

Est: 2002

ISSN: 2633-4704

# CONFLUENCE

## SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

[www.confluence.org.uk](http://www.confluence.org.uk)

20 years of publication

Feb-March 2024

### Guilty until proven? British Post Office Scandal Another miscarriage of justice by Chaand Chazelle

'Justice must not only be done – it must be seen to be done.'

Lofty slogan. But, really, how Truly is it adhered to in its spirit and letter?

'British Justice is – something to be proud of.'

But the truth is that 'pride' is in tatters; the Post Office bosses withheld the truth and the lies were constantly perpetuated by the high and mighty, who are/were running this organisation, the likes of Paula Vennels and her executives were earning bumper bonuses by taking £30 million annually off the Post Office losses; while sub-postmasters were stripped off their living, their properties confiscated, they were made bankrupt, their children were abused in schools, They ended up with depression and mental illness, some committed suicide, others were convicted and sent to jail, hundreds of lives were ruined.

Mike Young, a chief operating officer told the BBC – "the Horizon system is absolutely correct and reliable, we have full confidence in this system."

Not true.

The Post Office dates way back to 1660 when it was established by Charles the II.

'Post Office Counters Limited' was created as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Post Office in 1987. Richard Dyke took over the management until his retirement in 2001. Then a new role was created for David Mills to step into. With declining mail usage, a loss of £102 million occurred in 2006. Many of these sub post offices were run by independent shopkeepers, answerable to the Post office. It was a part of the fabric of British society until this scandal.

Paula Vennels was appointed as its Chief Executive in 2007

Seema Mishra was 34 years old in 2010 when she was accused of stealing £74,000 and was convicted for false accounting; she is 47 now – no compensation can bring back the lost years!

(continues on page 3)

### A special report on The Jaipur Literature Festival by Deepa Vanjani



"The old order changeth, yielding place to new..." sang Lord Alfred Tennyson and rightly so. The invasive presence of AI and social media have definitely been changers to reckon with, but love for literature and the arts and books seems to close to our heart. The Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Series Jaipur Literature Festival 2024 from 1-5 February, was a confluence of sorts that gave audiences moments to relish some cerebral champagne in jam-packed sessions.

As a media representative for Confluence for the first three days of the festival, I had the opportunity to talk to writers and attend some invigorating sessions.

2<sup>nd</sup> February: "I see myself as a seeker..."

#### In conversation with Arundhati Subramaniam

Having attended the release of her book *Wild Women*, I was eager to know how the poetic journey began and how women and spiritualism became part of that journey. The charming poet, also a Bharatanatyam dancer, with a voice that resonates in your memory, talked about how she "grew up with arts" and "her liberal, secular upbringing, with exposure to classical music and dance, eastern philosophy, but I was drawn to poetry." In a way the gravitation towards poetry was natural for she had this sense that "poetry is the only place where one can wonder, articulate existential questions, share deepest fears of loss and death," until this questioning took an urgency around 1997 when "an inexplicable experience" led to an urge for spiritualism and spiritual guidance.

(continues on page 3)

**Editorially Speaking**

Dear Readers,  
Welcome to the latest issue of Confluence South Asian Perspectives – the first of 2024.

We have already reached the first quarter of this year and to me, it looks like the clock is moving faster than ever before. I am very grateful to the writers who have helped us to bring out this issue through their valuable contributions.

The issue comes with the special reporting of the recently concluded Jaipur Literary Festival attended by one of Confluence’s long-standing columnists, Dr Deepa Vanjani from Indore. She attended the event as our Media Representative since Confluence has a lasting relationship with the JLF and we are proud to cover their annual proceedings. Our special thanks to Dr Vanjani for representing the magazine and meeting some of the prominent figures of the South Asian literary arena.

Another highlight of this issue is the reporting of the Post Office scandal in Great Britain which has attracted wide publicity over the past few years but has now become a topical issue for the UK government. Chaand Chazelle has done extensive research on this scandal and has written a detailed account of the grave injustice done to the Postmasters.

Contrary to the popular belief that modern computers are fool proof and have been programmed in such a way that they don’t lie, this scandal is a typical example that computer systems, too, could be manipulated to give false accounting information. It is quite unfortunate that hundreds of innocent Postmasters, some of whom were South Asians had to lose their livelihood and, in some cases, they have been imprisoned.

While I am writing this editorial Muslims are observing the holy month of Ramadan. In Gaza, Palestinian families preparing for Ramadan are facing starvation with children and the elderly now dying as Israel blocks food aid and fatally attacks civilians queuing up for limited food supplies. Israel has imposed increasing restrictions on movement, with many Palestinians – especially men – denied entry to Jerusalem or other significant religious locations. During this holy season of Ramadan and Easter, we would like to call for the right to worship to be protected by all parties of the current war.

Once again, I would like to remind all our contributors to help us by sending their submissions well before the specified deadline. Please email your work/s to [confluenceuk@yahoo.com](mailto:confluenceuk@yahoo.com) only and avoid sending them through any other means. A special request to book publishers too: please advise your reviewers to send their reviews directly to us. Finally, I would like to request the contributors to stick to the prescribed length and help us to maintain the quality and uniformity of the magazine.

I look forward to meeting you all in another issue in 2024.

Vijay Anand

CONTENTS		
Page	Title	Author
1	British Post Office Scandal ----- The Jaipur Literature Festival	Chaand Chazelle  Deepa Vanjani
2	Editorially Speaking	Vijay Anand
3	British Post Office Scandal (from p1)	Chaand Chazelle
4-5	The Jaipur Literature Festival (from p1)	Deepa Vanjani
6 - 7	Review of Tainted by the same counterfeit	Anita Nahal
8	Short story Peanut Seller	Subhash Chandra
9	An Ekphrastic Poem - Is there life after death	Cyril Dabydeen
10	Anjana’s Ramblings	Anjana Sen
11	Lakshmi Kannan’s Poems <i>Nadistuti</i>	Sudha Rai
12 - 13	Sarojini Naidu part - 2	Kusum Pant Joshi
14	Short Poems	Mona Dash
15-16	A conversation with Bem Le Hunte	Sharon Rundle
17	A Masterclass in Poetry	Yogesh Patel
18	Poems	Gopal Lahiri
19 - 20	The Wild Stream part -2	Nandini Sahu
21 -22	Bem Le Hunte discusses spiritual realism and .....	Sharon Rundle
23	Review of The Antique Hunters’ Guide to Murder	Anjana Basu



**CONFLUENCE SOUTH ASIAN PERSPECTIVES**

ISSN: 2633-4704

23 Cray Avenue, Orpington BR5 4AA

United Kingdom

Telephone: 01689 836 394 / 07801 569 640

Email: [confluenceuk@yahoo.com](mailto:confluenceuk@yahoo.com)

CHIEF EDITOR  
Dr. Vijay Anand

CONSULTING EDITOR  
Malathy Sitaram

EDITORIAL ADVISORS

Dr. Meenakshi Mohan

Dr. Subhash Chandra

Magazine Design: Confluence Publishing Ltd

<sup>2</sup> The views expressed by interviewees or contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect Confluence editorial policy. No part of this publication or part of the contents thereof may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the express permission of the publisher in writing

### From page 1. British Post Office Scandal

There was no proper investigation or concrete evidence of any wrong doing against her.

At the time of her 15 months jail sentence, she was pregnant.

The Post Office dates way back to 1660 when it was established by Charles the II. 'Post Office Counters Limited' was created as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Post Office in 1987. Richard Dyke took over the management until his retirement in 2001. Then a new role was created for David Mills to step into. With declining mail usage, a loss of £102 million occurred in 2006. Many of these sub post offices were run by independent shopkeepers, answerable to the Post office. It was a part of the fabric of British society until this scandal. Paula Vennells was appointed as its Chief Executive in 2007

Seema Mishra was 34 years old in 2010 when she was accused of stealing £74,000 and was convicted for false accounting; she is 47 now – no compensation can bring back the lost years! There was no proper investigation or concrete evidence of any wrong doing against her. At the time of her 15 months jail sentence, she was pregnant. Even when her baby was born in hospital, she was electronically tagged. Her jail-mates were the likes of Rose West and paedophile Venessa George in Bronze field prison. Seema says – "It was horrendous in jail being pregnant in that unhygienic place, it was a nightmare."

She also asserted that - even when she first took over the post office in 2005, on the first day of her training it showed a short fall of £80. It happened again on the next day of her training, the books repeatedly failed to tally with her takings. When she flagged it up to the trainer, the response was quite casual, fleeting and irresponsible:

"The accounts are never exact..." she was told.

But when it came to her arrest, there was nothing casual about the Post Office's stance. There was widespread miscarriage of justice in British legal history; nearly 900 sub post masters were convicted, 2000 were accused. Many were coerced into pleading guilty, the likes of Jo Hamilton. Even though she narrowly escaped custodial sentence, thanks to her community-support but nevertheless she could not escape the criminal conviction, she was convicted for doing NOTHING WRONG! But she was instructed never to mention, that –

'There was any fault with Horizon system.'

Why? What were the post office bosses afraid of? Why did they make sub-postmasters sign – 'non-disclosure agreements' if there was nothing to hide?

Ah yes, another malignant, crafty and wicked thing the post office did was, to maintain a big lie: 'YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE'

I write the above 5-words in Capitals, because it touches a raw nerve in me – In 2009 HDFC's senior bank manager in India, stole £50k from my account and opened a fraudulent account in ICICI bank, by forging my signatures. The bank kept lying to me – 'You are the only one, no one else has complained.' They tried to keep that a secret; because we might have formed an alliance like the sub-posters against the bank. But later, I did find out that there were several other NRIs (Non-Resident Indians), whose money was stolen by the same manager. In my mind what the Post Office did was worse than an arm-robbery. It is, how to put it, a white- collared robbery by proxy, using – 'Digi-thievery'!

But I am puzzled because I understand a whistle blower allegedly told Michael Rudkin and showed him the computer screen at Fujitsu's Bracknell office, allegedly saying – "A whole section was devoted to fiddle with the figures by remotely accessing sub-postmasters' computers."

I have no idea if it is true. But if it is, then it seems like an insider job. Not that the sub-postmasters were stealing but in fact it was the post office filling their coffers, showing profits resulting in bonuses??

And the mighty Angela van den Bogerd, responsible for handling complaints; pulled a huge smoke screen saying – "Oh no, they were only experimenting, developing..." or some such dribble!

Paula Vennells was aware of the glitches in Horizon system, but what she told Alan Bates and others: 'everything was hunky-dory!'

But the persecution and prosecution of sub-postmasters continued.

And, Paula is a priest? How does she sleep at night having sent people to jail and ruining their lives? To top it all, she was honoured. For what? Lying, sending people to their pre-mature deaths? I am so glad she is to return her CBE.

Oh, I know why, the investigators were so aggressive in securing convictions? Cash incentives of course. For every conviction, he and other investigators were awarded handsomely.

I remember about 30 years ago I was invited by a friend to visit his pub in Wales. There I met a couple of

Welshmen in their 70s, when they learnt that I was an Indian, they shared their stories with me, when in 1940s they were stationed at Rawalpindi; barely 18-year-olds. They said – "the officer class was always very arrogant and condescending, some were from aristocratic families, we were nothing, they didn't treat us any better than the way they treated Indians..."

Isn't that the age-old story of the colonials and the colonised? Or of the powerful and the powerless.

Another memory I have is, 20 years ago I was at the till in a Littlewood shop, I picked up 3 or 4 items, I always do my mental arithmetic and had added up the total in my head. The girl at the till asked me for a certain amount. I told her that, she was 96 pence out. She was adamant: "The till can never be wrong."

I stood my ground and asked her to add it up again, she reluctantly acceded to my request, then looked at me peevishly saying – "Sorry". At least she accepted her 'mistake' and I accepted her apology. Why are we under the illusion that computer systems are infallible? After all programmes are written by humans! And to err is human.

People rely on their GPS' and end up in a ditch. They leave their brains in the cold storage or is it the freezer?

Despite the board of directors agreeing that – "there were serious doubts over the reliability of the software." Yet the Federation of SubPostmasters took no interest in the sub-postmasters' plight.

But really, every time some blunder happens, like: Brixton riots, Partygate, MPs' expenses, now the Post Office fiasco – Select committees and commissions take years, costing the taxpayers millions of pounds, to no end. Not many recommendations get implemented and then - things go quiet...!

Personally I believe – the matter is much more fishier, which no enquiries may uncover!

