

# Rhetorica

A Literary Journal of Arts

Department of English and Modern European Languages  
University of Lucknow

## **ADVISORY BOARD**

Anamika, New Delhi

Antonio Andres Ballesteros, Madrid

GJV Prasad, New Delhi

John Thieme, London

Lakshmi Kannan, New Delhi

Neelam Saran Gaur, Allahabad

Sanjukta Dasgupta, Kolkata

## **EDITORIAL BOARD**

Dr. Maitraye Priyadarshini (Head)

Dr. Ranu Uniyal (Chief Editor)

Dr. Nishi Pandey

Dr. V.P. Singh

Dr. A.K. Lal

Dr. Madhu Singh

Dr. O.N. Upadhyay

Dr. Nazneen Khan

Dr. R.P. Singh

Dr. S.G. Puri

Dr. Fatima Rizvi

Dr. Meenakshi Pawha

## **DISCLAIMER**

Opinions expressed in *Rhetorica* are of individual contributors and not necessarily of the Editor and Publisher. The editors and publisher will not be responsible for any false plagiarism undertaking provided by the contributors.

*Dedicated to*



**Kunwar Narain**

(1927-2017)

# Kunwar Narain

## वे जो नहीं जानते

एक ठोकर लगी  
तो ठोकर-बराबर चोट लगी माथे पर  
खून छलक आया  
तो आँखें भर आई

माथे ने डाँटा,  
'तुम चुप रहो,  
तुमसे क्या मतलब?'

ठोकर ने कहा, 'सॉरी...'  
और आगे बढ़ गई  
गुज़रते ज़माने की तेज़ रफ़्तार से।

एक बूढ़े का आहत आत्मसम्मान  
लाठी टेके  
कहीं छूट गया युगों पीछे

मुड़कर देखा पीछे  
वह कुछ पहचाना सा लगा।  
पूछा उससे, 'कौन हो तुम?'  
'सिर ऊँचा करके उसने कहा, 'गाँधी !

'मैं चौंका— 'लेकिन तुम तो मारे जा चुके हो, बापू!'  
'नहीं' उन्होंने दृढ़ता से कहा,  
'मैं हर समय मौजूद हूँ  
एक ऐसा रास्ता जिस पर चलकर  
दुनिया की किसी भी अत्याचारी स्थिति से  
पाई जा सकती है आज़ादी ।'

## Those Who Do Not Know

A blow, so the head was hurt  
Some blood spilled  
So tears filled the eyes.

The head reprimanded,  
'You keep quiet,  
How does it concern you?'

The blow said, 'Sorry...' and moved on  
At the fast pace of the passing times.

An old man's injured dignity  
Propped up on a stick  
Was left somewhere epochs behind.

I turned back to look, he looked  
A bit familiar. I asked,  
'Who are you?' He raised his head high  
And said, 'Gandhi.'

I was taken aback 'But you've been killed, Bapu?'  
'No,' he said resolutely,  
'I am present all the time,  
A path, which can always be walked  
And freedom found  
From any injustice, any oppressive  
Condition of the world.'

Translated by  
Apurva Narain

'Witnesses of Remembrance'  
(2021, Westland)

# Letter from the Chair

Dear Reader,

Greetings and a warm welcome to the latest edition of *Rhetorica* (Vol. II, Issue IV). This issue takes up the theme - INDIA, a nation which is transcending and transforming everyday. Time has been a witness to the greatness of our nation which is reflected honestly in the present issue.

I express my profound gratitude to the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alok Kumar Rai, for his unstinted support and inestimable guidance. The Department of English and Modern European Languages believes in enriching and empowering every individual by encouraging them to contribute and participate earnestly in the magazine's forthcoming issues.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the editors and the entire team of *Rhetorica* for their commitment and expertise, which makes it a success.

Happy Reading!

Matrayi Priyadarshini  
Professor and Head,  
Department of English and Modern European Languages,  
University of Lucknow.



# Letter from the desk of Chief Editor

Dear Readers,

As we celebrate the 75th year of India's independence we look at our country with pride and think of our freedom as a privilege offered to us by our freedom fighters who gave up their lives to ensure a free country where we could live and breathe without fear. Freedom brings with it responsibility.

It fills me with great pleasure to see *Rhetorica* evolve into a full-fledged creative journal. In the current issue we welcome our distinguished members of the Advisory board. Having born out of an endeavour to collate the creative talents of our young minds, the literary journal now holds some remarkable contributions to its credit.

We dedicate this issue to one of our much-loved alumnus, poet, and thinker Shree Kunwar Narain. He did his Masters in English from the Department in 1951. The city of Lucknow remained very close to his heart, and he continued to live there for a major part of his life. A winner of Padma Bhushan, Jnanpith and the Sahitya Akademi awards Kunwar Narain is known as "the Buddha of contemporary poetry". As a people's poet he speaks of the socio-cultural strains that restrict everyday life. Narain's voice burns with a distinct awareness of the contradictions that permeate human consciousness. As a poet he is all for love. "I have loved in myriad languages..." wrote Kunwar Narain in his poem "The languages of Love".

As nation is the source and receptor of much of our creative collisions, we have compiled a collection of literary pieces that crisscross across this vast thematic canvas. It is encouraging to see how warmly contributors responded to our theme "India". I hope you enjoy reading through the pages of this fresh volume. Our readers remain our fine treasure and we seek your love and support through these literary efforts.

Warm regards

Dr. Ranu Uniyal,  
Chief Editor, Professor and Former Head,  
Department of English and Modern European Languages,  
University of Lucknow.





# EDITORIAL TEAM

## FICTION



**BHAVYA PANT**  
**EDITOR**

An enthusiastic learner and a research scholar. Her area of interest includes posthumanism in contemporary fiction.



**YUSUF AYAZ**  
**CO-EDITOR**

His doctoral research falls within the purview of medical humanities and involves a clinical analysis of the portrayal of mental illness in modern and postmodern fiction.



**SMRITI SNEH**  
**CO-EDITOR**

With a hobby to romance the ghosts of past through her writing, she hopes to inspire readers someday.

## POETRY



**MAZIAH SHAAZ**  
**EDITOR**

She's a gastronome and potterhead and enjoys watching psychological thrillers. She loves to read and wishes to go on a solo trip round the country.



**SHIVANGI GAUTAM**  
**CO-EDITOR**

An ardent lover of F.Scott Fitzgerald, she finds comfort in practicing her culinary skills by the day and flipping through excerpts of literary pieces at night.



**AKANKSHA PANDEY**  
**CO-EDITOR**

She's an admirer of nature and literature, accepting life as it comes following dreams and instincts.

## BOOK REVIEW



**MARIA KHAN**  
**EDITOR**

An enthusiastic learner, a budding writer and an academic trying to carve a niche for herself in the world of academia and literary imagination.



**PRIYANSHI AGRAWAL**  
**CO-EDITOR**

She is a happy soul in the labyrinth world of academia with the special ability to look at life pragmatically.



**ARSHIYA PARVEEN**  
**CO-EDITOR**

An ardent reader, her areas of interest include Historical, Environmental and Children's fiction.

## NON-FICTION



**NIKITA YADAV**  
**EDITOR**

A believer and researcher, her area of interest includes feminist discourse and the psychoanalytical approach towards maternal thinking.



**VEDAMINI VIKRAM SINGH**  
**CO-EDITOR**

Her areas of interest include performance studies, mysticism, indigenous literatures, and travel literature.



## **PHOTOGRAPHY**



**ASHUTOSH AGARWAL**  
**EDITOR**

Ashutosh Agarwal is a freelance photographer. Earlier world with *The Times of India* as content writer. He is an adventurer and a passionate trader.



**CHITRA BAJAPI**  
**CO-EDITOR**

A creative writer by her interest and a researcher by her passion, her doctoral thesis focuses across on the issue of sustained ecology in art.



**CHETNA RAWAT**  
**CO-EDITOR**

Chetna is an ardent reader, who loves psychological thrillers and fantasy fiction. Her area of research includes psychological study of violence in literature.

# In this Issue

*Letter from the Editor*

## Fiction

<i>Sanghmitra S Acharya</i>	1	<b>Adieu! The future's not ours to see...</b>
<i>Rajesh K. Tha</i>	4	<b>Full Circle</b>
<i>Banibrata Mahanta</i>	12	<b>Unclean</b>
<i>Sarvajit Mukerji</i>	17	<b>Guddan</b>
<i>Deepak Sharma</i>	20	<b>The Town Hall</b>
<i>Translators: Madhu B Joshi</i>		
<i>And Deepak Sharma</i>		

## Poetry

<i>Shirin Abbas</i>	25	<b>On Mrs. Gandhi's death</b>
	26	<b>Deep is his slumber</b>
<i>Deepa Agarwal</i>	28	<b>Folk Singers</b>
	29	<b>The Drums of Toil</b>
<i>Vinita Agarwal</i>	31	<b>The Land of Tathagata</b>
	32	<b>Old Lockdown</b>

<i>Mitali Chakravarty</i>	35	<b>River Songs</b>
	36	<b>Boundaries</b>
	37	<b>Holi (Delhi, 2020)</b>
<i>Lakshmi Kannan</i>	39	<b>You Birthed a Nation, Sindhu</b>
<i>Neera Kashyap</i>	41	<b>Cessation</b>
	42	<b>Unveiled</b>
	43	<b>Bridges</b>
<i>Prabhjeet Kaur</i>	45	<b>India through the Lens of Rabindra</b>
<i>Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca</i>	48	<b>A Lemon Tree Grows in India</b>
<i>Shruti Singh</i>	50	<b>BHARAT MA!</b>

## Book Review

<i>Yusuf Ayaz</i>	52	<b>Pixie Dust &amp; All Things Magical: Global Poetry in English 2022</b>
<i>Maria Khan</i>	56	<b>Reading Gandhi: Perspectives in the 21st Century</b>
<i>Purna Raj</i>	60	<b>Outbreaks: An Indian Pandemic Reader</b>
<i>Maziah Shaaaz</i>	64	<b>Beyond the Stars and Other Stories</b>
<i>Amrita Sharma</i>	68	<b>Stitching a Home</b>
<i>Priya Sharma</i>	71	<b>Unwinding Self: A Collection of Poems</b>
<i>Vedamini Vikram</i>	75	<b>Phantom Songs</b>
<i>Nikita Yadav</i>	81	<b>Smashing The Patriarchy: A Guide for the 21st century Indian Woman</b>

## Non- Fiction

<i>Usha Akella</i>	85	But after all, who knows?
<i>Namita Rai</i>	88	India
<i>A V Apoorva Raman</i>	92	Unfolding Queer India
<i>Ganesh Saili</i>	94	Tales of the Shutter Sutra
<i>Ganesh Saili</i>	97	In Charleville's Long Shadow
<i>Dhuryjati Sarma</i>	99	A Brief History of "Literary History" in Assamese
<i>K.N.Singh</i>	102	The Unique Indian Geoforms

## Photography

<i>Ajeet Kumar Gupta</i>	104	"Azadi ka Amrit Mohatsav"
<i>Ahmed Firoz</i>	105	"Walls have stories to tell.."
	106	Workshop

**Call for Submissions for the Next Issue**

**Theme –WAR AND PEACE**

**A Brief History**

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

This issue revolves around the significant vignettes of the highly diverse 'India.' It gives me absolute pleasure to introduce you to the Fourth issue of the Second Volume of the journal, *Rhetorica*. The constant aim of our journal has been to put invigorating themes on the table with refreshing and original voices. We receive some of the finest works with individualistic tone and flavor, which can help survive literary heritage and publishing culture.

In this issue, we seek to explore India in various forms. India encompasses complex ideas and provides a fertile ground for collective insights. We have received contributions from esteemed guests, faculty and students that contain reflections from past, discusses India's present and introspects the future. It was indeed delightful for me and the entire team to read captivating writings and incorporate them into a cohesive whole.

Rhetorica Society is overwhelmed with gratitude to the Honourable Vice- Chancellor, Professor Alok Kumar Rai for his valuable support. I would like to extend my thanks to the Head of the Department, Prof. Matrayi Priyadarshini for her encouragement and belief in the journal. We owe special thanks to our Chief Editor, Prof. Ranu Uniyal for promoting literary wisdom and culture through determined efforts. My sincere thanks to the Advisory Board of Editors for their continuous guidance. Heartfelt thanks to the editors and co- editors of each section for devoting their time and energy in the compilation of this issue. I want to convey my admiration to my co- editors of the fiction section, Yusuf Ayaz and Smriti Sneha, who have readily coordinated in the editing process. We wish to further our mission by striving to provide the best pieces for our readers.

Regards,  
Bhavya Pant  
Editor, Fiction.



# FICTION

"Beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of the fiction."

– Slavoj Žižek



## **Adieu! The future's not ours to see...**

-Sanghmitra S. Acharya

That was a very beautiful evening. Different from others. There were dreams floating around. Dreams which were supported by the concrete design to materialize them. And I was fully equipped to do so. At least that was what I believed. I was given a pay hike and assigned a new project to spearhead it. My dreams, serenaded by music, as the evening sprawled its ecstasy. The folks from the last project were both happy and unhappy. Happy because I got a better opportunity and unhappy perhaps for losing out on a colleague to another unit. But then 'that's how life is' was the clichéd line being dropped by almost every person I was meeting from my old project team as well as the new one! What was more important that we were all enjoying- drawing closer to dinner... and then to dance- amidst tinkling of glasses filled with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks of different kinds.

After a while my dreams felt a little claustrophobic... as did that of a couple of other friends. We decided to slip out of the venue, which was by then, brimming to the edge! We sneaked out! On to the roads of the metro city which had given us work and a profound sense of metamorphosing into adult creatures! The struggle to leave behind our innocent childhood and callous adolescence was often visible to the others on our stupid faces. Our intellect and management skills would duck themselves in embarrassment, till we gradually coiled the innocently stubborn childhood and callously tenacious adolescence into their shells- to be pulled out some other time!!

Three of us drew our bikes and decided to canter- just to the other side of the sprawling city. And we did! I was delving in a new sense of confidence reigning high in my mind. Sometimes filling me with a sense of joy and at other times, cautioning me-to ensure my head intact on my shoulders! Perhaps, I was taking time to let it sink in... I am now the manager of the project in which I started as an intern- wow! Not a bad start. I heard my own inner voice exclaiming to me in amazement. In a quarter of a century that I had trodden over the paths of my fairly simple and disciplined life, this was some achievement alright. Thanks to my mother who groomed me strongly believed in my simplicity and I completely owe it to her. Kudos to my sister who would be guffawing to read about my 'disciplined' life, much like any other 'big' sister. My father for sure, would be overwhelmed with happiness but would contain his expression as if nothing has happened. I could not wait to be with them and see all of this





happen! The thought that I would be visiting them in a couple of weeks was exhilarating. These thoughts were crossing my mind as I traversed from one red light to the other... halting and cruising towards my destination- both metaphorically and literally. I suddenly heard myself muttering to me –“and what about AJ?.” And I thought, a flash of pink crossed by face. But thankfully it was dark and not visible to anyone close to me- in the traffic. AJ is the fourth one in our ‘true-some foursome’- since school!! For some reason she stayed away from this evening get together, else she would have been cruising with us- on her own bike! Yes. Well, let me not hold it anymore. My friends believe that we are going around. So does my sister. But AJ and I am still not sure if this is true! Let us see what the future holds for us.

As we crossed over to Pimpri in our pursuit of the target set for the joyride this evening, I realized that I had lost track of the other two friends. Riding away in my thoughts perhaps I took no note of their changing the route, or getting stuck up because of the traffic which had tremendously thinned down by then. My dreams were with me and I knew the friends would soon catch up. But just about then I hit the speed breaker! Shit! As I controlled the bike and myself, my helmet flew in the air to touch the ground only after about 15 seconds or so. By then the bike was sliding horizontally on the road with me flung aside...!

“What the hell is happening...” the blessed divider was broken and the speed breaker was not visible because the white cross lines drawn once upon a time had faded, leaving the likes of me pondering over the situation. I was thrown away on the road- struggling to lift myself and resume my ride. As I waited to gain strength to do so, I watched the patchy road with untarred segments and no road lights. Nor any markers or indicators which would tell the commuters on the road about the ‘work in progress’ to reconstruct the road which had caved in some time ago perhaps. I could barely read the contractor’s hoardings who were assigned the job- a fairly big name in the industry. My vision was fading as was my strength. With no one in sight to bail me out of this situation I resigned to ‘whatever will be will be...’ and found myself humming ‘Que sera sera...’ my favourite song that I sang with my college band on our farewell function of the Engineering College fully laced with all our musical equipment! The humming now was sans my guitar, and of course without the other companions.

As I hummed my favourite song to distract myself of the growing pain induced due to the fall, I wondered about the quantum spike that the metropolitan cities experience in their growth because of young people like me who make these cities their home, work and dedicate their toil to its economy ever since they enter the job market, and at all levels of occupational hierarchy. They boost the economy of such cities by creating the demand for housing and rental



markets; market for the non-consumable household goods for purchase as well as rentals; eateries- high cost and also low cost like Dabba Walas; domestic help; consumable goods; leisure time activities; health and fitness industry... and many more. And what do these young adults get in return from their karmbhoomis? Poorly lit roads with intermittently broken and sunken patches? Unalarmed appearances of speed-breakers and callously left incomplete construction sites on the roads and their dividers? Their salaries are taxed, part of which goes to the urban local bodies directly or indirectly. Do they not deserve a better deal from the managers of the cities?

I leave these questions behind for the caretakers and managers for the cities who lure the youngsters to boost their city's economy but shamelessly shy away from their responsibilities towards providing a safe and secure city to them. This is important to take note of as the road traffic accidents become one of the major causes of mortality in cities of our country.

Adieu! The future's not ours to see... Que sera sera... whatever will be will be!

### **About the writer:**



Sanghmitra S. Acharya is currently Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was a Visiting Fellow at CASS, Beijing; Ball State University; University of the Philippines Population Institute, Manila; East West Center, Honolulu; and University of Botswana. She was awarded Asian Scholarship Foundation fellowship; and Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute Grant. She has travelled to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Germany, The Netherlands, UK, USA, Canada, Thailand, Belgium and Finland.

Besides writing on social science issues in academic journals and books, latest being 'Caste, Covid and Inequalities of Care- Lessons from South Asia' (Springer, 2022), she takes off time to delve in writing lived experiences.



## Full Circle

-Rajesh K. Jha

The whistle of the train was drawing away. She had to hurry up now before Hari Babu arrived home from his work in the next ten minutes. Perspiring and immersed in a cocktail of smells, he would fling aside the faux leather bag he has been carrying to his office for, only God knows how many years. He will sit on the veranda and take off his *kurta-pyjama*, wrap his *lungi* around the waist and wipe off sweat from his body using the thin *khadi* towel kept in readiness at the armrest of a plastic chair. He would switch on the fan but most often it would be of no use even if there was electricity since the voltage became abysmally low in the evenings. However, the symbolic turning of the ceiling fan was greatly reassuring to Hari Babu. It was part of his daily utterance in the evening to express the hope that voltage would improve in the night. Most of the days he was proved wrong, but he remained optimistic nevertheless.

This streak of optimism or foolish optimism, if you agreed with Mausji's description of Hari Babu, was the main source of grouse she had against him. Quite often, it led to bickering between the two which was resolved after Mausji went to bed without bringing dinner to Hari Babu and the poor Sunaina or Soni, as she was known across the mohalla, had to bring the *thali* for both of them. Mausji would scream at Soni, asking her to leave the room at once. Soni, having been a witness to such events for many years now, knew what to do. She would leave the *thali* and a glass of water in the room and quietly go back to the kitchen. Sometime later, after finishing the evening news on television, Hari Babu would meekly go to his wife and entreat her to eat dinner. He would also be profusely self-critical; blaming himself and his progressive-communist father for inheriting this optimistic, unpractical, streak in him. Mausji would turn this side and that on the bed a few times before agreeing to eat, the matter being resolved to her satisfaction in time i.e. before the family soaps on television started. After all, such petty marital pin-pricks cannot be allowed to become a reason enough to miss the serial - poised so very delicately between a scheming daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law struggling to wrest control over the son or husband, depending upon the channel you were watching.

