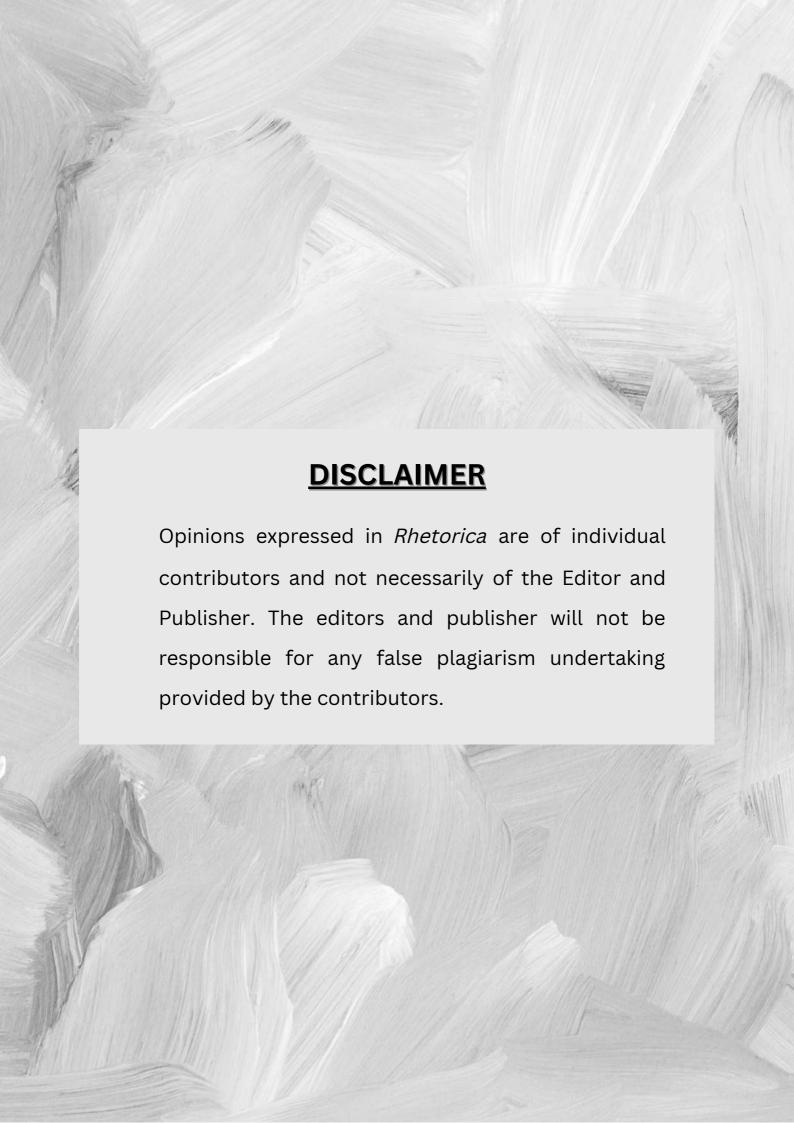
# Rhetorica A Literary Journal of Arts



Department of English and Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow



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**Professor Nasreen** 

(1962-2016)

### **War and Peace**

Unread, unopened, never sullied by a prying reader's eyes, the book has glared at them, on many apathetic evenings. Three inches wide, it dominates a shelf. Passive-aggressive in its cased two volumes, it has waited to begin a conversation, when they surrender, as they surely must.

And now, with pregnant war upon them, its moment has arrived; it comes down from the shelf. He is enthralled by Pierre's dilemmas
He wants the book to never end.
She hurries swiftly to the climax.
She doesn't like the characters at all.
She wants to take a swingeing sabre, and cut the tale to less than half its length.

They search for clichés to describe it.
'War is hell!' is all that he can muster.
She clears her throat and gently whispers,
'It may be so, but how I hated peace.'

-John Thieme

# Letter from the Chair

Dear Reader,

Greetings and a warm welcome to another edition of Rhetorica Quarterly (Vol. III, Issue I). This issue is dedicated to the theme of War and Peace. Each day, there is a news of war crime and then yet each day the world moves on with the spirit of survival. Strengthening this spirit, the issue brings out joys of poetry and prose, art and photographs delivering the nuances of our idea of war and peace.

I express my profound gratitude to the Honourable Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alok Kumar Rai, for his support and guidance. The Department of English and Modern European Languages encourages you to become an active part of this ongoing literary magazine. Your expertise and experience can be used to enrich all of our professional and personal lives.

I extend my gratitude to the student editors who have worked tirelessly for the same. I hope this issue stirs you from within.

Happy Reading!

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



# Letter from the desk of Chief Editor

Dear Reader Friends,

We welcome you to a new issue of Rhetorica focusing on the theme of "war and peace". We are delighted to bring more and more pages of creativity and art for our readers from different walks of life. Constant struggle for power and authority has made man his own enemy. We see battles being fought for assertion of power and lives being crushed under the weight of greed and animosity. Buddha's message of peace and Gandhi's call for practice of ahimsa has contemporary relevance. It is important for us to remember our mortal frame will degenerate and get destroyed, but our actions will determine the course of future generations. Borders divide us, define us and borders protect us. All creative souls aspire to live in a borderless world. Hence it is important that we join hands to usher in an era of love and peace across the globe. Let no man hurt the other and let there be enough for all. Let this world be filled with peace and let us create a world that thrives on mutual coexistence and harmony. With world peace becoming a persistent threat, and inner peace posing a challenge, this issue of Rhetorica addresses the subject with a deep sensitivity through different and diverse contributions.

We dedicate the issue to Late Professor Nasreen (1962-2016) our much-loved teacher in the Department. She was a wonderful colleague and an extremely good teacher with a kind heart. She is remembered very fondly by all of us.

I thank our Rhetorica family for their faith in us and the editorial team of the Department of English and Modern European Languages for their unconditional support.

I hope the readers will enjoy the collection.

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



### EDITORIAL TEAM

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



**SHUBHAM SINGH** 

#### CO- EDITOR

He is a postgraduate student at the University of Lucknow. Dangling between Metaphysical Poets and John Osborne, he is "just pretending to be a human being."





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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.



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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.



#### PRACHI KHOLIA CO-EDITOR

She is a poet and an avid reader with a curiosity for everything. Her works have been published in literary publications like Trouvaille Review, The Chamber Magazine and Dreich Magazine

#### FICTION



#### YUSUF AYAZ 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.



#### YASHVI SRIVASTAVA CO-EDITOR

She is a senior research fellow at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest are queer theory, gender studies, cultural studies and Disability studies.



#### SHIVANGI VERMA CO-EDITOR

She is pursuing her Master's degree at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. An occasional scribbler, she likes to read and collect quotes.

#### **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.



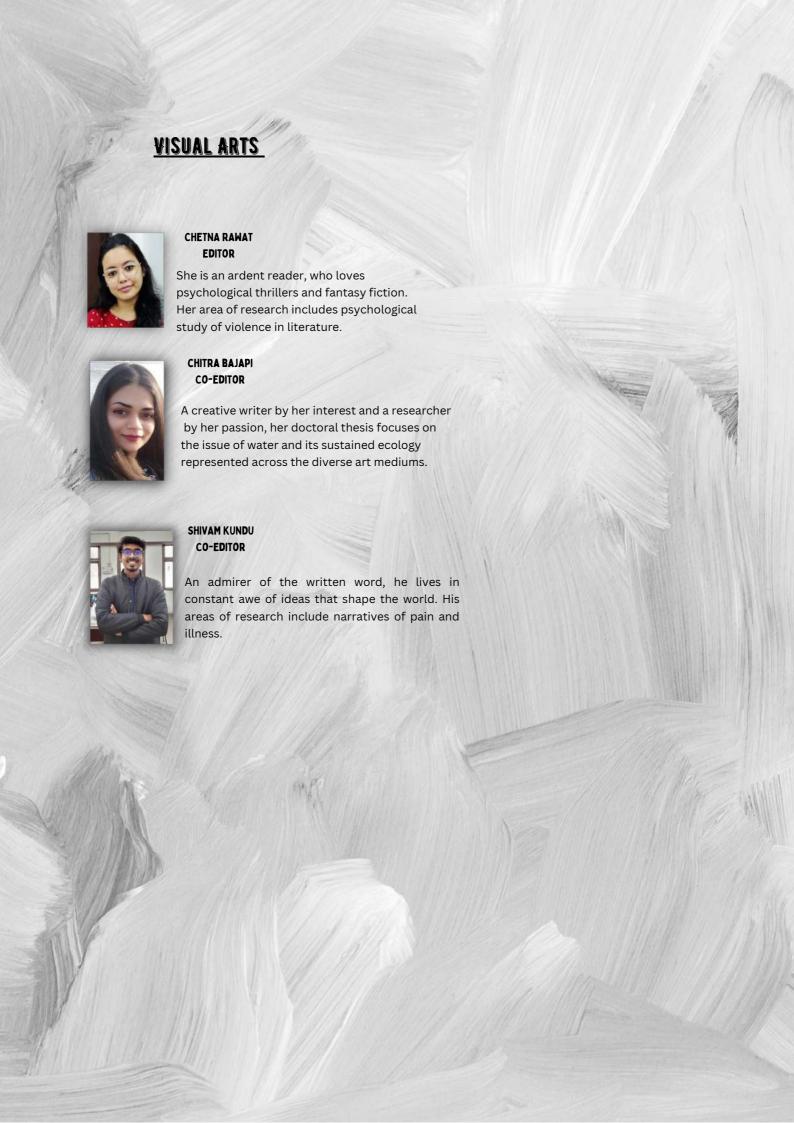
### AQSA ERAM CO-EDITOR

Intrigued by the classic and the imaginative, she is on an exploration of the human experience as depicted in literature and films.



#### APOORVA RAMAN CO-EDITOR

Intensifying her existential crises by indulging in Franz Kafka, she is often seen hoarding books and increasing her ever growing To-Be-Read section.



# Letter from the Editor

Dear reader

"War and Peace is what the author wished and was able to express in the form in which it is expressed," wrote Tolstoy in an article on his novel this issue is an eponymous twin to. At the risk of appearing work-shy, I am appropriating that statement for my own use in order to carry out the daunting task of introducing you to the first issue of the third volume of *Rhetorica*.

The two terms that constitute the theme of this issue have an interesting relationship with one another. The rigid dichotomy that exists between war and peace indicates that they are fundamentally at loggerheads, at 'war' with one another, but, upon reconsideration one realizes that it's often difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. A highly relevant theme considering the signs of the times, the creative expressions and artistic endeavors put together in the pages ahead explore the different facets of conflict and the lack of it in political and personal discourses across physical, psychological and ideological apparatuses.

I would like to thank the Head, Department of English and Modern European Languages, Prof. Maitraye Priyadarshini, for her guidance and support. I would also like to thank Prof. Ranu Uniyal, Editor in Chief, *Rhetorica*, for being the intellectual and emotional leader of the journal. Along with the contributors, editors and designing team, I would like to thank you, the readers, from the entire *Rhetorica* fraternity, for, what Whitman said about poets holds true for journals too. "To have great poets journals, there must be great audiences," happy reading!

Regards, Yusuf Ayaz Editor, Fiction.



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# Non Fiction

"Peace does not mean an absence of conflicts; differences will always be there."

-Dalai Lama

# Writing and Art: Instruments of Survival for Victims of Ukrainian War

#### -Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry

It is hard to believe that a real military war would emerge particularly when the world is already jostling with the pandemic. The timing, the demographics and the so-called 'reasons' (if at all) are all wrong.

July/August 2022 issue of *World Literature Today* collected 24 voices of the writers witnessing Ukraine-Russia war from cities of Odesa and Kharkiv. These writers ponder over the situation, condemn war, highlight their practical challenges of migration to other lands and discuss the process of surviving, staying resilient and hoping for peace to restore through writing, poetry, and music amidst the foray of armed men in streets. Curfew has been enforced and tanks crowd these streets now. Semyon Abramovich describes how his life changed:

War enters my life and becomes a reality. The daily air-raid sirens, the sounds of air-defense systems working, the deafening explosion of missiles...life is divided in half, into two parts before and after. (WLT p42)

Reading stories of war as history, narrative or some legendary tale is different than the practical reality of living it. The calmness of the peaceful times, the sights of vendors on the roads, the humdrum of a city life, people buzzing out of shops and malls, or the clumsy traffic of a normal everyday life transforms into the haunting silence on streets encroached by soldiers with weapons and guns, marching in their heavy boots or rushing on these streets herding the jeeps:

Bombings and missile strikes, multiple rocket launchers and the use of banned weapons, destruction of peaceful cities, roads, bridges, factories, millions of people's forceful displacement, and death, death, death...All this on February 24 (Oleg Suslov, WLT p 41).

About six and a half thousand civilians reported dead and more than ten thousand injured. These experiences of war weigh heavy in the hearts of the people.

These writers display a strong sense of hope along with the criticism of war. They report how war has impacted the citizens. Initially, people had no idea how to react. Some packed their belongings and fled; others walked to their office as if it was another normal day but as bombing increased, they took to safety shelters (Al Panteliat, WLT, p.41). Many people had to leave home overnight. Elena Andreichikova discusses her experience of leaving her home with other women while the men stayed behind. She returns to her husband after a month with an eerie feeling as she crossed the border on foot. She describes it so:

I will never forget the feeling: a gentle spring sun is shining; against my back, a wind that gives me courage and confidence, and I smile to no one in particular, because the border is empty; everyone who wanted to, left, and they aren't rushing to return just yet (WLT p 40).

Despite the difficult situation the citizens don't leave the willingness to live as understanding of life opens to them with this situation. They begin 'soul-searching', "War is a time of soul-searching" (Abramovich, WLT p 42). Writing not just becomes therapeutic for these writers but it is an act of resistance for them. They discuss what writing means for them and how the practical experience changes into a visual reality as that of a graphic narrative or a film of which they are the characters themselves.

Al Panteliat explains her process of writing as:

When it comes to my own pieces, I used to be able to theoretically categorize them as "metaphysical" and "cinematographic," but now only the latter category remains. I observe the same tendency among other poets. This is not surprising. Metaphors are a semitone, and in the current reality there is little place for them (WLT p 48).

Similarly, Dura Dukova emotes:

I'm crying as I write this. And I can't stop these tears. Because every bullet fired into my people is a hole in my chest. There's pretty much no breastbone left.

Today, all of us are volunteers (WLT p 41).

At the same time, not all is lost for these writers. They experience innate resilience and an endless hope. Maria Sternenko affirms "It is our belief that life won't end today" (WLT p 41). She looks forward to future and thinks of a world without war, claiming that "the day without war will hold real value" (WLT p 41). Evgeny Golubovsky's explains how poetry and music helped him survive:

I learn to not to give in to panic and to love life: during the war I daily seek comfort in classical music, in poetry (WLT p 40).

It is in the darkest hours of life that hope emerges. Art has that power to hold together, to bring peace even in most distrustful times.

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

Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry (educationist, author, and poet) teaches at the Centre for English



Studies at Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. She was recognised as an Inspired Teacher for The President of India's In-residence Program at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi in June 2015. She has been largely interested in areas of Australian and Indian literatures, studies of the margins, women, violence, and trauma. She translated Australian Aboriginal poet Jeanine Leane's book of poems Dark Secrets: After Dreaming (AD) 1887-1961 from English into Panjabi. She is an editor of Black November: Writings on Anti-Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath (2019); Patrick White: Critical Issues (2014); co-editor of Violence, Subversion and Recovery: Women Writers from the Sub-continent and Around

(2019, with Rachel Bari) and the author of Texting the Scripture: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Visionary Poetics of Patrick White (2016). Her collection of poems is Forbidden Button and Other Poems (Signorina Publications, 2020).

#### **Culture Wars: War Without Peace**

-Alok Kumar

People who don't cherish war know too well, that perhaps the most effective antidote to war is laughter, or an attitude of irreverence. Not being too sure about the fabled ability of peace to stand up to war, for the span of this paper I choose to be flippant.

Some people, strangely, are at peace with war, while most of us are at war with peace. War, even the smell of it (for people actually can smell a war), is exciting; while peace, hands down, is boring. To handle peace is a thousand times more difficult than handling war. War demands logistics and strategy; peace leans heavily on the gleanings of imagination. People talk of war by other means but I am yet to hear of peace by other means. Is that because peace is preferable to war, 'by-all-means'? We have heard of war that lingers, but we generally seem to miss out periods when peace malingers. Then, there are highly efficacious surgical strikes that short-change war, inevitably followed by a 'war of words. Then there is the familiar and familial war of nerves, losing out only to a war of attrition.

Talking of wars and battles, what strikes us as a given is that they should be fought over some well-defined issue, territory or object, or to undo a perceived injustice and should cease on the accomplishment of the said goal. But what is nearer to truth than the realisation that the most tragically wasteful wars had their genesis in trifles? To quote Alexander Pope, "What dire offence from *timorous* causes springs/What mighty contests rise from trivial things."

However, what is equally axiomatic about all wars is that they do not end up throwing emphatic winners and losers. There is nothing final about wars. Wars are always there—simmering or cold—; they only get escalated from time to time, and history has been in love with war. Whether it trots or ambles, history moves from war to war. New warriors join, new formations, new apologists, posturing and phalanxes but the war goes on, interminable. The war against good, against evil, against nature, against humanity, against ignorance; the war of land against water, of light against primal darkness; the act of pushing and tweaking sundry frontiers continues incessantly. And to risk a banality couched as wisdom, conflict is the only given in our

universe; only all conflicts do not become conflagrations. Peace is merely a temporary cessation of hostilities, a time of respite until another unforeseen confrontation arises.

Not seldom, we feel constrained to contrive a 'state of war' in our minds, which if taken seriously and prolonged irresponsibly leads to all sorts of war-mongering. No reason is this, though, to send us sulking, or to sap our confidence in the magic of human agency. If we have read our Hardy well, so have we read 'El Dorado'.

