Est: 2002 ISSN: 2633-4704

CONFLUENCE
SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

www.confluence.org.uk Over 20 years of publication Feb-April 2026

A Dazzling Debut for Durban: Diya Brings Ancient Grace to the Modern Stage

By Devi Rajab

Recently I was honoured to be the guest speaker at a young girl's Arangetram in Durban SA where a large proportion of indentured Indians came in 1860 to work on the sugar plantations in Natal province. They preserved their cultural traditions and built temples, schools and community centres to keep their language and religious practices alive. Dance was an important form of temple culture for South Indians in particular. On account of apartheid which kept races apart, few South Africans of other racial groups know much about this tradition and hence the difficulties experienced by the young dancer Diya in convincing her elite private school educationists about the seriousness of her art form.

Diya's journey to her Bharatanatyam Arangetram began with her curiosity as a young child, when she expressed an interest in learning the dance form. Both her parents are medical doctors and they are eager to give their children a well-balanced education embracing western and eastern traditions. What started as a simple pastime soon grew into a disciplined pursuit, shaped by her steady commitment and joy in the learning process. A central part of this journey has been her relationship with her guru, Srimathi Yogi Singaram, whose passion, guidance, and mentorship embody the true spirit of the teacher–student bond. Through this influence, Diya has gained not only skill in Bharatanatyam but confidence, cultural awareness, and positivity.

"When I was first requested to perform this task, I was humbled by the traditional gesture bestowed to me by the entire family who brought the invite personally and performed a beautiful ritual of blessing the invitation before handing it over to me. I was overwhelmed by …**(P 3)**

Legendary Singer Asha Bhosle dies

Asha Bhosle, the legendary voice behind countless timeless songs, has passed away this week, leaving behind a legacy that shaped Indian music industry for decades. From soulful melodies to vibrant tracks, she became part of millions of lives.

Bhosle, who recorded more than 12,000 songs in over 20 Indian and foreign languages, is widely considered one of the most versatile voices in Indian music. Over the decades, she recorded more songs than any other female playback singer of her time.

Bhosle began her playback career in the 1940s. Her timeless voice resonated across a film-obsessed India for nearly eight decades

Bhosle was the younger sister of the late playback singer Lata Mangeshkar and belonged to the prominent Mangeshkar family. Though she is gone, her songs will continue to echo, keeping her spirit alive forever.

Editorially Speaking

In the recent weeks we have witnessed two starkly contrasting moments that have captured global attention.

“We Go for All Humanity” – these are the hopeful words that NASA's Artemis 2 mission commander Reid Weisman proclaimed, just moments before liftoff, on a ten-day mission to the moon, on 1st of April. On the contrary, “whole civilisation will die tonight” declared the American President Donald Trump, days later.

These two statements emerging almost side by side and the events took place in the past few weeks have raised serious questions about the worthiness of human life and the world we are living now. While the ten-day Artemis 2 mission was traversing the Milky Way capturing the first human-eyed views of the Moon’s far side, events on Earth unfolded with alarming urgency. The concerns before us aren’t merely about inflation or the fuel prices; but a commentary on the perceived "sixth sense" humans claim to possess and the fragility of our modern existence. It also begs the question: what kind of legacy are we handing down to our children, or for the generations to follow?

This issue is reaching you later than expected. We’ve hit some roadblocks with our publishing consistency—as noted in past updates—and we truly value the understanding of our readers and contributors. While these aren't easy problems to solve, we look forward to a smoother path ahead as more writer contributions come in on time to help sustain our momentum. This time we had two of our experienced writers Dr. Deepa Vanjani and Tanusha Nagrath represented Confluence at the recently concluded Jaipur Literary Festival (JLF) and they have compiled their succinct coverage, including interviews with prominent artists, writers and alike. I hope our readers will find this insightful.

We will meet again in the summer issue.

Vijay Anand

Contents

Page	Title	Author
1	Diya’s Arangetram Singer Asha Bhosle dies	Devi Rajab
2	Editorially speaking	Vijay Anand
3 -4	Diya’s Arangetram	Devi Rajab
5	Age in Bloom – A poem	Laksmisree Banerjee
6	A Conversation with Bhawana Somaaya	Tanusha Nagrath
8	Pondicherry/Auroville Poetry Festival	Anju Makhija
9	Life is a Celebration – short story	Subhash Chandra
10	Non-fiction - GANDHI MEETS GERONIMO	by Cyril Dabydeen
12	JLF: Alice Oswald in conversation	Deepa Vanjani
13-14	Jaipur Literary Festival	T. Nagrath & D. Vanjani
14	MY FATHER MEETING MY MOTHER - poem	By Cyril Dabydeen
15	Review- ASTERKALI by Roopali Sircar	Dr. Azam Gill
17	Interview: Ricky Muthukumaraswamy	Sharon Rundle
19	Revisiting Sholay@50	Deepa Vanjani
20	Tanusha Nagrath wins 1st prize	Report
21	Beautiful Mind -poem (for Jane)	Meenakshi Mohan
22 - 24	Celebrating the epic woman	Lopamudra Banerjee
24	SONG OF THE GOATHERD	Cyril Dabydeen
25	How a Poem Leaps into Moving Art	Yogesh Patel
26	Book review: Remembering Bharatji	Sharon Rundle
28	The Currency of Bruises -short story	By Ritu Kamra Kumar
30	Review: Tara – the Dream Chaser	by Anjana Basu

the beauty and the gravitas of this tradition. They say it takes a village to raise a child. However, what I witnessed was how a community of teachers, parents, musicians, makeup artists, and stage managers came together bedecked in traditional kanjivaram sarees and formal suits to make an Arangetram happen and to witness a young girl's coming of age through dance and music."

This auspicious occasion was a celebration of the glory of a great tradition of an ancient culture rarely known or appreciated outside of its cultural ambit. This dance form has been handed down over centuries through love of worship, in praise of the glory of a pantheon of Gods in the various aspects of one universal force-

Brahma. Bharatnatyam was considered a spiritual practice, a way to embody devotion (bhakti) and narrate stories from Hindu epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. The dance was not

entertainment—it was a form of moving prayer, with gestures (mudras), postures, and expressions used to communicate religious stories.

This classical dance form has its roots in Tamil Nadu dating back to over 2000 years. It was originally practiced by female temple dancers. During the late medieval and colonial periods, the Devadasi system declined, often becoming corrupted.

Bharatanatyam lost much of its sacred status and was

An Arangetram is a significant event in the life of a Bharatanatyam dancer, as it marks the end of their training and the beginning of their career. It is a showcase of the dancer's skills and the culmination of years of hard work and dedication.

marginalized. By the 19th century, the dance form faced

stigma, as temple dancing and Devadasis came under attack due to colonial morality and social reform movements. In

the early 1900s, Bharatanatyam was revived as a respected art form outside temple spaces, largely due to pioneers like: Rukmini Devi Arundale – who brought Bharatanatyam to the stage and emphasized its spiritual and artistic beauty. It shifted from being a temple ritual to a stage performance, while retaining its devotional essence. Today, Bharatanatyam is one of the most widely practiced classical dances in India and abroad.

However, Bollywood seems to project a modern depiction of popular dance with a life of its own far removed from classical traditional dance forms. Almost every movie today depicts a modern dance form of jumping around and pivoting in athletic jamboree of movement with little content or meaning. So, it of great significance when young dancers like Diya spend years trying to master and keep alive and preserve a dying art form with all its traditional significance.

Our forefathers who came to South African shores immediately faced a "tabula rasa" of emptiness. They had left behind their literature, language, books, music, dance and their teachers. Learning and teaching are the building blocks of society and ultimately of A civilisation. They had the formidable task to create a learning environment to preserve whatever they could. In the early years tutors were of paramount value and thus what followed was our reverence for the guru epitomised by the motto in our daily prayers of Matha(mother), Pitha (father), Guru (teacher), Theivam (God).

Of significance is the place that the Guru holds in this hierarchy of reverence. In my youth we had few opportunities to learn this classical art form. The only exposure was through films. I recall dancing freely with little training, for my grandfather, who would sing the song about a snake that bends and twists and we were enticed to mimic its movements. Later a certain Dr Thirupurasundrie came from Madras and taught us folk dances for a concert to collect funds for the Natal blind society so some of us learnt a few more steps to entertain our folks. Subsequently, I studied ballet and took exams as a compensation for a lack of opportunities in Indian classical dancing. (Each year examiners would come from France and England to test us through grades 1-4 and then Elementary and Advanced which allowed you to teach).

Unlike Bharathnatyam, ballet offered no philosophy or was not rooted in a rich cultural and religious tradition. It was pure technique based on the motto…train like a boxer and live like a Nun.

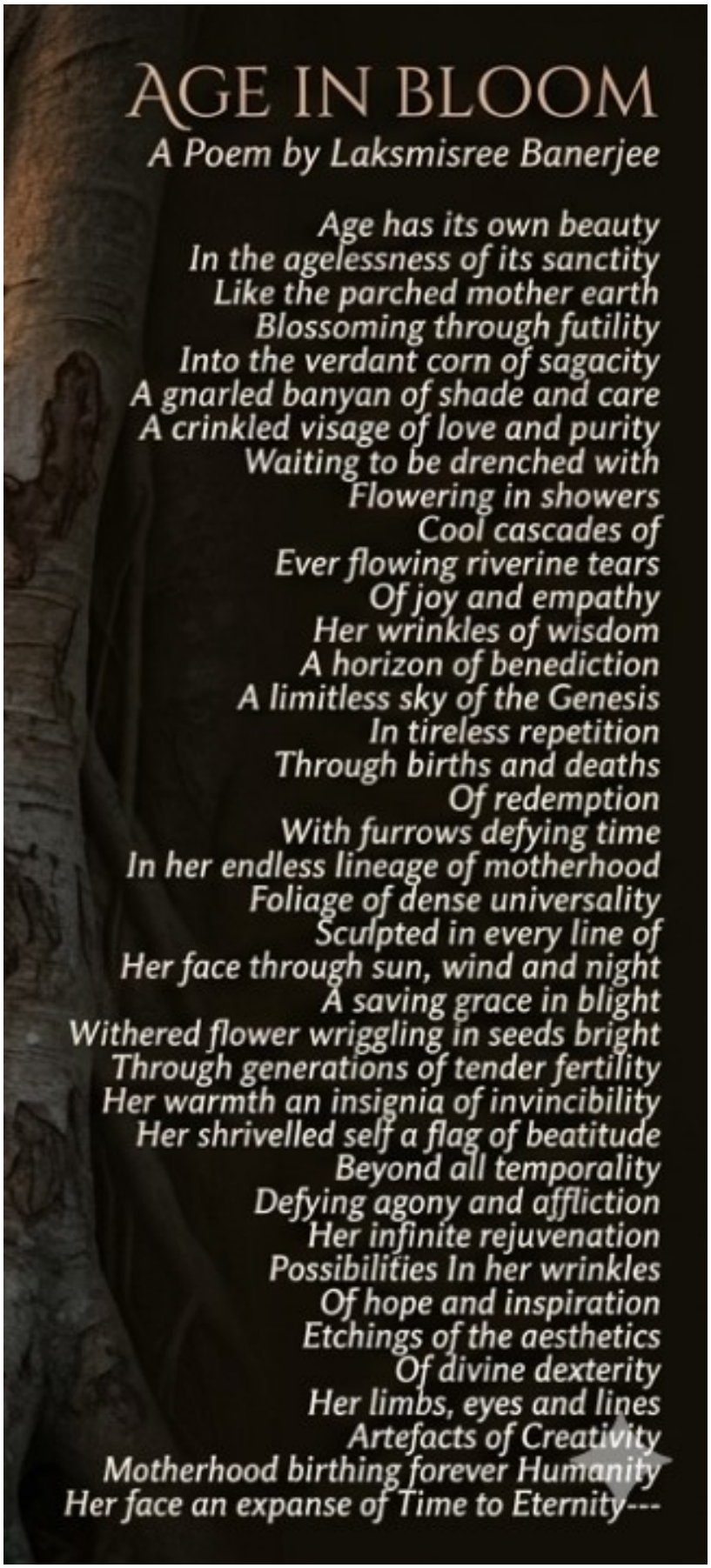
But lest I trivialise this great art form disrespectfully, I need to say that all dance requires discipline and a deep dedication to a rich tradition handed down over centuries and all dance is beautiful expression of human joy and mastery.

