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CONFLUENCE

SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

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20th ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE

DECEMBER 2022

**Season's Greetings to all our readers,
writers and well-wishers**

Celebrating Confluence - a Voice for South Asia **by Rita Payne**

Twenty years ago, Anandasundaram Sothinathan, known to many by his pen name Joe Nathan, established Confluence - South Asian Perspectives to cover developments from across the region embracing news, culture, arts, politics, poetry and other fields. At the time of his death in May 2014 at the age of 82, Mr. Nathan had succeeded in creating a publication which had become essential reading for those with a special interest in South Asia.

Sri Lanka

I remember meeting Mr Nathan at Commonwealth-related events where he diligently handed out copies of Confluence to all who attended. He was soft spoken and unassuming but passionate in supporting causes and issues he cared about. Although, he was based in the UK, Sri Lanka, his country of birth, remained close to his heart.

I have been going through our email exchanges and came across one dating back to 2009 relating to a visit to London by a Sri Lankan politician, Rauff Hakeem. This was his enthusiastic response: "Oh my word! Why did you keep me in the dark? He is one of those rare species of human kind who has stood up for the beleaguered minorities in his country despite open Government backed threats to his family and himself ! Please Rita, anything to do with Sri Lanka you must let me know."



Joe Nathan



First issue September 2002

Mr Nathan was a very helpful sounding board when I was planning seminars on Sri Lanka and other issues concerning South Asia. His knowledge,

insight and broad ranging interests were reflected in the quality and range of material in Confluence. He was especially committed to encouraging young journalists and would often direct them to me for career advice.

Mr Nathan was an active and loyal member of the Commonwealth Journalists Association which is committed to strengthening and defending media freedom in Commonwealth countries. He would attend and carry reports on CJA seminars and debates which examined the media landscape in different member states. He would regularly contact me about Sri Lankan journalists who were threatened or jailed for their work and urged me, on behalf of the CJA, to protest about their mistreatment.

Media Freedom

Mr. Nathan would no doubt have been deeply dismayed to see that the targeting of media workers is still widespread. The **International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)** today renewed its call on the international community for concrete action to protect the safety and freedoms of journalists as it recorded a spike in the numbers of journalists killed or imprisoned during 2022. The IFJ released the latest figures ahead of **International Human Rights Day**, recording 67 killings of journalists and media staff (continued on P3)

Editorially Speaking

Dear readers,

I am writing this editorial with much excitement as Confluence has now reached an important milestone in its long literary journey. This is our 20th anniversary issue that comes as an expanded special issue. It brings a great deal of writings from our writers and many of them have been part of this long journey since my father Joe Nathan established this magazine in 2002. I would like to thank all those who accepted my invitation or heard about this special issue project, and sent their literary contributions for this issue. It gives me enormous pleasure to read their personal stories and the interesting conversations they had with my father, even though some of them had never met him in person or even heard his voice over the phone.

In the very first editorial written by my father, he said '*Confluence is about meeting of minds, a fusion of cultures. We are talking here about the South Asian diaspora in Britain and their growing influence and contribution to the British identity*'. Even though his main focus at that time was on South Asian diaspora in Britain, after twenty years we see that this magazine has attracted more readers and writers from countries outside Britain. In fact, a majority of our readers and writers now come from further afield, I can tell. This trend shows the growing influence of *Confluence* among South Asian diaspora living all over the world. This is indeed good news for many of our writers too as they always want to attract a wider audience for their writings.

During the past twenty years, Confluence has proved itself as a trusted and well respected literary platform for a variety of writers, poets, artists alike. Our Facebook writers' group too has attracted hundreds of writers over the last few years and become a large writers' family.

Furthermore, Confluence has introduced numerous new but talented writers including several poets to the literary world by giving them free space in the magazine.

Funding this magazine has always been a tough task but we keep appealing to various people and organisations to support this magazine and hope the situation will improve in the future.

This year I was fortunate enough to travel to many parts of India and meet some of our regular writers in Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. In addition, I was also introduced to some new writers who have indicated their desire to become our regular columnists.

Since I took over this magazine eight years ago, Malathy has been providing editorial assistance despite her retired but busy life. My special thanks to her for her assistance over these years. However, it is becoming inevitable to have a more sophisticated editorial team as the scope of this magazine is widening as I could see.

While I thank all our present and past contributors for writing for this magazine and supporting us in many ways, I wish all our readers, writers and well-wishers a happy holiday season and a very Happy New Year which we hope will bring peace, prosperity and good health to all of us. Happy reading of the special issue and will meet you all in another issue next year!

Vijay Anand
Chief Editor

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Celebrating Confluence

Celebrating Confluence

in the line of duty in 2022 compared to 47 last year - a reversal of the decline recorded in recent years. According to the Committee to Protect Journalist's 2022 Global Impunity Index no one has been held to account in nearly 80% of journalist murders during the last 10 years. Pakistan and India were ranked 10th and 11th on the Index, respectively. Both have appeared on the index every year since CPJ first started compiling it in 2008, demonstrating the persistent nature of impunity and violence against the press in these countries.

Social Media

The World Press Freedom Index, which assesses the state of journalism in 180 countries and territories presents a grim picture. The Index published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) highlights the disastrous effects of news and information chaos – the effects of a globalised and unregulated online information space that encourages fake news and propaganda.

In her BBC Reith Lecture the renowned Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, discussed freedom of speech. She said cancel culture, arguments about "wokeness" and the assault on Salman Rushdie have produced a febrile atmosphere. She was forthright in her views on banning books which are considered offensive. "Do not ban them, answer them," she says. "In this age of mounting disinformation all over the world, when it is easy to dress up a lie so nicely that it starts to take on the glow of truth, the solution is not to hide the lie but to expose it, and scrub from it its false glow." So, while Chimamanda accepts that some restrictions on free speech are necessary in a civilized world, she believes that "the answer to bad speech is more speech".

Protecting free speech and freedom of expression, whether that be for dissent

or for the sake of argument, can only be achieved by "collective action", Chimamanda believes. To counter what she sees as a "climate of fear" and a reluctance to acknowledge it, Chimamanda exhorts people with influence to become a "coalition of the reasonable" and make it possible for discourse to aspire to a number of things including: assuming "good faith" once more; to "insist not only on truth but also nuance"; to make our case "respectfully and factually"; to "stop assuming that everyone knows, or should know, everything" and "to hear every side and not only the loudest side".

Media and Good Governance Principles

The value of collective action is demonstrated with a significant breakthrough on the 'Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance'. In November, Commonwealth Law Ministers agreed unanimously to recommend to

to assist member states and their agencies, as well as Commonwealth legislatures and judiciaries, civil society and media, to make appropriate contributions to promoting and developing democratic, accountable and open societies, in accordance with Commonwealth values, international norms and standards, and the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Conclusion

The 20th anniversary of Confluence has provided an opportunity to reflect on Joe Nathan's long commitment to journalism and the many changes that have taken place in the media in the years since he launched the magazine. Mr Nathan would have been so proud and delighted to see that his beloved magazine is flourishing under the stewardship of his son, Dr. Vijay Anand, aided by Mrs Malathy Sitaram who has added polish to the magazine with her sharp editing skills.

At Joe Nathan's memorial event at the Nehru Centre, Dr Anand had pledged to carry on his father's journalistic legacy as managing editor of Confluence. He paid tribute to his father's passion for journalism and his indefatigable commitment to searching for the confluence of cultures and ideas which attracted many writers of repute from all over the world. "As an experienced journalist, Joe offered an eclectic mix of articles, combining controversial topics with standard items. Despite his failing health, he continued to publish Confluence in print and electronically, thereby giving voice to the South Asian diaspora worldwide. "With his son's drive and commitment there is every reason to believe that Confluence will continue to thrive for another twenty years and Joe Nathan's memory will remain a unifying force for South Asians all over the world.



Commonwealth leaders that they should consider the Principles at their next summit meeting. This is an important achievement for the CJA which drew up the Principles in partnership with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and four other Associations: the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Commonwealth Legal Education Association, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK.

These Commonwealth Principles are intended to serve as a set of guidelines

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*Warmest congratulations to Confluence Magazine on its 20th Anniversary.
This incredible milestone is a tribute to the good work of Confluence and the
platform it provides to its creative artists. We wish them many more great
accomplishments and continued success in the years ahead.*

- Zaiwalla & Co

A graphic for A1 Accountancy LLP. It features a light blue background with a white laptop, a smartphone, a cup of coffee, and two pens (one orange, one yellow) arranged on a desk. The company name and services are written in bold, and contact information is at the bottom.

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My story

Writing for the Confluence magazine

Malathy Sitaram

Many moons ago I was born in Delhi. My father was a civil servant. My mother was born in 1915. She was the first Tamil woman to attend university in South India. She was remarkably modern always. I had an elder sister (2 years older than me) My younger sister was born in Bombay (Mumbai) where we moved to and where we attended a convent school. My father had a good job. The headmistress of my school was Canadian I think or perhaps British. I loved school and fared very well there. After school I went to a college (named Elphinstone) I took a B.A. in Philosophy and French.

I was married to one Nagaraj Sitaram when I was nineteen. He was born in Burma and had been educated in Britain. He was an accountant. He got a job in Assam and we lived there for seven or eight years. From there we transferred to London where he worked for the same company. When we lived in London, I went to a college where I took a BA degree in English. Later on, I was able to teach English in schools.

Before marriage, when I lived in Bombay, my mother did a lot of social work. We lived in a flat on the first floor of a five-storey building. My mother helped us with our homework and saw to it that we

completed it. Other women in the building came to her for advice even sometimes when they had problems with their

husbands. My mother did a social work such as helping poor children and she was much respected. And I was a bookworm.

My one and only child, a daughter was born in Bombay. She was named Anasuya but has taken on the name of Anya. She attended a private school and much later went on to become one of the first Asian television reporters in the UK. When we first came to England, we lived in a suburb of London. I taught English in a few



Malathy Sitaram was the first Asian teacher of English in Wiltshire schools. Also she was the first Asian to be appointed to the Swindon Bench of Justices of the Peace.

schools after obtaining a degree in English in a London college. My husband's job took us to Swindon in Wiltshire where I got a teaching job. I taught English. Grammar and help with writing. I worked for twenty years and took early retirement. Whilst teaching I was permitted to attend Bristol University one day a week. I got an M.Ed. in Education from Bristol University.

I came across the magazine 'Confluence' in London when I was attending a play at the Nehru centre. I was impressed with the

magazine and I phoned the then editor Joe Nathan to send me the magazine every month. I wrote for the magazine several times and am lucky enough after many years, now have the job of editing the articles that writers send. It keeps the brain working! When we lived not far from London, we used to attend plays and such like at the time at the Nehru Centre. After receiving the magazine, I started writing for it. Sadly, the Editor passed away and I had to persuade his son, Vijay to keep the magazine going. Readers and writers from as far away as America and India now write for the magazine which is quite a triumph. Essays, Stories and Poems of a high standard are sent to make a very interesting magazine. I love reading the magazine and also being able to contact writers as to their submissions which are usually of a high standard. I can suggest small changes that could be made. When the time comes for publication of the magazine I have to check that there are no errors or anything missing. Doing this is not easy and takes a lot of time. This can take hours. Confluence is now a magazine that is online and a pleasure to read.

We moved from London to Wiltshire where we live now. Both my husband and I are retired now and I am delighted to be able to continue editing the articles that so many writers send to Confluence. And it all started when I came across the magazine quite a while ago in London where I had gone to see a play.

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From September 2022 onwards

He Wrote On The Stone (In Memory of Joe Nathan)

As I stand at the beach
watching the vast span of the ocean,
I see waves approaching the shore
and delicately scrolling their stories.
The next stroke comes and wipes them off.
Yet, a few waves come
with puissance and force, hitting stones,
shaping them and writing history.
He wrote on the stone.

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Art by Meenakshi Mohan

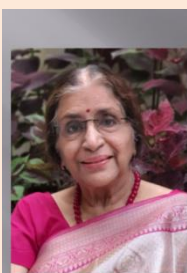


Dr. Meenakshi Mohan is an internationally published writer, scholar, art critic, children's writer, painter, and poet. She has been listed twice in the Who is Who Among American Teachers. She is on the editorial committee for *Inquiry in Education*, a peer-reviewed journal published by National Louis University, Chicago, Illinois. She was nominated in January 2021 as an Artist of the Month by DC South Asian Arts/Literary Council, Inc. She is the recipient of several awards, including The Panorama International Literature Festival Award, 2022, and the Setu Bilingual Journal Award for Excellence, 2022.

Remembering Joe Nathan by Lakshmi Kannan

He was 'Joe' to some of us, because he insisted that we call him by his name. I thank Dr. Vijay Anandavijayan, his son and the current editor of *Confluence: South Asian Perspectives* for giving me this rare chance in the special anniversary issue, to share my fond memories of Joe, the Founder Editor of this prestigious web magazine that continues to showcase some of the best writings from this subcontinent tenaciously, against many odds.

My first contact with Joe as an editor has to do with my first story written in English, after having published several collections of short stories and a novel in Tamil in my pen-name "Kaaveri". The story has a back story. Although I'm known as a bilingual writer, for some obscure reason I couldn't fathom, a few editors of journals in English who asked me for my Tamil story that I've translated into English.



Lakshmi Kannan is a bilingual writer, also known by her Tamil pen-name 'Kaaveri'. Her recent publications include *Wooden Cow* (2021), her translation of the iconic Tamil writer T. Janakiraman's novel *Marappasu*, for his Centenary Celebrations, *Sipping the Jasmine Moon*, *Poems* (2019) and *The Glass Bead Curtain*, a novel (2020, c2016). www.lakshmikannan.in

To be sure, I had published a few collections of my self-translated stories in English. Their question: 'Madam, we've published your translations. Why did you write this story in English?' sounded lame and didn't deserve any justification.

This particular story titled "Girl Watch" came to me in English and I didn't resist that. Why should I?

In addition, the story is best understood in English because of the pun in the title.

That's when my friends suggest I send it to Joe, editor of *Confluence*.

I was blown away by the friendly humour and warmth of Joe's very first mail to me, in response to the story.

'First of all, please call me Joe.' Then he quickly numbered each of my queries with answers:

1) Do I want to shorten your story? No! I see no reason why I should.

2) Did I see any flaws in the narrative? Actually, I looked hard, but couldn't find any. Will you save my time please by letting me know where to look?

