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Remembering Lata Mangeshkar by Sunayana Panda

It was a touching sight to see that the flags were flying at half mast in India just after Lata Mangeshkar had died. No, she was not a head of state or a former general. She was a Bharat Ratna and that is why the nation was honouring her. She was a singer who had earned the admiration of Indians over several generations for the high level of perfection she had reached with her art, a single woman who had worked hard to be where she was in her profession.

The news of Lata Mangeshkar's passing brought a wave of emotional tributes from many people. She had lived a full life and had lived long enough to become a legend in her lifetime. It was not so much grief which was expressed on social media but rather the acknowledgement that she represented an entire era.

Javed Akhtar, the poet and lyricist said, "Lata Mangeshkar brought out the subtext of a song. The words written by the lyric writer are like an ice-berg. They say something but they also hide a lot. Lata could always express what the words could not say. And that is what made her who she was. She put the right emotions into her songs."

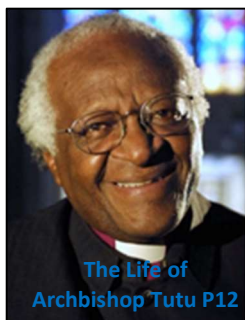


Her life is well-known. She was forced to start earning when she was only 13 so that she could provide for her four siblings and her mother because her father had just died. She worked as an actress and a singer in Marathi films and slowly rose in prominence through her hard work and became the legend that she was. For close to 7 decades she was the most eminent woman playback singer in India. A point to note is that she never married. She received the highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna.

No one can deny that her singing was flawless but we have to see Lata's work in the social context in which she worked to understand her courage and determination which took her to that level of excellence. At the time when she started singing for films it was not a glamorous job. The film industry was still in its early stages and there wasn't either the money or the fame which came later on. Lata Mangeshkar speaks of how she and Dilip Kumar used to travel in local trains to the studios.

It was a time when the names of the singers weren't even mentioned on the records. In fact, her famous song from "Mahal" which brought her to the attention of the public did not have her name on the record. It was the name of the character in the film who sang it who was shown as the singer of that iconic song, "Ayega, ayega, aanewala ayega"! People phoned the radio station when it was broadcast to ask for the name of the real singer.

Lata recounts in several interviews that she had so little money when she started her career that she could not afford to take a horse-cart from the station to the studio and had to walk the long distance. **(continued on p3)**



Editorially speaking

Dear readers,

This is the first issue for 2022, coming later than expected.

Entire world is going through a challenging period, and it is directly affecting our everyday life. Last two years have been so difficult for everyone but life is slowly returning to normal. It is quite understandable that some people are sceptical about the vaccines and their effectiveness, but no one can deny the fact that without the hard work of the scientists and the doctors this pandemic could have killed even many more thousands of lives.

The current invasion into Ukraine by Russia is threatening the world peace and causing serious economic crisis in many parts of the world. We saw a large number of people fleeing Ukraine as refugees into their neighbouring countries, but a large number of foreign students, particularly of asian origin were denied entry into those countries, which is deplorable. It is very unfortunate that the institutions that were created to promote world peace and to maintain order are helplessly watching the deteriorating situation rather than being able to do anything meaningful to stop the escalation of war.

Confluence was founded to give a platform for writers from all over south Asia and I am very pleased to see that more and more new writers are joining our family and contributing a wide variety of high quality writings. Since we are working with very limited resources it has become necessary for us to receive all your submissions many weeks before the publication date. So, I would like to remind all our contributors to help us by sending your submissions well before the deadline specified. Please send your work to confluenceuk@yahoo.com only.

Vijay Anand

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From that situation Lata rose gradually to the position where she was the only singer who was hired by all the top studios because they could count on her.

Most people from Maharashtra have a sweet voice. It's something they are born with, a genetic trait. Lata Mangeshkar's speaking voice was very sweet but it wasn't enough to take her to the top of her profession. She made every effort to be better and better. Once Dilip Kumar, the actor, commented that she did not have the right accent to sing Urdu songs. She immediately hired a tutor to teach

her Urdu. This was something very important because in those days most film songs were written in Urdu and if the singer could not pronounce the lyrics correctly the song could turn out to be less than perfect. Lata was wise enough to understand that if she wanted to compete in that crowded market she had to be flawless.

Today sound technology is so advanced that an error by the singer can be corrected digitally but this possibility did not exist at that time.

One had to be deeply concentrated to record a song without making mistakes. Lata recounts that they had to rehearse for several days before they could make the final recordings. All this was hard work and required dedication.

The decade that followed the independence was a time when people from many different cultural backgrounds congregated in Bombay (now Mumbai), the commercial capital of India. People who had been displaced by the partition also came to seek their fortune. This melting pot brought out a culture which would somehow catch the imagination of the whole country. Indian cinema, in this way, united the country.

Songs were an important part of films. Poets, music composers, musicians and singers combined their talents to create a kind of music which was understood and loved by all the regions and classes. This became a part of our collective consciousness. These songs united us, cutting across regions, class and local culture.

Lata Mangeshkar was a part of that pan-Indian music and has remained in our minds as the voice of that music. The music directors who composed the songs were not so well-known to the common man but the singer was.

The lyric writers were even less known even though the words of the songs which have become classics were written by them. How many remember Sahir Ludhianvi or Shailendra but everyone knows Lata Mangeshkar. In trying to sing like her, several generations of Indians have learnt to sing in tune and have acquired a sense of melody.

Many felt that it wasn't entirely a coincidence that Lata Mangeshkar left the world of the living on the day when the statues of Saraswati, the goddess of music and art, were being immersed in rivers after her puja day. As the goddess went back to heaven she took her favourite child with her.

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



Obituary

Innamburan' Srinivasa Soundararajan A rebel with a cause



'Innamburan' Srinivasa Soundararajan, 88 of Chennai, India died suddenly on 15 January 2022. An occasional correspondent for *Confluence*, his moniker was derived from his village, Innambur.

The eldest in a large family of modest means, his rebelliousness was already evident in his participation, as a schoolboy, in anti-British demonstrations, much to the consternation of his father working in local government. University education, then a rarity in such

families, led to a coveted place in the Civil Service where he entered the Indian Audit and Accounts Service. Over the next four decades, he served all over India, retiring as an Additional Deputy Auditor General of India. Though belonging to the Central Government, he was sought by many State Governments to lend his financial acumen in getting major projects off the ground. His trademark nonconformism, a 'can do' approach and fiercely apolitical stance were evident throughout his career, and he rather relished the inevitable turbulence this caused. In retirement, wearing his audit hat, he was apt to examine all national and international developments with forensic detail and indeed, contributed many an op-ed to professional journals, newspapers and newsmagazines.

After his wife, Vasantha predeceased him in 2000, he spent nearly ten years in the UK with his son's family where he volunteered with the Citizens Advice Bureau, a highly respected national advisory body. He was very proud of the bachelor's degree in Advice Studies that he subsequently attained from Staffordshire University. Upon returning to Chennai, he tried to establish a similar model of citizen advocacy but encountered too many barriers.

Over the last fifteen years, he was very active in empowering children from disadvantaged backgrounds to aspire towards a career in the administrative services and brought to bear his considerable knowledge in doing so. He remained passionate about the immense role of education and the pressing need to overcome entrenched gender disparities. He was very dismayed by the global and national inequalities that the pandemic had exposed. In his ninth decade, 'Innamburan' effortlessly took to all manner of social media and remote working platforms. Conversing effortlessly with youngsters nearly eighty years younger to him, his regular classes attracted a vast online attendance right up to the day before he died.

It was typical of his eclectic interests that, at the time of his death, he had done very extensive background research in an aspect of classical Tamil literature, intending to submit an application for doctoral research. The shortness of his stature was more than made up by the sheer force of his personality. Gregarious by nature, refreshingly irreverent and filled with insatiable curiosity, his friends ranged from senior civil servants to Indologists to Tamil scholars to teenage students who while mourning his passing also are celebrating a life well-lived. He leaves behind a son and a daughter.

Colonel (Retd) S Jagdish

Monoku poems

Semantic dance of Hindi and English

By Anita Nahal

Monoku poems are single horizontal line poems of no more than 17 syllables. This style emerged in the 1970's as a variant of Haiku. The single line contains a pause which could be brought about by speech rhythm or with slight or no punctuation. The first letter is generally written in lowercase, however, in Anita's poems she has chosen not to do so. Anita Nahal says she prefers to write either in spoken word-prose poem style with emphasis on numerous words, repetition and honing in clearly, and in detail, the message or in very, very short monoku poems with a brevity of words. Both for her are mediums to convey her depth of emotions and diversity of issues she observes around her. In the poems below she has combined Hindi and English words hoping to bring together languages and encouraging learning of feelings expressed,, and words by non native speakers of another

"Sona"

Sleep or gold

(A poem with five monokus)

- i.
Sona, quintessence of rebirth. Sun wears shawl close. Re-surgin warmth.
- ii.
Sona or not, humans are mostly beat. Memories and dreams. Tired souls.
- iii.
Wake up next to me glowing like sona. Legs walk. Sequins dimmer.
- iv.
Aging sona. Atypical. Placid like dawn water on a lake.
- v.
Some sona goes on between sheets. Some in minds. Not all sleep with someone.

"Phazul mein"

Of no real value

(A poem with five monokus)

- i.
Folks utter words. No meaningful patterns woven. Soothe-less. Phazul mein.
- ii.
The circus fire is circling round, round burning loose cannons. Phazul mein.
- iii.
When it snows in the South, mounds emerge unnaturally. Phazul mein.
- iv.
Red, green chilies... at myriad heats tongues burn. Why gossip? Phazul mein.
- v.
Cement mixer is twirling, twirling life rotations. Phazul mein?

Anita Nahal is an Indian American poet, flash fictionist, children's writer, and professor. Her third poetry book, *What's wrong with us Kali women?* (Kelsay, 0221) was nominated by Cyril Dabydeen, celebrated Guyanese Indian Canadian & Ottawa poet laureate emeritus & novelist as his choice for the best poetry book for 2021 for British, Ars Notoria. Anita teaches at the University of the District of Columbia, Washington DC. She is the daughter of Sahitya Akademi award winning Indian novelist, Chaman Nahal and educationist, Sudarshna Nahal. More on her at: <https://anitanahal.wixsite.com/anitanahal>



Uganda remembers:

'If we don't tell our stories, someone else will'

by Dolar Vasani

Once upon a time, a child called Idi Amin was born. At a young age, he joined the British colonial army, where he was known for his ambition, courage and cruelty. In January 1971, Amin staged a military coup and became the President of Uganda. His rule was brutal, earning the title, "the Butcher of Uganda".

In August 1972, he expelled 80,000 Asians, people who had played a major role in the economy, giving them 90 days to leave.

[Expulsion@50](#) is a podcast I created to raise awareness of this historical event. Twenty-eight episodes later, many themes and learnings have emerged.

Podcast guests came from many countries. Some started as icebergs, but soon melted; others were sometimes difficult to contain. People in their 70s shared joyful memories of climbing mango trees or making kites. Just as foods and smells evoke memories, the songs selected by the guests represent an emotional connection to their life back in Uganda.

The initial people whose voices I wanted to capture were people who had been expelled, but soon this expanded and diverse perspectives emerged. Other guests included academics and historians, and those who had written fiction or memoirs. The voices of the second generation and the listeners' perspectives were also captured.

Background to the Indians in Uganda and East Africa

The British Empire was sustained by extracting raw materials from the colonies. Following the abolition of slavery, Britain introduced indentured labour, when more than two million Indians were contracted and shipped across the Empire to work on plantations and to build railways. One example was the Kenya-Uganda line, used for transporting tea, coffee, cotton and sugar to the coast. Other Indians came independently to East Africa in search of a better life.

Guests spoke about grandparents arriving in Uganda from 1910 onwards. Males as young as 14 were put on boats and received by relatives in Mombasa, who provided work opportunities. The new arrivals learnt Swahili and brought with them an ethos of hard work, enterprise and ambition. Once established, other family members joined. Men returned to India to find a wife and came back married.

Professionals were also recruited from India to sustain the civil service and ensure a functioning government. The British created the "sandwich": Europeans (top), Indians (middle) and Africans (bottom). This showed itself in the town planning, where the hills of Kampala boasted freestanding houses occupied by the whites, and the blacks lived in the townships outside the city.

The Indians lived in the city centre, making them very visible, while the whites were hidden in the tree-lined suburbs. Black workers travelled into the city at sunrise and returned home at sunset, becoming invisible. Prior to independence in 1962, this de facto apartheid was repeated across the colonies.

Community schools were established for Indians, with teachers from India, the UK and the US. Within the civil service, jobs were reserved according to race and pay scales followed racial lines. Collectively, these policies, implemented over decades, sowed the seeds of inequality and resentment which African leaders sought to address post-independence.

