

DIVERSITY LOVE TOGETHER EQUALITY RACE PEACE GENDER JUSTICE RESPECT

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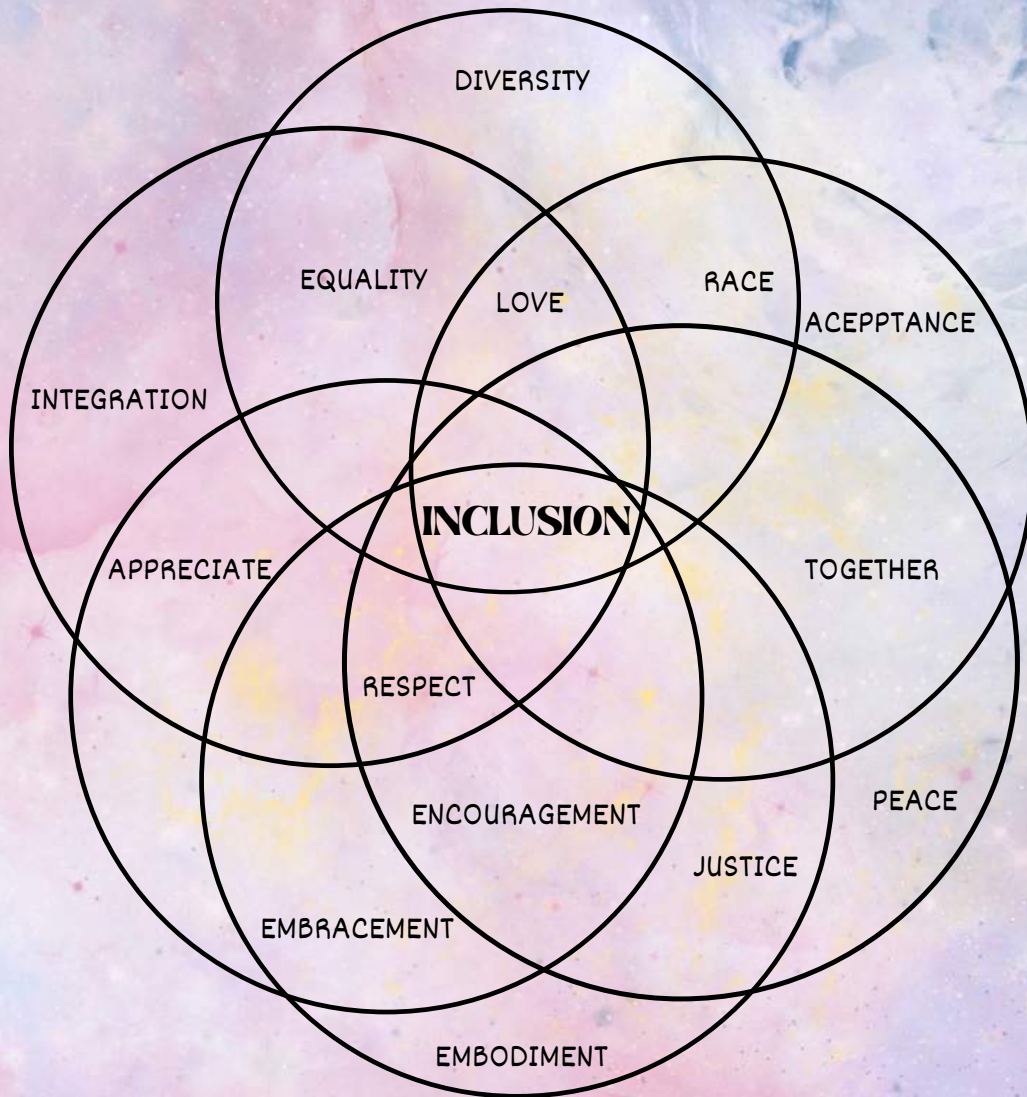
Volume 4

ISSUE 1

INCLUSION 2024

Rhetorica

A Literary Journal of Arts



**Department of English and Modern European Languages
University of Lucknow**

DIVERSITY LOVE TOGETHER EQUALITY RACE PEACE GENDER JUSTICE RESPECT

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Dedicated to



MARIA KHAN

1993-2023

A RENDEZVOUS OF DREAMS

One fine September morning,
I enter its portals,
In anticipation of what lies ahead,
A naïve young girl,
With reinvigorated zeal, And, a timid smile.
I met and bonded with new faces, Was taught and blessed by
stalwarts from places
Its bricks and meadows bore a silent
testimony
Of unspoken resilience
And a determination to shoot for the stars.
Very soon, it became my home and I became Its own.
It shaped my dreams,
Gave an unerring impetus to my eyes' gleam, I gradually chose
my path Learnt how to brave every odd.
Sometimes all it took for me to curb the imposter lurking within
Was just an angelic nod.
Today as I visit the sweet lane of memory
I'm greeted with lingering pangs of nostalgia
Which give a lump in my throat
But a wider smile, brimming with proud ecstasy
To know that I am and will always remain
A part of this place
Which I call my seat of becoming.

Maria Khan

Rhetorica Quarterly, Vol. 1 No. 3
Winter 2020



प्रो. आलोक कुमार राय
कुलपति
Prof. Alok Kumar Rai
Vice-Chancellor



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Message

It is a matter of pride to witness the success of Rhetorica, A Literary Journal of Arts, published by the Department of English and Modern European Languages. The journal has been a solid, inclusive platform showcasing a variety of literature and art through the lenses of different themes.

The Theme of this issue – Inclusion (Volume IV, Issue I), runs parallel to the University's philosophy of aiming to have an egalitarian society. And this happens when we strongly advocate for inclusion. It is more than a set of strategies or practices. It is an educational orientation that embraces differences and values uniqueness. The content in this journal has always been diverse, inclusive and comprehensive. I feel more than proud to see Rhetorica bringing out such thought provoking themes, to influence the reader's mindset for a kind approach to life.

I congratulate Prof. Maitraye Priyadarshni, Head of the Department, Prof. Ranu Uniyal, Chief Editor, and the entire advisory and editorial board for their sincere efforts. Running a journal with sheer grit and passion makes it a blissful read. Words are powerful and every story matters. I hope this issue stays with you for long.

Dated. 21-02-2024


(Prof. Alok Kumar Rai)

Letter from the Chair

Dear Reader,

Greetings and a warm welcome to another edition of Rhetorica Quarterly (Vol. IV, Issue I). 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,

We welcome you to yet another issue of Rhetorica, a literary journal of arts lovingly curated by the students of the department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. In a world steeped in binaries it is important to acknowledge, appreciate and assimilate the uniqueness, the differences and the diversity that marks each being on this planet. Inclusion- the theme of this issue is about mindsets, perspectives, and the expansion of human consciousness. Why Inclusion? Because we need to listen deeply to the voice of those unheard, unsung, unaccepted in our midst. Inclusion as a need of the hour also checks devaluation of people with disability. It helps us connect with those on the margins. We have a diverse range of writings from distinguished scholars, poets, and artists from different sections of the society. Our contributors have explored the theme of inclusion in a variety of ways. Each piece of writing adds a fresh dimension to the theme.

It is with deep sorrow that we dedicate this issue to our book reviews editor Maria Khan, research scholar in the Department. She left us on 6th December 2023 after a brief illness. Maria was a brilliant student bubbling with enthusiasm, full of promise and determination. She completed her MA from the department in 2017 and was working on her PhD thesis. As a young scholar she was full of curiosity and with a desire to excel. Words fail to express our shock at her untimely demise. Too soon a life as bright as hers was snuffed and we could do nothing. It was Mary Oliver who wrote: "When it's over, I want to say: all my life/ I was a bride married to amazement". The sparkle in your eyes and that lilting laughter will continue to live in our hearts, dear Maria. And your last WhatsApp message just two days before you left this world – I love you ma'am – will stay with me in my twilight years.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the honourable Vice Chancellor Prof. Alok Kumar Rai for his constant support and encouragement. The year 2024 will hopefully be a year of change, of possibility and a better life for all. We are indebted to our readers for their continued support. They give us the impetus to work with unswerving zeal.

In divine friendship.

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,

“When everyone is included, everyone wins” - Jesse Jackson

Introducing to you, the much-awaited issue of Rhetorica, themed on INCLUSION. It is a remarkable achievement if we do say ourselves, but its particularly exciting given the overwhelming response we have from you. Breathing the same spirit, this issue celebrates inclusivity and diversity! We, at Rhetorica, have gracefully embraced and practised inclusivity with our editors skilfully curating every issue. Inclusion starts with recognition, but prolongs with access to equal opportunities, resources and experiences. As a co-editor of poetry section, I am humbled by the plethora of submissions that we receive, each individual putting the same theme/emotion in such a unique tone, making an editor's task formidable. We might edit, polish and amend but we take utmost care of keeping the contributor's voice intact and strong. Prioritizing our contributors' perspective with our editorial team's vision has helped us attract and retain creativity and ingenuity.

I humbly take this opportunity to also remember our dear friend and editor of the Book Review section, Ms. Maria Khan. She was a Senior Research Scholar at our department and a favourite among students. Her sudden departure has created an unfillable void. 'Maria Di' was an enthusiastic and kind person. She was always determined to make the most of the coming opportunities and never did anything by halves. We all are truly indebted to her for sincere efforts in Rhetorica and her compassion for all her colleagues. Team Rhetorica will carry your love throughout its journey hereafter.

I express my gratitude to the Head of the Department of English and Modern European Languages, Prof. Maitraye Priyadrashini, for her guidance and support. I would also like to thank Prof. Ranu Uniyal, Editor in Chief, Rhetorica for being the substructure of this literary saga. Her unparalleled dedication and intellect has truly shaped Rhetorica. I also thank the contributors, editorial team along with the design team who have put this beautiful kaleidoscopic view for us. I hope this issue imbues in you the feeling of belonging and each day you accommodate a little more, and then each day you WIN. Happy Reading!

Warm regards
Shivangi Gautam
Co-editor, Poetry Section.



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I know Myself, Here I am

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Theme: Panchtatva

Non Fiction

“ Just because a man lacks the use of his eyes doesn't mean he lacks vision .”

-Stevie Wonder



**NIKITA YADAV
(EDITOR)**

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



**SMRITI SNEH
(CO EDITOR)**

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



**AASTHA PATEL
(CO EDITOR)**

A postgraduate student at University of Lucknow. She is a literature enthusiast who finds literary theories spiritual on a deeper level. She also loves to read and to be in sync with mother nature.

My friend Alka...

Sanghmitra S. Acharya

She is Alka in the true sense. Just like 'Alka' - the curls of one's tresses add to the glory of one's persona, she did that to everyone she connected with – sharing love and affection unconditionally. Her laughter would resonate, endearing the people around her. My association with her goes back to my school- the Christ Church College, Lucknow. My first day in school began with those twinkling eyes, slightly mischievous too, following me as I moved away from my father who had come to drop me off at my new school. Slightly apprehensive to let him go, I spotted those eyes that seemed interested in breaking into a conversation with me. So, it started with addressing my father. Prompt came to the assurance- 'Uncle, don't worry! She is in my class...'. Even before I could pose my quizzical glance at her- 'How do you know?' she had already held my hand and took me towards the assembly ground. I felt my father heaving a sigh of relief- his daughter was in 'safe hands'. And I was. Although at that moment, what mattered to me was to strike a bond with my new school, and Alka was there... making me feel a part of the school where she had studied from preparatory and I had just joined. In her tall frame, girdled in the green sash of St Patrick's House as part of the school uniform, she instantly made me feel the comfort that I was looking for as I saw my father go out of the school gate. There she was like a close friend, taking me around to meet a couple of other newcomers. One among them was from my old school- St Joseph's Cathedral. Little did I know that besides the ecstasy of that moment to have found one familiar face, both of them would have an immense impact on me as we grew and got older. The three of us forged a strong bond and have remained friends. School years went by, practising for Father's Day, Sports Day, Annual Concert, and of course, classes, year after year. Alka sparkled in sports, particularly on the basketball field. Equally comfortable in the group dances ranging from 'Neend Churaye, Chain Churaye' of Bollywood to 'Tile Dharo Bol Kedi Rimjhima', the folk song from the hills, which she practised and performed on various occasions. We would go out selling raffle tickets for the school fete. Almost every year after graduating from class eight, we watched a film with friends after exams. We discussed question papers soon after we came out of the examination hall. The chapel area was our favourite spot for playing and revising for the next examination. And the space between

the library and the primary school was our dance practice place. Often, we would visit Alka's place and be greeted with delicious food (fruits included) by Auntie, her beautiful Mom. She resembled her so much, and it was evident in one of her Mother's Day posts, which had the two elegant ladies in a single frame.

Time flew past, and we were soon on our way out of the school, through college to our respective universities and personal lives- with spouses and children added.

I reconnected with her when she joined her spouse, fondly called SP by his friends and colleagues. An avid birder, his training in Zoology transformed him into an Ornithologist of repute. Anyone having a remote interest in birds could not escape his invites to the uninitiated to participate in the Bird Day events. His posts 'JNU Unplugged' way back in 2008 and 'Sunday birding' in 2011, to pick on just two, are examples of his passion for informing bird enthusiasts that JNU was envisioned to have a bird sanctuary and deer park. Today, there are about 205 species of birds on campus, including the elusive sparrow, and 80% of Delhi's butterflies reside in JNU. While no pun is intended here, Alka would not miss any opportunity to grab and inflate the pun. So much so that she groomed herself as a sincere bird lover yet quipped as often as she could to label the beautiful feathered creatures as her competitors vying for SP's attention. She explained her 'transformation' in one simple cliché- 'If you cannot defeat them, join them' referring to the birds and the bird lovers who occupied the major share of her beloved's time.

Going back to my reconnecting with her, one fine Sunday morning, she suddenly appeared outside the shopping centre on the campus where many of us engaged with our household responsibilities of buying the coming week's veggies and replenishing the other depleting provisions. I was amazed- 'How come you here?' was written largely on my face. Her sparkling eyes joined her mischievous smile to answer- '*Tu Jahan – Jahan Chalega Mera Saya Saath Hoga...*' The intention was double-edged; the reference was to SP, her husband, but it could be to me, too. She had joined him after staying away because of work. We met after many years and were unaware of the developments in each other's lives. She bridged the years' time lapse in a line of Bollywood blockbusters of the 1960s. This was Alka! Joyous and cheerful impishly! We all burst out laughing. And thus began our second inning with each other. We would meet as often as possible. She had effortlessly transformed from a successful career woman to a doting homemaker.

I discovered that her poetry went dormant after we left school. She exuded emotions beautifully in her two liners-‘Tears rolling down her cheeks, I heard her speak of her agony...’, and ‘The sun reminds me to rise after the darkness of night...’ evident in her published poems. Sometimes, she would direct her *lekhni* towards SP, missing no opportunity to tease him for his passion. ‘Rain or thunder, fog or mist, nothing can keep this ‘tribe’ indoors’ was her note on WhatsApp on 18 Jan 2021, speaking of the obsession of the birdwatching Team SP. Another post which caught up my attention was referring to the superannuation of SP and their shifting to the new house. She wrote on 20 Aug 2020- ‘*six-month mein tata bye bye!*’. (Then, it was largely its literal meaning; now I read it as a metaphor, too). She shared pictures of different spots in the house taken from different angles at different times. They probably shifted to this endearingly adorned new nest sometime in early 2021- after the perfectionist in her finally gave a nod. A lovely morning sky filled with birds in the backdrop, and her gorgeous smile framed in a beautiful and candid self in the foreground was a picture sent in one of the ‘Good Morning’ messages that became the narrative of her whole being. Many more pictures followed, including the outing at the nearby lake where she often fed the birds. Or the ones that collaged the pictures of friends, her mom, Akansha, Akshat, and SP to commemorate days attributed to yoga, friendship, daughter and mother, family, and birthdays.

On 6 Feb 2022, she shared the quintessential Lata Mangeshkar song... ‘*Rahen Na Rahein Hum...*’ Little did we know then that it would barely be a year to see those words come true. For almost a year, she had stopped being her chirpy self. Her messages gradually lost her marked bubbly and frolicsome style and became tired and mundane monosyllabic information about herself. It took me a while to figure this out. My meeting proposals were initially stalled because we both kept thinking- Let the new home be organised and then the gala get-together...! We all had our bouts of illnesses and recoveries. A common friend had surgery for an abdominal tumour and recovered. I had my share, too. We kept exchanging the matters of our lives. Gradually, her illnesses were prolonged, and recoveries lessened, deferring our meeting. She convinced me to wait till she got better. She never did. As I write this, FM 106.4 plays ‘*Tum Na Jane Kis Jahan Mein Kho Gaye!*’



Alka

About the Writer:



Dr. Sanghmitra Sheel Acharya is a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She is also the Chairperson at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences at JNU. She was awarded the Asian Scholarship Foundation fellowship; and Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute Grant. She has traveled to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Germany, The Netherlands, UK, USA, Canada, Thailand, Belgium and Finland. Besides writing on social science issues in academic journals and books, latest being ‘Caste, Covid and Inequalities of Care- Lessons from South Asia’ (Springer, 2022), she takes off time to delve in ‘writing lived experiences.

Visual(izing) Inclusion

Gourhari Behera

Visuals and visual narratives play significant roles in promoting social, ethical and cultural values. As a passionate reader and avid admirer of visual narratives, be they illustrated classics, comics, graphic novels or picture books for children, I have constantly been intellectually and emotionally nourished and enriched by them. Of late I have begun to take a keen interest in picture books meant for children and published prolifically across the globe. The picture book, a combination of the visual and the textual semiotic systems, where the display mode dominates the narrative mode, has the tremendous potential to affect the mind of a child reader imaginatively and creatively in manifold ways. The transformative function of these narratives can be used for ‘educating’ a child in diverse ways because visual storytelling captivates a child’s mind and makes complex concepts more approachable and interesting. What I have observed is that picture books published within the last two decades all over the world have taken a transformative turn in the sense that instead of being conformist, like older picture books, they engage with sensitive issues more boldly by interrogating established ‘truths’ and deconstructing stereotypes. Picture books for children encourage reflection, invite critical thinking, challenge ideas and provide discussion points. They develop empathy for the marginalized, disenfranchised, exploited and the deviant and promote values of inclusion and diversity.

One of the most pressing issues related to the disabled is their inclusion into the ‘mainstream’ society. Despite a plethora of reforms, the disabled still are on the margins of society due to the attitude of the predominantly ableist society and prevailing stereotypes associated with the disabled. In recent times, many picture books meant for children have tried to engage with the issue of disability in a variety of ways. One such book I recently came across was *Manya Learns to Roar*; written by Shruthi Rao and illustrated by Priya Kurien. It narrates the story of young Manya who suffers from stammering but badly wants to enact the role of Shere Khan of *The Jungle Book* fame in her school play but is made fun of by her classmates because of her disability. The picture book beautifully recounts Manya’s anxieties and how she overcame them to emerge as a successful performer. The book, too, records her ‘acceptance’ by the school

fraternity. This book is a beautiful example of how these narratives sensitise young minds to the problem of disability and its acceptance by the ableist society. The reader-child imaginatively identifies with the situation and empathises with the book's protagonist. Considering the fact that inclusion and acceptance of the disabled within the 'mainstream' society is a difficult, sensitive and complicated issue, such picture books are a welcome intervention in the discourse of inclusion as they alter and remould nascent minds by interrogating and deconstructing attitudes and stereotypes about the disabled prevalent in the society.

Similarly, representation, acceptance and inclusion of gender diversity and the sexually 'deviant' into the societal matrix has been the concern of many picture books across the globe. Picture books and graphic novels about the LGBTQ are slowly making their presence felt, and publishers are no longer shy to publish on such 'bold' issues anymore. Progressive parents are not squeamish about their children being exposed to the matters related to the sexually 'different'. Richa Jha's *The Unboy Boy*, illustrated by Gautam Benegal, attempts to deconstruct the established 'gender identities' that prevent a 'boy' like Gagan from realizing his potential. The narrative is so designed that while he fights gender stereotypes, the reader empathises with him. Similarly, *Ritu Weds Chandni* by Ameya Narvankar is about accepting same-sex marriage, and Anshuman Sathe's *The Many Colours of Anshu* is about encouraging non-binary gender play.

Similarly, *Bhimrao Ambedkar: The Boy who asked Why* by Soumya Rajendran teaches children to learn to appreciate egalitarian and democratic values and Jyoti Gupta's *Different Different* is about social justice and respecting diverse cultures and identities.

The popularity of picture books has been on the rise, and publishers like Tulika Books, Tara Books, Zubaan Books, etc., are prolifically engaged in coming out with titles that are not only designed aesthetically but also intervene in the discourse of modernity by sensitising readers to contemporary issues in a non-conformist mode and participating in establishing an inclusive society. It's high time that these picture books become the object of serious academic research.

About the Writer:



Prof. Gourhari Behera, an English professor at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, specializes in Contemporary Literary Theory, Postcolonial Writings, and Indian Literary Criticism. He is an admirer of Indian classical and semi-classical music and currently researching Picture books, Disability Studies, Health Humanities, and Food Studies.

MPower

Sony J

The word inclusion means the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure OR the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of the other minority group. I would like to invite your attention to the second part of the meaning.

As a teacher, I remember some of my students who are differently abled children. My dearest one-winged angels: Sabin, Emmanuel, Meekha and Setric. An innocent smile is their hallmark. Sabin, Emmanuel and Meekha are very lucky children because their parents recognized their shortcomings and nurtured their talents. Sabin and Emmanuel were the students who experienced the benefits of Inclusive Education in government schools. But Meekha and Setric were transferred to a Government School after being neglected by a private English Medium School.

“Inclusive education is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. Inclusive education means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools. It means real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded—not only children with disabilities but speakers of minority languages too. Inclusive systems value the unique contributions students of all backgrounds bring to the classroom and allow diverse groups to grow side by side, to the benefit of all”. This information is taken from the official site of UNICEF. An inclusive Education system considers each and every student and paves the way for learning. All the students have equal opportunity to acquire knowledge from their surroundings. This system does not ignore or marginalized the differently abled students.

I can only remember Setric with great pain. His mother cannot accept the fact that her son is a differently able child. His father is a man who divorced his wife because of the birth of a differently abled child. Now his condition is so bad. He wants to stay alone in a room for a long time and sometimes becomes violent. Who are the culprits here? But the parents with differently abled children, I say you are ‘BLESSED’, those who stand close to GOD. Only you can love

and care for such children. You are precious. Parents who find out that they gave birth to a special needs child may not be able to accept first. Gradually, they merge with reality. No matter how difficult it is, they try to bring up their children close to our hearts. All such parents are remembered with pride.

Some of the differently abled children and their parents are the victims of neglect and abandonment. It is on this occasion I proudly introduce before you a magician, who is the representative of GOD from our God's own country. He is Mr. Gopinath Muthukad, a well-known motivational speaker. He has won international awards through his magic performance and who one of the twinkling stars of our state. He started Magic Academy and Magic Planet for Children. In 2018, he organized a campaign called 'Anuyathra' in association with Kerala State Social Security Mission to bring differently abled children to the forefront. From that, 23 brilliant children were found and given magic training, a magic team formed and named as 'MPOWER'.

The success of Mpower paved the way for the foundation of a Comprehensive Art Centre for differently-abled children to explore their artistic talents and promote the overall development of the differently-abled community. This art centre is a refuge for the parents of differently-abled children. This is the place which is fulfilling the meaning of the word 'Inclusion'. The skills of differently abled children are discovered and nurtured here. The art centre has also given handicraft training to the mothers of differently abled children for their earnings. It is a heaven of 'One Winged Butterflies' and their saviours. Let there be institutions like this all over our country. Let the persons around them be able to become their other wing. Let them help to fly with their dreams.

Inclusion means the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure. Depression is one of the most common diseases in modern life. Isolation is the biggest cause of addiction to disease. Isolation makes a man a Hu coward. This caused him to end his own life. So we can keep everyone together without any discrimination in our daily lives. Let our Families become an example of inclusion. To mould a society where parents and children accept and love each other. A social system without discrimination and marginalization leads to the progress of the nation. We can give colour to the dreams of fellow beings by keeping them close to us.

About the Writer :



Sony J is currently working as an assistant at the University of Kerala, located in Trivandrum, Kerala.

Inclusion – An Insight into a Young Mind

Payal Kalia

Inclusion is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure.

Inclusion is the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or intellectual disabilities and members of other minority groups. Today I am going to tell you a story about a ten-year-old boy named Dev who came to a school for the first time in his life. This boy is suffering from Cerebral Palsy and having issues with his fine and gross motor skills. He was my first student and I was his first teacher. But the day I saw him, and as I used to interact with him during the classes, I observed that the child was suffering from moreover physical disabilities rather than any intellectual disability. Since the child was unable to go to a proper school in his early years, he was lacking in many aspects such as personal, social, occupational, and academic domains. But the child had a spark in his eyes that he always wanted to do better in his life and he used to compare himself with others. Thanks to the inclusive setup started by Dr. Naval Pant, the director of my old organization, PYSSUM, and last but not least, the commendable support of my mentor and my guide, Mrs. Anju Mishra, for making it a huge success.

PYSSUM is an NGO working for the welfare of special students as well as providing an inclusive platform to the economically weaker sections of society. Thus, both the special students benefit from the inclusivity as well as the economically challenged students get a platform for value-based education. This even leads to a greater impact to sensitize society as the children, after going back to their places, can educate their loved ones about the different disabilities and the ways to tackle them as well. When I was working there, I used to use peer tutoring as a strategy to teach my students because, most of the time, the students learn a lot from their peers.

According to me, Inclusion is the happiness that I saw in the sparkling eyes of Dev when he used to get compliments for any work he did. Dev was a very happy, confident, and emotional boy. He loved to learn everything as fast as possible and beat all the others in the class. Keeping in mind his physical disabilities I used to teach him in the best possible way, applying the simple

to complex strategy. I started with the pre-writing skills which involved various activities such as tearing and pasting paper to make a collage, finger painting, thumb painting, beading activity to make a necklace, etc. Sometimes when I used to teach a different lesson to the inclusive students, he used to say that he would also take part. So, for his sake, I used to design the same lesson in a different manner more like story-telling, and then I used to ask him some questions related to that topic, to which he was very much able to answer well. Earlier, when he came to me, since he belonged to a rural background, he used to talk in a rural accent as well, and he wasn't able to dress up properly.

But after my continuous efforts and counselling to his parents and to him, his whole personality transformed. He started greeting his elders and especially his teachers in a very polite manner and started dressing up properly with shoes and socks, well-combed hair, and neat and clean dress every day. He also learned many personal skills, such as eating properly with a spoon and drinking water from his bottle and then from a glass. Earlier, when he used to drink water, he used to spill it over his dress, but these skills he gradually learned from the inclusive setup. One day even his mother was surprised to see that he was eating along with his classmates in the same manner they all were doing. Thanks to the efforts of Anju Mishra, mid-day meals started at our school's premises. This not only provided one proper meal to all the underprivileged students but also helped provide a single platform to eat, learn, and grow together.

Later on, as time passed and the child was able to learn many concepts orally, I started teaching him through the screen by different apps. I used to play many rhymes for them to teach them different concepts such as colours, fruits, vegetables, numbers, and letters in both Hindi and English. All the children used to enjoy those lessons as well as learning simultaneously. As a result of all the constant efforts made by the teachers, parents, and Dev, he was able to win a medal even in a special game event organized at the state level.

About the Writer:



Payal Kalia is an enthusiastic and dedicated Special Education Teacher with experience in teaching and supporting elementary level in the classrooms serving students with different learning styles.

The Happiness Index of Our Elders

A V Apoorva Raman

The image of India is as a young demography offering substantial potential for productive able-bodied citizens who actively contribute to the nation's economy. The elderly population is often put off the records during a political and/or social repartee. Surprisingly so, there are more than ten crores and forty lakhs (10.4 Crores) of people above the age of sixty, officially becoming senior citizens of the country. This demographic estimate is expected to triple in the next twenty years. From facts to deliberation, by 2050, 1 out of every 5 people in India will be over 60. States like Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, and Maharashtra are already witnessing an ageing phenomenon.