Though South African Indians have come a long way today in terms of opportunities for our children in dance and drama cultural silos limit our appreciation of the arts to a particular sector of society and whilst ballet may be regarded as mainstream, Bharatnatyam is still very much an exclusive art form peculiar to South Africans of South Indian origin and embedded in religious and cultural practices. Bharatanatyam remains largely unrecognised outside of the Indian community in South Africa. It is a troubling reality that in many of our elite private schools — particularly those steeped in colonial legacies — ballet continues to be upheld as the gold standard of artistic dance expression. It is considered "classical", "Elegant" "Culturally enriching." But Bharatanatyam — one of the oldest classical dance traditions in the world — is often ignored. Not funded. Not included in eisteddfods. Not celebrated in school assemblies. Not considered worthy of school colours or cultural recognition. This erasure is not innocent. It reflects a narrow, eurocentric lens that continues to define what counts as art and what is seen as "ethnic," "folkloric," or irrelevant. Children should never be made to feel that their culture is a second-tier identity, that their history is too foreign to matter or that their form of excellence doesn't fit the frame. And yet this is what one-dimensional thinking does. It silences multiplicity. It narrows the imagination. And in doing so, it robs us all of enlightenment.

In a truly post-apartheid South Africa, our schools and institutions must reflect the diversity of our society. We cannot continue to uphold only Western art forms as valid or worthy. We must make room on the stage for all our stories — all our rhythms — all our children. Bharatanatyam, like ballet, is classical. It is demanding. It is intellectual. It is spiritual. And it deserves its rightful place in our schools, our funding frameworks, our national stages. Culture does

not survive on nostalgia alone. It survives when it is practised, taught, shared, funded and valued. Let Bharatanatyam take its rightful place alongside all other classical forms in our nation. Not as an exotic curiosity, but as an integral part of who we are. And so our young dancer is doing more than dancing. She is asserting her visibility. In reclaiming her space is saying: We are here. We have always been here. And we will not be erased. The Arangetram is the final expression of years of learning, understanding, practice devotion moulding of the body to the mind in a graceful expression of gratitude to the Lord under a master. What we witnessed was the culmination of a young girls dream in choosing dance to celebrate her life, we thank her for actively keeping the tradition of our forefathers and mothers alive and for illuminating our worlds with the magic of this extraordinary art form.

AS a psychologist, award-winning columnist and author, Dr Devi Moodley Rajab, has not only made significant contributions to her field but has also carved a unique space in the hearts and minds of many through her profound writings.



Interview

The Ethics of Looking, the Art of Remembering: A Conversation with Padma Shri Bhawana Somaaya

By Tanusha Nagrath

Before the interview begins, the city is already speaking.

Torn kites - strands of red, blue, and yellow - remain caught in the leaning, listening, learning - eucalyptus trees, suspended like unfinished sentences between the earth and sky.

Green parrots orbit overhead with a quiet, but certain attentiveness, settling and rising without urgency. In one corner of the festival grounds, ducks glide across the water, indifferent yet present, absorbing everything and nothing, all at once. It feels instinctive, as though nature has learnt the grammar of the 19th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival 2026.

It is within this listening city that I meet *Bhawana Somaaya*, a woman who has spent nearly fifty years listening to cinema, memory, and the undercurrents of cultural change.

A film critic, author of twenty books, former editor of Screen, biographer of *Hema Malini* and *Amitabh Bachchan*, translator of the Prime Minister's Gujarati works, and recipient of the *Padma Shri, Somaaya* carries her authority without performance. Her recent book, *Farewell Karachi*, spanning over a hundred years and five generations, is not merely a memoir but an act of cultural preservation.

Our conversation begins where contemporary unease often settles - around violence in the Indian cinema.

As someone who loves Hindi cinema deeply, I ask her about the current anxiety around bloodshed and brutality, and whether this shift signals a decay in imagination or mirrors society itself.

Her response Is firm and expansive:

"I completely disagree with the idea that cinema's fabric can be frozen or defined in one way. Cinema has always evolved with time. Even in earlier decades, pre- and post-Independence, we had socially disruptive films, violent films, and experimental films alongside romantic and idealistic cinema."

A glimpse into her seeing soul...

What unsettles her is not violence, but the certainty with which decline is declared.

"What bothers me is this fashionable narrative that *'cinema is deteriorating.'* Who decides this? Are these people making films? Funding them? No. If you don't like violent cinema, don't watch it. I detest these drawing-room discussions where everyone assumes authority over cinema without research or responsibility."

Cinema, she reminds us, has never been singular.

"Different kinds of films are always being made - you choose your palette."

When asked about her own cinematic preferences after decades of criticism, her answer turns inward.

"I gravitate towards slice-of-life cinema."

Originality, for her, remains the highest ethic.

"For me, originality is everything. Low budgets don't matter. Star power doesn't matter. If a story is original and touches my heart, it wins.

Borrowing, plagiarising, remaking - those get fewer marks from me."

Midway through the conversation, the festival intrudes gently. Drums by *Nathulal Solanki* rise unexpectedly from a nearby space, grounding abstraction in rhythm. The intellect pauses. The body remembers. It feels like an apt interruption - cinema, after all, also lives in rhythm.

The belief that middle-class cinema has disappeared is one *Somaaya* challenges decisively.

"Not at all. A recent Gujarati film Lalo proves otherwise. Made with minimal resources, it tells a beautiful story of *Lord Krishna* visiting an ordinary man, prompting self-reflection."

Its reception surprised even seasoned observers.

"Within a week, it crossed unprecedented numbers for Gujarati cinema. Dubbed in Hindi, it repeated the success."

For her, this lineage is unbroken.
"This is the same middle-of-the-road cinema once made by *Basu Chatterjee, Basu Bhattacharya,* and *Hrishikesh Mukherjee*. It still exists."

Responsibility, she insists, cannot rest with cinema alone.

"The audience reflects society. Today, nobody wants to be middle class. The lower middle class wants to be upper class; the upper class wants to be richer so."
She recalls a time when identity carried dignity.
"In our time, being middle class was a badge of honour - we were custodians of values and culture."

Filmmakers, she asks quietly, are left with a practical dilemma.
"Cinema can't be blamed alone. Who are filmmakers supposed to cater to?"
The question of stardom in the social-media age reveals a deeper contradiction.
"There's a dichotomy. On one hand, we want realism and identifiable characters. On the other, we still respond to cinematic magnetism."
Certainty, she suggests, rarely survives scrutiny.

"For every theory we construct, there is an immediate deconstruction."
This moral complexity once defined Hindi cinema's heroes too.

"When *Amitabh Bachchan* played an underworld character, he was still a hero. *Vijay* from *Deewar* wasn't remembered for crime but for his wounds - 'mera baap chor hai'."
What audiences carried home was not brutality.
"We carried his pain, not his violence."
When the conversation turns to her recent book *Farewell Karachi,* the atmosphere shifts.
The parrots settle briefly. The ducks continue their unhurried glide.

Somaaya speaks of wounds she did not know she carried.
"I didn't even realise I carried those wounds until a therapist explained displacement trauma - the fear of not having a roof over your head."
Writing the book offered no structural certainty.
"Writing the book was extremely difficult. Unlike biographies where beginnings and endings are known, I didn't know where to start my own story."

Doubt accompanied the process.
"I doubted whether anyone would care about an ordinary family's legacy. But I realised something within me needed closure."

The emotional cost was immense.
"Every time I rewrote emotionally heavy chapters - my father being lost, my mother waiting - I wept."
Yet grief became resolve.
"I told myself: my tears cannot go waste. If it touches me, it will touch others."
The book, she explains, transcends the personal.
"The book documents not just my family, but an era - architecture, culture, displacement, and Gujarat's untold history, from a woman's voice."
Her detachment from outcomes feels earned.
"Yes. The universe gives you what you deserve. The less you stress about money, fame, or validation, the more comes to you."
Even the *Padma Shri* arrived without anticipation.
"I never imagined receiving a *Padma Shri*. When the call came, I was busy finishing a film review and didn't even process it immediately."

Parents

Honored with the Padma Shri in 2017 by President Pranab Mukherjee for her contributions to cinema and journalism.

An A to Z of greatness: Amitabh Lexicon by Bhawana Somaaya decodes 40 years of Amitabh Bachchan-2,833 words, one legendary journey

When asked about memory, her answer circles back to listening.
"Mostly oral memory - fragmented but powerful. Some material artifacts came as bonuses: newspaper cuttings, handwritten notes, family lineages."

As the youngest, she absorbed more than she realised.

"I was the youngest child, always around my mother. I listened without knowing I was collecting history."

Structure, ultimately, became the book's greatest challenge.

"Structure. I had to begin in the present to hook readers."

She chose movement over chronology.

"I used flashbacks and flash-forwards. I remained the narrator but disappeared when the story needed to breathe."

The scale still surprises.

"Someone once said my book has as many characters as Game of Thrones - and I'm born on page 101! But it worked."

As the interview ends, the kites remain caught in the trees. The parrots hover. The ducks drift on. Nothing insists on closure.

Asked about the book's cinematic future, she answers with faith rather than urgency.

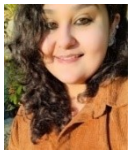
"Absolutely. It has OTT and film potential. No one has approached yet - but that's fine.

Krishna will walk when the time comes.

We will do the rest."

In a world quick to pronounce verdicts, *Bhawana Somaaya* offers something rarer: patience, memory, and the ethics of listening.

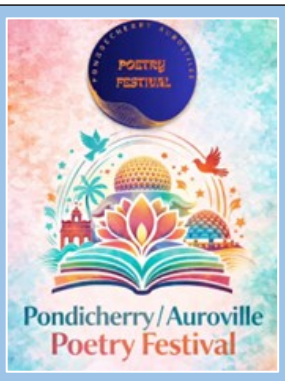
Perhaps that, like the festival itself, is what continues to breathe long after the tents come down.



Tanusha Nagrath is a Jaipur-based media freelancer, storyteller, performer, and voice artist. A Registered Talker with Prasar Bharati, she has appeared on Doordarshan Rajasthan and leading FM channels.

Her voice work includes Voice ATM projects, reflecting her versatility. An experienced live anchor, hosted major events like Pink Festival Jaipur and the Know India International Cultural Conclave.

A published poet featured in national and international anthologies, she also brings depth to theatre through productions like Chandni Raat Ka Ek Dukhant, continuing to expand her creative horizon.



Pondicherry/Auroville Poetry Festival enters its 9th year!

A Report by Anju Makhija

There are hundreds of festivals in India, yet those related to poetry are few and far in-between. The Pondicherry/Auroville Festival (PAPF-26) just completed its 8th edition this March. It was held in the picturesque setting of the *Sharanam Convention Centre* in the outskirts of Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu.

As a co-founder/curator (with Gayatri Majumdar), we have ensured that PAPF remains a festival with a heart, avoiding the commercial route. Every year, poets from the country and abroad participate enthusiastically. In addition, musicians, theatre practitioners, and others join in. Locals from the area are encouraged to present their work thus providing a regional flavour.

This year's theme was 'Memory-the heart of poetry'. There were readings, book launches, panel discussions on topics such as, 'How does poetry help in coping with war' and 'Academia and poetry: synergies and tensions.'

