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Rhetorica

A Literary Journal of Arts

वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्

Department of English and Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow



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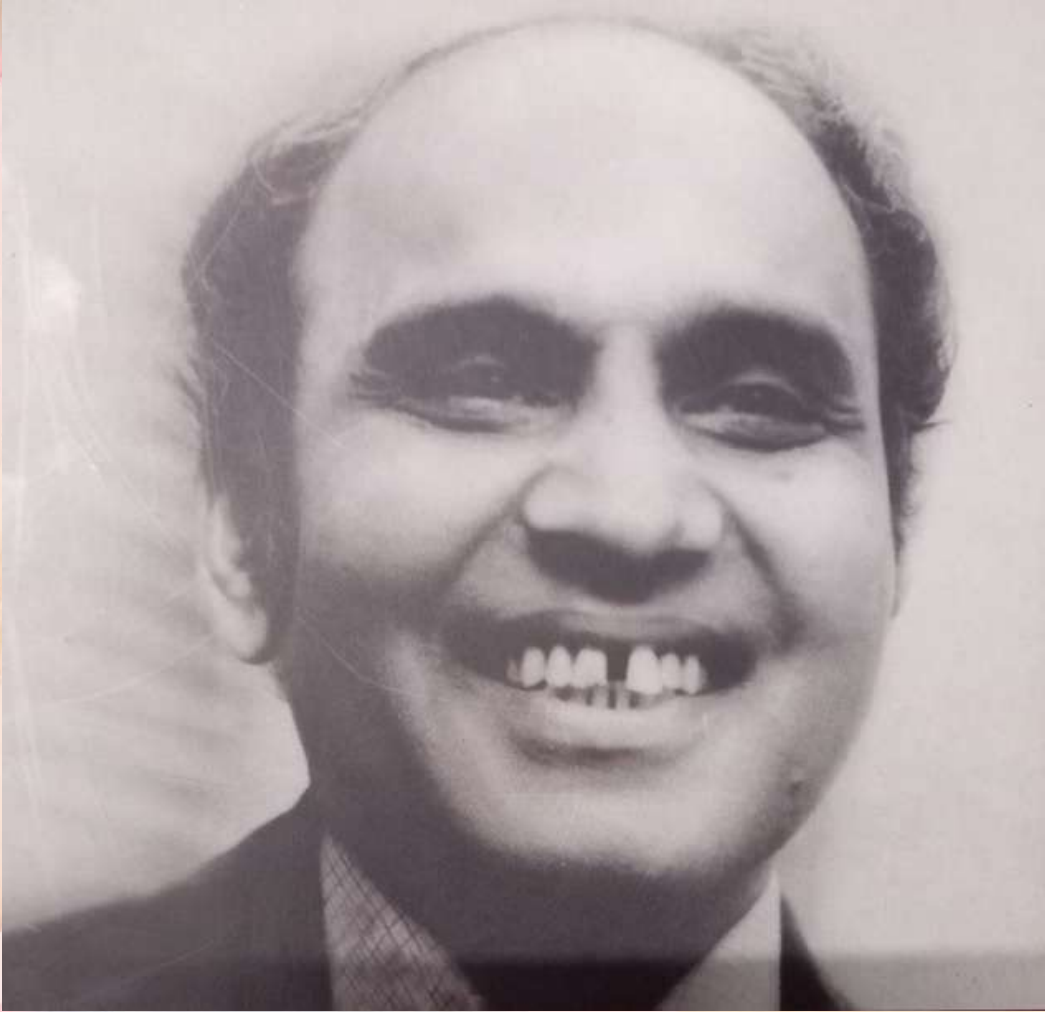
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Dedicated to



GIRIJA KUMAR MATHUR
1919-1994

चिरंतन विद्रोही

तुम कैसे अद्वितीय हो
ओ मेरे साधक!

जो तुम्हें प्राप्त हो सकता
उसे त्यागते हो
जो निकट तुम्हारे
उससे दूर भागते हो
जो मिला तुम्हें
उससे विराग, हे अनासक्त
जो प्राप्त नहीं हो सकता
उसे माँगते हो

खुद बंधने पर
करते विद्रोह बंधनों से
उन्मुक्त हुए पर
निज को स्वयं बांधते हो
जो प्रिय तुमको
उसके प्रति भूले रहते हो
जो खो जाता
तुम मोती उसे मानते हो

गिरिजा कुमार माथुर

(शिला पंख चमकीले, रचना-काल, 27 मई, 1959)

Of A Questionable Conviction

This is a man who talks of pain
as though it belonged to him alone.
Maybe he has invented it himself
and made a virtue of it.
Maybe he is a poet.

For hours he waits, in the night.
Toward another night he waits,
for that is his excuse to live.
The empty window in his lonely wall
belongs to him.

For months together
the window has been deceiving him.
Light comes in, then goes away on its own.
He has been trying
to polish the light on his heart.

They all say he was a poet.
His eyes saw the pain in the mirror
that occupied him.
They didn't grudge him that:
such a harmless pastime never ruined anybody's sleep.

(A Whiteness Of Bone)



Jayanta Mahapatra
(22 October 1928 – 27 August 2023)

Elegy

The evenings burn
incense
Pour visitors a drink,
And tell,
In the monody of time
As each ghost softens
Its way through hours
That never more again
Will live the touch, nor
No more can you hurt
me,
Nor I you.

Arrives a point of
Understanding and love.
I feel you around me,
Every look up,
I look into your eyes.
Every need
Becomes your name.

Your refusals
Do not hurt,
Nor the pain
I gave you and
Still would
Were you here.

In silence
Is our emotion,
And relationship
A dew-drop
Before it breaks:
Faith in a child
Before it grows
And learns
Love too can be callous

In your dying
My love has found
A new lease:
For beyond death
Only love goes on.

Nothing is diffuse
In a tear
Life in ashes
The burning pyre.

Death made you whole
Beyond night and fear
As a child asserts
Life in a brothel,
In a deserted expanse
A living star.

More than then
Now the flames
Give you back to me
In a way I could never
Carry you before:
The heaviness on my lids
The living ache
That has no name.

For darkness
You have made mother
In quietly slipping away
Into the stillness of
the night.

-Raj Bisaria



Letter from the Chair

Dear Reader,

Greetings and a warm welcome to another edition of Rhetorica Quarterly (Vol. III, Issue II). This issue is dedicated to the theme of Family. The blocks of which, make a society and more than ever, an individual. We, at Rhetorica are a huge literary family and extending that spirit to you, we present this issue with memories and narrations of different interpretations of family.

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 stays with you amiably.

Happy Reading!

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



Letter from the desk of Chief Editor

Dear Reader Friends,

29th August, 2023

In this age of rhetoric, *Rhetorica* strives to keep the flame of creativity alive. It is our aim to bring together diverse voices on a variety of themes. Our call for submissions on the theme of **family** elicited a warm response from the contributors. As a journal we have built a family of artists who strive to create a world that thrives on love, respect, and harmony. The entire universe is a one big family where mutual coexistence is possible only when we strive to sow seeds of love and water it with compassion, let them grow on a soil that is home for all – *char-achar*, human non-human, the animals, and the plants all find a space that is welcoming.

The Department of English and Modern European Languages with its glorious history has a legacy that must be cherished. Acknowledging the contribution of its alumni through **Rhetorica** is a small step forward. We dedicate this issue to a prominent Hindi poet **Shri Girija Kumar Mathur** (1919- 1994) who completed his Masters in English and L.L.B. from the University of Lucknow. His first book of poems **Manjir** was published in 1941. A popular English song “We shall Overcome” was translated by Girija Kumar Mathur in Hindi as “*Hum Honge Kaamyab*”. A recipient of Sahitya Akademi award and the Vyaas Samman he was a versatile genius who wrote songs, plays, essays and his autobiography “*Mujhe aur abhi kehna hai*”.

It was Maya Angelou who said: “I sustain myself with the love of family.” The issue features work by one of our distinguished alumnus Padmashree **Prof Raj Bisaria**. His passion for theatre and poetry, his control of pace and performance and his ability to evoke an interest in drama is unparalleled. As a living legend he not only shines but he also triumphs with dignity and grace.

In this issue we mourn the loss of a much-loved poet **Jayanta Mahapatra** who left his bodily frame on 27th August 2023. In his poetry the indigenous becomes universal and the marginalized traverses the globe to become central. He will be missed deeply.

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of all our friends from the writing community who have offered us their work for publication in **Rhetorica**. Our readers remain our priceless treasure. Your trust and good wishes are all that we need to sustain ourselves.

Thank you. Happy Reading!

Regards

Dr Ranu Uniyal

Chief Editor, Professor and Former Head,

Department of English and Modern European Languages,

University of Lucknow.



Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the latest issue of *Rhetorica*, our beloved literary journal that, with every successive release, touches hearts and connects sensibilities, constantly bringing people together as one big family. As we delve into this edition, we embrace a theme that touches the very core of our existence: family.

The notion of family is a potent force capable of shaping our identities and experiences. This issue of *Rhetorica* fosters a deeper appreciation for the universal truth that binds us all together: our shared humanity. By embracing the ethos of "Vasudeva Kutumbakam," we recognize that every individual, irrespective of their background, is the same in essence and, therefore, an integral part of our global family.

In a world brimming with diversity, the concept of family stretches far beyond the confines of traditional definitions. It encompasses a beautiful tapestry of connections that bind individuals across cultures, languages, and continents. This includes immigrants and their journeys to redefine the meaning of family across borders, the intimate struggles and triumphs of our neighbours who often find solace in chosen families, formed through shared values and experiences. It also includes familial bonds that extend beyond our species, relationships between humans and their animal companions, reminding us of the unconditional love that transcends language and cultural barriers.

The beautiful submissions we have received celebrate the myriad ways in which we define, cherish, and navigate the intricate dynamics of family, both familiar and foreign. In celebrating the unique perspectives presented in this collection, we acknowledge the power of storytelling to bring people closer, to foster empathy, and to strengthen the bonds that unite us all.

I thank Prof. Maitreyi Priyadarshini, Head, Department of English and Modern European Languages for her encouragement and Prof. Ranu Uniyal, Chief Editor, *Rhetorica* for being our leader, friend, philosopher and guide. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to our contributors, readers and the editorial family whose passion and creativity has made *Rhetorica* the vibrant and dynamic platform that it has become

Vedamini Vikram Singh

Editor, Non-fiction

Department of English and Modern European Languages,
University of Lucknow.



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Shakespeare Literary Festival

Call for Submissions

Theme: Inclusion



NON-FICTION

"I do think that families are the most beautiful things in all the world!"

-Louise May Alcott



Editor

Nikita Yadav

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



Co-Editor

Vedamini Vikram

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



Co-Editor

Shubham Singh

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."



The Known Among the Unknown

Anandita Bajpai

Recently, I moved to Delhi for higher studies. From what I had seen and heard, the city and the university were expected to be filled with priggish, complacent people. Coming from a city myself, albeit a smaller one, Delhi loomed larger in my imagination. I wondered if the people there would scrutinize me for a misplaced word or an opinion that didn't meet their standards of discourse. Would I ever be able to fit in and feel a sense of belonging and comfort?

Once I started attending classes, I realized that the majority of students are the same everywhere. They make mistakes, try, fail, complain, and learn. However, there were a few individuals who matched the image I had imagined and even feared. Their eyes carried judgment, intimidating and crumbling your image with one wrong move. I was very conscious of them, observing their reactions like a toddler observing elders to understand what is right and wrong, what is allowed and what is not. I would take note of their slight eye roll, questioning look, or blank stare, seeking validation in their eyes.

During a conversation among our peers about a political premise, I was half-engaged in the discussion and half-focused on their eyes. To my surprise, one person held an opposing opinion. The discussion quickly grew heated, and others cornered them for their differing perspective. As they struggled to find more valid points, I observed their hardened judgmental gaze melt away. Their confident stare shattered, revealing agitated and nervous discomfort. The louder assertions, the agitated eyes searching for validation, the forced smile trying to maintain the façade—all these familiar signs of vulnerability became apparent. Everyone present seemed to understand this moment of shared vulnerability, leading the conversation to diverge and eventually dissipate.

It was at that moment when the significance of Noon Meem Rashid's lines, which had been repeating in my head to calm my fears, truly resonated with me:

"...आदमी से डरते हो

आदमी तो तुम भी हो आदमी तो हम भी हैं ..."

The person I had perceived as a distant subject of curiosity, placed on a pedestal to pass judgment, unraveled before me as someone much like myself and everyone around. I went from being a mere observer in their periphery to standing face to face, recognizing them as a reflection of myself—someone at the core who shared similarities with me. This recognition created a sense of belonging, familiarity, and solidarity.

While we naturally feel a greater level of recognition with our immediate family, and are more intimately familiar with the small group of people we grew up with, there is still room for a broader sense of recognition with every being. It is through our shared instincts, feelings, vulnerabilities, and fears that we can relate to one another. By being conscious of this broader familiarity and showing compassion towards the needs and emotions of others, we not only foster an environment that is empathetic, accepting, and tolerant but also reassure ourselves with a comforting sense of belonging anywhere and everywhere. We recognize ourselves as part of a larger family with whom we connect through our shared instincts, emotional spectrum, and vulnerabilities.

About the Author:



Anandita Bajpai is currently pursuing her Master's degree from the University of Delhi. She graduated with a B.A. in English Honors from the University of Lucknow. She sees herself as a learner and as someone in the process of becoming.

Memoir: Kodak, Black And White

Neelam Saran Gour

Let me show you some photographs, each one encrypted with voices and stories. Old black and white photographs of my parents and me, held in place by neat cardboard corners in the stiff black pages of a vintage family album. My father, mother and me. In the active periphery of my childhood, there were aunts and uncles and grandmothers, each one a strong presence. But the nucleus of my world was the three of us.

This is me at age three, dressed in thick woollen dungarees and matching coat. A rabbit embroidered on the chest flap. And what a story it lets loose in my head!

For some reason I once wanted to be a Sahib, a cosmopolitan in top-hat, tail-coat and boots, swinging a cane. Not a memsahib but a Sahib. Maybe inspired by a picture in some book my father read out to me. In the absence of a tail-coat I demanded my green winter frock-coat and in default of the fitted breeches I shrieked for my green woollen dungarees with the red embroidered rabbit on its chest-flap. A straw hat and boots would ideally complete the ensemble and I fancied myself solemnly striding down the pathways of the triangular park near our old thatched bungalow, as suave as a swaggering, dandified toff taking the air in the Hyde Park or the Luxembourg Gardens. At three and a half years that fantasy took absolute possession of me one evening, bringing me into fierce conflict with my exasperated mother. There was a serious difficulty in the exercise of this costume-drama. These were winter clothes, packed away with dried neem leaves and camphor balls in the heavy metal trunk, and the timing of my impassioned fantasy had fallen on a hot June evening! My mother tried to distract me. I stood firm. I would be a Sahib, coat, hat, stick et al, and no lesser attraction would divert me. My mother threatened me with a slap, several slaps and imminent hammering but I gritted my teeth and persisted. My father, that long-suffering man of imagination, came to my rescue and reasoned: 'The child is deeply involved in some creative make-believe. We must not shatter it. Take out the woollen clothes and dress her.' My mother indignantly opened the winter trunk and took out coat and pants and dressed me in a huff. Then, hatted and booted, in thick woollen clothes, swaying a stick, a child walked down the Colonelgunj road, past the mosque, past the Holland Hall

by-road and the corner power-station, and into the triangular park! My Dad walked with me with a very straight face, fully co-operating with my inner life.

We must have made a curious spectacle that hot June evening- a child in thick woollen clothes, wearing a hat, swinging a stick, and a scholarly man gravely keeping step! I remember taking a turn or two round the park before the heat and oppression of my heavy woollen clothes put my fantasy to flight. An irritated mother waited back home to re-pack the clothes.

How can I ever retrieve my father in words? A lot of people who knew him used the word 'genius'. But he stayed in his own local space, wrote no books, hardly travelled and believed his small town to be the centre of the universe and quite complete as far as he was concerned and as far as there were books to read and questions to ponder. Musician, mathematician, physicist, linguist, philosopher, educationist – he was all these things. He was busy with a mathematical problem a week before he died, even when a stroke had considerably impaired his functioning. A post-card from a fellow mathematics buff arrived just after his death with a suggested solution! I am in no position to measure him. He was my father, playmate, refuge, counselor. He let me scrawl all over the walls because he thought it was good for a child to do so. He let me pile up my toys all over his bed and made a permanent place for them there. He told me stories from the Bible and the Koran and the Mahabharat and the Gulistan in times far more generous than ours. How well he sketched elephants, with one stroke of the pencil! He kept sketching elephants for me to marvel over. And how he was adept at suddenly catching a fly in his fist and holding it protected, then suddenly releasing it, absolutely unhurt, to fly away! I don't know who was more astonished, watching this game, me or the fly. He heard my crazy scribbles and took pride in them. When I felt unsure in the big, confusing world outside he said 'Nonsense!- Let them go to hell!' His very first sentence, on seeing me a few minutes after I was born, was: 'This daughter is more to me than seven sons can be to their fathers. And I shall teach her seven languages.' I didn't learn seven languages but have spent a lifetime learning how to use one or two on the page. It's strange that I haven't seen him all these years when in many things I write and many worlds that I inwardly inhabit, I meet not my own self but my father. More, in the words and ways of my grown sons, with a shock, I recognize something I have witnessed before, an expression, a quick reaction, a way of enjoying ideas. Somewhere in a corner of my wardrobe lie a pair of spectacles with thick lenses, a sola topee, even a pair of slippers with the imprint of his feet! I have kept them all. And though I am not sentimental about these things, it is

good to know they are lying there somewhere. As he lies there somewhere in the interiors of my mind.

This pic alongside shows me feeding the family parrot. My mother's meticulous recording states that I am something between one and two years old. Beside me, on the paved floor, stands a little steel glass. That little glass is part of a very touching paragraph of memory. When I was five or six and a very reluctant school-goer and an even more reluctant school-bus passenger (there were awful bully-girls on that bus and they held a kangaroo court and sentenced me to bring toffees and lozenges from home as revenue for them every day), once in a while as a special treat my mother used to come to fetch me home after school hours. Those were days I looked ecstatically forward to the last bell. Then, when the sign to leave was given by the teacher, I scrambled up, gathered my things any old how and raced with all my zest to the gate. It was a very long distance to the gate. The sun was scorching, the gravelly tar beneath my feet rough. I grew hot in the face, red and panting. Once outside the gate there was the heart-sinking terror that always overcame me: she wasn't there! There was a crush of cars, rickshaws and bicycles and a maddening crowd of jostling people but where was she? Then an equally overwhelming surge of relief. She sat in her rickshaw, waiting. And on the footboard of the rickshaw rested a small, dinky-plump earthen surahi, brand new, its mouth tied with a spotless white handkerchief. I clambered up the rickshaw and she produced a little steel glass out of her bag, tilted the surahi and poured me a glassful of the sweetest, most fragrant water in the world. She held me close as I gulped down long, breathless mouthfuls. And then told the rickshaw-man to drive us home. Across a long expanse of years, a whole lifetime, this memory comes seeking me out . My little grandson, one to two years old, noisily demands water in this little steel glass.

It's very hard to write about my mother. Maybe these pictures speak better than me. You see her preparing to ride a bicycle, you see her receiving her Ph.D. degree at a University Convocation, you see her sitting with me on her knee. You can also see the other side of the worn photograph with my own documentation: 'I am fore years ole. I am with my mother.' She used to teach me to write. Write I did. Many years ago I watched the writing of the electrocardiographic tracing on the cardiac monitor in the ICU of a hospital, and then the long, level run of the line across the screen that meant the script of her life had been written. But my script of her remains to be written. The pictures live on and her voice in my head, and her face in my own oldening face and her habits in some of my own ways. Things I am unwittingly replicating, things I am in perennial reaction to - a mother-daughter syndrome, complex and undefinable. We depended intensely on one another, we argued fiercely, we

went to the ends of the earth to help the other, gnashing our teeth as we did so. I am happy I did not leave her alone a single day in her old age because she feared loneliness. I am grateful that she looked after everything else so that I could look after my books, my job, my travelling existence. My books she never read. It was my kids she read, whose childhood she wrote. Some day I shall write about her and I can expect to hear her commenting and disagreeing with every line as I write. My mother, Vera, still living in my head.

And this one is my favourite - this photograph of her belongs to the late 1950s and early 1960s. Taken on a winter morning. It must have been freezing. There's a dense mist outside like smoke fuming out of a witch's cauldron. Mist even has a wood-smoky fragrance that I love. This is a classic Magh winter in Allahabad, the kind that returns every year without fail. When I still light fires, when the nose turns pink and my old museum of coats unlocks its treasures- legacy, lineage, love, all three. I have inherited several old coats belonging to parents, aunts and uncles and I step into their comfortable hollows as though they are still warm with the aura of those who once wore them. The coat in the pic was called a 'swagger' in sartorial parlance in those oh-so-chic 1950s. Swagger because its ample folds have a way of swaying in lazy flourish as one walks. My father gave it to my mother as a special love-gift. The year in the picture is 1956 and that is me in her arms and I am all of three months old. She was so proud of this coat. She nicknamed it her 'cheetah-choohah' because of its cheetah-spotted, mouse-brown look. Once when it developed a tear somewhere I remember how very upset she was. She rushed to Janes Dry Cleaners, Darners and Dyers in the Civil Lines. The darners did such a good job you just can't tell where the tear was. She died in 2003, my father in 1990. Every winter I take that coat out and wear it when it is too cold. It wraps its protective folds of warmth around me like mother's love. One pocket is bottomless like lost time - its base has come unstitched so that everything vanishes, like those old years and people who were the pillars of our existence. I don't trust this left pocket and use it only to warm my hand. Out of three buttons one is lost. But the damage doesn't show at all - like all rounded, seasoned lives in which only the owner knows the rents, the lost buttons, the hairline cracks. My coat is like that - sturdy, stoical and smart. I have tried finding the place where the darners repaired it but couldn't. For me and others of my generation darning up the holes in our lives that the past fell through with memories and stories is what we do. Like an old coat it warms us against the chill.

About The Author :



Neelam Saran Gour taught for 44 years in the Department of English, Allahabad University and retired as Professor in 2020. She is the author of 6 novels, 4 short story collections, a translation of her own work into Hindi, and 2 works of non-fiction exploring the literary history and culture of Allahabad. She has been an active book reviewer for numerous papers and journals including the TLS of the UK. She has also been a columnist for the Allahabad page of the *Hindustan Times* and for *Firstpost*. Her latest novel *Requiem in Raga Janki* won The Hindu Fiction Prize for 2018.

“Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”

Rafat Meraj

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्।

उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्॥

“The distinction of ‘this is mine; and this is not’ is made only by the narrow-minded or ignorant. For those who are of noble character, the whole world is one family.”