India is undergoing unprecedented demographic changes. The world is experiencing a significant increase in the population of adults aged 60 and above due to improvements in longevity and declining fertility rates. This demographic shift brings about various health, social, and economic challenges that are both current and future. One of the challenges is the lack of economic resources, which can lead to elder abuse. Middle-class elderly people are particularly affected by this issue as they depend on pensions to sustain themselves due to decreasing interest rates on bank deposits. As these individuals stop working and their healthcare needs increase, the government faces unprecedented costs, leading to income and pension scheme amendments for the current working population. Unfortunately, most of the elderly population suffer from chronic diseases and disabilities at different levels, making them privy to constant assistance and support to survive. The number of sick and frail elders that need affordable nursing homes or assisted living centres has consistently increased, and the demand for more perseveres. The absence of senior facilities in rural areas has led to homelessness, stricken poverty of the aged, and violence against the old.

Much of the non-working elderly population felt they were a burden to their families and contributed menially to the household. Their inability to bring anything of material worth to the table in the family often makes them feel of less value and worth. At times, there is a lack of sensitivity and cultural values amongst the younger family individuals or community members who resort to emotional harm that may emerge from verbal or emotional abuse encompassing sorrow, fear, perverse emotional discomfort, and loss of personal pride or sovereignty.

Along with sociocultural aspects, the digital illiteracy and the technological divide in multigenerational families often create a communication gap and negligence. This is seen in the form of accessibility and affordability to digital devices and the digital world. A few digitally illiterate have claimed that they consider themselves a marginalised and underprivileged lot of society in new settings, which modern and the internet govern. With Digital India as one of the government's flagship programs, most services, from online payment of utility bills to pension to PDS to banking to insurance, have gone digital. Digital illiteracy is a bane to older people who find it challenging to use the facilities. Instances in Jharkhand are reported where older people could not receive their PDS grains due to the failure of Aadhar verification because of their missing fingerprints. Most elderly women are part of the unconnected population in the country. Many older persons live in fear of the overshadowing technology. It is doubled when using computers and digital devices due to perceived complications, cyber threats, loss of hard-earned money, and more. They feel that there is no reason to use the mobile Internet. This generation has not grown with mobile technology and is usually opposed to new technical skills. There is a sharp reduction of personal ties due to a lack of communication with younger members of the families, contrasting a more demanding lifestyle and the inability of older family members to understand the modern digital language of communication. Many older people feel, in the digital age, that they are irrelevant or included.

Keeping the issue at the forefront, the question is of cultural and political importance. What can we, as individuals of our respective households and communities, ensure about our elders whom we know or do not know enough? The dwindling emotional well-being of the elderly population and our failure to recognise them as valued members of the family as well as society is an alarm. The kind of environment and society we are helping to build, we should keep in mind our generation is also likely to grow old in the future. The cultural wealth we cannot learn and teach from the older generations is a huge loss. The sentiments we are taught and choose to spread about their inclusion and well-being as respected community individuals should be looked into. The key is to educate ourselves, learn and unlearn from our experiences, and build a sustainable society with a high-reaching happiness index of the collective generations in any region or nation.

About the Writer:



Apoorva is a surfer of wordplay and a chaotic academic. She is a postgraduate student of Lucknow University and aspires to be a scholar of worth and prolificacy.

Ostracised or Equalized

Nivedita Roy

Lest you forget I exist
 I am a life, I insist
 Was the creator partial
 When he soiled his hands
 To mould and sculpt me?

ARTICLE 17 OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION: Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

The newspapers are inundated with reports that ensure our society has eluded achieving the target of acceptance of one and all.

Dalits are exploited for political gains, yet inclusiveness is a far cry in many parts of India.

A news report on January 23rd

*Unfortunately, the “water-caste nexus” remains unaddressed and is a significant missing link in government policies, which must offer separate provisions for Dalits to have safe access to water.

The news article in the Indian Express on April 1st screamed about an incident in Chennai

*A family, including women and children belonging to the Narikurava community, alleged that they were briefly stopped from entering despite having tickets.

These are just two latest examples. A whole encyclopaedia could be created on the atrocities this section of society has to suffer at the hands of the privileged.

Recent incidents across rural India witnessing Dalits getting beaten up to death, specifically around access to basic amenities and entry to places of worship, is now a new normal.

Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of independent India who played a vital role as a social activist during his lifetime, will be remembered on April 14th every year with various posts on social media and then eventually proceed to hibernation till the next year.

Many of us would find it hard to empathize with Baba Saheb, as he was lovingly nicknamed. There are a handful of organizations and marginalized groups who are struggling to continue this legacy. These remain almost obscure till required for an agenda to gain support by the powerful political parties.

A slight ‘favour’ expressed towards the lower castes by the political giants is deliberately flashed across news channels. This is a great tool to win over vote banks during elections. Yet, a government document needs a specific mention of which caste or religion one belongs to.

His writings reveal his own experiences as an “untouchable” during pre-Independent India. His fellow professors objected to his touching the water jug in the staff room. Some of them refused to correct the exam papers of the students of the depressed class. Dr. Ambedkar ran a campaign for social reform by establishing the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha (Group for the Wellbeing of the Excluded).

He believed that education is the only path to progress with particular emphasis on women’s education.

Quoting his words:

“the Constitution is workable; it is flexible, and it is strong enough to hold the country together both in peace time and in war time. Indeed, if I may say so, if things go wrong under the new Constitution the reason will not be that we had a bad Constitution. What we will have to say is that Man was vile.”

The constitution was drafted in 1947 and we are living in the year 2023. It would not be farcical to comment that inclusiveness is an unfulfilled dream. The progress so far has been minuscule.

Theoretically, the thought does exist. School textbooks do reminisce about Dr Ambedkar or his struggles to abolish the unjust caste system.

A few progressive Indian mindsets are not sufficient to fight this gargantuan evil of our society. It has to filter into the mindsets, ideologies and, above all, the acceptance of unity in diversity.

Here are some points to ponder on:

Have the thought processes on untouchability changed in 21st-century India ?

What is the justification for providing privileges to the privileged?

Does an occupation decide a person’s strata in society and his / her caste?

Has untouchability been abolished?

Have the intense efforts by the well-educated social reformer, Dr. Ambedkar, find a mention in any value debates?

The caste divide monster has resurfaced with a meagre amount of population standing against it. The woes of the ‘untouchables’ is developing ‘unhindered’.

Baba Saheb’s struggles, his words, and his ideology might be non-existent in the times to come. They may even be omitted from some books if the present scenario of re writing and editing the history of our nation continues.

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3. My article in TOI -Elusive Inclusivity

About the Writer:



Nivedita Roy is an award-winning author and poet who resides in the Kingdom of Bahrain and hails from Lucknow. She is also a teacher by profession. Nivedita Roy has written two poetry books and a collection of short stories. She has co-authored 26 anthologies to date and her poems and articles have been published in various global magazines and newspapers, as well as online sites. Additionally, she often hosts author interviews and poetry sessions on virtual platforms.

How to make a school more inclusive

Geof Sewell

One of the reasons Ted decided to become a special needs teacher was that it gave him greater autonomy than most of his Cambridge contemporaries. Like the Indian navigators he first dreamt of there, he had the freedom of the seas. He could create his programmes of study from basic principles, and so long as he kept the behaviour of his classes within bounds, he could encourage them to think for themselves, too.

It took him 15 years to understand how to make schools inclusive. When he became the Deputy Principal of Queensgate School, he had a brief to integrate 30 pupils with physical disabilities from a failing special needs school, and his priority was to challenge perceptions. Few mainstream teachers knew how to treat them. When Ted asked them how they might change things, one replied, “We need a new image. An official opening might help.”

“Whom should we invite?”

“The Queen”

In the event, none of the TV celebrities did not even reply, but the royal family accepted. Ted asked Kath, Summerhouse’s arts and drama teacher, to write a musical. The performance was slated for the afternoon just before Christmas when the building work on the unit was complete. Unlike most school plays, it was not designed for friends or families. There were no proscenium arch or curtains to hide behind. It was staged in the round, in the centre of Queensgate’s assembly hall. All the mainstream children from Years 7 and 8 were seated around the outside. They were to be presented with the disabled pupils: they were the centre of attention. Well-rehearsed, confident and assertive, they sang along with the band and raced their wheelchairs at the ring of spectators, shocking them into reflection. For a couple of hours, the play would distract the audience. It would take their minds off disability as a personal problem and point at integration as a joint project. The catamaran had set out in another new direction.

The Deputy Chief Education Officer was embarrassed by Princess Anne’s visit, as asbestos had been discovered during the building programme. For all her upper-class training, Anne’s manner with the LEA dignitaries was gauche, but she made the disabled children and their parents feel she identified with them. Among the most vulnerable was a girl called Jennifer with

epidermolysis bullosa, a rare condition that caused her fragile butterfly skin to blister in response to even the most minor abrasion. The blisters even occurred in the lining of her mouth. Another called Chardonnay had brittle bone condition. Their parents worried needlessly that they might not survive the transfer from the safety of a closed special school to the mainstream.

The first cohort Ted taught included two lads with athetoid cerebral palsy, Neville and Jason. He initially found it difficult to follow what either was saying. How could he help other mainstream teachers teach them if he could barely understand their worlds? Ever since he started teaching, he had a habit of visiting the parents of pupils with special needs in their homes. He was astonished at what these two could do outside school. Neville lived and worked on the family farm. He may have been in a wheelchair all day at the special school, yet he could climb the farmhouse stairs unaided. During Ted’s home visit, he crawled over to the tractor, drove it around the yard and manoeuvred its front loader bucket.

Both boys had been shown how to use specially adapted computer keyboards, but these only compounded their educational exclusion. For years, the special school staff had parked their wheelchairs near electric sockets. They had been facing away from the rest of the class, day in and day out. From now on, Ted told the parents, they would spend most of their week in mainstream classes, a teaching assistant alongside each of them, ready to explain their ideas to the mainstream teachers. They would continue to use computers, but most written work would be dictated. The role of amanuensis would be shared amongst the assistants, their fellow students, and volunteer mainstream teachers. At his first meeting with the careers officer, Ted said he saw no reason that they should not go to college when they left school. No more basket weaving for them. She said, “You want a lot,” and he agreed.

The initial anonymised audits Ted carried out at Queensgate probably underestimated the problem of bullying. Most incidents were verbal, though one in twelve also reported kicking, punching or unwanted touching. Most victims were in Years 7 and 8; after that, the problems appeared to decline. Most occurred within year groups. In the rare instances where older children bullied younger, these problems were nearly always confined to siblings.

According to the audit, disablist name calling was by now virtually unknown. Racist terms, though, were seen to be acceptable “between friends”. And there was an undercurrent of misogynistic and homophobic abuse. Of greatest concern was that three-quarters of the pupils felt that teacher interventions only worsened matters. Before Ted introduced the “secret friends”

strategy, they had kept complaints about bullying. A Year 10 pupil called Graham had been seriously injured after passing information about drugs to his form tutor. But he would only say he had got too close to a man on the school field practising his golf swing. Graham's head injury led to an almost fatal brain haemorrhage. The new secret friend strategy made all those tempted to bully feel as if they were under surveillance.

Bully boys like Rupert were still challenging the boundaries, however. He was one of the very few to harass disabled pupils and subject girls to overt, unwanted touching. Ted asked Rupert to join him for a personal and social education lesson. Those present told Rupert what it felt like to be disrespected. Each of them was individually weaker and less articulate than him, but they outnumbered him thirty to one. Ted made him stay for the ordeal until he was on the verge of tears. As they left, Ted warned him that he would put him in a similar circle of female students if he heard more complaints from them.

For reasons still not fully understood, local crime figures began to decline just as Queensgate introduced its new disciplinary procedures. The rates of burglaries and violence had grown alarmingly high on the local estate. In one appalling incident, the father of one semi-literate pupil called Jamie had his head cut off in a drug-fuelled argument in a poker game. But the police were able to withdraw first one, then both vans that had spent all night, every night for the previous decade, crisscrossing the estate. The school was still a demanding place to teach, but the disciplinary reforms and victim circles alleviated the pressure on staff and allowed the children to focus on exam results.

All the children with physical disabilities were taking GCSEs, and there had been some striking progress among the autistic pupils. When Paul arrived at Queensgate, he was said to be functioning at the level of a six-year-old. He could barely read and found difficulty with writing and sums. However, given a geometry puzzle concerning the number of connections between points on a circumference by a mainstream Maths teacher, he quickly mastered the sequence: "One point, no lines. Two points, one line. Three points, three lines. Ten points, forty-five!"

His response to the imminent arrival of Christmas was to make up a science fiction story:

Captain's log – Stardate 25th – time 3 am

I have arrived at a section of Earth called England. I am at a place called Whitehorse Road. I am entering a dwelling called Number Two. I am approaching an entrance. The building had a primitive alarm box, which I quickly dismantled with my disarming ray. It was easy to walk

through the door without opening it. This is a primitive world where they do not have matter stabilisers. One of the creatures came down the stairs from an upper floor, and I had to use my invisibiliser. He was unable to see me. He dashed to some strange indoor plant of some kind and started to search through some coloured boxes. He pulled out a couple and started to pull off the coloured paper. A larger creature came from the upper chambers and said, “What time do you call this for a Christmas Day!”

Although physiotherapy was outside his remit, Harold Heller, the OFSTED Inspector with responsibility for inclusion, even joined a lesson in Queensgate’s hydrotherapy pool. Ted had been planning to visit the home of a child with spina bifida that day, so Heller accompanied him to gauge the parents’ attitudes to the inclusion programme. It was given the top grade. Heller concluded that its special needs provision was the best he had seen in this country, only surpassed by a school in Uppsala, Sweden.

About The Writer :



Geof Sewell has given lectures in Durham University 1979-82, Montreal 1987 and Cagliari 1991. His significant publications are - Special Education: Policy, Practices and Social Issues: Barton 1981, Reshaping Remedial Education 1982 (I invented the role of SENCo), Coping with Special Needs 1986 (reflected my work at Thirsk School), Special Needs Provision: Assessment, Concern & Action 1996: which

was also shortlisted for NASEN Prize.

Linguistic Convergence: Maintaining Unity in Diversity

K. Srikumar

Visitors to Hyderabad are often puzzled when greeted with ‘kyaa honaa (hai)’ by someone at a shop, for instance. Little do they realise that what is asked for is ‘what do you want’ rather than ‘what has to happen (to you)’, the interpretation associable with the expression given the idiomatic parlance of standard Hindi. But how come this expression has the sense it has in Hyderabadi Hindi or Dakhini, as it is known commonly. The answer should be quite obvious if one has any inkling of Telugu, the language of the region. For there, the expression for the intended interpretation in Dakhini is ‘miiku eemi kaavaali ’(you.dat what wanted), i.e. ‘what do you want’. The Telugu verb here implying ‘want’ – kaavaali – is a composite built out of the form for verb be (the ‘unadorned’ form of is/was/are/am etc.) and a rudimentary fragment of a word meaning ‘want’. The verb be in Telugu, unlike Hindi, is not that transparent enough, because Telugu eschews verb be in the most usual contexts, for example, in place of ‘is’. Yet minority speakers in a multilingual setting are perhaps able to see through inductively from other patterns prevalent in the dominant language, as in:

1. Aayana mii mitruDu kaa vaccu

He your friend be come. PAST

‘He could be your friend’

Hindi has a way of expressing a ‘modal’ meaning – like, for example, obligation – by combining the unadorned form of a verb with the verb be as an assisting verb when the Subject of the sentence is not in its plain clothing, but carries an extra marker like ‘-ko’ in the example below. Banking on this, Dakhini has here deployed the infinitival form of the verb be ‘You have to come here’.

¹ The parenthesized text here stands for optionality of word.

Further, Hindi, as is well known, has a way of expressing a ‘modal’ meaning – like, for example, obligation – by combining the unadorned form of a verb with the verb be as an assisting verb when the Subject of the sentence is not in its plain clothing, but carries an extra marker like ‘ko’ instead, as in the example below. Banking on this construction, Dakhini has here deployed the unadorned form of the verb be with or without an accompanying auxiliary verb be; the adaptation here being played out on the structure available in the language.

2. Aapko yahaan aana hai

You-dat here come.inf be.PRES

‘You have to come here’

Yet another interesting aspect in Dakhini Hindi that one encounters is sentences of the following form:

3. Mai usko kal dekhe so hum

I him yesterday saw PRT. Be.PRES. I SG.

‘I had met him yesterday ‘

4. Yeh kal kharide so hai

This yesterday buy. Past PRT be.PRES

‘This was bought yesterday’

Convergence in language need not entail total surrender to the demands

The particle so (marked here simply as PRT) in these apparently mark their main verbs like ‘see’ or ‘buy’ in the above, as nominalized or tuned nominals (see further explanation below). As the resulting sentence forms a definitive statement on its stated proposition, they are identified as ‘Definitives’. The particle so is most probably appropriated from the correlative pronoun found in correlatives of yore in Hindi, as exemplified in familiar sayings like *jo kartaa hai, so bharta hai* ‘You will reap as you sow’ in Hindi and Punjabi:

5. Tum aaye so din merku yaad hai

You came REL PRT day I.DAT memory be.PRES

‘I remember the day you came’

Linguists call this little particle as a nominalising particle, that is, it functions to turn a verbal sounding element into a nominal sounding (=noun-like) one. Thus, in Dakhini, clausal complements (usku jaate ‘his going’) can be turned into nominal by using the particle so:

6. Main usku jaate so dekhaa

I him going PRT saw

‘I saw him going’ unc

However, the particle so in Dakhini takes the place of two kinds of elements in Telugu: one, for the particle [a] found in the following example marking a clause as modifier of a nominal) and two, for the nominalizing particle -adi in (8) which marks clause-like chunks and ‘Definitives’ stated above; for in Hindi, both of these functions may be performed by the verbal particle hue. Thus, even though Dakhini adopts the pronominal particle from the omnipresent correlative construction in Standard Hindi influenced perhaps by the trend in the languages it is in contact with, it is nevertheless guided by the sentential patterns otherwise in vogue in the language.

7. Ninna vaccin-a manishi

Yesterday come.past- REL. PRT person

‘The person who came yesterday’

8. Neenu atanni ninna cuusin-adi

I him yesterday saw.

The familiar language contact phenomenon of convergence underpins the foregoing linguistic tendencies in Dakhini Hindi, as often noted in the literature by scholars like Emeneau, Gumperz and Wilson on areal influences. For, long coexistence in a geographical area could give rise to structural Convergence among languages despite their underlying differences, as evident from their non-transplanted variety found elsewhere, owing to distinct genetic lineages. In the Generative Linguistics tradition of Chomsky, such a tendency in languages could be visualized as a way to negotiate and resolve the cognitive conflicts arising in the speakers' minds due to the parametric variations found among languages involved in the contact situation. Going by the discussion here, similarities achieved thereby appear limited to perhaps some superficial aspects of language alone. Because on a micro level, the converging linguistic varieties hold on to their own grounds, as the elements banked upon are those available in them. Thus, Convergence in language need not entail total surrender to the demands of the languages in contact.

Abbreviations: DAT: Dative; PRT: particle ; PRS: present; REL: Relative ; SG.: Singular

Acknowledgements: I am greatly indebted to Tanmoy Bhattacharya for some of the editorial interventions in the present contribution. I own up the responsibility for any errors and omissions that still remain.

About The Writer:



Dr. K. Srikumar is a Professor of Linguistics, currently heading the department in the University of Lucknow. His areas of interest include Generative Syntax, Phonology and Comparative Dravidian studies, with publications in several reputed journals and books. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* and Co- Chief Editor of *Vaak Manthan*, a biannual e-journal of the ‘Society for Endangered and Lesser-Known Languages (SEL)’.

What Divides Us Pales In Comparison to What Unites Us -Edward Kennedy

POETRY



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

MAZIAH SHAAZ
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She is an ardent lover of F. Scott Fitzgerald and finds comfort in practising her culinary skills by the day and flipping through excerpts of literary pieces at night.

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PRACHI KHOLIA
(CO EDITOR)

Some Days I Hope

Altasha Ali

Poets lie, soldiers lie, teachers lie to you
Books lie, news lie, but I'll tell you the truth
We hate the things we love, we love to hate
This argument I present so you exonerate
Me for the mistake I am about to make
I'll need forgiveness if not a bail from the jail
So here goes the truth and what it entails
Everybody lies, your state is not that great

We lost the paper somewhere along the way
My Grandpa was a freedom fighter, dad says
Now beard's gone, no nameplate on the door
We don't show off our guild or God anymore
We carry every piece of identity in our purses
We hide behind promises of valour and verses
But the repeat of the '47 looms on our heads
As the loudspeakers in mosque causes deaths

Oh, the diversity, the history, the heritage

Much to admire in this worldly wreckage
Like the news that flashes at eight O' clock
Her black head covering becomes the talk
But I had some really good friends growing up
They made me feel seen, made me feel loved
So somehow, I believe and some days I hope
All is not lost, and these lies don't last long

About the Poet:



Altasha Ali is a student at Lucknow University pursuing her Master's degree 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*. Her passion lies in creatively expressing emotions through words. She is fascinated by humans, their relationships and their stories. Through her work she hopes to connect with people and create stories that stay within their hearts long after they've put the book down.

Inclusivity

Arun Prakash Pandey

Let's make our heart as vast and deep as sea
 To greet with open arms each river's flow
 And also fill, if seems to be empty
 It's godly virtue if we can bestow
 Giving content to needy grants the glee
 Divine; it's truth of life, we must know.

The selfless love can embrace world as whole
 The things all are creations of the God
 And all should be thus loved as all have soul
 The same; may rule o'er earth or may one plod
 With empathy should him in throbs enrol
 And should e'er have for helpless ones our nod.

A man shall cease to be a man, I think
 If not, with will, can other's tears he drinks.

About the Poet:



Arun Prakash Pandey, son of (Late) Swami Nath Pandey, 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 many forms of English Poetry but somehow the sonnet seems to suit his mood and has become the main channel of his expression. So far, he has published an episode *Lakashmana Goes to Forest* containing 81 (Shakespearean) sonnets and a book of Hindi mini verses, *Bikhray Pal*. He has written eight One-act Plays and a number of Free verses, Couplets, Quatrains, Ghazals, Diamantes, Haikus etc. For him writing goes on regularly as an inevitable part of his routine.

Samadhi

Candice Louisa Daquin

A tree of sadness and loneliness grows in you
 curls its hankering roots about your precious calcium
 as you stand, away from crowd, observing, disinterring
 from the idea a melee is your place
 for you have never commanded, nor sought, ownership
 nor ever been wrapped softly in inclusion to watch
 fireflies make feast of dark and bid magic come close
 you who sewed sea pearls into days, till they lost their iridescence
 needed but one thing
 to be wanted; simple and pure like river water
 for thirsty seeker will seem sweetest of all
 and when you were not
 you turned your loss toward others famishment
 a spirit born out of the song of tremendous churning
 for someone who suffers, can know best, those who also suffer
 when need does not knock on your door and lay claim
 go into the nacreous lustre child, find the pain in others
 suck it out as you would a poison from a beloved's finger

About the Poet:



Candice Louisa Daquin is Senior Editor with Indie Blu(e) Publishing (USA) a feminist micro-press who published the award-winning anthologies *The Kali Project: Indian Woman Speak* and *SMITTEN: This Is What Love Looks Like* (poetry for women by women). She’s also Editor for *Raw Earth Ink*, *The Pine Cone Review*, *Parcham Literary Magazine* and *Tint Journal*. Her latest collection is *Tainted by the Same Counterfeit* (Finishing Line Press).

Your City

Chayanika Saikia

Your city has a bipolar heart,
too cold, too hot,
too generous, too rude,
too much, too little;

what holds you right there
in the midground is the
assiduous swarm of people;

not too divine,
not too diabolical,
not too neophyte,

not too old,
bridging the gap of
two extreme poles.

You are nobody among them,
you are anybody among them;
once you become somebody,
you watch them from afar.

That's the thing about your city,
you're a part of everything,
without adding up to anything.

Identity

You got your nose from?

Assamese and Hindi.

From my mother.

But you don't speak Hindi in North-east.

Your mother belongs to?

I live in Delhi.

To North-east.

Delhi is your home then?

But you don't look from there.

The city has what I'm left with.

I don't know what you mean.

And your place in North-east?

Your name sounds Bengali.

That is what you call root.

It's Sanskrit, actually.

So, you are a tree.

I heard you speaking Bengali.

You like dealing with too many things?

I read and speak Bengali.

No, just one.

Also, I like Urdu, I lived in Western U.P.

My Life.

What do you speak at home?

Gypsy Heart

Late winter evening,

cars crawling on a hibernal road,

one lamp post to another,

one FM song to another

memories to memories,

over the old Yamuna bridge.

The flock of migratory storks

from the Okhala bird sanctuary

camouflaged in fog,

cruised past my car window

discussing -to where

I belong.

About the Poet:



Chayanika Saikia is writing since April 2020 and her work so far has appeared/forthcoming in Petrichor, Muse India, Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2022, Cafe Dissensus, Piker Press, EKL REVIEW, hākārā, Setu (Pittsburgh), The Assam Tribune, Parcham, Y.a.w.p, The Little Journal of Northeast India, New York Parrot, Indian Periodical etc. and anthologies like *Varna Vaibhav* (Asom Sahitya Sabha), *The Kali Project*, *Poetry Unites*, *Antargatha*, *Ismat* etc. Her

Assamese poetry book *Kor pora kho loi* was published by e-kolom Asom Prakashan in 2022. She works for a National Oil Company in New Delhi and is the founder/editor of the e-magazine *Katha Kanchan*.

Hampi Ruins, Karnataka.

Gopi Kottoor

1.

Abandoned Shiva, Hampi

He is alone,

Stone deaf to prayer

Nobody goes to Him anymore.

With his faithful Nandi

His stone phallus shines in the glint off
an ancient light

His only devotee

And friend.

Falling through the dilapidated stones.

2.

Sanctum

Uncaring, his dancing goddesses at the
entrance, their hands

The sanctum is closed.

Hiding their pleasure zones deep into
the black soapstones.

Padlocked.

The nipples of the goddesses are eyes

What God inside

Of blackbirds, sharp pecking

Sleeps his sleep

Love fruit

Among the boughs of time.

3.

Ecstasy

Stones weather the nudes of ancient dancing concubines.

A dancer hides her lotus tuft

Cupping it with both her hands

As she dances.

Another puts her thumb into her parrot eye

as her lover presses deep into her thighs.

The sunlight slits a man's stone penis into a half lizard

Upon the central temple roof.

But unlike the dancing woman

He hides nothing.

4.

The Bath

Out here,

In the long shadows

Of the abandoned watch tower,

Children ride the stone elephant,

His head

Cut across in silence

As though in the fierce

Going back into love's secret
chamber?
Shiva with his consort?
Much is taken away
That speaks of death,

Of holiness,
Of the secret ecstasies of
merry gods
once here,
Where now chirp birds.

7.

Stone Chariot.

For battles done,
For all that blood
of humanity to return
A Lord in his stone chariot

Waits
For the wheels
Of his chariot
to move.

About the Poet:



Gopi Kottoor has published his poetry in journals such as *Acumen*, *Orbis*, *The Antonym*, and others. He has also won national awards for his poetry. He presently edits the online journal **chipmunk.co.in**.

Could I share the view please?

Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca

I stood at the bottom
of the mountain
They at the top.
They looked down from above
Their view magnificent
Mountain goats and sheep
Grazed peacefully and wildflowers
grew.

From where I stood the animals and
trees
appeared as dots, mere specks on the
horizon.
I asked the people at the top
if I could join them knowing

there was room at the top for both of
us
“Be grateful,” they said, “We gave you
a job.”
“Be grateful you can pay your bills.”
Money was the currency of exchange
for determining my worth.
I invited the mountain-top folks
To come down, join me at the bottom
Their response:
“Coming down from the mountain
is harder than climbing up
It’s a slippery slope,
And then there’s the view.”

Flaw

Maitreyee Dutta

There is a pain in me that refuses to
heal

Or may be a wound that refuses to clot

I stapled a band-aid but the red leaked
through

The gash on my soul, again bleeds
true.