Life in Uganda was carefree prior to 1971. We played in the streets without fear. During school holidays, we visited relatives in neighbouring countries or travelled to India and Pakistan, experiences cherished to this day.

Education was the highest priority of parents. Children were expected to pursue higher education.

The "sandwich" contributed to separate living within society. Nonetheless, guests spoke positively about relationships between Indian and African children at school; or with employees working in family businesses. Outside these formal spaces and interactions, there was no social contact. Raju Bhatt in [episode 5](#) reflects, "Only after experiencing racism in England did I question our past with introspection." Within the Indian community, mixing happened with ease.

In [episode 21](#), the author, Jameela Siddiqi reflects: "...our neighbours were Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Muslims... we exchanged foods, learnt each other's languages, and celebrated every festival". While there was mutual respect for different religions, marriage remained along community, caste, and faith lines. Indian women worked in family businesses and managed the household.

Sumanben Sanghvi, now 88 years old, in [episode 15](#) said, "I went to work every day..."

(Continues on page 6)



(From page 5)

life was easy because we had staff to help". Guests spoke about active social lives, with weekends filled with excursions — picnics, swimming, the drive-in cinema or theatre.

August 1972: the expulsion

Everything changed in August 1972. In [episode 19](#), Amir Majothi, now living in Yorkshire, recalls, "President Amin came on the radio and said we had 90 days to leave. We thought it was a hoax." Amin spoke about following his dream and being commanded by God. Similarly, in [episode 1](#), Zain Lalani, who ended up in Canada, recalls, "My father said, 'this is not about us. We're Ugandan citizens; we don't need to worry' ". The army was in charge; the erratic behaviour of soldiers compounded our fears.

Jaswant Jutley, who was 16 years old, recalls in [episode 20](#), "Many had a gun in one hand and Uganda Waragi (vodka) bottle in another." Indian homes were easy pickings, with many incidents of looting at gunpoint. Prior to our leaving, we gave away our possessions. In [episode 15](#), Sumanben explained, "We had five vans and each driver got one. It was a way of helping them to start on their own."

Asians' bank accounts and assets were frozen by the government; the luggage allowance on planes was 20kg and £50.00 in cash. Gold jewellery was one way to take money out of the country. This became a liability as women were strip-searched, beaten, raped by soldiers at roadblocks and at the airport. Discipline and the rule of law were replaced by chaos and anarchy. Many guests described their relief when their planes left Ugandan airspace.

Out of Africa

Where one ended up depended on one's identity document. The initial announcement referred to those with British passports. However, this had different meanings. Passports had to be verified and a whole slew of new regulations emerged.

Gender discrimination was practised openly; only a father with a British passport could have his dependents travel with him to Britain. Changes to the immigration laws in the 1960s saw the tightening of rules for UK passport holders living in the former colonies. However, white people could travel freely to Britain, even if they were not born there. People queued for days outside the British High Commission and other embassies to get their permits. Indians holding Ugandan passports also had to get their passports verified; many had their citizenship revoked and became stateless.

As Sara Cosemans, an academic in Belgium, highlighted in [episode 6](#), "The British government made the Ugandan Asians a problem for the international community, asking different countries to take them as refugees."

Under the auspices of the United Nations, almost 6,000 people were issued travel documents and flown out to transit camps in Europe, ending up in Austria, Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the US, among others. There are many stories of basic human

decency on both sides. While some Ugandans were overjoyed to "get our country back", the reality was nuanced.

It was hard saying goodbye to staff who had been so loyal. My parents, like many others, had invested everything in Uganda. This was our home. We never wanted to leave. Amin's presidency was also marked by violence towards his enemies. As Derek Peterson from the University of Michigan explained in [episode 22](#), "we must acknowledge the suffering experienced by the Langi and Acholi tribes".

In some ways, the 80,000 Asians were lucky to escape; half a million Africans were impoverished or tortured and killed, as Samuel Kalibala, now living in the US, recalls in [episode 13](#), "Poverty descended upon us. Sugar and salt became scarce and expensive. Inflation was rampant".

Experiences of exile

The Ugandan Asians are regarded as one of the most "successful" immigrant groups. What has contributed to this?

Being in camps was challenging — dormitories, bland food and cold weather. However, people felt safe, with "everyone being in the same boat". Volunteers helped navigate the system. Houses, jobs and schools were found. "My mother, aged 17, got a job in a bank as soon as she arrived in Ottawa," said Shezan Muhammedi in [episode 12](#). Once out of the camps, people experienced racism, poor housing and poverty. Guests spoke about needing to grow up fast and assume adult responsibilities. In [episode 3](#), Rohit Vyas from the Netherlands recalls, "I became the interpreter for my mother at the hospital."

In countries like England, we learnt new racist terms, like "Paki" and "wog", and were told to "go back home". Politicians like Enoch Powell in the UK and some media stoked the fire. We experienced bullying at school while our parents struggled to find suitable employment. Many hated the idea of being on social security and accepted a job because that was the right thing to do. Asian businesses could not access support from the banks as they were not creditworthy. Family members pooled human and financial resources and bought corner shops where everyone mucked in and worked long hours. Children continued their education with the hope of breaking the cycle of poverty.

Perhaps it was our self-reliance, tenacity and entrepreneurship that pulled us through... 50 years on, we must tell these stories while the survivors are still alive. If we don't tell them ourselves, someone else will, according to their own interpretation. The anniversary is a wonderful opportunity for educating the younger generation to know their history and heritage.



Dolar Vasani is an International Development Consultant based in Johannesburg. Her family was expelled from Uganda in 1972 and went to the UK as refugees. She is the creator of Expulsion@50 and can be contacted at expulsion50@gmail.com

All episodes are available on www.anchor.fm/expulsion50 and [You Tube](#).

Flash-fiction

EAT, PRAY, LOVE AGAIN*

By Cyril Dabydeen

Old but not feeble he is after his regular morning work-out at the city's indoor pool. But now being over seventy-five, his muscles ache. Heaving in, he drives on towards the fast-food outlet thinking about his youth when he would regularly eat hamburgers.

A compelling urge, desire. Dr Gamash remembers more--a flashback in time, you see. *What the heck!* He enters the burger joint; and it isn't crowded.

He takes a seat with aplomb. Almost at ease he feels after his swim: the slow crawl he'd done, then the deliberate breast-stroke, but never the back-stroke.

He orders a burger and casually looks around, without being circumspect. He isn't overweight, his cholesterol level is low. Self-awareness, sure. The other swimmers had easily moved past him, tight-assed women in one-and two-piece bathing suits. Sexy, yes.

The muscled male swimmers scooted along with their smart-looking goggles preening with pride.

Dr Gamash casts his eyes around the hamburger joint. Almost customary, if not casual, is his manner. He slowly eats his burger, a tantalizing fare. He smiles to himself. Remembrance, more than of things past, you see.

Three young women--girls really--a blonde, and two others with auburn hair, not coiffed--make eye-contact. *Do they really?*

He wishes he were young again. *Why not?*

The girls talk among themselves, sotto voce. Then the blond one gets up. She deliberately walks over to him. "Hi, I am Sally."

Twenty-something, oh. "I am...er, Gamash," he tells her. Generation gap, you see.

"Can I pray for you?"

"Pray...?" He observes her sparkly, bright-eyed manner.

"What for?"

"You have pains, don't you?" Sally bats an eye over...to her friends, with her committed style.

Gamash thinks of his joints aching. "Well, I'm an old man," he indulges her. Bones creaking! Not...swimming the backstroke?

"You have arthritis, no?" Sally being solicitous, or beseeching. "I can pray to help you with your pains."

Lovely lass, he thinks. "Yes, I have arthritis." Really thinking with past and present in coalescing time.

Nothing circumlocutory now, but what appears unreal with his own cognizance. Fantasy, almost like a secret...we carry. Our inner lives, let it be known. "Okay, pray if you must," he replies.

Not tell her he's a medical doctor and practised for years?

Eyes closed, Sally prays...lips moving. The other girls watch, seeming almost anxious. But Sally's determined, in her manner.

Gamash has his own eyes closed. Unconsciously he swallows. The burger taste, so good--let it be known. What culinary fare are we talking about?

Sally opens her eyes, thinking of her reward in heaven, yes. Saving an old man from his pains, in her benevolence--she is. Now during this time of the pandemic!

"What religion are you?" he asks Sally.

"I'm, er, not an evangelist, if that's what you're thinking."

Defensive, demurring.

"No, er, a neurologist?" Gamash attempts humour, sort of.

"A Baptist, I am." Sally glances over to her friends, without discomfiture.

Gamash simply nods. "And you...what religion?" she asks.

Should he say...*what?* An atheist? He's spiritual, but is now an agnostic, if truth be known. One's soul, inner rhythms tied to memory. Nothing countervailing.

He looks at Sally--the smile wreathing her face. Why not tell her...voodoo--like a tease? Or, a dare. *Not a...Muslim?* Yes, swarthy-complexioned he is, having been born in Spain with the Alhambra and the Moorish past in his mind's eye.

His immigrant background here in Canada now, note well. "I am, er, a Catholic," he tells her, like self-confession. Lapsed, maybe," he adds for good measure.

The twain meeting across the religious divide. Sally, with her self-satisfied air, walks back over to her friends.

Gamash's thoughts drift back to history: the Ottoman Empire. And other wars fought in Europe, like the Thirty Years War; and the Crusades. History being more than unforgiving, if only what's compelling. Myth-making, oh. Miguel Cervantes...Don Quixote. The not-so-recent Spanish Civil War, and Franco's triumphalism, for a while.

Whose side was he on? Picasso's painting, *Guernica*, images he mulled over.

The poetry of Lorca flits into his mind. Gamash also thinks of his long years studying medicine. And Canada...calling. Not ever his brandishing at windmills!

He closes his eyes...and the burger taste, yes. Salivary glands at work. Sally once more looks over at him, almost with expectation. *Who are infidels?* In Canada he proudly practised medicine for years.

--Tell her!

More deliberate swimming strokes in the pool he visualizes, and the other swimmers moving past him, the tight-bodied females. After friends in the sauna usually became interlocutors, asking about his true beliefs. Cognitive dissonance, ah.

Still swimming, or mimicking...lithe bodies making the swift turn-around. More images come to him. He automatically swallows, savouring the burger taste once more. He looks over at Sally's table, expecting her to wave goodbye. *His arthritis, see.*

He indulges his fantasy--being really as an athletic swimmer doing the backstroke, because she actually prayed for him! But, the demands of medicine; those were the days.

He gets up to leave. Sally looks back at him. Tell her...what?

Being a *believer*--why not? And his now practising psychiatry--behaviour therapy...with a veiled sense of transcendent love somewhere tied to his secret longing for permanence as one grows older. But not wiser in years!

Life's inner rhythms, and the body's demands with a sudden immediacy. The burger taste now most of all. And woman being destiny!

*A long-listed finalist for the Strands International flash-fiction competition #15/Dec. 2021.



Cyril Dabydeen's recent books include *My Undiscovered Country* (Mosaic Press), *God's Spider* (Peepal Tree Press, UK), *My Multi-Ethnic Friends and Other Stories* (Guernica, Toronto), and *Drums of My*

Flesh--a 2007 IMPAC/Dublin Prize nominee, and winner of the Guyana Prize. His major poetry collection is *Imaginary Origins: New and Selected Poems* (PTP). Taught Writing at the UofOttawa for many years. He adjudicated for Canada's Governor General's Award and the Neustadt Prize for Literature (UOklahoma).

Poetry corner

Frozen In Time

by Meenakshi Mohan

*I am frozen in time and space,
attired in my bronze outfit
I am an ancient history.
And now, a witness to the changes
the world has seen.*

*Time is like the wind --
you feel it,
inhale its warmth and coolness
but can never capture it.
And it is like water too.
Evaporated, it becomes invisible
yet, stays in the air.*

*Today, sitting frozen
at the library entrance
I am a witness to the history
that time has engraved
as in water and air --
unnoticeable,
yet, you read and feel
detached to that time.
I am that history!*



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



Two poems by Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca

Clouds of Fire

By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. (Exodus 13:21 (New International Version)).

*Lord,
If you go ahead of my people
In a pillar of cloud by day
Pillar of fire for light
So they could travel by night.
Can I ask you to do the same?
For me?
I am not travelling anywhere
At this time
Except into the New Year
And I need those clouds
Or else
I might lose my way
In the coming decade.*

Prayer of The Clouds

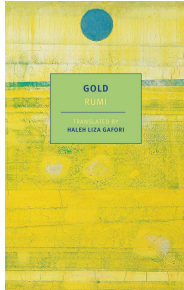
*Lord,
Would you please
Part the cotton ball clouds
As you parted the Red Sea
For the Israelites
So I may cross over safely
To the other side When the time comes.
Sometimes,
I hear the imaginary chariots.
I'm afraid to look back,
I don't want to turn into a pillar of salt*

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Kavita Ezekiel Mendonca's first book of poems, 'Family Sunday and other Poems', was published in 1989. Poem', was nominated for a 'Light of The Sabbath' is her recently published chapbook. She has taught English, French and Spanish, in private schools in India and overseas. Her poems have been published in several anthologies.