If only we were insightful enough to observe the world around us, we would have acknowledged that we are designed in such a manner that makes us dependent on each other. Upon scrutinizing the biological network, we come across the fact that everything on this planet is contingent upon one another, which consists of the whole ecosystem acting as a family. In addition, our culture and values too are profoundly entrenched with the sentiment of belongingness. India is largely rooted in the consequential ethical principle of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*," which is borrowed from the Hindu text *Maha Upanishad* (VI. 72), meaning the world is one family. India, like many other traditional Eastern societies, emphasizes more on family integrity, loyalty, and unity and supports collectivism rather than individualism.

Just like the functioning of a joint family, where there are individuals supporting and supervising each other, the world needs to become united as a family to overcome numerous crippling social evils. If we recall the Montreal Protocol of 1987, when scientists discovered a huge hole in the ozone layer which was created by the CFC (chlorofluorocarbon) and it was growing rapidly, two hundred countries united and agreed on halting the use of CFCs, and predictably the ozone hole completely recovered. This was the only time when every country in the whole world united and agreed on something, and the outcome was unimpeachable. Imagine eight billion people uniting as a family and working for the melioration of the world; the outcome would be impeccable.

“*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” explores the idea of unity by completely neglecting the concept of ethnocentrism while supporting the theory of cultural relativism. Despite India itself being a very diverse country, its ethos is rooted in the robust and strong theory of considering the world as one family, completely neglecting social discrimination. Family is when people are not divided by the

constraining segregation of caste, creed, religion, color, and superstitions. On the contrary, there is mutual respect and high regard for one another and a profound sense of belongingness. Regardless of social standing, we all bleed the same color. Family is a home where there is a feeling of comfort and security, where one is sure of never being exploited; it's like resting in the arms of one's mother, so full of affection and comfort.

Nature also becomes a part of the family as survival without the elements of nature is impossible. Flora, fauna, and even all the abiotic components of the environment play a crucial role in the survival of human beings, and not considering them as a part of our family would be fairly unfair. Flora and fauna largely benefit mankind through their innumerable offerings. Animals sustain the equilibrium by preying on plants and other animals to balance their population and maintain the ecological balance, also benefiting the abiotic components such as soil by acting as a source of fertilizers. Flora and fauna also add to the local economies through the source of tourism. So these biotic and abiotic components also count as our family.

The most valuable moral of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is that even if the world consists of dissimilar people with opposing ideas, of different social standing, of whatever differences one can think of, we all are one family, we bleed the same, and all we need to do is to acknowledge this fact and strive to attain the unattainable.

In the words of Woodrow Wilson, "We cannot be separated in interest or divided in purpose, we stand together until the end," we find the crux of the predominant concept of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" in his words. Between 200,000 and 300,000 years ago, Homo sapiens evolved from their early hominid predecessors. From the Paleolithic age to the contemporary age, we have advanced thus far together, with the assistance of each other. It wasn't strictly a dog-eat-dog struggle for survival. Human societies are rooted in mutual aid among a hefty count of unrelated individuals, and this mechanism of indirect reciprocity makes humans immensely helpful towards each other, thus unifying us all for amalgamated purposes.

Evoking the remarkable occasion when Neil Armstrong took the pioneering first step on the moon, he said, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." He could have mentioned "Neil" instead of "man" and "America" instead of "mankind," but it wasn't just an individual achievement but a success for the entire human race. Arguing on our dissimilarities and feeding our ego may make us satisfied, but it can never make us happy. In gratitude and acceptance, we become united.

About the Author:



Rafat Meraj is a postgraduate student at the University of Lucknow. Growing up in harmony with a fantasy world, she is fond of watching adventure movies, writing about imaginary plots and characters, and reading literature across genres. Dedicated to the craft of reading and writing, she is determined to establish herself as a writer.

Us As Creators

Vartika Srivastava

As Creators, in an increasingly populated world, there may be a few people who find time for the elders and children of the family. Otherwise, no one has the time to listen to them. The routine of the whole day has become solely focused on personal life tensions or indulgence in social media. Yes, in this post-modern era where everything is advancing towards high-tech and growth, the loneliness of individuals is escalating day by day.

Youth find their source of entertainment in social media, the gym, and friends, but the same is not true for the elders and children of our families. In our lives, we experience fearless childhoods and enthusiastic youth, but in old age, there arises a need for someone to listen and understand. This need isn't exclusive to elders; individuals of every age require support, love, and care in some capacity. While we can entertain ourselves during our youth, it becomes tough to do so in old age. No family member has the time to sit and listen to elders. We often find it boring and annoying, forgetting that these older people play the second most important role in a child's life after their parents.

Technology and science are helping make lives better on one hand, while on the other, they are becoming destroyers of relationships, human emotions, and even nature. In vitro fertilization (IVF) has made parenthood a reality for those who might be unable to conceive naturally. These couples are willing to undergo double precautions and the struggles of motherhood, but there is still apprehension surrounding the idea of adoption.

A significant portion of Indians hold a skewed perception of adoption, driven by a desire for "their genes, blood, and lineage" in their child. This mindset needs to change because children do not ultimately belong solely to their parents. As Marthi points out, the current approach to adoption is heavily parent-centric and needs to shift to being child-centric. Notable personalities like Sushmita Sen, who adopted her first child at the age of 25, are examples that have challenged this mindset.



A child has the power to transform an individual's world, whether biologically related or not, as famously expressed by Wordsworth: "The child is the father of the man." Children represent the future of a family and are a hidden treasure of joy. Growing up in a joint family, I realized through my childhood that there was no dearth of love; perhaps, there was no time to contemplate what love, care, and loneliness meant. A large family and a constant maternal presence ensured I never felt the need for someone to listen, play, and most importantly, guide me. These moments didn't cross my mind until I met "kitty." There was profound noise within that silence. She was a little more mature than her age. When we first met, she was unusually quiet. Her companions were leaves, trees, the moon, and the silence of the night. I attempted to engage in conversation, but a sense of fear held her back. This was an unfamiliar experience since children tend to chatter incessantly. What she needed was care and love, a prince embodying the nurturing qualities of a mother, someone to treat her like a doll. The desired prince charming is a common wish, yet it often reflects an unfulfilled longing for affection, not just from a mother but also from a father. Narratives, TV shows, movies, and K-dramas also often romanticize such thoughts.

Parental absence sometimes leads children to develop alternative "survival" strategies. In my conversation with the little girl, it became apparent that her parents had long neglected to inquire about her life. Their busy routines had made them take everything for granted, oblivious to the changes. They suddenly realized they might have missed something crucial: offering her the necessary attention. Their work-dominated lives had drained their energy and time, leaving little left for her. She confided in me that she felt utterly alone, prompting her to construct a fairy-tale world populated by imaginary creatures, a world she turned to when her parents were too preoccupied to

notice her. This make-believe family showered her with attention and created delightful moments filled with togetherness and joy. Entering this realm made her feel important, offering an escape from her real-world loneliness and pain.

Many individuals lack the time or interest to connect with children and grandparents, despite the simplicity of the task. All it takes is a little time, love, and care. What's the use of social service and our lifetime achievements if we can't create simple moments of togetherness and joy? Embracing those tiny, tender fingers, walking and talking with them, enables us to understand the significant challenges even the youngest and oldest members of our families face. Children possess an innate cleverness to survive. I'm consistently amazed by the remarkable moments I share with children. The young girl's candid revelation deeply touched me. So, let's set aside the burdens of life, take a respite from our daily routines, provide our full attention, and bridge the gap between the oldest and youngest generations in our families. Let's assure them that we are always going to be there for them.

About the Author:



Vartika Srivastava is a student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. She is deeply passionate about contemporary issues surrounding love. Her love for exploration has led her to travel and discover new destinations.

POETRY

“Home isn’t where you’re from, it’s where you find light when all grows dark.”

— Pierce Brown



Editor

Maziah Shaaz

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.



Co-Editor

Shivangi Gautam

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.



Co-Editor

Prachi Kholia

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.



I am because you are

Altasha Ali

I've always wanted to write about you, Ma
You are the reason I am; I am the reason you are
You made me, you raised me, it's us against the world
That's why you hold all the power whether to love or hurt

I am too sensitive for my own good, I know
You love me so much, it's tangible, it shows
But nobody talks about the wounds, you cause
That you never intended to, so we never talked

About that time, I smudged my lipstick 'cause you didn't notice
Or the time I told you how they hurt me and you did nothing
One time you told me it was good to stay quiet
And I have measured my words ever since, how low, how high

You bragged about me and you fed me fruits
I was okay with decoding your love even when it needed to be told
And I shouldn't resent the god, it's not permissible
But I never told anyone it was at home when I first felt invisible

You gave the definition of a good girl and I became it in turn
Until I realised the good daughter was never good enough
But I hold nothing against you, as I write this now
I've unlearned a lot, taught myself what love is, showed myself how

Forgive me, cause I'm just another kid who likes to complain
I am grateful, you did your best with what little you had
And I live my life knowing I'll be the better you when I become you
That's the holy dream, the lonely hope, the only truth.
And just in case I never get to say this again Ma
Your smile is my reason to exist, I am because you are.

Over, getting older

I'm so over getting older
More people not enough shoulders
To rely when It hurts as my bones grow
But what hurts more is watching everyone go

I think about the days we sat around for lunch
Sunday afternoons, mom yelled for brunch
Now I eat at the table all alone, it's done
Only I'm left behind, picking up those crumbs

And he doesn't call me as much anymore
We never talk about movies like we did before
He won't tap my head or make fun of me
He won't even listen to all my useless worries

She moved out first but I felt nothing
Yet Nobody knows I cried all night when you did
My two creators are all I'm left with
Time better stop now, this little girl wished
As I try to be who they need me to be
Guess I'm the only one Missing how it used to be

Family time, all of us hunched around
Gossiping about people, you're laughing loud
Late night snacks at three in night
Home cooked meals and someone to rely
No mountain was huge enough before
But It's not the same, it's not us anymore.
I really miss you and those days sometimes
I didn't realize that it really was my life.

About the Poet:



Altasha Ali is a student at Lucknow University. She is pursuing an MA in English. She started writing at the age of fifteen and has published three novels so far-*The Unintended*, *Entirety of Her* and *A Few Novembers*. She is passionate about writing and fascinated by human relationships and their stories. Through her work, she hopes to create a meaningful connection with people.

Around the Corner of My Balcony

Zafar Ali

Around the corner of my balcony
A little life covered in white feathers,
Sat on the decayed armchair of mine.
The looks in its eyes wanted to speak
A thousand words unspoken but
As if it found comfort in the silence.
I too, dared not to disturb the calmness
And stillness in its eyes, once having seen
The extremes in its voyage to life.
We remained seated together side by side,
Found ease in silence, staring, coexisting.
I kept wondering what circumstances could
Fly it off from the lap of nature to me?
To my decayed armchair, the mismatched
balcony,
The very lifeless house of mine.

Because I'm not unaware of the state of
People coming to find life in lifelessness.
I wonder if it is running from something?
The inevitability, the truth, or both; life.
Because I've been doing it for ages now.
O pious soul, you make me introspect,
Ask me to look into myself, but I'm afraid.
I see myself reflected in you,
The innocence excepted. Had I had that in
me,
I could've confessed to myself what I'm
supposed to.
But perhaps, I'd rather not do so to myself,
Because words unspoken are sweeter
sometimes.

About the Poet:



Zafar Ali belongs to the suburban area of Naihati, West Bengal, India. He is currently pursuing his B.A in English literature. The area he belongs to is very diverse in flora and fauna which makes up a large part of nature. He is deeply enamoured by it and enjoys writing poems on the same. He believes every part of nature should be cherished like family.



The First Cup

Sekhar Banerjee

You hear a morning bird's diphthong voice
when the yellow and flowing dress
of the rising sun touches
the tin roof of the houses like an empire spreading
between the east and the west
of your old small town. The joggers run in the nearby park
to measure
the elasticity of their shadows
where sunlight is glass
Night is a disposable sleeping suite of the universe
in deep winter
As if staff nurses doing their shifts
for such ailments
as insomnia and monochrome dreams
Then in the morning, every white hibiscus flower
in the black tubs of the closed coffee shop has a red heart
etched on it
But now you know more persons dead than alive
in your old home town
where winter smells like an old silk scarf
and brown cardigans
You sit with the first morning cup on the old table
of your joint family home
You sip tea and look at the empty chairs and think of
the missing members
Each sip is now an elegy for some loss. You gradually find
your palms soft
and empty
and you hold the morning tea cup like a
morning prayer



Homeless

My ma, frail at eighty, used to say,
‘Love adds an additional room in your mind
each time
when you let a person in’. She hastened to add,
‘It gets forever locked, however,
when someone is finally gone. It is much like
keeping a room
always marked for someone, close and dear’.
One by one, she lost her two sons, her husband at sixty,
her all sisters and three brothers by seventy
and her parents were all gone
when she was still young.
I saw her face dimming with each departure
like a lighted building
flickering and dimming with lost connections
everywhere,
losing her glow slowly every month
in her home-bound autumn, winter, spring
and summer.
I don’t know though much about her friends
and lovers.
With rows of closed doors and windows,
up
and down,
she might have become a tall old building
with dark, abandoned rooms
when she died
in her small old room in the old
small town.

An Urgent Telegram to my Dead Aunt

I SEE YOU COMBING YOUR LONG HAIR [STOP] WITH KEO-KARPIN OIL [STOP] IN
REPEATED
DREAMS [STOP] SMILING ENIGMATICALLY [STOP] RECITING TAGORE POEMS [STOP] ON
LOVE
[STOP] ALMOST HALF A CENTURY BACK [STOP] BENEATH A PLUM TREE [STOP] IN THE
COURTYARD OF OLD HOME [STOP] NOW SOLD [STOP] BUT I SEE ONLY HALF [STOP] OF
YOUR
SMILING FACE [STOP] THE OTHER HALF IS ALWAYS MISSING [STOP] FEELS AWFUL [STOP]
I
FORGET A LOVE POEM [STOP] EVERYTIME [STOP] WHEN I WAKE UP [STOP] PLEASE HELP
[STOP]

About the Poet



Sekhar Banerjee is a Pushcart Award and Best of the Net nominated poet. He received the Editor's Choice Award for a poem published in *Arkana*, the literary journal of Central Arkansas University. *The Fern-gatherers' Association* (Red River) is his latest collection of poems. He has been published in *Stand Magazine*, *Indian Literature*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *The Lake*, *Thimble*, *The Bangalore Review*, *Kitaab*, *Outlook*, *The Wire* and elsewhere. His poems have been included in several Indian and International anthologies. He currently works as Press Secretary to the Governor, West Bengal. He lives in Kolkata, India.

Home with Wheels

Gayatri Lakhiani Chawla

Two cans of cat food were all that was left
maybe some leftover Paska from last night's dinner
and raw tender Salo perhaps.

How can one pack one's home in a haversack?

Pack the sunshine that bathed the kitchen
the laughter of a warm living-room
where the family ate together
serving both bread and salt to the guests
at the dining table.

One to enhance prosperity
the other to wade off bad luck
both in a state of delirium now.

The night before the war
two rose candles brightened the dark room
who would have guessed that would be the last meal
sometimes unpredictability is a noose of death
for a world suffering from aphasia and blindness.

Note:

Paska- a bread native to Ukraine
Salo – Traditional Ukrainian food

To my sister from another mother

You left
before the flowers could
wither this summer. Blood red roses in a crystal vase
before the cuckoo could finish her morning song
before the sunglow mangoes could grace the fruit bowl.
Time was under embargo
life and death stitched by fate.

Splitting my heart
into shards of pain. Tears
fall silently to avoid eye contact,
seeping through the kitchen table
like a forgotten rusty robinet,
if only wood was a good conductor.

Still life

The leaves of the Gulmohar tree that you planted sway in the garden, the flowers are ablaze. A tinge of tangerine on a canvas of green foliage. I dreamt of a dream Father, where you held my hand tightly, your face reflecting a nervous grin as I point out to the candy store in the local fun-n-fair. You said ‘Don’t leave my hand Guddi’, I hold a handful of seeds of life in my fist, living in that dream breathing life into that moment. The window of my soul opens a canopy of bulbuls singing in chorus, the Gulmohar comes alive and you, where are you, Father?

wearry hands
ticking of the wall clock
still life

About the Poet:



Gayatri Lakhiani Chawla is an award-winning poet, translator, French teacher and healer from Mumbai. She is the author of two poetry collections – *Invisible Eye* longlisted for Cochin Lit Fest Poetry Prize 2018, and *The Empress*, winner of the 2018 US National Poetry Contest by Ræd Leaf Foundation for Poetry & Allied Arts. Accolades for her poetry include a special mention award in the Architectural Poetry Annual Competition 2020, the Panorama Special Jury Award, being shortlisted by Asia Pacific Writers and Translators in collaboration with *Joao-Roque Literary Journal* June 2020, and first prize at The New Normal Poetry competition by Poetry Paradigm and Oxford Bookstore. She is recipient of the Rahi Kadam Inspiration Award 2021. She is the author of ‘Healing Elixir’ The Hawakal Handbook of Angel Therapy, Numerology & Remedies.

Wingless Butterflies

Sony Joseph

On the Eve of World Labour Day,
A painful message shook me.
We are ready to go.
All are gathered under the Mango Tree,
Where, we had spent our tea time.
Now it is not for a tea but for a journey.
The sun moves step by step to the west.



A Silent Home, a huge crowd
My eyes are searching for ARU.
DEEP, SITA, ARU, KRISH, MUMU AND MYSELF,
WE are ploughing at the same field.
ARU is sitting like a black stone statue.
Her watery eyes prove she is alive.
She is staring into solitude.
I reach her with a pounding heart and trembling hands.
She is whispering.
“My Father left me alone.
My loving Father left me alone”.
I have no words to comfort her.
I have no words.

I too went through the same sour,
Thirteen years ago.
I can, I can understand her pain, others pain.
We, six friends are equally sad,
butterflies with broken wings.

I thought, I couldn't live anymore.
I cried for my father's love.
I ached for my father's care.

Then I believed a story a nun once told me,
story of the Flaming Candle.

The angels decorate the candle with fragrant flowers.
Gift the Flaming candle to the beloved soul.
When we cry for our beloved soul,
Flaming candle will go out.
Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry.

Our heart fills with the smell of love, heap of golden values.
We can fly, fly, fly.... even though we are wingless.
We can fly like a firefly.
The fire from our father's pyre.
The Light from our father's tomb.

Our father's spirit dwell in us,
lead us to the truth, color our dreams.
Follow us to our grave.
Let us soar like a phoenix.
Let us keep the flaming candle of our beloved spirit.
Let us spread the pure love around us.
Let us be a shading tree in our family.

About the Poet:



Sony Joseph hails from the district of Kollam in Kerala. After her undergraduate studies, she worked as a teacher at government schools in Kerala for about five years. She is now working as a University Assistant in Kerala University, Trivandrum. She writes stories and poems in Malayalam and English. She aspires to pursue a PhD in Women Studies. Inspired by John Milton's works, she writes about themes of Family relationships, God and Love.

Animal Kingdom

Sukrita Paul Kumar

I am a Tortoise

I am inside the shell
Hard and so protective
My neck so fragile
I keep it pulled back
Secure under a canopy
Iron strong

Away from
Chitter chatter
Battling voices
Clanging swords
Thundering clouds

I am a happy tortoise
A bearing of steel
Over a body
woolly and soft with
a soul that never dies

Don't I have to carry
The whole earth on my back...

I am an Ant

A spec in this
Humongous universe
That's the grain of truth I carry
heavy on my fragile back

With the ant behind
One behind another
The line is long
The journey short
but arduous

I am an Elephant

I know not when
I took a turn
In the womb of my mother

I know the moments
When I howled
As I came out
Of the floating paradise

I am an elephant
Pregnant heavily with
that memory
Moment on moment

In search forever
for the lost bliss

Hanging suspended on
Hope as the peg
Of memory

It falls again
And yet again
Rolled back over and over
Many times, over

The goal is visible but
never reached

I am an ant
I keep going.

About the Poet:



Sukrita Paul Kumar, former Fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, held the prestigious Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at Delhi University. An honorary faculty at Corfu, Greece, she was an invited resident poet at the prestigious International Writing Programme at Iowa, USA. Her most recent collections of poems are *Salt & Pepper* (Selected Poems), *Vanishing Words* and *Dream Catcher*. Her poems have been translated into many Indian and foreign languages, the latest is the book of her poems translated into Italian, published by Besa Muci, Rome. Her critical books include *Narrating Partition*, *The New Story* and *Conversations on Modernism*. She has co-edited many books, including *Speaking for Myself: Asian Women's Writings* (Penguin). An Honorary Fellow at HK Baptist University, Hong Kong, she has also published many translations and has held exhibitions of her paintings. Currently she is series co-editor of "Writer in Context" volumes being published by Routledge UK and South Asia. She is the Guest Editor of *Indian Literature*, a journal published by Sahitya Akademi, India.

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The Meaning of Family

Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca

The steep slope challenged us
The walk to the Naaz Café
at the top of the hill winding endlessly
Sometimes disappearing into the clouds
Our young legs not trained for such treks
Wishing for a horse or camel
to give us a welcome ride.
Nothing fazed father
He took everything in his stride
Whispering words of encouragement
Promising us the view would be poetic.
The Hanging Gardens of Bombay
(of Bombay, not Babylon!)
was a Family Sunday ritual
It was the meaning of family.
Past the Tower of Silence

Where a community buries its dead
We spoke a silent prayer
For those who left the earth
Thankful for another day of life.
Feeling like kings in the large airy cafe
the standard order samosas and chutney
For mother, colourful cassata ice cream
The tables wobbled; the chairs uncomfortable
We noticed them but didn't care
The waiters cheerful and smiling.
The sparkling lights of the Queen's Necklace
Breathtakingly beautiful below
A Naaz Café special promise delivered.
We conquered the steep slope
The trek felt like a pilgrimage
Only because we were with family.
Family carves moments into posterity.

About the Poet:



Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca hails from Bombay. Her first book of poems, 'Family Sunday and other Poems', was published in 1989. Her poem 'How to Light up a Poem', was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. 'Light of The Sabbath' is her recently published chapbook (2020). She has taught English, French and Spanish, India and overseas, for over four decades. Her poems have been published in several anthologies, including the Journal of Indian Literature published by The Sahitya

Akademi. She holds a Master's Degree in English and French and a Master's Degree in Education. Kavita is the daughter of the late poet Nissim Ezekiel.

IT IS THE SEA AGAIN

Bibhu Padhi

Today it is far from me,
its distant sound

appearing at my ears
like a small thunder.

It was the same this time
last year, when I invited

the sea to my home,
to take care of my failing heart.

I am alone except the sea,
describing itself to my eyes,

the waves rising and falling
on the level sand.

A glimpse of it has stayed
with me for centuries.

For it, I have taken birth
so many times, as if

to take birth was the only way
I could be inside it.