Most of the activities took place at *Sharanam*; other events were held at *'Palais de Mahe', Pondy and Unity Pavillion, Auroville.*

Sonali Pattnaik, who attended the festival, had this to say: The poetry shared was evocative, inclusive, experimental, powerful, soft and revolutionary, speaking to the times and speaking to the heart. The venue was pure bliss, the summer weather notwithstanding, with its beautiful lily ponds and grand banyan and mango trees and the spirit of community was everywhere… May such places help us to remember our shared humanity and strengthen resistance against invasive, imperialist and hateful forces.

Unique in so many ways, PAPF continues its journey with the addition of K. Srilata, a well-known poet and academic, as co-curator. The prizes given at the fest included, The *Vishendevi Award for Creativity in Villages* and The Wood Rose Spiritual Poetry Prize.

(My thanks to the Editor for asking me to write about this event.)

Anju Makhija is a Poet, Playwright, Translator, Editor and the Co-founder Pondicherry Poetry Festival. Her latest anthology is *Changing, Unchanging: New and Selected Poems {1995-2023}*

Short story

Life is a Celebration

By Subhash Chandra

That was the tagline on his WhatsApp.

Aarav lived in a nearby Housing Complex –just about twenty yards from ours and came over now and then on a Sunday. Lowering himself into a chair, he said, "You know what your problem is!"

We were childhood pals. While he was fit as a flea, I was a sickly child. My tonsils got infected every so often. I would get a fever, and I had difficulty swallowing and eating for days. Lala ji (Father) would take me to the GP, who injected me with Penicillin. Even today, in my mid-seventies, tonsillitis harasses me off and on.

I waited. I knew he'd answer it himself. He always did. "Gautam, you look at the glass half empty, always."

A sentence I had read and heard a hundred times, at least.

You're wrong… I am worse. I find the water in the glass murky. I imagine a morbid end to an ailment after it has chosen me. And a whole horde of them have.

He was the leader of our group of four children, though he was the youngest and I the oldest. There was a difference of four years between us. He could whirl a stone up a Jamun tree, bringing down a rain of fruit which we collected and relished … unwashed, uncleaned. Mine would barely touch the lowest branch and make an embarrassed, barren comeback. After a few attempts, I stopped doing it.

Aarav shook his head in disapproval. "That's not right. Not at all. Try to change your mindset, shed negativity or else you'll be chipped away … slowly but surely, bit by bit, and your condition will worsen."

I maintained a cynical silence.

"You see, the mind is the master."

He was right, I agreed with him inwardly.

But perhaps, he sensed my thought and continued with renewed vigour.

"If you want to overcome a disease, think all is well … no, believe all is well. It's been proven scientifically that the body obeys the mind and releases Endorphins (happy hormones) that add a protective shield to your system, and fight off inflammation and oxidants," he said, brimming with confidence.

As a young boy, he could dart up a tree like a squirrel, whereas once, egged on by him and the two others, I assayed crawling up a smallish tree, but coming down was a trauma I haven't gotten over to this day.

Another Sunday:

"How are you doing today, Buddy?" Aarav asked.

"I am fine," I said. Life is …

"Beautiful," he completed my sentence with a smile. "But why is there a wail in your voice?"

After a brief pause, he said, "Gautam, I don't talk baselessly. I can give you several examples of people who cured themselves of serious illnesses through positive thinking. Sandy Robis, a pancreatic stage IV cancer patient, attributed her recovery to the use of humour, Robbie Robinson, who suffered from a non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, overcame the disease by laughter, and Norman Cousins, suffering from a "terminal" and "irreversible" connective tissue disease (ankylosing spondylitis) documented that 10 minutes of intense laughter gave him two hours of pain-free sleep. Doctors had given him a 1-in-500 chance. He lived for another 35 years.

"And I have experienced it myself. Some years ago, I began to feel giddy. The GP referred me to the ENT specialist, who in turn advised me to consult a Neurologist. He prescribed expensive and complicated tests."

"Your giddiness (dizziness or vertigo) is due to your damaged inner ear, which is the body's balance mechanism and sends positional signals to the brain. When inner ear canals, fluid pressure, or vestibular nerves are disturbed by crystals, infections, or inflammation, they send conflicting signals, triggering a spinning sensation," he said with a grim face.

"I decided to not take his treatment. I'd get up every morning and repeat to myself thrice, with full conviction that all was fine. I had no health issues and went through the day cheerfully. Besides, I regularly watched How I Met Your Mother, Young Sheldon and other comedy shows. Would you believe that in three months, no trace of vertigo?"

The health articles buttressed his views.

#

Yet another Sunday.

That day, my knees were hurting like hell. He settled himself in his favourite chair and waited for his cinnamon cup of tea, which was Nandita's, my wife's, speciality. With the first sip, he launched on his pet theme. I decided to thwart his harangue.

"Now start counting my maladies that have mounted a joint assault on my frail, immunocompromised body: heart condition, fracture in the middle of my spine, a thickened vocal cord, inability to take antibiotics and painkillers as they upset my stomach and gobble up my weight and muscle mass. Today you can see I am all skin and bones; my haemoglobin is about 10, body temperature 96, and weight 54 kg only."

I paused and then continued, "My knees creak when I negotiate the stairs to our first-floor flat with the quadripod. One-third of my legs burn because of poor circulation."

I was breathing fast. His smile evaporated. Nevertheless, he said defensively, "Look, start with one health issue at a time and wipe it out of your mind. Imagine that your knees are fine and they will be fine … then deal with another health issue, and then yet another… Health is in your hands."
"You don't understand, Aarav. Our constitutions are different." I had repeated it to him umpteen times, but it cut no ice.
"All bodies have a mind and muscles," he'd counter. "And muscles have memory."

#

Then Aarav moved to Bengaluru with his family. His company had promoted him as Sales Director – a huge jump from the position of Sales Manager. A bloated pay package, a bungalow, a big car and other perks. He sent me a celebratory gift. Swiggy delivered a handi (an earthen container) of Roshogollas -- my favourite sweet -- which I relished. Over time, his WhatsApps became infrequent.
He sent me a message asking about my health. The tagline was: I am running a mad race.
Soon after, he phoned me. Tagline: Life is a deadly battle for survival.
"Gautam, I'm in a hellhole. The CEO accuses me of not doing my best. Revised targets are not being fulfilled. I don't motivate the Sales teams enough. The Company wants every single individual in India to use only our phone. But competition is fierce," he said with a heart-rending sigh. He sounded acutely distressed.
A year passed. I inquired about his well-being. His tagline read, Life is a nightmare.
Stress seemed to be doing him in. Something was drastically wrong with my dear friend. I called him.
"How are you, Aarav?"
I could hear only heavy, raspy breathing for a couple of minutes. Then a sinking voice, "I wish euthanasia were legal in India!"
I learnt later from his wife that he was suffering from depression, insomnia, Parkinson's, and Peripheral Neuropathy.

Literary non-fiction

GANDHI MEETS GERONIMO

by Cyril Dabydeen

Serendipity, it must be, in our immediate acquaintance. The expected tied to the unexpected, you see. "Where do you come from?"

"Where?" From what indeterminate place, oh.

"You...Indian?"

Origins mixed in with phenotype, with real places in our mind. New beginnings, not endings, as nothing's ever the same again in the passage of time. Place or topography being with us now in one domain. Yes, this middle-aged man with genuinely long hair, and a suave or nonchalant manner. Oh, crossings in my mind, and barriers broken. A long narrow strait like the Bering Strait, but far from Asia. Reindeer, yak, buffalo, thick-coated because of layers of snow. Another Ice Age somewhere. Territories being just a vast landscape before the continents inexorably drifted apart.

We look at each other and make faces, almost in a pantomime. Mirroring selves, like where we never wanted to be in the first place.

Where do you really come from?

--You tell me.

Ringlets of hair on his face, neck, I am intrigued by--in a manner of speaking. He keeps looking at me, in our anonymity, if with instant camaraderie. He's employed by the federal government I must know.

"But do they allow you to...?"

Allow me?

"Your long hair…Why?"

Hand-signs, almost like in a Sweet Grass ceremony. A potlatch. We look around, being, well, circumscribed without ritual. He's an Algonquin Indian, ah.

Real native, you see.

Now what do I call him. *Geronimo...?* Nomenclature, like an insignia, symbolism being all. And my instant or immediate recall: a US Airforce trainee high up in his outpost (so-called) with clouds all around, and a swoosh of air. Yes, men training to jump off an airplane with parachutes on. Fear...ah. The leader of the group looks alarmingly at his nervous beginner. *Just say the word Geronimo, and off you go!* A talisman or token, the name being a good luck charm, nothing less.

GANDHI MEETS GERONIMO ….

No fear of flying, eh? The heart in tatters. The Great Spirit now with us. "Really Geronimo...an Indian chief?" I tease.

"Only if I call you Gandhi," he demands from me.

Wide-faced laughter, yes.

Odd, I remember being asked by a Russian-cum-Ukranian not so long ago what kind of Indian am I...with the Amazon region coming closer. Bow-and-arrow Indian, or an elephant Indian?

Gandhi comes back to me, in a flash. Non-violence and ahimsa...satyagraha, more than the symbolic. Another Peace Treaty in the making. Indeed a genuine Sweet Grass ceremony. And Truth and Reconciliation...as we come to grips with the infamous Residential Schools experience in Canada--the prejudice and horrendous trauma felt by Native kids years ago. Yes, victimization of Native children in the attempt to homogenize them...as "Canadian."

--It is our peace offering, I know.

The Great Spirit coming closer. The circle closing in. Landscapes with India's archways established to recognize the English Raj--being monumental. A sub-continental divide: the vast landmass with Aryan and Dravidan markers. Moguls and maharajahs being at it.

Did Alexander the Great really want to conquer Asia beyond the Indus Valley?

Columbus in his *Pinta*, *Nina* and *Santa Maria* fleet going across seas and oceans--as Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain in my own mind-wandering way.

More to demarcate, you see. East being east and west being west--the twain now meeting. Imagining who we really are in one place and time, in our *beingness*. Yes, here in Ottawa—Canada as a whole--renowned as "a meeting place" with many races and creeds, and who being labelled simply as "newcomers"--more than "settlers."

This man—Geronimo—my acknowledging his iconic Native status, being allowed to wear his hair long in the federal government accommodating *cultural difference*--here in the nation's capital city, in genuine indigenous territory. Yes, hundreds of thousands of Algonquin and other tribes (or nations) have lived here long decades ago. History taught in schools and colleges, not just about those being descendants of people who were European pioneers-cum- settlers. Inuit peoples also from far up north reside here, some I vaguely interact with in the city's parks and streets.

Indeed Ottawa boasts having its own Wabano Native Centre...providing healing spaces and practices. Now TV and radio talk-shows proclaim indigenous heritage with conviction or resonance. And I'd met the city's newest poet laureate, a Native; and the Parliamentary poet laureate is Native--Sky Dancer--with whom I shared imaginative space.

This man keeps being himself with a glint in his eyes as he accepts me for who I am, like foreknowledge. Tell him that more than a decade ago I'd encountered the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Ovide Mercredi--a Cree--who said he was an advocate of non-violent resistance because of what he learnt from the Mahatma; and he'd travelled to India after being nominated for the Gandhi Peace Prize.

Yes, my Indianness coming to the fore. Foreshadowing, remembering--much more. My taking liberties because of our propinquity, or anonymity. People spread out across vast North American continent with India coming closer, where my ancestors had come from. Oh, *Geronimo*--legendary chieftain. History and TV images conjoined in my subconscious: here in this diverse capital city now with many others from far geographical places who I regularly encounter--people of all cultures, creeds--immigrants and refugees, too, because of turmoil in other parts of the world.

Changing politics and climate, and identities being reshaped, you see, with our multicultural selves. This man takes it all with his genuinely Native spirit aligned to my own sense of provenance--where I have come from, but our now being distinctly Canadian.

"Yes, you Gandhi," he replies, ventriloquizing almost.

We both smile, or laugh--the twain meeting--indeed here in Canada with boundary lines crossed, deliberately.

