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IN MEMORIAM

KEKI N. DARUWALLA: ICON AND ICONOCLAST

by LAKSMISREE BANERJEE

The passing away of Keki N. Daruwalla is a tragic loss which has created an incontrovertible void in our vast literary arena. There is not much one can say other than what is widely known about the life, times and literary output of this celebrated Poet and Maestro (27th Jan.1937 to 26th Sept. 2024), one of the indisputable patriarchs of Global Indian English Writing. Hence bidding him 'Adieu' seems surreal since his poetic omnipresence is indelible as much as his oeuvre pulsating in his books and deeply etched in our hearts, minds and memories. This pervasive sense of grief with veneration, for many readers, writers and admirers across the globe, paves the way to his final immortality in the annals of our human evolution. Moreover one has to admit that despite his scintillating cosmopolitanism, his wide ranging scholarship and historical knowledge, his poetry is deeply rooted in the Indian ethos with an ingrained Indian sensibility ensconced in a morally alert world-consciousness.

I recall having studied Daruwalla as a teenager in college, with an obsession for the imaginative lyricism of the English Romantics while searching frantically for meaningful gratification

in the realistic Modernism of Eliot and Daruwalla, belonging to two successive generations of poets from two diverse lands. Yet one must state that they are quite alike in their graphic economy of style with an undercurrent of dissent and



disillusionment with a world not quite in parity with their idealistic realism. However one has to acknowledge here the chiselled finesse of the Indian English Poetic Idiom that was brought about by the legendary Keki Daruwalla and few of his ilk, who

pioneered a literary language uniquely different in form and essence from the staid English of earlier Eurocentric authors and yet

archetypal enough to stand out magically on its own as Indian-English in the global arena of creativity. In this, I wish to offer my salutations to our eminent Keki Daruwalla for having led the way as an invincible trail-blazer of our modern and postmodern

Indian Poetry/ Literature in English with its singularity and immensely unassailable impact in these globalized, contemporary times.

Universally known as a Poet-Police (due to his prolonged service as an upright IPS officer) Keki Daruwalla's Poetry and Persona are totally integrated in a fierce adherence to truth, honesty and realism, much like a rugged landscape beautified by a natural plenitude of softness with an opulent imagination. I remember this meaningfully sparkling dichotomy in him, when I first met him in 1993 at a Commonwealth Studies

Conference in Jaipur, myself then a young lecturer and upcoming poet. There was an immediate personal connect / rapport as I marvelled at his tender humility, humanity and gentleness with an equal adherence to the principles of unbiased veracity and authenticity, despite the wide difference of our statures. I started addressing him (continued on page 3)

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Dear readers, I am very pleased to bring out the latest issue of Confluence: South Asian Perspectives – the third issue of 2024. The world is undergoing an unprecedented period now as there has been continued unrest in the Middle East as well as between Russia and Ukraine. In South Asia, too, recently we saw a major political upheaval crippling Bangladesh's economy further and a change of government by ousting the former Prime Minister. In contrast, Sri Lanka has turned the corner by electing a new president who has brought some kind of optimism among the wider population including the minority Tamils, who have been demanding greater power sharing for several decades. Last month's election was a true milestone in the history of Sri Lanka since its independence from the British over seventy five years ago, paving the way for a new generation of political leaders. If the new president, an advocate of anti-corruption, proves to be an effective leader and brings back democracy and revives the country's economy from peril, it will be a true blessing for all the communities. In this issue, we also record the demise of the legendary poet Keki Daruwalla at the end of last month. I thank Prof. Laksmisree Banerjee who has written a touching memoriam about her experiences with him and his works at very short notice. As always, we are looking for more contributors who can write regular columns. So, I would like to ask our existing contributors to recommend any new writers they would like to introduce to Confluence. Finally, I would like to let you all know that our next issue will have to be out on time in November as we will be taking some time off. So, I would be very thankful if we could receive your contributions by the end of October. Vijay Anand  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 CHIEF EDITOR Dr. Vijay Anand CONSULTING EDITOR Malathy Sitaram EDITORIAL ADVISORS Dr. Meenakshi Mohan Dr. Subhash Chandra Magazine Design: Confluence Publishing Ltd 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. © Copyright, Confluence Publishing 2024		<table><tr><th></th><th>Title</th><th>Author</th></tr><tr><td>1</td><td>Keki Daruwalla: Icon and Iconoclast</td><td>Laksmisree Banerjee</td></tr><tr><td>4</td><td>Bangladesh at Cross roads</td><td>Mahendra Ved</td></tr><tr><td>6</td><td>Encountering the Legend</td><td>Deepa Vanjani</td></tr><tr><td>7</td><td>Review -Post Box no. 203 Nala Sopara</td><td>Chaitali Sengupta</td></tr><tr><td>8</td><td>An introspective look at Indians in Africa</td><td>Devi Rajab</td></tr><tr><td>10</td><td>Review - Sukrita Paul Kumar's Yellow</td><td>Gopal Lahiri</td></tr><tr><td>12</td><td>Let's Get Old Together</td><td>Meenakshi Mohan</td></tr><tr><td>13</td><td>A Masterclass in Poetry</td><td>Yogesh Patel</td></tr><tr><td>14</td><td>Review - Symphonies of Life: Poems</td><td>Anita Balakrishnan</td></tr><tr><td>15</td><td>Poems: Timeless, Startling</td><td>Gopal Lahiri</td></tr><tr><td>16</td><td>Threshold fiction: THE POET PASSES BY</td><td>Cyril Dabydeen</td></tr><tr><td>17</td><td>Thief's Birthday</td><td>Subhash Chandra</td></tr><tr><td>18</td><td>In Conversation with Gopal Lahiri</td><td>Meenakshi Mohan</td></tr><tr><td>20</td><td>Co-editing to publish over 100 short stories</td><td>Sharon Rundle</td></tr><tr><td>22</td><td>Review:Nandini Sengupta's The Blue Horse and Other....</td><td>by Anjana Basu</td></tr></table>			Title	Author	1	Keki Daruwalla: Icon and Iconoclast	Laksmisree Banerjee	4	Bangladesh at Cross roads	Mahendra Ved	6	Encountering the Legend	Deepa Vanjani	7	Review -Post Box no. 203 Nala Sopara	Chaitali Sengupta	8	An introspective look at Indians in Africa	Devi Rajab	10	Review - Sukrita Paul Kumar's Yellow	Gopal Lahiri	12	Let's Get Old Together	Meenakshi Mohan	13	A Masterclass in Poetry	Yogesh Patel	14	Review - Symphonies of Life: Poems	Anita Balakrishnan	15	Poems: Timeless, Startling	Gopal Lahiri	16	Threshold fiction: THE POET PASSES BY	Cyril Dabydeen	17	Thief's Birthday	Subhash Chandra	18	In Conversation with Gopal Lahiri	Meenakshi Mohan	20	Co-editing to publish over 100 short stories	Sharon Rundle	22	Review:Nandini Sengupta's The Blue Horse and Other....	by Anjana Basu
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immediately as Keki Da (the Bengali way of addressing an elder brother) and he responded with equal fervour. In this context he came to know about the Tata Fire Tragedy in Jamshedpur / Tatanagar in which my only child and myself were burnt to the bones and fatally injured with hundreds dead in the accidental and negligent conflagration on the 150th Birth Anniversary of the Founder Jamshedji N. Tata, just a couple of years ago. I can never forget his overbrimming empathy as he agreed to write a Foreword for my second Book of Poems (dedicated