After savouring the serials, Mausji directed Soni about the preparation of breakfast in the morning and enquired about the collection of *malai* from the full cream milk and other



sundry issues of the kitchen. She took a round of the kitchen paying special attention to the remaining quantities of valuable items like dry fruits, *ghee*, etc. and retired for the night to her room. Switching off all the lights except the one 4-watt CFL bulb in the kitchen to let Soni complete the washing of plates and getting the gas stove ready for the morning, Mausi ji asked Soni to eat properly as she seemed to be losing weight. She also bolted the outer door of the house which opened in the space earmarked for a low-roof tiled servant room, where Ghooran was supposed to be sleeping. However, it would be at least another hour or so before Soni could finish her daily chore and prepare for sleep on the inner veranda of the house.

•

Soni was hurrying up. The tea must be ready before Mause ji changed into his lungi and Mausi ji came rushing in to take the tray with tea with two Marigold biscuits for her husband who was a diabetic of long-standing. Five minutes before Hari Babu entered the house, Mausi ji got inside finishing her evening round of gossip and information gathering from other aunties of the mohalla. Neither would she ever miss an evening round-up of the goings-on in the neighbourhood, nor would she allow anyone else to serve tea to Hari Babu.

Soni hurriedly buttoned up her shirt and looked into the palm-sized mirror she kept in one of the drawers alongside plastic jars fully or partially filled with spices like *jeera*, *dhaniya*, dried chilli etc. Almost pushing Ghooran out of the damp and poorly lit kitchen, she whispered to him to get busy, attending to the cow which was to be milked half an hour after the sunset. She did not want to raise any suspicion in Mausi's mind that anyone other than herself had entered the kitchen while she was away in the evening on her public relations cum information gathering sorties. Soni knew that Mausi did not only have a sharp eye for deciphering any goings-on in the kitchen but a sharper sense of smell too, almost like a dog. She quickly started frying the leftover rice and *dal* from the afternoon and put a strong *tadka* of *heeng* into it, partially to make it edible as dinner, and more importantly to mislead Mausi about the smell in the kitchen.

The outer gate clanked and she heard the quick steps of Mausi ji. She knew Mause ji must also be around the corner of the road that opens on the main road to the market on one side and the railway station on the other. He never missed the evening train which had the reputation of being the only local train that ran on time. The only problem was that it left the Udalpur station around 4:30 in the evening, which was at least an hour before the official closing of Mause ji's office. It was always a struggle for Hari Babu to convince the new officer about his sincerity towards the work and the compulsion to catch the 4:30 local train. Mostly



he would succeed as he did not leave the office even for lunch and worked hard to the satisfaction of all officers who were frequently changed in his department. Finding Hari Babu on his desk at all times pleased the bosses to no end and he had no problems getting the special permission to leave a little early.

However, it deprived Hari Babu of the pleasures of sitting in the staff-union meetings or making little speeches against the bosses and bosses of bosses. He had always fancied himself as a rebel and a fighter for lost causes of the underdogs in the tradition of his father, who was a freedom fighter and later, a Kisan Union activist in the area. He nursed a deep regret in his heart, that had there been a train starting at 5:30 in the evening from Udalpur and running on time, he would have been the most radical leader of his association. It was not destined to be and Hari Babu remained a hard-working, obedient and loveable employee of the revenue department in the district, who was often jeered at and made fun of, by fellow clerks and peons for never speaking in meetings or agreeing to participate in a strike.

He tried to compensate for his lack of social involvement by reading up the magazines and doing something or the other for those whom he thought deserving of help. He would buy the old copies of popular magazines sold on the train at a very heavy discount. The only thing missing in these magazines was the masthead that exposed the contents page of the magazine. Among the people for whom he regularly bought such magazines was Soni to whom he showed extra affection by buying the English film magazine once a month. Soni waited eagerly for these magazines which she kept meticulously arranged near her bed on the veranda. On days when Mause ji did not go to the office, she would go to him and clarify some of the meanings of the words in the magazine that she could not make out based on the photograph on the page. Hari Babu was too happy to help her learn English. It was like a bit of a palliative balm to his social conscience he had inherited unwittingly from his father.

•

Mause ji came rushing in, casting a furtive glance at the kitchen as if assessing the capabilities of Soni in completing the evening chore to her satisfaction. Soni poured tea into two cups for Hari Babu and Mause ji and added some sugar to one of the cups. She kept the cups in the tray and lifted it to hand over to Mause ji. Suddenly, Mause ji looked questioningly into the eyes of Soni.

“You seem to be lost these days. What's the matter?”



“Nothing, I was just thinking of getting the vegetables ready for the evening.”

“But you forgot to keep Biscuits with tea. You know well that your Mause ji can't have tea without biscuits and if he does, he will suffer the whole night with gas.”

Mause cast a stern glance at Soni. Soni knew she had made a mistake and Mause ji was very close to discovering that something was keeping Soni distracted from her routine which was almost like a sacred ritual. She knew keeping silent was the best strategy.

“No...actually...the packet of biscuits finished yesterday”, Soni mumbled.

“You could have asked Ghoran to bring it from the market. He keeps loitering in the *mohalla* or hanging around in the courtyard. He has hardly any work these days. Where is he? Hasn't he readied the cow for milking and cleaned its place. Was he...”

Soni's heart missed a beat. She thought Mause has noticed that Ghoran could have been around when she was out in the *mohalla*.

“No... he must be outside getting the cows ready for milking and I thought not to disturb him with market work as he would have taken a long time in the market...” Soni's heart was now pumping hard and she feared further questioning.

Mause relented and called Ghoran to the inner veranda and asked him to go running and get a packet of marigold biscuits from the nearby shop.

The iron gate clanked once. Soni understood that Hari Babu has entered the house. She knew that Mause ji would not be too harsh and questioning with her once Hari Babu has arrived. He would tolerate all the foibles of his wife but would not allow her to treat Soni harshly or scold her in his presence. Mause ji always blamed her husband for spoiling Soni with undeserved affection and protection. She claimed a special right over Soni since she was HER distant cousin's daughter. Hari Babu was a docile, caring and adjusting kind of husband on all matters except when it came to something relating to Soni. He had this strange problem of linking certain things to his conscience with which he would not compromise, whatever the consequences. Perhaps, it was the pain of not having his own son or daughter which left a lonely spot in Hari Babu's heart. Over the last 15 years, when his wife brought the five-year-old Soni from her parent's home, he had treated her like his daughter, though he never dared to tell his wife not to treat her as domestic help. But Hari Babu had learnt to live with such contradictions in life for the sake of familial peace and a good night's sleep.



Ghooran came back with a packet of biscuits. As he gave it to Soni, he slightly pressed her hand and his eyes lingered on her for a while. She was still not quite composed, having weathered the questioning of Mausji but she realised Ghooran was looking at the middle button of her shirt which was still open. She walked with quick steps into the kitchen and set her shirt right. Perhaps God was favouring her today, she thought. It gave her courage.

“See me after dinner. Be around in the courtyard when I am locking the inner grill of the veranda”, She whispered to Ghooran.

Ghooran nodded without speaking a word. He was like that only. Days would pass but nobody would hear a word from Ghooran. A newcomer to Hari Babu's house could quite easily think that Ghooran was dumb. However, his eyes did all the talking, especially with Soni. She could make out what Ghooran was saying or thinking just by looking at his eyes which would light up on seeing Soni - always, unfailingly. In the deathly routine of the Hari Babu household, things would repeat in the same time cycle for weeks, months and years. There was no scope for anything unpredictable and exciting happening and Mausji took care not to allow any change to unsettle this household. But the storm brewing in the Soni's mind was going to change this forever.

\*\*\*

“I have missed my periods”, Soni whispered as Ghooran stood outside the iron grill against the faint light of the bulb. A slight sense of worry crossed his face, quickly replaced by a questioning eye seeking Soni's counsel for a further course of action.

Soni had already decided what to do next. Like every other day, she carefully took out the assortment of medicines for diabetes, blood pressure and one for proper sleep, also a few 'energy' capsules prescribed specially by Mausji based on the knowledge gained from watching advertisements on television. Handing over the medicines to Hari Babu, she kept a cup of hot milk on the side table. She shut the door gently behind her and switched off the lights in the bedroom.

There were still one and a half hours left before the train arrived. Her heart was thumping as she prayed that Mausji should fall asleep by then. She knew that Mausji would not wake up early tonight. She had kept a small bag ready in which all her belongings could be accommodated. However, time was important in her plan. She did not want to be at the station much before the train arrived for the fear of being recognised by someone on the platform. The





last train from the town left around midnight. She had to reach just in time to buy a general ticket and somehow get onto the train.

The train moved away from the platform and slowly picked up speed. The sharp light of the engine seemed to stab the heart of pitch darkness that lay ahead of it. The shrill whistle of the engine sounded strangely eerie tonight, frightening. The first time since she decided to leave Hari Babu's home, Soni was feeling nervous. Where was she going? What will people think about her in the morning when they come to know of this? How would Hari Babu survive the taunts of Mausji about her? Will she be accused of theft? Will the police be informed? True, she had taken out the lightweight gold necklace with a Durga pendant from Mausji's iron almirah known proudly as 'Godrej' in the household. This was the only valuable item that her mother had left with Mausji for giving to Soni on her marriage day. After all, this was the only memory she had of her mother. Her mind was racked with ominous thoughts and deep anxiety about the coming day. Squeezed between the passengers on the over-crowded berth, she snuggled up to Ghoran looking for some warmth from his body.

When the cacophony of vendors selling tea, samosa, newspapers and other sundry items woke her up in the morning, the train had reached Jind. Soni and Ghoran quickly gathered their luggage and got off the train. The platform was full of people arriving from Bihar who had come to work in factories and fields in the prosperous state of Haryana. As soon as they came out of the station, they were greeted by people waiting there to pick up men and women for working in their fields, factories, and households. Boleros, Scorpions, Safaris, Trolleys and various other kinds of passenger vehicles waited to pick these people up and carry them to their respective workplaces. In the jostle between the freshly arrived crowd of labour and their prospective employers, Soni's eyes caught the attention of a boyish-looking person. Clad in a pair of jeans and tee shirt with a *gamchha* in the style of a Palestinian *Keffiyeh* thrown across the shoulder. He looked impressive as a strange combination of a modern city-bred person and a small-time feudal princeling. When he gestured to her, Soni shyly went to his Bolero and sat in the back seat. Ghoran followed her and seated himself in the middle row. Slowly, the Bolero filled up and Satinder took the driver's seat.

It did not take Soni long to take on the responsibilities that went far beyond her assigned duty of keeping the large compound of the house clean and looking after the cow kept in the inner courtyard. Satinder's ageing mother Jagodevi found in Soni, a jovial and helpful person for the kitchen work. More importantly, she was the only person with whom the lady,



who had become old much before her time, could converse. It did not really matter that a large part of what she spoke in her native Haryanvi was probably never understood by Soni. Her skills in English were also a treasured asset as they made her valuable in reading the address and other small details on several official documents and court papers that came to be delivered by post. Satinder was happy to have company for his mother and a multi-talented person in the service of his household. Acknowledging her importance, she was allowed to stay in the small outhouse on the premises.

On that night, Soni had come back to her room after finishing the household work. She was just about to go and lie on her cot when she heard a rustle in the background. Assuming that it was Ghoran who came to her cottage whenever he could manage to come without being noticed, she remained unconcerned. However, she was in for a shock when she saw Satinder standing there. Before she could understand anything, Satinder had forced himself on her. Whatever little resistance she could offer was too feeble to make any difference to the outcome. What could she do? Who will hear her shouts and cries in the middle of the vast field where the house stood? Dazed by the speed of events, she could not decide anything.

Satinder came back to her in the night again after a few days. In the faint light of the moonlit night, his face looked worried, body language showing a sign of nervousness.

“I have committed a great sin, a crime indeed. But I seek your forgiveness”, pleaded Satinder.

Soni did not utter a word. The silence was crushing Satinder. He was sweating, shivering, anticipating the worst from her. Soni was quiet but her mind was in a whirlwind. In every split second after Satinder's fear-laden apology and during her silence, she was thinking of the options. If she went ahead to the police, she could be asked about her hometown and her secret might be out. Maybe the police would think that she had run away from her former employers' place after committing theft. The options before her left no chance of happiness for her. Suddenly, a thought crossed her mind like the lightning in an overcast sky.

“Marry me”.

\*\*\*

Satinder gathered some courage and spoke to his mother about the possibility of marriage with Soni without telling her the context in which it originated. Of late, Satinder's marriage was one of her major worries. He was approaching 32 years, and still, he hadn't



received a single marriage proposal. The villages around Rajpura faced this peculiar problem. Eligible bachelors found it very hard to get a match in their community so much so that many of the affluent people in the area sent their sons abroad just to look around for a bride. She had heard of many such '*foren*' brides in the nearby villages. She did not want her only son to remain unmarried and get into the bad company of local lads who visited the cities and came back late in the night or the next day. Not getting a bride from her community could not dampen her spirit, as it somehow let the family tree survive.

Their marriage was solemnised in the village without much fanfare but with a large community feast. Ghooran was the only person from the side of the bride. He took up the role of her brother and witnessed the wedding. As per custom, Ghooran was given numerous gifts: clothes, cash and a brand-new mobile phone to acknowledge his special position as the representative of the bride's family. After the wedding, Soni moved from the outhouse to the room reserved for a long time now, for the bride of the family. Ghooran went back to work at the farm with the harvester as the reaping season had arrived.

Not long after, one fine morning, the police arrived at Satinder's house in a jeep. They had a warrant to arrest Soni for theft and murder of Hari Babu who had died in his sleep due to an overdose of anti-diabetes medicine given in the night. Two lady constables flanked her to the jeep.

### **About the writer:**



Rajesh Jha is a Multi-lingual translator, writer and government media professional. He has translated several books including Orhan Pamuk's novel *My name is Red* and essays of V.S. Naipaul. His translations and writings have been published in reputed literary magazines and journals. Some of his writings can be seen on his blog [hyphen.blog](http://hyphen.blog). He did his MA and M.Phil. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi before joining the Indian Information Service. Currently he is posted as Special Correspondent for Prasar Bharti in Dhaka. He can be reached at [rajeshjha.dhaka@gmail.com](mailto:rajeshjha.dhaka@gmail.com)



## UNCLEAN

-Banibrata Mahanta

c. 2050.

The country has reached a stage where it has surpassed all targets of economic growth and has also done exceedingly well in terms of all definitions and parameters of development. It has reached heights that could once only be dreamt of. The country can now boast of having built, in rapid succession, numerous massive manufactories; the length and breadth of the country are dotted by large numbers of massive, sprawling industrial units that produce every conceivable item of daily use. Enormous aircrafts and huge trucks transport these goods from places where they are manufactured to every city in the country, and there is an equally well-planned and tentacular delivery system in place that helps reach these products to every doorstep. The middle-class folk have completed all preparations for imprisoning themselves within the safe confines of their own homes. Every employment opportunity in the country, the city, the village, the locality now operates on the principle of work-from-home. The air outside is difficult to breathe or survive in and houses now have mandatory air-purifying units installed; the groundwater, or whatever little is left of it, is fully contaminated; the precious little bit of water that one manages to use comes from the small but highly sophisticated water-treatment plants fitted in every house.

Amidst all this, in the middle of all that was there and not there, caught between all that was real and unreal, one thing remained certain. Even in a near-perfect world such as this, somewhere, some people were needed in these factories and industries – hands and bodies that vied with each other to do all that work that the middle-class had relinquished. While much of the automation and robotization had already been completed, there remained some work for which mechanisms and robots had not yet been put in place, and that included the maintenance and repair of the robots themselves. It is this in-between world and its intermediate reality that was inhabited by Ramesh and Atahar. Both of them were between thirty-five and forty years of age, insignificant, unimportant workers employed in one of the biggest companies in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

“You didn’t go to your village this year too?” Atahar asked Ramesh.



“How could I, Atahar bhai? I didn’t get even a day’s leave,” said Ramesh. “The manager has increased my pay a bit, though. And what about you?”

“Ha, ha. There is no way I can get a raise. It’s simply out of question. And this is the only job I’ve managed to get in a long, long time. If I ask for leave to go home, I will probably lose my job. What good will come of going home and becoming jobless in the bargain? How will I manage household expenses? So, I don’t even ask. Did you get a handsome raise this time?”

“Huh! Five hundred rupees. The same as every time.”

“It’s still a raise. Ramesh bhai, someone was telling me that there was some news yesterday about the air quality having become even more poisonous in the past fortnight. Have you heard about it?”

“I have. But what can we do? The factory people do give us masks to wear. And some protective clothing too. I have no idea how effective these are, but then even if they aren’t, what can be done? We have to do what we are doing, isn’t it? Are you facing any issues?”

“No ... not really. Or maybe I am ... I’m not sure. I’ve had breathing problems since I was a child. I really don’t know whether it is my childhood problem of being unable to breathe deeply during change of seasons that has got aggravated or my shortness of breath is linked to inhaling the increasingly poisonous air around me.”

“Atahar bhai, Eid must also be around the corner and preparations for celebrating the festival must also be in full swing at home, right? When is Eid?”

“It is day after tomorrow.”

“Really? I hope you’ll treat me to some *sewai*, brother.”

“Who can afford to think of *sewai* here, brother? All that one hopes for is two meals a day. And whatever the company gives, we accept it gratefully as our lot.”

“You’re right. But we can at least talk about *sewai* if we want to, can’t we? No one can stop us from doing that.”

“Yes, that we can. My family wanted me back home for just a couple of days, even one, if possible. But how can one leave one’s job and go? Who will stand in for me during the four days that I’m not there? And what will happen on the fifth day when I’m back? What if



the person decides to stay on and I don't have my job anymore? It scares me to even think of such a scenario. I'm willing to die gradually inhaling the poisonous factory air rather than be faced with the prospect of hunger and uncertainty."

The morning conversation ended. Both Ramesh and Atahar went off to work. They continued with the daily business of their lives. They were both neighbours, living in adjacent rented rooms in a half-built, dilapidated building. How long and how effectively the crumbling walls and broken, makeshift doors would ensure their separation and keep them neighbours was a matter of debate. Incomplete structures housed incomplete people in incomplete relations!

It was past midnight when Atahar suddenly woke up to the harsh sound of someone beating on his tin door. Groggy and struggling to breathe, he tried to focus on the words coming in.

"Atahar! Atahar bhai! Are you awake?"

Struggling up to be on his feet, Atahar groggily stumbled towards the door and somehow managed to open it. Although his face betrayed a hint of annoyance at being woken up from his sleep in the middle of the night, he remained decorous in his behaviour.

"What happened, brother? Is there any problem?" he asked, rubbing his eyes open.

"Do you have something to eat, bhai?" asked Ramesh.

"What happened? Did you not have your dinner?"

"The manager had given a deadline for today. I had to ensure that the entire stock was ready for despatch tomorrow morning. If I hadn't finished it today, he would surely have docked a part of my day's earnings."

"Oh! So, you were caught up the entire evening?"

"Yes brother. I've only just returned from office. There was no time to have anything. Do you have something I can eat?"

"I've nothing right now except for a packet of biscuits, but the rats have nibbled through half of it. But wait, I think I have a bit of puffed rice left from what my wife had packed for me when I went home last time. Let me see."



Atahar was still terribly sleepy, but he could empathize with Ramesh's difficulty. On numerous occasions, he too had been caught in similar predicaments. He also knew the pangs of hunger and the agony of sleeping on an empty stomach. He had also gotten used to it to a large extent. Almost as a matter of routine, once in a week or a fortnight, in times of crisis, the owner, the manager or the supervisor under whom Athar worked would put him in a situation in which he would be forced to look for ways to mitigate the pangs of hunger at odd hours, when the possibility of being able to do so were pretty bleak.

Atahar took out the single plate he had, put the handful of dry puffed rice that he could find and putting it on the plate, held it out towards Ramesh. Ramesh gratefully took a bit of it in his fingers and putting it carefully into his mouth, chewed it slowly and contentedly.