It is summer and evening
and the birds return

to their homes just as I do,
carrying the day.

Now it is again the sea
and a dim memory of stillness.

About the Poet:



Bibhu Padhi has published fourteen full-length collections of poetry. His poems have appeared in major magazines throughout the world, such as *The Contemporary Review*, *The London Magazine*, *The Poetry Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Manhattan Review*, *The New Criterion*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southwest Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Antigoniish Review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *Debonair*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, and *Indian Literature*. They have been included in numerous anthologies and high-school/university textbooks, six of the most recent being *The Bloodaxe Book of Indian Poetry*, *Language for a New Century: An Anthology of Poems* (New York: Norton), *Journeys* (London: HarperCollins), *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry*, *Distant Dreams: A Selection of Poems* (Hyderabad & Bombay: Orient BlackSwan), and *The Penguin Book of Indian Poets*.

Family

Arun Prakash Pandey

A family in itself is world as whole
For one who bides and has familial bond
Silk - soft as well steel - strong, involving soul
With thoughts, the narrow selfishness, beyond
And beings all, each within heart enrol
Like throbs, like breaths and calls of their response.

The most upright support is here attain'd
With sacrificing will together stand
The loving feels with loveliness enchain'd
Extending hand before one may demand
And each is fill'd with pain, when one is pain'd
It speaks of unity how solemn, grand.

A family - tie is tie of love and trust
Where space is given each to each adjust.

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 got 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, Haikus etc. His writing goes on regularly as an inevitable part of routine.

Unbound by Blood; Yet intertwined by our Souls

Swetha

The tale of the red thread ties soulmates together for all eternities,
The truth of the umbilical cord ties the mother to the child,
But we remain unbound by blood;
Yet intertwined by our souls.

They say you don't get to choose the family you are born into,
But you can create your own kith and kin.
As the saying truly goes,
At times it is the bond that is chosen that is deeper than blood ties.

The heart that seeks refuge and comfort in the company of a stranger,
Sometimes finds shelter for a lifetime,
And thus find a sanctuary safe to call family,
One where the meaning remains undiluted and uncompromised.

It is here where one learns that it is not fate that pushed them together,
But lonely souls, yearning to find a home;
Often cross paths and find themselves amongst travellers who are just as lost,
Seeking for a companionship, purely on the basis to never be abandoned again.

And it is here that we learn,
That found families are made from scratch,
They are built on infallible trust and understanding,
That one can finally choose who they get to call family,
Where they will truly be at home, rather than just being housed.

Kintsugi

Made of porcelain,
Such is the human heart,
You hold me tender to your bosom as the first day begins.

Made of clay,
Such is the human body,
You sculpt me into a mould that will one day resemble a cornucopia.

Made of stardust,
Such is the human soul.
You unravel the secrets of the world one at a time.

Made of passion and understanding,
Such is the human bond,
You teach me what it means to have a family.

Made of Kintsugi,
Such is the essence of human love,
Father and Mother, who piece their precious child to a full-grown adult.

Made of Kintsugi,
Such is the beauty of familial bonds,
Cracked yet beautiful, flawed yet perfect, broken yet loved.

About the Poet:



Swetha is an aspiring poet and an avid literature enthusiast who tries to find beauty in the mundane and create magic with words so that life will be romanticized and treasured. At present she is in the final stage of completing her Masters in English and Comparative Literature at Pondicherry University. On all days, you will find her curled up with her favourite music on, reading a novel or writing poems for her Instagram page: [@wordflirt_sw](#).

Circe

Apoorva

(The entire poem is based on and referenced from Circe by Madeline Miller)

I was teething in experiences then
Shadowing the skeletal halls of Oceanus,
Nueva and Naïve in the hands of men, mortal and Gods.
I witnessed Prometheus whipped into a terrible fate
Defied my father and gained prudence from Forethought.
I held Aeetes in my arms
Raised him in a myriad of colours, beaches, love
and white leafed Moly.
I met a failing mortal of the sea and made him a God.
I crushed the yellow petals of *pharmaka*
And transformed Scylla into a monster.
My siblings and I were branded the First witches.

I was sent to the gallows of Aeaëa,
Churning out Hermes for sodden crumbs
of the kósmos and the next world.
I honed my art, my life force, my blood, my wight-
I embodied the island.
I became the island
As it engulfed me whole
under the watchful Thunderous sky.

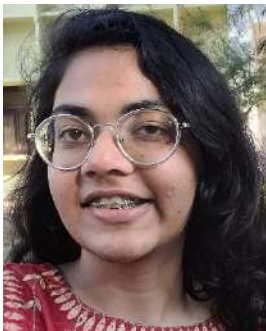
I became hope, honour and catalyst for Dedalus
In aiding against his Cretan tyrant,
I breathed the whisper of freedom unto his starving ear.
I was charged with bringing My sister's prodigy into the world
I fed my flesh to the infernal stomach Minotaur.
I was bestowed with a daedal loom as gratuity for service
And as stars once a year brush the earth
Such a constellation Daedalus became to me.

I attempted and failed to protect my niece, Medea.
Watching and mourning as the tides brought
rendition of her madness and downfall of Colchis with her.
I gave refuge to mariners
And they returned it by raping me.
From an afterthought, I became a feared lullaby
I turned them into pigs and threw a feast for my lions.

Odysseus ravished my sea shore
With his gaunt, empty-handed unruly men.
He had unmatched brilliance unlike any other
We became paramours for a year whole.
I bore my first son Telegonus
Shading him from the piercing eyes of Athena.
I challenged Trygon, bane of the Gods
But watched as Athena took my son to rule the West.

I contested Helios to free me from Aeaea.
I drank the drouth of mortality
Swinging on the branch of peace
with Telemachus by my side.
I found my kindred in corporal flesh and blood.
And salvation in becoming the Enchantress.
I was brimming in experiences now.
Walking the halls of my own world.

About the Poet:



Apoorva is a student of Lucknow University. She prefers collecting bookmarks, fallen flowers and dreams. She believes great minds and great words are all that runs the world.

1.

My mother and I
haven't grown up
in the same language.

You've colonised my pen and past.
My poetry dances
at the funeral of my tongue.
I win at my own collapse.

2.

I'm learning to be two people
my mother's daughter
and my own boat

I am not half of anything
but all of many things
and whole of both

our love is in tandem
when our words are not

our love is in tandem
when our worlds forgot

I am a me that's mine
but her scent is in my seed
I am a me that's mine
her greenness runs in my vines

she is in every colour
my flowers bleed.

identity third.5

sometimes I wonder
if I can have a voice without having a language,
if I can find home without belonging to one land,
if I can have roots that borrow from many soils,
if I can have a name that doesn't tell you who I am.

I used to think mine was a landless language,
but I am
too landless in the world of lands,

too homeless,
too unnamed,
too outside,

to borrow a breath from your plans.

can I borrow some growth from all of you if I promise that a weed can...
a weed can flower...

can you give me some sky,
even if I am a voice without a language?
will you give me some sky,
if I am just a weed with a plan.

(All these poems have been taken from the collection *When Silence Speaks*. The section is called **About Home**. Each individual poem doesn't have a title except for the third one.)

About the Poet:



Shruthi Rameshan has graduated from York University in Toronto with a Dbl. Major in Anthropology and Communications. After a short stint in PR, she ran her own dance-theatre company in Dubai –writing for stage and translating words into movement. As a writer, she started in poetry and eventually found short stories and scripts. Her recent work, *The Kingmaker*, was an online play commissioned by the Brampton City Council and premiered in 2021. Through her works, both on paper and stage, she tells everyday stories, romanticize growing pains and study love.

Rhymed Thoughts

Jaydeep Sarangi

for our friendship

Let us sit down at this edge
all we want is recycling
as recharging our old music,
a canopy project, heart-to heart
a state of fulfilment, rivers overflowing.

It's easier to throw things out
writing or playing, we live
in a bout of disposable grief or joy.
The great global cleanup and
the familiar gestures turn on to questions.

New bride lights the evening lamps,
floral rings are offerings
Kolkata, Toronto and Lismore have one flow,
fingers hold the evening's calm.
the smile settles on our brightened lips.

A Dalit

In that tea shack at a railway station
The boy was having his piece of bread
Dipping it in tea, blank

He has no father,
mother has gone missing for years.

His land is now lost
So is his speech, life.

That piece of bread is his new land
He soaked that piece in hot tea.

Highway is a sea,
his sense of running, inhabiting

No click of cameras
No newspaper reports
Some named him Dalit.

About the Poet:



Jaydeep Sarangi is a widely anthologized poet with ten collections, latest being, *letters in lower case* (2022). A regular reviewer for poetry journals and newspapers, Sarangi has delivered keynote addresses and read poems in different continents and lectured on poetry and marginal studies in universities/colleges of repute. His books on poetry and Indian Writings, articles and poems are archived in all major libraries and online restores in the world, including Harvard University, Oxford University, Sorbonne University, Barkley Library and University of Chicago. He is the President, Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics (GIEWEC) and Vice President, EC, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata. He has been known as ‘the bard of Dulung’ for his poems on the rivulet Dulung and people who reside on its banks. Sarangi is Principal and professor of English at New Alipore College, Kolkata and actively spreading the wings of poetry among generations. He edits *Teesta*, a journal devoted poetry and poetry criticism. With Rob Harle he has edited six anthologies of poems from Australia and India which are a great literary link between the nations. With Amelia Walker, he has guest edited a special issue for *TEXT*, Australia. His website is: <https://jaydeepsarangi.in/>

A Complete Family

Kumar Sawan

We were a family
Two kids with parents
A complete family
One would say.
I loved Papa.
He was ill.
Some “liver cirrhosis”
They said.
Six years he suffered
And we suffered with him
My sibling, my mother
All suffered.
From sleepless nights
To sleeping on
The hospital floor,
He was oscillating
Between being and non-being.
He used to joke around
“You will burn me one day”
“No one speaks like this”
We said.

Vomit, weakness, fever
He grew thin
Day by day.
I loved papa
This realisation
Came to me
After he passed away.
What followed were
Feelings of dread
And panic attacks
My mother became silent
She does not talk much now
She said some months ago
The family has shrunken.
I will wait
For us to heal.
I will wait for us
To regain
The feeling of family
And the sense of security
That family brings.

About the Poet:



Kumar Sawan was born and brought up in Lucknow. He is a Ph.D. scholar in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, Lucknow University. His work has been published in *Rhetorica: A Literary Journal of Arts*, *Contemporary Literary Review India*, *SPL Journal*, *Literary Horizon* and *The Teesta Review*. He can be contacted

on his Twitter handle @thekumarsawan. E-mail: kumarr.sawann@gmail.com

Father

Rati Saxena

Finally, what remains?
Some unclear marks on fingertips,
hundreds of wrinkles on the back of the palm,
some babble and a bit of gossip,
or was it all suddenly gone, become an aged child?
A father suddenly a child
whose dreams weren't visited by fairies,
who had a toy top spinning on his feet,
who played the tabla on his forehead.
Father, who was a mountain
under whom we found refuge on stormy nights.
Father, who was a roar
even while asleep, electrifying our nerves.
Father, who was a wall
that kept every thunder outside from reaching in.
Father who became a refugee in his own body
and started running around like a stubborn child,
crying for his mother
and nibbling raw fruits.
However pleasant the experience of childhood,
that much unpleasant, too,
cleaving the fatherhood from father
and shattering it into scattered pieces of glass.
Finally, what remains?
The last word of the last sentence?
The last hiccup before the final silence?
Or the vague childishness of an aged father?

Translated by Seth Michelson

Mother, whom I hated

1-

In poetic tradition

Mothers are never to be hated

Same as goddess are worshiped in the temple

but women can be raped on the road

Same as a girl without menstruation is most poise

But small girls in malls, and markets places are stolen
to the flesh market

But what I know that I never felt so close to mother

Even if we were sitting in the bus next to each other

I was angry with her because she sends me to

Mama's home in my childhood, keeping other daughters with her,

Because she called me back from Mama's home, when I started loving there,

Because she never defended me, when other sisters made fun of my

Uncivilized behaviour

Because she scolded me hard, every time when father made fun of Bhopal,

To the place which she belonged to

This list could be very long,

I could release very late that going to Mama's place was the best part of my life

I also could release that I came back in right time,

I could understand now only, she was hurt more when I was scolded


2-

I could not love her

Even though she gave me wings


By teaching me cycle,

Though she never learnt herself-cycling



I could never thank her for the speed she added in my life
I was doubtful about her, even though
She saw a few seeds of poetry by reciting the poets
Like Jayasi, Tulasidas and Hariowdh

Could be I still angry on her as she sent me away
Though I forgetting the seeds of dreams I got in her brother's home



I was upset, as she wanted me to learn Sanskrit, so that I could
Read Geeta, when she leaves this world at the end
As she was always upset that she could not read Geeta in right way,
When her mother was leaving
I was always target of other family member due to my education
in such an old-fashioned subject

I wonder, If I had not learnt this magical literature, I could be
Half learnt middle class woman, and with no poetic tradition.

I almost stopped talking to her
But I was watching her religious tours
against Father's wish, and her boldness
to steal freedom from the darkness.

I could never realize, when and how her boldness
Quietly made a home in my heart
And when I was traveling alone, I was giving
Credit to myself.

When I cook, I always remembered her small tricks,
To add more flavours in the food, and save a few bucks
Though I never learnt her cooking in a proper way,
In fact, I never loved her cooking till her alive

I wonder, how I learnt her technics, and keep passing
To my daughters, whenever they asked me

I do realise that I was also loving the same kind of food,
She used to love most.

I hated her the last time, when she married in a family
Which was not suitable for my personality.

I openly blame her for her selfishness
To get rid of forth daughter once again

I could never forgive her,
until she lived, for the years
which were removed from my own life
I forgotten, what she added in my life
I was astonished myself that
I remembered her rituals she followed to celebrate festivals

I don't know, why I keep thinking of her every day
While cooking, while celebrating rituals,
While approaching towards ancient literature
I don't know, why I remember her so much,
Is this my love for her, which was pricking me all the time?

I am sure, she will get back her childhood
When she her dadda will tell her stories of life after the war.

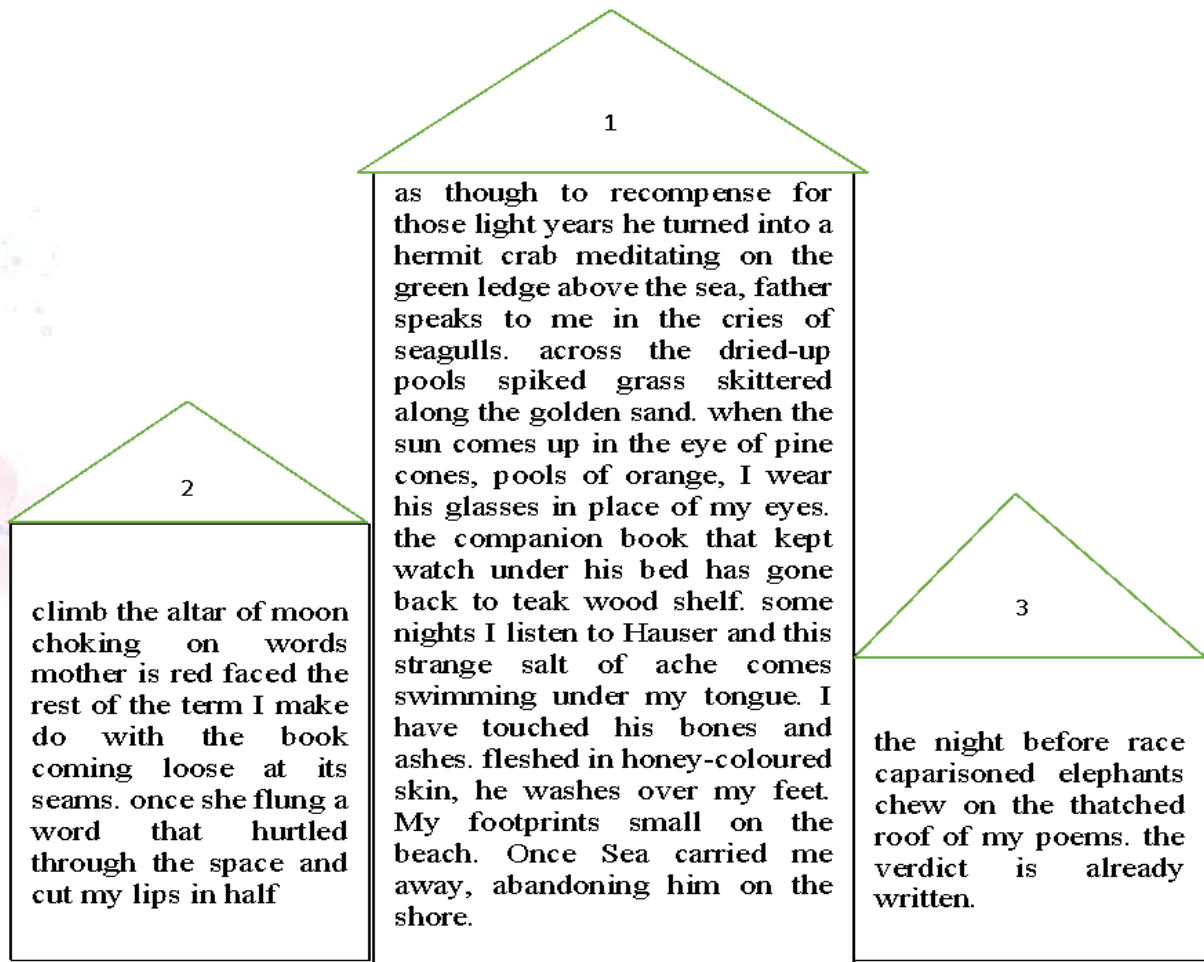
About the Poet:



Rati Saxena is a poet, translator, and editor an academic scholar of ancient Indian literature. She has Six collections of poetry in Hindi and five in English, four Travelogues. She has translated fifteen books from Malayalam and Six of International poets to Hindi. Her poetry books have been translated and published in many international languages, she has poetry residencies in Germany and China, and invited to universities in USA. Her awards include a fellowship from the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (2004-5), the Sahitya Akademi Award for Translation (2000), the State Bank of Travancore Award for Poetry (2001), Naji Naaman's Literary Prizes (2016), the DJS Translation Award for Chinese poetry (2018) and the Rajasthan Patrika prize for best poem (2020), Rajasthan Sahitya Academy's highest award "Meera Puraskar". She is founder and editor of the first bilingual web journal 'Kritya', and founder and festival director of 'Kritya poetry festival'.

Sandhouse

Smitha Sehgal



About the Poet:



Smitha Sehgal is a legal professional and poet who writes in two languages-English and Malayalam. Her poems have been featured in contemporary literary publications such as *Usawa Literary Review*, *EKL Review*, *Madras Courier*, *Ink Sweat & Tears* and elsewhere.

Old Safe

Savita Singh

Mother opens an old safe
From it emerges
Zari saris, silk lehengas
A black-and-white
Picture with father in a wooden frame
From the safe comes out an faint odour
And it dispersed around outside.

Mother shuts the safe
End of an era
As if life and history in the womb of time
Has been seen and smelt

A mixture of tragedy, joy and astonishment
As if the coming time has been measured
In mournful ballads

Mother shuts the safe
Like death closes eyes.

You Go, I'll Come

(For Pankaj Singh)

You go, I'll come after I've collected
everything,
Let me keep your scattered things neatly,
Your clothes gone for ironing,
I'll search for your poems
Lost here and there,
And put them in the book of your life.

You hid many things from me
To protect me from hurt,
Let me learn of those things
Let me comprehend my heart,
Clean up the nooks and crannies
of my mind, so I don't say something harsh
to you. The life of humans is like this,
Shrouded mostly in mystery,
Let this mystery be meaningful.
All this will take a little time,
Please do wait without impatience,
I'll come; you go.

Let me take a little time.

Let me lay down a few bricks
For the future of my children.
They will build their own houses,
That's what we had decided upon anyway.
They believe in happiness,
They feel vivaciousness
is the essence Of life.
Let sadness not touch them too soon,
Let me help them grow up.
You go, I am filling up ink
In your beautiful pen.
This will take
The longest.

Your work progresses by looking
At your beautiful handwriting.
It looks like you have just written
And kept aside a page,
The writing is still wet
Like your blood.

I'll come once it dries.



In This Time

(For Medha)

1.

What time is it now?

The night is past

Now she returns home from a music festival

Humming the songs that were performed there,

And starts watching an art house film on her laptop

She goes to sleep around five in the morning

And wakes up at half past two the next afternoon.

I wonder what kind of revenge

You are taking on these patriarchal times

Days and nights have been fixed for some definite jobs here

We know this more spaces than from hours

In which a woman exists

Turning time on its head in your life

Is scary, cataclysmic too

I fear they might wound your body.

2.

Yet, I tell you to survive somehow, my child

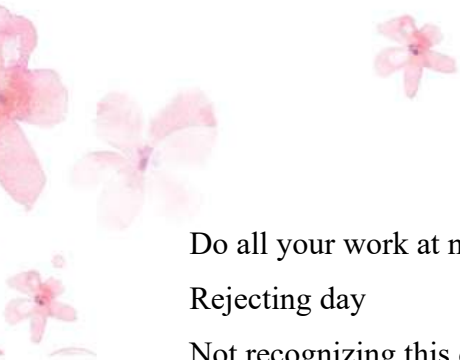
May your body become indestructible

You must engage in bigger conflicts than me


The roads to freedom have always made the soul shiver

We have lost so many battles

Their memories run in our veins like fresh blood



Do all your work at night
Rejecting day
Not recognizing this darkness
is a sort of transgression
We, too, did all this in our time
All the wounds were recognized then
Our feet are still immersed
In the black waters of the night



I wish
You to rise above your vengeance on time
Live in this struggle like all the women in the world
Wake up on time, go to sleep on time
The light that filters through the trees
Let it enter your soul like enlightenment
The road ahead is rocky
And it is still a little dark.

These poems are written by Prof. Savita Singh in Hindi and translated by Uttaran Das Gupta in English.