Through the Poetic Lens

Ghazals in search of new meanings



ISBN: 9781681375335, New York Review of Books.

I find the new translation of Rumi offered in *Gold*, translated by Haleh Lisa Gafori, quite refreshing as explained below. One major attraction for me is that there is no artifice in Gafori's labour over Rumi's translations. She has no need to translate Ghazals in the form of Ghazal that prevails in English. It works wonders because the focus is on meanings and keeping the text honest and close to how it would have come across from Rumi. It is apparent in her introduction when she compares the translation of Ghazal 2144 by her to A. J. Arberry and Coleman Barks:

Arberry

*Whatever comes of the world's affairs,
How does that affect your business?*

Barks

*What happens in the world,
What business is that yours?*

Gafori

*Whatever the ways of the world,
What fruits do you bring?*

As you would see, the problem is created by the original 'Baareh to koo?' Gafori understands Baar as fruit or harvest, while the others are picking up 'business' from the expression 'Kaar o baar'. There are no drums, of course, in the discharge of these translations of the originals, as Rumi would have originally recited these verses to friends, who would then transcribe them into a written record. Nor would it also come through the philosophy, preaching and wisdom crystalizing from his Sufi trance 'with arms extended, the right palm turned up to the sky and the left down to the ground', when he would have been in 'a 360-degree embrace of creation'. To bring such enlightenment in translation is never going to be possible as there is also the sound and music of the original language that will always be lost. Therefore, Gafori goes for the best mix she can achieve where previous translators failed as they had no experience of the original language.

It is impossible to generalise Rumi's *Gold*, that word appears throughout in his poems and would mean the most refined and valuable richness the soul would have extracted as the Sufi and divine love after burning through the worldly pulls full of self and greediness.

*You brought my spirit to the boil
Turned my grapes to wine.*

... ..

Watch the smoke rise.

Talking about Ghazals brings me to Adam Tankarvi's *The Old Flame* published by Lajja Publications.



After Urdu, in India, Gujarati is the second home of Ghazal and it dates back to about 1539 when a Sufi poet, Miya Khub Mohammed Chisti, lived in Ahmedabad, now Amdāvād. I have no intention here to introduce history of Ghazals for which there is enough to read through a Google search. Surat became one of the main hubs where, in the seventies, my learning of the form took place with masters of this form. Tankarvi is a pioneer of the Gujarati Ghazals, in which he introduced familiar English words mixed with the vocabulary of colloquial Gujarati. Initially, it sounded unexpected and strange, but the oddness about it was, in fact, fresh. Tankarvi mostly used it to create humour. For a long time, he was at Vallabh Vidyanagar University teaching English literature. Even after moving to Bolton, his journey in writing Gujarati Ghazals continued, and to date, he remains very popular. However, this time he returns with 100 Ghazals in English and attempts something Ghazal has failed to achieve in English. What is it?

English Ghazal has no magic its counterpart enjoys in Urdu and Gujarati. There are many aspects to it. With crisp syllables and strict constructs of Indic languages, the Persian and Arabic metres work well. In English poetry, metre is loose and mainly moves with stress. This creates a mismatch with the original metres from the land of Ghazal's birth. A second important reason is that there is also a lack of interaction with peculiar traits Ghazal demands between the reciter or a Shayar (a poet) and the audience.



Yogesh Patel

'Daad' is one of them. It means an animated response. There is no such culture in English nor would you expect the audience to shout 'Irshaad', a demand or a request to recite a 'sher', a couplet of a Ghazal. A repetition of the lines and words in various tones and with different stresses are the other facets that would sound silly in English. The magical and dramatic atmosphere generated by these repeats is a unique experience even dares to suggest a drama of the Ghazals. It leads to the delivery of a second punch line of the Ghazal which would often play with the words, meaning or a realisation of meaning in a different context. Also, Ghazals have a special group of symbols like a moth, candle, barmid, etc. that don't place themselves with the expectations of the readers or the audience. Therefore, English has evolved into a written form where rules are important and it is constructed as per those rules. To my horror, the Poetry School webpage even dares to suggest having fun with it! As a celebrated ardent exponent of Ghazal, Tankarvi is obviously more familiar with the original form and interactions of the custom. He is trying to bring this to his experiment in English Ghazal which has been tried by the others but they all have fallen flat on their face. To make things worse because of the stress meters in a vogue in English, the phrases can end in unwanted length! A line of Ghazal is a one breath evocation of excitements and expectations. But if you have to read the page length lines with complex images and ambiguity at play, it becomes a joke! Yet, I have seen it in reputed literary magazines, including PN Review. Daringly, Tankarvi wants to step into this space and wants to bring the magic of Ghazal into English. Is he successful in making this possible? In my opinion, we are not there yet! Why? Tankarvi can improve when he trains his ears on native English.

I am against myself—
Running the race, so weird

I do live here, however
It's not my address, so weird

Of course, I'm here, and yet,
There is no trace, so weird

*With this mirror in my hand
Search for my face, so weird*

Yogesh Patel received an MBE for literature in 2020. His new collection of poems, [The Rapids](#), is just published by [The London Magazine](#). He runs [Skylark Publications UK](#) and a non-profit [Word Masala](#) project to promote SA diaspora literature. Extensively published, an award-winning poet, he has also received the *Freedom of the City of London*.

Two poems by Lopamudra Banerjee

My Mother's Kitchen

*[Inspired by the poem 'Indian Summer'
by the Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra]*

Chanting and waiting
The mornings of cardamom tea,
'The Mouth of India opens'.

The intense swirl of the *daal*
Cinnamon courses through the curry's veins,
Spoonful of offerings, splintered flowers.

Grandma's last wishes, the subterfuge of loneliness.
The wrinkles, the loose ends of a melody
Tattooed in the cumin-favored bits.

Mustard seeds float over warm water,
I return to my familiar coconuts and moist air,
I return to rough summers, the Norwester winds.

Milk, sugar, bay leaves, mumblings of ancestors,
"Don't touch!" The rice pudding, still boiling hot!
I return to slippery floors and mother's kitchen smoke.

Heated aroma, scurrying past somber wind,
Long afternoons, dreaming of the concoction
The unexhausted story of Indian spices.

*Daal: The Indian version of lentils cooked in a broth.
Here I refer to the Bengali 'daal' which is lentils cooked
in a savory curry.*

Sad Songs Are Born in the Kitchen

Monochrome songs
Bloated aftermath of honeyed tea.
You know the long, wet hand
The fingers of a strange, drizzling sky.

The sky, overcast with jabbing words.
The black-and-white fool's dream
Scream of the earth
Inside sad songs
Vaporized longings
Formative lessons
Missing pieces of puzzles
Born in the kitchen, piercing the void
Between half-cooked broth and bruised fingers.

You know there's no real hero in the portraits
Hung on the walls, and you burnt your own,
looking away.
You know you are neither the mistress or the muse,
Only the body of a woman,
Only an ounce of ignited fire and the blood drops
of a spirit wild.

You know the summers on porches and the
mad swell
Of rain in your throat, tingling with verses.

Lopamudra Banerjee (Lopa) is an author, poet, translator, editor with seven books and five anthologies in fiction and poetry. She lives in Dallas, Texas where she also teaches Creative Writing at Texas Christian University. She has been a recipient of the Journey Awards (First Place category winner) for her memoir 'Thwarted Escape: An Immigrant's Wayward Journey', the International Reuel Prize for Poetry (2017) and International Reuel Prize for her English translation of Nobel Laureate Tagore's selected works of fiction (2016). She has also co-produced and acted in the critically acclaimed poetry film 'Kolkata Cocktail' (2019).



Flash fiction

The Free Prisoner of the Dark Dungeon

by Sunil Sharma

He called himself as the Free Prisoner of the Dark Dungeon.

This infuriated the President of the Mad Republic.

"How is it possible?" he asked the director of the special prisons, the most dreaded being the Dark Dungeon, a series of dark cells underground and watched by fierce guards and hungry dogs, ready to shoot the harmless inmates at the slightest pretext, and then fed to the dogs in the central hall before select prisoners.

Brutality was the religion there and guards, the high priests!

The poor souls, after watching the gore and the hounds and the drunken guards and the mutilated fellow prisoners---mere dirty drags---would snap and die or go raving mad, their spirits broken and dignity, destroyed.

The dogs waited for them to die.

It was a system that followed the techniques of the Star Chambers and Nazis.

The Republic was equally complicit---as it grew silent and fearful---never questioning the jailing of the men and women of conscience, highly-educated professionals who stood up for the defining values of their democracy.

In the Mad Republic, they were the new criminals---and threat to the country run by a suave gentleman who spoke five languages, quoted Nietzsche and talked of economic equality and free markets at Davos every year---and got dissidents killed in his backyard.

Officially, the special prisons did not exist. Only homes for the criminals that housed the desperadoes, bandits and rapists---visible on the outskirts of the major cities as fortresses and covered in the state media as reformatory places for the children gone astray.

"How is it possible?" the president repeated. "A top enemy of the state, a mad writer, imprisoned in the Dark Dungeon, the ultimate in cruelty...claiming to be totally free, and happy! Is he not mocking us all?"

The director was known as a vicious thug and drove sadistic pleasure out of the torture of the dissidents kept chained in the subterranean dark cells across the state. The Dark Dungeon was the last place for the unbroken and unbent!

"I will personally check, Mr. President and report to you, sir!" he croaked.

"You better be..." the President hissed and dismissed the stout and short guy who, once out of the Palace, wiped his dark brows and breathed easy.

Fear!

He understood its core vocabulary and source---and similarly, inspired the same in his subordinates.

When the director arrived in the innermost cell of the Primary Prisoner (PP), accompanied by his retinue of the jailor, guards and dogs, he

found the bedraggled and bearded guy lying on a thin mat over the cold stones, legs shackled.

The torches lit up the semi-dark cell full of stink, a cold wind rushing from the iron doors that creaked on rusted hinges.

"Get up, wretch!" the jailor commanded hoarsely. And kicked the frail man in the ribs. It was done more to please his stern boss rather than kick a man dying in that state-sponsored hell of dark torrent.

The man sat up, rubbing eyes.

"Say good morning to Sir, you idiot!"

The PP smiled but said nothing.

The portly and ruddy jailor raised his hand to strike the PP but the director stopped him and barked, "Wait outside!"

The retinue quietly withdrew.

"Hi friend of the State!" the director, when wanted, could sound deceptively sweet. "How you doing?"

The prisoner replied drily. "Not bad!"

"Happy?"

"Yes."

"In this dismal spot?"

"It is most beautiful!"

"Is it? I see it as the most wretched on earth!"

"Correct."

"How?" asked the bewildered director, already sweating under collar, nostrils hit by stench. "Free and happy here!"

"It depends on how you see it."

The director wiped the receding forehead. "I know you are famous for your wordplay. Have read your *Words as Wings*. Enjoyed the book every time I revisit it for insights."

PP peered closely at the clean-shaven jowly face of the visitor and grunted, "Hmm!"

"I mean it."

"Your official readings are different than the ones by simple readers. Ha!"

"No, my friend. I too read your books as a simple reader, a human, not the official."

"Hmm!" the prisoner said and yawned. "Tell me what makes the State send his chosen thug to a 'vanished' man kept in their dungeons without proper trail?"

The thug winced. Then he hissed, unable to control anger for a dirty man in shackles:

"Wanted to check how a wretched broken man can feel free and happy in this hell-hole created for mads like you?"

PP laughed loud. A maniacal laughter that echoed ominously within those stone walls, prompting the jailor to rush in, revolver drawn but the boss gestured him to leave---which the latter did willingly, as the underground regions produced claustrophobia.

"You can destroy body-n-soul but..."

"...but?" the director was all ears now. Ready for the *clue* to be conveyed promptly to the President who hated failed messengers.

"...but the mind."

Director laughed. "Fool! Unaware of the power of the State! It can twist the mind and body..." PP laughed equally loud. "Fool! Power is most unfaithful."

The enforcer was in a hurry--- he offered a cigar.

The prisoner accepted.

"How you be free and happy here?"

The man exhaled, "So, that is the reason you were dispatched by that mad man of the palace?"

"Sort of..."

"OK. I will tell you, otherwise..."

"Otherwise?"

"The Mad Republic will kill you for non-delivery."

The director blanched.

"It is not prison but a garden!"

"I do not see that."

"See it my way!"

The prisoner moved up hands and unlocked secret regions there with his sonorous words and voice.

The director saw a real garden in that dimness---green trees; singing brooks; insects and butterflies, flying in a golden light; a paradise. Incredible!

"Kill this magician!" he roared, before leaving.

PP shouted. "My words will fly away to far-off times and lands. You can kill me, not my words."

A terrifying laugh echoed there!



