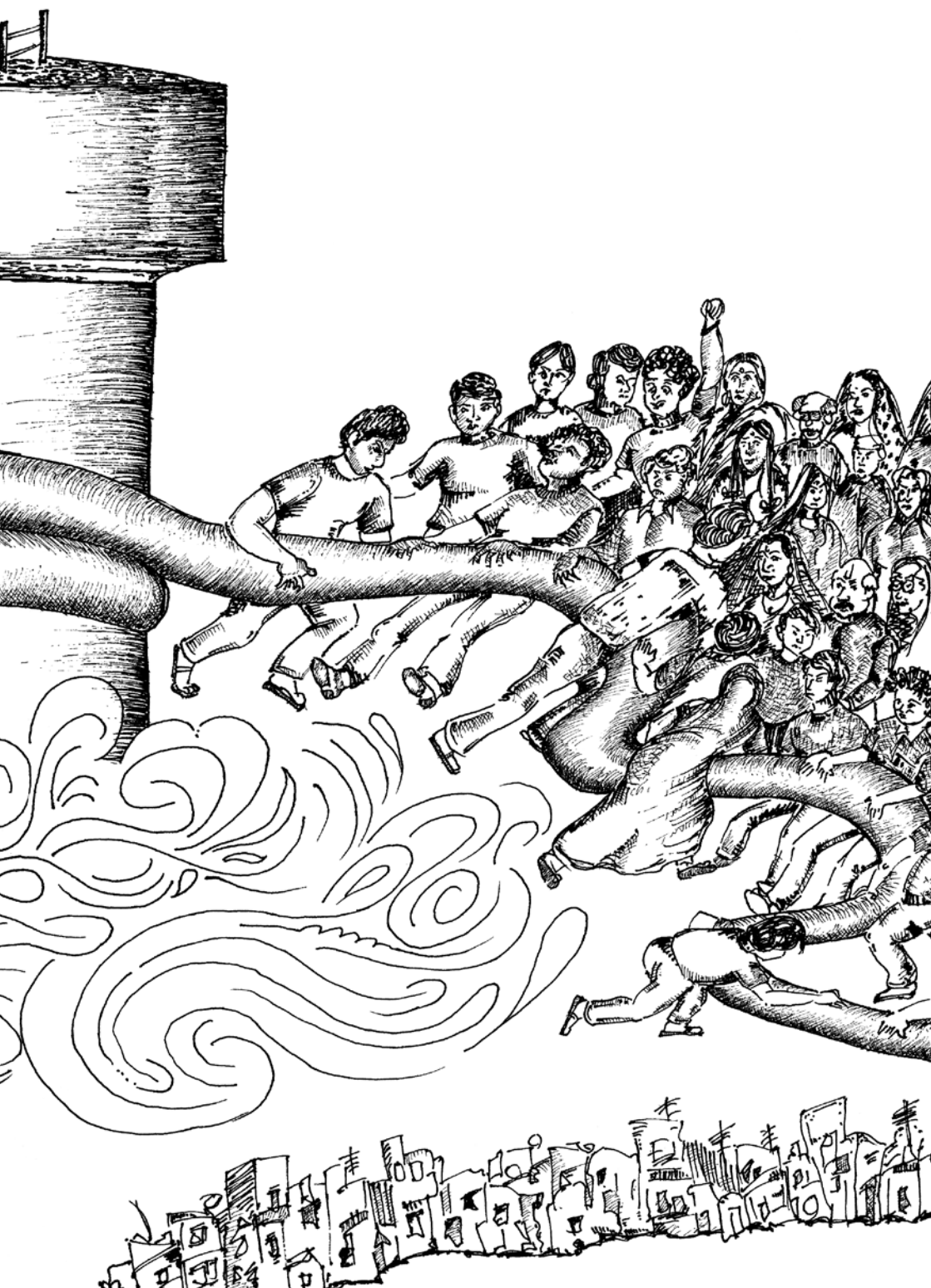
The Water Cookbook

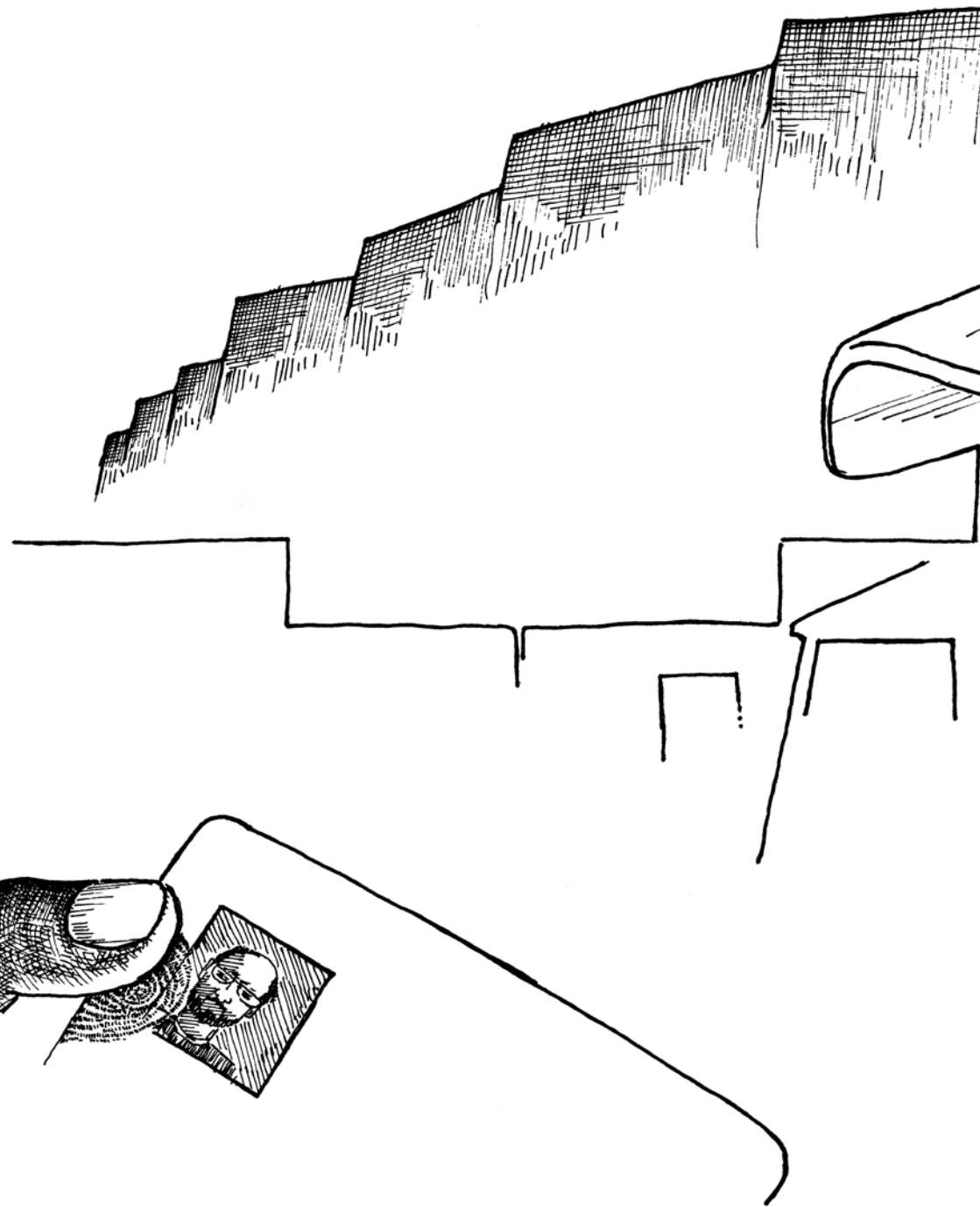
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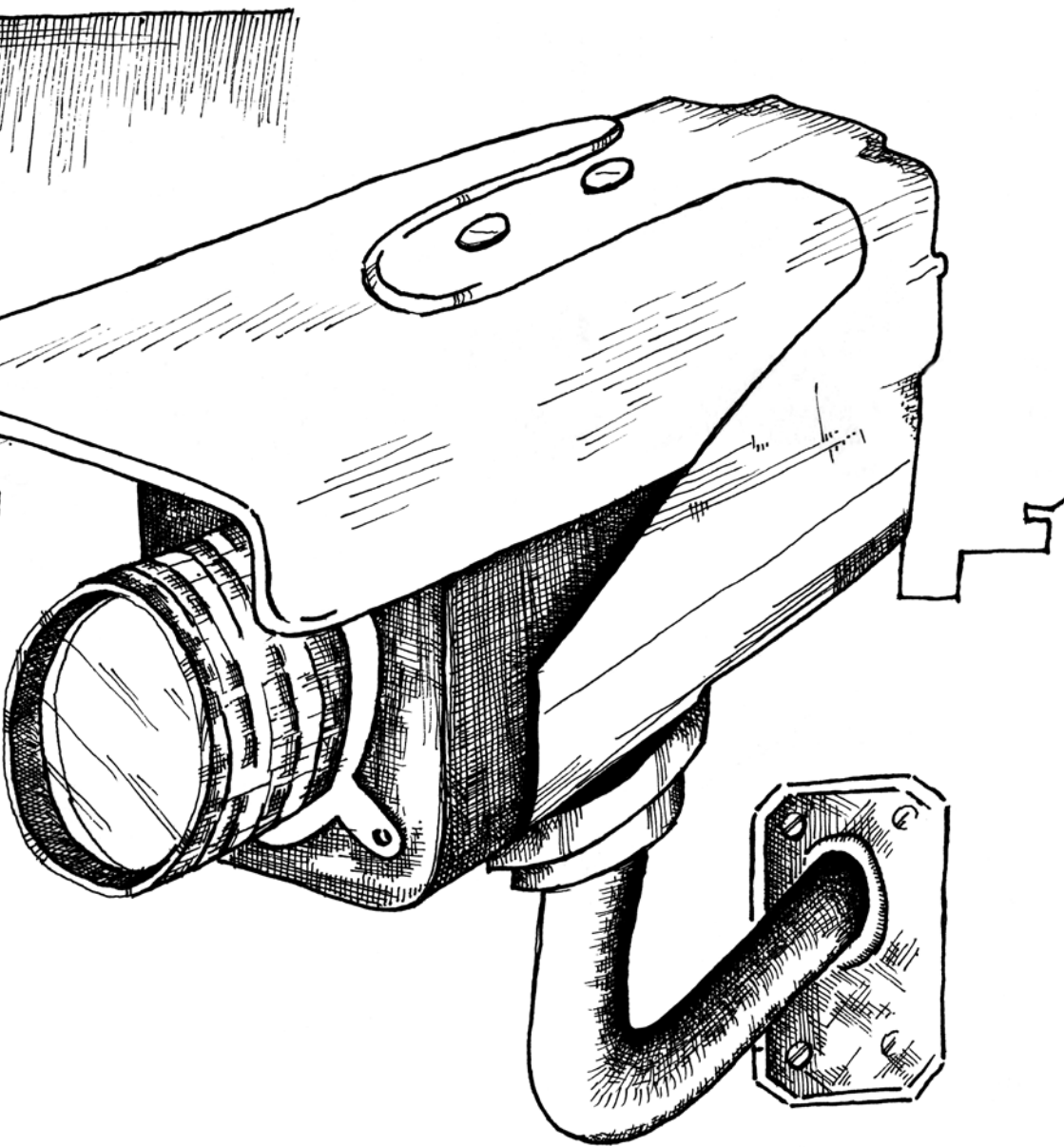