to the Fire Victims) and also provide its apt title FIRE OFFERINGS. In his inimitable, poetic way he wrote some memorable lines with quintessential sensitivity in his Foreword, which I quote here with great reverence and pain for his sad demise "The burns were so severe that she had to undergo over twenty major surgeries---that such an event must have been cataclysmic for a person of great charm and sensitivity is obvious. Even worse was the fact that her daughter too suffered terribly in the accident. Hence what we see here is a poetry born out of agony, a cry of the body against the shock of burns, the cry of beauty against the scars disfiguring it". This refined dualism remains the essential stuff of his writings---viz. luminous imagism, a controlled effervescence with a direct delineation of the real in its interactivity between the personal and the universal. This hallmark of great writing informs all his poetry, short stories, novels, essays etc. much like a lighthouse heralding the way for avid readers and writers lost in the stormy seas of temporality. His ardour

and succinctness is at once evident in every literary genre that he practiced, while his Poetry remains a supreme testament and insignia of his artistic skill and primary aesthetic craftsmanship as a deathless Poet.



Precious Memory of a Wonderful Poetic Camaraderie with the Iconic Poet

Daruwalla's poetry of naturalism with a remarkable jurisprudence and masterly sculpting of the craggy landscape of our cruelly afflicted world, does not offer any relieving ripples of lyricism. It is often oblique, sardonic and minimalistic without being dull, sodden or soggy. One feels easily the inner core of a rich, animated compassion in his human-centric cosmology with an energy that vibrates through his imagism, symbolism and controlled poetic magnificence. His poetry and writings are densely textured in dealing with the contradictions, violence and resistance of living experiences with defiance against the persecution of humanity through which we derive his veiled solace nurturing our dreams of a better world. We believe his unforgettable lines will continue to resonate across the roof of the world till the end of our time-space continuum. Nothing would ever be able to erase such gems from this maestro's pen inscribed perennially like rocks in our mind-scapes--- "Forget maps and voyaging, study instead/ the parched earth-horoscope

of a brown people" or " Map the wrinkles on the ageing skin of love" or " Migrations are always difficult/ ask any drought / ask any plague/ ask the year 1947". His iconic iconoclasm in breaking out of the stranglehold of

obsolete traditions of both living and writing, while carving out newly created paths of conception, composition, thought and practice, makes him the deathless Legend we will continue to adore forever. Undoubtedly his stupendous lines of poetry, novels, short stories and varied literary genres will continue to inspire generations till the end of human civilization. His poetry is ineffable and

monumental like the Hippocrene from where we will continue to draw our fountain of inspiration, love and humanity.

Good Bye Immortal Poet---May flights of Angels sing thee to thy rest!

Professor Laksmisree Banerjee is a Multi Award Winning Poet, Litterateur, Vocalist & International Sr. Fulbright and Commonwealth Scholar. As a Fmr. Vice Chancellor & University Professor of English and Cultural Studies she has taught and lectured in premier Universities of the world. Widely published and anthologized she has twelve Books of Poetry with several Academic Publications.



Current affairs

Bangladesh at Cross roads

By Mahendra Ved

Bangladesh has rid itself of a government that kept out the political opposition from the election processes, and enforced what was, in effect, one-party rule. But the turmoil, heightened by mass protests that were misjudged and mishandled by the previous government, causing over 500 casualties, is unlikely to end anytime soon.

The fall of Sheikh Hasina Wajed's government after a 15-year rule has ushered in a period of unprecedented political change that is pulling the country in diverse directions. Too many players have made it a battleground of individuals, ideologies and external forces.

A transition of a country that was on the cusp of change in its 50th year, with its economic and human resource indicators better than anyone in South Asia and raring to move from a least-developed to an intermediate nation, has sadly been stalled.

The economic recovery seems difficult after the momentum gained under Hasina was hit first by COVID-19 and then by the high fuel prices caused by the Ukraine conflict. Unless political stability returns and high inflation is arrested, the volatile mood that the protests generated may be prolonged.

Heading the interim government, Professor Muhammad Yunus, with many well-wishers, especially in the

Western world, has said the right things and made some positive moves. He has goodwill but zero political base. Going by ground reports, this has made his position unenviable. Retired bureaucrats, academics with little or no experience in governance and student leaders in their twenties who have idealism but lack political coherence, are grappling with the myriad issues. The presence



of women and NGO representatives in the government is a positive sign, but that of religious leaders and politicians from minority communities, even granting that Bangladesh is a conservative society, makes it a menagerie that Yunus may find difficult to manage. As reports of witch hunts emerge, repairing the past damage becomes that much more difficult.

Yunus has promised elections, but setting a timetable seems difficult. An inclusive election process is needed. The students emerging from the anti-discrimination movement, now pitch-forked in power, are pushing for reforms that are undoubtedly overdue. But not all players are willing to wait. The country had traversed through two

martial law regimes and a two-year hiatus against a 90-day promise during 2006-08. People have shown little patience and great volatility in the past.