"Sorry for waking you up in the middle of the night, bhai," Ramesh said after he had eaten some the puffed rice.

"It's okay Ramesh bhai. If we don't understand each other, who will?"

Ramesh, in an attempt to make small talk as he had the puffed rice, said, "Atahar, you have kept your room remarkably clean. How do you manage? Look at the mess in my room."

"This is where I have to live, isn't it? So, I try to sweep my room every morning."

"Brother, should I say something? I hope you won't mind. Please don't. You are like my ... no, you *are* my younger brother. I know I can tell you whatever is on my mind and you won't take offense."

"Why should I be offended? How many people do I have here to talk to? How many people here can I go to in order to get the satisfaction of human company, to get the satisfaction of having talked to a fellow human being? And come to think of it, can one even afford to feel offended?"

"You know, for a long time after I came here, and for a long time before that when I was in my village, maybe always, ever since the time I was a child, the Muslim localities that I saw were invariably very dirty. At least that was what I was always told – that Muslims are dirty people and they dirty and pollute the environment around themselves. Maybe that coloured my perception. But that is what I have always believed."





Atahar flinched visibly. He was nonplussed. His face suddenly seemed sadder than usual. Still, he managed to keep his composure as he said, “Yes, I know how it is. Maybe it is true. Don’t you still believe it is true?”

Ramesh was taken aback by this question. He replied hesitatingly, as if thinking aloud, “To be honest, maybe in some corner of my mind, I still think that way. But today I wonder what to make of such perceptions, opinions and thoughts. Now look at this city which we live in. This city is full of poison, of dirt ... people have polluted and dirtied the city for years and have now conveniently retreated into the safe confines of their homes, leaving it to less fortunate people like us to risk our lives to do everything in this life-threatening environment. We know that these conditions will eventually kill us. Yet, we continue to brave these conditions to manufacture things that ensure that their clean, uncontaminated lives can go on uninterrupted. I feel now that once upon a time, I ... I mean we ... behaved in the same way with people living in those localities in our villages. To talk of ourselves as clean and pure, we called other people unclean. What we did in the village isn’t very different from what people have done to us.

Atahar was shaken. His eyes brimmed with tears. He made as if to speak something, but the slight movement of his lips caused the tears to flow down his cheeks, and his voice choked.

### **About the writer:**



Banibrata Mahanta is Professor of English at Banaras Hindu University, India. His areas of interest include Indian writing in English, the changing contours of Indian nationalist thought, contemporary literary theory, especially disability theory, and translation. His recent works include the volume *English Studies in India: Contemporary and Evolving Paradigms* (coedited, Springer 2019) and an English translation of the Hindi novel *Lavanya Devi* (Orient Blackswan, forthcoming) for which he was awarded the prestigious PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant (PEN America) in 2021.



## GUDDAN

-Sarvajit Mukerji

This road leads to the Mission Hospital compound. The main gates of the Mission Hospital face the highway and are about half a kilometre away, while this shady and narrow road lying behind the hospital, meanders through the residential quarters, the new nurse's hostel, and the Higgins Memorial school, eventually crossing the railway track and plunging into the busy bazaar. The railway level crossing seems to bifurcate the two worlds—the quiet hospital compound and the vibrant, busy market. The first little bungalow with the veranda on your left, as you cross the railway lines on the hospital compound side, is occupied by a matron and there you may see Guddan hard at work in the garden with no trace of self-consciousness or shyness in her demeanour. She is swarthy, hefty and strong. She wears a pair of old khaki trousers and a shirt or a longish skirt, the self-same shirt and a *gamchha* around her head, busily planting potatoes or turmeric or whitewashing the little bungalow with lime. Guddan has been staying with the matron for the last three years or so. Before that, she lived with her mother Lado on the bazaar side of the railway track. You might say that Lado and matron were neighbours separated only by a row of mighty Sal trees and the railway line. Lado worked in the hospital too. She was an ayah in the OPD, as hard as the betel nuts she was always chewing. If you wanted to jump the cue, get a duplicate registration slip or juggle the system to your advantage in any way, Lado was the person to go to. She would arrange it all for consideration. Clad in her regulation blue sari, picking her teeth with a safety pin, she was a familiar sight at the tea stall across the hospital gate.

Her daughter Guddan is very different though, and as Dr Prabhakar says 'not all there'. She doesn't talk much, can laugh loudly when amused but equally, can fly at you when angry. Unlike her maverick mother, she is silent and plodding. Though most of the neighbours dismiss her as mad, all agree that she is a wonderful mimic. She can bark like a dog, imitate cats fighting or make rasping noises like a *langur*, to perfection. It all started when she was about eleven years old, and a group of itinerant *behrupia* tribals camped beyond the railway shed. She learnt how to make animal masks and tails and imitate all the animal sounds from them. She would blacken her face, fashion a long tail of wire and rope and hide behind the Sal trees. When the



children returned home from the Higgins Memorial School, she would amuse them by imitating a *langur* or barking like the headmistress' Alsatian. Lado and Guddan lived together. Lado never bothered to send Guddan to school or train her for anything.

As the years rolled by, the bazaar grew in size. More and more people wanted pucca houses and shops and Lado's substantial land began to attract attention. Now Lado was often seen at the tea stall surrounded by thuggish men, rather than the attendants of patients. "They are after my land Bhaiyya", she grinned at Deenu, the ward boy from ophthalmology. "They think they can fool me because there is no man in the house...but I too have seen *thana*, court, *kachehri*.".... And then Lado disappeared. Early one-morning matron found Guddan on her veranda, her head resting on her drawn-up knees and moaning. She said that goondas had beaten her and thrown her out of her house. Dr Prabhakar lodged an FIR, and the matron took Guddan to the police station ...but all that happened was that one night in peak summer a bulldozer reduced Lado's house to rubble and a monstrous JCB began gouging a huge pit for the foundation of some big building. Everything was covered an inch deep in dust and the clanking noise of the JCB was heard night and day. By now it was clear that it was Chandrika, the owner of the *hauli*, who was getting the construction done. He would roar down on his motorcycle several times a day, and always spent the night in a rough brick shack on the site itself.

Matron often wondered if Guddan realised what was happening. She certainly never talked about the demolition and destruction of her home, though Matron had seen her standing behind the *karaunda* bush planted by Lado long ago, and staring at what had once been her home. Guddan spent all her free time fashioning a mask, a tail and the claws of a tiger. To make the mask more fearsome, she added a tongue painted blood red, to the snarling mouth. She begged a pair of heavy rubber gloves from the electrician, painted yellow and black stripes on them and, at end of each finger, she fixed bent iron nails like claws, also painted a nasty red. She would practice snarling like a tiger.

The monsoon came early that year...and what a monsoon! It poured for days on end. Soon the gaping pit that once was Lado's home, was full of water. The JCB stood idle and then went away. Only Chandrika continued his routine guarding of the site, and spent every night there, too drunk to bother about the rain dripping through the corrugated iron sheet which constituted the roof of the shack where he slept.

.....



Chandrika's motorcycle came roaring through the dripping darkness. He parked it close to the flooded pit and staggered to its edge to pee into it, swearing at the slippery mud. Suddenly he heard a ferocious snarl. Turning his head, he saw a tiger rush at him from the *karaunda* bush, its snarling mouth open, its tongue red with blood. Sharp claws ripped open his back. Before he could scream, he slipped and toppled into the inky water and disappeared without a trace.

Three monsoons have come and gone. No one has dared to build on that piece of land. It is a pond now, around which shrubs and creepers grow. Herons tread daintily on its margins and buffaloes wallow blissfully in the shallows. Ababeel birds glance off its burnished surface, and fly off to settle on the young saplings which have taken root. All is calm and quiet. Lado's land is a home once again.

### **About the writer:**



Presently, Sarvajit Mukerji is Professor in the Department of English, University of Allahabad. His areas of interest are ecocriticism and feminism. He has published around 30 papers in national and international journals. His book on T.S Eliot, *The Poet and His Times* was very favourably reviewed. He has edited several texts published by Macmillan and Orient Longman for teaching and post-graduate courses in several universities, besides serving on several committees on syllabus reforms and the introduction of the semester system. His by-line on gender issues "Coffee Break" appears as a regular column in the Campus Newsletter.



## The Town Hall

-Deepak Sharma

Translators: Madhu B. Joshi and Deepak Sharma

The High Court of the state has delivered its verdict on my PIL filed two years ago: the Municipal Corporation of our Kasbapur will have to cancel its agreement with the tourism department of the state under which our town hall would have been declared a 'heritage hotel'.

The press asks me how at this age of eighty-five I could muster courage to challenge as powerful an institution as the Municipal Corporation.

By way of an answer, I repeat the incident when my father was ready to lay down his life to save this very town hall.

The year was 1942. And days of the August Revolution.

It is a known fact that in March 1942, a British delegation led by Sir Stafford Cripps arrived in India to elicit cooperation from the Indian National Congress for the Second World War. There was widespread unrest against the proposal. And on 8 August 1942, when the Congress Committee sent a call for the 'Quit India Movement' and the very next day when Gandhiji was taken into custody in Pune, the country rose in protest. The streets reverberated with slogans of 'Quit India' and 'Do or Die!' At some places people got carried away and set government buildings on fire. Electricity lines were disrupted, trains and vehicles were burnt.

As in other cities of the country, residents of Kasbapur too took to the streets carrying Congress flags. The protesters were quite a mixed bag.

Some set out for the Collectorate, most marched towards the town hall.

Named the Victoria Memorial Hall, the town hall was a greater symbol of British hegemony. A huge red sandstone statue of Queen Victoria stood right at its center, both hands resting on a moneybag. This town hall had been planned in the year 1897 to commemorate 60 years of the coronation of the queen of England. By 1911, when its construction was finally completed, Victoria had already died in 1901.

On that day, the procession had planned to pelt stones at the statue of Queen Victoria.



Sitting in his office in the town hall, the Mayor immediately ordered his police guards to lathi-charge the protesters.

Instead of deterring the protesters the charge had quite the opposite effect. The stones were now aimed directly at the windows of the town hall.

Those days my father used to work in the town hall in the library on the second floor. One of the balconies of the library sat right on top of the main entrance of the town hall.

Sensing the frightful intentions of the restive crowd he came and stood on that balcony. He intended to address the agitated crowd pelting stones at the building using the public address system of the town hall. That system was used to make public speeches and state felicitations and announcements of public interest. Let me also add here that at that time our town hall was not only home to the various city offices, it was also the site of the city's elections and important examinations were held here. It also announced disasters and information about public vaccinations and other health related measures. And also, the lists of casualties during World War I.

These announcements were often made by my father. He had an impressive voice, effective and rotund. And he knew how to use it.

“This is a brother of yours speaking”, as his voice reverberated unexpectedly everyone listened to him wonderstruck, the policemen and the protesters stopped what they were doing. “Just as you are, I too am a devotee of Gandhiji. His chosen path is one of non-violence, not of anarchy; of civil disobedience, not of aggressive action. We must not repeat 'Chaurichaura' here. It must be remembered that on February 5, 1922, when our brothers resorted to violence at the police station there, our Bapu had to observe a fast for 5 days. Would you want Bapu to commence a fast again? Today he is much older, physically more frail! And also consider this my brothers and sisters-this town hall is a public body, the center of public utility services for our public life. This is ours. Its round domes, bright urns, cupolas, the clocktower and all its four clocks are ours. It's all ours. Why should we destroy these? The British have no stake in these. They have to leave India. If not today, tomorrow. Or the day after ...”

And then the microphone in my father's hand got disconnected from the P.A. system.

But my father did not panic. Not at all. Knowing that the British government would now dismiss him from service.



Calmly, he placed the microphone on the parapet and raised his hand, 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai.'

The protesters seized his fiery ovation instantly, threw away the stones their hands held and raised their hands in unison to repeat 'Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai.' 'Please leave now,' signalled my father.

The policemen held their sticks and watched the crowd leaving the town hall.

My father smiled. As if he had found a treasure. His town hall was intact, the museum which housed pictures and descriptions of historical monuments and eminent personalities of the city had remained unharmed. The rare books in the library, which held all the scholarship of the world, were safe. The very books he had been savouring for the last fifteen years.



**About the writer:**

Born in 1946, Deepak Sharma taught English Literature in the Postgraduate Department of English, Lucknow Christian College, Lucknow. Now retired, Deepak Sharma has 21 collections of short stories in Hindi. She has been frequently published in important Hindi journals like Hans, Kathadesh, Aajkal and Kathakram.

**About the translator:**

Madhu B. Joshi is a translator, a media manager and consultant, an independent editor, academician and an author. She prefers to be known as a communication practitioner. She has taught translation and a short, self-designed course on Indian Culture, mentored content teams of major education NGOs; designed educational audio-video programmes for CIET and NCERT; written short stories for children; commented on socio-political and cultural issues.

Joshi has translated Hindi poetry and short fiction into English, and particularly nine major books from English to Hindi and three from Hindi to English. She has also worked closely with Pratham and The National Literacy Mission and has published four books for children.

# POETRY

Ah, no! I love India,  
For there I learned first to love God  
and all things beautiful"

-Paramahansa Yogananda  
("My India My Pride")



## On Mrs. Gandhi's death

- Shirin Abbas

The light has gone and hopelessness descends  
in blankets of dark, swirling grey mists  
covering a nation with its gloom  
There is no leader, only anguished hearts  
that hunt the way to doom.

the night has fallen, there is no moon  
nor stars and the sky seems so far  
there is no light, no one to guide the way  
only a dark hatred burns everlastingly  
and millions watch...helpless and astray.

O come the morn with singing birds  
and light and sunshine clear  
come dawn and vanish hazy mist  
come hope and wipe the tear

-- that falls across this fallen land  
with hearts that long and long...  
and grieve the death of one who was  
and millions hopeless throng...

...and stumble in the darkened streets  
at times they stop and pause  
for the sound of a voice, the touch of a hand  
a ray of a light that was!



(Written at age 17 soon after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination in 1984 and after witnessing the senseless riots that rocked the nation in its wake. This poem was later forwarded to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on Mrs. Gandhi's first death anniversary, who replied with a note of thanks. Published National Herald, 31 October 1988.)

## Deep is his slumber

Millions throng...  
hands folded, heads bowed  
with tear-filled eyes,  
hope-filled hearts  
at temples, churches and mosques,  
chanting, in different languages,  
prayers filled with one note-  
of hope, salvation, redemption...  
and He who has for years listened  
and toyed with His playthings on earth,  
till now tired...He brushes them aside,  
their chants grow louder...He turns his head away  
till their unceasing murmur is like a lullaby  
to which He closes his eyes...and sleeps  
Deep is His slumber,  
unshattered through the night  
and maybe when at dawn He awakens,  
He might play with them again  
or cast them away...  
and create a better toy to play with  
when He wakes.  
It is better that He sleeps...  
their desperate chants continue,

more out of habit than need  
and He continues to sleep... through the night!

**About the poet:**



Dr. Shirin Abbas is a British Chevening Scholar and an alumnus of the Media School of the University of Westminster, UK. She has over 30 years' industry experience in mainstream journalism and 14 years' academic experience encompassing both teaching and administration. She is hailed as a Media & Gender Expert and has received several international research awards. Her research interests are Gender Studies, Journalism, Media and Communication and Development Studies. Her Ph D in 2016 is on Exponential growth of Mobiles and their use for inducing Social and Behavioral Change in rural India.



## Folk Singer

-Deepa Agarwal

He weaves through a labyrinth of sound  
we follow  
towed by unseen threads of silver  
navigate clouds  
drift into unplumbed depths  
writhe in sweet pain  
pause at a cul de sac of emotion  
as the seductive silk of his voice  
winds around us.  
caresses,  
soothes, disturbs, evokes.

Whence was it birthed  
this welter of sensation?  
Sourced from whisper  
of tentative rainfall  
drumroll of thunder  
bird's trill of joy  
wind's insistent clamour  
or the ocean's roar?

He can only tell us  
about his father  
who handed him this baton  
and his father's father  
and the one before.  
A many branched tree of voices  
a jewelled song



wandering in a timeless maze.

## The Drums of Toil

The eager field waits  
drenched with anticipation,  
waits for the shawl of green  
to cloak its barrenness.

Eager sprigs of paddy wait  
to connect with the earth  
seeking fulfilment  
the miracle of plenty.

Eager women wait  
hope pulsing in their veins  
sparkling in their eyes  
as they await the drumbeat.

It comes  
a reverberation of promise,  
as the *hurkiya* croons a spell  
evoking a litany of gods  
and across the field, affirmation trills.

Deft hands spring into movement  
supple feet execute a well-loved dance  
greening the brown  
while ancient stories perfume the air  
tales of love and war



of magic and fantasy.

How cherished this music  
holding hands with toil!  
What place for drudgery  
if song absorb essential grind?

Note: This poem speaks of the practice of “Hurkiya Baul” in Kumaon, where hurkiyas or traditional musicians perform at the time of planting paddy. A *hurka* is a small drum similar to the *damru*.

### **About the poet:**



Deepa Agarwal is an author, poet and translator, who writes for both children and adults and has over 60 books published. Her work has been translated into 16 Indian and 6 foreign languages. She is the recipient of notable awards like the N.C.E.R.T. National Award for Children’s Literature in 1993 for *Ashok’s New Friends*. Her historical fiction *Caravan to Tibet* was on the IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) Honour List 2008, non-fiction *Journey to the Forbidden City* on the Parag Honour List 2020 and shortlisted for the Neev Book Award while *Kashmir! Kashmir!* was on the Parag Honour List 2021. Her poetry collection *Forgotten Kaleidoscopes* was shortlisted for the PVLFF Best Poetry Award.





## The Land of the Tathagata

-Vinita Agarwal

On the banks of the Niranjana River  
where hills recede and  
deep rocky channels lend force to flowing waters

awns the peepul tree  
that witnessed your golden halo.  
For a moment, tree, river mountains were one.

A patch of soft, dry mud  
where you sat, fighting Mara  
that inciter of passion, catalyst for lust

that wicked head  
that's desolate in light  
ecstatic in shadows.

You fought it well.  
It begged for your soft pulse, your coral heartbeats, your cobalt veins.

Begged for your practice  
to come to naught.  
You gave nothing.

Leaves murmured  
under the full moon  
shone as though crying.

At the hour



when a candle is but a stub  
its flame but a flicker

and the muslin of dawn  
is about to unfurl,  
avarice and passion were conquered.

A lotus emerged  
unsullied by the grime that held it  
the pond's eyes gleamed in a new light.

A new wind, a new breath, a new gaze.  
A oneness that tasted like honey.  
Time paused and felt its own velvet.

Tathagata  
you've never left  
ever since you walked those steps

into our hearts.  
Our fingers on your teachings  
reading the braille of truth

the blind being led to light.



## Old Lockdown

My old hometown of Bikaner  
where my old aunt still lives  
with her old locked joints.

The old wise priest at the temple  
collects old rain water in an old tank  
its old sweet coolness still on my tongue.

It doesn't rain very often, though.

Rains have been in old lockdown  
ever since the mighty old Aravallis  
dwarfed to dust.

Old sands curl on themselves here  
and lift like old muslin curtains  
masking the old doors of my old house  
a house that doesn't belong to anyone anymore:  
an old eternal lockdown, that.

Locusts haven't visited for decades -  
there's not much to feed on.

Life is an fossilized old exoskeleton  
its old flesh sublimated to ether  
but this old town, lockdown and all  
still palpitates in my heart  
like a fresh wound  
without the guard of old scabs.