**Chaand is a writer, Producer and a broadcaster.**

**Broadcast on AIR & on BBC world service. She wrote, produced and**

**directed her 1st feature film- THROW OF A DICE. Her new screenplay is - Heritage Reclaimed-about theft of the KohiNoor diamond. She is busy with its pre-production. She is also busy editing her novel - Girls Will Laugh. She was also a Labour Councillor.**



## THE JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL (JLF 2024) DIARY

By Deepa Vanjani

"My life shifted in 1997, poetry returned, but I now approach words with a much greater respect for silences. Poetry and my love of dance is still part of my life but something much more fundamental has shifted."

How have the online platform and literary festivals impacted poetry? "Online exposure of poems has democratised the form and literary festivals have discovered that poetry is a potable form."

Where does the inspiration come from? "Women's voices, especially the spiritual mystic poets, for I have a thirst for hearing voices. It's not just women who are thirsty, the world is thirsty."



A lot of the inner working of the poet's voice is found in his/her writing. So I asked her about her poems, particularly the one titled 'Prayer', where she writes about the vigil ending - "when maps shall fade, nostalgia cease and the vigil end."

"This book was published in 2001, but I remember that I had this nascent understanding that shifts happen in quiet and undramatic ways in the hush of the bedroom in that hush that solitude dreams are born, things shift and it is when nostalgia ends. That is the moment when there is just the present, to inhabit the self, the moment when the vigil ends."

There is another poem which seems to have anger pent-up in it: "The halitosis of gender, my homogenised plivesos about as rustic as a mouth-freshened global village."

"Yes, it is an angry poem," she answered, "anger about voices that tell us how to belong, whether in our culture or outside, that give us prescription for belonging, recipes of belonging to a particular culture

or faith, I wanted to feel my own way of who I was."

### Do you think poetry is on the decline?

"There is an online explosion of poems, the form has been democratised on the other hand there is not particular attention to form." Literary festivals, she adds, in inviting poets have understood...". She talks about her recent work about women's voices in which she has translated from other languages as well, for she felt "thirsty for voices, and it's not just women who are thirsty, the world is thirsty for

more balanced narratives, there are gaping historical silences."

"No change is linear, it's always two steps forward, one step back."

### In conversation with Urvashi Butalia

Writer, academic, and founder of Zubaan, Urvashi Butalia talked about change in gender perspective, "I don't know if there is any major, substantial change, even if there was how do you measure it. I mean you can see some change- like I teach in public universities and I see both men and women students wanting to understand gender and work on it. You can see many more women in education. You see some good legislation. With the removal of Section 377 and the recognition of trans people, there is change but I cannot say it is radical across India. There is a political will to change but by and large the mind-sets and the hold of patriarchy hasn't gone away."

Change is happening but it is still way to go. Should that dishearten us? "There are some countries where women's status and position is further ahead than in India. We cannot allow the slowness of change to disappoint us because any change is never linear, it's always two steps forward, one step back, it is zigzag. In a country like ours it's to be understood as a mosaic."

We then talked about the kind of work her endeavours Kali and Zubaan have been undertaking. "Both", says Butalia, "were set up to publish works on and by women and to bring women's voices to public attention. They were not doing from the ground for women, it we were certainly publishing women's voices and trying to encourage more and more women to write in their own words".

### 3<sup>rd</sup> February:

"Acting and art and everything else went hand in hand from the time of play..."

### In conversation with Kelly Dorji

We began by talking about how modelling, acting, illustration, writing got into his life and he made a simple yet profound statement, "The origin was play." He recalled how during the growing-up years, his siblings and he "used to act and

entertain our parents every evening. We were conditioned in our outdoor play" building our own roles and playing outside, forced to be creative in our spare time because pre-electronic days."

He left his career as a soldier and also trained in Wushu or Kung Fu which the Chinese martial art form, and Muay Thai which, says Dorji, helps take injuries better. Reminiscing his acting days, he said that it was his friendship with actor Bobby Deol that brought him into films. He was young and he would perform his stunts, "almost died in a couple of stunts", fell off a helicopter "doing crazy things" and then decided not to go out of the way for anyone.



When I asked him about his modelling career he remarked, "I am an incidental model." His mother had it clear that he would do no modelling till he got a 1st class in his BA. So he began modelling in his second year on the sly.

Finally, and importantly we got to his book The Rainbow of Clouds which has his beautiful illustrations with some poems of his and brief explanations. Explaining the illustrations, he tells me how the silk scarf is an important symbol in Buddhism and how "peace is a generic reference in Buddhism." He refers to himself as being more spiritual which reflects well in the sentiment he voiced by the time the conversation was drawing to an end, "When your actions and livelihood show disregard towards life, your advancement in spirituality is also hampered."

**Take Aways from Some Sessions**

Gulzar saab in the Front Lawn of Hotel Clarks Amer, the JLF venue, stole hearts with his inimitable sense of humour, wittiness and the usual baritone voice rendition: वक्त हमेशा एक सा चलता है फिर घड़ियों के टाइम क्यों नहीं मिलते... (Time always moves the same, then why don't the clocks match the time...) Manju Kapur and Devika Rege interacted with Rachna Singh in Afterlives where Kapur recounted how "a book grows organically as I write" because she works on drafts of her novels year after year till "I have a novel that is authentic." A book, she says is never really finished as creating it so intimate.

Devika, whose book Quarter Life has been called the study of 21st century democratic consciousness, described the process of researching for the book, which took six years, drawing from the raw material of the world.



With Dr. Shekhar

Pawan Verma, who released the book 108 Portraits of Indian Heritage and Culture penned by art historian and curator Dr. Alka Pande, lauded it as being the "magnum opus of our cultural heritage." Pande, speaking about book, emphasised the fact our aesthetics are very different from the west. "We are different in image – making in India. Our art is internal/inner looking. That is why our sculptures have eyes closed in chintan and meditation." Speaking about the interconnectedness of art, she said "All Indian art is sacred."

"The business of poetry is dangerous. It is always mercurial, molten and unpredictable," said Arundhati Subramaniam during the release of the book Wild Women on the opening day of JLF. She mesmerised the audience by her reading, "I pestled my heart in love's mortar ..." adding that in Wild Women she talks of disembodied voices of women who

have an appetite and who have been ignored. Reclaiming Hope, a very interesting interactive session on mental health saw some eye-opening insights from renowned doctors Dr. Amit Sen and Dr. Shekhar Seshadri who also spoke their initiatives Children First and Samvad and Neha Kirpal. The need to pay attention to gut health and education that develops egalitarian human beings with an aesthetic sense were pivotal observations made during this interaction.

**A brief moment with Dr. Alka Pande:**

When I asked her how she amalgamated the many roles she balances she assigned it to her "passion for work". She opines, "delving into it is a therapy."

Tarun Tahiliani sent the audience into peals of laughter with his witty observations. In his session in Durbar Hall on the second day of the JLF, he recounted about the change that came about in the Indian fashion scenario with the onset of television. What he emphasised was the way western construct of fashion is different and Indian bodies are different, with two prominent observations: "Women have the ability to transform themselves and women who dress up do it for themselves" and "Social media has trapped people in perfection. It is twisting people's perception of themselves.



With Dr. Alka Pande

Mary Beard and Peter Frankopan in their discussion Twelve Caesars: Images of Power from the Ancient World to the Modern spoke of how Augustus and Caesar created the visual identity of power, of a leader through monarchical representation on coins and portraits.

"History is not a line of progression. We have to be careful that perspectives have to shift because there is not just one." Such and other insightful observations like those on how socio-economic conditions are conducive to reading, how power limits writing by limiting access to it in order to monopolise knowledge and so on, were

brought to the fore in the session The Sea in the Middle: The Mediterranean World which had Brian A. Catlos and Josephine Quinn in conversation with Sanjoy Roy.

**The release of Book of Gold:** The Kanchana Chitra Ramayana of Banaras had MAP Director Kamini Sahney in conversation with Philip Lutgendorf. The audience got a



lot to much upon-how king Udit Narayan of Banaras revived the Ramayana in a lavish project that took 18 years in the form of an illustrated folio and how Ramnagar and Ayodhya were thus brought together. "The Ramcharitmanas is told from four points of view, and not a single perspective that is a narrated which makes it a post-modern epic," shared Philip Lutgendorf, Professor Emeritus of Hindi and Modern Indian Studies at the University of Iowa.

There are many more sessions to talk about. But I would wrap-up here with the one almost everyone can identify with-reading comics. Word, Image, Text, the session had Co-CEO of Archies comics Nancy Silberkleit, Sarnath Banerjee, and Kelly Dorji in conversation with Somnath Batabyal. Banerjee shared how comics taught him to quieten himself by giving him a contemplative space. "Comics help me exercise muscle. They are compositional, musical," he added. Nancy, while speaking of the journey of Archies and how the comics have become diverse, stated something which strikes just the right note on which to end this piece:" Let our young people read. Reading is a wonderful gift."

**Dr Deepa Vanjani is presently heading the English Department of PMBG Science College, Indore. She has over 25 years of teaching experience at college level and is also a registered DAVV, Indore PHD guide.**

## Book Review

**TAINTED BY THE SAME COUNTERFEIT****Author: Candice Louisa Daquin****Publisher: Finishing Line Press, 2022; ISBN: 9871646629725****Rhapsodic treatise on the dualities of life and love****Reviewed by Anita Nahal**

Well-known poet and editor Candice Louisa Daquin's book fascinates us right from its very graphic jacket. Readers are encouraged to take a pause and observe the essence of this powerful, heart-touching, authentic, realist, and artistic poetry collection through the narrative the jacket is trying to portray. One cannot help but think of Salvador Dali's painting *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening* which he painted in 1944. Influenced by Sigmund Freud, he believed that dreams and imagination were pivotal rather than peripheral to human thought. What conjures up in our brain while we jostle between dream and reality is a tiny, sometimes unrealized space wherein folks attempt an exploration of their assumptions and beliefs and draw conclusions on big and small existentialist issues.

On Daquin's jacket, the panther with a wide-open mouth could either be releasing or preparing to swallow a beautiful, nude young woman in a striking (perhaps ballet) dance pose. The nakedness of the woman and the sharp teeth of the panther invite the reader into a raw and earthy poetic experience, suggesting what could be scary, disturbing, or violent sexual or non-sexual connotations, especially since arrows pierce through the panther's neck and head, and big hearts, birds in flight, roses, and even a key and lock embedded in a woman's hand on the back of the jacket are all in red. The intended meaning could be to shock folks from complacency or interject surrealist visualization. The readers can speculate and decide for themselves. For me, the woman's dancer pose, literally in flight from the panther's mouth, speaks of joy, upliftment, freedom, uninhibitedness, and sheer love and respect for the self and, in turn, for others. In a universalist symbolic manner, Daquin, through her poetry and jacket, underscores justice and self-realization for all.

Besides the riveting jacket, the title of the book, *Tainted by the same Counterfeit*, is very

ingenuous for a book that is a rhapsodic treatise on the dualities of life, wherein being "tainted" regardless of a given set of

people or circumstances in one's life is clearly etched. There is no question about that. There are no doubts

about being tainted because almost all humans are tainted. No one is perfect. The question that may arise is: who and how much?

The choice of the jacket design, the title, and the poetry in the book all seem reflective of the good, bad, and evil that most homo sapiens ascribe to and actualize. Daquin's poetry alludes to a world where anyone could be tainted by choice, circumstances, and happenstance, the ramifications of which could be smooth, drastic, or anything in between. Being tainted or tainting another by

countless forms of counterfeit (real, psychological, financial, or imagined, etc.) is the emphatic message of Daquin's book. There's a restlessness that most of us feel routinely as we

move through our lives, which seeps through each poem by Daquin. A master wordsmith, she seems to be moving along with her words, creating a magic spell that is set in motion with the very first lines of the very first poem:

*Somewhere in a filing room with corrugated cardboard and dried blood*

*her skirt of 2006 is folded by a uniformed man who isn't used to folding women's clothes.*

*She will not be wearing again it's evident of a crime committed...*

(*The memory of clothes*, p. 1)

Be it in the kitchen, "Two chairs/ pull towards each other..." (*La politique de la chase vide*, p. 3), or in the open fields, "...legs scratched by dead corn; the sky looks enormous/ in a rush of past and future..." (*The rule curve*, p. 5), or in thoughts, emotions, actions, or the realities of life, such as a girl menstruating, Daquin

urges us to observe and explore closely humanity's dyads and dualisms.

