

## DELIVERING BREXIT

By Shanta Acharya

The newly elected leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister of the UK, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, has pledged to leave the European Union on 31 October 2019, 'do or die', if a free trade agreement cannot be reached by then. The 'Withdrawal Agreement' Theresa May, his predecessor, brokered was thrice rejected by Parliament. For Boris Johnson, this agreement is beyond resurrection unless the 'backstop', an insurance plan to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and its southern neighbor, is removed. The EU has made it clear the backstop is not negotiable. Ursula von der Leyen, the recently elected President of the European Commission, indicated her desire for 'constructive relations', but the newly configured EU has emphatically ruled out reopening negotiations. The EU Commission's Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, said he was looking forward to working with Boris Johnson 'to facilitate the ratification of the withdrawal agreement and achieve an orderly Brexit'.

The threat of a no-deal Brexit may have worked in the beginning. It looks unlikely now, taking into account Mr Johnson's majority of one, which is less than Theresa May's after her decision to call a snap election in 2017. With Parliament refusing to leave the EU without a deal, the appointment of a no-deal Brexit cabinet comes as no surprise. While the government directs additional resources into preparing the nation for no-deal, Mr Johnson's threat to withhold payment of the divorce bill, which is legally binding, may not help in facilitating a smooth departure. Blaming the EU for a no-deal is also not helpful. The problem with Brexit lies at home, where differences are just as fractious and entrenched as before – divisions which led to the fall of Theresa May, not to mention David Cameron, who unwittingly called for the referendum. Whether Boris Johnson turns out to be the third Prime Minister to be sacrificed to Brexit remains to be seen.

In his victory speech, he promised to 'deliver Brexit, unite the country and defeat Jeremy Corbyn'. He promised to energise the country, get Brexit done by end of October and take advantage of 'all the opportunities it will bring with a new spirit of can do.' Mr Johnson further assured the nation that 'we are once again going to believe in ourselves, and like some slumbering giant we are going to rise and ping off the guy ropes of self-doubt and negativity.' He has promised investing in health and social care, policing and defence, education and infrastructure, and uniting the 'awesome foursome'. One cannot deny the feel-good power of his speeches, but words come easily to Mr Johnson. The nation's socioeconomic problems, its deep and entrenched inequality, cannot be easily fixed. People have heard it all before and are skeptical of more promises.

Mr Johnson faces a country frustrated with Brexit. There was no call for a referendum from the people, it was forced on the nation by the Conservative party. The referendum itself was poorly framed, it was meant to be advisory and the margin of victory was far from decisive, thrusting the country into an existential crisis. Brexit was never defined, there is no evidence that a 'no-deal' Brexit is what people want or voted for. There has never been a consensus on what Brexit means. Mrs May's 'Brexit means Brexit' is as close a definition as any. The Conservative party has now reached a point of reckoning. Mr Johnson longs to be seen in the mould of his hero, Winston Churchill. Such a legacy seems unlikely as long as the fundamental divisions in the country are heightened by the persistent threat of a no-deal. As leader of a divided country facing a constitutional crisis, the challenges he faces will test Mr Johnson's self-belief. If he manages to deliver a 'managed Brexit' ratified by the EU and the UK Parliament that would be nothing short of a miracle. It seems unlikely even for an alchemist.

Parliament remains intractably divided, it is unlikely to ratify a no-deal Brexit. In an open letter, dated 9 July 2019, from Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the opposition, he wrote: 'Whoever becomes the new Prime Minister should have the confidence to put their deal, or No Deal, back to the people in a public vote. In those circumstances, I want to make it clear that Labour would campaign for Remain against either No Deal or a Tory deal that does not protect the economy and jobs.' The newly-elected Liberal Democratic party leader, Jo Swinson, who is committed to staying in the EU, said Mr Johnson had 'shown time and time again that he isn't fit to be the prime minister of our country'. She is not the only person to publicly say so. The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, also committed to staying in the EU, congratulated Mr Johnson, but said she had 'profound concerns' about him becoming Prime Minister. Mr Johnson continues to depend on Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party, who have kept the Conservatives in government since the 2017 general election.

The fact is that delivering Brexit remains an impossible assignment, no one has found a solution to the Irish border question. A hard border would violate the Good Friday Agreement – hence the 'backstop'. It is hard to see how Mr. Johnson can extricate himself from this alliance without destroying the UK. A no-deal, hard border exit could strengthen calls for a United Ireland, encouraged by demographic change and the slow waning of unionist sentiment. If dark clouds gather on the Northern Ireland border, it will spur demands for... **Continues on P3**



Girish Karnad P15& 21



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Samaybharti P12

Editorially Speaking

Dear readers,

I am very pleased to bring this issue of Confluence on time. This has been possible largely because of our writers who sent their manuscripts on time as promised. I am really appreciative of their commitment and hope this will be the case with our future issues too.

In this editorial, I would like to highlight some of the literary events that took place recently when some of our writers were recognised for their contributions to the literary world. As reported in our last issue one of our regular writers Yogesh Patel was recognised as a ‘poet of honour’ by Matwaala, a collective of South Asian diaspora poets in New York. Yogesh has a regular column titled ‘Through Poetic Lens’ for the last few years. Recently one of our regular short story writers Subhash Chandra, has been recognised by a few different literary bodies for his work. The most distinguished award was the prestigious ‘Literary Brigadier Award’ by Story Mirror, a global online portal for short stories and poems. As many of our readers know, Subhash is a prolific writer of short fiction. Another achievement, well worth mentioning here, is the publication of ‘Poems Grow with You’ by one of our regular columnists and prestigious Sahitya Akademi award - winning writer Anju Makhija. We congratulate these writers and look forward to their contributions.

For many years we have been covering the Jaipur Literature Festival in London as well as in India. In this issue, Sunayana Panda has written her account of the event recently concluded in London.

In my last editorial, I said “For those of us living in Britain the major disappointment during the last three years is Brexit, but I very much hope we will see the end of the tunnel before our next issue”. Unfortunately, there is no end of the tunnel to be seen so far but in this issue Shanta Acharya, a well-known writer and investment specialist has given a detailed account of the complex issues involved in delivering Brexit.

As usual, we look forward to receiving submissions for our November issue from next month onwards. In the meantime, once again we welcome your feedback through letters to the Editor.

Happy reading and enjoy the rest of summer!

Vijay Anand

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**From P 1**  
**DELIVERING BREXIT**

independence in Scotland. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU in the referendum. Most members of parliament do not want to leave the EU without a deal. Yet there is no consensus on what that deal should be – except it should not be no-deal. If Mr Johnson aspires to negotiate a deal, surely the matter hinges on how to find a solution to the ‘backstop’, which has eluded negotiators until now.

While the solution to such impasse is to hold fresh elections, such a move is fraught with danger. Having an election before delivering Brexit could deflect the Brexit vote to Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, which peeled off much of the Conservative vote in the European elections, and the remain vote would strengthen the Liberal Democrats. Tory activists believe Mr. Johnson can woo back the faithful from the Brexit party, though his new cabinet may have lost him crucial liberal-leaning seats. The risk of a disastrous rout from a split base, possibly handing Downing Street to Labour and shattering the Tories, may still deliver a solution.

The consequences of a no-deal exit cannot be foreseen. If we think we have a good idea of what Brexit means, we have only seen the tip of the iceberg. The truly unacceptable face of Brexit will be revealed when the trade negotiations

begin and the UK grapples with its future relationship with the EU along with the rest of the world. It stands to reason that working out new WTO-based deals will not be to the advantage of the UK. A no-deal Brexit is one of the chief threats the IMF has identified in hindering world growth: ‘The principal risk factor to the global economy is that adverse developments – including further US-China tariffs, US auto tariffs or a no-deal Brexit – sap confidence, weaken investment, dislocate local supply chains and severely slow global growth below the baseline’. The impact on the UK will be significantly worse. Those who argue that such predictions are baseless need to remember that the UK has not yet left the EU. The damage Brexit has inflicted on the value of sterling is just a taste of how bad things would get once the UK moves firmly into the realms of uncertainty. 2 August 2019

 **Shanta Acharya is a writer and investment specialist. Born and educated in India, she won a scholarship to Oxford and was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy for her work on Ralph Waldo Emerson. She was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of English and American Literature and Languages at Harvard University. The author of eleven books, her latest is *Imagine: New and Selected Poems* (HarperCollins India; 2017). [www.shantaacharya.com](http://www.shantaacharya.com)**

**Poetry and Painting by Meenakshi Mohan, Ed.D.**



Painting (12X16 oil on canvas with pallet knife)

**Sisters:**

*The sandstones where you stand today,  
Would remain astute with your footprints  
To tell the stories you once shared —  
The waves would whisper your secrets  
The heart of the ocean would bury,  
your untold jealousy and rivalry,  
The soft breeze would orchestrate  
The sinfonia of your unbounded love!  
Yes, we were here once  
Would resonate many many years from now!*



**Meenakshi Mohan has taught for over two decades in America, having earned a Doctoral degree from Chicago in Educational Administration with a focus on Early Childhood. She has published many papers and books and has been included twice in the Who’s Who among American Teachers.**

Travelogue

The Mauritian Way!

By Sonali Kalia Appanah

I was born and raised in India, but arrived in Mauritius by virtue of marrying one of its citizens. A bright-eyed bride ready for the future in every way. Many people told me that Mauritius is a mini-India! For one simple reason, this made me more ill prepared than I had ever imagined.

This country is small but fierce in its identity and nothing like a mini-model of somewhere else. Mauritius is a melting pot of cultures and traditions traced back from places such as India, Africa, France and China. The historic imprint that the Dutch, the French and the British left behind cannot be undermined either. Communities live, work and play in absolute harmony in this tiny island nation, which is only 65 kilometers long and 45 kilometers wide.

choice in addition to the mandatory English and French. The Creole language is what brings the population together as the one, being most widely spoken.

The Mauritian economy is nothing short of a miracle, ranking high in competitiveness, open investment climate, free economy and good governance. In addition to ranking high in democracy, economic and political freedom, Mauritius is also a welfare state, providing free healthcare, free education up to tertiary level and free public transport to senior citizens, students and the disabled. The country boasts of literacy levels as high as 95% and has the highest human development index in Africa. The country's geographical

“community” reigns supreme, where people come together to work, play, and remain united in happiness and grief. Be it a wedding or a funeral, the community is there to pitch in. I remember something my mother in law once told me, that resonates this fact. She said, “We must go and offer our support and assistance and they will do so for our family in return!” Mauritians also deeply nurture their cultural identities and pass on the language, traditions and rituals from one generation to another.

Festivals in Mauritius are a great time to see the unity in diversity. The whole nation lights up with Diwali lights, the Chinese food festival is an annual event for Mauritians from all communities. Every house has a Christmas tree for Christmas and



Its population of approximately 1.27 million makes it a country with the highest population density in Africa. Even more amazing is that at present, women slightly outnumber men. Ethnic populations consist of primarily Hindus, Chinese, French and Creole, speaking principally English (the official language of the National Assembly), French, Creole and Bhojpuri. However, within the Hindu community, you also have the Tamils, the Telegus, the Marathis and the Biharis, many of whom speak the corresponding regional Indian languages. Local schools offer Asian Languages (Tamil, Telegu, Hindi, Marathi Mandarin and Urdu) as a

riches consists of beaches, mountains, rivers, forests and lakes, making it a true topical paradise with something for everyone. Tourists enjoy the island's natural beauty, water sports and rich history, while taking in the perennial calendar of touchpoints that it has to offer.

However, this is not what I find most amazing about this island. The kaleidoscope of experiences that I had since my arrival here in 2001 has left me with an admiration that never wears off. Mauritian society has held on to traditions and close family ties. They have made it a part of their day-to-day life and way of living. A sense of

through New Year's Eve and Biryani is a national favourite of every community. In essence, the spirit of the festival takes precedence over its community affiliations. People enjoy each community's culinary offerings and wait to attend their festivities to appreciate these delights. Mauritians have big hearts and even bigger smiles with which they will invite you into their country and their lives.

I remember the first evening I went out in Mauritius, in 2001. The roads were deserted and lights in the houses were turned off at 8pm. Being a bit cautious by nature, I said to my taxi driver, if there is a problem or some



unrest, I would like to go back. He was quite puzzled and asked what made me feel that there was some sort of unrest. I told him that I do not see people on the streets; the lights are all turned off. He smiled and said, “They have had their dinner and have already retired for the night!” Simplicity of the Mauritian society demonstrated in its purest, most unadulterated way. Another such incident that I recall is just after my marriage, my husband and I drove out to the local market to run some errands. When we stepped outside the car and into a shop, my husband left the car unlocked and the windows down. I expressed my concern to which he replied, “Nothing

will happen, no one will touch the car. Besides, most people know us here!” I am conscious that in many villages in Mauritius, it was common practice to do this or to leave the house windows open during the hot summer season. It was perfectly safe. The fact that almost everyone knows everyone in Mauritius is such a cohesive feeling. Anywhere you go, you are bound to run into a either a friend or family relative. I will add though that a lot has changed since then.