"Girl Watch" was published and got me so many readers from India, South Asia and beyond that I felt very, very grateful for Joe. I wish Dr. Vijay Anandavijayan to take giant leaps from the foot prints of his father.

WHAT DOES THEATRE MEAN TO MUMBAI?

A REVIEW OF ANJU MAKHIJA'S MUMBAI TRAPS: COLLECTED PLAYS

BY URNA BOSE

In Mumbai, theatre is not just merely theatre. It is a statement. A symbolism. A vocabulary. A cult. A history. A heritage. A legacy. A political manifesto. A geographical tracing. An ethos.

In Mumbai, theatre is not just merely theatre. It is a stethoscope to read the city. A road map of its battles and struggles, its darkened, blood-stained, murky underbelly, and its dazzling, dizzying, eye-blinding towers of ivory. A boiling cauldron of socio-economic and cultural-demographic eccentricities and idiosyncrasies.

In Mumbai, theatre is not just merely theatre. It is a God. Or perhaps the entire pantheon of beliefs and ideologies, traditions, and modernities

colliding with each other and co-existing side by side, *kyunki yeh hai aamchi Mumbai mamu!*

Theatre experts verify that before the pandemic disrupted our lives and box-office numbers at large, there were about 1,500 – 1,800 play performances in a month across Mumbai, in four commercially viable languages. Primarily, Hindi, English, Gujarati, and Marathi. Now if you are a true-blooded theatre aficionado, you can add to this mix Telugu, Kannada, Konkani, and others, and do the math for yourself. Mind-boggling right?

The early origins of Mumbai's theatre are in south-central Bombay. From Khetwadi to Kamathipura, the centre of

Bombay after the Portuguese gifted the island city to the British. And believe it or not, there were easily around 35 makeshift theatres that featured plays performed in English for the British soldiers.

Like mushrooms on a hillside, theatre

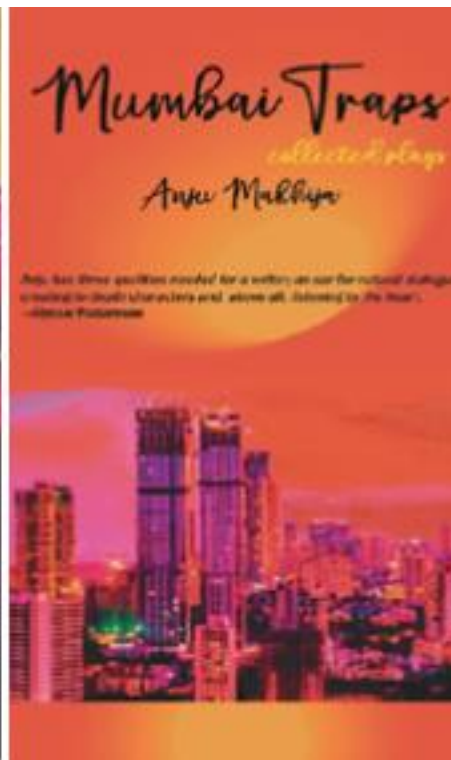
into a literary genre not quite explored in book form: drama.

Published by Dhauri Books, and with a cover that captures the ambitious skyline of Mumbai, Anju Makhija's *Mumbai Traps: Collected Plays* then almost stands up and stands out, as a clutter-breaking, genre-bending, pushing-the-envelope-of-imagination-further, kind of a book. And Alyque Padamsee's words on the cover deeply resonate as the reader explores *Mumbai Traps*, play by play. Padamsee writes, "Anju has three qualities needed for a writer; an ear for natural dialogue, creating in-depth characters, and, above all, listening to the heart."

Many plays from the book have been staged and some are in the process of being produced. This collection has six plays including a poetic drama and a musical. And the book is really an ode to the quintessential, unstoppable, never-say-never spirit and the

resilience of Mumbai, which could teach even high-tensile steel many a crucial lesson.

The narratives cover an entire gamut of characters and their trajectories, as they navigate through the trials and tribulations of Mumbaikars caught in the fishing net of life. In *Mumbai Traps*, you will meet characters stuck in the compartment of a local train stalled on a bridge to a lady who bequeaths her upmarket South Mumbai flat to a flower seller. Within the dexterous pages of *Mumbai Traps*, you will come up, close, and personal with a woman's fascinating encounter with Yama, the God of Death; to a man's encounter with God in his soul mate's avatar. And as if this is not enough of a roller-coaster ride of



has been known to spring up at the most expected venues across Mumbai. From the Jambori Maidan, which hosted the Kamgar Fest (the oldest theatre festival in the city) in 1938-39, to a cult play like *Vastraharan*, whose 5,000 shows have been performed by mill workers from Lower Parel and Naigaon. In fact, traditionally plays have always been and continue to be performed even today, in chawls and on street corners.

Given the rich theatrical history of the Maximum City, it is not surprising that Anju Makhija, an award-winning playwright, critically acclaimed poet, and translator who won a Sahitya Akademi Prize and was on their English Advisory Board for 5 years, chose to deep dive

emotions, choices, and journeys, you will also come face to face with an unscrupulous, affluent woman who strikes a deal with her maid and shares stolen jewellery. Then, there is a mythology-based play in which a fish turns into a man and becomes a Mumbai restaurateur-socialite, almost in a Kafkaesque fashion.

Meeting with Lord Yama is a riveting poetic drama, a subversion of the popular myth of Satyavan-Savitri. Instead of a super devoted wife, pleading, cajoling, and negotiating with Yama for her husband's life, the drama unfolds in delicious layers as the 33-year-old K.G. teacher Brinda finds herself in Yamapura and ponders on many existential questions.



Urna Bose is an advertising professional, writer, poet, and editor. Her poetry has gone viral, globally. She won 'The Enchanting Editor Award 2019', from the Telangana Poetry Forum, and the 'Women Empowered - Scintillating Creative Impactful - Feminine Power Inspiration Award 2020'. And recently, the prestigious Nissim International Prize for Poetry, 2021. As the Deputy Editor for Different Truths, she also devotes her time to the 'Poet 2 Poet' column. Urna's campaigns have won both Indian and global creativity awards, and some are even industry case studies, today. Urna believes that soulful poetry and gooey chocolate cake can pretty much fix everything.

"Brinda: Love...hate...is there a difference?

To love the other is to forget one self.

But those who do, live to regret!

For while one forgets, the other feasts,
giving into temptation like a wild beast.

Then, the inevitable split –

not much fun for one to tango,

not much fun for one to eat a raw mango!"

(Meeting with Lord Yama, Act 1, Scene 5)

The witty, playful exchange between Brinda and the dapper Yama in a stylish Nehru jacket, will make you guffaw at one level, as will the truths doled out in the garb of humour resonate at a level far beneath the surface.

If *Wishes Were Horses* is a beautifully crafted script that holds up a mirror to many bitter pills that we'd rather not gulp down in our hamster-wheel lives in Mumbai. Exactly the reason why this

play needs to be read and re-read, slowly, so that its essence trickles deep down into the marrow of our consumerist bones.

If *Wishes Were Horses* tells the story of Pushpa Vaswani, who turns around her suppressed life spinning it on its proverbial head through her last act of defiance as she wills her South Bombay flat to Chandrika Kamble, a street flower vendor rather than to her selfish, materialistic family.

been murdered and his decapitated head goes missing. The *Last Train*, with its heart-wrenching honesty about the human condition and cutting-edge dialogues, is simply unputdownable.

"Rajesh: The whole damn world is a cheat. Everyone is a cheat – brokers, punters, cricketers and me! I'm a cheat, I'm a loser. (Pulls out his pocket flaps.) A broker, fully broke. A pauper!"

(The *Last Train*, Act 1, Scene 2)

In Anju Makhija's *Mumbai Traps* then, Mumbai is not just a landscape, mindscape, or a mere state of the mind. Mumbai is that one singular larger-than-life, omnipresent character. Living and breathing, gritty and glamorous, steamy and unpredictable,

opinionated and pluralistic, forgiving and unforgiving. All rolled into one.

In conclusion, I think the title *Mumbai Traps* couldn't have been more apt and befitting. Why? Well because just like the city of Mumbai itself, *Mumbai Traps*, too looks the reader straight in the eyes, puts its arms around you, plants a tender kiss on your sweaty, grimy forehead on a rain-drenched afternoon, and slowly draws you in. Making you question who you are, prodding you to understand life in a profound and transformative way, gently inculcating the lessons of humility and hard work...and seductively trapping you in, like that thoroughly convincing lover: Mumbai, Meri Jaan.

(If *Wishes Were Horses*, Act 2, Scene 1)

The *Last Train* left me with giant-sized gooseflesh and a sense of déjà vu that I was unable to shake off, as the entire play takes place in the compartment of a slow train that gets stalled late one night.

We see and get to understand commuters from a large cross-section of our spread-eagled city; a stockbroker, a journalist, a wannabe actress, a bank clerk, and a rag picker. The situation soon becomes volatile as a politician has



Joe Nathan – A tribute by Anuradha Datta

I first met Joe at the Nehru centre in 2008. He used to wait at the entrance of the Nehru Centre and distribute copies of Confluence to the visitors. Initially I didn't pay much attention to this magazine but one day I read some articles and found them all quite interesting. I was impressed with the variety of articles in the magazine. Starting from the editorial, short stories, poems, memoirs, Bollywood gossips, photography, historical novels, current news and you name it!

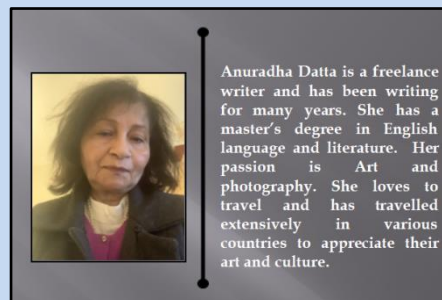
When I had the time to go through some of these articles, I realised the amount of work Joe has undertaken. I truly appreciated his dream and passion for this magazine. It was not an easy job for him to go through all the articles, edit them and taking out the print version of the final version. He was so focused and was determined to make his dream project a success. It must have been so hard and intense for him to manage a magazine like this single-handedly.

Since I realised that I could also make some contributions in the field of art, I approached Joe and I discussed about my work in the world of art in Delhi and the experiences that I gained here in London. Joe was happy to publish my articles and my first article was on J S Mali, who is a conceptual artist and he got various awards for his creations. After my first article, I became confident enough to write many more articles.

Joe was flexible; it was easy working for him. He had a good network of writers and well-wishers. He started giving me assignments to go and review art exhibitions and write reviews on them. On my next assignment he sent me to the National Portrait gallery to review an important exhibition. It was, "The Indian Portrait 1560 – 1860. The exhibition was telling the story over the three centuries of Indian portrait making. The exhibits were unique and they were never exhibited anywhere else. It was fantastic and awe inspiring to see magnificent portrait of Jahangir, holding a globe. This exhibition tells us the story of artistic achievements of Indian art and artists of that era. It was such an amazing experience and an honour to be there.

Joe always appreciated my hard work and my style of writing. Gradually I became used to my working schedule and used to look forward to meet new artists and get to know their views about their work and about their style of work.

Joe passed away peacefully in 2014 May. I had lots regards for him and I shall cherish my memories of Joe forever.



Anuradha Datta is a freelance writer and has been writing for many years. She has a master's degree in English language and literature. Her passion is Art and photography. She loves to travel and has travelled extensively in various countries to appreciate their art and culture.

DREAM BOOK Poem by Lakshmi Kannan

O no, not again.
It was the same dream
down to the very same details.
Only this time I got a sense of me
like I was watching myself in a repeat movie.
A professional dream analyst and friend
counselled. 'If a dream repeats itself
then it's telling you something.
Try to decode the message'.
It was getting late for my flight
the car hadn't come to ferry me to the airport.
Worse, I can't find my suitcase or handbag.
Around me are total strangers,
why would they care if I miss my flight?
Enough! I said, and got wicked.
Let me get rid of the suitcase
packed with my messy karma,
the handbag with my phone
crammed with numbers of people
I can do without.

Let me go with just this air ticket,
the small cash in the pouch around my waist,
my *Aadhar* card to prove who I am
(and a few cardamom for comfort)
This is the moment.
Let me be free of all that.
I rushed to the car that came late.
'To the airport. Hurry!'
The driver jerked his head
pointing at the rear window.
The strangers were there
holding my suitcase and handbag.
'Don't want them,' I said, shaking my head sideways.
They stared at me,
then kept the luggage on the front seat
next to the driver.
So much for my plan
to go unfettered.
The suitcase jostled with the handbag.
Did I see a hint of a smile on the driver's face?
He must've connived with the strangers. Damn!

JOE NATHAN: A TRIBUTE

(23 October 1931- 04 May 2014)

by Shanta Acharya

It was on the 28th of February, 2005, that I first heard from Joe Nathan. Our paths had crossed at The Nehru Centre a few days earlier. In his email, he

described Confluence as 'a bi-monthly launched with funds from a charity in September 2002.' Joe supplemented fluctuating advertising revenues with his personal savings. He informed me that copies of Confluence were 'distributed free at select venues such as The Nehru Centre, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Waterman's, Lyric Hammersmith, and the Barbican Theatre in London as well as at Sampad, Birmingham.'

Confluence was also 'accredited reading at the Library of the House of Commons, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and at 16 Central Libraries and their branches in London.' In addition to the UK, subscribers to Confluence were from Australia, Canada, Germany, India, New Zealand and the USA. Synonymous with Confluence and in spite of limited means and indifferent health, Joe attended all major events held in London at the venues mentioned above with copies of Confluence. He was Joe to one and all. Some may have addressed him as Joe Nathan, but no one called him Anandasundaram Sothinathan, which was his name.

His indefatigable commitment to the confluence of cultures and ideas attracted many writers of repute from all over the world. He set up the Confluence Foundation.

His writing courses earned him the appreciation of Croydon Council's Education Department. Keeping any publication alive without access to steady

funding is a herculean task. Joe made a real contribution to the South Asian scene in London. Marking twenty years, with an enlarged readership is no mean

achievement. He would have been proud to see his son, Vijay S. Anandavijayan, keeping the flame alive. By going digital, Vijay has taken Confluence to a large and growing readership. I was quite surprised to see an extensive reference to one of my articles published in Confluence ('Perception & the Self', September 2011) by Ashok Prasad, one of the most educationally

qualified persons in the world. The growing influence of Confluence, with the increase in readership, was reflected in the appointment of Malathy Sitaram, an ex-English teacher, as sub-editor.