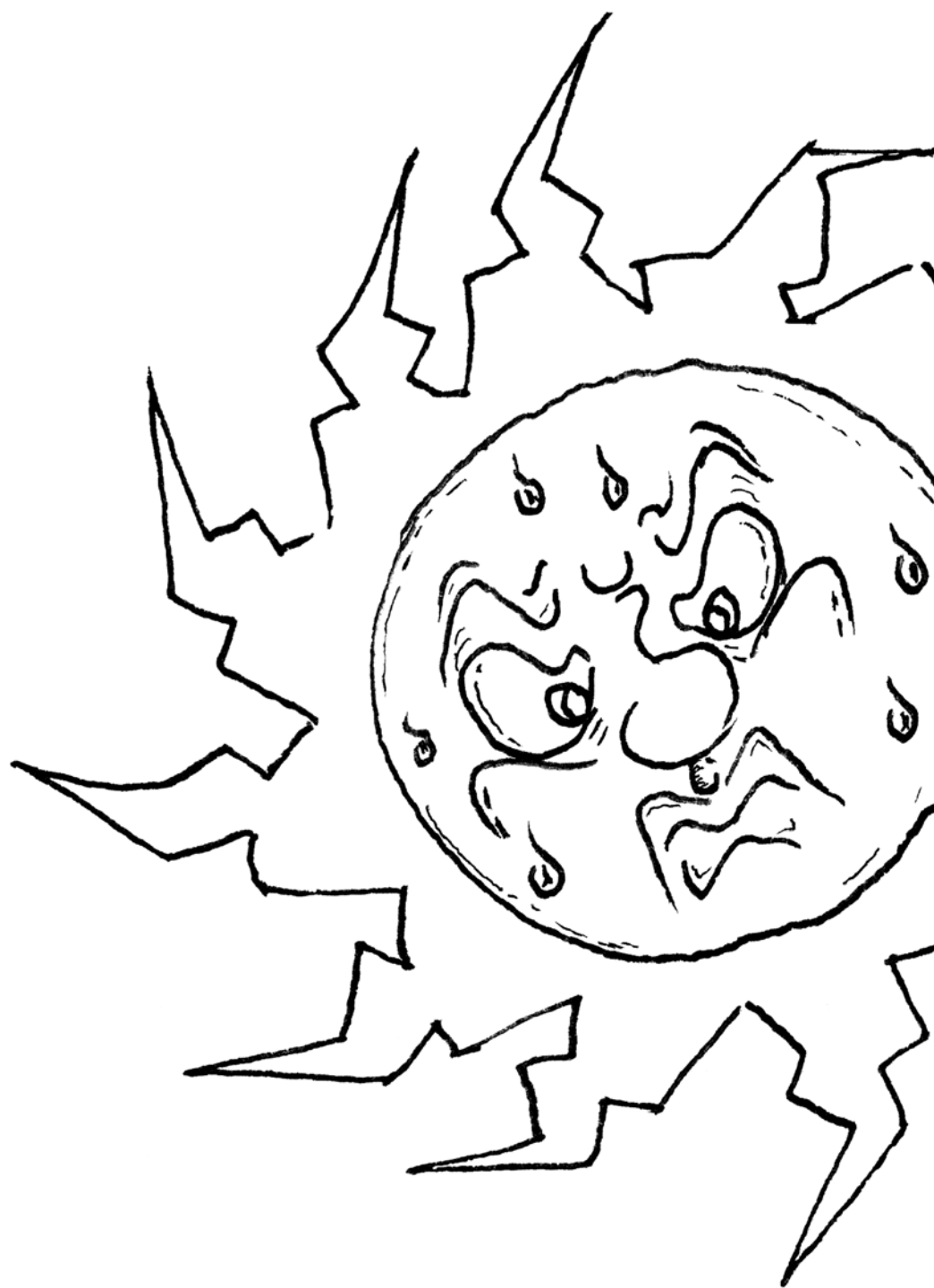








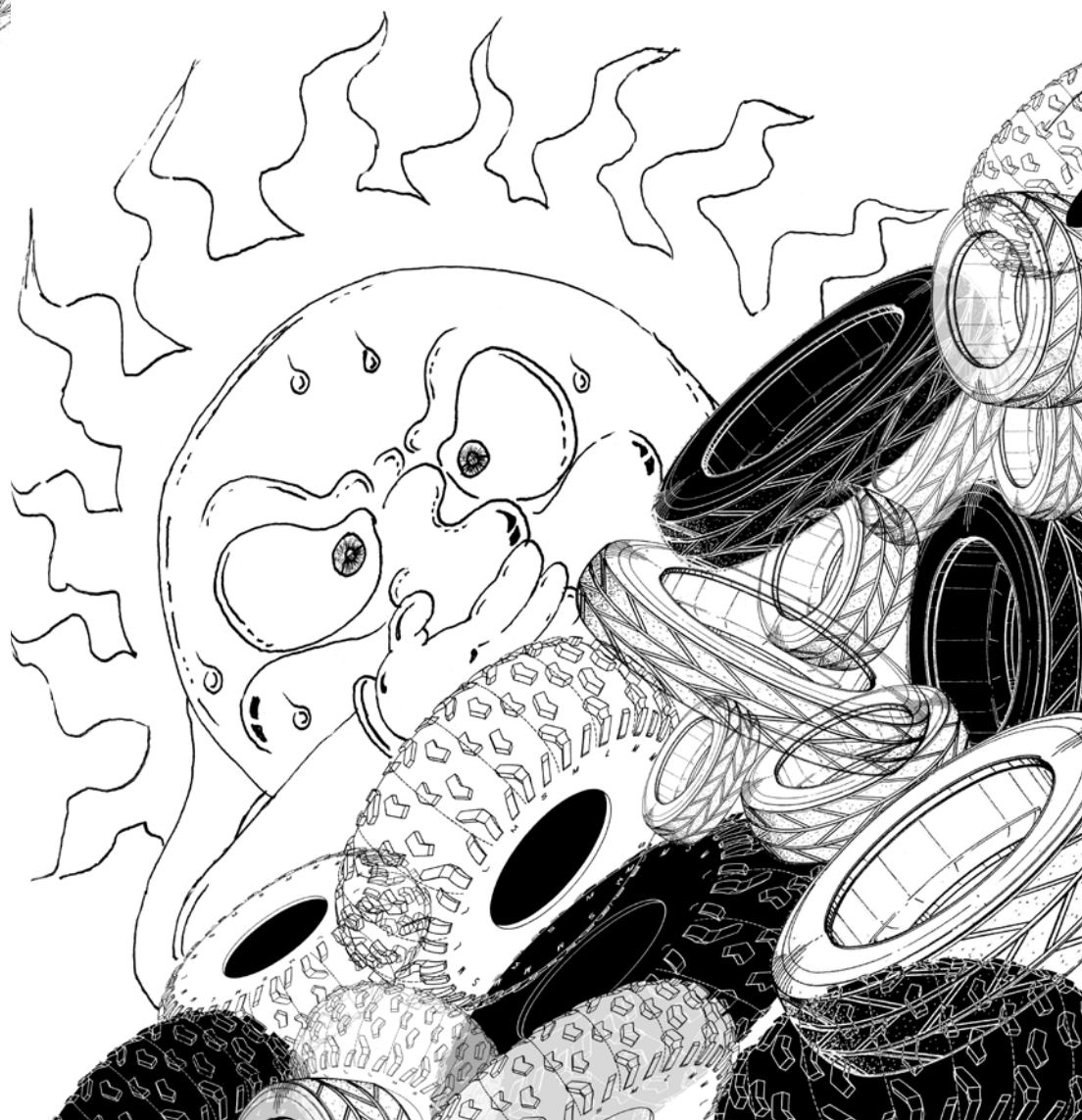




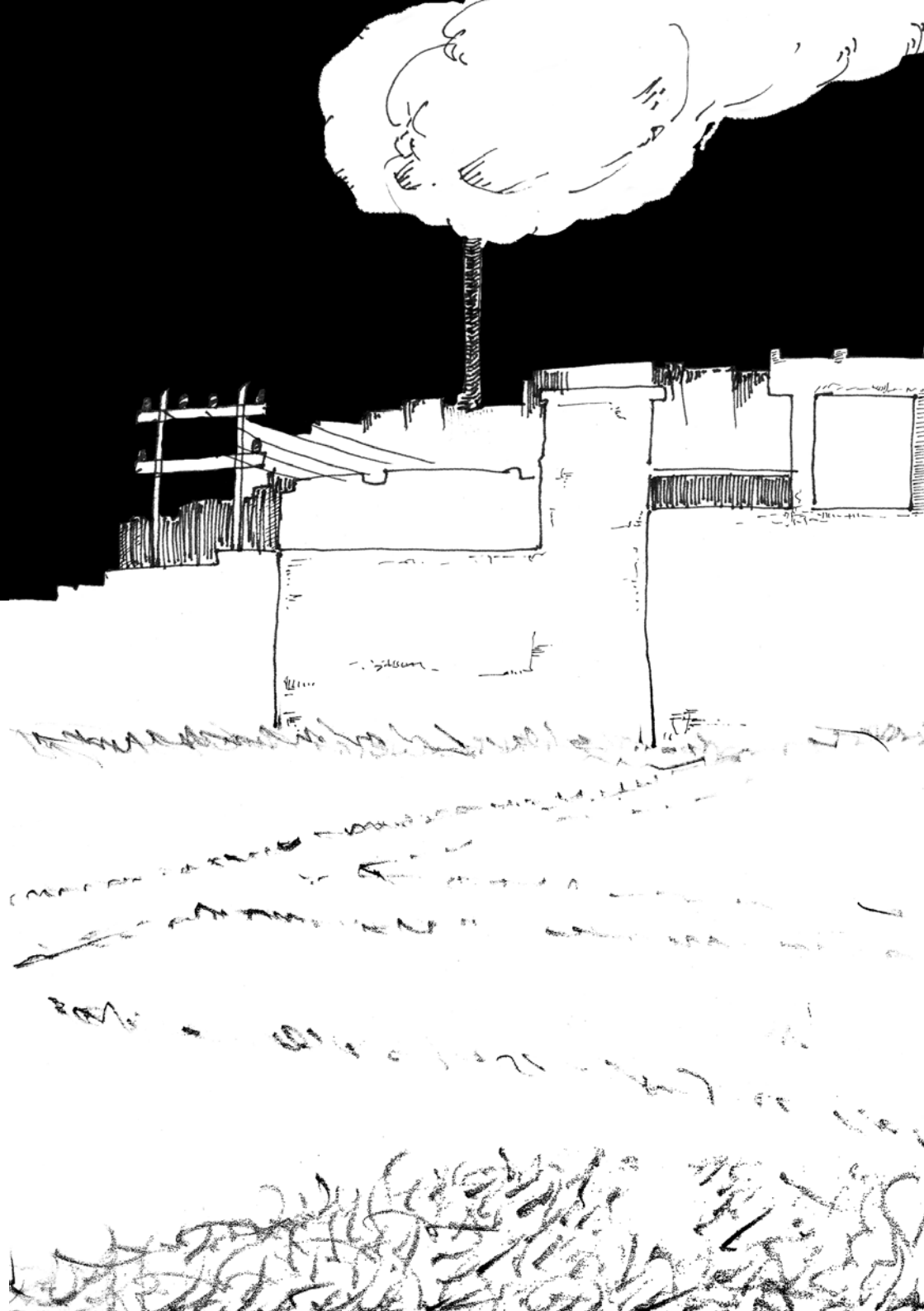
I CAN TELL BY MY OWN POT
HOW THE OTHERS ARE BOILING



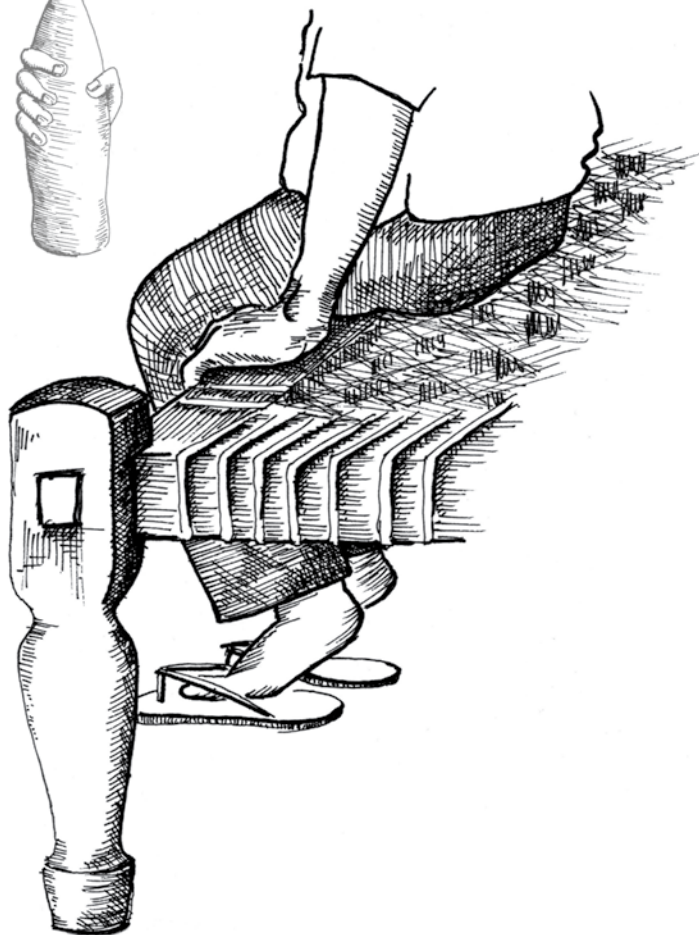


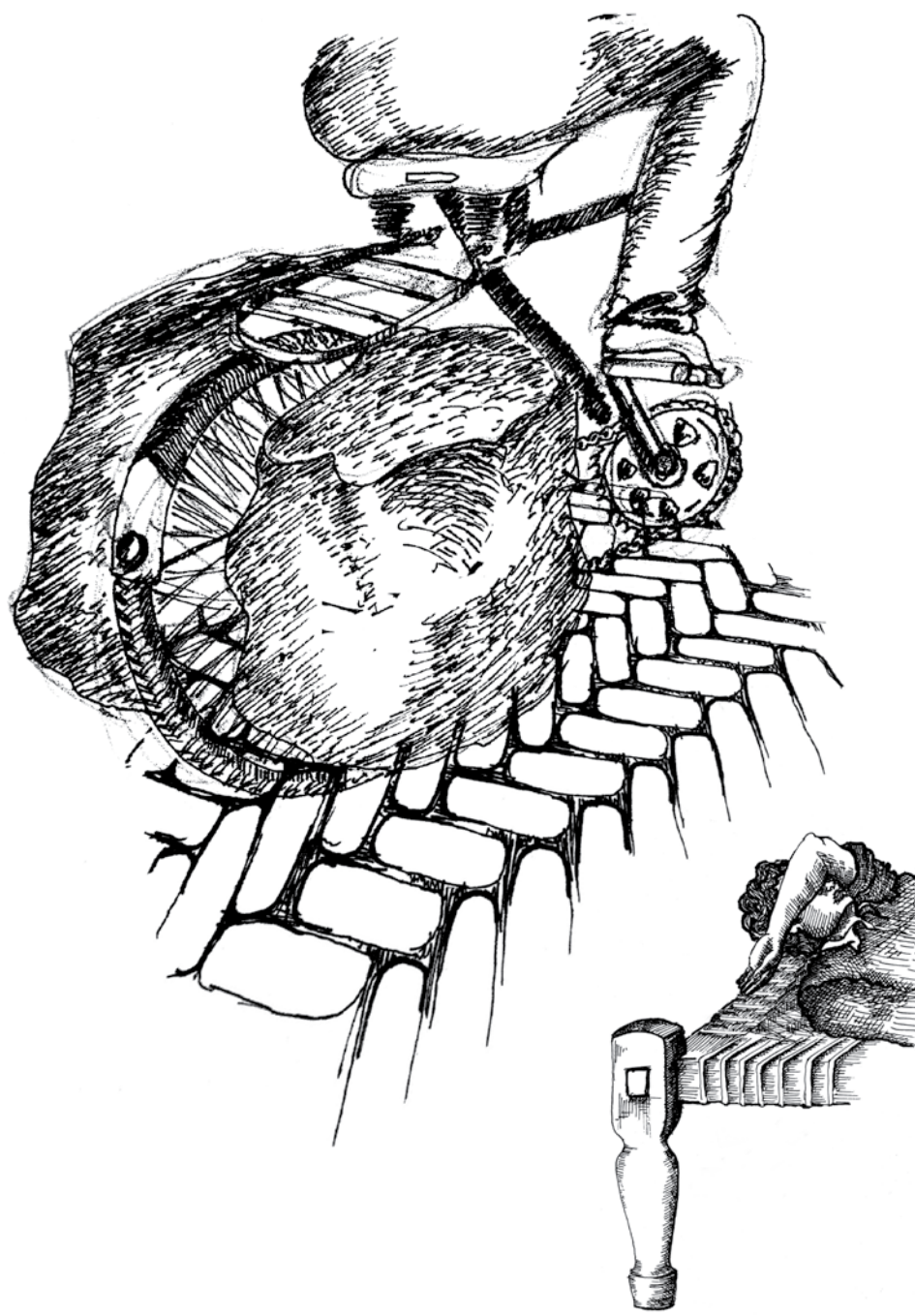


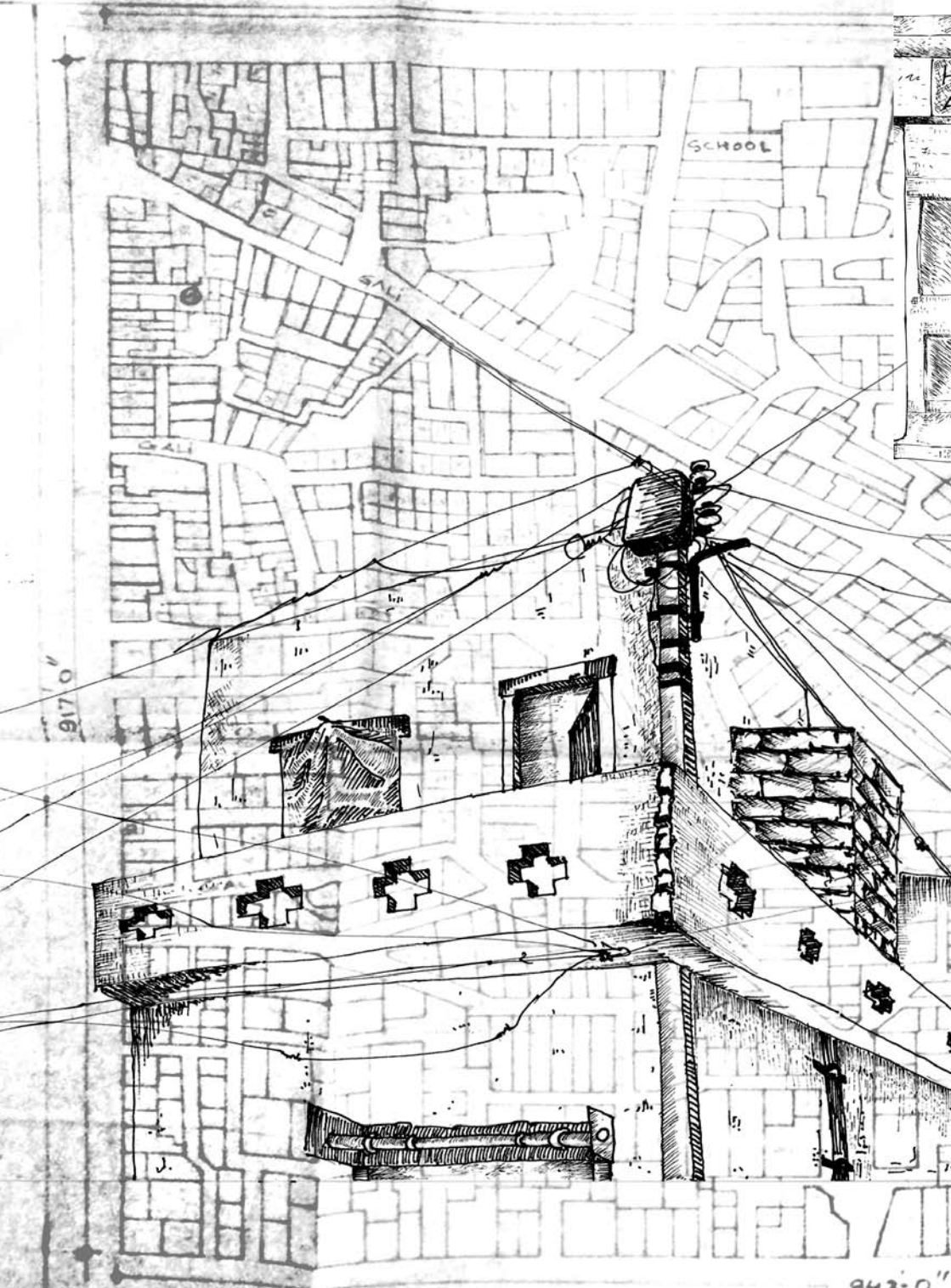




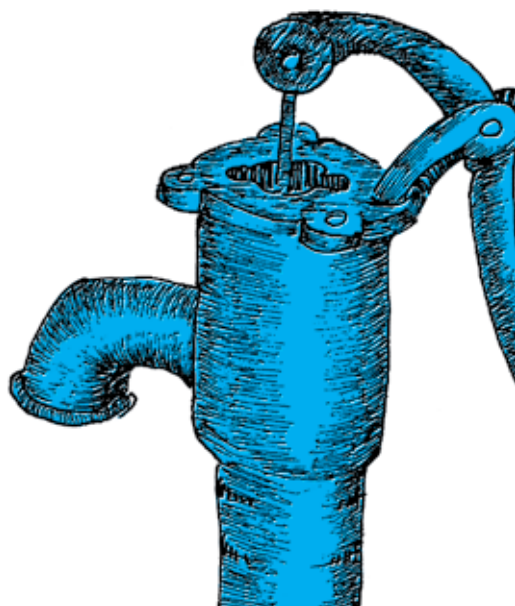


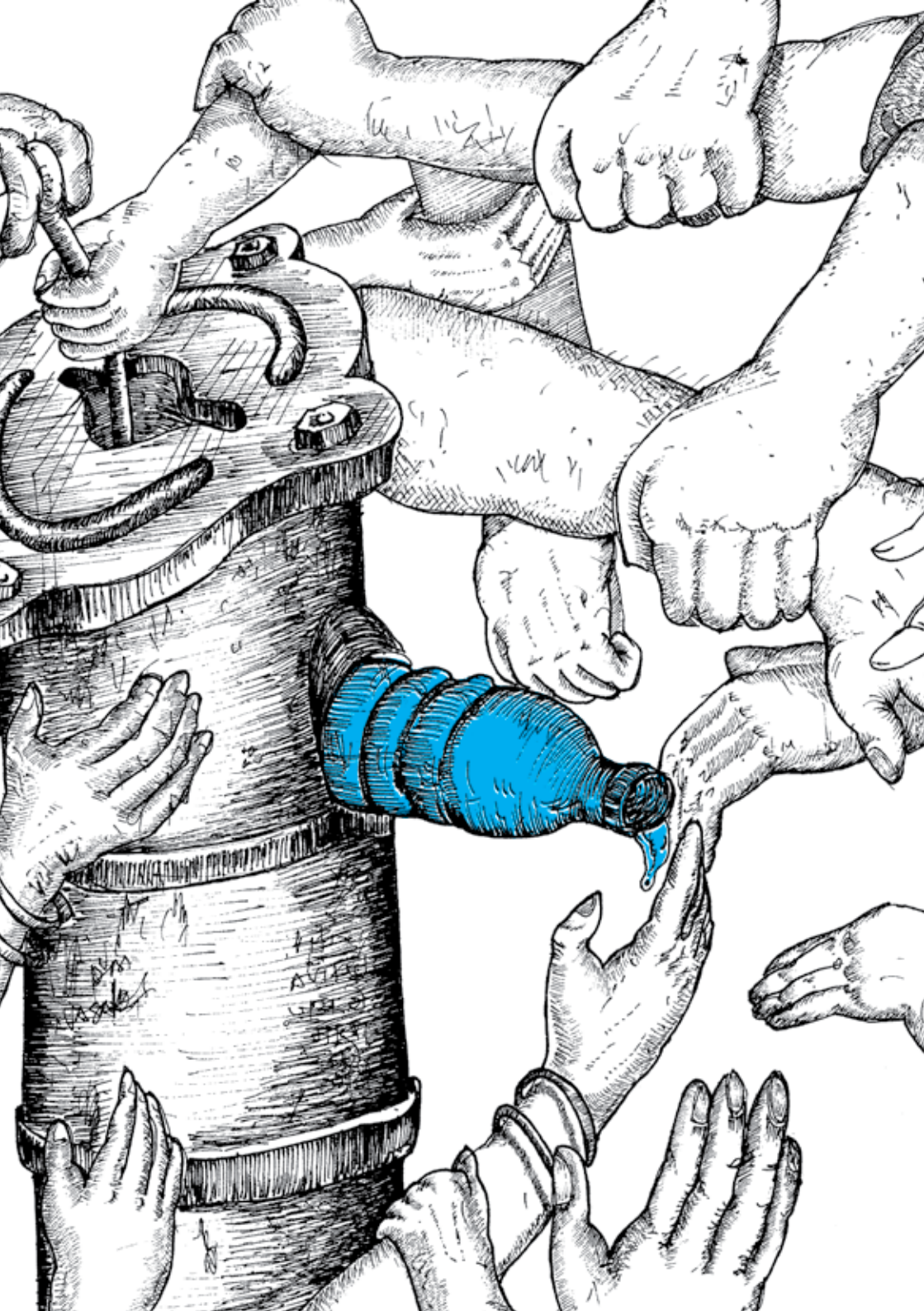