With the election as the litmus test of the transition that he is presiding over, Yunus may risk one next winter. But it could take longer. Also, the process may prove more complex this time. Bangladesh's political chessboard is set for several potential permutations and

combinations. Alliances could shift rapidly, with old enemies becoming new allies and vice versa. The outcome may be far from certain, with multiple forces vying for power and influence.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) is

pushing for early elections. But its Islamist ally Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI) which shared power during 2001-06, wants more time to rebuild after years of ban and persecution. The students, however, view not only Hasina but also BNP's Begum Zia, twice-prime minister, as part of the problem. The "Battling Begums of Bangladesh" had for over three decades stunted political evolution.

As Begum Zia is ailing, the BNP has begun to project her son, Tareq Zia, now in exile in London. But he has to clear serious graft charges before court work and work to win a wider acceptance from the Islamist groups, besides the student leaders.

Determining the political transition will be Yunus' decision, influenced by advisors at home and in the West, on

whether to launch a King's party like two of his predecessors, Ziaur Rahman and H M Ershad, or leave politics to politicians, himself going out in glory like Mandela.

More significant will be time and efforts to contain the Awami League, its leaders in jail and cadres on the run. The country's oldest and largest party has a record of bouncing back. A delay in holding the polls could make it a player, with or without Hasina's family. The BNP and its Islamist allies would not want that.

The Awami League, accused of corruption and misgovernance has, however, played a pioneering role in the past. Rightly or wrongly, Bangladesh's birth was triggered by its decisive role. Bangladesh has jettisoned the party for now and for some very valid reasons. It needs to renew its search for a national identity, notwithstanding Yunus' rhetorical declaration of "second independence."

The next few months, even years, will decide whether Bangladesh wants to be a South Asian nation with its natural links and as a bridge to Southeast Asia. Or does it wish to seek comfort by acquiring a faith-driven identity – over 90 per cent of its people practising Islam -- and emulate Pakistan, Afghanistan and West Asia?

If it is the latter, with the push coming from the Jamaat and the Islamist groups, then half of its population runs a huge risk. Bangladesh is a unique Muslim

nation where women enjoy high social independence. It has perhaps the world's largest female working force gainfully engaged in garments and electronic industries. That along with Yunus' Grameen Bank network, guarantees their economic independence. Will they be sacrificed and reduced to the status of women in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan?

The abrupt change in Dhaka underscores the dangers confronting emerging polities and economies in the post-colonial era. The risks have multiplied in a region that is increasingly becoming the battleground of big power rivalry in the new century's version of the "Great Game", between the US/West and China.

Beyond dousing domestic fires, Yunus' big challenge is foreign policy. He can woo China but not annoy the US and the West who clamoured for democracy's return, have blessed him and were quick to recognise the new government. They are the largest market for Bangladeshi goods. Whether or not the West does, China has investments and may continue as part of consolidating its South Asian presence.

Besides the usual players, Pakistan has returned to the Bangladeshi arena and is reviving old ties. It has mooted the revival of the stunted South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to cut India, the largest player, to size. Yet, while others can make promises, Bangladesh, whether or not it

likes to admit it, India is the only one that can help substantially. It can take the cue from the Maldives where the Muizu Government has, after a year of hostility, reached out to India.

The need is mutual and Dhaka would need to rise above domestic politics and reach out to Delhi which had supported Hasina till the last hour and is now hosting her. Surprised and disenchanted by the change, it is anxious about the strong likelihood of the return of Islamists and militant groups. Hasina had closed down their camps and facilitated over a decade of relative peace in India's northeast. Dhaka will have to move beyond providing protection, on the ground, to the Hindu minorities. The two also need to engage in the management of their 4,300 km border through which illegal movement of smugglers and cattle is rampant. They also need to discuss the sharing of river waters, of the Ganga and other river systems. Since any two neighbours must work together, 'friendliest' till a few weeks ago, they can forge a workable relationship for mutual benefits.



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Encountering the Legend

K.R. Thakur reminisces his meetings with Dr. Vikram Sarabhai

by Deepa Vanjani

Vikram Ambalal Sarabhai was an Indian physicist and astronomer who pioneered space research and helped to develop nuclear power in India. He was regarded as the Father of Indian space program, and was honoured with Padma Bhushan in 1966 and the Padma Vibhushan(posthumously) in 1972.

Rocket Boys, the popular television series, traced the lives of two brilliant physicists who altered India's trajectory, Dr. Homi Bhabha and Dr. Vikram Sarabhai. The Gen Z, who would have read these names and their biographies in their text books, came face to face with the challenges and odds the two men faced to make our nation's space and nuclear programs a reality.

How about meeting someone who has had the chance of having in person encounters with Dr. Sarabhai who set up the Indian Space Programme? I was thrilled when I met Mr. K.R. Thakur, the Mumbai based engineer, to talk to him about his meetings with the legend himself. Well, it is not just Dr. Sarabhai, Mr. Thakur worked with Prof. MGK Menon and Prof. Govind Swarup as well.

How did it begin? Says KRT (that's how people address him), "I graduated in mechanical engineering in 1964. Thereafter, I did an in-house, one year course in nuclear engineering conducted in Mumbai by the Department of Atomic Energy of Government of India.

On successful completion of the course, I was posted to the construction site of an atomic power project in Rajasthan in 1965. One fine morning in 1967, I received instructions to go back to Mumbai and report at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) to work as a project engineer for setting up a massive 1,700 ft. long and 100 ft. wide radio antenna near Ooty for the study of radio signals coming from outer galaxies beyond our Milky Way."

Does that remind us of Star Wars and maybe even ET (who can forget the adorable Martian)?

KRT travelled to Mumbai and he recalls "Within two or three days I was



at TIFR, Mumbai, reporting to Prof. Menon who was the Director of TIFR. Later, Prof. Menon became the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister of India. Prof. Menon explained to me the objectives of setting up the giant antenna. He then introduced me to Prof.

frequent visitor to TIFR," recounts Mr. Thakur, "to take stock of research being carried out in several scientific fields and their applications to address technical challenges. In the very first week of my joining at TIFR, Prof. Swarup introduced me to Dr. Sarabhai as the project engineer for the antenna project."

"Dr. Sarabhai's visits to TIFR often coincided with lunch time of the institute. TIFR has a beautiful canteen by the sea side. He would stand in the queue like any other employee to pick up his simple vegetarian meal and pay for it. Since he knew that I was working on the antenna project, he would often look for me and come and join me on the table where I was having my lunch. I was a 25 year old junior engineer, while he was the chairman of AEC, and still he would show his courtesy and ask me if he could join me. Dr. Sarabhai was a picture of courtesy, humility and modesty."