Over the years, Confluence has published several of my poems, reviews of my poetry books. My review of books by others. In fact, Joe's first request to me was to review a collection of poems, edited by Keki Daruwalla, and published by the Sahitya Akademi: Four Indian Women Poets: A Celebration. Subsequently, my reviews of Kunwar Narain's collections of poems were also published in Confluence. In addition, Confluence has published several articles by me – Reflections on the Riots in London in 2011; Perception & The Self; the Financial Crisis in 2011; the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012; India's De/Re-Monetization in 2017; several articles on

Shanta Acharya won a scholarship to Oxford, where she was among the first batch of women admitted to Worcester College. She was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy for her work on Ralph Waldo Emerson. She served as a Visiting Scholar in the Department of English and American Literature and Languages at Harvard University before moving to London. The author of twelve books, her publications range from poetry, fiction and literary criticism to finance. Her poems have been translated to Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Hindustani, Odia, Russian and Ukrainian. www.shanta-acharya.com



ANNIVERSARIES

BY SHANTA ACHARYA

Precious as memory, vital as breath –

anniversaries are leaves in a tree, pages of a book,
a reaching out, embracing the world.

Some anniversaries are for quiet contemplation.

Others, a celebration of things to come –
past, present and future dancing together.

They arrive with their own self-definitions –
the launch of a journal, a book, an institution, a continent:
a confluence of views, always a commemoration.

Throwing open the doors and windows of imagination,
sharing stories with strangers who become friends,
anniversaries are for making connections.

Planting one's flag, establishing one's place in the world –
memories, events, people remembered, revalued
like family heirlooms. A Vicennial is rare as porcelain.

Brexit between 2016 and 2019; in addition to more recent articles about my mother and a conversation piece based on the war in Ukraine. There are not many

publications I can think of where the editors are so generous and open-minded in giving writers the space to share their thoughts on such a wide range of subjects.

I wish Confluence every success over the next twenty years. Without confluences, our world would be significantly poorer.

Confluence and my creative journey Anita Nahal

On the 20th anniversary of the heterogeneous, robust journal Confluence I am delighted to share about my creative journey in its delightful pages. I chanced upon Confluence through a Google search for fresh avenues for my poetry to be published. I was expecting a usual “rejection” as writers often receive, but lo and behold they accepted! That was in 2016. It’s been six years now of a fruitful association with Confluence. In this time frame, about twenty-five poems, a couple of articles and six flash fictions of mine have been published by the gracious journal. In fact, Confluence, with the dynamic Vijay Anandvijayan and Malathy Sitaram at its helm, was one of two journals (the other one being New York based Aaduna) that believed in my writings and gave these a printed spot! Confluence, like Aaduna became a launching pad for my confidence and my writings. Many of the poems and flash fictions published therein later found their way in to my three collections of poetry, *Kisses at the espresso bar* (Kelsay, 2022), *What’s wrong with us Kali women?* (Kelsay, 2021), and *Hey, Spilt Milk is Spilt, Nothing Else* (Authorspress, 2018), as well as in a flash fictions book, *Life On The Go, Flash Fictions From New Delhi to America* (Authorspress, 2018).

I deeply appreciate Confluence for its holistic approach and presentation. It’s a journal that covers critical current news stories, presents academic-researched based analysis of major global and literary issues, carries insightful book reviews, and reserves space for the diverse arts from around the world. Sometimes its articles are inter-disciplinary. In line with Thomas

Friedman (*The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 1999) or Frans Johansson (*The Medici Effect*, 2004) Confluence presents topics and genre at and within comparative intersectionality and intermingling. “Today more than ever, the traditional boundaries between politics, culture, technology, finance, national security, and ecology are disappearing. You often cannot explain one without referring to the others, and you cannot explain the whole without reference to them all.” (Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, 1999). Vijay Anandvijayan and his Confluence seem to agree!



Anita Nahal is a Pushcart Prize-nominated Indian American author and professor. She teaches at the University of the District of Columbia, Washington DC. Her third poetry book, *What’s wrong with us Kali women?* (Kelsay, 2021) has been prescribed as mandatory reading in a course on Multicultural Society at Utrecht University, The Netherlands. It has also been nominated by Cyril Dabydeen, celebrated Guyanese Indian Canadian, Ottawa poet laureate emeritus and novelist as the best poetry book for 2021 for British, *Ars Notoria*.

Vijay’s editorial is always succinct, timely and thought provoking! I congratulate him for continuing to produce Confluence providing so many writers of myriad genre a splendid publishing opportunity.

I am sure his father would be very proud of him for carrying forward the legacy of the journal he had started and continuing his yeoman work which reminds me of Osho, about being focused in the “moment” to achieve something of value. And in this case, it would be imprinting an indelible vestige of literary inheritance. “There is no other space, no other time. This moment is all. In this moment the whole existence

converges, in this moment all is available.” (Zen: *The Path of Paradox*, 2016). Vijay certainly has secured that precious place for his father, himself, and his journal.

Confluence became a medium for me (intentional and per chance) to be acquainted with other writers living in different countries or in the US with whom I have formed long lasting friendships and artistic collaborations. Cyril Dabydeen, celebrated Guyanese Indian Canadian, Ottawa poet laureate emeritus and novelist became a mentor and encouraged me towards never giving up. He believed in my poetry, especially my prose poetry style, and offered a fabulous blurb for my latest, fourth poetry book, *Kisses at the espresso bar* (Kelsay 2022). I was surprised and grateful when he nominated my third poetry book, *What’s wrong with us Kali women?* as the best poetry book for 2021 for British, *Ars Notoria* of which Dr. Yogesh Patel is

a patron. One day, out of the blue last year, Dr. Patel sent me a simple message on FB messenger saying “Congratulations!” and the link to the page in *Ars Notoria* where the nomination was listed. I wrote back, “Wow! I am astounded! Did not expect this...” I have saved Dr. Patel’s treasurable message!

Dr. Subhash Chandra, Dr. Malashri Lal, Dr. Basudhara Roy, Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, Dr. Roopali Sircar Gaur, Dr. Nandini Sahu, Dr. Swati Pal and Dr. Meenakshi Mohan are also some of the others whom I came to know or renewed my fellowship with

because of Confluence! Some of them were also acquainted with my father, writer, and professor, Chaman Nahal. Thus, a generational connectivity incurred and grew even more.

To provide a few examples, Dr. Roopali Sircar Gaur and I brought out two anthologies together, *In All The Spaces: Diverse Voices in Global Women's Poetry* (Authorspress, 2020), and *Earth, Fire, Water, Wind: Anthology of Poems* (Authorspress, 2021). Then, Dr. Meenakshi Mohan and I edited an anthology, *Nursery Rhymes and Children's Poems from Around The World You May Not Have Heard* (Authorspress, 2021). And very soon to be released is a poetry anthology, *Soul Spaces, Poems on Cities, Towns & Villages* edited by eight individuals, Basudhara Roy, Cyril Dabydeen, E. Ethelbert miller, Jaydeep Sarangi, Malashri Lal, Nandini Sahu and Swati Pal, all of whom are in some way woven with my Confluence thread! Therefore, inadvertently, Confluence, true to its name, became a convergence of like-minded folks, new or previously known, and became an artistic fusion sprouting forth new writings and alliances. Johansson argues, "by stepping into the intersection: a place where ideas from different fields and cultures meet and collide..." it can lead to "...igniting an explosion of extraordinary new discoveries." (Johansson, 2002). That's

what happened for a bunch of us through Confluence, pretty much like the amalgamating life-giving waters of Alaknanda and Bhagirathi or the Ohio and the Mississippi mingling, moving, learning, and giving. Above all, getting to know a kind-hearted, intellectual, easy-going, and generous individual like Vijay, is a bond I shall cherish forever!

Since I am a poet by heart, I'll end with a few words about the different poetic styles of mine that found their way into the illustrious pages of Confluence. Over the last thirty years of my writing life, my poetic styles have been in flux and changing due to what captured my imagination and what best I could express myself with at a given time. While I seek and attempt to maintain stability or as some might call, staid balance in my personal spaces with family and friends, creatively I am very versatile, restless, and ever interested in expressing myself in new ways as I feel otherwise, I shall stagnate as a writer not adding anything distinctive to the poetic canon. Says British writer Seb Reilly, "Experimentation is an integral part of being a writer and experimenting more widely can be incredibly beneficial." (Reilly et al., 2019). I am not married to traditional poetry and have often been criticized for writing prose poetry. I believe in being eclectic in my clothing fashion and style

which seeps into my writings as well. I have experimented with several techniques and approaches, all of which have been published in Confluence! These include, short poems, free verse, prose poems, and the latest being, Monoku poems! I end by offering my recent poem in Monoku style which though not published in Confluence, was nominated for the Pushcart Prize by The Ekphrastic Review.

*Pampushky Dreams

(five monokus)

- i. Joy isn't a twirling, round, giggling wind gone love struck. Its reuniting. Peace.
- ii. Distant visages dare touch selvage of my face. Go back invaders.
- iii. Sisters, mothers, daughters hold giggling hands. Shoved to cry, hands shut up.
- iv. Horses don't neigh naughty anymore. Heck, horses have been banished.
- v. Ponytails, scarfs, hats courtesy in Pampushky dreams. Sleep is awake.

*The above is an ekphrastic poem written in response to an Ekphrastic challenge to the painting, "Carousel", by Olexandr Murashko (Ukraine, 1906). It appeared in The Ekphrastic Review on March 25, 2022.

Short Story

Saved by a Whisker By Subhash Chandra

"Saved by a whisker!" he said in impeccable English.

I was still panting from the sprint across the road to escape turning into pulp. A spanking new SUV was hurtling down like an avalanche. The road in front of the Arts Faculty in the university is used mostly for flaunting dare-devilry by wealthy students to impress girl co-passengers in swanky cars.

I cast a scrutinising look at the man. He wore a clean, ironed shirt and pants, though the shirt's collar and cuffs were visibly frayed. His pale, pinched face had a couple of days old stubble. However, he looked decent and educated.

"Yes, you're right."

"Life hangs by a brittle thread!" he continued.

I taught philosophy at the university.

"Absolutely," I said and moved on.

As I was walking towards my car, he caught up with me from behind.

"Excuse me, Sir."

"Yes?"

"Are you teaching here?"

Obviously a conversational ploy; I was on the campus, my age, and the books in my hand were pointers. I'm wary of strangers waylaying me into conversations.

"Yes," I said cautiously.

Furtively looking around, he hesitantly took out a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket.

"Sir, can you give me five hundred rupees for this? ... I need the money urgently."

"You know very well it is worth much more. Why are you offering it for a pittance?"

"Sir, I can't approach a stranger."

I gave him a sardonic smile. "Have we become friends, already?"

He looked embarrassed and said, "I can trust a teacher."

"Okay, I'll take you to the State Bank of India on campus and help you exchange it for its full value."

His face clouded. "Sorry, Sir ... I'd not like to ... I can't do that."

"Why?"

After a pause, he said, "Sir, my brother was in Dubai... It's a long story. Can we sit somewhere?"

What was he up to? Did he want to wangle a cup of tea, or breakfast or was he spinning a larger trap?"

#

We went to the Canteen.

"Coffee?"

He nodded.

I ordered omelette sandwiches with the brew.

"Yes?"

He spoke in a low, deliberate voice, "Sir, my elder brother worked for an oil company in Dubai. Every two years he'd visit us and leave a bundle of US dollars."

"But they pay in Dirhams in Dubai, don't they?"

"Yes Sir. But he worked for an American Oil Company."

"What's your problem exactly?"

"After about eight years, he was arrested at the airport. He had told us a lie. Actually, he was into smuggling drugs."

I slid to the edge of the chair. A scared silence sprawled on the table.

"The Agent who had promised him a white-collar job stopped taking his calls. Nowhere to stay, with not much money in his pocket, he was an easy catch for the smugglers' gang."

Mom and me with stubborn grief and a pile of dollars that could not be converted into rupees through legal channels.

Icicles swarmed my blood. Was the man sitting in front of me a criminal himself? I decided to leave.

But on an impulse, I asked him, "Was he married?"

"Yes."

"Any children?"

"A son."

"Are they living with you?"

"No, they are with her parents."

After a short, troubled silence, he resumed morosely ... Would you be interested ... I mean it will help us if you take part of them. Mother is seriously ill... suffering from Cancer."

The frog of greed leaped across my mind.

#

Suddenly, I asked him, "What do you do to support the two of you?"

"Okay, when and where to meet?"

"Now, at my place."

We drove to an unapproved colony near Mukherjee Nagar. He led me into a house -- actually a hovel. I sat down on an old chair and he went in and brought out a briefcase full of wads of dollars. I probably could not conceal my excitement.

"Sir, this would be a windfall for you," he said. "These are two thousand dollars."

An enervated voice warned me to not proceed further.

I pulled out a bill from a wad. It looked fine. I checked more of them.

"How much?"

"Forty thousand,"

"I have thirty on me, right now."

The money was for the next instalment of the home loan.

"No problem, Sir. You pay the rest later."

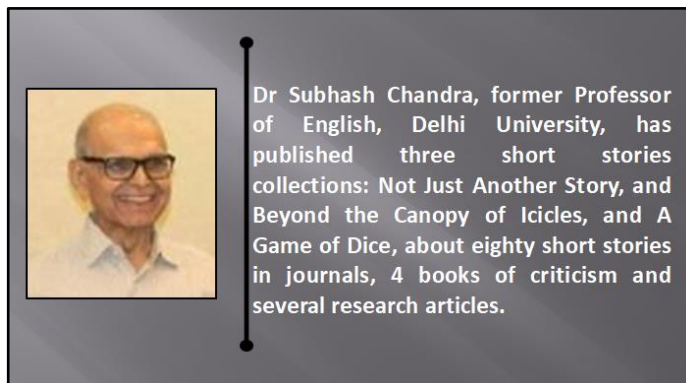
Suddenly, an old woman emerged from the adjoining room.

"My mother ... she is suffering from kidney Cancer."

She wore a Cross, was slightly stooped, her face sallow and creased, and her eyes ringed with black circles.

I stood up.

"Mom, he is a professor."



"He'd periodically smuggle all kinds of drugs -- cocaine, marijuana, weed, etc. worth crores. He'd amble through the Green channel with aplomb. A tall, fair-complexioned man, dressed in branded clothes, he did not arouse suspicion.