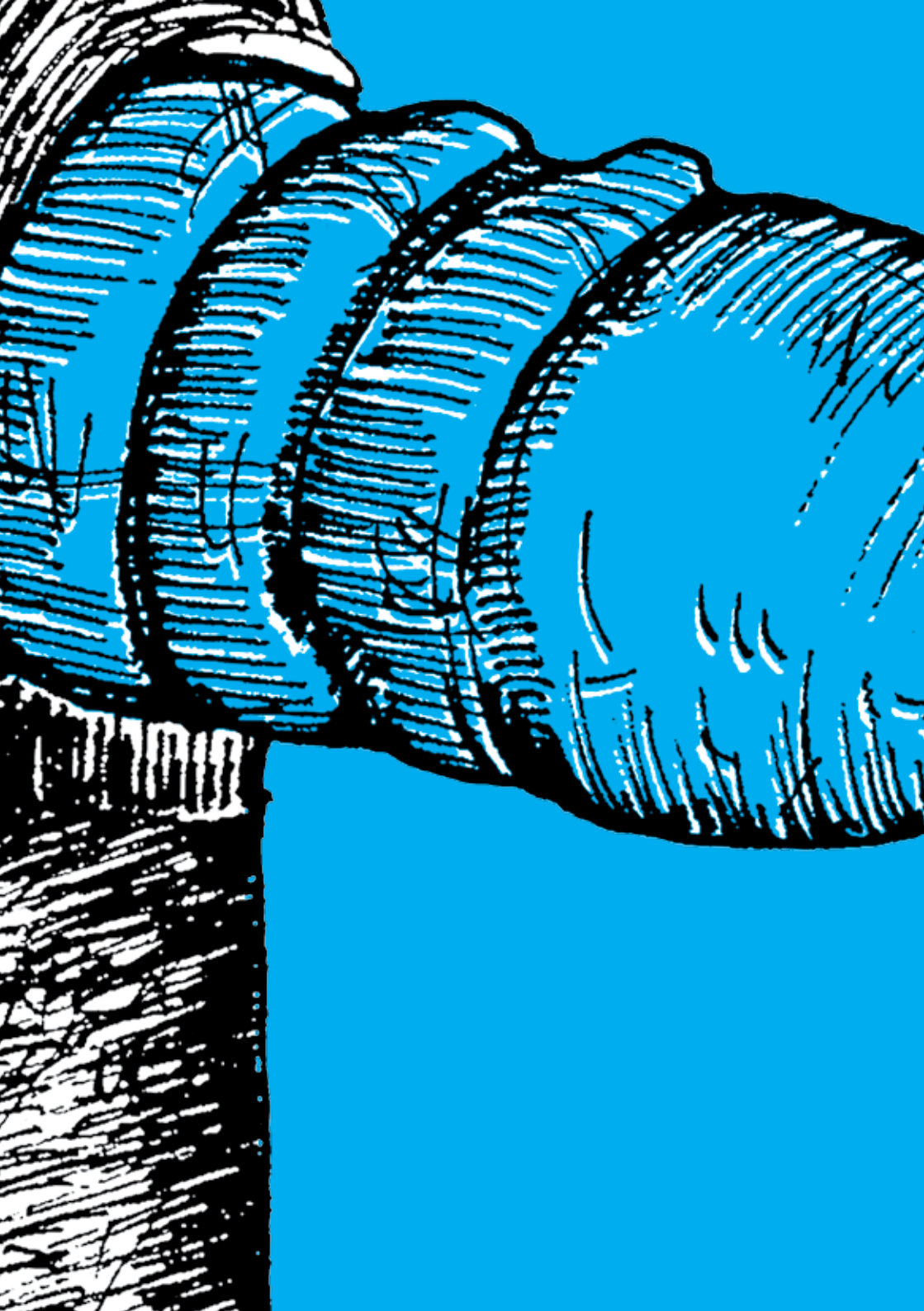




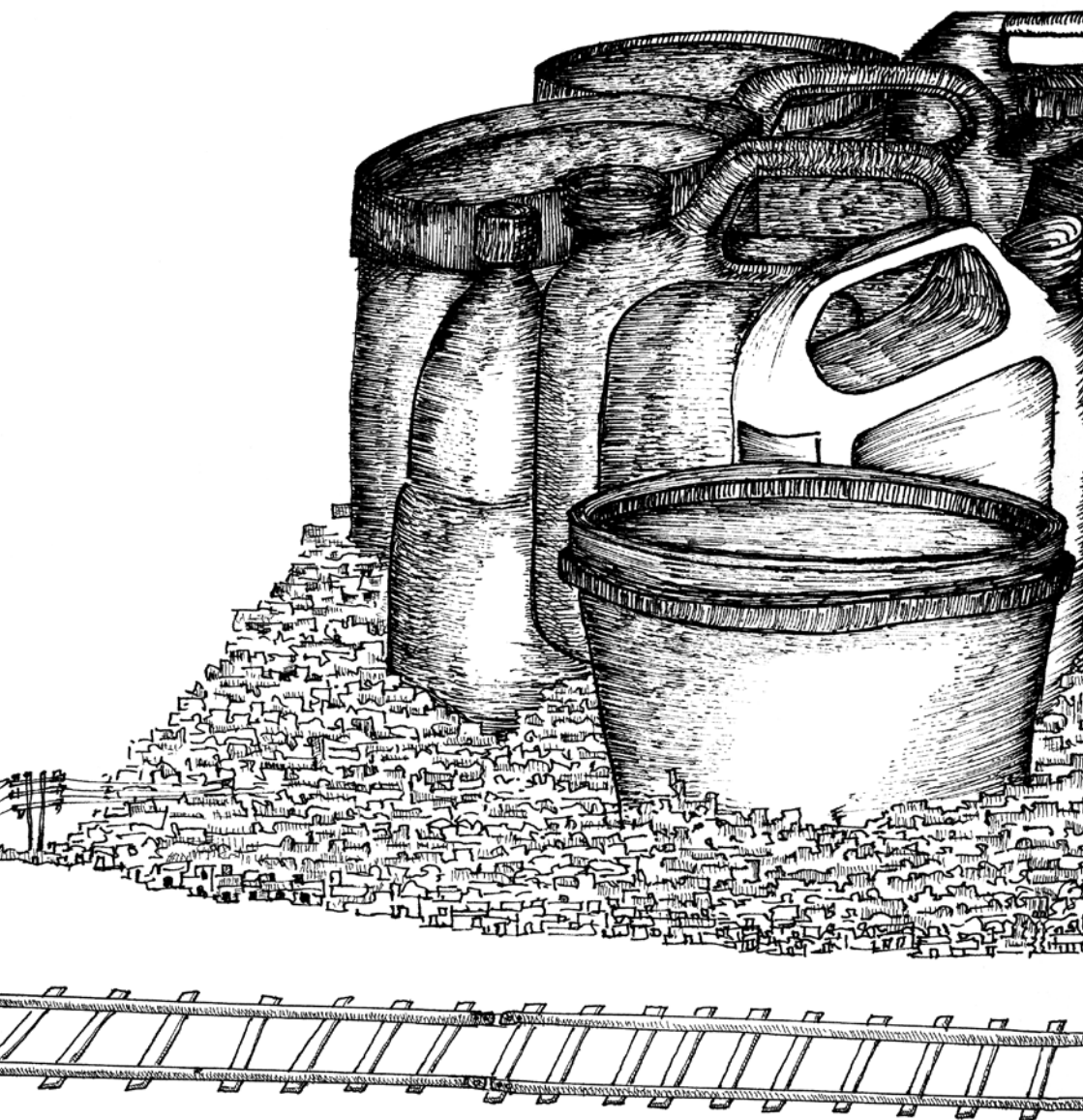




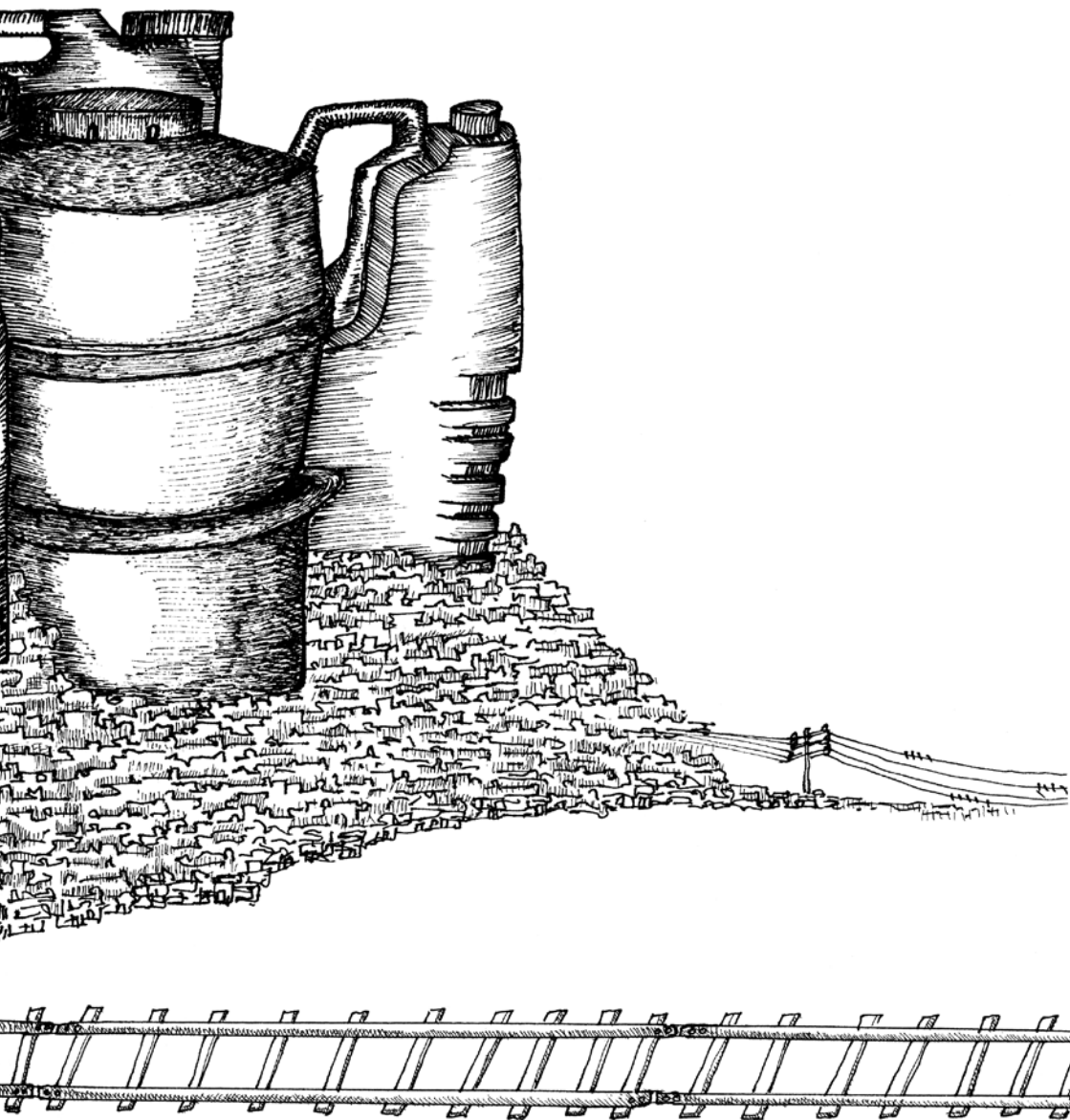


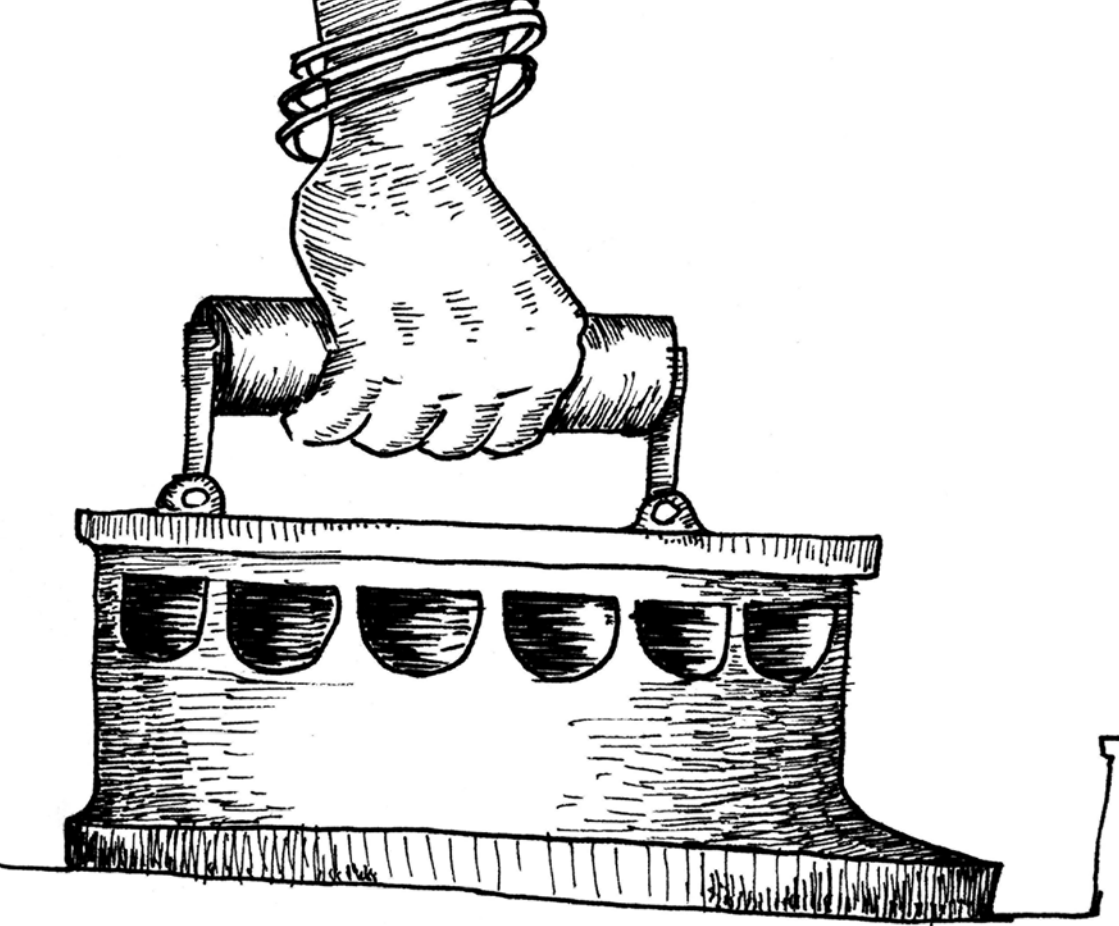


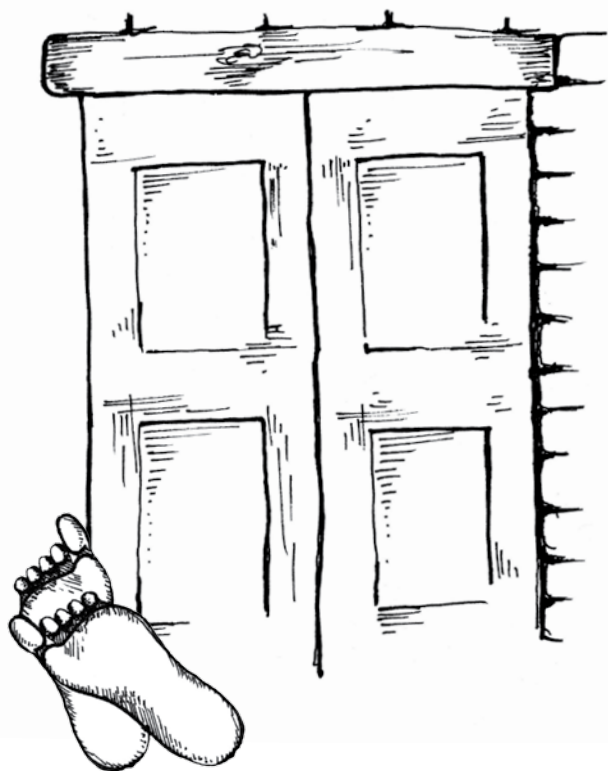
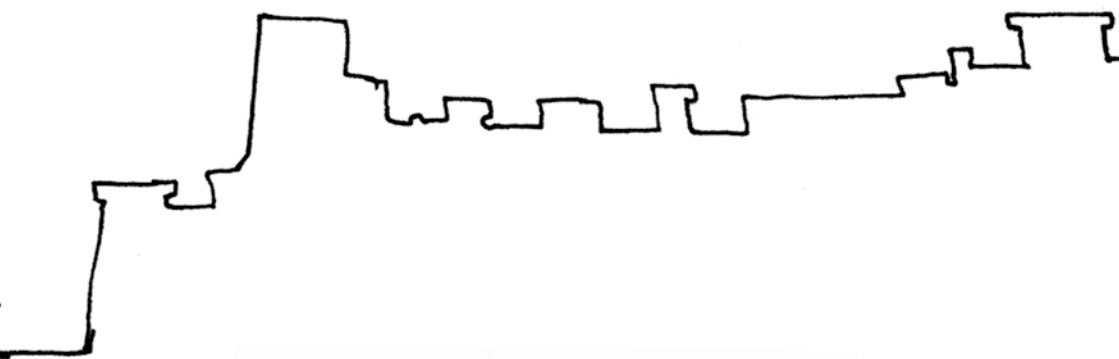


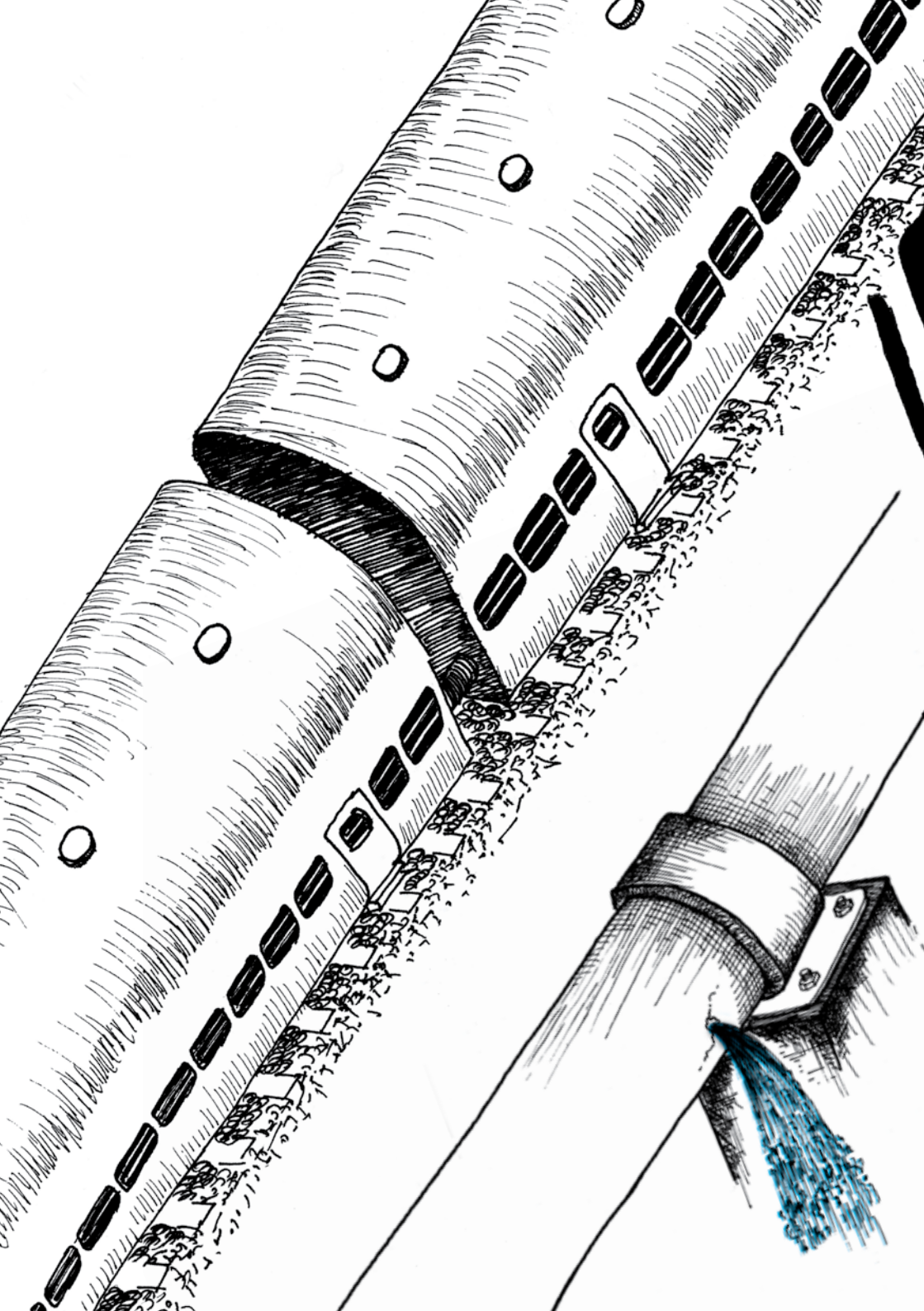


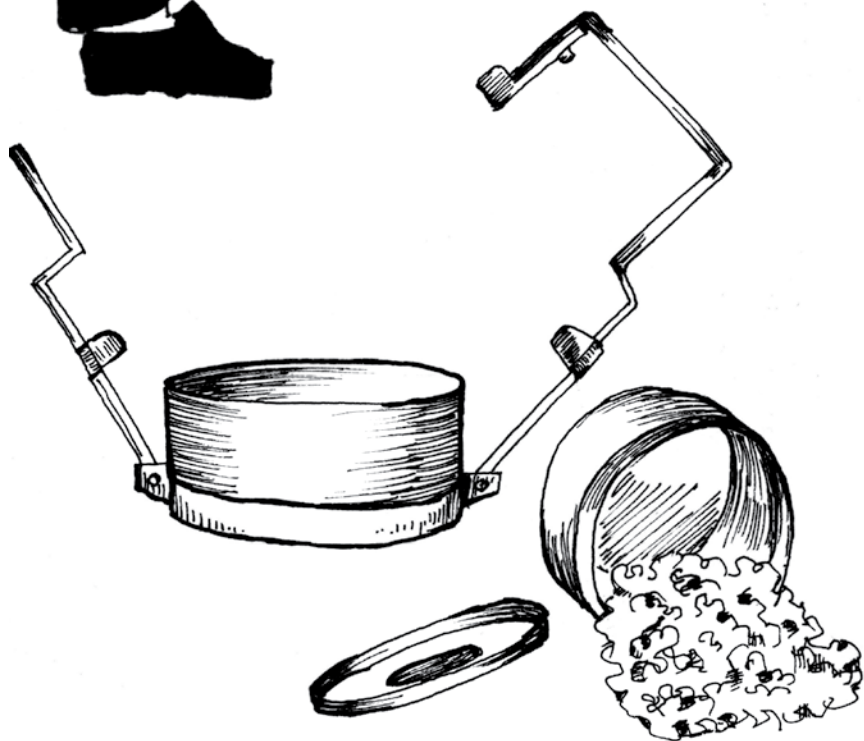
WHERE WOULD THE GRAVY BE
BUT FOR THE WATER.