About the Poet:



Savita Singh is a poet from Delhi. She writes in Hindi and English and has four collections in Hindi to her name, *Apne Jaisa Jeevan* (2001, Radhakrishna Prakashan), *Neend Thi Aur Raat Thi* (2005, Radhakrishna Prakashan), *Swapna Samay* (2013, Radhakrishna Prakashan) and *Khoyi Cheezon Ka Shoke* (2021, Radhakrishna Prakashan). She has a collection of fifty poems, *Nayi Sadi Ke liye Pachas Kavitayen* (2012, Vani Prakashan). She has edited a collection of protest poetry of twenty Women poets writing in Hindi, *Pratirodh ka Stree Swar: Samkaleen Hindi Kavita* (Radhakrishna, 2023). Her work has been translated into French, a collection of assorted poems, *Je Suis La Maison Des Etoiles* (Dastaan, 2008). She co-edited an anthology in the world women's genre, *Seven Leaves, One Autumn* (2011, Rajkamal Prakashan). Also, a bilingual (Hindi-English) Collection of Poems, *Rowing Together* (Rajkamal Prakashan, 2008)). Her poetry has been translated into many languages, including French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Catalanian. She has two collections of poems translated into Odia, *Jeur rasta mora nijara* (2013, Timepass Publication), and *Prema bi ek Yantrana* (2021, Athena Books, Bhubaneshwar). Savita Singh was awarded the *Hindi Academy Award* (2016), *Raza Foundation Award* (2006), and *Mahadevi Varma Award* (2016), Eunice de Souza award (2021). Recently, she has published her post-doctoral research work (FMSH, Paris) on Krishna Sobti, "*Walking On Dew: A Feminist Reading of Krishna Sobti's Listen Girl*" in *Krihna Sobti: A Counter Archive*, eds., Sukrita Paul Kumar and Rekha Sethi (Routledge, 2022). Her latest book, *Reality and Its Depths: A Conversation with Roy Bhaskar* (2020, Springer) is among her recent publications in political philosophy. She is the founding director and professor in the School of Gender and Development Studies at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

About the Translator:



Uttaran Das Gupta is a New Delhi-based writer and journalist. He teaches journalism at O P Jindal Global University, Sonapat. He has published a book of poems (*Visceral Metropolis*, 2017) and a novel (*Ritual*, 2020).

A True Masterpiece

Megha Sood

A photograph,
a token of vintage memory—
neatly tucked in a yellow-tinged album
so close to me,
a plethora of emotions,
rushing and breaking the floodgates
neatly kept in place by the time
and its profundity
Time, like a ceramic pot
shining on the shelves
of my granny's kitchen;
storing a separate story
in every pot of hers
Opening the lid releases a Pandora
of bay leaves cinnamon-soaked vignettes
a snapshot of time,
passed from generation to generation.
Memory-soaked and pickled
in those pot-bellied jars
packed lid-tight
lined up those rows;
as valiantly displaying

those scars, those cracks
the merciless time has left on those.
She says smiling through
her crow's feet
we all are as brave as these
braving the harrowing heat of the kiln
shaped and morphed
by the time, which is unforgiving


Time pinches and pricks
leaves those indentations
those ridges,
to accentuate the beauty
hidden in our souls
like the cracks in the clay
Stressing those lessons
of life and its learning
that everlasting shine
on the glistening array,
a true masterpiece
for the world to see
true glory in its glaze.



Joy his face brings

The slow stirring
rising bubbling of the water
in a steel grey teapot
my first act of the day
The simmering of the cold tap water
slowly and surely;
leading to the loud whistling
filling each silent corner of my sepia-tinged
room
My ears are attuned to this familiar sound
that anoints the start of my day
the sheer joy of seeing bubbles
dancing on the thin skin of water
as it forms a perfect moment in time
gently as a reminder for me
to add a few leaves of my Jasmine tea leaves
dancing to its own mellifluous rhythm
syncopating with the joy of the bubbling
water

As it fills the room with its aroma
and I sit down with my warm cup
leaving a thin impression on its rim
on my long wooden table
a provenance of happiness for us in the past year
as we hunker down with our own version of
realities
I can feel your soft footsteps nearing me
soft arms gently around my body
warm supple touch of your forehead
on the nape of my neck
Reminds me of the bliss of being a mother
to this joyful, shining kid
after unexpectedly losing
so many to the ruthless time.



Family Album

Crinkled dog-eared pages of my family photo album
some faces are clear and others are muddled with time and ignorance
Tainted with the sepia-tinged colour. Memory is a special thing it lights up the dark places
you don't want to visit, bringing the dusty cobwebs to light
The pain frayed at the end, tattered and ripped apart for the whole world to see
those unacknowledged advances in the dark with the calloused hands
My father's taut face and proud chest as he smiles
with the false pretence of being the protector in a family where
dark looms in every dimly lit corner. Spindly legs and dainty-figured mother
posing with the much-revered submission.
With my sisters' wrought faces of a book dog-eared with time.
Some pages are missing from the album as part of the admiration,
Some through disdain and contempt to keep the family together
almost glued to the spine of the album, waiting to fall apart at the slightest touch.

About the Poet:



Megha Sood is an Award-winning Asian American Poet, Editor, and Literary Activist from New Jersey, USA. She is a Literary Partner with “*Life in Quarantine*”, at Stanford University. Member of *National League of American Pen Women (NLAPW)*, *Women's National Book Association*, and *United Nations Association-US Chapter*. She is an Associate Editor for the literary journals *Mookychick (UK)* and *Brownstone Poets (USA)*. Author of Chapbook (“*My Body is Not an Apology*”, *Finishing Line Press*, 2021) and Full Length (“*My Body Lives Like a Threat*”, *FlowerSongPress*, 2022). Co-Edited anthologies (“*The Medusa Project*”, *Mookychick*, UK) and (“*The Kali Project*, *Indie Blu(e) Press*, USA). Her co-edited anthology “*The Medusa Project*” has been selected as a digital payload to be sent to the moon in 2024 as part of the historical *LunarCodex Project* in collaboration with *NASA/SpaceX*. Find her at <https://linktr.ee/meghasood>

FICTION

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

-Leo Tolstoy



Editor

Yusuf Ayaz

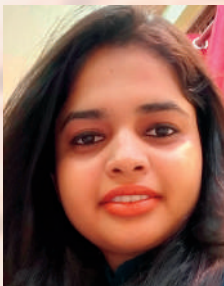
His doctoral research falls within the purview of medical humanities and involves a clinical analysis of the portrayal of mental illness in modern and postmodern fiction.



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Co-Editor

Shivangi Verma

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.

Even if I Could Go Back in Time

Altasha Ali

I've never thought of choices as right or wrong. They were choices that were needed to be made for my life, even when they ended up hurting others or me. Except, this one choice that I knew would haunt me whether I make it or not. This one choice that I don't know I'd change even if I could go back in time.

I sit at the table all by myself as I watch my family click pictures up on the stage. Mom has a shine to her skin as she stands beside Dad, Myra and Aarav stand on either side of them. My younger sister, Malti, sits in the middle, a dimple showing on her left cheek as she smiles at her fiancé.

I stare at them until my vision gets blurry and I feel a lump in my throat. I could be up there with them right now. I could be giving Malti my blessings on her journey, guiding Myra through her teens and spoiling Aarav with everything he needs. I could ask dad about all his worries and I could lay my head down in Mom's lap. I could do all of that and more if it wasn't for that one choice, I made a few years ago. And before I knew it, I was transported back to being a 24-year-old.

"Meera? What are you doing?" Malti stormed into my room staring at the clothes in my hands that I was hastily throwing into my suitcase.

"I am getting out of here. I am done. I won't be manipulated like this. I won't suffocate myself in this jail cell forever."

Malti grabbed my hand and yanked at it, all the clothes fell from my grip as I looked up at her.

"Can you calm down? Where are you going to go in the middle of the night? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know! But any place would be better than here!" I yelled at her. The tears came back with a vengeance as sobs racked my body, when Malti grabbed me in her arms. She hugged me very tight.

She never hugs me; I thought to myself, she never shows any affection. But that night she hugged me and that little gesture was bigger than the whole sky.

I ran out of tears and fell asleep on her shoulder at some point. And when I woke up the next morning, I saw her for the first time lying beside me. I got off the bed quietly and looked around my room. *So many memories, so much love, how can I give up without trying one last time?*

I walked down the hallway past Myra and Aarav's room and saw my dad reading newspaper in the drawing room like he didn't just destroy my whole world last night. *"You get married or you sit at home forever."*

Some choice he gave me. Ignoring him, I went straight to the sliding glass door looking for Mom. She was working silently on her beloved plants in the backyard, her back turned to me.

I took a deep breath. *One last time.*

I walked towards her and she peered over her shoulder. But she didn't quite look at me; her eyes seemed to be seeing right through me, like I was hollow or entirely invisible.

I sat beside her.

"Mom..." I sighed. "Mom?"

She didn't respond. But I was going to speak anyway.

"I can't get married right now. I don't want to. I'm sure the guy you found for me is great, but you have told me so many times that marriage is a responsibility. And I am telling you that I am not ready for it. I have plans for my career, for my life. I have dreams and goals and I don't want to put them on the back burner just because of a marriage I don't even want. So please...talk to Dad. I don't have anyone in my life. And I would never have anyone unless you approve of them. Would you talk to him? Huh?"

"How many years do you need?" Her voice seemed unfamiliar.

How many years? I didn't know that I was supposed to have a deadline for my dreams. I didn't know that I have to ask to live a few years, out of my own life.

"Five?" I whispered.

Mom finally turned to look at me. “So, you’re telling me that you want to live like a child for another five years. Five more years of your nose either buried in those books or eyes staring at the phone screen? Five more years before I could worry about your siblings?”

“I can apply for jobs. I can get out of the house. I’ll live on my own. I will...”

Mom got up dusting her hands off and I followed after her.

“That’s not possible.”

“Why not?”

She glared at me. “Because you are a girl. The world is unsafe for you. You get married at the right age and you move out only when you move in with your husband’s family. That is the family you come from. That is how all of us have done it.”

My family was everything to me but there was a wall between us. There always has been.

“What would happen if I don’t conform?”

“You’ll ruin your sisters’ life, our life. People would talk. What is wrong with our oldest? Why is she living alone? Does she have a man? Is she characterless? Is she...”

“Then why did you give me an education? Why did you let me dream?”

“We gave you an education so that one day, if by some bad karma you end up with an abusive man, you can have the choice to get away from him. Your education is not an excuse for your refusal to grow up.”

“So, it was marriage. It was always about marriage. Because I’m good for nothing else, right?”

“Your life is not going to end if you get married. You understand that, don’t you? It will be the beginning of your own little family.”

“Yes. I understand that. My life would not end, not literally, at least. I would still be alive, barely breathing, tending to a man whose mother never bothered to teach him how to treat a woman because she was too busy training her daughters.”

“I would put everything on hold to cook him breakfast and dinner and clean up after him, while he goes to work, to a job he isn’t even passionate about, but he has to do it because a man is not a man unless he earns. While I want to work but I can’t be passionate about it.”

"I have to be available to him at night and be desirable during the daytime. Even if by some luck, I find a good man with a good family, eventually I would have to choose, between family and career just like you Mom. I am a heartless bitch if I choose my career and a spineless corpse if I choose my family. And if I choose both, it will chip away at my sanity each passing day, slowly but surely. So, forgive me, if I don't want to live that reality. If I want some time, enough time before I feel secure enough and ready enough to do all of that and to give my whole life up for something as fickle as love."

"If that is your perspective then I can't help you. But one day you'll reach the top and you'll have no one. All your friends would be married, your siblings would have moved on and your parents would be dead. You'd be way past your prime to attract a man who would be willing to start a family with you. This dream of yours will fizzle out too and all you'll be left with is regrets. Life would lose all its meaning because there's nothing in it without love."

But I was also someone I loved, Mom. You taught me that and I would protect this relationship before I'm ready to handle any other.

And just like that the choice was made. I knew I was going to regret it. I would wake up each day and try to convince myself that it was exactly as it was supposed to be and I'll go to bed each night wondering why it couldn't be any different. But even if I could go back in time, I was not sure if I would have made a different choice. All I knew was that, I had finally grown up and it was time to move on.

Wiping the corner of my eyes I get up, ready to leave the party where I was invited but not welcomed.

"Meera? It's a familiar voice. I turn around to look and it's Mom.

I don't know what she wants to say, all I know is that I have missed her. And maybe it's all exactly how it's supposed to be.

The End

About the writer:



Altasha Ali is a student and writer based in Lucknow, India. She started writing when she was 15 and has published three novels so far, *The Unintended*, *Entirety of Her* and *A Few Novembers*. Writing to pour her emotions on page and creating art out of it, is her passion. She is fascinated by humans, their relationships and their stories. Through her works, she hopes to connect with people but more importantly, she wants to provide some relief to both the reader and herself.

A Story to Tell

Raja Chakraborty

Stories are born in a moment. Some take a lifetime to die. Some barely live.

But they all have a story to tell.

If you listen carefully.

Take this tree, for instance. Yes, the one next to your window, your everyday tree.

One day take out time, sit down and look at it. I mean really look at it, open your mind and lend your ears.

You will hear in the murmur of its leaves the story of an old woman, you surely remember, the one who used to live on the road, in the shelter of the tree, forsaken by everyone, banished from their lives and sights.

Concentrate. The leaves will tell you this was not how it used to be

The old woman once was a young girl, seven or so, when her family came here and settled down. The father was a doctor, a kind one and good in his trade. In no time he had a name spreading far and wide. Long queues formed in front of his door, each morning. His earnings, though modest, was enough to keep the family happy.

The young girl grew up, merry and much loved. She used to run up and down this very road, full of life, a careless butterfly in the wind. Yes, like her father she was a kind-hearted one too, helping out with the patients, taking care.

One summer day, hot and parched, an old man, waiting in the queue collapsed on the road. There was no shed, no respite from the beating sun.

Next morning, the young girl, young but wise for her age, planted a row of seeds on either side of the road.

She watered them every day and nourished them as if they were her own children.

Years went by. The young girl bloomed into a lovely lady.

The road was now lined with fine trees.

Then one night, strange people came to their house. No, not patients. Who they were nobody could ever know.

Later on, the neighbours said they heard those people threatening the good doctor for not listening to them, not practising their faith and help all who came to him. They dragged him and his wife out of the house and hacked them to death, blood reaching the trees. They set the house on fire.

The girl saw everything, hidden behind this tree, shaking with its leaves, too terrified to move, too stricken to cry. Three souls and a dream died that night.

She never spoke again. The tree became her home. Gave her shelter. Protected her. Till she grew old. Old enough to die.

And you thought she was mad, just mad.

So, you see, everyone has a story to tell.

You only have to listen.

About the writer:



Born and brought up in Kolkata, India, Raja Chakraborty is a much-published, bilingual poet, writing in English and Bengali. He has penned five books of English poems so far, 'The Soup Bowl and Other Poems', 'Whispers in the Wind', 'Broken Lines and Rainbows', 'About Maya and Other Poems' and 'Where the Shadow Falls'. In Bengali he has published six books of rhymes and poems. He is also a regular contributor to magazines and anthologies which include Setu, Piker Press, The Writers Club, First Out, Litterateur Review, Dissident Voice, Duanespoetree, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Borderless Journal, Outlook, Different Truths and a host of anthologies.

A Lesser Family

Sami Rafiq

On the balcony of the Roshan family's second-floor flat stood an old battered tricycle outgrown by a toddler, a worn-out doll's house, which it seemed the dolls had vacated for higher stations, and an antique iron flowerpot holding a cactus that seemed to have given up hope of getting attention.

On this deserted balcony, where it seemed no one ever came, a round spot was forming on the ceiling. Who but the cactus knew that the round spot was a paradise in the making with the fragrance and pollen of flowers?

There was no intervention from the inmates of the flat, and the cactus was glad to get the company of the first bees clustering around the spot. If one were to peep indoors, one would see a family bedroom through the glass doors.

It was always a mess in the morning when the children had to get ready to go to school. The mother would be scolding, chiding, and calling as the children struggled with their heavy school bags and starched uniforms.

"Finish your breakfast now; the bus is waiting."

Hannah, the younger child, was eight years old and hated eating breakfast. Daniel the older child, was ten and was always up to some mischief.


"Mother, why is Daniel always playing with my water bottle? Tell him not to," Hannah cried, giving her pinned curls a shake.

"You are such a cry-baby!" Daniel laughed. Outside on the balcony, the number of bees had grown, and a small hive had started to take shape.

The queen bee settled into the new home and laid countless eggs. The worker bees were busy foraging for food for the soon-to-be born babies. Very soon, grubs were squirming in their little cells and being fed on a diet that humans called ambrosia.

The royal jelly that the nurse bees fed the babies rivalled the formula on which Hannah and Daniel had been brought up. The cool, fragrant air currents that the bees created with their wings were far more healing and soothing than the electric fans in the flat.

The cactus had begun to flower, and a bee or two was hovering around its dewy yellow flower.



The steady buzzing of the bees could give serenity and composure to a disturbed mind in contrast to the chatter and arguments indoors.

There existed two worlds now unaware of each other.

Both were supported with hard work, love, and commitment but were not connected to each other.

For the bees, home was a deserted balcony with a cactus flower and the gardens of flowers and trees nearby. For the children, home was on the second floor with their toys and bedroom.

The humans would have been afraid of being stung, and the bees vice versa, if they had been aware of each other's existence.

Thus, the two worlds continued to live side by side, unaware of each other.

The children had a winter break, but there was no break for their mother or the bees in the hive.

Both laboured from morning to evening, always in movement, always buzzing about, and always cooking, feeding, cleaning, washing, airing, and clearing.

Once, when the mother was sick and watching the balcony from her bed, she spotted the flowering cactus.

"How could I have forgotten my cactus, oh! How lovely the little flower is!" Just looking at it from her bedroom made her feel better.

She had remarked to her husband, "Did you see the little yellow flower on the cactus?"

The only answer was "huh", from where he was lost in his files.

He did not even know about the existence of the cactus.

He had remarked later, "You must keep the balcony clean; there is too much junk there."

There was no mention of a cactus. Hannah, however, had crept onto the balcony one Sunday morning and watched the bees, becoming absorbed in their movements for a long time.

She bent over and smelled the cactus flower; for a child of her age, she was not afraid of bees. The bees, too, carried on with their work unperturbed by the human child.

One day the children were away on a school trip, and their mother had some free time on her hands. She decided to check on the cactus on the balcony.

She was greeted by the buzzing of bees.

"Oh! God, what a big bee hive!" She exclaimed.

It was a huge hive, larger than a football, and there were hundreds of bees clinging to it.

The cactus flower was forgotten in her panic upon seeing the place abuzz with bees.

The children were forbidden to open the glass doors to the balcony. Their father peered at the huge hive through the glass doors.

"It must contain such a lot of honey; something needs to be done," he murmured.

“Daddy, are you going to destroy the home of the bees?” Hannah had asked, her little face expressing fear.

“They are dangerous for us,” her mother replied.

“Yes, people can die of bee stings,” her brother added knowledgeably.

“But there must be mothers and babies and all their toys. What will happen to them?” Hannah continued with concern.

“They should not have built a hive on our balcony.” Daniel said affirmatively.

Through the glass, the human family looked at the bee families with trepidation and fear.

One evening, Hannah had placed a chair against the bolted glass door and was trying to undo the bolt.

“What are you doing, Hannah?” Her mother cried.

“I want to see the bee hive, the mother, fathers, workers, and children,” she replied stubbornly.

“They all sing different songs and smell so beautiful. I could watch them all day.

Oh! How cute the babies must be!”

“The bees will sting you, darling... Aren’t you afraid?” her mother tried to reason with her.

“Why would they sting me? I am not going to disturb them!” She answered.

Her father had appeared then and said with some determination, “We will collect the honey and get rid of the hive.”

“But why would you rob their home, Daddy? They are not robbing us, are they?”

“No, dear, but you know it's difficult to find pure honey even in the market these days, and here we have been blessed by nature with such a huge hive full of gallons of honey!” her father had remarked.

She became pale and began to cry, “I don’t want their honey; I don’t want to destroy their home.”

Both parents decided that before some calamity took place, the bee hive should be destroyed as soon as possible.

While Hannah had been crying and opposing her parents’ decision, there was a restlessness in the beehive.

The bees were disturbed and had begun to bump drunkenly here and there.

Hannah had noticed the change from the glass door. Her brother had been playing with their father’s new 5G mobile phone and trying to get pictures of the bee hive.

“Something is disturbing the bees; they are losing their way,” she remarked.

“Huh, I read somewhere that these 5G signals make them lose their way,” her brother remarked casually, and did not noticing the look of horror on his sister’s face.

“The bee hive will be gone tomorrow, Hannah; we just want you to be safe,” her mother answered, patting Hannah on the head.

The balcony wore a war zone look the next day, with pieces of the burnt hive lying about and scores of dead bees.

In the kitchen stood a huge container of pure honey.

The parents’ wanted their children to taste the pure honey. Daniel was very eager to taste it, but when he saw bits of wax, dead bees, and stings in the honey, he made a face.

“Give Hannah a spoonful,” he smirked.

“And where is Hannah?” The mother asked.

They hunted all over the house, but there was no sign of the child.

There was a look of terror on the mother’s face, and she rushed to the balcony to see whether she was there.

She noticed that the cactus flower had fallen, lying wilted among the shreds of the hive still intact with baby bees. Who would attend to them now? She couldn’t help thinking of a bombed-out site, the outcome of human greed and avarice.

In the far corner against the balcony wall, sat Hannah with a dead bee in her hand; the smoke had blackened her cheeks.

A piece of the hive sat upon her curly head, giving her the mien of royalty.

No one but the bees knew which celestial garden her soul was wandering in.

About the writer:



Sami Rafiq is Professor at the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University. She has made significant contributions in the field of Women's Studies. She contributed four lecture modules to the Swayam portal in January 2021 on the following areas: 1 Indian science fiction 2. Sufi poetry. She has also delivered online lectures on creative writing and comparative literature. She has contributed a module to E Pathshala MHRD on Ismat Chughtai. She has been writing regularly for the Hindustan Times “Inner Voice” column. She has also published academic papers on comparative literature and Indian Writing in English. She is the founding and chief editor of Cloverleaf, a journal of Spiritual Heritage Education Network, Kitchener, Canada.

Hunger Pangs

Deepak Sharma

"Shall I bring something to eat?" Asked Sadhana. This was my first conversation with Sadhana after her marriage.

"Why not?" I cooed, "In fact, I suggest you come and cook for us for an hour or so every day."

Four months ago, Sadhana had been cooking for us.

"That will be quite an issue with my mother-in-law," she said, making an effort to control the saliva in her mouth. "She says there is so much ironing to do at home; where do you have the time to go out?"

Like her natal family, her in-laws were also in the business of laundering and ironing clothes.

"This is not good news for us," I said, disappointed.

Last week we returned from Atlanta, where we had been visiting our elder son. Sadhana's mother, Genda, had told me that in our absence, she had managed to marry off Sadhana. The day we received our visas, Genda had taken the girl home. We had to lock the house since our younger son and his family are also settled abroad.

"If I could, I would have come to your place every day—morning and evening. To tell you the truth, food is scarce here."

Sadhana had enjoyed cooking and feeding us and herself. She had a good appetite, and even after a full meal, she liked eating something or other at short intervals. Also, she would spend her free time picking the greens, grinding the lentils to form a paste, or preparing fillings and spices for stuffed bitter gourd. During the three years she had been with us, all our meals had been feasts. Her chapatis were so thin and soft that I would gorge on four of them. Her eagerness and enterprise more than compensated for her huge appetite.