A beautiful take away that from the life of a great man.

These meetings over lunch were fruitful because they used the time to discuss the challenges the antenna project was posing. The antenna project presented many technical challenges of the first time kind. KRT specified a few, "Like we needed 24 gear segments of 40 ft. diameter - height of a four storey building. We needed to develop heat treatment to get certain special grades of steel to have high level of hardness and easy machinability, which are two contradictory requirements. There were also tricky civil engineering challenges like strengthening of soil on an eleven degree hill slope on which the antenna had to be set up."

These lunch table encounters proved to be very rewarding for him. "They used to start with enquiry about if the project was coming up on time," recounts Mr. Thakur, "but quickly, the conversation



With Dr. Govind Swarup at his felicitation evening

Govind Swarup, who headed the Radio Astronomy Division in TIFR, and to whom I was to report. Prof. Swarup was hand picked by Dr. Bhabha from Stanford University to set up the Radio Astronomy Division in TIFR. Prof. Swarup had developed the concept of the massive antenna to be set up at Ooty."

How then did he meet Dr. Sarabhai? "Dr. Vikram Sarabhai was the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) of India at that time. He was a very

used to shift to any technical issue that I may be facing. It was amazing, that though he was a scientist, he had multiple possible solutions to the technical challenges. If he did not have a solution, he would ask me to come to his office so that he could connect me to the right people in

the industry or other institutions who could guide me. Thus I ended up meeting the professor of soil mechanics in the Indian Institute of Technology at Powai, Mumbai, and senior engineers at Mazagon Docks workshop, senior people at Heavy Engineering

Corporation at Ranchi and many others."

The rendezvous were gateways to learn more about Dr. Sarabhai, to know him as a person and not just the man of science. Undoubtedly, meeting someone of that stature is not likely to slip from one's memory, "I can never forget those brief and meaningful encounters with Dr. Sarabhai. They left a permanent mark on my mind."

Incidentally, the antenna at Ooty is still in operation, 56 years after it was set up. "I understand it has discovered

many new galaxies and has been recently upgraded," adds KRT with a twinkle in his eyes.

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.



Review

Chitra Mudgal's Post Box no. 203 Nala Sopara, Moving exploration of the transgender experience Translated by Madhu Sriwastav and published by: Sahitya Akademi Reviewed by Chaitali Sengupta

"Post Box no. 203 Nala Sopara" is a compelling narrative that challenges societal norms and prejudices through the poignant journey of Vimli aka Vinod, a transgender individual, portrayed with exceptional sensitivity by the Sahitya Akademi award recipient Chitra Mudgal and beautifully translated by Madhu Sriwastav. In my opinion, it is not merely a novel; it is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of empathy.

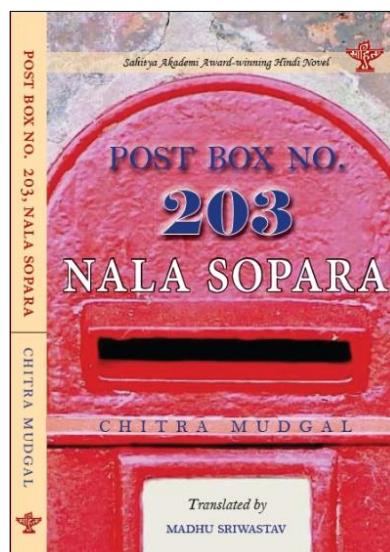
Mudgal's storytelling is both vivid and empathetic, delving deep into the psyche of Vinod as he grapples with the complexities of identity, acceptance, and dignity in a society rife with prejudice. The novel is inspired by a real-life character, and its epistolary format offers a unique lens through which the readers are confronted with the harsh realities faced by transgender individuals, from familial rejection to societal discrimination. The narrative unfolds through a series of letters, providing an intimate glimpse into Vinod's thoughts, emotions, and struggles. The letters reveal a deeply personal struggle with identity, as Vinod attempts to reconcile inner truths with external perceptions. Vinod's family, in their desire to protect and perhaps out of their inability to understand, opts to keep Vinod's identity hidden. This secrecy leads to an intense identity crisis in Vimli aka Vinod as he grows up. This is further exacerbated by societal expectations.

As he grows up, Vinod realises that he is different from his siblings. He can't stand against a wall and urinate, like other males, because he is born without the male organ, a penis. While he's still grappling with this, he's forcibly taken away by a group of eunuchs. His family easily dissociates with himself by spreading the rumour about his accidental death. However, Vinod finds it extremely difficult to forget his mother. He calls her up, but she is under dire family pressures. She rents a post box and asks him to send

society comes to know this, it will not accept her other children.

Mudgal's prose is imbued with a profound sense of humanity and allows the readers to develop a deep connection with Vinod aka Vimli, as he continues to share his moments of despair, joy, and contemplation with his Ba, Vandana Ben Shah. Vinod years for his mother. *'Ba, an oath on you, please allow me to call you every day, in the morning and evening for a minute...'* he begs in the letter. But this opportunity is cruelly denied to him. Through the protagonists' character, Mudgal shows that despite their marginalized status, they experience the same feelings and desires as anyone else. Later, Vinod meets Tiwariji, the M.L.A. who believes that *'the structure of politics needs such burning issues, as Vinod's. 'If you worship gender, do so, but do not deprive others. God resides in every particle, everybody has a right to life, even transgenders have this right. The loftiness of creation doesn't get marred by aberrations.'* Tiwariji's words are exactly the words Vinod wants to listen. He is swayed by Tiwariji's beliefs and decides to use the political platform to advocate for the transgender community.

As the reader read through the pages, Vimli aka Vinod emerges as a complex character, his voice resonating with depth. Mudgal's ability to create a character like Vimli/Vinod is commendable. The epistolary format



letters to *Nala Sopara Postbox No: 203*. Of course, she never answers back to Vinod's letters, for she knows if the

adds a layer of intimacy and immediacy to the narrative. Vimli's letters are written in a conversational and accessible style, making us feel as though we're part of his circle. His letters are filled with a raw and honest portrayal of his inner world. These also reveal his journey of self-discovery.