*Too soon  
the child menstruates  
bleeding away her right to play  
she is captured behind glass doors  
starved and polished*



*until catching eye of man  
old enough to have given her life... (Hymen, p. 13)*

The inherent dimness of progressing through the meandered obscurities and absurdities of living, like a caravan lost in a desert, thirsty and willing to fight to find water, is the contradiction towards which Daquin attempts to draw us. It isn't that there is no joy or peace in life, yet it is rimmed with salt that might tickle sometimes, like a spicy margarita's salt-rimmed glass, and sometimes pinch a great deal when sprinkled on an open wound. A recent song, *Only love Can hurt Like this* by Paloma Faith, comes to mind as I continue reading Daquin's poems, as most of them are about love—a love that is unrequited, confused, tormented, and sometimes satiated. A love that receives, gives, loses, prevents, pleases, and is consumed by its own motif, emotionally and physically. Love poems by John Keats, Anne Bronte, and William Shakespeare come to mind.

The second element that stands out in this beautifully crafted book is gendered nuances and veracity. Womanhood, sisterhood, and LGBTQIA+ are some of the focus points for Daquin. In all, the celebration of diversity emerges through a distinct semantics about equity challenges that persist despite the millions of dollars spent educating girls and on DEI programs. And therefore, Daquin appears as a shining mentor, encouraging all to follow their path, their hearts, and be supportive of each other, regardless of their gender identification. This very personal, confessional collection is a rare clarion call to let people be, let them exist, without impinging any kind of preconceived collateral damage on their romantic or self-identification choices. It's the salutation to the "self" that Daquin's poetry heralds. To give one example:

*Oh women  
slow down  
disease chases those who survive by drowning  
stop and listen to the beat of your heart  
far from competitive playground.*

*teach your daughters to dream  
not weight loss and prom dresses  
nor crabs in a bucket, pinching others back  
that we emerged from clay  
forging and set, with our tender strength  
each other free. (That we were clay, p. 17)*

This brings me to my third and final point for the purposes of this review: that the parity Daquin seeks for all is revealed the most in this collection through poems on love, on longing, on need, and on establishing some reasonable semblance of normalcy. There is a sense of dystopian misery in failed love that seeks help for a return to better times. In the poem *Intimidation* (p. 24), Daquin says at the end, "we purchase pieces of costume/rev up the game/dinner eats the diner/let's turn form on its head/and dance barefoot, deft/learned in bonded war/with ourselves." Daquin also talks about the need for love's nourishment.

*I am a soul needing  
nourishment  
it does  
not come in usual  
form  
used to  
chain and ball. (Nourishment, pp. 25-26)*

And it's very refreshing to find a poet in contemporary, acutely bullying times, quite openly accepting that to be helped is not a sign of weakness, but rather a strength of character to take the first step towards healing from some kind of loss and trauma.

*You found me on the edge of the world  
where only tumbleweed and lost directions fell  
spilling into chasm, rendering fallow  
land uninhabited by those striving to untender yen  
you gathered me into your warmth... (Crocus of their heart, p. 28)*

Successful, satisfying, and gratifying love—even one that hurts—is Daquin's *raison d'être* in this collection. It's, in fact, the most heartening and realistic quality of this winsome collection. I couldn't help but remember Rihanna's song, *The Way you Lie* (2010). We all seek love, and few get it, though the yearning remains till we die, and some may endure pain to get and retain what we believe might be love, not lust. One cannot forget, for example, Princess Diana's quest for true love. And judging is not in the realm of poets and their outpourings. The last poem in the book, *The unseen world*, charmingly captures this emotion, leaving the reader pleased that in this abnormal, chaotic, war-strewn world, there is some prospect for humans to feel loved, cared for, wanted, and safe.

*If I could starve for want of you, I believe I would. For no  
moment passes with satisfaction, unless in some way, you exist  
on its marble periphery*

*My love; your eyes bewitch my life blood, kindling the charred  
rejoinder of hope, a poppet to your sorcery, emerging deep  
forest*

*When dying comes for me, it'll be your face I kiss, feverish and  
familiar, your preternatural smile haunting my passage, faithful  
ghost, mine*

*In this place. In each other. A languid, yawning soft space  
between, the unseen world.*

Daquin employs a variety of poetic forms: free verse, short stanzas, long stanzas, some non-rhymed couplets, and some poems having a combination of single lines and stanzas. To me, this suggests poetic liberty to express itself in the manner the poet chooses. There is no artificial attachment to any form, which is clearly reflected in Daquin's choice of words, poetry topics, and her attempt to draw readers to the disparities that exist, especially in love.

On each page of the book, a butterfly greets us, symbolizing freedom, rebirth, faith, and transformation. Daquin's exquisite collection is the epitome of a renaissance that most of us seek to emerge from scathed yet still trudging forward from each failure. That's the hallmark of brave people, and Daquin's collection is a nod to gallantry and survival in an unequal, selfish, and cruel yet prospectively utopian world.

**Two-time Pushcart Prize-nominated (22,23), and Tagore literary prize finalist 2023, Anita Nahal is a writer and academic. More on her at, [www.anitanahal.com](http://www.anitanahal.com)**



## Short story

## Peanut Seller

by Subhash Chandra

The chill pierced the bones. Despite the two layers of woollens, an occasional shiver coursed through me. After alighting from a bus, I was walking the one-kilometre almost deserted stretch with no shops or houses on either side except for a bank a little way away from the road.

Peanut sellers mushroom all over Delhi with the slightest nip in the air. How come I had not noticed him all these days, though the cold and mist had settled on Delhi about a fortnight ago? But then I am not very observant. Generally, I am lost in memories -- mostly negative -- of hurts, betrayals, and insults, both real and imaginary.

A small heap of peanuts with a tiny smouldering clay handi half buried in the crest to keep the nuts warm. Nothing could be more inviting!

But strangely enough, a figure, covered with a chaadar (sheet) -- looking more like a bale -- was sitting with his back to his wares, hunching forward a little.

"Hello," I said.

No response.

"Can you hear me?"

Silence.

I clapped hard and a voice issued from the bundle, "You'll have to wait."

"Why?" I asked, a tad brusquely.

"I'm having lunch."

"Oh, how long will it take your Highness to finish your lunch?" I asked, irritated.

Silence.

I picked up a peanut for munching.

"That is not fair, Sir," the voice chided me.

If it hadn't been broad daylight, I might have been spooked.

I turned to move on but lingered. My classes were to start after an hour. The situation I was in was vexing but fascinating!

Then the bundle transformed into a young boy not more than twelve. He meticulously rinsed his mouth, washed his hands, and dried them on a piece of cloth.

"Haan, Saab," he asked sitting down cross-legged. His eyes were large and lively, hair oiled and combed, a knotted tuft at the back of his head, and a small tilak on his forehead.

"A hundred grams, please."

He weighed the stuff, put it into a small paper bag, and then added one more peanut to it.

"Why one more?"

"Just in case the breeze tilted the balance forward."

I had come across many who willfully underweighed. I felt like chatting him up for a while,

and as I sat on my haunches, he gave me his chowki (a low wooden stool).

"Arre, I don't need it."

"It's all right, Saab."

"When you refuse to serve customers," I asked conversationally, "while lunching don't you lose money?"

After a short pause, he put his index finger on his forehead, and said, "I will get what is written here. No more, no less."

I looked at my watch -- half an hour left for the class -- and got up. I had to revise the lectures I was going to deliver that day.

"Namaste, Saab," he said.

The next day I again stopped and conversed with him while savouring the hot nuts.

"Do you go to school?"

"Yes... To a government school."

"You're not attending classes these days?"

"The boys' shift starts in the afternoon."

"Which class are you in?"

"Seventh."

"Do you like studies?"

"Yes."

"Where do you live?"

"Srinivaspuri ... in a temple."

"Eh?"

"My father is a Pujari."

I stopped by the next day and the next ... it became a routine. One day he asked me, "Your office starts in the afternoon?"

"I am teaching in a college."

He got up with alacrity, smoothed his kurta, and touched my feet with both hands.

"Bless me, Sir."

"What is your aspiration?"

"To become a professor. Like you."

#

Another day.

"Sir, my English is weak. Can you teach me?"

That was the subject. I taught at college. He was a bright and diligent child and would always complete the homework I assigned to him. He showed remarkable progress in just a month. And he'd always clarify his doubts.

And then I had to go to the All-India English Teachers' Conference in Nagpur for five days.

#

Today he was not there. I did not find him in the next day few days, either. Inquiries at the bus stop elicited no information. I grew restless and finally, on a Sunday evening, I went to the Srinivaspuri temple.

The Pujari motioned me to sit down on a mat; he was making preparations for the evening Aarti.

After he finished Aarti, he gave me prasaad, and sat in front of me.

"Yes, Shriman."

I want to meet Shaswat. His face had an expression that was a mix of sadness and a calm resignation. He looked vacantly into space, and said, "He has gone."

"Where?" I blurted out reflexively.

He pointed to Lord Vishnu's idol. A stunned, pained silence sprawled between us.

I wanted to but did not dare ask how it happened. However, Pujari ji continued, "It was a Sunday and he had set up the shop early in the morning. Generally, he wound up at dusk. But that day, it suddenly got cloudy, and dark and colder in the evening. The street lights had not yet been switched on. Perhaps, he was getting many customers."

After a pause, he said, "A big car swerved off the road."

A girl of about fifteen brought a cup of tea. She was a replica of her brother. After she went back into the room, he said, "Shaswat always worried about his sister's marriage and wanted to save up as much as possible. In summer, he sold ice cream."

#

I wondered how Pujari ji got to know the details. Again, he said, "A staff at the bank buying peanuts noticed the drunk demon and jumped aside in the nick of time."

Did his spiritual power make him divine the questions in my mind?

"It is so tragic ... I am so sorry!!" I heard myself speak aloud.

Pujari ji went into a trance, as it were, and uttered words from The Gita

*Weapons cannot shred the soul, nor can fire burn it. Water cannot wet it, nor can the wind dry it.*



**Dr. Subhash Chandra is a former Associate Professor of English at the University of Delhi. He has published three collections of short stories, viz., *Not Just Another Story*,**

***Beyond the Canopy of Icicles, and A Game of Dice, and more than eighty short stories in Indian and foreign journals, and Guest Edited College Fiction Section of MUSE India. He is on the International Advisory Board of Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific (Australia) and the Editorial Board of induswomanwriting.com***



## IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

### An Ekphrastic Poem

by Cyril Dabydeen

He wavered, he kept thinking--  
imagining, Dr Aziz did, hoping to meet  
his wife somewhere after, and he began  
to love her only after being married, now  
thinking with an English sentiment...  
being a medical doctor.

He'd lost the sensuous feeling gradually,  
for his relatives had chosen her to be  
his wife; but, you see, the feeling would  
have disappeared after a while in  
nature's way; and being himself only,  
in the Muslim manner.

She became a mother to his son--  
and in giving him a second son she'd died;  
Aziz realized what he had lost, and no  
woman could ever take her place; now  
what is the uniqueness of love anyway?  
*Could Miss Quested tell?*  
*Mrs Moore...let her be!*

He amused himself thinking about this;  
she was gone, and there was no one  
really like his wife; over time he began  
to feel she'd sent all the beauty and joy  
of the world into Paradise! Would he  
meet her again beyond the grave?

Belief in the life to come, almost like  
Christian epiphany, which paled to a hope,  
then reappeared in a dozen heart-beats:  
the corpuscles in his blood deciding  
which opinion he should hold long--  
as nothing ever strayed, nothing passed  
that didn't return, the circulation being  
ceaseless, it kept him young, for he truly  
mourned his wife, her *selfdom*.

Ah, let Mrs Moore be her own self  
--an echo divine, and oh, let it  
be a declaration, about where we go  
from here, not to the Marabar caves  
again, you see. Aziz will keep asking with  
tremor in his veins; with Professor Godbole  
saying "Come, come," in his Brahmin's way!

*Adapted from E.M. Forster's  
A Passage to India.*

### LEAVING

I kiss you my chair, table,  
typewriter, I kiss you all;  
I take offence at this leaving,  
a feeling bursting in my heart  
with words alone I cannot tell.

Artefacts, signs of creativity--  
compelling moments really  
sharing parts of myself &  
asking you to forgive me  
for not giving of my best.

Momentum of blood & bone,  
a bleeding heart in my  
archive of feelings with  
wood & plaster I bring to you,  
the years' testament only.