"A gifted Canadian poet" (*Toronto Star*) – Cyril Dabydeen is also a short story writer, novelist, and anthologist. Critics described his work as being "In the tradition of Pablo Neruda and Nicolas Guillen... Dabydeen expresses strong sympathies for the poor and a feeling for the hard ironies of existence..." *The Ottawa Journal.* And, "It is the epiphany, the moment of illumination, which comes out of an ordinary experience." Peter Nazareth (University of Iowa, US). He is Ottawa Poet Laureate Emeritus. He taught Writing for many years at the University of Ottawa.

A poem by Cyril Dabydeen 'MY FATHER MEETING MY MOTHER' is published on page 14 and 24.

Jaipur Literature Festival
"Poetry will keep humans human"
Alice Oswald in conversation with Dr. Deepa Vanjani

This was the 19th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival, and as always it was a cerebral extravaganza. There was a lot on the plate, but meeting the British poet, Oxford professor of poetry (2019-2023) Alice Oswald, was something I had been looking forward to and having a conversation with her in the media lounge, nuanced by her heartwarming insights, was a sheer pleasure.

Poetry, says Alice Oswald, has always carried the conscience, a memory of everything people have done to each other.

The concern for the environment, the close observation of the natural world is predominant in the poetry of Oswald. Is there a special connection or concern, I asked her. Being the daughter of a gardener and garden designer, she was trained as a gardener since childhood and feels her closest friendships are with plants and trees which have a natural intelligence, "I feel an excitement and delight in the natural world and being a naturally shy person, a great affinity with plants who have such a quiet voice," and her poetry is the way "to hear and pass on the voice of the natural world especially as not many are listening. Gardens are philosophical places, sources of morality, of the lesson how things rely on each other, of growth is not a horrible off-scale idea, that we still rely on the natural world." Who could have put it better? "I have three children and I really worry about the world they are inheriting," confides Oswald.

An admirer of Rabindranath Tagore, having worked at Dartington which was inspired by Shantiniketan, she has read a great deal of his work, and she finds lot of his ideas to be fundamental to her way of thinking, of how poetry comes from the landscape.

When asked about the art of writing poetry and its technicalities, Alice feels that poetry has rules of melody and that "Writing is a complicated process. A poem does not really work unless it comes in a gust of energy."

For aspiring poets and those looking at publication of their writing, her message is "learn patience." Even if the work is not published it is good to "find a small circle of poets, listen to criticism by creating a poetry family because poetry is a collaborative art."

Since there were other media persons lined up for interviewing her, it was time to wrap up this short conversation with her.

Snippets:

Take Aways to Remember

While Pulitzer Prize winning American writer and critic, Prof. Stephen Greenblatt invigorated the audience intellectually with his remarkable session in Durbar Hall at Hotel Clark's Amer, on how Christopher Marlowe, who came out of nothing, son of a poor cobbler in Canterbury, went on to change Elizabethan theatre forever. *"Marlowe's achievements are magnificent. His plays were about people who break barriers of hierarchical society."*

Shobha De in her session in the Front Lawn had some brilliant wisdom to share:

"Nudge the young in the right direction. They are listening, not dismissing. We do not have nuanced and balanced conversations about sex."

The launch of the book Chapal Rani: The Last Queen of Bengal, was followed by an eye-opening session with the author Sandip Roy, who threw light on the way ahead of its time life of Chapal Bhaduri who played the goddess and queens in the Jatra in Bengal.

The Alchemy of Ambition, Rohit Sarin and Vinita Gupta in conversation with Mukesh Sud, was replete with wisdom from Gupta, who has spent five decades at the Silicon Valley in the US, *" Focus on playing well, not winning,"* an analogy from her expertise in Bridge well-applied to life, she went on to comment on cultivating ethics, *" If don't have ethics, you don't have trust and ethical choices matter."*

JLF coverage by Tanusha Nagrat and Deepa Vanjani

If poetry was the moral compass of this year's Jaipur Literary Festival, then its many voices reminded us how deeply literature is entwined with life's fractures, silences, and courage.

In a deeply contemplative session, Javed Akhtar reflected on the non-linearity of existence: "Life is never linear, it keeps changing, there are different packages with good and bad, one has to sit with their package and think whether it's good or bad for them." With characteristic wit and gravity, he invoked survival and adaptation – "How to be a good cockroach… zara sochiyega" – before reciting a searing poem that placed conscience at its centre. Amidst overcrowded streets and moral dilemmas, the poem asked whether movement itself becomes violence: "chaloon to auron pe zulm dhaoon / rukoon to auron ke zulm jheloon… zameer, tujh ko to naaz hai apni munsifi par / zara sunoon to ki aaj kya tera faisla hai."

A quieter intensity filled the tent at Baithak during Jagdeep Singh's session on the launch of his poetry anthology "When God's Don't Matter."
"I don't think my poems are dark," he said, "They are confessional. They deal with reality."
Poetry, for him, arrives unannounced – "You cannot schedule a poem. Poems come when they come." Love poetry, he observed, almost always begins with heartbreak, bearing fractures that medicine cannot heal. Writing without armour demands bravery: "You are bearing yourself out there." Almost as a whisper, he added, "If I were to hawk something today, it would be love. Peace. Brotherhood."

Questions of silence, ruthlessness, and craft animated Jeet Thayil, who remarked wryly, "When a writer is born in a family, the family is finished," and later, "The greatest gifts families give each other is the gift of lying." Reflecting on writing poetry today, he spoke of choosing silence and society's complicity in it: "Choosing deafness and choosing silence… and we all as a society make allowances for it." On craft, his advice was uncompromising:

"Learning how to be ruthless with your writing… There's no fat, the work is lean."

A feminist and reflective lens shaped the conversation with Karuna Ezra Pariekh, who spoke about her forthcoming book Water Baby, "a part travelogue, part memoir," offering "a feminist perspective on the history of travel in India and globally through the experiences of women of color." On isolation and creativity, she observed that while longer works demand solitude, poetry often emerges "in a fit or fire of emotion." Most resonantly, she affirmed: "Poetry insists on our vulnerability."

That insistence took concrete form in Banu Mushtaq, who urged writers to abandon hesitation: "Don't just plan to write. Just start writing. Write, write and write yet." Speaking of challenging authority, she recalled, "I asked questions that nobody thought one would… A woman is expected to be silent and uncomplaining, I challenged everything and faced all kinds of violence against me and my family."
Memory, multiplicity, and generosity shaped the conversation between Esther Freud and Karuna Ezra Parikh around My Sister and Other Lovers. "Memories are seen differently by different people in the family," Freud reflected. "No two people given the exact same circumstances will tell the same story." Reading her sister's version of shared history, she admitted, was "incredibly useful and moving… I learned things that had been hidden from me." On the writer's courage, she invoked the idea of "a splinter of ice… that makes you courageous enough or careless enough" to tell difficult truths.

Material culture acquired philosophical and civilizational depth in Laxmi Puri's meditation on The Sari Eternal. "This saree, this unstitched river that winds around… like a second skin to me," she wrote, positioning the sari not

merely as attire but as a living archive of memory, ethics, and spirituality. Writing the book, she explained, was "a tribute, a conversation, a meditation," inviting others to write their own love letters to the sari. Reading from the book, she reflected on the deeper meaning of unstitched cloth within the Indian imagination: "Unstitched cloth has always been associated with sanctity, completeness and transcendence." Stitching, she noted, was historically viewed as an act that ruptured wholeness, which is why unstitched fabric became central to rites of passage and worship. This, she emphasized, was "not just a spiritual preference, it's a civilizational stance."

Healing through poetry took centre stage in William Sieghart's session on The Poetry Pharmacy, a project born from listening rather than theory. Having written hundreds of poetic prescriptions and spoken to thousands of people in libraries, Sieghart described the experience as humbling and weighty. What emerged most starkly, he said, was that "the most common affliction of the modern era is loneliness." In an age saturated with digital communication, he pointed to the paradox of constant connectivity without genuine connection, noting the emotional toll of maintaining online avatars, particularly for the young. His most potent prescription came from the 14th-century Persian poet Hafez: "I wish I could show you, when you're lonely or in darkness, the astonishing light of your own being."

Storytelling as a bridge to truth animated Gaur Gopal Das, who reflected on why humour often succeeds where direct instruction fails. "Stories and humor have a way to say serious stuff that reaches more to your heart than your mind," he observed, explaining that truth, when delivered plainly, can feel painful, even abrasive. Truth, he suggested, is like surgery – necessary but difficult. Humour works as anesthesia, softening the blow and allowing insight to pass resistance. Recounting a parable of a boy burdened with a bag of stones, he spoke of the emotional weight we carry daily – anger, insecurity, comparison, resentment. The story ended with a gentle question addressed to everyone listening: "What is that one stone that you need to put down today?"

At the Biographer's Ball, Jung Chang spoke of writing under censorship and surveillance: "I wrote all my books not with provocation in mind, I just wanted to write truthfully." Her guiding principle, she said, remained simple and unwavering: "to be honest."

And finally, Vir Das offered stark advice to aspiring artists: "If you can do anything else with your life and be happy, for God's sake do that." Comedy, he said, takes everything – personal life, peace of mind, certainty – but "when it's good, it's so goddamn good." The best work, he added, comes when "everybody else is angry, but you're not."

Together, these sessions reaffirmed that literature – whether spoken, sung, or quietly read – remains one of our most honest ways of making sense of the world.

MY FATHER MEETING MY MOTHER
By Cyril Dabydeen

No sideways glance, nor turnaround,
but only shyness--

days long gone, but coming back
to me with a sensibility my own.

A village hideaway, it must be,
in my mother's inner life—

what's come to pass, I believe,
being themselves, you see;

their sense of attraction only,
the body an emblem with

a vow taken, I must know--
a whim or fancy, their reticence

with words, emotions locked in,
arms and legs, thighs concave,

not convex, the heart beating,
eyes closed, more than being

non-committal, my father--
what's to come, in a world his own,

my not yet being born, in
forgotten territory only.

Book review

ASTERIA's ENCHANTED GIFT
ASTERKALI: Do You See the Stars?
By Dr. Azam Gill

Dr. Roopali Sircar Gaur is a poet, writer, professor, editor and social justice activist. Her latest offering, ASTERKALI: Do You See the Stars? is a collection of one hundred and one poems published by Sabre & Quill.

Temporal and spatial strains of the classical and the divine converge in the title, the

Proto-Indo-European root 'Aster' for 'star' forming the stem of the Greek closed compound Asteria, making Asterkali 'Star-blossom,' or rather, Dazzling Star.

Start reading ASTERKALI, and let the sky descend with every conceptual word embroidered in sensory images twinkling in the bejeweled sky that does not hang overhead, but descends to awaken dormant gems in discerning hearts.

Aster buds of love, wisdom and faith, bloom to decorate a vast temporal canvas.

The poems seamlessly navigate spiritual eras, from beliefs admitting diversity to the structures of obedience distilled to perfection through exclusiveness. Craft, skill and spiritual insight overlap to offer an incredible voyage. And therein abides Roopali's social activism, ceaselessly working its integrous magic.

ASTERKALI suffixes an additional poem to its one hundred of completion. The single-digit suffix implies continuity. The sub-title encapsulates this infinite benefaction, blessed of sensory images conjured by Roopali's powerful wand.

The haunting poetic voice consecrates the death of Captain Batra with the power of simplicity "I wept bitterly." Illusion and reality, form and content clash and merge in "I saw in the prickly cactus the beatific face of God!" — deifying even the harshest of realities.

Sensory images power and, articulate the emotional reach of Roopali's thematic vision, orchestrating the convergence of diversity.

Visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory, vegetal, bestial and physiological images trip the light fantastic across the pages to titillate and conduct the reader from the sensorial to the sensual.

SHAKUNTALA: From the Mahabharta to Kalidasa, a Tale of Patriarchy, boldly retells a patriarchal story, adjusting the feminine without any hint of male envy: "The meditative silence of the hermitage trembled with foreboding ..."