'Post Box No: 203, Nala Sopara' is a profound and moving exploration of the transgender experience. It is also a powerful critique of the prejudices they face. What makes 'Post Box no. 203 Nala Sopara' truly exceptional is its ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, thanks to the masterful translation by Madhu Sriwastav. Her translation garnered the 2023 Muse India GSP Rao Translation award.

One of the novel's unique strengths is its use of Hindi and Gujarati words. Sriwastav has retained both some Hindi & Gujarati words in her translation. This

linguistic choice enriches the narrative, grounding in its cultural setting and adds layers of meanings and texture to the story, making the characters' voices

Chaitali Sengupta is an accomplished writer and translator, and her works travel fluidly between fiction, poetry, non-fiction and works on translation. Her latest book "The Crossings-poems on war, migration & survival won the Runners-Up award in the London Book Festival 2024. She garnered recognition for her debut collection of prose poems, "Cross Stitched Words," which earned the 'Honourable Mention' award at the New England Book Festival in 2021. Her expertise in translation is evident in her notable work, "Timeless Tales in Translation," which received the special jury award at the Panorama International Literature Festival in 2023. With three translation books to her name, Chaitali has been a consistent contributor to both online and print media.



more genuine. Sriwastav has successfully captured the essence and nuances of Mudgal's narrative, ensuring that the emotional depth and social commentary of the original text are preserved for English-speaking audiences. Her ability to bridge the gap between languages while preserving the integrity and emotional resonance of the original text is commendable.

This translation does justice to the complexities of Vinod's journey, capturing the nuances of identity, acceptance, and dignity with grace and empathy. This book is a must read for anyone seeking to understand the complexities of gender identity and challenges the readers to confront their own prejudices.

Devi's Diary

Issue of identity: An introspective look at Indians in Africa

By Devi Rajab

For Indians in Africa today the issue of identity and nationality is a wavering concept. Indians in the Diaspora essentially left the mother country in search of greener pastures either as immigrants or temporary sojourners. They ranged in status from indentured labourers to professionals, merchants and traders. By and large wherever they settled in the world they seemed to have fared well, contributing significantly, in relation to their numbers to the GDP of their host country or the country of their adoption

Thirty years into our democracy South Africans of Indian origin are taking a fresh introspective look at themselves. Who are they? How have they coped? How have they changed and what is still unique in their constructed cultural frame of reality that distinguishes them from Indians in the Diaspora? Recently I took a trip down memory lane to tell my story.

I did not choose to be born in Durban. The decision was made for me over 100 years ago when my grandfather Ramiah Moodley chose to board the ship *SS Truro* headed for Africa where he was told that the streets were paved with gold. He was barely 20 and full of zest for a new life of adventure and excitement. Like a lovely damsel Durban caught his fancy and he fell in love with her bringing forth many children and grandchildren.

He did well, for Durban may be considered to be South Africa's most charming city with its diverse population of Indians, Zulus, English and an exotic melange of diverse peoples known only in South Africa as Coloureds. On account of its balmy winters in all my life I can't ever recall needing an overcoat. Its beaches were then and still are now perennially inviting though the laws when I grew up clearly separated the waterfront along a racial divide. Ironically the great Indian Ocean was

barred to the very people from whom it took its name. However, the lush green semi tropical countryside, opulent in its natural beauty and history certainly made up for its ugly past.

As a child I was consciously aware of the Zulu presence in the dancing and the drumbeat, the music and the language, in the arts and craft in the market places, in the human driven colourful rickshaws and in their contribution through sweat and toil without which the City's wheels would have grinded to a halt. As a 3 year old child I remember the deep anxiety and fear that my family experienced over the racial tension between local Zulus and Indians which culminated in the 1948 riots. I was also acutely conscious of white oppression through the passive resistance movement of the Indian Congress and of the harsh laws and restrictions that restricted so called 'non white' people of their basic rights to freedom. Separate entrances, facilities,

schools, hospitals, ambulances, benches, beaches, and residential areas created barriers between races tainting the city into a racial whore. Still we saw her native beauty through dappled light and never let go of that dream to claim her as our very own. We marched through her streets, held up posters in the air and boycotted events in our struggle to reclaim her to her rightful place. She was as she still is today our mother city.

I spent my early childhood playing among children in a racially integrated neighbourhood on the lower Berea where the streets would be lined with heavily laden mango, guava, pawpaw and banana trees, Dutch apples and kumquats. Durban in the summer would induce 'monkey like' behaviour in us kids as we scaled tree upon tree in search of the fruit. There were Indian and English speaking families and Afrikaners, various hues of

so-called coloured people ranging from 'playwhites' to the more proudly coloured and even a black lawyer. I recall that he had a purple Lincoln Continental, a Mercedes Benz and even a Volkswagen, which invariably filled up half of the narrow street. He had a Zulu chauffeur and the whole entourage of Indian nanny and numerous children would be taken to school each morning. We would all glare in amazement at this grand sight. Heswall Road must have been a fascinating place to warrant two sociologists to study the interracial interactions of the residents of this street. They noted that bowls of curry and sweetmeats would be passed over the fence among neighbours with little reciprocation from the white quarter other than effusive praise for the delicious delicacies. Still the contact was vibrant and engaging. It was quite remarkable how people lived so harmoniously together until the Group Areas Act which divided the city into designated areas for particular racial groups, came as a bolt from the blue to disrupt a beautiful neighbourhood. By a stroke of a pen Heswall Rd was declared

a white area to accommodate an influx of European immigrants.

I went back to see it some 35 odd years later. Our house still stands but the hollyhocks have gone. The veranda where my grandfather would read us stories from the Ramayana has become into a derelict mess. The garage still had the rusted ballet bar where we would practice our pliers and stretch our limbs. The mango tree, which we climbed as children, was looking sadly barren. I walked through the house and saw the old pantry, which used to be filled with



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stone jars of all sorts of pickles, chillies, mangoes and lemons that would be served at dinner parties. There was the prayer room beside it where every evening the 'kamatchi' lamp would be lit with an offering of water and flowers and the family prayer would be said before supper. Ayar the family cook would lay a white starched tablecloth with dinner plates and cutlery and serve a freshly made meal that varied on a daily basis. If the table could talk it would echo tales of contentious discussions held over several dinners among a multiracial liberal intelligentsia who gathered in this modest home to 'cathart' over the horrors of apartheid. On holy days when religious rites were performed vegetables would be cooked in separate pots and served on banana leaves in abundance in Natal. I looked out in vain for the holy thulsi (wild rosemary) tree, which was always present in the backgarden of most Hindu homes in Durban. As I walked down memory lane I almost heard Saighal and Subbulaxmi and Peter Paul and Mary and the Beatles and Elvis Presley all raise their voices in song to

acknowledge my presence for they were the voices of that time and place. And as I left heavy hearted I thought I heard Bob Dylan wail *"....The times they are a changing"*