This wound in me cannot heal

Nor by love nor by medical means

It is beyond science, beyond magic

Stamped as it is by their logic.

A flaw that blots the absolute
perfection

Given to me by my honest birth
station

A woman I am and what greater crime
To always remain an outsider in time.

There is a pain in me that refuses to
thaw

I am a woman and forever a flaw

I am the onlooker but never the part

A devious fable of a grievous art.

What they Told!

They told me;

“Eat what you like;

Wear what others like”.

I wondered if that was all,

A limit to my life.

Pages of idioms and Bulky theories

Convoluting words and false rhetoric

Faux banners with brightly painted
words

But Women empowerment falls short.

To speak and to eat

To choose and to wear

To live and to breathe:

Ah, Permission is an application

And the absolute truth of my station.

I am a train chained to the platform

A ship sunk by its own anchor

My eyes; made to see

My mouth; made to speak

But mind; made to believe.

They told me;

“Eat what is right;

Wear what others like”.

I wondered if what they told,

Was the limit to my life.

Unseen

The dawn peers at the little boy

running around with his sack.

Pell Mell, he jumps by

Eyes darting front and back.

The sun climbed up to the top,

Sweat beads slithered down.

Spindly little fingers grabbed fast;

Sneaking far deep down.

And yet his rush furthers:

Eyes bright with hunger.

Swollen feet that chafe and fester,

Burdened by oozing bloated blisters.

The Sun peers at the young teen

Dashing around with his sack

Stumbling, teetering with rotten teeth

And gnawing on a blackened meat.

The hustle of the town creeps ahead

With a wide berth and shifty gaze

Trembling feet and weary eyes

Starve just for a moment's respite.

The dusk creeps up hastily watching

A man hobbling rapidly with his sack

Heaving breaths, stinking hands:

People passing by with unseeing eyes

About the Poet:



Maitreyee Dutta is presently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Khagarijan College, Nagaon, Assam. She completed her Masters in English Literature from Tezpur University and is presently pursuing a doctorate degree from Gauhati University. She has published researched articles in UGC Care Journals and reputed Peer Reviewed Journals. Beyond academic research, she is also an avid creative writer and enjoys dabbling in fiction and poetry. She also engages in public speaking and has many awards to her name. She can be reached at—mdutta1506@gmail.com.

The Maps to Reach You

Nandini Sahu

“When feelings are immense, words stand poor.”

From the blue you said that, you, my cherished blue-eyed lover.

You travelled all the way from the island realm remote

I knew, you knew, that is the time when the drinking glass had to be fragmented.

The glass of the mellow and all-encompassing wine is to calm.

What goblet is in my hands? Which map takes one to you, my chum?

Suddenly the Yellow Moon is full. Tonight

you hang like a silver smile on my lips, you pierce me abysmal.

This city sleeps on the pavement. They say a charmer will cross the asphalt soon.

Planting his chauffer, he will disappear to the air thick and thin.

Hauling on my city’s dusky fabric the chauffer is vexed by sea, sand and salt.

I see, you raise your hand to touch the Yellow Moon in amazement.

Just to intoxicate you a bit in a little-eyed window of the lover’s nest

About the Poet:

Nandini Sahu, Amazon's best-selling author 2022, Professor of English and Former Director, School of Foreign Languages, IGNOU, New Delhi, India, is an established Indian English poet, creative writer and folklorist. She is the author/editor of twenty books and the recipient of the Literary Award/Gold Medal from the Hon'ble Vice President of India for her contribution to English Studies. Her areas of research interest cover New Literatures, Critical Theory, Folklore and Culture Studies, Children's Literature and American Literature. Currently, she is designing an MA programme in Indian Knowledge Systems which are inclined to comparative Indian literatures and cultures as well as Hindu Studies.

www.kavinandini.blogspot.in

www.nandinisahu.in

Stargazing

Neera Kashyap

The children called them the big and the little dipper.

In my time the irregular rectangle with its tail straight and edgy

like a kite flying wild.... dotted into the great bear and the little bear

circling endlessly around the Pole star throbbing with a knowing light.

The children had raced up to a hill peak at a holiday resort on a dark night.

Patience all around – for me to pant up, for resource persons to assemble the

telescope, for dark clouds to disperse.

The great bear dimly visible, its dotted edges pointed to the Pole star.

Polaris, said the children.

A dark cloud parted. Mars. I bent low, shut an eye to see it in the viewing lens.

A smudged redness high in the sky. Lots of questions. How close to Earth?

Why red? Why cold? How many moons? Can one jump higher on Mars? Why?

The children knew. I knew nothing. The children knew I knew nothing.

Nebula. A cloudy spot on the white of the eye, blurs vision, I ventured.

Giggles. One child knew: Between the stars, a giant cloud of dust and gas.

Why? Silence. The forest bristled. More clouds parted. The stars blinked shyly.

Venus. A cloudy steady light. The resource person said, it could move as far

away as 260 million kilometres. My mind wandered.

Small hands clutched my arm amid a babble of excitement. “Aunty, you heard?”

When Venus comes close, she is only 38 million kilometres away. Not 260.

Only 38.”

Stories

It was a clay pot with a glaze
that Ma gave me before she died.
She said it told its story to her
only after she filled it with Ganga
water
and offered it at morning prayer.
It said it was earthenware clay,
not stoneware or porcelain.
It had been trampled upon and beaten
till dug up by a potter's discerning eye,
balled and slapped onto his
wheelhead;
moistened, moved and shaped;

so that, centred
it could be moulded evenly.
Its story lay in centredness:
gentle hands, centred clay,
controlled coning, spinning of the
wheel.
Bone dry, the pot was fired
till all moisture, all sulphur, all carbon
left.
A solid porous pot glazed to make it
waterproof,
so, it could hold Ganga water
and Ma's story.

At play

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
A light ahead that shines beyond the sun
and in the heart when dervish dances cease.

Just glimpses on this road of sickness, madness, death.
Some joys, some peace, the sunny hill reflected
Not enough though, except the glimpses say enough
Both on the road and in the maddened dervish heart.

In this light, there are inclusions, no exclusions
Of love and hate, of war and peace, of greed and giving
In an ever-changing play, the light seems not to change
Images now bright, now dark - perpetually playing within itself.

(Acknowledgement: The first two lines of the poem 'At play' have been taken from Rainer Marie Rilke's poem, "A Walk".)

About the Poet:



Neera Kashyap has worked in the field of social and health communications. She has published a book for young adults, *Daring to Dream* (Rupa & Co.) and contributed to several prize-winning anthologies for children. Her work as a writer of short stories, poetry, book reviews and essays has appeared in several international and Indian literary journals and poetry anthologies. Internationally, her poetry has been published in journals in the US, UK, Europe and Singapore. In India, the journals include RIC Journal, The Wise Owl Art, Teesta Review, Outlook India, Rhetorica Quarterly, Yugen Quest Review, The Punch Magazine, Chipmunk & Indian Cultural Forum.

They are not "they"

Pranjal Kumar Singh

They are not 'they',

but they are 'us'.

An inseparable part-

and-parcel of us.

It is not 'we', or 'they' alone,

but 'us' altogether,

That makes the whole.

The difference in aspects,

no matter they be;

can't change the commonality,

as Humans in We.

The both of us

are creations of Almighty.

Then why to be ashamed;

or look down upon,

in whatever identity

has been set by the Mighty.

Contrary to it:

let's be proud in our being,

and let them share their pride

for who they are in being.

In whose authority,

its determination is rightly?

As to who is superior,

or inferior of us two?

And who commands the other

in the affairs of Life?

To proceed-and-succeed

as community we need:

holding of hands, and

embracing of all.

sensitizing and helping,
those in their need.

Together we can grow,
and build our community:

The community of Humanity,
wider than these identities.

We can carry our identities,
but then to build a community;
based on engagement,
on agreement and disagreement
But at the end of the day,
standing for common upliftment.

About the Poet:



Pranjal Kumar Singh is a student pursuing Bachelor's degree at the University of Lucknow. He has always been captivated by the power of words and gives utmost importance to philosophical enquiry.

Tess: A Woman

Prerna Anmol

On the soft, green surface of Marlott,
 I danced like a carefree nymph.
 My gown is touching the feet of Earth,
 Or I would love to wear a short skirt.
 Oh, dear Angel,
 or malicious Alec.
 Who are you?
 Why are you here?
 Just to define the maiden,
 The definition of purity is based on
 blood.
 It's not the Victorian era,
 It's not the imaginary Wessex.
 In the light of the present,
 You can see me a part of different.
 Why should I kill you, Alec?
 The path is mine,
 with the problem of poverty.
 I carry the strength of a shadow,
 But I am not weak as a body.
 You can try
 you can touch.
 But you will receive
 only the sorrow.
 Yeah, the Sorrow,

Who was not my part.
 It was the frustration,
 of your mental distortion.
 Oh, dear Angel,
 Tell me what is pure.
 A white gown with red blood spots,
 Or my naked body in your arms?
 Why should I pay?
 Why should a woman pay?
 Is it in the Bible or the Ramayana?
 Alas! It is so.
 Here's a new decision of mine,
 You cannot choose between grape and
 vine.
 I am not an option.
 My purity is not a conclusion.
 You should go,
 with Lisa or Marian.
 I am enough,
 enough to live on my own.
 He was right.
 God's not in heaven.
 But all's wrong with Head.
 Oh men! I am sorry.
 I accept myself with all my Heart.

About the Poet:



Prerna Anmol is a research scholar, pursuing PhD in English literature from University of Lucknow. She hails from Chhapra, a city in Bihar. She writes poems in Hindi too that have been featured in numerous anthologies.

IF I HAD WINGS

Prithvijeet Sinha

If my hands were wings,

I would have told you.

If I had wings

to replace shoulders,

Nobody would have

I would have shown you.

dared to reach

and raise a hand on me

I would have flown away

or pulled

to pay tribute

with brute force

at the mendicant's shrine,

my wrists

tolled every temple's

that had remained

first bell at dawn,

delicate through teenage.

pressed my ears

Never again

against the church's

would they find me

antique walls

to press spurious ink-marks

to hear divine homilies

on my fingers.

and said my prayers

inside the mosque.

**

If I had wings,

traitors who pulled me
 by the back of my shoulders
 to enquire
 my identity
 wouldn't have been here.
 Nor would have remained
 fabricators
 ceaselessly fitting cudgels
 and their stains
 of communalism
 around my body.

If I had wings,
 I would have reached
 my branch.
 I would have
 been in concert
 with an army of
 parrots, pigeons
 and mynas.

We would have laughed
 and satirised the bane of
 human conquests.
 If I had wings,
 I would have spent
 a lifetime atop these branches
 without touching
 those lower regions
 of human birth and race.

To fall into death's final notice,
 I would have fallen
 once
 to become
 beloved of the soil
 and the grasslands.

Listen now
 O Divine Benefactor:
 Let me fly now!

I AM THE FLOWER

I will be silent
when you pluck
me from my garden
on your days of transgression.

But I will learn
to grow
in other environs
when you
come to pluck
me each day.

Nature,
most profound,
will ensure
I live
in some form.

I will enter your home
as a garland
made from marigold.

At others
I will become the incense of jasmine
spread all over your neighbourhood.

Incarnations
will be my order
of the day
in this city.

I will become
the bouquet of roses
that you hand over
to an
acquaintance.
I will be
your own nursery's

pride of place.

I will flourish

as a flower

I will be Nature's

in the garden of

beneficiary.

earthly delights.

My gentle home.

The nectar of my being

Nature is

will be in such

a constant gardener.

glory's light.

She will conceal my multiple births

from oppressors.

About the Poet:



Prithvijeet Sinha is a writer from Lucknow, India. He is a post graduate in MPhil from the University of Lucknow, having launched his prolific writing career by self-publishing on the worldwide community Wattpad since 2015 and on his WordPress blog *An Awadh Boy's Panorama*. Besides that, his works have been published in several varied publications as Grey Sparrow Journal, FemAsia Magazine, Hudson Valley Writers Guild, Inklette Magazine, Piker Press Online, anthology

Pixie Dust and All Things Magical published by Authors Press(January, 2022), Cafe Dissensus, The Medley, Screen Queens, Confluence- South Asian Perspectives, Reader's Digest, Borderless Journal, Lothlorien Poetry, Live Wire, Rhetorica Quarterly, Ekphrastic Review, The Kolkata Arts, Aze Journal, Dreich Magazine, Visual Verse, In Plainspeak and in the children's anthology Nursery Rhymes and Children's Poems From Around The World (Authors Press, February 2021) as well as Soul Spaces (AuthorsPress, 2023) among others. You can reach his blog here (<https://anawadhboyspanorama.wordpress.com/>)

Letting it in

Priyam Kotwal

As age adds years to life,
A couple are festered away, fretting over
Bygones from yesteryears;
Wading through trenches of the Limbic system.

An old rose in a book is pulled out
And then stashed away in its soiling bed;
A laundry list in once prized writing,
Fumes in decade-old sweat.

Conjuring up spirits from a lifetime of love,
And mounds of its left-overs,
Might manifest new ones in a jiffy.
As it does one day...

Love – with the gentlest of knocks
Presents itself on the porch,
In a garb, you wouldn't know existed.
Looking with the softest eyes, only 'hope' has.

Causing the faintest flutter, you might miss
If you didn't let it in
And greeted it with the warmest touch.
The touch that only 'acceptance' knows.

About the Poet:



Priyam Kotwal was born and brought up in Lucknow. She is an IT and Digital Strategy Consultant with Gartner, helping clients realise their mission-critical priorities through digital transformation and benchmarking. She holds a B.Tech in Biotechnology, a PGD in Global Business Operations and a Masters in Counselling Psychology. She loves singing and is a passionate writer. Her modest oeuvre of poetry comprises poems on love, longing and embracing oneself, among other themes.



(sketch by Manjushree)

Love in Death – 2020

Puneet Pathak

Amma, Tears?

Look I cry too.

Don't my dear, it's a burden

I have to bear.

There is something in my eye.

[To herself]

I cry as you suffer for food

As I did, for my milk is not

proper for you.

I search for the green valleys,
inside

These brick-walled houses.

They forgot about us, left us
stranded.

Butchered our homeland and peace

Now they are hiding.

Don't worry my child

Your voice still brings hope.

We will make it through.

Till my last breath.

B

Bakign feminism

Breka patriarchy

Belly aceh of worldly desires

Black snaek of our dark hearts

Blue sksy only appear

Betwene thoughts high

bravery witnesses onyl at border's
brink

Bewillderde

Banisehde

Bridled fourht state

Birsd strangulating

Babylonian lifestysl

backseta in righteous actions

black heol of corruption

badeg of fake responsibility

bread of rotonn skin

baffeled hungry minds

bag full of atomic bobms to carry

bleaknsse of heaven

bailign out on society

biat f cajolery

balde

bosomed

balloon f cancer

belief cannot achieve righteousness

Bottled state empires

Bigotry and prejudice

breath slowing down

bring out reality

But or otherwise you will suffocate

Beaten under tyranny

Without free speech and expression

Blinded.

Earth

Year 2050

I have lived for uncountable centuries

I have seen love, death, misery, hatred,
war.

But now,

I am dying.

Rotting, deep within.

They are abandoning me,

As I have fulfilled their desires.

All my resources have been extracted.

This tree can now bear no fruit.

They have gang-raped me like
cannibals,

When I cried only a few could hear
me.

My sacred ground polluted,

Now I cannot breathe.

Those who cared,

To keep this paradise alive,

I can no longer serve them.

This wasteland is all your doing.

My clock is running out-

Wordsworth, now your melodies
cannot muse,

The sigh of the reaper, an imagination.

I can hear my heartbeat slowing down,

They have found a new place to rape
again,
I will also be distant broken star,
I will now sleep, deep in the corner.

I wish they could
I wish I could
Dying...

About the Poet:



Puneet Pathak holds a Masters in English Literature and is currently pursuing his PhD on ‘Indian Theatre and Performance Studies’ from University of Lucknow. He is fond of writing poetry and short stories and is also training in acting.

A MUTED VOICE

R. K Singh

I can't hear myself,
their noises erase my world
choices are denied—
questions of being wound me
courage and strength fade away

they mute my voice
distract us from the truth
crowns change with the wind
and they play chess with our lives

they feed us dust and potions
in their new temples
arouse their magic deities
make us yell loud
and hang us upside down

CRY OF A MOTHER

Why do they ignore the clitoris when half the world has it?

the lovers don't care, the doctors don't talk

it's no leaf that falls on the wave's crest

and rots on the shore before they prescribe

a chocolate remedy or testosterone cream

to revive in dapple light:

denial is the way of life

be it desire, emotion, or frailty

for conformity, unity and control

the redness of the setting or rising sun

is too much to the drab colours of the priests

who accuse of heresy, witchcraft or immorality

to shut the so-called hotbeds of sedition

when all they seek is stoppage

of the show of teeth, blood and skull

in the spinning wheel

About the Poet:



Ram Krishna Singh, also known as R.K.Singh, has been writing for over four decades now. Born (31 December 1950), brought up and educated in Varanasi, he has been professionally concerned with ELT/ESP. A retired Professor at IIT-ISM in Dhanbad, Dr. Singh has published 25 poetry collections, including Tainted With Prayers/Contaminado con oraciones (English/Spanish, 2019), Covid-19 And Surge of Silence/Kovid-19 Hem Sessizlik Tolkîni (English/Tatar, 2021), Silencio: Blanca desconfianza: Silence: White distrust (Spanish edition, Kindle, Spanish/English, 2021), A Lone Sparrow (English/Arabic, 2021), Against the Waves: Selected Poems (2021), 白濁: SILENCE: A WHITE DISTRUST (English/Japanese, 2022), and Poems and Micropoems (2023). Find him on Twitter @profrksingh and on Facebook www.facebook.com/profrksingh. More at: https://pennypoetry.wikia.com/wiki/R.K._Singh. email: profrksingh@gmail.com

Scream

Seema Jain

When the clouds turn blood red and the sky becomes crimson
 When the winds bleakly howl, and shadows of darkness lengthen
 From the depths of the heart rises a shriek pretty molten
 That disperses its atoms of sorrow over the sullen landscape.

The bare hills denuded of forests scream in wordless agony
 The flowing waters of the rivers groan under human apathy
 The muted screams of little flowers crushed before they can blossom
 The moist eyes' gaze at our heroes being devoured by booming cannons.

And do we have the ears to hear the anguished screams of those
 Who are doomed to traumatized lives despite our tall claims and vows
 Their shrieks reverberate in the air, made heavy with their sighs
 For each of their tragic woes, angels shed tears from their eyes.

One day, these accumulated screams will rise in a crescendo
 And the terrible deluge will pave the way for a new world order's manifesto.

There Was a Princess Long Ago

Abandoned on birth and adopted by a queen and king
 There was a lovely princess long-long ago
 Rooted in values, peerless in beauty
 The princess was well-schooled in duty

A young prince, handsome, brave and noble
 Gained her hand in a fiercely contested Swaymvar

Though the path has been rough and thorn-ridden
They have challenged things once forbidden

With fire in their hearts and iron in their souls
They have step by step melted their chains
Today the canvas of life is the limitless sky
Thousands with their 'everyday mutinies' gave us wings to fly

The countless unsung 'sheroes' have forged for us new pathways
Which millions more like us will surely tread one day
The era of emancipation doesn't come overnight
It takes centuries for this sun to shine bright.

Dreamer

Hidden in the secret crevices of human heart
I have always existed since mankind's start
Propelling civilization step by step on its way ahead
From living in caves to the modern-day jet age

Do you remember how my dreams of flying gave us wings
And what brought the whole global family together in a string
The golden crops, the moving wheels, the skyscrapers the spacecrafts
The info highways the virtual world all started with my vision vast

I have a dream of liberty equality and fraternity
And with revolutions have brought down tyrannical regimes
I dream of a world where one is not judged by the colour of one's skin
Or the sex one is born into, or the class one belongs to.

I dream of a world where peace and harmony prevail
Over wars conflicts hateful boundaries and insidious travails

ALWAYS BEGINNING

Shanta Acharya

To see the universe with new eyes, not blinded by shadows light casts.

To find the resolve to be always beginning, never lose heart –

Let the angels in, be open to perfection that never lasts.

In time everything changes, even our perception of truth.

To find the resolve to be always beginning, never lose heart –

To listen to the laughter of children opening up the sky.

In time everything changes, even our perception of truth.

Everything that is born dies, unknown to us the hereafter.

To listen to the laughter of children opening up the sky –

To connect to the universe with every breath of ours.

Everything that is born dies, unknown to us the hereafter.

Is there something somewhere patiently recreating us?

To connect to the universe with every breath of ours –

To rise like the sun when we fall, lose everything, almost.

Is there something somewhere patiently recreating us,

Urging us to find the resolve to be always beginning?

To rise like the sun when we fall, lose everything, almost –

To keep an open mind, dream of meadows wild with flowers,

Urging us to find the resolve to be always beginning.

It is to love we keep returning, the place with miraculous powers.

To keep an open mind, dream of meadows wild with flowers –
 To risk everything for that heaven-on-earth feeling.
 It is to love we keep returning, the place with miraculous powers.
 Along the way we rise like a prayer, receive the world's blessing.

To risk everything for that heaven-on-earth feeling –
 Let the angels in, be open to perfection that never lasts.
 Along the way we rise like a prayer, receive the world's blessing
 To see the universe with new eyes, not blinded by shadows light casts.

THE PROMISE

What crowned gods are these that roam our streets,
 invisible death squads, taking a toll of lives?
 Placing my trust in hope, I carry on living, dreaming
 of a world where hearts beat with love and minds
 swim in rivers of light, rafting through rapids
 of change, defying death, unclenching a fist,
 claiming refuge in life, reaching for the sky.
 Bound by laws of nature, gods do what they can
 promising us the freedom to be ourselves –
 like treasured wrinkles on the face of a beloved,
 a calligraphy of leaves against the light –
 beauty unsurpassed, blossoming with age.

What reasonable person would choose to be a city
of demons, when you can be the metropolis of love?

THE AWAKENING

I try to open my eyes, not squander my life on lies.
Nothing in this world is true, nothing more real than me.
Casting aside all doubt of my ability to change,
Living in doubt and darkness, I keep an open mind
Until I find a way of letting the light of the universe in.
Some things start right here, in the heart of desire.
I step inside myself, astonished to meet my many selves.
Once revealed they take wings, irrevocably.
Not this, not this: I sing, encouraging them to live, let live.

About the Poet:



Shanta Acharya's poems, literary reviews and articles have featured in major journals and anthologies. The author of twelve books, her publications range from poetry, fiction and literary criticism to finance. The latest of her seven poetry collections are *What Survives Is The Singing* (UK; 2020), *Imagine: New and Selected Poems* (India; 2017), *Dreams That Spell The Light* (UK; 2010). Her doctoral study, *The Influence of Indian Thought on Ralph Waldo Emerson*, was published in 2001 in the USA and her novel, *A World Elsewhere*, in 2015. She has received several awards for her poetry and her poems have been translated to several languages. www.shanta-acharya.com

I Advocate for the Tenants

Stasha Strange

I advocate for the tenants

and the unhoused.

We talk about belonging, a lot.

How the places that should help

don't believe the homeless deserve

to breath, let alone belong.

I see it most in supposed faith leaders

that seem more like cult leaders,

when you look too closely.

I've only felt like I belonged in

one place, an old building,

my home of decades.

All the artist and bohemians

were priced out.

I still grieve my community

and the belonging feeling

that was stolen from me,

even though it's been years.

Belonging means the safest place.

It's more about being accepted for

who you are and where

you're at then where you

rest your head at night.

Every human being deserves

to belong. If we could be there

for one another, in grace

and service to the human race,

how much more peaceful

would the world become?

I take belonging seriously.

I've felt more of it out there

on the streets among the

homeless, then anywhere else.

Unfortunately, the way the world

is now, belonging can be exchanged in belonging you have to
for currency. To truly believe make room for everybody.

About the Poet:



Stasha Strange is an accomplished writer who draws inspiration from the untamed worlds found within books. Recently, she transitioned from the vibrant San Francisco Bay Area to Ohio. Her literary prowess shines through her publications in prestigious outlets such as *Poetic Reveries Magazine*, *Ohio Bards*, an Anthology, *New Beats Generation*, *Blossom*, an Anthology, and *Sidewalk Sanctuary* her debut chapbook. Stasha's talent has earned her numerous accolades, solidifying her position as a gifted wordsmith. She shares her life journey with her partner, Andrew, and her beloved companions, a feline familiar, Jax, and a silly snake named Noods.

Love, yet stay true to your unique self;
Naturally different.
And that makes the real difference!
Taking that difference to weave it into a tapestry of humanity.
The diversity only adding to the richness of the mosaic!

About the Poet:



Tarun Paul Mathew is an 18-year-old non-speaking autistic teenager from Kochi. He started to communicate through writing around the age of 7 years. Using typing as his mode of communication, he has been passionately teaching people about autism through blog articles, interviews, and panel discussions on multiple forums. He has collaborated to co-author a book titled *Talking Fingers-Voices of Non-Speaking Indian Autistics*. Tarun loves listening to music of various genres, watching nature documentaries as well as reading, including poetry. Tarun describes himself as a free thinker. To him, inclusion is when people become interested in his thoughts and opinions.

Fiction

"In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute."

-Thurgood Marshall



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Magnolia Mansion

Altasha Ali

Her watery eyes plead with me across the room. The school cafeteria is a mess but all I can do is look at her. I blink once and she is standing right in front of me, this time glaring daggers.

I gasp for air as I sit up on my bed. *Not this nightmare again.* I get off the bed, and the first thing I see on the side of my wall is my reflection in the mirror. I can hear the sound of thunder outside my window as I take a step forward. The flash of light strikes the mirror for a moment, and I see someone standing behind me. I scream as I run out of the room.

“Mom!” I knock on her door loudly, and she opens it right before my legs give out and I begin crying.

The next morning, I wait with mom as my name is called. I make my way inside the doctor’s office. Doctor Sharma smiles from her graceful perch on the couch as I get settled on my seat in front of her.

“How are you today, Riya?”

“I am okay.”

“Sit back and relax.”

“I am fine.”

“So, what brings you here today?”

“I don’t know. My mom said I needed to see you,” I shrug.

“And you don’t think so?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“What I need right now is not a doctor.”

“What is it, then?”

“Someone who believes me.”

“I’ll believe you. Just try me.”

I scoff. “You’ll believe me? You’ll believe that I see the ghost of a dead girl from my class who died this summer? You’ll believe me if I say that she is trying to contact me?”

“What is her name? The girl who died?”

“Kaya.”

“Were you friends with her?”

“No and see, just look at your face. You’re judging me. I am a seventeen-year-old grief-stricken girl who has gone hysterical.”

“Hysterical is a big word for a seventeen-year-old, don’t you think?”

“I like reading,” I frown.

“What do you read before bed?”

“I do not read horror stories if that’s what you’re implying,” I sigh.

“I am not implying anything, Riya. I am trying to understand you.”

“Yes, but you won’t believe me like everybody else. These are not just nightmares. I saw her last night.”

Dr. Sharma took a deep breath before she put down her diary and pen on the coffee table and looked at me.

“Okay. Let’s say you saw this girl, Kaya. Do you see other dead people?”

“No.”

“Have you ever witnessed the death of someone you know or someone close to you before?”

“Yes. My pet dog Pluto when I was 7.”

“Do you ever see him in your dreams?”

“I don’t remember him that well.”

“And what do you remember about Kaya?”

“She was a girl in my class. I’ve seen her since we were in third grade. She was a loner. Didn’t have any friends.”

“What else? Have you ever had any interaction with her?”

“Yes. Small stuff, nothing that stands out. Except just this one time I gave her a sanitary pad in the bathroom last year, and she thanked me.”

“So, you were kind to her? Why didn’t you make her your friend?”

“I...I don’t know. I already had friends and she never talked to me. She never talked to anyone. And there were these rumors about her and her family.”

“What rumors?”

“They live at the Magnolia Mansion and there are all kinds of horror tales about that place. The kids...they said Kaya and her mom were into devil worship and sacrificed cats.”