LOST HER NAME is a lamentation: "All she had hugged was a handful of ash..."

The social conscience of BARBER's DAUGHTERS celebrates justice, equality, courage and fatherhood in "a dream celebrating triumph, the inversion of millenia."

"...gave me a rolling pin and Snatched away my pen" exalts a

woman's determined ferocity in I AM KALI.

In WHAT SECRETS DO GODS HIDE, "Mysteries lie in chanting mantras These secret magic words," which will "Reveal themselves when ..."

The voluptuousness of a bygone age and its tawdry reality synthesize in "(the) sun turned deep red... full faced moon... lights and havelis ... sound of ghungroo and dancing girls sparkle the..."

A sleight of mind verbalizes "Sparkle," while "deep in the Himalayas quietly flows the emerald Indus" in its transcendence through perpetuity.

And the poet invites Tennessee Williams for a cameo appearance in "Where desire is only a street car."

Enchanting visual images dance nimbly at their gala ball "... Reclined on gaudy rexine seats ... Storm raged inside her ... A lone woman ... Stepped out to fight."

The self-assurance of "... Musk mad jungle cries ... They had cheered alike for both coffin and cricket ..." retrieves and entwines a lost tempo within the modern to tweak the strings of time.

Pathos and bathos merge in the irony and satire of social criticism: "The ladies Club secretary was on Zoom, Bholu, Babli, Sonu, Goldy and Bunty Growing up in slums and shanty towns Like wriggly worms in cow dung ... Pleasure globes suckled chewed and bitten off."

Roopali Sircar Gaur exhibits a warrior's courage and a visionary artist's imagination to humanize the sacred, breaching the limits of reverence: "By the pranking dark philanderer ...The disrober of bathing women ...The wise charioteer..." Time swings to the divinity of pre-history and the supernatural, choosing critical integrity over veneration without compromising reverence.

Composite visual, olfactory and tactile images vivify the banal to democratize the elitism of taste in multiple domains. Composite images swirling in the affordable "parantha-wala-gali churning out stuffed fried parathas and kachoris claiming antiquity," redesign the hierarchy of taste, while blending past and present.

Roopali Sircar Gaur's literary finesse disrupts timelines to outpace Faulknerian sleight of hand.

She unhesitatingly plucks Lady Macbeth and subjugates her within "The natural order disrupted by a moral disorder (which) can no longer hold ... storms of greed beyond human need," so appropriate to the avaricious opium-dealing cartels who introduced tea to India.

Social activism for a key component of the human development index writhes with "wiggly worms ... To see children read and write is truly a God given sight ... To read and laugh and not just fly a kite."

Visual, auditory and bestial images bounce, collide, flow, rise and ebb, in a triumphant danse délectable.

Mother earth, gastronomy and the leisured class connive to fill a panel of compound vegetal imagery: "...sizzling pakoras in the wok ... cups of tea from the smooth sloping hills of Darjeeling, mother earth unable to bear the extra weight ... "

"The natural order disrupted by a moral disorder can no longer hold..."

Art genuflects to the Gaurian moral order when Mira Nair, W. B. Yeats and Shakespeare bubble in the same cauldron on a misty heath in MONSOON WEDDING, THE SECOND COMING, to contemplate "...storms of greed beyond human need."

Michel Foucault's "History of Madness," postulates its conceptual exclusion of choosing humanity over animality. Roopali Sircar Gaur successfully defies him in A SHREDDED MIND, exalting the exclusiveness of "the mad woman in the attic," within a poet, driving creativity and birthing life itself, under:

"Clear pieces of shining crystal

Like a beauteous chandelier

Hanging from the ink blue sky

Myriads of twinkling drops of light."

Gratitude to Dr. Gaur, for opening hearts to see inner stars, bringing the sky down to the earth for some, and grafting wings on others to soar among the stars with humility — without searing them. It is tempting to wonder how Icarus' flight might have ended had it been Roopali advising instead of Daedalus warning.

***

Dr. Azam Gill, novelist, analyst and retired Lecturer of Toulouse University, has authored nine books, including four thrillers — BLOOD MONEY, FLIGHT TO PAKISTAN, BLASPHEMY, JADINY, and contributed to six anthologies. JADINY: Just Another Day in New York, is the first alternative history thriller about the 9/11 Twin Tower attacks.

Interview

Ricky Muthukumaraswamy
in conversation with Sharon Rundle

In February, I had the great pleasure of interviewing Mr Ricky Muthukumaraswamy, a talented artist and singer.

He came to Perth, Australia, in 1984 with his wife Anette and their three sons due to the unrest and riots in Sri Lanka.

A banker in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Ricky worked in the tax department in Perth for ten years. During that time, he nurtured his love for sketching and painting by joining other artists. He went to Claremont School of Art where he gained knowledge and experience of techniques.

When he retired, he immersed himself in his art. He observed that most of his fellow artists found portrait art difficult, but Ricky, being used to portraiture, went ahead with his portrait sketching.

I asked him about his early life and his parents. "I was keen on sketching and drawing even then. My father assisted me in this field very much by buying books on art," he said.

"My family have always been singing. I went to the temple on Fridays and sang devotional songs, which is how I developed the talent to sing. My parents should be lauded for their perseverance in making me sing on every occasion." He considers his singing voice as God's gift and takes it seriously. "I enjoy singing Indian songs in Hindi. I also sing in

English, Tamil, and Sinhalese and my pronunciation is very good." (English is Ricky's second language). He concentrates on the melody and puts emotion and feeling into his voice. He has sung in musical shows and on stage in Perth, where has made a name for himself.

You can hear Ricky Muthukumaraswamy and Monica Holmes sing on YouTube, and Ricky Muthukumaraswamy and Gnanasampanthan singing *Thevathi Poloru Pennonru* in a Tamil cultural show organised by his sister Shantha Jeyaraj in Perth.

Shantha came to live in Perth in 1989. Ricky said she is a "go-getter". She runs her own cookery and cake making show *Shanta's Table* on YouTube.

Ricky's uncle Sundaram Mathura-Nayagam was a pioneer of Sinhala cinema. From making sandalwood and neem soaps and perfumes at factories both in Madurai and Ceylon, he turned to making films. He started in India and set up Sri Murugan Navakala Ltd.

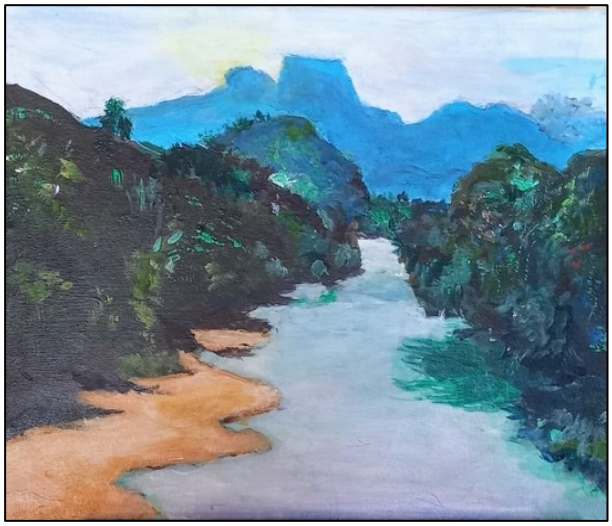
His production company had an office in Madurai and a studio—Chitrakala Movietone—at Thrupparankundram. Ricky said "to my knowledge, my uncle was the only entrepreneur who had his fingers in every pie. He was very enterprising and was the first Tamil person to produce Sinhalese movies."

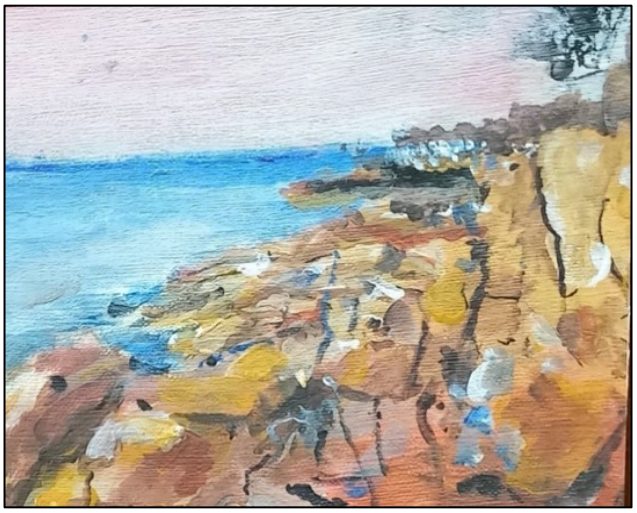
Kadawunu Poronduwa (or *Broken Promise* in English translation) was the first-ever Sinhala 'talkie' film where the characters on screen spoke and sang in the Sinhala language. Before that films were in English, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, or Telugu. The film shot in India premiered at the Kingsley Theatre in Colombo on 21 January 1947. It proved a great success at the box-office and continued to be screened for almost three years.

As previously mentioned, Ricky and his wife arrived in Perth with three sons. Tragically, Ricky's second Gavin son passed away in 2014 at the age of 40. He left behind a wife Jean Muthukumaraswamy and a one-year-old daughter, Arundathi. Gavin was a talented Computer Graphic Image creator. Ricky used to go for his art with Gavin. After Gavin passed away, Ricky joined an art class in Kalamunda (an eastern suburb of Perth) and continued to brush up his artistic skills. He feels that he produced his best paintings at this time.

Ricky has painted numerous portraits of Hollywood stars. His paintings are original creations. 'Painting is very deep in my soul,' Ricky said. Some of his portraits are commissioned. He prefers to use water-based acrylics for his artworks as it is important for expressing his love of colour, sheen, and gloss. He uses acrylics because of environmental concerns too, as it is not healthy to inhale turpentine or pour it down the sink. He also avoids oil paints. He is conscious of the effect of lighting on his paintings on display as it can cause them to fade.

He exhibited his paintings in a one-man show on 28 June 2025, attended by over a hundred people. He said his wife and his sister made this event happen. Many people wanted to buy his paintings. He said he felt like a proper artist. He has also donated some of his paintings, including a large canvas painting of two elephants to cancer research.





At the age of eighty-seven, Ricky suffers from Parkinson's disease which limits his activities. I asked him how he deals with the effects. He said that he faces immense difficulties, as it means that his body freezes. My painting consumes my thoughts and keeps me going. Parkinson's disease is debilitating so concentrating on my painting gives me a focus."

What advice would he like to share with other people? "Never look back in anger. Don't waste time doing nothing. Go on with life. I have my painting gear in the care home where I now live so I don't think of Parkinson's. Painting provides a diversion, I get involved, even in bed I think about my painting and when my body goes rigid, I think about what I'll do tomorrow." He continues to sing, he sings karaoke, he sings in his room. He said that most people with Parkinson's disease lose their voice, it fades to a whisper because they don't practice using their singing voice. "Singing is good therapy, people should sing out loud. Singing also helps people with dementia, it's good for the brain, and it brings people together." Then he sang the song *Mona Lisa* beautifully to me.

Photos courtesy of Ricky Muthukumaraswamy (c)

Dr Sharon Rundle is a member of the Institute of Professional Editors and Chair of the University of Technology Sydney Writers Alumni. She has co-edited five anthologies of stories from Australia and the Indian subcontinent. Her work appears in books, anthologies, journals, magazines, and radio.

Revisiting Sholay@50
"Kitne aadmi the?" Any Guesses?

By Deepa Vanjani

"*Kitne aadmi the*?"(how many men were there?)
Three words, a soft cadence with an assertiveness, and without a second thought we know the answer. It's Gabbar and the film is **Sholay**.

The 1975 film, a Sippy multi-starrer, turned 50 this year. Its rerelease was a much-awaited moment of sheer joy. As I sat in the multiplex, and the credits began to roll, the rush of memory began. I was four when I had first watched it in Bhopal. Since it turned out to be a huge hit, it ran on in cinema halls, giving us another chance to watch it in Bhilwara in Rajasthan, this time in a box. Those days cinema halls had boxes for families which had a slightly higher ticket price.