**About the poet:**

Vinita Agarwal is the author of four books of poetry - *Two Full Moons*, *Silk of Hunger*, *The Longest Pleasure* and *Words Not Spoken*. She is an award-winning poet, editor and convenor of literary events. Joint Recipient of the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2018 and winner of the Gayatri GaMarsh Memorial Award for Literary Excellence, USA, 2015, she is Poetry Editor with *Usawa Literary Review*. She has been educated in Kalimpong and Kolkata. She has a gold medal in MA political science from M S University, Baroda. She has recently co-edited the *Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English* (Hawakal). Her work has been published in *Indian Quarterly*, *Mascara Review*, *Zingara*, *Fox Chase Review*, *Indian Periodical*, *Asian Cha*, *Voice & Verse Poetry*, *TallGrass Writers Guild anthology*, *Vayavya*, *Stockholm Literary Review*, *Constellations*, *Pea River Journal*, *Open Road Review*, *Bengaluru Review* among others. She was featured in a documentary *Deepest Uprising*, on twenty women poets from Asia, produced in Taiwan. She has curated literary events for PEN Mumbai. She is an independent researcher on Buddhism and Culture and has made presentations at international forums. Read more about her at [www.vinitawords.com](http://www.vinitawords.com)



## River Songs

-Mitali Chakravarty

Rivers flow into the sea.  
Each with a distinct lore  
creates history. Humans  
settled on shores from  
days of yore, hunting,  
farming, then sowing  
their souls into the land  
till each coloured by a  
distinct loam, develop  
a separate identity.

Ganges carries tales of  
Himalayan splendour  
to the alluvial soil of  
Bay of Bengal. Born  
Tsangpo in the heart of  
Shangrila, Brahmaputra  
sings acceptance of  
diversities while emptying  
its soul into the seas.  
Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri  
spew stories from plateaus  
painted in distinct hues by  
the soil. Mahanadi flows from  
deeper inland sprinkling tales  
from Chhattisgarh.

Rivers that listen to

the murmurs of men  
pour their stories into  
seas to reverberate  
with echoes of tales  
that touch the hearts  
of different lands  
as they integrate with  
the lapping waves that  
lave distant shores.

The Bay of Bengal mingles  
with the Arabian Sea in the  
vaster waters that swirl to  
encompass all lands. Indus,  
Sutlej, Jhelum, Chenab  
unite Subcontinental lores  
before joining Mahi, Narmada  
and Tapti across the ocean floor,  
again, to whisper tales of love  
and sorrow of the people  
that fill these lands.

Stories mingle and swirl  
till from the clouds emerges  
a Truth that, like a rainbow of  
myriad colours, emblazons across  
a fearless sky: "We are all one.  
Unique and yet of the same kind."



## Boundaries

How difficult was it for the hills  
to be sliced by boundaries?

There was a time they flowed on  
Earth, unrestricted by fences or  
lines. The grass grew on both sides.

Then came the changes. The air  
still shared the same scents as the  
mountains, the rivers and the ravines.

Even the birds flew across the walls.  
Only some believed in make-believe  
lines drawn to pen into enclosures

what a few possessed. Belonging  
was a tune that they sang. It rang  
through spaces that had been free —

lands, rivers, oceans, trees.  
Who crafted these? Who created all?  
If the creators of galaxies claimed ownership,

where would the fence-drawers have gone?



## Holi (Delhi, 2020)

Can Time roll back to the past?

Can history be changed?

The colours of Holi hum  
a blood red.

The baul with his ektara sings —

Time mutates.

We repeat stories of love and hate.

Yet hate stays. Love fades.

Why is it we love to hate?

Why are different colours  
condemned?

Time mutates but

can the past be changed?

Mutilated by genocide,

Partition's grizzly bride does

Raas on Holi by Yamuna's banks.

Where has Krishna gone with his flute?

Radhas are part of the loot!

Time stays.

What is it we gain?

Rape, burn and kill.

Nazrul weeps.

Krishna has lost his flute

Mute Radha lies burnt to soot.

Strikes, Hatred, Pain.

Where are the dreams?

What are the dreams?

Do we dream?

Dream anymore?

Scream. Scream. Scream —

This is the way the world stops.

This is the way the world stops  
in a bloody burning by-lane.

Can love not flood the drying riverbed?

Rumi, Nazrul and Tagore walk side by side

And Holi again with Tesu bloom?

(Written as a response to the violence in February-March 2020 & updated in 2022.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020\\_Delhi\\_riots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_Delhi_riots))

**About the poet:**

Mitali Chakravarty is the founding editor of [borderlessjournal.com](http://borderlessjournal.com), an online forum which nurtures a special section on Tagore. Archived in the Singapore National Library, *Borderless Journal* is an exploration of a world beyond borders that hopes to unite mankind under one sky to celebrate the human spirit. Currently, *Borderless* is in the process of bringing out its first anthology with Om Books International. Mitali translates from Bengali to English and has also authored a book of humorous essays on living in China where she spent eight years called *In the Land of Dragons*. Trained as a journalist to cover arts and developmental issues, she has written for the *Statesman*, the *Times of India*, the *Hindustan Times*, the *Pioneer*, the *Daily Star* as well as multiple online forums and anthologies.





## You Birthed a Nation, Sindhu

-Lakshmi Kannan

River Sindhu,  
you birthed a nation.

Like it happens in traditional families,  
A new born baby is named

after a venerable grandfather/mother.  
That done, the name is never used again.  
It's just not done!

For how could you disrespect an elder  
by calling out his/her name?  
Only priests are allowed to chant the original name  
in religious rituals,  
a yajnopavita, a wedding, or a shraadh

to continue the thread of lineage

The family gets busy  
choosing an alternate name  
that's closest to the original.  
Parvati becomes Meenakshi,  
Ranganayaki turns into Rama  
the imposing Anantasayanam  
morphs into a crisp Narayan.  
Cool, isn't it?



River Sindhu,  
you were called Indos by the Greeks.  
From there you made an easy transition to Indus  
and birthed a country, India.

Yet, in the ancient Sanskrit *nadistuti*  
you continue to be Sapta Sindhu  
straddling the Himalayan realms  
and South-Central Asia.

A nation got its name from this mighty river.  
Would you still say 'What's in a name'  
dear Bard of Avon?

### **About the poet:**



Dr. Lakshmi Kannan, also known by her Tamil pen-name 'Kaaveri', is a bilingual writer. Her twenty-five books include poems, novels, short stories and translations. *Wooden Cow* (2021), her latest, is a translation of the iconic Tamil writer T. Janakiraman's novel. Lakshmi was a Resident Writer for The International Writing Program, Iowa, USA; Charles Wallace Writer, University of Kent at Canterbury, UK; British Council Visitor, Cambridge, UK; Sahitya Akademi Writer; Fellow, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. For details, please visit

[www.lakshmikannan.in](http://www.lakshmikannan.in)



## Cessation

-Neera Kashyap

As goddess Devi, you come in many forms...

Gauri, Amba, Bhavani, Saraswati, Durga, Lakshmi, Parvati...

It is as Kali that you reveal your greatest power.

Black-skinned, red fills your eyes, your blood-splattered hand,  
your outstretched tongue; your skullcap drips blood from a severed head.

Power flashes through your sword, your scimitar, the shocked eyes in your  
garland of male skulls, your foot as it presses down on Siva's supine chest.

Calm in his death.

Fiery Mahakali, destroyer of evil, Goddess of Time, symbol of the invincible.

You invoke horror but go beyond definitions, linearity, preconceptions...

Suddenly I see your kindness, your love, your protection.

You come from the unfettered imagination of creation, unfettering ours...  
carrying us beyond protection and destruction.

Through destruction you show the way out of destruction, the constraints  
through which we live, horrified yet protected, destroyed yet released.

Mahakali, unceasing are your kinetic energies.

In the shimmer of your wild dance, there is.....cessation.

For Siva lies underfoot, accepting of death  
death of all sensory pulls, of all thought.



Still in release.

### Unveiled

If the formless is one without a second, complete in itself  
why so many gods?

Just as human bodies we need to touch, taste, hear, see, smell  
perhaps we need the gods to touch, taste, hear, see, smell...  
to make sense of what we search for amid our fears and sorrows.

There is not much I do for her, my goddess  
but offer her a red hibiscus everyday  
or a yellow one when the red is not in bloom.

I clean her up unfailingly for it is only to the clean one  
can I offer my insecurities, my vulnerabilities, my failings,  
hoping for some clean-up myself.

She doesn't mind any of these or more -  
my galaxy of diverse pleadings.

On one rare occasion, she lifted her veil and threw it off,  
told me to do the same with my  
galaxy of diverse pleadings.



## Bridges

More emphatically than Brahma or Vishnu,  
it is Shiva who is internalised as the limitless, the formless  
the unchanging transcendent Brahman, the Self of each individual.  
Yet, depicted in endlessly endearing forms, each feels symbolic of our need.  
A coiled serpent is our unmanifest energy, his crescent moon our power over growth;  
the opening of the third eye our capacity to snuff lust, resplendent on his forehead;  
Ash appears on his body as cinders of desire, his haunts – ego-death, its cremation.  
With tiger seat for meditation, he drinks the poison churned from our conflicts,  
his matted locks controlling the torrential waters rushing down from heaven.  
His rudraksha beads energize, his trident balances, his drum sounds the primeval.  
Eternal Yogi, remote ascetic, he is also the quintessential householder, the family man.  
Benign as Ashutosh, simple as Bhola, ferocious as Rudra, he is Pasupati, the lord of all animals.  
As Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, he rests in a harmony of movement and stillness  
dancing the Ananda Tandava – the resting point beyond all form.  
His depiction as lingam – loved and revered even in the crudest of forms  
is the bridge that connects form with the formless,  
the saguna with the nirguna.

**About the poet:**

Neera Kashyap has authored a book for young adults, 'Daring to Dream' and contributed to several prize-winning anthologies for children. As a writer of short fiction, poetry, book reviews and essays, her work has appeared in several International literary journals and poetry anthologies. The poetry journals include *Verse Virtual*, *Life & Legends*, *Failed Haiku* and *Setu Magazine* (USA); *RIC Journal* (Indo-French); *Kitaab* (Singapore); *The Punch Magazine*, *Teesta Review* and *The Wise Owl* (India). The publishers of the anthologies include Indie Blu, Transcendent Press, Setu Mag (USA) Clarendon Press (UK) and Hawakal, Write Order, Author's Press, Exceller & Brown Critique (India). She lives in Delhi.



## India through the Lens of Rabindra

-Prabhjeet Kaur

Where is my India located? Where does its heart beats?  
Where the violet hour is soaked in the blushing sky  
Or is it in the jingling of the bangles, exhorting the overlapping  
kaleidoscopic arc against the daylight,  
Or the mild mango showers in the day-break  
Where the cuckoo is the crepuscule's minion  
And here the full moon is baked on the large iron plate.

The heavy rains of July stabilized my moored boat  
besides the ghats of spirituality,  
The sounds of 'Govinda!' filled the Western sky  
To mark the festival of Krishna's birth.  
The night witnessed the cracks in the puffing clouds  
Showing stars through the rain-washed air.  
The devotees reached with their longing feet on the river ghats  
With the overshadowing branches of banyan above their head.  
Besides the framework of the Western heaven  
Their inaudible adoration stood like a picture.  
A moment came when nerve's desire terminated  
And silence unveiled the hidden mysteries of his congregation.  
Where to-night the soul was reaching the ninth gate,  
Perhaps it was in the blowing belly of the conch shells.  
The waning crescent peeped through breaks of the dungeon grate  
Where I heard the temple bells tolling across my mind.  
The ambrosial aroma of basil filled my nostrils,  
My heavy eyes gained all its strength to open



And blend the darkness of the night sky with the sunbeam of thy heart.  
The beat skipped and the soul in union cried  
Looking at the impenetrable darkness,  
As if the very gateway of oblivion were before me,  
Reaching to the vista of eternal sky.  
My heart was filled with love, my beloved Lord  
That forgot the faces of the people behind my back.  
The maidens stood with lights  
To float their lamps across the river side.  
When I did see its heart dipped in white sugar balls,  
Cooked in rosy syrup within God's vermillion cauldron.  
The enlightened devotee saw its heart glowing differently  
in the hollow of the earthen lamp  
As if in a yearning union with an effigy casting a spell over his flute.

Perhaps those heavy clouds obstruct my vision  
Whenever I see peace between saffron and green  
The bruising heart of my Motherland holds thy hand aback  
When you leave her shore and make your own room abroad.  
Her child, do remember when you hid in the lap of thy tricolour,  
Harkening back to Aesop fables in thy babyhood.  
Oh Almighty! Where is my nation located amidst the vast oceans?  
Perhaps it is present in its citizens who held their heads high,  
Whose thoughts are not held within the rigid shackles of the rootless past,  
Where Knowledge, Compassion, Sympathy and Self Control  
ignites the intellect of the population,  
Where the reason flows in the unison of the three rivers  
Unescorted by the algae of credulity.  
And from the sharp north to the declining west,  
Thy ensign stands free before the world.  
I am a sacrifice unto thee! My nourishing mother,





Hail to thee! My Alma Mater!

**About the poet:**



Prabhjeet Kaur is pursuing M.A. in English from Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow. She is an ardent admirer of Romantic poets especially, Wordsworth and Keats. She is inspired by the works of Rabindranath Tagore. Her poetry connects the culture and heritage of ancient India that captures the essence of spirituality. It also highlights the uniting peace between various religions co-existing in India.



## A Lemon Tree Grows in India

-Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca

To remember is to preserve the lemon tree  
outside my grandmother's house  
exactly as it was in childhood.

The large tree, contrast of green leafiness  
with yellow lemons on every branch  
Graced the window like a painting.

At night the cats fighting under the tree  
sounded like crying children.

The darkness changed the yellow lemons black  
Moonlight turned them back to yellow.

The lemon tree shares the beauty of the land  
with the Mango, the Banyan, the Orange,  
The Gulmohar, the Peepal and the Neem trees.  
As the trees celebrate their *treeness*, so...

I ate food in the common *thal* with my Muslim neighbours  
Fish in white sauce on banana leaves at Parsi weddings  
Spicy Vindaloo in my East Indian friend's home  
Red Mutton curry at Jewish wedding celebrations  
Idlis and Sambhar at my South Indian colleague's  
Daal and potato vegetable with poories, at my Hindu friend's house.

I want to grow a lemon tree here in a Northern clime  
My neighbour tells me it might just  
grow in my sunroom.  
In the backyard it probably will



not take root.

For the winters are bitterly cold.

When the pine tree on my front lawn

Drops pine cones

I see lemons

It's the only way to be back

Home in India.

Celebrating Diwali, Eid, Passover, Ganesh Chaturthi

The train journeys through the spectacular Indian landscape

The colours of home, the flavor of India.

I grew up in the India of one world.

When I return, it is to that world

I wish to retrace my footsteps.

### **About the poet:**



Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca was born in Bombay to Prof. Nissim Ezekiel and Daisy Ezekiel. She attended Queen Mary's School, St. Xavier's College, Bombay University and Oxford Brookes University, U.K. She holds Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees in English, American Literature and Education. Her career spanned over four decades in Indian colleges, American International Schools and Canada, teaching English, French and Spanish. She is a published poet and has her poetry page at <https://www.facebook.com/kemendoncapoetry> and blogs at <https://kavitaезekielpoetry.com/>. Kavita has published two books of poetry, 'Family Sunday and Other Poems' and 'Light of The Sabbath.' Her poems have appeared in several anthologies.



## BHARAT MA!

-Shruti Singh

The fragrance of soil  
Like a red vermillion sandalwood  
Something strange in you  
Brings me to you *Ma*,  
Your lush green body  
Heart with *peetambar*  
Splish -Splash of streams  
Tweeting of birds in full swing  
*Ganga* shelters in *jata* of *Shiv*  
*Gopal Krishna* himself does acting  
How can anyone hate you?  
Whose *anchal* becomes shade,  
Hindu Sikh Parsi Christian  
Jain Buddha Muslim and Tribal  
You assemble many colours  
To do your makeup  
No one can harm you  
A lamp of hope has been lit  
Wherever Sun Moon and stars will shine  
You will shine there *Bharat Ma!*

**About the poet:**

Dr. Shruti Singh has worked at Babu Banarasi Das Institute of Engineering and Technology and Isabella Thoburn College. She has published papers and a book. Her area of research interest is Indian poetry in English, Feminist theory and Criticism, Professional communication and English Language Teaching. She has taught Professional communication, soft skills and regular courses of B.A and M.A. Her doctoral research was on “Shifting Identities: A study of the poetry of Sujata Bhatt, Mamta Kalia and Kamala Das”. She has a firm faith in ‘Hope’ and ‘God’.

# BOOK REVIEW

"Books are a uniquely  
portable magic."

-Stephen King,  
On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft



## Pixie Dust & All Things Magical



**GLOBAL POETRY IN ENGLISH  
2022**

Edited by  
**ANITA NAHAL**



## Pixie Dust & All Things Magical: Global Poetry In English 2022

Edited by Anita Nahal, published by Authorspress (2022)

Price: Rs. 595/-

ISBN: 9789390891542

Language: English, pp.280

-Yusuf Ayaz

The human condition, as we have been experiencing it in recent years, has seen some devastating and discouraging developments, sapping the spirit of existence and drowning out the music of life. With darkness all around, we all needed a little nudge to awaken us from the trance of despair we were slumped in and point a hopeful finger towards the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel. *Pixie Dust & All Things Magical*, an anthology of global poetry in English, edited by Anita Nahal provides us with that much needed nudge. Upon reading the poems, it gets clear, that this is an anthology with an *aim* rather than a *theme*. What binds the submissions together is not, so much, an overarching theme, as a shared end to which they collectively contribute. After a very long time, I came across a collection of poems that I read from cover to cover with a happy heart and a smiling face. This book lives up to its title and does exactly what it promises to do: spread magic.

The first three poems by Pragya Bajpai set the tone of the anthology. “Letters,” “Magical Mole” and “The Magic Lies in You,” have a common strain: recognizing the magical in the familiar, in the personal. They also highlight the idea that what qualifies as “pixie dust” is highly subjective and might differ from individual to individual. These poems remind us to recognize and appreciate the magic within our own lives instead of searching for it without. “Magical Mole,” for instance, makes a case for the magic the poet personae perceives in the eponymous mole:

“Dream and desire roll into one

As the earth meets the sky,





the little magical mole  
knows not why,  
the tornado makes me blind  
when the fire runs wild.

The little mole is a tacit conjurer.”

Poems like Anuradha Gajaraj-Lopez’s “You are Found,” Priya Pramod’s “I am Magic” and Sean Cribbin’s “Charmed,” amongst others, reinforce the idea that the editor expresses in the introduction to the anthology, that “magic can be the simple joys of life that are oft overlooked.” Pixie dust is hence transported from the grandiose lands of fairies and gnomes to the humdrum of our everyday life. “Charmed” provides a lesson on self-love and exhorts one to have faith in the magic inherent in their individual self. Sean rightfully remarks,

“Most Blessings in Disguise,  
never. get. Recognized.”