Cyril Dabydeen is a recent prize winner in the International Short Story in English Conference and the Strands International Flash Fiction contest. His stories have appeared in numerous literary magazines, e.g. *Prairie Schooner* and *World Literature Today/USA*. His short fiction books include *My Undiscovered Country*, *Play a Song Somebody*, *My Brahmin Days*, and *North of the Equator*. He is Ottawa Poet Laureate Emeritus.

## Anjana's Ramblings

### Going Back

I hesitate at the gate.

Maybe this was not such a good idea after all. It was all exactly the same but completely different. Even the name of the house. *Craven Lodge* was now the *Brahma Sagar*, and for a moment I thought I was at the wrong house. But no, this was it. My childhood. It was here. Right here at this very spot, where I had waited for the school bus over four decades ago.

The gate hadn't been repaired, it still creaked in an eerie sing-song way as he pushed it open. I remembered teasing my sister about the ghost of a young boy swinging on the gate, one night as we returned from a movie. She had screamed and run up the drive into the house, where my mother stood waiting to tell me off. I looked up the drive now, expecting a 14-yr old gangly girl with braces and thick glasses, running in. But no parents, no siblings, no past in sight.

He pulled me along, tugging at my hand as if I were a Labrador on a lead reluctant to walk any further. 'What's wrong? Aren't you excited?' I had been. Up until 5 minutes ago. So excited. This was my first trip into the past, and we had planned it all so meticulously for months now. Sitting in Glasgow, I had been almost feverish with the anticipation of visiting this house. But my boots now seemed to have welded themselves to the ground, and a large lump of nameless emotion had lodged itself in my throat.

'Come on,' he repeated. 'I've heard so much about your precious *Craven Lodge*, for thirty-five years now. From all of you. What's wrong now?'

How could he possibly understand? He who was born and raised in the same small town where he went to university. When people asked him where he was from, he knew what to say.

Whereas I floundered at that question, never having lived anywhere for more than a year or two. Even today, as I try to root myself into our 'forever home,' I am aware of the youth of these roots. The only thing I know about permanence, is how impermanent it is. Which possibly explained my reluctance to go any further up the drive. What if it slapped me on my face?

This house was the only one embedded in my heart. Where my childhood was replaced by emerging young adulthood. Where I realised, I was a girl, and replaced my riding breeches with the occasional skirt. Where I began to grow my nails and hair and stole my mother's lipsticks. Where boys replaced horses. Up ahead was the stone at the bottom of the lawn, overlooking the golf course and the gymkhana club. Where I sat and stared at my biology notes, whilst looking out for the boy on the motorbike who rode up the hill.

The tug at my arm again, bringing me back to the moment, and I allowed myself to be dragged up the drive. A curious trio, man, woman, and her seventeen-year-old self.

Suddenly it was there. Rambling cottage in enchanting disrepair. He watched me watch my younger self run up. I started to follow, breathe in, and swallow the past. Then reach up to the doorbell at last.

### One World

The first Sanskrit phrase we were made to memorise in school was Vasudeva Kutumbakam.

It translates roughly to 'The World is One Family.'

Maybe Lennon's Imagine was born from this, who knows?

I found my Kutumba, my tribe, my community last Saturday.

When our street in Newton Mearns, Glasgow became one family.

Waking up to a white world, I had dragged myself wearily into jacket & hat, woollies & wellies, and begun to shovel the snow from my drive.

Before long, I realised Doug across the road was doing the same. Emma and Greg had finished theirs and had started on the footpaths outside. Morgan, next door, paused for a break as Maggie brought him a cup of tea. And one for me. Which not only warmed my poor cold hands, but also my lonely heart.

Before we knew what was happening, there were about twelve of us, shovelling, chatting, laughing, belonging to the same universe. And cursing my husband who had texted through it all to say it was 28 degrees where he was in Calcutta, India.

There was a passer-by, out with his dog, who stopped to chat, and then proceeded to brush the snow off my car. Apparently, I was not doing it right.

I did not know him. And he did not realise he was trespassing.

For those two wonderous hours, there were no boundaries, or differences.

The white stuff had erased it all.

We were just people under one roof.

Vasudeva Kutumbakam.



**In March 2022, she won the Dorothy Dunbar Rosebowl, the First Prize for Poetry for the Scottish Association of Writers. Anjana lives in Scotland and spends as much time as she can in Calcutta.' She is also currently serving as the secretary of Scottish Association of Writers (SAW)**

## Book Review

## When the Rivers of the Vedas Flow

By Sudha Rai

Review of *Nadistuti* by Lakshmi Kannan. Hardbound Authorspress, 2024.

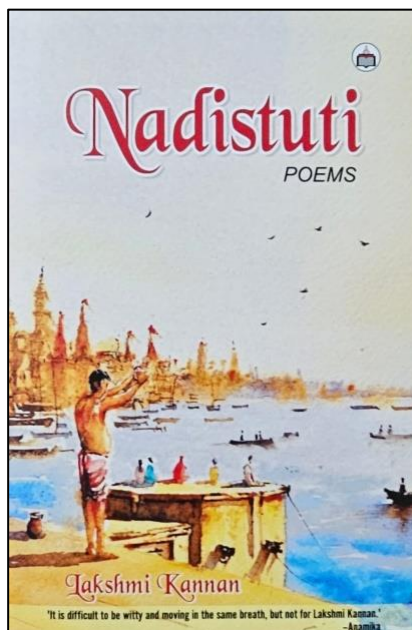
Rs 495/- ISBN 978-93-5529-939-0

Poet, novelist, short story writer, translator and critic, Dr. Lakshmi Kannan, stands out with distinction as a major Indian writer in English. *Nadistuti*, *Poems* (Authorspress, 2024) and *Guilt Trip and Other Stories* (Niyogi Books 2023) are her latest publications. Her other books include *Sipping the Jasmine Moon*, *Poems* (2019) and *The Glass Bead Curtain* (Vitasta 2020, 2016).

In *Nadistuti*, her fifth volume of poems, developed intertextually, Kannan carries forward 'Nadistuti,' the 75<sup>th</sup> hymn of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mandala of the *Rig Veda*, a hymn from 'Nadistuti Sukta,' a set of verses recited in praise of the rivers considered important for the geographic construction of the Vedic civilization - *Narmade, Sindhu, Kaveri, Godavari, Sarasvati, Gange*, and *Yamuna*. The volume brings home in five sections - 'Naman,' 'Nadistuti,' 'Chamundi,' 'Mandala' and 'Fireside,' a rare and brilliant assemblage of Kannan's recent poems, that articulate the symbiotic relationship between riverines and the feminine.

Covid-19 swept away innumerable human lives. In the section 'Naman,' dramatizing "the big scourge," Kannan pays homage to departed fellow poets, and others. In "Meditative Mother" the persona comments: "Around her, / the nation screamed for 'Oxygen!'/ Perhaps for the first time, people realized/they had taken it for granted,/ like a mother's presence." In the poignant "Vasundhara's Last Journey," the poet's swivels effortlessly between points of view; the observing consciousness of Vasundhara, as she is taken out "on her last journey," and simultaneously, third person perspectives recording the empathy of Vasundhara's neighbourhood. The fifteen poems of 'Nadistuti,' evoke roots of rituals and legends, rendering luminous Ganga's banks in "Ganga, Her Many Faces," and in "Golden-hued in Godavari," Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's dance on the banks of the river Godavari. The parable-like "Said the Ocean," illustrates Kannan's self-reflexive irony as the Ocean (representing the Infinite), provokes the River (the persona of the poet), "But tell me, it seems you write more about rivers?" In the title poem 'Nadistuti,' Kannan deftly brings together a middle-class man's anxiety regarding the stored water resources in buckets available for his bath, juxtaposed with his fervor to invoke the sacred rivers while bathing. His relief and pleasure when the

blessed flow of tap water lasts the duration of his bath, illustrates the poet's humanitarian concern for those less privileged.



Kannan picks up one of her strongest themes in the third section 'Chamundi,' unraveling the intricacies of an existence bounded by patriarchal attitudes, myths and rituals for girls, wives, and mothers. The poet's unapologetic denunciation of a blatantly privileging social system for the male comes through in "Hemavati": "Infant girls, birthed by apologetic mothers/ received stoically, a half-hearted welcome. Baby boys ushered celebrations with a feast." "Anger Becomes Her," lays emphasis on "cathartic anger," rather than tears. The poem "Snake Woman," illustrates an elaborately worked out dream semiotics. Kannan narrated (in my public 'Conversation' with her on *Nadistuti*, at Rajasthan International Centre, Jaipur

organized by Rajul Bhargava *VOICES* with UEM, Jaipur, 31/01/24), the impositions on her own mother to conceive a male child, through oppressive and painfully austere rituals of Nagapuje. Kalis and Chamundis subverting masculine control over their minds and bodies must continue to rise.

Ridiculing control over women's body language, with in-built humour and message, Kannan sends rejoinders to patriarchy through metaphors of swinging and swiveling, in "Swivel Stool." It is a delight to see the poet's memorable character, Muniyakka, the rural household help from the village Kokkina Halli, resurfacing in "Muniyakka in Maximum City," using native Kannada "Kettu pichachi" and "Olle pichachi" and the exclamatory Hindi "Arre"! Rural India wins "hands-down" here over "bustling Bangaloreans" with intentional satire directed at cosmopolitanism.

The fourth section "Mandala" develops themes of time and timelessness, permanence and impermanence, through breathtaking beauty of imagery. "Kolam" (Tamil for 'rangoli'), focuses on women making street rangolis: "...white dots of rice powder rain down/like bright stars on the dark earth." In "Jiva and Isvara," Kannan visits sensuously, the Upanishadic explanation of the mutuality of Jivatma and Paramatma.

In 'Fireside,' bridging personas and her own self, distilling impressions, examining concepts of individuality and relationship, Kannan expresses deep-felt gratitude in intimate, meditative, autobiographical poems on her family. A special theme in this section, resonates real mothers and mother Kaveri. Three poems address the binding thread between mother and daughter. In "A Dialogue (Amma)," the young Kannan poses questions to her mother Saradambal, a reputed painter in her times. Her mother's answers demystify artistic creation, leading to the poet's discovery of her own creativity in writing. In "Lost and Found," the metallic box containing oddments and treasures (that young Kannan earlier lost), sincerely found and 'saved' by Kannan's mother, addresses the importance of childhood, especially for the gendered girl child. For child brides, as in the case of Kannan's mother, childhood is a distant dream. In "It Took a Lot of Growing Up," Kannan posits through hindsight her admiration for her "sorted" mother. In "A

Room of One's Own (Sridhar)" the woman writer who has at last acquired a room, brilliantly resonates Virginia Woolf's essay, relishing her cozy independent space: "The walls of my room/ dissolve to let the rivers flow in for my poems..."

*Nadistuti* weaves through river symbolism, two separable poetic voices. The first reverberates through characterizations and pithy dialogues, the poet's resounding roar for women's rights. The second, a declared autobiographical voice, submits to the grand mandalas of nature, time, experience, and eternity. The humility in attitude in "Picchai" (Tamil word for alms given with blessings): "I had only asked with my palms folded,/ *bhavathi bhikshaam dehi.*/ The *picchai* you gave spills over," is profound.

Kannan traces with reverence, the historical, geographical and mythical antecedents of India's rivers, underscoring their civilizational significance, as also the present need to evaluate human activity through an ecological consciousness. The re-emergence of rivers as renewed critical signifiers in fresh social and feminist contexts, secured in narrative and rhythmic diversity, makes *Nadistuti* a touching and inspiring work.

**Sudha Rai is former Professor and Head, Department of English, and Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. She has been awarded several prestigious national and international research fellowships such as the Senior Fellowship of the Australia-India**

**Council; Visiting Research Professor at Paul Valery University, Montpellier III, France; and Senior Research Fellowship of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.**



She is the author of the works *V.S. Naipaul: A Study in Expatriate Sensibility; Homeless by Choice: Naipaul, Jhabvala, Rushdie and India;* and co-editor of *Films and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema.*

## SAROJINI CHATTOPADHYAY NAIDU & SOME OTHER INDIANS IN THE UK

### Part - 2

by Kusum Pant Joshi

***Sarojini Chattopadhyay Naidu (1879- 1949), visited Britain thrice between 1895 and 1920. Though India was then a British colony and its ruling classes were notorious for their racism and discriminatory attitude, Sarojini was the first Indian poetess, after Torulata Dutt (1856-1877), to be hailed for her English poetry by English poets and critics. She was also welcomed by Suffragists and covered widely in English papers.***

Sarojini was again in the UK between 1912 to 1914 when war clouds were gathering on the European horizon. Once again, British newspapers talked about her literary activities. The 31 October, 1912 issue of the 'Pall Mall Gazette, Illustrated Supplement' carried a full-length column on her new book: 'The Bird of Time' (1912) with a highly positive Introduction by Edmond Gosse. An article titled: "The Songs of a Dreamer" also carried a photograph of Sarojini. After highlighting the outstanding features and originality of her poetry, the English critic had ended his review on a highly positive note that "... its merit is incontestable and its charm is all its own."