Amitabh and Dharmendra in the 'Ye Dosti' Song

Watching it now made me realise it's magnitude and the many reasons it remains a cult film to this day. The star cast is undoubtedly the USP of Sholay, but there are other ingredients that are so well-blended into the plot that every detail adds to the flavour of the film.

The background score stands out; it carries the ups and downs of emotions. Ramgarh, the setting of the film, is like a character. It is like RK Narayan's Malgudi, complementing the story and characters. Ramgarh is to Sholay what Malgudi is to Narayan. The camera work is stupendous

and deserves kudos for such fast-moving scenes, and close shots done so well with no VFX and digital tools available in those days.

The characters, both major and minor, are well-delineated. Each contributes to the development of the story. Mausi, played by veteran character actor Leela Mishra, is embedded in our memories, as much as Jai played by Amitabh Bachchan, Veeru played our Dharam paaji, (late Dharmendra), and Hema Malini as Basanti. Even Dhanno, the female horse who

The Coin

pulls Basanti's tonga, has a place in the schema of the film. "*Chal dhanno, aaj teri Basanti ki izzat ka sawal hai*,"(move dhanno, today it's the question of your Basanti's honour) is not just a famous line, it's also about the relationship and trust between the animal and the driver. It was way ahead of the times to have this women empowerment concept which is so simply, yet powerfully stated by Hema ji aka Basanti, when she says if Dhanno being a mare can pull a tonga, why can't she (Basanti) drive one!

Not just the protagonists, the minor characters are so well-delineated that they remain etched in the memory, even if they have brief roles- Jagdeep with his typical accent, Asrani as the "*hum angrezon ke zamaane ke jailer*"(I am a jailer of the British era)and Satyan Kapoor as the silent and firm domestic help of Thakur. Amjad Khan in his debut performance is so indelible a character, that he became synonymous with Gabbar.

Salim-Javed have done wonders with the script. Impactful dialogues loaded with intense emotions, with each character assigned their well- crafted part, makes the characters and the dialogues memorable. The tinge of humour is unmistakable as when Amitabh turns round and asks "*Tumhara naam kya hai Basanti?*" (what's your name Basanti?)

Talking of Thakur, Sanjeev Kumar, as always, is brilliant. His progressive view about getting his daughter-in-law(Jaya Bachchan) remarried despite her being a widow(the scene is there in

the uncut version), back then, is a strong message of social change.

Pancham (RD Burman) has created some outstanding music for the songs, equally melodiously rendered. "*Ye dosti",* the eternal friendship song, with Manna Dey, for a change, giving a playback to Amitabh. RD Burman, with his chuckling naughtiness, Jalal Agha with is lively passion, and Helen with her sensuality have immortalised the song "*Mehbooba mehbooba*" (a term to address the beloved).

Even the coin Jai tosses for making decisions in crucial moments, is an integral part of the script.

Sholay is a classic example of complete mainstream cinema entertainment because in the decade of the 70's the parallel/ art cinema wave had also begun with films like *Ankur*. A blend of all ingredients mixed in as proportion that makes the viewers go through a roller coaster ride of emotions.

As a tribute to Dharmendra: The scene in which Veeru stands atop a water tank shouting "*mausi chakki peesing*"(aunty will grind the mill in prison), will always be remembered and so will he.
Needless to say, he looks breathtakingly handsome in the film!

Photo courtesy: Ramesh Sippy

Dr. Deepa Vanjani, Professor of English, is based in Indore. An animal lover, she is also an author, and a PhD guide, who freelanced with Hindustan Times and Times of India previous to writing for Confluence.

"Elegy: A Gift from Those Who Have Gone" Tanusha Nagrath wins 1st prize for her poetry

Acclaimed poet, radio personality, and cultural voice Tanusha Nagrath has been awarded the First Prize in the Single Poem category at the Proverse Poetry Competition 2025, organised by Proverse Hong Kong, an internationally respected independent publisher known for fostering diverse literary voices across South Asia and beyond. Her winning poem, "Elegy: A Gift from Those Who Have Gone," will be featured in the forthcoming international anthology Mingled Voices 10, scheduled for publication in April 2026.

The Proverse Poetry Competition, associated with the International Proverse Prize and its annual poetry initiatives, is widely acknowledged for encouraging both emerging and established writers, offering them a global platform to share deeply personal and culturally resonant narratives. Proverse is co-directed by Dr. Gillian Bickley, an accomplished author, editor, and researcher known for her work in biography, family history, and nineteenth century Hong Kong, and Dr. Verner Bickley.

Together, they are also the co-founders of the International Proverse Prize for unpublished book-length works and the International Proverse Poetry Prize for single poems in English, further strengthening the platform's global literary significance.

Tanusha's poem is a poignant exploration of grief, memory, and emotional resilience, inspired by the personal loss of her father. Through lyrical sensitivity and introspective depth, her work reflects how loss transforms into a quiet, enduring presence, reshaping one's understanding of love, absence, and healing.

This recognition marks a significant milestone in Tanusha Nagrath's creative journey, affirming her voice as one that bridges personal experience with universal emotion, and resonates meaningfully with readers across borders. It is noteworthy that Tanusha Nagrath is also a contributor to Confluence: South Asian Perspectives, a magazine published from London.

Beautiful Mind

By Meenakshi Mohan

(For my friend Jane)

I stared at her,
tears rolling down my cheeks
my friend—a woman,
once with a brilliant mind,
an executive with a brilliant career —
vibrant and spirited
who *governed the very spring of her life.*

today, she sat in a chair
with a vacant stare,
looking out the window of a home
where others like her
found their final residence.
what was she seeking out there
in the tracery of barren trees
in the stark winter afternoon
lost in the shadows of the gray light?

her grandkids came to see her,
hoping their grandma would tell ***them stories***
as in the good *old times.*
the love of her life looked lovingly *at his wife,*
the sweetheart*he married fifty years ago.*

she searched their faces
with that same blank gaze,
who are they?
her heart ached to call them by name,
but like *those winter branches,*
her mind was stripped bare.

the leafless limbs outside shook gently,
shedding tears of last night's rain,
were they lamenting too?
did they share a similar sorrow?
perhaps not—
nature would heal the trees come spring.

I stroked her hair tenderly,
my friend, your beautiful mind would
live with me forever.

Meenakshi is an educator, writer and an artist. She has published widely in the UK and USA. Currently she is serving on the editorial committee of Inquiry in Education, a peer-reviewed journal for National Louis University in Chicago.

Celebrating the epic woman Draupadi to the Everyday Woman Today: Through Amalgamation of the Arts

By Lopamudra Banerjee

A comprehensive subjective reportage of a literary and artistic initiative in Bachman Library, Dallas, USA, hosted and curated in collaboration with local artistes and performers of the city.

"I will not tweak or twist to take in your doomed definitions of fortitude.
I soak in my own sunlight, my cloudy mane, my bumps and ridges dance
To the spring of your footsteps.
Inhale my quaintness and bounty, as my crushed contours,
My defiant dreams die and resurface, over and over again"

The essence and resonance of these words recreated in Bengali, my mother tongue, originating from my roots in West Bengal, India, thousands of miles away from my adopted home in Texas, USA, was born in a new avatar when I wrote the title poem 'Nijoswi' in 'Draupadi Theke Nijoswi—Amra', my debut collection of poems and prose poems in Bengali, and published it from Penprints, Kolkata this year. Back from a whirlwind trip in India, it was my consciousness as a Diaspora Bengali-Indian poet and writer that reared its head stronger every day. Moreover, with this consciousness, there was the emotional urgency to launch and introduce this collection of mine to the Bengali-speaking and the South Asian population in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, weaving the different facets of the metaphorical reality behind the book through the marvels of performing arts.

"Celebrating Draupadi Theke Nijoswi—Amra', Through Music, Poetry, Dance & Drama", the event that took place on Sunday, December 14th at Bachman Library Blackbox Theater in Dallas, Texas, is a collaborative endeavor that had its roots in the contents of the book and then spread its wings further, amalgamating various forms of literary-artistic expressions. The ideas behind the event were conceived after a period of conscious deliberation, so that I could not only introduce my books to my readers, but also celebrate the nuances of my artistic expressions, to give home to my poems published in the collection in the vast universe of music, dance and the creative arts.

"Poetry, which shines discreetly at the heart of every Bengali, no matter which part of the world he/she resides", in the words of the honorary guest for the occasion, renowned Bengali poet and playwright Goutam Dutta, is also 'a weapon of a silent revolution'. It is the spirit of a poet, a revolutionary that struggles within the boundaries of a domesticated home, which begets verses and prose, where the home and the greater universe converge, a universe that transpires in the mind of a nomadic poet, which the other honorary guests and speakers, author Quazi Hassan and essayist, author Salauddin Mahmood, in their poignant words, summed up eloquently. In essence, I have tried to weave a universe in the collection that encompasses the feminine subjectivity of the epic Mahabharata's 'Draupadi' to the intense travails of our modern, everyday women. It is that very universe that came alive during the event, through the various performances of all my creative friends in the city of Dallas. Professor Neil Bhattacharya from Southern Methodist University, honorary guest for the event, recited some lines from Sabyasachi Deb's famous Bengali poem 'Krishna', depicting the pathos and the fiery utterances of Draupadi, dishonored and disrobed in the 'dyutasabha' in Mahabharata. His internalization of the feelings converged with my ethos behind the book in which there is a whole trajectory of the 'mindscapes' of women, from the annals of history to the postmodern times when we walk upon the bosom of the earth, surrendering to her being as our 'quintessential human act'.

The 'quintessential human act' of words and images that found their moorings in the vernacular Bangla or Bengali, my mother tongue, was again taken to a new dimension altogether when local performers of Dallas came together to render the poems with the garb of performing arts, with the whole event competently conducted by emcee Mousumi Chatterjee. Esha Bhattacharya, with her rendition of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's song 'Ami Chitrangada' as the opening song, added an apt connotation to the quest of feminine subjectivity in the book. Also, along with the performers in dance (MUDRA, an ethnic dance troupe based in Dallas), in music and poetry reading (Sabyasachi Panda, Anindita Majumdar and Sarmin Erina, a Rabindra Sangeet artiste), there was a beautiful artistic resonance as poetry and literature turned into performing arts, which was a dream that I nurtured with the book launch of 'Draupadi Theke Njoswi—Amra'. It was a moment of exhilaration to see the nuanced symbolism of womanhood in my poem 'Nijoswi' taking a body of its own as the MUDRA dancers (Antara Nadi, Rafia Rasu and Parul Bhatia) rendered it through 'avinaya' (acting) and classical dance postures. Anindita's recitation of the two poems 'Basha Kothao Nai' centered on the theme of displacement of a woman and 'Unmochon' based on the theme of self-exploration of the poetic self was amalgamated with Sarmin's rendering of 'Tori amar hothat dube jaay' and 'Aponare diye rochili re ki e', two songs by Tagore that transported us into a new realm of introspection, deconstructing the poems with a new sense of awakening.

The final act of the event, 'Mukhomukhi', a psychological drama written by myself and enacted by me along with Priyanka Paul (with Mousumi Chatterjee as narrator, and Sharanya and Esha in music), was another conscious choice for the event, to celebrate the liberating power of literature. For the first time, I attempted to introduce myself as a playwright, with the Bengali drama adaptation emerging this year from an English short story 'Rendezvous', which was published in 'All That Jazz: A Romance Novella & Other Pathbreaking Tales' (Blue Pencil, 2020). A dialogue-based audio drama with only two women as the

protagonists, it was an experimental writing incorporating some elements of the 'stream-of-consciousness' style, in which the exploration of the self comes in the form of jarring truths, revelations, breaking patriarchal constructs and bringing to the fore repressed aspects of a woman's desires, sexuality and her inner world in various layers. Through the act of writing and enacting a part in such a play, it was my privilege to uphold my creative ethos to the audience, that developed in time through my reading of women authors like Ashapurna Devi, Mahasweta Devi, Kabita Singha, Taslima Nasrin in Bengali and also Plath, Maya Angelou, among others in English literature.

