

## LOVE UNDER THE CAMERA LENS

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In the rain-swept Mumbai  
Searching a rendezvous is difficult.  
They settled for a branded coffee shop  
an import from the USA, like many other such things  
into a post-colonial nation ready for anchor conquest  
by the West.

The two sat and watched the morning crowd scatter  
under a pregnant sky with a dark ballooned belly  
over the ugly battered skyline.  
Drenched, scared, they ordered coffee  
stars in their brown eyes magnified under the  
bifocals, although the price hurt, confessed J Alfred Prufrock later on, in his post-modern avatar  
to his nerdy pal  
the next day through the Whatsapp along with a selfie.

The two love-sick undergrads from the crowded western suburbs  
wanted exclusivity---and some peace and privacy for small talk.  
These days, you know, anything can happen---crazy guys chasing the couples off the Marine  
Drive to preserve sanctity!  
But where should we meet then? He whined, adjusting his pony tail, while she flicked off an  
imaginary fringe off a broad forehead to cover nervousness.  
We can...um...meet in the college canteen. She ventured, eyes rolling comically  
as the heroines do in the Bollywood.  
No, the crowd is cheap and we are always under the camera lenses of the CCTVs.  
Then? She asks.  
Malls?  
Naw.  
Why?  
Because even there you are being watched!  
They paused. The MNC- coffee house dominated their yearning hearts and subdued them with  
its rich décor.  
On my society-building premises? He asked timidly.  
No, you are being recorded by the CCTV there also. She answered and grinned.

In multiplexes, we cannot talk! He sounded desperate.  
We have got no place for romance in this big metro! All the public places are under the surveillance by the state.  
But why? She asked. They, afraid of harmless love?  
Yes. Love is no longer a simple chemistry but a cause of paranoia and killing.  
How? Her tone was low.  
We are all being watched! All are suspect! Their own citizens! The deviants are caught.  
Who?  
Anybody hooded or sporting ear-studs and spiked hair or tattooed arms...he laughed at this profiling of counter-culture, love and youthful romance.  
She looked puzzled, while he snuggled closer and tried to hold her slim hand. Then she pointed out to the CCTV camera and both smiled, creating a continent between them on the sofa under a smiling Mona Lisa fake on the stucco wall.  
Next time, she said, another haunt.  
Sure.  
We would eat a lot and roam, she said, grinning, while the CCTV cameras rolled on the walls, recording this urban dalliance.

**Brief author-bio:**

Mumbai-based, **Sunil Sharma**, a college principal, is also widely-published Indian critic, poet, literary interviewer, editor, translator, essayist and fiction writer. He has already published three collections of poetry, one collection of short fiction, one novel and co-edited five books so far. His six short stories and the novel *Minotaur* were recently prescribed for the undergraduate classes under the Post-colonial Studies, Clayton University, Georgia, USA. He is a recipient of the UK-based *Destiny Poets'* inaugural Poet of the Year award---2012.

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