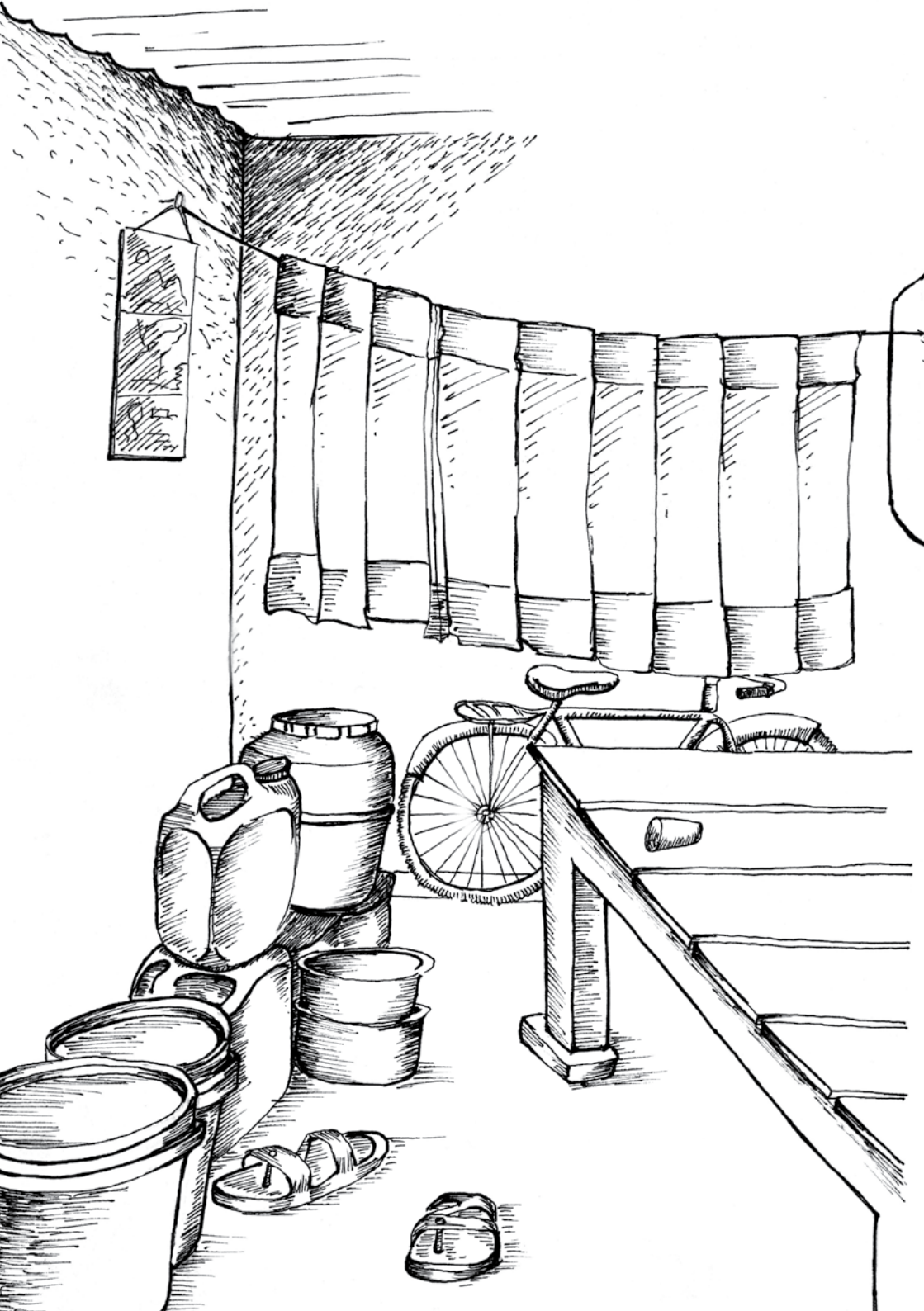


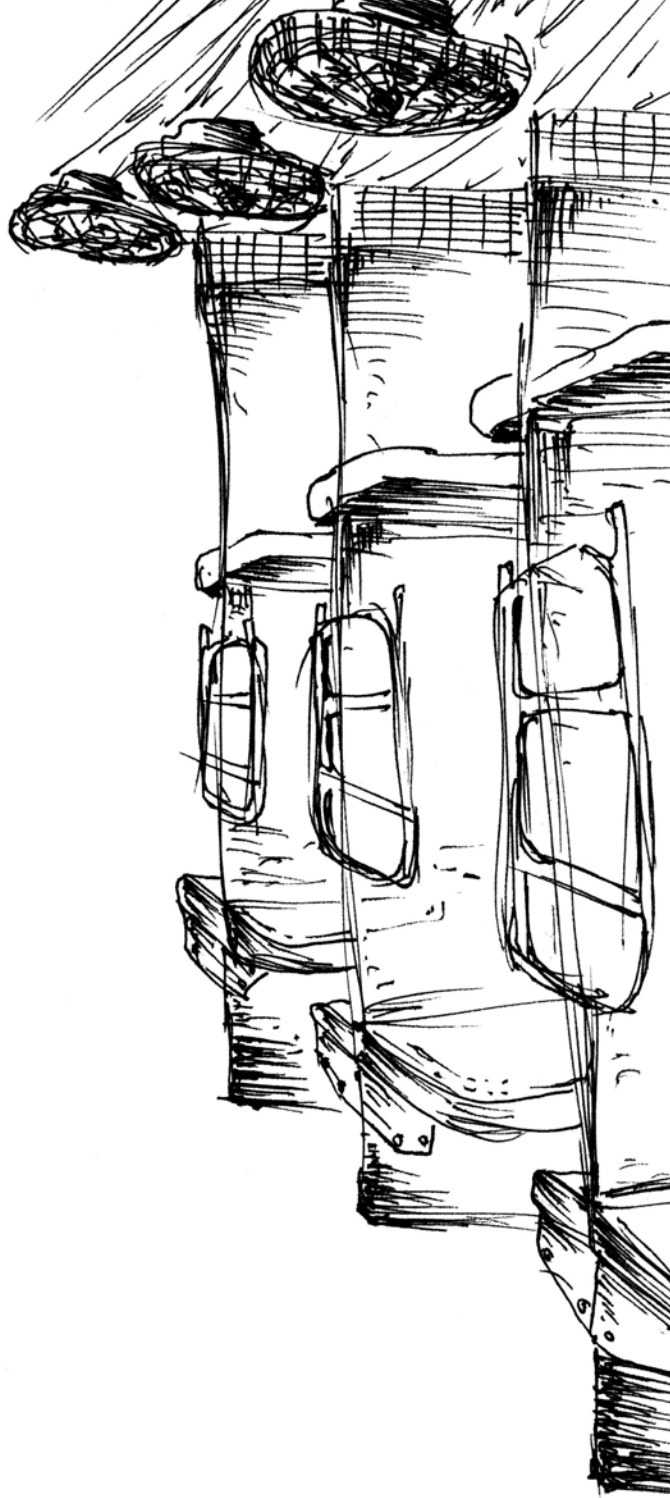
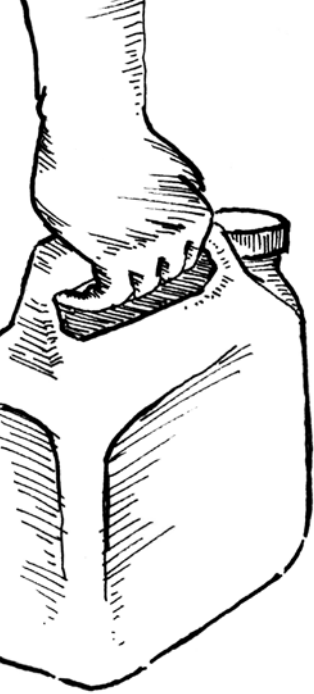