"What is the issue about food?" I inquired.

"My mother-in-law and my sister-in-law don't see eye to eye on anything. The two are always out to stab each other."

"Don't they knife you?"

"Oh, they do try! All the time. But I somehow manage to evade them."

"You are one smart girl!" I exclaimed, "And on top of it, you are Genda's daughter, a woman who wins everyone's praise for her patience and courage."

When Genda's husband married another woman and threw her out of the house, all Genda got by way of support from her parents was a roof over her head. The family's laundry and ironing business had already been divided among her brothers. She found work as a household helper in two or three houses. In fact, from the very beginning, she used to do many other chores for free at our house. In return, she would occasionally request a new pair of shoes for Sadhana, saying, "Get her a new pair of shoes, Madame." Sadhana had flat feet; her soles touched the ground. I began to order special, comfortable shoes for her from a Chinese shoemaker. When Sadhana began to grow up, Genda left her with us to be a maid at our house.

"I am smart because if I get involved in their bickering, I will also have to starve. Like them," laughed Sadhana.

"Leave your in-laws' house on the pretext of meeting Genda," I chortled, "and help me in the kitchen here..."

"Sure," Sadhana said, sounding a little embarrassed, "and I will have a few feasts of my own accord too."

But Sadhana could never come to me again.

Genda was at our house when someone from Sadhana's in-laws' house arrived with the news of her demise.

"I am coming with you." Genda's nervousness had been unbearable.

I got my car out, and we both reached Sadhana's in-laws' house.

"How did this happen?" I asked the middle-aged man who introduced himself as Sadhana's father-in-law.

"We have been ruined, mem sahib! Robbed by fate....," a middle-aged woman darted through the courtyard bursting with people and howled, "My earning hand is gone. She used to iron mounds of clothes in the blink of an eye."

Genda began to blubber.

"But how could she die at such a young age?" I expressed my indignation.

"It happened all too soon yesterday. Here she is ironing clothes, and suddenly she runs outside. Approaches the jamun tree standing there and starts going round and round it in circles. Screaming, wailing, and sobbing loudly. I ask the elder daughter-in-law to check on her. She returns and tells us that an insect has gotten into Sadhana's ear, and when it moves back and forth inside her ear, she also moves back and forth. We are all bewildered. Then someone asks us to shine a light into her ear, as on seeing the light, the insect would crawl out. While we are fixing the wick of the lantern, she clambers up on a branch of the jamun tree. She plucks the leaves and stuffs them in her mouth. We are about to reach her; her sister-in-law calls out to her; the children call out to her, but she just does not listen. She continues plucking the leaves, chewing them, and spitting them out. We call her. She clambers again, but this time instead of resting on a branch, her feet let her down, and she fell down with a thud.

"To tell you the truth, she had flat feet!" a woman exclaimed.

"This is her sister-in-law, our elder daughter-in-law. Ask her how hard we tried to save her. But once the blood started flowing from her head, it never stopped till death came and took her away."

Genda's howls grew louder.

"Come, Genda," I coaxed her, "let's go to Sadhana. We would see her."

Looking at Sadhana lying there, still and lifeless, was a shock.

Thin as a reed, her complexion had also gone pitch black.

"How did she lose so much weight within two months of her being here?" I sought an explanation from her mother-in-law.

"Which of us is well built?" Her mother-in-law turned our attention to her elder daughter-in-law, asking, "Is she heavy? Well-built? We are poor people. How could we afford to feed her adequately? The kind of amount she ate at your house. How can we maintain health like yours? From where will we get the money?"

"I heard you valued her labour," a young man came towards me, "now help us, won't you?"

"Anyway, a woman's shroud comes from her maternal home. Her natal family bears all the expenses of her last rites." Sadhana's father-in-law crept in to join him.

"That's the least you could do. You have such a big car! Such a big purse! We have to be helped. Another young man joined them, his voice holding a hint of a threat.

"I'll send for Genda's family," I grew watchful, "they'll all be here soon..."

"And you? Won't you give anything?" Sadhana's mother-in-law drooled, "Will you leave her dead body empty-handed?"

I opened my wallet and gave her five-hundred-rupee notes.

"I'll see you later. " I patted Genda's shoulder and headed towards my car.

As I reached a lonely stretch of the road, I stopped the car and broke down.

Tr.: Madhu B. Joshi

About the writer:



Born in 1946, Deepak Sharma retired as Reader and Head of the Postgraduate Department of English, Lucknow Christian P.G. College, Lucknow. Awarded Sahitya Bhushan by Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthaan, she has 21 collections of short stories in Hindi. Deepak Sharma has been frequently published in important Hindi journals like *Hans*, *Kathadesh*, *Aajkal* and *Kathakram*.

Saving the Tree-man

Sunil Sharma



Little Nandu was not sure.

Heard the voice; this time, bit louder.

Faint “Hullo, kid!” that reverberated in the silent stretch, off the main street; a slightly-secluded spot, amidst the rubble, grass and commercial waste---his bit of open and unoccupied space.

“Hullo, *there!*”

Nandu looked about.

The *guy*, flowing beard and grimacing face; lips and mouth, open; eyes puckered up!

A man in silent agony...about to holler!

The “old guy” lived in the heart of the gnarled tree and watched over the modest neighbourhood, top of the elevated ground; a green hulk.

Not many kids played there, terrified of the sad eyes and the scream caught up in the throat of the figure carved by anonymous hands; a tortured being imprisoned in the trunk of the tree.

Popularly called the Tree-man.

The vivid eyes and face.

Arresting figure!

The Tree-man, the “old guy” of the run-down area.

Workers returning late in the night avoided the tree that was there for at least three generations, as told by his paternal grandfather.

Even strong men with powerful hands and muscular bodies got cold feet. Avoided taking the short cut skirting it, fearful of the whispers---inhalation and exhalation of a soft breath.

“A ghost lives inside!” they said.

Nandu enjoyed the lonely spot, ghost or no ghost.

His friends refused to play under the tree.

Nandu loved looking at the carved face.

“Does the old guy really breathe?” Nandu once asked the grandpa, outside the shanty-room, on a summer night full of stars and a baby-faced moon; a clear sky that hung like a blue sheet.

“Yes, child,” replied grandpa. “It does breathe. It talks also. Tree-man is a hybrid. Half man-half tree. Very special. It speaks...”

“What?” Nandu interrupted: “Speaks?”

“Yes, son. Trees have hearts...”

“Hearts?”

“Yes, hearts. A beating heart! Place ear to its chest and hear the beats.”

“Oh! Interesting!”

“Very interesting! They breathe, sing and dance, like us.”

“Is it?”

“Yes, Nandu. When there is breeze, the leaves rustle. The leaves sing song and dance with their green limbs. Lie down under the shade and watch their happiness.”

Nandu was lost. So much of the wonderland lying in the open!

“Tongues? Do they have them?”

Nandu asked.

A soft breeze blew as if on a cue.

The silvery moon smiled.

Nandu thought he heard the murmur of the distant leaves and a long sigh; a combo of gentle sounds wafted on the back of the breeze.

“They speak, if you are listening. I have heard trees speak...on many occasions, sad and happy...”

“The Tree-man? Heard him? You?”

“Yes, kid. The Tree-man. Our generation heard voices of the trees. Now, no longer. Trees have been silenced by the traffic din. We are losing them forever...”

“Do they speak our language, Pa?”

“Yes, they do. Listen with your heart, son. They will talk to you as well. Especially the Tree-man, the lonely soul on that heap of garbage, watching like a guardian.”

Little Nandu decided to do that soon.

He often went there, afternoons, to play.


The Tree-man sat there, the usual pose---motionless. Eyes, un-seeing. Face, glum.

Beard caught in the fixity of a congealed moment; un-flowing tresses; frozen misery.

Nandu looked at the furrowed forehead; liquid eyes; open lips about to emit a deep-throated cry.

The timid boy placed an ear against the human face---listened for long!

Nothing!



He began playing under its shade.

Then *heard*: “Hullo, kid!”

He paid no attention, playing with the invisible pals, the game of hide-n-seek.

Heard again, *the voice*: This time, louder, hoarse, coming from inside the gnarled trunk.

“Hullo!” Nandu answered. “Is it you, the Tree-man?”

“Yes, I am. A soul trapped inside this wobbly body!”

Nandu nodded.

The tree sighed. “Nobody talks to me. I feel wretched.”

Nandu crept closer.

“I will talk to you, dear tree. My grandpa also talked to you earlier.”

The tree smiled. “Yes, I remember him and other young men. An entire neighbourhood came over here to play and pray, almost daily. Now, it is a long wait for a companion or a kid.”

Its ancient veins stood out. The tired face broke into a pale smile.

“When was the last time you spoke to a kid?”

“Years. Lost count. Earlier men and women worshipped trees. They have forgotten those prayers now.”

Nandu grew sad.

“There was a time when my ancestors predicted future. Folks believed their words.”

Nandu was astonished!

Trees predicting future? Never thought the dumb guys could do this!

“Where was it?” he asked, sitting on the stones beneath the canopy; rude stones as seats. “When?”

“In early Greece. Other early cultures as well. When trees, stars, winds, seas and humans conversed and lived as a happy family.”

“Really?” Nandu’s mouth opened, eyes wider, his standard expression. “That is fantastic! A common language for trees and humans! Wow!”

“In those happy times, kid, each culture had got a Talking Tree or a Tree of Life. Can you imagine this kind of blissful co-existence? Those happier times! Now, a memory only.”

The tree sighed heavily. “That state is over. Gone forever. Trees are now mere timber for the hungry markets.”

Another sigh escaped its lips.

Nandu could not bear to look at those sad eyes and gasping mouth.

He could not escape the horror of that reality---utter loneliness of the tree-guy.

“I am sorry!” Nandu exclaimed. He wanted to hug the lonely tree.

The old man reminded him of grandpa and Nandu grew unhappy, remembering the grandpa.

The wind sang a sad song. The tree sighed again.

Nandu could no longer bear the overwhelming sadness of the tree. He got up and hugged it with bare small arms, stretching them as far as possible.

He felt the faint beating of an old heart inside the wooden home.

He stood, listening to the irregular rhythm---tik-tik-tik-toc-toc-toc-tik-tik; like the first rains falling across the plains in a fine cascade with a soft hi---ss---ing sound.

Heart-beats of the bearded guy, residing inside the tree-home for so lo---ong!

Unbelievable!

Grandpa was right. “The trees possess souls, like others. Respect each creature. Never hurt them. We all are created by a loving, kind God. We are related.”

He understood the words of grandpa, holding tight to the tree, its bark coming rugged in tiny hands, “centuries deposited there”, as pa had told him on another occasion.

The tree softly said, “Thanks Nandu for talking to me. For the friendly hug. Feels good.”

“Welcome, my friend! My grandpa taught me to love each and every being of God’s creation.”

“Fine values! Your grandpa was indeed noble!”

Nandu nodded again.

“Come daily to play with me, my friend,” requested the old tree; raspy voice, pleading. “I will protect you with my leaves and boughs in every season.”

“I will, my friend. I love this place---and you.”

Just then, the earth shook.

Nandu thought there was a quake coming. He looked around.

Deep rumbling.

Bulldozers!

The tree shivered and began sobbing---desperately.

“Why are you crying now?” asked the bewildered boy. “Are you scared of something?”

“Those monsters!” exclaimed the tree.

Sobbing bitterly, it said, “These iron devils killed my siblings. Razed forest nearby. Now, they are coming after me. I knew they will come for me one day and now, the killers are here, finally!”

“What will happen?” Nandu asked, equally terrified of the approaching bulldozers.

“They will uproot and chop me down. In slow motion. Murder me, in fact, as they murdered my family and friends earlier. Good bye, good boy!”

“My God! I will seek help...”

“It is pointless. My death is imminent. Just think of being torn apart slowly, your own body, limb by limb, in a slow manner...”

Nandu shivered.

“You know what will happen, if trees die?”

“No.”

“Humans will face an angry sun and wind. The treeless earth will die...”

“My God!” Nandu exclaimed.

“That is the future for the cruel people. The humans know but hardly care...”

Nandu hugged the tree and said, “...Don’t you worry, friend! I will not allow that to happen.”

“Can you stop the hungry devils? A mere boy?”

“Yes, I can. To save my friend...and the future.”

The tree sighed.

When the bulldozers arrived, the drivers saw a strange sight: A frail boy hugging the marked tree in a tiny embrace, eyes closed, lips mumbling a prayer, while the wind moaned and the tree shook due to the tremors caused by the machines...

(*Author-note:* The photograph above inspired this story partially. The tree with the carved face can be seen in High Park, a famous public garden, in Toronto, Canada. The artist is not known.)

About the writer:



Sunil Sharma, PhD. (English), loves to listen to the symphonies of the birds, winds, oceans, rivers and watch the sky and stars for their ethereal beauty. Currently based in Toronto, Canada, he has published 26 creative and critical books so far, joint and solo. A winner of, among others, the Golden Globe Award-2023, and, Nissim Award for Excellence for the novel *Minotaur*. His poems were included in the prestigious UN project:

Happiness: The Delight-Tree: An Anthology of Contemporary International Poetry, 2015. He edits the English section of the monthly bilingual journal Setu published from Pittsburgh, USA:

<https://www.setumag.com/p/setu-home.html>. For more details, please visit the

website: <https://sunil-sharma.com>.

I'm Getting Late

Shubham Singh

“Da, where are you?
reach the station in half an hour
If you wanna come home.”

An alarming call from my sister triggered sweat,
a manifestation of fear of missing the train.
I ordered a bike on rent for quick delivery.

The elation of homegoing on *Rakhi* amused the clock,
and I slept too late as my eyes were willing
to see no dreams but home.

Clock arms were pacing like wheels of a train.
“Sir, here is your captain Manoj, at location,”
and chanting the pickup code, I rushed to my captain.

“Manoj Bhai, I'm getting late,
fifteen more minutes is all I have.
Either a *Rakhi* with sisters or another trashy dawn.”

Misery masked his face on hearing *Rakhi*.
“You'll not miss your train, Sir.” We departed.
The bike, train, and clock, all were competing.

The only thing, beyond competition,
was his desire to reach the station.
He too was alien to this familiar mighty land,

a land that bargains dreams for needs.
He lost his sister when she was twelve,
absent on the final *Rakhi* as he was abroad.
He informed me blankly and took a turn.

He turned uneasy, as if, “*Bhaiya*” echoed in his ears,
in a soft tender tone uttered by a shadow in memory.

Caress outstretched, he approached joyfully,
to embrace a sister nowhere existing.
Speed breaker and a U-turn to hyphenated reality.
‘Stories’ are the prosperity that migration gifts
to every family and its migrants.

He dropped me at the station and picked a sigh,
a brother-to-none had celebrated my sisters.

A fellow pawn in the game of cities,
stood there for long, no call to alarm him.

I was on the way to my family,
He reached his family much ahead.

About the writer:



Shubham Singh is a postgraduate student at the Department of English, University of Lucknow. Dangling between metaphysical poets and John Osborne, he is “just pretending to be a human being.”

The Strange Case of Sharad Kelkar

Vijay Prakash Singh

I am Sharad Kelkar and this is my own story. I was always happy within the circle of my family. Lata my wife, Sumukhi my ten-year daughter and Lalit my fifteen-year-old son made up my emotional life. We spent our leisure hours together; watching movies, eating meals, going shopping and travelling to hill stations. We were a family that bonded well. Seventeen years after being married to Lata, I still loved my wife and of course, my children were always a priority. We laughed and played together and the best moments of our life were spent in one another's company.

But as the years passed on, after two decades of this happy world which was a source of joy and fulfillment, something began to change as the children grew up. They became argumentative over small matters and if you tried to convince them of your point of view, a heated conflict occurred. Sumukhi, who had always been a docile child, began to become aggressive over issues like her obsession with fast food takeaways or choosing Humanities over Science or any of the dozens of issues that crop up in daily family life. Lalit started spending more time with friends than family and I knew he was spending his pocket money on beer and cigarettes. While I loved books, I found them staring at smartphones for hours together and both brother and sister stayed up late into the night, watching movies on the laptop or talking to friends while they slept till late in the morning and often missed classes. Any attempt at counselling or bringing them round to my point of view resulted in high decibel arguments about freedom of choice and undue interference. It seemed to me a strange generation. A generation that generally had earphones on and a blank expression as they failed to connect with parents or participate in the family as a group, a generation that hardly ever touched a book or witnessed nature or even spoke of relevant issues in a world where marriages broke up a dime a dozen and couples decided not to have children or sought the opinion of sexologists or fertility clinics if they did. A world of climate change and collapsing economies, of same sex marriages and rampant shootings in America. Why the list of

aberrations was endless! (Though I did not think same-sex marriages were an aberration). My children occupied aloof worlds. Everything was available in that smart ubiquitous gadget called the mobile. You got the news on that, you read whatever you read on that and you heard the music you wanted on You Tube. No need to visit a library or go to a concert. But if all this and my perception of it can be dismissed conveniently as the 'generation gap,' how could one dismiss the defensiveness and aggression that led to heated tantrums, tears and recriminations.

And where was my wife Lata in all this? Well, for her I was the unforgiveable villain who made the children cry and invariably, I was at fault. And so, the years went by and though I tried to silence my tongue as far as possible, showdowns, though occasional, did take place until I began to think, what was the point of trying to retain the illusion of a family when so many times we were totally fragmented and while we all remained aloof from one another. As this disillusionment grew, so did the emptiness until I began not only to retract but often thought of how solitude would work for me. This too wasn't exactly the rosy option it might seem, because one got so habituated to live with family that even if the family turned against you, the thought of a solitary situation filled you with despair. Besides where could I go to? I loved nature and the hills beckoned me. We as family had taken so many hill holidays together but the idea of spending time alone there filled me with melancholy, if not despair. So I hung on and drifted in a limbo of habit and hurt ego.

Then one day, out of the blue, I recalled meeting Swami Muktinanda as a young man on a college trip to Rishikesh. We had literally bumped into this ageing sage and one of us asked him what was the meaning of life. The eternal question!

"What do you think?" he asked, and while one guy piped up to say professional achievement and another, a happy family life or working for the good of others, the Swami frowned and with a wave of the hand dismissed it all. Then smiling he said, "You are all too young. For some it could be getting a job, for others marrying your beautiful girlfriend or then becoming a GM of your company. But when you get all that, remember an emptiness will gnaw within you. By then you will be quite old but the quest may have begun within you. Remember me then and here on that other bank of the Ganga is my Ashram. You can then come to me." How prescient that was! What a man of wisdom was this! For I certainly was at that stage where the bonds of attachment held me bound while I wasn't so sure that I wanted to break free since, like the caged parrot I had once tried to free, I might just fall to the ground instead of flying away. A couple of more years passed and one child left home while the other was on the verge of leaving and being thrown upon each

other, my wife and I, had frictions of a different kind. I was rude and belligerent in her perception and nothing good in my nature shone through so that we lived often sulking against each other, breaking off communication and then bouncing back until the next finger pointing and show of tempers. I too vented more than I should in trying to make her see my point of view but that only backfired. Human beings aren't tailor made to get along with each other since each individual is different from the other. The irony was that yet we could not live alone and lived clinging to friends or family. I grew older and health issues cropped up until sometimes I was mocked at losing my temper because I suffered from hypertension or taunted as a case of bad health. I mocked at her in turn and so we limped on in a conjugal familiarity that often turned bitter !

Meanwhile, Sumukhi left for her graduation in Fine Arts at Baroda and Lalit was doing well at his job with Price Waterhouse. Lata had begun to look at suitable matches for him. I had my books and music and gardening but Swami Muktinanda's words kept haunting me. I often thought of retiring in the Himalayas in a cottage amid Devdaar woods. It was a dream nurtured over the years but Lata did not take to the idea. Women are always more practical while the much-maligned male has his dreams. Men are maligned because yes, they have hindered the dreams of women. Be that, as it may, a lot of issues came up. Where would we find doctors in a remote forest and who would be there to help us! And so, the dream was shelved but I hankered for the allure of the ranges with its pristine waterfalls and dense forests, its fresh air and relative silence. Maybe I should experiment going to live there *alone* for three months to see how I would like it or then return to Rishikesh to get some nuggets of wisdom with which I could develop equanimity about life, I thought.

I thought of the latter as a more fruitful quest since, I might then be able to live the solitary life I thought I would like but I wasn't sure. Then one week jaded with the humdrum life I lived with its ceaseless round of books and tending to potted plants I began to make plans to go away! But what if the Swami had taken Samadhi! I was chasing an illusion. I had no address to write to him but clearly remembered his ashram. Then I thought of an alternative path I could take in case Swami ji had attained *Moksha*. I would see if I could find another *Guru* at the ashram and if I did not find one, I could proceed to Uttarkashi or then Gangotri and the fount of the Ganga. That way my venture would not be a waste since the mountains were always there for me to embrace.

And so, one day I packed a few kurta pajamas and sweaters and shawls and other sundries apart from some money and decided to go away when my wife had gone to Lalit's flat in Bangalore to

take care of him and show the photos and bio-data of some girls she had ‘shortlisted.’ I wrote a simple note which would not provoke too much hope but one that did not seem callous.

The note said, “I am going to Rishikesh for a few days not to escape from home but to discover if there is something more. My debit cards are there for you to use. I hope to be back but how soon I cannot say.”

And so, I left for a *Vanaprastha* as it were.

About the writer:



Vijay Prakash Singh is Professor at the Dept of English & Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, India. His areas of research are Classic Nineteenth Century Fiction, the Modern Novel and Travel Literature. He has published in several Indian and international journals such as *The Eastern Anthropologist*, *South Asian Review*, *Religion and Arts* among others. He has published a survey of major Himalayan and Tibetan Travelogues entitled *Mountain Travelogues on the Himalayas and Tibet* published by Pilgrims Publication Varanasi and a collection of short-stories entitled *A Day in the Life of Ghulam Sarwar* published by Writer’s Workshop, Kolkata in 2014. *A Secret life on the Alaknanda* is his second collection of short-stories. Dr. Singh has been an academic Associate at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS) Shimla. He was Fulbright Scholar in Residence from August 2019 to May 2020 at Claflin University, a Historically Black campus located in South Carolina, USA.

Earth Family

John Thieme

The tap on the door is very quiet. So quiet that he's not quite sure if he's heard anything, but when it's repeated, he pushes himself up from his armchair and shuffles along the passage to answer. The caller is a young woman with leaflets in her hand, a relief from the knock-and-run zero-hours delivery men. He assumes she must be selling something, though, and in a way she is. She's canvassing for next week's local elections.

'Hello. My name is Jasmine and I'm your Green Party candidate for the council elections.' Her broad smile is clearly a vote winner, He wonders whether it's put on for the occasion or whether it's her natural manner.

He nods and returns the smile, mustering a feeble, 'Hello.'