Finally, he was caught by one of the spotters who meander around ostensibly aimlessly at the airport but keep a hawk-eye on those emerging from the Green Channel.

My brother looked into the officer's eyes.

"I'm sorry I'm in a bit of a hurry. My mother is in the ICU."

"Passport please," the officer said in a cold, steely voice.

The officer flipped the pages and noticed the frequency of his visits to India and the country he travelled from each time.

#

"He was imprisoned for twenty years. Unable to bear the ignominy, he committed suicide inside the jail, leaving

He did not answer.

"I mean, besides conning people."

There was a quick play of expressions in his eyes: shock, anger, and hurt."

"Okay, Sir. Thank you for the breakfast," he said getting up.

"Sit down," I said with such authority that he was taken aback.

"You can't order me around, Sir. I will pay for the breakfast."

He was a genuine guy, I decided. He had that innate dignity that marks out an authentic individual.

I laughed." Come on, I was joking."

He looked confused.

"Yes. I'm interested in your offer."

By now greed had uncoiled inside me fully. We could pay a few instalments of the home loan in advance, I thought. I could buy a piece of jewellery for my undemanding wife.

He slowly lowered himself onto the chair.

She looked at me and said, "Don't take that stuff. It is fake; all of it will turn into white paper by the time you get back home."

An eerie silence breathed in the room.

"Mom!"

"Don't shout. I will not collude with you anymore... I'll commit no more sins."

After a sad pause, she resumed, "He is my only child, and I wish he had never been born! ... I am suffering from hunger, not Cancer... He is a drug addict... will do anything to snort his next dose. For three days, I have not cooked; there is nothing at home to cook."

She crossed herself and moved to go into the room.

"Just a minute Ma'am, I said, emptied my wallet, thrust the money into her hands, and hurried out without looking back.



A TRIBUTE TO JOE NATHAN

by Debjani Chatterjee

I never actually had the privilege of meeting Anandasundaram Sothinathan or Joe Nathan as the literary world knew him. This was because I live at quite a distance, in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. My interaction with the founder-editor of *Confluence: a Magazine of South Asian Perspectives* was initially by letter in the first few years of this century, but we soon switched to email. There was always a warm, easygoing and engaging tone to his communications, as though we were old friends who had known each other a long time.

I would sometimes send him an article, a poem or two, and occasionally give feedback on a particularly absorbing issue of *Confluence*. Whenever the chance arose, it gave me great pleasure to introduce him to the writing of my fellow contemporary South Asian writers in the UK. This was not often the case because Joe himself tried to keep his finger on the pulse of all things South Asian, be they literary, musical, historical or political. I recall that one fine novelist that I was able to draw to his attention was his compatriot and my friend Daisy

Abey. Mostly I would contact him to offer to write a review, but soon it became Joe who would ask me to review particular books for him.

So what manner of person was Joe Nathan? He had an independent and quietly confident manner. A very experienced journalist, he had a reasonably

artificial pleasantries. At the same time, he managed to remain courteous. He was kind and encouraged many a new writer by publishing their work. As befitted the journalist he was, he had an insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. There was also a slightly impish, even cheeky, side to his character, though it was well hidden most of the time.

Dr Debjani Chatterjee MBE FRSL is a Sheffield-based writer and editor, who was an early contributor to *Confluence*. Here she gives a personal portrait of the magazine's founder-editor.



I remember that on one occasion he had received a Penguin anthology of South Asian writing. I had already edited a number of anthologies at this time, mainly of South Asian poetry. Joe posted me the review copy after asking if I would be willing to review the book, and to do so quickly. I gladly reviewed it and he was pleased to get my piece. It was only then that he – somewhat cheekily – asked me to post back

the anthology as he wanted to keep it! Well, Joe was clearly fond of South Asian literature!

Joe's Sanskrit name, Anandasundaram, meant 'Bliss in Beauty', and I believe he lived up to its beautiful and spiritual meaning: he found joy and value in culture and all the South Asian arts that were his heritage.

good grasp of the South Asian cultural scene in the UK. He had his own perspective, but was also open to divergent views. There was no narrowness or intolerance in him. The highest compliment I can give him would be that he was a true pan-South Asian.

As an editor, he was always direct – no beating about the bush or wasting time in

Three Haiku

Atalanta's Game

He thought he caught me
by throwing golden apples.
I let him – and won.

Chinese Puzzle

This great wall was built
to bar the barbarian.
Now flock tourist hordes.

Study Subject

At the Dinosaur
Museum, you can study
little boys and girls.

Laughing with Angels



Poems
by

Debjani Chatterjee

Painting by Tara Chatterjee

My memories of Joe Nathan by Sunayana Panda

I had just moved to London in 2006 and wanted to keep in touch with India so that is how I went for every single event at the Nehru Centre. When I saw that there was going to be a lecture by Girish Karnad I was really keen to attend it. He was someone I admired greatly because of his contribution to artistic cinema in India. The evening was memorable and listening to Girish live was an exceptional experience. He was a multifaceted genius: actor and screenplay writer but also playwright and fiction writer. He had worked very closely with Shyam Benegal and was part of the world of literature, theatre and cinema.

After the lecture was over as I was coming out I noticed a pile of the printed version of the Confluence journal which had been placed at the exit. I picked up a copy and went home. The next day, while the experience was still fresh in my mind, I wanted to write about Girish Karnad and having just gone through the new issue of Confluence I realised that it was the ideal forum to publish my thoughts.

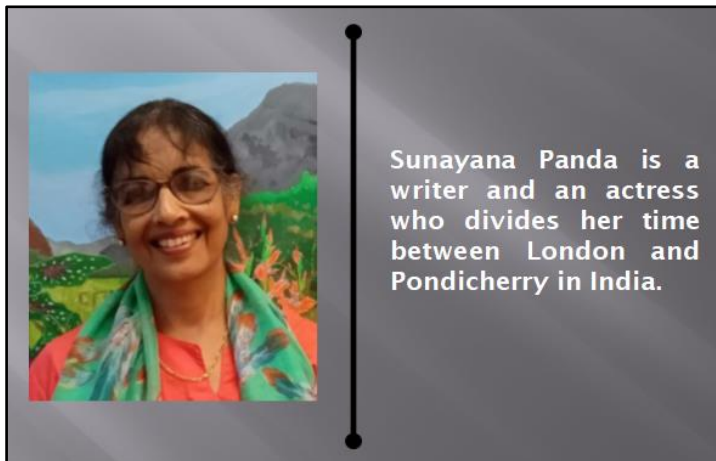
In hindsight I realise what a piece of good luck it was that the copy of Confluence came to my hands just when I was thinking of writing about Girish Karnad. I dashed off an email to the editor and to my utter surprise I received an answer immediately. He was very happy that I wanted to write something. The following week there was another event at the Nehru Centre and I was there very early to get a good seat. That is when I met Joe in person as he was placing the copies of Confluence near the entrance. I was surprised to see a man who was not young anymore because I was sure that this journal was being published by a young man full of energy and strength.

I started talking to him and was really touched by his humility. I had edited a quarterly magazine in India and knew the work involved. But he was doing much more than that. He was producing the

journal and running the show almost single-handedly. Not only that, he was also distributing it by taking the copies to

various venues of culture. I was truly impressed.

At this point he told me that he was always on the lookout for people who could write regular columns for the journal. I volunteered to write about theatre as this was my area of special interest. So, he would get complimentary tickets for me and I would dash off to the theatres where the plays were being staged. It was a fantastic opportunity for me to get to see these plays which were brought to London by Indian troupes because had it not been for Confluence I would not even have known about them. I enjoyed writing the reviews of these plays and soon I was also writing about cinema.



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

What I found so fascinating was this: Joe was making a sincere effort, absolutely alone, to connect people of the Indian subcontinent who were living in the UK. This was the world before social media and people lived lives which were not as connected as they are now. All the sharing of information and images just did not exist. For those times, a journal which had articles of special interest for a certain community was the only way to keep in touch with the group. Today Confluence is read by people from various parts of the world because it has a presence on the internet but when it was a printed journal

on paper the readership was limited to only those who subscribed to it or those who

could pick up a copy from the various places where it was available.

The diaspora from the Indian Subcontinent had a very special point of view on things and there was at that time, two decades ago, a real need to connect on a level which did not bring in politics. Confluence was a journal which was the only one of its kind at that time which was edited in the UK. There are many things which can divide the people of the Indian Subcontinent but there is also so much which can bind us together.

We often have dreams of doing something big and wonderful to make the world a better place, to bring about harmony and happiness into people's lives but we discourage ourselves by thinking, "Oh, what can I do alone? How can one person make a difference in the world? One needs

a big group of people to make these dreams come true. Only people in power can make a difference in the lives of people." But Joe was a living example of how one can touch the lives of many people and create a ripple of waves which would reach many others even if one was working alone and with very little resources. The important thing was to keep the passion burning. To keep a magazine going, year after year, one needs the mental stamina of a long

distance runner and not the burst of energy of the sprinter.

Social media has changed the world but even in this changed world a magazine like Confluence which promotes culture and thought has a place of importance because it goes deeper than social media posts and connects readers and writers alike on that level. It shows us that even though we are so different outwardly we are actually the same inwardly. In a world where we are constantly up against the forces which want to divide us, this message of inner unity is an important one.

If we are celebrating this anniversary issue it is because of the continued efforts of Vijay Anandavijayan who has taken up the work where his father had stopped. We send our heart-felt thanks to him.

Memoir

IMMIGRATION JUDGE

by Cyril Dabydeen

A suave manner about him, this man looking at me, almost with natural curiosity. "Are you Indian?" he asks.

I hum an answer. "My ancestors..."

Odd, he starts singing the Indian national anthem, like he was born to it, this Canadian middle-aged man with a slight paunch. Rabindranath Tagore in his shirtsleeves, it seems like. A Bengali's rhythmic voice and tonality coming from somewhere far, yet close up.

"Where did you learn it?" I am more than amused, if only intrigued.

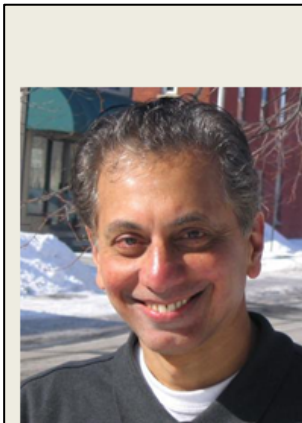
Now he isn't sure about India's stance in the Ukraine-Russian war taking place, he tells me--like an off-the-cuff remark. India had abstained at the UN vote, he knows; and he hints that the answer might be due to the Indo-Pakistani crisis, and Russia getting closer to Pakistan...and, it means more strife for India. Geo-politics, ah.

I persist asking where he learnt to sing the Indian national anthem. So casual, almost unexpected, fortuitous. Still mesmerized I am, you bet.

He explains that when he was a young student at St Mary's elementary school here in Ottawa, the Indian High Commissioner was scheduled to pay a visit, and their school's choir teacher, a Miss Kipling (assumed name, echoic), made the class's children learn to sing the Indian anthem as the best greeting to give to the High Commissioner. *The very best.*

Indeed he'd learnt it--as he knew the words, the rhythm, the solemnity too. *Jana-gana-mana-adhinayaka, jaya he.*

Then this sixty-year-old Anglo-Canadian man with the francophone in him lets me know that he used to be an immigration judge in this capital city. Yes, long after his early grade school days, to be sure; and the Indian anthem remained with him as a life-long experience, now part of his inner being, I dare to think.



Cyril Dabydeen – "a noted Canadian poet" (House of Commons, Ottawa), short story writer, novelist, and anthologist. Author of 20 books, he was a Pushcart Prize nominee via *Prairie Schooner* (USA). He won the Okanagan Fiction Prize, and the Canute A. Brodhurst Prize for fiction. His work has appeared in Oxford, Penguin, and Heinemann anthologies. He has done over 300 readings internationally. An Ottawa Poet Laureate Emeritus, he taught Writing at the University of Ottawa for many years.

Was it why he became an immigration judge? Did he come to this realization, if also because of what's expressed in W.B. Yeats's poem, "Among School Children"—one of his best poems—with the quintessence of a line that goes: "The children learn to cipher and to sing"; and indeed, about a country being "bound together by imaginative possessions," according to said Yeats. As India's anthem still resonates.

Here: new people coming to our shores, new identities, what's almost existential in Canada because of the relatively small population (in one of the largest countries in the world), though most

Canadians live close to the US border—not in the vast almost inhabitable tracts of land. And some demographers have been advocating that Canada's population should aim to reach near 100 million before long.

Not ever 1.3 billion like India's?

The immigration judge looks at me with a frown. *Am I not Indian?*

Delve into the question of my forbears, and the indenture labour system of

decades ago. And Gandhi's advocacy in South Africa with his *ahimsa* (non-violence) ideology--his vanguard campaign to put an end to the system of Indian indenture. Indeed so many of us in

the Indian Diaspora (so-called) who might have come from this source--*kala pani*--and are obsessed by the history of it with the ongoing polemics about identity often aligned to multicultural politics.

Now, too: the fact that one in every seven human beings on planet earth is an Indian (phenotypically so no less) is not lost on me.

The words and rhythm of the national anthem from this white Canadian man—the judge—keep echoing, with the realization of India's destiny. Yes, "a tryst with destiny," famously Nehru's. Worlds far apart, but becoming closer. Geography is destiny, I remind myself, but with my ethnicity intact—this also

being destiny, according to the late Madame Chiang Kai-shek.

I try to imagine the immigration judge evaluating those before him not so long ago, new immigrants--those with special case histories come from India no less, and the decisions he might have made that would last a lifetime. Destiny, you see.

No doubt, subliminally, the words of the Indian anthem may have often come back to him, if also clouding his vision. New, or strange, sentiment you see, because of his early school days and that nascent choral experience.

Tagore's haunting words and rhythm no doubt formed a permanent niche in his mind, I imagine.

This man and I carry on a conversation about places we have been to, and where we have all come from long, long ago. Wanderers we are, but never far apart with destiny continually in the making. And our being here now, in a permanent place, what's more than existentially longed for. Oh, never mind that I've often contended that creative writers are nomads--yes, nomads of the imagination-- words first attributed to African-born Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka. Or, not contrarily, as Nigerian-born Ben Okri (Booker-Prize winner) had said: that upon first setting foot in India he felt he'd always been Indian.