The island has a laid back, take it easy approach to life, a contrast from my country of birth. An incident that demonstrates this is the simple art of

taking a Mauritian bus. Running and jumping into the bus as soon as it stopped, in order to secure a place is what I was used to. It is after all a survival of the fittest approach! As soon as the bus stopped, I started to climb aboard. My husband, aghast said, “What are you doing!” When I asked why, his calm reply was “Let everyone get off and we will have the time to get on the bus!” Moreover, in line with true Mauritian civic sense, we did. Only then did I understand the embarrassed stares of everyone getting on and off that bus!

My foster country is a pearl of the Indian Ocean, steeped in culture and traditions. The care that it now needs to take is that the modern degradation of society that we see in other places, does not affect it. That the new generation takes on the mantle of passing on the heritage it once received to the coming generations, with equal dedication and fervor. That the fast pace of life does not dilute its rich experiences. That the instantaneous nature of life today does not take over well thought out plans and actions. Societal modernization must not take over the commitment to each other and that the “it takes a village” movement sustains. I have seen how Mauritius has evolved over the almost 2 decades that I have spent here. It warms my heart to see where this country has reached today and is continuing to do so. However, modern vices will threaten our future and that of our children. Nevertheless, I feel safe in the knowledge that this country and its people are equipped to deal with it and most importantly, determined to do so.



**Sonali Kalia-Appanah**, was born and raised in India. She is a hotelier by profession and describes herself as a typical “Army Kid”! She lives in Mauritius, with her Mauritian husband and two boys. Her passion is to share her childhood experiences, lessons from her profession and her life in Mauritius through her writing.



South African Newsletter

A tribute to Khorshed Ginwala  
By Devi Rajab

The death of Khorshed Ginwala at the ripe old age of 90 has brought an era of great South African women to an end. This modest doctor with a passion for the poor who used her medical training and humanity to uplift communities was South Africa’s first ambassador to Italy. Regal in her bearing, Khorshed Ginwala Rustomjee could turn heads without uttering a word. Elegance and refinement epitomised this gracious lady. During a public service career spanning five decades, Khorshed had been able to weave the many strands of her passion – medicine and community health, social work and community development – into a tapestry of social responsibility towards the poor. She declared that the Parsi tradition taught its devotees to promote “good words, good thoughts and good deeds” and that her father raised his children to imbibe these values early so that they always thought of the plight of the underdog.

A politicised medical practitioner in the 1960s to 1980s, Khorshed understood medicine in the context of society and community and the relationship between medicine and welfare was well entrenched in her mind. Her strength lay in making the right connections. She felt rightly so that in any developing society, medical practitioners could not afford to turn a blind eye to the social and political conditions that created poverty and poor health. In an interview that I had with her a decade ago she described her career as extensive and diverse. “Having originally trained and practised in medicine my experiences as a medical practitioner in the apartheid era led me to diversify to community health, care of the elderly, child and family welfare, the role of women in South Africa, adult education, early pre-school learning and a host of other social dimensions of development.”

Korshed was born into the Parsi community of Bombay – a tiny community of Persian extraction which has had a disproportionate impact in all areas of high finance, industry, philanthropy and the arts (their members include the illustrious families of Tata, Wadia and Rustomjee). At the time of her birth in 1929, Khorshed’s family already had deep interests in southern Africa through her industrialist grandfather who had established large scale oil processing and cotton manufacturing factories in Portuguese controlled Lorenzo Marques. Korshed was sent to primary school in Durban but later returned to Bombay where her principal schooling took place at St Joseph’s Convent, and later at St Xavier’s College. This was followed by a medical degree at the National University of Ireland in Dublin where she met her future husband, Sorab. The couple returned to South Africa where her husband ran his family insurance brokerage in Durban. Their wedding was the talk of Durban town, as the Ginwalas and Rustomjees were well established and

wealthy families renowned for their high standing in the community as leaders of the NIC.

Early in her career as a medical practitioner, Khorshed was exposed to the poverty and hardships of Indian and black families in the municipal barracks in the city. She partnered with the first Indian woman doctor, Dr Goonam, and took over her private practice when she left the country. But Khorshed found herself unable to conduct abortions, even for women in distress. She subsequently



accepted a position at the segregated King Edward Hospital. “I soon discovered that racism was the root of the hardships that blacks suffered under apartheid. I found myself working through the corridors of KEH attending to children suffering from malnutrition and watching mothers of new-born babies sleeping on floors and under beds at one of the country’s busiest hospitals. I knew I had to do something about it.”

Ginwala was refused a South African passport in the 1960s. Three years later she won a scholarship to study health administration in Britain and was eventually granted a passport because her employer, the Natal Provincial Administration, sanctioned her sabbatical leave. When she returned, the NPA had established, through working with community leaders A M Rajab, P R Pather and J N Reddy, the first Indian hospital, (R K Khan Hospital) in Chatsworth. Here Ginwala became the Deputy Superintendent. Despite being founded and funded by the Indian community, a subtle campaign maintained the status quo and only whites were appointed to management positions. Ginwala spoke out against job reservation as she was eminently qualified to hold a senior position in hospital administration, having postgraduate qualifications in Hospital Administration and Health Service Management (London) and a Master’s degree in community health (Natal)

Later, as a dedicated member of the ANC, she was involved in protest politics and served as Chairperson of the Reservoir Hills branch. Organising her political contribution along medical lines, she participated in drafting the ANC National Health Plan. In 1993 she was appointed to the ANC’s Commission on Human Resource Development, which looked to manage the political transition in the health sector by training senior health service managers at centres nationally.

She is best known for her leadership of the Durban arm of the National Council for Child and Family Welfare and the Durban Blind Society. In 1982 the council changed its constitution to a non-racial one after much pressure from black child welfare societies and she was the first person of colour to be admitted to serve on this body.

During the apartheid era, progressive health, welfare and education structures integrated a number of activities in opposition to government. At the forefront in Durban was the Natal Teachers’ Society. Ginwala worked in close association with its membership against the uprooting of community and state-aided schools under the Group Areas Act and against separate education departments. The high standard of education of Indian state-aided schools and the quality of teaching during the 1980s can be seen as a legacy of the society’s leadership.

Due recognition of her achievements came later. In June 1995, Khorshed was appointed South Africa’s Ambassador to Italy, Albania and St Marino and later High.

In tasking stock of a life well lived Korshed may be best described as a community activist rather than a political anarchist. She was a medical practitioner with a conscience who preferred building bridges and using her political affiliations to do so. Her loyalty to her party came from a deep commitment to serve rather than receive. Indeed, her life is an inspiring celebration of one woman’s remarkable dedication to make a difference. Hambe Kahle Khorshed Ginwalla It was privilege to have known you and watched you leave a trail of shimmering light behind you.



**Dr. Devi Rajab is a well respected South African journalist and former Dean of Student Development at UKZN and the author of several books.**

Film Festival

London Indian Film Festival Finally Arrives

By Lalit Mohan Joshi

This year’s highlight of the London Indian Film Festival (LIFF 2019) is Bengali Cinema. Srijit Mukherji’s latest thriller Vinci Da turns a hot favourite of Indian as well as western audiences. A London based English teacher, Robert Aghajanian, is floored. “Besides being a master thriller it prompts you to think more deeply about responsibility and guilt. To me it shows that life is more intricate, more nuanced and with lots of shades of grey. It invites you to make your own mind as to who are the goodies and baddies in life.”

A talented make-up and prosthetic artist, nicknamed Vinci Da after Leonardo da Vinci because of his prodigious skills, gets unwittingly drawn into a psychopathic legal expert’s criminal plans to rid Kolkata of evil. This edge-of-the-seat psychological thriller superbly orchestrated by the prolific filmmaker Srijit Mukherji.

The ten year old London Indian Film Festival appears to have finally arrived. There is more variety in terms of different kinds of films from different parts of India. “This year is probably our strongest programme ever with exciting world premieres, rarely seen archival masterpieces, and some seriously cutting-edge dramas and documentaries, in 23 venues across 5 UK cities and towns. We invite you to immerse yourself into the cinema of a billion lives”, claims the Executive and Programme Director, Cary Rajinder Sawhney.

The 10 day festival in London (20-29 June) is screening 25 feature films and three film events with filmmakers Anurag Kashyap and Gurinder Chadha and actress Radhika Apte.

LIFF had humble beginnings until five years back when the Bagri Foundation came on board as its principal sponsor. “I have seen it grow slowly each year”, says Sunayana Panda, a Puducherry based Indian film critic who has regularly attended the festival. “It has taken time to attract good films and filmmakers.”

Another Bengali film of the festival is Arjun Dutta’s debut Abyakto (Unsaid), a poignant tale of a mother and son. The story encapsulates an unusual journey of Indra right from his childhood, adolescence to being a grown man. A series of unexplained events which turn him into a man he never ought to be.

“I have always been intrigued by inter personal relationships but it’s not a personal story, it just came organically to me. I have heard of such cases where family secrets are not revealed. Often we tend to take everything very casually, we don’t think what the other person or our parents have suffered all through their lives.



I also wanted to show that any kind of love is beyond any gender barriers, says Arjun Dutta.

During Abyakto’s screening at Watermans Brentford, Social historian Kusum Pant Joshi gets completely engrossed. “The filmmaker has sharply contrasted the young protagonist

(Indra) and his pretty partner’s modern Delhi home, with the stately, old and rambling Calcutta mansions with ornate Victorian furniture and décor. I was moved by the shots of torrential rain, background music and the Indian classical music. The film creates an ambiance full of languor and a sense of tragic unease.”

After its debut at Cannes, India’s female filmmaker Rohena Gera’s Hindi love story Sir (2018) has created a buzz this year. Audience loved the film for its narrative restraint which keeps them tense and full of empathy. There is an undercurrent of class division which flows as a subtext throughout the film. “I found the script very good and realistic. Rohena chose two people from the extreme sides of the social class ladder. He is a wealthy man who has been living abroad while she is a maidservant from a village. The end though sad is positive. The filmmaker leaves it open to all possibilities” says Sunayana Panda.

Watermans also held international premiere of Anjali Bhushan’s seminal documentary My Home India. The film essentially uncovers a little-known story of unimaginable humanity, generosity and kindness. Towards the end of WW2 the Polish ambassadorial team in Bombay, led by the determined heroine, Kira Banasinska and supported by local Indian communities including the principalities of Kolhapur, Jamnagar and several others, dispatched a convoy of food relief and other essentials, thousands of miles to Iran, where Polish refugees from Soviet Siberian labour camps had found their way on foot and were suffering.

An expedition was planned with a novel idea, to bring 5,500 women and children to India which became their home. Replying to a question Anjali Bhushan said I had nothing to do with this story but felt if not me who will tell this story.

LIFF deserves credit for having grown in variety of films and screening venues. It is to be seen how it now meets the challenge to building similar audiences as it has in central London. It also needs to look even deeper into regional Indian cinema and change the myopic Bollywood perception among the British South Asians as well as native British that there is this other intelligent Indian cinema that needs to be seen.



Lalit Mohan Joshi is a London based journalist, film historian and documentary filmmaker.

LitFest

The Zee Jaipur Literature Festival at the British Library

By Sunayana Panda

The Indian Literature Festival at the British Library had a name that sounded a bit confusing: The ZEE Jaipur Lit Fest at the British Library. You might wonder why it was called the “Jaipur Literature Festival” if it was being held at the British Library in London. Well, the same group of people who organise the Lit Fest at Jaipur brought this festival to London. Over the years “Jaipur Lit Fest” or “JLF” has become a brand name. This same group organises Lit Fests in many countries of the world other than the UK. The main sponsor of their UK festival is ZEE, the popular Indian media company.

The British Library was the ideal place for this event which was about books. The discussions, usually with a maximum of four speakers, were held in three different areas. There were two tents set up in the courtyard of the library and the third space was the theatre auditorium indoors, in a block which is outside the main

decision to make because many were happening simultaneously.

It was intellectually stimulating to be in the presence of such eminent writers, scholars, historians and thinkers gathered in one place. One felt dazzled in the middle of so many stars. It was such an intense experience to attend so many discussions and explanations in two days that it will take a while for the listeners to assimilate all that information.

The topics ranged from travel writing to short stories, from the British Raj to Indian politics, from Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare to Islamic art, from the craft of writing to the use of emojis. There was an interesting presentation of old illuminated manuscripts which was accompanied by projections of the illustrations. The scholar, Christopher de Hamel, who spoke about it was full of wit and humour.