With entries by poets from all across the world, this catalogue presents a whole gamut of experiences and stories from different national, cultural and racial backgrounds. What binds this variegated assortment of verses is the shared aim of taking the reader’s attention away from the harsh realities of the pandemic-stricken world. It affords the readers a much needed break from the realm of facts and statistics and provides the comfort of the magical. Poems of the likes of Seema Jain’s, “O for a Pinch of Pixie Dust” and Anuradha Gajaraj-Lopez’s, “A Beautiful World” set forth alternate realities and give one a sense of reassurance. “Wonders in my Eyes,” by Manisha Khatate, reflects that magic lies in the eyes of the beholder and suggests that with “miracles on fingertips,” everything in this world appears magical when seen with “childlike eyes.” Seema Jain’s poem provides a splash of optimism and a dash of hope by wishing for the magic of pixie dust to rid this world of all its evils. It would be unfair to give otherworldly interpretations to the pixie dust here as it is more likely the combined goodness and efforts of mankind. She writes:

“O for a pinch of Pixie Dust  
That could make life an unending bliss

That could usher in a change of heart

Transform the world

Into a land of peace and love

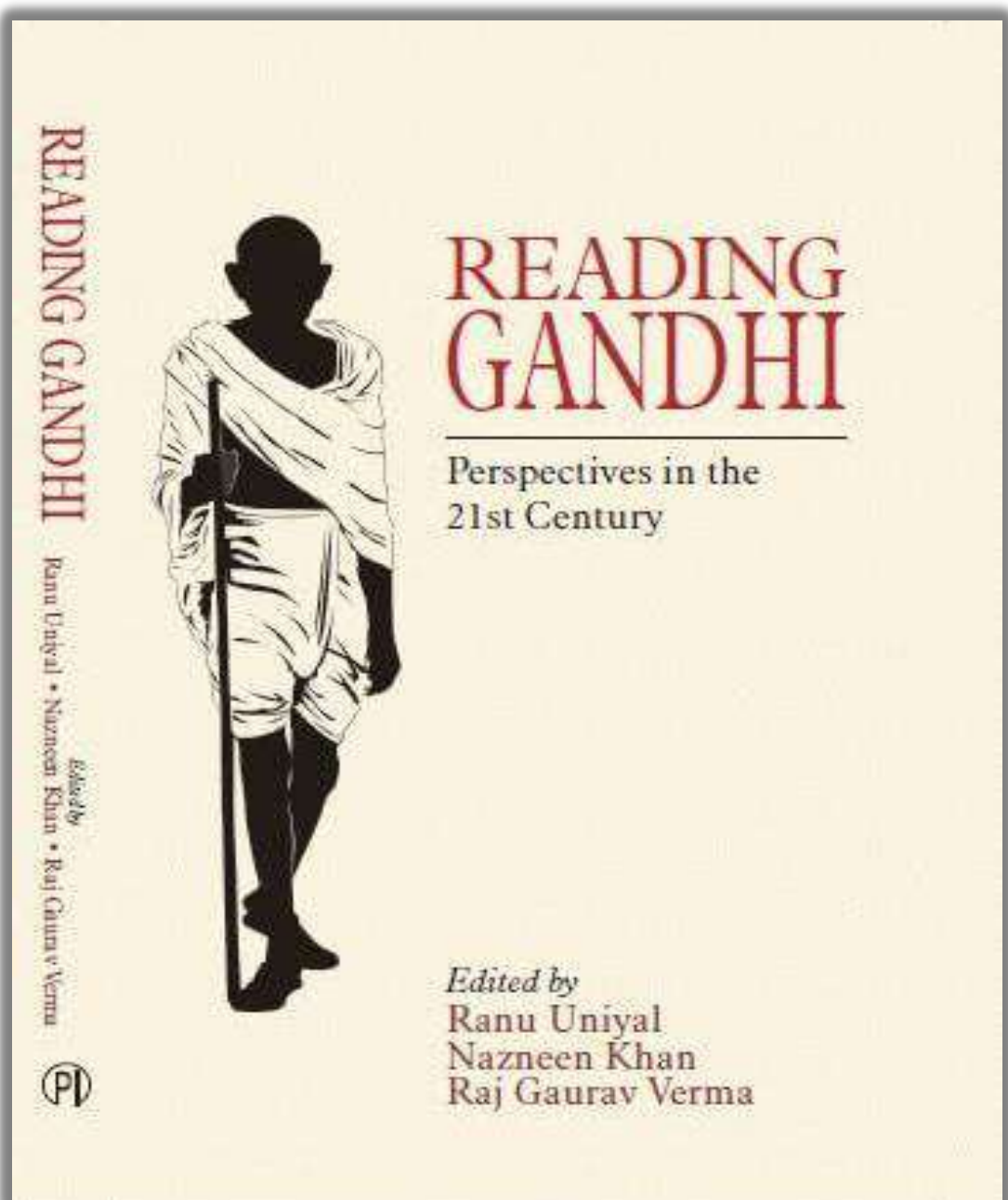
Dissolving all hatred and strife”

Apart from featuring pieces from different socio-cultural backgrounds on miscellaneous subjects, the anthology’s diversity lies also in the structural and technical ingenuity and heterogeneity of the poems. Poems like “A Better Tomorrow? Surely...” by Christine Larsen and “The Pastry Chef” by April Bulmer composed in prose and Nosano Kikhi’s “My First,” an instance of ekphrastic poetry, make the collection stylistically vibrant. A definite page turner, *Pixie Dust & All Things Magical* is a collection that would certainly bring a smile to the reader’s face.

### **About the writer:**



Yusuf Ayaz is a Ph.D student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His area of research falls under the purview of medical humanities.





## Reading Gandhi: Perspectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Edited by Ranu Uniyal, Nazneen Khan, Raj Gaurav Verma, published by Pencraft International (2022)

Price: ₹ 800/-

ISBN: 978-93-82178-36-1

Language: English, pp. 196

-Maria Khan

Intending to serve as a helpful resource material for budding researchers and academics exploring the realm of Gandhian studies and postcolonial literature, the editors Ranu Uniyal, Nazneen Khan and Raj Gaurav Verma present to their readers a canvas of multifarious thoughts and ideas encapsulating the essence and epitome called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, titled *Reading Gandhi: Perspectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The book titled *Reading Gandhi: Perspectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* is a tribute to Dr. Shikoh Mohsin Mirza who is mentioned by the editors as possessing “a Gandhian streak”. The Introduction of the book rightly speaks of the relevance of Gandhi across ages and multitudes and defines his persona as of somebody who combined “theory and practice”. The articles in the book touch upon various themes related to the Gandhian ideology and thought, ranging from Bhikhu Parekh’s sublime introductory reflections on Gandhi to John Thieme talking of R K Narayan’s fiction as a symbolic representation of the nationalist ideals that Gandhi vouched for, particularly in Narayan’s, *Waiting for the Mahatma*. The book goes beyond to explore the ideas of post-truth in the context of the Gandhian movement of Satyagraha through the article of Raj Gaurav Verma where he talks about Gandhi’s disobedience and its role in inspiring a mass upheaval and he rightly observes that it was Gandhi’s strong conviction in truth that gave him the courage and power to face the British oppressors. There is an article to explore the concept of food and Gandhi where Roopa Vijay and Meenakshi Vijay elaborate upon the concept of simple living



and high thinking that Gandhi embodied in his eating habits also, where he refrained from consuming heavy and oily food and drank an adequate amount of water which is so much in accordance with the parameters recommended by organizations like ICMR and WHO and imply overall health and wellness of the body, mind and soul. There is an article by Amrita Sharma that tries to decode Gandhi's dress and attire as a symbol of silent revolt.

Vishakha Sen's article on Sudhir Kakar's *Mira and the Mahatma* perfectly sums up the nuances of "feminist subjectivity" through various characters that embody the Gandhian ideals of women empowerment. Neena Gupta Vij in her article titled "The Syncretic Morality of the Mahatma" writes: "Violence operates on a praxis of fear-generation, while non-violence stands firmly rooted in freedom from that fear. The moral individual being envisaged by Gandhi did take birth. The hundreds of people who left their homes, their beliefs and insulated way of life, became fearless in the presence of the Mahatma who exemplified fearlessness." Pritish Acharya's ideas on the Champaran Satyagraha are an interesting historical read. Suchitra Awasthi's article on *Hind Swaraj* talks about Gandhi's views on Indian education and its relation to the advancement of Indian values and thought with respect to the tenets of true civilization.

Alok Kumar's excellent insights on Gandhi and the "Heuristics of Living" are apt and replete with various arguments in support of his thought. As he perfectly sums up the relevance of Gandhi in the current socio-cultural scenario: "What makes Gandhi unique among the thinkers of the twentieth century is this insistence on connecting 'truth', 'humility' and 'non-violence' into a fundamental functional triad." He mentions how this theory stands indispensable. Papia Sengupta talks about a relatively lesser explored topic related to Gandhian thought and that is his urge to uphold a common national language, with particular emphasis on the *Hindustani* language, supporting his argument with various historical anecdotes and instances. Fatima Sahrish's article articulating the importance of Gandhian ideals of humanity and social justice and the need for their practical application in day-to-day life are worth a read.

It would not be wrong to say that the present assemblage offers a myriad of perspectives to interested scholars to recollect ideas ranging from cultural anecdotes related to Gandhi to a philosophical enquiry of his thought and practice. Gandhi was a monument and an enigma, an inspiration for millions of Indians and that's what the articles try to encapsulate. All the important and unexplored points of interpretation related to Gandhi and his ideological thought have been talked about. The editors have done a commendable job of compiling such

exemplary and refreshing articles and meticulously envisaging this significant theme for the book. The book rightfully touches upon every major aspect related to the man called Gandhi and makes one ponder upon the infallible and overarching relevance of the Gandhian ideology.

**About the writer:**



Maria Khan is a Ph.D Research Scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest include South-Asian literature, post-modern fiction, cultural studies, disability studies and mad studies. She aspires to carve a niche for herself in the world of academia and literary imagination.







## Outbreaks: An Indian Pandemic Reader

Edited by Madhu Singh, published by Pencraft International, Delhi (2021)

Price: Rs. 1495/-

ISBN: 978-9382178354

Language: English, pp. 504

-Perna Raj

*Outbreaks: An Indian Pandemic Reader* is an effort to carve a synchronization among the otherwise diversified disciplines like History, Films, Literature, Culture, Society, Covid-19, Healthcare, Lockdown, etc. It is a compilation of essays dealing specifically with the history of pandemics in one section; in the second section, the essays deal with the description of the epidemics in Films, Literature and Culture and the third section of the compilation deals with essays on the Covid-19.

The compilation emphasizes on the ability of the epidemics to create the strenuous, apprehensive and emotionally unclear and vague situation with acute medical emergencies. The book argues that the occurrences, the encounters, the very remembrance of the epidemics testify that the dynamics of life are beyond human control. This book is an unpretentious venture to assemble and collate numerous reactions relating to the obscure provocations of epidemics/pandemics in India in its socio-cultural and historical state of affairs.

In almost all the essays, the failure as well as negligence of governments, both colonial and post-colonial times, in making adequate provisions, is hinted at. The factors crucial to the situation remain healthcare, poverty, poor sanitation, unhygienic living conditions and state of affairs. Persistent and appalling epidemics/pandemics left the people at their own resources, ultimately surrendering to their Gods.

Epidemics/ Pandemics and their relations with various Gods in various parts of India is also one of the dynamics which has been catered to in different essays written by various stalwarts. The compilation has essays talking about the historical, socio-cultural and



anthropological aspects of various pandemics/epidemics ranging practically from Cholera to the most recent Covid-19. The essays literally encompass reasonably all of them including Cholera, Malaria, Cowpox, Influenza, Smallpox, Spanish influenza, Covid-19 etc.

The book is a reflection of various writers on the topic of Pandemics and Epidemics and their impact, which resulted in socio-cultural and political anxieties about communication, interrelation and social belonging. Writers and their experiences and understanding of the structure of the pandemics and epidemics form the core idea of the book and the commonality in all the essays.

Writers like David Arnold, David Hardiman, Ralph Nicholas, Niels Brimnes, Harish Naraindas, and Subhendu Mundhave been included in the first section. All of them in their essays have elaborated upon the past epidemics including Cholera, Indian Plague, Influenza, Small Pox, Goan Epidemic, Famines and Bombay Fever. These essays are direct as well as critically intense. They are nerve-wrecking and stimulating. Different parts of India facing different problems is the highlight of the section.

Mahatma Gandhi, Amrit Gangar, Fakir Mohan Senapati, Heinz Werner Wessler, Master Bhagwandas, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ahmed Ali, Phanishwar Nath Renu, Harishanker Parsai, Tulsi Ram and Madhu Singh are the writers who are incorporated in this section. This segment offers a variety of genres. It has essays, short-stories, memoirs, commentaries, translations, etc. This section establishes an impeccable connect between pandemics/epidemics and films, literature and culture. The focal point of this section is the correlation and mirroring of the things happening around in films and literature.

Arun Bandopadhyay, David Arnold, Sudhir Chandra, Harish Naraindas, Promod Kumar Nayar, Amrit Gangar, Rohini Mokashi Punekar, Dakxin Bajrange Charra, Alice Tilche and Madan Meena in the essays of the last section mainly deal with and focus on the brand new Covid-19 and its repercussion on various socio-economic as well as psychological factors. A very distinct, distressing and agonizing incident was the journey of a large group of migrant workers from big cities to their homes in order to escape the hostilities. This has been empathetically treated in this section of the compilation. The impact of Covid-19 on the education and overall development of the society is also catered to.

Vaccines, anti-microbial therapies and other medical developments are helpful in times when people are rendered helpless and desolated. Technology, artificial intelligence, human intelligence and all other scientific achievements zeroed down in front of the mystic, enigmatic and uncomprehending dynamics of nature. This section is full of critical remarks and logical insights on Covid-19.

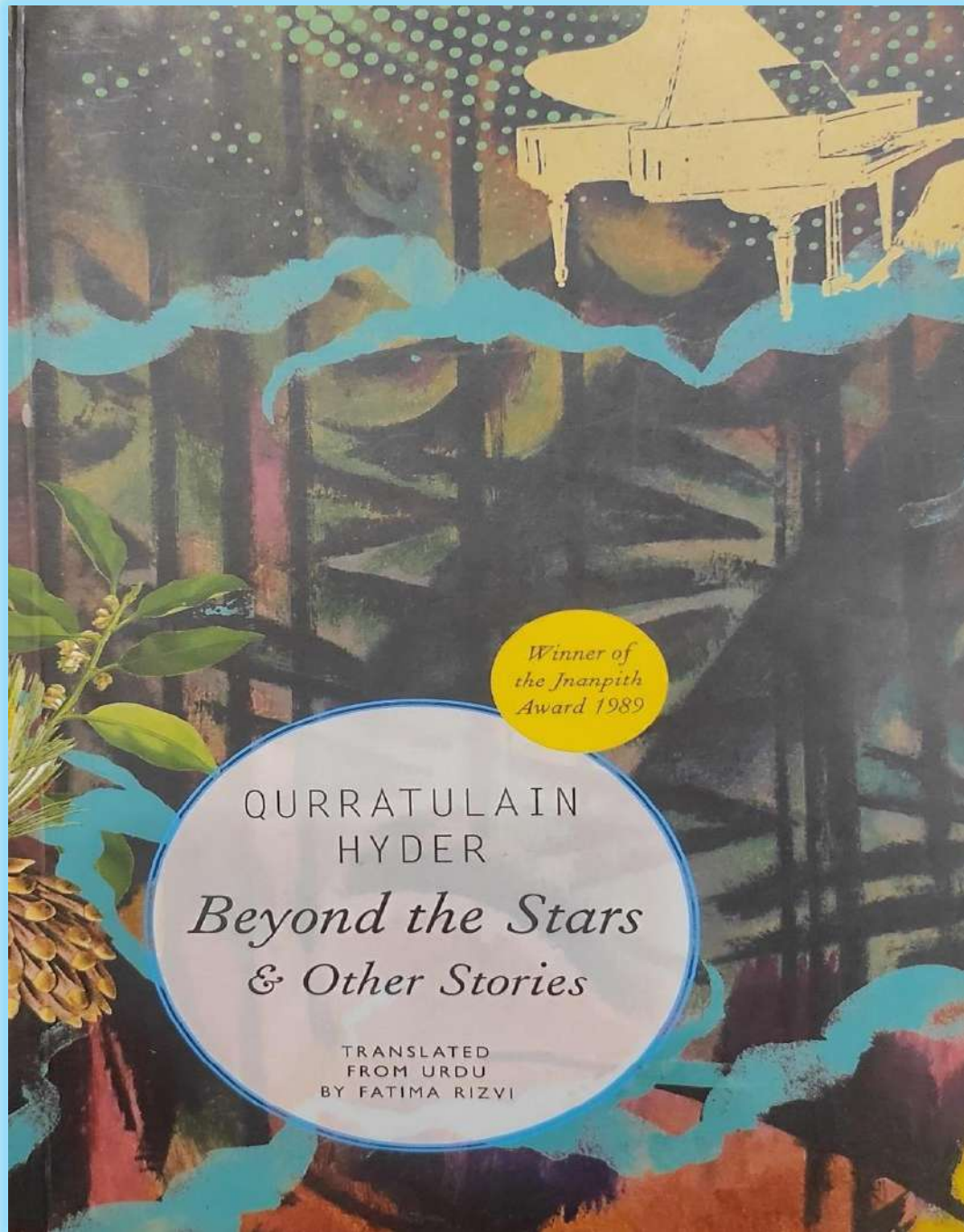
Prof. Madhu Singh has done a phenomenal work. Her extremely powerful understanding of the circumstances is beyond appreciation. Her deep perception and sensible rationale in presenting such issues is reflected in her editing as well as translation abilities. She has dealt with marginalization as well as discrimination in this compilation. She speaks about women, their condition, their ordeal, nightmares and trauma with a special concern.

The book is quite thought-provoking and vivid in the sense that it has tried to encompass various emotions, milieu, situations and circumstances relating to the pandemics. The essence of all the essays appears to be similar. Apparently, the focus is on the ordeal. The singular vigor is identified by the editor, Prof. Madhu Singh and put together in the form of this compilation of essays.

### **About the writer:**



Prerna Raj did her Ph.D in English from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. An educator for the past ten years, she has trained teachers while taking care of CPD (Continuous Professional Development) where she teaches.



## Beyond the Stars and Other Stories

<Translated from Urdu>

Written by Qurratulain Hyder, translated by Fatima Rizvi,

published by Women Unlimited (2021)

Price: Rs. 495/-

ISBN: 978-9385606366

Language: English, pp. 195

-Maziah Shaaz

*tū shāhīñ hai parvāz hai kaam terā*

*tire sāmne āsmāñ aur bhī haiñ*

*isī roz o shab meñ ulajh kar na rah jā*

*kī tere zamān o makāñ aur bhī haiñ*

A prolific writer who inculcated and imbibed the influencing resonances of Muhammad Iqbal, whom she greatly admired and rightly so, Qurratulain Hyder or Ainie Apa as she was fondly called, became the aforementioned falcon (shāhīñ) and soared so high that what she achieved in the process remained untouched. *Beyond the Stars and Other Stories* is one of the earliest collections of stories which she published before 1947. The title of this anthology comes from the eponymous story in the collection, the opening line of which is indeed borrowed from Iqbal's famous poem, "*sitāroñ se aage jahāñ aur bhī haiñ, abhī ishq ke imtihāñ aur bhī haiñ*". Hyder wrote against the grain, boldly facing the challenges of her time. Her writings focus on the time that was both turbulent and alive in the most unfortunate way. Her stories are representatives of the ethos in which Hyder lived and wrote about and yet her writings never overtly catered to a particular political sentiment or ideology. One can even find glimpses of her personal life in her stories, though they cannot be strictly understood as autobiographical.

The very first story in the collection, "The Deodar Forest ", brings out a beautiful yet bleak picture of a love that remains unsaid and unrequited. Like the uprooted deodars that bravely faced the storm but couldn't survive, Khalida and Javed's affection had the ending similar to what O. Henry painted in "The Last Leaf". "Star-crossed" is another story that has one of the most beautiful and picturesque opening paragraphs but carries a waft of gentle sadness. It makes one feel helpless at the hands of fate. "Beyond the Stars" is one of the finest stories in the collection that validates its title. One feels in resonance with the characters who are nostalgic as well as behold an uncertain future and uncharted territories, spending their time singing and smoking to dispel the lull caused by their tiresome work as party workers. "The Dance of a Spark" has a lively vibe where the three main characters discuss poetry, love and life at the time of the second World War and follows a modernist narrative technique. One can find a curious confluence of two different varieties of romance in the story "Stray Thoughts". It is a first person narration that highlights the disparity between crisis and comfort, art and luxury and sentiments placed at entirely polar opposite ends. One of the shortest stories from the collection, "Stray Thoughts" is representative of a certain section of a society that has nothing to worry about in the world even in times like war and struggle, except for their own thoughts "vying for attention".

It can be safely vouched that Hyder's prose carries the lyrical quality of poetry. It is beautifully descriptive yet naturally realistic and possesses the charm of simplistic writing that was rare in her times. Hyder's stories offer a panoramic view of the lives of urban Muslim families and are analysed through a singular yet diverse lens bordering on modernity and tradition.