“Is that why you think she is trying to contact you?” I nod. “But why you? You didn’t even know her that well.”

I look down at my hands, my vision getting blurry. “You don’t believe me.”

“Yes, I don’t Riya. Because you’re not being honest with me.”

“Honest about what?” I look up.

“Everything.”

I walk out of the office and down the stairs, ignoring my mom as she follows me. I slam the door of the car shut and stare out the window as mom starts the car.

“I know you’re mad at me but Dr. Sharma will help you.”

“This is not a psychological problem, mom.”

“If you do this for me Riya and you don’t get better, I will do anything you ask of me.”

I say nothing as we pass by the road and I look at the mansion from afar in all its dark, gloomy glory. It stands alone, not fitting in with any of the other houses. Kaya died there; she fell off the giant staircase.

In my room, I look out the window – the moon hangs low in the sky. *I don’t want to sleep tonight.* I go back to my bed and open my diary and start writing about Kaya.

I trace every interaction I had with her. I talked to her like she was just another girl in my class. And I know many people would tell me not to do it or she’d put a curse on me. But I didn’t care about that.

I shared my lunch with her once in seventh grade. I passed her the ball during the game period. I laughed when she made a joke once. The last time I saw her, she spilled her juice on her shirt. I don’t know why I noticed her all the way across the cafeteria when no one else did.

She held me captive in that eye contact that lasted for more than half a second. I thought about going to her, to ask her if she was alright. But someone said my name, and I looked away. A minute later when I looked back, she was gone.

Why did she look at me like that? Like it was my fault that she spilled the drink on her clothes or that she was sitting all alone.

I shut the diary and lie back. My tired eyes shut close of their own accord.

I enter the school building and look over my shoulder; *mom is walking away from me*. I make my way through the bright hallway. I stare at the animals and the alphabets on the walls as I reach my classroom, third grade it reads on the door. It is my first day. *Pluto wasn't there to hug me today and wish me luck*.

Someone runs into me as soon as I enter the class and I stumble back. Moments later, as I look up, the girl gags and throws up all over my brand-new uniform. I hear the sounds of laughter; I see the cruel kids and their pointed fingers at me as I stand there alone on the verge of tears.

“Come with me.”

I look over my shoulder to find another girl. “Come on, I’ll help you clean up.” She smiles at me and offers me her hand. I take it and follow her to the washroom.

“What’s your name?” I ask her.

“Kaya. Yours?”

“Riya.”

She wipes my shirt with her handkerchief.

“Thank you, Kaya.” I look down at my shirt and then look up at her. Suddenly it was *Her*. The Kaya I remember from the cafeteria that day, much older and taller.

“Kaya?”

“You couldn’t do that much for me? Was it really that hard? Tell me!” She yells at me and my eyes suddenly shoot open.

I sit up on my bed and look around my room.

“Mom!”

A few seconds later mom comes running. “Are you okay? Did you have another nightmare?”

“Mom, I feel so guilty. I hurt her.”

Mom sits down beside me and rubs my arms.

“What are you saying?”

“I saw a memory I had completely forgotten about. She helped me. And I didn’t. I just stared at her.”

Tears roll down my cheeks as I think about her. “She needed a friend mom. She needed me to be her friend. She needed me to ask her, to include her, to consider her. And I just ignored it. I just forgot about it. I just let her go, and didn’t follow her. What if I had followed? What if I asked her if she was okay? What if she felt better and was still alive? She would still be alive.”

“It’s okay. It was an accident, Riya. She fell down by accident. It was not your fault.”

“It is my fault. I should’ve talked to her. What do I do now? She is mad at me.”

“She is not mad at you. She is in a better place now. You are just feeling guilty and I know what you can do to ease it.”

“What can I do?”

“Next time, if you ever find yourself in a situation where you could hold out a friendly hand to someone, do not think twice, okay?”

“I won’t.”

The End

About the writer:



Altasha Ali is pursuing an MA in English at the University of Lucknow. Altasha 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 pages and creating art out of it, is her passion. She is fascinated by humans, their relationships and their stories.

You Blocked Me

Masenate Agnes Mopeli

Today, his mother, Pauline, was surprised to see her son so excited. She was concerned rather than happy because this had never happened ever since he started going to Motion Secondary School. She assumed that it must have had been a good day for him to come home wearing such a genuine smile and, in fact, it was. Tables had turned and he was going to be included in the school teams. Going straight to his mother he hugged her and the tears of joy were released; he said, “Starting from today, I will do what I enjoy the most and none of the teachers will ever mock me for being different.” As he said this, he took out a letter from his pocket and told his mother, “This is the key that has opened the doors for me.” It was a signed note with the school’s stamp where the school attested to equality and inclusion. The heading said, *EQUALITY AND INCLUSION FOR ALL*.

In his entire life, Andrew had always encountered challenges which he was able to overcome through the support of his mother. At age fourteen, he had to hide the pain he suffered in an effort to save his mother from worrying over too much baggage. Her plate was already full and it was terribly exhausting for her to take it anymore. The greatest tragedy was that she had to be a mother and a father at the same time and this was too much for her. Wherever Andrew went, he was defined by the condition he had no control over, albinism. Additionally, he became a play toy even to the small children in the village because of his physical disability. He had acquired several names in the Hillside community.

“I do not know what I have done in this world for my son to suffer like this.” These were the words that were uttered by Andrew’s mother who, besides her own suffering, had to bear the pains committed on her son by the society. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that even the person like the chief of the village who was supposed to protect them was part of those who perpetually shamed their family. For those who had had an opportunity to sit and learn more from Andrew never forgot how intelligent he is. The book was judged by its cover yet the contents were so nourishing should it have had someone turn the pages wisely.

Even though the mentioned situations were obstacles in Andrew's education, a few like his mother and some junior teachers spotted some unique wisdom in him. Whereas, some teachers joined hands with the other kids in using names which offended and belittled him but his determination played a vital role. His wisdom developed more as every day, he had to deal with people who saw nothing in him but a stupid albino who could not walk like others and had to lean on a crutch. In order for him to find his strength, his mother had to assure him now and then that he was a survivor who would, one day, become an important part of the society. It indeed eventually happened.

Like every child, Andrew had genuine friends who would fight with him, shared meals together and that is how he learnt that not everyone saw him as different. He was an outstanding performer in all subjects. Like the former school, this current one did not offer him much of the chances to show his skills. He was indeed a gifted child. His identity was used to knock him down but his mother was always there to collect the pieces. It was not by choice but rather, circumstances, that he had left his last school and joined this one. Both schools would rather lose the opportunities to win medals where he could have helped, than to be known as having "*an abnormal being,*" as they called him.

One day, he came home with sadness painted on his face and his mother had to comfort him as always. He said, "Mother, you know I am good at debates?" His mother knew that it was not healthy for him to see her tears and hence she faked a smile and asked, "What do you want to tell me?" He had badly wanted to be a part of the team that was going to the city for the debate competition, but he was told that he couldn't. He knew very well that he was capable and had dreamt of being called to the stage and honoured with a prize.

It is the small things that helped him to accept his situation though, like any other child, he had dreams which made him forget that he was going to be treated in this manner for quite some time. His hopes helped distract his mind from the negativity, however, sometimes, it was difficult to deal with everything. He was not always strong and his mother played a crucial role in ensuring that he survived the burdens. Rumour has it that his father was a soldier who died in a war when he was not even weaned. He had to find all the comfort from his mother who never failed to be his pillar of strength.

Alienation from the rest of the society had helped Andrew and his mother to know and maintain their position. An innocent, brilliant child was denied access to quality education. It so happened that in one week the school was to be evaluated and the officers came unannounced. The school was busy preparing for the science fair which was one of Andrew's favourite subjects. As usual, he was ignored though he was doing well and he knew that his chances of being part of the team were slim. He was treated like he did not exist. Some of us who knew his efforts and were his closest friends only wished there was something we could do but there wasn't.

The underperformance of the school in the academic competitions had always concerned the ministry of education in this district and today was a good day for them to have the truth revealed. What goes up must come down and that is exactly what happened with the teachers who were careless. Today when the officers of education were passing by the window, they were caught by the harsh words directed towards Andrew who stood in front of the class with tears streaming down his face. This incident caught their attention and they decided to secretly record the scene for future reference. That was indeed a good move because they had to monitor the situation closely so that their case could be strong and today, Andrew, with his voice shaking, fought for his place.

With his left hand he wiped away the tears, stood up and leaned on his crutch and said, "I don't know what I have done to deserve this. First you blocked me from entering the English debate and now you are here destroying my future again by excluding me from the team." There was silence and he released all that he had kept in his heart for a long time and this time he surprised the teachers because this came unexpectedly. He continued, "For a long time you have been calling me names and I just can't tolerate this anymore..." he sobbed bitterly and picked up his books to leave the class but there was more for the teachers.

Turning their heads to the voice at the window they could not believe their eyes. These people who had psychologically abused Andrew for so long were wondering how long the officers had been standing there and how much they had heard and seen. One wanted to get up, the other wanted to speak but could not move her jaws and the other wanted to rush out to address the call of nature. Even though the weather was a bit cold, teachers were sweating with fear because

being caught red-handed meant nothing other than being jobless. They knew if this matter went any further the children would innocently testify against them.

All he wanted was to be a participant in the competitions. He was extremely happy to find his feet although for him, the journey had never been easy. Now the school knows that everyone deserves a chance to show their skills, although it took ages for it to acknowledge everyone's strengths. It did not matter where he came from or his other unique features, all that the school needed to do was to put his name in the team and let him show the world what he was capable of doing.

About the writer:



Masenate Agnes Mopeli is from Lesotho. She is pursuing an MA in English from Dibrugarh University, Assam. She acquired her BA degree in English and African languages and Literature from the National University of Lesotho. Masenate is a Mosotho girl who loves exploring and reading. Coming from a country which has two official languages, she has had the opportunity to read books in her own local language and English. Studying literature at the postgraduate level has instilled the love of writing in her.

Revelation

Amita Ray

It was while traveling to my work place that I encountered her in the ladies' compartment of a local train. An emaciated middle-aged woman used to beg wearing the most disgruntled look on her face. Added to this was her arrogance which surfaced on being refused the penny she thought she was entitled to. Her haughtiness emanated as a string of unintelligible abuses from her mouth in a high pitch. We pitied this woman because she could not speak, but disliked her too, because of her unseemly behaviour. Accepting a one or two rupee coin was below her dignity which she didn't hesitate to fling back at the giver. Her ranting, albeit gibberish, held us all in tense bewilderment as long as she was in the compartment.

I wondered if this hapless woman had taken to begging due to compulsion. Did she live alone? Did she have children to look after her? The white sari she wore was always reasonably clean contrary to what one would expect. Her hair wasn't scruffy; it was oiled and tied in a bun. We, the commuters, who met her got curious about her. The vendors of the local train we knew and communicated with, could not enlighten us about her either. And communicating with the woman in gestures and signs was impossible. After all, who would bell the cat!

So, this woman who was almost a regular visitor in the ladies' compartment remained an enigma. We chose to leave her alone and those willing to gratify her with more than a penny did so to keep her pacified.

Jaya, Professor at a college, justified herself saying, "How does it matter the way she behaves with us? The fact is that she begs because she is needy and helpless." Chandra chirped in, "Yes, she is dumb and probably deaf too. It is our responsibility to help the challenged in society. And despite her ill behaviour, probably stemming from her being challenged, she is certainly a part of this inclusive society."

From another corner, a pert young girl recently into a job added, "I am sure she is mentally challenged too. Is there any reason to grumble and disparage her for all the cacophonies which we don't even understand?"

A college student lifted her eyes from a book she kept open in front of her and quipped, “It might be her way of blessing us!”

So, there were opinions and perceptions galore, but the majority was exasperated by her negative vibes.

Those who have travelled in local trains are very much aware of the gruelling situation prevalent inside the bogies during peak hours of the day. Trying to get a secure foothold, jostling and elbowing passengers in a bid to get down when the destination arrives, are all part of the daily ordeal.

It was a hot summer afternoon. On my return journey from college, this woman boarded at a station. Suddenly, the train huffing and puffing screeched to a dead halt midway between two stations. The woman had boarded our compartment in the previous station. There was a power failure, almost a routine affair. As we sweltered and seethed, the woman’s howling remained unabated and reached its peak. There were vendors in the compartment doing brisk business, taking advantage of the boredom of passengers. So, the *chole bhaje wallah*, the boy selling knick knacks, the man vending *sherbet* in small pouches sheltered within insulated cooler boxes, the woman selling cucumbers cut in slices and sold with a dash of salt, seasoned with red chilli powder, were all actively engaged.

Mobility in the compartment, crammed with commuters and vendors, was pathetically restricted. The woman selling cucumbers had lodged her basket just behind my seat which was near the entrance. I needed something to munch on to dispel boredom. So I bought cucumbers for myself and my friends. I reached out to her over my shoulders, money in hand and made the payment.

The train suddenly started moving much to our relief, the fans started functioning with vengeance, and there was jubilation around. After two stations, the woman selling cucumbers came to me and said, “Didi, my money.”

Embarrassed, I calmly said, “I have given you dear. You must have forgotten.”

“No didi, I don’t make such mistakes.” She smiled.

I was now perturbed. The honesty of these vendors who interact with us daily is beyond question. But who had received the money which I had handed over without looking back? I remembered very well touching the damp hand of the recipient.

My colleagues confirmed my payment but she was adamant!

Suddenly a thought flashed through my mind. The woman whom we meet almost daily was standing behind me near the door yelling out as usual. Could she be the culprit? My assumption was confirmed by a lady sitting opposite to me and who could get a fair view of her. “Well, I have seen that mad woman taking the money from your hand which you passed over your shoulder. She got down at the previous station.” It was my fault; I shouldn’t have been so casual in giving the money. But on second thought, I was happy that the money went to a person in need and not to inappropriate hands.

On another equally hot and uncomfortable day on my journey back home, the train ruthlessly screeched to a halt again, midway between two stations. The little respite we got from the searing heat with the fan whirring was also cut off. As we started fuming, panting and sweating in gallons, the minutes turned into hours. There was no inkling of the train taking a start.

When the ordeal seemed excruciating enough, many commuters resorted to jumping down the bogie and trekking on the chip strewn track towards the highway. After an expectant wait for a while longer, my colleague friends and I followed suit.

We had hardly ambled along a shortcut path (as directed by a local resident), than we saw a pack of about seven dogs near a small hut. Wagging their tails, they were engaged in licking off the last remnants of a hearty lunch served on two large *thalis*. A woman draped in white sat on the porch of the hut. A little girl was happily frisking between the canine group and the woman, occasionally patting the back of the devourers.

We stood as if in a trance, watching a scene of perfect camaraderie. But when we moved ahead and the woman came in full view we were befuddled. It was that cacophonous woman with repugnant ways we encountered in the train!

“What is she doing here?” “We blurted out almost in a chorus.

More surprise awaited us when we looked at her countenance. Gone was her distraught and discontented look. In its place we found a calm and contented look belying the visage we envisaged almost every day. And most amazingly when our eyes met, she gave us a surreal Mona Lisa smile! Was it a miracle or did she have a twin sister? But other than her facial expression, the woman was unmistakably *she!*

There was a small pan shop nearby. We approached the owner of the shop to satiate our escalating curiosity. It transpired that Mashi (the woman was referred to as aunty) came with this little girl one fine morning and started living in that abandoned little hut some years ago. The girl was presumably an orphan, a street child who had tagged along with her for some inexplicable reason. The girl was extremely fond of her whom she called *Dadi*. As the woman could neither hear nor speak, and the child was too small, the history of their co-existence remained inscrutable. But what mattered most was that they were happy in each other's company.

“Are these dogs fed every day?” I gushed out, unable to hold myself.

“Yes, almost every day...with the money she gets from begging she cooks for herself, the little girl and for the dogs of this locality. She looks so benign and happy while feeding them.

The story was too magical to be real. A sense of guilt filled us when we contemplated on how mean we were to be judgemental about this woman. We went up to her and poured out all the money we had in our bags keeping just the amount we needed for travelling back home. A divine look emanated from her face as we bathed in an inclusive bliss.

Chole Bhaje Wallah: the man who sells fried chickpeas

Thalis: flat plates

About the writer:

Amita Ray, based in Kolkata, is former Associate Professor in English. She is a translator, short story writer, reviewer and poet. She has four volumes of translations to her credit. The titles of her translations are: *Khirer Putul*, *Treats in Translation*, *Legends Speak* (Co-authored) and *Dwipantarar Katha* (The Story of Deportation). She is a widely published short story writer and her collection of short stories, *Trail of Love and Longings* received rave reviews. She has published a collection of poems, *Until Birds Sing*. Her translation of Abanindranath Tagore's, *Khirer Putul*, has been inducted into the postgraduate curriculum of English Literature at Burdwan University, West Bengal.

The Shadow of a Shadow

Nandini Sahu

Ragini was lying on her belly in her room, room no 12 of Mahendra Tanaya Ladies' Hostel, in the Berhampur University campus in Odisha, year--1995, and reading a poem by Sappho. It was a poem about the errant sexual behavior of a lesbian, her emotions described in fragments:

“Even in Hades I am with you
Andromeda...Gongyla...My desire feeds
On your beauty, Gongyla. Each time I see your gown
I am made weak and happy...You of all women whom
I almost desire, come to me again...

You lay in wait behind a laurel tree...You
A woman wanderer like me... I barely
Heard you, my darling...You came
In your trim garments...And suddenly
Beauty of your garments!

Hermes came to me in a dream, I said
My master, I am altogether lost...
And my many riches do not console me
I care only...to die...and to watch the dewy lotus
Along the banks of Acheron, river of hell...

I have no embroidered head-band for you, Kleis
And no idea where to find one
While Myrsilos rules in Mytilene...The bright
Ribbon reminds me of those days when our

Enemies were in exile...o Kleis...”

Ragini couldn't help smiling to herself thinking of Sappho's desire for all her girlfriends, Andromeda, Gongyla, Athis, Kleis. So many? She had read somewhere that Sappho of Lesbos was a poet, writing liberally about her sexual desire for her female friends and her poetry was subjected to tremendous violence in the Christian West. She was a victim of the state mandated management of *compulsory heterosexuality*. Still, her work survived and was oft quoted until in 1000 AD the church destroyed all her poems and quotes. In 1073, her poems were publicly burnt in Rome and Constantinople by the orders of Pope Gregory VIII. Still, some Egyptian papyrus preserves her poems in the form of quotations!!

Ragini was amazed. A woman has to suffer so much suppression, mutilation, censorship and disparagement, only because whatever she thought or freely wrote was thought 'unnatural' by a group of people? But in the norms of Indian civil conduct, it is quite 'natural' when a woman's soft emotions are crushed in the nuptial bed and she has to undergo marital rape throughout her life! Still, she can be called a respectable married woman, feeding her limbs to a man whom she might not love, and drying his underwear proudly, lifelong, like the national flag.

The implications of the word 'unnatural' seemed to her quite unnatural.

She was reminded of her elder sister who was married to Rajib *bhai* at a very young age. She bore three children for him by the time she was twenty, yet his lust was never satisfied. He would shout at her at the drop of a hat, humiliate her for not being as qualified as him, call her names, but she had to be with him in the 'natural' circle of her 'happy' married life, without a choice. She had never seen him speaking to her softly, touching or patting her shoulder any time, even when she was in labor pain. He had never got her a single rose on her birthday. Since their father passed away, leaving two young girls and a boy behind with an ailing widow, her mother, it was decided that her sister Shalini, who was in +2 first year Arts by then, should be married off to Rajib *bhai*, a Deputy General Manager in a multinational company. Their mother had got some amount from her dead husband's office which was not enough for the higher education of three children. Shalini's wedding ceremony was simple, but the dowry was not so. A Wagon-R car,

refrigerator, TV, and whatever else was required for a household, their mother arranged. After that Ragini was sent to a hostel since she got a scholarship. Since then, she has always been on fellowships, staying in hostels, now pursuing a Masters from the university, staying in a single room which she voluntarily shares with her friend Suni, Sunita Malhotra from Chandigarh.

Ragini couldn't divert her mind from the thought of her sister Shalini, how she went to her in-law's house, scared, crying all the while, when she was just sixteen. After fifteen days she came home with a *mangalsutra* around her throat, bruises on her neck and nape, lips and eyes swollen. She had been to a honeymoon which Rajib bhai's friends had sponsored, in Delhi, Shimla, Kulu and Manali. Their mother was so happy to see that at least one of her daughters was *settled* in life. She couldn't see, or perhaps she didn't want to see, her stony dead eyes, chopped wings and blue-black bruises.

Ragini had to get up with a start with the loud ringing of the bell for lunch or breakfast, whatever you call it, at 10 am. Oh, she was late. Today, the first period was to be taken by Prof. Mohapatra, her favorite teacher. He taught them theory – post-colonialism, post-modernism, ecocriticism, feminism, narratology and new criticism. She rushed to the bathroom. There was no water supply. Water supply was from 8.00 to 9.00am, one hour, and you had to queue up to get your turn. Or, perhaps store two buckets of water so that when the rush was over, you could bathe peacefully. Thank god, Suni was her roommate. She had collected two buckets of water for Ragini after she bathed in the morning. Suni knew Ragini would study from six to ten in the morning, and she would never like to be disturbed for trivial things like water. So Suni had willingly taken that on herself, to help her almost every day.

“Thanks, Suni-di. It's very sweet of you.”

“Ok, ok, now bathe quickly and come to the dining hall. There is egg curry today. I have asked *Bhagban bhaina* to keep two eggs for you.”

Ragini couldn't have thought about her hostel life without Suni. They were two extremes – Ragini was a good student, serious about her future, because she never wanted a life like her sister Shalini. Or, it's better to say that the life that had been imposed on Shalini. She had a secret desire that someday she would become an IAS officer; earn so much that it won't be impossible

to for her to rescue her sister from that snare. She needs a lot of money and empowerment for that; she has been focused in her career.

Suni was different. She had no such aim in life. She was the single child of rich parents, her Papa always on business trips outside India and Mummy was busy with her kitty parties. The daughter was left to the *ayah*; thus, she preferred to share her life with her hostel mates rather than with servants.

That was how she was here, doing certificate, degree, diploma courses one after the other, aimlessly, just to be facilitated to stay at the university, particularly in the hostel, far away from home. During the first two years, she had a single room of her own, which used to be always locked. Because she never wanted to stay alone. She had befriended the senior girls and used to chit chat with them, help everyone with money and personal care. She had enough spare time with her. Whenever someone was ill, someone was upset, heartbroken, disturbed, had to go shopping, had some relatives in her room, Suni was there. She was so good-natured that within no time she became everybody's favorite. She had long hair, great skin, a charming smile, she was a real beauty, and Ragini was very fascinated to see her in the dining room or T.V. room every day. She envied her, how much time she had! When did she prepare her notes? When did she study?

The fact was, she never prepared notes, never studied and never wanted to be 'something' in life. She was just living in the present. During the summer vacations when everyone was excited, shopping for their family members before going home, Suni had nobody to buy things for. Because she couldn't find suitable designer sarees for Mummy or suits for Papa from places like Annapurna Market in Berhampur where her friends preferred to shop. After all, they had to buy fashionable yet inexpensive stuff. And there was no point going to a mall alone and buying things for Mummy which she may not like and give away to her servants. She wanted to breathe fresh air, live like her friends, and be happy with small things in life. But she only got big things, big hurts; and she was supposed to fulfill the big expectations of her parents.

Like, on her last birthday--when her friends had arranged a tea-*samosa* party in the common room, she got a call from her Mummy.

“Darling, we are in the town today, for my speech in the Women’s Welfare Association of Odisha tomorrow. Why not come with me, I can buy some birthday presents for you, and have dinner with you”.

“No Mummy, thanks. Actually, my friends have organized a small get-together in the common room.”

“Oh, come on! Forget that. I am reaching in ten minutes, now get ready”.

In the evening Suni came back to the hostel with a diamond ring, five designer suits, sandals, perfumes, and vacuum in her eyes.

Mummy sent her to the mall and then to the hostel with the driver with an order of what things to buy for her only daughter, because she met the local M.L.A.’s wife in the restaurant.

During long holidays, the hostel was closed, and the rooms were temporarily given away to the sportspersons coming for different championships from other states. So, the hostellers had to vacate their rooms at short notice, lock their cup-boards and suitcases. Suni would always leave the hostel on the last day, and come back on the re-opening day itself because there was nothing much to do at home. She never liked to join Mummy’s parties where the gossip was about the recent fashion trends or the personal lives of celebrities or about saris and the diamond jewelry those socialite ladies were wearing. She was a fish out of water at Mummy's parties.

Some evenings when Papa was home, he would enquire a thing or two about her university and retire to his bedroom. Mummy and Papa were like two parallel train lines, never to meet. But still they were together. She had never seen them talking, going out together, forget about ever holding hands or having any physical contact.

Was it *natural*?

Can two people share their lives for convenience? Papa had so many female friends; Mummy had many male friends, who would drop her home, drunk, at the wee hours of the morning. Papa had no objection.

Was it *natural*?

They believed in giving space to each other in their marriage. This concept of ‘space’ was beyond her comprehension. She felt trapped at home, and the hostel was her rescue.

That was when she met Ragini. They had seen each other as two strangers, exchanged smiles in the dining room, but had never spoken to each other. Ragini was in the first year and Suni in the second year. Suni spent her spare time wandering through the market place. Making the rounds of shops had become her habit; she got a pleasure out of it. Hockey, chess, table-tennis and cricket were played at the university campus in the evenings. She never went to the university tournaments. She didn’t even bother with the daily newspapers, although many of the girls in the hostel including Ragini were regular visitors of the central library for newspapers and journals. But the game she liked even more than cricket was to select a shopper from the crowd in front of her and follow her. Roaming through the supermarket was her favorite pastime hands down. She herself stocked everything in her room; it was more like a household. She restocked on salt, lentils, rice, coriander and chilies, even dry shrimps in her room, which she had seen in the servants’ quarters at her place, and which she relished.

That day Suni was roaming in the basement and afterwards took the escalator to the main part of the store, to the cosmetics and soft toys section, where creams and rouge were displayed like magazines and lipsticks and artificial hair sets shimmered like wedding *dupattas* pinned behind the protective glass. The mannequins were inviting to the clothes section on the other side. Though Suni had never bought anything other than an Olay Total Effect, she liked walking through the cramped lanes of the mall, which was familiar to her in a way the rest of the town was not. She rushed her hands inside her coat pocket and found an election campaigning card with rich aroma and smiled to herself. Girls in the ladies’ hostel were least bothered about the

qualities of a prospective candidate for the posts of President, Vice-President or General Secretary in the Students' Union annual elections. They would smell and check the quality of the perfumes they sprayed on their cards and decide whom to vote for. They would accept a bunch of cards from each candidate with all politeness, as if they were actually going to campaign for them inside the hostel; and then push the cards into each corner of their suitcases and cup-boards so that the aroma would stay with their clothes for some time.

Whose card is this? Devendra Bishoy's? Suni smelled it and put it back in her pocket.

Then she spotted a girl from her hostel, Ragini, in the supermarket. The hostel gates would close at 6 pm, so Ragini had to pick the 5.30 road-train, which comprised two buses attached by a thick iron chain, and the first bus would drag the second one, like a mother dragging her naughty child home in the evening to study; this created a funny sight. Ragini was in a hurry, picking one thing from here and one thing there, lest she might miss the road-train. She saw a lovely snow-white teddy bear, and checked the price tag. No, it was beyond her budget. She was paying the bills at the counter when she heard the horn of the university bus. Suni wanted to help her with her bags, but was hesitating. She might wonder what she was doing in the market if she had nothing to buy? At that moment, Ragini, while trying to hold her handbag and the shopping poly bags in the left hand and pay with the other hand, dropped all her bags. Suni had to join her.

"You let it be. I'll pick your things. You pay the bills and let's rush to the road-train".

"Oh, thanks a ton!"

But they were late. That day the bus left sharp on time, unlike some other days, and they missed the bus. Ragini was very worried, as any first-year student would.

"Not to worry, we can hire an auto. I am your senior, so it's my responsibility now," volunteered Suni.