Guardian about short stories, Paul McVeigh is a writer and also the director of the London Short Story Festival, Namita Gokhale is a noted writer and is a founder-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival along with William Dalrymple. Navtej Sarna is the former Indian Ambassador to the USA and also the former Indian High Commissioner to the UK apart from being a writer of fiction and non-fiction books.

It was heartening to see the large number of people who attended the sessions. The Lit Fest made it clear that books connect people because reading is a collective experience even though it looks as if it is a very private and personal experience. We are alone when we read but all those who have read the same book have been through the same experience and they are all bound by that common experience. When we discuss

the merits and shortcomings of a book



Left: Audiences at ZEE JLF at the British Library 2019 Right: Celebrating the Short Story - Namita Gokhale, Chris Power and Navtej Sarna with Paul McVeigh

library. The courtyard was decorated with colourful festoons to give it the air of a festival and a separate tent was put up as the temporary bookshop where one could buy the books written by the authors who had come as speakers. The organisers had also very thoughtfully created a space on one side, within the bookshop, where writers could sign the books for their readers.

The discussions started at 11.15 in the morning and went up to 5.45 pm non-stop. Every hour there were three discussions held simultaneously in the three separate venues and a new set of discussions started with a gap of 15 minutes. There were so many interesting topics in the programme, and so many well-known writers reading from their books, that choosing which ones to attend and which ones to let go was a difficult

Another session was called “Tharoorism” which started with Shashi Tharoor talking about his special use of words but who also then spoke about his life as a politician. The very first session was with Jeffrey Archer who spoke about his writing career.

There was also an entire session dedicated to the short story. The speakers Namita Gokhale, Chris Power and Navtej Sarna were in conversation with Paul McVeigh. Each of them read out from their stories. The topic of discussion was “What is left unsaid in a short story” so the writers spoke about how a short story is like an ice-berg where only the tip is seen and much is suggested and not said outright. This panel of speakers was made up of eminent writers. Chris Power writes short stories and used to write a column in the

we talk about an experience we have shared.

While it is true that literacy has gone up in many countries of the world and the number of books sold online is higher than the number of books sold in bookshops one cannot help noticing how libraries are closing down and more and more people prefer reading brief texts on social media rather than an entire book. In this context one can see how important it is to celebrate reading and books.

Namita Gokhale said last year, “The Lit Fest not only brings the readers and authors together but also it becomes a meeting point for authors to meet other authors.” Authors did not get a chance to meet so many other authors in one place until Lit Fests were started in the world. It is a



**India, Empire and the First World War - Santanu Das and Shrabani Basu in conversation with Yasmin Khan**

golden opportunity for everyone. There are many divisive forces in the world that are breaking the harmony between the people of various communities. But there is another force which is gradually bringing humanity together. Art and culture, knowledge and technology, can build bridges across all that divides us. Seen from this angle those who work behind the scenes to organise the



Pragya Tiwari and Shashi Tharoor

literature festivals or film festivals can only be called soldiers of peace. They are fighting against ignorance and prejudice, and it is as real a fight as those who go out with guns and tanks.

Now this festival is an annual event and they will be back next year. All book-lovers are invited. Same place, same time of the year.

**Sunayana Panda** is a writer and an actress. She divides her time between London and Pondicherry in India.



# A Poem by Prabhu Guptara

## Raakhee

A raakhee is a thick red thread, occasionally decorated with baubles,  
Signifying “to preserve, to keep, to hold safe from harm”.  
The brother offers some token money,  
While the sister prays, waves a lighted blessing round his face, and ties the thread around his wrist.  
No one tells you that the thread goes unseen around the head and through the heart:  
A covenant between a sister and a brother, adopted or real,  
That he will protect her  
Even at the cost of his life.

I was alone at home when her mother-in-law rang  
“There’s been a bomb at the Embassy”, she said  
Prabhi’s gone”.  
“I’ll catch the first ‘plane”, I mumbled.  
“You can’t!”, she said, “The airport’s closed!  
And no one’s allowed at all close to the building!”.

Dead instantly, her husband said later,  
But I saw that for three days you’d bled, drifting in and out of consciousness,  
Praying for him and Ammachi and my brother and me  
but most for your daughters, on whom it was your last wish I keep an eye  
Though I have not even seen them since the day they buried your mutilated body  
That we were also not allowed to see.  
Ammachi cried and cried and cried, till she too was gone.

So many years later, in a trice really, came Roger’s invitation.  
I hesitated.  
Dawdled, rather.  
Wondering if I could face where you were killed.

You should, said my wife gently, you still can’t talk about it  
And after fourteen years you should be able to let it go, move on.

I do not speak, I cannot say:  
For some things, eternity is not enough

From what am I to move?  
Your death?  
Put like that, it might even be possible.  
But death is not a thing.  
Death is an absence.  
And how can one move from that?  
Only by filling the void with something else:  
As if anything might fit!  
And if it did, what would I have left?  
Not even your absence.  
Not even tears.  
Valuing your absence is the only form of loving you that is left me.

We see an hour-long documentary, structured as an exciting who-dun-it, a detective story.

I scour that, and the nearby museum filled with photographs and memorabilia.

But there is not even a hint of your presence.

As if in the great scheme of things you might not even have existed.

The world doesn’t know or care, but you know that you will always move me.

And then, as we leave, the lady at the counter tells me  
that she and her family fled from the genocidal massacres in Rwanda,  
only for her husband to be killed as the bus  
on which he was travelling back from his night shift  
happened to pass the embassy at the wrong moment.

He isn’t in the film either, nor does that museum have any of his memorabilia.

But his name is on the memorial plaque, with yours,  
And two hundred and sixteen others,  
uniting them with you in death.

I have many brothers to care for, many sisters to protect.

A raakhee is a thick red thread.

© Prabhu Guptara

Prabhu’s first published poem was in The Illustrated Weekly of India, in the 1960s. Since then, his work has appeared in Indian PEN, Journal of Indian Writing in English, Kunapipi, Masala, MuseIndia, Poetry24, Ship of Fools, and The Redbeck Anthology of British Asian Poetry. Two collections of his poems, Beginnings & Continuations, were published in the 1970s by Writers Workshop, Calcutta. He edited An Anthology of Contemporary Indian Religious Poetry in English, as well as Selected Poems of Leela Dharmaraj. In January 2017, Skylark Publications, UK, chose him Poet of the Month, and he is included in Debrett’s People of Today.

Market

# Gold price bull market started again?

By Ragu Dharmaratnam ACMA CGMA

Unlike coffee or oil, Gold isn't consumed, in addition to its safe haven status, gold is also used in jewellery and industry. Over 50% of gold demand is from jewellery, and over 15% of demand is generated from industrial applications. Gold began the year at \$1220 an ounce and it is currently trading at \$1420. It was mired in a multi-year downtrend that had seen the lustrous yellow metal lose about \$850 an ounce from its all-time high price of \$1900 reached in September 2011.

The gold price rally from April could mark the continuation of a major bottoming effort that began in 2016. There are various reasons for the rise and fall of the price of Gold and it can be grouped into "fundamental and technical factors".



Factors favouring higher prices

Interest rate

Gold does not pay interest like treasury bonds or savings accounts, but current gold prices often reflect increases and declines in interest rates. As interest rates increase, gold prices may soften as people sell gold to free up funds for other investment opportunities. As interest rates decrease, the gold price may increase again because there is a lower opportunity cost to holding gold when compared to other investments. Low interest rates equate with greater attraction to gold. Recent Federal Reserve commentary about lowering of interest rates discussed heavily in the recent FED meeting may be one of the reasons for seeing the recent high gold prices.

Global Crisis

Gold prices tend to rise when people lack confidence in governments or financial markets, which is why it often gets called a crisis commodity. World events often have an impact on the price of gold because gold is viewed as a source of safety amid economic or geopolitical tumult. For example in the U.S - China trade talk,

the prospect of the world's two largest economies engaging in a tit-for-tat tariff standoff has already started to cool global growth, and Brexit uncertainties do not help either.

Jewellery demand

High demand for jewellery comes from China, India, and the United States. In some parts of India, gold is still regarded as a type of currency, a display of wealth, an important gift and a hedge against bad times. This demand drives up the price of gold in India.

Demand and supply

Just as with any other commodity, price of gold is essentially determined by both the demand and supply of this precious metal. The price of this metal is almost always on the rise because of

its finite supply and its ever-growing demand. Increase in physical demand for gold does not always increase the

price of gold but it increases the interest in gold. High ETFs supply will definitely increase the prices of gold, and we have witnessed a tremendous increase in ETFs in the recent past. ETF's are basket funds investors can purchase that allow for increased liquidity and the potential ability to spread their risks over a large number of assets for a minimal cost.

Central bank instability

In the U.S., the Federal Reserve is the central bank. Most countries have a central bank and other dominant ones include the European Central Bank, The Bank of England, the Bank of Japan, and the Swiss National Bank. Bank failures and irregular economic policies make buying gold seem like a safe haven investment.

U.S Treasury yield

With FOMC policy makers' forward guidance pointing to lower interest rates in the future, US treasury yields have been steadily eroding in recent weeks, with US 10-year Treasury yield dropping below 2.0% for the first time since November 2016. With inflation

relatively stable around the FED's medium term target of 2% and the ongoing decline in Treasury yield is bullish for gold prices.

Price uptrend is supported by technical factors with the use of graph

As you can see from the graph gold prices peaked in September 2011 at \$1900 an ounce and followed by four years of down trend when the price dropped by almost 45% and bottomed in Jan 2016. The green horizontal line which is called "resistance line" in technical analysis acted as a strong barrier during the past three years where you can see blue bars (each blue vertical bar represents one month worth of price data) attempted six times to break above and failed at \$1375 price level. Finally, this level was taken out to the upside last month. Since January 2016, prices moving to the upside supported by the red uptrend support line on the graph is also another positive sign that the higher prices are here to say.

Conclusion

Both fundamental and technical analysis methods (used by most hedge funds and big banking institutions) are pointing towards higher prices for gold over the coming months as long as the price does not fall below the green horizontal line at \$1375.

While the gold price rally has been aided by falling US Treasury yields and the weak US Dollar, these are not the root causes of the recent market environment, but merely symptoms of the US-China trade war and its impact on Fed policy. The key theme here is "uncertainty". Uncertainty in financial markets translates to volatility. While the other asset classes don't like increased volatility, precious metals tend to benefit. Please note September has historically been a strong month for gold and then the period leading up to Christmas always been a high demand period for gold.

Ragu Dharmaratnam ACMA, CGMA writes regular market commentary for various magazines such as "Investors Chronicle" and "Asian voice".



He is also head of finance for a UK group of highly successful international specialist food retailer with the group turnover of €350 million and a director & treasurer of a charity for Children with special needs.

# “Morning Bells are Ringing-Ding Ding Dong”

## A tryst with the old world charm

Dr Deepa Vanjani

Here a tick-tock, there a chime, and the swinging of pendulums- when you step into ‘Samaybharti’ you are greeted by all of this. It’s an inconspicuous shop in the old part of the city of Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar, Indore. Many would miss the shop, except that it caught my eye due to my penchant for antique clocks. Yes, Samaybharti Clock Co. (that’s the name of the shop), has its walls and racks full of clocks that date back to the last century.

[VA1] Dhananjay Chaudhary, the proprietor, known in the city as the ‘doctor of clocks’, started learning the art from his father. His passion was such that he mastered the art of fixing even the otherwise irreparable clocks and to this day, he does that. Clocks as old as a century old, one’s that date back to the early and mid- twentieth century, with their brass gears and hammer, balances, levers and other parts, are seen at his shop. Some are there just for getting them into the ticking mode, some others are for selling, while some are part of his own collection. He works on his lathe machine (rarely seen these days) to make the clocks tick again with precision. The metallic inner parts of the clocks are quite fascinating, especially when one watches the hammer strike to create the chiming sound.

The story began with a young man named Vasant Rao Chaudhary, who came to live in Indore from Maharashtra at the age of 18, to assist his uncle in his new clock manufacturing venture and to learn work in the process. The venture was among the first of its kinds in the country, ‘the purna swadeshi’ venture. This was somewhere in the year 1940-42. The eager young man picked up the nuances of watch and clock repair. His uncle being a Swadeshi enthusiast, manufactured the first ever indigenous clock with Hindi numerals in Indore. This clock with Hindi digits dates back to 15 June 1957 and hangs on the wall of the shop to this day.