Living in an age, however, when the idea of constructivity (however sloppily constructed) is the epistemological dominant, ironically, we have begun to talk about culture wars as if they are the sole given. Culture wars are the staple of today's society and politics, as a pattern is sought to be imposed on normal cultural dissensus and it is doled out as civilizational logic. We have been primed to assume that the war of civilizations is the destiny of the human race. With one hand we exiled the very idea of consensus out of our lives, and with the other penned epics of discord. The prophets of civilizational clash declaimed the inevitability of culture wars. Talk of culture wars, and we look askance at the America of 1960s as the decade when the tragedy unfolded. But while we speculated and debated, culture wars kept coming closer to us with measured steps and successive approximations. Hartman reminds us of those "sixties conservatives who supported violent police crackdowns on student protestors at the university of California at Berkeley", and calls out the earlier signs of deep disquiet in William Buckley's *The Superstition of Academic Freedom* (1951), "whose withering critique of "secularist and collectivist" professors gave life to a powerful conservative imagination that had supposedly been rendered obsolete."

As Governor Ronald Reagan dubbed the University of California "haven for sex deviants", we had to wait full fifty expectant years for our own Jawaharlal Nehru University to be crowned with that title. And what a wait it was! Finally, we had caught up with culture wars. As for making sense of culture wars, we can't by any reckoning call it "a war that wasn't", for war it is—protracted, vicious, dirty and devastating—one that leaves our soul cauterized. However, what the advocates and votaries—Richard Nixon's "silent majority"—of culture wars force on us is the recognition of "peace that never was". The peace and normalcy, we are told, were spurious and skin-deep. Abnegation and denial of the 'received' cultural knowledge are the grand gateways to culture wars.

Nixon made the point quite bluntly when in one of his inaugural addresses in 1973 he said, "The time has come for us to renew our faith in ourselves and in America. In recent years ... our children have been taught to be ashamed of their country ... At every turn we have been beset by those who find everything wrong with America and little that is right." Does it sound familiar? If not, it very well should. As there and then were they, so here and now are we: at crossroads; culture wars feed on simulations of uncertainty, loss and long-drawn injustice. It is about who we were and what has become of us, about corruption of our core beliefs, the loss of a golden age; and the now or never urgency of reclaiming our heritage. Well, nearer home we have resolved to call it negative image peddling and subversive reporting, to be rectified by positive misreporting. Anyways, the surest takeaway from the present scenario is that culture wars have progressively become uncultured.

But before my rantings exhaust your patience and another war of sorts is in the offing, let's call it a day.

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



Dr. Alok Kumar teaches at the Department of English, DDU Gorakhpur University, and has a teaching experience of twenty-five years. His areas of research include literary theory, south-asian writing, culture studies and translation studies.

#### The Women's War in Svetlana Alexievich's

#### The Unwomanly Face of War

-Tooba Masood

The canon of war literature has forever been hegemonized by male perspectives. All official and accepted records or texts about war have dileanated the dry historical truth of glorious yet plain facts about war. Whenever men have talked about war, they have tended to focus on strategies and maneuvers, equipments and supplies, generals and squadrons, and victories and defeats. They usually answer the question *what happened*? But gloss over *what did it feel like*?

The 2015 Nobel laureate in literature, Svetlana Alexievich wrote the book *The Unwomanly Face of War* (1985), which attempts to address exactly this. It is a collection of testimonies by real Soviet women veterans of the Second World War narrated in first-person monologues.

During World War II, the USSR had the largest contingent of women combatants. They were 800,000- 10,00,000 strong, making 8% of the regular army. The number of women in non-combatant capacity was even larger, estimated to be 43% of medical assistants, 100% of nurses, and nearly 10% of the Partisan forces. Yet, Alexievich tells us that no one but her ever questioned her grandmother about the war. "Women's war has it's own colours, it's own smells, it's own lighting, and its own range of feelings. It's own words. There are no heroes and incredible feats, there are simply people doing inhumanly human things." Alexievich wanted to preserve this bare human truth of war. She wanted to write a history of the soul and not another history of war. She tells us, "whatever women talk about, the thought is constantly present in them: war is first of all murder, and then hard work. And then simply ordinary life: singing, falling in love, putting your hair in curlers..."

The monologues are intimate and powerful. They reveal what it is to be a young woman in combat in a military system designed by men for men. The boots, army shirts and trousers were all manufactured and given out in men's sizes. They even had to wear male underwear. There was no provision for female toilets and hygiene products and women struggled to deal with

menstruation with several women's cycles completely thrown off and very many losing their reproductive capacity altogether in the harsh conditions at the front. Therefore, the performativity of their gender reacted so violently with actions drastically alien to it that it leads to several instances where the women try to preserve their 'female selves' and its associated history with discreet, little actions.

"We were all given kit bags to put our things in.. I cut off the straps, ripped out the bottom, and put it on. It looked like a military skirt... put on a belt, and decided to show myself off to the girls."

"Once during a drill... I picked some violets. A little bouquet. I picked it and tied it to my bayonet. And went on like that."

"I made my wedding dress out of bandages overnight. By myself. My friends and I spent a month collecting bandages."

The book also brings to light the unheeded record of war labour by non-combat staff members like cooks, laundresses and nurses.

"The work was very hard... It was all done by women's hands... We used "K" soap, very stinky, it smelled awful... The underwear was black as earth. Many girls got ruptures from the work, from carrying heavy things, from strain. "K" soap caused eczema, nails came off, we thought they'd never grow back. But even so, after two or three days of rest the girls had to go back and launder."

"For two and a half years I was at the front. My hands bandaged and washed thousands of wounds... Bandages and more bandages... Nowadays I'm in poor health, my nerves are weak. When someone asks me, "What decorations did you receive?" I'm embarrassed to admit I don't have any decorations... But we all received the greatest decoration of all—the ninth of May. Victory Day!"

However, the war for these female soldiers did not end on victory day. Back home, they had to fight yet another war when they were branded whores and prostitutes. The hero narrative was

reserved exclusively for male veterans. Women were forced to hide their medals and scars if they wanted to be desirable wives and mothers. Disfigured, dehumanized, unwanted, many of them could never find successful rehabilitation in the aftermath of the war.

The Unwomanly Face of War ruptures the originary myth of the Great War by peopling the battlefield with millions of women. The glorification that went into the creation of that myth comes apart from the discursive breaks caused by the sights, smells and sounds that the women in Alexievich's book record and narrate.

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



Tooba Masood is a Research Scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Allahabad, Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India. Her areas of academic interest include women's writing, documentary prose, narrative journalism and feminist theory. Her ongoing thesis, under the supervision of Professor Neelum Saran Gour, is titled "Journalism in Fiction with reference to the writings of Svetlana Alexievich." She has also served as a guest lecturer in her department.

# Top Gun Maverick and The Military Industrial Complex in Hollywood

-Isha Singh

The recently released *Top Gun Maverick*, starring Tom Cruise, broke all cinema records and reestablished the supremacy of US fighter pilots on screen. Every year, Hollywood churns out numerous movies in which the US military is almost fetishised, leading to what has been dubbed as the military-entertainment complex. It is a notable point that this complex is rather phallic and centred around leading men, almost deifying the uniform. The Top Gun franchise has barely two female characters of any value and they are relegated to mostly being Cruise's love interest.

It is of course, rather thrilling to watch dogfights between F16s and advanced jets on screen but we tend to forget the jingoistic underpinnings at play here.

Several movies on the US military have been released, creating an unknown 'enemy', the 'other' which has to be destroyed or bombed. Even in *Top Gun Maverick*, we do not know who the enemy is or which country is storing uranium. We just feel goosebumps when the bombs drop and the targets are hit.

As a young teenager, I was a huge fan of *Top Gun*. When I grew up, I realised that the movie was just perpetuating the same hegemonic masculinity that makes our lives as women difficult. I even met certain fighter pilots who were in no way encapsulating the charm of Maverick. They were just like other entitled men too. I recalled scenes in *Top Gun*, where sweaty male pilots heckle Kelly McGillis' character in the bar. In fact, what passes off as romance at the start of the film, would be considered harassment in today's age. Kelly McGillis wasn't even cast in the sequel as she had aged. Tom Cruise's Maverick does not age; he is the embodiment of hyper-masculinity. He is virile and an alpha, someone who can do extraordinary things like fly a jet at Mach 10.

This militarisation goes hand-in-hand with the creation of a hyper-aggressive masculinity, which tells men to keep their grief bottled up. Clearly, Maverick has not yet dealt with the loss of his flying partner Goose. Goose's son has not dealt with the loss of his father either. But they overcome it by doing incredible stunts together, not by seeking therapy. The Terminator,

Universal Soldier, Rambo etc. create this image of the military hero and seek to propagate the supremacy of the US military.

Where are the women in all these films?- Playing love interests, getting heckled in bars, lost in jungles to be rescued among other brief roles. *Top Gun Maverick* does include the character of Phoenix, a female pilot but it seems like she is one of the 'bros' and has been included to keep the film a little egalitarian.

So, while a younger me might have loved Tom Cruise in his overalls flying a jet, will an older me want another sequel to Maverick? Maybe if it is around PTSD which is one of the real outcomes of war, or about a female fighter pilot and the challenges of her role. But to another superhumanly male figure doing reckless stunts on screen- "Negative Ghost Rider." (Negative Ghost Rider. a term from the film which the Navy pilots use to say NO)

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



Dr. Isha Singh has completed her doctorate in English Literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has worked on inter-generational trauma and memory of the Holocaust and has taught communication and English. She has also authored a book of horror short stories titled Where Do You Go in the Dark, My Love? published by Harper Collins India. She has published poems, articles and short stories which have appeared in Indian Literature, Cosmopolitan India,

Khaleej Times and others.

#### War and Peace in the Living and Non-living World

-K.N.Singh

Wars have been fought in the living and non-living world ever since the evolutionary history of Planet Earth. The war pattern appears similar in space and time both. Intermittent peace has also prevailed. It is believed that wars lead to peaceful creations. Tranquillity exists in nature's outdoor environment.

The infinite intelligence of the mind reveals silence and solitude of nature that brings realisation of peace. It is a state of mind that brings overflowing bliss in which we all prefer to live. The verbal silence might bring thoughts of negativity not peace. In nature the whistling and whooshing of winds, soft rustling of leaves, burbling of the rippling springs and rivers, chirping of the birds produce sounds of divine vibrations. It is so different from the chaotic noise produced by the humans.

The nonliving Earth developed out of magmatic elements undergoing war like state by operative dynamic forces. When exposed to extreme heat within the crust or placed under immense pressure, magma emerges through the crust, it is then known as lava. As the lava eventually cools, minerals begin to harden and we get deposits of gold, silver, precious mineral and rocks. Rubies, Emeralds, Sapphires etc. are created beneath the Earth's surface under immense pressure. It is akin to present day wars of acquiring resources.

The first primitive unicellular plant life developed in inorganic sea. It is not as yet known from where the protein, an organic material needed for life, came in the inorganic world. However, it proliferated and diversified into various plants and the animal kingdom. They waged war for their existence in space and time under varying physical environments. The wandering continents of planet Earth faced weather changes in new locations. It caused extinctions of life that could not withstand the change or could not adapt to environment.

When countries or groups of people take weapons to fight each other they bring war and calamity. Even without arsenals, verbal sparring can bring war like conditions. Wars have been fought throughout the evolutionary history of the world. Sanctions imposed by the international community are wars as well.

The war perspectives changed with scientific and technological advancements in the living world. The nonliving environment was also greatly affected due to human interference in nature. The climatic changes modified weather patterns transforming weathering, erosion and sedimentation. The greed of living beings led to the unlimited exploitation of the environment. The war of living with the non-living greatly brought changes in laws of nature.

Demographic changes, technological shifts, land-use change and environmental changes are creating risks. Therefore evolving life needs to adapt and adjust to the changing environment. Thus resilience and fighting for survival became intrinsic part of nature. This characteristic continued even in higher forms like human beings. It was aimed at establishing supremacy of countries and people.

Adaptation in human beings and in animals is a process whereby the organism gradually acquires resistance to certain factors in its environment and consequently the capacity to live in conditions previously incompatible with life, and to solve all unsolved problems. Defence reflex thus becomes necessary for survival. Thus, transition from the stage of extreme tension and the possibility of extinction to that of stable adaptation and survival is a part of existence.

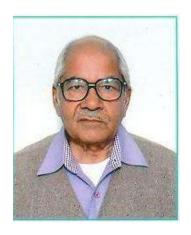
The biological and social law of survival of the fittest is adduced oft- times as a bar to the promotion of peace. To expect or desire the cessation of war is to disregard the law of survival of the fittest. The thought itself is Utopian. Various thoughts, inventions, institutions, and the social system itself, are a result of the intra-social struggle, in which one survives and another is cast out. Thus, destruction and creation or war and peace are bound to come one after the other.

It is the notion that since animals and plants have advanced in perfection by means of struggle for existence and the consequent "survival of the fittest"; therefore men in society must look to the same process to help them towards perfection. This is an unfortunate fallacy. It is commendable to rouse nations to intelligent action, but it does not mean that nations are under the inevitable necessity of making war upon one another. It is imperative to upgrade the whole world towards simple living and positive thinking. The war for productivity brings prosperity to nations and individuals. It brings vision of physical and mental strength, peace, silence in soul and divine vision of self exploration.

Maya Angelou explicitly denounces war and calls for peace in the following lines:

Today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more.
Come, clad in peace and I will sing the songs
The Creator gave to me when I
And the tree and stone were one.

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



K.N.Singh was born in a small village of Uttar Pradesh in 1937. After studying intermediate Science from Wesley school in Azamgarh, he proceeded to Varanasi to pursue a 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 geologist in the GeologicalSurvey 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*, and the *Khaleej Times* of Bahrain and Dubai. He wrote a book

Geo-scientific Perspective of Samudramanthan which was published in 2020.

# Poetry

"War is what happens when language fails"

-Margaret Atwood

#### A Shikara

a *shikara*floats without its *haenz*blood-streaked lilies
wilt into the lake

#### The Avataras

the *avataras*descend for peace—
the cries of war orphans

#### **Sunlight Splinters**

sunlight splinters through shattered windows ambulances wail

#### War

war crack of rifles at the crack of dawnheads crack open like ripe, red, mushy, watermelons

#### **Peace**

p e a c e
we have yet to learn:
how to spell it
how to think it
how to feel it
how to live it
how to activate it

#### **About the Poet:**



Rupa Anand is a spiritual seeker and a published writer of experiences. Writing since 2008, her poems are an expression of images, thoughts, ideas, emotions and events that somehow get etched upon her mind and psyche. She says "There is magic in Nature. I hope my poems will connect you with the beauty and calm of the natural world." Rupa has a BA (Hons) in English Literature from Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi. A cancer survivor, she lives in New Delhi with her husband, daughter and beloved cats.

#### \*A piece of peace\*

Peace, Harmony, Happiness and Glory

Are the unmatchable, unrivalled, nonpareil and irreplaceable part of every story.

Peace is all about holding and embossing each other's hand not only in the face of triumphs but also, in the imposter called disaster.

Peace is in the heaven above and on the land.

Peace is tight, close-knitted and a hard piece of rope,

Peace is life, peace is hope.

The way birds flap their wings,

The way Nightingale has melodies to sing.

The way they soar high and claim the horizon,

Peace pierces the sacred sky.

Peace diminishes every grief and sorrow,

It's always established and can't be borrowed.

Peace is in our thoughts and mind,

Peace is tranquil, serene and easy to find.

It teaches and preaches us to tackle life's hailstones with utmost grace and straight-forwardly.

Peace and harmony are the fundamental prerequisite of our lives and an ideal path to follow. It is an integral and most compressive part. It's an essential requisite that comes from within.

In the era of rat-race and cut-throat competition, we must strive and lift our hands together to attain the wondrous virtue of peace.

Let's together pledge to spread peace and placidity in order to make this budding world a blooming place to live in.

Let's undertake and honour to unfurl optimism and peace with undying efforts.

Do remember that eradicating the mental turmoil and turbulence is the utmost call for the day. Thus, the only way forward to bring off and attain peace is to curtail the inner brawl which is muddling and barging in on us from our virtual trail.

#### **About the Poet:**



Hashmita Arora is a student of MA semester I at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. She is fluent in writing, editing and communication and is keen to build a career in content writing. She is an avid reader who wants to develop and pursue research work.

### THERE WILL BE WORLD

#### PEACE IF

If rage dare not break in under the skin

If there's no memory of what had been

No remembering the face of ugly war and sin

If towns are not made with blood and blood turns not into iceberg If lost paradise is regained with love and love wins over lust

If veins no more turn into wires

If fingers coil not around triggers

and barrels are allowed to rust

so the world won't turn into open orphanage

under the giant roof

If men believe in what Gita, Bible said
If barbed wired boundaries
don't look like realm of death
painted in red, the colour of broken breath

If hatred makes one sick in the head
If greed is less, promises kept
And power is no more bred

There will be world peace
If the world knows how to heal
and how to let the imprisoned self be free
If humans are at peace with themselves
they won't look back

#### HUNGER

of winter sky

She doesn't reply

A child cries next to his mother's body strangulated by the tight knots of destiny at refugee camp He knows nothing of cruel inclemency

Nothing of bombs, bullets and war cry High-pitched silence around his mother is unbearable to him

He doesn't know what mourning means He cries desperately

For there is no other way to define hunger Devastation is only counted in terms of lives lost

not in lives ruined

#### **About the Poet:**



Pragya Bajpai is a mother, bilingual poet and a Central Government Officer serving at the National Defence Academy, Pune. She is an alumna of Lucknow University and holds a Ph.D. in English Literature from Banaras Hindu University. She has authored two poetry collections and has edited 4 anthologies celebrating the armed forces. She has been awarded with the title 'Kavya Shiromani' by the Department of Languages and Culture, Government of Telangana. She is widely published. Pragya is an editor and

designer of the international ezine *Brahmand: Voice of the Cosmos*. She can be reached at <a href="mailto:pragyabajpai@gmail.com">pragyabajpai@gmail.com</a>. Instagram: pragyabajpai29

#### **Peace in Nature**

I scrambled up the steep stairs in the evening,
Away from the commotion of my small universe.
With heavy fraught in mind and fake shining,
Only to be in solitude or in the company of breathers.