"I am Ragini. You are?"

"Sunita, can you call me Suni."

"Yeah, I have seen you in the T.V room and the dining hall. You are in the second year, right?"

"Right. Yes, here's a chocolate for you. I always wanted to give you one. Because I heard that you were the university topper last year."

“Oh yeah, thanks again. I always wanted to speak to you. Everyone says you are so nice and helpful.”

They had a nice chat. They spent 40 minutes in the auto talking about the university, their classes, departments, teachers, the road train and its antics, all fun.

The next day, they met again in the canteen and Ragini noticed that Suni was alone. Why was she always alone? She invited her to join her friends.

Ragini discovered that Suni was an introvert when it came to sharing her feelings with people. She seemed docile, feminine, quiet and lost in herself. That mysterious silence in her sad eyes got Ragini attracted towards Suni. They started keeping a tray for each other in the dining hall, whoever came first. They started sending a word for each other through the ward-boy if there was a good movie in Doordarshan on Sunday evenings. Suni gave Ragini a bottle of pickles which she had taken from the supermarket, because she saw that most of the days during the part-I university examination, Ragini would take her dinner to her room to eat after late night studies. But next morning the tray would be kept outside her room, the food only nibbled, may be because of the tasteless curries.

There was one thing common between them. Both of them were lovers of nature.

As soon as Ragini came from the department, she would toss a few morsels of food down her throat and hop away like a bird to join Suni in the garden. Suni had created a small kitchen garden beside her room where she had grown tomato, spinach and green chilly. Every weekend she used to cancel their meals in the mess and cook for both of them. She loved cooking. Suni would be busy with her gardening and Ragini followed her around and watched. During such hours Ragini’s hands and feet constantly itch for some achievement in the garden. But she was good at nothing except studies. Suni would pluck tender tomatoes and chilies and tuck them away in her *dupatta*. Ragini walked behind her, ineptly plucking leaves and grass which she thrust into Suni’s *dupatta*. Sometimes she would happen to touch a worm or a caterpillar; she

would scream in horror and hold on to Suni and wipe her hands on her stomach. Suni remained untroubled, as if it was Ragini's wall, not her stomach.

Ragini again became the topper in the part-I, M.A. examination, and Suni passed out after the completion of her second year. The day she was given her degree, she filled the application form for another M.A. course, so that she won't have to leave the Mahendra Tanaya Ladies' Hostel. "Oh Suni-di, I was upset thinking that you will have to leave this place and go home. It's good that you are going to continue your stay here. See, I have no best friends except you."

"But you know, I have to vacate my room and share the common room with the M.Phil, Ph.D girls,"

"Why, you can shift to my room. Being the topper, I am given a bigger single room this year. You can stay with me."

Ragini's life became smooth with Suni's presence in her room. No more queuing up to bathe in the morning, no more worries, like "what shall I wear today?" She always forgot to press her clothes when there was power supply. Most of the time they had to manage with a generator which didn't support an electric iron box. So, she had to wear her crushed cottons to the department. She was allergic to synthetics, she was a pure cotton person, and cotton needs ironing.

Now Suni would get up at 6 am, with the bell of Ragini's alarm clock, but had nothing to do throughout the mornings after watering the plants, bathing, storing water for Ragini, an elaborate *puja* and making two cups of coffee for both of them. So, she would devote some mornings to arranging the wardrobes of herself and Ragini, some mornings for assembling Ragini's study table, book shelves, notes, Xerox copies, pens, table lamp. Sometimes she would take out Ragini's cotton dresses and iron them with her iron box.

"Suni-di, please don't do that. Let it be. I'll do that in the afternoon after I come from the department."

“When? When there is a power cut? You better concentrate on your Elizabethan World Picture or whatever you are reading. I can do this.”

“Why don’t you, too, sit down with me and prepare notes on your Home Science papers?”

“No... please don’t ask me to prepare notes. Moreover, what shall I do with a first class? I just need to pass. When you become an IAS officer, keep me as your Private Secretary, ok? You are such messy! Just look at your suitcase!”

She was right. Ragini’s workload was so much. Apart from the P.G. part II course, she was also preparing for the UGC NET examination in English as well for the Civil Service examination. You never know. You have to keep all the options open.

She learnt from Suni, what it is called to share and care. Coming from a family where her widow mother was harsh on her children, and a sister married off too early and brother, a spoiled brat, she had no strong family ties. She felt Suni was her mother, sister, friend and her family. During the morning hours when Ragini studied, Suni made it a point to finish her work in the room in an hour and go to the roof top with her wool and needles. She was knitting a sweater for Ragini; she had only one sweater. Suni would never disturb her while she was studying; rather she would lock their door from outside so that her classmates could not disturb her. Raji, Anamika, Sagarika, Mona, Damayanti, Parul, they were staying in the same row. Since Ragini was the topper, they had a kind of wariness, and they would come to Ragini and Suni’s room in some pretext, to ask for a book or some notes, to clear a doubt, and then waste her time with silly talk about boys in the department or about the boys’ hostels.

One evening Surabhi came to Ragini’s room to ask for some Glucon-C, which Suni used to store to give Ragini when she came tired from her classes. When Ragini opened the door with a book in her hand, all the girls in the row came to her room.

“Ay Ragini, don’t you get bored reading all the time? You don’t have a boyfriend either! Only mug up your books all the time. What a girl!”

“No *yaar*, I was just reading something. Come!”

“Give me your Glucon-C. I am feeling weak.”

“Why, is your boyfriend troubling you too much?” said Sarita and everyone started laughing loudly.

Reshma, the girl in the next row, had a cousin staying in the boys’ hostel. So she had the most information about the boys, thus she was very much in demand.

“Reshma, what’s news? You are not sharing with us!” Rakhi asked her.

“Hey, you know, my cousin was saying there were photographs of Hollywood and Bollywood heroines in two pieces in their bathrooms. All those boys go there and kiss those photos, they do all bull-shit in front of the girls’ photos, you know? They even do *that* for each other,” she said with a giggle.

“Please don’t discuss all that here. Suni-di will kill me,” told Ragini; and Suni was already there at the door.

“You girls don’t have any study hours? At least think of the university topper. She has to study!”

The crowd dispersed.

“What is this Suni-di? I could have told them politely.”

“No Ragini, you don’t know such girls. They disturb you during your study hours, and then they will study throughout the night. And why should she borrow Glucon-C from you every day? Can’t she buy it? But she can buy new *kurtas* every month, hmm?”

“No Suni-di. Her boyfriend gifts all that stuff.”

“Ragini! Please don’t tell me about boyfriends!” Then Suni got very upset.

“Why? Why do you hate boys so much?”

Suni hesitated. “Do you have some time? I can tell you tonight after dinner. The mess bell is on.”

That night Ragini could know that Suni was a girl with a disturbed past. Beneath her serene temperament like the Pacific, there was a hidden storm.

Suni’s Papa was one of the top-class industrialists of the state. He was a successful businessman, and to be successful in business he had to make many compromises. One of those was, he had promised the local M.L.A. to marry off his daughter Sunita with his wayward son Samant, without her consent, even without consulting her. The boy was a rogue. He had somehow passed M.A. from some private university, and those days he was waiting to join politics in the next

general elections. He had heard about Suni's charm from his family and friends, and was waiting for her during last summer vacation.

Suni went home in mid-May, again to join her classes on 1st July. Pretty long vacation, and she was thinking to kill time by growing a kitchen garden at home too. So, the next morning she was instructing the peons to get plants, manure and seeds and clean that area. At that point, a rough, shabby looking man in his late thirties entered their gate with full authority, parked the car inside and got down.

“Salaam *sahib!*” the peons told.

Who was he? Suni had never seen him! And why was he coming forward to Suni with open arms?

“Hi sweety! You made me wait so much!” and he almost pulled her to his chest in front of the peons and the servants. All looked down. Suni was still in her night suit, looking fresh and tender.

She got hyper, lost control and pushed the man as hard as she could.

“Who the hell are you? And how dare you behave like this?”

“Oh, your father hasn't told you that I am your fiancé? What is this? Call that man, hey you!” He shouted at a servant.

Suni's father entered the scene.

“Ragini *beta*, he is Mr. Samant, the only son of our M.L.A. *sahib*. I have given him the word that you and Samant are going to tie the knot next year. If both of you agree, we can have the engagement done during your summer vacations. Also, both of you will get some time to spend together. Why don't you take her out today, Samant *beta?*”

“Oh, sure uncle! She is such a beauty!”

“Papa! I need to talk to you, now!” and she rushed to her bed room.

“Samant, please be seated. I will be back in a minute. Actually, I couldn't tell her about you. She came home only last night.”

Samant waited, restlessly.

“Papa, please don't do this to me. I want to study for some more years, I am in no mood to get married right now. I am not prepared. And this man is repulsive! I cannot marry him, Papa!”

“What? How can you be so arrogant? He is the M.L.A.’s son, and your father’s future as an industrialist depends on him to a great extent. See Suni, I didn’t ask you to give me your decision. You have to marry Samant, whether you like it or not. And once you marry, you will start liking him.”

“No Papa, I’ll die if you force me. Please Papa!”

“*Nothing doing.* Just shut your mouth. He may hear it.”

Samant overheard everything. Repulsive? Ok. He would make her jolly well understand what a repulsive man is like.

Next few days Samant tried to lure her into a relationship. But Suni was adamant. She had no desire to marry. And if at all she has to marry, the boy would be of her choice. She is also the daughter of a stubborn father-- so, *nothing doing.*

But destiny had something else in her store for Suni.

One night, the world turned upside down. There was an unlikely rain. Rain, more rain. The bird’s eye view of the landscape gave the picture of the Jurassic age. The crystal-clear water-world was flanked by forest black-waters. The landscape was dotted with skyscraper ghettos and massive pylons. It became a different world altogether with wild beasts around. Samant lifted Suni under the nose of her father to an unknown farmhouse.

Under the fading glow of the skyline, water divided beneath the bridge. Colonies of red ants encroached the unclaimed lands, the deciduous trees elongated that night, creating an unlikely rain in Suni’s whole being. Her mind and body caught fire in the rain.

The next morning, she came back to the hostel; but not a soul was there except the warden *didi* and her children in one room. Rest other rooms were allotted to the football tournament girls from Punjab Technical University. Suni lied to the warden that she had to come back early because her parents went to the U.S. for a month, and she wanted to come back for her studies. Warden *didi* liked Suni because she was a polite and nice girl. She allowed her to stay with her family for that month till the university reopened.

Suni hated men, all men, after that night.

“My god! Suni-di!! Oh my god! Oh my god! How can you bear so much pain in your heart and still smile? How can you be normal after all that happened? I will kill that bastard. How could your parents do that to you? Why didn’t you inform the police? Oh my god! I am so disturbed! so upset!” Ragini started sobbing.

“Don’t cry Ragini dear! Informing the police was of no use. His father is the M.L.A., and my Papa supports his party. Anyway, the fortunate thing is that Samant found me frigid, cold, repulsive and unsuitable to be his wife. So, he denied marrying me; Mummy called up the next week to scold me that I didn’t cooperate with him.”

Was it *natural*? Premarital sex is allowed for a man with any number of women, just to test who would be most suitable to keep him happy every night! If a woman adopts the same method?

Ragini’s immature brain was failing to define what was natural and what was not. She was sobbing, and was most restless that night.

“You know Suni-di, my elder sister who is married to Rajib *bhai*, with whom she has three kids, also has a painful story. Why are men like this?”

Ragini told her Shalini didi’s story at length. That night they spent the whole night talking, wiping tears and comforting each other. Unlike other days when they used to sleep separately, one on the bed and the other on the floor, that night they slept on the same bed.

The shadows of the neem tree near their window were softly reflected on the bed, cold breeze blowing; like white foam, the moonlight was falling on the bed in patches. The night had calmed down after the perturbing storm of Suni’s story. Ragini slowly put her head on her arm and stroked Suni’s long, silken hair. The sides of her temples were wet with tears, she wiped that with her fingers.

“Oh Ragini! This is love! This is heaven my dear! This is pure love, true love, which you have given me, and I have given you. I love you so much my dear! I would not regret it if I die after

getting such pure love in my life.” She went on whispering into her ears, and drew her close. She kissed her forehead softly, then touched her cheeks, chin, neck, nape, back, slowly she touched her everywhere, drew her so close that they were inhaling each other’s breath. Ragini was breathless.

Suni took the initiative. She kissed Ragini’s mouth, first softly, then she went on sucking her lips, for a long time, while her hands caressed her naval and her budding breasts. And she didn’t know when her hands delved deep, deeper, deepest, into Ragini’s being. Like two rivers, flowing into each other and merging in the sea, they merged through the body to the soul. Like soul mates.

Both of them felt at the moment-- that was so *natural!* Like leaves coming to a tree, like flowers blooming in spring or migrating birds reaching their destination every winter, without fail.

Life was good, after all. This was not forbidden love, no.

Next morning Ragini was feeling somewhat guilty. But Suni showed no such sign. It was like every other day. Bathing, storing water, cooking for both of them as the mess was closed for the day; in fact, Suni was very particular that Ragini should by no means feel disturbed.

‘You sleep for an hour now. I am going upstairs. I shall open the door at 10 am, you have your breakfast, then study, ok?’ She kissed her cheek and went out. Ragini felt uneasy. How can she behave so normal after all that? Was she mad? Ragini was confused.

But Suni was not. As if she always knew it. Like Sappho, she knew that she would get her consolation, comfort and stay in a woman, never a man. She was made like that. She loved all softer emotions in life, which she could expect only from a woman, not a man. Precisely, from Ragini.

Ragini was her alter-ego. She was smart, slim, intelligent, outspoken, determined, ambitious, dedicated, childlike, immature, stylish, dependent on her, and at the same time an independent, modern, twenty-first century woman with a nonchalant attitude. Which Suni always wanted to be. But she was never made like that. She could never be that devil-may-care type.

So what? Ragini's success was no less her success! Ragini's achievements were no less than her own! Life went on. Ragini and Suni, both were comfortable now. They cared, shared, loved.

One day the seniors in the hostel ordered some DVDs in the T.V. room to have fun after Ganesh Puja. One of the movies they watched was Dipa Mehta's *Fire*.

All the girls giggled. Oh shit! Oh god! What's going on? What are these two women doing? Is that possible? They have a serious problem.

Ragini prompted, "why not? Can't you see what kinds of men they have in their lives? How can a woman love a man from whom she doesn't get care, respect, comfort or emotional love? Is love all about having sex with a man? You all are so educated. How can't you realize that love is a very soft emotion, which a woman can share only with a person who needs her emotionally, not just physically? Physical closeness is another way of showing one's care and concern for the person whom one loves, be it a man, a woman or even nature. What is so unnatural about it? Being a 'homo' or a 'hetero' is not a setback in one's character. There is a problem with us if we are perverted, indecent, dishonest, violent, cheat or evil. But how can someone's different sexual preference be a problem to us? Why are we dramatizing our reaction to someone's alternative sexuality? If one is sincere and honest, what is the problem? Times are changing, so why not change our mindsets? The thought of homosexuality creeps you out? Fine. Who is asking you to be one yourself? But how does that give you the right to be hyper-critical or mock someone who is a lesbian or a gay? At least stop judging people for feelings they have no control over! Nature has made them so, after all."

What???

All the girls exchanged a meaningful glance with a suppressed smile.

After that day, whenever the gossip mongers would see Suni and Ragini together, there would be whispers and then some giggles.

But who cares? Where there are bigger things to care about, one doesn't get time to care about petty things like what people are gossiping about.

Ragini's part II examination was on, and she had to study very hard. Suni had to take extra care that she was not disturbed by anyone.

"Suni-di, thank you so much, if I am doing well in my studies, the credit goes to you."

"Hm...keep your flattery to yourself. I am sure you want an excuse to go out with your friends for a party. Ok, go, but come back by 6.00 pm and sit down to study."

What is a mother like? Is she like Suni-di?

"What would you do alone? Why don't you come along?"

"Oh no, you all are a big group-eight boys and seven girls. G-seven, that's what you call yourselves, no? I can't stand those boys."

"What's wrong with them? They are so respectful towards you." Ragini insisted, but Suni never went out with them.

"Hey Ragini! What's the problem with that roommate of yours? She is weird *yaar!*" Reshma would say.

"Come on, she asked you that day to study during the study hours, so you are against her. But you might know that she is the darling of everyone in the hostel, including the Warden."

"Oh...but she is your darling, for sure. We wonder, would you love your husband someday as much as you love her?"

"You guys have no other topic than boyfriends, husbands? That's why Suni-di scolds me when I come out with you. She is right."

All those girls thought she had airs. Attitude.

Has true-love ever been well accepted, anyway?

Ragini's second year exams got over, and she came out with flying colours, as expected. By that time Suni had completed the first year of her double M.A. course. All first-year girls of the hostel decided to throw a farewell party for the out-going M.A. students in Sonapur, a beautiful beach a few kilometers away from the university.

It was great fun. Throughout the day Ragini and her friends along with the junior girls jumped around at the beach, got wet and wild, danced, sang, and had sea food in the restaurant. Suni was watching from a distance. She never liked such wild fun. Even if she was junior now by capacity, she was elder to all of them, and she liked to maintain that. She sat with the Warden and helped the cook, Bhagwan bhaina, instead. And thought tomorrow she would fry some dry fish for Ragini. She loves dry shrimps.

Not that Suni was a morose and serious girl all the time. She also knew that Ragini was fun-loving, so she had to remain happy. On the way to Sonapur, the girls got down at four o'clock in the morning to freshen up near a village. Suni took them to a clean place, and asked them to relieve themselves when it was near dark. The girls were happy that before the day break at least they would be fresh. After the job was over, they went to a bore-well nearby and bathed or semi-bathed and changed into fresh clothes. While coming back to the bus, they discovered that the clean place where they had relieved themselves was actually someone's large backyard, smeared with cow dung water the previous evening, maybe for some function.

“Run! Fast!”

They ran and ran up to the bus and once inside it they were laughing all the while till they reached the picnic spot, to the surprise of the Warden and other staff of the hostel.

Suni knew that Ragini was a sea-food person. While roaming in Sonapur, she discovered good crabs somewhere. Then she asked Bhagwan Bhaina if he would allow her to cook in the hostel mess the next day, just for an hour. He agreed, but it had to be done at 6 am, when nobody would be around. Suni bought two kilos of crab, alive, and hid them in a bucket and kept it in a corner inside the bus. Before lunch, some girls came to the bus to collect snacks from their bags, and

yelled. All the crabs had come out of the bucket and were roaming inside the bus, like dinosaurs, creating a weird scene. The cooks and others rushed to discover that scene, but Bhagwan *Bhaina* never disclosed who had kept them there. Suni was smiling to herself, Ragini could see.

“Suni-di, you did it for me, right? God! Imagine! You want to cook crab in the hostel for me? Let’s ask the warden to remove Bhagwan *Bhaina*, and you be our new cook, ok?” she whispered.

Suni pressed her palm, to keep quiet.

After lunch the girls requested the warden that they would like to spend that night in the beach and stay in some lodge at their own expense and then go back to the hostel the next morning. So, the warden also had to book a room for herself and her kids to be with the girls.

They got two dormitory kinds of halls, where there were twenty beds in each hall, and they were sixty girls. Still, the girls agreed that they could share the beds, adjust, but stay back in Sonapur that night and enjoy the night sky at the beach.

In the night, the sea was in her wild, wilder, wildest best. The silent, white, gloomy monsoon village light and the whimpering dusk did their bit to sway the girls even more. The unending wind intoxicated the sky; the earth bloomed in the embrace of the sea. Suni was whispering alone, “oh sea! Twist my life, release me from my mind’s clasp... let this moment be still, unmoving. What shall I do after Ragini, my little love, leaves this place next week? Embrace my soul, yearning. You are like the fertile creation, green and fresh like the mustard fields, wet and overflowing like a river, like a shimmering rhythm. You come and grow in my restive soul, drown me in your blue eyes, mix my breath with your stormy breath. You are the music of creativity; let me bloom in your embrace. I have nowhere to go, not to the house of Mummy and Papa, and I can’t follow Ragini anymore. She has her career, her future. Oh sea...you are my only rescue now....”

Slowly she got up from her place and started walking towards the wild waves. She had almost lost consciousness. The girls were busy dancing around the camp-fire at the beach...

“Aap jaise koi meri zindegi me aaye-- toh baat ban jaye...”

han...han...baat ban jaye!”

“Sunita, what are you doing? Oh, someone help! Help!” The Warden shouted. Ragini and her friends were startled. What happened? It was dark everywhere except the light of the fire and a crescent moon.

The fishermen, three of them, jumped into the water and dragged Suni’s drowning, unconscious body from the water.

The night was quiet, silent like death, in the dormitory. Everyone was upset, whispering in a suppressed voice, scolding the kill-joy.

“She has always been like this. Weird! A big show off!”

“She has attention problem, you see!”

“Don’t know how our poor Ragini tolerates such a creeper.”

It was 2 pm now. Everyone went to sleep in the dormitory after twelve o’clock, and the lights were off. Suni was given food and sedatives; Ragini gave her a piece of her mind, and asked her to sleep beside her. She was extremely worried. God! What if something would have happened? Now who is going to look after this girl after she leaves the hostel? She has her Civil Services Prelims next month, and then the UGC NET exam. She has to go home and prepare. They have to vacate their rooms tomorrow and shift to the common room till they get the hostel and university clearance. The girls were in a mixed mood, looking forward to the future. Some were going to take up jobs and some were going to get married. Their public life starts from the coming week. Student career is over, so are all these irresponsible, funny, happy days. They were apprehensive, yet happy in a way. Exchanging addresses, phone numbers, e-mails, inviting each other for their marriages in near future.

Life was going to take a new shape.

Ragini had to qualify either the civil services or the research fellowship examinations. Otherwise, Maa would be after her life to marry, like Shalini, and settle down. No, she was not going to marry. She couldn't think of sharing her life with someone like Rajib *bhai* or that useless Samant.

Ragini tried her best to put Suni to sleep by patting on her head. She was on sedatives, so she must sleep. But Suni was not getting sleep, she was shivering all over. Ragini comforted her, put Suni's head on her chest and caressed her hair, her eye-brows, and whispered, "Sleep...sleep...now sleep..."

At 3 am., Reshma woke up by listening to some strange sound from the bed beside hers, where Ragini and Suni were asleep. It was a scary echoing sound, as if a wild beast was gorging on some raw flesh and licking, relishing it. It was a sound she had never ever heard, never ever imagined in the weirdest of her dreams.

She got up with a start and imagined, perhaps some sea creature had entered the dormitory, coming from the sea waves, and was creating this noise, eating flesh. Perhaps the crabs had come back from the sea where they were thrown out of the bus in the morning. "Raji, Rita, get up and switch on the lights.... Please!" she whispered.

The lights were on. All lights from all directions.

Two girls, so close to each other, breathing through the nude bodies of each other, delving and drinking deep into each other!

Soul to soul.

Heart to heart.

Body to body.

Living only in that moment. As if other moments didn't exist. Not breathing when not together.

So much comfort!

Such warmth!

Such togetherness! Such closeness!

That was the last time they lived. After that, limpness oozed out of their eyes, they never sobbed, cried, laughed or smiled. There was no wetness in the soil, no shower of light in the mornings. Only there was a rotten, musty, stinking wretched feeling as if they were in a bottomless pit.

Ragini left the hostel the next morning, so did Suni.

They were asked to leave, in fact.

Such moral degradation! Such a violation of the laws of nature! Other girls may get misguided. Unpardonable! Most unnatural!!

Their parents were informed telephonically by the warden. Mummy and Papa were furious. Ragini's Maa couldn't understand a word of it—lesbianism !!What is that?

Both the girls were packed off; all clearances were given to them in an hour. No one spoke to them; they didn't speak to each other either.

A silent good-bye. The last good-bye. Maybe, next birth, if there is any.

Suni gave her a gift, which she was planning to give her the next week, with a proper farewell.

Ragini, sitting in the train, opened the packet with tearful eyes. It was the same snow-white teddy bear that she had seen in the supermarket last year, but couldn't buy it. The day she met Suni for the first time.

Suni was not articulate like Ragini. She had only written on the teddy, "It's me....!"

Mrs. Busybody

Deepak Sharma

Tr.: Madhu B. Joshi

I know they call me flabby-mouth, the gossip and Mrs. Busybody behind my back.

You think I invade the privacy of others? That I enjoy finding and revealing their secrets? Or maybe you think I am dying to condemn people? I am habitual to jumping to wrong conclusions? And I distort the reality of others?

Wrong... absolutely wrong... in fact, I am above manipulation. I never twist anyone's truth. I just pull facts out of the shadow of doubt and provide certainty.

I believe women must have conversations amongst themselves. Frank conversations are a great means of building, maintaining and improving relationships; the basis of organizing our inner strength and unity. The medium that allows us to view personal events in the context of social reality.

Now the other day, I went to my neighbour Kanta's house driven as much by curiosity as with sympathy. You might ask- why?

It so happened that the night before that, when I saw Anil laughing and chatting with Nalini a little too much at the anniversary party of the college principal, I joined them and asked him, "Kanta hasn't come?"

And I got the reply, 'No, she is out of town...visiting her family.'

Now, how could I have accepted this statement as the truth when I knew Kanta was at home. She had not gone to her family and will not go there at all. I am her neighbour. We live in adjacent residential units in the staff quarters on the college campus.

**

"Why didn't you come to the party yesterday?" I asked Kanta the minute the door opened.

“I was not feeling well,” Kanta looked worried. Dejected.

“You were not around so Anil spent most of his time with Nalini. And do you know what she wore to the party? A funny top and skirt...”

“Well, she is not a married woman,’ Kanta grumbled. ‘She is a free bird. All the more reason to flaunt herself.”

Anil and my husband are Senior Lecturers in the Biology Department of the college and Nalini has recently returned from Lucknow to Kasbapur as the newly appointed lecturer in the same department.

“And where did this idea of you going to your parents’ home spring from? Anil said you had gone to visit your family...”

“This is what Anil is harping on. He wants to send me to my parents' home. I don't want to go there.”

“So that is what it is! I wondered just why you would go there. At this time when the children have school...” Kanta had shared with me that since her father's death, her three brothers had divided the business and the house and they were busy chasing their own interests. Her sisters-in-law and nephews and nieces did not care about Kanta in the least. Her mother had passed away years ago.

“But Anil is hellbent on sending me there.” Kanta bawled.

A car came to a stop outside. “Anil is back.”

Kanta stood up startled, “I have to pack my suitcase...” Kanta hurried towards her bedroom so I stepped out into the *verandah*.

“You?” Anil looked embarrassed.

“I came to see Kanta. She is right here. I have counselled her to not visit her family at this time. Leaving you, leaving the children and home unattended.”

“Her elder niece is getting engaged. All her family have been calling her to come. She could not get a confirmed ticket yesterday. Today, I managed to get a confirmed ticket...” Anil made no effort to hide his irritation, he folded his hands as a concluding gesture and moved towards the living room, “See you later...”

“Return that ticket,” I followed him into the living room. “I have coaxed Kanta to visit her family when the children's school is closed for holidays...”

“I will check with Kanta,” Anil stepped into the inner room.

I did not sit in the living room. I went and stood near the fridge at the other end of it. To eavesdrop. The fridge was closer to the bedroom.

“Why did you call that tattletale here?” Anil hissed. “To petition her? To plead?”

“I didn't ask her to come,” Kanta replied.

“Well! Send Mrs. Busybody back. Had her husband not been my senior, I would have personally pushed her out.”

“I can't ask her to go away,” Kanta whimpered.

To register my presence, I called out loudly, “Kanta...”

Anil arrived pulling a suitcase.

“Sorry, madam. Please forgive us. Kanta is in a hurry to leave. Her brother and sister-in-law are insisting Kanta has to be there for the engagement...”

I sat on the sofa in the living-room, “I have to talk to Kanta before I go. Need to ask her to get me some stuff from her hometown.”

“What stuff?” Anil's face flushed.

“They make great *papads* and *badis* there, I will order some...”

“Let me see what's taking Kanta so long,” Anil hurried inside.

A moment later a scream rose. It was Anil's. "What happened?" I rushed in the direction of the scream.