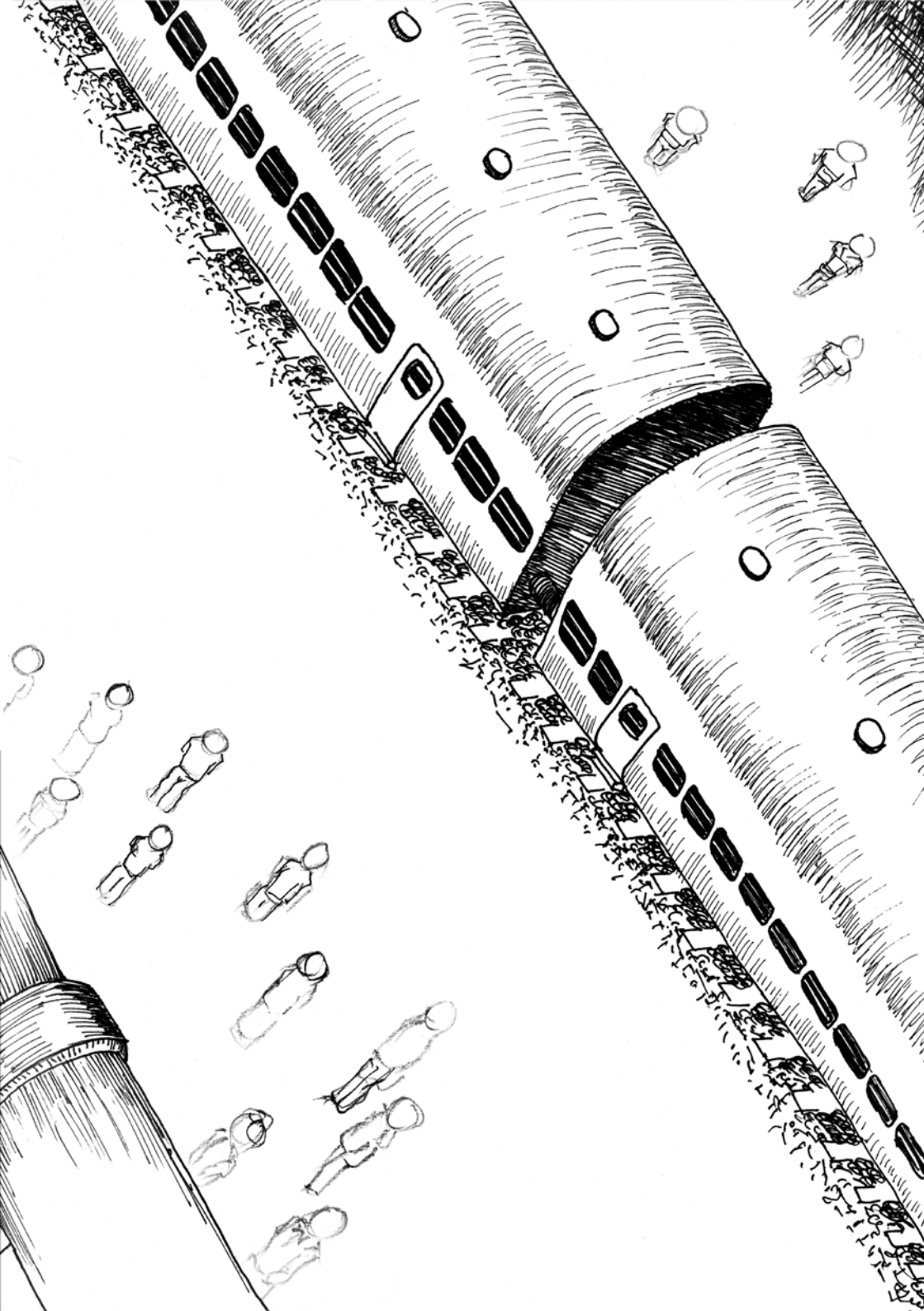


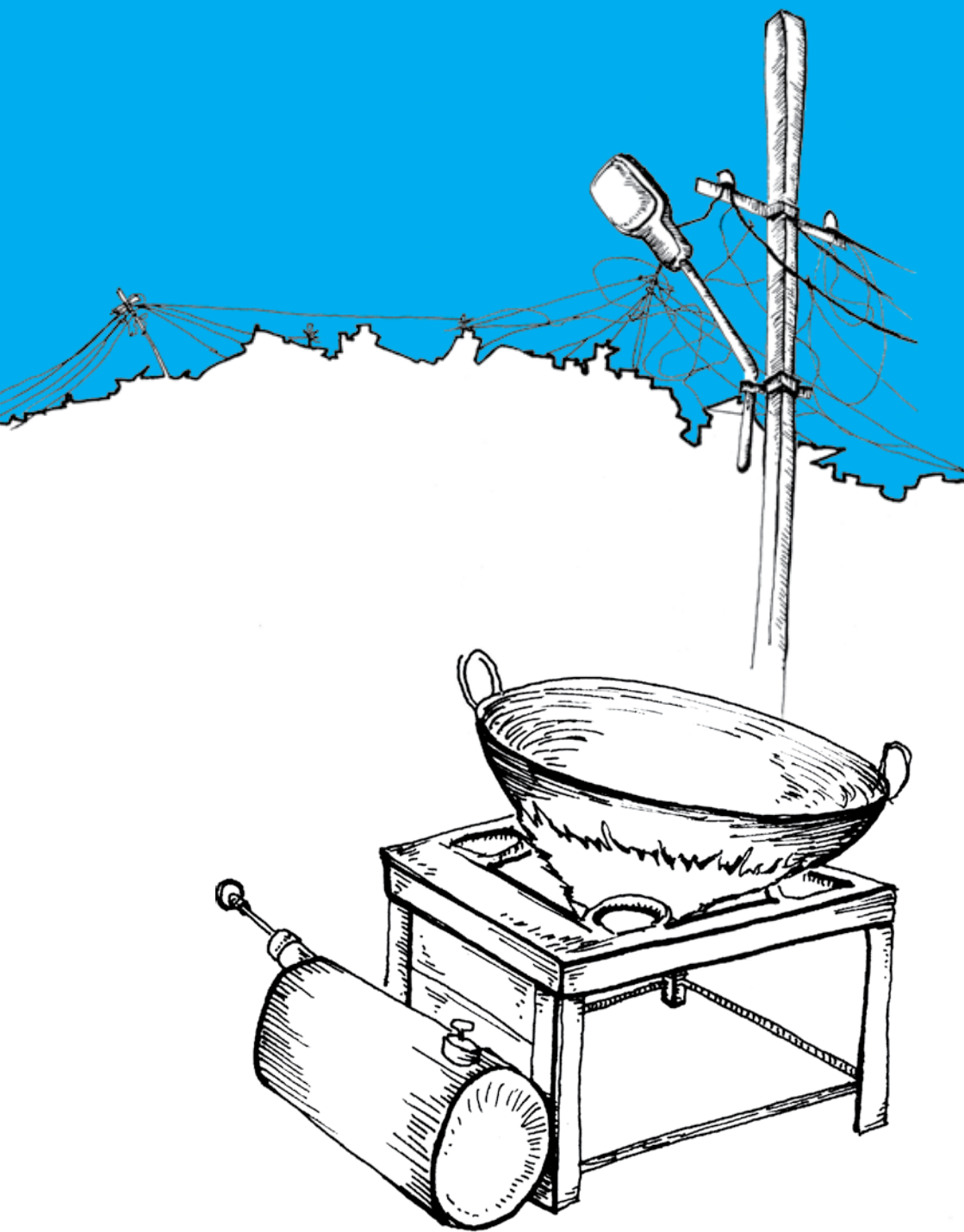




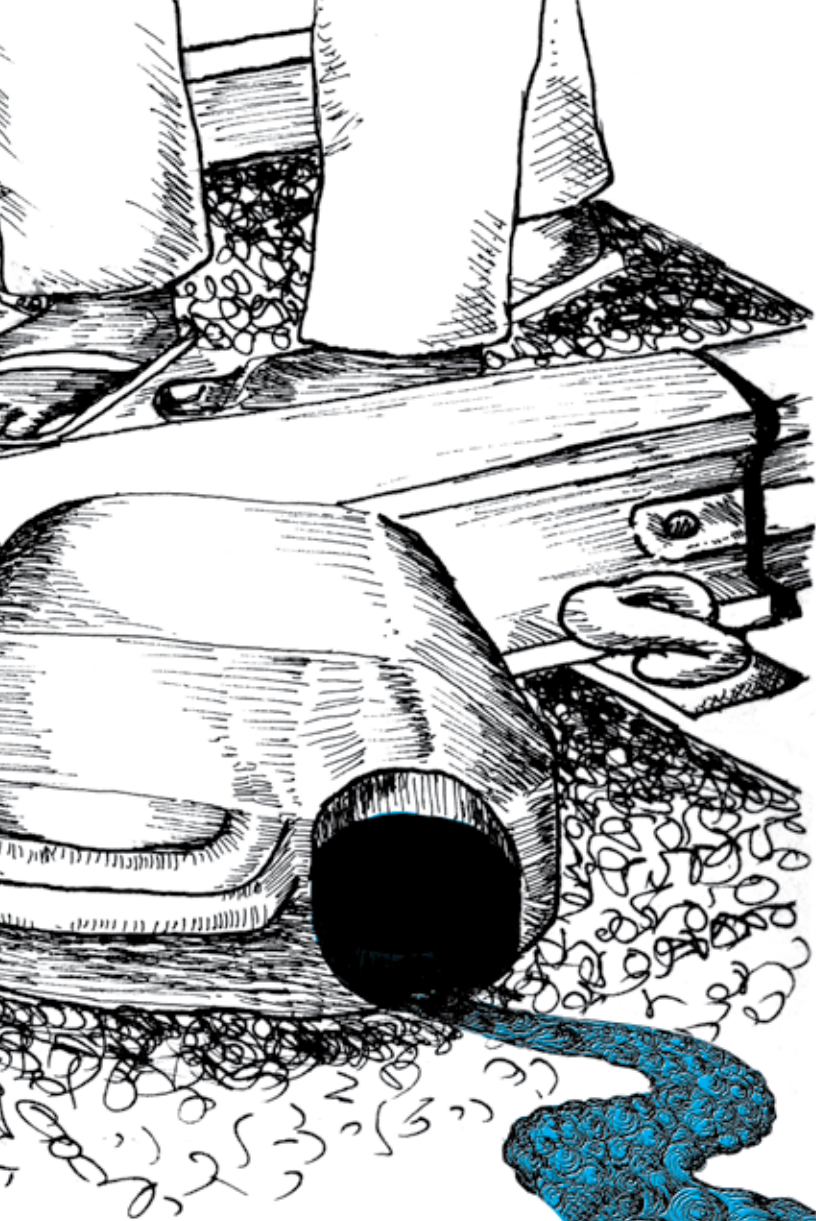


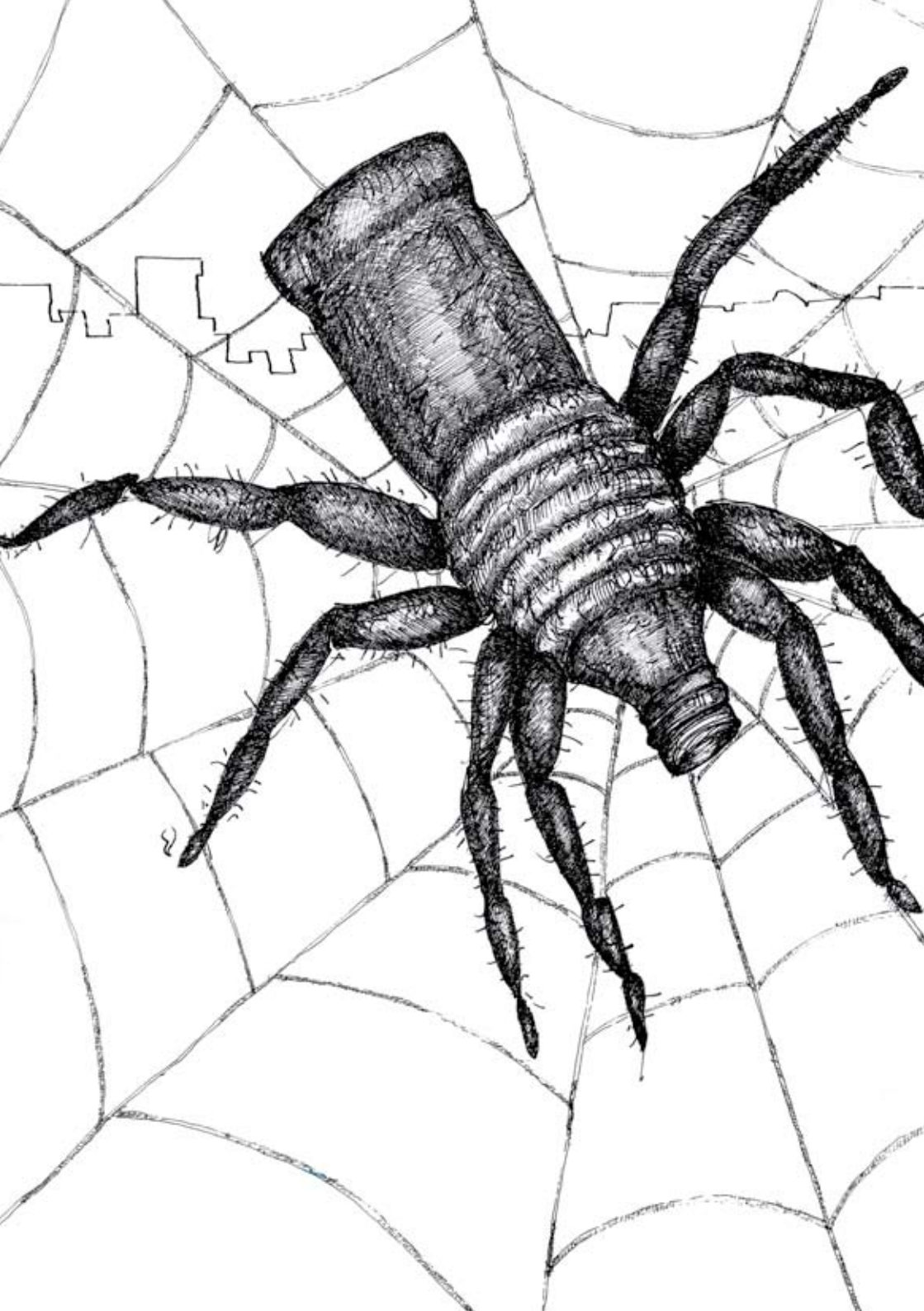


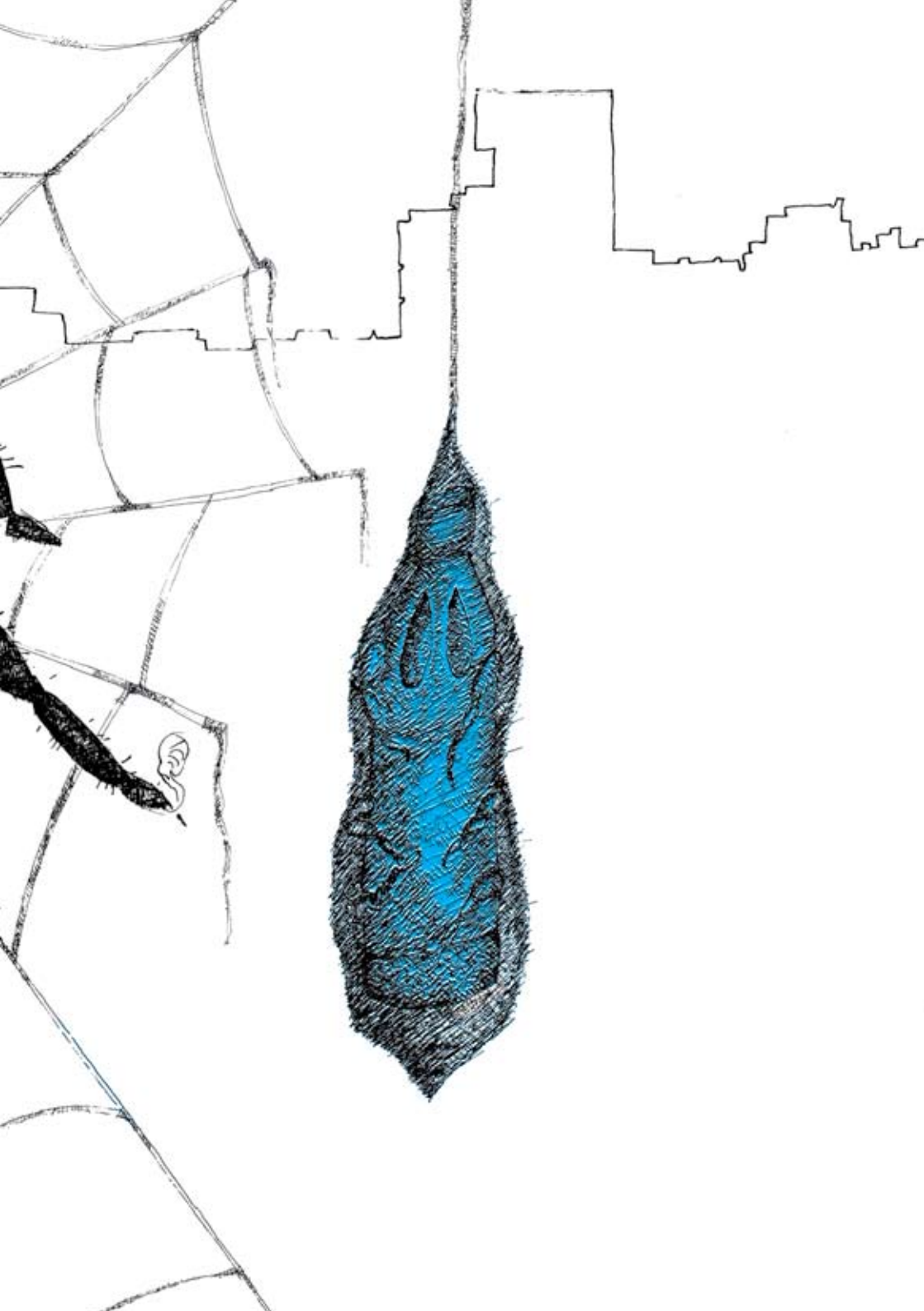


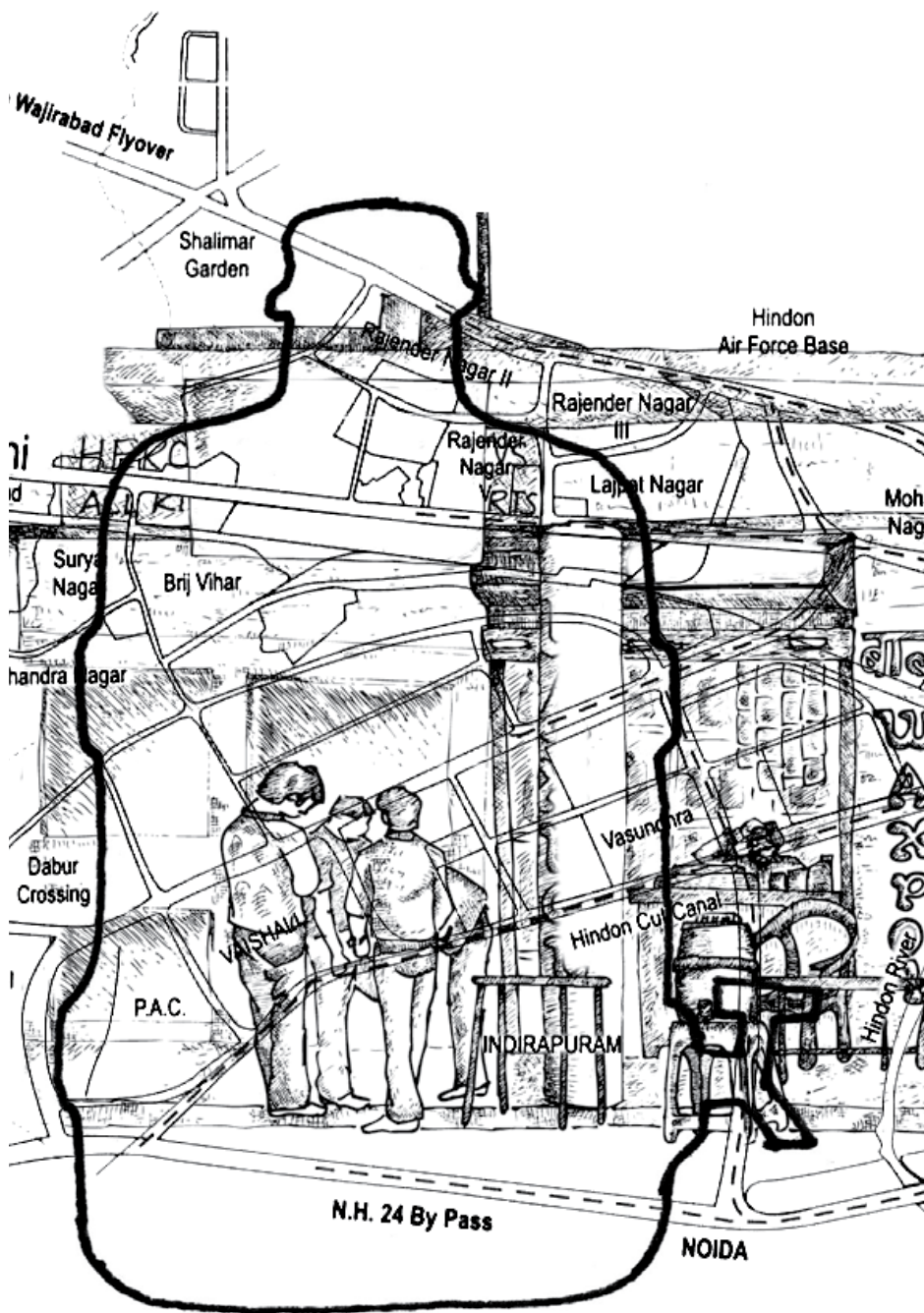




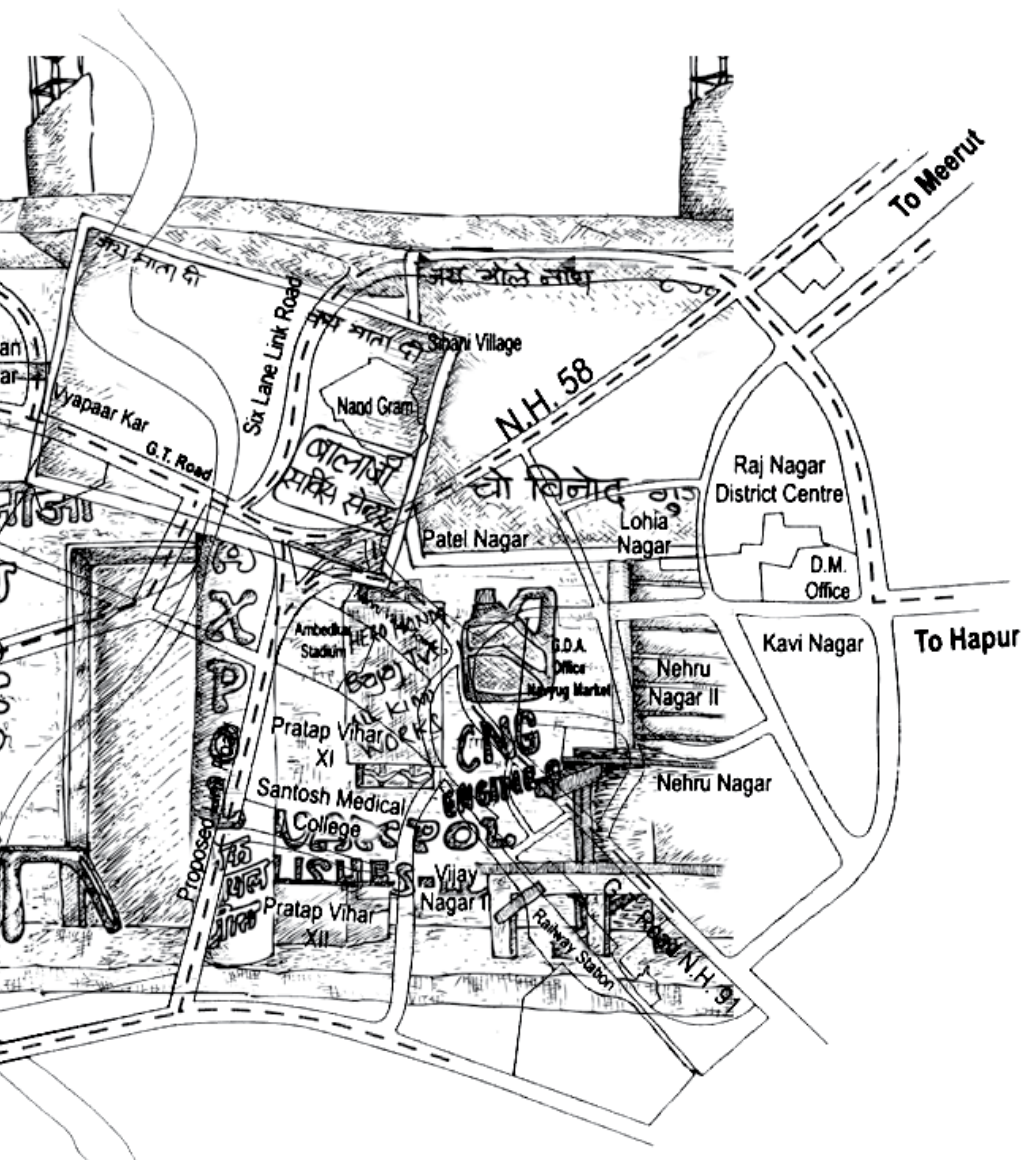


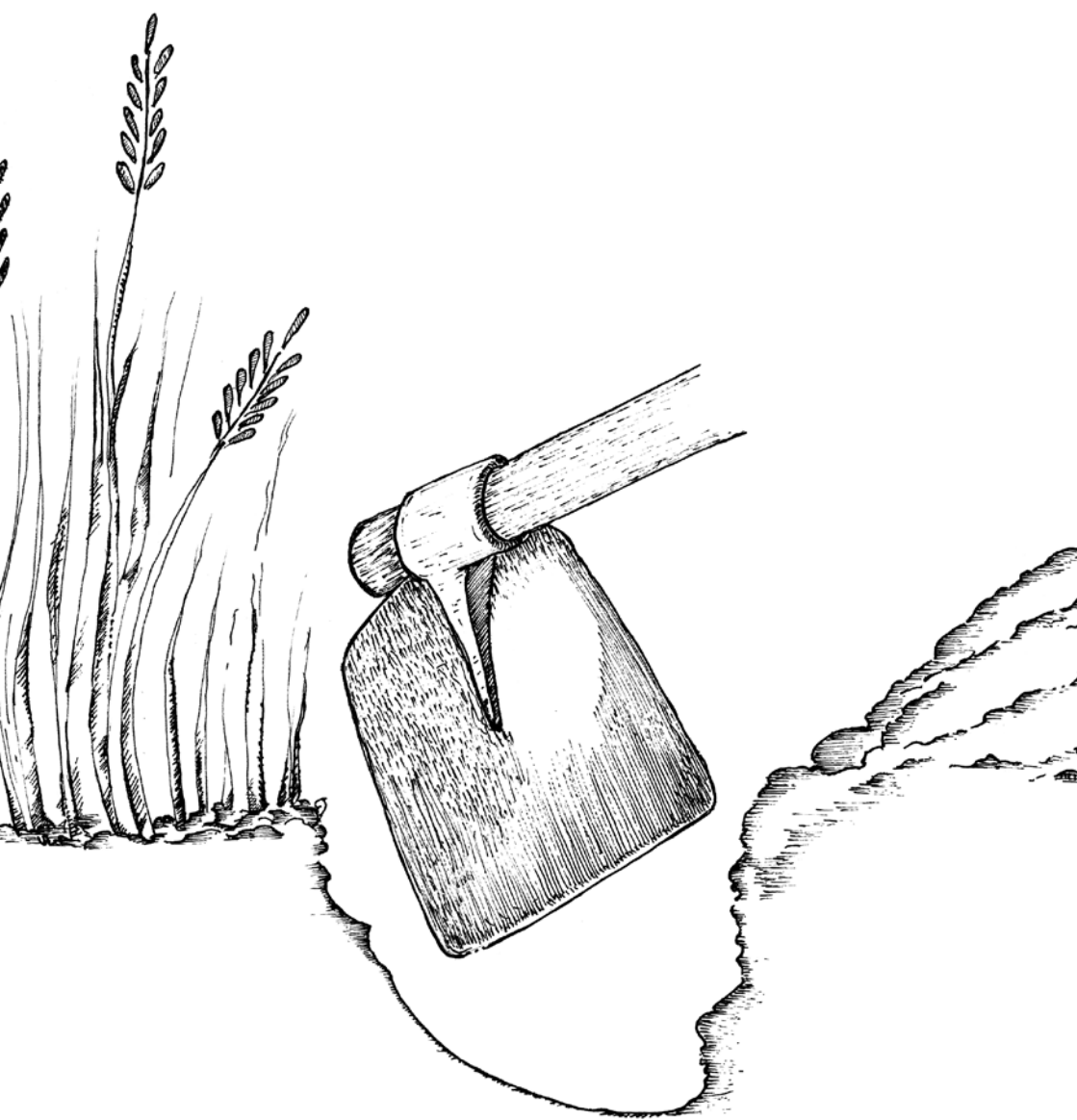


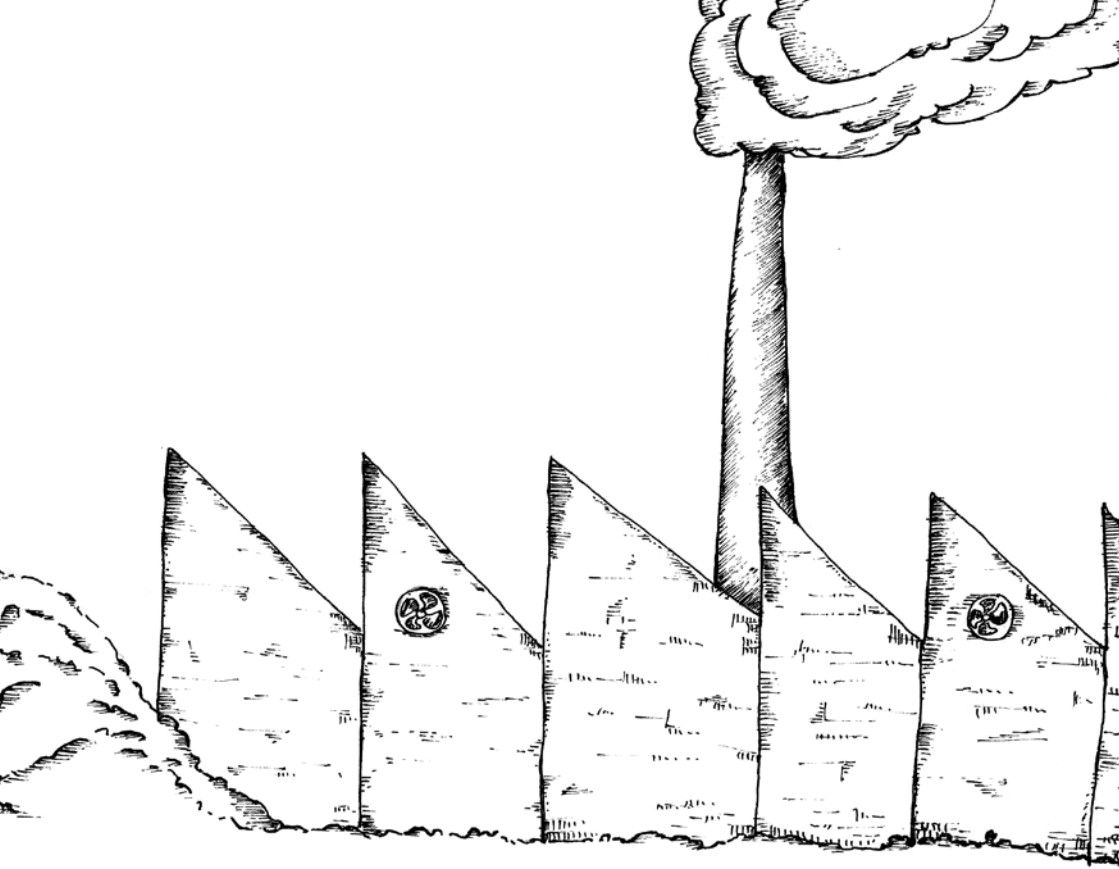




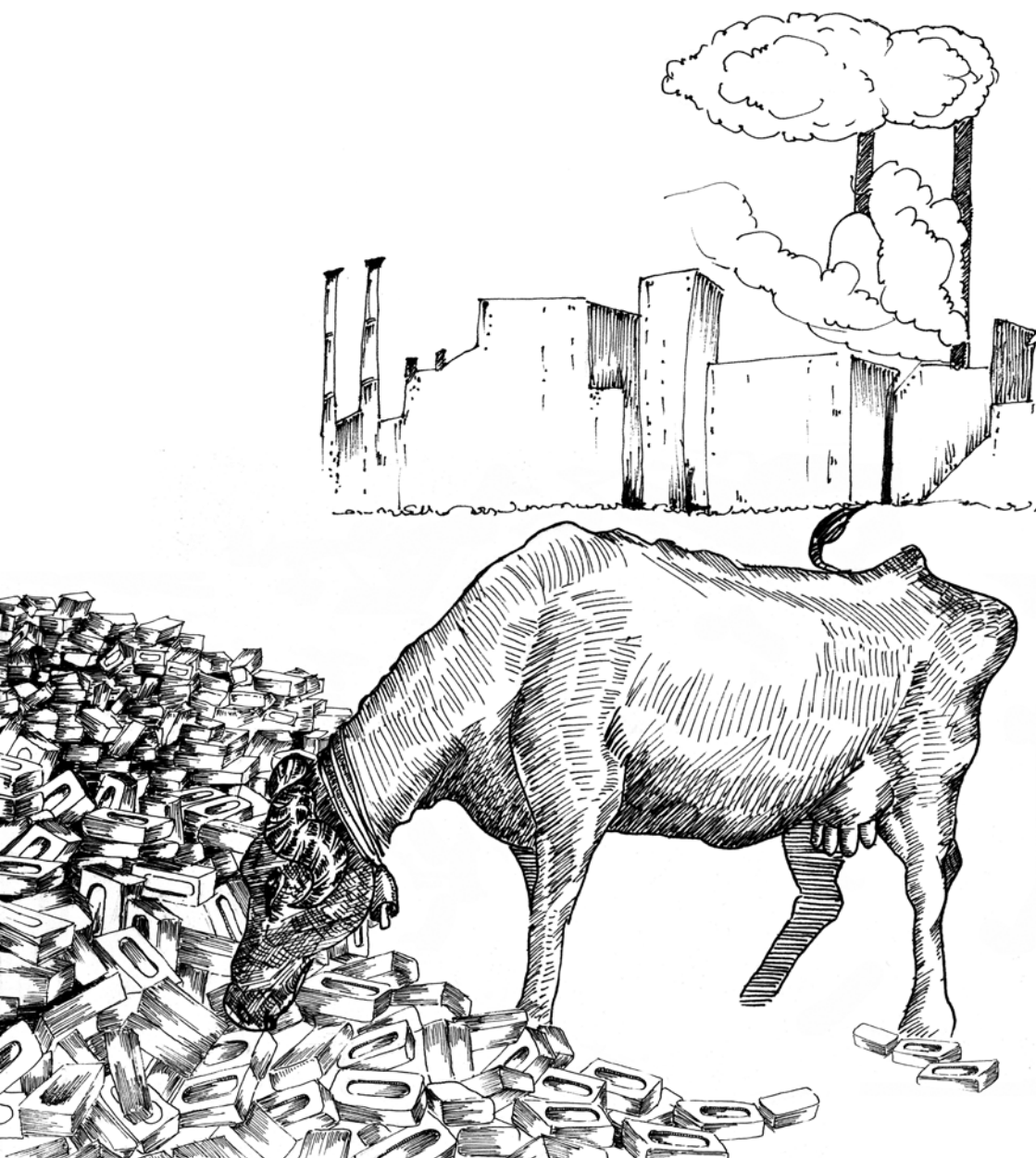
THOSE WHO HAVE NO THIRST