As I was rambling, with some doubts in hand,
Some miracle happened; yes!!! with God's permission.
Environ changed, was as if He flicked His wand,
I felt like time has come for a happy intermission.

Suddenly, the fresh air splashed on my face,
Urged me to open my eyes, forced me to take a break.
I turned and saw the beauty of the enclosing place,
Was impelling me to enjoy it for only 'your sake'.

Crisp and enchanting winds touched my little body,
Asked me to leave the past, be in motion.
I looked behind and noticed that I was not a shoddy,
I picked up the relief, I got the blissful potion.

When the little creatures flew high in the sky,
In the group of three or five, or in the shape of airplane,
Thought that came to mind was to give another try,
Continuously I watched them, inspired me to break a chain.

Now I was savouring the aesthetics, with open brain, There I no longer stew in my own thoughts. I felt every positive energy, I kept the sane, And found the attractiveness in corners and spots.

Clairvoyant vision looked the nebulous clouds, Puffy, sanguine, white, blue, over casted the sky. Serene moon unveiled in trivial thunderclouds,

Made an exit for golden light of the sun to say goodbye.

Peeps were surrounding me, some far some near, Busy in whispering, giggling and clicking it out. But amidst them, I had something else to gear, I had that peace and had to enjoy that bout.

Chirping of the birds and emerging rainbow after sunset, Sun leaving and Luna proudly making its way. All the natural aesthetics assuredly did their best, And I realized that it's there, where I like to play.

It was just an amazing incident, from blue to clean, I learnt my lesson; I got the tranquillity in nature. I discovered from every scene what they mean, Most important was, not to be your own butcher.

It started with one, I have made a collection,
I love to be in the restful and calm nature.
Where love is pouring directly from the heaven,
And where I like my company the most soother.

#### Plight of a Motherland

O my dear son! please listen to me?

Stop this rain of canons, spread love.

Your brothers and sisters are dying,

Have some pity, a mother is groaning in pain.

These bullets are hitting my sister,

I am also a mother; I can feel it.

Let this blood bath and war get over,

Sprinkle peace, lives and care.

Let the flowers blossom in that field,
Let the fragrance reach to other lands,
Let the child not succumb to injuries,
Let her make us proud, let's unite our hands.

O my dear son! Please listen to me.

Buildings are destroyed, so the hearts of everyone,
Fear, solitude, stress and depression, revolving around them.

Moms and babies are crying, hunger and thirst make them weak.

Government is helpless, economy is short,
Every person is tired, wishing to end this wrought.

Let this blood bath and war get over,

Sprinkle peace, lives and care.

Let the plant reach to its height,
Let the fruits it bears, reach to every mile,
Let the mother conceive a child,

Let her grow sweet, cheerful and mild.

#### **About the Poet:**



Shreya Jaiswal is currently pursuing her Masters in English from the University of Lucknow. She is a budding poet who believes that poetry is a great medium to convey feelings, emotions and to understand human beings better. Apart from poetry, she is an orator and loves to read books.

# The war with grief

When the funeral pyre was lit, she screamed

her husband's name long and loud.

We breathed one long collective breath, felt her grief as our own.

No war here between grief and its expression, blood coursing undeterred

through arteries, veins, capillaries; snaking through a maze with

a myriad dead-ends, searching for an opening for its own acceptance.

The world outside, the Universe within.

The grief can stay for long - needing voice, others, hand holding of a myriad kind.

The world returns unquietly with words: 'Chin up', Crack on', 'Soldier on'

even as the feral buffalo roams restlessly through the floodplains -

wild and alive, raring with natural energy, seeking voice not suppression

for its own healing

for its own transformation.

The world comes with its chain links of uniformity;

to box up what cannot remain unboxed, scared of this voice;

unmindful of the fact that, with expression, we are far better at regaining

equilibrium

than in losing it.

# A searching war

Moving from an old to a newer self is a cause for war;

a dark cold winter of doubt and sadness.

Perhaps we move because we can no longer suffer the old place.

Perhaps we don't carry suffering, suffering carries us.

It takes energy to take steps towards the new.

If we do, the new takes many more steps to meet us.

We don't really understand what makes us move.

In the daytime we see the sky, the sun, the moon, clouds.

In the night we see more, we see the black sky and the stars and

know there is much more that we do not see.

Such as what lies beyond what we see, think?

Are there other planes of existence, of consciousness?

That help us take steps towards the new?

A universe within that is there for each of us, uniting us even as we wage our wars in search of it.

#### **About the Poet:**



Neera Kashyap has worked in the field of social and health communications. She has published a book for young adults, Daring to Dream (Rupa & Co.) and contributed to several prize-winning anthologies for children. Her work as a writer of short stories, poetry (including haikai), book reviews and essays has appeared in several international literary journals and poetry anthologies. Her poetry has been published in journals in the US, UK, Europe and Singapore. In India, the journals include RIC Journal, The Wise Owl, Teesta Review,

Outlook India, Rhetorica Quarterly, Yugen Quest Review, The Punch Magazine & Indian Cultural Forum. She lives in Delhi.

# Red ground

Those red grounds,

covered with bravery.

Those barren lands,

under the scattered bones.

These lifeless plants,

the witness of fire.

No bees, no scorpions

came to prey

under the sun in heavy darkness.

Behind the bounds and tilting heads,

a history got lost.

Tomorrow again

sun will spread

same darkness.

No one will know

how many promises have been broken?

## Peace?

Those lips with scarlet blood,

uttered something.

Say to her,

now she can fly.

War with thousands of deaths

has taken a lot of lively breath.

Some cold, some warm,

has taken some smile, some charm.

They say it brings peace.

Yes,

with the pieces, came peace

those conflicts got seized.

Now the children will fly,

in the morning's Vermillion sky.

Will they get a bright future or

will become a lower creature.

Who knows

those deep cuts not on body

but heart

sometimes it brings disaster

sometimes pain and blisters.

They will heal but

what about those

unseen mark

#### **About the Poet:**



Sanskriti Kushwaha is a student of Lucknow University who is not interested in studies but the aesthetics of books and some old flowers and leaves in them really attracts her. Just like culture she is also a mix up of everything.

# **Darkness**

It is dark everywhere.

The dark is persistent.

It rules everywhere,
it shadows every face.

It is known for its colour,
it is known for its strength.

It is known for everything that blackens and ends.

July 1987

## **About the Poet:**



Dr. Prachee Doval-Naithani, Assistant Professor, at a private University in Noida. An alumna of Jawaharlal Nehru University, CCS University, Karnataka University and Amity University, she has a double Masters in English and German Literature and Doctorate in Management (Exploration of the Indian Mindset beyond Indian Frontiers). She writes poetry in both English and Hindi and has been a closet-writer for over 3 decades. She is now desirous that her work sees the light of

day. She has also been a street-theatre activist in her hay days and a member of the Jana Natya Manch, having worked with Safdar Hashmi.

## War and Peace

The wars have e'er been fought and still are fought As man's mentality remains the same And thus, are issues sought, and come unsought As well, and controversies rouse the flame It may not be solution but then fraught With envy, scorn and pride each other blame.

There have been ruins bringing sufferings great
Disease and famine after gulp the men
It has tho' sometimes taught to calmly wait
And seek the ways to cross the problems' fen
And not sans gaining fruit, tho' little late
But should prefer and drop the narrow den.

The peace is virtue godly which sho'ld deck Humanity, and cease to cause our wreck.

#### **About the Poet:**



Arun Prakash Pandey, son of (Late) Swami Nath Pandey, an ex. Principal, started writing poems almost five decades back. The topics have always been Love, Beauty, Life, Time, Death, Memory and Fancy. He has adopted so many forms of English Poetry but somehow the sonnet seems to suit his mood much and as such it has become the main channel of his expression. So far, he has published an episode 'Lakashmana Goes to Forest' containing 81(Shakespearean) sonnets and a book of Hindi mini verses 'Bikhray Pal'. He has written eight One- act Plays and quite a good number of free verses, Couplets, Quatrains, Ghazals, Diamantes etc. His

writing goes on regularly as an inevitable part of routine.

## A PAIR OF BOOTS

1.

Once I had no images of war As would be the cause of wasted blood, And why outside were a pair of boots? Oh, how could an innocent child be aware! When I saw someone with no leg or arm,' How much pain I felt all the over my body, The notes on the doors "A hero lives here", Aversion overcame me to the edge. How I was willing to turn it off, my dear! With my little hands but it was feasible! I knew someone lived under that record. Only with one foot or arm like an invisible. Fear or grieve expelled me of these streets Whenever I had to pass from there reluctantly? Their hands smaller than mine but not sweet I wanted to cry; I was ready for crying... We had no idea how war could be even worst with his cold gifts like tears and sticks. Then what hurt me the most on earth; One legged neighbour who lost it on battle... Nobody informed us how war kills folks, And we played games of war and shooting. Then my peers disliked them in our walks, Oh! If it were possible! Renew those legs back in boots.

2.

In each of my blood cells,
In every joint...
The world lives with me side by side,
It's growing in every part of meThe great rebel appeared inside

Against battles, fights, and wars!

You know, I was raised in a great sorrow

I sought salvation from heaven at hell.

I hid my tears from my grandpa under my pillow

And Life also wept next to me.

I often followed my grandpa,

One... two... three... counting his steps on chase

How I hated that dusty path,

Which was remained untouchable on place!

One side of it was obsolete,

In unbroken world no far from land.

Like my grandfather's painful dream,

And its grief, seemed me, never to end

It had never been worn since he purchase,

And the earth was unrecognizable to it.

Maybe near the box or on the bar

It spent its lifetime in loneliness.

It was an unhappy pair of boots,

It turned yellow in uneasiness.

Time made it to live in a bend

I knew it also cursed war in spot.

#### 3.

To be honest,

I dislike a long sleep, maybe, a long hope.

When I still see it in my dream

My grandpa's leg was left in battles.

I grew up with a sense of sorry about him,

Oh my God I stared at him in grief.

I also was killed in one of his wars.

Maybe, it's the true cause of being a poet.

My friends comforted me in my childhood

When one booted World came at threshold

4.

I was an innocent child at that time,
However, I could cry hiding my trembles
There're many questions but no answers
But I was unaware why I hid my legs from him,
The days make everybody go through things,
A random bullet aimed for a pair of boots.
And I was scared to death to not bury it,
I drank my bitter tears in a losing mood.
My grandpa's leg was in that shooting boot...

Translated by Shakhnoza Rakhmanova

#### **About the Poet:**



Khosiyat Rustam Islamalievna graduated from Tashkent State University and studied at the Higher Literature Course at the Faculty of Uzbek Philology of the National University of Uzbekistan. She is a poet and has also written a number of stories and screenplays. She has participated in several international poetry festivals and won the 2012 poetry competition in Bursa, Turkey. Since 2015, she has been the Editor-in-Chief of the most influential newspaper, Kitab Dunyosi. In 2021, she won the International Writers Residency at the University of Iowa, USA, and returned to study. Her poems have been translated into more than 30 languages and

her books have been published in several foreign countries.

## LOOK WHAT I FOUND

Look what I found!

It's a helmet

with no name

or date.

Military green

with a chin strap,

it is an artifact.

An anachronism

that the war happened

under our forebears'

aquiline noses

and that Uncle Paddy

had indeed been the pacifist

in the family,

obliterating

a dangerous propaganda

and nationhood.

And that our contacts

had saved our men

from the barbarians'

gospel of martyrdom.

I've heard

folks say

that if one leans

close to the helmet

a history of combat

and searing pain

can scream out

in the ears.

Maybe we can

even hear a ghost's name

or two

revealed.

Or the senseless

dragging of that soldier's

feet

who lost his sight

and speech

and then his ears too

felt a din of silence.

He died in his mother's home

in '48.

\*\*\*

You can sway this helmet,

play with it,

kick it on its head

in a mock drill.

The one who wore it

is now the soil

on which

our crumbling house

staggers.

The elegiac soul

of this village

is not unfounded.

#### LITTLE GRENADES

The doctor gave me a strange little prescription for my back pain.

There were little red grenade-shaped plastic pills that I had to uncork to drink the mushy olive ingredient meant to provide me relief.

It's funny at first and sad that the pain of another, massive kind had to be symbolized so nonchalantly in them.

A war is killing thousands.

Another centenary

and memorial
is coming soon;
a young man's beheading
and a brave girl's death under custody
is a present clarion call
to whiplash all muezzins.

The war rages in pockets of nonchalance until red pills in the shape of grenades show us our shock and dismay;
The shape of it
The duality of it
The way it is about broken limbs in a battlefield erroneously simplified in a liquid for back pain.
The real thing made into little toy guns and little plastic grenades purchased from the chemist's

#### **About the Poet:**



Prithvijeet Sinha hails from Lucknow. An MPhil from the University of Lucknow, his works have been published in several varied publications as Hudson Valley Writers Guild, Inklette Magazine, Piker Press Online, anthology Pixie Dust and All Things Magical published by Authors Press, Cafe Dissensus, The Medley, Screen Queens, Confluence- South Asian Perspectives, Reader's Digest, Borderless Journal, Lothlorien Poetry, Live Wire, Rhetorica Quarterly, Ekphrastic Review, The Kolkata Arts, Aze Journal, Dreich Magazine, Visual Verse, In Plainspeak and in the children's anthology Nursery Rhymes and Children's Poems From Around The World, among others. His life force resides in writing.

# Young Men

Imagined slights turn into louder threats

And the world watches with bated breath

Lines are redrawn on maps still wet

And they will be etched with our blood next

We are marched and dropped into a country which does not smell like our own

Like fresh cattle led to bloody slaughter at the break of dawn

They say it is for our country and its people unknown

The unceasing Molotov cocktails prove them wrong

We march together as our fathers did in the red days of old

But no pity for our fallen brothers left behind in the dead of the cold

They turned doors into death traps and the windows spit lead

Our commanders urge us on and the boy next to me takes one in the head

So colourful stripes on flags are cause enough for this madness

The air reeks of petrol and our cigarettes stink of sadness

We will keep marching till they tell us to stop

For that's what we should do

Young men as we are

They do not tell us what we are fighting for

Just carelessly thrown into the meat grinder

Young men we are

Fighting an old man's war

#### **About the Poet:**



Swapnil Patrick Singh is pursuing his post-graduation from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. He has a passion for dead languages, foul writers and cold winters. He is a dog lover.

# I Went with Him

Days back there was a call, a call for bodies and souls. My son, Aman, marched, as they say, for national pride. A newly recruited Jawan, the first citizen of the border.

Carbines, artillery, rifles, machine guns and the father of a waiting granddaughter, all are means for a victory of nothingness. Why such thoughts are ascribing on my emotional tabula rasa?

No father shall be weak, as they say, strength is a word for us.

Neighbours console my family,
"our brave will return with stars and medals".
but they talk of farms and climate to me,
they barely console a father,
they barely console the crying child in the
father.
they never console a soldier devoid of
weapons.

Speaker and listener in himself,
Smiling misery is the sum of a father.
A dying bride jewelled with harshness,
waiting for a life from a life at war.
Shots on field are wounds on heart,
brides die with every shot.

Express a father going along with the child, emotional than the child, vulnerable than the child

Don't mark me strong, for I have to cry, as a father dies in proportion to his child.

My facade has a meaning in it, reasons in it, few roles in it, but nowhere a father in it.

He went with the body, his soul here,
I'm his part and I'm all there,
others sent prayers with him
but I went to the war with him,
and here lies my soulless flesh,
eating, walking and imparting its duty to life.
All dreams went, our hope went, our home
went,

to war with someone else's dreams, hope and home.

### **About the Poet:**



Shubham Singh is a postgraduate student at the University of Lucknow. Dangling between Metaphysical Poets and John Osborne, he is "just pretending to be a human being."

# Dilemma

Dilemma of just an ardour, between two minds one who face and one who listen. But the question was same due to one step, they never became queens of this game! Niddle-noddle of my heart with that thumping voice and cry slit my ears wall. Days spent, graph of voice from hill to nil. Day by day war in my head,

was it also for that mind,
or she make it habitual
or fear of people or whatever?
brutalized, suffer and pain forever.
I as audience and she as performer
throw up the sponge.
Never try to meet the world
the world that could be glamour.
War was just started,
Victory of women over fear
Peace of that lady make "him" won,
And Hush of night again after rising sun.

### **About the Poet:**



Vartika Srivastava is a student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. She is obsessed with contemporary issues of love. She likes to travel and find new destinies.

## The Frontier

Torn between pacifism and patriotism,
he hovers on the blurred, reflecting border
that teased two nations into war.
His unaccustomed boots take two steps
forward,
towards the muddied point of no return,
then three steps backward into no man's land.

she stares at his imagined image, in the sprawling hall of self-distorting mirrors, her parents call the absence of her mind.

Across the frontier's unseen reaches,

She yearns to meet her unknown soldier and consummate her fantasy of peace.

## War and Peace

Unread, unopened, never sullied by a prying reader's eyes, the book has glared at them, on many apathetic evenings. Three inches wide, it dominates a shelf. Passive-aggressive in its cased two volumes, it has waited to begin a conversation, when they surrender, as they surely must.

And now, with pregnant war upon them, its moment has arrived; it comes down from the shelf.

He is enthralled by Pierre's dilemmas
He wants the book to never end.
She hurries swiftly to the climax.
She doesn't like the characters at all.
She wants to take a swingeing sabre,
and cut the tale to less than half its length.

They search for clichés to describe it.

'War is hell!' is all that he can muster.

She clears her throat and gently whispers,

'It may be so, but how I hated peace.'

## War Museum

Imperial.

Two giant guns guard its Ionic portico, sentries marshalled by the gods of war. Its massive dome lours o'er the lawns below.