My grandfather is gone and with him went a lot of history. Now post apartheid South African cities are currently undergoing a dynamic transformation and Durban is no exception. Parts of the city are manicured and controlled while others have taken on the character of most cities in the developing world-fluid, messy, violent but vibrant. Though apartheid is a thing of the past, class and race have contributed to the concept of gated communities where wealthy residents have secured themselves behind electric fences in exclusive golfing suburbs. Alongside the upmarket development lie ethnic enclaves of sub economic townships previously established by the apartheid government to house separate racial groups in line with their policy of separate development. The biggest and most vibrant township of Chatsworth lies in the south of Durban and is home to the largest community displaced Indians.

While the old Durban where 90% of Indian South Africans resided was noted for its temples and its mosques, the new city has now been taken over by casinos and nightclubs. In the greater Durban area alone there are over 5 casinos strategically positioned near townships servicing a new culture of gamblers.

Against deceptive advertising of instant millionaires, the reality is that thousands of poor people are falling foul to the gambling habit and on a daily basis pitiful tales are heard of township residents losing their monthly salaries to the slot machines. The casino economy has taken hold while the temples lie empty as national monuments. Still they are a sight not to be missed. They stand as monuments to the early immigrants who brought out skilled artisans to construct places of learning and worship for the community.

Book Review

Sukrita Paul Kumar's *Yellow: Poemlets, New & Earlier*

Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, ISBN:978-93-6183-586-5

Reviewed by Gopal Lahiri

Poemlets: Splendour of Expression

There are poems that tremble with human presence or its absence. Such poems have a dynamic simplicity that pins our attention. They are short, crisp and concise but they have the power to enthrall, disturb or unsettle us. Sukrita in her latest collection of poemlets (a beautiful coinage by the poet herself), '*Yellow*', discovers a vehicle for giving form to her deepest discoveries. The total engagement of these poemlets is exhausting and striking because of the candour and elegance. At the end, they are presented here in exquisite miniature. A reasoned, measured tone marks these ethereal moments.

What is remarkable perhaps, is that the poet looks at the dynamic of words within words and decipher the multiplicity of meanings within words. Like in her earlier book, '*Salt and Pepper*', she pays intimate attention to things that might otherwise be unnoticed and unheeded. One is left with a mix of emotions that linger and move themselves into the subconscious.

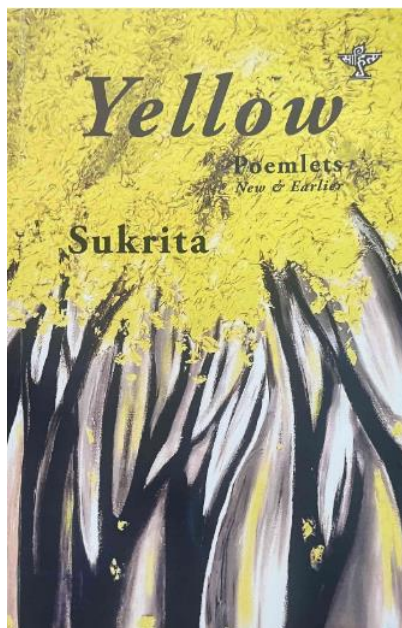
Sukrita says in her *Preface*, 'The poemlets in this volume came into being at times in series or bunches under different themes, or as snapshots and insights individually as disparate units. The visible canvas of each poemlet is small, stretchable hopefully across the hemispheres, end to no end.'

Sukrita's poetic style embodies her thoughts. Her thoughts are subtle, discreet but also engaged and passionate. Here the tiny poemlets produces a high-toned effect and a ringing sound the reader's mind. And there is no denying that each poemlet has a perceptible structure.

The book is insistently contemporary and concerned with intimate moments of life.

Her poetry adds a sense of playfulness at times and ameliorates the cohesive tone.

Take the clusters of poemlets in the first poem '*Buddha in neighbourhood*' and the poet perhaps want us to redirect our gaze to ponder our fascination and desired actions.



*clouds of haze
melt the mountains

with Buddha's hum
or
tiny bells ringing
love
amidst waves of gentle breeze

offerings landing
on Buddha's visage
or
Buddha in grey stone
melting in
white peace.*

Sukrita is a poet with a keen eye, a roaming intelligence, and a passionate sensibility. There is a boldness, accuracy and intensity about the way the poet approaches her poemlets. Stylistically, this book takes readers on a ride over different terrains and geomorphological landscapes, going from one tiny poem to another, laced by a few artworks drawn by the poet herself. These images are all specific, surprising and they manage to tie the abstract into concrete. What is more impressive is that the poet never tries to make the images prettier than they are, images or metaphors alone are enough.

*one day
all those stories

twiddling their thumbs
behind the shutters

half smile peeping
from fathomless eyes

will roll down the cheeks
as tears; (we the homeless)*

How these poemlets work? The poet has given an interesting answer. 'While it (read poemlet) needs to be complete enough to be able to transmigrate into the readers mind, it also needs to respect the reader's participation in its reception and perhaps even reconstruction.' But chances are there that the readers' perspective can be unlike anyone's else. No definitive answers are demanded.

What makes this book so compelling is not the big issue it touches on, but the small details allocate in pages after pages, from the bottom of poet's heart. Silence between the lines, around images and metaphors, offer a kind of breathing space between the texts. And as the poet says, 'that invoke the reader's active participation in the birthing of yet

another poem from the one received.' And the delights of the poet's shimmering reflexive lines are endless.

*once again
that language
of silence
of dumbness*

*bridges weighed.
under... (high and low)*

We all know that Sukrita Paul Kumar is not only an eminent poet but also an accomplished painter. She has a strong visual sensibility to her writings. For her, the analogy between poetry and painting is exacting. With her intellectual elegance and generosity of spirit, her illustrations in this book constellate into a masterwork of images told with a poet artist's splendour of expression. One can take note of these lines, '*womb is a natural gufa/ of creation/ and it is a tomb/ of all memories. (gufa)*'. They generate perhaps the electric vibrations beneath our skin.