HAVE NO BUSINESS AT THE FOUNTAIN

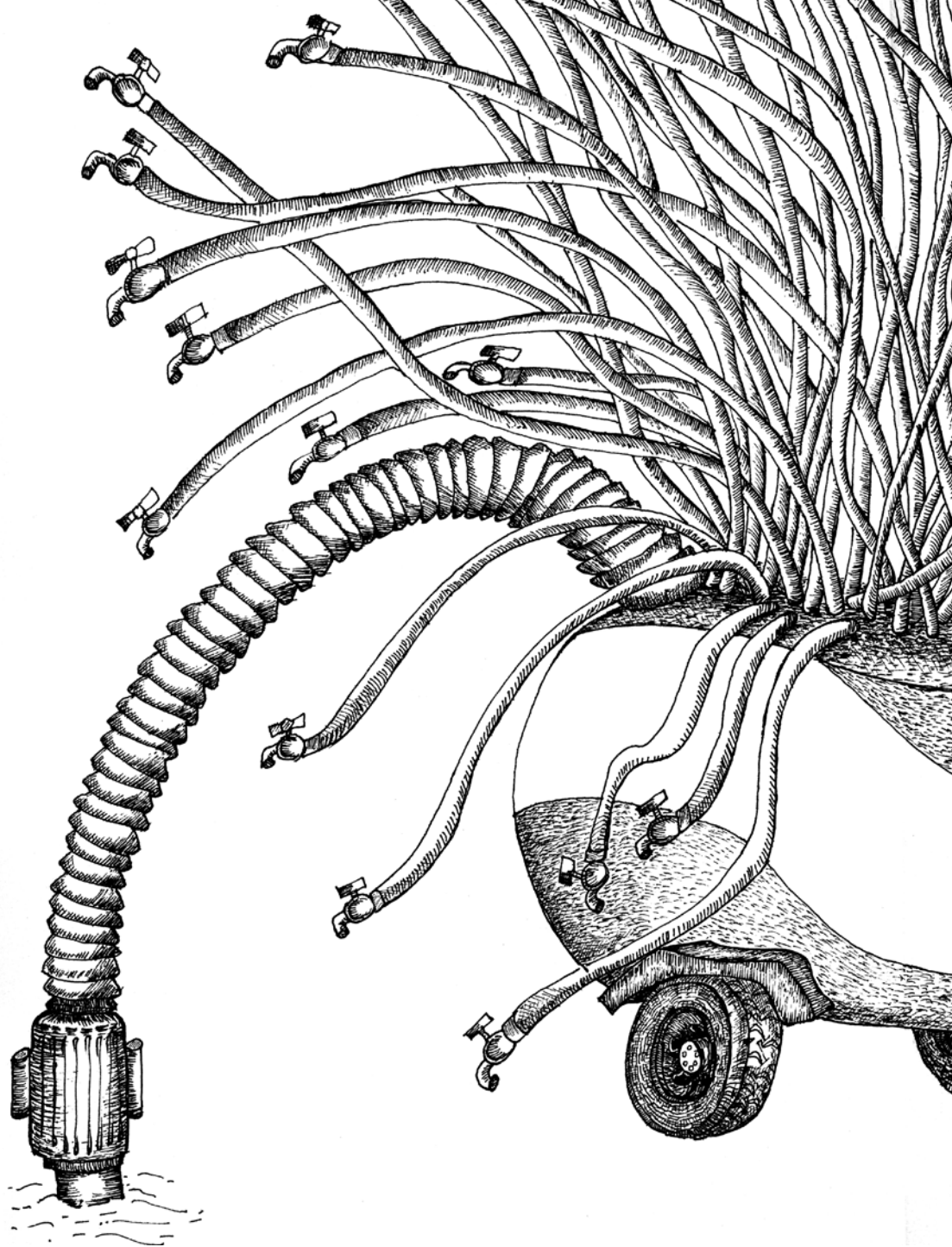


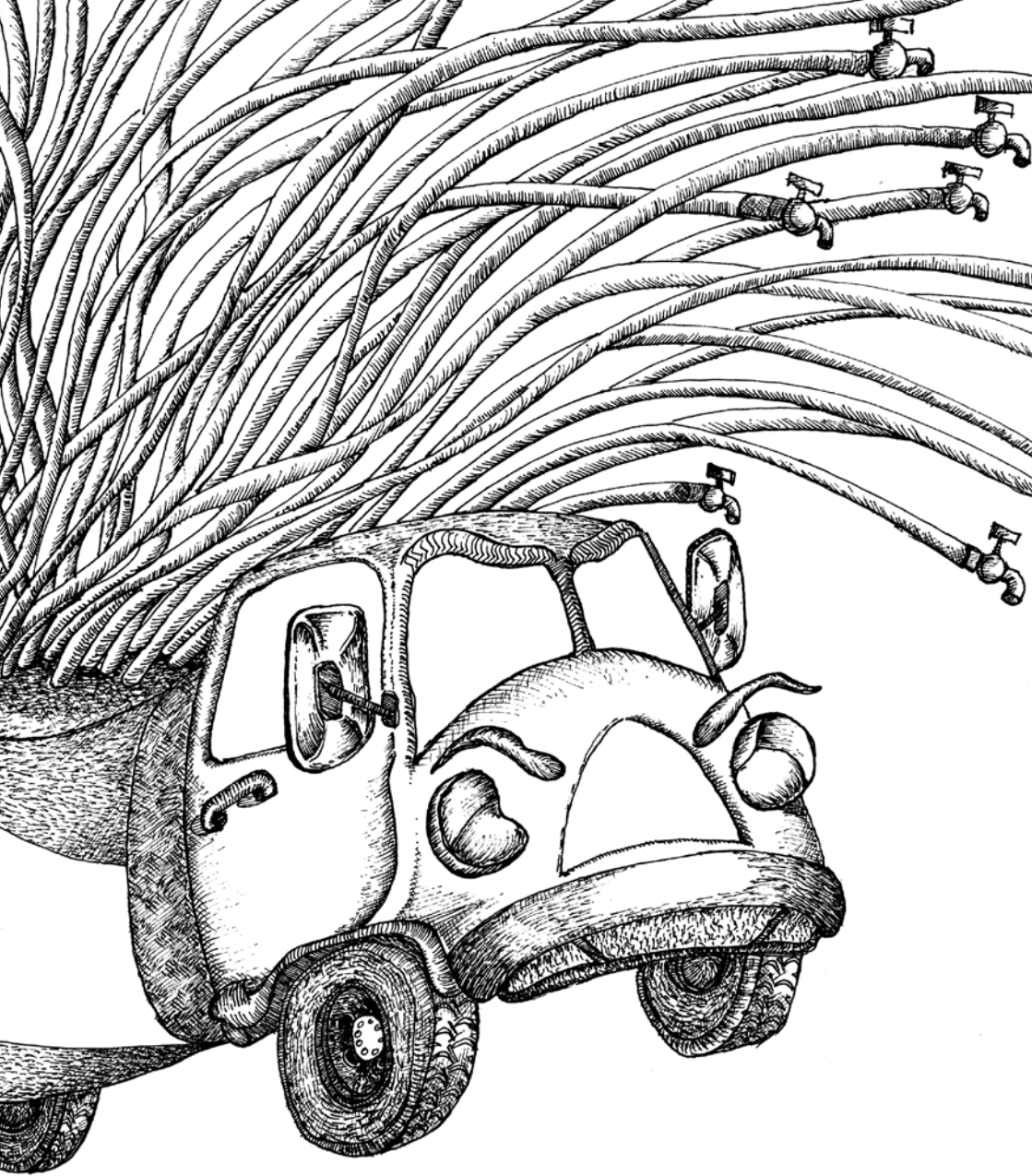


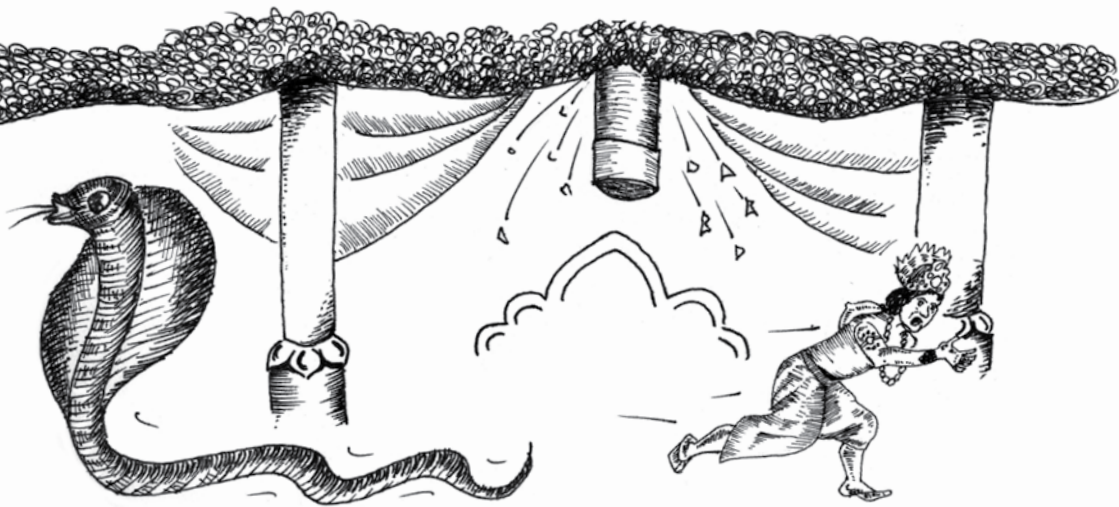
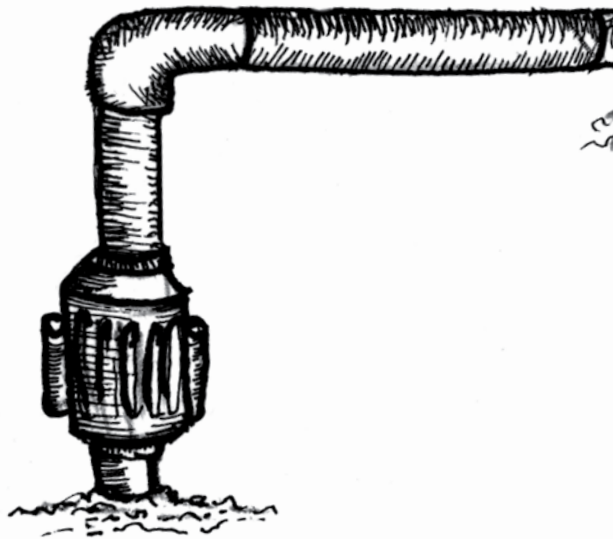


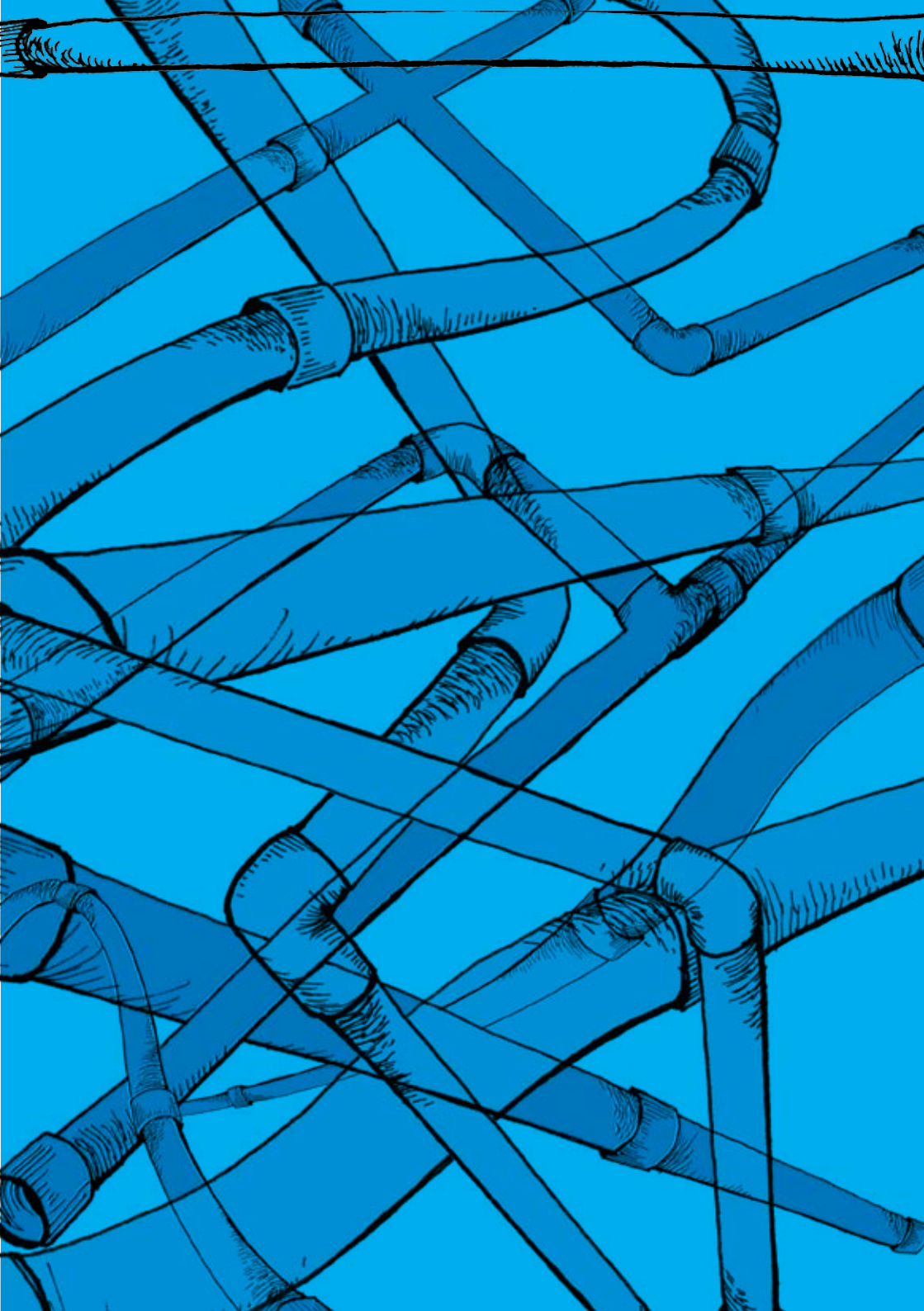


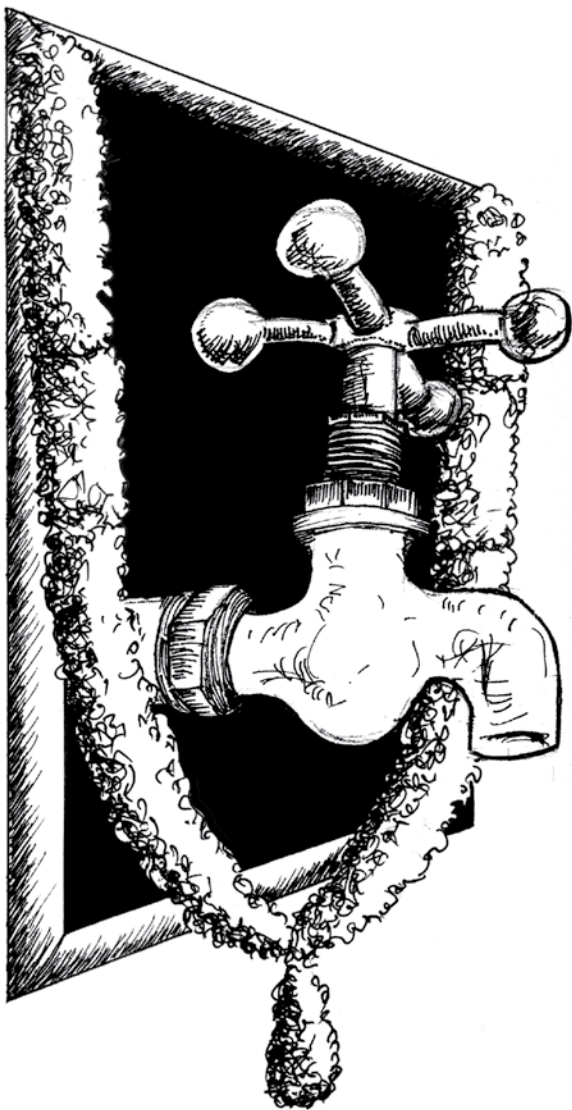












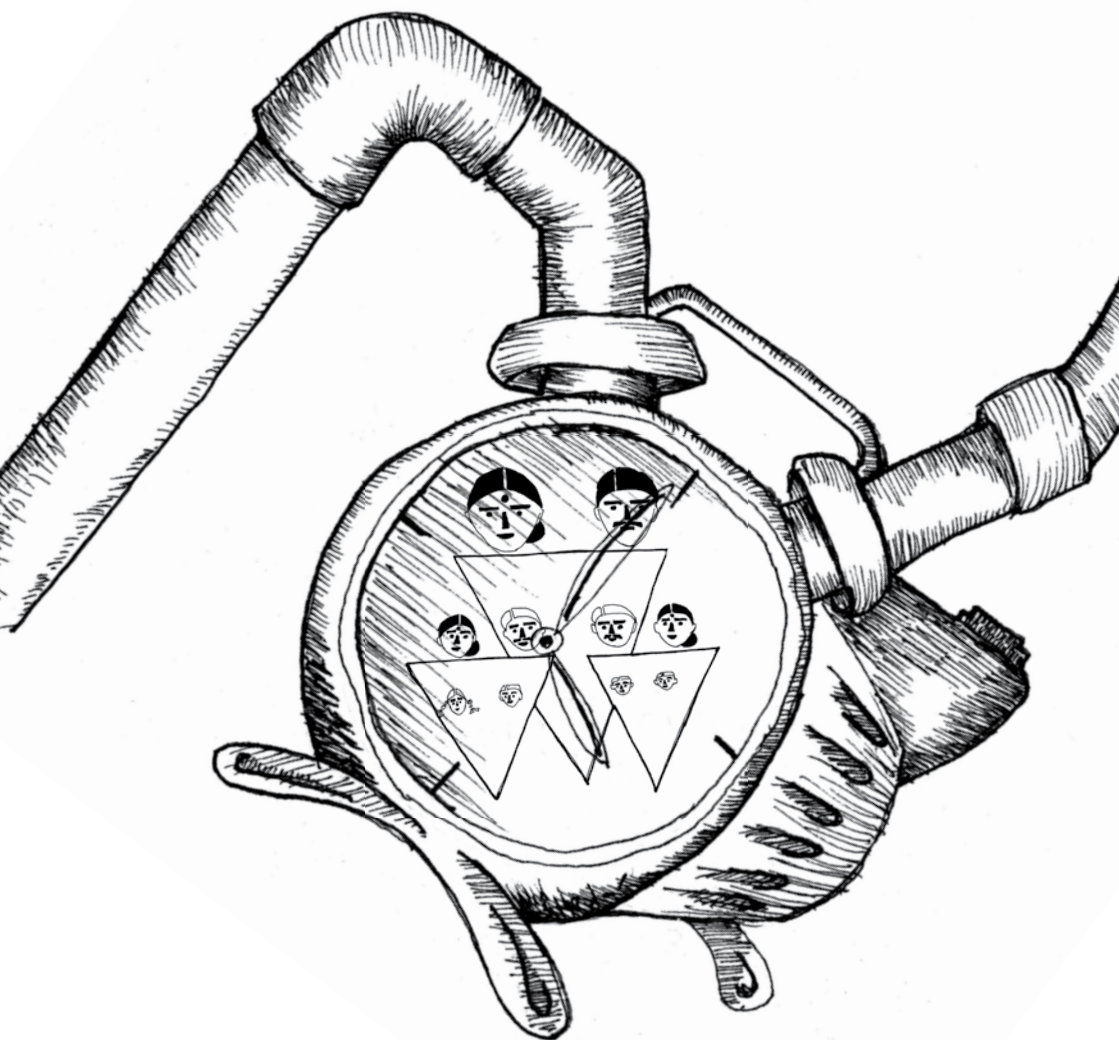


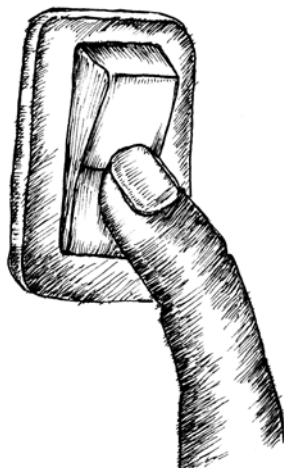
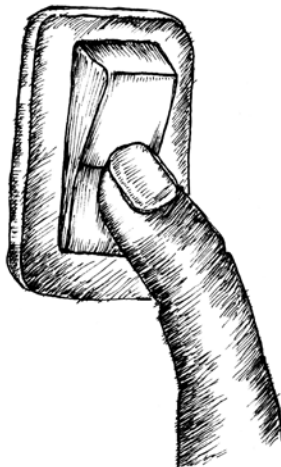
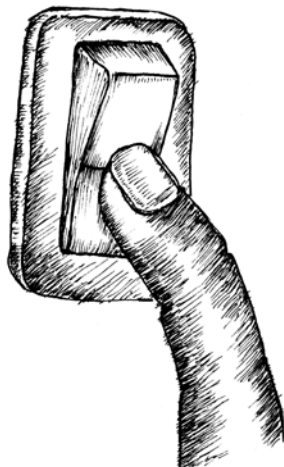