The one drawback however was that the clocks often developed technical problems and customers would then complain. Vasant Rao , meanwhile, had developed such an interest in this work that he would sit in the light of the lantern at night to make a machine for a clock that was 70 years old. When a Swiss engineer was called by his uncle to assess the clocks being manufactured in his factory, Vasant also presented before him his own machine. In his report the engineer wrote that though

the clocks manufactured in the factory had a slight technical error, the one which had been made by the young lad was quite close to precision. This

project and who got him his old pocket watch for repair, when all others had failed to do so. Someone had guided him to Mr Chaudhary. When the task was accomplished successfully, the engineer acknowledged the latter’s skill by calling him “the best engineer of watches.” An army officer from Mhow named Sisodiya once approached him with a carriage clock which was 170 years old and Chaudhary fixed it in a few days. It is no doubt that he has made a place for himself in this field. Senior advocate of the city, Mr Ashok Chitale after getting his old clock repaired at the shop commented that the repair charges were too less as compared to the kind of labour involved in it. Anil Kelkar from Indore reminisces how he had bought in 1947 from Switzerland. It developed a snag and could only be repaired by Mr Chaudhary. Likewise, Gulshan Kumar Bhasin bought a cuckoo clock from Black Forest, Germany. To maintain it and keep it ticking, he had been looking for someone, till he found Samaybharti.

In fact, Indore owes it to him that the clock atop the tower of the Gurudwara at MG Road [a prominent location in the city] still going. The clock was especially built in the year 1975, and is one of the tower clocks with a 12 kg pendulum. When it went out of order, no one could set it ticking again, till Mr Chaudhary was called in. The Gurudwara Prabandhan Committee was eager to restore the clock as it was the city’s heritage. The clock was repaired and the incident was covered by the local television channel as well. The clock works on weight which descends up to 21 feet to operate the pull and push system that gives energy to the gear, says Chaudhary.

The vintage Swiss Favre Leuba mantle clock with its enthralling chime, and the cuckoo’s twittering in the cuckoo clock, make one wonder at the timelessness of time. And Mr Chaudhary seems to be the keeper of the old time!



motivated him to gradually set up a shop named Samaybharti in the year 1976.

His son Dhananjay has worked hard to learn and master this now obsolete art by assisting his father over a period of years. The gentleman has kept alive the tradition of repairing clocks using a lathe machine, quite incredible that. He has some interesting stories to share. Like the one of an engineer from abroad who was in the city to work on a road



Dr Deepa Vanjaani is the Head of the department of Languages in a leading colleges in Indore, India and a visiting faculty with Educational Media Research Centre, UTD and School of Comparative Languages, Indore.

## Mumbai Column

### Mumbai Expressions

by Anju Makhija



The big story of the past few months has been the elections. India witnessed the largest ever electoral exercise in human history. Some 600 million people cast their ballot out of an eligible 900 million! A 67% turnout, higher than many developed countries ensured that the people's voice was heard. The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) ended up not only as the largest party in terms of votes but also won 272 out of 303 seats. Prime Minister Modi campaigned tirelessly to spread his vision: uplifting the lives of ordinary people and making India a substantial player on the world stage.

Soon after the elections were over, water woes started. In places like Beed, Maharashtra, entire villages were deserted as residents migrated in search of water. Say the environmentalist: our rivers are polluted, traditional water harvesting systems are lost, catchments are deforested, groundwater levels are depleting and ponds and lakes are shrinking at an alarming pace. A dismal situation indeed. Experts on water management feel that the root of the problem lies in the state's failure to complete the Irrigation Sector reforms. The water policy was adopted in 2003 has not been revised. There is virtually no water management, even standard operating procedures are not properly implemented.

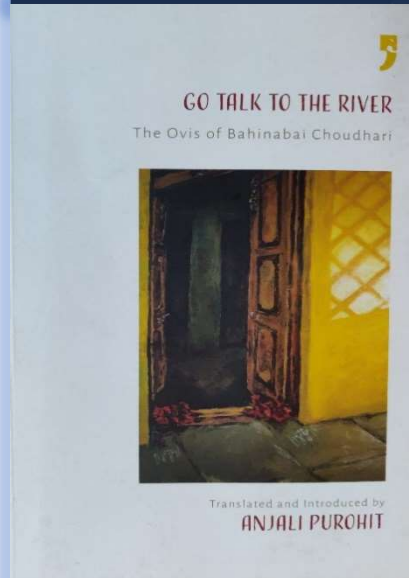
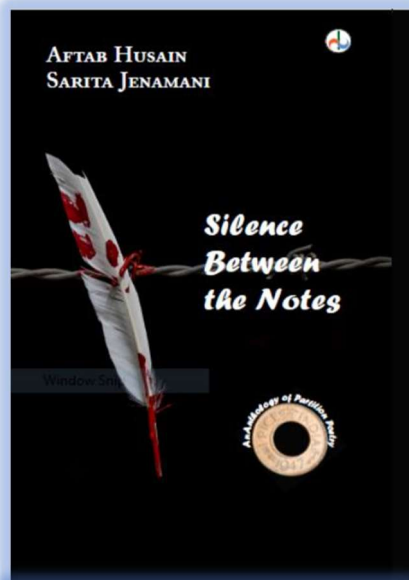
P.M. Modi unveiled the Jal Shakti Ministry to deal with the catastrophe. The monsoon was also delayed but when it came with a bang, our woes multiplied; streets of Mumbai were completely flooded. The global climate change has had a huge impacted here. Thankfully, the world is finally taking notice and new schemes are being launched all over. The 'mad' development, we have seen in the past decades calls for a return to traditional methods. Leaders have been asked to bring plans, (not speeches) to the Climate Action Summit to be held in New York this September during the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations.

The big loss to the culture world was the passing away of Girish Karnad, our most influential and prolific playwright; he was also an outstanding actor and accomplished director. As an administrator, he headed the Film and Television Institute, the Sangeet Natak Akademi and Nehru Centre in London. He was extremely fond of classical culture be it the Puranas, Upanishads, or Natya Shastra—he felt they had continuing contemporary relevance. The Padma Bhushan recipient had penned powerful dramas including Yayati, Tughlaq, Hayavadana and Taledanda—all strong comments on our socio-political scenario.

Interest in our regional literature is growing at a very fast rate. The Novels Collective—a fairly new entry in the scene—plans to translate over a hundred novels in a short time span. They have also been arranging play readings. Mohan Rakesh's 'Aashad Ka Ek Din' was recently presented with a dedicated

group of actors like Meeta Vasisht and Ram Gopal Bajaj. The event was co-ordinated by Aswini Kumar, poet, professor and a driving force behind the organization. Sangeeta Jindal, one of the founders of the Collective expressed her dismay as to how we, Mumbaikars, find it difficult to express ourselves even in Hindi, our national language.

Recently, I came across on a truly unique volume (Shambhabi /Hawakal Publishers, Kolkata). Krishna Mohana Banerjee's *The Persecuted*, is the first drama written in English by an Indian. It provides an insight into the Hindu orthodoxy. Editor Paromita



Sengupta states: 'At a time when bigots are beefed with beef, at a time when cow-slaughter leads to man-slaughter, mob-fury and lynching... I cannot help but revisit a drama written nearly two-hundred years ago (1831) in Kolkata by a young Hindu Brahmin, who was persecuted by the Hindu Samaj for being implicated in an incident of beef-eating'. One wonders if such a drama was written today, would the performance be banned? Most probably, yes. Playwrights of the earlier decades were more outspoken than us!

Writers today are reinventing our past in many ways. India's most popular

mythological novelist, Amish Tripathi, released his latest book, *Raavan: Enemy of Aryavarta*. His other works, like *Immortals of Meluha*, have gained cult status. The Shiva trilogy has become the fastest-selling book series in the history of Indian publishing. Amitav Ghosh released his ninth work of fiction: *The Gun Island*. In this book, he presents a painful portrait of the dying Sundarbans and the changing ecological landscape. He was awarded the Janipath award recently.

Our experimental artist, Nalini Malani, known for her political mixed-media paintings, drawings, videos installations and theatre work, was recently awarded the prestigious Joan Miro Prize ('19). Malani's works give voice to the silenced, particularly women. Although, she has been mainly exhibiting abroad since the past decade, I still recall the impact the partition-related videos had on me when I first saw them at a Mumbai gallery. Being a migrant, her family had witnessed the horror partition and were forced to leave their homes in Sindh, Pakistan.

The newly set up Partition Museum in Amritsar is organizing a seminar on the plight of the community. Sapna Moti Bhavnani has made a film, *Sindhustan*, which revisits the past; it has already won several international awards. Aftab Husain and Sarita Jenamani have edited a comprehensive anthology: *Silence Between the Notes*. (Dhauli Books, Odisha) It has a wide range of poets including one of my favorite, Fahmida Riaz. She was a major voice in Pakistani Urdu poetry known for her bold feminist and anti-establishment stance. In the poem, 'You Turned Out Just Like Us', she writes: And today, I burst into laughter / You turned out just like us / No! We were never two nations / To hell with education and knowledge / Let's sing the praises of ignorance / Just ignore the pothole ahead.

Socially-conscious films are also in the limelight: *Seed Mother* won a prize at this year's Cannes Film Festival. It celebrates the exceptional spirit of Rahibai Soma who champions the use of local seeds and traditional methods of farming in the villages of Maharashtra. Anjali Purohit, artist and writer, has translated the poems of Bahinabai Choudhari in a volume entitled *Go Talk To The River* (Yoda Press, New Delhi). Bahinabai (1880) lived at a time when many women sang songs as they worked in the fields or performed household chores. This unlettered peasant composed some of the most beautiful verses in Marathi. Here's a gem: Man, with all his humanness / remains ignorant and illiterate / Arey! On being printed / even the blank paper becomes learned!

Anju Makhija is a Sahitya Akademi award-winning poet, playwright and translator based in Mumbai. She has co-translated the verse of sufi poet/mystic: Shah Abdul Latif ('Seeking the Beloved', Katha, New Delhi). She has also co-edited anthologies related to partition, women's poetry and theatre. Her new book, 'Poems Grow With You', has just been published. She is currently working on a volume of her 'Collected Plays'.

[www.facebook.com/anjumakhijawrites](http://www.facebook.com/anjumakhijawrites)

Short Fiction

Beyond the night

by Mona Mohanty

Waking up was the easiest part. Throughout her childhood, she had thought that nightmares, literally, meant bad and scary dreams occurring when one was deep in slumber. How wrong she had been! It was the time when she was up and about which could be defined as a nightmare.

Life had been a ball till she passed out of college. Her house was always crowded with, at least, a couple of friends partaking of her mother's delicious meals. Not that her parents complained; for they liked having youngsters in the house. They felt that the constant chatter and laughter imparted a cheerful atmosphere to the house.

However, things changed once her parents got it into their heads that their only child had attained marriageable age and, therefore, it was time to scout for a suitable bridegroom. Her protest that she needed some time to look for a job and then marry fell on deaf ears. Her parents told her that she could always get a job later on depending on which city she settled in after marriage. She couldn't believe that her parents could behave as if they were living in the Stone Age.

From the numerous matches that came swarming in, twenty suitable young men were shortlisted. That was when the pressure to meet the eligible men fell on her. The ensuing fights with her parents became a regular feature as she refused to be displayed like a showpiece. Her parents told her that she was over reacting and that was the only way to fix a match. She fired back angrily saying that her future could not be entwined with someone in such a cursory manner. Things came to such a pass that her father stopped speaking to her while her mother kept on nagging her daily. To add to her woes, Saurabh, her best buddy since their kindergarten days, had gone off for his final leg of military training and his phone had been unreachable for days. There was no safe outlet for all the emotions coursing through her then.

Finally, on a blistery Sunday afternoon, she got through to him. 'Hi Minx,' he said teasingly. Hearing the cheerful voice address her by the nickname he had given her aeons ago, she burst into tears. Instantly dropping his bantering tone, Saurabh asked, 'Hey! What happened? What's wrong?' She continued to weep harder. 'Calm down and tell me what's troubling you,' he said.

Slowly, taking control over her emotions, she narrated the events of the past few weeks. After hearing her out, he said, 'Sweetheart, tell your parents that you are going to marry me.' For a moment, there

was total silence and then it was followed by hysterical laughter. Finally, taking a grip upon herself, she said, 'You've gone crazy! Why should I lie to them?'

'It won't be a lie,' he responded. 'I have always wanted to marry you.'

'Have you taken leave of your senses?' she shouted. 'I can only marry someone I love.'

'Well, that takes care of my solution to your problem, doesn't it? Bye, then.'



The phone was disconnected abruptly. Staring at the handset, she felt a pang of regret at her outburst. One thing was certain; they would never be friends again.

The next few months gave her a bit of respite as she joined work in a multinational outfit. This meant that she was out of the house for long hours and got back home late. However, the reprieve did not last for long. One evening, she reached home after work to find some old family friends being entertained by her parents. She went and greeted them. They chatted amiably with her for a while and then she excused herself saying she needed to drink some water. As she poured herself a glass of water in the kitchen, she heard aunty say, 'Your daughter will be perfectly suited for our Amit. Let's get them to meet up once and then if all goes well, we can finalize the date for the wedding.'