Imperial.

This building that was once the home of Bedlam could speak of the insanity of strife.

Instead, it simply itemizes conflict — the spoils of war archived as *objects d'art*.

Imperial.

Young children run to mount a shiny tank they call Matilda. Could someone tell them war is not a person? 'Entschuldigen Sie bitte!'

Should *I* apologise, when, after all, they won the peace?

Imperial.

The museum houses many paintings.

Amid their tessellated slabs of warfare,
I hope to gaze at fearless heroes,
with a bluff self-confidence in nation.

Instead, I find unpeopled desolation,
and tooth picked fragments of gnashed, caried teeth.

Imperial.

I shudder at this word that sanctioned carnage, and turn towards the ration books of peace.

## **About the Poet:**



John Thieme is a Senior Fellow at the University of East Anglia. He previously held Chairs at the University of Hull and London South Bank University and has also taught at the Universities of Guyana and North London. His academic books include Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon, Postcolonial Literary Geographies, The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English, and studies of Derek

Walcott, V.S. Naipaul and R.K. Narayan. His most recent critical book, *Anthropocene Realism: Fiction in the Age of Climate Change*, is forthcoming from Bloomsbury in 2023. His creative writing includes *Paco's Atlas and Other Poems* and the novel *The Book of Francis Barber*.

# I, Whore; I, Birangona<sup>1</sup>

Would it be too grotesque if I tell you

My crumbly, cracked insides turn into

Mushy, gooey mud

Yearning to ooze out of me

Through my scars

And cover my shriveled frame in its brown earthiness

Every time I imagine you caressing my ravaged body?

Would it be too strange if I tell you

After I killed that unwanted, half-formed haramzada<sup>2</sup>

I thought of myself

As the ephemeral, feathery, white kaash-phool<sup>3</sup>

Masquerading as a pretty thing,

By the river bank, blowing in the Sharat<sup>4</sup> breeze

Dying, decaying, withering away in truth

And yet I dreamt of your gentle hand picking me up

Making me want to live on, as though in a painting?

Would it be too much to ask you

To forgive me for the carnal sin I did not commit?

Unwanted: no one to turn to

The Father<sup>5</sup> is gone too

I remember your empty, lovely promises

On days my soul feels too bland, too bleak.

Would you hear me out if I tell you

I am tired of this stuffy room

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Birangona means war heroine, and is the title awarded by the Government of Bangladesh to women raped during the Bangladesh Liberation War, 1971. It is estimated that 200,000 to 400,000 women were raped by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators. Despite the honorable title given to the victims in an attempt to make them socially acceptable to the masses, most of these women were turned away by their families and ostracized by society. As a result, some of them turned to prostitution.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> an illegitimate child.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> "kans grass", which is native to the eastern part of the Indian Subcontinent.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> one of the 6 seasons of Bangladesh

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He was assassinated in 1975. Birangonas were asked to consider him to be their father, since their own families had shunned them.

Not too different from the Pak bunker<sup>6</sup> that had me trapped

A room that smells like cheap powder and sex

I am tired of being served as a meat dish

To be eaten, to be ravished

Just so I can eat fistfuls of rice till I die

And kill my two titles with me

Whore, Barangona<sup>7</sup>

## **PTSD**

Like puppets that dance to the tune of the puppet master

Bodily integrity we had to barter

For a pawn's role in groupement

Dictated was our every movement

Down to our index trigger finger

Zombie-esque mindlessness

Anesthetized consciousness

Marching on, committing sins

Break-ins, bombings, burnings, slayings

Etched on to memories that retain the rawness

Some made it back

Seemingly in one piece, but with many a crack

On the inside, that cannot be discerned

Recurring nightmares of haunting experiences not penned

Self-annihilation the only thought that stuck

Martyrs and-slash-or heroes they call us

Is it worth all the fuss?

While they celebrate

We ache to recuperate

Our stories history shall never discuss

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Pakistani bunker; girls and women were abducted and confined in Pakistani military barracks where they were raped repeatedly.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> A distortion of the original "Birangona", "Barangona" has come to mean prostitute.

# **Women's Revolution**

The theocracy is crumbling in its seat
43 years now, the people shall no longer just bleat
Like a pregnancy that lasts for 42 weeks at most
Before a new life is pushed out through its host
The old order must be rolled up and with it its extremes
To give way to the new, despite long-standing Supremes

Zan, zendegi, azadi<sup>8</sup> – we chant

Escape from generational or communal trauma we can't

Skulls smashed with batons, chests rammed with bullets

Tears run in rivulets

The blood of short-lived lives of children on the land

Of the Ayatollahs that forbid the sight of a female hair strand

Stop, we want the right to life and liberty
Your draconian laws have lost validity
The fire in the hearts shan't fizzle out
Do not mistake it for just a transient bout
Fear is absent, risks abundant, united we strive
Cyrus's standards we shall revive<sup>9</sup>

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>The slogan of the on-going revolution in Iran – "Zan, zendegi, azadi" translates to: women, life, freedom.

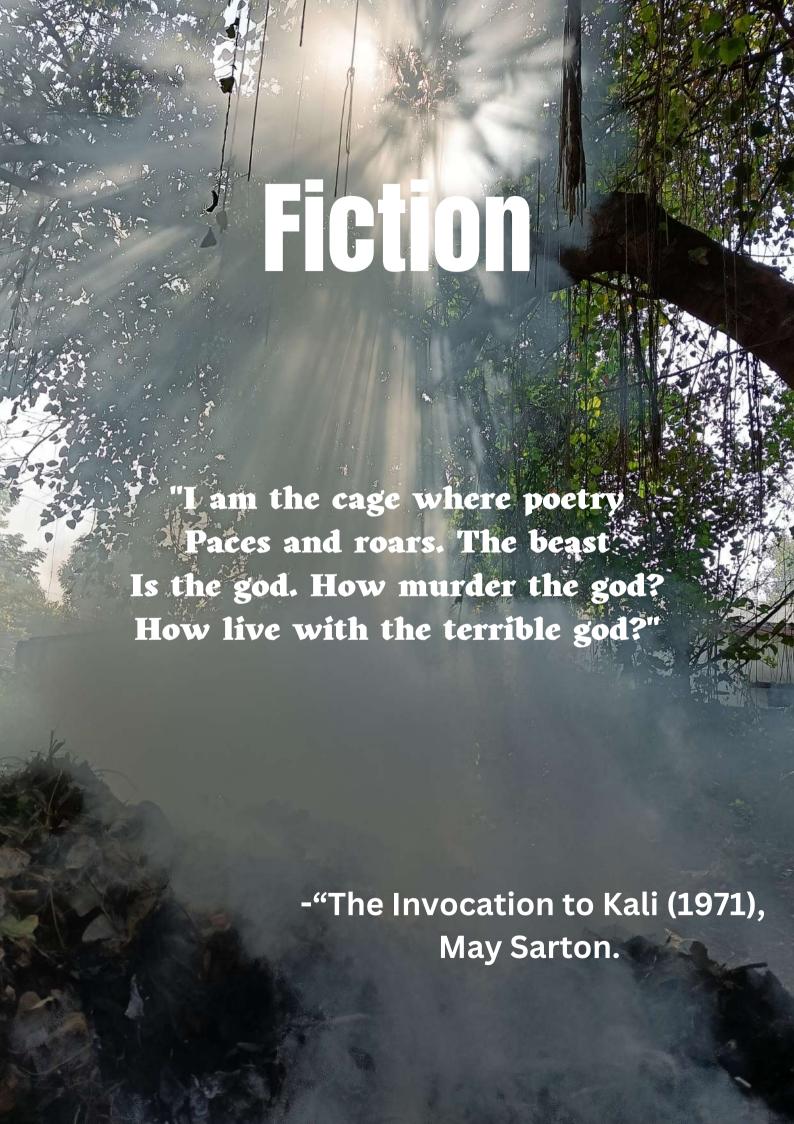
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Cyrus the Great, an Iranian emperor of the Achaemenid Dynasty, wrote the first human rights charter or the first declaration of human rights in 539 BC.

#### **About the Poet:**



Noora Shamsi Bahar is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Modern Languages, North South University, Bangladesh. She completed her MA in English from The University of Western Ontario and has been teaching undergraduate students since 2010, being the youngest lecturer in Bangladesh when she began her career. She has presented papers on the themes of violence (on the page, stage, and screen), performative revenge, rape trauma, childhood defiance, and transgressive womanhood in Oxford, Prague, and Dhaka, which have been published as book chapters and journal articles. Despite her Iranian parentage, Ms. Bahar finds

pleasure in reading Bengali fiction and translating them into English. She won the Tagore Award for Translated Fiction (2021), sponsored by *The Antonym*.



# Nightmares of the Afghan War

-Kychkar Narkabil

## "A welcome to arms"

Ι

I don't know how much longer I am going to live, but I can tell you that I've already lived for a long time. It's actually a lie that I've only been alive for 24 years. I've probably lived for a century or two but I'm still at a loss to figure out this darkness that keeps growing inside me day by day. I don't know how to see what it really is, this evil that breaks my spirit and saws my soul to pieces. I don't know if I'll ever be able to understand myself again, or even understand what has happened to me.

It's hard to live as an extra, as an overload. When it's not really you that they need, when you're just an expendable...something – I can't figure out how to say it.

The one thing I can say is this –I'm a soldier. I crawl around on the ground, my gun pressed to my chest. Bullets keep flying over my head. I am way too tired, my face is dusty and dirty. I am going somewhere to some battle, I am coming back from some battle. There are mountains, huge blasts, lots of blood, wounds and dead people; there are people alive whose eyes have turned to stone, whose hearts are filled with fear and danger...

"Kuchkar, you're too young!"

"I'm already 19, comrade Mayor."

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"I pity my three children."

"I'll miss my mother, I'm afraid of dying."

"Is your mother old?"

"Thirty-Seven."

"Terrible..."

"And what if we're captured?"
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"It won't happen. It's life or death...You'd be better off shooting yourself, that's just how it is."

The suffering of war doesn't turn into a memory. Instead, it just goes on every day. I never actually returned from the war. Mama, how old are you now? I've lived for more than tenfold of 24 years. When is it going to end? My heart hurts, Mama. The war never ends and I miss you. Are you still 37, Mama? I should be giving my wife flowers, socializing with a fake smile, reciting poems, drinking wine with my friends, making toasts, smoking cigarettes...But something's wrong with me. There is a dark fog inside of me. I just leave and keep leaving for the war. No, the war is not over, not by a long shot. Tomorrow, we're going to fight, we're going to shoot. Maybe this time I'll die, or at least come back wounded. Yesterday, Shukhrat and Avaz were killed. The battle before, it was Vasya and Zaytsev.

When you live with horror you get stone hearted. Nothing seems dangerous. Your pain actually becomes easy to bear when you realize that death will end all your misery. What's the big deal? Everybody dies. So I might die today or tomorrow, what's the difference. But, at least...maybe I can die the day after tomorrow.

Actually, I'm not even a human being when I'm at war. I'm a dirty, clumsy, senseless animal, cold-blooded, with no human feelings. If they tried to find an image to make a monument on the "Tragedy of the 20th Century," my statue would be ten times worse. The war,

the tragedy, the victims...they wouldn't even seem like a big deal. Instead, an 18 year old guy with a sad stare, whose look cannot even distinguish one color from another, who regrets ever being born, who is shivering with fear, who has gone crazy, hoping to share the last draw of your joint, so he can at least get high and enter that heavy powerful world flying. I would give you the last drop from my canteen for that. The water would run out, and I would just press my teeth harder against my lips and sip.

Are you still 37, Mom? Did your hair turn grey the day I was fighting with death, and you were the only one praying to save my life at that moment? I am not 24 years old. I have survived the claws of hell for the sake of your happiness, but to my own unhappiness. It's a game of chance, when I was playing with death I realized how long each moment of life actually is, and that I have lived longer than every person's life taken together.

Sometimes I miss the war. Believe me, folks, sometimes I feel like just going up a mountain and shooting somebody. You won't believe it, but I would return from battle tired but healthy, I would enjoy the risk and fear and closeness to death, I would enjoy watching the meaningless, weak, helpless dying bodies. I fell in love with my gun. I can easily distinguish the sounds of different explosions into categories such as bombs, mine blasts, machine guns, ER-ER-ES shells, AGK shells. They explode in my soul every day.

"Let's drink."

"Pour, Iqbol"

"You're pretty quiet"

"Don't try to make me talk, Iqbol. Just pour and shut up." It's all passing before my eyes, I only want to talk to myself. Sorry, friend, I'm exhausted. If I were still a human being the memories would torture me. You know, when guys who have been at war meet each other they feel sick inside, their eyes have this look. They know that they are expendable in this world, that they are being crumpled and thrown out like garbage. No matter what society it is, war turns men

into useless filthy trash. I am expendable. So pour me some wine, Iqbol, let a friendly soul pull me out of this darkness....

II

The earth feels at a loss turning,

The air scatters whistling.

The wounded mountains keep falling,

The world is looking for a stretcher.

The young grass keeps crying,

It feels sick and tired.

A drop of blood falls down,

From the water jar of heaven.

III

Last night Ernest Hemingway visited me. We talked till dawn. I said that it made no difference if I returned from the war dead or alive. He said that those who actually understood the dangers of war will go mad. I think he's probably right.

I said anyone who survives the war will be tortured for the rest of his life. How could anyone escape it?

He said it's really impossible. And, to tell the truth, war is something that is really difficult to tell the truth about.

"A Farewell to Arms," he said, "is a masterpiece that reveals the tragedy of war, the soul and spirit of a suffering man. When I wrote this novel I had already witnessed a lot of these events in my life. My father shot himself, my wife died, but not even these losses and suffering could divert my attention from thoughts of the war."

"You were going to say that the sadness of all pain and suffering dissolves in the face of a tragedy of the heart."

"Yes, that's right. It would be impossible to defeat this man."

"But I think that at war nobody wins. It's the war that always wins over mankind." Hemingway left his war saying. "Farewell to Arms," but I had to open the book that said, "Welcome to Arms."

IV

I don't know when I'm going to finish my story about war. I'm suffering a lot. And now my dreams have turned into nightmares. Even my thoughts don't belong to me. I'm losing track of my surroundings. I would have to go somewhere to finish the next part. Somewhere I can relax, where nobody can disturb me. It wouldn't be a bad idea if the doctors could tell you a way to distract you from yourself.

Describing the war is five times worse than dying. My hands and feet get weak, it's like something pitiless is eating my insides. It's destroying me because I can't show the truth, I can't express the whole meaning of the badness here. You have to cut up your heart so that somebody can look into it and see what you have seen, or at least to understand half of what you have been through.

There is a cold scene, an exhausted quietness frozen before my eyes. Land and sky are shaking together and coming closer and closer, just on the point of blending into each other. Death smells from the quiet dead. The tension hurts. Your eyes abhor this cold and heartbreaking existence. The skin of your will is breaking down and falling. It is impossible to read your state from your pale, ravaged face. You can't find any place to locate yourself, you have started to break into pieces from the inside. After awhile, you realize the shells are flying, they're thundering in the air. You cry out from the explosions, from the blasts turning the world upside-down. When a man roars from fear, his face convulses and his hair turns grey in a second. The cold sweat foams out from vessels where the blood has stopped running and your skin becomes like glue. You are dead but alive. Is death really so dangerous? The shells start flying again, they make a roaring sound. They seem to be tearing the air into pieces. You are lying on the earth, holding your head as if the shells were coming right at you.

So the war has started again. The heavy vehicles drag ahead tearing up the poor earth. You submit yourself to the will of the war as if you are unconscious from the screaming, from the dust that flies to the sky, from the dense and bitter smoke, from the whistling bullets, from all the sorrows and troubles, from all of it happening all at once.

Barely aware of anything, I jump behind a tree. The branches and leaves keep falling down with breaking and crackling noises. If you bring your face close to the bark of the striped white logs you can smell the shell powder. You know what will happen if the shrapnel tears off a man's hands and legs. His blood vessels will show and his bones will poke out, the blood from his torn off leg will fly fountain high into the air.

Why should I even talk about it? Hasn't it all happened before? I lie and pray to God to save my life with my head pressed against the ground, saying to myself, "I'm not going to die." I start daydreaming about how if a bullet hit me in the face there would be a crater where my face used to be, or maybe it would make a small hole where it entered, tearing away my flesh, and then my bones would scatter around like pieces of wood. Or if the bullet hit my forehead the side of my face would be torn off, my eyes would come out of their sockets. I would die all of a sudden without even feeling any pain. But no, I'm not going to die.

All at once, over my head, there's a blast, some kind of lightning, fire that seems to be flaming out of my own eyes. The world becomes white fog. In a second everything will be over. The thoughts in my mind are so toxic that I even get tired of expecting my own death. Suddenly, about a meter above the ground, the bark is blasted off the tree and scattered around. The bullet goes through the tree, gouging it like a nail. From fear I hug the earth and claw it so hard my fingers hurt with a sharp pain. Then the dust next to me explodes and without even being aware of it I am thrown up with the blast.

I am lying face up, somehow, and the sky is turning around me, fast. Something is pressing on my stomach. I start from a deafening scream and notice Zaytsev, from my rifle company, lying in the dust and dirt, his body shivering and shaking. His screaming cries overwhelm all the blasts and explosions. Zaytsev's shocking roar now rules the battlefield. I raise my head to move. The thing pressing on my stomach falls aside. I grimace as a warm gluey fluid is sprinkling into my face. I jump up. In front of me is a leg, torn off at the hip. The blood is springing up from the place where the flesh is hanging. Zaytsev's pale eyes are staring deadly cold at the sky. A white bone the size of a fist is sticking out from the place where the leg was torn off. His uniform pants and shirt are hanging wet on his body. The dusty ground is covered with his red blood. I try to lay the torn off leg next to the body, but the leg is too heavy. I just want to put the leg with the body, I can't think of anything else. I have completely forgotten about all the firing that's going on. The trees are breaking apart with the blasts, shrapnel is falling like rain.