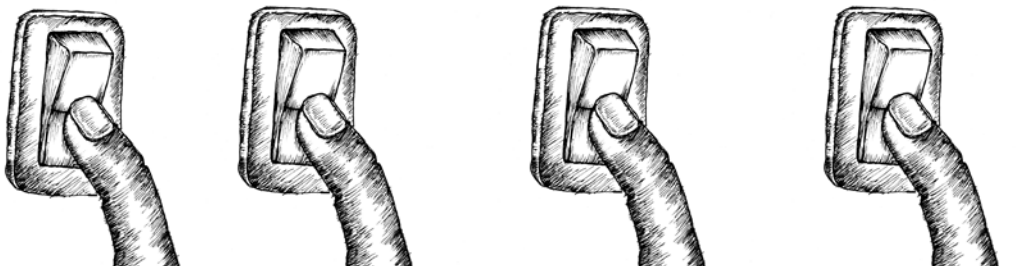
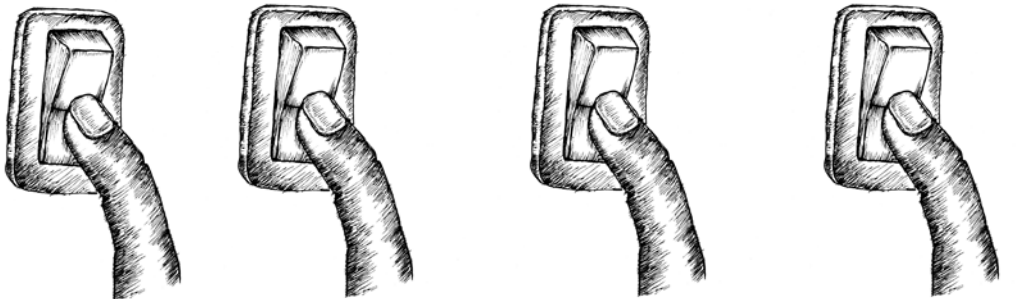
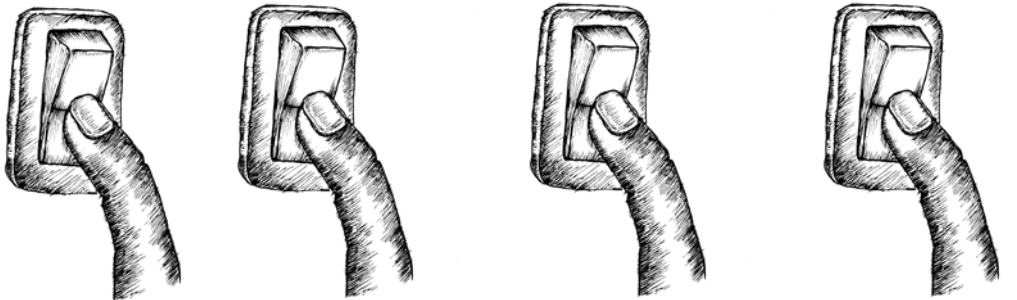
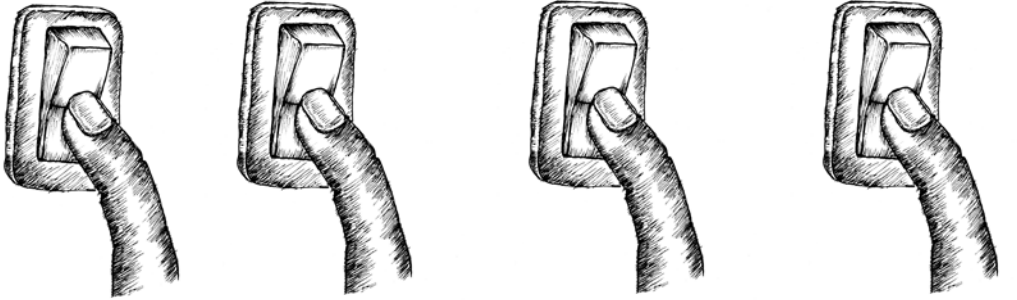
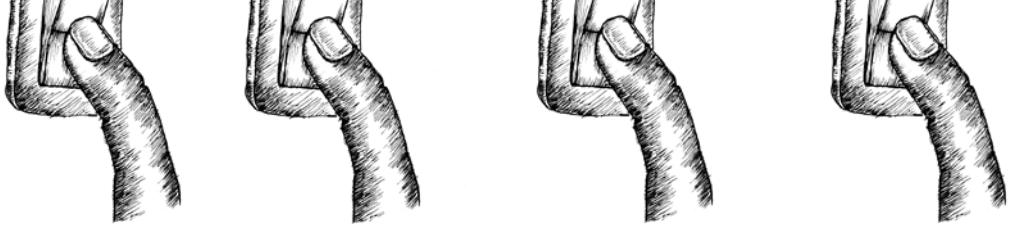


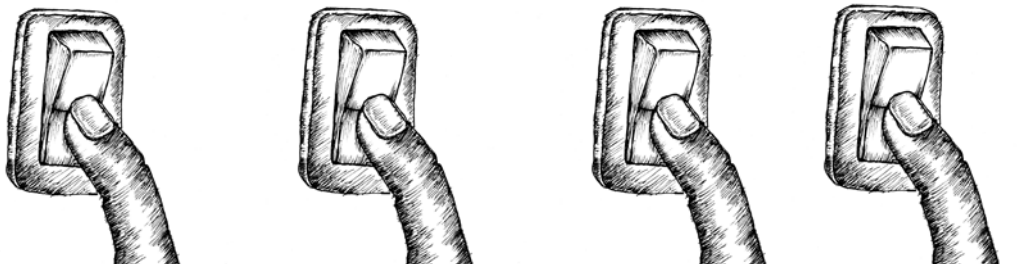
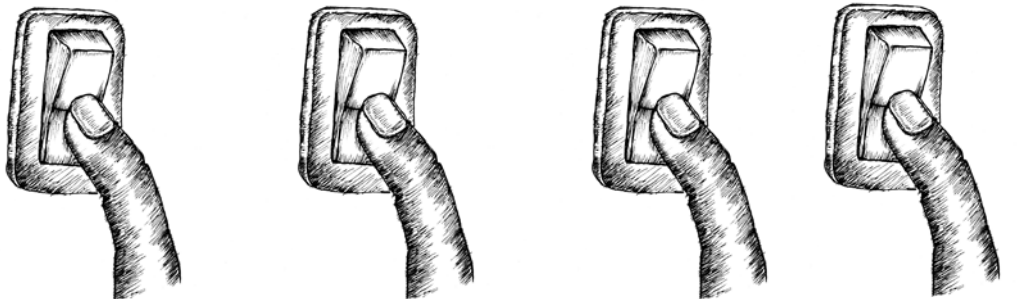
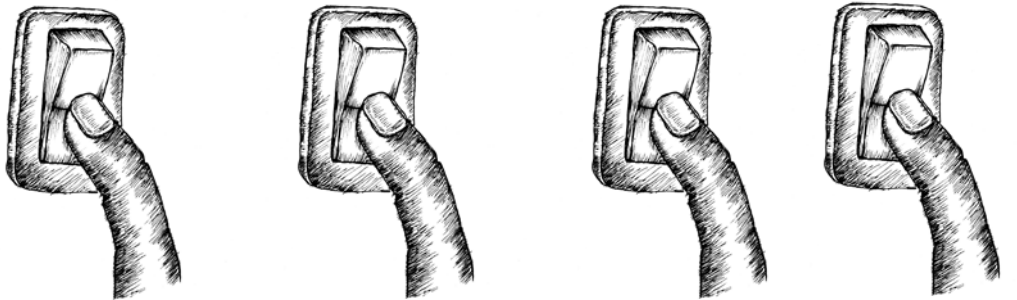
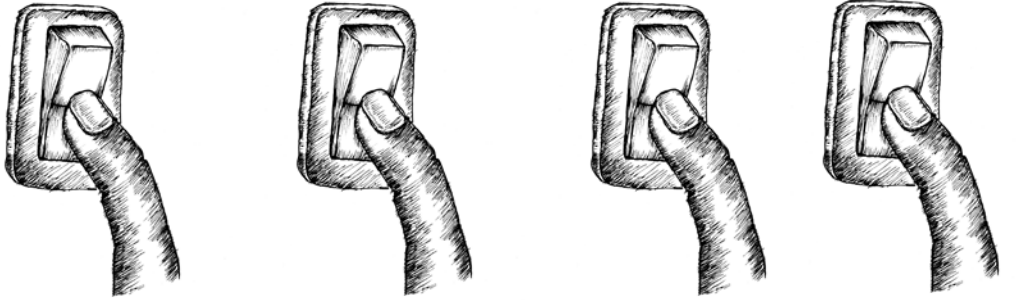
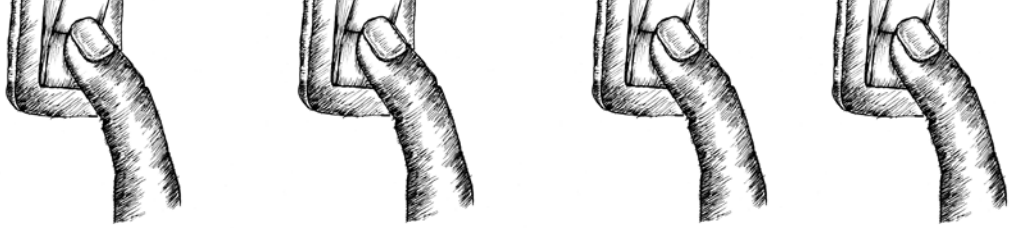
क्या आप नहीं चाहते कि हिन्दन
नदी स्वच्छ व प्रदूषण मुक्त रहे ?
तो फिर इसमें आपने पॉलीथीन / कूड़ा क्यों डाला ?

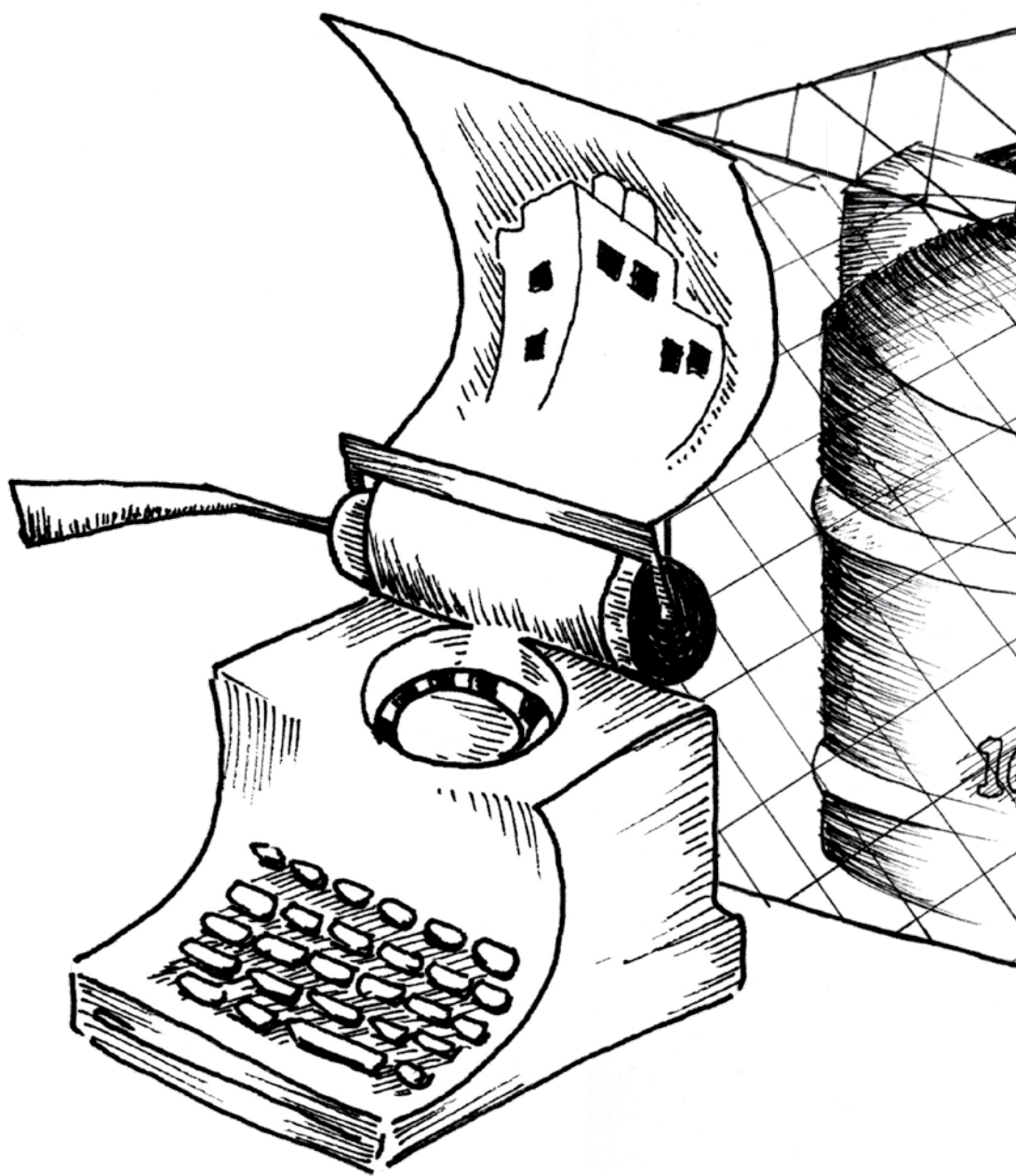
IF FAMILIARITY WERE USEFUL,
WATER WOULDN'T COOK FISH.