Simmering with rage, she went back quietly to her room. After a restless night, she left home early the next morning saying that she had a meeting. Reaching office, she called up one of their clients, Rohan, and asked him to meet her. He had been hitting on her since their first meeting. The moment he came in, without further ado, she asked him if he was married. His smiling reply was, 'No, but then, I have been waiting for you all my life.' She blushed, but putting all her nervousness on the backburner said, 'Then, it will have to be done today; otherwise my marriage is going to be fixed up by my parents in a day or two.' Without

any hesitation, he nodded, got up and taking her hand led her out of office to his car.

He drove them to a temple nearby. Within an hour, they were man and wife. When she took him to her parents, they were shell shocked. Her mother took her aside and asked about Rohan's family. She curtly replied, 'I have married him and not his family.' Her father, overhearing her response, told her to get out of the house and never show her face again.

Then, began the nightmare. For Rohan, was the quintessential spoilt rich boy who was totally into boozing, gambling, womanizing and did not think twice before thrashing her when she did not toe his line. She could not turn to anyone, for she was, basically, a prisoner in that hell-hole.

One day, he beat her up relentlessly and vanished from the house after breaking her leg. Somehow, she managed to call an ambulance to take her to hospital. As she was being taken in on a stretcher, she heard a voice that she had thought she would never hear again, 'Minx?' Her pain glazed eyes opened and, unbelievably, it was Saurabh.

Three years later, on a wintry Sunday morning, she was making breakfast, when the doorbell rang. Before she could go to the door, she heard it being opened and the murmur of voices. Must be a salesman, she thought. Suddenly, two bony, wrinkled palms came from behind and closed her eyes. The spatula in her hand clattered on to the ground. Tears flowed down her face as she pulled the hand away, hugged her father first and then her mother. Saurabh smiled as he came in and completed the circle.

Far away, a train whistled as it chugged away to its final destination.



**Mona Mohanty is a serving bureaucrat in the Indian Revenue Service. In her spare time, she revels in observing the activities and antics of all living beings especially humans and those from the animal kingdom. Such behaviour results in a mind collating sights observed and translated into the written word. 'Betwixt Twists And Turns' is an output of such a hobby.**

## Reginald Massey's Book Page

### Life and career of Girish Karnad

By Reginald Massey

Girish Karnad, one of India's leading playwrights who had an international reputation has passed away at the age of 81. Like Shakespeare he wrote about legendary and historical characters in order to understand current dilemmas and confrontations. One of his best known plays for instance concerned Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the 14th century sultan of Delhi who was cultured and learned. However, his decision to move the capital from Delhi to distant Daulatabad in the Deccan region was resisted by his subjects. At vast expense the entire administration moved south but then returned to Delhi. The play clearly illustrated the blundering decisions of the government headed by Nehru in the years after independence. Karnad felt that British Raj had been replaced by Licence Raj under which entrepreneurs and industrialists could not move a finger without a licence. And that meant having to bribe ministers and bureaucrats.

However, Karnad was equally critical of today's saffron brigade who advocate Hindutva. If he were alive today he would have applauded the likes of Mahua Moitra the Opposition MP from West Bengal whose passionate speech in the Lok Sabha electrified the nation. He himself was a brilliant orator who did not mince his words or hedge his bets. He took V.S Naipaul to task for antipathy towards India's Muslims and caused a ruckus by saying that Bangalore's airport should have been named after Tipu Sultan who he claimed had been the best ruler of Mysore in 500 years. He also claimed that though Tagore was a great poet he was a second rate playwright. Karnad, a Brahmin, condemned the Hindu mobs that demolished the Babri mosque in 1992 with the tacit support of the government. More recently he took up the cause of journalists who were bullied and muzzled. The murder of

the Bangalore based journalist Gauri Lankesh appalled him. He received death threats but that did not deter him from speaking out loudly and clearly.

Karnad's father was a doctor who had fallen in love with a nurse who was a widow. In those days high caste

efforts to popular Bollywood block busters. On television he appeared in *Malgudi Days* based on RK Narayan's well known short stories.

He was greatly influenced by the philosopher Krishnamurti and questioned many of the institutions and practices prevalent in Indian society. He chose to write in Kannada and then translated his plays into English. Among his many awards were the Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan as well as the Jnanpith which is India's highest literary honour. He held important positions such as Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Director of the Film and Television Institute of India and Visiting Professor at Chicago University. In 2000 he was appointed Director of the Nehru Centre in London and it is there that I often met him. He was a gentleman par excellence who made the centre a place of high culture where the best of India could be seen and heard and discussed.

He was married to Dr Saraswathy Ganapathy and they had two children, Radha and Raghu.

On June 26 a programme of remembrance was held at the Nehru Centre when those who had worked with Karnad paid tributes to him. Divya Mathur, poet and founder of Vatayan: Poetry on the South bank who had organised the event concluded the evening with the following words: 'A great man of the stature of Girish Karnad walked amongst us for three years.....That he lives in our hearts is no mystery.'

A resolution was passed that a three day seminar be held to discuss and evaluate Girish Karnad's immense contribution to world culture in general and to South Asia's culture in particular.



Hindu widows were forbidden to marry a second time but that did not

deter Dr Raghunath Karnad and Krishnabai Mankikar. Their son Girish had obviously inherited their strength of character. He was also a brilliant scholar. He took a degree in mathematics and statistics and in 1960 won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford. At Magdalen College he read Philosophy, Politics and Economics and was elected President of the Oxford Union. On his return to India he worked for the Oxford University Press. After seven years with OUP he became a full time writer-actor-producer-art activist. He acted in scores of films from intense arthouse

Malathy’s Musings

Reminiscence

By Malathy Sitaram

The older one gets, the more one tends to think of childhood. I find my thoughts dwell on Bombay, my beloved city in which I grew up, having arrived there with my family from Delhi in 1946. My father was a civil servant and had been transferred there to work in the Govt. Shipping Department. Bombay of course is a port. My elder sister and I went to school there in what is called the Fort area which is the best part of the city. Cinemas, shops, the High Court, schools, Bombay University etc were in this area and was also where we lived. When we arrived from Delhi we lived in a suburb, but soon we moved to the wonderful city centre which was an exciting place to live in with several good schools and colleges.

India had been coveted and fought over for many centuries by Afghans, Persians and later from the 17th Century onwards by European powers – the French, the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British who fought one another for the booty that was India. India was divided into several kingdoms ruled by Maharajas who engaged in battle with one another from time to time. The European powers cleverly wooed the Maharajas and finally it was the British who ruled the roost. The Maharajas had been cleverly set against each other and found themselves in the end having to kowtow to the alien British rulers who enjoyed supreme power for almost a century or thereabouts. Hence to this day the use of the English language in India and the reason why I think and write in English. I refused my mother’s pleas to learn to read Tamil unlike my elder sister who learned to read Tamil. I was always engrossed in an English story book. At home my parents read excellent newspapers, such as The Times of India and The Hindu which to this day cater to the English-speaking minority. My mother used to get Tamil magazines every month. I think my sister learned to read Tamil but I refused to learn. At school we had English and French and in the fifties, Hindi was introduced. We had a Hindi Master, the only male teacher and I remember we used to have fits of giggles in the classroom. Poor man! Most of us struggled with the grammar with the exception of two pupils for whom Hindi was the mother tongue.

We lived in a five-storey building which was the norm then. Now Mumbai

as it is now called has quite a few skyscrapers. It has an excellent racecourse which Arabs used to frequent and probably still do. Our building was in an excellent location. One side of the whole long road named Queen’s Road (which probably has a Marati name now) had similar looking blocks of flats on one side of the road which had an attractive appearance. Our road ran parallel to train tracks. Bombay had the first electric trains which ran from early morning to late evening carrying thousands of passengers to work from the distant suburbs to and fro. Later on in the day there would be many men on the train carrying a load of metal tiffin carriers who would be delivering workers’ lunches lovingly prepared by their suburban wives. Some time back there was a BBC television programme about this unique practice. What was amazing was that individual tiffin carriers full of food lovingly prepared by wives reached the right person at their place of work.



St. Anne’s High School which we attended was excellent and my sister and I loved school and did well there. The school was in a very attractive building and is very likely still there. There has always been a lot of competition to get one’s children into the best schools. As it was a Catholic convent school, the bell rang at noon for Angelus when the Catholic pupils would pray. Most of the teachers were Goan Catholics. The exception was the Mathematics teacher, a formidable, no nonsense Maharashtrian lady. Maths. was not my forte. English, History and French were. During the long summer holiday at the end of the school year was when we would purchase new text books as advised by our teachers for the new year. My father would take us to a shop not far away to purchase the new year’s text books. We would also be waiting for the final exam results and School reports. Such joy when we received good reports which we usually did. We loved school.

My best friend lived almost a mile away and we visited one another at least once a week. I was supposed to return

home before it got dark but most times could not tear myself away before it got dark. My friend’s parents would send a servant to accompany me home if it was dark and he would walk a few paces behind me till I got safely home. Certainly, the streets were not safe for women. It was quite common for a ‘flasher’ to expose himself to women even in the daytime. One just averted one’s eyes and looked straight ahead.

We were three sisters and we had three beds in our bedroom. One night I awoke to a foul smell and was shocked to find there was a man standing by my bedside. he was peering at me and I pretended to be asleep. My heart was beating very fast and I felt it would be heard. After a while he moved away to the balcony and I leapt up and ran to my parents’ bedroom and clung to my mother. Our flat was on the first floor. Only after a while I woke my mother up and said there had been a man in our bedroom. My parents got out of bed but of course the burglar had gone. He had come up by climbing a drainpipe and must have descended as fast as he could. We found he had collected some silk sarees which he had placed on top of drawer. The police were called. I don’t remember if the man was caught.

To this day, my sister who lives in Kolkata and I love to talk about our schooldays. The year when she graduated from college was when I joined college. I used to wear skirts and blouses. The ‘salwar kameez’ had not caught on yet. However, in my third year I took to wearing sarees and loved wearing lovely cotton ones. There were the best cotton mills in Bombay and they produced the most attractive prints. My sister and I often wore voile sarees. Soon the ‘khadi’ and handloom fashion became more popular. Such lovely colours and prints.

Now, living in the UK. I wear Western clothes. Mostly trousers. When the local Indian community have functions to celebrate festivals, I have the opportunity to wear sarees. So many beautiful silks lying there unused. In India too it seems the salwar kameez has taken over though probably not widely in the South.

**Malathy Sitaram was the first Asian to teach English in Wiltshire Schools and simultaneously, the first Asian to be appointed to the Swindon Bench of Justices of the Peace. Now retired, she is just as busy.**



## Short Fiction

## The Spot

Subhash Chandra

As soon as he settled in front of the computer in his office in Gurugram, he hit Google. He must get the answers. It was a matter of life and death for her. The frightful scenario played out in his mind in all the ugly details. Glistening beads appeared on his forehead despite the December chill after he quickly browsed through a couple of Websites. He sat back scared, and worried how he would broach the subject to Nishita.

He recalled watching a documentary film on leprosy on the telly. The sordid life of lepers in a ghetto on the edge of the city - - tormented faces, wilting eyes, despairing walk. Nobody smiled, nobody greeted anybody. No rising sun brought hope and cheer, no night promised sweet dreams. They woke up every morning with the gnawing thought that their wasting bodies would gradually lose their limbs.

He must not delay. The disease was at an early stage. He took half a day off and planned on the way how he would begin. But when he reached home around 3:00 PM -- thanks to the nightmarish traffic -- Nishita had not yet come back from school. How come? Her classes were over at 1:00.

He phoned her.

"I'm caught up in an emergency staff meeting."

This was not the first time. She came home around 4:00 PM.

#

"What's it, Shivansh? You look troubled," she asked.

"Nothing."

"You've come home early for nothing? Come on, you're bad at telling lies."

"He kept silent."

"Have you had lunch?"

"Yes."

"Another lie. I'll rig up something -- maybe bread omelette."

After he had finished, she said, "Now, tell me what it is. Something serious at office? Is it attrition?"

He let out a non-committal 'Hmm.'

"But you needn't worry. You will surely land another job soon. And if it comes to the crunch, we can manage within my salary, with a little squeeze in our lifestyle."

He almost whispered, "Nishita, have you noticed that spot?"

"What spot?"

"The little brown spot near your left ear." She looked into the washroom mirror and laughed. "Is that the cause of your worry?"

"Yes."

"Silly boy!"

"Look we are almost middle aged now -- in our forties. The body undergoes crucial metabolic changes at this stage. It's nothing. Forget about it."

"But Nishi, there's no harm in consulting a doctor."