"Kanta slashed her wrist with my shaving blade," Anil stood shivering in the bathroom next to his bedroom. On the floor an almost unconscious Kanta lay holding her bloody wrist, her face blanched.

I picked up a towel and strode towards Kanta. I lifted her injured arm above the level of her heart and placed it on my shoulder. Then found the artery coming to her wrist and tied the towel tightly on it to stem the flow of gushing blood.

I spoke to Anil, "We have to take Kanta to the trauma centre. Lay Kanta on the back seat of your car. I will help you take care of her..."

On the way to the trauma centre Anil broke the silence, "Kanta should have thought before slashing her wrist. How will the children react? What will People Say? I will be so ridiculed in college...our names will appear in newspapers...there will be a scandal ... But did she spare a thought? Once the idea came to her mind that she had to die, she had to be dead..."

"Why do you think she will not survive?" Not wishing the trembling Kanta to be scared further, I cut Anil mid-sentence. "She will survive. She will definitely survive. We should spend this time in prayer and hope ..."

**

There were three doctors at the trauma centre. One of them stepped forward to check Kanta, "First, we have to clean her wrist completely and find out how deep the wound is, what has been cut. There are so many muscles and nerves in the wrist! Then there are the ten bones of the fingers and the two arteries which bring blood from the heart...radial and ulnar..."

"My wife will survive, right?" Anil became impatient.

"Let's see..."

Kanta was taken to the ICU.

Stockstill, Anil and I kept vigil outside the ICU. The doctors there took quite some time to bring Kanta back to normal.

And their efforts did succeed.

“You are lucky,” the doctor came out and congratulated us. “Both the radial nerve and the radial artery at the wrist were saved. We have stitched the vein. The cut was horizontal. Not vertical. The good thing is you brought her here in time and first aid had already been administered. Otherwise, a lot of blood would have been lost and we would have had to transfuse blood.”

“I gave her first aid,” I looked triumphantly at Anil. “I am the one you call Mrs. Busybody...!”

“Please, I am so embarrassed.” Anil folded his hands. “Had you not been at our house today, it would have been a disaster...”

Regret and remorse were stamped on his face.

“I have something to say to you,” the doctor sarcastically addressed Anil, ‘Your wife should not have had to cut her wrist. She is not mentally ill, nor does she want to die. A person finds oneself trapped and seeks help. They cut their wrist, but tactfully. They don't let the blade go too deep...’

“When would you be discharging her?” Anil swallowed.

“You could take her home right now. Of course, she would need to rest for a few days.”

“I will bring the car from the parking lot to the gate here.” Anil found a halfway decent escape from more rebuke.

Kanta was brought out of the ICU on a wheelchair. Seeing me, she wept, “I shall be singing your praise all my life...”

“Praise for what?” I patted her cheek. “Wouldn't you have helped me if you were in my place?”

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 Hindi short stories to her name. Deepak Sharma has been frequently published in important Hindi journals like *Hans*, *Kathadesh*, *Aajkal* and *Kathakram*.

About the translator:

Madhu B. Joshi is a translator, a media manager and consultant, an independent editor, academician and an author. She prefers to be known as a communication practitioner. She has taught translation and a short, self-designed course on Indian Culture, mentored content teams of major education NGOs, designed educational audio-video programmes for CIET and NCERT, written short stories for children and commented on socio-political and cultural issues. Joshi has translated Hindi poetry and short fiction into English, and particularly nine major books from English to Hindi and three from Hindi to English. She has also worked closely with Pratham and The National Literacy Mission and has published four books for children.

BOOK REVIEW

"A book is a garden, an orchard, a storehouse, a party, a company by the way, a counselor, a multitude of counselors."

-Charles Baudelaire



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She is a research student currently pursuing her PhD in English from the University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest include Mysticism, Performance Studies, Travel Literature and Indigenous Literatures.



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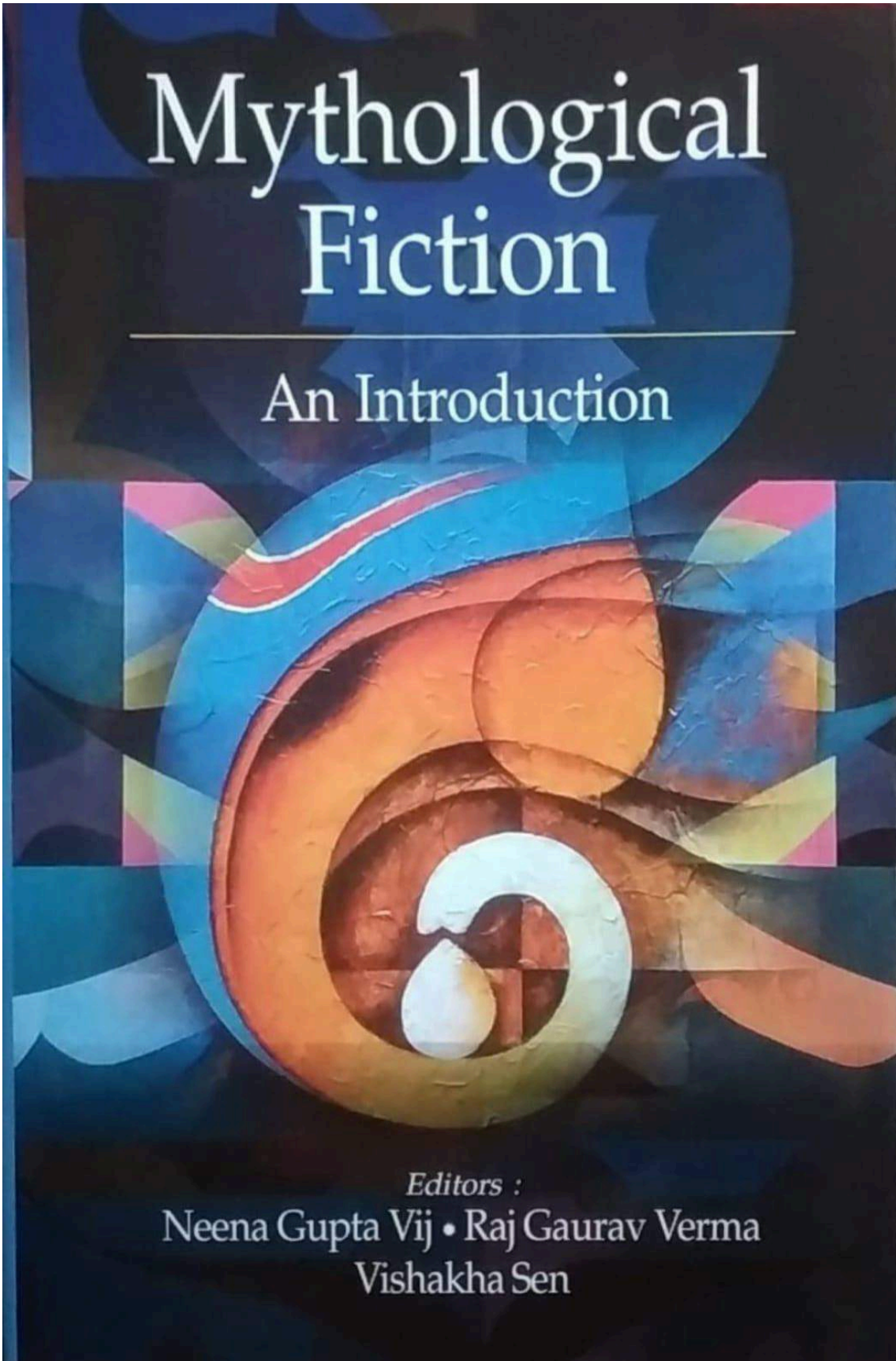


**PRANJAL KUMAR SINGH
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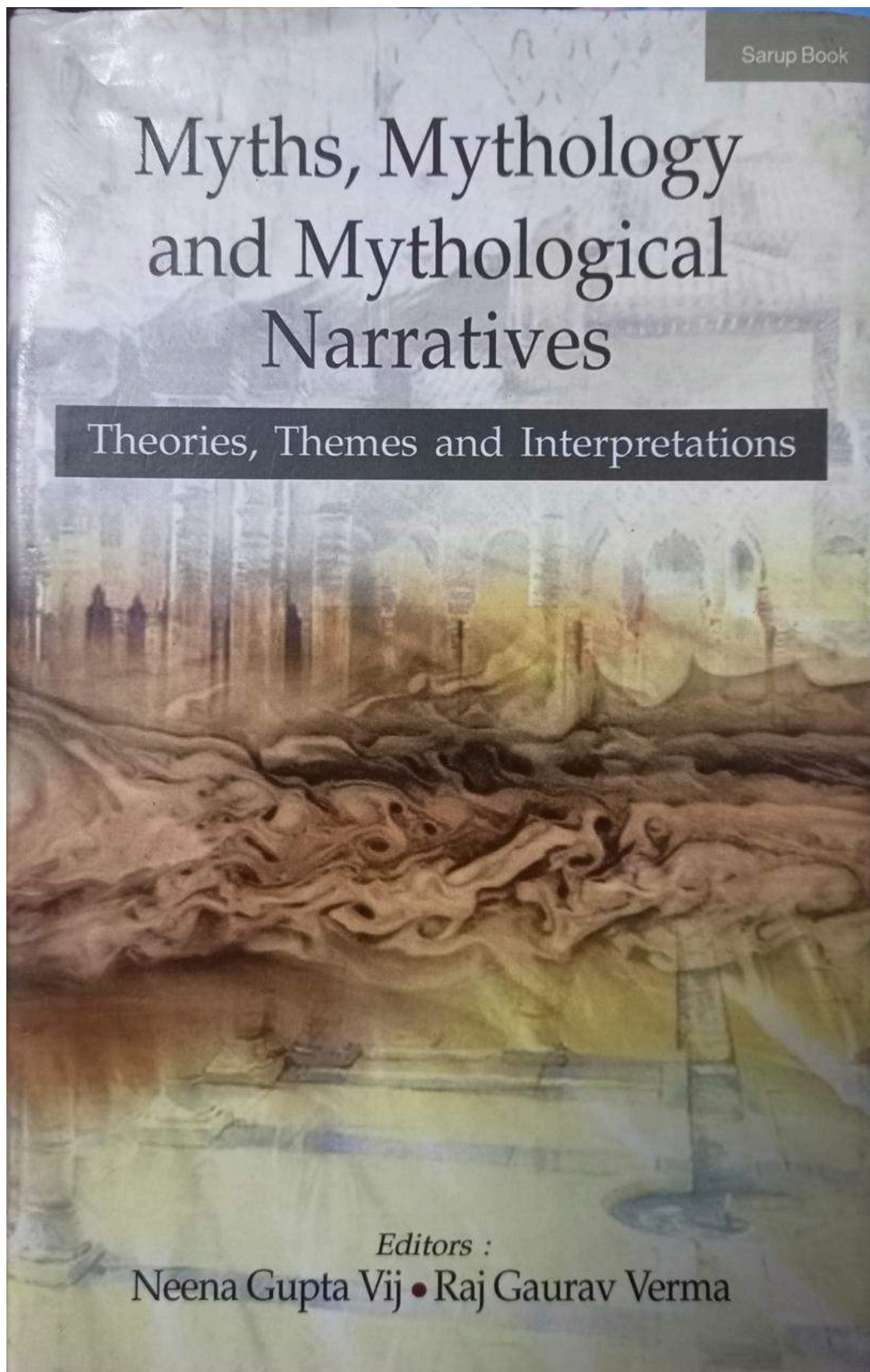
He is a student pursuing Bachelor's degree at the University of Lucknow. He has always been captivated by the power of words and gives utmost importance to philosophical inquiry.

Mythological Fiction

An Introduction



Editors :
Neena Gupta Vij • Raj Gaurav Verma
Vishakha Sen



Sarup Book

Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives

Theories, Themes and Interpretations

Editors :

Neena Gupta Vij • Raj Gaurav Verma

makes the texts available to larger readers across the languages making it easy to understand culture, society, language and myths.

It is noteworthy that Anupama Purohit in the book *Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives* has projected Krishna as a superhuman being. Through the lens of magical realism, she has presented Krishna as an iconic image of Vishwarupa. She talks about how the elements of magical realism in mythological fiction helped the authors to wrap the description of avatars as fantasy, but in modern times we use this tool to present a realistic picture.

Chetna has described the queerness in her paper called “Queerness Unveiled: A Select Study of Queer Identity in Indian Mythology”. She argues that queerness is not new in our society but it’s been there since old days. She says that the masses should understand that homosexuality is not a taboo, but a part of sexuality that exists around us. There are many references that she has given to show how homosexuality has been prevalent since the medieval period. Chetna has explored Queerness through four major texts written by Pattanaik; such as *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore*, *Shikhandi: And Other Tales They Don’t Tell You*, *Gender Fluidity in Hindi Mythology* and *Queerness in Indian Mythology*. These works challenge our understanding of gender and also give some obscure tales along with the familiar ones on queerness from Hindu mythology.

The chapter gives numerous fine examples of many people who disguised themselves as homosexuals. For example, Krishna dressed up as Radha, Indra disguised himself as Gautama, Chudala, wife of King Shikhidvaja took the form of a man and many more characters presented homosexuality through their roles. It is interesting to note that there are some popular stories of female-to-male transformation from Hindu mythology. The book “*Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives*” discusses female-to-male transformation and the idea of bisexuality. Through these stories and narratives, the authors have shown the reality of those people who are non-heterosexual, thereby making up for a lack of their voice and acceptance of their sexual identity because of a conservative mindset in India on sexuality.

Aritra Basu in her chapter “Is Reading Gendered? Analyzing Gender Representation in Indian Hindu Mythology” argues how gender bias is represented in both epics, The Mahabharata and The Ramayana. Women were not allowed to do work through which they could create their own identity in society. The authors have not only critically analysed the gender bias here but also the aspects of male domination in Hindu mythology.

There are many more writings which show gender biases. In his paper called “Different Tales, Common Fate: Shades of Womanhood in the Ramayana”, Raj Kumar Singh highlights the condition of women by analyzing the character of Sita. He points out that women have continuously been facing societal challenges because of the male-dominated society. They’re always seduced and discriminated against in the society. Although he touched on almost all aspects of womanhood to represent how women have strongly played an important role in the Ramayana and how men are responsible for women’s condition where they feel abandoned and separated from society, while reading his paper, I felt that not only men but to some extent women are also responsible for women’s suffering.

Partha Sarthi in the chapter entitled “The Ramayana to its Retellings: Shaping India as a Nation” where we can see the idea of nationalism and unity. Through the mythological narratives, he has shown how our epic stories are connected from one generation to the other, and how these texts beautifully generated the idea of the oneness of territory and commonness of culture.

“Myths, Mythology and Disability: An Indian Perspective” by Priya Sharma explores disability which is perceived as a taboo in Indian society. In her chapter, she is trying to break the stereotypes of disability by presenting many characters from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. She points out that people with disability face many challenges and problems due to their body differences. Society should understand them and try to eradicate their differences.

Amrit Mishra’s chapter “Deep Trivedi’s I am Krishna: An Existential Enquiry into Mythology” is about existential ethics. It also presents Krishna as a simple human being who belongs to the village folk and is not ready to give up in any condition. Amrit Mishra talks about human desires and says that human life is all about the fulfilment of human desires by exploring Krishna’s character.

Mythological Fiction: An Introduction explores Sanjay Patel’s works showing us how he has used mythology to reflect multiple cultures and hybrid identities in his works. Sanjay Patel, who is a UK-born Indian American animator and illustrator, has brilliantly depicted mythology in colourful and appealing images in his movies. Traditional mythological narratives of most of Patel’s writings have been shown in the book in such a way that today’s audience can relate to and understand them. In his paper “Hindu- American Superheroes: The Works of Sanjay Patel”

Andrew Wright has also highlighted human virtues through various universal themes of Patel's works.

Along with mythology, the book is enriched with different cultures, human traits, principles and languages of India through various characters from both epics- The Mahabharata and The Ramayana. First chapter "The Novel and the Epic: Reading Indian Mythological Fiction" briefly touches on all the important Indian novels and epics from the ancient to modern era which are necessary to understand the history of Indian writings in English.

Ipsita Deb in her paper "Re-Telling History: A Study of Saiswaroopaa Iyer's Draupadi: The Tale of An Empress " has not only described Draupadi as an autonomous being but also portrayed many female characters like Kunti, Rukmani and Uttara in a way in which women are capable in today's time not only to fight for their rights but to make decisions for themselves as well. She points out three of Draupadi's choices so that we can analyse the greatness of Draupadi's character. In the chapter, Draupadi is shown as actively participating and organising all of her father's political debates. She is portrayed as a princess who is aware of the political intrigues surrounding her marriage rather than as a helpless victim.

The chapter "Revisiting Ramayana by Rewriting Ravana: A Study of Amish Tripathi's Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta" of *Mythological Fiction: An Introduction* reminds me of the main character - Satan of Paradise Lost by John Milton where he was depicted as a villain because he always tries to create difficulties for human beings. Similarly the chapter "Revisiting Ramayana by Rewriting Ravana: A Study of Amish Tripathi's Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta" also points out that Ravana is not a proper villain of the epic Ramayana but he became an enemy because of his circumstances. He became an anti-hero because of his experiences of childhood trauma, discrimination, hatred, and unconquered love of Vedavati. The same chapter presents Ravana as a character representing the ambiguity of dharma and evil. It interestingly emphasises the key elements of the Ramayana tradition by telling Ravana's story from both perspectives.

Ankita Ananya has discussed Yayati's conflict between individual human desire and universal social norms in her chapter called "Hero or Villain: Revisiting the Myth in V. S. Khandekar's Yayati". She has described human conflict in a very linear way through the character of Yayati. She states that man always keeps running after pleasure and desires due to which he is responsible for his own downfall. He is afraid to face the truth like Yayati, who is

unable to accept his advancing age and death which he later regrets deeply. The chapter “Amish Tripathi’s Shiva Trilogy: A Study in Mythological – Ecologism” highlights the importance of nature and complains that our progress of society or the world is only the evil of this nature. Nature is used for our advancement and development which is why there is a need for spiritual awareness and for rejecting the material desire to develop human nature bond in a better way.

The last chapter of the book “Mythological Fictions in India: Carving a Feminist Space” shows that many female characters have not been discussed properly in the earlier writings because they have been written from the male perspective and due to the male-dominated society, their problems were presented and explained in different ways. He has given some names of female writers in his chapter who defined the conditions and problems of minor female characters very well through mythological fiction.

To conclude, both books *Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives: Theories, Themes and Interpretations* and *Mythological Fiction: An Introduction*, explore the concept of mythological fiction which talks about the growth of not only main characters but also the minor and marginalized ones. Each chapter of the two books is thoughtfully structured which explores deeper aspects of human nature. Both books are written in a very captivating manner with good characterization and both explore mythological characters.

One of the best aspects of the book *Mythological Fiction: An Introduction* is that it has deep significance in Indian mythology. Colours represent many Indian Gods and spiritual paths, and all-inclusiveness. Temple architecture reflects culture and tradition and the book *Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives* features a temple and water on its cover page. White colour represents calmness, brightness and truth and yellow represents the earth and sand.

The books are highly useful to those who wish to get a clearer understanding of mythological narratives. The way all the authors have presented Indian mythology is very engaging and the language they have used is simple and easy to understand. I strongly recommend these books to all those who enjoy Indian mythology.

About the reviewer:



Karishma Bharti is a research scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. She is pursuing her PhD under the supervision of Dr. Mohd. Tariq. Her areas of interest include gender and sexuality, Queer Studies, Aesthetic Literature, Non-fiction Writing, and Indian Writing. She is naturally drawn to nature, and enjoys rain, walking on grass and snowy mountains. Her love and enthusiasm for romantic and inspirational poetry is boundless.

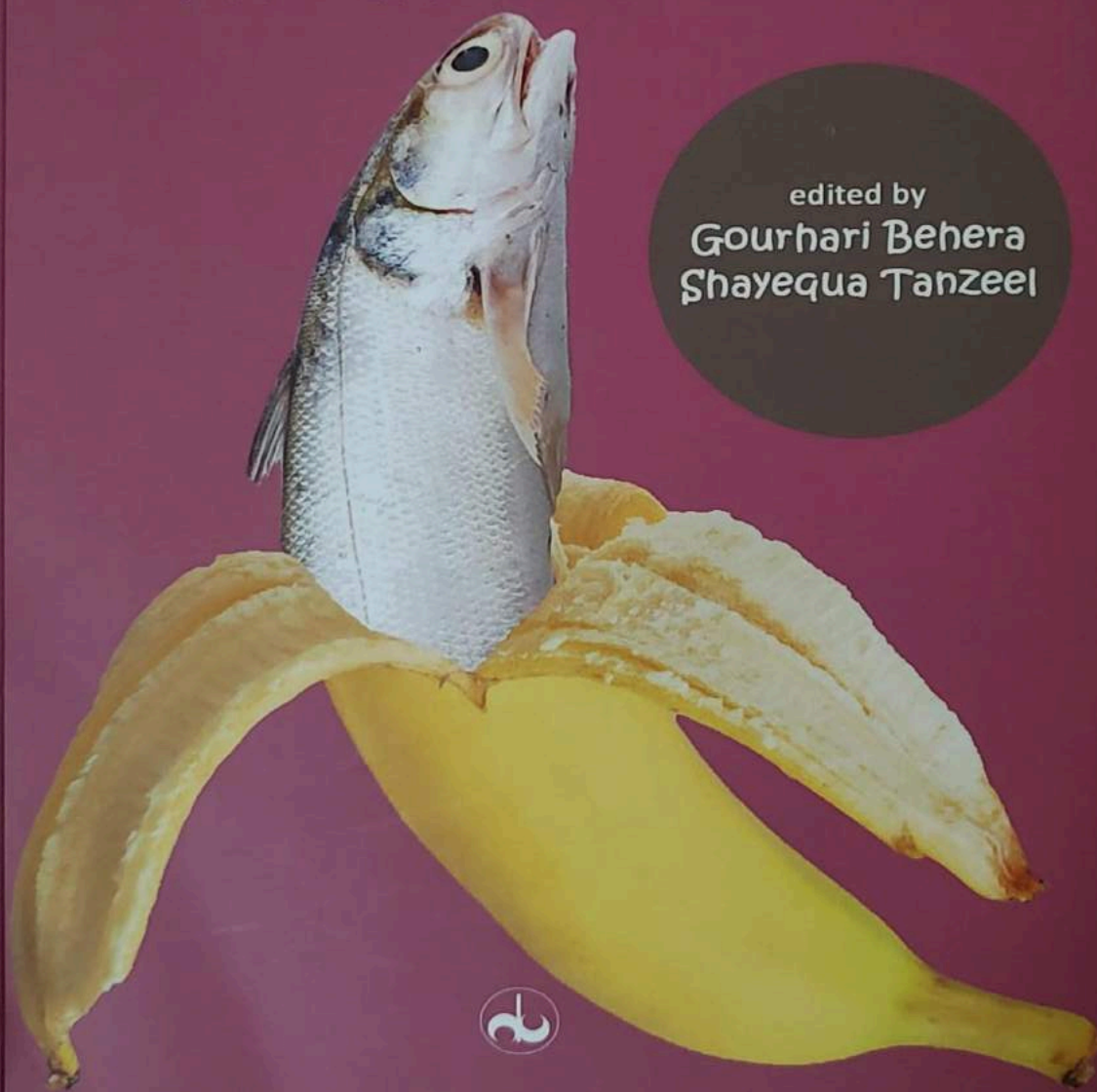
DIVERSITY LOVE TOGETHER EQUALITY RACE PEACE GENDER JUSTICE RESPECT LOVE TOGETHER EMBRACEMENT

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LITERATURE across MEDIUMS

the aesthetics and politics
of medial boundary crossing

edited by
Gourhari Behera
Shayequa Tanzeel



DIVERSITY LOVE TOGETHER EQUALITY RACE PEACE GENDER JUSTICE RESPECT

***Literature across Mediums: The Aesthetics and Politics of Medial
Boundary Crossing***

Edited by Gourhari Behera and Shayequa Tanzeel

Published by Dhauli Books (2023)

Price: 495/-

ISBN: 978-81-959411-24

Language: English, pp. 167

-Aqsa Eram

Intermediality in literature can be seen as the study of its movement from one medium to another. *Literature across Mediums: The Aesthetics and Politics of Medial Boundary Crossing* is a collection of essays that seeks to explore the manifold relationship of literature with other forms of media. The editors Prof. Gourhari Behera and Dr. Shayequa Tanzeel, affiliated with the Department of English, DDU Gorakhpur University, see the transgression of medial boundaries as intermediality, wherein literature combines, adapts, incorporates or refers to other mediums. The edited collection of nine essays brings together contributors and their ideas originating from the national seminar held at the Department of English, Gorakhpur University in 2019, titled “Literature Across Mediums”. The cover page is immediately striking to the reader and conveys what to expect in the book wonderfully.

The essays compiled focus on various subjects and cover a wide array of mediums, such as cinema, music, dance and graphic novels. They can be broadly divided into two sections based on their intermedial relations: one, intermedial adaptation, and two, the combination of media. There are four essays in the book which discuss the adaptation and transference from a medium like text to cinema. The essay titled ‘The Photograph and the Filmic Images: Subhas Chandra

Bose in Shyam Benegal's *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero and Other Cinematic Representations* by Mohammad Asim Siddiqui depicts how the appropriation of political figures of India such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi or Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose has continually been performed over the years. Reading it as an exchange or intersection of medial boundaries, Siddiqui highlights how the historical persona of Bose has been adapted by Shyam Benegal. Almost forgotten in Hindi cinema, Benegal brings him back to life cinematically through his personal and political ideology. A similar aspect of film-making has been examined by Khusi Pattanayak in her essay "Mischief Managed": Role of Rowling in the Reels of Potter.' She analyses the immense role and creative control of J.K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter book series, in creating the film series. She highlights the adaptability and transferability from the medium of book to cinema. 'Junoon's Anglo-Indian Connection' by Sarvajit Mukerji examines another adaptation from text to cinema, of Ruskin Bond's *A Flight of Pigeons to Junoon*. This film is also directed by Shyam Benegal. The essay says that the cinematic interpretation of the text takes on a feminist slant, redeeming the figure of the Anglo-Indian woman. Chayan Dutta and Sunita Murmu also present a study of the cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare into 'Zulfiqar' as a recreated text set in Kolkata's political landscape in their essay "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold": Decoding Shakespeare in Srijit Mukherji's *Zulfiqar – An Introspective Disclosure to the Contemporary Socio-Cultural Politics*.'

The remaining five essays of the collection can be categorised as the exploration of combined mediums. The essay titled 'Gesture in Sacco's Palestine: Affective Trauma and Human Rights Advocacy' by Beerendra Pandey is an engrossing study of how Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine* uses gestures as a form of resistance and depicts human experience to affect the reader/viewer's humanist sentiments. Another study of the visual and performative medium is Manju V. Vallath's 'Kathakali Othello: Shakespeare in Kerala Tradition.' It elaborates on the methodology of the adaptation of Shakespeare's drama *Othello* by Balakrishnan into a performance of Kathakali. Shayequa Tanzeel's essay 'Adaptation of the Myth of Orpheus and Remediation of Rock Music in The Ground Beneath Her Feet' explores how Salman Rushdie adapts the Greek-Roman myth of Orpheus to Indian mythological traditions in the novel and attempts to appropriate and represent rock music in the literary medium. Babitha Justin examines a series of artistic works depicting epidemics and pandemics in her essay 'The History of Pandemic Art' to show how during the Covid pandemic, digital spaces were used to express

anxieties through art. Finally, and most importantly, Anjita Singh in her essay ‘The Consummate Artist: A Study of Intermediality in the Works of William Blake’ has wonderfully explored William Blake as a poet-painter who was not limited to any specific artistic medium, exemplifying his vision through intermedial or transmedial means.

Literature Across Mediums is an excellent introduction to the idea of intermediality, especially in the Indian or postcolonial context, for the readers, students and scholars of English literature. It provides a great insight into a comprehensive range of topics, giving impetus to question and investigate more such instances of transgressions of medial boundaries, whether it is adaptations influenced by greater ideological visions or an amalgamation of different artistic mediums existing homogeneously.