V

I'm afraid to go out at night. There's a leg making heavy steps on the staircase, its climbing to the third floor. It's after me. Sometimes, when I put on my shoes at the door, it appears, right under my face. It stands there and shakes and shakes. My eyes get dim, I let out a yell. The leg comes wearing a blood-filled boot and a piece of Zaytsev's brown trousers.

What time is it? It's probably after midnight. Something is stepping up the stairs. It has reached the second floor...listen...it has reached the third floor...now it's here...it's knocking on my door....

VI

Today, I talked to the poet Eshqobil Shukur, about human beings and literature. He recited one of his poems. I told him that I couldn't write anything at all. He explained it by saying it was the poet's consciousness. Sometimes people have this state of mind. With this state of mind, he said, you might not be able to write even one line of a poem for months. I wasn't aware of having fallen into this state of mind, but there is some kind of weight on my soul that's been causing me trouble. I wanted to go somewhere that was somehow far away, but I didn't know where that could be. I told him that. You must be under the influence of something, you have to change yourself, you have to move on, said the poet. But I've gotten used to thinking about the war all the time. Frankly, I miss the battlefield.

"Can a man go back to those times that caused him so much suffering?" I asked him. He stared at me in shock and looked away. He said that past tragedies could turn into cherished memories. He said that I was enjoying the pain and suffering, and for a man there could be no greater misfortune.

"I believe that war will defeat the world, all of mankind," I said. Eshqobil Shukur pretended to have not heard me.

VII

The moment fate put a gun in my hand at the age of 18, I was destined to remain forever in the embrace of war. The number of people I had shot and killed was the number of times I had been shot and killed myself. My hands are bloodstained, my eyes are bloodstained, my mouth is bloodstained...My century and you too are bloodstained. We are all murderers.

My heart hurts. Unfired bullets riot in my chest. I have to fire them off, in any case. But at whom? Where?

#### VIII

"Kuchqor, I miss my family. I want to get out of here, now. Do you think we'll live till the end of it?"

"I'm so tired of all of it. We'll see what fate has in store for us, friend."

"If we ever return from this cursed war, as soon as we get back to Tashkent, we'll drink till we are dead unconscious.

"I hope we can all get home safe and sound."

"Yeah, if none of us are dead, we can go out to a restaurant together."

"Oh yes."

"And you can recite some inspired poetry."

"Of course. Give me a drag of your smoke."

"I hope we'll be that lucky."

"Don't tempt fate, Shukrat. You'll see, it will all be over someday. Then I'll recite poems at the top of my voice."

"Do you think people will be shocked?"

"I don't care! If you want I'll recite poems standing on the table. If only we're all safe and sound."

"Really?"

"Of course. Restaurants, bars, cinemas, cute girls, it will all be ours, right?"

"I hope it will all come true."

But no, Shukrat, no. Your wish did not come true. Almost half of us were gone, dead, by the time we got out of there. And I lost half my soul. One half of the world was blasted away, my friend. Do you want me to recite some poems to the open graves, Shuhrat? Do I deserve to recite any poems, Shukrat? Would it be worth anything if I recited poems? My heart is not filled with poems now, but with dirges, Shukrat. Why did you grip my hands so tightly when your eyes were closing for the last time, friend? My heart and soul were aching, tears fell from my eyes, my throat was clogged. You were going to die and leave me in a life which did not smile at us, but that I survived into. Shukrat, my friend, for a moment when you were saying goodbye to the sky and the clouds, your lips shivered:

#### "RECITE POEMS IN ANY CASE."

I'll recite, friend, I'll recite lurning in flames, spitting and scattering. Farewell to you, my friend!

IX

"So what do you want, sir?"

"Be a good girl, bring me six bottles of beer."

"Just for you? Alone?"

"Yeah, is that a problem? You want me to blow up your bar!"

The waitress' eyes open wide. She thinks I must be crazy. Anyway, she brings six bottles of beer and puts them on the table. She makes me pay the bill right away as if she has to run away from an enemy.

The world is shaky. The world is like a ship being drowned in the depths of the ocean. People are walking around with their heads down and their feet up in the sky. Look, people are walking on their heads! On their headzzzz!

X

In my throat, forty souls of mine are splashing,

If I stare at the sky, the mountain and rocks are flaming.

At this moment my mother is remembering me, burning.

Farewell, my mother, my dear friends, start crying and weeping.

The world isn't worth my fingernail,

Whatever I saw,

The world will take revenge on me.

This bullet that hits my chest,

Will tear my mother's breast.

I could agree to rot in this ground,

If only I could just visit my motherland for a second.

I am dying,

My tortured body is washed by my blood.

I wish I could hug my mother,

Say farewell to me, and cry for my mother, friends.

XI

Like a ship overturned in a storm, I fall down together with the table. Empty bottles fall on top of me with jingling sounds. The ceiling is turning around and around at high speed. Over me I notice some bodies turning around with the ceiling. They seem to resemble police. Yes, that's them. Something hits my head, heavy like a stone. My eyes are inflamed and I come to my senses a little. I clearly see two policemen with batons. They're beating me and hitting me on the legs as they drag me out of the bar. One by one they all pull me out.

"Idiot! Why'd you drink so much if you can't handle it?"

"Hey, this guy's a journalist, isn't he?"

"Just let him lie there, he's passed out, right? He's crazy."

"Hey, I think he works for the same newspaper my sister works at."

"Put his stuff back into his pockets."

I can't sleep at all tonight. The cockroaches are crawling over my body and not letting me sleep. The fleas are sucking my blood. What is that dropping onto my face? What is that thing hanging from the ceiling, waving at me? What is it? Ugh, ugh, it's a man's hand, a man's hand. Mama, mama, please!

#### XIII

On the way back from Ali-hali our troops demolished a village and turned it to ruins. The houses, fences, all knocked down. Tanks drove through, grinding up the yards and gardens. We passed by shooting at the farm animals. We picked and ate fruit as if it was our own orchards, throwing fruit at each other for fun. Before we got there the artillery, planes, and helicopters had bombarded and shelled it so fiercely that there was not a human to be seen in the village. When we passed a ruined house with broken windows Bachkaryov kept staring at me, pointing at the half fallen down wall with his hand. Under the wall lay the dead body of a boy, about three years old, completely naked, his intestines hanging out loosely. I covered my face. My legs shook and I got dizzy. I started throwing up over and over. My jaw cracked, cold sweat ran from my body. I wished and wished very, very much that the earth would swallow all our regiments and all our army completely. I had no interest in life, or for my own survival.

Nothing will ever wipe out the scene that is stamped in my eyes. It will accompany me for as long as I live. The fallen wall, and I myself, fallen along with it.

Something seems to be pulling my bed somewhere. Something soft is touching my feet. Now it has crawled up to my knees. My body is freezing. I'm afraid to look at it. It's crawling towards my stomach. It wants to lie next to me. I'm shivering, I look at it, terrified. At that

moment a swarthy baby claws my face with both hands, something is streaming down his rotted crocodile skin. I try to scream but my voice is strangled in my throat.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Bring me some water, I had a nightmare."

My wife runs sleepily to the kitchen. My little son lying next to me cries out. Without coming to my senses fully, I try to calm down my son.

"Go on, go to sleep now kiddo, go to sleep now..."

"Here is the water, drink it please. My God, you scared me to death. Did you have a fright today?" I keep silent, watching over my son and wife until dawn. I'm afraid of going to sleep.

#### XIV

There's another bad thing about war. The tragedy is that war passes on to the next generation through blood, leaving its impact on the whole human race. The scenes of each war, each minute of which seemed to have lasted for years, turns man into a beast, makes him numb. Those who witness it will live all of their lives in the claws of that war. I was shocked to see that my son, not even two yet, won't let his toy machine gun out of his hands. Now, he'd rather play with guns than trucks, remote-control cars, or any other toy. I wonder suspiciously, whether his interest was inherited from me in the form of the revolt which sometimes riots in my blood.

"Hey, son, drop that thing in your hand. Can't you see it's a gun? It can kill people like me, like you and your mom (No, I had shot one myself).

XV

Whenever I have written about the Afghan war, I have considered myself a bloody handed soldier of an occupying army, with its policies of endless sins. We are occupiers, that's all there is to it. I don't want any comments or other interpretations. Nor do I want the participants of the Afghan war to be tortured, discriminated against, or called international soldiers. And don't belittle us by claiming 'the state has taken care of us.'

Whatever I have written about the Afghan war I considered myself a bloody handed soldier of an occupying army, with its policy of endless sins. We are occupants. That's all. I don't want any other comments or interpretations. Nor do I want the participants of the Afghan war to be tortured, discriminated against, or to be called international soldiers. And don't insult your own intelligence by saying that 'the state has taken care of them.

The poet Nabi Jaloliddin who fought in Afghanistan wrote to ask people to pity the soldiers, to not talk about them behind their backs, and if they were no longer needed, to please gather them all at Independence Square and mow them down with bullets. But no, no Nabi, they wouldn't dare shoot us. If the people who were really guilty of the Afghan war were gathered, there would be no bullets left for you and me. There would be countless government officials, generals and talking heads who would have to be shot down first. I would be willing to make myself a target for a bullet at the end. If only for the sake of a peaceful, quiet life for my son, who is still unaware of the world's cruelty, for the sake of a country that could promise that my son would not see any war.

My dear friend, Nabi Jaloliddin! The sinners of this war are countless.

XVI

It's raining heavily. It's about evening. I am climbing up a slippery hill. There is no trace of a human to be seen anywhere. But I'm carrying my gun over my shoulder. My son is there beside me. I'm wearing my flak jacket. Suddenly, in front of me, there are bearded men with guns in their hands. I fire at them, but my machine gun doesn't work. Carrying my son, I run down the hill. They are following us.

**Translated by Kosim Mamurov** 

## "The War"

She was six years old.

But, she wasn't a child.

She looked through the window.

There was a war going on outside.

She drew the curtains.

She came across slowly to the table. She wrote on white paper with her obscure handwriting: "I am leaving. Let me know when the war stops. I will return..."

Her mother took her to remote areas away from the front where there weren't any sounds of guns, grenades, shells and bombs.

Time passed. Time had flown by. There appeared a grave in the remote areas on which it was written in that obscure handwriting: "I am leaving. Let me know when the war stops. I will return..."

## "The Pillar"

My hair was shaved at the barbershop. I looked at my bald head in the mirror when I came home. My father sighed as he saw my appearance.

"Are you leaving?"

"Yes, I am leaving, dad."

"Do you know where will you go? Did they report it to you?"

"Yes. They said: "To Afghanistan." Maybe, they will take us to another place. God only knows!"

"There can be no lies in cold news. So you are going to the war..."

My father shook his head. He sighed heavily and put his hand on the left side of his chest as if his heart ached: "O my child! O my child!" His wailing came from his inside. He stared at me leaning on the pillar.

"You know, the war killed my dad. I was only three years old at that time" he said, eventually. "I became an orphan when I was three. My father left me alone in this world and left me to live an orphan's life. But... but you don't do it to me. Don't make me an orphan again, son!" He started sobbing like a child.

I had never seen him in such a condition. I sat down in front of him in confusion.

It seemed to me that if the pillar wasn't there, my father would have fallen down. I looked at the pillar again. The pillar helped to hold not only my father, but also the sky above him.

When I wandered along the front to the sound of machine guns, I heard my father's plea: "...Don't do me it to me! Don't make me an orphan again, son!.." I heard it repeatedly "...Don't do me it to me! Don't make me an orphan again, son!.."

I always prayed to God before the horrific war. I asked Him: "Oh, my God, please, help me, keep me alive. Don't make my father an orphan again..."

I returned. I saw a war. My father faced two wars. I think that there can be no big or small war. However, one thing makes me calm: 'my war' didn't part him from me. It didn't make him an orphan again.

Thank God he is alive! He is eighty years old. There is still that pillar in the middle of our yard. Recently, I built a rectangular marble wall around it. I don't want people to lean on it

because I couldn't throw it away. It helped my father hold himself at a complicated time. It restrained him from falling down like another son once, but I didn't...

## "The Boots"

They lost their owner in the war.

A woman took and put them in the corner of room.

"Keep silence! Hey, turn away!" She placed the boots facing the corner with orders like these.

They were like two tiny orphan children looking at her sadly. They stood there for almost half an hour. The woman began to feel sorry them.

"Ok! Keep silence! No more noise, ok!" She hugged them tightly and then put them on the chair.

"Come here, baby. We will have dinner together as usual!"

She stared at the boots for a long time and remembered something. Suddenly, she cried out with pain. The woman was sobbing while holding her head.

She was only six years old... The owner of these boots...

Translated by Shakhnoza Rakhmanova

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



Kychkar Narkabil was born in 1968 in the village of Mominkul in the Altynsay district of Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya region. He is the author of many poetry books, including *Tulip in My Palm*, *The Unique World*, *Flower in the Window*, and others. His prose works include *Company*, *Mystery under the Sky*, *We Did Not Return from the War...*, *Samodil*, *There Was No Sky in the Distance* and *The First Day of the War*.Narkabil's dramatic plays such as *Tests of Destiny*, *You Wake the Sun*, *Light Does Not Stay in the Shade* and

Everything Has an Answer have been staged in theaters in Uzbekistan and other regions. The author's works have also been warmly received by Russian readers. His books Hochu uvidet tvoi glaza and Tulpan na snegu have been published in the Russian Federation, and his short stories appear regularly in several prestigious Russian publications. Narkabil is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper Man and the Law, published by the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He is a member of the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, as well as of the Writers' Union of Uzbekistan.

# "Stalks, Shoots and Leaves"

#### -Srinjay Chakravarti

Laurel and Hardy, everyone called the two brothers. The younger brother, Saral, was short, fair, and lanky, with always an amiable, facetious expression on his face, much like Stan Laurel. He was clumsy, too, like the legendary comic actor, and gauche. While his elder brother Sahaj was such a spitting image of Oliver Hardy that people stopped and stared, especially when the duo was together. He was a tall, big, burly man, with a peevish expression always clouding his countenance. The only difference from the American comedian was that Sahaj was rather swarthy. You could tell they were brothers quite easily, from their features.

It was the summer of 1974. The Naiya brothers had arrived a few weeks ago and set up a shop at the bazaar on Calcutta's Rhododendron Road. It wasn't even a makeshift stall, this shop of theirs—just a handcart on which were piled fresh fruit and vegetables.

Their polite demeanour and courteous behaviour soon won over many patrons, and all sorts of customers from nearby localities would flock to them for fresh produce. Their prices, too, were extremely reasonable.

Then the monsoons arrived, and Sahaj and Saral found it difficult to negotiate the muddy and slushy streets with their handcart. But they couldn't afford to invest in a proper, stationary shop in the market—it required a lot of capital, as they well knew. They did get hold of a huge, multicoloured umbrella and kept going. With the arrival of autumn, the Bengali season of festivals, the vegetable vendors were in a somewhat better position.

One day in late November, Mrs Uttora Samajpati visited the market on Rhododendron Road after quite a few years. Her maidservant, Pratibha, usually did all the shopping for her, buying fruits, vegetables, fish, and meat for her, and then herself cooked them for the old rich widow. But Pratibha had gone away that morning for a week to her village home in Bankura.

Mrs Samajpati got down from her old Landmaster. Her driver Lakshman helped her alight—she was getting old and her legs were rather weak.

"Wait for me, Lakshman, while I get some greens."

She trundled to the first corner, where Saral stood with the handcart. It was a position that gave the brothers a strategic advantage in attracting customers. Sahaj was not there that day.

Mrs Samajpati picked up a couple of exceptionally large, ivory-white, splendid cauliflowers at his shop. As Saral started to wrap the cauliflowers in a bag, she said hastily, "I only want the curd, please."

"What?" Saral was startled.

"The florets of the cauliflower—don't you know, they're called curd, since they look so much like cheese curd..."

"You want only the head?"

"Yes, only the white flesh. Cut off the stalks, shoots, and leaves, please,' she said.

Saral looked at her, aghast. "But why? Why do you want to just throw them away?"

"Yes, of course," Mrs Samajpati said. "Who can eat them? These can't be digested at all! Just hack off those extra things—the stalks, the stems, the outer leaves, and the other green stuff, and discard them."

Saral looked at the old lady for a long moment, tears glistening in his eyes. Then he lowered his eyes and got to work, hacking away at the hard green shoots and leaves, clearing away the excess roughage.

Mrs Samajpati, naturally, was quite startled and puzzled. "What's the matter? Did I say something wrong?"

"Oh, it's nothing, really. It's just that I suddenly remembered those days in Pakistan when we considered ourselves lucky if we could find even a handful of these cauliflower leaves and shoots."

Understanding dawned on her face.

Saral's voice choked. "For weeks on end that winter some three years ago, this was all we got to eat. Soups of these stalks, these hard green stems and leaves...the cauliflower heads themselves were an unheard-of luxury. It was a very lucky day for us in the winter months when we got to eat an entire cauliflower for lunch and dinner."

"Was it during the war, then?"

"Yes, Bangladesh had not been born yet. We were still at our village in Gaibandha. Our family had stayed back in East Pakistan after India's Partition in 1947, but even we were forced to abandon our homestead in 1971. There were several Hindu families in our village, and one by one we all fled. Of course, Muslims, too, were not spared. Particularly those who worked for the Bangla Language Movement, the movement for our mother language."

"The last straw came when our next-door neighbour, Ahmed, was killed. He had been a dear friend of mine. Pakistani soldiers came one night and bayoneted him after he refused to disclose our whereabouts. They then gangraped his younger sister Nusrat in front of her parents' eyes, and then slit her throat. We were hiding in the plantain grove behind our house and could hear her screams. The army of the occupation forces from Islamabad dumped both the bodies in a canal nearby and went away."