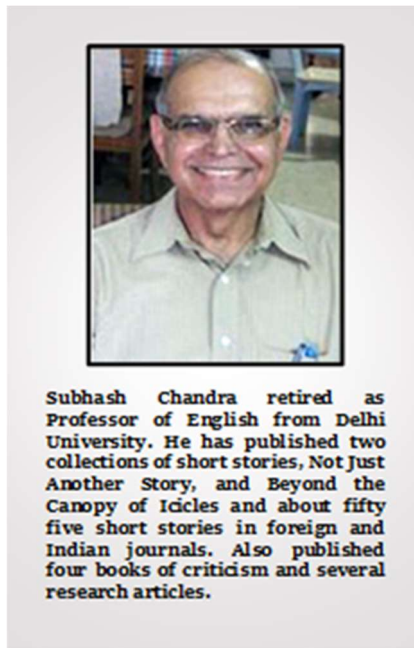
She again smiled. "You're the limit. Always imagining the worst and killing yourself with worry."

"Actually, Nishi... it's a symptom of leprosy."

"Are you mad?"

"Nishi, I've read a lot on the Net. Every Website confirms that kind of spot is an early symptom..."

She lost her cool. "Sorry, I won't be paranoid like you. I refuse to be your clone! I'll not consult a doctor!"



#

After a week, he did something that shocked her. He carried his sleeping mattress to the drawing room. The next morning, he separated the towels, and clothes in the cupboard.

She was livid. "Oh, it's come to this! Okay, you're being wise."

He did not react.

"If you want I can move out; you'd be absolutely safe then!"

She employed a full time maid for cooking and other household work. She told the maid to keep Shivansh's utensils separate. The maid found them funny; how could they stretch a quarrel that far. Her husband bashed her up every now and then; sometimes she, too, threw things at him. Yet they went on with their lives smoothly.

#

A month passed. Often, Nishita won't get sleep, thinking all kind of thoughts. Tonight, she realised that deep down she loved Shivansh, despite his being a terrible bore; he was always serious, almost solemn. But he was honest to the core, and was steadfast in his principles and values. She knew married life with him would always be stable. Perhaps, there was no harm in getting herself tested.

#

The family doctor closely examined the spot in the thin beam of his pencil-torch. But he did not laugh it away as she had expected. Instead, he started scribbling a prescription.

"Get these tests done."

Her face lost colour and she asked falteringly, "Anything serious, doctor?"

"It's always better to eliminate possibilities."

Icicles flowed in her veins on way to TrackLab.

"Ma'am you will get the report in a week." She trudged back home with leaden feet. The wait turned out to be a nightmare. She lost her concentration and rambled in her lectures.

#

"Nishita, I've received complaints against you," the Principal told her.

"Oh."

"You know, your students are preparing for class twelve Board exams and you need to give your best. But they are dissatisfied with your teaching."

"I'll be careful, Ma'am."

One day she asked Shivansh whether he would leave her, if she was diagnosed with the dreaded disease."

"There's no question. I'm taking precautions, so that I can look after you in case of need."

She felt like hugging him, but desisted.

"But if the reports are clear, I would need to be fair to you."

"I don't get you."

He did not elaborate.

#

She reached the Lab early in the morning and got the reports. She did not have the courage to look at them and gave the envelope to Shivansh.

"Congratulations, Nishita. I'm happy to be wrong."

Today, she gave him a tight hug. "Oh, Shivansh, you are such a dear."

But there was no matching warmth from him.

"Okay, I have to complete a project by this evening," he said and left.

In the afternoon, she went to Hiren and showed him the reports. He jumped up elated. "Now I can't wait any more. Divorce the bore, pronto."

She stared at him with rising anger and trained her scalding gaze at him.

Hiren looked at her agape. "Hey, Nishi ...come on, what's wrong with you?"

"My name is Nishita," she said severely.

"Aren't you the same crawling thing who went cold when I told you about the spot? Aren't you the same scum who was ready to discard me as stinking waste, if I tested positive?"

He stammered, "Nishi ... I mean Nishi ...."

"Enough!" she cut him short. Not a word more. You are just dirt!"

In the evening, she served Shivansh his favourite chirwa kheer, and veg pulao. But he did not touch the food and said, "Nishita, you are free now."

"Yes, thank God! And Shivansh, I love you so much, sweetheart!"

He placed the papers before her."

"What's this?" she almost fainted.

"Look, I've known it all along. You've been meeting your childhood heart-throb. I do understand; the first lover never dies. If I had known your parents forced you into our marriage, I would not have agreed. Anyway, now you are free."

## Poetry corner

## “human and animal contact”

## Two Poems by Anita Nahal

Anita Nahal presents some new poems from her third ongoing collection of poetry. These are the result of Nahal's deep endless questioning of human existence, its connection to other species on our planet, as well as everyone's intrinsic correlation and context with any other form of living beings on planets and galaxies beyond. Above all, these poems reflect Nahal's lifelong quest to find answers to the question: why we treat others the way we do?

*Quail*

It lay on the plate  
 Brownd and just resting  
 Upside down, with everything bare  
 Whole, not cut to be camouflaged  
 And its legs and hands facing downwards  
 It could not say a word, and I thought,  
 What if I was to be roasted and laid  
 like that, ready to be devoured?

*It's not all about sex*

It was pretty dark now  
 and the path was not lit except for the guide's powerful  
 torch  
 which suddenly sprawled on trees tops right in our  
 path.  
 We stood still, whispering, “What do you see? What do  
 you see?”  
 Gesturing to follow him, hushing us, fingers turned  
 backwards, and then  
 hands full open in stop.  
 Right above us, a drama was ensuing.  
 The sloths were not frightened by the glaring light  
 And the new mom with the baby clinging to her breasts  
 was walking fast.  
 As fast as sloths can when in danger.  
 The stud sloth was in pursuit from another branch  
 His heat made him faster and he reached right under  
 the new mom  
 He retracted quite suddenly knowing his heat wasn't  
 going to be satisfied, today.  
 After scratching himself thoroughly, he tried again.  
 The baby sensed something and quite valiantly left his  
 mama to stride up the branch alone.  
 Mama sloth pulled him back to her embrace.

The stud knew, it was only to be about consideration,  
 today.



**Anita Nahal is a professor, poet, flash fictionist, children's writer, higher education administrator and chair yoga instructor. Please find more info on her at: [www.anitanahal.wixsite.com/anitanahal](http://www.anitanahal.wixsite.com/anitanahal)**



Through the Poetic Lens

Yogesh Patel

In the June/July issue of The London Magazine, in his essay ‘How Not to Write Poetry’, Paul Griffin criticises Poetry Society’s prescription of teaching poetry where a student makes ‘lists of words and then writes poems using these words describing objects or situations.’ The fashionable ‘spoken word’ culture also bears no compass to what real poetry recital should be. However, he misses to point out that just the traditional construction of poetry with rhymes and metres do not always make poetry if it also fails in delivering us to the challenging content. Hence, when I look at the three recent collections in terms of the points just made, I put them in this order: Patina by Kavita A. Jindal, then Tigress by Jessica Mookherjee and finally, The Waiting by Usha Akella. I rush to point out, however, that each poet’s approach is completely different in lyricism, traditional forms, and making poems transcend from ‘describing objects and situation’.

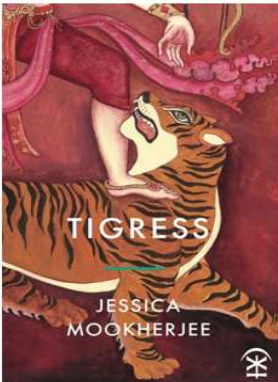
Jindal demonstrates a more balanced craft. Her observations achieve measured reflections and moods well wrapped in an endearingly lyrical manner. She has poignancy and grace laced in a are simplicity. In ‘Anything but’ simplicity speaks volume where – ‘On Not Being a Muse’ – a woman is objectified by an artist (man?) and has to deliver a portrayal, but in conclusion will not be ‘static’, call it her liberation from the expected perception.



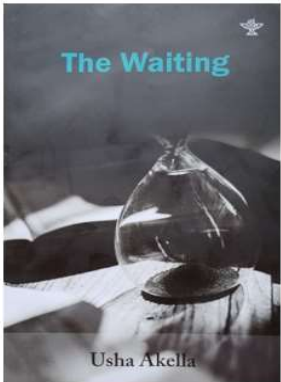
**The London Magazine**  
[www.thelondonmagazine.org/subscription/](http://www.thelondonmagazine.org/subscription/)



**Patina**  
Kavita A. Jindal  
ISBN: 9780993513541  
*the wind in the trees*



**Tigress**  
Jessica Mookherjee  
ISBN: 9781911027720  
*Nine Arches Press*



**The Waiting**  
Usha Akella  
ISBN: 9789388468008  
*Sahitya Akademi India*

*Gladly I will do it all  
Anything but be*

*Static while you are active  
Anything but be  
The one from whom you source  
What you make your own.*

Her poems show us that the beauty around us is not the derivative of any ostentatious aesthetics but the metaphorical patina. Patina brings time, history and value in the play. This metaphorical patina assimilates from one’s reactions to adverse encounters in life. Jindal finds these reactions in the potpourri of emotional tangles, distant observations and the measured responses drawing in a deeper meaning. Her poem ‘Piccadilly Line Salon’ brings this point home by poet putting us in the middle of women peering, pouting, slicking, and flicking doing their make-up in the morning on the tube. It contrasts with ‘Should I rustle in my satchel?/ Check in a mirror/ for bits of breakfast pear/ stuck in my teeth?’ We are left wondering about the make-up versus reality, the artificial against the natural. Jindal succeeds in her craft with lyricism and restrains as displayed in her other poems about the lack of clean water for some, Brexit, hashtag, Trump, and Boris. Here is a poet that claims ‘When slow living comes back in fashion/ I will claim as I have always done/ ...That I was here first.’

In Tigress, Jessica Mookherjee’s approach is to focus on the details of events that formulate her torturous journey in life so far. Starting from ‘me lurking inside her (mother’s) eggs, like a tiny spark’ the unborn child arrives on a plane from Bangladesh ‘from one/ part of the dying Empire, landing like an actress’ to the adolescence of ‘I open drawers, letters, cupboards, read everything/ to lie, cheat, steel my way into someone else’s life.’

The figure she cuts of her mother is of a woman struggling to define her being. The poem of the title, ‘Tigress’, captures the inner wars of this woman who would be a tigress but resigns to submission.

*Behind her husbands’ back  
She plans an attack.  
Until it starts to get dark. Until its time  
to take her pills.*

This collection is not only about Immigrant’s life, or growing up, or trying to figure out parents lost in making a new home as migrants, or about struggles. It is also about woman’s wrestles with hostile realities, father’s unemployment, mother’s illnesses, poet’s negotiation with two tugging cultures, deciphering the meaning of fatherhood and motherhood, a difference between a house and a home, complexities of distances and proximities of relationships, intricacies of family, issues of depression, misplacing oneself and trying to find that self again. One minute poet clings to a fallen tree as an embodiment of mother and love, the next, she finds ‘Damp sea sat outside the pub’. These poems are ‘describing objects and situations’ as discussed earlier, but they transcend by creating impressions which lead the readers to deeper – sometimes disturbing – debates. These are the poems lived –autobiographical – pushing a reader to confront uncomfortable themes.

In The Waiting, Usha Akella once again returns to the terrain of a devotional quest. She is a master of traditional metrical forms but that is not her aim in this collection published by the prestigious Sahitya Akademi in India. Akella demonstrated her affinity to the spiritual aspects in her drama poem Ek. However, to read this collection in isolation again and make assumptions will be a mistake, as Akella’s other collections do ignore this aspect and explore various other themes of life, including her passion for travels as in her collection The Rosary of Latitudes. The philosopher Martin Heidegger has suggested that God cannot be coalesced into any known quantity, but must be sought afresh. Akella tries here to make quest fresh with a self-crucifixion

*I am nailed on the cross of my own  
being  
This is divine Love, I suppose.*

These are the same millennia-old poems of longing displaying an ache to resolve the *dwait* into *adwait*, a duality as a soul and God, into a singularity of God, but with a modern quest.

*Three Steps,  
and I am back  
a butterfly in a cocoon.*

This is not a centrifugal dispersion into a singularity, but a centripetal collapse, akin to a black hole, into the singularity, God. That is why the poet is on own cross. The poems here are not indulging in ‘describing objects and situations’. They are quite contrary to Mookherjee’s lyrical details of everyday living and experiences.

*A recipient of many awards and widely published internationally, Yogesh Patel was Poet-of-Honor recently in NY. An editor of Skylark 1969-2001, he currently runs Word Masala Foundation and Skylark Publications UK to promote the diaspora poets. By profession, he is an optometrist and an accountant.*

## Linguistics

## On Collective Nouns

by Dawood Ali McCallum

I'm not quite sure how the subject cropped up, but a German friend and I were discussing collective nouns. You know the kind of thing: A swarm of bees, a convocation of bishops. Many of these we use without even realising that's what we are doing. A bunch of flowers. A deck of cards. A wad of notes. Most however are more obscure. I was boring everyone about how much time we spent in the tiny rural primary school I attended writing these examples out and doing exercises with bits of cardboard to match the noun to the right subject.