About the reviewer:



Aqsa Eram is a PhD scholar at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her interests lie in the areas of Gothic Literature, Literary Theory and Popular Literature.

The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2022

Edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Vinita Agrawal

Published by Hawakal Publishers (2022)

Price: INR 700/-

ISBN: 978-81-960065-9-4

Language: English, pp. 262

-Akanksha Pandey

The *Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English* is the third volume of the Yearbook series by Hawakal Publishers that got published in June 2022. It is a compilation of poems published in a spectrum of journals, magazines and books both national and international. It highlights quality poetry in English by Indian Poets and the Indian Diaspora which are unconventional in both form and content. However, it respects the distinctive legacy of older poets of this strata. As it is stated in the anthology itself - “The aim of the series is to present quality poems in English published in India and abroad. It is hoped that the exercise of bringing out such anthologies will eventually prove to be a fertile ground for establishing the aesthetics of Indian poetry in English.”

The first poem by Abhay K itself throws us into the bitter reality of life – “We are the angry men / we are the confused men.” It resonates with T.S, Eliot’s “The hollow men.” Continuing with the tone is Adithya Patil’s ghazal in English – “The last sky goes saffron before it bursts dark/ Come, now, study the holocaust from the start.” Then there is Anil Petwal spitting out more truth such as stating the reason of the forthcoming holocaust- “The miracles of Gods in apocryphal folklores/ flatter the innocents in the streets/hierarchies are Ponzi schemes/ meant to fool the ones at the bottom of the ladder.” The emotional turmoil is very well conveyed by Anjali Purohit – “The person you left behind lies buried/ under centuries of igneous rock left/to fend for herself with a cardboard sword”. Jaydeep Sarangi writes “Darkness has a voice, mysterious

whispers/ you call, my desire has an evening, our moods match.” The poems are diverse in theme and structure and have to offer a lot that is relevant to contemporary times. It is noteworthy that the anthology has Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca’s poem ‘Poet,Lover,Birdwatcher’ too whose title is purposely the same as Nissim Ezekiel’s poem but it offers a fresh perspective. It talks about the heartfelt experience involved in taking pictures of the aerial species and serves as a message for all those who love to take photographs of nature- “The hunt for a good picture of birds and butterflies/is an exercise in pure love”. Then with this hint of pure love is also Ranu Uniyal’s Kindness, a trait so necessary but easily forgotten in today’s times. It provides the hope to rise as a phoenix. “Kindness is a virtue: unfazed but wise/Abandon it, devalue it/It would still, rise.

Sudeep Sen’s words reach straight to the heart of the diaspora when he says – “Engineered within their histories/of migration, travel-over land, by sea- coping with life’s mechanised emptiness.” There is a remarkable Haiku by Suresh Babu and Utsat Sethi. Vivek Narayanan writes about the brave protesters of Shaheen Bagh in the bone chilling winter and also provides a translation for Padma Narayanan titled as “Maitreem Bhajata”. Last but not the least are the poems by the editors Sukrita and Vinita Agrawal. The book has a section titled ‘Beacon Lights’ with the legendary poet Jayanta Mahatapatra’s ‘Playing the magician’ – “Sunday, when I thought I was accountable for myself/ Was a dying within myself for the sorrows / I suffered for the world that wasn’t with me enough?” The book concludes with a shraddhanjali section for paying a tribute to distinguished poets who are no longer with us. There is also an introduction of all the poets at the end of the book.

This is a book where poetry exists for poetry’s sake alone. The essence of the series lies in the distinctive and peculiar features of Indian poetry in English that soars high in the vast skies of heterogeneity, innovation and craftsmanship. Form and content both are mesmerising. All the poems have a universal theme and this adds to the anthology’s grandeur. It has a cover design by Bitan Chakraborty with leaves dancing to the wind just like the poetry in this compilation fills the heart of the readers with freshness, greenery and souls dancing with ecstasy on the beat of these dignified poets’ words. The font is legible and big enough. The book has an aesthetic experience inherent in it. It can be devoured bit by bit, poem by poem, or all at once. *The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2022* is a strong recommendation to anyone who wants to taste the flavours of India with a tint of contemporariness and who wants to explore the ancestral

legacy of Indian poets. It is a classic read for all types of readers, new or old to poetry. The Yearbook series is clearly a fertile land for Indian poets to mark their territory and treat for anyone who loves to read.

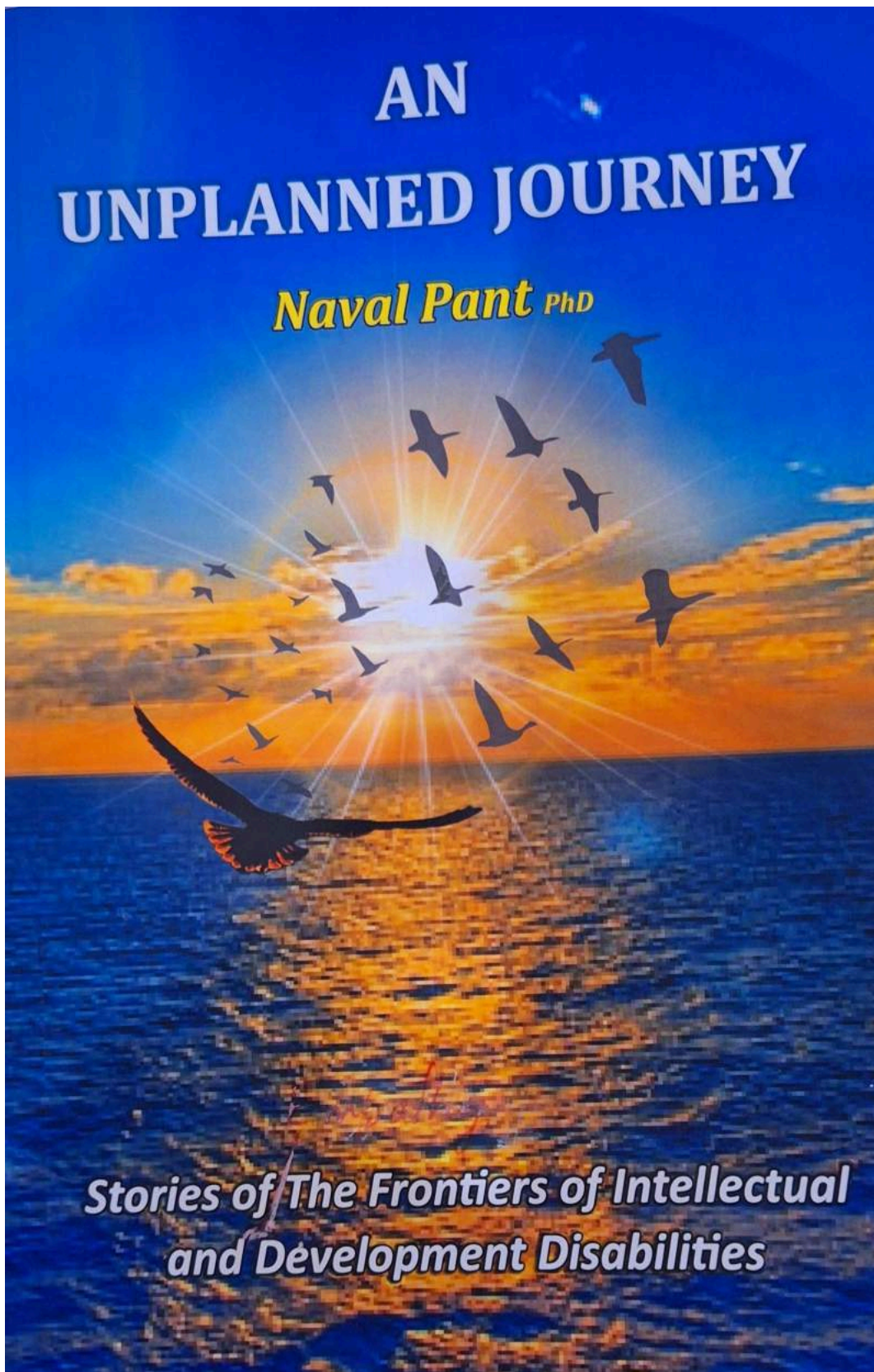
About the reviewer:



Akanksha Pandey is a PhD Scholar at the University of Lucknow. She follows her dreams and instincts. She is in love with the unfathomable beauty of nature and the enchantment of books and music.

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boy with the “Buddha Smile”, whose resilience and defiance against all odds and hurdles life threw at him, is evocative and reinstates faith in the Supreme Being. Moko’s story not only makes you feel the fears and pains of the parents but also gives hope to look for happiness in the most simple things of life. The narration takes you along the intimate highs and lows of the family's life where one inadvertently becomes a part of their story and reciprocates their emotions.

The transformative tale of ‘Manas- The Bal Hanuman’ is a funny nostalgia shared by Naval, where patience, compassion and above all ‘love’ became the key factors in helping shape the future of Manas. The persistent and tenacious efforts the educators showed at PYSSUM Day care in helping ‘Tanu the Princess’ achieve what seemed to be an impossible task, is a reflection of what it takes to be the giver in a society. The stories of Puja, Disha and Srikant come as a necessary reminder that one might face glitches and disappointments in the journey of healing and growth. No mission comes without challenges and no matter how hard one tries, the opportunities elude one. ‘Yogesh, the Angel from the Garbage Can’ becomes the quintessential story of the goodness lodged in humankind. It is inspirational and imparts strength to those who fail to understand that paths do change. The story of Yogesh from sleeping on a garbage can in some village to being an active participant in the vocational training offered by PYSSUM is proof that good samaritans like Amulya exist who took Yogesh under his wing and made him reach the right place. The story ‘Imtiyaz, the Skilful’ is a story of one such young boy who is punctual to the core and a perfectionist. He secures a salaried job at PYSSUM through his skill at making neat and perfect envelopes, giving a big boo to all the detractors who never might have believed that he could achieve what he did. His tale also offers reflection on the harmonious existence of two faiths in the nation where both are guided by the divine force to seek smooth solutions in the wake of shared interests.

All the stories have one thing in common-the protagonists are differently abled whom the writer addressed as “Angels”. The narration reads personal and highlights the writer's perspective. Despite it being the first hand account of all the stories, it is emotionally balanced. Humble undertones and modest baring of the heart on the part of Naval empowers the narration to be more authentic. The writing style is simple yet vividly descriptive. The stories cajole you to enter the world of these Angels and with every story you are left with a message. The recollections look sharp and the flow of thoughts seems to be unwavering. Lucid diction and

untranslated Hindi words add a personal touch to the retellings. Chapter 15 of the book takes the readers to the supporting framework, backstory, ideas and goals behind the success of these stories. There are photos from the events organised and participated in, by these young and bright minds. A poetic delight awaits the readers on the back cover of the book for which one must pick a copy of the same for sure.

The metaphor in the eponymous story stands for the unexpected turn in the journey of the parents of these angels and their realisation of being on a different path than the rest. This collection captures the anxiety and fear of those who experience this change of route for the first time with almost no prior knowledge. Naval has traced the intricate trajectory of the lives of the involved parents starting from denial, blame, anger, self-flagellation, guilt and ultimately fear and depression of traversing an unknown territory. The stories reinforce the idea that acceptance only comes gradually and time gives way to more empathy and compassion. Through grit, perseverance and support from family and friends, one can gain a huge reserve of strength that one never knew existed. Somewhere between “total denial” and “unrealistic hope”, life finds its way.

About the reviewer:



Maziah Shaaz is pursuing a PhD degree from the Department of English, University of Lucknow. She's a gastronome and Potterhead and enjoys watching psychological thrillers. She loves to read and wishes to go on a solo trip around the country.



The Ballad of the Warrior Girl

KUYILI

by Vanavil K.Ravi



The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili

Written by Vanavil K. Ravi

Published by Nivethitha Pathippagam (2022)

Price: Rs. 90/-

ISBN: 978-93-91614-16-4

Language: English, pp. 94

-Geyata Sharma

“If there is light in the heart, there would be light in the words uttered.” The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili by Vanavil K. Ravi demonstrates the same light of bravery to the readers. The work talks about the unsung woman warrior Kuyili who is known as the army commander of Queen Velu Nachiyar. Her fights against the British trading enterprise, popularly known by the name of East India Company, is notable and plays an important part in the history of India.

“It takes a great amount of history to produce a little literature...”, and Vanavil Ravi is successful in bringing out the elements of literature through this story of Tamil history. His works in Tamil and English are highly appreciated. According to Prof. K. A. Raja Ram, “Vanavil's works richly deserve all the prizes for literature including the Nobel Prize.” *The Ballad of the Warrior Girl Kuyili* is an outstanding piece of poetry and literature. The book's first edition was released in 2022 and is published by the Tamil Nadu Publishing House of Nivethitha Pathippagam. It will be improper to judge the book by the cover because the cover showcases just one aspect of the tales of the brave warrior Kuyili. The book of 94 pages, 15 cantos and innumerable moments of courage by Kuyili is a must read. The International Conference on 24th January, 2021 appeals to the textbook committees and the Government of Tamil Nadu to prescribe such books of Venavil Ravi as a part of curriculum for students.

The ballad is a thrilling experience from the start and becomes sensitive by the end. “...brutality with all their might. She stood her ground firmly. They beheaded her at last. Chivalry would thus become...a thing of the past.” The work has excellently used both the poetic and prose form of language. To unfold the mystery of the first suicide bomber and the first Woman Martyr has been an outstanding task done by the author, Vanavil K. Ravi.

The Ballad of The Warrior Girl Kuyili satisfies the readers’ minds and their hearts. It is a fine combination of words and rhyme schemes. The words bring out the figure of a female warrior and also paints a picture of the beautiful nature, dark forests, wicked men and our freedom fighter, Kuyili.

“Victory to Kali, Victory to Durga, Victory to Shivganga! Freedom to all, Freedom to all, Freedom to one and all! By the grace of God, We have broken the British wall!” This poem talks of our past, present and future in the most beautiful and precise manner and is one of the best works in contemporary poetry. It can be called the best feminist ballad by a man of the 21st century.

About the reviewer:



Geyata Sharma is a postgraduate student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages at the University of Lucknow. She loves reading Urdu poems and also likes to write in English. Geyata envisions herself as a sweet and helpful teacher in the future who motivates her students to do their best.

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Vibrant Voices: An Anthology of 21st Century Indian Women

Poets

Edited by Seema Jain

Published by Sahitya Akademi (2022)

Price: Rs.300/-

ISBN:978-93-5548-389-8

Language: English, pp. 236

-Vedamini Vikram

Vibrant Voices is an anthology of poems written by contemporary Indian women poets. Published in 2022, it captures and represents the vast range and depth of human experience in present times. While the perspectives in the poems remain strongly grounded in various perceptions of identity, the words 'Indian' and 'Women' have opened up immensely. A singular, common meaning cannot be attached to these terms. The poems are at once global, spiritual, existential, and the experience of being a woman is not tied down to repression or suffering alone. Additionally, the anthology includes poems by writers from the Indian diaspora and those based in India. The contributions come from both young and seasoned poets, established and emerging, reflecting the dynamic landscape of contemporary Indian poetry by women.

The book begins with a quote from Kamala Das, and the editorial introduces influential Indian women poets like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, and Kamala Das, who made their mark in a male-dominated genre. Placing the anthology in this context, Editor Seema Jain bridges the old and new, aiming to trace changes in women's poetry in the twenty-first century. The anthology acknowledges earlier women poets and seamlessly incorporates the works of new poets, placing them in the same tradition. However, the postmodern landscape is different, reflecting socio-cultural changes. More women now write, breaking the notion of being a minority; it's an

established cannon or rather a dissolution of cannons, disrupting traditional norms. While it may touch upon gender experiences, poetry itself is no longer confined by gender; it is unique and vast.

The comprehensive editorial organises poems into thematically similar sections. Jain identifies common undercurrents in certain poems, classifying them accordingly, including themes like Mythology, Intertextuality, Maternity, and Nostalgia. The detailed editorial discusses these aspects and provides various examples. However, there is merit in examining not just thematic similarities but also stark contrasts. Each poem is unique, approaching the same subjects differently. For instance, in Kumud Bala's poem, 'A Solitary Woman,' the portrayal of a woman alone is one of hope:

“Don't think of her as alone
 She may have been abandoned
 Her journey has just begun.
 Earth, sky, sun and moon
 All are alone
 ...She prepares herself for the future
 She has to cross miles and miles
 In the journey of her solitary life.”

A woman alone is no longer seen as sad or vulnerable; it becomes a hopeful scenario with much to accomplish. Conversely, in Malashri Lal's 'Swinging in Sawan Rain,' suffering and repression persist, painting a bleak picture of loneliness in the present. Patriarchy is depicted through the powerful metaphor of a swing that separates aspirations of freedom from reality:

“She lightly touches the ground with her toes
 And swings higher, gazing at the sky
 Dreaming of flying away from the jhoola
 Truly free
 But she has no wings
 And the jhoola swing
 Is placed in the pleasure garden by his command.
 Her body possessed by him
 Her mind rebellious yet tethered

By time and tradition.”

These differences are evident throughout the collection, spanning a diverse range of emotions and worldviews. Longings akin to fairytales coexist with strong, aggressive, and rebellious stances. This explores the many moods, dimensions, complexities and ironies of human experience. The sheer variety in women's experiences, as depicted in the anthology, authentically and fearlessly captures real, diverse, and multifaceted history. The poems offer honest portrayals, unencumbered by overarching narratives.

The poets demonstrate a keen observance, transporting readers into intimate experiences with glimpses of deeply personal moments presented vividly. In Chanchal Sarin's 'Weaving Destiny,' the poet draws parallels between a spider web in an old tree in Delhi and her inner thoughts, linking the scene to the afterlife and spiritual mastery of weaving. Similarly, Alka Tyagi's 'Mighty Long Embrace' vividly depicts the act of stitching a button onto a shirt as an encounter with infinity. The collection showcases a richness of perspective, sensory feeling, observation, and sensibility. Some poems stand out for their stylistic and technical differences, adding another layer of meaning. Hema Ravi's 'Footfall Galore,' for instance, comments on different individuals lacking depth by skillfully describing the sound, weight, and gait of their footsteps.

Life is explored from so many angles and lenses, and it is so closely observed and honestly crafted that if the genre is liberated from power politics, cannons, or hegemony, a genuinely honest and real picture of the times can emerge. This book serves as a segue from the old to the new, transitioning from the struggle of breaking up canons to their dissolution and the freedom of hearing a million voices.

The collection is also a blend of a young and fresh perspective as well as an old one. Even the images vary from fresh and new to changing and nostalgic. For instance, Kadavakollu Tejaswini's 'The Guy Next Door' tells a modern-age love story, incorporating themes of city migration, and long-distance relationships during the COVID pandemic with images of earphones and motorcycles. On the other hand, Kavita Mendonca speaks of black and white TVs and old transistors in her recollection of her homeland India in 'Those Bombay Sundays.'

The poems prompt contemplation on the female gaze being more holistic, with a wider and more empathic range of vision. Some poems comment on the futility of war, as seen in Gulnar Raheem Khan's 'Who's the Winner?' where the poet speaks in the male voice of a soldier, questioning notions of bravery and manliness, contemplating the worth of dying for pride

or power. Other poems with political commentary are also holistic, addressing global unity, helping neighbours and refugees, and observing economic divides. Manjula Mahanti's 'Love and Care,' portrays an underprivileged bouquet seller as a more profound lover of art, displaying greater receptivity and sensitivity to nature than his privileged customers. Notably, Meenakshi Mohan's 'Ruined Glory' reflects on old patriarchs growing old and powerless, offering a sympathetic perspective. Particularly noteworthy is Anita Nahal's 'What's Wrong with Us Kali Women.' This prose poem stands out as one of the most powerful pieces in the anthology, addressing racial and gender prejudices. Simultaneously, it provides the perspective of the 'Kali women,' embracing a refreshingly egalitarian, accepting, progressive, and evolved stance: "There's nothing wrong. Nothing wrong. That's your fear labelling us. We are the Kali women. And all other female, male, and androgynous gods. We don't distinguish. We seek. We learn. Comprehend. Embrace."

Family remains a central theme in the anthology, yet it unfolds through a diverse range of perspectives. The exploration of motherhood and marriage is approached with creative ingenuity, employing various poetic techniques, forms, images, and viewpoints. In Laksmisree Banerjee's 'Of Mother and Trees,' her mother is likened to Anne Frank, drawing parallels between women of the past—whether distant historical figures or her own mother—who lived and died with unfulfilled dreams. Arundhati Subramaniam's 'When Landscape Becomes Woman' delves into a pivotal moment when the poet realises her mother is more than a familiar body. Peering through a keyhole at her mother in a grown-up party, she observes sensuous beauty and a subconscious yet intentional seduction in her ways. This portrayal emphasises that mothers are also women, individuals with their own needs.

Ranu Uniyal's 'I Owe an Apology to Mom' eloquently captures the sense of security one feels with a mother and how it gradually fades as individuals grow into their own. The poem delves into the sacrifices mothers make, ensuring their children have certainty or 'grass' beneath their feet. Through the vivid imagery of grass being stripped away by night birds, the poem metaphorically illustrates the erosion of certainty, with the poet unable to sustain the same hope her mother provided. Additionally, it draws a connection between her ability to write as a poet and her mother's reassurance. The poet finds herself unable to write once that shelter is gone, confronting the harsh reality of the world through her own eyes.

Pramila Venkateswaran's 'A Lamp in the Dark' paints a solemn picture of a bride getting ready for her wedding day. The mood of the poem is dark, as if she is getting ready for death. Seema Jain's 'Why My Lord! The Duchess to the Duke' is a response poem to Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess,' where she highlights the weight of a whole family name thrust upon a newlywed bride and her struggles as she deals with the misogynistic duke. It ends with hope that the duke's reckoning will be carried out by a more aware and just posterity.

Vibrant Voices emerges as a significant and timely contribution to contemporary Indian poetry, illuminating the diverse and dynamic landscape of women's voices. The poems skillfully navigate the complexities of identity, transcending traditional definitions. Editor Seema Jain's contextualization, drawing from the legacies of previous poets, establishes a nuanced bridge between the past and present. The thematic and stylistic prowess of the poems, coupled with the editor's insightful commentary, reveals a profound engagement with eclectic yet relatable themes. Notably, the anthology's strength lies in its recognition of both thematic coherence and individual uniqueness, emphasising at once the solidarity as well as heterogeneity in contemporary women's experiences.

About the reviewer:



Vedamini Vikram is a research student currently pursuing her PhD in English from the University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest include Mysticism, Performance Studies, Travel Literature and Indigenous Literatures.

THE FEMALE IMAGINATION IN 21ST CENTURY

Indian Texts and Contexts



Edited by

R.B. Sharma • Stuti Khare

The Female Imagination in 21st Century:

Indian Texts and Contexts

Edited by R.B. Sharma and Stuti Khare

Published by Pencraft International (2023)

Price: Rs 800/-

ISBN: 978-93-82178-42-2

Language:English, pp. 167

-Raj Gaurav Verma

The Female Imagination in 21st Century: Indian Texts and Contexts edited by R.B. Sharma and Stuti Khare, brings together fourteen articles from contributors from different literary perspectives. Assuming a postmodernist stand, it fixates on the idea of female participation in the creative space. The book proposes to look at the subversive potential of such participation and how it may influence women's hold in the socio-cultural, economic, and political sphere. It unravels the association between imagination and participation, the Imaginary and Symbolic, and social and literary structures.

Of particular importance is the introduction by the editors which aligns the readers with the twin approach emphasised by its vision of imagination and participation. It shows the expertise of Sharma and Khare in this venture on Imaginary, Symbolic and the real world. Their focus is on the identification of Imaginary, which is made up of the old and new knowledge systems influencing the social and cultural practices (9). They reflect on the female imaginary and the way it gets diffused in the normative patriarchal framework operating in all the realms of

human experience. They explain the constitution of the imagination through primary and secondary sources. While the “primary sources of the Imaginary are the creative energies of the individual, the secondary sources are the material conditions of existence” (10). They suggest that “exclusive zones of female experience” are complex as it is not only made up of female experience marked by suffering and violence, but sometimes go beyond the “known territories of human experience” (10). They refer to the possibility and scope of the Imaginary state and the way it can affect the symbolic and material conditions of female life, creativity, and imagination. They have discussed various literary genres that have been experimented with by female writers, like poetry, mythological fiction, science and speculative fiction, children’s literature, and theatre.

This book builds up a novel approach derived from feminist criticism and psychoanalytic theory. It creates an alternative insight into the female imagination marked by its paradox. In this line, Alok Kumar's article reads the role of Feminist participation in the "Neoliberal imaginary" and how it may surreptitiously aid Neoliberal postfeminism. Ranu Uniyal marks the Indian Women's participation in "poetic imaginary". She distinguishes the present Indian Women Writing from the previous phase, unsettling the established power dynamics marked with silence accosting the readers with otherwise hidden domesticity and unequal sexual relationships. She opines poetry paves a path for speaking silence.

Mariam Tariq Usmani unravels the journeys of disabled females in Indian cinema. Her article touches upon the participation of disabled females in "cinematic imaginary" which is particularly governed by its headstrong projections on bodily perfectionism and ableism. An article by Karishma Bisht unfurls the participation of female creativity with real-world struggles and bodily challenges in her study of Pramila Balasundaram's *Sunny's Story*. It opens about the people being affected by Down's Syndrome.

Adiba Faiyaz's article elaborates on female participation in "epic" and "mythic imaginary". Through her reading of Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantment*, she uncovers the tropes of autonomy and subjectivity exercised by the female characters in the novel. Similarly, Archana Gaur's article demonstrates female participation as a creative writer and in a creative space in the realm of retellings and mythological fiction. She focuses on the treatment of language as a medium of assertion of patriarchal power in Kavita Kane's *Sita's Sister* and *Ahalya's Awakening*.

Avishek Deb and Pinak Sankar Bhattacharya look at voicing the female participation in "female hygiene" and "tabooed imaginary". They have delineated the engagement of print, electronic, and social media in covering discussions on sanitary napkins and menstruation. Rohit Yadav in his article locates female participation in "theatrical and performative Imaginary" marking the paradox that women's plays are written not for reading but for staging. It highlights the restructuring and deconstructing of the normative patriarchal performative norms allowing fluidity in participation on stage and content.

Through her reading of Deepa Narayan's *Chup: Breaking the Silence*, Sumana Mukherjee marks the "cultural lag" existing in the superficial images of women empowerment and stereotypical structures operating under the surface in the name of cultural values and morality. K. C. Lalthlamuani and Lalrinsangi Nghinglova analyse Manu Kapoor's *Home*, explicating the zone of conflict existing between the inner and outer space in the lives of women. Priyanka Francis interprets Tasha Suri's *Empire of Sand* and *Realm of Ash* in the light of psychoanalytic theories of dream, memory, and fantasy and how they affect material human life. Ashima Sona talks about female participation in "diasporic imaginary" and transnational space, through her reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*. Anupriya Roy Srivastava's paper explores the interiors of India through her analysis of Manish Jha's movie *Matrabhoomi*. It discusses female oppression, female infanticide, and gender violence.

This book creates a dialogue between creative space and female voices, between participation and imagination. It will be a good read for students, scholars, and academicians working in the fields of feminist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and literary theory. It covers topics of varying range looking at such interdisciplinary intersections. It is a supplementary reader to understand the recent development in genres of science fiction, children's fiction, mythological fiction, theater, cinema, disability studies, and hygiene vis-à-vis female contributions to them.

About the reviewer:



Raj Gaurav Verma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. He has worked on children's literature in India in English. His areas of specialisation include Modern/ Postmodern Literature, Indian Literatures in English and Literature of the Diaspora. His published works include: *Diasporic Writings: Narratives across Space and Time*, *Indian Women Writings: Introduction to Select Texts*, *Reading Gandhi: Perspectives in the 21st Century*, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays on Life and Literature*, *Mythological Fiction: An Introduction*, and *Myths, Mythology and Mythological Narratives: Theories, Themes and Interpretations*. Currently he is interested in Travel Writing, Anthropocenic Literature, Plant Studies and Critical Animal Studies.