All of which sends me back to reflecting on my last book of stories--*My Undiscovered Country*--where I've suggested that a writer is always trying

to "discover" the place he inhabits--in my case, Canada--and my foregrounding this volume with the epigraph: "The soul of a man is a far country" (D.M. Thomas).

I have also familiarly recalled when introducing audiences to my work at literary readings: what writer Jose Marti (father of the Cuban nation) has said, that "literature is the most beautiful of countries." Indeed I will continue to do so, if only bearing in mind my encounter with the Canadian immigration judge, like what seemed foreordained.

Jaya he, Jaya he, Jaya he, Jaya Jaya, Jaya, Jaya he.

"The ruler of minds of all people," sings the anthem with destiny in the making, more than provenance, you see. Now believe me!

Confluence: The Wings of Time by Malashri Lal

At the turn of the millennium, in the very early years of *Confluence*, I met Joe Nathan by serendipity. On a bright morning at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies), London, I was co-hosting a conference relating to women and human rights as portrayed in literature, culture and society in South Asia. I was in the company of a few colleagues when I noticed a dignified, small built gentleman walking into the room. In formal attire and with a gracious smile, he introduced himself as Joe Nathan, said he was a journalist and wished to attend the programme. We, the organizers, were delighted to note such interest and welcomed him warmly. As the room filled up with speakers from UK, Australia, India, and participants from SOAS and other parts of London, our morale was boosted by

the presence of a highly attentive person in the front row, Joe Nathan, who was taking copious notes. During lunch Joe told us about *Confluence: Perspectives*

from South Asia, a path breaking journal that he had pioneered in 2002 and he requested our help with submissions of essays, commentaries, creative writing and book reviews. His vision for the journal was impeccable, and timely. The

Indian diaspora in the UK was prominent



Malashri Lal (left) with Nadine Gordimer

for its accomplishments, scholarship about south Asia was evident in SOAS's many courses in languages such as Hindi and Bengali, and translation activity had begun seriously from India's regional languages into English. At the same time,

there were impediments such as restriction on the book trade, which prevented books from travelling easily across borders. A free exchange of ideas was possible only through the medium of print. I am talking of a pre- internet era. We could however use email to stay in communication, which I did with Joe Nathan till he passed away in May 2014 at the age of 82.

My contributions to *Confluence* were quite prolific in those years as I was deeply touched by Joe's commitment to South Asian perspectives. I tried to keep the readers of *Confluence* updated on important literary events in and around Delhi. In 2006, I published "Neemrana Notes : Memoirs of a Conference" held at a 15th century fort in Rajasthan, hosted by the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations.**

The advisory committee, led by novelist Namita Gokhale, had a galaxy of writers and a few academics such as myself. The programme was shaped by a holistic vision of Indian literature that placed writing in English alongside the

regional languages and encouraged in-depth dialogues. **The event at** Neemrana was a precursor to the famous Jaipur Literature Festival of which Namita Gokhale is a founding director. I wrote in *Confluence*: "This was one time that continents were mapped by literatures other than English, and paid tribute to the post-colonial creative impulse. Multilinguality and cultural mix has enriched our legacies and this conference rightly spoke about identity and assertion. The presence of literary stalwarts such as Gulzar, Don Mattera, Ashis Nandy, Miral el Tahawi, U R. Anantha Murthy, Ashok Vajpeyi, Kofi Anyidoho, Nuruddin Farah and many others made it the season's most significant literary gathering."

Another piece of my writing that I recall wistfully was titled, "Nadine Gordimer in Delhi" an event that I was moderating at the India International Centre on 13 November 2008. It was a great privilege to introduce the Nobel Laureate to a Delhi audience and to engage with her in a public conversation. A brilliant writer and an astute observer of socio-political developments in South Africa, post-apartheid, Nadine Gordimer spoke with candour. I tried to summarize the discussion for *Confluence* readers: "What does the present hold

for South Africa and what are the token messages of the land and its people? A troubled post-apartheid society has been Gordimer's subject in her recent works. Immigration, cultural conflict, degraded ecosystems, problems of governance are themes that enter her writing but all of it touched with tenderness and deep understanding for a country she loves. Some critics have detected her impatience with a South African modernity that is casting away what may have been precious within the heritage of black people's memory. But, if so, it is the dilemma of post colonialism that many countries, including India and South Africa, have in common."

I often wrote book reviews for

Khanna's *Breaking Paths: Stories of Women Who Dared*, (*Confluence*, November 2019). The book presents stories about the "interiority of women's lives, their worries for their family which lie at the core of their being, their stoical acceptance of poverty and hardship, their helplessness in the face of marital violence... The hallmark of the book is a feminist perspective that touches the ground reality of life narratives in many parts of India." I sent *Confluence* a regular book column for almost one year, and was very glad that Vijay Anand carried forward his father's dream and his literary legacy.

Perhaps it was Joe's dedication and Vijay's efficient communication that kept many of us writing for *Confluence* and referring authors and readers to it.

When Joe asked for more contributors from India, I helped readily. Some friends were willing and became regular contributors to *Confluence*. I enjoyed being able to reach out to a UK audience and acquainting them with my reviews and opinion pieces. I continue to believe in Joe's vision,

and have placed my confidence in Vijay's outreach to the South Asian community. I can imagine Joe Nathan amidst us even now, watching the channels of friendship and literary camaraderie that *Confluence* has made possible.



Confluence as it was major method of spreading information about new publications from India. The titles were chosen based on my interest in emerging feminism, where it has always been my endeavor to contextualize the issues. For example I published a review of Meera

ROAD SAFETY MATTERS IN TODAY'S WORLD

by Sheila Malhotra

Today I'm covering a topic close to my heart-that of Road Safety with special reference to India where real issues lie. Mr Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways has put Road Safety in the forefront recently. The Ministry proclaimed 'Every year about 80, 000 people die in road crashes in India, which is 13% of the total fatality across the world.

Clarifying the reasons for the accidents, the Ministry aims to provide road safety



information for road users, to encourage safer behaviour among current and

prospective road users. He met actors Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan in Mumbai to seek their support for his Mission across India. A few days later, former Tata Sons chairman, Cyrus Mistry's untimely death in a car accident caused a stir. It was a wake-up call after which shows and panel discussions on Road Safety were broadcast on TV.

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His car was almost at 100kmph. He was in the rear seat, not wearing a seat belt. Now the Road Ministry is making a *draft proposal* for making seat belt alarm system mandatory for all M and N category vehicles

Travelling in taxis on highways in some states in India, I found back seats covered with extra cushioning, hiding the buckle below. Most taxi drivers don't wear seatbelts (even in hilly terrain) until they approach towns where policemen would fine them. Then again larger vehicles remain on the rightmost lane forcing drivers to overtake from other lanes, thus causing accidents.

Now I go back to year 2009. A cold winter morning. The train came to a halt and a young woman stepped down. She was like the morning dewdrop on a rose petal.

Her friend picked her and they drove along an empty road. A truck came straight at them. The dewdrop fell from the rose petal and burst. Her life came to an end. She was just 24. Sad memories, broken hearts and her collages on her

house walls was all that was left. She happened to be my niece.

On trying to induce people that something must be done about road safety, all answers were "Nothing can be done in India" So I took it as a challenge. On returning to London I put away my art material. My life revolved around art, but from that time my mission became one—Road Safety.



Established artist, freelance art critic and Road Safety campaigner, Sheila Malhotra is widely acclaimed for her very unique series 'The world through a Porthole.' She has often illustrated the problem of pollution at sea, thus embarking on the subject of Green Peace.

voice. From conception to final video, it took two years. The next four years was spent in searching for a Road Safety charity whenever I visited India. Most charities were for other causes. Finally, after intensive research and after verifying its authenticity, I found Save Life Foundation and met its Founder and CEO Mr Piyush Tiwari in Delhi who welcomed me.

He had started this charity after his cousin bled to death on the road and no one came to his help.

I am associated with Brake, UK's largest Road Safety Charity. Every year during road safety week school children meet me in a park for an awareness campaign. They participate in sponsored walks to raise money for Brake.

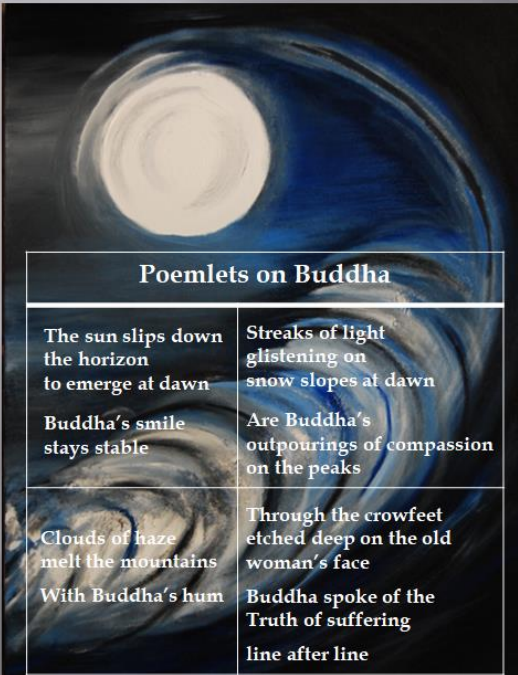
Now I could finally get back to painting again.

Camcorder in hand I walked the streets of London, in buses, in a car, to capture signboard, road markings, movement of larger vehicles and driver behaviour. I took similar photographs in India. It was now time to put everything together and make a video. My husband added his

These charities and such others should be applauded for their endless effort in trying to make roads safer and help bereaved families. We, the people should give them a helping hand. Let us correct our Road behaviour and not let a mishap change our lives.

Poems and Paintings

by Sukrita Paul Kumar



Poemlets on Buddha	
The sun slips down the horizon to emerge at dawn	Streaks of light glistening on snow slopes at dawn
Buddha's smile stays stable	Are Buddha's outpourings of compassion on the peaks
Clouds of haze melt the mountains	Through the crowfeet etched deep on the old woman's face
With Buddha's hum	Buddha spoke of the Truth of suffering line after line

These poems and paintings are dedicated to the beautiful memory of dear Joe Nathan, the founder of "Confluence", whom I met in London soon after he began publishing it, more than two decades ago. His charming simplicity, modesty and persistence won over so many of us who stayed on with the magazine long after his sad demise. I write this note also in admiration of his son Vijay Anand and his team who have continued to publish this magazine with ardent commitment and zeal.



Born and brought up in Kenya, Sukrita Paul Kumar is a well-known poet and critic, who held the Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at the University of Delhi till recently. Formerly, a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, she is an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing Programme, University of Iowa (USA), also of Hong Kong Baptist University and Cambridge Seminars.



Weaving New Patterns into Tradition Tapestry of Women in Indian Mythology

Edited by Meenakshi Mohan

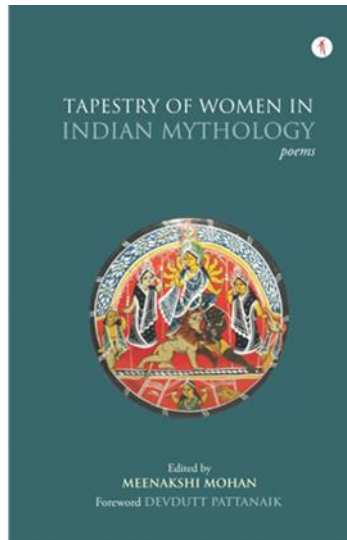
Reviewed by Anita Balakrishnan

Since time immemorial, myths have helped humans understand the mysteries of the cosmos, and the customs of their own society. Myths exist in almost all cultures, and often focus on the exploits of either a male hero or a group of brave male warriors. Women are invariably cast as marginal figures, either as wives, mothers or daughters whose sole purpose is to serve as a passive foil to the male hero.

In his foreword to this anthology of poems focusing on women in Indian myths, celebrated mythologist and bestselling author of numerous books on Indian mythology, Devdutt Pattanaik emphasizes what is perhaps the central animating force of this collection, the need to foreground the hitherto unheard voices of the complex women in the Indian epics. He observes that the most frequently told stories reveal how Indian mythology has informed Indian patriarchy. He goes on to state that the selection of stories that get told, and those that are ignored often relies on popular perceptions of what the audience wants. According to Pattanaik, as a result "there is a whole body of stories of Indian women that escapes the public eye".

This anthology focuses on precisely this unexplored area: poems describing women from Indian myths, who present significant incidents from the epics in their own voices. So, we have feisty Draupadi from the *Mahabharata*, Sita, Surpanaka and Ahalya from the *Ramayana* as well as the energizing female power of Durga among many others who in their sheer range reflect the gloriously diverse ancient literature of India. The major takeaway from these poems is that feminism is not a new

phenomenon in India, it is as old as the epics, while being at the same time as current as these retellings.



Anita Balakrishnan is the former Head of the Department, Department of English, Queen Mary's College, Chennai, India. Her research is focused on contemporary Indian writing in English. She is the author of *Transforming Spirit of Indian Women Writers* (2012). She has published widely in various national and international journals.

Showcasing the work of 70 poets, ranging from renowned writers such as K. Satchidanandan, Keki Daruwala, Lakshmi Kannan and Sanjukta Dasgupta to newer voices, this anthology presents poems on women characters as iconic as Sita and Draupadi and as little-known as Bhanumati, Duryodhan's wife or Madhavi from the Tamil epic *Silappathikaram*. The editor Meenakshi Mohan says that she wanted to highlight their sagas of joy, pride, humility, tenacity, persistence, struggle, and victory. She hopes that these unique stories will engender many questions, arguments, and discussions.

Significantly, the inclusion of male poets in the anthology serves to underscore how the many feminisms in the world have shaped the creative processes of men who are socially privileged and occupy positions of power in contemporary society. It is hoped that this shift in focus from women as traumatized victims to women as empowered individuals will help to forge a creative alliance between men and women to work towards achieving an equitable society.

A successful anthology needs to combine pace and variety. The editor, Meenakshi Mohan, has thought deeply about the choice of poets, about the poems she has put together and how they relate to each other. She has arranged the poets alphabetically, making for easy reference. The opening poem by Meenakshi Mohan sets the tone of the anthology:

"I am a woman of many layers,
/I can be tranquil as soft breeze,
/warm as winter hearth, / deep
as ocean".

Some poems in the anthology are searing portraits of women from mythology as in 'Draupadi 2: Then and Now' by bilingual poet Lakshmi Kannan:

Not beaten anymore

*Draupadi stands bare of
bruises*

*her heart arrested at a still
point in history.*

She has done it.