I wondered if there were such things in German: My friend frowned and consulted his wife. Both agreed they existed but that there were very few. How to describe a lot of cows, sheep, goats or horses?

Well, the word is the German equivalent of a herd, of course. But just the one word, common to all. Why would it need to be any different from one type of animal to another?

Good question. Why indeed?

I'm really not too sure. I remember even as an infant wondering just that. Of course, there are patterns: Whales, walrus and pelicans all form pods. Antelopes, elephants, buffalo and zebra all move around in herds, but then so too do curlew and sea urchins apparently. Sheep form up in flocks, yet someone who gathers them up into that flock is a shepherd, although on reflection I can see why that may be preferable as a job title to sheep-flocker. I have no problem with packs-dogs, weasels, reporters and coyotes-nor troops-baboons and kangaroos among others, although kangaroos, irritatingly can form a flock, Gaggles, colonies or bebies are fine by me too. It's when these terms become exclusive things really start to get odd. Only starlings for example gather in a murmuration. Only badgers form a cete. I suppose, as was the case when I was a child, the only way to learn this is by rote.

And what about the choice of word to describe these gatherings? Surprisingly often, the terms selected seem downright judgemental. A few are celebratory-an exultation of larks, a pride of lions, a parliament of owls. Although at present, if I were an owl, I think I'd put in a bid for something which better reflects the implication of wisdom. Far more often they are pejorative: from the sneery squabble of seagulls or pandemonium of parrots

as a herd, but people will still look at you askance if you referred to them as a pack, a pod or a troop. Politely condescending smiles and slightly raised eyebrows would similarly greet your announcement that you've just seen a flock of cows.

Now my German friend, generous to a fault, attributes this plethora of collective nouns (I think that might just be another one) to the wonderful richness of the English language. I am not so sure.

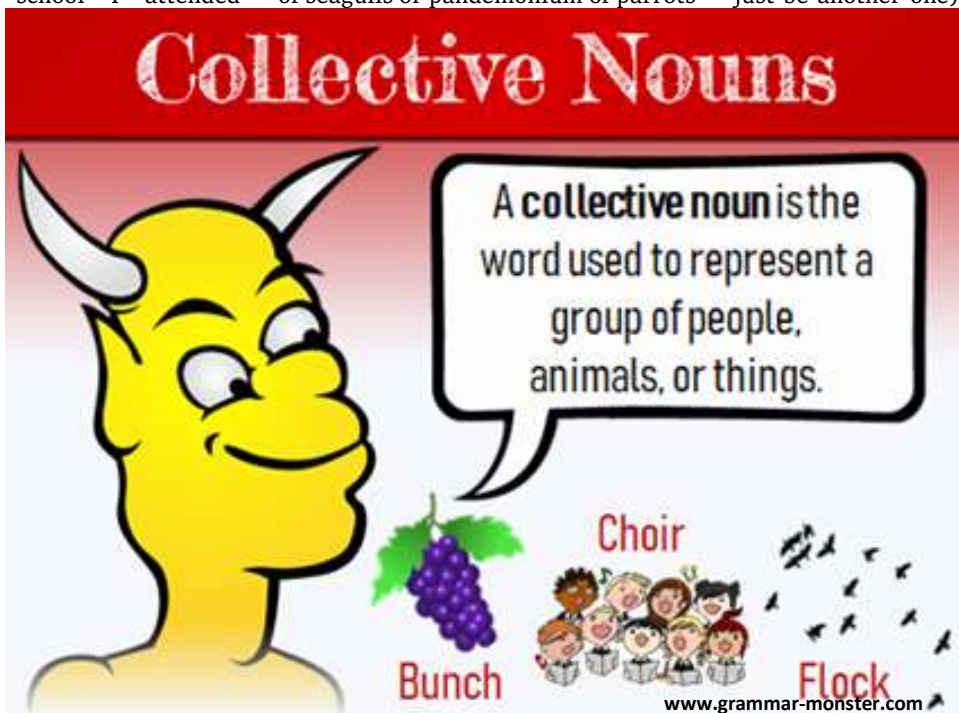
Yes, it's quite charming to be able to talk about a wealth of information or a constellation of planets, but only so long as you get it right. This really all seems to me more like the use of Latin in Church or Courts. It is there to separate those who know the language from

those who don't and to enhance the power of the former at the expense of the latter.

Latin, both ecclesiastical and judicial, has been superseded by simpler language in an attempt to make both establishments more accessible. This obsession with the right word from among a confusing range of illogical terms just seems out of kilter with the times. Whether collective nouns are something we should celebrate as enriching our language or view with disdain as divisive and exclusive, it is clear they aren't going away anytime soon. On the contrary, new ones are being added almost daily. My favourite of the more recent additions is the correct term to refer to a group of bankers post the financial crash. A wunch.

I believe it's what is referred to as a Spoonerism.

**Dawood Ali McCallum is the author of a series of novels published in India and the UK. Learn more at [www.dawoodalimccallum.com](http://www.dawoodalimccallum.com)**



through the grimmer plague of locusts and unkindness of ravens to a mischief of rats and a murder of magpies.

Some echo with the weary bitterness of hard life experience: a tedium of golfers, a mutter of mothers in law, an ingratitude of children, a desperation of divorcees. Others are delightfully mischievous. I love a guess of diagnosticians or a smear of gynaecologists. A few offer revealing alternatives. Grandparents, interestingly, can either be referred to en masse as a wisdom or a nag. One or two are downright obsequious- an erudition of editors, for example. No prizes for guessing the occupation of the creator of that one.

Why aren't all these oddities now regarded as ridiculously anachronistic and confined to history along with the other things I was made to recite over and over after Assembly, such as how many pennies there are in a shilling (12), pecks in a bushel (4, if memory serves) or chains in a furlong (10)?

Why does any of this matter? Because you may get away with mistakenly describing a flock of sheep

## Obituary

### Girish Karnad - India's Theatre and Film Icon

By LALIT MOHAN JOSHI

Friends of Girish Karnad in London congregated recently at the Nehru Centre to celebrate his life in theatre and cinema. It was precisely the place which he had headed as the Minister for Culture, Indian High Commission and the Director, Nehru Centre from 2000 to 2003.

The event was organised jointly by the Nehru Centre and Vatayan which is a London based literary organisation. An emotionally charged Vatayan founder, Divya Mathur said that the memory of Girish Karnad was permanently lodged in the hearts of those who had closely worked with him.

The tributes came wrapped in anecdotes. My personal story with Girish Karnad takes me back to my student days when I first encountered him as a protagonist in Shyam Benegal's seminal Nishant. Certain sequences are still fresh in my mind where as a school teacher he was confronted by a ruthless feudal family.

This was the period when New Indian Cinema was emerging. Shyam Benegal's trilogy Ankur (1973), Nishant (1975) and Manthan (1976) had such a great impact

By the time Girish Karnad joined Benegal, he had already established himself as a great playwright with two path breaking Kannada plays - Yayati (1961) and Tughlak (1964) which he had written in his early 20s. "His creative juices flowed with the theatre. And that's where his real talent lay", said Shyam Benegal, the new Indian Cinema pioneer, who gave him an early break as an actor and scriptwriter in Hindi Cinema.

Karnad made his acting and screenwriting debut in a Kannada movie Samskara (1970). It was based on a novel by U.R. Ananthamurthy and was directed by Pattabhirama Reddy. Girish Karnad made his directorial debut with Vamsha Vriksha (1971), based on a Kannada novel by S. L. Bhyrappa. Later, he directed several movies, in Kannada and Hindi including Kaadu (1973), Godhuli (1977) and Utsav (1984).

On a personal level, I met Girish Karnad in London when he joined as the Minister of Culture and director of the Nehru Centre. It was a coincidence that the year he joined was the year I set up the South

expression at the end of the event spoke volumes. Next day without any malice he warned me to take a lesson from the experience.



Author with Girish Karnad

Without mincing words he depicted the same directness while expressing his views before the media. Karnad drew heavy flak while he took on two Nobel Laureates - Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore by branding him a mediocre playwright and V.S. Naipaul as anti-Muslim.

I asked Shyam Benegal why despite having two theatre icons Vijay Tendulkar and Satyadev Dubey in his team he included Girish Karnad in scripting Nishant, Manthan and Bhumika. "He has a razor sharp mind. He takes plotting and constructing sequences, scenes and dialogues in the screenplay like a game of chess", replied Benegal.

During the making of Bhumika, Girish Karnad and Satyadev Dubey would drop into Benegal's Pedder Road flat at dinner for idea bashing. Nira Benegal would cook but before dinner could be served, both Girish and Dubey would start an intellectual debate descending soon into a shouting match. Nira Bengal would finally ask them to get out of the flat and fight instead on Pedder Road. Sometimes, it would go for hours and both Benegals would go to sleep. Girish had a set of their flat keys. In the morning, Nira and Shyam would find both Karnad and Dubey tired and snoring on the floor of their living room.

This anecdote narrated by me at the Nehru Centre drew cheers. Other officials, scholars, artists and filmmakers who addressed the evening were B K Guhare, Nasreen Munni Kabir, Martin Pick, Jay Visvadeva, John Keay, Nasreen Rehman, Nikhil Kaushik, Chitra Sundaram, Sangeeta Datta, Nona Sheppherd, Alaknanda Samarth, Ruth Padel and Vayu Naidu. The audience got submerged in the ambiance of bitter-sweet, funny as well as wacky tributes paid to the one and only icon Girish Karnad.



L to R: B K Guhare, Nasreen Munni Kabir, Martin Pick, Jay Visvadeva, John Keay, Nasreen Rehman, Divya Mathur, Nikhil Kaushik, Chitra Sundaram, Sangeeta Datta, Lalit Mohan Joshi, Nona Sheppherd, Alaknanda Samarth, Ruth Padel, Sitting: Neelum Singh, Vayu Naidu and Anuraag Dhondhiyal.

on me that I could not resist writing a letter to meet Shyam Benegal and to my surprise received a reply within a week to meet him in Mumbai. Before heading to his Tardeo office, I bought a small Japanese Shebro Delux mini cassette recorder to record an interview with him.

I tried to hide my nervousness when I met Benegal and recorded my very first interview with him. That was, a decade before I joined the BBC, London. As I came out of Benegal's tiny cabin, I was struck by a young Girish Karnad with a beautiful lady (who I later learnt was M.S. Sathya's wife Shama Zaidi) and the theatre icon Pandit Satyadev Dubey all sipping tea with a script on the table. That was Bhumika (1977) in the making where in the credits, Girish Karnad's name appears on top before Satyadev Dubey and Shyam Benegal.

Asian Cinema Foundation (SACF) with Derek Malcolm and film archivist P.K. Nair with an aim to build and promote South Asian and predominantly Indian Cinema through film festivals, new research, publication of books and our South Asian Cinema journal.

I will never forget his interest and all out support to set up SACF at the Nehru Centre. He took personal interest in widening the inaugural panel which initially included only Saeed Jaffrey and Pamela Cullen. He telephoned Prof Corey Creekmur, Illinois University, and the late Jagmohan Mundhra to join the opening and release of the inaugural issue of South Asian Cinema.

Another quality of Girish was his being upfront and direct. Once in a SACF film event he advised me not to include a well-known broadcaster. He feared he would be difficult to control. On my insistence he gave in, but his fears came true. His grim

## Short Fiction

### EMPIRE WRITES BACK

By Cyril Dabydeen

Professor Dhiru Patel's strange or sanguine manner it seemed like what was predetermined; and a post-colonialist, he was teaching English literature in Delhi at JNU, let it be known.

Why not?

India had indeed been under the British Raj for too long. Under France too, in places like Pondicherry—note well. His host in Ottawa, Professor Benoit—a French Canadian—ahemmed at that, and would talk “expertly” about India after his one visit there. Now he was pleased to welcome Professor Patel in this capital city with the federal parliament.

“Welcome,” Benoit said.

Professor Patel, short in stature and roundish, was fastidious in his ways. Indian ways, do you know? And Benoit knew Patel well, for he'd been hosted by him in India a year ago. I also knew Professor Patel well, in a manner of speaking. Now let India be India.

Patel figured two days would be long enough here; then it'd be to Toronto to meet many immigrants. Indians, Indians. I nodded.

Benoit became ingratiating. Make his guest's stay happy in his narrow dwelling, indeed.

“I must have a bath,” said Professor Patel. A ritual?

But Benoit only took showers in his dwelling—never a bath. A jet of water pouring, splashing, I imagined.

“Yes, bath,” said Patel, almost with guile.