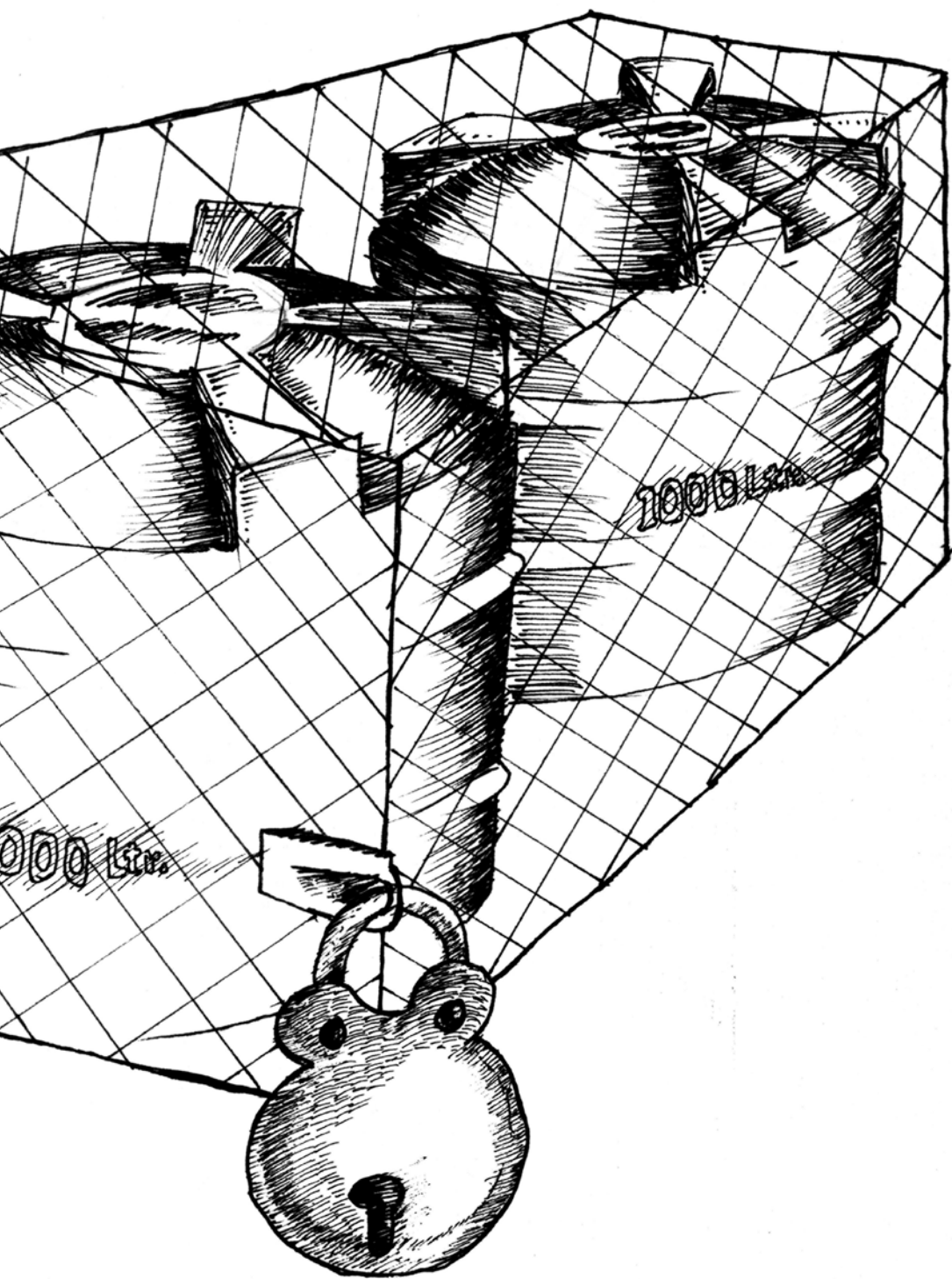


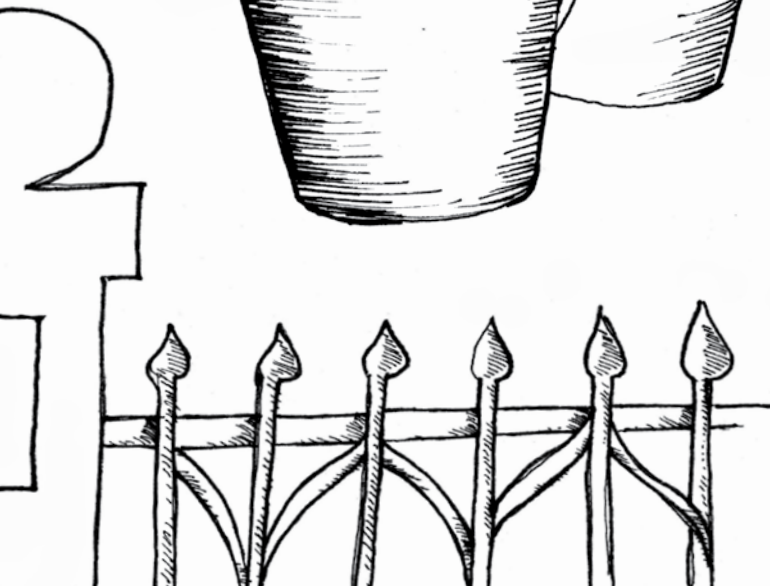
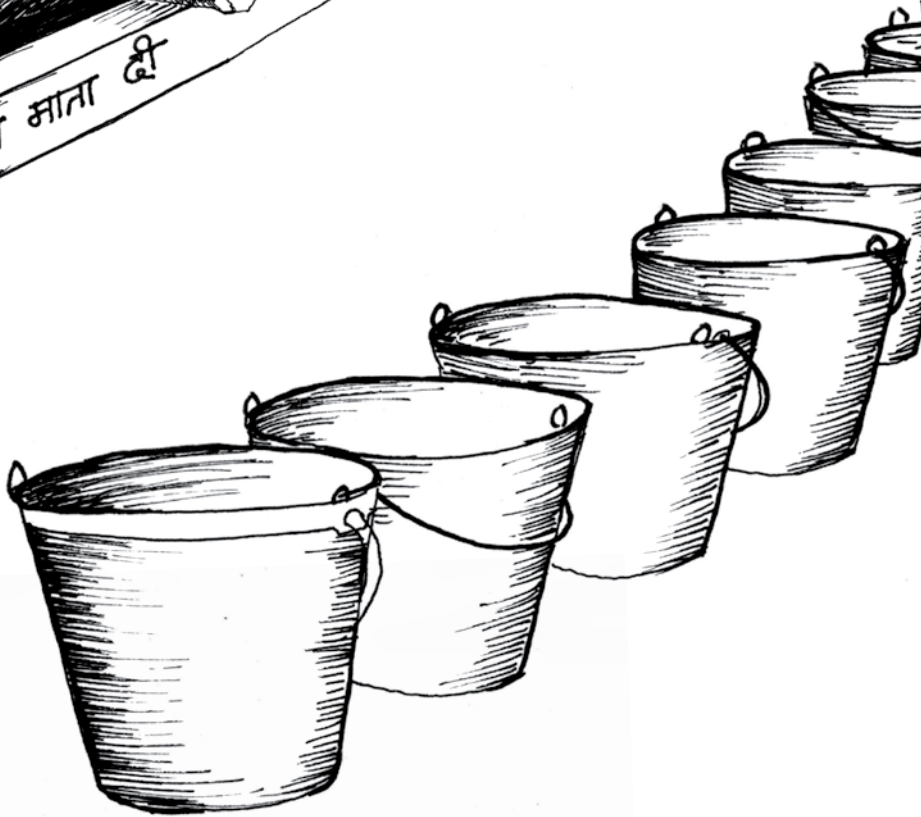
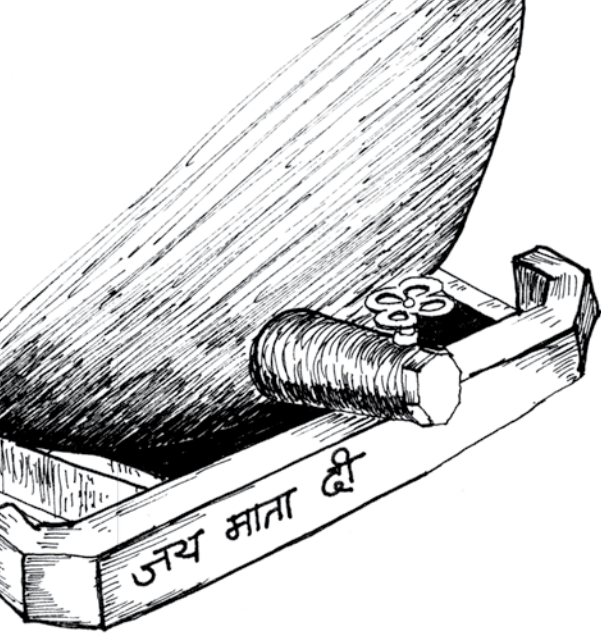


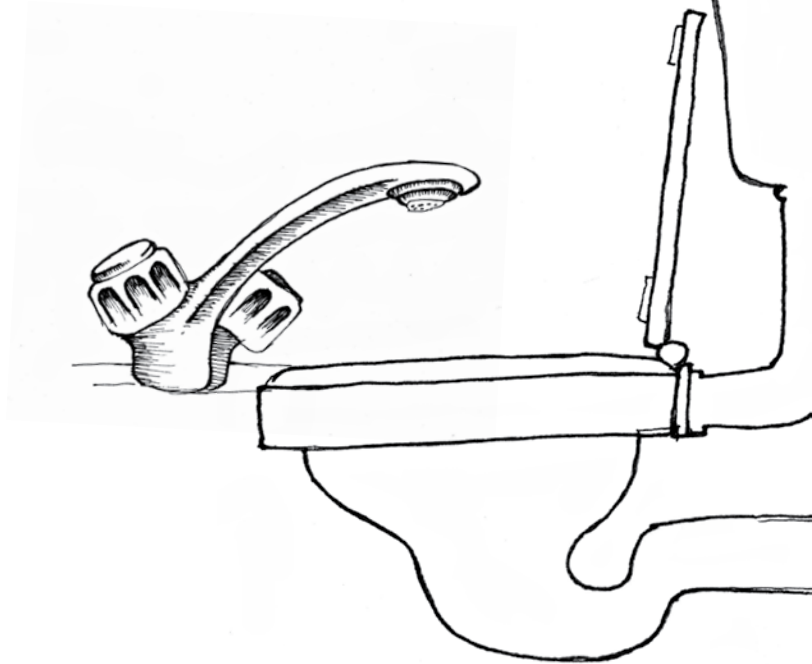
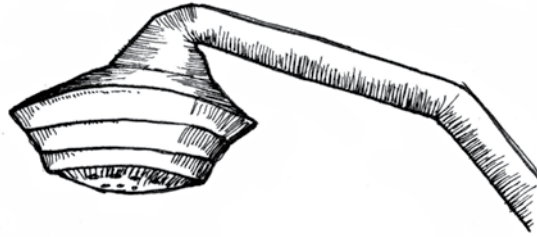
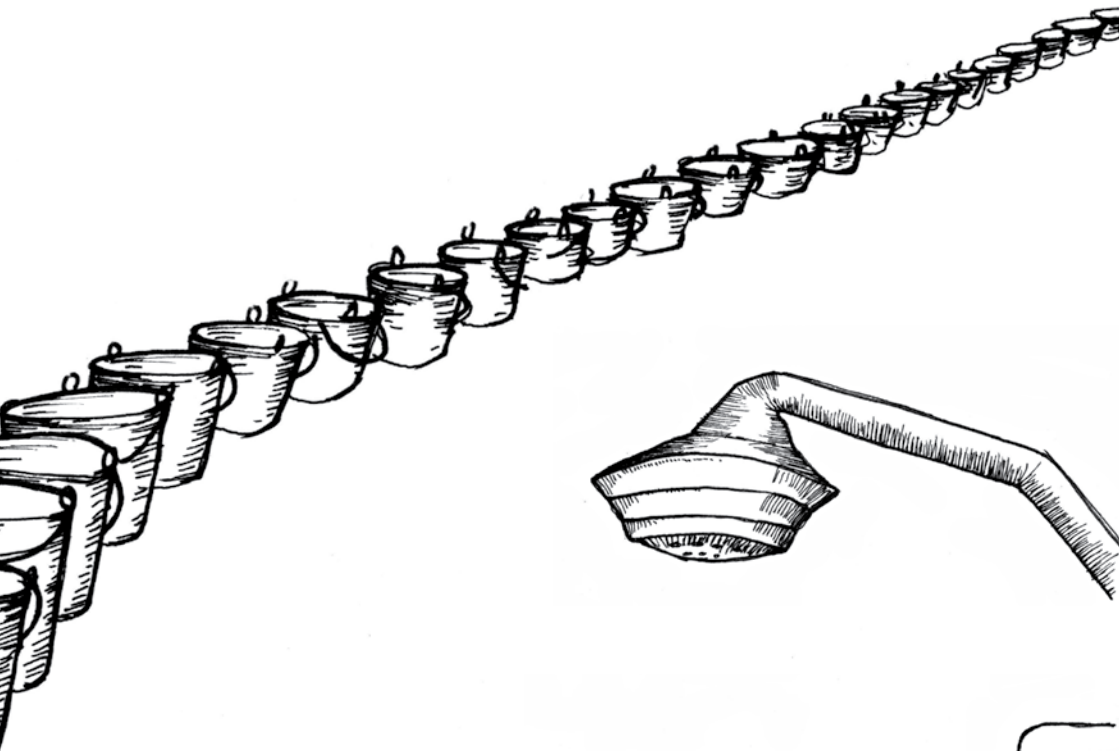
















I CAN TELL BY MY OWN POT HOW THE OTHERS ARE BOILING

The sun baked the earth with its heat. It was 2 in the afternoon.

Black smoke came out of the tall chimneys. Factories were scattered all over. And there was a strange stench around that forced one to cover one's nose. The sky was black. Getting darker as time passed.

Who knows what was being burnt in these factories ?

And in the middle of all this lay Lakhan- wide eyed and trying to get some sleep. He had just come back from a meeting that had been called upon by the elders of the settlement. He was familiar with the place, the people and their problems and the elders often took his counsel.

His bed was lying in the shade of his house, but the sun was fast encroaching upon it. Lakhan tossed and turned and tried to sleep. The sun almost reached his bed and he had to move it right next to the wall of his house. He didn't go inside.

It was a mud-thatched house, painted with lime.

The entire colony was surrounded by factories from all sides, and if one were to go to the factories and look around, it would seem impossible to even imagine that there were people living nearby. His house was in the corner of the settlement and was closest to the factories.

Lakhan finally went inside his house to get a bottle of water. He took a few gulps and put it back inside.

Although the settlement had been there for the past two decades, no one could've guessed that 20 years of its life had passed. It seemed to have been there forever. Such was the mark that the black smoke from the factories had left on the bodies and faces of the people. It made them look like they were a species that had always belonged around the Factories.

Some say that the place existed because of Rajiv Gandhi's timely 'help' in allocating space to the people. Which is why it's called "Rajiv Gandhi Nagar". Others say that it was during Tiwariji's term that the people were dumped from the city into this place. They started calling it Rajiv Gandhi Nagar

so that they could get their basic amenities faster than other resettlement colonies that had cropped up around the same time. But despite being Rajiv basti, the place still hadn't found itself in the government books. It was still an illegal settlement.

There was a handpump on the road outside the settlement. A crowd of children and women slowly began to form around it. All of them had a container, a bucket, a drum or a bottle in their hands. The heat had mellowed down and in the cool shadow of the factories, people came out to collect water for their homes.

The long line of cans, bottles and buckets looked like a snake coiling itself around the lone Pump. The people were busy chatting with each other, but they had the corner of their eyes locked onto the Pump. Even a twitch to jump the line by someone would transform their mouths into tanks and cannons. Barrages of the choicest swear words would be aimed at each other. Those who ran out of ammunition would then steel themselves to face the return volley of verbal bombs. This drama would play itself out every morning and evening.

All sense of discrimination would escape one's body on the first sight of the Pump. There were no lovers, relatives, elders, kith or kin in this line.

And what was wrong with that? Water is the basis of our life. It crosses the simple boundary of need for those who can't get it. Everyone in that line knew that.

The ruckus around the hand pump awoke Lakhan. He sat on his bed, wiped his face and stared blankly at the pump. His neighbor Mishri Ram, the owner of the daily goods store next door, walked up to him.

Mishri: I don't know when this bickering will ever stop... its almost become a ritual now.

Lakhan: Brother... this is a war for water.. it wont let go so easily. Haven't you heard of Bhagirath's penance.. how hard he had to work to get the Ganges to come down from the heavens to this earth ?

WHERE WOULD THE GRAVY BE BUT FOR THE WATER.

Towards the end of the alley is a grocery shop. It is a small shop, catering to everyone from small children seeking marbles to young men and women looking for fairness cream. Right next to this shop is Naghma's makeshift stall. Naghma is the local laundry woman who isn't particularly friendly with anyone - in fact, the neighbours think of her as a loud-mouth.

On a normal day, Naghma can be found busy working. The wooden box being used as a table is covered with folded sheets and she goes about her work with the kind of routine that is only possible when its being done so many times that it becomes a subconscious act - the sprinkling of water over cloth, the light but studied brush of a heavy iron, the re-filling of coal pieces into the iron every few minutes. The silence of the small room is broken every few moments by the echo of the gushing steam and vapour. Customers who want to get the clothes done quickly are asked to wait outside. Naghma's shop is the last one in the alley. Beyond it runs a busy railway track. The passing trains and the loud noise have become a part of the lives of the people living there.

Naghma lives with her husband Mohan and their child. Mohan works as a security guard at a metal factory in the nearby industrial area. Naghma and Mohan eloped from their village in Bulandshehar about twelve years ago, and settled here. Their neighbours are not unaware of their unique history. They are special lovers; the affection of their relationship has been growing over the years and is of its own kind. The couple, you see, fights a lot. It starts with something very trivial and quickly turns into a massive, loud fight. The neighbours rarely pay heed because everyone knows that as the night becomes deeper, so will their quarrel cease. Mornings see the couple's relationship at its best as Mohan happily leaves for work and Naghma busies herself with ironing and the household. When their child returns from school, he throws his bag on Naghma's ironing table and runs away to the playground with his friends.

By the evening, Naghma has to close her shop so that she can go get water. For this, she has to travel to a hand pump on the outskirts of the locality. This daily chore takes about an hour or two. All the women in the locality have the same story to tell. Some go early in the morning, others go in the

daytime but most go in the evening. After dusk, they are at the mercy of the broken pipeline across the railway tracks.

Late one evening, Naghma is cooking. The sound of her kerosene stove allows little else to be heard. Her child sits near her and plays with some old cardboard boxes. Mohan walks in and washes his hands with the water kept in a bucket at one corner of the room. He then flops down on a mattress beside the wall. He is, as usual, drunk. Naghma asks him if he wants some food. But there is no drinking water at home today. If he wants any then he has to go across the railway tracks. Mohan is furious and, very soon, they are fighting bitterly.

Mohan: To hell with this! I work all day and have to hear this crap when return home. Why the hell you don't go to fill the water?

Naghma: I work hard all day too! You know it is too late for me to go across the railway track now. You should go and fill the water.

Mohan gets up, picks up two plastic water cans of 5 litres each and, after briefly cursing Naghma, leaves. Naghma is unfazed and continues to cook.

It is 11 at night. The air resounds with the screeching of an approaching vehicle. Soon, there is a scream to accompany it. Some mishap has taken place around the railway tracks. People start opening their doors and start rushing towards the tracks. Naghma joins them. It wasn't the first incident of its kind. In fact it had become a routine affair now - two to three casualties almost every month. Each one of them wants to cross the tracks quickly. Everyone has fear in their mind and prayer on their lips as they search for the victim. The crowd starts to assemble near the tracks. Someone suggests calling the police. They have found the body, and are trying to identify it.

As the crowd grows, Naghma makes her way towards the dead body. Next to two plastic water cans lies the body of Mohan. Naghma stands frozen and the women start to gather around her. Close to Mohan's body, is the cracked water pipeline. It carries water from the Ganges to the upper-class apartments nearby.

This is now the relationship that the Ganges has with the world where she descended, after a long struggle, to cleanse it's millions.

Mohan lay dead on the railway tracks, with the water that he had collected spilled all around him.

THOSE WHO HAVE NO THIRST

HAVE NO BUSINESS AT THE FOUNTAIN

After eating, Rajendra puts aside his plate and reaches out to get a drink of water from the filter. This is no ordinary water but comes out of a filter on which are etched the letters “RO”. The magical “RO” mechanism treats raw water to make it fit for consumption. Such water purification devices have become fairly popular in Rajendra’s locality, where the water invariably tastes salty. As a curious manifestation of the ‘generation gap’, the local elders have not developed a taste for this treated water. To them, salty water is the norm.

Rajendra drinks a glass of RO treated water and after a loud burp goes back to his usual seat.

A map is hung on the wall behind where Rajendra usually sits. It is a map of this locality and is marked by what seems like an array of multi-coloured pens; each mark indicated something different. To the outsider, the mystery of the map is solved only when he or she takes an upward glance at the shop sign – or, in other words, the name plate. It reads - ‘Chaudhary Properties’. This is a typical property dealing shop. The markings on the map help identify the status of different land properties - sold, vacant, leased, rented, municipal land, etc. The locality boasts of several property dealerships. They sprung up like mushrooms when the recent relocation of industry from the city to this area escalated land prices. Many young men then busied themselves in the business of property.

Rajendra is one of them. He stays with his parents and four elder brothers. The family has a substantial amount of land- both cultivable and otherwise. His father, who is quite old, always maintained that the family should continue farming. The sons, however, were not inclined to do so. With the sudden rise in property prices, the value of their land was determined by its selling-price rather than its fertility. After all, isn’t the worship of Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) becoming far more popular than that of Annapurna (Goddess of bounty)? And haven’t people begun to believe that worshipping Lakshmi will bring the best of both wealth and bounty?

Naturally, there was a lot of fighting between Rajendra and his brothers over property claims. Their father chose to divide it equally amongst his sons. From what he got, Rajendra sold a major chunk to buy a house, shop,

and car. And this is how his property business began. This is the case with most young men of this area – they too have been anxiously waiting to get their pound of flesh in the form of family property.

What separates Rajendra from the rest is that he has yet another way of making money – a ‘side-business’. Over the land remaining from his inheritance, he has put up a small single room. This room is actually meant to hide a high capacity submersible pump. The idea is to sell groundwater – a booming business. Most factories in the area have a huge demand for water and Rajendra reaps the benefits. To crack this idea, he says, he relied on his instincts and basic logic. Farming was going nowhere and industries were coming up – naturally, the demand for water would be high.

The elders feel that this business venture is immoral. In their words – “Paani bech ke paisa banata hai!” And how! Every year, Rajendra’s submersible pump goes deeper into the ground to get the water that his business requires. They fear that if this continues unabated there will come a time when Rajendra’s submersible pump makes inroads into the Earth’s core and disturb the life of its resident Hindu deities. Already, his ‘business practices’, they feel, has attracted the ire of the water-Gods. The Gods feel powerless before his pump and, as a result, they have shrunk deeper inside the folds of the earth.

The elders have other fears too, that the old Gods will suffer at the hands of the new avtar – the Nal Devta – who has been brought here from afar by the municipal authorities, who provides water depending on the whims and fancies the new Brahma, the Authorities. And as the new God has prospered, so has the river turned old, pale and weak, fed against her wishes by domestic and factory wastes. Apart from blessings, she can hardly offer anything today. Some day, she too will die, as mere mortals do.

The Authorities occasionally feel guilty and seek to bring her back home, to once again become intimate with her. They beautify her, dress up her banks in ‘green’ and police her shores from unwanted elements. As if aging and dead rivers can regain their youth through cosmetic surgery!

IF FAMILIARITY WERE USEFUL, WATER WOULDN'T COOK FISH.

4:30 am. The beeps of an alarm clock break the silence.

What explanation could there be for the wilful disturbance of sound sleep at this hour?

Well, if there is water in your tap only at this time of day, then there is no question of sleeping on – you get up. Necessity pitted against necessity. Do not blame the government. Their job is to simply provide you with water – how and when you get it is not their concern. This is fast becoming a daily feature of urban life.

Bimla is more than sixty years old. She lives with her family; rather they have made her stay with them. The house, you see, is legally in her name – having been typed in many years ago on type-writers that no one uses anymore. It is a double-storied house in a middle-class colony on the border of the city. Bimla's husband Kewal Ram, who worked as a clerk in the Election Commission, got this house constructed keeping in mind the benefits of living near the capital. As a result of his untimely death the family is now headed by Bimla. Perhaps it is because of this exalted status in the family that she has to wake up early in the morning to fill the tank with water. Her two sons, along with their families, are not a part of this daily routine.

But today, Bimla appears to be quite happy. This is a feeling which she gets only for about 15 days every year. Water supply remains suspended/restricted during this time period. All households have to arrange water from the tanker based supply which is made available by the municipality. It's a strange and unique sight to see; queues of people in a middle-class colony, lining up to get water. Bimla's age exempts her from this chore and the drudgery falls on her daughter-in-law. For this, Bimla is grateful to the river Ganga. In fact, she often wished that this situation could be extended. For these 15 days the Ganges river water treatment plant is closed every year for the purposes of cleaning and maintenance. This small vacation for the river Ganges brings an unwanted work load to Bimla's daughters-in-law. Both of them dislike this work. They think that standing in a long queue for water is like living the life of a slum-dweller.

It seems that these days Mother Ganges is not in control of the ebb and flow of her own life. The new Bhagiraths of this world have tied the goddess to a strict plan that can't be modified according to her wishes. She can now only flow according to the maps drawn by these Bhagiraths. For Bimla's daughters-in-law the appellate authority is only Bhagirath and hardly Mother Ganges.

Bimla on the other hand is quite pleased with this break from her routine. On these days, without the help of an alarm clock, she wakes up after everyone else in the family, long after the hustle bustle is over. The first thing she does on each of these days is thank the Mother Ganges.





The Water Cookbook

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