"We fled in terror after that—my parents, my younger sister, my brother, and myself. We put up at a refugee colony near Calcutta. After a few days, we moved into an abandoned shanty in a slum near Sealdah railway station. We had to do something to hold our bodies and souls together—and so we became vegetable vendors at Sealdah market. We came to this bazaar just a few months ago."

Saral wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "Our family had everything back there in Pakistan—a homestead, rice fields, mango orchards, banana groves, ponds, and canals. All gone now!"

"We didn't even have passports. We sold whatever we had, a little gold jewellery and our utensils, and somehow snaked into India through secret, underground routes, travelling for days on end by bullock-cart and boat. We all came to India, our extended family—my parents and

grandparents, uncles and aunts and cousins...all except my little cousin Nipuna. She was drowned one stormy night while trying to board a boat to cross the Padma."

Mrs Samajpati started to say something, but then stopped.

"There were days when we thought we would die of hunger. When we didn't get even cauliflower leaves to stew and eat."

He handed over the packet to Mrs Samajpati with a watery smile, who blinked up nervously at him.

"That's why, when you asked me to throw away the excess leaves into the garbage bin, memories of those traumatic days came back. I remembered those harrowing days and nights, when even vegetables were impossible to get, what to speak of mutton or fish."

Mrs Samajpati didn't know where to look. She lived alone with her maidservant and driver, her furniture, books, and memories, in a sprawling three-storied house in the upscale neighbourhood of Rhododendron Avenue nearby.

She had two daughters: both were married and had settled abroad. Lekha, the younger daughter, was in Singapore, while Rekha lived in Dubai.

Mrs Samajpati had been born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth—her father, who had been one of Bengal's leading tea planters, had owned a string of tea estates in Assam. Her husband had retired as a director in a multinational paint company. He had passed away a few years ago.

Mrs Samajpati trudged back to her car with her cauliflower heads. She didn't feel like shopping anymore.

She had lost her appetite—she decided she would go back home and go to bed at once. She would cook the cauliflower heads tomorrow.

#### **About the Writer:**



Srinjay Chakravarti is a writer, editor and translator based in Kolkata. He was educated at St. Xavier's College, Calcutta and at universities based in Calcutta and New Delhi. University degrees: B.Sc. (Economics honours), M.A. (English). A former journalist with The *Financial Times* Group, his creative writing has appeared in more than 150 publications in over 40 countries. His first book of poems *Occam's Razor* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta: 1994) received the Salt Literary Award from John Kinsella in 1995. He has won one of the top

prizes (\$7,500) in the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Memorial Poetry Competition 2007–08. Website: www.srinjaychakravarti.com.

Ghosh frownes.
"No. A mother and father and six siblings. I am the warried and I: "No. A mother and "No. A mother and in a few years you will be married and living

parents' house," Ghosh speculated. "I suppose."

Ghosh shook his head. "You are still young. Free," spreading his hands apart for emphasis. "Do yourself Before it's too late, without thinking too much about pack a pillow and a blanket and see as much of the world can. You will not regret it. One do it will he

Ashoke said i g lift tur hands. "To t in the distributing an inch.

"To each his own," Ghosh said. He tipped his head poly to one side, letting the last of the cigarette drop from he gertips. He reached into a bag by his feet and took or diary, turning to the twentieth of October. The page was and on it, with a fountain pen whose cap he ceremonious

crewed, he wrote his all the expanse rippe over motive engine and handed to Ashoke will still be be abeautiful new The sound we are the cona butterfly will still be abeautiful new The sound we gies capsized into and the cona sixth contains nd the tram depot."

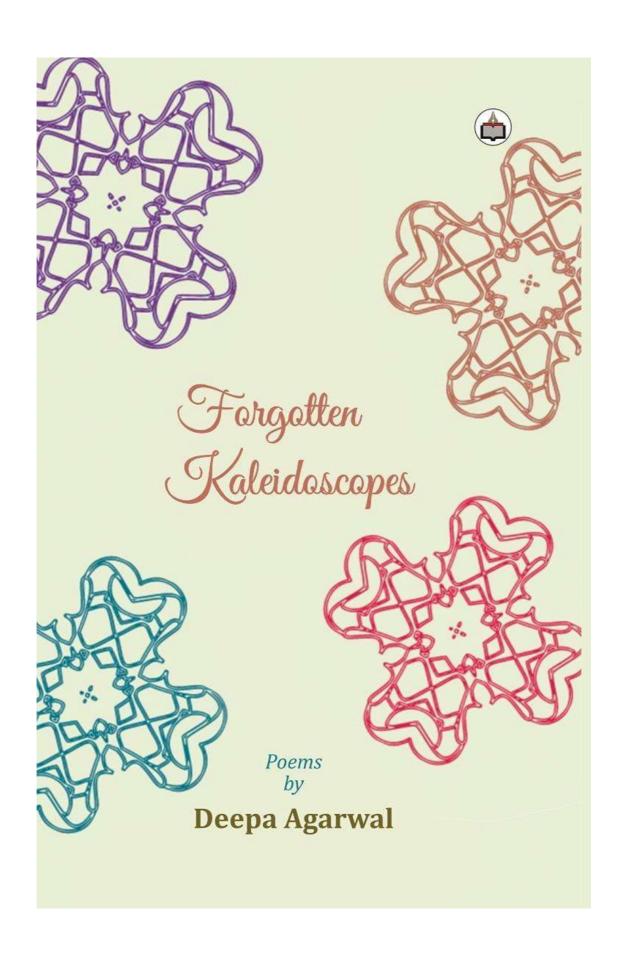
"Thank you," Ashoke said, folding up the information and tting it at the back of his book.

"How about a game of cards?" Ghosh suggested. He pull a well-worn deck from his suit pocket, with Big Ben ge on the back. But Ashoke politely deRuskin Bond ard games, and besides which, he preferred to read. ne the passengers brushed their teeth in the vestibule ged into their -

om the same cup with ne rim, then settled in ights and turning their

Only Ashoke contin single small bulb glow time he looked through night, at the vague of mes. Carefully he p v delicately tunnele suringly, powerfully the wheels. Sparks dow. A fine layer of eyelid, his arm, his he scrub himself wir rived. Immersed in ost in the wide, sno unaware that one da Ashoke was still re

> and sixth, contain sengers, telescope their sleep. The se well, flung by the accident occurred Ghatshila and D able phone woul nearly five kilon shila, that he wa Over an hour pa



Forgotten Kaleidoscopes

Poems by Deepa Agarwal, published by Authors Press (2021)

Price: ₹ 295/-

ISBN: 978-93-91314-12-5

Language: English, pp.130

-Seema Jaiswal

"Deceptively simple and seductively suggestive, Deepa Agarwal's verses flow as a river that

offers surprises in its twists and bends, subtly revealing meaning."

Sukrita Paul Kumar

History has always been a testament to the fact that a woman, oftentimes, has been

treated as an object of subjugation, violence and marginalization on different bases. Since the

beginning of civilization, a woman has remained de facto the private asset of a man. Religion,

law, science and history have been used as male chauvinistic weapons in order to ensure

female subservience. Forgotten Kaleidoscopes, an indispensable compendium of as many as

seventy-seven poems written by Deepa Agarwal, consequently, comes up with a splash of

hope for those who are unheard, unvoiced and suppressed for so many years. It is an ultimate

concoction interspersed with miscellaneous themes, that opens up the chauvinism and double

standards that women in India face routinely. The poet provides her reader and more so, the

females, the substantial space to think and discuss their vulnerability and subordination as

well as resistance and resilience to carve out a niche for their own.

Womanspeak, the first and the longest section, unravels multiple issues related to

women. The eponymous poem concludes with the gut-wrenching experience of a widow in

India. Here, Agarwal seems to refute the idea that a man should be the fulcrum of a woman's

life. She also questions the patriarchal structure and an overbearing societal obligation imposed upon women.

"....a woman's life must lose colour

without a man; no matter

how many indifferent rainbows stain the sky."

The poet also repudiates the cultural barriers that a woman has been subjected to and the extremities she has been exposed to. Although prima facie, the titular poem sounds like a ride of amusement, a song full of as many colours in a kaleidoscope but soon all of these get tempered and morphed into a scar that leaves the reader into dismay. "A Tale of Two Princesses" comments on the set norms where society appreciates girls who are meek, vulnerable and dependent rather than those who are vivacious, effervescent and independent. "She, Innocent Fly" exudes the resilience of a woman who makes her way through every struggle and remains intact.

"She inhales

healing turmeric

even as chillies exude fumes

that blister her throat

and she recalls

the flower sweet breath of babes

along with the everyday reek of garbage."

It also champions the idea of women's empowerment where she encourages women to rise like a phoenix and take charge of their own identity, fiercely and fearlessly.

An assertive and strong-willed woman who is exposed to the adversities of life, being tossed like a ship in a stormy sea and buffeted by adverse circumstances and still has the courage to stand like a rock is well executed in the poem, "Do Not Weep Lonely Mirror".

"Mother India" and "Thoughts on a Ritual" share a common thread that girl children are largely undesirable and unwished for. "Accident Prone Women" really speaks to the reader as it triggers inconvenient questions that have no straight answers.

This catalogue operates on various other feminist standpoints, talking about rape cases, discarded love, brutal domestic violence and abusive marriage, underprivileged women, gender stereotypes and much more. It urges women to stick around, through all thick and thin.

Childhood, the second section is a moving meditation on childhood and its nitty-gritty. "Childhood Rain" underlines the glaring generation gap and the gaping disconnect we have with nature as we age. "A Cloistered Girl" showcases the well-established tyranny of patriarchy that imposes social, cultural and religious restrictions on girls who cannot have their say at all. And "Once There was a Childhood" fondly captures the nostalgic elegance of childhood which has its difficulties and struggles but certainly not at the expense of joy and energy.

Loving and Hoping, the third section alternates between unfulfilled love and desperate hope. It echoes the huge expectations from love, despite being fully aware that the returns are set to bring unfulfillment and disappointment. This whole section is a lament for aching loneliness, agony, and discomfort that shares the scary experience of unfulfilled love, unfulfilled love left with hope, hope that stands tall amidst every adversity, miseries, painful chasm of being among the unknown, yearning, and limitations in love. An autobiographical tone runs through the book, especially in the fourth segment of this assortment. The crisis can be well observed through the first-person narrative that many poems find their expression in.

The Cage of Memory, thus, is a resonance of the poet persona's miserable past, a memory of her dead father, her elderly mother, her brother and her lover. Her past seems to

be full of injustice, obsolescence, suppression, and denial. Though it's now gone, she still carries its bruises in her heart.

"Questions remain unanswered

answers remain unquestioned, argument is stilled with acquiescence

and at the end, a great weariness

because it has to mean... it must have been,

it's gone, it's done..."

Amidst the wide range of subjects, *Cityscapes* is inundated with a very piercing, gloomy, poignant display of accidents and an unpromising picture of Delhi. "Good Thoughts" is synonymous with good people who are well-mannered, spotless, brave, skillful and strong enough to "resist the buffeting of the gale" but they still cannot survive amidst the "marauders, unfettered, undisciplined" people.

Through the next segment which is *Word*, Deepa Agarwal calls for a renaissance in poetry reading and writing. She urges words (poetry) to let them "loose on the air like pine seeds." She is trying to awaken poetry's voice that "had seeped like rain water into the earth." For her, reading and enjoying poetry is like "a mango seed emerging from mundane soil, tender, fresh, trembling like victory unfurling" but now they are "congealed in the throat like unshed tears" and entombed in the clutter of daily living. She advocates the dynamism of poetry to keep it alive and upholds the idea that poetry has the power to bring the unprecedented, and smothered voices into light that people fear to even think and talk about. If poetry can manifest a beautiful and delicate emotion through words, it also can embody the grief, despair, deadly and devastated truth of life, she says. She showers all her love for poetry when she states,

"But she was a poem, and I embraced her with savage joy."

Random Utterances, the concluding segment of this assemblage, facilitates the readers with a wide spectrum of life lessons that comes out of Agarwal's own experiences. It offers an intense poetic journey that traces multifarious themes. The vicious circle of life, inevitable death, the struggle of a poet to compose a good poem, nature, challenges of old age, ageing, survival, solitude, pop culture, advertisement and commercialization of everything, diminished sensitivity, deceit, to say the least, have been displayed on her vast thematic canvas.

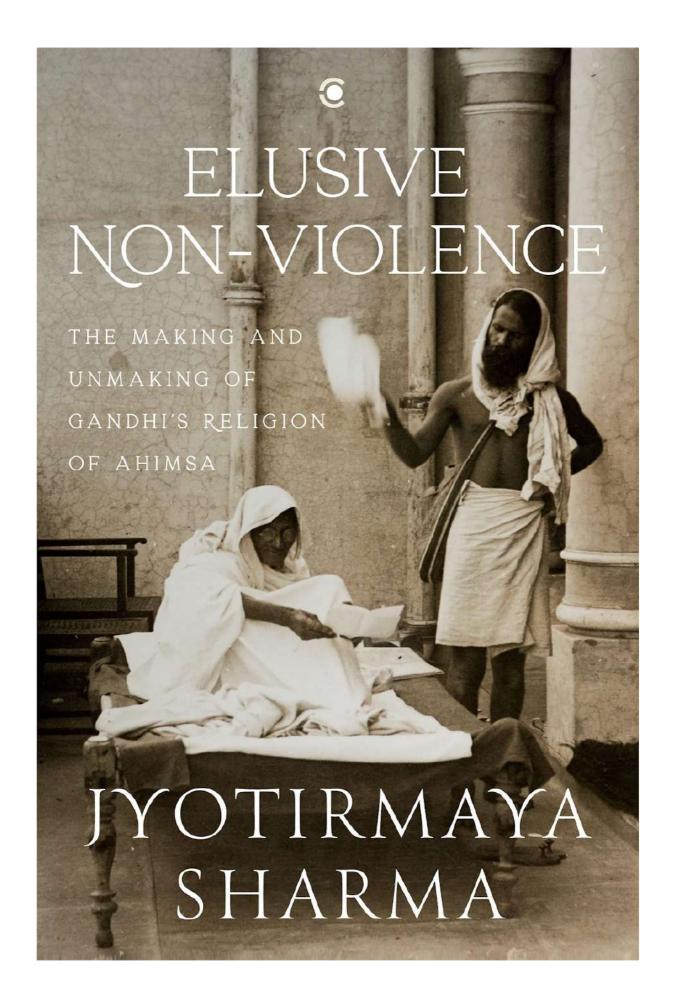
Forgotten Kaleidoscopes' charm and diversity lie in its rigorous use of abundant similes, metaphors, euphemisms, allusions and enjambment that make the collection stylistically vibrant.

Agarwal's sharply-etched and crystallized images make it more vivid and easy to relate to, and thus this bittersweet concoction successfully tugs at the heartstrings. Deepa Agarwal is a poet with loads of emotional quotient and academic brilliance and this compilation is a repertoire of nostalgic memories and a treasure trove of unspoken emotions showcasing her intellectual depth.

### **About the writer:**



Seema Jaiswal is an Assistant Professor of English. She is an ardent lover of nature and its beauty who loves visiting religious places. *Kashi* is the fulcrum of her life. She is a Research Scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her area of research falls under the category of Gender Studies.



Elusive Non-Violence: The Making and Unmaking of Gandhi's

Religion of Ahimsa by Jyotirmaya Sharma

Published by Context, Westland Publications, Chennai (2021)

**Price: Rs 381/-**

ISBN: 9789390679607

Language: English, pp. 268

-Mohd. Siddique Khan

The book focuses on Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's interpretation and restatement of

Hinduism to establish Ahimsa as the core value of his religion and politics. Sharma begins the

'Introduction' by taking up the contemporary and historical reflections on the image of

Gandhi. His admirers-Barack Obama, Trevor Noah, Malcolm Gladwell, Albert Einstein,

Sohan Lal Dwivedi, etc, and critics-Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhagat Singh, B.R. Ambedkar and

Martin Buber are put in contrast. Critics' accounts are studied in detail and this set the critical

tone of the book as it starts with presenting Gandhi's inconsistencies as put variously by

revolutionaries, extremist nationalists, Arya Samaj members, Sanatanists, and a Jew

philosopher. These references are not new, but the author, however, has used them efficiently

to prepare a background. The first chapter, 'Truth and Non-Violence is My Creed' discusses

the question of Hindu-Muslim rivalry amidst the danger of retaliation by Hindus on the

assassination of a Hindu preacher from Arya Samaj, Swami Shraddhanand (1926) by a

Muslim man. Gandhi, here, as quoted by Sharma emerges as a pacifier for the words he chose

in his tribute to Shraddhanand's murder. He calls the assassin 'brother', but he also forbids

the two communities to commit violence for it will be a breach of their respective religions.

This chapter affirms and condemns Gandhi equally for his pragmatic politics. The second

chapter, 'Hinduism Is an Ocean into Which All the Rivers Run' shifts the narrative from historical to philosophical, whereby Gandhi appears as a passionate believer in the superiority of Hinduism as a religion for the mankind. This chapter is unique for its portrayal of Gandhi as a master of the narrative-building as he 'fabricates' the tradition of Ahimsa and his understanding of the history of Hinduism and India, going through 'trials' and 'epochs'. Gandhi also introduces a utopian mission of Hinduism for the betterment of India, whose responsibility lies solely on Hindus for they are superior in number and religion. The third chapter, 'Truth and Non-Violence Are Our Goal' proceeds with Gandhi's idea of Hinduism as a true religion which although has gone through interpolation, is still essential to be retained in its true essence by the use of reason. Gandhi appears as an interpreter of Hindu scriptures and prioritizes Moksha, Satya and Ahimsa as important tenets of Hinduism and rejects every Hindu preacher and principle which seem unreasonable and unjust for mankind. Chapter four titled 'I shall Expect Non-violence to Arise Out of that Chaos' shows Gandhi's paradoxical stance on non-violence by juxtaposing the inevitability of violence. Sharma aptly points out here Gandhi's inconsistencies as his understanding of Ahimsa seems to be confused and contradictory. In the fifth and last chapter titled 'In the Life Beyond There is no Himsa and Ahimsa', Gandhi is shown to be a man of abstractions who persistently urges to forsake the fear, cowardice and desires related to the human body. For as long as the body exists, there will be violence; Gandhi insists on accepting death as the ultimate reality to attain the state of Moksha.