Some of these poemlets are meditations on subsistence; some, observations on nature and surrounds, some narrate her personal experiences, while some strive to capture the radiant receptivity to beauty. The following ones delve into the life and convey intimate exchanges.

*the newspaper reads well
when
nothing is happening
or
children play
with toys
adults with
their conscience. (meaning)*

How do we distinguish reality from its opposite- whatever that may be? The poet searches the borders of reality and the surreal nature of the world where we live. Her poetic texts function as

fragments of memory and journey, coming into sharp focus, then blurring where content and form mirror each other. The poet flows into a haunting meditation on *ganga* in the series of poemlets. A beautiful pilgrimage of small delights and calmness are reflected here. The poet sees and transmits the world in new and wondrous ways.

*my soul lies deep
in your waters
o ganga
my body must dive
into the river
from Himalayan heights
to embrace her (dialogues with ganga)
or
running with you downhill
o ganga
through vales and dales
moment by moment (dialogues with ganga)*

In her earlier book '*Salt and Peppers*', in '*Blue Islets*' poem (included in the present collection as well) the poet asserts a likeness between unlike things and maintains their comparability but now islets aka poemlets share details from a realm that usually operates from the '*pristine clarity*'.

*words as frozen ice
stuck in the
throats
of lovers (breaking silence)
or
the smell of fresh snow
blowing off
the sands of desert
in the mind
sowing seeds
anew (winter poems at minnesota)*

'*Yellow*' is a quietly commendable collection of poemlets by a poet of intense passion and restraint. In the poem '*not so randomly*', the poet talks about *yellow sun/ shooting out of/ black clouds*. And then the yellow leaves '*making space for new leaves on their/ branches*'. The poet contextualizes hope and despair in the natural life cycle.

The book conveys the hesitancy, resonance and fever dream of a discerning mind discovering what writing poetry can do. In these series of poemlets, the poet intentionally avoids the use of punctuation in most cases, adding to that sense of speed and rhythm and rushing into the next thoughts. They are symphonies of thought, miniature manifestos for reason and humanism, for unknowing and spiritualism that can also be seen as timely.

The cover design by Dibyojyoti Sarma is stirring. '*Yellow*', published by Sahitya Akademi, is one of those singular books that pulls readers into a completely immersive world of poemlets.



Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, writer, editor, critic and translator and has published in Bengali and English language. He has authored thirty books to his credits His poetry is also published across various anthologies as well as in eminent journals of India and abroad. His book reviews have been published in Indian Literature of Sahitya Akademi, (Print journal), Muse India, Scroll.in, Different Truths, Kitaab (Singapore), Setu (US) online journals and many others. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prize for poetry in 2021. He is the recipient of the Poet of the Year Award in Destiny Poets, UK, 2016, Setu Excellence Award, 2020, Pittsburgh, US and first Jayanta Mahapatra National Award on literature in 2024.

Poetry

Let's Get Old Together



by Meenakshi Mohan

Let's get old together –
you said,
when I fall, you hold me
when you slip, I become your support
we laughed and walked together
life was a beautiful color
with love and melody.

Alas! you left much before
the leaves turned brown
the flowers were still blossoming
the trees were still dancing
the blue-throated hummingbird
still sang its melodious song
unaware of the coming of Fall.

Today, I sit quietly at my window
waiting for the winter of my life to arrive
when trees, bushes
and the ground be covered in a silver
blanket
children of the neighborhood playing
snowball,
and young lovers walking hand-in-hand
perhaps saying to each other –
Let's get old together.

I look far beyond
at an empty bench
where you and I sat often
dreamt of our heavenly world
and you recited Keats,

Wordsworth, and Shelley.
My love, sing the Blue Moon Song again and
let my heart race.

Come, take me to your land
where peace would wrap us around, and once more,
we could say,
Let's Get Old Together

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



Associations/Connections



Yogesh Patel

A Masterclass in Poetry

Most poetry workshops will engage you in an exercise asking you to list things connected to your poem's premise or impulse. The instinct is to stimulate possibilities, not to teach you the design of your poem. Harried Michael Schmidt of PN Review and Carcanet Press recently grumbled that the association of images and instances in poetry are given. "(The) poems that have designs on their readers aren't to be trusted". My counterpoint is that any learning process cannot be done without understanding the design and its components. Learning in creative art should equate to understanding, not with the methodical approach. Also, the workshop environment should not be prescriptive. It is best if it is about understanding the process and technique, so one can level up one's work. The first outburst is usually is a very raw draft, not a final poem! Revisions involve further exploration of associations and connotations. You breach the outer reaches of a given poem. The copious experience of the content should grow organically. Look at a [short poem by Daljit Nagra](#):

Look there he goes even now, my father
into some other world, all my life
I have been harbour-struck
trying to make him appear
from wherever he went
the years before
I was born...

Nothing special? Wrong. The association of ideas in words can be juxtaposed in contrast. Here, the poet's father may have passed away, but the mentioned 'some other world' could be a culturally alien world of the poet's father. The association contrasts with the word 'appear'. That throws us back to when his father arrived on a ship as a migrant. It connects the image of how migrants cling to their ways, alienating themselves.

The poet attempts to find this otherworldly father. There is also a statement about cultural estrangement here. Let me associate this with my poem, 'Bottled Ganges', in which I am capturing how migrants cling to their old values and cannot escape the 'precious' past. Here, Nagra brings that idea home with stark contrast. He robustly highlights the lost father! In such a compact poem, he packs a lot in with a simple association of images, ideas, history, sentiments of loss in different contexts, and two opposing concepts — 'gone' and '(to) appear'.

Associations, aka connections or connotations, of images and ideas unlock the potential tapestry of poems. Conversely, the correlation can sift through layers of meaning. One word can also trigger an additional dimension, as in Sukrita's poem from her recent collection, Poemlets;

flakes of snow
dwindling and tossing

constructing virginity

for the sun in spring
to melt it away

Check how the poet associates a simple observation on a snowfall which covers everything to make the landscape look bare, hence 'constructing virginity'. Thus, moving from the concrete image of a snow-toss to something intangible. Perhaps, the word 'constructing' elicits the image of old monarchs preparing daughters as a commodity, a marriage transaction. Here, it triggers the masculine play of the sun. Its discharge conceives the idea of fertility as spring. The revelation entails transitioning through links and connections, jumping between unrelated players, and discovering a common factor to achieve an enhanced outcome. The observed virginity leads to hope of fertile spring.