From English newspapers, it is also clear that Sarojini Naidu's activities had not remained confined to the realm of poetry. An in-depth article titled: 'MRS SAROJINI NAIDU - Indian Poetess and Leader of the Women's Movement' appeared in 'The Westminster Gazette' on 22 November, 1913. It began as follows: "Mrs Sarojini Naidu BA, whom Mr Edmund Gosse describes as 'the most brilliant, the most original, as well as the most correct, of all the natives of Hindustan who have written in English, and who is now in England has been interviewed by a representative of 'The Westminster Gazette'. Mrs Naidu who is small in stature and frail-looking in appearance, is a typically dainty and sweet-tempered

woman of the East. She is a student, an orator, and a poetess."

Then, turning to the purpose of her present visit the article stressed that: "The object of the lady's visit to this country is twofold: to work among the Hindus and Mohammedan students that they may themselves work together in harmony for the good of their Motherland; and to study the social questions of the day."

It went on to mention her views on the position of Indian women and stressed that they had a respected position in society and according to ancient Indian traditions were the 'ardhanginis' (the other half of men). When asked about female education, she had said that their education should not be based on foreign ideas but on the country's own traditional values. During this visit, English newspapers had also highlighted occasions when both British and Indians resident in the UK, had joined to honour her. A special newspaper item of mid-November 1913 titled "Dinner to Mrs Sarojini Naidu: An English and Indian Tribute," reported as follows: "A remarkable company of men and women of distinction in the world of literature and affairs assembled at the Cecil on Friday evening ... Mr. W.B. Yeats presided, and among those present were Princess Sophia Dhuleep Singh [daughter

of Maharaja Dalip Singh of the Punjab], Sir Frederick and Lady Pollock, Sir Krishna Gupta [ICS], Mrs Alice Meynell [British writer, critic, poet and suffragist], Mr and Mrs Ernest Rhys [British writer, best known for founding the Everyman's Library series], Mr W. Heinemann [Publisher, bookseller and novelist], Mr Ezra Pound [expatriate American poet and critic], Mr Robert Ross [British journalist, art critic and art dealer, known for his relationship with Oscar Wilde], ... Mr Harold Munro [English poet and proprietor of London's Poetry Bookshop], Mr T. Strange Monro, Mr and Mrs Newton Knight, Miss Evelyn Underhill, Mr Syed Wazir Hasan, Mr S.K. Ratcliffe, Mr Edwin R. Bevan, Mrs P.L. Roy, Mr B. Dube, Mrs Leila Mukherjee, Mr Syud Hossain, Mohammad Ali, Mr Loken Palit, Dr. J.N. Mehta, Mr R.S. Bajpai and other Indian ladies and gentlemen. The company numbered about one hundred and twenty to do honour to Mrs Sarojini Naidu."

Another feather was added to her cap when she was honoured by being made a Member of the Royal Society of Literature.

Her third trip to the UK was from 1920-1921. Once again she was in the news with English newspapers highlighting her conspicuous participation in diverse activities. 'The Vote' of 16 January 1920 reported that she had been invited to speak in various branches of the

Women's Freedom League (WFL) in the UK and in many European countries on the Feminist Movement generally and on votes for Indian women.

In an article captioned: "Poetess as a Prophet" the 'The Daily News' of 22 May, 1920 expanded on how she and some other women had addressed the International Women's Suffrage Movement at London's Kingsway Hall.

In 1920, for the first Sarojini shot into prominence for her strong disapproval of the way the British administration in India had reacted and had handled the Punjab during and after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy of 13th April 1919.

Besides surrendering the Kaiser i Hind Medal awarded to her by the British in the mid-1920, she gave a powerful speech in a mass meeting held in London. A report on the meeting ran as follows:

"Expectation was on every face as Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, poet and politician, rose to speak. It would be presumptuous, perhaps, to remark that Mrs. Naidu is a personality, yet such she obviously was—and striking, in her black, silver-embroidered sari. In a voice vibrating with emotion ... she proposed the recall of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, and the impeachment of the ex-Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer.

"It was with the deepest regret she said that she did this because of the personal associations she had had with the people against whom she was going to speak. Both were friends of hers from whom at various times she had received personal kindnesses. But when grave matters of life and death and fundamental principles were at stake she could not afford to mix up and confuse personal with world-wide issues.

"As the only Indian speaker that night she had to speak in the name of her martyred India. It was possible for her that day to sing a Hymn of Hate, it was possible for her to speak of revenge and retribution, but she would only speak of reparation and regeneration—'reparation for us,' she added, 'regeneration for you.'

'My outstanding impression in the debate in the House of Commons on Thursday,' she continued, 'was an impression of the tragic irony of a legislature based on an unequal mixture of ignorance and insolence in regard to Indian affairs. From the Ministers of the Crown downwards, to those who set up a claim to be friends of India, not one single Member of Parliament had taken the trouble to acquaint himself with the findings of the National

Congress Committee, in which are detailed page after page the agony and shame to which my brothers of the Punjab, my sisters and their children, were subjected.'

"Mrs. Naidu was proceeding to describe how her sisters of the Punjab had been stripped naked, flogged and outraged, when she was interrupted by a man in the audience. 'Your psychology may differ,' she replied, 'your standards of insult may differ, your standards of modesty may differ. I do not know, being only an Indian, what the standard and the psychology of morality and modesty is in Europe; but in India, forcibly to remove the veil from the face of an Indian woman is equal to desecrating the veil of a consecrated nun. Can anyone deny that this outrage at least was committed, if no others? But some of these outrages are too terrible for me to speak aloud to you. At least still retain enough of the modesty and reticence which are the valuable gifts of the women of my race as to be unable to unfold their shame before you.'

'To-day,' she proceeded, 'we stand at the parting of the ways. It is for you to choose whether our ways shall lie together in the future or whether we shall say, in bitterness, farewell.

'I speak in the name of my Nation. Choose well, and, like comrades, hand-in-hand let us make that pilgrimage to the common goal of Self-realisation.

'I appeal to you to make this choice to-day, whether men like the Viceroy by his weakness, Sir Michael O'Dwyer by his merciless strength, and General Dyer by his panic-stricken brutality shall be your ambassadors and symbols in my country, or whether you will say halt to injustice, halt to tyranny and demand that freedom for India for which you fought, for which you gave your sons, for which to-day in your darkened homes the widows sit mourning the gift of their beloved at the altars of English liberty.

'In making your choice whether India is to be lost to England for ever or won to her for all time in equal friendship and not in dependence, remember the little pair of blood-stained shoes which were picked up from the hand of a soldier in the field of Jallianwallah, which stands in India to-day as sacred a relic of martyrdom as any piece of wood unnailed from the cross of your crucified Christ. Choose to-day and give me the message to carry back to the women of my nation.' (Prolonged applause.)

The question that arises now is: How could a woman of Indian origin receive so much importance and attention from members of

the ruling class notorious for their generally dismissive and negative attitude towards India and everything Indian?

The answers lie in a number of factors and forces. First of all, despite the infamous air of superiority of members of the British ruling class during the British Raj, the British people never constituted a group united by their general condemnation and negative perceptions about India and its people. Consequently, there always were some individuals and groups within British society, who had a humane and open attitude and it was fortunate that Sarojini happened to meet two such open-minded British literary figures – Gosse and Symons.

Secondly, a study of the changing British attitude towards other cultures and people shows that Sarojini Naidu's second visit to the UK in the first decade of the 20th century, coincided with a period when British artists, writers and literary figures had begun to exhibit a conspicuous tendency to be receptive of other cultures and people.

Focusing on this trend, saying that it began in 1910 and linking it with Postimpressionism in the arts, Mary M. Lago in her selection of letters exchanged between eminent British artist, William Rothenstein, and Indian poet and Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, 'Imperfect Encounters' writes: "Rothenstein was not the only English artist who felt restless in those years. Virginia Woolf observed later that "in or about December 1910 human character changed."

A conspicuous long-term positive result of this novel trend in Britain was the coming together of a group of prominent British artists and literary figures. After deciding to stand up for the defence of Indian culture and art, they wrote and signed a strong letter of protest to the Editor of 'The London Times' on 28 February 1910.

In this historic Letter to the Editor, they highlighted a trend noticeable among some important British officials in the field of art to openly denigrate Indian art and literature and their refusal to see any artistic merit in Indian works of art and literature. They also declared that India had a long and glorious tradition of fine art.

The signatories reads like a list of celebrities from the world of art and culture in Britain. Among their leaders was a group of professors and accomplished artists, writers led by William Rothenstein, writer scientist, art critic and philosopher. Another solid outcome of this positive trend was that signatories of the letter to 'The London Times' decided to establish a

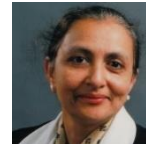
new organisation in London in March 1910. This was The India Society. Its sole aim was to correct the warped western perception of India and promote Indian art and literature through talks, publications and a journal. One of the direct outcomes of their concerted efforts was the publication of Tagore’s mystical poem, the ‘Gitanjali’ in 1912.

The India Society and Rothenstein and his friends were also behind the warm welcome accorded to Rabindranath Tagore when he visited Britain in 1912. In addition, they played an active role in the selection of Tagore for the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature for his ‘Gitanjali’ in 1913. It is now more than a hundred years that a warm welcome was given in Britain not only to Sarojini Naidu and

Rabindranath Tagore in the early 1900s but also to Swami Vivekananda a little earlier. This symbolised the awakening of Britain and the west to the priceless gems in the fields of philosophy and wisdom that India could offer to the world.

Their visits were also marked with admissions by eminent western thinkers of the early 20th century such as Romain Rolland and Ananda Coomaraswamy, that after chasing materialism and power, it was high time that the West turned its gaze towards Indian philosophy and thought and took up the pursuit of higher goals that were in consonance with mankind’s spiritual nature and would lead humanity towards peace and harmonious living.

Today, when the world seems to be increasingly edging towards intolerance, violence and hatred, perhaps it is time once again for the Powers that be, to pause and, casting aside crafty Power games and chasing after monetary gains, to look at the world through the spectacles of Humanity that ancient Indian philosophy has been advocating through its poets and seers from Time immemorial.



Dr Kusum Pant Joshi is a historian and Chief Researcher/ Press Officer for South Asian Cinema Foundation(SACF), London.

## Poems by Mona Dash

### Hybrid

It is not easy to be a hybrid  
to have wings sprouting  
where the arms are  
when the waters turn skies  
to have legs turn into mermaid tails  
when land sights deep waters

It is not easy to be a hybrid  
to sing songs from different shores  
the tongue forming easy notes  
the music mixed with this and that

It is not easy to be a hybrid  
to see multiple hues  
mixing on skin, forming purple greys  
and green pinks when the order was  
for one, only one

It is not easy to be this and that  
and more  
being always asked  
what are you, after all ?

### The waiting /grief

Of all the gifts you have given me  
It is this silence  
I will remember you by  
Solid bark like, roots deep in  
unmoveable ocean rocks  
eroding gently or not at all  
Oizys, daughter of Nyx  
stands sentinel, howls nights

Mona Dash is an award- winning author based in London. her work includes her memoir *A Roll of the Dice*, a short story collection *Let Us Look Elsewhere* , a novel *Untamed Heart* and two collections of poetry. She has been published in various journals and listed in leading competitions. Her work has been presented on BBC Radio 4, included in Best British Short Stories 22, and more than thirty five anthologies. She also works in a global tech company. [www.monadash.net](http://www.monadash.net)

### The sunrise

Here am I, with open arms  
nourishing succour  
this is how life seeps  
how the water speaks  
how lush forests grow

and there you are  
burrowed under the earth  
in an unending den  
proud of the shining eyes  
of the glass doll  
you mate with ceaselessly  
until it breaks

while outside I weave  
colours wondrous  
If only you could see  
and seeing could understand  
what it means, my intensity

### Drown

You didn’t say a thing  
You didn’t do a thing.  
Those curious eyes watched.  
Not sure why,  
not sure what they thought.