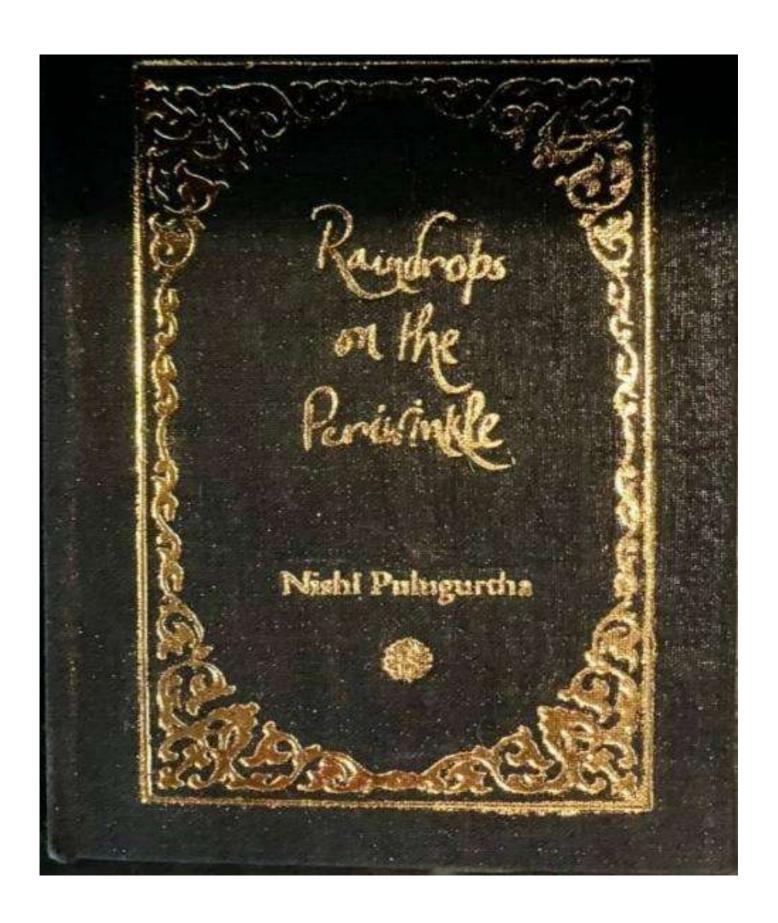
The book also tries to comment on other issues like untouchability, cow slaughter and inter-religion marriages within the context of Hinduism. Gandhi's interpretation of each of these issues is taken from Hindu scriptures, yet he modifies them according to his political aspirations. Gandhi's ambivalence on belief in one God, idol worship, Arya Samaj, and India as a non-violent civilization only adds up to further intricacies.

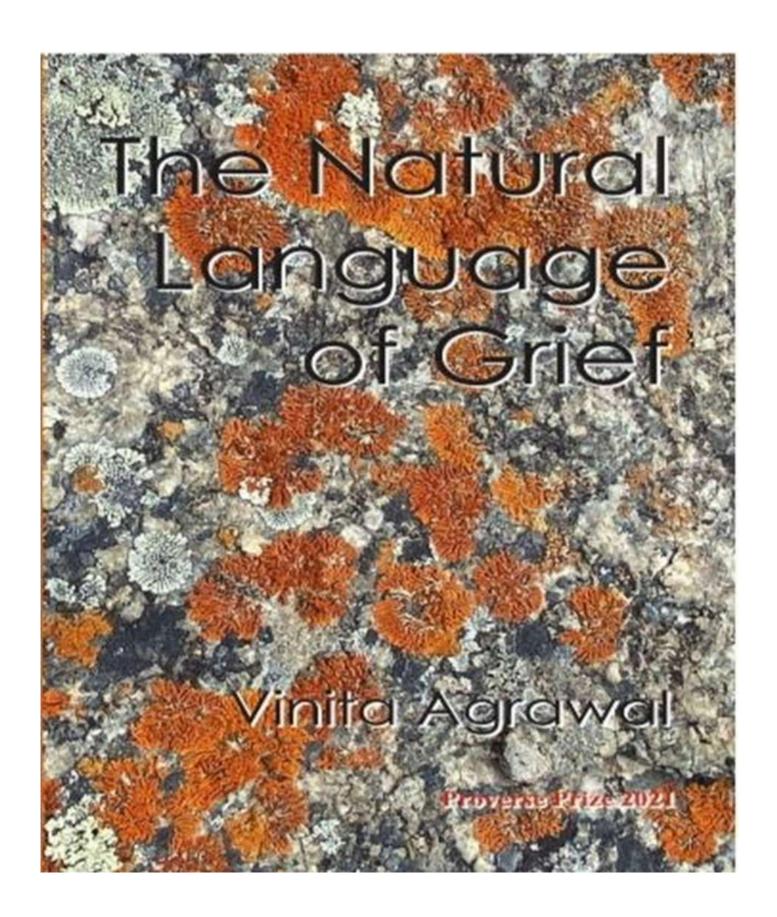
Sharma builds up a strong case against Gandhi's paradoxes and inconsistencies by using his speeches, letters, articles, etc. Sharma's tone is less scathing in the last two chapters where Gandhi's interpretation of Hinduism is contrasted and comprehended in the light of Hindu scriptures. The introduction and the first chapter seem to be more sceptical on Gandhi's attitude on the questions of communalism, Nazi killing of Jews, revolutionaries, and understanding of authentic history. Words used by Sharma: 'fabricates, confuses, forges, etc' concerning Gandhi's speeches and points of view puts Gandhi's ideologies in suspicion. Sharma's thorough research gives an objective and balanced understanding of Gandhi as a man and a politician. While trying to trace Gandhi's understanding of Hinduism, Sharma has subtly revealed his politics. However, there is a repetition of ideas and the book moves haphazardly in terms of arguments. The book appears and unintentionally fits within the critical-of-Gandhi canon and thus becomes relevant to contemporary politics, academics, and research. For the book can't be read in isolation and will eventually fall into the revisionist historical discourses emerging in Indian research, the book may prove to be an important read. The idea of 'non-violence as elusive' is not new in Gandhian studies but its analysis through a religious prism gives a new interesting intersection between Gandhi's religion and politics.

## **About the writer:**



Mohd. Siddique Khan is a Research Scholar pursuing his Ph.D from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His areas of research are South-Asian Literature, Indian Writing in English, and Literature in Translation.





# Raindrops on the Periwinkle (Nishi Pulugurtha)

#### and

# The Natural Language of Grief (Vinita Agrawal)

## Raindrops on the Periwinkle:

Published by Writers Workshop, India (2022)

**Price: ₹200/-**

ISBN - 978-81-956648-4-9

The Natural Language of Grief:

**Published by Notion Press (2022)** 

**Price: ₹ 354/-**

ISBN - 13: 978-988-8492-62-6

### -Akanksha Pandey

Nishi Pulugurtha is a versatile writer based in Kolkata. Her publications include a monograph, *Derozio* (2010), a collection of essays on travel titled *Out in the Open* (2019) and *Across and Beyond* (2020), a volume of poems, *The Real and the Unreal and Other poems* (2020), a collection of short stories, *The Window Sill* (2021), and a co-edited volume of poems, *Voiced and Vision: The First IPPL Anthology* (2021). The collection titled *Raindrops* 

on the Periwinkle (2022) is dedicated to her 'Amma'. She writes "... And Amma who has

Alzheimer's disease, becomes the subject matter of my form poems as well." Reading these

poems is like entering into the mind space of the poet.

It is published by the Writers Workshop. While her body was locked up in the house during

the pandemic, her brain could not be held within any shackles and from there emerged this

beautiful and heart-wrenching collection of poems that everyone can easily relate with. One

can be immediately fascinated with the cover of the book and the title which is so unique. It

is an easy to carry book since it is comprised of only sixty pages and the book is also of a

smaller size. I preferred reading it while travelling. I was mesmerized by the effect the words

had on me. The poems, although short and crisp, carry so much meaning that the book

reminded me of Francis Bacon for a second. The poems contain the hustle and tussle that

almost everyone faced during the pandemic. I want to thank the poet for the cathartic effect

this collection induced upon me.

"Shrieking, shouting-home

Frightening scary walls close

To breathe to live-Home".

This is what most of us felt during the lockdown. Home brings comfort to the majority of

people, but to be caged makes us feel helpless. Humans are social beings and to be devoid of

contact with the outer world proves dangerous when the mind speaks too much to endure.

Loneliness and depression soaks in. And then, "yellow leaf dry

some green too-holding on to

Life-" in many ways.

Some part of the soul wants to end it all while the other wants to cling to life and achieve all

the pedestals one has ever dreamed of. It is a baffled state of mind. Interaction with others

and moving out of the house, saves a person from being alone with his mind which is capable

of making "Hell out of Heaven and Heaven out of Hell", as Milton observes. There is a thin

line between being alone and being lonely after all, as she writes,

"a new leaf

torn off and planted

secluded".

When the need to communicate is not fulfilled, it causes suffocation. Eventually, there comes

a phase when one cannot communicate even if they wish and the feelings become

unfathomable:

"words fail to come out

refuse to as she tries hard

so much still to say".

But amidst all the darkness, there always is a hope and a little faith that allows us to keep

going, no matter how hard it may seem. Somehow, the Last Leaf never falls and the desire to

see the other side which is greener, dominates:

"green brown

leaves hold on

hope springs."

Pulugurtha beautifully uses nature as a symbol to portray the mood and lays emphasis on the

human-nature relationship.

Vinita Agarwal is an award-winning author, writer, poet, editor, translator and curator of literary events; based in Indore, India. Few of her poetry collections are: *Two Full Moons* (2018), *The Silk of Hunger* (2015), *The Longest Pleasure* (2014), *Words Not Spoken* (2013). Her individual poems have also appeared in many reputed national as well as international magazines and journals. She was a joint recipient of Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize 2018 and winner of Gayatri GaMarsh Memorial Award for Literary Excellence, USA, 2015. She won Proverse Poetry Prize 2018, Wordweavers Poetry Contest 2014 and many others.

Her poetry collection, *The Natural Language of Grief* has an aesthetic cover page and it comprises of fifty-six heart-warming poems. The title suggests that the anthology will be gloomy and dull but it is certainly not the case. The symbols used are ample but what unites them is Grief. It recapitulates many memories of the poet and stimulates hope as a response. The poems are taken from everyday life and this helps the readers to connect with them instantly. The description of emotions is so beautiful that it has the capacity of leaving the reader almost in tears. From the investigation of existential questions to the resolution in faith and natural environment, this collection of poems is a gentle jolt to the heart. Pandemic was a period when almost everyone spent their time in contemplation and *The Natural Language of Grief* is a result of the unrest that these reflections led to. Just like *Raindrops on the Periwinkle (2022)*, it talks about isolation, familial bonds, commotion during pandemic and the ways to deal with all of it. Since I read both the anthologies one after the other, it felt like a cascade to me. The poets' experiences can seem similar but they are in fact, distinct along with the universality of these poems.

In the poem "Migrant Exodus", she talks about the agony of the labourers and workers when the lockdown was announced. Their life became helter-skelter and the adversity left them helpless. The parents were worried about their children and the youth was worried about their parents. All of them craved the presence of family and a familiar place where they could feel safe. As she writes,

"Merciless March

A sudden ebb of destiny, this lockdown.

Livelihoods gone.

Hands that laboured from dawn to dusk

dangling empty.

Feet fleeing to someplace called home."

Some of the poems also talk about the phase when the lockdown was over and people had forgotten how to interact or socialize. As she writes:

"People everywhere,

voices all around.

broken chants of hellos

that don't mean a thing."

In the aftermath of the pandemic, many had transformed into newer and sober versions of themselves and so did the poet, as she observes in "Version of Me":

"I'm not what I was. Not anymore.

The winds turned me inside out

I'm an ashlar floor of fallen leaves

curling against the base of tree bark."

It also contains some poems about the appalling situation that was faced by almost every household. Rushing to the hospital with a family member, expenses of the medicines, anxiety of what the next minute shall bring as death was unpredictable and with the looming danger of the corona virus around. There was no surety of the next breath. As she observes:

"And then the worry over medicines.

So many! Twice I sold my gold/without telling dad.

Some pills didn't suit you,

so I rushed across hospitals for changes,

facing the arrogance of these places.

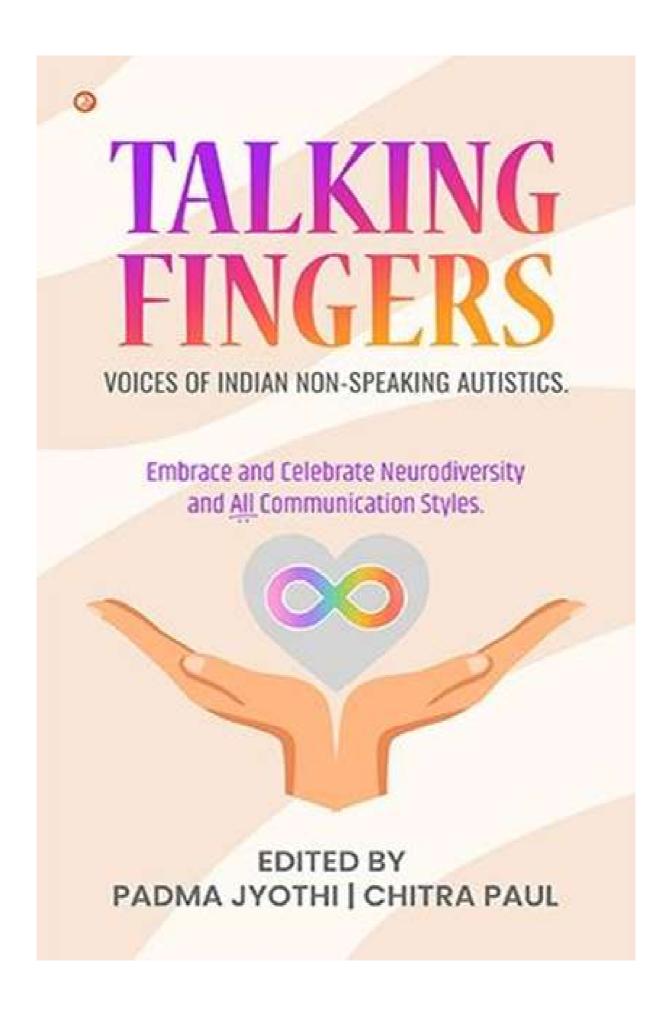
The helplessness, the bone weariness."

Both the poets, Nishi Pulugurtha and Vinita Agrawal have given a personal touch to their poems. The poems are relevant and true to their times as they deal with the dark realities of life that lockdown further filled itself with, to the brim. They are appealing in terms of craftsmanship and content. Each of the poems are a heart-throbbing experience for the readers. The language is lucid and just perfect for the message they want to convey. It shall be a quick read for some and a long immersing one for those who try to understand every bit of the layers of meaning that these masterpieces carry. The poems are garnished with hope and love for humanity. If one had to define the reception of the above books in one line, it would be – A rainbow of sentiments packed together, felt all at once.

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



Akanksha Pandey is an admirer of Literature. She follows her dreams and instincts. She is in love with the unfathomable beauty of Nature and the enchantment of books and music.



Talking Fingers: Voices of Indian Non-speaking Autistics

Edited by Padma Jyothi, Chitra Paul; Published by OrangeBooks

**Publication (2022)** 

Price: Rs. 500/-

ISBN: 978-93-5621-103-2

Language: English, pp.94

-AV Apoorva Raman

Talking Fingers is a remarkable study in articulation through the account of sixteen

individuals on the spectrum. We get a sense of the intricacies of the non-verbal aspect of

language acquisition. It is an acknowledgement of their neuro-diversity and an alternative

communication style which helps to convey their thoughts to the world and present their

unique perspective and experiences of life as they perceive it. This initiative was made by

two enthusiastic mothers of autistic children, to challenge the stereotypes that are held by the

neuro-typical discipline. The primary objective is to put forth the idea that non-speaking does

not equate to non-thinking and that there are alternate approaches to communicate, other than

speech. The book aims at redefining the approach to autism in the Indian context, while

giving them a safe space for expression and making it imperative, while upholding the

absolute need of inclusivity and a changing attitude from ignorance by educating oneself and

consequently to understand that they are more than their biological impairments. The goal is

to be empathetic and recognise their visibility. As Anudeep Kandula observes, "If you can

change your perspective, then inclusion becomes a norm rather than an exception."

When contextually analysed, the book presents a myriad of perspectives coming from the prepossessing creative minds ranging from ten years old to adults. This work attempts to enquire with the methodology of questionnaire posed at the authors, throwing light upon their interpretation of the cosmos and about themselves. It serves as a medium of acceptance and celebration of the variations in brain-functioning and the contribution of the emergent communicators in society as they continue to be advocates for their community. Aratik Dey observes, "Speech is only a mode of communication, not a measure of intelligence." They affirm the idea that love, care, respect, understanding and all things human do not need words as parameters to form interconnection with the external world. Many authors were disappointed by the conservative attitude of the benign when they tried to communicate with these "doubters". Many struggled through self-identity crises finding it difficult initially to understand the apprehensive behaviours of these skeptics, but through the support of their families and educators, they have prevailed. Mothers are frequently mentioned as their primary cheering squad and benefactors, thus, family plays a supportive role in their lives. There is so much more than what meets the eye, more than the pathogeneses of autism. Debunking the myths long prevailing in circulation around their supposed lack of empathy, Tarun Paul Matthew observes, "If non-autistics had any empathy, young autists like me wouldn't be struggling so much perhaps?"