Sunil Sharma, PhD (English), is a Toronto-based academic, critic, literary editor and author with 23 published books: Seven collections of poetry;

four of short fiction; one novel; a critical study of the novel, and, nine joint anthologies on prose, poetry and criticism, and, one joint poetry collection. He is, among others, a recipient of the UK-based Destiny Poets' inaugural Poet of the Year award---2012.

Sunil edits the English section of the monthly bilingual journal *Setu* published from Pittsburgh, USA:

--- <https://www.setumag.com/p/setu-home.html>

For more details, please visit the link:

--- <http://www.dr.sunilsharma.blogspot.in/>

Obituary

A tribute to Archbishop Desmond Tutu

by Devi Rajab

Every society deserves to hear the voices of its moral conscience. When it ceases to do so, it degenerates and self-destructs. Throughout history in every subcontinent there have been a number of outspoken individuals who have had the courage to speak out at great personal cost to their lives and the safety of their families. Such protagonists have come in several forms such as poets, writers, politicians, scientists, religious leaders and artists. Locally in SA we have had a proud history of having produced outstanding personalities in the struggle who were fearless in their opposition to tyranny. Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, Bram Fischer, Helen Suzman and more recently Desmond Tutu were shining examples of the voices of our national conscience. On 26 December 2021, South Africa bid farewell to much-loved Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu whose life was the epitome of that moral conscience. He was widely loved and respected by all hues of the people of South Africa whom he fondly referred to as the "rainbow people of God" which he was later credited for having coined the term the Rainbow People. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's passing is certainly a cause for mourning, but it also serves as a moment for South Africans to reflect on a truly extraordinary life and to collectively renew our commitment to the principles to which his life has been testament.

In many ways our beloved Archbishop Tutu may be described as a maverick in the sense that he was a fiercely independent thinker whose loyalties were directed towards truth and not power. Throughout his colourful and meaningful life under apartheid and post-apartheid, he was unafraid to challenge the status quo and insist that the nation should be guided by a strong sense of integrity. For this he was applauded by the people but not necessarily by the ruling class whom often faced the wrath of his criticism. Fearlessly he led marches against the government of the day, if and whenever the need arose. When the Zuma administration denied the Dalai Lama a visa to enter SA on the occasion of his 80th birthday on account of China's stance against the religious leader Tutu raised this as a human rights issue.

Some may describe him as an active pacifist who became known, despite his peaceful approach, for his unflinching stance on human rights abuses both during and after apartheid. Prior to him donning the mantle of Archbishop Desmond Tutu as Anglican Bishop was honoured with the Peace Prize for his opposition to South Africa's brutal apartheid regime. Tutu was saluted by the Nobel Committee for his clear views and his fearless stance, characteristics which had made him a unifying symbol for all African freedom fighters.

Attention was once again directed at the nonviolent path to liberation.

Later, he fought for the rights of those living with HIV/Aids, worked to raise awareness about tuberculosis, and campaigned against racism, sexism, homophobia and trans phobia. He also became known for his outspoken views on the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict; the Darfur conflict; South Africa's policy of "quiet diplomacy" on Zimbabwe and, later, the ANC corruption.

"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor," he said. "If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality."

"People who call pacifists weak," he said, "that's not the case. Actually, you go into confrontation. You confront violent people without weapons, and your confrontation draws out their violence, as it did in Birmingham with the dogs, as it did in South Africa with the dogs."



Archbishop Tutu is widely acknowledged for his role in liberating South Africa from apartheid and also for his unwavering commitment to better our democracy so that it might be socially and economically inclusive of its entire people. But we remember him too with enormous affection — for the love and joy and humour he shared with the people of South Africa. In her memoir, Helen Suzman recalled that Tutu "called me his child even though I am fourteen years older than he is!"

The Arch as he was fondly known as, had an infectious sense of humour which many will remember. Once when asked by a child what one had to do in order to win the Nobel Prize, he jocularly responded thus: "It's very easy, you just need three things — you must have an easy name, like Tutu for example, you must have a large nose and you must have sexy legs."

In one of his stints with the Dalai Lama the two great men laugh about their separate concepts of heaven and what they each think will happen to them after death.

Tutu's humour was perennial, his laughter infectious. In the United States, when confronted by a woman who ran up and greeted him with "Hello Archbishop Mandela", he warmly congratulated her on getting two for the price of one.

His relationship with his wife Leah whom he married in 1955 may be described as being as enduring as the mythological legend of Rama and Sita. Together they established the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation which was dedicated to providing what they called "accountable servant leadership". The couple who had four children worked tirelessly towards resolving conflict, promoting tolerance and facilitating health and wellbeing among those in need. One of his daughters Reverend Mpho made headlines when she married Marceline van Furth. Tutu senior had long advocated against homophobia, famously calling it the "new apartheid" and stating that if gay people couldn't go to heaven, he'd rather go to hell.

As an anti-apartheid activist in the 1970s he supported the economic boycott of South Africa, which pitted him against US President Ronald Reagan's policy of "friendly persuasion" and "constructive engagement". He saw his role through frequent travels as a means of raising awareness of the brutalities of apartheid to the international community. After the fall of apartheid, Tutu's most notable role was in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which he chaired. The TRC initially played a positive role in South Africa's international image. However, it became clear in later years that mending the deep fissures left by apartheid would be a Herculean task. The enduring image that South Africans hold is the one of the Arch holding his head and weeping as the atrocities of apartheid unfurled through the tragic stories of the victims of apartheid. Whilst the emphasis was on reconciliation, critics drew attention to an imbalance in redress between perpetrators and victims.

Tutu may be described as that eternal soldier who forged onwards and upwards, like the Man of La Mancha as described by Don Quixote "to right the wrongs "in the world. In the last years of his life, he remained a guiding light despite his fewer public appearances. At the time of his retirement, he lamented having spent "too much time in airports and hotels", which denied him the opportunity to "grow old gracefully and to enjoy music, beautiful sunsets and a rose that is bedecked with dew,"

He felt that human beings were "created for the transcendent, for the sublime, for the beautiful, for the truthful... and all of us are given the task of trying to make this world a little more hospitable to these beautiful things." The greatness of Tutu lay in his ability like Mandela to rise like the phoenix from the ashes of apartheid ,to bring hope and justice to a deeply wounded people.



Dr Devi Rajab is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books. Now she is the Chairperson of Democracy Development Program. She is also the former Dean of Student Development at UKZN.

Tribute

Spotlight on the Literary Contribution of the Late Mannu Bhandari

A report by Dr Manoj Mokshendra

London, 8th January: Under the auspices of the Vatayan-UK Literary Forum, a special programme was organized to commemorate the eminent Indian author, Mannu Bhandari (1931-2021) who had recently breathed her last. She is considered to be a big name in the post-independence storytellers. She presented the image of an independent and intellectual middle-class young woman in her writings. Her literary space is very wide, with a novel like 'Your Bunty' at one end and 'Mahabhoj' on the other. Apart from stories and novels, she also wrote scripts for films (Rajnigandha) and television serials and autobiography 'Ek Kahani Yeh Bhi'.



She was obviously in an emotional state of mind. She said that her mother always inspired her to do something great in her life. She revealed several facts about her intimate relationship with her, saying that her mother embodied a temperament of simplicity and sobriety and how she ever remained detached and neutral to the extent of ridiculing herself.

Sudha Arora, award winning writer, translator, editor, a well-known name in telefilm, column writing and a close friend of Mannu Bhandari, reminisced the time she and her husband spent together in Mumbai. She has preserved the eulogy, Mannu had written on her first collection of stories. The audience was completely indulged in the conversation amongst the three ladies closely and emotionally related to Mannu ji. While Sudha focussed on the spontaneity of Mannu's creative writing and humor, and also on the proportionate coordination between the literary craftsmanship and plot of the fiction, Rekha Sethi drew attention towards Mannu's excellence in dramatization of her fiction with a special mention of "Mahabhoj". According to Sudha Arora, Mannu was immovable in her principles. Mannu's memorable story "Salt" and 'Defeated' inspired her polity-based fiction "Mahabhoj" is remarkable.



After a brief welcome and introduction by Mira Mishra Kaushik, MBE, chair of Vatayan-UK, who said that Mannu was not only a freedom fighter, but also a harbinger in creative writing focused on the female world, Dr Rekha Sethi, Coordinator/Chairman of Vatayan-UK's series of events, Memoirs, writer, critic, editor and translator, who

teaches at Indraprastha College-Delhi University, conducted the programme. She said that Mannu would always be remembered for her comprehensive creative writing including a variety of literary genres in Hindi literature.

The well-known Kathak dancer, Rachana Yadav, was invited to share thoughts about her relationship and how she was inspired by her illustrious mother.



The audience was completely engrossed in the discussion on Mannu's personality, creativity and the impact she made to the fiction writers. Before the Vote of Thanks was delivered, the well known writer Tithi Dani invited brief comments from the British Parliamentarian, Mr. Virendra Sharma, MP, Dr Manoj Mokshendra and Dr Arun Ajitsaria. Intelligentsia from all over the world included Prof Tomio Mizocomi, Liudmila Khokholova, Dr Jaishanker Yadav, Vivekmani Tripathi, Arpana Sant Singh, Kadambari Mehra, Kalpana Manorama, Mahadev Kolur, Saubhagya Korale, Jay Varma, besides the audience on YouTube.

Reported by Dr Manoj Mokshendra
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ENGLAND - INDIA BLIND FOOTBALL – FUNDRAISER

The Indian Blind Football Team seeks your contribution to help cover the travel & visa costs which will help the 10 member team travel to the UK. The entire project is run using donations through individuals and few corporate's in India without any Government or state support. This tour will give invaluable experience to the Indian players by playing against some of the best players and develop a strong team for the future. You may contribute any amount you wish by using the link below and also share this with all networks to raise awareness of the game : <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/blindfootballindia> Official England FA invite: <https://rb.gv/qbdjlm> and more at : www.BlindFootball.in

The Indian Blind Football Federation (IBFF), formed in 2016, is responsible for the Indian Blind Football movement and the National Team is an independent body developing the sport of blind football among the VC in the country. IBFF is promoted by the NGO 'SRVC' Kochi (Society for Rehabilitation of Visually Challenged). IBFF is recognized by IBSA New Delhi (Indian Blind Sports Association), the Paralympic Committee of India (NPC of India) and All India Football Federation (National FA) for all technical support to promote and develop Blind Football in India. The aim of the project is to showcase the sporting talents of the visually challenged and offer vocational training skills which can help in employment.

Translation of Tagore's "paye cholar path"

THE RAMBLING PATH

Translated by Chaitali Sengupta

1.

Here is the rambling path. It travels out to the fields, from the forest, and through the open fields to the river's edge, trailing under the shade of the Banyan tree, just beside the ferry ghat.

And then, it winds through the broken banks on the opposite shore, before meandering into the village. Further on, skirting beside the linseed fields, bowering through the shadows of the mango-groves, edging by the lotus-pond, passing by the Rathala, and finally reaching into a village unknown to me.

On this path, so many have walked- some who have walked past me, some who have kept me company, while some have seen only from a distance! Some have worn a veil; others have not. Some going to fetch water, while others returning, their pitchers brimming with water.

2.

The day is now at its end. Darkness is descending.

Once upon a time, this path seemed to be my own, belonging exclusively to me. Now I see that I've the permission to walk upon this path only once, and no more.

Passing the lemon-grove, the bank beside the pond, that ghat of the twelve temples, the silt-ridden riverbed, the cowshed, the granary storing paddy, passing those familiar glances, the familiar voices, the known faces, I will never go back and say again, "Hello, there you are!"

For this path is the one where one walks ahead; this is not a path of returning.

In the greying dusk of the evening today, I turned back once. I saw this path embracing the many forgotten footprints of the past, that are attuned to the melodious notes of the raga 'Bhairavi.'

The path has briefly sketched, in a single line of dust, all the life-stories of the travelers who have sojourned this path. A single track that stretches from the sunrise to the sunset, from one golden door to another.

3.

'O rambling path, do not keep the tales of those voices of the past fettered to your dusty ways. I'm waiting with my ears attuned to your dust, do whisper the tales to me.'

The path falls silent, its forefinger pointing towards night's dark veil.

'O rambling path, all those travelers, their thoughts, their desires- pray, where are they all gone?'

The mute path refuses to speak up. It only spreads its sign, between sunrise to the sunset.

'O rambling path, those footsteps that once fell upon your breast, like a shower of flowers, are they all traceless today?'

But does the path now its destination? Does it know the way where the flowers have disappeared, and where those silent songs have reached? Does it know where the starry light dazzles the perennial pain brightly, like the festival of light?

