



F-bloc: A tribute to childhood

Description

Unknown to most people of Kolkata, there is a tiny store that exists underground at a very specific location. The name of the store is F-bloc. Strolling down Park Street that lies in the center of the city of Kolkata, after you pass the busiest crossing, with McDonalds Café Coffee Day and Barista Lavazza, on your left and KFC and Au-bon-pain on your right, if you keep moving forward you will find a park on your right. If you take a left you will find yourself in a one-way road called Rafiq-Ahmed Kidwai road. If you take the correct right and make it to the end to find the correct basement you will reach F-bloc. If you are unsure, the door looks like a microchip with a hand sticking out as the door handle.



Comic books as graffiti on the wall

But what is F-bloc? It's a store that caters to the needs of those who still completely haven't let go of their childhood. Batman, Captain America, Iron Man, Hulk, Flash, Garfield, SpongeBob Square pants, Tintin, Asterix, you will find everyone there. F-bloc sells t-shirts, posters, little merchandise like bobble-heads and coffee mugs, and a lot of other things, but most of its revenue is generated from the sale of its t-shirt. The shop is also decorated with little and big action figures of various products of popular culture, like 10 inch models of Captain America and Iron Man, and a larger than life model of the predator from the 'Predator series'.

It hasn't been that long since F-bloc has come into existence. The store was started sometime around 2009 by Fahad Ahmed, who owned the property where the store stands as a storage facility for his other shop. He then decided to utilize the space for something else. And thus F-bloc was created. The idea behind creating F-bloc, said Ahmed, was that an establishment like that was not present in Kolkata. Ahmad himself as a child was fond of T-shirts and other merchandise related to cartoons and comic books but being brought up in Kolkata, he rarely ever found them in a store. So, in a way, this entrepreneur decided to take things into his own hands. The T-shirts sold in F-bloc come from various parts of the country and some even from the US.



The Old School Man of Steel

When asked why the establishment was in a place like that, inside the basement of an apartment building, Ahmad said it was designed that way so that he could have total control over the business part of it. He spoke of the commercializing trend in the market that is profound these days. He believes that if he moves out to a more commercial setup, like a mall or a general store inside a market place, soon he will have to change how the store functions conforming to the commercializing trend. To him F-bloc is doing well enough without all that. People who love T-shirts with cartoon characters on them and are not afraid to show it find their way to f-bloc, thanks to the little news coverage they have had, their website and their dedicated facebook page.

The success of recent commercial films which are based on comic books have made people more welcome to the concept of superheroes and cartoon characters as something very mainstream. When asked if that has helped F-bloc in its business, Ahmad agreed, but he also commented on the new renditions of all such products deteriorating in their standards. According to him, and his design head, Debasish Ghosh whether its cartoons or comic books, the new products and the recent launches cannot match the standards of the old school. The new generation of cartons and comic books have become too flashy but they lack the depth of the character and the richness of literature that they had a few decades ago.

Cartoons, comic books, superheroes, aliens, are all fascinating to those who enjoy them. But in a way, a lot of people say, they are things people hold on to, when they do not want to grow up. But those who fall under that category see them as something entirely different: tools for hope and imagination. F-bloc shares those views. Like a child it is unwilling to get muddled up with the big bad commercialization of the world outside. Otherwise why would a popular and thriving shop like that be unwilling to move out of the basement and grow up?

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1. Potpourri

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