'Celebrating Draupadi Theke Nijoswi—Amra', through all its heartwarming renditions in various forms of performing arts, has been engraved in my heart as not only the author of my debut collection of vernacular Bengali poems, but as a curator and host of a memorable event. It gave me the succor to live through the hubris of this life through the marvels that artistic endeavors can create from time to time.

Lopamudra Banerjee is an award-winning author, poet, translator, editor based in Dallas, Texas, but originally from Kolkata, India, with nine solo books and six anthologies in fiction, nonfiction and poetry to her credit. 'Draupadi Theke Nijoswi—Amra' is her debut book in her vernacular Bengali language (Penprints Publications, 2025).

Poem

SONG OF THE GOATHERD

--for Rosemary

by Cyril Dabydeen

The bleating noise I heard,
a sheep, a lamb, in distress--
I could've told her

as she imagined solving
the world's hunger-problem--
where I came from.

Why didn't you drink milk each day,
like I did, or like Gandhi did--
Why didn't you?

Get a goat and milk it every morning,
it would solve the hunger problem--
declarative, you see.

***Oh, no*, I said, for the next morning**
the goat would be gone, stolen--
d'you really know?

In the village, yes, faraway,
words of hope, being an outsider
--I let you know.

A Masterclass in Poetry

How a Poem Leaps into Moving Art

Yogesh Patel

My love affair with filmmaking has a long history. I learned the art not as a separate discipline, but through writing and thinking for cinema—from scriptwriting to acting and songwriting. Therefore, making a film on poetry has never been a linear undertaking. As a poet and filmmaker, I see visuals and hear sounds beyond words, a sensibility that shapes my work profoundly.

The basic act of filmmaking is too often reduced to a technical exercise, seen as just a poetry recital with images like a slideshow. This casual dismissal misses the heart of the matter: ***technique does not make a film live; art does***. While today's tools, from high-end software to more accessible editors, are powerful, what one uses depends entirely on what one wants to achieve. It is knowledge acquired through practice that matters.

The same principles apply to audio. Sound is not merely attached to image; it is engineered. You manipulate it, stretch it, compress it. Sound is where pacing becomes tactile, with its own poetry and drama at your disposal.

In filmmaking, time is your poetic meter. While working on tracks, timelines, footage, or sound, time determines the outcome. Knowing how to cut to the second is not the point—film schools teach that well enough. What makes a film work is the artist who feels the pulse of the film at every second it runs. Like good poetry, you do not see the meter; you feel its precision.

Preparation is everything. Storyboarding is not a place for boredom or complacency, but the real canvas on which the film must justify its domain.

Let me offer one specific instance—a small intervention that changed everything.

The poem in the poetry film, ***Fare the Well,*** first published in *The London Magazine*, is from my forthcoming book.
Watch it here:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QZSEb3cWwXGXGZo6yna7uca3A82LWkDN/vie

2½: Two and a Half,
Yogesh Patel, Poetrywala,
ISBN: 978-81-990400-4-5

To take the poem beyond words—and the film beyond a simple flow of image to image—I introduced a brief noir intervention at the line "they will think." The structure became: image, then noir, then image. You can see how the colours jump at the words. This was not an aesthetic indulgence, but a living moment.

By cutting the footage into three precise segments aligned with the poem's recital, I treated only the middle section. Saturation was reduced, allowing colour to persist without authority. Contrast was set to avoid announcement. Gamma was adjusted so that light retained presence but felt emotionally thinned. Brightness was reduced just enough to introduce restraint.

The noir moment is subordinate. It does not declare itself. It passes. Like a line break in poetry, it creates a pause for transformation, not a show.

The same logic applies later with the image of a library, triggered by the word *iterate*—to record, repeat, systematise—in the line "how they had failed to iterate it." Here, noir functions as a muted, failed attempt at the colour of nuance, its inability to hold lived intensity. A falling leaf then restores coherence and balance.

Neither the leaf nor the library appears in the related lines.

Nor do noir, light, or the visual thresholds that lead us into these transfers. This is precisely the point. A poetry film should not merely represent what is written; it must move beyond the words while remaining faithful to the poem's integrity. Too often, filmmakers add unrelated imagery in the name of obscurity. I try instead to remain close to the poem's assets and their associations.

A gospel: **The poem must not be lost to the film.**

This principle guided the adaptation of "fare thee well," a poem from my collection *2½: Two and a Half*. The text explores absence and memory, using the metaphor of a season's passing. The filmic invasion, a brief descent into noir at a moment of collective misperception ("they will think"), visually enacts the poem's core tension: the gap between what is witnessed and what is truly gathered from experience. The subsequent library scene, paired with the word "iterate," renders the failure to archive lived intensity not as an idea, but as a felt, visual absence of colour. The tools—saturation, gamma, contrast—are not used for effect, but for emotional transcription. The poem's assets, its images of leaves, fire, and loss, are not illustrated but extended into a new, faithful medium. The film becomes a leap, not an illustration, ensuring the poem is not lost but seen anew.

Yogesh Patel's last poetry collection is The Rapids (The London Magazine, 2021). He has received an MBE for literature and is honoured with the Freedom of the City of London. With multiple awards to his credit, he has read in the House of Lords, UK. In 2025, he received Faber's FAB Prize and Poetry Archive's World View 2025 poetry film prize. Recently his work has appeared in AGNI, PN Review, The London Magazine, and World Literature Today.

Bindu Agrawal's

Remembering Bharatji (Smriti ke Jharokhe Se)

English translation by Meenakshi Bharat

Reviewed by Sharon Rundle

I found it a challenge to review this remarkable translation of a memoir of an outstanding Hindi writer whose many accomplishments and achievements in literature, literary circles, and politics fill the pages. It is a significant example of life writing.

Remembering Bharatji is a tribute, vividly written in great depth and detail, by Bindu Agrawal, the wife of Bharat Bhushan Agarwal, and translated by writer, translator, reviewer, and critic, Meenakshi Bharat. In her Translator's Note, which serves as a preface to the book, Bharat begins by describing her connection to Bindu Agrawal, and the author's deep connection, admiration, and affection for Bharatji. Through the eighteen years that Bharat lived in the same home with her mother-in-law, "there was not one day that she did not speak about her illustrious husband, Sahitya Akademi Award winner Bharat Bhushan Agarwal, the path-breaking Hindi poet of the Tar Saptak… She had taken on the herculean task of publishing every word that he had ever written… once this task was done, she turned to writing this memoir, as if to give a final seal to her relationship with the man and his word". (p. xi) In the making of this memoir, key photographs marking important relationships have been included, and the memories of others who knew the great man have been gathered. "I was slowly drawn into the rich world of Hindi literature, a space with which I was then unfamiliar,"(p.xi) Bharat writes, "to translate this volume [a literary artefact] which had been singularly hailed as the first memoir by a woman writer in Hindi by astute critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee, and which had been applauded by readers as both deeply personal and well researched." (p. xii)

Meenakshi Bharat further relates her own heady challenges and rewards experienced when translating this "inimitable-memoir-cum-biography-cum-autobiography-cum literary criticism (p. xii). — chitt ko shanti mili" (p.xvi). With the mind, body and soul thus finding peace through this memorialization of her poet-husband, she raises it to the level of an exercise in understanding human experience and achieving spiritual goals.

While this book is indeed a path-breaking tribute to Bharatji, "marking many firsts in the Hindi language", it is nonetheless not a hagiography. The author's great insight allows her to maintain "the inimitable intimate knowledge of a wife," while being "informed with the perspective of a practised literary critic (p. xiii) [who] does not shy away from critiquing both the personality of Bharatji, and his writing". (p. xii) As translator, Meenakshi Bharat had to: "navigate different registers—the intimate directness with which the personal was accessed and communicated, and the highly critical formal language whenever the world of letters was broached". (p. xiv) She has done so admirably.

The first chapters reveal Bharatji as a boy whose life is one of sadness, rejection, and loneliness. Denied love and understanding by an unfeeling, manipulative and materialistic father who seeks to keep him from an education, he, unexpectedly, receives it when he is singled as a protégé by discerning mentors who recognize his intelligence and application. This sees his early poems being published. He goes on to write "melancholy poetry and songs, but also humour, including a parody of Harivanshrai Bachchan's Madhushala". (p.36)

In 1946, he became "the father of the limerick in Hindi". His limericks were published in 1955. He also developed a new form of verse in Hindi, Dhut Vilambit, and found satire and humour a pathway and a

safety valve to revealing truth and unpalatable ideas.

For various reasons, including economic, employment, literary circles, education, and politics he moved several times to different parts of India including Agra, Allahabad, Lucknow, Calcutta, Bhopal, Delhi, and Shimla where he was appointed as a visiting fellow at the Institute of Advanced Studies, as well as undertaking an extended European tour, where he was feted as an honoured guest and speaker.

The memoir traces the many influences on his thought, including political thinkers such as Marx, Gandhi, and Lohia (pp328-330), as well as ancient texts such as the Ramayan, and fellow writers, playwrights, poets, and scholars. He was knowledgeable on a wide range of topics and issues, and his independent, progressive opinion was frequently sought by others, which he offered generously.

Clear-sightedly, Bindu Agrawal presents a balanced picture of this great man: notwithstanding his full, busy life, he took an intense and loving interest in his wife and children, as well as his siblings and their families. She reveals him to be a family man who tried his utmost to be supportive and understanding, even when he disagreed with their views. Sometimes, his principled bent caused him inner conflict. Occasionally, he lost his somewhat short temper or became stubborn over decisions to be made that upset the harmony and balance of his family life. The author also describes him as restless, sometimes disenchanted (particularly with political issues), committing to so many committees and meetings that he had no free time. He was excessively busy translating manuscripts too, and this affected his writing and his family. The author critiques his plain speaking, a tendency that often caused offence to others, especially when he was sent manuscripts to critically evaluate--and he was sent a great many by writers eager for his highly valued assessment, comment, and advice.

On the plus side, his attitude generally was modern and progressive. He practised forbearance and patience. He genuinely believed that “only a love that knows how to give is true love. Love makes a person progressive and generous”. (p. 326) He believed in independence, non-interference, and a Buddhist philosophy.

Bindu Agrawal describes how she was a beneficiary of his support and generosity with his insistence on her achieving a full education of the highest standard; in fully supporting her independent work, ideas, plans, and her own outstanding achievements.

Bharatji’s death in Shimla on 23 June 1975—sadly without finishing his planned classic magnum opus—was a great shock for his family, dear friends, supporters, and admirers. His death was a great loss, both to his writer-memoirist and Hindi literary circles.

The author, the late Bindu Agrawal is to be congratulated on such a detailed, incisive and well written volume, that reveals not only the life of a highly significant and outstanding leader in literature and politics, but also portrays him as a genuinely supportive and loving partner in their relationship. Most significantly, her memoir also becomes a singular record of the life, politics, and literature of the times.

The translator, Meenakshi Bharat, is also to be highly commended for capturing the essence and insights contained in this book and for achieving her aim of navigating the different registers of the narrative voice, as well as the core, heart and soul of this remarkable relationship and the lives so brilliantly led.