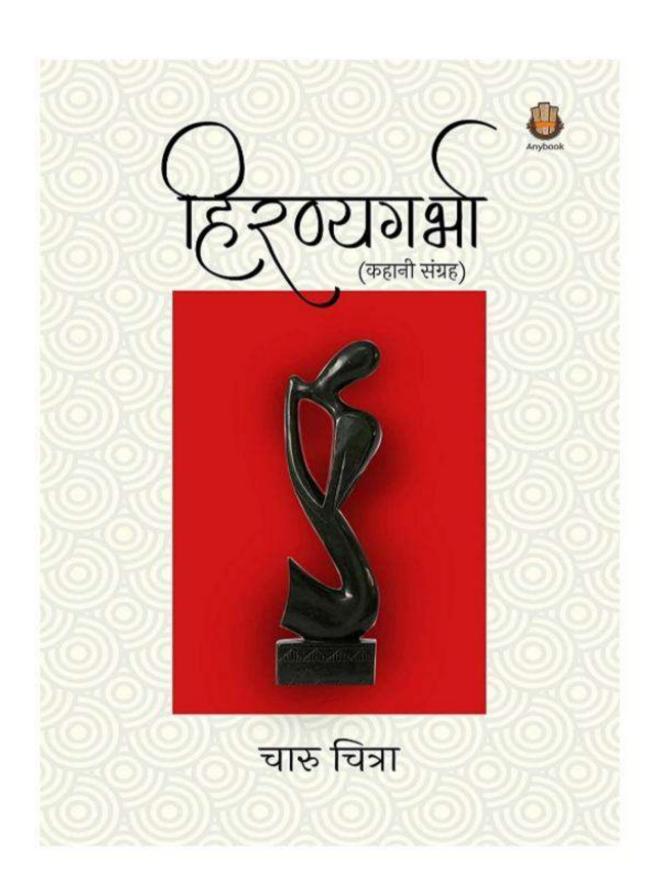
The pieces of information offer a psychological account about their interests, aspirations, experiences, opinions organised in units as a coherent whole, giving them the opportunity to unveil their distinctive complexities. This well-documented, critically appraised, seminal contribution strives to answer certain curiosities and also serves as a mode of learning, more about the spectrum. To name a few, How in the face of their limitations they wade through life as it comes with its variability? How they envision their future selves? What are their happy pockets, their preferred activities? How do they perceive themselves,

their dynamics with their self-image and understanding? What contributions they want to make for this very world which has such little to offer to them? This fresh and innovative synopsis brings in a background and an intimate and nuanced understanding of the effect of social disproportion and sensibility and lack of interpretive communities. It brings to the fore the challenges for people with autism in the customary domain of the largely unaware masses and upholds the necessity to ideate a new system which will incorporate and enable the voices of many other neuro-divergent individuals in the arena of human exhibition of their beliefs and capabilities. The editors, Padma Jyothi and Chitra Paul have done an earnest valuation by bringing their narratives to the forefront, while complimenting their inclinations and diversity.

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



AV Apoorva Raman is a student of Masters at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Intensifying her existential crises by indulging in reading Franz Kafka, she takes a keen interest in hoarding books and increasing her ever growing To-Be-Read section.



Hiranyagarbha

by Charu Chitra, Published by Anybook (2021)

Price: ₹ 250/-

ISBN: 978-81-95286-88-4

Language: Hindi, pp.179

- Shubham Singh

Darkness is not always the opposite of light. It is a womb where the light gets its existence.

The whole universe came into being from a golden womb of darkness. This darkness never

resists a new creation rather a creative force uses it as its base for self-manifestation. Charu

Chitra's Hiranyagarbha takes upon this theme of light and darkness in the context of women

and middle-class families.

Hiranyagarbha is a collection of vivid stories that reflect on the extraordinary

complexities of ordinary middle-class families and the female experience in particular. The

author acknowledges the experiences of this section of the society as her "very own". Charu

Chitra's women, despite the darkness that haunts them and the numerous atrocities of life that

chain them, are able to set themselves free and shine over darkness. This is her first collection

of short stories. The book is dedicated to people who are fighters, who can triumph over

darkness like a beam of light, and who make use of creative force against the forces of

destruction. Chitra writes in her dedication:

"Ve jo bediyaan tod azad hone ki koshish karte hai

Ve jo lab silne pe bhi awaj dete hai

Ve jo beej hote hai—

Un sabke liye"

Charu Chitra collectively presents the experiences, trauma, and transformation of the middle-class women in varied roles like that of a girl who is devoid of education, an old woman living with nostalgia as her only source of existence, a woman whose heart got divided with a demarcation of geographical boundary, a Northeastern girl trying to negotiate between her chastity and the expectations of her family, and many others like them. They have no voice of their own but after every traumatic encounter in their life they turn into something new, into something more powerful, into something more resilient.

Themes vary from conforming to traditions, to the theme of partition ("Ek Aur Batwara"), to a more contemporary one like that of a live-in relationship ("Ahista Ahista Zindgi"). Characters represent various age groups, and belong to different stratas of society: a young girl in "Aaj Imphal Phir Band Hai!", a newly married woman in "14 Saal ka Mard", and an old woman in "Suno, Tum Ek Aurat Ho". All these themes and characters join hand in hand to make this book a manual for self-valorization for women.

A literate middle class is realistically portrayed on the canvas for the reader with their resistance to change, their tendency to judge themselves from a social lens before taking actions, their materialistic desires in contrast with their refutation of materialism, their awkwardness on the out-of-closet concerns like that of LGBTQ and live-in relationship and many more similar concerns.

"Ek Aur Batwara" is based upon the theme of partition. It highlights the sense of alienation and rootlessness that *Muzahirs* experienced when they had to leave their homeland and could not make a return. Raisa and Panditain encounter partition in every moment of their life they have lived apart. The life of a middle-class widow is an embodiment of unfulfilled desires and is an echoing theme of the next story, "Suno, Tum Ek Aurat Ho". It shows the role of patriarchal society in affecting the life of a widow, as Rohit says to his Aunt: "Suno tum ek aurat ho aur apni maryada me raho". The short story titled 'P O L S C' presents the hollowness of modern ethics and highlights the insensitiveness of the children towards their families and parents.

Northeast Indians are viewed from twin points of view, as an outsider (when Naoni visits the Northeast region in search of work in the story "Robot, Tum Azad Ho") and as an insider in the story "Aaj Imphal Phir Band Hai!" This short-story portrays the failure of the system in creating a sense of oneness, belongingness and inclusion among the Northeast Indians. It raises the issue of overlooking their interests and concerns under the politics of votes. It strongly speaks of a united country in the face of divisive forces acting in social and political spheres. The impact of social realism in the book is enhanced by its engagement with real life problems. The ultimate outcome is alienation and insecurity which hamper the progress of the youth because of their narrow communal or ethnic identity. Romesh is one such young boy who deviates from his path and gets into inappropriate affairs because of this sense of alienation from Nagas and Kukis.

"Log dhool khati bandhi gathariyon me se dhoond kar Kargil ke shaheed us din bahar nikaal late", this line from the short story, "Lieutenant Sarah salutes you Sir" shows the opportunistic approach of citizens towards their soldiers. The anonymity of the soldier who has been killed in action is an existential question for the whole family. It is stated as: "pure

pure ghar marghat me badal jaate hai". Few social media statuses and reels are all that they get for sacrificing their lives. Sarah understands this thing that serving a nation is a reward in itself and continues the legacy of her father.

Impact of unsuccessful live-in relationship on the lives of girls, being questioned about the concept of virginity, unnecessary inclusion of social media in daily life, dismantling of a family system, etc. are the burning themes in the story, "Prem ka Encyclopedia". Well-educated students are not even ready to accept but simply impose their ideologies upon them. They impose their desires on their partners against their values. Such relationships are based on quenching everlasting lust and having personal space for such affairs. They even disregard their families, if they try to intrude in their affairs.

Charu Chitra highlights a major issue related to adolescent sexuality in the story, "14 saal ka Mard". She points out how the children, as a victim of western influence, are unable to control their hormonal changes and they imitate a world of virtual fantasy by engaging themselves in sexual affairs before reaching a mature age. She quotes Kaifi Azmi's lines in the introduction:

"uDne khulne meñ hai nik.hat kham-e-gesū meñ nahīñ

jannat ik aur hai jo mard ke pahlū meñ nahīñ"

These lines are the driving force of the final story "Hiranyagarbha", which celebrates the individuality of the woman. Mradula refuses to offer her newly born transgender baby to the community of Transgenders and celebrates the birth by deciding that she will take care of the baby: "garbhnaal ka rishta hai ye——aur main! Main Hiranyagarbha hoon, meri kokh asadharan hai, vilakshan hai".

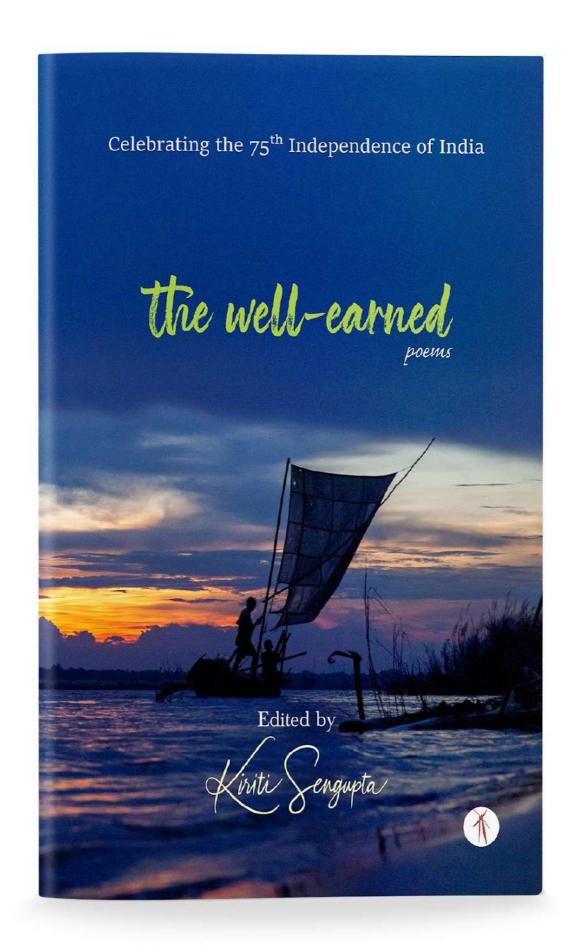
Hiranyagarbha is an artistic narration with linguistic awareness sponsored by the originality of imagination. Chitra's language is lucid, touching the scenes of daily life, in a third-person omniscient point of view. An everyday world is created out of ordinary speech and diction entrapping the emotions of middle-class women in particular and all the women in general.

It is no doubt a visionary fictional collection of current relevance, touching brackets of human, feminine, and transgender identities. It brings to light some unworked, untouched issues like those concerning Northeastern Indians, corporate employees, widows, and children. Beauty lies in the solution which Chitra indirectly points out and the solution is 'a progressive woman' for they are inherited with the power of creation, as they are *Hiranyagarbha*. A progressive woman can make this world a better place for human beings. Chitra empowers her characters with a progressive perception of life and this makes all the difference. She offers it to the readers to take her stories as stories or not, "meri kahaniyan, kahaniyan hai ya nahi— pathak nirnay kare", thus collapsing the boundary between the world of fiction and the world of reality. To conclude, her stories may be seen as an answer to the quagmire of a myriad of situations. A reader is awestruck by the potential of lessons and pleasure that the stories carry. Chitra's stories can be seen as wandering realities, as nightmares to great minds.

### **About the writer:**



Shubham Singh is a Masters student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Dangling between Metaphysical Poets and John Osborne, he is "just pretending to be a human being".



# The Well-Earned

# Edited by Kiriti Sengupta, published by Hawakal Publishers

Price: Rs. 400/-

ISBN: 9789391431563

Language: English, pp:-198

-Shivangi Verma

### As Rabindranath Tagore said:

the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

India has celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> year of independence and observed it as "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav" and on this occasion, **Hawakal Publishers Private Limited** has published an anthology called *The well-earned*, which is a poetry anthology that marks the expression of freedom by each contributing artist. The book is edited by Kiriti Sengupta, Founder and chief editor of the *Ethos Literary Journal* and recipient of the 'Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize'. Sengupta in the short introduction has said "this anthology celebrates autonomy as the key to life". Releasing this collection on the 75<sup>th</sup> year of independence means celebrating Liberty. India got freedom on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947 from British Raj and since then we have received plenty of poetry anthologies but it's very rare to find anthologies which celebrate autonomy. As written by the editor, "The perception of freedom varies-recognition of autonomy enjoys a broad spectrum in human psychology".

Sengupta through this collection tries to convey that freedom is not only about physical freedom but it's also about liberty of mind, celebrating life and human existence as well. There are poems about spirituality, eternity, hunger, victory, power and the beauty of life. Many a times we hang on to our dreams, as Amit Shankar Saha in his poem, "Liberty to use imagination" writes-

"We just keep quiet about it

As if like trees we are bending

In a definite direction"

It shows that as adults we are often scared of sharing our ideas, thoughts and dreams with others and they remain left unsaid. The years 2020 & 2021 have been the worst and the toughest for all of us and we all were reduced to caged birds seeking to be set free. Bashabi Fraser, in the context of the same thing writes,

"So I will sing to freedom's call

I will dream of trees ablaze

With colours that molten sun

Has decreased to one and all"

In "Freedom's Call", the similar thought can be seen in Devika Basu's poem "I wish I could" as she says-

"Fly straight to my father's nest

Read a novel with a succinct sip."

Both poets look at the concept of freedom during the lockdown days, as many people were far away from their families and that deadly virus had separated them. Durga Prasad Panda in his poem, "Election" has metaphorically defined election and power as sexual desire which is there in every human being. He writes-

"available

Across the counters of democracy

Victory is phallic"

As Tagore said and also quoted by Kiriti Sengupta in his introduction to this anthology "my freedom lies amid lights in the sky", Farooq's poem "Azadi" translated by Jyoti Bachani also describes the same thing, that freedom is in everything, everything we live for, everything we feel, everything we express, everything we think; even in a small drop of water, there is freedom:

"Azaadi in their fragrance

Azaadi in each and every drop"

These lines explain that freedom is what we seek even in little things and it is omnipresent.

Each poem is written very beautifully and every artist has tried their best to explain the term 'freedom' in their own artistic way. The anthology celebrates freedom of joy and happiness, a celebration of autonomy and human existence is shown and moreover, it has tried to liberate the mind of people. As the editor writes, "Liberated India hasn't helped us become nonconformist or unorthodox". *The well-earned* highlights that every individual should preserve liberty in their way which will be true independence for all of us.

### **About the writer:**



Shivangi Verma is pursuing her post-graduation in English at the University of Lucknow. An occasional scribbler of words, she is interested in translation and likes reading books and collecting quotes. She aspires to make an identity for herself in the field of Literature.



"In the midst of chaos, there is also opportunity"

Sun Tzu, The Art of War





Pictures by Ahmed Firoz

Senior Strategist: Industry and Economic Affairs Two Oceans Strategy UK A photographer by passion.



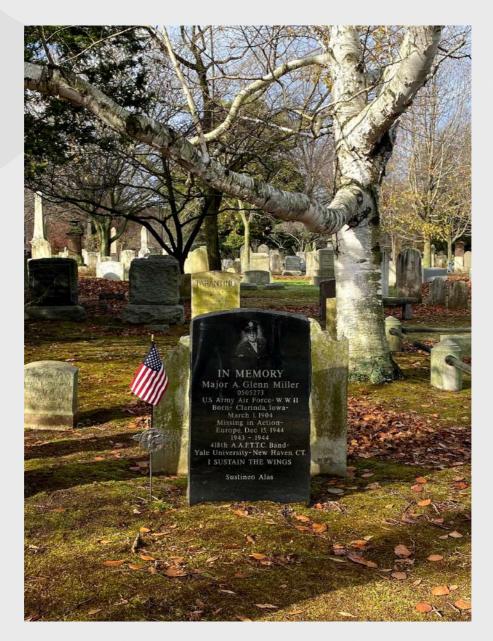


Artwork by Meenakshi Mohan

### **About the contributor:**



Dr. Meenakshi Mohan is an educator, art critic, children's writer, painter, and poet. She taught at universities in Chicago, Boston, and Towson University in Maryland. She published has widely in the academic creative areas. She has been listed twice in the Who is Who Among American Teachers. She authored three children's picture books, The Rainbow in My Room, The Gift, The Rebirth of the Demon, and edited Tamam Shud, poems of Kshitij Mohan. She recently had a solo her paintings in exhibit of Potomac, Maryland. She is on the Editorial Team for Inquiry in Education, a peer-reviewed journal published by National University, Chicago, Illinois.



All is not fair in love and war.

"You will return to me someday," she told him.
You are my solace, my peace, and my soulmate.
The war ended, and the world gained peace.
She is still at war and in search of her peace.

# **About the contributor:**



A creative writer by interest and a researcher by passion, Chitra Bajpai is a Fulbright Fellow and a Senior Research Fellow at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her doctoral thesis focuses on the issue of water and its sustained ecology as represented across the diverse art mediums in Indian English literature.

# Keystone Workshop on The Welfare of All of Us: A Study of Disability and Inclusion 15 February 2023









### **Call for Submissions**

Our family is our first interaction with the world that shapes our identities. It is also a sentiment, a comforting sense of belongingness. Across different cultures, a family includes people, animals, nature, and trees. Passed down as a moral value through the ages in India is the Sanskrit phrase 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' which means the world is one family.

Rhetorica, the literary society of the Department of English and Modern European Languages, invites submissions that explore the essence of a family and the various definitions and emotions associated with it.

THEME- FAMILY
CATEGORIESFICTION (UP TO 1500 WORDS)
NON-FICTION (500-800 WORDS)
BOOK REVIEW (800 WORDS)
POETRY (3-5 EACH)
PHOTOGRAPHY(2-5 EACH)

Deadline - 15th May, 2023

### 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 are required to 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