Has hurt the supreme male

into a sullen silence

by her terrible nakedness.

Sanjukta Dasgupta's 'Sita and the Golden Deer' offers another wry commentary:

*Male authors of the world's
Patriarchal epics blame
The bewitching femme fatales
But the heroes insist they need
Such beauties as their brides
In the killing fields and theatres
of war,
Like trophies by their sides.*

These poems show a female icon, Sita, as a fierce character who manages to shame even the *maryada purushottam*, or perfect man, Rama. She is a far cry from the meek, submissive wife and mother who is heralded as the ideal woman in traditional narratives. In these poems she is seen as a fierce woman who endures a trial by fire to prove her faithfulness and who defies Rama when

he asks her to walk through the fire a second time. Draupadi is seen as a strong, intelligent woman, educated and beautiful. Although she is often depicted as a helpless victim whose disrobing led to the Kurukshetra war, she shames the Pandavas with her 'terrible nakedness'. She vows to wash her hair only in the blood of her enemies and it was her words that led the kingdom into battle. These poems accord agency to other women in mythology as well, including Ahalya, Durga, Hidimba, Shanta, the Buddhist Amrapali, Kannagi and Manimekalai from Tamil Sangam literature. This voluminous book of poems reflects Indian culture in all its diversity and glory.

If good poetry serves to make us feel human in times of loneliness or turmoil, the poems in this collection are worth dipping into at critical moments of our lives. They amply illustrate the travails

women have had to endure over the centuries, and their ways of triumphing over their circumstances.

Indian women have begun to question the idea of Lord Ram as *maryada purushottam* or ideal man, when seen in the context of his decree that Sita upon her return to Ayodhya, submit herself to a second *agni pariksha*. Other women characters from mythology such as Ahalya, Mandodari, Gandhari, Kannagi, Yashodhara or Shanta also defy the patriarchal diktats that decree their silence in the face of trauma and pain. These poems creatively recast these trauma narratives into poems that celebrate their ability to prevail and even triumph in a world determined to suppress their collective voices.

Vishvarang-Vatayan-UK Festival: 5-10 November, 2022 A Report by Manoj Mokshendra

London, 5 November 2022: Organised by the Vishvarang-Vatayan-UK, this Festival was inaugurated by **Mr Virendra Sharma**, British MP, who in his brief speech, congratulated the Director of the Festival **Divya Mathur** and her team for organising a weeklong programme, especially during a global economic crisis. Brilliantly presented by **Dr Padmesh Gupta**, the programme began with a Vandana by the eminent singer, Vibhuti Shah. Vatayan's Chairperson **Mira Mishra Kaushik, OBE**, said that it is a matter of great pleasure that United Kingdom is one of the 31 countries where this festival is held simultaneously and Vatayan is representing the UK. The Chief Guest was **Mr Santosh Chobey**, founder of Vishvarang, who apprised of its aims and objectives, also recited some of his beautiful poems.



The chairman of this programme, **Mr Anil Sharma Joshi** congratulated Vatayan for the bonanza of events and said that Vatayan-UK has also served worldwide audiences during the Pandemic. He concluded his speech by reciting some of his popular poems. Following two sessions were devoted to

poetry in which celebrated poets recited their works including Usha Verma, Mohan Rana, Nikhil Kaushik, Shail Agraval, Tejendra Shrama-MBE, Arun Sabbarval, Arun Ashthana, Vandana Mukesh, Jai Verma, Indira Anand, Krishna Tandon and Shanno Agraval. Anchored by Shikha Varshney, the young and upcoming poets - Shefali Frost, Tithi Dani, Richa Jain, Ashish Mishra, Gyan Sharma, Madhu Chaurasiya, Ashutosh Kumar, Indu Baroth, Abhishek Tripathi, Antareepa-Thakur Mukherjee and Astha Dev recited their poems.

The next five days, 9 sessions covered a variety of subjects including literature, education, art and culture in which eminent as well as young and upcoming UK writers and artists participated. Presented by Antareepa Thakur-Mukherjee, Kahani-UK was organised in collaboration with 'CINEINK'.

Session 3 included stories by Dr. Achala Sharma (Meher Chand ki Dua), Divya Mathur (Sandeh), Tejendar Sharma (Khidaki) and Usha Raje Saksena (Ruke Qadam Ruk ke Bar Bar Uthe) recited their respective stories. The dramatic presentation of Divya Mathur's story was presented by Mamta Gupta. **Session 4**

included Usha Verma (Cost Effective), Shail Agrawal (Basera), Kadambari Mehara (Talash), Arun Sabbarwal (Udari) and Jai Verma (Ghulmohar).

Session 5: began with a dramatized version of Mahendra Davesar's story 'Ibu' by well-known actor and poet Krishna Tandon followed by Vandana Mukesh (Ajnabi Shahar mein), Shikha Varshney (Jhanjhat Khatma) and Astha Dev (Amrutvani).

Session 6 was devoted to Hindi Education, Art, Music and Dance in the UK, it was presented by Astha Dev and in chair was Mira Mishra Kaushik, OBE, speakers included educationist Dr Aruna Ajitsariya, MBE, Rakesh Mathur, Dr. Ragsudha Vinjamuri and Uttara Sukanya Joshi, who covered their subjects brilliantly. **Session-7:** included two sessions of Folk Songs organised in collaboration with Singapore Sangam, presented by Ashish Mishra. The speakers included Dr.

Madhu Chaturvedi, Dr Manoj Srivastava, and the singers were: Vibhuti Shah (Gujarati), Dr Nandita Sahu (Marathi), Deepa Swaminathan (Tamil), Ragsudha Vinjamuri (Telugu), Shankutala Bharane (Konkani). Swati and Shriyanka Ghosh (Bengali), Aradhana Jha Srivastava (Maithil) and Dr. Mahadev S. Kolar (Kannad). **Session-8: Savan:** Songs were presented by Vidushi Sucharita Gupta, Prof. Chandrakala Tripathi and Ritupriya Khare. The programme was presented by Aradhana Jha Srivastava and concluded by Astha Dev.

Session 9-11: Memorial Lectures: were dedicated to the eminent Indian British authors Satyendra Srivastava, Subhadra Kumari Chauhan and Dr Gautam Sachdev. All in all, VishvaRang-Vatayan-UK festival was a great success in which over 60 Indian British writers and artists participated over a variety of subjects.

Short fiction

Unsold: The Bougainvillea By Sunil Sharma

The bougainvillea bloom...again.

Lutyens' Delhi is vibrant: a bride wearing flowers.

Remember?

You liked the red ones.

We visited the village of Oliva Nova, Valencia, Spain, to see them there. These flowers always captivated you.

In a trance, you got down and felt them with dainty hands.

The way you touched me, as if I were another flower of this species. Your soft hands glided on my back, stimulating the choked pores---now distant memory, like a receding vista.

Remember?

I drew red bougainvillea on 10X10 feet canvases, while you posed, in Oliva Nova.

"Are they for me?" You asked.

---Yes. I confirmed.

Your smile was a reward for my labor

under the hot Spanish sun.

In the night, I spread the red flowers on your heaving bosom.

You squeaked! The bougainvillea descended and settled down in a soft shower.

---Perfect! You said and smiled, lashes fluttering, red full lips pouting.

I owned the universe.

We stayed there for a week and moved on to Venice. I painted the gondola and you---eyes lit up. Chin slightly raised. The Venice breeze ruffled your hair.

---Romantic! You observed.

We moved back to Delhi. I was happy and tried hard to sell my paintings.

It was tough!

I gave private tuitions, illustrated for a few journals---and managed, believing in you and a golden tomorrow.

In the process, I failed to notice your boredom and restlessness.

Most of the time, you were busy talking on the phone or visiting friends in Connaught Place.

Your smile kept me going.

The spell broke.

Three months later, home a bit early, I overheard on phone:

"Come in the afternoon, he will be away. A failed painter. Impractical! Stifled here! He has no present...and future."

Quietly, I closed the door and went out into the rain, walking for an hour, eyes blank, heart empty, tears mixing with the drops.

A person adored---who adored you in return---predicting as an Oracle!

Those eyes with dull expressions and a weak smile came back to me in that walk near the ruins of the old fort.

A failure!

The canvases stacked up.

All trash! A failed artist!

I then remembered the last argument:

"Why don't you sell on the market?" you had asked aggressively.

"Is it necessary?" I countered.

"If you do not market talent or sell works, what is the use of your art?"

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"I will find an audience for my art soon..."

"Already you are late for that. You could not sell any of your bougainvillea canvases! How will you survive? On your brother's dole?"

It hurt. "If I am unable to sell or get prizes or recognition, does it diminish me as an artist?"

"Yes. You have to get your due..."

"And, if I don't?"

"Then you miss the bus and die unsung!"

"I do not buy this mercenary view."

"Are you that confident? Bigger than the market forces?"

"Big or small, as long as I continue to paint and my work gives delight to a viewer who is not a direct buyer, it is enough for me! I do not want to be part of this parade, this marketing madness. I refuse the rat race! For me, painting is like gardening, I work on my little patch and cultivate it for pleasure, not for profit! Not everything can be monetized...it is scary, this tendency!"

You looked aghast!

"You will die hungry and..."

"And?"

"Mad!"

I smiled. "Let it be! It is the failure of the society that continues to fail its own children and produce new Van Goghs in every age."

"You are impossible!" you said. "And a fool!"

"Market is not the right indicator or last sovereign for an artist without a lobby or a godfather..." I continued.

You said nothing.

And incrementally grew distant---a thing I understood in that long walk.

More than mine, it was your failure!

Failure of a romantic seeking a worthy cause.

You ran away from a well-to-do family to embrace bohemia and find some poor artist to save in a messianic zeal.

A struggling artist.

Then you got bored by the drab poverty and the grinding struggle involved in the

That night, I could not sleep. All the painted canvases stacked up in a corner turned into garbage.

Before dawn, I went to sleep and dreamed of the red bougainvillea of Oliva Nova.

This time, I saw you with a rich and fat and bald merchant in that famous village, both walking together, arms linked.

Wearing the red heels, you walked over the sunflowers, crushing them casually, talking about art and its glamour to a bored companion.



Sunil Sharma loves to listen to the stars, birds, winds and watch the sky. Tries to understand the eye-language and enthusiasm of the pet dogs---feel the pain and weight of the leash, trapped in a home- cage, bound with the chains, watched by Covid-19.

Sunil has published 23 creative and critical books--- joint and solo. He edits the monthly Setu journal: <https://www.setumag.com/p/setu-home.html>

For other details, please visit the website: <https://sunil-sharma.com>

Both looked as an odd couple in quest of romance and beauty in a touristy place--- seeking souvenirs and pictures for social media.

She looks back, sees and ignores me.

My heart stopped.

The divine flowers!

So, refreshing!

life of a guy who elects to draw and paint flowers rather than selling them from a flower shop for the customers.

You hardly understood the pain of a struggling painter in a market not favorably disposed towards the young and the poor without powerful connections.

You left in the night, without any warning, any clue.

Vanished sans any trace.

When I got up, I looked for you.

Then I saw the pink envelope.

It contained a short farewell: I am leaving a dreamer for a doer. Life does not wait.

Go grab it.

Or be doomed!

Bye.

Healing.

They radiated colours and happiness.

In that troubled dream, I continue to admire the scene.

Another strange development: Van Gogh walking ahead, in the field full of sunflowers, hat on, and a canvas and brush in a backpack.

He looks back. Asks me to join him in the field trip.

"Master!" I cry and fall down, hands folded, his spiritual offspring.

He smiles and whistles...calling me again...walking ahead, this time slowly.

I stand up and follow the Master, ecstatic.

The flowers smile again!

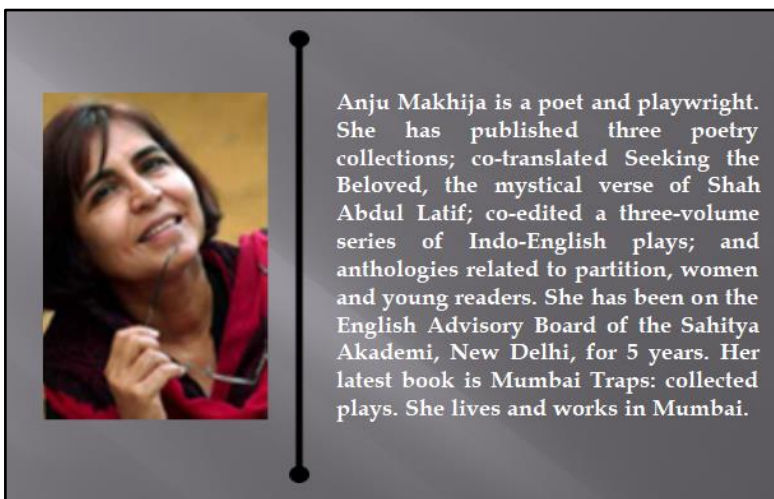
My association with Confluence by Anju Makhija

Over the years, I've written many columns but the longest-running one has been Mumbai Expressions for Confluence. Hence, it's a pleasure to write this article for their Silver Jubilee Issue. My association with Confluence started over a decade ago when Joe Nathan was the editor. It continued when Vijay Anand took over the reins. Both shared two things in common: they were extremely professional and respected their writers enormously. Luckily, I was able to locate my first column written in Jan '10. It began with the following words: I am reminded of my years in the '90s in Montreal, Canada, where we struggled for better communication between diverse cultures. The two solitudes (English and French) existed side-by-side, with the other communities in the periphery. Decades later, the situation has changed greatly with the mushrooming of innovative magazines, like Confluence, that offer scope for dialogue and debate.

My association with Confluence ended before the Covid pandemic – I discontinued the column since my new book, Mumbai Traps: collected plays required my full involvement. Both Mumbai Expressions and Mumbai Traps have much in common! They explore Mumbai as a place of perpetual restlessness where glamour, ambition, religious fanaticism and crime form an explosive mix; it's city of badshahs, petty politicians and, of course, culture vultures.