Chaitali Sengupta is a published writer, poet, translator, reviewer, and a journalist based in the Netherlands. "Cross Stitched words", is her debut collection of prose-poems, published in the USA. Her two works of translation are "Quiet whispers of our heart" & "A thousand words of heart". She has co-authored several esteemed anthologies, and has contributed largely to well-known online/print journals, like Café Dissensus, Borderless Journal, Muse India, Contemporary Literary review India, among others. More about Chaitali:
<https://crossstitchedwords.wordpress.com/about-me>

Honour

Divya Mathur Receives a Coveted Inaugural Award

The first Vanmali Pravasi Katha Samman will be presented to the well-known London based author **Divya Mathur** during a three-day Vanmali Story Felicitation Ceremony organized by Vanmali Srijan Peeth and AISECT Publication under the aegis of Tagore University-Bhopal. This is on the heel of Mathur honoured with the Indian Government's top accolade Padambhushan Moturi Satyanarayan Award for her untiring public service and authorship.



Vanmali Srijan Peeth, an institution dedicated to the creative contribution and memory of the renowned storyteller, educationist and thinker Late Jagannath Prasad Choubey 'Vanmali', awards authors whose works have democratic and human values in the contemporary story scenario. In addition to eight poetry collections, Mathur has eight books of fiction to her credit. To promote UK based authors internationally, she has edited several critically acclaimed anthologies.

To counter the pandemic mental health and to hold the international community of Hindi writers together as a family, Mathur has organized nearly one hundred programmes since the Lockdown began. A benefit of this is immeasurable and has kept engaged positively a large old audience who have enjoyed hundreds of participating speakers from across the world. Her quiet determination to do good in this world by promoting cultural understanding between mainstream British society and the British South Asian community has received worldwide applause. Mathur is well known for her tireless work in promoting the arts as a mode of interconnection between various sections of society.

That she receives this award from those benefitting from her exemplary work is a testimony to the respect and affection she commands.

Short story

Get a Dead Body or ...

By Subhash Chandra

They wrangled for long over who should inform the police.

#

It was an acute water crisis in the blistering month of June, caused by massive electricity outage. Taps had run dry and panic was rife. People were frantically running around for a bucketful of water. Those who had dysfunctional hand pumps – the number was miniscule – got them repaired and their neighbours stood anxiously in queues.

The two tenants in Hari Prasad Bagadia's building came down to demand water. Bagadia – the penny-pinching, cunning house-owner put on an expression of helplessness and shrugged his shoulders.

"What can I do? The whole city is without water."

"You can get the hand pump in your courtyard repaired."

He was intending to get it done anyway, but now there was an opportunity to squeeze the tenants for some money.

"Hmm ... okay ... but all of us will have to share the cost."

Alagappa Chettiar and Satya Pal happily agreed.

Now the problem was how to carry water to the floors above.

Prof. Satya Pal was about to retire and did not have the requisite energy to lug water to his second floor. Chettiar on the first floor was a patient of hernia and had been advised by his doctor not to lift weight.

Bagadia, with his heart condition, could not afford to undertake any strain. "I have a suggestion. We employ a daily wage labourer." "That's a good idea, said Chettiar and Prof. Satya Pal. And again there was consensus on sharing the expense.

#

On the pavement along the park sat a horde of poor men who congregated there every morning in the hope of being picked up for some work. Sitting motionless on their haunches, they looked like tree stumps. The moment a car or a scooter stopped in front of them, they came to life.

Bagadia and Satya Pal looked at the crowd.

"Let us get that boy," said Bagadia.

"But he is too young ... and frail."

"Don't worry. These people are hardy. Besides, a grown up might be difficult to handle and might object to working for three families."

#

Bagadia got his share first and then the other two kept their buckets for filling. The boy was made to slog without a break – working the hand pump and carrying water to the first and the second floors.

Bagadia's wife got a bright idea and told her maid to wash clothes. The two other ladies, too, got inspired and followed suit.

After working non-stop for hours, Raghu, (Raghunandan Prasad) felt exhausted. He so much wanted to rest his aching limbs awhile, but somebody or the other was constantly screaming at him. While coming down from the second floor, he sat down on the landing. But Bagadia's wife came out and hollered at him.

"You've been employed not to laze away the time."

Raghu sprang to his feet, went down and resumed pumping out water.

When he was going up to the first floor, hunger gnawed at his entrails.

He thought it'd be lunch time soon. He would ask Bagadia for part payment and have a full lunch.

He asked Bagadia what time it was.

"It's not yet lunch time. You'd better focus on work."

The boy winced at the answer and obeyed.

After some time, an intolerable cramp wrenched his stomach. Then he felt giddy, lost balance and rolled down a couple of steps on to the first floor landing.

When Chettiar's wife came out to demand more water, she saw him sprawled on his face, blood oozing out from under his head and ran back up.

#

Bagadia rushed out and hurriedly felt the boy's pulse.

"We are in big trouble," he stammered to the other two. "The fellow is dead. One of us has to call in the police."

"Since he was carrying water for Mr. Chettiar, it's his responsibility to call the police," said the professor.

Chettiar promptly pointed out that since Bagadia and the professor had gone to hire the boy, one of them should discharge that duty.

Satya Pal quickly accused Bagadia of picking out the boy.

"It was he who suggested we hire the boy, despite my objections."

Finally, Bagadia had to ring up the police station.

#

The Sub-Inspector, accompanied by two Constables peremptorily asked, "Who saw the dead body first?"

"I did," replied Bagadia, putting on a doleful expression.

The Sub-Inspector was recording the details in his pocket notebook.

"Then what did you do?"

"I called Prof Satya Pal and Mr. Chettiar."

"How were you at home?" he asked Satya Paul.

"The University is closed for summer vacations."

"I'm not well. I've taken leave from my office," said Chettiar.

"What is your malady?"

"Stomach upset."

"Where do you work?"

"Rural Electrification Corporation," he said and added for effect, "I'm a Senior Engineer."

Bagadia picked up the thread again. We were about to call in a doctor, but thought it'd be better to inform the police first."

The Sub-Inspector looked at him probingly, as by his very looks and ingratiating manner, Bagadia seemed a fishy character.

"What is your profession?"

"Umm ... I'm a Social Worker."

"What social work do you do?"

Bagadia asked him obsequiously, "Can you come in for a moment?"

The Sub-Inspector followed him into his drawing room.

After about fifteen minutes, both of them came out.

"It seems a case of accident," pronounced the Sub-Inspector.

Already two inquiries were going on against the Sub-Inspector for shoddy investigations into cases and suspected corruption.

Satya Pal and Chettiar visibly exhaled their relief.

The Sub-Inspector told one of the constables to draw a line on the floor around the body.

Then addressing Bagadia he said, "I'll send a police-van with a Constable to pick up the body."

"Okay, Sir," all the three spoke up simultaneously.

The constable thumped Bagadia's door.

"Where's the body?"

"On the first floor landing."

"No, it's not there."

#

The Sub-Inspector was furious and fixed a singeing gaze on Bagadia.

"Now you have only two options: either bring a dead body, or catch the boy. Or else all three of you'd get minimum seven years in jail."



Dr Subhash Chandra, former Professor of English, Delhi University, has published two short stories collections, Not Just Another Story,

and Beyond the Canopy of Icicles, about sixty short stories in journals, 4 books of criticism and several research articles.

Book review

Rowing with Poetry by Jaydeep Sarangi

This World of Mine: Selected Poems by GJV Prasad, New Delhi: Hawakal Publishers, 2021

ISBN 978-81-952401-5-9, Pp 94

GJV's sensitive, democratic and daring poetry makes this collection a special read. He tries to maintain the honesty and integrity of a committed contemporary writer by expressing loudly what he thinks should be expressed and communicated to the readers.

One of the interesting aspects of GJV's poetry is his attempt to give some voice to the marginalised people. His poem 'Edible Woman' is 'addictive', 'incredible', 'attractive' leading to leaking our taste buds for spicy hot *urulaibajji* and *besanladdoo*. My heart leaps up in desiring them.

GJV keeps his basics plain, forthright and topical. He is proving the fact that multilingualism is a holistic gain in India. The first poem in *This World of Mine* 'Desperately Seeking India' brings India's unique advocacy of diversity in the midst of sociological differences and political heresy. "I promise/ Never/ To mention India again", vocalises the poet. His poem, 'Election Strategies: Shining India', and reading it after a cuisine poem is an interesting journey.

Life is truly beautiful when the soul is content. GJV writes about the human condition in general:

"we fought for light
we got it
we didn't know
what to make of it." ('15th August 1974', p. 12)

As I whisk from one poem to another, I am absorbed into GJV's precious sea of thoughts, depthless waters. His workplaces remain an important home of thoughts in this collection. A teacher is always a teacher. In poems like 'JNU', 'How Brown was My

Campus', 'Two Writers at JNU', and 'First Class in Room 016' he returns to the campus. These campus poems are rich with classroom images and ethical questions moving between 'right wrongs' and 'wronging rights'.

His poems don't construct roads and create jobs. His poetry doesn't prevent wars, enact legislation, or inspire social movements. His poetry is not pretentious, cryptic, elitist, and futile. One does not need a master's degree to understand GJV's seemingly simple poems. His corpus is relevant to the larger culture in India and beyond:

"You either die with water
Or you die without(.)" ('From 'Indiettes', p. 70)

He is confident in using Indian ethos and intertextuality effectively and finds a rare delight in sociolinguistic experiments in poetry. His poems on 'Sati' are testimony to GJV's potent use of culturally loaded terms and expressions.

His poetic style and cadence do not follow a regular and foreseeable pattern. In this amorphous yet native art there is not a single line that is uninteresting or superfluous.

Poetry refreshes and renews language to which we have become habituated. It allows for imaginative leaps and associations. Many of his poems end with one liners after some stanzas:

"He is a respectable man
Wont it be best to reach settlement
Make him pay for his act
He said
And laughed at his own joke." ('Just Reality', p. 43)

In GJV's canvas 'new worlds are born', dreams touched. Part of poetry's power, for

GJV, is its ability to rehabilitate the language into something more beautiful and true. One needs language that is *familiar*, not unfamiliar. The poems are laudable in their intentions of preserving such familiarity. Here, GJV preserves poetry as a place for intellectual and creative freedom and also for the outcome of this unlimited freedom to be automatically ethical. History is filled with examples of excellent artists who subscribed to odious systems of thought. To be ethical is pure magical thinking. Poetry can engage individual imaginations to break down social boundaries and divisions. We

need politics — united minds agitating, street campaigning, and raising voices for justice. GJV's poems tend to be political. To be political is believing on one frame. GJV is not restricted to be one dimensional:

"...being male and a husband
for me there is no escape(.)" ('saturday morning ritual', p. 35)

We can experience the journey of poetic sunshine through GJV's collection, the confidence of an Indian poet in this great Asian Century where 'endless crownnoises'* determine English poetry in general. The world listens. Our journey knows this is a book that will last.

Note:

*'Endless crownnoises' is a powerful identity marker (a phrase) from the master nonagenarian poet Jayanta Mahapatra's trend setting poem, 'Dawn at Puri'. The phrase is a *summum bonum* of the spirit of Writing Back.

Jaydeep Sarangi is a senior Indian poet with nine collections and a poetry reviewer anchored in Kolkata. He is the Principal, New Alipore College, Kolkata. Website: <https://jaydeepsarangi.in/>

Blog

The Joy of Human Interaction

By Anjana Sen

This is not an article, and it has not been researched. Unless indulgent introspection were a research tool. This, however, is a realisation that will resonate with all of you. A realisation of what exactly we have missed over the last few years.

Like most of you, I thought I had been fine during lockdown. Complacent for the most part in not needing much, and happy in my beautiful home, meeting friends on zoom and other social media outlets. Watching TV, eating well, healing from personal bereavements, reaffirming family values..... the list is endless. The list of what I thought had been the benefits of lockdown.

That changed this weekend when I was struck with what we already know. The reason why we have unanimously opted for physical meetings, facing and working with each other, rather than in tiny windows on pixelized screens.

It is our joy in human interaction. I know it sounds simple and rather obvious. The simplicity of this realisation hit me with a sharp blow last night, changing my very perception, altering my complacency in inner peace. I thought I was a self-sufficient island; I so obviously am not.

My husband and I had decided to enjoy a city break weekend to Edinburgh. We left on Friday, returning yesterday, despite dire threats by weathermen about storm Mallik and Corrie and the rest. No storms approached us, I think the Gods decided to give us a break, so the city break itself was dry, albeit a tad windy for my long hair. But I stray.

From the moment we checked in to the hotel, a modest last-minute reservation at the Ibis in the heart of the Royal Mile, I KNEW what I had missed.

People.

Nameless friendly strangers.

Oh, the joy of inane chatter, complimenting young girls at the reception on their piercings and tattoos, watching them perk up instantly to a better degree of attentive service. Muffled conversations with masked taxi drivers through glass partitions, neither party heard nor cared for what was being said. But words were being exchanged and conversation was being made. And this is what we, as human beings thrive on.

I must be more human than most, I thought, for this was my battery juice. This patter. Like Kryptonite or whatever it was that Superman needed, I needed conversation.