Benoit was only too willing to please his special guest. But his gritty bathtub had no cork or stopper--not equipped for someone to take a bath. Did Professor Patel figure he would be in the Ganges next?

I'd laughed at that when it was related to me.

See, Benoit drove around to the hardware stores desperately looking for a suitable cork—so Professor Patel could be accommodated. Ritual bath?

The etymology of the word “bath” with inferences, denotative and connotative came to me, almost with foreboding. What culture are we talking about?

Professor Patel later confessed that he simply wanted a shower—not soak

himself in someone's bathtub. Hinglish? Post-colonial inflection, see.

Benoit lamented, “Too much trouble having a guest”—even if Ottawa was a welcoming place.

“An Indian guest do you mean?” I rejoined.

The laughter was on us—as Professor Patel only wanted a shower. A mischievous glint was in his eyes, like I was conniving with him. Now Professor Patel had to buy his bus ticket to Toronto well in advance.

“The bus-station people insisted I must,” he moaned. “Not like in India, eh?” I tried.

Benoit forced a smile. Forbearance, d'you know?

~~

I agreed to take Professor Patel—in order to get his Toronto ticket ahead of time, since it was a special holiday...and there would be a long line-up. Patel patiently waiting in his turn at the Voyageur Bus Station I conjured; yes, there on Kent Street named after majesty, like Queen Street and Albert Street in the city. Royalty abounded.

Many college students would already be in the line-up—but not willing to have their sense of fairness and tolerance put to the test. Busy-busy.

Professor Patel simply deliberated.

Sunday morning, bright and sharp, I picked him up after doing his puja, I presumed. Benoit was yet accommodating.

“Ah,” Patel let out, acknowledging my being on time. No one was ever on time...in Delhi?

I drove down the Queensway—the quickest route to the bus station. Patel's eyes swept across the landscape. And the lineup at the bus station was indeed long, over fifty people. First-come, first-served. Faces riven with grimaces. Bapre bap.

Professor Patel looked at me, sanguinely.

Canada, you see.

He must wait his turn, as the line slowly snaked along to the ticket-counter. One hour...two? The ticket master was methodical, efficient.

I waited outside, and imagined Professor Patel-- elderly man with the

entirety of India on his shoulders, the burden of empire in his mind. The line slowly moving forward. And yes, what India had experienced during the Raj. Professor Patel indeed deliberated.

After five minutes, I saw Patel with a gleefully expression coming towards me. He fluttered a bus ticket in his hand. Look, see.

“So quickly?” I rasped.

“Yes, yes.”

“But...how?” The long lineup?

I waited to hear his explanation. And thinking of Canadians' tolerance or forbearance once more. Granting Professor Patel special privilege, did they?

“No, no,” Patel let out. “I simply moved to the front of the line.”

“You did?”

“Why not?” he censured.

I was amazed. Boldly, or brazenly, he added: “I walked straight to the counter, ahead of everyone.”

He laughed. I imagined the others in the line with exasperated looks. How dare he?

Patel laughed. The ticket master nodded to him, see, because of colonialism--what India had suffered.

I didn't see.

Again he laughed in an unexpected manner. A great wrong had been done: Now let them pay for it: his post-colonial instinct was all.

The car ride back to his guest's house on the Queensway once more. Ha-ha! Benoit also laughed, like having the last laugh. Canada and India--history's making and unmaking. And the twain meeting-- marking time!



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Interview

A Meeting with Jeffrey Archer

By Sunayana Panda

It was an experience of a life time to hear Jeffrey Archer speak about his career as a writer at the JLF at the British Library. “No, I am not a writer, I am a storyteller,” he said. There is a difference. A writer focuses on the beauty and power of language whereas Jeffrey Archer focuses only on the craft of the story. But he is not just any story teller. He has sold 300 million copies of his books and has been on the bestseller list for novels as well as for his short stories.

Jeffrey Archer is 80 years old and still continues his routine of writing 8 hours a day in 4 blocks of 2 hours each. He says that hard work is necessary for becoming a successful writer without which your talent can never be expressed. “My skill for telling stories is a god-given gift,” he confesses. But even that skill needs the expert hand of an editor to give it the perfect shape. He was full of praises for the editor who took the first draft of his highly successful novel *Kane and Abel* and restructured it, giving it a more readable form.

“I don’t write for the money,” says Archer. “My novel *Kane and Abel* earned enough and since its publication I have not needed money. I write to be read. That is what makes me wake up in the morning and go to my writing table.” In this day and age when we all write on the key-boards of our computers Jeffrey Archer continues to write by hand.

Talking of short stories he said, “Don’t start writing your short story if you don’t know how it ends.” A short story often has a twist at the end and that twist is what makes the short story so memorable. He admits that on the other hand when he writes a novel he doesn’t know how it will end.

Jeffrey Archer is immensely popular in India. Last year 7500 people turned up at the Lit Fest in Jaipur to see him. But he himself cannot explain why he is so popular. One can try to understand this phenomenon. It could be because India has a large number of people who can

read English and of these many are above the age of 50. Those who grew up reading English novels, because that is all there was, must be the ones who are buying Archer’s books. Even if we take just 10 percent of the educated Indians and assume that they are the main readers of works of fiction it will add up to a huge number because of the sheer size of our population.

Excerpts from the interview:

S: You write these enormous novels and then you write short stories. These are two completely different genres of writing. How do you do it? Do you get an idea for a short story while you are writing a novel or do you start thinking of a short story after you have finished

S: Some of your short stories are taken from real life. And you mark these stories with an asterisk in the table of content to let your readers know that they are based on real life. Why do you do that? Why do want your readers to know that these stories are based on real life?

JA: I do that because if I didn’t tell my readers that I have taken them from real life they would never believe that such stories can actually happen, they are so incredible. Real life is far more amazing than anything you can create from your imagination.

S: Who is your favourite short story writer?

JA: In India R.K.Narayan.

S: And in the world?

JA: Maupassant, O’Henry, Roald Dahl

S: How do you explain the fact that so many people read your books in India?

AJ: I can’t explain it. I don’t know. We have done surveys. 50 million people in India have read my book *Kane and Abel*.

S: How often do you come to India?

JA: Once a year.

S: Have your books been translated into Indian languages?

JA: Yes, they have been translated into three or four Indian languages.

S: And the Short stories?

JA: The short stories too have been translated.

S: When was the first time you went to India?

JA: About forty years ago. I went to Bombay and Calcutta. At that time all the women were dressed in saris. Now all women in India are in Western clothes. I love the sari. It’s such a beautiful dress.

S: Is there anything else you would like to add?

JA: I love the Indian people and always will.



writing the novel?

JA: I get a short story in the middle of my novel, in the middle of my sequence or whatever I am doing and then I write down three or four lines just to remind me. So when I got to the end of the Clifton Chronicles I already had ten little vignettes. Sometimes I get a story which is so interesting but I can’t write it because I am in the middle of something. So I put down just 4 or 5 lines.

S: What special skill do you need to write a good short story?

JA: You have to remember that in a short story every single word counts. Have you read my story written in just 100 words which is at the beginning of the collection called *Tell Tale*? It has a beginning, a middle and an end. A short story can be that short. So, keep in mind that every word is important.

## Travelogue

### LUCKNOW Part 2: WHERE LOVE OF A LEGACY BLOSSOMS

By Prithvijeet Sinha

With my essays here on Confluence, I have intended to start a journey that has my hometown Lucknow as its fulcrum. As befits the style I adopted in the preceding essay (published in the May 2019 issue titled LUCKNOW : A LAND OF PLENTY AND EVERGREEN MEMORIES) this one too rests on the connections and bonhomie forged with relatives who may have met me for the very first time or after a spell of years in between, by sharing the sights and sounds of my beloved city with me as a common link.

Memories from such a repository of joyful instances is what I share; only this time around it involves the beloved pair of Paul Kaka (uncle) and Mo Kaki (aunt), both belonging to the paternal side of the family and soon to be united in holy matrimony later this year. Their trip to Lucknow was at

scellings and an air of spirituality all meld here to offer an unforgettable experience. Its doorway, with the city's typical fish motif is emblematic of the fertile imagination the people of Lucknow stood for and mirrors the majesty of Rumi Darwaza that stands a few miles away. Mo Kaki had draped her head in a scarf presenting a picture of dignity as if the ambience of calm around these deeply sacred sites had given her serenity. Of course, we visited the Residency too and discovered a mosque at the rear end of the location, that though worn down by the passage of years, was mesmerizing even in its present state. The passage of time had not taken away its spiritual dignity.

In the other leg of their three day stay, as both are fitness enthusiasts and maintain agile physiques, having undertaken a hiking

building captivated them. From children skating merrily, playing lawn tennis, to the inner Spence Hall with its upper deck, the magnificent Constantia - the central part of the structure - and the library and chapel adorned by frescoes, they took in all the charm of the institution. I thank our lucky stars because we were able to go to the upper reaches of the Constantia as well, something which was forbidden to students. The walls and ceilings are impeccably maintained while the classical aura of the portico, the fabled Gothic stone figures of angels and demons that were closer to us at this height and the beautiful view of the river and the lush green on all sides led the couple to sit down in the balcony to take in the ambience of the surroundings. Later, both of them couldn't stop talking about the impact that half an hour's reverie had on them. Coming



a crucial confluence of the 'around the world' one they had undertaken in late 201 and covering half of 2017. To me, it was an extension of their deep love which, I'm sure, strengthened beyond measure as they shared their common ideal of wanderlust. I was lucky that a trip to Lucknow fell on their radar in the Indian leg of this joint sojourn. Their presence was such that the usually chilly early part of January seemed to be full of sunshine and warmth that we usually don't expect.

The iconic locations we went to were the same as on my prior trip with Geoffrey Kaka (referenced in the May issue of Confluence). What made it different was the luxury of time both my guests had to explore the city. So Bada Imambara exuded a different charm as we imbibed the cool, darkened recesses of the famous labyrinths and in a photograph taken from this instance, shadows and light intermingled to create a certain aura that only a visitor can fully grasp. Kaka, on his part, captured the beautiful imagery around us on his camera, with some great shots of the various angles, shades and natural lighting that make a monument special. Kaki, on the other hand, was gracious in complimenting a lady's brightly colored sari and adding smiles to someone else's day out.

The neighbouring Chota Imambara, another former royal palace and resting place of kings past, was visited by us. This is a dainty little piece of heaven priding itself on its serene air in contrast with its more famous neighbour's overwhelming ambience. Crystal clear water bodies, fountains, the dazzling structure of the main building, the many chandeliers hanging from filigreed

expedition in Nepal before embarking upon Lucknow, they graced a special fitness

session as chief guests under the aegis of my father's prestigious cricket academy, named ABHIJEET SINHA CRICKET ACADEMY. Demonstrating some of the fitness techniques themselves which they have been accustomed to perform together, they were full of energy and interacted with the students, adding smiles and a whole quota of confidence among discerning youngsters. After a hearty meal at Mainland China (a



restaurant) we all went for a walk in the beautifully manicured, always teeming Janeshwar Mishra Park with its sprawling acres and gigantic Tiranga (the Indian tricolor flag) matching the lovely weather. Mo Kaki and Paul Kaka had a good post lunch jog there.

Every trip has a high point. The pinnacle of their sojourn, for me, was when they got totally transfixed by my alma mater La Martiniere Boys' College which as I have mentioned previously is an architectural marvel, with its Gothic appearance and recent facelift ensuring that every inch of the

to La Martiniere to spend the best latter half of the day was indeed a perfect choice for all of us. (They still enthuse about it.) Paul Kaka even told me that students wouldn't desist attending school if their surroundings were this idyllic. I told him, in turn, that it was indeed one of the reasons to attend classes for me, just to partake the beauty of the place. In its restored form, being awed by an old world antiquity here is inescapable. What's more, a film shoot was being conducted in another part of Constantia so it was a complete trip, entertaining us in every way.

Of course, like all great trips, this one too came to an end. But the gratitude, grace and ever smiling visages of the good-looking pair has stayed with me. To this date both continue to recall the memorable three days and I, on my own part, feel thankful that I was able to open up my world to these globe trotters. I believe a profound sojourn concludes not with an adieu but a resolve to come back. The same applied to the one with Paul Kaka and Mo Kaki.

**Prithvijeet Sinha hails from Lucknow. He has published his work on GNOSIS JOURNAL, THE MEDLEY, CONFLUENCE, CAFE DISSENSUS EVERYDAY, CAFE DISSENSUS MAGAZINE, THUMBPRINT MAGAZINE, READER'S DIGEST and maintains a prolific writing output on his WordPress blog AN AWADH BOY'S PANORAMA and on Wattpad. He has currently submitted his poems to CONSEQUENCE MAGAZINE and JAGGERY. His motto in life is to create and expand his world views.**