Dr Sharon Rundle is a writer, editor, academic and avid reader who has presented conference papers, and lectured courses and writing workshops at universities, colleges, and institutions in Australia, UK, and India. She is a member of several Indo-Australian organisations and served on the Board of Directors and Management Committee of the NSW Writers' Centre. An Australia India Business and Community Awards finalist 2022, she has been particularly active in building bridges between Australia and India over the past decade. Her family connection to India stretches back for at least six generations.
https://sharonrundle.com.au

To order past issues of
Confluence magazine
Please contact
The Editor, Confluence South Asian Perspectives
Email: confluenceuk@yahoo.com
Phone/WhatsApp: + 44 - 7801569640

Short story

The Currency of Bruises

By Ritu Kamra Kumar

Rucika first learnt the grammar of bruises long before she learnt the grammar of marriage. They were not always purple or blue. Some arrived colourless—shaped like pauses, like sentences abandoned midway, like doors shut too softly to be called slams. Others bloomed visibly: tender crescents on the arm, fingerprints on the wrist, marks that demanded translation before the world could acknowledge their existence.

As a child in Chembur, she had watched her mother cook with a reverence that bordered on ritual. Spices were never flung carelessly; they were introduced.

Heat was regulated with patience, not force. "Food," her mother would say, stirring slowly, "remembers how you treat it." Rucika grew up believing this applied equally to people, to marriages, to life itself.

Her father, a bank clerk who believed in the quiet virtue of routine, never raised his voice. He believed that dignity lay in endurance. Her elder brother Sameer left for Dubai early, carrying with him ambition and an unspoken escape. Her sister Anuja married into a quieter home in Thane, where silences were benign. Rucika remained—the accommodating one, the keeper of equilibrium, the daughter who learnt early that harmony was her responsibility.

Marriage to Vishal felt like arrival. He admired her cooking, her organisational skills, her ability to host with effortless grace. "You make everything feel settled," he once said. She mistook it for love, not recognising the early architecture of control.

Vishal preferred the invisible kinds of violence. He prided himself on restraint, on never "losing control" like the men who populated crime reports. His anger arrived wrapped in vocabulary—adjust, compromise, respectability. When words leaked venom, they were delivered with surgical precision. On rarer days, when language failed him, his palm spoke—swiftly, conclusively.

Later, there was always something to follow: a silk stole from Commercial Street, a designer watch, a weekend booking in Lonavala. Gifts arrived like apologies that refused to kneel.

"Why do you make such a big deal out of everything?" he would ask, arranging the box neatly on the bed, as though order itself could erase chaos.

Rucika would nod. She had mastered nodding—the generational inheritance of women who learnt early that disagreement had consequences.

They lived in Sudarshan Heights, Andheri East—a respectable society where incense lingered in elevators in the mornings and expensive perfumes in the evenings. Here, bruises were not scandals; they were rumours, quickly laundered, folded, and stored away. Like compensations.

Reveti, eight, and Rahul, five, learnt early to read atmospheres. On good days, Vishal built Lego towers with Rahul; on volatile ones, Reveti quietly took her brother into their room and played teacher, chalking alphabets on an imaginary blackboard. Childhood, for them, had begun learning caution too early.

Kamaini, Rucika's mother-in-law, lived two buildings away. Her presence arrived with the sharp click of bangles and the certainty of inherited wisdom.

"Marriage is not a playground," she would say, sipping tea. "Men get angry. That shows mardangi. At least Vishal provides."

Endurance, Rucika realised slowly, was Kamaini's dowry—and her bequest.

Sunday afternoons belonged to Cafe Monsoon, Bandra. Suruchi, Vansikha, Nalini, and Virinda arrived armed with statistics and hashtags. Feminism, here, was articulate, caffeinated, and curiously stalled.

"My cousin left her husband," Suruchi said once.

"And then?" Rucika asked.

"She's struggling. Society doesn't forgive."

Outrage circulated freely. Solutions did not.

"Have you tried counselling?" Vansikha asked gently, as though recommending a new skincare routine.

Rucika smiled. She had perfected that too.

The real rupture arrived not through Vishal, but through Sonia, their domestic help from Dharavi.

The Currency of Bruises…

Sonia's days were measured in buses, brooms, and borrowed resilience. She spoke little, but her body narrated everything—stooped shoulders, eyes trained to the floor.

One morning, as Sonia bent to sweep the balcony, Rucika noticed bruises on her forearm—angrier, unapologetic.

"Ramchand?"

Sonia nodded. "Daaru," she whispered.

That evening, Vishal overheard them talking.

"Why interfere in servants' matters?" he snapped. "They're used to this life."

Used to.

That night, Vishal's violence arrived not as a slap but as systematic dismantling. He questioned her competence, her motherhood, her worth. When finished, he left money on the table. "Buy something nice."

Currency for bruises.

Something recalibrated within her—quietly, irrevocably.

That week, Rucika attended a book discussion at the British Council Library. The conversation circled around women whose resistance was neither loud nor celebrated—women who negotiated autonomy inch by inch, often paying dearly. The language unsettled her—not because it was unfamiliar, but because it named her condition with unsettling clarity.

Later, she reread a novel about a woman who survived droughts, deaths, and disappointments with stoic grace. Once, such endurance had felt heroic. Now, it felt disturbingly inadequate. Was survival the only inheritance available to women?

That night, Vishal slapped her.

The next morning, a gold lotus pendant arrived.

For the first time, she felt clarity instead of gratitude.

Change arrived not as rage, but as arithmetic.

She documented—dates, gestures, silences. Patterns replaced excuses. She began to see how affection followed aggression with clockwork precision, how control masqueraded as concern.

She spoke to Sonia again—not with sympathy this time, but information. Legal aid, helplines, shelters run by NGOs in Lower Parel. Sonia listened, afraid but alert.

"Who will change him?" Sonia asked.

"Maybe no one," Rucika replied. "But you can change your place in the story."

The sentence surprised even her.

The society's Ganesh celebration that month glittered with lights and laughter. Vishal performed benevolence flawlessly. Kamaini beamed.

Later that night, anger resurfaced—about the way Rucika had spoken to another man, about respect.

When Vishal's hand rose, Rucika did not flinch.

After the slap, she retrieved not a saree but Vishal's prized watch.

"This is your compensation," she said calmly. "For the bruise you just gave me."

She slapped him—not violently, but decisively. Something ancestral cracked.

Kamaini arrived, aghast.

"No," Rucika said quietly. "I've found my mind."

She left with the children for Powai, to a friend's spare room. Legal notices followed. Counselling occurred—not reconciliation, but reckoning.

For the first time, she called her parents.

Her mother cried—not from surprise, but recognition. Her father was silent for a long time. "Come home," he said. It was the bravest sentence he had ever spoken.

Sameer funded a lawyer from Dubai. Anuja arrived every weekend, folding Rucika back into familial care.

Parallelly, Sonia left Ramchand and joined an NGO kitchen. Her bruises faded first; her fear later.

At her parents' home, Rucika cooked again—not to appease, but to anchor herself. Recipes returned as memory. The children watched her reclaim rhythm.

A friend suggested casually, "Why don't you post your food?"

She did.

What began as photographs became narratives—recipes braided with survival, spices with resilience. She named the page Bruised to Brewed.

Followers arrived slowly. Stories faster.

Cooking transformed from inheritance to livelihood, from labour to language.

Months later, standing at Marine Drive, Rucika watched the sea rehearse persistence.

She thought of women who endured, those who resisted quietly, those who refused inheritance.

She was no longer interested in compensation.

She wanted a different currency—choice, dignity, sustenance.

Behind her, Mumbai breathed—bruised, resilient, unfinished.

And somewhere within, something resurrected—not innocence, but strength.

Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar, Retd. Officiating Principal and Associate Professor of English at MLN College, Yamuna Nagar, is an acclaimed academician, poet, and writer. With over 400 contributions to leading national newspapers and magazines, she has published 70+ research papers in reputed national and international journals and edited books.

PASSION PRINCIPALITIES AND PRINCESSES

Nelofar Currimbhoy's *Tara – the Dream Chaser*

by Anjana Basu

This is the story of a princess for whom life should have been a glorious blaze of romance. Instead, Tara Kumari of Jaivangarh finds herself on the run from her handsome but abusive husband, Vikram, and her mother, who is determined to make money by selling off her principality's land — even turning heritage jewellery into modern high jewellery.

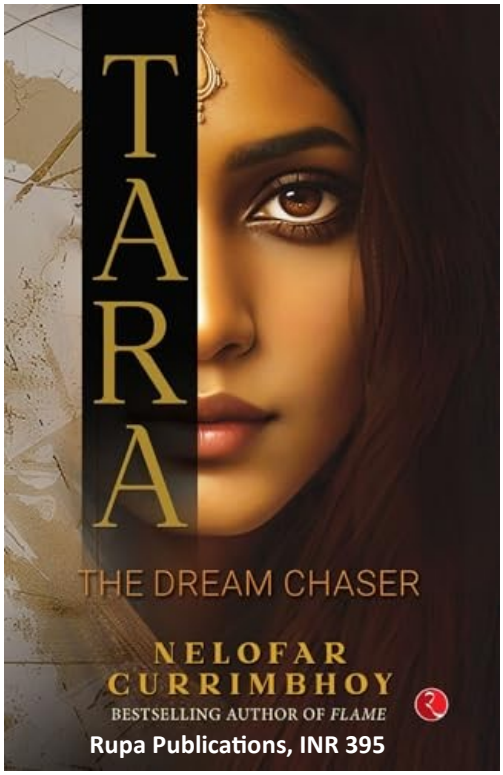
Afraid for her life, Tara flees to Mumbai, where she meets a host of people and finds love with the half-French Kabir — whom the author claims is also half-Bengali, though the surname does not suggest that. However, since he is in love with his *Nokon* and captures soul-stirring photographs, he may be Bengali after all.

There is a gunman hot on Tara's heels as she dashes through Mumbai, meeting Vivan Mehta, her dream film star, and finding her heart miss several beats when he gifts her her own heirloom earrings bought at an auction.

Currimbhoy paints a life that includes a day at the races, a love affair between a Maharajah and a Rajmata, and Tara's birth — for some inexplicable reason, the Maharajah tells his wife to 'seed an heir for the kingdom in the best way she can'. Tara is the result. The story flits between past and present with cinematic precision.

Babies — and the lack of them — form one of the recurring themes of the book: Aishwarya's struggle, Tara's mother's determination, and Tara's own willingness to sacrifice her life for her people keep the story at fever pitch. She learns to rebuild her life from scratch, even though she possesses the weapons of her beauty and the power to attract men. Yet her life seems to settle too easily onto a path towards success, even though it is edged with danger.

We are aware of modern princes and their erstwhile kingdoms, struggling to survive by reinventing themselves as heritage hotels and tourist attractions. Tara's activism of choice is helping her people preserve their handicrafts and converting one of the palaces into a museum. However, her mother and husband join forces with an unscrupulous Mumbai promoter to fight her — adding to the drama.



Rupa Publications, INR 395

Why, for example, is Vikram, who bears the royal Rathore surname, not a prince? And why is Aishwarya determined that her daughter marry him in a state filled with eligible royals? Jaivangarh is certainly not the only Rajput kingdom. However, the sweep of the story eventually makes such questions irrelevant — the reader is too caught up in Tara's turmoils and the discovery that even love can prove more complicated than expected. The clash between love and fascination raises deeper questions about what love truly is.

Tara keeps a journal, writes poetry, and is determined to discover her real father — though she is unsure of the circumstances. She is also aware of the power of social media and the Mumbai film world, which she uses to her advantage against the goons trying to seize land from the Jaivangarh farmers.

There is an array of high-profile transport — helicopters, cruise ships, fast cars — whisking people from place to place at the nick of time, though they often become instruments of destruction. As we know from Princess Diana's tragic example, a fast life can shatter in an instant. Not that Tara's life is destined to end that way — despite the bullets and blazes, she emerges triumphant, though the ending is not quite what one would have expected. It remains, however, true to one of the underlying themes of the story.

Readers can lose themselves in an extravagance of romance and description, uncertain whether everything will end happily ever after — but then, princesses come with their own fairy tales.

Anjana Basu works as an advertising consultant in Calcutta. She has had a book of short stories published by Orient Longman, India, the BBC has broadcast one of her short stories and her poems have featured in an anthology brought out by Penguin India.