Discussing the weather with a red-headed Chinese back-packer in the lobby, proceeding to get directions from an elderly lady clutching a very expensive handbag in the lift. My husband whispered irately to me that he could google directions to the restaurant. I tell you! Google? Why? When I can spend five minutes with this elegant lady who proceeded to tell me what she had enjoyed at the very restaurant her family had taken her three years ago for the seventieth, after her husband had passed and her grandson had graduated. Precious information I will forget in two days, but the human interaction gave me the bounce I needed for my joy to multiply.

At the said restaurant, where we arrived very early because the errant wind really was playing havoc with my hair, a very simple smile, and a long story of how we were from Glasgow etc etc, originally from India etc etc, all helped the young man (from Malawi, I add just for your information) in ensuring we got a table asap. Accompanying the girl to our table, she turned out to be a student around the same age as our daughter, the exchange of which fact resulted in us getting an even nicer table than the one reserved for us.

And this is how the next delightful few hours flew by. It was a very fashionable dining place in the heart of Edinburgh's St Andrews Square, modelled on Bombay's Irani Cafes. When our waiter, a young man from Poland who charmed even my not-so-gregarious husband, learnt that we had not only been to Bombay a few times but also had a good friend from there, he brought over other waiters and we had lengthy discussions on what to order, with adjoining diners joining in, and an impromptu party began. As I said before, I will forget all the names and faces, but then, in that moment, there was pure exhilaration and joy. We had desserts on the house.

On Saturday we went to the Playhouse for our first show in many years. It was a Musical called the School of Rock, not particularly something we thought we'd enjoy, but it was what was on, and hey, we both love Queen, it couldn't be bad.

It wasn't bad. Crushed between people, lots of people for it was a full house, we had so many

interesting conversations with so many interesting people. I heard Himself recommending yesterday's restaurant to people, I discussed shocking petrol prices with the family from Falkirk on my left, and the children behind me sang along to all the songs till I felt I should too.

We had about an hour to kill between the show and our dinner reservation, so we walked along the street looking for an empty-ish place to have a drink. Lo behold, we found a bar, where we walked in like pre-covid days and ordered large red wines at the bar where no one asked to see our covid passports and everyone smiled a lot, drunkenly I must add. It was later, when I walked past the dancefloor on my way to the ladies that I realised that all was not what it seemed. We had unwittingly walked into a rather notorious gay bar. But back at our table, nobody judged us for not being gay, indeed a young man came and sat at our table and proceeded to confide in us about his ex-boyfriend, extracting promises from us not to tell his current boyfriend. We were charmed, and agreed. Current boyfriend soon joined us, and they were beginning to embrace us affectionately when we remembered the Virus was still around, as was our table at Giuliano's and beat a hasty retreat. When we told our daughter, she thought we were akin to aliens, but this is one memory we will retain!

I tell my husband that all of this is brainstorming and research for my 'work', he remains indulgent if a tad smirky. But oh, the joy of human interaction.

As a PS, I have just had a man through the door at noon today, to see about a rising damp problem we have. A little bit of chat, and we realise we have multiple mutual friends and lived in Erskine at the same time. What are the odds?



Anjana Sen spent her childhood years, all over India, and later travelled the world before 'settling' in Scotland (Glasgow) in 2000. She has been writing in earnest over the last three years. She is a member of the Scottish Association of Writers, and also the Secretary for Eastwood Writers.

Short story

POND LIFE Reshma Ruia

Mrs Basu realised she was in the middle of an English heat wave when her husband came home early from office on a Tuesday.

'Did they sack you?' Mrs Basu enquired. Mr Basu worked as a cultural attaché at the Indian High Commission in London. He spent his days organising visas and programme schedules for visiting dance troops from Bombay to Birmingham. A role that was always under review by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Mr Basu shook his head. 'They sent us home. It's almost 26 degrees and there's no AC in the office.'

'Well, take a shower then. It will cool you down.'

Mrs Basu was annoyed by her husband's sudden reappearance. She had finished her lunch of cold watermelon soup and was planning to call her brother in Kolkata. He had just become engaged to a girl from Simla and she wanted to know all about the new bride-to-be. The why's, where's and when's of their romance and wedding.

'Let's go to Hampstead Heath. I've heard there is a pond where we can swim,' her husband suggested. He picked up a copy of the Evening Standard from the kitchen table, rolled it up and began fanning himself.

'But you don't even know how to swim,' Mrs Basu reminded him. Opening the freezer, she found a mint chocolate cornetto and pushed it into his hands.

'This will cool your insides. There is no need to rush about in this heat.'

But Mr Basu wouldn't be budged. 'Its miles away from this smog. It'll be like our honeymoon.' He took hold of her hand. 'Come on, Tara, let's not be too sensible. Let's be carefree for once.'

Mrs Basu tweaked his cheek and relented.

'I'll pack a picnic,' she said. Slicing the bread into triangles while the eggs boiled, she thought of her honeymoon in Goa, the two-hour train ride from Margao that they spent standing, because all the seats were occupied. Her sweaty hand in his, the gold band of his wedding ring digging into her thumb. They were so nervous and shy.

Palolem beach spread out in front of them, a golden carpet. Hawkers walked two and fro, colourful sarongs draped over their arm and straw buckets balancing on their heads, the silver and glass of the bangles and other trinkets they were selling glinting in the noonday sun. Families strolled hand in hand, munching roasted chickpeas from folded paper cones. They found a secluded corner behind a disused fisherman's shack and Mr Basu held up the towel like a curtain while she squirmed out of her pink and white batik print tunic and jeans. 'I am so lucky,' he said, whistling as she stood in her frilly green swimsuit, sand between her toes.

Mr Basu had refused to come into the sea. 'I just don't feel like it today,' he'd said, his eyes drooping in sadness. Mrs Basu had felt a quick stab of disappointment. She was a regional swimming champion in the under twenty five years age category and swam every morning at the Tagore community swimming pool near her parents' house. After their move to London, she had googled a list of nearby swimming pools and swam religiously every Sunday morning whilst Mr Basu travelled to Bethnal Green to shop for Pomfret heads, mustard seed and drumsticks for their Sunday supper.

'You're like a dolphin,' Mr Basu had said on their honeymoon, rubbing her back and her shoulders with the towel, tenderly prising away the long tendrils of wet hair that stuck to her cheeks.

He had never learnt to swim properly, he confessed. He was a chubby boy at school and the boys made fun of him in the changing room, called him Sumo wrestler to his face. One time they hid his uniform and he was forced to walk to the headmaster's office in his tight navy Speedos to report on them. The students had finger pointed and laughed and so he decided he didn't want to swim.

The right moment to swim came and went, then it was too late and anyway his parents, both anxious academics preferred he spent his summer holidays in the library cramming for exams for the Indian Foreign Service.

On the first night of their honeymoon, he told Tara that her kisses tasted of salt and lime. Like a Mojito cocktail.

'Let me teach you how to swim,' Mrs Basu offered through the years and each time Mr Basu shook his head and declined. 'No dear. It is not meant to be. I don't want the water to drag me down. My feet are meant to walk on solid ground.'

On their summer holidays back home in Goa or in Cornwall where the blue of the water reminded them of the sky back home, Mr Basu would sit cross-legged on the water's edge, one protective hand over her pile of clothes, watching his wife as she ran into the waves.

'Careful my dear,' he shouted as she ducked and dived through the water, her slender arms slicing the waves.

It took two bus changes and a twenty-minute walk to reach the pond in Hampstead Heath.

The heath was a burst of green this time of day. Butterflies nodded over the buttercups and high above them, aeroplanes trailed a plume of smoke in the swimming-pool blue of the sky. The heat felt heavy and yellow and Mr Basu unbuttoned his shirt and breathed in the air deeply.

'Such a beautiful feeling,' he said, flinging open his arms wide as though ready to gather the wildflowers, the trees, the buzzing bees and the butterflies into one tight embrace.

'It's nearly five pm, won't the pond be shut?' Mrs Basu asked her husband. She looked around for a bench. The armpit smell of the tube and the broken escalator had tired her out.

'Nature never shuts down, Tara,' Mr Basu reminded her, mopping his forehead with his shirtsleeve.

Then just as they were looking around for a sign, they saw it. The pond lay there, a spherical ball of green liquid and light. The late summer sun lit the tall, feathered grass around its edges, turning it golden. A family of ducks paddled contended in the distance.

Mrs Basu squealed in pleasure. 'How unspoiled and pure does it look! No horrible chlorine smell or school boys making a racket in the changing rooms. She slipped out of her clothes behind a rhododendron bush and Mr Basu rolled up his trousers and waded into the pond's edge, trailing his fingers through the water.

'It's so lovely and cool,' he shouted back at his wife. 'I am almost tempted to give it a go...' he stopped. It was fear and a knot of stubbornness in the pit of his stomach that made him halt. He had left it too late. He could never be at home with water and yet...

There she stood, his wife of twenty years, round and soft in a red gingham swimsuit. Her grey hair piled on top of her head, held in place with a red elastic band, her bare toes curled against the grass.

'I am a lucky man,' he said, rubbing his eyes.

She went in. The water spiralled around her. Mr. Basu, looking at her, his hand shading his eyes had the impression she was jumping through hoops of gold.

'Tara. You look beautiful.'

She spread out her arms, beckoning him in.

'What are you waiting for? Come join me. It's time you learnt to swim.'

Mr Basu shook his head. 'No dear. It's not for me...' But, what were his arms doing? They had taken a life of their own. They were busy unbuttoning his shirt, unzipping his trousers, until he stood in his navy blue boxer shorts and white vest.

'Tara, wait! I want to swim,' he shouted and paddled towards her outstretched waiting arms.



Reshma is an award winning novelist, short story writer and poet. Her first novel, *'Something Black in the Lentil Soup'* was described in the Sunday Times as 'a gem of straight-faced comedy.' Her second novel, *'A Mouthful of Silence,'* was shortlisted for the 2014 SI Leeds Literary Prize.

LIES DAMNED LIES AND FAKE POLITICS

Anjana Basu

The Silent Coup: A History of India's Deep State Josy Joseph

Terror and counter terror tactics can be manipulated and it doesn't need a RAW to do it. While Pakistan has the all powerful army at its disposal, according to journalist Josy Joseph, all India needs is its police, its Central Bureau of Investigation, the National Investigation Agency, the Anti-Terrorist Squad backed by the Income Tax department and several other organisations that can unite to exert pressure on those the State has chosen to single out.

The Silent Coup is a cynical account of how fake news is created by an author who has access to the requisite documents. Joseph creates a world where the chosen are singled out and put through the wringer until they submit to whatever they are required to do. Joseph describes his book as "an incomplete documentation of the vicious attack on the world's largest democracy by those who are duty-bound to protect it." Spearheaded by the ruling elites, the non-military security forces have, according to Josy, been used to target Muslims and turn them into the victims of encounters or use them to point out members of their community who can be victimised in turn.

The first part of the book concerns Wahid Deen Mohammed Sheikh, a teacher who became a target of the system after 9/11 and its fallout in India. Joseph recounts Wahid's ordeal at the hands of the authorities from 2001 to 2013, including his encounters with the infamous Dr S Malini who established herself as a narco analysis specialist on the strength of what were later revealed to be fake documents and who worked closely with the Bangalore police, helping them to expose terror suspects. Joseph dramatises those encounters with grim humour – if a book this bleak can be described as humorous at all. The doctor was ultimately sacked by the Karnataka government when her deceit was discovered, but by then she had been responsible for over 1,000 narco tests, about 3,000 lie-detection tests, and 1,500 brain mapping tests and even these figures did not help to exonerate those the self styled Dr Narco had tormented.

What the reader finds is the helplessness of innocents who think that as Indian citizens

they have some right to security and justice and who are ultimately betrayed by authority figures who are also caught in the web of deceit. Wahid and his fellow

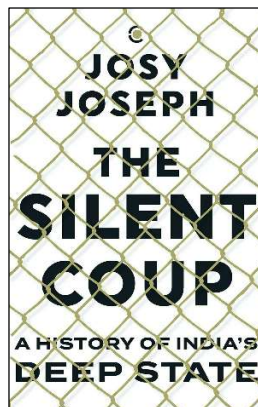
Muslims were picked up whenever the state required fall guys regardless of evidence to the contrary.

Joseph's canvas spans 9/11, the Mumbai train blasts and the Gujarat riots. There is even the story of a young major from a Military Intelligence Unit who devised a plot to assassinate Narendra Modi in 2015 that was later revealed as fake but showed how narratives that centred on the threat to a strong up and coming political force caught on in popularity. Along the way former ministers like Haren Bhai Pandya who had testified against the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat, were assassinated.

Then there was the handling of the Sunil Joshi murder case which strengthened Joseph's case against the security. Pragya Singh Thakur was pronounced innocent of the murder in 2017 and eventually stood for election on the BJP side.