'I'm sure a person like you will want to vote for us.' She points towards his front lawn. 'You've such a beautiful garden and like so many things in town, it'll be affected if the plan for the new road goes ahead. Did you know that already there are only half as many birds as there were ten years ago. No starlings, and finches, and tits are down by 80%, and across the world ... Well, you must have seen all the disasters on the news.'

He admits to watching the news, 'depressing though it is,' but before she goes on, he makes sure she knows that he hasn't voted for more than twenty years. 'The politicians we get today. They're all as bad as one another.'

'Gosh! Twenty years. I wasn't even born then. I'm eighteen. But it's my generation that's going to have to live with the worst of it, isn't it?'

'You sound like that Greta Thunberg. You have to admire her, but she is a bit intense, isn't she? And it doesn't help when she makes us oldies feel guilty.'

'Oh, you shouldn't. You're not to blame. It's the multinationals. The capitalists. Me, I worry about the future, but I like to enjoy the present.'

And then he surprises her. 'The present is the future. It's happening now.'

'You mean global warming?'

‘Yes, exactly. We’ve been spared the worst of it here so far, but just look around you. The floods, the storms, the drought we had last year. No wonder, there’s less birds.’

It’s as if he’s stolen her spiel. Jasmine decides he’s prime material. The only problem will be getting him to turn out to vote.

‘I can see you love birds.’ She gestures towards the seed holder suspended from a pole near his door.

‘Oh, that’s nothing. I’ve a proper feeding station in the back. And I get more visitors there, because it’s further away from the road.’

‘Oh my! Could I possibly see that? If you’ve got time, that is. I mean, I wouldn’t like to intrude, but it does sound exciting.’

‘You’re very welcome. If *you* have time.’ He’s beginning to warm to her. ‘Come on in. No, you don’t need to take your shoes off. This side of the house is mucky enough anyway.’

She gasps when she reaches the back door. It’s a showpiece garden. She never would have imagined anything so impressive and well maintained in a house such as this, with an elderly owner.

‘You could win national competitions. The cherry blossom is fabulous just now, isn’t it? And the water feature. Wow. The running stream. The drystone walls. And ohmigod, your tulips are the finest I’ve ever seen and they’ve been laid out, so the colours offset one another. Do you do it all yourself?’

‘No, it’s a bit too much for me. I do some, but my wife was the one with green fingers. Since she passed away, I pay a gardener. I do all my own cleaning and housework, so that I can afford him. The section that I’m responsible for is that bit down the left-hand end. No upkeep involved there.’ He laughs.

She peers earnestly at where he’s pointing. It’s been left untended.

‘Well, that’s a brilliant example of rewilding and every garden needs a patch like that. You are a natural Green, I think.’

He doesn’t reply. He doesn’t want to compromise his garden with politics. He doesn’t think she’s playing him, but he’s not sure.

‘Have you been alone long then?’

‘Nine years. She was just seventy. And we didn’t make it to our golden wedding. We were married for forty-nine years. I was twenty-three when we got married.’

‘So you’re ...’

‘Eighty-one.’

‘We’ve got that in common then.’

‘Come again.’

‘The numbers. Eight and one. You’re eighty-one and I’m eighteen. Two sides of the same coin.’

He smiles. She’s very quick, but he doesn’t think she’s manipulative. Her eyes are the purest blue he’s ever seen. He imagines her as the future of a planet that may not have a future, but quickly tells himself he’s being sentimental.

‘Where is your feeding station, then?’

‘It’s just round that corner. It’s not visible from here, but you can see it from the kitchen. Lovely to look at when you’re busy with the pots and pans. Come along, I’ll show you.’

The feeding station comprises two more poles with containers stuffed with nuts and fat balls, seeds strewn across the top of a high bird table and mealworms on a ground feeder that has stubby wooden legs.

‘You are a true Nature lover!’

‘Perhaps you’re right, but I don’t think like that. I don’t see Nature as separate. We,’ and he pauses to measure his words carefully, ‘are all one.’ He spreads his hands in a gesture that encompasses the trees, the rose bushes, the walls, the water, the moss, a hovering bee.’

‘Wow, that’s brilliant. You’re a hylozoist.’

‘Come again.’

‘Hylozoism. They taught us about it in school. It’s the belief that all matter has life. More than just animism.’

‘I don’t think I’m unusual. Doesn’t everyone know trees are sentient beings?’

‘Maybe, but most people think stone is inert.’

‘Well, I don’t need any fancy terms. I just get up in the morning and I come down to see my family. I’ve learned to love the snails, the worms, the wasps. That’s what keeps me going. Otherwise I would find it hard to go on.’

‘You’re very wise. Like I said, a true Green. You should come and give a talk to my group.’

‘Are they all *human* animals?’

‘Fraid so.’

‘I don’t think I’d be suitable then. And even in my prime I was never one for public speaking.’

‘Well, let’s see. I’m going to work on you where that’s concerned. By the way, what’s your name?’

‘Walter.’

‘Well, for starters, I’m going to drop the “l.” You’re Water. The source of life. And your garden feature proves it. Anyway, I’m sure now that we can count on your vote next week.’

‘Oh no, don’t be. These old legs struggle to get up to the town hall. They’re not too bad on the flat, but they balk at the climb up the hill.’

‘Then I’ll come and pick you up, Water. Your vote is really important to us.’

‘You have a car?’

‘Yes, well at least most people call it a car. Did you see that mustard-coloured box on wheels when you came to the door. That’s my “car” – part of my family – though I tend to avoid calling it a car myself, because it’s not like other cars. I run it on vegetable oil. It doesn’t pollute like petrol.’

‘Does that work?’

‘That’s a sensitive question, Water.’

‘And what’s the answer?’

‘Sometimes. When it doesn’t get clogged up.’

‘So you’re going to take to vote me in a car that may not get us there and I may not be able to vote, after all?’

‘Oh no, you won’t get out of it that easily. If the car is playing up, I’ll drag you up there, kicking and squealing, if I have to. There’s no escaping me, Water.’

He grins.

‘And I’ve also got a bicycle, which is really helping to save the world. So you may be riding pillion.’

‘No chance’

‘Water, you need to know. I’ve just adopted you – you and your willow and your tulips and your worms. You are now officially my family.’

‘Don’t you have family of your own, apart from the car and the bike?’

‘You mean human family? Not really. My parents died in a plane crash when I was two and I’ve no siblings. I get on with some of the people in the Green group, but you and your garden and your drystone walls and your stream have now become my true family, my earth family. I’ll be back tomorrow with a lawyer to legalize this.’

‘It’s not necessary. The walls have accepted us already. The willow tree witnessed it. That’s enough.’

‘And you’ll vote Green next week? That *is* necessary.’

‘Let’s see, Jasmine. The family will survive, with or without our votes, with or without humans.’

About the writer:



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 University of Guyana and North London. His academic books include *Postcolonial Contexts: Writing Back to the Canon*, *Postcolonial Literary Geographies*, *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. 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*.

BOOK REVIEW

“Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.”

~Anna Quindlen



Editor

Maria Khan

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



Co-Editor

Aqsa Eram

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



Co-Editor

Apoorva Raman

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



498A:
FEARS AND DREAMS

PROF. VIKAS SHARMA

498A: Fears and Dreams

By Prof. Vikas Sharma

Published by Diamond Pocket Book Ltd (2022)

Price: ₹ 250/-

ISBN: 978-93-5599-134-8

Language: English, pp. 191

Pritam Basak

The novel centres around the theme of complications among family relations where divorce is represented as a common event mirroring the frequent divorces in the present society. First, the couples enter and accept the institution of marriage but fail to uphold it. and next. They get divorced due to misunderstandings between themselves each as uncompromising as the other. Thus, their ego supersedes love and understanding, damaging the relationship devastatingly within a few days. The second significant issue in the book that revolves around the broken marriage is the implication of the dowry system. The bride can only get married only when her father can pay the demands put forth by the groom's family. The third factor that is discussed is the matter of satisfaction between the wife and the husband. Their physical or material desire became so high that nothing could stop them to dive into extra-marital or post marital relationships. Therefore, their love sustained temporarily at the beginning when handled by the falsity of voices and appearances but for them love meant only physical love. Prioritizing the marriage as a lifelong bond nurtured with patience, faith, dedication and determination became secondary. Maintaining an extravagant lifestyle of erotic enjoyment is their ultimate goal. Thus, the characters like Jatin, Tanvi, Sahil, and Anjula struggle with their respective problems. Very

few relish the infinite joy in this finite life. Behind all these scenarios, there lies a saying, which is, the Department of Divorce is under the control of Hell as is unfolded in the story itself. Marriage is now seen more as a curse than as a blessing. More as a destruction than as a construction.

The next important aspect that the novel focuses on is the role of law and justice forming the secondary themes of the novel. First, is the significance of the title which is named after Article 498 of the constitutional law. It states whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished. The novel projects this on the female who struggles with the consequences of the dowry system in her marriage. This article is a kind of weapon for them to insert fear into their counterpart by complaining a file against them and to get their dream fulfilled by taking an act of revenge even after divorce. Consequently, sometimes innocent family like Mr. Pandit and Mr. Singh in the story who become foul victims and are levied with heavy charges, helpless against allegations under Article 323 registered by the family of Mr. G.K. The cover page of the novel indicates these symbolic terrors. In combination with such themes, the role of the advocate also comes into focus. Their portrayal as per the story is depicted as passive and satirical. Advocate Mr. Sharma charges very high fees for each case they undertake. Borrowing a loan from a bank or lending properties are the ultimate options in order to survive legal proceedings at times.

Regarding the plot construction, it is well-crafted with fragmented stories of dowry issues. Besides, it covers the following matters such as the migration from India to the U.S.A. which takes place in the story differently for different people. For Jatin, it is a relief from the burden of 'chill-penury.' He dreams to settle there forever. He even changes his identity from Jatin to Joe and entitles himself as the son of Joseph. He sets up his shipping business, his education and farming life. Life for him here is more easy-going and he can use his free will with others such as Sophia and Procne. For Jay, it is for the educational purpose and he eventually fulfils it by achieving the Pulitzer and Booker Awards. For Tanvi, it is an invitation to begin a new life with Jay; Secondly, the setting of the book is during the Corona Pandemic and revolves around India (especially Uttar Pradesh) and U.S.A. (specifically New York). Lastly, is the use of language which is lucid and easily comprehensible.

Therefore, the book was an impactful experience. I was thrilled by its matter of subject and delineation, that is, the vulnerability of marital bonds and repercussions of the self. I recommend the readers to go through this novel to have a look at the modern-day dilemma of self-isolation and fickle mind-set coupled with the traditional dowry system that still prevails in the society.

About the reviewer:



Pritam Basak is a Research Scholar pursuing his Ph.D. from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His areas of interest are Trauma, Memory, Archive Literature and Cultural Studies.



यह
जीवन
खेल
में

संस्मरण

गिरीश
कर्नाड

अनुवाद: मधु बी जोशी



Yeh Jeevan Khel Mein

Memoirs by Girish Karnad, Translated by Madhu B.
Joshi

Published by HarperCollins Publishers, India (2022)

Price: ₹399/-

ISBN: 978-93-5489-469-5

Language: Hindi, pp. 291

Ajeet Kr. Gupta

A prolific Indian actor, film director, Kannada writer and playwright, Girish Karnad is known for his contribution to the cinema in South India. He has been one of the prominent figures in the age of modern Indian playwrighting in Kannada. *Yeh Jeevan Khel Mein* is the translation of his memoir *This Life at Play* published in English, which was jointly translated by Karnad (self), Srinath Perur from Kannada, and Madhu B. Joshi and was published in 2022. The work covers the first half of Karnad's remarkable life from his childhood in the city of Sirsi, his early engagement with local theatre, his early education in Dharwad, then in Bombay and finally in Oxford, his career in publishing at Oxford University Press in Madras (now Chennai), his travel and success in Kannada Film Industry, his personal and his life as a writer.

The book is divided into ten chapters. The memoir starts with the captivating story of struggles faced by Karnad's mother Krishnabai Mankikar, a widow who married his father Dr. Raghunath Karnad, who was already married. She wanted to become a doctor but she was unable to fulfil her strong desire because of her unfavourable situations. She became a nurse and worked

with his father who was a doctor as well. She had a son from her first husband Bhalchandra, who later adopted the Karnad surname.

Girish Karnad lived his childhood in Sirsi which was situated in the beautiful terrain of Western Ghats. It was surrounded by lush green jungles full of majestic peepal and banyan trees, which had several places where sunlight did not reach for centuries and it was the natural habitat of wild animals too. His father was appointed there as a government doctor. His days in Sirsi brought various challenges along with privileges. Sirsi was the place which introduced plays in his life. His family used to enjoy free tickets for the plays being performed by the traditional theatre artists of Karnataka. It was there when Karnad witnessed Yakshagana, even though his parents always preferred to watch modern Indian plays which used to come from cities. He says Yakshagana was considered crude, unsophisticated, and suitable for illiterate villagers. It was perhaps an early trigger for his interest in Indian mythology, folk art forms and pre-modern performance repertoire that influenced his work. It also awakened in him myriad possibilities of storytelling and various narrative epistemologies. History and mythologies became the basic tools of his plays which he used to solve modern-day social issues. On being asked how his characters felt so true to life, Karnad once told Vijay Tendulkar – “Oh, I met them all in my childhood in the streets of Sirsi.”

Karnad family moved to Dharwad and started living in Sarasvatpur which was situated on a hill in the South-Western corner of the city and inhabited by fifty-one Sarasvat families. The colony was distinguished geographically as well as linguistically. Karand went to Karnatak College for his further education and studied Mathematics, which helped him to learn playwriting- “It is Mathematics which taught me that, while working out an individual part, I always had to be vigilant about the effect it had on the other parts. This essential technical training for a playwright.” He underwent the intellectual development of his mind. He was inspired by the writers, poets, and intellectuals. He was immensely influenced by contemporary British modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden. He started reading poetry and thinking in English, which was furthered during his England visit.

He lived for six years in Dharwad and moved to the city of Bombay to pursue an MA degree. He earned the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship for his higher education. He studied philosophy, political science, and economics in Magdalen in Oxford and earned the degree of

Master of Arts. He was elected the President of Oxford Union in 1962- 63, which was one of the most popular councils for discussion and debate in the world.

Karnad drew his literary inspiration from the West but he always chose to write in Kannada. He is renowned for his plays, which he translated into English himself. He produced *Yayati* in 1961 when he was 23 years old. After that, with continuous efforts for two years, he published his next play *Tuglaq* in 1964.

In 1963 he returned from England and started working with Oxford University Press, where he published *The Striders* (1966) by A. K. Ramanujan. He resigned in 1970 to dedicate his time to writing.

Other than his plays, Karnad is well-known as an established actor and director in Kannada. *Samskara* and *Vams Vriksha* both were adapted from literary works. *Samskara* was written by U. R. Ananthamurthi and translated into English by A. K. Ramanujan. It was the first movie produced by Karnad where he played the role of Praneshacharya, the protagonist of the movie. Girish Karnad also served as the director of the Film and Television Institute of India from 1974 to 1975.

About the reviewer:



Ajeet Kumar Gupta is a research scholar, who is currently pursuing his Ph.D in English, from the University of Lucknow. He is interested in exploring the characteristics of Indian superheroes and comics in India.



33 Love Poems
by
mayogarciareyes

33 Love Poems

by Mayo Garcia Reyes

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Language: English, pp. 56

Prachi Kholia

Mayo Garcia Reyes is an American poet and special educator from San Diego, California. He wrote his first poem when he was just seven years old and fell in love with writing. He has degrees in English Literature and Religious Studies, with an emphasis on Creative Writing. Mayo taught young adults with disabilities basic life-skills for 31 years before retiring in the summer of 2019. His publications include *Phantom Songs* and *Collected Poems* and *Nataraja Notes and Other Selected Poems*. He has a keen interest in art which is often evident in his choice for book covers.

33 Love Poems is a quick read of just about fifty-six pages, published by Authors Press in 2023. The cover is a calming light blue, illustrated with paintings on both front and back covers of the book. The artistic sensibility of the poet is established with this itself. We see the painting of a couple embracing each other on the front cover. It is Gustav Klimt's well-known work by the name, *The Kiss* (1908) which has themes of intimacy quite pertinent to the overall theme of love that we find in his work.

A generous collection of 33 poems in total as the title suggests, with a consistent theme of love as discussed earlier, the poems can almost be read like a single piece in continuation. Even the table of contents can be read like a poem on its own. The entries in this collection do not follow the standard structure of a poem. It consists of short poems of free-flowing thoughts, beginning with the very first line as the title of the poem, using small alphabets with nothing in capital. It has one sentence in the whole poem without a full stop, and uses an ellipsis instead. This makes it seem like the poems are in the form of a continuous thought, finished off with a date at the end, though it does not follow a linear timeline. Mayo keeps his 'i' small throughout the book and leaves pauses arbitrarily. Again, a testimony to the poet's dislikes of a strict structural form.

There is nature imagery throughout the collection with words like 'rain,' 'sun', 'rivers', 'scent of lavender', 'moon', 'white stars' and 'trees' repeating in multiple poems. Mayo brings forward the beauty of daytime in the mind's eye of the reader by including words like 'sunrise,' 'morning', 'summer', 'brightness', 'light', 'radiance' and 'luminous' and then contrasts it with the eeriness of 'darkness', 'ghost', 'blood', 'crimson ash', 'death's house', 'shadow' and 'silence' of the nights. The poems move from the physical realm to the spiritual by going from the body and nature to dreams and phantoms. The emotions are strong and consistent but rather than existing in the material world, they appear to be rooted in the metaphysical. Reiterating Mayo's views on poetry, "words become a medium surfacing from the unconscious to the conscious realm." These poems are as mystical as they are spiritual (though not in a religious sense).

I would like to conclude by saying, these are not simple romantic poems. Nothing is literal. I read it like a fever dream and perhaps that is the appeal that the poet is going for, since what better way to take up the topic of love and using the abstract. That being said, if poetry is an art, it is this and Mayo Garcia is an artist first and foremost.

About the reviewer:



Prachi Kholia is a Ph.D scholar at the University of Lucknow. Her works have been published in literary publications like *Muse India*, *Setu*, *Trouvaille Review*, *The Chamber Magazine*, and *Dreich Chapbook*.

The background is a complex collage of various textures and colors, including shades of grey, black, and white. It features abstract shapes, patterns, and what appears to be a map of Australia. The collage is framed by a decorative border of pink and orange flowers on the left and right sides. The text is overlaid on this collage.

Renew **R**elocate **R**estore

**poems from
Australia and India**

**edited by
Robert Maddox-Harle & Jaydeep Sarangi**

Renew Relocate Restore: Poems from Australia and India

Edited by Robert Maddox-Harle & Jaydeep Sarangi

Published by Cyberwit, Allahabad

Price: 300/-, pp. 209

ISBN: 9789395224598 (ISBN10: 9395224592)

Language: English

Jyotirmoy Joshi

Have you ever experienced a book that evokes emotions akin to the aroma of the first monsoon on a dry land or the scent of dust and grass? These quintessential feelings of locality, deeply rooted in a specific place, seem to speak directly to the very soul of that place. Such is the nature of *Renew Relocate Restore: Poems from Australia and India*, a captivating collection edited by Robert Maddox-Harle and Jaydeep Sarangi, and published by Cyberwit in Allahabad, India. The poems within this collection delve into the essence of the local while simultaneously exploring the international, examining the profound emotional connection that humans have with a place, resonating across oceans, each with its own unique flavors. As someone wise once said, "Love transcends all"; and this book beautifully manifests such transcendence, not by distancing itself from a place but by immersing itself deeply within it. The way a place is felt shapes the nature of the emotions it evokes, as eloquently expressed by the poet Adrian Rogers: "A west/wide windswept sea not always kind is, this day—from a solitary peak blue-deep sun woken horizon-defined yet, will not let me be."

In this remarkable book, a place is more than just a mere location; it becomes a language through which feelings understand themselves and are rendered understood. *Renew Relocate Restore* successfully evokes both a spirit of localism and universalism, embodying the grand endeavor of liberal humanists. Human nature transcends place, yet it is not despite the place but because of it. The rolling seas, the setting sun, the effects of relocation, the incredible discovery

of one's roots, and the emotional intensity of these experiences form the essential emotional and humanistic undercurrents that run beneath each carefully chosen word of every poem. These poems eloquently express a seething sense of identity, fleeting in the very moment it is felt, much like phantom dots of vision, followed by an anguished longing that compels us to question our own identity. Adrian Rogers beautifully captures this sentiment: "Close-fitting cloak and a tunic flap in a singing wind draughting leggings and the stones feeling roughly rounder under hard-soled sandals, make me ask, who am I?"

However, amidst all the turmoil and uncertainty, there is hope, present in its various forms, some of which are less endearing. True hope acknowledges the possibility of unfulfillment, yet it persists, as beautifully described by Amelia Walker: "After all, there's no closing the box, and this greedy bird sings such sweet songs." The emotional exhilaration experienced while reading this book lies in its bravery—not only in its vulnerability but also in its ability to bleed that vulnerability and fashion it into poetry. As celebrated poems often demonstrate, vulnerability serves as the ink that gives them life. Vulnerability is not a lack of strength but the realization of a natural fact, the very reason behind our human ability to decipher that which we cannot convey to ourselves through mere words and normalcy. This necessary vulnerability shines through the pages of this volume, as poignantly expressed by Basudhara Roy: "Some pieces will be forgotten, lying around /A few will, in the end, not be found."

Within the tapestry of *Renew Relocate Restore: Poems from Australia and India*, there are verses that encapsulate the profound essence of the human experience, leading towards an inevitability that the sensible acknowledge, yet the creatively brave celebrate. For instance, in his poem "Quicksand", Syed Ali Hamid captures such a sentiment with intense clarity: "But how thrilling it/to slide towards death/knowingly,helplessly!" These evocative words encapsulate the exhilarating yet unnerving journey that life often presents. *Renew Relocate Restore* is a collection that speaks of longing, legacy, and the quest to find what was once lost, capturing the essence of life—a life deeply felt and, therefore, exquisitely lived. One prominent theme thread through most of the poems in this collection—the sense of dislocation and the subsequent need to relocate. The act of laying down roots once uprooted is one of the most profoundly felt emotional challenges for individuals or communities, a phenomenon that occurs with increasing frequency in the age of globalization and a capricious nature. Often, emotional turmoil ensues as one must surrender everything and make sense of a new sense of belonging and a new beginning.

Existence cannot be understood in isolation, and this inevitable turmoil gleams through the pages of this volume. It explores emotions of sorrow, surprise, and astonishment at how one world, seemingly singular, can be so multifaceted in every conceivable way. Bronwyn Owen Allen encapsulates this sentiment beautifully: “It was a surprise we were so in tune. She, from far, far away, born of a girl married at thirteen to her father; he fostered empowerment using the tool of education.”