This is a work of transcreation from Urdu to English therefore every translation is twice written. For any translator, attempting to translate a writer who was so particular with translations, challenges must abound but Fatima Rizvi has ably stood up to the challenge. Translations are tricky and require a good command over both the languages. Fatima Rizvi, who is a professor of English at the Department of English, University of Lucknow, is well versed in both English and Urdu languages and therefore has efficiently brought out the nuances of one language into the other. Her choice of words and sentence structures have helped maintain the essence of the original text. The translation stands out because of its elegance and panache. It has the credibility of Hyder's writing style and literariness and promptly brings out the thematic concerns of her work. The introduction to this collection is astutely insightful as it gives a bigger perspective on Qurratulain Hyder's life and the ideology

that surrounds her work. This translation can be fairly understood as a generous addition to the rich literary life of the English language for Dr. Rizvi has coloured the tradition with her sharp imagination and creativity.

### **About the Writer:**



Maziah Shaaz is pursuing her Ph.D from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her area of research and interest lies in Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Ecofeminism. She is a gastronome and a potterhead and enjoys watching psychological thrillers. She loves to read and wishes to go on a solo trip round the country.





# Stitching *a* Home



This is a volume to be read by the fireside in winter. The poet tells us 'places have souls too' and 'you have to let them settle'.

**Keki N Daruwalla**

**Basudhara Roy**





## Stitching a Home

By Basudhara Roy, Published by Red River (2021)

Price: Rs. 230/-

ISBN: 978-8195090006

Language: English, pp. 94

-Amrita Sharma

With a touch of the rhythmic hues that construct a metaphoric home for a wandering body and a fleeting soul, Basudhara Roy's second collection of poems brings a new and delicately crafted addition to Indian English poetry. In her own words, the poems in the collection "talk of many things - of moments, people, places, love and loss." With the title remaining a central and recurrent motif that runs throughout the collection, the poet herself comments: "What, however, makes them belong for me, is their aspiration to emotively configure the contours of home."

Divided into three parts, namely 'I Sift the City,' 'I'd still Keep it' and 'It Takes Time,' the collection contains fifty-three poems that sweep across a vast panorama of thoughts and emotions that all seem to originate and immerse within the sketch of a "home." Written in a language that is elegantly simple and lucidly vibrant, the poems talk of human emotions that surround a very contemporary frame. From personal to universal encounters, the reader is taken through images and trails that stand very relatable and yet distinctly exotic at times.

The poems in the collection thus bring forth themes that remain unnoticed and yet project everyday "chores," as one of the poems with this title notes, "In an uncertain / world, they offer me order, / sanity, assurance; become / the one hope on which my / conversation with each day / is embroidered." Thus, connecting an echoing experience to everyday symbols, the poems lead the reader on a thoughtful journey.



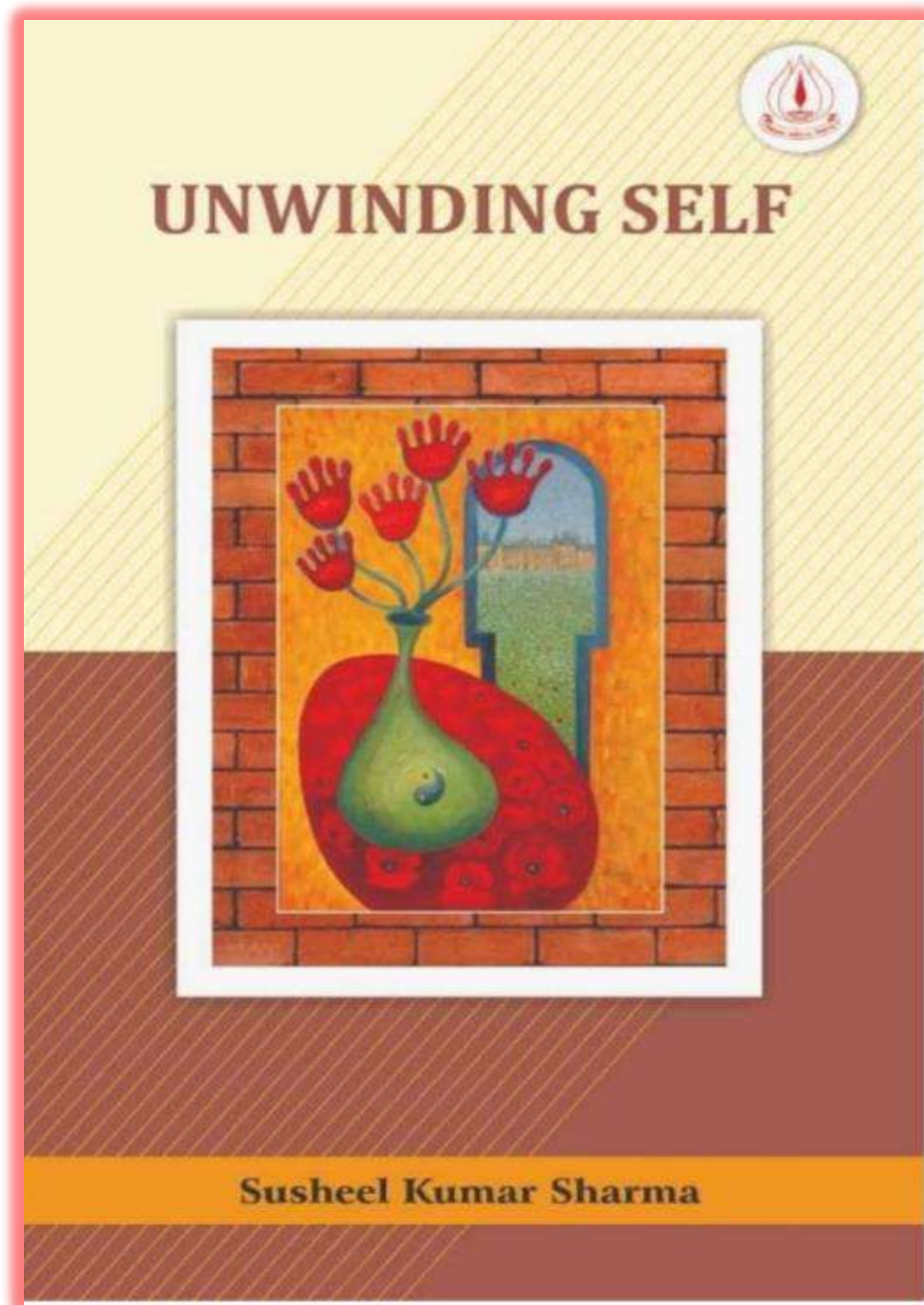
The print and design look elegant and stand out for a recurring image of a “home” throughout the pages. While the words in the print constantly weave together a collection of home imagery, both in physical and metaphoric spaces, the book’s cover and design also lend a unique feel to it. When held in hand, this thin collection appears impressive and beautiful.

The collection is thus a beautifully crafted “home” to the poetic words that manifest Roy’s simplistic perceptions and dense musings. It is recommended for readers looking for an easily chewable yet nuanced poetic appetite. It will make a perfect addition to one’s collection of finely blended modern contemporary Indian English poetry and a lucid companion to a quiet reading room.

### **About the writer:**



Amrita Sharma is a Lucknow-based poet and writer. She is a Ph.D in English Literature from the University of Lucknow and is presently working as a Guest English faculty at the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Una, Himachal Pradesh. She has worked as a Fulbright Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Languages and Cultures, University of Notre Dame, USA from August 2021 to May 2022. Her works have previously been published in several national and international journals. Her first collection of poems is titled *The Skies: Poems* and has been published as a part of ‘The Hawakal Young Poets Series 2022.’





## Unwinding Self: A Collection of Poems

By Susheel Kumar Sharma, Published by Vishwanath Kaviraj Institute, 2020

Price: Rs. 250/-

ISBN: 978-81-943450-3-9

Language: English, pp. 152

-Priya Sharma

“Poetry is a political act because it involves telling the truth”.

-June Jordan

*Unwinding Self*, as the title suggests, is an act of opening up of the poet's consciousness. This is the second anthology by Prof. Susheel Kumar Sharma after his much celebrated work, *The Door is Half Open*. Both the anthologies have carved a niche for Prof. Sharma in the world of Indian English poetry. As the aforementioned quote by June Jordan, the meaning of poetry in this collection is an act of telling the truth as well, we see layers of meanings coming out of the flowing words on pages, and every reader may identify with his own truth in the different layers of this anthology. These poems speak not only for the poet or the characters present in the poems, but also voice the conflict and chaos of every human on Earth. The trapped disillusionment and anger of the human heart and mind is given an outlet in these poems. These poems present the daily life experiences in such a unique way that the reader's attention is tangled for discovering the next statement that is written. These pieces appear as an array of scenes from people's life, traditions and emotions. At some places, these poems appear as interior monologues of the speaker and at some places they sound as a sarcastic comment on the situation under discussion.

In the poem, “Akshaya Tritiya”, the reader sees a festival of joy, merriment and fulfilment. As he says,

“The GDP may go up on this day;  
Even, Budhia is able to  
Eat to his fill;”



In the poems, “On Reading Langston Hughes” and “Theme for English B”, we come across the ambitions and aspirations of young minds willing to make an identity in this world,

“I am the only person  
Aspiring for higher education in my community.  
I have a dream of a better life;  
I have a dream of freedom  
To change my conditions  
I have a dream to love and to be loved  
I have a dream not to give up.”

In the “End of the Road”, the pain of the loss of vision is presented, and an elderly man is made to choose the right set of spectacles for the right occasion. In this collection one comes across the poet’s love for the Indian mythology, culture, traditions and festivals. Almost throughout the book, there are references of Hindu faith and doctrines and its philosophy. Repeated presence of the Indian mythological river, Ganga proves his inclination for the same. In the poems like “Snapshots”, “Durga Puja”, “Chasing a Dream on River Ganga”, “Bubli poems”, stories from the *Mahabharata* are loaded with his spiritual understanding. Glimpses of the Indian society are rooted in almost every poem, to quote a few would be “Allahabad” and “Yamuna Bridge”. We also find a vivid description of Bombay life in his poems like “Crowded locals” and “Distancing”. In the poem, “Kerala Flood 2018”, he gives a sarcastic comment on the corrupt political leaders who pose as gods but are of no use. As he says, “The proxies are no good.”

The glossary provided at the end proves helpful for the readers who are alien to the Indian culture and mythology that has been very vividly used for creating a picturesque glossary of emotions and culture. The book has a mixture of long and short lyric-like poems which are up to forty-two in number, but despite the length each and every piece is capable enough to leave an imprint on the readers’ mind. There is a use of a lot of enjambments in several stanzas, probably reflecting a kind of Wordsworthian school of poems, those which are an output of a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility. Poems are the refection of a poet’s emotions; in this anthology some poems are extremely moving and emotional. For instance, the poem, “Thus Spake a Woman” is a kind of an elegy or a dirge. A woman in this poem is unable to find enough reasons for the suicide of her own child. One really is made to feel the struggle of a mother in conceiving and giving birth to a child, who on growing old commits suicide, caring the least for the feelings and trauma of the parents after committing this appalling act.

“You were precious for me O child!

Why did you have to die?

I was bold to live this misery

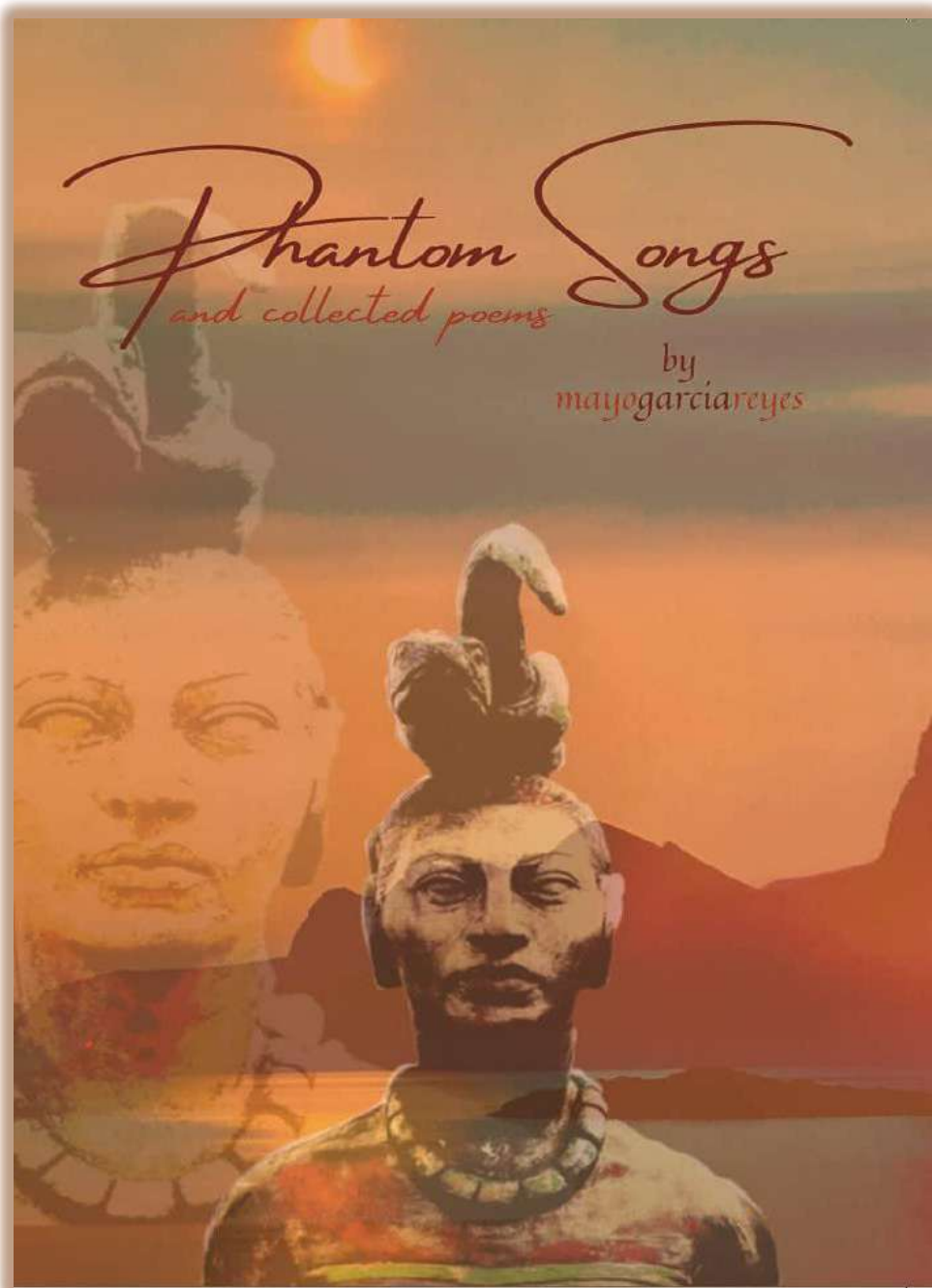
Why were you so weak, my child?”

These poems are true to the poet’s heart, as the very title suggests, *Unwinding ‘Self’*, these poems are a true reflection of the poet’s experiences in the society he inhabits. Some poems are extraordinary in their appeal and stir the relatable emotions in the readers’ heart. The use of various literary elements and poetic devices that attract the attention of the readers and also the rich caricature of life-like characters ensures a prominent place for Prof. Sharma in the midst of Contemporary Indian English poets.

### **About the writer:**



Priya Sharma is an Assistant Professor of English. She enjoys reading poems and short fiction. She is currently researching on Disability Studies.





## Phantom Songs

By Mayo Garcia Reyes, Published by Authors Press (2021)

Price: ₹ 495/-

ISBN: 978-9355290144

Language: English, pp. 178

-Vedamini Vikram

*"I "compose" or write poems, because I experience an elevation of infinitude when I slip into the phantom-sphere of my inner human light feeling the music, imagery and meaning of language, words and lexicon. A poem is an expression of words made conscious on paper. The "dream-world" of perception becomes a poem using the medium of language.*

*Language, words, the spoken or silent word is potentially a transformational force upon the human consciousness."*

- Mayo Garcia Reyes

Innumerable perspectives surround poetry as an expression. The poetic process has been explained variously as a metaphysical phenomenon, an output of ideological production and consumption as explained by Marxist thinkers, a spontaneous overflow of emotions recollected in tranquillity and even as a divine manifestation in some cultures. People explain and experience poetry in different ways. It is essential that we celebrate the existence of all these perspectives in spite of irreconcilable differences between them. This is why in an increasingly materialistic, rational and agnostic world, the creation and circulation of poetry like that of MayoGarciaReyes' is welcomed and encouraged. It can perhaps be best explained as a kind of spiritual poetry where a deeply personal experience is expressed in words, spaces, patterns, imagery and symbols and is communicated to the reader on multiple levels. The way in which this experience is shared or transported to the reader or the way in which this communication is encoded is where the real skill of a poet gets reflected.





*Phantom Songs and Collected Poems* is a compilation of poems by MayoGarciaReyes published in 2021. It includes poems drawing inspiration from a wide range of impulses and cues provided by nature, human feelings, geographical places, seasons and colours. It includes over a hundred poems interspersed with a variety of images with no preface or introduction, just a powerful prelude in the beginning:

“i have entered  
into your night’s solitudes  
love being  
a phantom song  
i have breath’d  
into your  
countries  
the night’s  
radiance..”

Going through these poems feels like witnessing a number of sceneries and travelling through a number of countries and landscapes and entering into someone else’s body, mind and spirit and still relating to the experience like it's your own. The craftsmanship is so organic, intuitive and yet skilful, that the reader feels like she has a direct access to the “dream-world of perception” of the poet through the words spread out on the pages before her. This is achieved in a number of ways.

One of them includes challenging the general form of expression. Lines break, letters drift away and rules of grammar get defied in almost all the poems. Brackets are left open-ended and sentences start midway without a beginning and sometimes conclude without an end. The first thing that this does is make one feel like they’re in unfamiliar territory. It lets go





of a sense of control and opens one to deeper forms of meaning. The following poem is a beautiful example of this idea:

***“Is breath (having the broken Green)”***

*..is*

*breath(having the broken green)*

*the light*

*d*

*r*

*i*

*f*

*t*

*i*

*n*

*g*

*Lining,*

*(shining)*

*trees as Countries Rain,*

*anointing*

*In green darkness from slowly dim Green Skies*

*having Leaves (the*

*infinite Green earth)*

*Nearest stars*

*“open”*



This unique placement of letters communicates what is usually lost in sentences that are familiar. This distancing from what we “know” and the language we accept as “normal” enables us to experience the new.

Another way in which a paralingual effect is made on the reader is through evoking images in a beautiful yet effortless way. The following poem is an example in which a familiar imagery is wrapped in unfamiliar expression:

***“At the kali temple***

***(dakshineswar)***

*they carry*

*water singing*

*of the body’s fruit,*

*adoring their*

*shadows*

*feet holding the earth’s swell*

*along*

*the sky’s ring,*

*green birds travel*

*above them*

*remembering*

*their names,*

*by firelight*

*praising*

*their*

*wombs..”*

It brings back an image that the reader has seen before even if not through a first-hand experience. The language and imagery in all the poems is filled with motifs of nature - rivers, skies, womb, winter, trees, rain, earth, soil etc. The poet self-admittedly speaks “the Sun’s language”. These are elements that everyone has had a personal interaction with. The way in which the poet weaves them together brings back the memory of a familiar experience and the primary emotions evoked are that of nostalgia and exhilaration.

In a way, the book is also a journey through India. The titles of the poems like “At Bodh Gaya”, “At Swami’s beach”, “Rishi poem”, “Spring at Dwarahat”, “Song of Asia” and “At Kali Temple” give us the context as to where the poems are coming from. The poems weave geographical places together in the thread of intimate perception, seeing the world in moments, sights and visions rather than geopolitical cross-sections of longitudes and latitudes. Travel through India, here, transcends names of cities and imagined boundaries or ‘Shadow Lines’. The poet is looking at trees, temples, fields in India and exploring a specific human emotion at the same time. It is like travelling through the soul of India and its aspects both corporeal and ephemeral. The poet has described his poetic journey as follows:

*“I have held you under burnished nights,*

*Phantom of my breathing, threading the countries with my perennial*

*songs...”*

Having gone through this enticing collection, one feels that it is fruitless to bind these poems in explanations of theories, poetic criticism and analysis. These poems are to be felt and lived. It is then that one comes to appreciate the effectiveness of the word ‘phantom’. These are truly phantom songs singing of the phantom existence that is our lives and minds.