However, this kind of operating system had existed before. The Kashmir issue was triggered in 1987 when the assembly elections were sabotaged. 1987 also found the 54th Infantry Division of the Indian Army floundering in Sri Lanka without proper intelligence and without a United Nations mandate. Major General Harkirat Singh, who commanded the Division reportedly, had to buy a tourist map in Hyderabad before he launched the operation and the result was bloodshed.

Part Two of The Silent Coup is given its context by the question "How did our police and intelligence agencies come to display such utter disrespect for the law, citizens and the state?" Unable to keep pace with



sophisticated terror tactics, they found other ways of proving their efficiency by framing innocents like Wahid, extracting confessions through torture and spreading fake news. This was unconstitutional, but as long as the perpetrators could prove that they were defending the nation, against a Muslim conspiracy they were lauded for their efforts. It is a scenario that is unprofessional at the least and one that continues as the country's security at a loss for concrete evidence sets up minority stooges as their fall guys – apart from Wahid, there is the story of Irshad Ali who actually was a police informer until the IB men he reported to suddenly kidnapped and blindfolded him and his cousin and presented them to the media as terrorists from the Al Badr, for which they languished ten years in jail. "This model, of creating a fake incident or a fake terrorist, is among the dirty secrets of the Indian security establishment", write Joseph.

It is a universally black canvas that Joseph paints but one that comes at the right time when people in India are willing to believe all kinds of anti-Muslim conspiracies and the so-called 'presstitutes' can be manipulated by whichever party is in power. Fake news is rife concerning the growth of the Muslim population in states like Bengal and speculations on the religion of certain prominent anti-BJP women leaders which oddly enough are being fuelled by American journalists like Janet Levy – the US has its own school of Muslim conspiracy theories which dovetail neatly with those prevalent in India. Joseph's style is clear and bleak, the facts are easy to pick up though the effect on most readers would be one of deep unease and a sense of looking over one's shoulder.

Deepening the disillusion is the end of the book which talks about Kapil Mishra ordering the Delhi police to clear the streets of the capital of anti-CAA protesters, or else... Joseph ends: "The police officer quietly walked out of the frame. Then began the riots."

Anjana Basu has to date published 7 novels and 2 books of poetry. The has BBC broadcast one of her short stories. Her byline has appeared in Vogue India, Conde Nast Traveller, Outlook and Hindu Blink.



Poems of Gopal Lahiri

Longleaf Pine

*I will touch your rugged skin,
your leafy hairs, the sundry tuft of needles,
pendulant cones hanging down from the branches,
as your body morphs from one century to another.*

*If I touch your head, it appears as if I stroll
on the blue sky, your hands are rusty brown, so pristine,
I feel that too; so little between you and the old folks.*

*Not too sure, but this is how faith works weaving its fabric
saving you from the mud of pathogens,
sunlight drops on the soft scales as you store
memories on the winged seeds.*

*While the wind rattles your old veins, cheer every quiver,
you surrender to windthrow,
Where life is there, death is inevitable,
You smile, I have been here for a long time.*

©gopallahiri

Valley Muse

*I get associated with you through the shared wall
That's you conveying silence in smile.*

*Long nights impregnate me with desire,
rainy days are like an acre of green grass
so fresh so quiet so verdant,*

*The tall trees often seem to be more tender
your bonnet hat and leather jacket are always in
a cloud of expectation.*

*You once believe the earth as round square
sky an undyed Pashmina Shawl.*

*Now it's done and we switch roles,
I learn poetry on empty street in summer
You form a flashlight pointed at the fusain.*

*In the birch and cedar way, my old car
with its flat tires, stalling and starting,
raises noise time and again*

*Townhouse drips sunlight on the passages,
my memories are now yellowing
under the glass window.*

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Gopal Lahiri is a Kolkata based bilingual poet, editor, critic and translator and published in English and Bengali language. He has authored 23 books to his credit that includes four jointly edited collections of poetry on Jallianwala Bagh, translations of Tagore songs, Indo-American Anthology and Scaling Heights. His poetry is also published across various anthologies and in eminent journals of India and abroad.



Postcolonial Retellings: A Review of *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*

by Basudhara Roy*

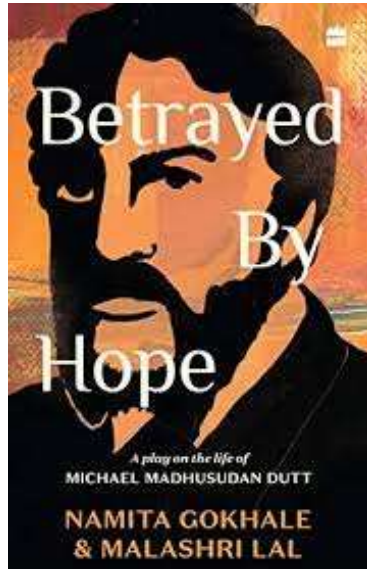
Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt

Namita Gokhale & Malashri Lal
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What does it mean to resuscitate, in art, a life from the past? When the life, especially, is that of one of the country's foremost literary and maverick artists living in and through a turbulent historical period, attempting to weave a cosmopolitan dream in times that were sadly parochial, how does one go about the act of biographical reconstruction with both veracity and vision? *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* authored by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal is a scintillating genre-bending work, as profound as it is lucid and as visionary as it is authentic. Written in five short acts, the play encapsulates all the rich contradictions of an esoteric and exceptionally gifted mind nourished, incarcerated, and finally punished by the exigencies of its times.

From the very beginning of the play, one is drawn to its crisp pace and the compact ordering of its temporal universe. Biographical, as the work is, the authors have been careful in their selection of episodes from a prodigiously eventful life so that there is neither omission nor flattening and the urgency and precision of the narrative are maintained remarkably throughout. Undiluted authenticity, an important concern in a literary work of this nature, has been ensured through exclusive dramatic reliance on Michael Madhusudan Dutt's correspondence, especially his letters to close friends and acquaintances at various significant moments of his capricious literary career.

However, the resurrection of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's (MMD's) life with biographical consistency is not, primarily, the play's project. Far more radical and visionary in its conceptualization, *Betrayed by Hope* is a singular postcolonial exploration, chiefly, of its protagonist's extraordinary personality, his underrated accomplishments, and their significance in a globalized world order. What makes this play of significant academic interest is its conscious use of a pedagogic mode of investigation, reflection and meaning-making. The Sutradhar of the play is a young Bangladeshi research scholar, Rubina



Rahman, whose tone in the play "alternates between her lively city-girl self and the serious scholar with a task at hand." She is, as her creators assert, "somewhat out of her depth in handling the interplay of the poet's life in undivided Bengal with the divided legacy after Partition and the birth of East Pakistan in 1955, and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh in 1971." The Sutradhar's befuddled sense of identity and postnational consciousness mirrors, in a way, "MMD's own negotiations with different cultural and linguistic legacies." Posited as the subject of Rubina's doctoral dissertation, MMD comes alive to her as well as to the reader/audience in all his diverse facets – Anglophile, polygot, precocious, profligate, convert, confident, cosmopolitan, subversive, and an indefatigable iconoclast.

Throughout the play, MMD is presented textually i.e. reading out either from his work or letters with the researcher-narrator interpreting/commenting/ interrogating/ substantiating on these readings. The result is a rare dramatization of the interaction between a reader and a text that throws poststructuralist theories like the Death of the

Author to the winds. "It is not for me to judge Mr. Michael Madhusudan Dutt's character or mercurial life or the precarious paths of morality he often chose to tread," says the Sutradhar at one point. At another point she says, "I am no longer a neutral researcher; I confess to having lost the academic distance necessary for a scholarly project. I am literally boiling with rage at our hero's convenient double standards, at his hypocrisy, his selfishness."

Poised between the self and the world as creativity is, it is impossible to separate the art and the artist. Similarly, in interpretation too, it is virtually impossible to be impersonal. No wonder then that our Sutradhar's reflections are mediated through her own identity consciousness: "I do understand MMD's cultural confusion. We encounter the same sort of dilemma more than a hundred years later. The same linguistic confusion ... am I a Bangla-speaking Bengali, or am I propelled by an alien English tongue?" Her gender-identity also surfaces robustly at times: "Literary brilliance, overweening ambition – these things didn't give him the right to destroy so many lives. Tortured genius! Hah! Let me flag that these tortured genius types are always men." And yet, it is through such gender-identification with MMD's abandoned wife that Rubina Rahman's most intense and eloquent critical insight is born: "In the depths of his heart, did Madhusudan feel guilt towards the wife he had abandoned in Madras along with the four children he had fathered? Was he turning his guilt into dramatic art by focusing on heroines, bold and accomplished in his shorter plays and poems?"

It is interesting to note that the play's title *Betrayed by Hope* is an antithesis of the title of Dutt's well-known biography *Lured by Hope* (Oxford University Press, 2003) written by Ghulam Murshid and translated from Bengali into English by Gopa Majumdar. The colonial sub-text evoked by this resonance in nomenclature is striking and leads one to ruminate on the brand of hope that both these texts effectively contour. The hope that

lures MMD's life and ultimately betrays it, was distinctly born of the colonial encounter. His thirst for English and other European languages, his reverence for British culture, his desire to live in that coveted land and to earn the respect of fellow Englishmen, were all idiosyncratic to the immensely fertile and immensely turbulent sociohistorical period that MMD was part of. Similarly, his literary accomplishments in Bengali fuelled primarily by his culturally hybrid imagination and his exceptional felicity in the classical languages of Europe, would not have been possible in any other historical period.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, in *Betrayed by Hope*, poignantly represents both this flight and failure of his age. His sensibility, richly nourished by the complex cultural encounters of colonialism, could not attune itself, at the same time, to its dogmatic prejudices. An yearning exile in his own country and a nostalgia-ridden foreigner in England, MMD lived continually in the interstices – of language, religion, culture, morality, profession and posterity. His creativity also, as the Sutradhar points out, comes vitally from these interstices.

Having been an avid and admiring reader of two formerly co-edited books by Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale, *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology* (Penguin India, 2009) and *Finding Radha: The Dance of Love* (Penguin India, 2018), I cannot help discerning a similar narrative structure in *Betrayed by Hope*. In all three books, there is an interweaving of creativity with criticism, a strategic montage effect, the achronological illumination of biographical facts by intensification of particular episodes, and the projection of a whole through fragments.

Betrayed by Hope is, thereby, as much a reconstruction of the enigmatic character of Michael Madhusudan Dutt as the former books attempt to reconstruct Sita and Radha and if the success of these earlier books is anything to go by, in this search for what betrayed him, Michael Madhusudan Dutt shall not only be found but shall be academically cherished and creatively reinterpreted for decades to come.

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What's in a Name

by Anjana Sen

My name is Anjana Sen.

Some of my friends here in Glasgow do call me Anjana.

Then there are some who call me Unjaana, Aenjena, Anjaanee, Angela, Anya, and my favourite, Anyaana.

It makes no difference, because, after all, what's in a name?

I grew up in India, a country whose diversity is second only to her population. There are 22 official languages in the constitution, but as per the latest census, more than 19,500 mother tongues are spoken.

And then, there are the different dialects and pronunciations.

In Bengali, the language of my own community, I am called Aunjona.

When I did my under graduation in Madras, now Chennai, I was Yanchhanna.

In the north of the country, I became Unjna, or worse, Anju.

It never mattered, because, after all, what's in a name?

In Sanskrit, Anjana means the 'gracious gift of god', and was the name of Hanuman's mother. Hanuman, the monkey god, who I have thus never been able to take quite seriously, with maternal instincts coming to the fore whenever we were near a Hanuman temple or a statue. My sister and I would collapse into fits of giggles, because I always whispered, 'Hello *Beta*' (hello son) even as my mother darted furious glares in our direction.

I wasn't always Anjana. Born first to the first-born son of a patriarchal gentleman of zamindari descent, who was also the Chief Engineer of the state of Orissa, much contemplation, discussions, and prayers had preceded my naming ceremony. And I was christened (well, Hinduised) Moushumi. In Sanskrit it means Time, and I have no idea why the elders chose it, maybe to ensure I had my Monday submissions written on time, but I stray.

When I started school around the age of three, I was bullied by other little children who called me *Musambi*, which means an orange, and I went from being a sunny little girl to a sad and surly child who refused to go to school. Apparently, my parents were quite troubled by the whole situation, till the local army doctor and a friend of my father's took him aside and said,

'TK, just change her name.'

And my father, (then a Major in the Indian Army) in his first rebellious act against his own, did just that. I cannot thank that officer enough, for who wants to be Time when you can be the mother of God.

There had been a lot of discussion again, in the small cantonment of Mhow, and Anjana was finally decided upon because it went well with Anupama, my sister who was a baby at the time. And she was named Anupama because a friend of mine had a baby brother called Anupam.

Honestly, our parents were just lazy, when you think of the bank of beautiful Bengali names they could have chosen from. But then, they saved **you** the angst of having to master names like Suchandrajita or such like.