The poems in this collection seamlessly traverse various essences of being, whether one's own being or in relation to a place, legacy, or the world at large. A latent sense of despondency permeates throughout—the despondency arising from the loss of an essence or the gradual poisoning of the planet, our only home, which we have emotionally and chemically plagued. Christopher (Kit) Lelen questions, “I ask myself , the way a ghost will/ is this a world we'll have left?”

Yet, beyond these dark and intricately described clouds of human emotional delineation, a glimmer of hope shines through, betraying the presence of a future sun. There is a sense, the truest of all, that whatever comes next will be accompanied by hope, calmness, and contentment—imbued with the notions of *carpe diem* and *memento mori*. Lakshmi Kannan's writing celebrates this theme with pure nostalgia, “Where are the delicately scented flowers that you shower on the ground so generously?... How we guzzled the neem *rasam* every April...”. Poets wise beyond their years convey this enrapturing wisdom beyond the mere words they employ, as captured by Ranu Uniyal: “Let us rejoice with seeds of hope our memories could not reap and tears failed to sow, blessed with the grace and beauty of days which hang like lame twitters of youth.”

What *Renew Relocate Restore* exemplifies is that humanity is not solitary—neither in our existence nor in our quest for understanding. It is a cybernetic, seamless flow of ancestral memory, roots, and legacies that extend beyond our comprehension—a life spreading beyond the years we live, leading toward a guileless and calming inevitability. Sukrita Paul Kumar eloquently captures this fluidity of being human and humanity itself in her poem “Dialogues with Ganga”: “But death you confirm has no colour /It is transparent like truth....”

Within the vast expanse of this anthology, the implications extend far beyond mere words. *Renew Relocate Restore* resonates with a pulsating rhythm, a symphony of significance. In Australia and India, the land breathes with ancient wisdom and demands our unwavering attention. Nature's capricious whims tear asunder the familiar tapestry of people's lives.

However, let us not confine ourselves to the boundaries of nations, for the challenges we face are not bound by geographical borders. The call to action resonates globally, as the tapestry of our planet frays under the weight of the tendrils of decay in every form.

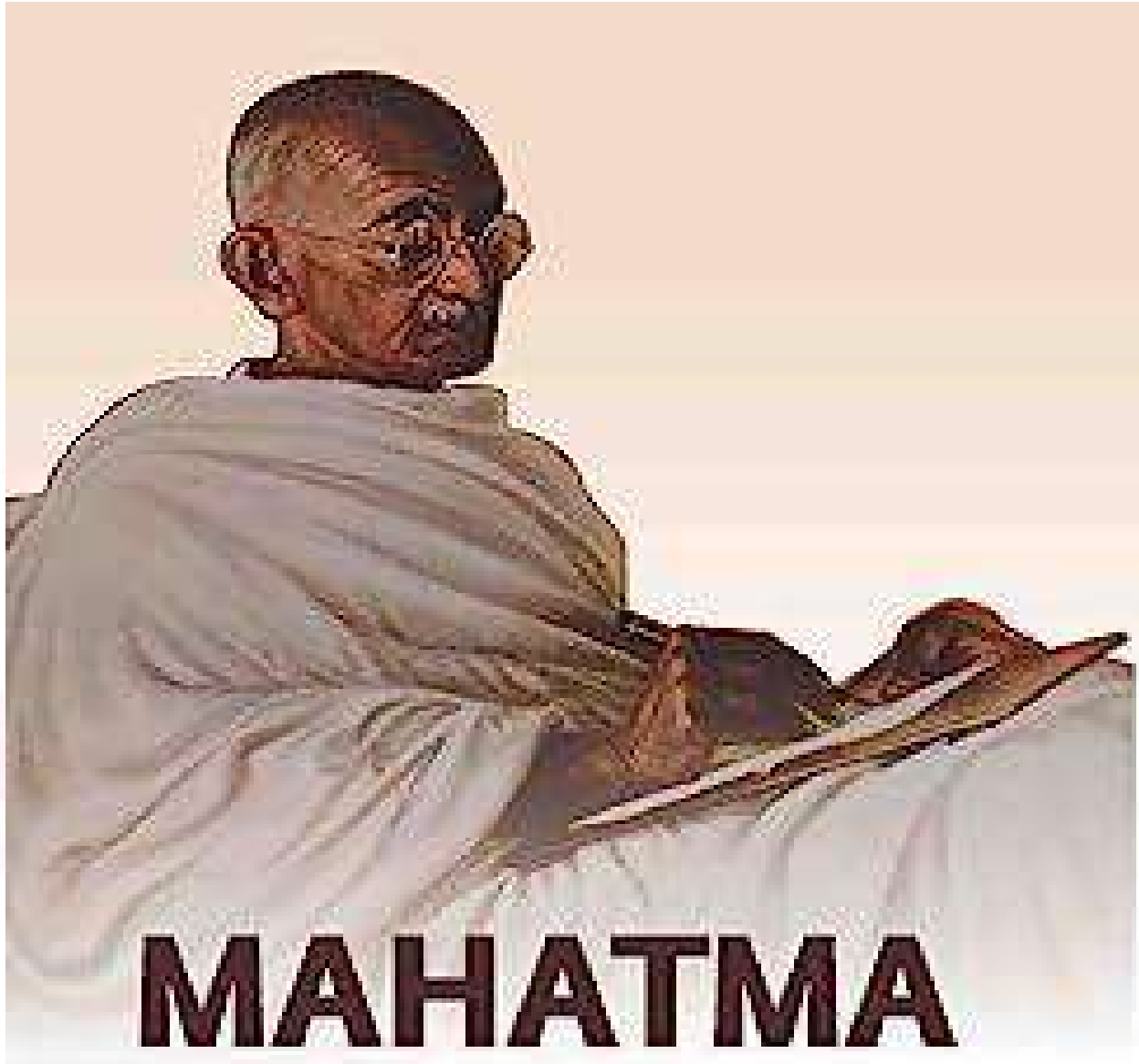
Within the pages of this anthology, a symphony of voices rises—a chorus of Indian and Australian poets, each painting their own strokes upon the canvas of interpretation. In this enchanting mosaic, every reader finds their own refuge, their own solace. Each verse becomes a vessel for transformation, inviting us to embark upon an odyssey of introspection and reawakening. Within these hallowed pages, a new world unfolds—one that beckons us to renew, relocate, and restore not only our surroundings but the very essence of our being.

The poems in this collection convey the fluidity of being a human and the interconnectedness of humanity. Edited with incisiveness and empathy by Robert Maddox-Harle and Jaydeep Sarangi, it weaves together these diverse and fervent human emotions, creating a discernible connection that transcends temporal and geographical limitations.

About the reviewer:



Jyotirmoy Joshi is pursuing his Ph.D from the Department of English and Modern European Languages. His areas of curiosity include, amongst others, fantasy literature and mental health. A motorcyclist, a Walter Mitty (guiltily/gladly so), a Liberal Humanist (proudly so), a Ravenclaw, a Bardolater; incisively curious, who sees much more than he reveals, a peculiarly intricate jumble of all the idyllic fantasies and all the dark eccentric thrillers that he is watched/read.



MAHATMA GANDHI

Essays on Life and Literature

Editors

**Ranu Uniyal • Nazneen Khan
Raj Gaurav Verma**

Mahatma Gandhi: Essays on Life and Literature
Non-Fiction, Edited by Ranu Uniyal, Nazneen Khan and
Raj Gaurav Verma,
published by Value Publications (2023)

ISBN: 978-93-91599-36-2

Price: ₹900/-

Language: English, pp. 214

Kumar Sawan

An Insight into the Gandhian Realm:

“He was an ordinary man in his appearance, who wore a loincloth and lived a life of principles.”

(*Mahatma Gandhi: Essays on Life and Literature*, edited by Ranu Uniyal, Nazneen Khan, and Raj Gaurav Verma)

Today after many years of independence, Gandhi no longer remains confined to the categories of “freedom fighter”, “historical figure”, or “a revolutionary”. Any categorization would be limiting his personality and binding it to a particular peg. This is what is exemplified in the book *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays on Life and Literature*. He is an essence that flavours the lives of many people in the world today. Gandhi can be seen as a channel that unified the various political movements into a single method.

The book comprises many adequately researched chapters such as “Gandhi in Books” by Dr Raj Gaurav Verma, “Redefining the Indian Womanhood: The Gandhian Perspective” by Saba Parveen, “Gandhian Ideology: From Books to Real World” by Nikita Yadav. These chapters vary vastly covering the application of Gandhian thought to different institutions of law, religion,

economy, politics, literature etc. There are various myths associated with the thought of Mahatma that the contemporary media propagates. This book busts any myths related to his life or teachings. It is very important that a book written on any historical figure remains unbiased. And because this book is written by researchers from different sociocultural backgrounds, it is well-researched and impartial.

Any researcher of Gandhi, who wants to be neutral in his approach may pick up the book after reading his *Hind Swaraj* and *My Experiments with the Truth*. The first chapter titled “Gandhi in Books” is a bibliographical survey of books by Gandhi and on Gandhi. His extensive writings deal with medicine, health, vegetarianism, basic education, social reforms, and women. This chapter may prove as a helpful reference list or secondary source for a Gandhian scholar. Another essay by Saba Parveen titled “Redefining the Indian Womanhood: The Gandhian Perspective” explores in detail the relevance of his thought in the lives of Indian women. In all his political movements, peace and protest, women took the central position. History cannot hide the oppression women went through and are still going through. Mahatma worked on the ground level to eradicate prejudices and forms of injustice that prevailed in the times of the freedom movement. He opposed child marriage, dowry, sati, purdah system.

In “Decoding Gandhian Texts in the New Millenium: A Re-assessment of Gandhi’s Impact on Indian English Novel”, Roopali posits that the writers- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao fabricated their writings centring on the National movement as well as Gandhi. These novelists worked like an ally of Gandhi, speaking up against economic exploitation and casteism. The essay discusses in detail the presence of his principles in the novels like *Untouchable*, *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Art*, and *The English Teacher*. Similarly, the essay by Nikita Yadav titled “Gandhian Ideology: From Books to Real World” carefully connects the principles of Mahatma with the “art of poetry”. Just like poetry regulates the life of individuals, Gandhian thought regulates the life of the nation.

If one is a beginner on Gandhi, knowing nothing of him, this book is the perfect match for them. The language is simple and easy to understand. Seen from a critical perspective the approach of the book is impartial. It is an amalgamation of subjective analysis and objective truth. So, it helps one to sift through myths and find out facts about his personality. This collection of well-researched essays is an addition to the ever-expanding scholarship on

Mahatma Gandhi. The essays also locate him at the meeting point of violence and non-violence, tradition and modernity, and natural and urban life. Moreover, his influence on Indian Literature in English is also deeply explored. The proof of his relevance lies in the continuous study of his principles in the whole world.

About the reviewer:



Kumar Sawan was born and brought up in Lucknow. He is a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, at University of Lucknow. He is a Lecturer at Government Polytechnic Madhogarh, Jalaun. His work has been published in *Rhetorica: A Literary Journal of Arts*, *Contemporary Literary Review India*, *SPL*

Journal, *Literary Horizon*, and *The Teesta Review*.



Mosaic of Poetic Musings

Contemporary Women Poets from India

Editor

SEEMA JAIN

Mosaic Of Poetic Musings: Contemporary Women Poets
From India

Edited by Seema Jain,

Published by Authors Press, India (2022)

Price: ₹ 995/-

ISBN – 978-93-5529-435-7

Language: English, pp. 500

Rajkumar Singh

Seema Jain, the editor of the book, is a retired vice-principal from Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar. She has produced several literary works, two of which were published under the banner of Sahitya Akademi. Seema Jain has dedicated her entire time into pursuing literary interests and has joined numerous online poetry groups.

The anthology *Mosaic of Poetic Musings: Contemporary Women Poets from India* contains 278 poems composed by 138 Indian women poets writing in English and are based both in India and abroad. The reader can immediately get fascinated with the cover page which is beautifully designed to attract readers. The images of flowers and butterflies signify femininity and women's virtues. The vibrant colours of the cover page are symbolic of women's lives and many facets of their lives. The title of the anthology attracts the readers' attention to turn the pages full of different hues in the lives of women. The word "mosaic" in the title signifies various patterns of their lives. The anthology includes heart-warming experiences of these poets who have weaved them into poems.

The poems in this collection highlight the wide variety of ideas, thoughts, emotions, and viewpoints that Indian women poets express. They weave them with the fabric of their souls and minds giving the readers a glimpse into the diverse range of sensibilities of the women poets by focusing on their real or imagined experiences. The poems present the picture of women's awareness against the backdrop of the rapidly shifting social, cultural, and familial context. This anthology can be an effective educational tool for gender studies and curriculum creation because it features numerous renowned voices, including Deepti Naval, Arundhati Subramaniam, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Ranu Uniyal, Anita Nahal, Anju Makhija, Harinder Cheema, Lily Swarn, and Kavita Ezekiel.

The poems compiled in this anthology come in a variety of forms and colours and cover a wide canvas of subjects. The majority of the poems are written with women in mind and focus on issues that affect them. The poems address issues like gender inequality, women earning less than men in the same working position, job opportunities and identity issues of women. Other delicate subjects covered in the book include difficulties faced by girls, foetal killings, acid attacks, difficulties faced by Dalit girls, adoption of girls, dowry torture, anguish experienced by brides and many more. One such poem is "Rape" by Anita Nahal which addresses the social concerns surrounding rape in India and provides several examples from different spheres.

In the anthology, numerous poems address underrepresented aspects of women's lives, such as the sufferings of domestic workers, the plight of women who must travel great distances in search of water, the tale of a small-town girl, a poem about a strange marriage involving strange vows of celibacy, the monologue of a girl who has been sexually assaulted by her uncle, body-shaming, and so forth. Additionally, poetry about sisterhood and the Kali avatar is included in the collection as poems devoted to Afghan women by Rashmi Bajaj highlighting women's strength and determination, as evidenced by some of the poems. These poems are full of enthusiasm and motivation for all women suffering from violence.

There are poems speaking out against male violence and defying all gender-specific rules. Bina Singh's poem "She" has an appealing line: *Rising of she, motivational, breaking conventions.*

The line: *Rise! Believe! Refuse Conditioning* from Saranya Francis' "Rewrite" serves as another illustration. Shobha Sharma's poem "The Victor Writes History!" is a masterful

depiction of patriarchal values, masculine aggression, and dominance. It also reminds us of Winston Churchill's words "History is written by the victors."

This vibrant collection contains both dark and light shades of life. There are many themes outside of women's lives which include nature and life, unmet desires, time and death, searching for one's self, human survival and needs, self-motivation and struggles in life. The pain of separation, incomplete tasks and the pessimistic side of life is also portrayed. The poems depict the splendour of nature, the serenity of the river, the sound of the breeze, the music of the monsoon, the piety of the conch, the brightness of the Sun, the calmness of the evening, the song of the rain, words on the season of autumn, about spreading love and kindness, teaching forgiveness and human goodness, self-love, how to free oneself from guilt and remorse, and lastly, how to become independent.

There are other poems about a mother's love like Padmini Viswanathan's "Darling Daughters", Pankajam Kottarath's "Hopefully...", as well as a daughter's dedication; to her love for the son in the military, and so on. The book includes vivid memories of various poets experiencing different emotions. There are poems about loving oneself and one's partner. They are about the value of stillness in love, many promises made, letting go of love and shattered relationships. Every poem has a certain quality that makes you grin after reading it. The last line of Ranu Uniyal's poem, "Winter Blues," *Such a mysterious thing is love*, sums up love's mystery well.

The poets in the anthology have affirmed and transformed the metaphor of enlightenment in women's lives. The anthology uses numerous types of poem structures, including epigraphs, Haikus, reverse poems, theatrical monologues, and ghazals written in English language in the narratives. Poets also employed Urdu, Pali, and Sanskrit vocabulary in addition to their local languages. Some poets like Purnima Trivedi Kulkarni and Ranjana Sharan Sinha have used allusions from Bhagwat Gita and referred to various Ramayana and Mahabharata characters.

All the poets have given a personal touch to the poems. The anthology is true to women's sensitivity and emotions dealing with their personal sufferings and experiences. It is appealing since the anthology is the microcosmic representation of women's life. Each poem is a heart-throbbing experience for the reader. The language is well crafted to convey the feelings and experiences it aims at. I was mesmerized by the language each poet used carrying so much

meaning altogether and their effect on me. Hence this anthology is a must-read for readers of any age.

About the reviewer:

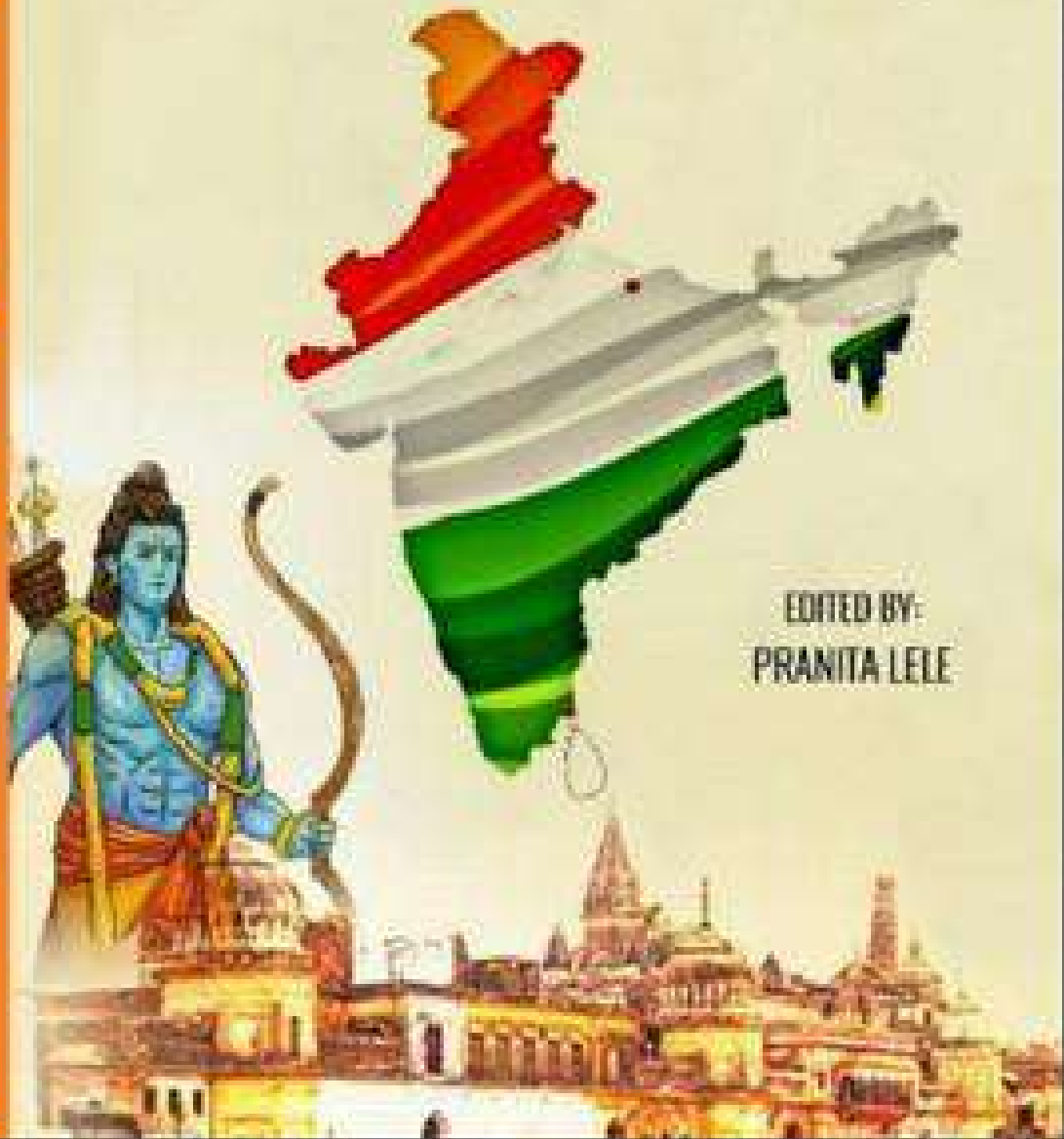


Rajkumar Singh is a Research Scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His areas of academic interest include trauma, pain, and memoirs of personal sufferings. He has presented his papers at national and international forums. His articles, chapters, poems, and creative works have been published in various journals, anthologies, and books.

THE JOURNEY FROM
AYODHYA TO RAM SETU

K. N. Singh

THE JOURNEY FROM AYODHYA TO RAM SETU



EDITED BY:
PRANITA LELE

The Journey from Ayodhya to Ram Setu

By K N Singh

Publisher: Book Rivers (2023)

Price: 250 INR

Language: English, pp. 237

Ankita Sharma

The Journey from Ayodhya to Ram Setu, written by K.N. Singh, is a book that provides the readers with a perspective on our historical heritage through a scientific and logical lens to examine our *itihas* with a scientific and more logical approach in contemporary times, when people lack their faith in their past. Going through the entire journey of Rama, Sita, and Lakshman, this book can also be read as an individual's journey of finding his/her "Self". K.N. Singh has worked as a lecturer in BHU in the department of Geology and Geophysics, through his book he has turned myth into reality for the readers. He has also worked as a geologist in the Geographical Survey of India and retired as the director of the Petrology Division in 1995. Through his book he transforms myth into reality, providing an in-depth examination of ancient India's values, culture, political affairs, traditions, social and geographical conditions.

This book starts with tracing and explaining the Lineage of Lord Rama. He gives us the history of both the Suryavash and Chandravansh dynasties and then discusses the different versions of Ramayana and their retellings. The writer has touched on all the major incidents that happened in the epic Ramayana. This book can be read from multiple perspectives as it gives us an overview of our (society's) past, ancient India. The writer draws a geographical description of the landscapes and places mentioned in the Ramayana in order to prove the authenticity of the

incidents that happened in the past. This proves that Ramayana is not a myth but a reality, and a testament of our history. The history of a far more developed and conscious society.

Since the time Macaulay poisoned the Indian parliament with his venom in the form of *Macaulay's Minutes* in 1835, and replaced our ancient Indian knowledge system with the so-called Anglicized History and Science, we have lost faith in our past. The writer through his book makes an excellent attempt on making the readers aware of the scientific advancements in pre-historic times. Beautifully, he explains the concepts like Hydrodynamics, Aerodynamics, underwater architecture, the science of Vastu Shastra, Ayurveda, and technologically advanced weapons used in wars. He writes, "The power of technology they had thousands of years back is unimaginable.... The concept of some reusable missiles can be seen in the ancient wars where some *Astras* would return to the person who launched it" (101). He points out, the mention of the wisdom of Spermatogenesis in the Ramayana in his book, and writes, "Further sperm storage was a wonderful thought of the past and it led to innovations in the present-day gynecological science."