### **About the writer:**



Vedamini Vikram is currently pursuing her Ph.D in English from the University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest include spiritual literature, performance studies, indigenous literatures and travel literature.



# SMASHING THE PATRIARCHY

A Guide for the 21st-century Indian Woman

SINDHU  
RAJASEKARAN





## **Smashing The Patriarchy:**

### **A Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Indian Woman**

By Sindhu Rajasekaran, Published by Aleph Book Company(2021)

Price: Rs. 699/-

ISBN: 978-93-90652-88-4

Language: English, pp. 271

-Nikita Yadav

In the 21st century, the affirmation that we have outgrown the chains of patriarchal beliefs wherein the male was regarded as the supreme authority in our society has already been rooted out to a certain extent in our consciousness. The belief is reinstated by citing how women of today are educated, independent and self-reliant. This may hold some truth if we go by the traditional definition, however, with the changing times the meaning and form of the patriarchal society have also evolved. Women in the 21st century face the same shackles of patriarchy, albeit an altered version, the only difference being that today they have their voices raised in defiance against such social norms which try to chain them. Amidst numerous such voices, this particular book, *Smashing The Patriarchy - A Guide for the 21st-century Indian Woman* by author and filmmaker, Sindhu Rajasekaran is an interesting take on how women coming from different social, cultural and professional backgrounds with diverse beliefs tackle patriarchy in their everyday lives. In the present times, when feminist theories and beliefs are considered overrated and beaten to death, this book is like a fresh breath of air. The book's most intriguing aspect is the absence of judgements or prejudices - the varied opinions are what the woman face in their daily lives and it is presented as it is without any fabrication, idealization or biasness.

The premise of the book is structured around women's issues with in-depth insights from the women themselves. In the chapter, "Beauty", Sindhu Rajasekaran talks about how women have to deal with the unreal standards of beauty and chauvinistic culture around them,

how they are judged if they dress up and at the same time are ridiculed if they are underdressed. Beauty has always been a double-edged sword when it comes to the Indian culture - men want women to look pretty and all dolled up but within certain parameters, and because of this, when women pursue femininity on their own terms, their fragile male ego gets hurt. Amidst such judgements and the looming presence of social media which objectifies beauty, it's the women who are standing up for themselves and making their own choices and have seemed to understand what Simone de Beauvoir meant when she said: *"To lose confidence in one's beauty is to lose confidence in oneself."* The chapter titled "Ishq in the Times of Tinder" talks about love, body politics, consent and of course the sacred of all - marriage. The best part of millennial love is that women are more self-aware and are not willing to compromise their dignity over love or marriages. Sindhu Rajasekaran deals with some "taboo" topics like sexual politics, self-love, and the meaning of consent, which are often not discussed even by people who consider themselves liberals. And for this very reason, it is refreshing to witness such uninhibited thoughts of women speaking their minds without holding back on such bold issues. Power has always been considered a male's prerogative, and to date, it is a real struggle to see women in any position of power in the patriarchal setup. The third chapter, "Women at Work" deals with gender bias, lesser representations of females in workplace culture, office politics, gender pay disparity, motherhood penalties and many more such complex issues concerning working women. Women, owing to their femininity, have to always take extra efforts as opposed to their male counterparts. The good thing is that millennial women are not shying away from these challenges, they are fierce when it comes to their profession and in their own way are working towards uprooting the patriarchal powerplay at work.

*"Femininity has many meanings in India. It always has and always will. It holds the secret of flight. Tells the story of creation. Gives the power to sustain. To love and raise. It is the rage that ends all evil."*

"Demystifying the Feminine", the fourth chapter, deals with femininity and what it actually means to Indian women. It is rooted in the ancient past of Indian culture- in the likes of Sita, Draupadi and Shikhandi, from where the writer takes her inspiration and delves deeper into gender performativity, femininity that transcends socio-cultural narratives, the art of reflexivity and female narcissism. Women today are embracing their feminine side in the way they choose to, taking back control over their bodies, hence dismantling the patriarchal notion of femininity. In the concluding chapter, "Society, Sanskar and Choice", we see how empowered women are judged because they are labelled as the ones who went against the so-

called “social norms”, the criticism also extends to the women who choose a traditional lifestyle, as they are considered to be weak and submissive. Every choice that a woman makes is always scanned under the lens of scathing criticism, however, contemporary women are free enough to make their own choices blocking out the redundant voices of mockery and objections that surround them.

While reading the book, the readers will find themselves invested and riveted by the diverse perceptiveness of the experts and the insights and visions of millennials and Gen Zs. Probably, what makes this book an outstanding read is that how it is essentially a compilation of opinions through the lens of numerous women, and the possibilities of interpretations are just endless but never unidimensional. As soon as the readers agree with a certain point of view, Sindhu Rajasekaran surprises them with an alternate perspective. However, certainly, there is a world not confined to these shared experiences in the book, as every woman’s experience of patriarchy differs from others radically. Sindhu Rajasekaran has written a well-researched and insightful narrative exploring the psyche of Indian modern women and their experiences with the patriarchy.

### **About the Writer:**



Nikita Yadav is a Ph.D Research scholar currently pursuing her Ph.D in English from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University Of Lucknow. A believer by nature, her areas of interest include feminist discourse and the psychoanalytical approach towards maternal thinking.

# NON FICTION

"Read a thousand books and  
your words will flow  
like a river"

~ Virginia Woolf





## But after all, who knows?

-Usha Akella

The concluding lines of the *Nasadiya Sukta*, known as the ‘Hymn of Creation’ of the *Rigveda*, reflect the heart of ‘Hinduism’, the pinnacle of revelatory literature free from the motive to establish religion:

*(Translation by Prof. Raimundo Panikkar (Ref. 3, pp 58, “The Vedic Experience- Mantra manjari published by Motilal Banarasidas.)*

को अद्धा वेदं क इह प्र वोचत्कृतं आजाता कुत इयं विसृष्टिः।

अर्वाग्देवा अस्य विसर्जनेनाथा को वेद यत आबभूव॥६॥

ko addhā vēda ka iha pra vōcatkuta āajātā kutā iyaṁ visṛṣṭiḥ |

arvāgdevā asya viśarjanēnāthā ko vēda yata āababhūva ||6 ||

इयं विसृष्टिर्यत आबभूव यदि वा दधे यदि वा न।

यो अस्याध्यक्षः परमे व्योमन्तसो अङ्ग वेद यदि वा न वेद॥ ७॥

iyaṁ visṛṣṭiryata āababhūva yadi vā dadhe yadi vā na |

yo asyādhyakṣaḥ parame vyōmantso aṅga vēda yadi vā na vedā

*But, after all, who knows, and who can say*

*Whence it all came, and how creation happened?*

*the gods themselves are later than creation,*

*so who knows truly whence it has arisen?*

*Whence all creation had its origin,*

*he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,*



*he, who surveys it all from highest heaven,  
he knows - or maybe even he does not know.*

The verse exemplifies the sheer scientific spirit of the ancient Indian seers who dared to explore questions of our origin, being, and end. It is the signature note on religious freedom—the ultimate wisdom to give each soul the unequivocal spiritual liberty to quest—and encapsulates the inevitable humility in the face of mystery.

For centuries, this is the India that the world has looked to—for spiritual guidance. It holds me together firmly—while I can still spiral out from this luminous core. This is the India whose ground I touch when I disembark from my plane. This is the India that gives me wings, and urges me to transcend every limitation within and without.

India's image in the world dawned on me through travel—she still holds her reputation as a spiritual beacon. In all my travels, about 20 countries till date, Tagore is *the* Indian poet quoted with reverence. Isrečko Kosovel, the Slovenian poet was convinced that Tagore would be able to show a new direction out of the disillusionment Europe was experiencing post-world war. A taxi driver in Jaffa, told me Israel looks to India for answers. A shopkeeper in Jerusalem dropped his prices by 50% when he confirmed I was Indian. An acupuncturist and herbalist in New Mexico told me that everything worthy in her life came from India. So often, the gesture of the 'namaste' has been extended to me—not as a cliché but as a sign of recognition.

And—I cannot reconcile the loftiness of the *Nasadiya*—with India today.

How to understand the religious and spiritual corporations well-oiled with modern marketing and brainwash strategies?

How to understand the nauseating rise and fall of India's gurus and spiritual teachers mired in sexual, political and economic scandals?

How to understand India so severely polarized as right wing or left wing?

What is definitely unfolding is a Hindu resurgence—a resurgence that seems necessary in the light of Indian History—but if it manifests in extreme it will cease to be the beacon touted by Swami Vivekananda—as fundamentalism in any religion wears the same ugly mask. Quotes from the *Upanishads* of universality and oneness are a mockery in the face of caste crimes, caste wars, communal hatred and religious intolerance.



The sickening corruption, materialism and consumerism has rendered a people devoid of a guiding center, we are ethically numbed and morally tattered. Ironically, the India that spawns truths that guide the world—eats her own tail. Today, India's culture is a spawn of Bollywood; a crazy mishmash of repressed or obscene sexuality, cultural clichés and confused paradigms.

My quarrel with India as a woman is deep, real and frightening.

I cannot reconcile the worship of the Devi with the perversity of sexual and gender crimes cited in the newspapers. The extreme threshold of the Delhi rape case that woke up the nation is an insight into a numbed moral compass. Rape hasn't abated since then, inter-generational trauma and violence is perpetuated by honor killings, dowry, and complicated female psychologies victimized by eons of social machinery.

When I beat my wings, there is half-flight, because the other archetype, *immanence* demands I confront the demise of the goddess, and look to India's roots before I reach for the gods of the sky.

Unless that transpires, India cannot be worthy of the vision it delivered to the rest of the world.

(The piece is an updated and edited version from its first publication in *The Rosary of Latitudes*, 2015)

### **About the writer:**



Usha Akella has authored nine books, including poetry, one chapbook, and two musical dramas. Her latest poetry book is *I Will Not Bear You Sons*, published by Spinifex, Australia. She earned an MSt. in Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge, UK. She is the founder of Matwaala ([www.matwaala.com](http://www.matwaala.com)) and [www.the-pov.com](http://www.the-pov.com), a website of curated interviews. She was selected as a Creative Ambassador for the city of Austin in 2019 & 2015.

She is widely anthologized and has been invited to numerous international poetry festivals all over the world.



## INDIA

-Namita Rai

The melodious lyrics of the song "Chaudhawi ka Chaand ho, ya aaftaab ho " on FM radio floated through the air and made its way into my senses. I was so swayed by the sweet romantic melody that I played with my tendril-like locks on my forehead and posed as Waheeda Rehman, with the image of Gurudutt in mind, in front of the mirror.

Gurudutt and Waheeda Rehman's romantic pair had made waves in that era. The ringing of a phone brought me back from my world of imagination.

I picked up and respectfully said "*Aadaab* "to uncle Hassan who returned my greeting, with his usual, "*Namaste*". His deep, soothing voice brought memories of papa. Tears blurred my eyes.

Since childhood, I had been tying *Rakhi* to his son Ashraf. I accepted uncle Hassan's invitation for the evening. How could I have forgotten Eid?

No wonder FM radio was playing songs on "*Chaand* " and "*chilman* ".

As we entered uncle Hassan's house a waft of aromatic *sewaiyaan*, *kebab* and *biryani* entered my nostrils titillating my taste buds. I found Vishnu panditji and uncle James already gracing the sofa in the drawing room.

Uncle Vishnu pandit was a chaste vegetarian for his family members, however a voracious meat eater outside. The day he was to eat nonveg, he would, as per his convenience, avoid reciting *mantras* and *shlokas* in front of God. My father who enjoyed pulling Vishnu panditji's leg used to say, "One day I am going to disclose this to panditaain". However, panditji never took this seriously or got offended. This friendship grew deeper on the football field of Naarmal school near river Gomti in Nishaatganj, where they gathered every evening to play football.

During these gatherings, the group often recounted the incidents from their youth. One was the boat incident and the other was the "*Bhaat* ceremony" in panditji's marriage.

It so happened that Vishnu panditji's marriage got settled in a Brahmin Orthodox family. He asked his friends particularly, James and Hassan to wear a sacred thread or



"JANAIU" around their body and pose as Brahmin in the *baaraat*. During the "*bhaat*" ceremony, all his friends were seated beside panditji in a *pangat*, when someone disclosed their real identities. The bride's grandfather was orthodox to the limit of eccentricity. He asked the friends to sit in another *pangat*. But Vishnu panditji insisted that if his friends were not allowed to sit with him, he would not marry.

With the intervention of some wise relatives, everyone agreed to panditji's suggestion and the marriage was solemnised. However, the bride's grandfather was extremely displeased over the fact that the groom's party didn't have knowledge of "DEV VAANI" or "Sanskrit" and were conversing in Urdu and foreign languages.

This is but one example of Vishnuji's Indianness. Such Vishnu pandits are found in every lane-by-lane *Nukkad*, *mohalla* and cities where the heart of India beats.

Such Indianness can be seen in sports grounds, literary meets, festivals, Cinema theatres, in scientific endeavours, philosophy and cultural gatherings, etc.

It has its roots in the Indus valley civilization, in the Mughal settlements, in the spiritual Rishis meditating in the Himalayas, in British subjugation and finally in liberated digital space. India, despite the ravages of time, has survived, developed, transformed and enriched as a nation. One cannot avoid mentioning the contribution of our holy and mythological scriptures as Geeta, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Quran, Gurbani, and Bible which teach us to be duty conscious, generous, self-sacrificing, not to forget our great leaders too who kept the unity and integrity of diverse India.

I am not wise enough to grasp the philosophy of Geeta but had seen elders in the family conducting themselves in the right manner and discipline. Hence Indian *sanskaras*, values and conduct were embedded in my being from childhood. Maybe because of my joint family bearings, which taught us to stick together in happy and difficult times. This great institution of the joint family system in India has grown in relevance, especially after the pandemic. The world also agrees with this today. The world recognises the sanskara of *ATITHI DEVO BHAVA* or Indian hospitality. That reminds me of an Italian guest who came to live with us in India for two months. He was a patient of my uncle and wished to experience a joint family system. I was a child then. I still remember that after coming back from school, I ran to my room and was shocked to see a lady in a royal blue robe with light golden hair lying on my bed. I ran to my mother and cried about the strange-looking lady who was in my room.



My mother laughed, and said, "she is not a lady, but your Freddy uncle. He has come all the way from Italy to see, how you sisters quarrel in a joint family system.

My much-pampered helper joined in the teasing and said "Didi Ji, now your story of quarrels will travel to Italy ". I stared at him in silence. Uncle Freddy was welcomed into the family by my grandmother who put a vermillion tilak on his forehead. In the beginning, we children were too shy and hesitant to approach him as we knew little English. But he smiled and offered us a box of candies. Everyone from children to helpers of the house as well as Granny welcomed him in their own special way. He was surprised to find that sixteen people were living under one roof amicably. And the house ran like a well-oiled clock. He would often observe my mother working in the kitchen and grandmother offering prayers to God or reading "RAMAYANA" and "SUKHSAGAR". He was not familiar with our language, so he used to communicate through his eyes and gestures. However, he wrote everything to his brother in letters.

Once he got a chance to attend an Indian marriage in relation. The bride's looks and attire charmed him so much that he exclaimed "I love Indian bride". Everyone around him laughed at his innocence. We introduced him to Indian cuisine and *chikan karri*.

Finally, it was time for him to leave. He gifted my mother, a musical box which on opening played "Lara's theme" and gave silver idols of lord Ganesha and Laxmi to grandma. He requested my mother through gestures to make a round thing for him, to eat. But no one could guess what he was asking. As he was about to leave for the Airport, we gifted him a doll of an Indian bride draped in a red *zari* sari with sequence work which was made by us. He was so overwhelmed that he knelt and touched my mother's and grandmother's feet with tears in his eyes. We all gave him a tearful farewell. As he boarded the plane my mother exclaimed, " Oh I had been so silly, actually Old Freddy was asking for round *puris* to eat, and we couldn't understand ". Then she chuckled light-heartedly, " Doesn't matter, we have given him an Indian bride, she will make *puris* for him". Uncle Freddy had caught the essence of India, which is just love and tolerance for the unique differences that God has given to us. This is how we live in India with Indianness and gift this incredible uniqueness to our guests also. By following our Indian sanskara of "ATITHI DEVO BHAVA".

Today the Pandemic has changed the whole approach to life. The cry for medicines, blood, and oxygen cylinders made one forget all the differences, animosities, hatred, selfishness and the concept of nuclear families has lost its shine.



The world is again looking for Indianness in its social institutions. Families are meeting more often, rebuilding relations and giving value to them.

One doesn't need to tour the whole of India, to get the feel of Indianness but just stay with one or two families to have the "*DARSHAN*" of Indianness or India of which we are so proud. India is bound by physical boundaries but its philosophy of *VASUDAIVA KUTUMBAKAM* transcends nation and makes India more unique and popular in the world.

**About the writer:**



Namita Rai is a teacher by profession and a poetess as well as a writer. She has a teaching experience of 17 years in prestigious institutions of ICSE and CBSC board. She writes poems, articles, memoirs and book reviews for newspapers, journals and magazines. She translated the book "Har Bachcha hai Khaas" from Hindi to English.



## Unfolding Queer India

-A V Apoorva Raman

The existence of the Indian queer component of the *desi* societal machinery is as old as the country's culture itself. It is not off the record that even today the majority from the Spectrum choose to stay closeted in their own right and safety. I, being a queer of Indian parentage, have experienced and seen my fellow denizens struggling to come to terms with their own selves.

The purpose of this piece of writing is to compel the audience to speculate and learn about an equally important marginalized section of their society whose existence was not even recognized by the Indian constitution itself until recently. Historical enquiry provides a context and legitimacy to their struggles, giving their voices a relevance in the world which has been long deaf to their sense of self. In a heteronormative world, the queer Indians remain structurally oppressed and unrecognized in almost all major fields of work. They are discriminated against, in societies, households, and even at times, in other seemingly accepting countries where they are privy to multiple discriminations based on race, sex, partner preferences and gender identities.

### I

In ancient India, homosexuality or a non-normative sexual identity was acknowledged as “Tritiya prakriti” or third nature. The acceptance of the concept of gender fluidity had associations with the famous Indian myth of Lord Vishnu taking the avatar of Mohini, showing that both masculinity and femininity reside in one's body. Another example is the “Ardhanarishwara” form of Lord Shiva, an androgynous blend of Shiv and Shakti. There are other similar accounts that defy gender normativity in the Indian culture. Koovagam festival celebrated in South India, is one of the largest annual gatherings of trans people in India celebrating love and diversity.

### II

Looking at recent trends in the indigenous chapter of all things Rainbow, Ashok Row Kavi is a person of prominence as he was the first Indian queer to come out to the world. He founded the first queer magazine *BombayDost* in 1990.





Works like, *Lotus of Another Colour* by Rakesh Ratti provide interesting insights into the subject. Kaushalya Bannerji has recorded interviews of South Asian Queers and their experiences. *Sakhiyani* by Geeta Thadani explores women relationships in the Indian context. *Facing the Mirror: Lesbian writing from India* is a collection of Indian lesbian experiences. *The Truth about Me: A hijra life story*, giving voice to the hijra community, is an autobiographical account of A. Revathi.

### III

Lucknow's first Trans hospital was opened on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 in Hazaratganj, making history in being the first transgender clinic of India. There are several active organisations in India that provide various kinds of assistance to Indian queers like Sappho for Equality, Humsafar Trust, Sangini based in New Delhi, Humraaz (providing services for queer men). Our very own Awadh queer pride that stands as a representative of the queer people living in the vicinity of Lucknow began in 2017 and held its 6<sup>th</sup> pride parade at Rana Pratap Marg in the month of February. The circle keeps expanding as more and more people are coming out recently and speaking about their dysphoria encouraged by the support and love that pours from the community as well as allies.

The Indian Queer lens is slowly emerging as a strong voice in the normative mainstream life pushing the boundaries of the yore to form a neo-culture of acceptance and sensitivity.

#### **About the writer:**



Apoorva is a student of the University of Lucknow, and also an avid reader. Currently stuck in the House of Fae, battling between the genre of fantasy and the not-so-appealing reality.