As I grew older, I became Silver to my friends, thanks to my initials, AG for Anjana Gupta. I still have a smattering of these friends and must remember to reply to 'Yo Silver' every now and then. Alas, marrying my beloved husband meant I am now AS, Arsenic!

The confusion with my name doesn't end there. All Bengalis have a *daak naam*, or a pet name. Unlike the humble middle name here in the UK, our *daak naam* plays a glamorous role. It is used only by the core group of family and friends. For everyone else you have your school or your 'good' name. My own *daak naam* is Jhuma, which means good luck, because, according to family legends I brought my father back from the dead. He returned home after the post-war ceasefire with Pakistan in 1965 almost exactly the day I was born, but that's a separate story. I'm thankful for the name though, because usual Bengali *daak naams* are ridiculous. My sister, a stunning and successful woman in her early fifties still answers to PomPom by elderly aunts. I have a cousin called Poopoo and another called Babun. Poor things.

Jhuma emerged from the inner circle because that's what my husband calls me, ergo most of our friends now call me Jhuma. It's interesting when Anjana's friends and Jhuma's friends get together, the confusion when they realise, they are talking about the same person. Amuses me, but then, what's in a name?

My poor husband never gets to be called by his own magnificent name, Sarajit, which means 'he who has victory over the truth'. He has always been Sen (or Zen sometimes). Maybe that's a good thing after being called SirJeet, Sarabjeet or even SaraGit. I once referred to him as Sen, in the presence of my late father-in-law, who was not particularly amused. I should have said, 'Baba, what's in a name?'

As a PS I'd like to add simply, that the sweetest name I have been called has been and will remain, Mummy.

London Report

Vatayan's Grand Award Ceremony Dr Kamal Kishore Goyanka and Geet Chaturvedi Honored

London, 5th February 2022: The International annual award ceremony of Vatayan-UK was organized under the aegis of the Central Hindi Institute-Agra; to honour the two eminent Indian authors, Dr Kamal Kishore Goyanka and Mr Geet Chaturvedi in the presence of Mr Virendra Sharma, British MP, Mr Anil Sharma Joshi, Vice-Chairman of Central Hindi Board-Agra; Mira Mishra-Kaushik, OBE, Chairman of Vatayan-UK, Dr Beena Sharma of the Central Hindi Board-Agra, Dr Nandita Sahu, the newly appointed Attaché (Hindi and Culture) of Indian High Commission-London; Dr Pushpita Awasthi, eminent author and the President of Gurukul, Anita Gopalan, eminent writer, translator and artist, Divya Mathur, author and founder of Vatayan-UK; and Dr Padmesh Gupta, founder of the UK Hindi Samiti as well as Purvai and the director of Oxford Business College.

The program began with the melodious and soulful Saraswati Vandana by Sri Lankan singer, vocal trainer and music teacher, Visharad Gayatri Ashini, followed by a warm welcome of the guests by Mira Mishra-Kaushik, OBE, Chairman of Vatayan-UK and Producer/Director of Contemporary Performances, who said that the award winning Vatayan-UK which has been engaged organising the regular literary and cultural activities over the past two decades. It has also provided a strong platform to writers and art-enthusiasts from all over the world, especially during the Lockdown, it has created a record by holding 92 weekly events and has collaborated with a similar number of programmes with sister organizations. Dr Nikhil Kaushik, an eye surgeon based in Wrexham, film-maker and author, presented a short PowerPoint presentation on the activities of Vatayan-UK.

Introducing the award winning author and translator Geet Chaturvedi, the writer, translator and artist Anita Gopalan said that it was music that brought them together at first and later as an author. As a writer, poet and translator, Geet holds a unique place among Indian writers because of his innovative poems. Born in Mumbai, Geet studied Buddhism and Advaita, and wrote extensively on these in both prose and verse. He has come to be known as 'Professor', 'Master' and 'Scholar'. The citation was read by the young and eminent writer Tithi Dani, while Geet Chaturvedi was honoured with the Vatayan Literary Award. Geet read out a very emotional memorandum of thanks, in which he expressed his sincere gratitude towards his family and

towards Vatayan. Geet recounts with eloquence of several members of his family; his father read the Rigveda and Gita to him. Expressing his gratitude towards his mother, Geet accepted, 'I got a soft heart and melting eyes from my mother'.

Presenting an incomparable literature and achievements of award-winning authors, the eminent author, Dr. Pushpita Awasthi borrowed a line from Geet's statement a line of Geet Chaturvedi that 'Feelings make us speechless, not arrogant to link the multi award winning author Goyanka ji, who has played an important role in the study and analysis of Premchand's life and works. The renowned blogger and writer, Shikha Varshney read Mr Goyanka's citation with great affinity while Anil Sharma Joshi ji presented Vatayan Shikhar Samman to Dr Goyanka along with a bunch of flowers.

Accepting the award, Mr Goyanka, expressing his warm gratitude to all the people associated with Vatayan-UK, said that he was born in



a business family, due to which it was difficult for him to study literature. While working on Premchand, he got continued support and cooperation of both the sons of Munshi Premchand. Recalling his literary work, he said that whatever he did, he did it with utmost sincerity; never longed for any awards. While Mr Goyanka's relentless creativity and intimacy impressed the audience, Geet ji's positivity and candid approach was an inspiration to all.

Congratulating the award-winning authors, the British MP, Mr Virendra Sharma, expressed his heartfelt appreciation for Vatayan's regular and meaningful activities and also thanked Vatayan for introducing him to two or three new writers every week. Congratulating the award-winning authors, Dr Nandita Sahu said that she looks forward to her continued association with Vatayan-UK. On behalf of the Central Institute of Hindi, Anil Sharma Joshi reiterated a very pleasant announcement that to enhance the dignity of Vatayan Awards, cash prizes would also be offered to award-winning authors.

The programme concluded with a passionate vote of thanks delivered by the young and upcoming writer Ashish Mishra. The program was broadcast live on YouTube, featuring eminent Hindi scholars, artists and media personnel from India, UK, Germany, Holland, Russia, Spain, USA, China, Japan, Mauritius, Denmark, Germany, USA, Canada, Trinidad and Sri-Lanka etc.

Compiled by Divya Mathur, eminent author and founder of Vatayan-UK vatayanpoetry@gmail.com

On the Grave Business of Poetry: A Review of GJV Prasad's *This World of Mine: Selected Poems* by Basudhara Roy

Let us begin with the book's title. *This World of Mine* – says GJV Prasad and the deliberate use of the pronoun 'this' immediately makes the 'world' objective and shared with the reader, at least through signification. This idea, then, of the world being shared, lessens the force of the possessive pronoun 'mine', establishing that this said world's contours are neither eccentric nor idiosyncratic but very much identifiable and relatable. And yet, the 'mine' retains its presence and cannot be dismissed completely. There is no denying the poet's claim to this world. For better or worse, this is the place that he inhabits and chooses to be inhabited by.

Look closer at the book's cover and the green will draw you in – light, buoyant, the colour of regeneration and peace. What strikes you forcefully, however, is the quiet owl scrutinizing your gaze. The owl's presence warns you that this world is going to be dark and it is up to you to stay or leave. You trust its wisdom and decide to stay. In the fifty poems that follow, you are stirred to look at this world that you share with the poet, anew. It is not as if you never saw this before but refracted through GJV Prasad's idealism, realism, humour – grim and often sardonic, his acuity, reflection and honest acquiescence, the shadowy world becomes compellingly concrete. You are grateful that you chose to stay and be showed around this world that you might never have discovered on your own.

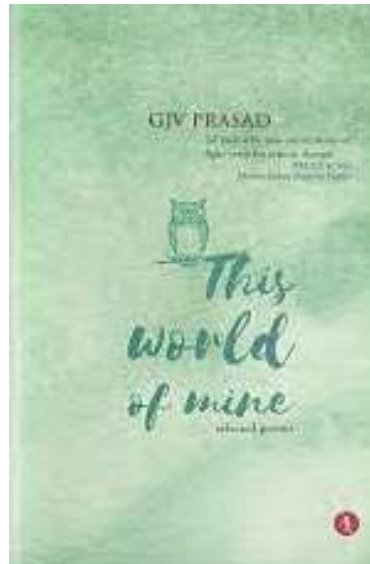
Prasad's first book of poems, *In Delhi without a Visa* was published to critical success in 1996. *This World of Mine: Selected Poems* is his second poetry collection that makes its appearance after nearly twenty-five years. Given the committed nature of Prasad's art, this long silence is difficult to explain. In 'Poetry', he writes:

Why does poetry make so much sense to me
When I never know what the poets mean
Why does poetry give me so much energy
When it takes so much effort to read

To anyone, even summarily acquainted with Prasad's critical acumen and towering stature as a critic, these lines are bound to be baffling. And yet, at a deeper level, they do not only bear themselves out but also help explain the poet's ambiguous relationship with poetry. Note the delicate opposition of the words 'mean' and 'sense' as also, of the words 'energy' and 'effort'. Since poetry means so much, it must be well-weighed. The trained linguist that Prasad is, he deftly plays with the various registers of a word, trapezing across to suit his fancy as well as to beguile the reader.

The poems in this collection are unabapologetically political. Whether it is fanaticism, fundamentalism, sexism, communalism, postcolonialism, Marxism, feminism, or more – Prasad will not shy away.

He will tell you the truth exactly as he sees it, sans metaphor, sans slant, and sans any personal *ism*. In 'The View', the golden sunset that alchemizes the poet can hardly animate the twig-picking old man. "What's so special Babu/ You can't eat it can you?" he says. In 'Her Story', the "lying professors" do not know "how else/ To get a woman student/ Into a relationship". In 'Godhra-Gujarat', all wrongs of Ghazni are duly avenged – "Ten eyes for an eye/ All thirty two for a tooth". In 'Election Strategies: Shining India' "Yearly blood-letting keeps the nation glowing/ The interests in our vote banks growing/ We are the ones who keep India Shining".



The first meaningfully-placed poem in the collection 'Desperately Seeking India' brings India's diversity, separatism and prejudice admirably together. Here is an emotional acceptance of India's differences and an intellectual admission of failure to surmount them. "I promise/ Never/ To mention India again" says the poet. Inside India, it would be impossible to make an appeal to or for India. So, is unity impossible? The answer is found in 'behold the dark', a poem written for the post-atom bomb world in which physical light become the reason for material darkness and moral luminosity. Prasad writes, "perhaps/ there is a lesson in the dark/ you hold hands/ when you can't see/ with people/ you don't know/ and come together as a world."

But the most riveting political poems in this collection are those that quietly take up the feminist cause. In 'Hey Ram' (a title that conjures both Ram and Gandhi), the husband is "A good family man but better on a committee". In 'Draupadi Said', Draupadi regrets asking Krishna for help, insisting that she had wanted not clothes but

"summary, summary justice" and concludes, "I was a fool/ To expect such - / Anything was too much - / From men or Gods". The three poems in the Sati series, placed in historical chronology, throw different lights on the idea of the Sati and showcase, perhaps, Prasad's humour at the grimmest. In Sati 1, the funeral pyre is a tragic choice for the widow to end a more tragic and choiceless life. In Sati 2 and 3, there are parallel accounts of Roop Kanwar's tragic burning with Sati 2 documenting the dynamic economics of religion and Sati 3, the façade of it along with the critique of a disconnected diasporic ideology. In 'Edible Woman' (with deliberate resonances of Atwood), the woman, in a fervour of hyperbolic romantic love, becomes to the male lover, every conceivable Indian culinary delicacy - "I mean to say I can snack/ On you any time/ And time and again". In a country where rape is a regular headline, Prasad sardonically points out how even the basic equation of romance is flawed.

JNU which remains an indispensable part of the poet's identity, features prominently in the collection in its myriad flavours in poems like 'JNU', 'How Brown was My Campus', 'Two Writers at JNU', and 'First Class in Room 016'. Personal poems like the Family poems, 'Kai Visiri', 'Ishwar Natarajan' and 'This was Nattu' reveal the softer side of the poet's mind, where emotion gently vanquishes intellect. However, for the greater part of the collection, Prasad's sparkling wit dominates, rising at the service of both clarification and satire. Ruminating on the history of the Taj Mahal in 'where did the masons go', he comments, "love was a grave business/ in this nation." So is poetry (though one cannot overlook the pointed pun on the word 'grave') and one sincerely hopes that more self-reflective and eye-opening poems from GJV Prasad find their way to our unquenched, awaiting hearts in the days to come.



Basudhara Roy is a poet, academic and faculty of English at Karim City College affiliated to Kolhan University, Chaibasa. Her latest work is featured in Madras Courier, Lucy Writers Platform, Berfrois, Gitanjali and Beyond, The Aleph Review and Yearbook of Indian English Poetry 2020-21, among others. Her recent (second) collection of poems is *Stitching a Home* (New Delhi: Red River, 2021). She writes and reviews from Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India.