I drowned. I struggled. Thrashing as the water rose  
in waves and whirlpools  
I sank, you watched  
You who had said, water  
fall in, feel it, let go!  
I did,  
And you let me down.

The moon, your friend, is glistening low  
It doesn’t let me see the shore  
But somewhere a lighthouse glows  
Surely it will carry me through to morning  
When at last the daylight shows.

## Conversation with Professor Bem Le Hunte, who designed the University of Technology Sydney Australia Creative Intelligence Degree Course

By Sharon Rundle

**The Creative Intelligence course involves unity of all disciplines, the unity of consciousness needed for radical collaboration and next level consciousness - Meta Cognition**

I have long admired Bem Le Hunte's writing and am fascinated by her work in Creative Intelligence at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. I asked her: What does it mean? How difficult was it to persuade a university to add the Creative Intelligence course to the curriculum? How does one go about teaching Creative Intelligence? Have you had meaningful feedback? How is this course assessed?

Bem said that she came across a global search for Course Director in Creative Intelligence. The Idea was the vision of UTS Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor of Education in 2013. They wanted a degree that met the needs for the time, for future multiple fields. Not looking at a single degree but an innovative experience around the seventeen different degrees and five different fields that a single degree cannot prepare you for. A way of looking at creativity and applying it to solve the complex challenges of our time.

Bem wanted to be part of this new degree, a discipline that had to transcend all other disciplines. Bem was Director of Teaching and Learning from 2019, the only person employed for this for the first three years. The first time she had heard the idea of creative intelligence was a course by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi called the Science of Creative Intelligence. So, the first thing she thought was that this is a spiritual degree. The Creative Intelligence course involves unity of all disciplines, the unity of consciousness needed for radical collaboration and next level consciousness - Meta Cognition.

"If you read the [Charter for Transdisciplinarity](#) written by Nicolescu. It charts the almost spiritual nature of

this kind of unity, consciousness and how important it is to have that bigger consciousness tackling these challenges that cross borders.

The Upanishads say that there are many knowledges, but only one knower. I love that idea. It really applies to the



curriculum and how we're trying to educate people for more than one story, more than one line, more than one perspective," Bem said.

Bem created a brief for the course using creative industries training, pushing boundaries and constraints. Her approach was to treat it like a company/industry rather than an academic project because an academic approach was too hard a shift of paradigm. It was warmly received by early pioneers from each academic faculty. One thing after another made it easier to run the course. For example, thousands of students applying for this course. It became a high ATAR course

meaning very high secondary exam results to enrol.

"This kind of education works. It expands people radically from within to make changes that need to be made and go out and do action. It has to transform people, to prepare for a world of change, to tackle some of the challenges and be more useful citizens of this world. It brings a web of ideas, a web of connections, and collective consciousness," Bem said.

The genius of the design is that it combines with a core degree, so students do the core degree as well as the Creative Intelligence degree course. She has a narrative approach to curriculum design. She can see it as a journey with three acts:

**Act 1 Industry Partnership 850+ Partners:** The first three years students are given a Creative Brief that the staff create with the partners for the students.

**Act 2 in first half of fourth year:** Students are given an Industry Partner who they work with to collaborate to create their own Brief.

**Act 3 before they leave university:** Self-Initiated Project without industry partnership or brief to work out what real world challenge they need to tackle.

Bem teaches it from a place of presence and self-awareness. What she tries to get across to students is this Metacognition of being able to take in more than the ordinary, not to just see the common, but the uncommon; not just to sense what is there, but sense what is unexpected. What is the paradigm shift?

Bem designed a game called the Web of Ideas to create a web of ideas, connections, and collective

consciousness. The game starts with one student’s question, and someone else has to jump up and say, ‘that connects to mine’. And together, the students make a web where all of these ideas are connected – to actually demonstrate that we live in this connected world, this connected consciousness of ideas that are shared. Everything connects to everywhere all at once. Creative people ‘connect the dots’ to see connections between two dots that other people haven’t seen. The Creative Intelligence course demonstrates that it’s possible to see connections, sometimes in almost a prosaic way, for example, by actually surfacing it and visualising it and showing it on a washing line, using pegs to show how everything is connected to everything, how everything connects to everywhere.

The assessments are authentic assessments in education. The students are focussed on outputs that may be useful. So that it’s always normalised that it’s a real-world degree. For example: Problem solvability, students are given cutting edge ideas and paradigms from across the disciplines. They curate their own three questions from ideas of their own, then devise a question they would like to explore and shift it to another domain. They are required to do a thought experiment, a ‘what if’ scenario, or a speculative research proposal on their question. The assessment is measured by how far they have taken that idea, how far they have pushed that idea, to make it different.

Showing that they have gone beyond traditional thinking, the marker of a Peak Transformation Learning Moment.

The Creative Intelligence degree course went on to win award after award including Universities of Australia National Award for Best Program; Business Higher Education Round Table Award for Best Engagement; Wharton Award – Reimagining Education; and the Green Gown Award –sustainable futures.

The course received a bank of positive feedback, a big pile of thank you letters from graduate students written with great sincerity. The course is not only transformative for the students, staff are also transformed.

Then came the amazing statistics: graduate students had a 93% employment rate. The course had an industry partnership of 850+ partners. The course had proved its worth. Students come back as industry partners. Now there is a partnership of students, industry partners, and alumni. It took ten years of hard work. “It is now, really rewarding, a beautiful project to lead and is called The Club That Nobody Wants To Leave,” Bem said.

Bem is now the Director International (since 2024) and is consulting and supporting more universities. The University of Arizona (US) is now delivering this course and it has proven to be successful there too. <https://www.bemlehunte.com/>

Dr Sharon Rundle is a University of Technology Sydney Friend of Distinction, who encourages international people-to-people links. She edits fiction and nonfiction books, literary magazines, and journals. She co-edited five Indo-Australian anthologies of short fiction. Her stories, essays and articles appear in books, anthologies, journals, magazines, and have been broadcast on radio. She has taught at universities and presented conference papers in Australia, the UK and India. She has served on the Board of Directors and Management Committee of the NSW Writers' Centre. She was an Australia India Business and Community Awards finalist 2022. <https://sharonrundle.com.au>



Become a High-flyer with world-class education from UK & FUTUREPROOF YOUR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES  
OUR BRITISH COUNCIL CERTIFIED AGENT & EDUCATION COUNSELLOR CAN HELP YOU TO FIND THE BEST EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION IN THE UK TO SUIT YOUR FUTURE CAREER GOALS AND AMBITIONS



- An international student in the UK is typically allowed to work up to 20 hours a week.
- Anyone completing a UK degree can stay and work here for up to two years on a Post Study Work Visa Scheme.

Email: [diligenteduserservices@gmail.com](mailto:diligenteduserservices@gmail.com)  
WhatsApp: +44-7801569640





Yogesh Patel

## Three muses of poetry: Ambiguity, abstract, and absurd

### A Masterclass in Poetry

A poet recently repeated the age-old grumble about a conundrum of ambiguity in poetry! The glossary of terms at the Poetry Foundation describes ambiguity as “a word, statement, or situation with two or more possible meanings.” There are mainly two types of ambiguities: Lexical and syntactic. However, some seven can be categorized as a metaphor (two things alike), reversed metaphor (two meanings resolved into one), two ideas connected to a single context (here in Jussawalla’s poem there are more than two), a union of two or more meanings (as happens in the poem, the accident and other international news of the day collapse into the ordinary interest of the day, namely the local accident), poet finding a new idea in the middle of his expression (as in the third couplet beginning with ‘When I come home...’), the unknown thrown in for the reader to imagine the outcome (as in the last couplet in the poem), and two words that create a conflict of a status in poet’s mind (in this poem, it is the phrase ‘as far as’). Ambiguity is not good in business communication but it arises from removed commas, words with double meaning, the same word meaning unique two things with differing pronunciations- as in lexical ambiguity, or a complete sentence meaning distinctive things in a dissimilar context, as in syntactic ambiguity.

There are as many expectations from poetry as there are definitions of it! Much of the poetry you see on social media is mediocre, as they lack courage. In the style of the Rupi Kaur phenomenon, they posture as strait-laced. Too obvious, or of direct narration. Lacking the tangents it can shoot off to, to make poetry more intriguing, complex, and challenging and to reveal multiple layers of meaning as a full experience. After all, life may look linear but is complicated and unpredictable. The experiences we encounter are not neatly arranged extracts. It is said that poetry paints, while a painting creates poetry. Painting has always focused on an experience, which can be simple or complex as in modern art, be it entrenched in cubism, metaphysical, surrealism, or realism. Standing in the art gallery in front of an abstract painting is for an experience, not for extracting the schoolbook logical meaning of every splash or choice of colours or apparition of any shape you may see. Complex poetry does that using the lexicon, style, forms, poetics, images, tones, and sounds. It deploys abstraction, ambiguity, and absurd as its handles to deliver the experience the poet wants, but may end up being different for the reader who brings their own contexts to the table. Yes, story-telling can exist in poetry—as you can see in Adil Jussawalla’s poem here—but it can be made of many narratives of images coming together or an event you want to be expressed. For a straightjacket telling, you

have prose, but to celebrate the language rolling in its all elements or components as a lexicon or the syntax with the spoken facet, you need poetry. Hence, next time when you write straightforward content in a line of a poem or a stanza, find the tangents that thought, emotion and image have to offer. Go to them and create an impression, adding similar poetic experiences elsewhere than the locale you started out with. Coalesce them with the correct choice of words, sentences, and diction. Such a tool allows varied suggestions, possibilities, allusions, implications, and senses.

Abstraction in art is not about duplicating reality. Create an atmosphere and roam in it as a poet to capture a new paranormal world, not ever forgetting what your concept was. Think of abstraction not for the telling, but for the impact, which also delivers the raw sentiments you started with. Remember, the abstract words cannot be pictured. For example, love needs sounds, smell, colours, shapes, texture, tone, narratives to enhance, and images. A fragrance of a flower requires a picture, a picture of a flower has no such need. Hence, for any experience of that picture which is touchable, real image, and exciting, you will need to put it back in nature and make it engulfed in its essence, including its fragrance which gives its unique identity.

#### Coming Home

A horse has been led to the top of a tower in Prague,  
A puppy pushed under the wheels of a car.

Someone is celebrating body parts in Tel Aviv  
And prison guards in Tehran.

When I come home from work the wife says  
They floated boats in Hiroshima.

I take down my atlas and look for Prague, Tel Aviv,  
Tehran. I don’t get as far as Hiroshima.

At dinner I ask the wife if she knows anything about  
A puppy and a car and where it happened.

Adil Jussawalla

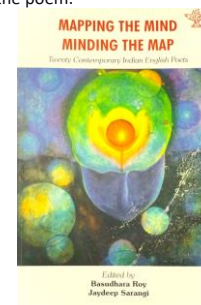
*(from Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map)*

Absurd happens in literature when a poet dares to challenge the norms, revealing a conflict in a concept. While the Theatre of the Absurd raids the orthodoxy or doctrines, away from such narrow notions, in general, it examines contradictions. Here in this poem, while the world is busy with its serious conflicts of war, torture, and irrational behaviours with the broader impact on humanity—demonstrated by the poet’s news list—the irrelevant minor worry about a ‘puppy pushed under the wheels of a car’, both unrelated to him, absurdly becomes a focus of main concern. After the hard day’s work, just as the dinner takes precedence over all those horrendous, absurd, or amusing events, a local accident becomes more central.

Understandably, this poem shows you, with ambiguity and juxtaposed narrations, how you can bring a wider canvas to vivid life, equally if you imagine how you can play with the lexical, syntactic, and structural aspects of poetics, involving rhymes, rhythms, forms, metaphors, similes, and more. It opens a world of options from your first drafts, which you may rush to get published. Even the simplest action of changing the perspective you have expressed in your poem, in finalizing it, can show you the arguments you could harbour in your concept and poem. Look at these lines by K. Satchidanandan, again from another poem appearing in [‘Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map’](#), a great anthology edited by Basudhara Roy and Jaydeep Sarangi for the Sahitya Akademi:

A man walks with a door  
along the city street;  
he is looking for its house.

Ambiguity is not the reality portrayed in the words here, but it is the essence and impact of the reality arising from the incongruously, rearranged images repurposing reality! Also, note how effectively poet uses the word ‘its’ and not ‘his’! Each word matters in poetry with its lexical implication. Here in ambiguity, it allows a concrete outcome to options available. Next time, look at the lines you have penned and change the perspectives to repurpose your magic in the poem.