## Tales of the Shutter Sutra

-Ganesh Saili

“If you can’t make a decent picture,” I heard S. Paul, doyen of Indian photography, say to his son: “At least find a decent face to photograph!”

I guess that says it all. I try to teach my charges the different positions from which you can take a picture.

“Knees!” I remind them. “Are made to be bent. Never mind if your clothes get soiled. Get on with it.”

And so I take my class through the gamut of history that begins with the Greeks, who called anything with an arched cover *kamara* – as in a room or box. Light came in through a pinhole to produce an inverted image on the opposite wall. During the Renaissance, painters and artists used this invention and you see it reflected in their paintings. In his notes, Leonardo Da Vinci illustrates a miniscule hole on one wall through which light enters, creating an inverted image on the opposite wall.

Of course some believe that it was an Arabic invention dating back to the eleventh century. They were the first to use it to observe solar eclipses. Afterwards, much later, came the *camera obscura*, reduced in size and with a ground glass at one end so that image was seen on the outside. You could say it was the forerunner of the *portabilis* which came much later in the nineteenth century.

In my case though, I hereby do plead guilty to practicing photography without a license. This casual flirtation with pictures began in the summer of 1975. At the time, how I wish I had known that a casual affair would possess me and end up grabbing all the days of my life. I do remember that it began with the June issue of *Imprint Magazine*, R.V. Pandit, where the owner-publisher announced the release of India’s first picture book with the following quote: “Even though I say so, *Ganga: Sacred River of India*, with photographs by Raghubir Singh and text by Eric Newby is the finest pictorial book Indians have ever produced.” Pompous as it sounded, he had a point. It had cost oodles of money to produce. I wasn’t smitten. I was sold - hook, line and sinker – promising that someday I too would do my own coffee table book. That came along in 1995, when Ruskin Bond and I were asked to do a book on our hill station entitled



*Mussoorie and Landour: Days of Wine & Roses.* Looking back down the years, lugging my cameras, I find the past is another country where things were done differently. And standing on the cliff's edge of three score plus ten, one thing I know for sure is that humans, not places, make up memories.

On occasion, my camera takes me to different parts of the country. On one such occasion, I was wandering around Konark's Sun Temple when I saw a photographer with a cluster of old analogue cameras strung around his neck much in the manner of our politicians bedecked in marigold garlands.

How on earth did he use these?

Where did he find the film?

Or for that matter, who processed them? I wondered.

I tried striking up a conversation but he dismisses me with a withering glance saying: *'Mobilewala photographer hai kya?'*

Before I can open my mouth, he has moved on with a gaggle of tourists in tow. 'Smile!' he shouts at his customers, at the last moment whipping out a smart phone from his hip pocket finishing his task.

Clever man! It's the moment of truth. All those outdated cameras are only decoys, or props or window-dressing to attract the unwary.

Mouth agape, I stand there, knowing how the dinosaurs must have felt like when that meteor hit the Earth, triggering mass extinction.

A somewhat similar tale unfolded at the Parsonage which is home to the celebrated actor Victor Banerjee. And lest this tale get too long in the telling, suffice it to say: boy meets girl, they fell in love and parents disapproved. A perfect recipe for a runaway wedding with Victor as photographer with an old analogue camera.

'Ganesh! Please drop this at the photo lab' he says, handing me the film. I did so. Later I picked up the results. Or so I thought. There were none – just a roll of celluloid.

'The prints?' I ask with trepidation. Victor was going to be cross with me. And you're right, he was but only with himself. 'What do we do now?' He asks.

'What do you mean *we*?' I mumble, passing him a felt-tipped pen. "Write something on the



celluloid.” It must be said, it looked cute, a yard of film stretched across the bridal pillows with the legend: ‘Happy Wedding pictures. 1992!’

Who said something about truth being stranger than fiction?



## IN CHARLEVILLE'S LONG SHADOW

-Ganesh Saili

‘Would you consider teaching photography to our Officer Trainees?’ boomed Santosh Mathew’s baritone. In 1996, he was a Course Coordinator at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration.

‘Santosh!’ I teased. ‘You don’t need a joker in the pack?’

‘Of course not!’ He assured me: ‘All India Service officers should have a hobby.’

‘Like a safety valve on a pressure cooker?’ I joked.

Arrived in a classroom brimming over with officer trainees, my heart pounded away. But I needn’t have worried. Missing was the euphoria of clearing one of the toughest exams in the country. While each officer trainee was bright, the one seated next to them, was brighter. This was no melting pot, it was a mosaic. Each retained the identity of their varied backgrounds: river and mountain, greenery and desert, wealth and poverty, urban living and tribal ways. This is where they merged into the Steel Frame of India.

Of course, there were give-aways: ill-fitting safari suits meant small towns or rural backgrounds, while the bold and the brash stuck were sore thumbs in Wrangler jeans, Reebok shoes and Dolce & Dolce Gabbana shades looking like out-of-season mangoes.

With the blender of training, packed from dawn to dusk, with jogging, physical training, horse riding and back-to-back classes. Cultural activities sandpapered all differences, *Bharat* and India merged becoming one. Sleep-deprived probationers perfected the art of sleeping with their eyes wide open.

Anyway, down the years, I did try to do my tuppence bit initiating trainees into the magic of making pictures. Some took to photography like ducks to water; others sank without a ripple. My mind’s magic lantern throws up Keshav Chandra, who came back with images of places like Arunachal. Power to you Keshav! Rumours of your new-found affair with watercolours, continue to disturb me.

Rumours had little to do with the light-fingered thief aboard a night train, during Bharat Darshan, who flicked a camera to nip in the bud a promising photographer like Himani Pande. Poor wretch! For a handful of silver, he deprived us of pictures of Jharkhand. Though what he



could not steal was the brilliance of her images now taken on a cell phone. Later I was asked to judge a photo exhibition alongside the redoubtable Joint Director, Mr Binod Kumar. Nudging him, I almost spilt his coffee. He was not amused. ‘I hate to trip you, but you’re giving all the prizes to one person.’ I remarked.

‘How do you know?’ he growled suspiciously. ‘Are you into match-fixing?’

“Look at the vibrant use of form and colours!”

“Not possible!” he muttered, taking the prints off their mounts, as he turned them over, each revealed the same name: Naveen Sona, who in later days held solo exhibitions all over the country, capturing moments that would be lost forever.

Time cannot bring back Gauri Katol of the Audit & Accounts from the hereafter, a probationer meant to scale greater heights. It was not to be. And today, looking through old pictures, I find one of her astride a chestnut stallion, with merry abandon, clearing hurdles on Happy Valley’s famous riding field.

No stiles to clear for Abhinav Shivam of 2016. He had an eye for pictures. No matter who wins the toss, stunning pictures of Nagaland are guaranteed.

After two decades of lugging my cameras around the Administrative Academy, standing on the cliff’s edge of three score plus ten of our allotted days, one thing I know for sure: humans, not places, make better memories.

### **About the writer:**



Ganesh Sali, born and home-grown in the hills, belongs to those select few whose words are illustrated by their own pictures. Author of two dozen books; some translated into twenty languages, his work has found recognition worldwide.



## **A Brief History of “Literary History” in Assamese**

-Dhurjjati Sarma

Writing a literary history of any language is an act of retracing the footprints of time that takes one back into the imaginative and thoughtful universe of those who helped shape and determine through the ages the destiny of the linguistic-literary culture in question. Just like the present-day world plagued and scarred by discontinuities and uncertainties of time and spirit, so were the times of our forefathers; and, therefore, the way they conceived and imagined the world around them was likewise tentative and contingent upon spatial-temporal specificities of the age. With the benefit of hindsight, the future generations have attempted to rationalise or make sense of the imaginative-thoughtful output of their forefathers handed down to them through oral compositions or extant literary works in manuscripts that have withstood the ravages of time. Literary history is a way of commemorating the artistic and creative achievements of the bygone eras, and, through them, of forging an unbroken link connecting the contemporary state of affairs with that of the past — the older the connection, the stronger the claims of the language towards autonomy and self-assertion.

This teleological burden often impinges upon the structural and ideological premises that shape the histories of literature in India, during both the colonial and nationalist phases of modern history. In Assamese, the need for a comprehensive history of Assamese literature was felt during the last decade of the nineteenth century among the members of the ‘Asomiya Bhashar Unnati Sadhini Sabha’ (Society for Promoting Welfare of the Assamese Language) in 1888, and, accordingly, Kanaklal Baruah and Ramakanta Borkakati took upon the responsibility of collecting and cataloguing old Assamese manuscripts from various sources. Based on these resources, the first history of Assamese literature written by Debendranath Bezbaroa came out in 1912. Immediately following this publication, Hemchandra Goswami was entrusted by the government of Assam to undertake, in an official capacity, the mission of collecting Assamese manuscripts of yore and compiling a descriptive catalogue of them. As part of this mission, Goswami also compiled a multi-volume selection of Assamese literary works called *Asomiya Sahityar Chaneki* (Typical Selections from Assamese Literature) which was published under the auspices of the University of Calcutta in 1929. An important literary critic and historian who took up the task of writing the history of Assamese literature in the pre-Independence period and continued thereafter was Dimbeswar Neog who wrote as many



as six histories in English and Assamese, among which the two comprehensive ones are *New Light on the History of Asamiya Literature* (1962) and its Assamese translation as *Natun Poharat Asomiya Sahityar Buranji* (1964). The twentieth century was a period of framing an identity of Assam not only as a ‘region’ in itself but also as an integral part of the Indian ‘nation’, particularly imagined as *Aryavarta* — the cradle of Indic civilisation. This ‘framing’ characterised multiple efforts at reconstructing the ‘history’ of Assam through concerted endeavours of retrieving, compiling, and editing *buranjis* (medieval chronicles) on the one hand, and at composing literary works based on historical events in the form of novels and plays on the other hand. The new literary experimentations of the period were active determinants of an evolving literary taste of a new reading public in Assamese.

With the establishment of Gauhati University in 1948 began the institutionalised study of Assamese literature, and thereby necessitated the construction of a canon of literary works for in-depth textual and academic study. Satyendra Nath Sarma (*Asomiya Sahityar Samikshatmak Itibritta* [1959, 1981]) and Maheswar Neog (*Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha* [1962]) were instrumental in shaping the opinions and thought-processes pertaining to the critical-textual study of Assamese literature in general and literary history in particular. Both the histories, written in Assamese, and running through multiple editions, have documented the trends and movements in Assamese literary history till 1980. As part of the Sahitya Akademi project of histories of Indian literature, the *History of Assamese Literature*, written by Birinchi Kumar Barua, was published in 1964. A supplementary volume, edited by Gobinda Prasad Sarma, was published by Sahitya Akademi in 2013. Apart from these single-author volumes, a mega multi-authored six-volume project on *Asomiya Sahityar Buranji* under the auspices of Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture (ABILAC), Guwahati, is in progress. The project was undertaken in 1991, and, so far, five volumes out of six have been published.

[ Note: The above observations form part of a project on a critical history of Assamese literature that the author is presently working on. It is hoped that this write-up will provide a preliminary awareness on the development of “literary history” as an important marker of identity and self-assertion on the part of the Assamese intelligentsia throughout the twentieth and the early years of the twenty-first century.]



**About the writer:**

Dhurjjati Sarma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, Gauhati University, Assam. He was earlier a Production Editor at SAGE Publications, New Delhi, and, before that, a Research Fellow in North East India Studies at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. He is presently engaged in studying the early and modern literatures of Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu from a comparative-cultural perspective. As a student and teacher of comparative literature, he is also trying to develop new insights and perspectives on the composite area of comparative literary history. His writings have been published under Sahitya Akademi, Routledge, and Palgrave Macmillan, and in journals like “*Space and Culture, India*” and “*Margins: A Journal of Literature and Culture*.” He is presently working on a critical history of Assamese literature.



## **THE UNIQUE INDIAN GEOFORMS**

-K.N.Singh

Nations get recognition for the natural beauty of their land forms and the wisdom of their people. The unique geo-morphological land forms in India are 4.6 billion years old. They show the Earth's successive history of development. The Earth consists of five elements or 'Panch Mahabhoots' that constitute the 'Pind'- a round solid lump or planet.

India existed as a part of the Gondwana land long back in the present day Indian Ocean in the south. This is the direction of 'Yama', the god of death and decay. The Gondwana land disintegrated and some of it migrated to the north and north-westerly direction as continents of South America, Africa and as the Indian subcontinent. India and Sri Lanka were a single tectonic plate which separated later during the Himalayan orogeny. It was as a result of this that the 'Patal lok' or the realm of existence of 'Yama' was created in the south.

I don't like to immortalise or concede to accept the mythological story of 'Samudra Manthan'. But I would like to appreciate the wonderful scientific wisdom of the ancient Indian sages and saints who said that Lord Brahma sitting on the lotus flower emerged from 'Kshirsagar' to create the universe. He was highly perplexed to find himself in the sea. Brahma had no one to either consult or guide him in commencement of creation.

Lotus flowers are found in ponds and lakes. They are never found in the sea. Brahma's lotus was a unicellular, stem-less and non-flowering algae. The first biological life proliferated into the plant and animal kingdom from the sea. Like this mythological story, India is a treasure of many more ancient scripts such as Vedas, Purans, Upanishads, and the Ramayan.

The Indian craton, almost triangular in shape, having a vertex facing south is surrounded by sea on three sides. It is composed of different rocks of varying ages, forming mountains, valleys, plains and rivers. The sacred Narmada river ascends from Amarkantak, the neck of Shiva and flows westwards in a rift valley. It is the largest west flowing river and is almost 270 million years old. The river has no estuaries or deltas. The Sardar Sarovar Dam on the river with the tallest statue in the world is a big tourist attraction. The geo form of Indian craton contains rich mineral wealth. The most precious stones i.e diamonds were first known to human beings during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. They were first mined in India in the early 1700s.



The meteorite impacted Lonar Lake of Maharashtra State in the Deccan traps is visited by geoscientists of the world. This God created lake on 'Bhu Lok' is a gift of nature to the people.

The craton is fringed by the lofty Himalayas in the north. The mountain ranges with valleys are the source of the origin of north Indian rivers. The hills are covered by snow and glaciers. The mountain Kailas is considered to be the abode of Lord Shiva. The name Himalaya is appropriate as it is a house of snow. Water is the most precious mineral for survival of human beings. Water exists everywhere in all dimensions of the world. Some essential forms of water are clouds, snow and glaciers. They are much superior as compared to stagnant or flowing waters of ponds and rivers. There is believed to be divinity in water bodies which are located higher up, above the ground level. The dark clouds represent divine forms and are called Indra or Varun. The water in the clouds becomes inferior in quality as they descend and deteriorates considerably after merging with oceans. The Himalayas are called 'Deo Lok' because of the quality of water.

The Indo-Gangetic plain between Himalayas in the north and Bundelkhand-Vindhyan-Hazaribagh plateau in the south cover an extensive area from Aravalli Delhi ridge in the west and Rajmahal hills in the east. It is the youngest geoform of India. The fore deep that came into existence during the Himalayan Orogenic Movement commenced with fluvial sedimentation. Sediments such as sand, silt, clay and gravel from the northern and southern high land filled the fore deep in cyclic order. The interruption in sedimentation was caused due to glaciations.

The landforms so created by geological processes were identified by our ancestors as unique for dwelling and agricultural practices. It was one of the most precious gifts of nature. Lord Rama and Krishna preferred to take birth in this wonderful land. In the ancient city Varanasi, Buddha delivered his sermons at Sarnath in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Nature is a source of divinity and eternal love. It is imperative to establish harmony between mind and nature for the flow of creativity that can be attained on any of the wonderful Indian geo-forms. The physical consciousness has wings to connect with spirituality. This will lead to blissful feelings about the unique Indian geo-forms. The poet Iqbal rightly said "Saare Jahan se acchaa Hindustaan hamara".

**About the writer:**

K.N.Singh was born in a small village of Uttar Pradesh, in 1937. After completing Intermediate Science from Wesley school in Azamgarh, he proceeded to Varanasi to pursue Masters Degree in Geology at Banaras Hindu University. In 1961 he became a Lecturer at the Department of Geology and Geophysics in B.H.U. He left the teaching profession to become a professional geologist in the Geological Survey of India in July 1964. He retired as a Director of Petrology Division. He has written articles that are published in the Gulf Daily News, Khaleej Times of Bahrain and Dubai. He wrote the book *A Geo-scientific Perspective of Samudramanthan* which was published in 2020.

# PHOTOGRAPHY

“To other countries, I may go as a tourist, but to India, I come as a pilgrim.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.



**"Flag hoisting at University of Lucknow"**



**"Tranquility of our times"**

**Pictures Courtesy :  
Ajeet Kumar Gupta**





**"Walls have stories to tell, because stories are written on them. In bright and vibrant colors of all hues, people speak their heart out with graffiti."**



**Pictures Courtesy :**

**Ahmed Firoz**

**Senior Strategist: Industry and Economic Affairs Two  
Oceans Strategy, UK**

**A photographer by passion.**

**A disability workshop "Interpreting Disability: An Exploration of Separation and Togetherness" was held on 20th September, 2022 at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. This workshop was conducted by Keystone Institute India.**







# **RHETORICA**

## Call for submissions

War and Peace, two antithetical, yet, at the same time, interrelated states of affairs and being. Without the existence of war, peace loses, at least, some of its meaning and vice versa. After all, in a manner of speaking, what is peace if not the absence of war and what is war if not the cessation of peace. Humans have waged wars, both, to disrupt and regain peace.

The idea of war is an inextricable part of the human condition. Man has always been in conflict with others and, at times, with oneself. The upcoming issue of Rhetorica intends to explore the different facets and possibilities of 'war' and 'peace' at political, personal, cultural and other levels.

Rhetorica, the literary society of the Department of English and Modern European Languages, calls for submissions on the theme of War and Peace for its upcoming issue.

### **THEME- WAR AND PEACE**

#### **CATEGORIES-**

**FICTION (UPTO 1500 WORDS)**

**NON-FICTION (500-800 WORDS)**

**BOOK REVIEW (800 WORDS)**

**POETRY (3-5 EACH)**

**VISUAL ARTS (2-5 EACH)**

**Deadline : 15 November, 2022**

Note:

- Submissions should strictly abide by the theme.
- They should be mailed as either .doc (non-fiction, fiction and poetry) or .jpeg (for photography) files only.
- Submissions should not exceed the word limit.
- They should be original and should not have been published anywhere previously.
- They should be free of plagiarism. A Declaration regarding the same should be attached with the submissions.
- Contributors should mail a high resolution photograph and a bio-note of not more than 100 words along with their submissions.
- All the submissions may be mailed at [rhetoricaquarterly@gmail.com](mailto:rhetoricaquarterly@gmail.com)



## A brief History:



Having grown and evolved amid the rich cultural legacy of the city of Lucknow, the Department of English and Modern European Languages at the University of Lucknow is proud of its rich literary heritage. Many alumni of the department have left an indelible imprint by becoming distinguished contributors to Indian literature and philosophy. The glorious, vibrant, creative history of our department begins with Prof. R. H. Nixon B.A. (Cambridge) who headed the department from 1925-1926. At a very young age he renounced the material world, took sanyas and became known as Swami Krishna Prem. Through his writings on Indian philosophy and mysticism he continues to enlighten the seekers of spiritual life. The department was also graced by Swami Chinmayananda, who remains legendary as an international spiritual leader. Our department classrooms have also been home to the earliest literary musings of leading writers like Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain and Qurratulain Hyder, who made significant contribution to Indian Writing in English. Eminent Hindi poets Raghuvir Sahai, Girijakumar Mathur, Kunwar Narain, Anamika and the Hindi novelist Kamta Nath remain the creative luminaries of our department. It is equally noteworthy that Padamshree Chandrasekhar Rath, who wrote in Oriya and Padamshree Raj Bisaria, who continues to contribute to the world of theatre are illustrious gems in our vibrant literary and cultural landscape. With unfailing enthusiasm, the department of English and Modern European Languages continues to nurture young literary minds hoping to find a voice of their own.