However, both the column and the book go beyond the city, coaxing us to take a look at larger issues. Both are based in the Mumbai reality but do not exclude the surreal which co-exists just below the surface. In one of my columns, I recall writing about the sleazy dance bars of the city, thereby tackling an important social issue. Some years ago, they were banned and many closed down putting the dancers and bar owners out of business. Interestingly, the Indian Supreme Court nullified the

abused. As Virginia Wolf aptly put it: 'Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings'. In the past few years, Netflix and OTT platforms have expanded in a big way here and many female producers have come in the forefront. Just last month, Alia Bhatt's film, Darlings, was released and it's causing quite a stir. It deals with women combating domestic violence in unusual ways, often boldly taking the matter in their own hands instead of waiting for NGO's, police or corrupt government authorities.



Maharashtra government orders. According to the judges, the ban contravened fundamental rights that guarantee freedom of expression. In their judgment, they observed that the ban prohibited dancing only at a certain class of establishments and exempted others like high-end hotels. This was unconstitutional. The court saw the ban as an extremely classist and elitist distinction. The judgment stated that women should be free to make their choices. They cannot be forcibly rehabilitated and pushed into 'respectable' jobs like jewellery-making or tailoring.

In our 75th year of Independence, women are still struggling for equality. A recent survey shows that one out of every three woman in India is sexually

Confluence has always stood for equality and I hope in the years to come, it will continue doing so via thought-provoking articles. Joe Nathan had written in an editorial: 'This magazine takes the view that the bottom line is where migrants, while rightfully trying to retain their identity through various cultural practices, must at all times bear in mind that they are not perceived as

posing a threat to other's way of life and values. This is of fundamental importance in the interest of social cohesion and integration. Also when men see women as partners, we will see a huge change!'

As I write this article, a thunderstorm rages in Mumbai causing many trees to fall. Our world is going through many calamities that are causing human suffering. I am thankful that Confluence has given voice to so many new writers expressing diverse views. It's also heartening to note that it has sustained the loyalty of those who have been with them for decades. I certainly am part of the Confluence family!

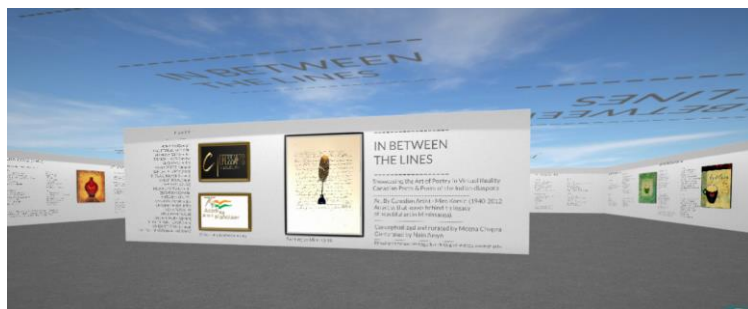
Every editor has a vision and I wish the best to Vijay Anand.



Yogesh Patel

Through the Poetic Lens

The exhibition of poems



Long before Terence said it in 150 BC, Indian scriptures stated nothing is said that has not been said before. So, why are we still enjoying what is already said before? Well, arts exist because they refresh and articulate what needs to be said from different angles and contexts, often relating to our time. Poems illustrate this credibly. It is one thing to read a poem on a page, quite another to hear it read, that triggers an atypical response. Just as it is one thing to enjoy it set to music in various renditions, and a completely refreshed experience to watch it as a poetry film. But in a unique exhibition of the work of female poets from India, the UK, the USA, and Canada, on the walls of a virtual art gallery, also incorporating paintings, Meena Chopra, a renowned poet and artist, brings us even further into the unexplored dynamics of poetics by juxtaposing them in the gallery's reserved silence, lighting, angles and slow pace. This is a novel context for poetry! We have seen before concrete poetry, so it is nothing new in reading poetry as a visual form as well.



language
a stone

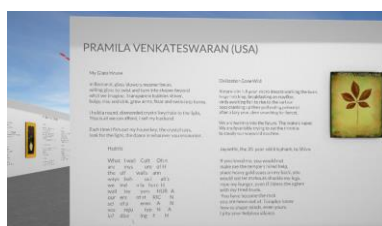
total
weightlessness

In fact, in the recent collection of poems by David Rushmer, *What Space Between Us*, published by Shearsman, on the cover, I had this to say:

At a glance, Rushmer's pages are poetically assembled words re-examining their nuances in context to the others in the same space to create a kaleidoscopic view of meanings. His each poem is 'a theatre of multi-dimensional space' and sits in a personal space. As

explained by the title poem, it happens because he leads us in this collection to the language that is a weightless stone!

Meena Chopra's experiment that presents poetry visually, such a point is further enhanced by the visual aspects of Pramila Venkateswaran's, which you can access through this link: <https://www.meenachopra.art/crossarts-gallery>



So, when she invited me as a critic and poet to write an introduction to the exhibition, I was thrilled to accept the invitation because I have worked with Meena for many years to know her poems and paintings, including her book cover painting for my collection, *Swimming with Whales*. Miro Korsch, not to be confused with Joan Miro, was the master of still-life paintings with a plain back drape of grainy colours. This discipline also suits poems punctuated by them. Meena's discerning eyes have ensured that these paintings do not overwhelm them, leaving the text to have its day. It shows Meena's understanding of how collaboration works in any art.

The interactive engagement of poetry with the other media always brings forth a fresh experience. After all, when Pound gave us a mantra to make it new, he meant to go make it fresh – as mentioned earlier, *nothing is said that has not been said before*. You can give a new context to the poem or present it in a new manner, and best can express your poem in a novel way. You refresh. The late Miro's premises are here in that assemblage. He puts you in a gallery within his paintings with the lights and arrangements at play!

You are observing objects as sculptures. Like his paradigms, the poems in personal gallery also exist within the frames of their canvas. You will discover a space in which images play out the game, as in Anita Nahal's *Calm Hope*: "Sometimes we can subtly trick time/To think it's not going anywhere/Pausing the moment on paper or heart."—In this case, the canvas, or as in Mona Dash's "I have with me a beautiful shoe but a broken foot/..."—in this case, a contradiction.

Hence, step closer and read a poem or step back to read it in context to the other space, including paintings and poems. Jumping off the page, the floodgates the poets' words open on these walls of a gallery aesthetically invoke a unique response in the observer. Walk through the gallery with your quiet bubble of space, but experience the universe of a poetic spell. Meena Chopra has pulled off a trick here, placing us into this unique theatre.

The flip side of this approach to poetry also has Monica Ong's *Planetaria*, which in April 2022 had its exhibition in Chicago Gallery. She explored the images to create poetry. Its flyer boasts: *If poetry and astronomy were to throw an art party, this one invites audiences across disciplines and cultures to imagine new cosmographies where everyone belongs*. In effect, it claims it playfully takes *poetry off the page*...

The same flip happens in the poetry film genre. For most poets, poetry film means they recite their poems to pictures or a video. The genuine poetry film invokes poetry; words participate as actors. In many, poetry shapes up without words, and in some, with sounds.

However, returning to my point—*nothing is said that has not been said before*, let me conclude with David Rushmer's theatre of words:

From where
I stand
Nothing remains
In the mirror
To speak to me (Depth Charge)

And yet that is also an expression in itself!

Yogesh Patel has received an MBE for literature. His collection of poems, *The Rapids*, is just published by *The London Magazine*. He runs Skylark Publications UK and Word Masala project to promote poetry. Extensively published, an award-winning poet, he has also received the Freedom of the City of London.

Short story When Amrita Shergill met Frida Kahlo by Reshma Ruia

'I am the Amrita of Mexico' Frieda says, smoothing down the pleats of her crimson dress. She leans forward and touches Amrita's cheeks. You are pale my dear. Let me warm your blood with a shot of tequila and ice. And so they begin. Lying on a beach side-by-side, holding hands. The sea waves at night are birdsong. The waves peck at their feet. Above them, the stars are a thousand peeping toms. Their hours are few for when morning comes they will dissolve -a fistful of ether and ash. But for now there is a whole landscape of memory to traverse. A calendar of names to stone and abuse. The men who built them and tore them down. The children who forgot to wake up inside their womb. Their bodies that betrayed them again and again. Breasts and bone, the liver, the heart sliced like fruit for the world to feast.

We had fun and we had pain Amrita says. How many locks did we break, how many maiden aunts did we hoodwink, slipping

away in the thick of storm, pulling out our paintbrush like a sword. There were no winners only casualties in this war. Frida presses her thumb against Amrita's mouth. Hush no regrets my friend. We were born women but we were not born slaves. You and I were meant to pull down walls.

Love has undone us both. Look at the scars we carry. Let us consider them gifts. They brought us our art.

They fall asleep. And just beyond the rim of dark the baying of dogs begins

**Amrita Sher-Gil was a Hungarian-Indian painter. She has been called "one*

of the greatest avant-garde women artists of the early 20th century" and a "pioneer" in modern Indian art. 1913-1941

**Frida Kahlo was a Mexican painter known for her many portraits, self-portraits, and works inspired by the nature and artefacts of Mexico. 1907-1954*



Reshma Ruia is a writer and poet. She has a PhD and Master's in Creative Writing from Manchester University. Her first novel, *Something Black in the Lentil Soup*, was described in the Sunday Times as 'a gem of straight-faced comedy'. She has published a poetry collection, *A Dinner Party in the Home Counties*, and a short story collection, *Mrs Pinto Drives to Happiness*. Her work has appeared in international anthologies and journals, and commissioned by the BBC, University of Cumbria and Manchester Literature Festival.

Zilka Joseph



Zilka Joseph is an internationally published poet who has authored five collections, the most recent being *In Our Beautiful Bones*. Her books have been nominated, been finalists or won awards for PEN America, Pushcart, Foreword INDIES and Notable Best Indie Book awards. Her work reflects her Indian and Bene Israel roots, and Western cultures. She teaches creative writing, is a manuscript advisor, and a mentor to writers in her community. www.zilkajoseph.com

One Bird Seems Caught

in something in the tree
it flaps violently
is it a cat in the branches
hidden carefully or hawk
I cannot see but the bird is still
flapping

my heart leaps
into my mouth this is the moment
of death this is how it is
up there by yourself on a lonely branch
and even if there were other birds there
you are alone so alone
and what is happening
is a sudden assault
this attack as you sit there
sunning yourself
in a garden or on the grass or on a patio
a space you rested in
every day and suddenly this

thrashing
a shower of leaves
does the blood pound
delicate bones crack
does the bird inside the bird
shaken and trembling
escape

Transcending Boundaries Publishing fiction by South Asian Australian authors in Australia by Sharon Rundle

Diversity and inclusion in Australian publishing is under scrutiny. The Australian Publishing Industry Workforce Survey on Diversity and Inclusion (publishers.asn.au) released on 31 August, 2022, refers to all sections of the book publishing industry.

The survey report states that: "The industry is largely white, including a high percentage who identify as British; less than ten percent identify with an Asian culture, and 10.5% with a European (non-British) heritage"

In my area of research, the field of literary and genre narrative fiction, South Asian Australians are increasingly taking on roles of editor and senior editor, whether in-house or freelance. What it needed now then is diversity and inclusion in the many roles that are seen as gatekeepers. Marketing departments, for example, have considerable influence on what is published. It is critical to employ staff who understand the market and readership of narratives from the South Asian (and other) diaspora in Australia when making decisions about accepting submissions. Manuscripts may be overlooked if the manuscript assessor does not relate sufficiently to the narrative. It should be acknowledged here that workers in the book publishing industry work longer and harder than ever and are under pressure to select books that will earn a good return. Nonetheless they may be passing over books which have the potential to reach a wide readership.

As the publishing Workforce Survey joint principal researcher Susannah Bowen noted: 'in the publishing industry, workers are also gatekeepers and tastemakers. A diverse workforce supports cultural representation and enables inclusive publishing in literature, education and information.'

In 'Transcending Boundaries' published by the University of Technology Sydney, Australia (2017), I investigated the experiences of Australian authors from the South Asian diaspora publishing works of

fiction in Australia. My results showed that more novels by South Asian Australian authors were being published in 2014 than when my research statistics began in 2004 which was encouraging, but the number of such books published barely registered on the chart compared to the total number of novels published in Australia.

Authors whom I have interviewed spoke about misunderstandings which arose during the process of publishing their books. These manifested in decisions about book covers, marketing, and promotion of

seem too much to ask for Australian publishers to do their homework and get it right.

South Asian Australian authors can be disappointed when reviewers reveal unconscious bias, prejudice and lack of awareness when their books are reviewed. Some authors have pointed out that even reviews published in respected literary journals can seem oblivious to the intention of the author, and aspects of racism that are revealed through the narrative.

Dr Sharon Rundle is co-editor of the newly released book *Relatively True*, stories of Truth, Deception and Post-Truth from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia, *Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia* and *Agathokakological Aussie Summer* stellar online stories. Sharon acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Darkinjung lands, waters, and seas, on which she works and lives. <https://sharonrundle.com.au>



I am heartened by the knowledge that the lack of diversity and inclusion in book publishing is now acknowledged and that submissions of works of fiction by South Asian Australian authors may receive a more favourable reception. Nevertheless their submissions may still be influenced by

their books. One author commented that she was given the option of 'yet another book cover with a "sari" border', which she firmly rejected. Though other authors I interviewed, as well as a South Asian Australian publisher had no objection to books with such border design. Another author expected to have an image of an Indian flute on the cover of the Australian edition of her novel, this instrument is an integral part of the narrative, instead a western style flute is depicted. In India, the book showed the correct instrument on the cover. A third author was surprised by an image of a Sri Lankan woman wearing a dupatta on the cover of her book published in Australia. This was not the case with editions published in other countries. These are common complaints about lack of cultural awareness in the book publishing industry rather than the odd aberration. These may seem minor quibbles, but they are of significant cultural importance, not only to the authors whose culture ought to be respected but also for Australian readers and the South Asian diaspora in Australia. After all, it doesn't

unconscious bias and prejudice on the part of manuscript assessors. Queries about whether such books will sell in sufficient numbers to justify the risk and expense of publishing, for example, which to some extent can be addressed by marketing and promotion.

It should be noted here that the Australian Government Home Affairs website states that: 'At the end of June 2020, 721,050 Indian-born people were living in Australia, more than twice the number (329,510) at 30 June 2010. After the United Kingdom, the Indian-born population is the second largest migrant community in Australia, equivalent to 9.4 per cent of Australia's overseas-born population and 2.8 per cent of Australia's total population.' This means that Australian publishers may well be missing an untapped market.

James Kellow, President of the Australian Publishers Association said that "our workforce doesn't always represent the breadth of our culture. This plays into what and how we publish and the extent to

which we reach, or don't reach, all potential readers."