ISBN 9789355485137

**Yogesh Patel** received an MBE for literature in 2020. His latest collection of poems, [The Rapids](#), is published by [The London Magazine](#). Patel’s poem appears on the Poetry Wall of the Royal Society of Literature. His poem is to be launched aboard a NASA rocket to the moon to be archived there. His poem has been featured on the wall of Cambridge University’s Language Library. He runs Skylark Publications UK and a non-profit Word Masala project to promote SA diaspora literature. Extensively published, an award-winning poet, he has also received the *Freedom of the City of London*.

**Four Poems  
by Gopal Lahiri**

**Dyad**

In the wide-open field  
the stars rest on my shoulder,  
the immense vista of silence  
between the lines,  
waits at the edge of the sleep,  
each moment is a quiet recollection,  
the moonless night is so complete in itself.

A crescent of rock-framed sands  
washed by arcs of blue water,  
I do not know  
how to speak before  
my own silhouettes,  
I only learn to sit and condense,  
clouds bow down to touch the earth.

**Shadow Line**

I often bend down to collect a few footprints,  
in the shapelessness of darkness, I see a shadow,  
I pluck one to meet myself in a new time,  
It is a process I do not want to forget anymore.  
At the end of my journey, I always search for  
wobbly hands. My mother. The fingers stand like  
soft white candles. Each togetherness  
calms heart and fills the smell of absence.  
She dips her nib in blue ink, catches my whispers,  
the glass, the unseen faces, the ancient night  
chisel the forgotten alphabets and syllables,  
the prayers unheard, gods never arrive at my  
doorstep.

**Annihilation**

The silver lily lifts its tired feet and floats,  
as if a prayer by water's edge,  
then rustling in the yellow reeds join and  
turn back to the snakeskin bodies  
of slinking rivers.

Bushes thriving under hot sun,  
will laugh with the wind of curse  
behind them,  
stones are now free from their places,  
eroded and deported far away.

A jungle of concrete will slowly destroy  
the spreading roots, seeds, and earthlings,  
the animated hymn of birdsong,  
There will be no one to carry them  
back to their silent, natural way.

**Change**

The trees listen to the birds with quietness,  
and for a while the rain falls with ice  
around their wreath of darkness,  
the leaves unfurl and speaks in tongues  
through stony lips.

Here the flowers live and die in silence,  
the richness of fire is touched  
by the transformation of rain,  
like an old love comes back again  
in a soft embrace.

Now little seeds sprout,  
the rough edges of the world  
are toned down, the air is blowing  
with petrichor, barren land is awakened  
and dance to the tune of rain.

Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, critic, editor, writer, and translator with 29 books published, (10 books in Bengali and 19 books in English) including six solo/jointly edited books and two joint books. His poetry and prose are published across more than 70 anthologies as well as in eminent journals of India and abroad. His poems are translated in 16 languages and published in 12 countries. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prize for poetry in 2021, He has received Setu Excellence award, Pittsburgh, US in poetry. His collection of poems 'Alleys are Filled with Future Alphabets.' has received Pan Asian Ukiyoto awards in 2022.  
©gopallahiri

## A long story

### The Wild Stream Part -2 by Nandini Sahu

That day we took her along and rushed to the school ground at 10 am, though the CM was to arrive at 11am.

Mami Pradhan was ten years old. But she had a tremendous sense of dignity, doing nothing that would be frowned upon in the society as just suitable to a maid's daughter. She was thin, flat chested, malnutritional and looked hardly six or seven years old. She maintained herself as far as she could, always looking good in her own terms in my old clothes that Ma gave away. She was my classmate, studying in the MCD school. Even native clothes looked fine on her, however old fashioned they might seem to others. She had that air of a refined, accomplished girl, which was purely made up, superficial. She would always struggle to be a face in the crowd, to be different, and was successful to some extent, because she had the advantage of a beaming grin, ear to ear, quite unnecessary most of the times.

Udayagiri was a small town in central Odisha, in Phulbani district. It was a sleepy town, having no character of its own. My parents spent their lifetime there, more than forty years, without any definite reason. First, they wanted to be together, as teachers, one in a boys' high school and the other in a girls' high school, both government schools, so that their children would be secure with both parents. After retirement we pleaded them to move to some other town where proper medical and higher education facilities would be available. But they never agreed.

"Beta, Phulbani means where flowers speak to men, 'phool' speaking 'vani'; see the greenery around. And Udayagiri is where the sun rises, it's like the sun-city," Baba had all excuses. But they spent their whole life with tooth aches, fever, rheumatism, with lack of medical facilities, and now they were all by themselves. Their children are away, in townships, in metro cities and two of my sisters are in the U.S., because one cannot think of a career in Udayagiri, unless one is a farmer or a shopkeeper; or at best, a school teacher.

Most people of Udayagiri belonged to the hills and most had never seen a train, a sea; forget about an airplane or a chopper. So on that eventful day, we gathered in our school ground, wearing our best frocks, applying little Emami snow-white cream of Ma under Ponds powder, and trying to look our best. Mami had taken special care to groom herself, she was looking more like a clown with that artificial black mole tattooed on her cheek and magenta coloured alta applied on her lips to appear like lipstick. She wore one of my old frocks which Ma had given her the previous year, which she wore only on special occasions. She had made it a point to stand a little ahead of the crowd, to catch the attention of people, and was grinning all the while, for no specific reason.

The helicopter landed at 11am on the right time, most unlikely for a politician. Biju Babu was different. He was an active and happy-go-lucky kind of a man, quite good looking, like his son Naveen Patnaik, the present Chief Minister of Odisha. Biju Babu was garlanded by the choicest beauties of the local college, best attired, perfumed, who also were awarded with the pleasure of shaking hands with the CM.

The CM went to the dais straight away and started passionately lecturing the audience. His gestures drew a suppressed murmur from the awestruck audience. In the midst of loud applause, he waved his hands and said, "Jai ho!"

"Jai ho!"

"Biju babu ki jai ho!"

"Long live Biju babu!"

"Jai ho! Jai ho! Jai ho!"

Instantly, and very dramatically, our Mami caught hold of a national flag lying in the ground and vigorously waved it at the party workers and the CM, out of excitement. I tried to stop her from drawing the attention of people towards us, but she was adamant. She shouted in her trilling voice "Baju baju jai ho!" "Baju baju jai ho!" That's what she could make out from the slogans, I mean.

A party worker of Biju babu glanced at her, a lanky girl, looking as old as five or six years, hands thin as a bird's legs, waving and hopping, in rags. He whispered something in the CM's ears.

So, she belongs to the people below poverty line, BPL; can make an eye-catching headline.

Suddenly the CM did an unusual thing. He asked one of his party workers to get that girl on stage. He did it promptly, lifted Mami in a moment and placed her on the dais, in front of the CM, the very Chief Minister of Odisha. Biju babu patted her shoulder, gently, politely, affectionately, and asked, "What's your name, beti?"

"Mami Pradhan," she announced proudly.

So, that was that.

"Bhaiyon aur behano! This is real India. This is the real face of Odisha! Look at this girl. Mami Pradhan. She has a dream in her eyes, even if she is poor. Poor? Who is poor? Lord Krishna ate a fistful of puffed rice from his devotee Sudama and they shared their fortune!

Mami is our Sudama. Let us all take an oath today that we, the privileged, the educated, would do our lot to support all Mami Pradhans in our villages. You have shown your great love and faith in me by casting your precious votes for our party. If you promise to shower your love in the coming general elections, I also promise you that we can create an Odisha of our dreams, where there is no poverty. Garibi hatao!"

"Jai ho! Biju babu ki jai ho!"

There was thunderous applause in the air. The journalists rushed to click photographs of Biju babu holding the reed thin hands of Mami Pradhan, still with a grin, ear to ear.

"God! Look at this girl, she is not at all nervous! See her guts!" our neighbor Mini didi told my elder sister.

“Yes, she has always been a dare devil. I knew she would do something like this someday.”

Not that Mami could make out any head or tail of the contents of the CM’s speech. She had nothing to do with the national or the state politics; her entire politics was her individual psyche, of catching attention of one and all. Getting acceptance was her personal agenda. Only one sentence of the CM had impressed her greatly, “Mami Pradhan has a dream in her eyes”. True indeed. After that day, she became the best ever dreamer under the sun.

The CM was ready to leave. Mami got tears in her eyes. “Don’t leave... don’t leave....don’t leave....my dream merchant”. She was not ready to be parted with her glorious moment. It was her lifetime achievement award.

Mami-bou rushed to the ground as someone told her about the happenings. She dragged her daughter home, hurling her choicest abuses at her.

“Ay Bou, leave me alone. Let me go near the helicopter!”  
 “You bloody girl, go and broom the house. Ma will come home after this meeting and then shout at me that she had given you off, not me, from the household chores. I can’t broom today, I have back pain.”

So the king of kings, Biju babu, left, leaving behind ambitions and a truckload of dreams in Mami Pradhan’s eyes.

The next day, the front pages of all news papers in the state carried photographs of Biju babu holding the hands of a BPL girl and showing a Utopian future for every poor of Odisha. The front lines were, ‘Biju Babu identifies the real face of Odisha,’ ‘BPL girl makes history!’

Mami managed to collect most paper cuts of the day. (Till today one can find a few of them laminated, hanging on the broken walls of her hut.)  
 In the evening, Ma was amazed talking to her.

“Ay Mami, why were you jumping like that in front of the dais? You wanted them to notice you and call you there, eh? What an idiot you are! If something would have happened to you? Your Bou would have scolded my daughters that they had left you alone. Do you know how these politicians are? Biju Babu is a nice gentleman, no doubt, but do you know the party workers? If someone would have lifted you? If you were crushed in the crowd? Don’t do such things again, you get that? What a girl!”

Mami got annoyed; she was still basking in the glory of the morning. She rushed out of the room bouncing her pig-tail, grumbling something at Ma. Hurling a gali or two, perhaps.

From that day, she stopped having pigtails and managed to snatch some money from her mother’s monthly salary to buy Lifebuoy soaps to wash her hair and have a pony tail, just like me. Perhaps she had a proper hair-cut too.

To add fuel to the fire, the next day two local journalists came with a mike to our house and Madame Mami was hailed.

“Mami-ji, how old are you?”

“Ten years.”

“Do you go to the school?”

“Yes, of course!”

“Yesterday, the chief Minister of Odisha could identify you among all and said that you are the real face of Odisha. How do you feel?”

“Oh, I was the most beautiful among all present over there; in fact I am the most beautiful one in the whole town, so he noticed me. Someday I shall go to his house and stay there; I shall.... I shall...”

My Ma pushed her Bou to go and stop her. “You never know what rubbish this stupid girl is going to tell them! Go stop her. All these journalists are making a tamasha here, they have no other business. Those politicians left. Now we shall see them again after five years. I don’t know why on earth all of you are getting such excited. We have seen it all.”

But Mami became, or at least she thought that she was, a celebrity overnight. All that media attention, photographs in news papers. “Mamiji, Mamiji, Mamiji, how do you feel? How do you feel? How do you feel?” She was metamorphosed from an ugly caterpillar to a pretty butterfly. The ugly duckling turned into a prince charming with the magic wand of Biju babu. She felt she was more of a socialite, page-three lady now than a mere maid in our house. She had new airs. She was stubborn not to wear my old frocks anymore; thus her Bou gave her some finicky slaps.

“Ay Bou, slap me. Till I go to his house someday, you scold me, hit me. Then all of you would come to meet me with appointments. Then I won’t have time.”

With this new-found celebrityhood, she stopped studying with us during the evenings. Baba had made it a point for Ma that Mami could help her during the day time, but she had to sit down to study with us from six to nine in the evening, till Baba would allow us to watch Door Darshan channel on our new Surya Kiran colour T.V.

Mami started dozing and dreaming during her study hours, looking forward for that T.V. time, to get in touch with the hot and happening girls in big cities, their new hair styles and make up. She would experiment those hair styles on herself. But her new hair styles always ended up in a disaster. **(To be continued)**



**Nandini Sahu, Professor of English and Former Director, School of Foreign Languages, IGNOU, New Delhi, India, is an established Indian English poet, creative writer and folklorist. She is the author/editor of twenty books. She is the recipient of the Literary Award/Gold Medal from the hon’ble Vice President of India for her contribution to English Studies.**

## Bem Le Hunte and Sharon Rundle discuss Spiritual Realism, writing best-selling novels, and what we should take from the past into this great future. What can we let go of? And what might we transcend?