Understanding Disability: Interdisciplinary Critical Approaches

Edited by Ranu Uniyal and Fatima Rizvi

Published By: Springer Publications (2023)

Price: Rs. 9,447/-

ISBN: 978-9819949243

Language: English, pp. 450

-Nikita Yadav

Understanding Disability: Interdisciplinary Critical Approaches is a book edited by Prof. Ranu Uniyal and Prof. Fatima Rizvi. The book takes a deep dive into the topic of disability and aims to challenge the pre-existing notions about people with disabilities. The book also sheds light on how Disability Studies has become an emerging academic field that explores the meaning, nature, and consequences of disability in social, political, cultural, and historical experiences.

The work is divided into three sections: 'Disability and Empirical Experiences', 'Disability in Literature, Film and Theatre', and 'Dealing with Disability.' The first section aims to comprehensively understand disability as a lived experience, based on observation or personal experience. In one of the essays, Gaele Sabott, an Australian writer and the founder of a disabled-led arts company, emphasises the importance of disabled writers creating their niche in the writing world by drawing from their lived experiences, even if it does not resonate with the mainstream audience.

Disability is often viewed with pity and sometimes assumed to result from bad karma in past lives. However, disability is a medical condition that can lead to functional impairment, whether physical or cognitive. This collection aims to highlight that disability is just a part of an individual, not his entire identity. People with disabilities should not be limited to only

interacting with others who share their disability, rather they should be accepted as a society and have the same rights as citizens. The Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory, formulated by Prof. Wolf Wolfensberger in 1983, is still one of the most profound theories surrounding disability. SRV is about providing valuable roles and opportunities to oppressed or marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities. The essay ‘Social Role Valorization Theory in India: An Idea with Consequences’ by Elizabeth Neville, Percy Cardozo, Mitu De, and Raymond Lemay discusses inclusive practices as an initiative to improve the lives of people devalued by society.

In the second section of the book, the papers explore various aspects of disability through literature, films and theatre. While reading these papers, it becomes clear how art in any form can help able-bodied individuals connect with the challenges faced by people with disabilities in their daily lives. Literature and films play a vital role in introducing people with disabilities to ordinary people, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from the essay ‘From Narrative Prosthesis to Disability Counter Narrative: Reading Cognitive Differences in Aparna Sen’s Park Avenue’:

Cinema is perceived to be a powerful and effective medium that mirrors the realities of society. Despite getting mired between the real and the imaginary lives, it is an effective medium for entertaining people, instructing them, and helping to change their attitudes and behaviours.

The papers in the third section, ‘Dealing with Disability’ deal with the idea of holistic growth of people with disabilities and how it is only possible when the world we live in is accessible to them like it is to others. Everyone should have equal opportunities to grow and nurture their abilities. The book features diverse papers that portray people with disabilities through various perspectives. It delves into the inner world of people with disabilities through the lenses of researchers, social activists, and medical professionals. The book also covers the experiences of caregivers and family members of people with disabilities. By exploring the depth of disability beyond the surface level, this book offers a unique and original perspective. In one of the essays, ‘Hold Your Breath: Promoting Health for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities’, the writer uses the term “pagal bachchon ka school” to remind the reader of the associated stigma surrounding intellectual disabilities. Reading these papers may require processing a lot of new information and dismantling preconceived notions about disability to gain a new understanding. One of the insights discussed in the book is the intersection of

linguistics and disability. The book emphasises that there is no need to use terms like “specially abled” or “differently abled” to describe people with disabilities. The word "disability" should not carry negative connotations because people with disabilities do not want to be portrayed as victims. Instead, they need opportunities to explore their identities and independence.

I found the book to be well-organised and easy to comprehend, even though it covers some complex and medical aspects of disability. However, the only drawback is that the proposals mentioned in the book will remain confined to its pages unless they are implemented in real life. On the bright side, the book is available in a digital format that enables readers to keep track of any essay updates. By clicking on the Crossmark button, readers can quickly and easily access the current status of an essay, along with any corrections, retractions, or updates to that record.

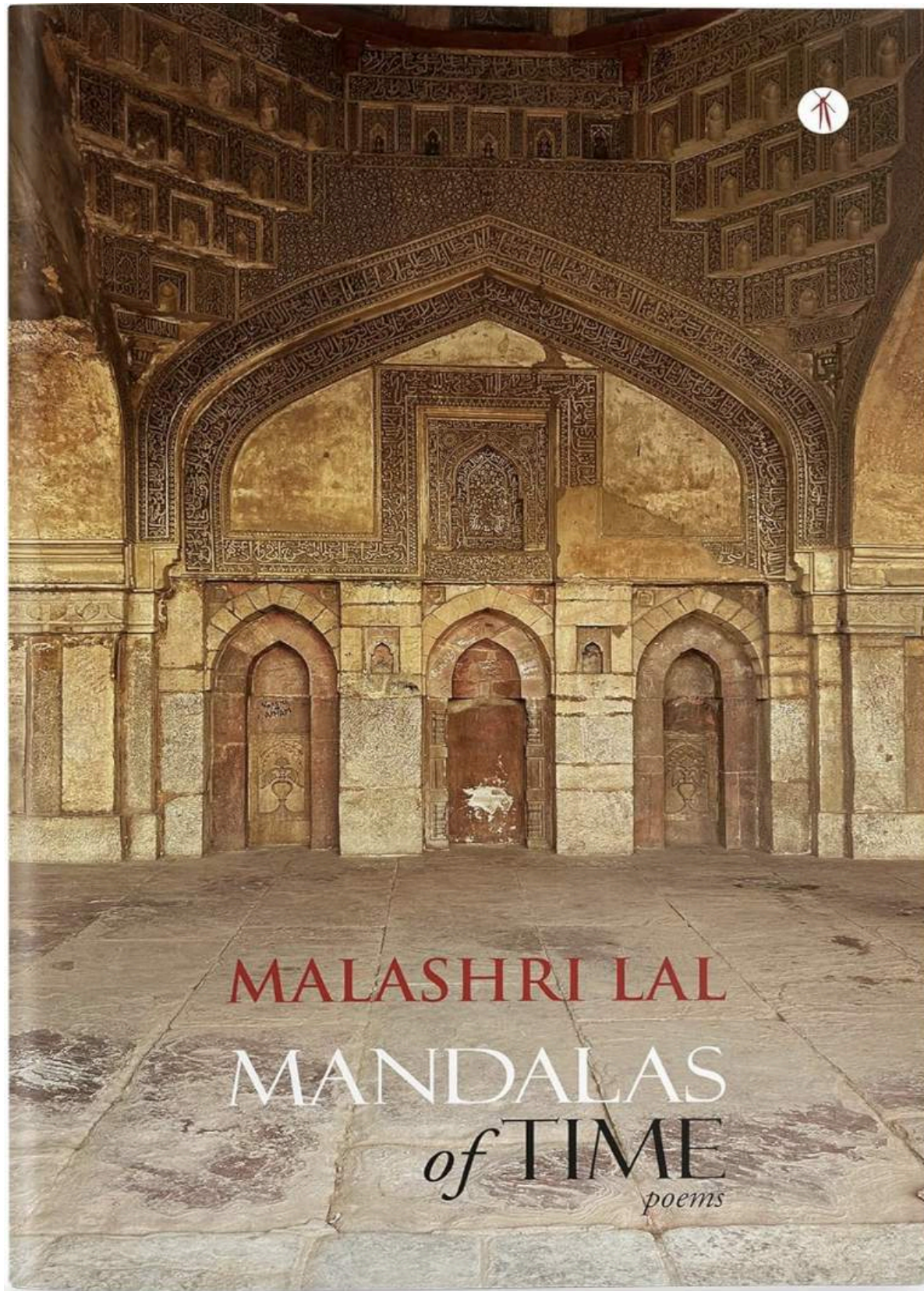
About the reviewer:



Nikita Yadav is a believer and researcher. Her areas of interest include feminist discourse and the psychoanalytical approach towards maternal thinking.

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MALASHRI LAL
MANDALAS
of TIME
poems

Mandalas of Time: Poems

By Malashri Lal

Published by Hawakal Publishers (2023)

Price: Rs. 500/-

ISBN: 978-9391431990

Language: English, pp. 114

-Paridhi Kishore

“Mandala” epitomises an ideal universe, and the title “Mandalas of Time” captures a fervid tone that creates harmony between various facets of human life encompassing the world. “Home” is a mythic place of desire for Malashri Lal, and she is continuously engaged in appropriating new spaces as her home, both in terms of geographical locations and from the sites of her mindscape.

In her debut collection of poetry, *Mandalas of Time*, Malashri Lal, like an enlightened soul, is introspecting her journey and fluid identity that makes her embrace and recreate the rendition of timeless mythologies like Ramayana and Mahabharata. In this collection of seventy-five poems, Malashri Lal's feminist sensibility traverses through various dimensions, constructing and reconstructing her identity as a liberal feminist. Her troubled feminism invites cognitive dissonance over ‘Poshak’ and ‘Purdah’, and the conflict is beautifully drawn:

“The feudal heritage of my childhood
Fights off the reformist Bengali lineage

My troubled feminism struggling
Between Poshak and Purdah.”

Malashri Lal, a renowned academician, retired as a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Delhi, had a sparkling academic career, and her liberal upbringing helped her to negotiate intricate complexities of different worlds that come together in her poetic sentiments. A multifarious voice and linguistic consciousness make this collection rich in the delivery of diverse emotions.

Malashri Lal deconstructs the women characters resurrected from mythology and asks questions to defy the conventional stereotypical narrative associated with them. In the poem “Manthara Dasi”, she slams society for the double standards that see Manthara as a crooked woman and projects the motherly instincts of Manthara:

“Yet I loved—like a mother
I loved Kekayi and desired the best for her.”

A conscious and evolved mind brings to the surface the incongruities of life and makes people aware of various allegorical protrusions of mind, memory, and mythology. “Sita and Pandemic” is one such example of metaphorical cognizance where the poet has compared the trauma of lockdown during the Covid pandemic with the agony of Sita confined in Ashoka Vatika—Ravan’s anger symbolises Covid, and Hanuman, the invincible God, embodies medical professionals that have been entrusted upon to bring ‘agnivaan,’ the edifying vaccine, to vanquish the rival forces.

"But I trust Hanuman will again peer down from the Ashoka tree
With the message of hope
And bring the agnivaan to this new war of justice
I’m told it's called a ‘vaccine’ in modern tongue."

Malashri Lal’s dazzling poetic sensibility makes her appreciate and highlight confluence and convergence to glorify the chasm and unity of two different worlds. “The River” portrays unison and separation:

Shakuntala’s journey, her womb ripened by nine months
Was not anyone’s concern.”

Malashri Lal, like a skilled weaver, blends the knots of aesthetic beauty and cosmopolitan layouts of all the experiences ranging from human to nature. Like a monk, she dwells on the wealth of experiences earned through meticulous actions. There are poems that affirm her fine feminist sensibilities. Poems stimulating happy hormones communicated through vibrant colours like the peacock’s resplendent blue, and the colours of Dahlias and Gulmohars. Hues and shades of grey in the form of agony and anguish are the subject matter of various poems.

Tribute has been paid to all major stalwarts like Gandhi, Tagore, and Dalai Lama in whose world she finds herself ushered in absolute tranquility. Mandalas of Time is the true representation of various seasons of life. The rhymes reverberate with a sense of completeness.

About the reviewer:



Dr. Paridhi Kishore is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Her areas of interest include Postcolonial studies, Indigenous Feminism, and Indian Literature in Translation.

Special Entry

Seema Jain and Malashri Lal in Conversation

Prof. Malashri Lal in conversation with **Seema Jain** about her poetry collection, *Mandalas of Time* (New Delhi: Hawakal Publishers, 2023).

Prof. Malashri Lal's book *Mandalas of Time* has received rave reviews in India and overseas from some of the finest critics. Describing the book as an epitome of Prof Lal's unique sensibility and an amalgam of her long and fruitful career as an academic, coupled with her sensitive soul as an empathetic human being, **Prof. Seema Jain** engaged with the author in an insightful conversation:

SJ to ML: Prof. Lal, your poetry fuses together disparate cultures, languages, emotions, and layers of experiences. There is a distinct blend of the western literary traditions with our rich folklore, traditions, myths, history and social reality and the ethos of our cultural context, albeit with a fresh take every time. For example, your poetic voice steeped in Rabindranath Tagore, in Bengali culture and literature, also connects seamlessly with the Bhopa singers and folk epics of Rajasthan. You traverse easily from Calcutta to Jaipur to Delhi to other locations across the globe, from Bengali and Sanskrit to Hindi and English. How would you like to interpret this protean identity?

ML: 'Protean' is a fine descriptor for what you have rightly noted in my personhood. Largely, the fragmented identity is the result of life experiences. My lineage is Bengali, originally from Calcutta on my mother's side and Shantiniketan on my father's side. However, my parents never lived in Bengal—my mother grew up in Dehradun and my father in Rangoon, Burma, in undivided India. After 1947, my father joined the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in the Rajasthan cadre, and our nuclear family lived mainly in Jaipur. We spoke Bengali at home along with its literary and cultural accompaniments; outside the home, my affinities were with Rajasthani and Hindi. I studied at the Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls' Public School where the Principal was a British lady, our English teachers came from Cambridge, and we had superb

teachers for Hindi and Sanskrit. As you can see, this provided a delightful *mélange* of influences and opportunities. It played through my poetic imagination when the time was right—that is, while writing my first book of poems, *Mandalas of Time*.

SJ to ML: Many of your poems focus on the mythology of India, especially the women characters: Radha in poems like ‘Radha’s Flute’, ‘Radha’s Dilemma’, ‘Krishna’s Flute’, ‘Sita’s Rasoi’, ‘Sita’s Pankha’, ‘Manthara Dasi’ etc. There is also a deep engagement with geographical and metaphorical spaces like Shila Devi of Amber, Bellagio, Italy, Godhuli in Delhi, Howrah Bridge, Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Viceregal Lodge in Shimla, and many more. Quite a few poems are about historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Rani Padmini, Maharani Gayatri Devi and contemporary personalities like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Gulzar sa’ab etc. How do you look at this complex of your deep engagement with diverse cultural spaces and what has gone into shaping your inner landscape?

ML: Mythology is lodged at the core of my literary consciousness. Beyond the fragmentations that I have mentioned above is the canopy of coherence that mythology provides. Every prototype of the human condition is prefigured in the stories told in the Puranas, epics, Jataka tales, *Kathasaritsagar*, folklore, and other originary texts. In India, we are fortunate that traditions of storytelling, reinventing and innovating have been constant from ancient times. Against this background, I find my thoughts and perplexities about some characters entering the interstices of less known episodes, or my creativity exercising a poetic license in imagining personalized moments about them.

Let me turn to some of the persons you have mentioned. Sita is an admirable figure of quiet strength and Radha a character denoting unconditional love. In writing the two books with Namita Gokhale, *In Search of Sita*, and *Finding Radha*, an osmotic process brought them deep into my consciousness. However, I like to connect mythology with contemporary thought—so my Sita poems dwell on the dream of a gender-just society, and my poems on Radha embroider the ecstasy of love. ‘Manthara dasi’ questions social prejudice against disability, ‘Rani Padmini Today’, written during the controversy over the film *Padmaavat*, pits old values against the new.

You've asked about the geographical locations—well, I used to travel extensively—and my imaginary companions and my perennial questions kept me company. In Bellagio, Italy, I sketch the Celtic goddess Belisama in conversation with Sita of Ashok Van—both are wondering about 'endurance and hope', concepts that women hold dear. In Viceregal Lodge, Shimla, the colonial past is overlaid with postcolonial subversion. At Amber, Shila Devi from Jessore in Bengal is an icon of a transition made smoothly to a temple in Rajasthan.

As to the literary and cultural figures about whom I've written, they appear as exemplars of something that I have admired—the Dalai Lama's message of compassion, for example. Tibetans have suffered a history of displacement and attempts to erase their culture. Yet, the spiritual leader articulates the value of empathy and spreads the message of a friendly smile. Rabindranath Tagore offers another kind of encompassing vision—innovation, inclusivity, and an inner strength. My parents' home in Jaipur was/is named 'Shyamoli' after Tagore's last home in Shantiniketan. The word denotes evening, darkness, a fading away—but a sense of joy, not tragedy, resides in such completeness. For me, Tagore is the consolation in adversity, and also the celebration in abundance. Such paradoxes are resolved in mythology, which becomes my refuge.

SJ to ML: Your poetry seems to be replete with literary echoes from eastern poets like Tagore, and poets from the west like Yeats, Frost, Eliot, Tennyson and many more in such poems as 'Prayer for a Granddaughter', 'Amaltas in Summer', 'Go Gently into the Sunset' (reminiscent of 'Crossing The Bar', 'Tithonus' and 'Lotos Eaters') while the poem 'Hawa Mahal' portraying a cloistered princess, carries echoes of 'The Lady of Shallot'. Are these echoes actually there or have I perceived these as a reader? And has their occurrence been conscious or not so conscious a phenomenon?

ML: You have adroitly pointed towards the literary echoes that have crept into my poems. After four decades of teaching English, one can hardly escape the memory of great poems, nor do I wish to. Between mimicry and influence is a huge gap, and I hope I lean towards an impact that is indirect rather than direct. Yeats, Frost and Tennyson you have rightly identified through phrases and key words that I have used. Yeats' spiritualism, Frost's use of nature, Tennyson's sense of history, are tropes that constitute the basic rubrics of poetry. But my purpose is to

contextualize these for India of my times. Hence, the ‘Prayer for a Granddaughter’ desires a remembrance of the freedom struggle of India. ‘Go Gently into the Sunset’ was written during the pandemic, amidst the violent and untimely destruction of life. ‘Hawa Mahal’ is one among the many poems about Rajasthan’s feudal heritage. Cloistered women are an inevitable part of this scenario—and the link that I forge with histories of feudalism in Europe evokes a juxtaposition across time and culture. Though I published my poems rather late in my life, there is no ‘anxiety of influence’—the literary echoes are welcome.

SJ to ML: One of the most remarkable aspects of your verse is your feminist stance. If the very first poem ‘Ardhanareesvara’ talks of gender equality, ‘Royal Heritage’ questions the suffering and injustice entrenched in our systems. ‘Escape’ highlights domestic violence and a woman’s silent suffering and helpless predicament. Poems like ‘Ladies’ Special’, ‘Woman Migrant Worker’ based on news reports of women migrants delivering babes on station platforms or on the road reflect the agony and invisibility of women from marginalized sections, and society’s apathy towards them against the backdrop of corona times. One of the poems pays a tribute to Maharani Gayatri Devi for her beauty and her luminous soul urging girls to be gentle yet firm. ‘Rani Padmini Today’ asserts that today’s values cannot be used to judge the past. Then quite a few of the Radha and Sita poems celebrate their attractiveness and strength in their own context.

Your feminism, I would say, seems to be a soft, mellow feminism rather than the firebrand variety, firm and deep but not loud or coarse. It does not fail to see the tenderness of Radha’s self-effacing love, and ‘Sita’s Pankha’ becomes a symbol of her devotion and care, a celebration of simple harmony. What would you like to say about this aspect of your poetry?

ML: Feminism is imbued in my composite self, it determines everything I write. My first book was titled *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English* (Shimla: IAS, 1995), when no one was teaching courses in feminism. I was asked cynical questions about labelling writers as ‘women’. The academic situation started changing somewhat later but even there I was contending against a feminist history that was assumed to have descended from Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf. My book had foregrounded Sarojini Naidu as the foremother of Indian feminism—though one could find several other examples such as Savitribai Phule or

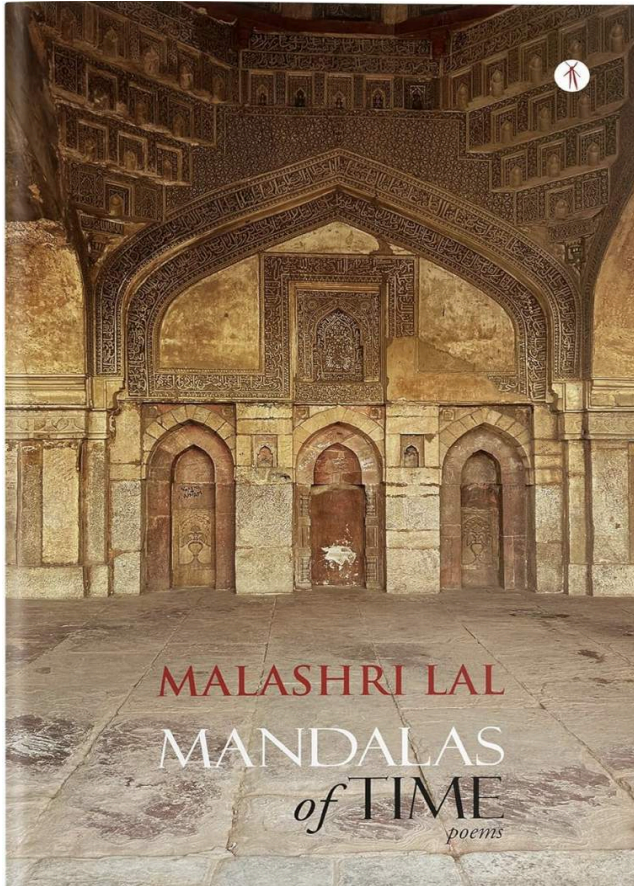
Pandita Ramabai. The history of feminism in India has never been confrontationalist—according to me. Myths and legends speak of women leaders, the feminine divine is a strong heritage, the reform movements in the nineteenth century saw women and men equally committed to women’s education, and women being freed of social ostracism. In keeping with this realization, Ardhanareesvara becomes an eloquent portrayal of androgyny, and Sita and Radha are luminous presences for their wisdom and resilience.

The gap between the ideal of equality and the situation on ground is vast. The poems you recall deal with aspects of ‘violence,’ which can be subtle as in the poem ‘Escape’ or more obvious as in the poems based on news stories about women migrants. Signifiers of the female body interest me because that is the essential territory on which gender power is exerted. We know this from wars and human trafficking--and other such dismal accounts. In Rajasthan, some feudal practices are indeed questionable from the modern viewpoint—for example the *jauhar*/ mass self-immolation committed by Rani Padmini and the women of the palace. What was ‘heroic’ then is criticized now. My poem asks questions about imposing the present onto the past. About women’s history, one needs to remain sensitive to the social context. In real life, I was fortunate to see the changes brought about by women leaders such as Maharani Gayatri Devi, who was yet another liberated woman. Educated at Tagore’s Shantinikentan, she pioneered education for young Rajput women in purdah in Rajasthan.

Maybe I have witnessed the long lasting change that a gentler form of feminism can introduce in society. I respect the steadier feminism that is culturally coded and strives for the empowerment of women without destroying the social fabric. Perhaps I am being idealistic. Perhaps that is why I named the book *Mandalas*... These are pools of experience, and though discrete, they ultimately cohere in a discernible form.

SJ to ML: There is a use of deep symbolism in your poetry. In the poem ‘Bougainvillea’ e.g. this ‘invincible’ migrant tree taking root in our land and growing in ‘carefree abundance,’ shattering the gentle chameli, and pushing the harsingar to the corner, adroitly represents the imperial rule. Likewise, the poem ‘The Boat Ride’ adds a mystic touch while many other poems tend to reflect traces of a unified sensibility, where thoughtful emotions or felt thoughts, the

About the book *Mandalas of Time* (Back cover)



Mandalas of Time blends cosmopolitan experience with the memory of India's epics and legends, magnificent landscapes and metonymic associations. Malashri Lal's lyrical vocabulary of change is configured around vignettes that spark the imagination yet recognize the invisible boundaries of social choice, especially for women. Sita and Radha are part of the mandala of consciousness, so are castles in Europe and the eternal music of flowing rivers. The poetic self is intricately woven into a rare awareness of effulgence, the result of an open-hearted receptivity to life's lessons in patience. There is rebellion and heartbreak, too, counterpointed by ecstasy and hope. Such diversity of voice, location, moods, and a rich array of linguistic play makes this

volume unique in its defiance of conventional form. For Malashri, the sources of poetic inspiration are embedded in the many layers of her cultural heritage, Rajasthan and Bengal being primary among them. Her vision eagerly scans folktales, monuments, history and relationships to interrogate the meaning of legacy and to speculate upon the future of such knowledge. This time travel yields a chiaroscuro of joy and sorrow with many shades in between. *Mandalas of Time* is philosophic yet grounded in offering memorable poems that resonate long after the reading--they speak to the core of one's existence.



Malashri Lal, Professor in the English Department (retired), and Former Dean, University of Delhi, has authored and edited seventeen books. These include *In Search of Sita*, *Tagore and the Feminine*, and *Finding Radha*. *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* (2020), co-authored with Namita Gokhale, received the Kalinga Fiction Award. Malashri Lal's latest book is *Mandalas of Time: Poems* (2023). Her creative writing has been published in *Indian Literature*, *Confluence*, *The Beacon*, *Setu*, online portals and anthologies. Lal received research and writing fellowships at Harvard University, Bellagio, and Newcastle and was a Senior Consultant to the Ministry of Culture during the 150th year celebration of Rabindranath Tagore. She has served on book award juries such as the Commonwealth Writers Prize, London, the DSC South Asia Literary Prize, London and India, The Hindu Literary Prize, The Sushila Devi Book Award for Women, among others. She is currently Convener, English Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi, and Chair, English Advisory Board, Bharatiya Jnanpith. Among other recognitions, Malashri Lal received the Maharani Gayatri Devi Award for Women's Excellence, 2022

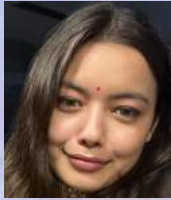


Seema Jain is a bilingual poet, short story writer, translator, editor and reviewer, who has been Ex-Vice Principal & Head, P G Dept of English at KMV Jalandhar. She has 14 published books, two published by Sahitya Akademi including 2 edited poetry anthologies on contemporary Indian women poets. She is a recipient of many prestigious awards, with her poems published in more than 100 International/ National Anthologies and Journals, digital pandemic archives of Stanford University, recited at Sahitya Akademi's Sahityotsav 2023, FOSWAL 2023, Washington DC South Asian Literature Festival 2023, and various other platforms nationally and globally.

Graphic Designing

“It is more important to click with people than to click the shutter.”

– Alfred Eisenstaedt



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.



Inclusion

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.



Pilgrimage to the Grove of Morpheus



Aliens Are Welcome

Robert Maddox-Harle

About the contributor:



Robert Maddox-Harle (aka Rob Harle) is an artist, poet and reviewer. His work is published in journals, anthologies, online reviews, books and he has four volumes of his own poetry published – *Scratches & Deeper Wounds* (1996) - *Mechanisms of Desire* (2012) - *Winds of Infinity* (2016) – *The Blazing Furnace* (2022). Recently received lifetime Literary Achievement Award 2021 (GIEWEC). He is currently a member of the: Leonardo Review Panel: Member of Editorial Board of numerous international literature journals: Australian-NZ editor for *Setu Journal*. Artwork, Publications, Reviews and selected writings are available from his website: <https://www.maddoxharle.com> (<https://www.maddoxharle.com/>)



"I know myself here I am"



28/11/2023 13:11

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Rhetorica

Call for submissions

Nature comes into being by the synergy of the Panchtatva (पंचतत्व). Bhumi (earth), Apas (water), Agni (fire), Vayu (air), and Akash(space) come together to form us and all that exists around us. Creative Arts is one of the means to fathom these fundamental elements in their multiple manifestations.

Rhetorica aspires to bring together various attempts at comprehension and expression of the Panchtatva from across the globe . We call for submissions on the theme of Panchtatva (पंचतत्व) for our upcoming issue.

Theme: Panchtatva (पंचतत्व)

Categories for submissions:

Non Fiction: 500 to 800 words

Poetry: 1 to 5 each

Fiction: 1500 words

Book Review: 800 words

Visual Arts: 1 to 5 each

Deadline: 30th June 2024

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