Memory, Migration, and the Idea of Home: Avid Learning Presents the Mumbai Launch of Sarnath Banerjee's *Absolute Jafar* at Royal Opera House, Mumbai

What does it mean to call a place home? Cities are also shaped by the memories, relationships, histories, and stories we attach to them. They become repositories of personal and collective experience, places where childhoods unfold, families take root, friendships are formed, and histories, both intimate and political, leave their mark. For those who leave, a city can become something else entirely: a place reconstructed through memory, carried across borders, and continually reshaped by distance, nostalgia, and the stories we tell ourselves about where we came from.

Migration rarely ends at the point of arrival. It leaves behind fragments of language, family histories, music, food, rituals, relationships, and unfinished conversations, creating an emotional geography that can span continents and generations. The experience of moving between places can also unsettle the very idea of belonging: when does a place become home, and can one belong to more than one place at once? Between what is remembered and what is imagined lies a more complicated landscape, where cities become characters in our personal histories and where the past continues to intrude upon the present. It is this unsettled territory that **Sarnath Banerjee** explores in ***Absolute Jafar***, his latest graphic novel and perhaps his most personal work yet.

Avid Learning, Royal Opera House, Mumbai, HarperCollins Publishers India, Literature Live!, and **Project 88** present '**Phantom Cities and the Idea of Home'** celebrating the Mumbai launch of *Graphic Novelist and Artist* **Sarnath Banerjee**'s graphic novel, ***Absolute Jafar***, published by **HarperCollins India**. Set in a world where bureaucracies and borders shape human relationships, the book is a poignant meditation on belonging and becoming.

The immersive evening will bring the book's ideas to life through a mix of conversation, performance, and visual storytelling. *Actor and Musician* **Imaad Shah** will interpret selected passages through voice, sound, and music, creating a live, atmospheric layer around the text. This will lead to a conversation between Sarnath and *Filmmaker* **Kiran Rao** that explores the themes of memory, migration, cities, belonging, and the stories we carry with us. Interspersed through the evening, Sarnath's artworks from **Project 88** gallery will extend these ideas visually, creating a fluid interplay between image, performance, and conversation.

About the Book:
Brighu is getting older. Badminton has replaced judo, irritation has replaced anger, metabolism has slowed down. Yet, some things remain: the inability to take a cab, anxieties about the digital universe, and panic for the future. So Brighu walks. Unceasingly, through known and unknown terrains, with the pointlessness of a detective without a case. An Indo–Pak romance withstands years of toxic nationalism between two hostile countries, only to unravel in a third, in Europe. Jafar, born of that romance, inherits a history he has no control over. As he grows up in Berlin, his father, Brighu, desperate to hold on to the fantasies of a fading home, tells him bedtime stories: of sultans and jinns, of street food and eccentric cousins, of Delhi, Calcutta and Karachi. Set in a world where bureaucracies and borders shape human relationships, Sarnath Banerjee's Absolute Jafar is a poignant meditation on belonging and becoming. Perhaps the author's most personal work yet, it is a bittersweet rhapsody, rich in humanity, wit and imagination.

Praising the book, *Writer and Journalist* **Mohammed Hanif** says, *"A wondrous tapestry of languid humour, mournful art-making and stupendous fun in strange cities. This is an anti-anxiety pill of a graphic novel. Keep it handy."*

In the words of *Executive Publisher* **Udayan Mitra**, "*Absolute Jafar is stunning at so many levels: in its ideas, in its storytelling, in the sweep of its narrative, and of course in its art. Sarnath Banerjee's new graphic novel is a tour de force, and it is also perhaps his most personal work yet. We at HarperCollins are delighted to be able to bring this exceptional book to readers.*"

Avid Learning has consistently championed programs that bring together literature, culture, and critical global conversations. Through its long-standing collaboration with The Royal Opera House, Mumbai, Avid Learning continues to create platforms for meaningful dialogue with some of the world's most significant thinkers and writers.

Join us for an evening of stories, sounds, images, and memories, and a journey through the many ways we find, lose, and carry home.

Program Details:
When: Wednesday, 7th October 2026 | 6:30 PM - 8:00 PM
Where: Royal Opera House, Mama Parmanand Marg, Mumbai
Register: www.avidlearning.in
For Press: ayeshah.avid@gmail.com

About Speakers/Artists:

Sarnath Banerjee is the author of the graphic novels Corridor, The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers, The Harappa Files, All Quiet in Vikaspuri and Doab Dil. He created Gallery of Losers, a series of billboards for the 2012 London Olympics. His installation, Critical Imagination Deficit, was showcased at the 13th Berlin Biennale 2025. His recent solo exhibitions include The Melancolony of a Heartburn City for the Gujral Foundation, and The Spectral Times, which was shown at the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai. He has been a Belknap fellow at Princeton University, a CAST fellow at MIT, Cambridge, a fellow of Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, and was the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship. Banerjee also co-founded the award-winning publishing house Phantomville. He is currently working with Rohan Debroy on an illustrated book about mosquitoes and how they challenged the British Empire.

Based in Mumbai, **Kiran Rao** is a director, producer, and writer. In 2010, Kiran directed her debut feature Dhobi Ghat. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and received worldwide theatrical release in 2011, establishing Kiran as a director with a distinct voice. Laapataa Ladies, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2023, marks her second outing as a filmmaker. It was selected as India's official entry to the 97th Academy Awards. The film was released to critical and commercial success on 1st March 2024. In addition to her work in film, Kiran is deeply committed to social issues. In 2016, she co-founded the Paani Foundation, a non-profit organisation working with farmers in rural Maharashtra, India.

Imaad Shah is a musician and actor living in Bombay. He makes Disco and Funk music with his band Madboy Mink and writes wordy Urdu rhymes with his acoustic guitar. He has directed a short film, music videos and a play, the musical 'Threepenny Opera' by Brecht.