So what might the future of Australian book publishing look like? It is promising that South Asian Australian authors of fiction are winning major literary awards and prizes in recognition of the standard of their work. Michelle de Kretser, for example, won the prestigious Miles Franklin Award twice, in 2013 and in 2018,

as well as other major Australian literary awards. Literary awards and prizes play an important part in recognising outstanding books and focussing media attention on them. This, in turn, increases book sales.

Respondents to the Workforce Survey suggested 'diverse recruitment', such as a wider range of advertising for jobs, awareness of structural racism when

recruiting workers, and positive action such as quotas.

As I said at the beginning, acknowledging the problem is a good start but there is still a long way to go before we see true diversity and inclusion in Australian book publishing.

Book Review

Aruna Chakravarti's 'The Mendicant Prince'

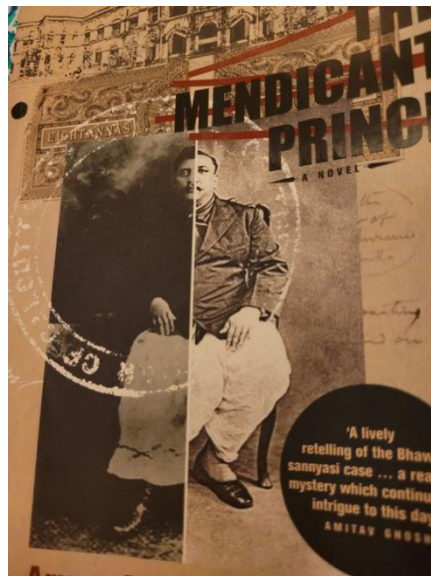
Reviewed by Monmayee Basu

In my childhood I had heard the story of Bhawal Sannyasi from my grandmother and had developed some interest in it. Then came a movie named Sannyasi-Raja which I saw while in school. Uttam Kumar, the famous actor (popularly known as Mahanayak), acted the role of Ramendranarayan Roy (Mejokumar) and it turned out to be a highly popular film. I too was deeply moved being at an impressionable age. My interest in the case deepened. Then after many years I recently read Aruna Chakravarti's riveting historical novel *The Mendicant Prince*, and was indeed awestruck by the way the sensational case of the early 20th century Bengal has been handled by Chakravarti, the acclaimed author and Sahitya Academy Award winner.

Aruna Chakravarti is per se an excellent story-teller and, apart from being the author of many magnificent works, has written two highly celebrated historical novels -- *Jorasanko* and *Daughters of Jorasanko*. Her mastery in writing historical novels is unbeatable. Now she is back with a new one -- *The Mendicant Prince*. The book has a unique, distinctive style of its own. It is written in the style of a romantic thriller -- reminiscent of Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution*. Both are written as thrillers and fiction rather than simple narrative history. The

Mendicant Prince is so gripping that I found it difficult to put the book down.

The whole history unfolds through first person narrations by the different historical characters of the novel themselves. Each narration reveals a new perspective and a new interpretation. These turned the story into an intriguing thriller. History and story-telling are seamlessly woven together creating a fascinating piece of historical literature.



There are many striking points that provide the framework to the entire narration.

Mystery starts from the beginning and thickens as the plot progresses. In-

numerable incidents at different times, contradictory

statements, official letters, documents, pamphlets that mirrored the war between the pro-sannyasi and anti-sannyasi camps, interesting trial proceedings in which numerous people were involved, have been handled so deftly that they collectively furnish an explosive element to the events that revolve round the legendary enigma of the Bhawal sannyasi case. Even the smallest and minutest detail of the complex issue did not elude the author's attention. Clarity and consistency of a very complicated narrative is the hallmark of this work. It is Chakravarti's book that has lifted all my doubts and lack of knowledge about the incident of which I was so curious since my childhood.

The story starts with the arrival in January 1921 of a sannyasi sitting cross-legged on the Buckland Bund by the Buriganga river bank of Dhaka. He had an extremely fair, heavily built ash-smeared body and light-coloured eye-balls. The local people found an uncanny resemblance of the sannyasi with the 'late' Ramendranarayan Roy or Mejo Kumar of the royal family of Bhawal. Twelve years ago in 1909, Mejo Kumar had gone to Darjeeling for a change of air as his health was failing because of the acute stage of syphilis from which he was

suffering. His wife Bibhavati, her brother Satyendranath Banerjee, doctor Ashutosh and a retinue of servants accompanied the prince. Initially, the prince showed considerable improvement, but suddenly the condition worsened and he became critically ill and died soon after. It was an unusually stormy night and the body was sent for cremation. On reaching the cremation ground heavy downpour began and the pall bearers took shelter here and there leaving the corpse.

However, when they returned after some time, they found the body missing. Out of fear they decided to go back with the story that the body had been duly cremated. A pall of gloom descended over the palace of Bhawal when the shocking news reached there. Lot of questioning of a large number of people including Satyandranath, Dr. Ashutosh

and others by Baro Kumar Ranendranarayan Roy, who was the elder brother of Mejo Kumar, and the eldest sister Indumayi Devi, who was in charge of the family after their parents' death, yielded no significant result and the mystery remained. Satyendranath, since their return from Darjeeling, lodged himself in his sister's apartment in the palace. After some time, however, Bibhavati, through her brother, claimed her share of property, relinquished her claims as a rani of Bhawal and left with her brother. More tragedy was awaiting the family; soon afterwards, in September 1910 Ranendranarayan died and two years later the youngest brother Rabindranarayan followed suit. Eventually their widows also could not continue in the palace for long. Their shares were appropriated and the entire state of Bhawal was taken over by the British administration. Indumayi died in 1921. Prior to her death she had thoroughly questioned the sannyasi and was eventually satisfied that he was indeed her second brother Ramendranarayan Roy. She also wrote a letter to F.W. Needham, the manager of the Bhawal state that she was convinced that the sannyasi was none other than her second brother who was presumed

dead. The sannyasi ultimately disclosed his identity and pressed before the British authorities his claim as the Raja of the Bhawal state. The dowager queen Satyabhama Devi, -- the grandmother of Ramendranath Roy -- also wrote a letter to the British Estate Manager of Bhawal in support of her grandson's claim, but no response came from the British and nothing was done to restore the prince to his legitimate position. After waiting for more than ten long years Ramendranath filed a case in the court



of the first sub-judge of Dhaka. The case was heard in the district court of Dhaka, the High Court in Calcutta and the Privy Council, London.

Herein comes the most intriguing part of the tale. The mastery of the author lies in the portrayal of the intricate court proceedings through the vivid and lively testimonies of various people both for and against the prince. It is significant to note that Chakravarti's adroit narration of these interesting trial evidences remains completely neutral and leaves it for the reader to make his/her own conclusions about the case as well as the personal characters of the several witnesses. Most baffling was the attitude of Bibhavati Devi, the wife of the prince. Her behaviour was incredulous from the very start. She showed no interest in ascertaining the identity of the sannyasi. She did not even open the letter addressed to her by Rani Satyabhama Devi who informed her of the return of her grandson. Highly intriguing were the evidences of Prankrishna Acharya, a reputed doctor of Calcutta, and Sarajubala Devi, the widow of the late Ranendranarayan, the eldest prince. The evidences of others were equally

enigmatic. As an adept chronicler Chakravarti illustrates dispassionately, but in a very interesting way, a legendary court case -- a real life mystery -- that leaves the reader simply enthralled.

All of Aruna Chakravarti's works are characterised by her skilful depiction of picturesque natural beauty along with vivid descriptions of details of daily lives -- food and dress etc. -- that add colour and flavour to the narratives and make them very delightful readings. The Mendicant Prince is no exception. A few examples are given below :

"Yesterday's wind and rain had lashed at the trees, stripping the boughs of their blossoms, ... The stark branches, silhouetted against the sky like black lace, were dappled with patches of velvety lime-green nodules that would burst into foliage in a few weeks. Minute balls, tinier than mustard seeds, hung in clusters from the bare twigs. The trees had started fruiting..." (First hint of coming summer in Darjeeling.)

"She remembered all my favourite dishes and cooked them with her own hands. Succulent crab curry, duck's eggs in a rich red gravy with peas and new potatoes, tiddlers in a sweet and tart sauce, puin greens with shrimps, fat wedges of ilish fried to a golden crispness and served sizzling hot straight from the wok..." (Bibhavati's reminiscences of her mother's culinary skill).

"An elephant , enormous as a mass of cloud, stood near the dais. Its front legs were raised, its trunk lifted in an arc high in the air, like a trumpet... This was Phoolmala, the mejo kumar's favourite. The stormy air resonated with the creature's cry -- a cry of joy. And on her back, the sannyasi sat in the pouring rain....Master and animal knew each other, recognised one another. The two forms blended into one, like a magnificent piece of sculpture." (Excerpts from the account of

Kashinath Hazra, a local from Bhawal, who came to see the sannyasi).

A little more than a century has elapsed since the mendicant appeared at Buckland Bund, but the mystery and the controversy still rage with great intensity. Even now it evokes

interest in people about this exalted real-life drama. Aruna Chakravarti's novel has sparked off a renewed curiosity in the case and with her unique story-telling acumen she has transported her readers to the days of the past when this enrapturing drama was being enacted.

Monmayee Basu is the author of Hindu Women and Marriage Law, published by Oxford University Press (2001); the co-author of Women and Law in India published by Oxford University Press in 2004; and also the author of several essays published in different books and journals.

Hindol Sengupta's Sing, Dance and Pray

The Inspirational Story of Srila Prabhupada Founder - Acharya of ISKCON

by Anjana Basu

The initial connect of the title is with Eat, Pray, Love which is perhaps unfortunate since Srila Prabhupada's intent went far deeper than Elizabeth Gilbert's quest for self realisation. Hindol Sengupta narrates the story of how an ailing Bengali sanyasi made a dent in the consciousness of America at the height of its rock'n'roll and LSD era by chanting the name of Krishna. The result was the birth of the organisation known as ISKCON which straddles the globe with its saffron-robed disciples. By now most people have come to accept the being of ISKCON but possibly few wonder how the organisation came into being. Sengupta charts the progress of Srila Prabhupada's journey from North Calcutta to San Francisco and beyond.

What is obvious is that the man who began his life as Abhay Charan De was an indomitable spirit. From the beginning he was inducted into the faith of Sri Krishna through his father and through the mystics of Bengal who followed in the footsteps of Chaitanya Mahadeva. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, the most magnetic and individual of the sanyasis whom Abhay Charan came into contact with suggested that the young man with his background of Scottish Church college and the benefit of funds and education dedicate his life to preaching the lessons of Sri Krishna to the West.

This message took its time in taking root in Abhya Charan's mind – even though the fact that he was born in a time of conflict predisposed him towards peace and an existence beyond the material. Surrounded by the threat of plague which drove millions of Calcuttans to leave the city and by the chants of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's followers, the inspiration of a life beyond the material was always part of Abhay Charan's world.

Ultimately he abandoned his successful pharmacy business in Allahabad and Lucknow and took the road of sanyas, shaving his head and donning saffron robes. Sengupta posits that Abhay Charan's path was the next most

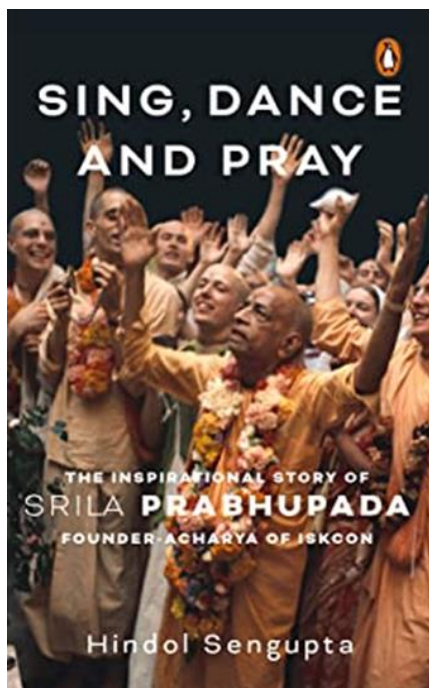
influential contact of Hinduism with the West, following Swami Vivekanand's speech in Chicago and it was a far more difficult journey since Abhay Charan set out by ship to live in New York at a time when the city was at its worst in terms of pollution, crime and poverty. However, at another level the city was on a creative high with Beat Poets like Allan Ginsberg and musicians of the calibre of Pink Floyd, Lou Reed with his Walk on the Wild Side and many more. The Vietnam War had spurred the hippie movement and somehow despite the odds stacked against

phrase – followers of Krishna he said were on a perennial high unlike those who clung to the material high of LSD which brought them down with a thud periodically. Sex, drugs, rock'n'roll, he combated them all with his Hare Krishna Hare Rama mantra and even approved a new twist that his San Francisco disciples put on the rhythm while his New York followers protested.

Krishna Consciousness drew in the Beatles – George Harrison on his deathbed had the mantra chanted into his ears – and Allan Ginsberg said Abhay Charan was his guru – though AC Bhaktivedanta as he was by then known as, said he was no one's guru but everyone's servant.

He was 71 when he came to America, fighting heart attacks. The climate worsened his health even as his cause began to grow temple by temple. Before he left two years later, he had another heart attack and doctors advised to avoid stress. However he continued fighting for the cause of Sri Krishna for another 10 years and the fact that the centres of ISKCON are spread worldwide, including Bhaktivedanta Manor in the EUK, which was gifted by George Harrison, speaks volumes for the selfless work that Srila Prabhupada – the last of his enlightened names – put in. His publications and his tribulations are all touched upon as well as the list of celebrities who followed him first in a trickle and then a flood.

Sengupta emphasizes the struggle that went into the founding of ISKCON but also adds that it was a measure of good luck or the blessings of Sri Krishna that put Srila Prabhupada in the right place at the right time. Occasionally there is self consciousness to the style of the narrative but the story wins through. On the 125th birth anniversary of Srila Prabhupada this is the kind of book that gives the ISKCON story new illumination – one has to wait of course to see whether it will stand the test of time like the Ramakrishna Mission but, in all likelihood, it will.



him AC Bhaktivedanta managed to get the ear of the people who mattered.

He was a good cook – ISKCON still believes that the food it serves Sri Krishna is the most delicious in the world and Sengupta has thrown in some ISKCON recipes for Khichari and more between the pages. The food helped break the ice on occasion. Abhay Charan also had the gift of finding the right