Furthermore, the writer, through this book, makes a noteworthy contribution to making Ramayana an important text in ancient Indian literature. For him, Rama is a king beyond a Hindu identity. Rama depicts the qualities not only of a benevolent king but also of a protector of Dharma and Humanity. It is not merely a mythology but a history of our ancestors. He writes, "Relevant in all times and to all ages, it delves deeply into human behavior through their characters; thus, showing the followers the right path towards Dharma or righteousness" (215). Rama believed in inclusivity, equality, justice, and right actions.

K.N. Singh in his book highlights that the Ramayana can be read as an epic that mirrors the realities of the society and people existing at that time. It can also be read and analyzed as a feminist text. He discusses Sita and Surupnakha as two strong women characters who changed the course of history. Sita's *Swayamwara* and Surupnakha's wish to pursue Rama and later Lakshmana are two such examples. He writes,

"In Ancient India, the practice of *Swayamwara*, or self-chosen groom was a significant ritual. A young woman of marriageable age, belonging to a noble family, had the right to choose her own spouse in the presence of her parents and family members. The intention of the ritual clearly signifies the ideals of women empowerment in a forgotten age and time". (22)

Also in his book, the writer, mentions the first androgynous character i.e., Ila, and the androgynous couple and touches on the issue of untouchability. This book gives readers insight into the political system of Ancient India, which is relevant even now. He highlights topics like the shift of power, Sophistry, State Silent protest, duties of a ruler, good governance, and *Ram Rajya*, which easily finds mention in even a layman's conversation on politics. He mentions *Shloka* by Tulsi Das describing Ram Rajya,

“Daihik, daivik, bhautik tapa, Ram Rajya nahin kahuhi byapa, sab nar
Karahin paraspar priti, chalahin svadharama nirat Shruti niti”. (218)

This means, that “None suffer from a physical, spiritual or material disability, everyone lives with love and harmony, and each follows their religion peacefully” (218).

The writer through his book directs the readers to read Ramayana from an Eco-Critical perspective. He points out the loss of non-humans because of war and human settlements in the forests. The reverence for *prakriti*, and eco-consciousness engrained in the everyday activities of our ancestors is noteworthy.

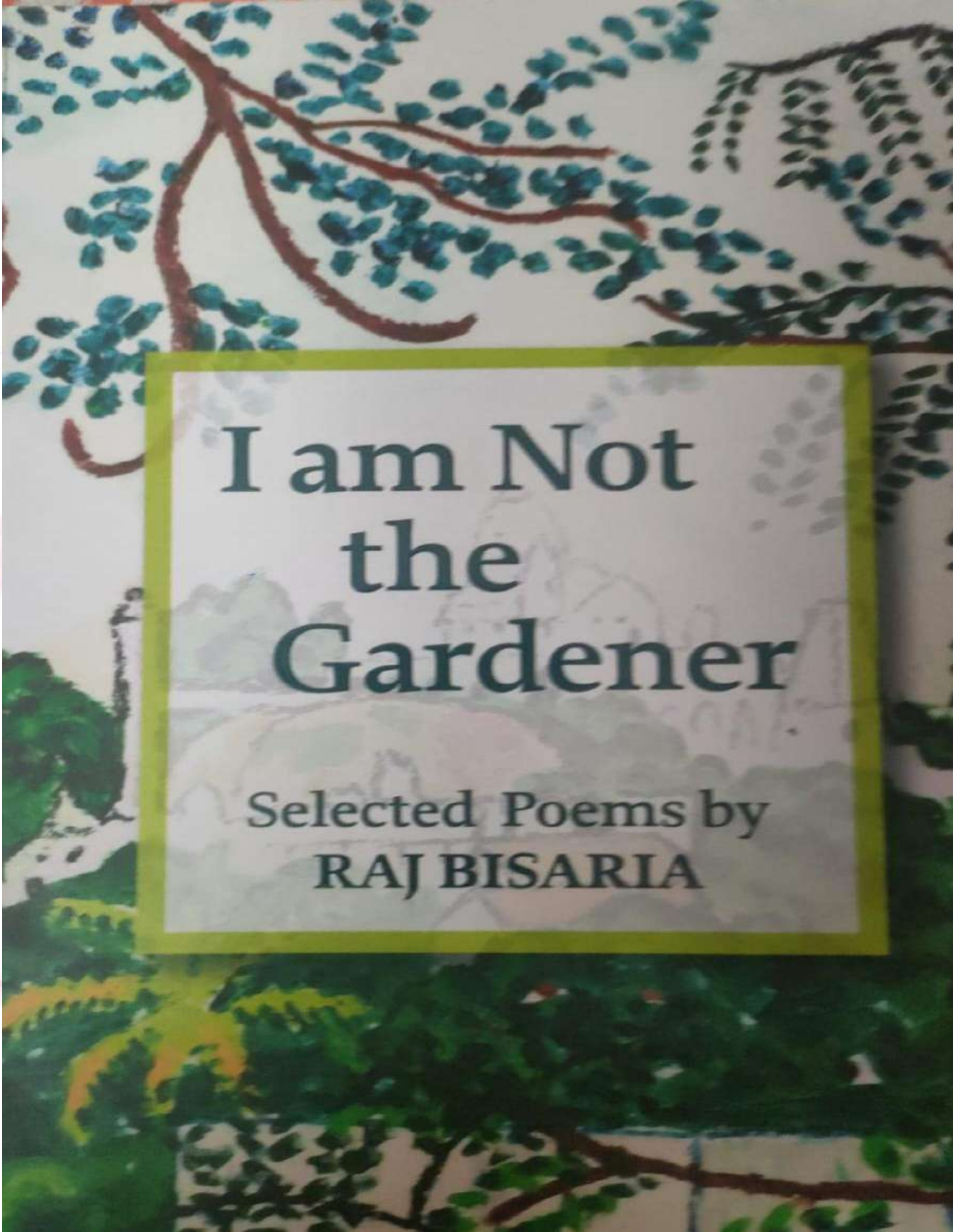
This book will attract readers who are interested in theology, Hinduism, Cultural Studies, Feminism, Dalit Studies, History, Eco-Criticism, and Science. Researchers who are interested in unearthing our forgotten past and comprehending it from a new, modern (non-anglicized) perspective will find this book useful. This book will provide an unbiased viewpoint to approach Ramayana, India's greatest *Mahakavya*, as a historical, cultural, and literary text.

In the nutshell, it can be deduced that, “*The Journey from Ayodhya to Ram Setu*” by K. N. Singh is a fascinating book that brings the ancient epic of the Ramayana to life. Singh's thorough research and engaging storytelling make it a valuable read for anyone interested in India's past, culture, and values. The book's inclusion of quotes and its descriptive language make the journey feel real and immersive. This book is an invaluable resource for readers seeking a deeper understanding of our ancient heritage and its relevance to contemporary times, this book is a wonderful addition to a person's reading list.

About the reviewer:



Ankita Sharma is a Research Scholar pursuing a Ph.D from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest and research are Anthropocene literature, Climate Fiction and Film, and Post-Human Theory and Literature.



I am Not
the
Gardener

Selected Poems by
RAJ BISARIA

I am not the Gardener

Selected poems by Raj Bisaria,

published by Terra Firma (2023)

Price: 275/-

ISBN: 9-788192-047484

Language: English, pp.124

Priya Sharma

Raj Bisaria's *I Am Not the Gardener* is a powerful and perceptive collection of poems that transports readers on an amazing trip through the poet's life and experiences. Bisaria's journey, from his modest origins in a tiny town to his climb to fame as a prominent theatre figure, is the result of tenacity and an unrelenting enthusiasm for the performing arts. The opening lines of the first poem "Curtain Boy" throws light on the disheartening event of rejection faced by Bisaria in his first audition. This painful memory of his tender years, still throbs in his heart. This piece carries the pain felt by the poet, when he was a lad of seventeen years old and was deemed unfit for a theatrical role. This collection stores in its pages a tough yet rewarding journey the poet took in order to fulfil his dreams and create a life that he desired for.

For his titular poem "I am not the Gardener", he says that he wanted to keep the title incomplete, so that it arises an urge in the minds of the reader and he is compelled to read the book. He perceives himself as a felicitator whose job is just to humbly guide others,

“I am not the gardener,
Nor the owner of the garden.
My job is to do odd things
To weed out little wrongs.”

Here we can translate the job of the gardener to that of the theatre director who mends the artistic qualities of his actors and his stage becomes the garden, where he showcases different qualities of his actors like flowers in the garden.

In this assemblage one goes through varied emotions, the fear and sorrow of a boy’s heart to the self-doubting man, an artist, a lover, a son, a father, and the man who became the father of modern theatre, all these personalities of Bisaria are put forward by these poems.

Reader is reminded of the dilemma of J. Alfred Prufrock in the lines,

“One does that kind of a thing,
You know
When one grows old:
Flannel trousers do not mean much
As walking on beach does.”

The book transports readers back to Bisaria's early years while vividly conveying rural India's character and the difficulties experienced by budding artists in a culture that frequently gives priority to traditional career options. He describes his own problems, victories, and the numerous people who had an impact on his life, the author's writing style is engrossing, and his poems make readers feel an emotional connection with him. The vivid description of varied events from his life makes this collection a memoir. The feeling of confidence and self-celebration a man gets when he enjoys his own being is presented in these lines,

“Earlier I used to dress up

For someone

I tell you it was half the fun,

Now I dress up for my own

I tell you it is more fun.”

This memoir's frank and introspective voice from Bisaria is one of its most notable features. In addition to addressing concerns of the socio-economic class, cultural norms, and the changing dynamics of relationships, he goes deeply into the complexity of his own identity. It is like a lyrical biography about the theatre. His openness and sensitivity add dimension to his personal experience and make the tale relevant to a normative reader.

In addition, Bisaria offers insightful observations about the theatre scene throughout the book. He talks about the difficulties that theatre performers encounter, the craft of improvisation, and the fine line between originality and financial success. Through these observations, readers will gain a unique understanding of the Indian theatre landscape and the passion that motivates individuals who are committed to the profession.

I am Not the Gardener is more than simply a biography of Bisaria; it provides a window into India's larger social environment. Readers get a look into the complexity of Indian culture and the role of art in upending the status quo as the author discusses social and political topics. For readers interested in the relationship between art and society, this examination gives the story an additional dimension of depth and importance.

These poems offer a depth to the persona of the exemplary theatre artist. Although the poet focuses mostly on his theatrical experiences, there are occasions when readers get an additional insight into personal and familial elements of his life. One might get a glimpse of the unrequited love of the poet and the warmth of a loved being.

Readers who value memoirs about human development, creative passion, and the strength of resiliency will find *I Am Not the Gardener* to be a touching and thought-provoking read. The inspiring story of Raj Bisaria's transformation from a country child with enormous hopes to a Padma Shri winning theatre personality serves as a reminder of the value of remaining true to one's hard work, devotion, and belief in the transformational power of the arts.

Deepa Kamath has done a wonderful job by using Mickey Watts' painting piece as a background for the cover design. She has used beautiful illustrations of Raj Bisaria with his family members and other places of importance, which hold an important place in his life. These images give a personal and regal touch to the book. This collection holds near about forty poems and in words of the poet himself "It is his labour of love." The open-ended title on the cover page leaves the reader to contemplate and discover the poems underneath. Poet has successfully woven the tapestry of his life with vibrant threads of emotions and memories.

About the writer:



Priya Sharma is an assistant professor of English; she enjoys reading poems and short fiction. She is currently researching on Disability Studies.

AMRITA SHARMA

The
Skies
poems

the
Hawakal
YOUNG POETS
2022

The Skies: Poems
by Amrita Sharma

Publisher: Hawakal Publishers (2022)

Price: Rs. 350/-

ISBN-13: 978-9391431105

Language: English, 112

Smriti Sneh

With a pleasant pastel blue cover tinged with mellow clouds, to give a pictorial sense of the book title, *The Skies: Poems* by Dr. Amrita Sharma is a quite a poetic journey. A young voice as Prof. Ranu Uniyal described, Dr. Sharma manages to traverse a myriad of feelings and experiences; from love and longing, to the essence of womanhood, and her heartfelt admiration for, as she herself so beautifully frames it - "every person I met and every poet I read".

Sharma's poetry collection is a breathtaking and transcendent work. With her impeccable craftsmanship and profound insight, Sharma creates a collection that is both enchanting and thought-provoking, but most importantly - lucid.

Dr. Amrita Sharma is a young soul with a knack for traveling, especially the aspect of meeting new people, and all of it deeply reflects in her poems. She holds the prestige of being a Fulbright Fellow at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA, and several of these poems are inspired by the time that she spent there and the people she met, her roommate being one of them, who holds a partially eponymous place in this anthology, in the poem 'To Unni in Seoul'. She writes of their humble abode,

was "home" away from our hometowns.

The Skies is a symphony of words that beautifully captures the images of this world that Sharma takes in through her own subjective lens. The ease and simplicity with which she creates an imagery so evocative, painting vivid pictures of the tiniest bit of whatnot, we see but forget to notice in everyday life. The titular poem, *The Skies*, being a testament. In her poem, 'On a Plain Sheet Of Rolling Scale', she enquires with utter ease, yet again reiterating the significance of the little things in life,

"Have you noticed each dawn is sliding across?"

Yet again asking her readers, as if personally acquainted with each of them, she poses,

"When was the last time you dipped

your fingers in a moist soil that drenched

your skin and made it a paint brush with living chords?"

Sharma has also anthologized her first collection with a lot of thought, distinctly dividing it into nine sections, namely: 'Musings', which as the name itself suggests revolves around her musings; 'You and Colours', which shows how different colours in an array of settings inspire a different emotion and elicits varying feelings in this rather observing poet of ours; 'To them with love', is a section for direct dedications to friends, to places, and to ambiguities; 'Thought Trails', in a way combines the idea of journeys and random profound thoughts; 'She and Her', is a section dedicated to the many facets of womanhood; 'Set on a Stage', is a section of uniquely-crafted verses divided into acts, scenes, prologues, and the like; 'Within', is a section of introspection and longing; 'Journeys', a compilation of the poet's thoughts during and about travelling, specifically about her time away from home - her geographical home so to say; and the last, 'Abstractions', as the name yet again suggests - a tapestry of abstract ambiguities about nothing in particular but yet a lot at once, with a touch of quirk.

One of the notable strengths of *The Skies* is the depth of emotion infused within the verses. Sharma delves into the intricacies of human experience and the marvels of nature, seamlessly

blending the subjective with the universal. The emotions conveyed in her words resonate deeply, evoking a profound connection with the readers.

The longing of a woman's love finds a deep-seated place in several of the poems here. In 'For Omnia Vincit Amor', she writes,

“Before the spring ends this year,

I intended to confess my love to him.

As April appears again,

I wonder if you could be mine ever.

Unlike Radha, I cannot be your beloved

Unlike Aurora, I can never get you the immortal boon.”

Sharma's poetic language is sublime, showcasing her command over words and her ability to evoke sensory experiences. The metaphors and similes she employs add layers of depth and meaning to her verses, creating an immersive reading experience. Her language, while rich does not feel even slightly overwhelming or inaccessible. Instead, it invites readers to engage in contemplation and reflection.

Furthermore, *The Skies* is a testament to the power of poetry as a means of self-expression and exploration. Sharma's introspective poems offer insights into the human condition, prompting the readers to reflect on their own place in the universe. Her words act as a gentle guide, inviting readers to find solace, inspiration, and a renewed appreciation for the beauty that surrounds us.

About the reviewer:



Dancing with the ghosts of past and the realm of memories as her name would partially suggest, Smriti Sneha can often be found either with her head in a book or cooking elaborate meals, when she is not writing a casual poem. She is a research scholar at the University of Lucknow.



WRITERS SPEAK

(Vol. I)

Edited By
Sagar Kumar Sharma



Writers Speak (Vol. 1)

Edited by Sagar Kumar Sharma,


published by Signorina Publications

Price: ₹999/-

ISSN: 978-81-953836-7-2

Language: English

Shubham Yadav



Writing is a passion for many people, but it can also be a very difficult thing to do. That's why it's so important to have a good guide that can help you get started and show you the way forward. *Writers Speak* does just that! It provides you with all of the information that you will need in order to begin writing your own books as well as a lot of useful tips and guidance on how best to go about it.

Writers Speak is a fascinating and insightful book that delves into the minds of some of the most celebrated contemporary authors, poets, novelists and critics of our time. Compiled by the editor and poet, Sagar Kumar Sharma, this collection of interviews offers readers a rare glimpse into the creative process of these talented individuals. The book provides an insightful and inspiring look into the craft of the creative writing process and the innovative themes and ideas that drive it.


Sagar Kumar Sharma is pursuing a PhD in the English department of the School of Humanities at IGNOU, New Delhi. A number of his poems, book reviews, and research papers have been published in prestigious national and international journals. He did his Master's in English from the Department of English, Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar. He is a member of the team that created the syllabus and prepared the course for the MA in Folklore and Culture Studies at IGNOU in New Delhi. *Writers Speak* is his first edited book. His areas of interest cover American Literature, New Literature, Literary Theory and Cultural Studies. Additionally, he writes poetry in Hindi and English.

In *Writers Speak*, the editor engages in a series of interviews with various writers, poets, critics, and novelists. One of the most fascinating aspects of the book is the wide range of writers and poets who are interviewed. The interviews cover a wide range of topics, including the writers' personal experiences, their literary influences, their thoughts on contemporary Indian writing in English and their advice for aspiring writers. From established literary giants to up-and-coming authors, the book provides a diverse array of perspectives on the creative writing process.

The interviews are conducted semi-structural and in a conversational style, which allows the reader to feel as though they are a part of the conversation. The editor expertly draws out the unique perspectives and experiences of each interviewee, highlighting their creative processes and the methods they use to develop their ideas.

One of the standout interviews in the book is with Koral Dasgupta, *The Sati Series* writer, who discusses the process of incorporating real-life events into their writing. The author delves into the challenges of balancing fact and fiction, and the importance of staying true to the emotional core of a story. Koral Dasgupta tells, "Writing about women and redefining or questioning gender roles is an age-old phenomenon that has evolved and strengthened with me."

Another compelling interview is with a poet, Padmaja Iyengar-Paddy, who discusses the role of experimentation in their creative process. The author explores how they use language to create new forms and structures, and how this experimentation can lead to innovative and unexpected ideas. Padmaja Iyengar-Paddy tells, "Honestly, I wanted to write something different, away from love, sorrow, life etc. the useful themes for poems...And then thought, why not attempt movie reviews in poetry form?"




Throughout the book, the editor emphasizes the importance of innovation and originality in the creative writing process. In this regard, Candice Louisa Daquin makes a very important point: “Those who do not read, cannot be good writers, it’s impossible...It is our responsibility to know what is out there, and what the ‘masters’ and those who are well respected have written so we can either choose to agree or disagree, but at least we know and are not ignorant.”

What makes this book so compelling is the diversity of voices represented within its pages. Each writer has a unique perspective on the creative process, and readers are sure to find something of value in each interview. Some of the writers, poets and critics such as Anand Prakash, Bibhu Padhi, GJV Prasad etc. discuss the challenges of writing, while others such as Anju Makhija, Deepa Agrawal, Lopamudra Banerjee, Shanta Acharya, Ranu Uniyal etc. talk about their inspirations and influences. Some others such as Anamika, Amarendra Khatua, Rizio B. Yohannan, Sunil Sharma etc. offer practical advice for aspiring writers, while others reflect on the role of literature in society.

One of the strengths of this book is the quality of the interviews themselves. The editor has clearly done their homework, and the questions are thoughtful and probing. The writers respond in kind, offering candid and often surprising insights into their work. As a reader, you feel as though you are eavesdropping on a fascinating conversation between two intelligent and creative individuals.

Overall, I think *Writers Speak* is worth reading. It is a valuable resource and informative read for aspiring writers and anyone interested in the creative writing process. The book offers a wealth of insights into the challenges and rewards of writing, and the innovative themes and ideas that can emerge from the process. Whether you are an aspiring writer or simply a lover of literature, this book is sure to provide hours of thought-provoking reading. Highly recommended.



About the reviewer:



Shubham Yadav is a PhD research scholar in English at the University of Lucknow. Recently his paper titled “Transcendentalism and Skepticism in Arun Kolatkar’s Select Poems” has been published in the prestigious journal *Creative Saplings*, alongside his contributions to other reputable journals and book chapters. His research delves into the realms of critical animal studies, examining the intricate connections between literature, philosophy, and ethics. With a profound interest in this field, he aims to explore the intersections of these disciplines and shed light on their broader implications.



Visual Arts



“I need pictures. They are like islands, places to get to in a sea of words.”

— Charlie Mackesy



Editor

Chetna Rawat

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



Co-Editor

Chitra Bajpai

A creative writer by her interest and a researcher by her passion, her doctoral thesis focuses on the issue of water and its sustained ecology represented across the diverse art mediums.



Co-Editor

Shivam Kundu



An admirer of the written word, he lives in constant awe of ideas that shape the world. His areas of research include narratives of pain and illness.



Co-Editor

Pratyush Pandey

He has keen interest in society, politics and its inter-realtionality, all absorbed within the ken of intellectual enquiry that lends extensive and exciting proposition to his life.



वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्



Artwork By Tanisha Mishra



About the contributor:



Tanisha Mishra, a masters student, is on a literary journey with various areas of interests. She is indulged in sketching, painting, dancing, reading and writing. She writes poetry in English as well as in Hindi.

A Mother's Story



My mother's art of storytelling took me to places. She fed my mind with stories of people, art, language and culture. Little did she know, she also fed my soul!

About the contributor:



Shivangi Gautam is 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.

Snapshots of blessed lives



About the contributor:



Aprajita Pal did her graduation from National PG College and is currently pursuing masters degree from University of Lucknow. She loves listening music and reading novels written by introspective female writers.



The Shakespeare
Literary Festival
2023
1st edition
Organised by-
Department of English and Modern European Languages





RHETORICA

Call for submissions

The best of the abilities and talents spring from diversity. While diversity is a fact, inclusion is the act. It fosters the real grounds for creativity, mapping every inch and colouring every tile. Our prime motive to understand, promote and implement inclusivity begins by proudly announcing the theme for our next issue- Inclusion.

The upcoming issue of Rhetorica, the literary society of the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, welcomes creative pieces which are focussed on Inclusion or Inclusivity.

THEME- INCLUSION

CATEGORIES-

FICTION (UPTO 1500 WORDS)

NON-FICTION (500-800 WORDS)

BOOK REVIEW (800 WORDS)

POETRY (3-5 EACH)

VISUAL ARTS (2-5 EACH)

Deadline : 31st October,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 should mail a high resolution photograph and a bio-note of not more than 100 words along with their submissions.
- All the submissions may be mailed at rhetoricaquarterly@gmail.com