It has been a great pleasure to interview Bem Le Hunte who was born in Kolkata, India. She lived there, and then in London where she studied anthropology at Cambridge and worked as a university lecturer. She moved to the Himalayas and now lives in Sydney, Australia. She is “Indian by birthright, English by descent and Australian by choice”.

She is enchanted by the genre of Spiritual Realism and its exploration of the spiritual life, the inner life, the whole idea of transformation – which is very much a literary theme in her novels.

“Living in other countries has been integral to my life, I describe myself as a liminal human. That liminality, although uncomfortable when you're a child - and painful when you're encountering racism became a powerful place to write from in my future life. That's really useful for writers because it's that metacognition that you need to tell a story well from other characters' perspectives.”

Bem went to India every summer with her grandmother which she said, “meant that I never lost touch with my roots and how people think, and I observed very closely the cultural nuances, the thinking, the rituals and the customs of people in India and family life.”

Bem said that her novel *Elephants With Headlights*, is a complex work that's woven with themes from various knowledges she teaches and has explored over the years, as well as the story of Savitri - a classic Sanskrit story and the theme of Sri Aurobindo's classic poem, *Savitri*.

*Elephants With Headlights* begins on the streets of New Delhi where

Siddharth the father figure is an entrepreneur who is trying to bring a driverless car over to India. Yet there are still elephants walking the streets of New Delhi and the latest law is that they have to wear headlights. So, there is this simple technology of putting a headlight on an elephant to go through a street, alongside a driverless car.

It was her metaphor for the evolution of society. She said that the whole question of this book is: “what should we take into this great future with us



from the past, and what can we let go of? And what might we transcend?

While not wanting to give away too much about the novel, Bem said that “the central question is what do we take forward? We're all hurtling towards the future and we're losing all the things that used to keep society together. The family, religion, belief systems, values - so much changes over time and so much change is good, but do we have to throw out everything?

I teach transformative learning because I'm interested in this transformation of society. *Elephants With Headlights* questions that whole transformation of society and how we move forward. My experience as an anthropologist and having perspectives from other cultures comes through all my novels. Readers experience it through the characters, through the story, and through the emotion.

There are ways to think more deeply about life, its purpose and the future that we're going into, which is part of the quest for the novel *Elephants with Headlights* and it's clear about its message around meditation. I've practised meditation for thirty-plus years.”

Siddharth learns to meditate. He says to the teacher, the guruji in the book, that he has everything material. His teacher tells him, ‘Because then you've got everything, I'll give you something even more valuable. All the worries of the world.’ His gift gives Siddharth inner access to people's consciousness. It's a challenge about what it means to be a human being - what kind of person you are. The astrologist's predictions stop at a certain time. But what will happen beyond that?

Bem tells me that: “Extreme storytelling challenges constraints. The magical realism genre doesn't stop at the single sense of a life happening between birth and death, so I went beyond boundaries”.

One of my characters announces that she has clairaudience, and this creates a whole world of magic that you have to believe in, but it does that through a balanced perspective - you have to

take a reader with you before you espouse the totally miraculous. Otherwise, you're just speaking another language. There's always that journey of induction into a magical world, into that liminal space." Bem said that she played with this concept of spiritual realism. She wanted sceptics too in the novel, as a counterpoint.

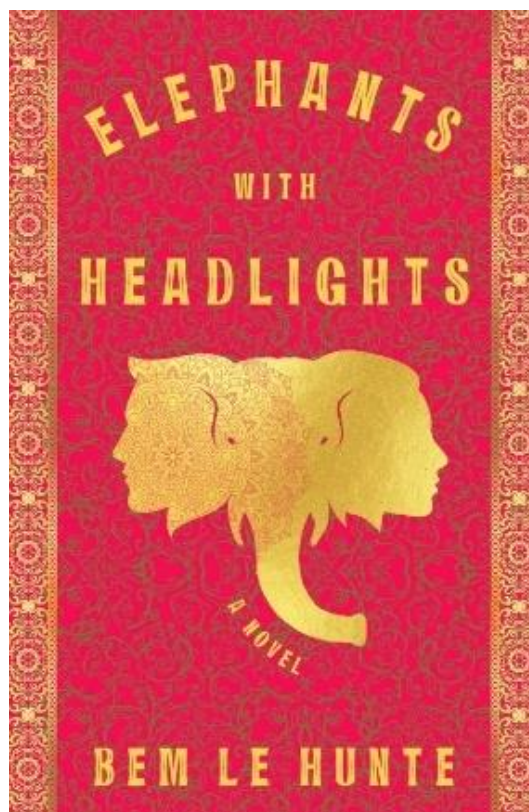
"I didn't plan Savitri's story until I went to live in Auroville on a sabbatical - and she came alive. I made her encounter the same storyline in a modern context that Savitri [of the *Mahabharata*] encountered when she demanded that she marry the man of her choice, despite the prediction that it was not going to work, that her marriage was fated. Savitri had the absolute belief about what she would do."

Neel, the son and Savitri's brother, has an Australian fiancé. Mae is typically Australian. She is straightforward, she doesn't hold back, in the way Indians would expect her to - no matter what she felt. Mae clashes with her prospective mother-in-law. Bem said, "Swearing at your mother-in-law is unheard of in India! Mae couldn't have imagined how serious it was going to get, that was fun to play with. She had no idea what she was actually unleashing. But characters unleash the story and propel it forwards by their actions. That was totally unexpected that Mae went that far in being rude to her fiancé's mother. And the mother-in-law being able to stand her own ground and stay calm through it and almost win the battle for a while".

I asked Bem about unconditional love and acceptance in her novel which ultimately binds these disparate characters.

She said, "I think that that's a role of fiction, but the problem is you often

need to go through a challenge in order to realise the importance of it, so you do go through the dark and come out into the light again and it's a realisation that's a powerful transformation. Knowing how to repair and tolerate and accept is a theme for me because I move between cultures.



In India, you can have a spiritual conversation. You can talk to people very openly about your connection with the divine without people looking at you as if you're mad. What does it look like when you open up that whole world - which I say again is a gift of India - and see this boundary-free view of the miraculous and the spiritual?

In *Elephants With Headlights*, I had to inhabit the world of the character Dadi at the time of her death, to go through the motions of what it would be like to speak a language with people who are from another side of life. How to capture the ineffable? I described it as like a butterfly, but for me, that was the moment of the sublime. Savitri was determined to be there. She was told to be there. She knew she was

playing a cosmic part as an assistant in the journey for her grandmother, who was waiting for this date with destiny and just wanted to leave her body but couldn't. I wanted to go on that journey with Savitri and Dadi. I wanted to understand what it would be like, and to capture some of the ineffable and inexplicable. I'm really intrigued by this whole idea of life not being bound within the book ends of birth and death. I've heard of method acting, but being in method when you're writing, being in the world that you're describing and actually living in it felt like I went with her too, as if it were on another astral plane. That scene came very easily to me. That was the first really powerful bit that came to me with the story, indicating to me that it was a story that needed to be told.

I like stories that make a difference and that make you see things afresh and give you unusual perspectives, to help you transcend and also to bring joy and optimism. I'm not a negative storyteller, although I can tell a dark part of the story. But coming up out of that is really important. I don't want to leave any reader without hope.

It always feels authentic, it comes from deep within and with good intentions for the world and for the reader. I feel connected with my readers when I'm writing, so I feel like I have been of service, that I've been useful. I feel that's the kind of satisfaction that I get from writing. It's an incredibly worthwhile thing to do."

*Elephants With Headlights* is thought provoking, captivating, magical and a great read.

Previous books: *The Seduction of Silence*; *There, Where the Pepper Grows*; *Father of All Stories*; (non-fiction): *Creativity and the Sacred*.

## Book review

## FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE

C.L. Miller's

## The Antique Hunters' Guide to Murder

Published by Pan Macmillan

Reviewed by Anjana Basu

The book begins with a murder in an antique shop which draws Freya and her aunt Carole into a mystery. Arthur, antique lover extraordinaire and a man with a past is found dead at the foot of his old wooden stairs. The police are inclined to dismiss it as a heart attack but a letter from Arthur lands into Freya and Carole's hands packed with clues that sends them to Cophthorn Manor, the house of the late Lord Metcalf which is apparently hosting an antique lover's retreat. Despite her misgivings, since, apart from the danger, she is estranged from Arthur who used to be her mentor in antique hunting, Freya accompanies her aunt to the Manor which at first sight appears to be filled with priceless furniture but after a second glance appears to be filled with something quite different.

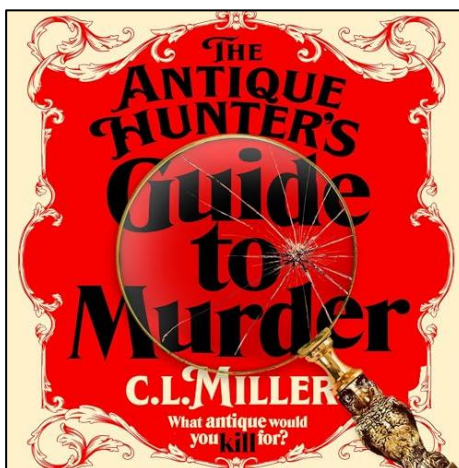
Miller lays out her cast of characters - Giles, Phil, Amy, Bella - all of whom have something to hide. They are each given chapters to themselves, in between the narrative which appears to be taking the reader into manor house murder territory. Miller collaborated with her mother who was an antiques expert to bring artefacts like Gillows furniture and a Martin Bros Wally bird into the story, most of which readers would be unfamiliar with. While it has the making of a country house murder, with the usual cast, *The Antique Hunters' Guide to Murder* is a guidebook of what to expect in an old manor house with secret panels, outhouses transformed into guest cottages and more. The results of her research have been put to good use so that those unfamiliar with the English countryside will have a vivid perspective,

Everyone is grouped together under one roof so to speak and the power also goes providing all the elements for suspense - Miller refers to it as the 'electric' - Darkness punctuated by screams to always pleasant to shiver with. There are also anonymous warnings and traces of break in as Carole and Freya find that their cottage has been rummaged through, luckily without their secret stash of Arthur's journals being discovered.

Miller's plot travels back in time to Freya's beginnings as an antique

fuddy duddy black number with plastic beads and sequins round the cuff. Freya is not described barring the fact that she finds her real self again, so why Phil, the 'silver fox', is attracted to her is hard to explain until one shrugs it off as a writer's indulgence. Carole gives us a blow by blow account of Phil's bare torso so that the reader is left in no doubt as to his attractions while Freya remains shrouded in black, characterised only by her IQ where antiques are concerned. Giles, Amy and Franklin too remain shrouded in anonymity physique wise. Perhaps a little description was required in their cases too beyond Giles' Shanks.

Miller manages her smoke and mirrors well enough to cover the identity of the murderer, with the usual gathering of the suspects together in one room to await the disclosure. It also seems obvious that the Indiana Jones type antique hunts will continue since Freya has a cruise to Petra booked and Bella is hijacking a van of stolen treasures to return to their rightful countries - though whether for activism or a finder's fee is unsure. Perhaps also more of Carole's Pink Panther backstory with Arthur!



hunter under Arthur's guidance, with the death of her boyfriend in Cairo. The murder thereupon takes on thriller undercurrents as Miller opens up about the black market in stolen antiques. Everything is not what it seems in the story and Arthur's hand is reaching out from beyond the grave to help trap a betraying murderer with wordplay and mire hints.

The narrative is not quite as fast paced as it might be and Freya is too busy catching up on her past self before her marriage spoils it all to be believable to begin with. Carole comes across as glamorous, blonde and charming in comparison to her 'middle aged' niece who is dressed for some reason in a

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





**A1 ACCOUNTANCY LLP**  
**ACCOUNTING AND TAXATION SERVICES**

Accountants and Tax Consultants  
 Kumar Viththyakaran  
 5a - 7a St. James's Road, Croydon, CR0 2SB  
 Tel.: 020 8684 4450, Fax: 020 8683 4929,  
 Email: a1.accountancy@btinternet.com



**Zaiwalla & Co**

---

Holborn Tower, 137-144 High Holborn, London WC1V 6PL  
 Tel: +44 (0)20 7312 1000 | DX: 42 Chancery Lane

Ranked in The Legal 500 2023 in Banking, Commercial Litigation and International Arbitration  
 Finalist for Litigation and Dispute Resolution Team of the Year at the British Legal Awards 2022

*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*