Should you insist on the mechanics and cogs of these moving parts of the association of narratives through

the hoops of images and ideas, here are some handles:

** First, think of physical connections.*

** What are they? Items, places, or animals?*

** What narratives do they conjure up?*

** In this association, think of smell, touch or sound. How can you link them, as shown in the examples earlier?*

** How can you jump from them or imagine them interacting with other aspects and players?*

** For the personal touch, summon your experiences and how you can relate them to the poem's world.*

** Think of linking the leading meanings and philosophical facets.*

** What about complex politics, muddled religious concepts, and cultural questions?*

** For the visual lineup, including plays of colour and light, also consider monuments, myths, and landscapes to uncover possibilities.*

At one level, many poets move swiftly to the long series of images, ideas and narratives with too much density, on the other level, distillation or filtering the connections leaves some with bare-boned poems. It brings us back to Michael Schmidt's point. Once you have all the ingredients from associations you have visited, as poems are not a design, your voice will have to make a choice and guide you in lifting your poem, not forgetting the demands of current trends, what will be accepted for publications, and what is your aim.

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.

Nostalgia, Wisdom and Melody

Meenakshi Mohan's Symphonies of Life: Poems

Reviewed by Anita Balakrishnan

Penprints, India, Kolkata, pp 154

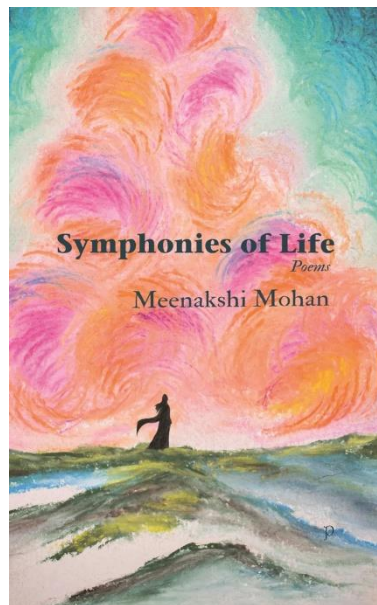
Poet, artist and scholar Meenakshi Mohan's debut anthology of poetry *Symphonies of Life* traces the trajectory of her life from her childhood and adolescence in Birlapur, near Calcutta, to her marriage and immigration to America, the birth of her children, and the vicissitudes of her adult life. The poems are largely autobiographical, tracing the relationships that have shaped her persona, from her origins in India to the landscapes she inhabits in her present home in America. The poems centred on family relationships reflect a sustained thread of creativity that is passed down through the generations, from her grandmother and mother, to the poet's own experience of motherhood, raising two young children, to her grandchildren. Meenakshi Mohan's poems appreciate the creative legacy of all these human connections in a manner that resurrects the voices of the past.

The title poem, 'Symphonies of Life' delineates a familiar theme, the need to stoically face the crescendos and downswings of life:

*Life is like
symphonies,
with haunting melodies of sadness and
despair,
with echoes of love and delight.
Between tears and laughter,
that weave a story.*

The familiar is rendered lyrical in the poet's simple, yet evocative words.

The next poem, a translation from a Hindi verse by Rishi Kumari, 'A Tribute to My Mother' sets the tone for many poems in the book. Three short poems that follow are nostalgic



portraits of her mother's love and protectiveness towards her daughter.

testament to such deep emotions that segue into philosophical perspectives on mortality. The beauty of the seaside setting at her daughter's home in Maine evokes the memories of the close bond they shared and her way of coming to terms with the inevitable. Initially, she yearns to slip away from life:

I noticed broken wooden steps

*Going down to some unknown
destination, crossing over the streams...*

*down to the shore where a lone red
boat was waiting.*

But the call of Meenakshi's two-year-old granddaughter, who runs up to hug her, reminds her that there is a lot of life to be lived as yet. The interweaving of lines of her husband's favourite Hindi ghazal by Gulzar into the poem emphasizes the hybrid culture that underpins her

creativity. The poem, 'Chat Masala: On Hyphenated Identity', is a light-hearted take on her Indian-American personality.



During a recent online

The poem 'I am Always with You, My Child' is a heartfelt plea by a daughter left bereft by the loss of her mother:

*Today,
As clouds appear as rocks on my way,
come, fill my life with rainbows again.
The mother's silent response is seen in
the image of the star shining bright in
the night sky.*

The best poetry evinces the need to express in words, experiences that are too painful to bear. Meenakshi Mohan's poems on the loss of her husband, are a

Although nostalgia and wistful memories of family bonds are a significant theme in the books, the seriousness and pathos are leavened at times with funny, witty poems that highlight humorous vignettes of modern life. Nostalgia for the flavours of the homeland is a perennial theme in diasporic writing, and Meenakshi Mohan's poetry is no exception. An entertaining situation is presented in 'The Story of an American Rasoi where Noodles Danced' (Rasoi is kitchen in Hindi). As a young wife, the poet is tasked with preparing spaghetti in tomato sauce for a potluck Indian dinner, to cater to the westernised tastes of the children. While she is preparing the pasta in the traditional

way, her husband advises her to take a shortcut and cook the whole thing in a pressure cooker. When the pressure knob is released, the spaghetti noodles and sauce splatter all over their new, pristine white kitchen! Being too tired to cook the spaghetti afresh, they serve the scraped off pasta. Needless to say, the children preferred the expertly cooked Indian food! Juxtaposed with this comic tale of culinary ineptitude, is the poem titled 'My Dadi's Rasoi'. In her rudimentary kitchen, Meenakshi's paternal grandmother turns out masterfully prepared sweets and savouries that she feeds her granddaughters with love.

William Safran asserted that members of the diaspora retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland. Writing is one of the most important means of myth-making available to the diaspora. Reinventing the myths of the homeland is therefore a central theme in diasporic literature. Diasporic writers must maintain their connection to their natal land if they wish to be called members of the diaspora. They manage this connection by translating their habits, food and ways of speaking across national

boundaries. These myths become more than mere stories for these writers; they become modes of rediscovery and memory, of forging a sense of collective cultural belonging.

Meenakshi Mohan draws on strong women from Hindu myth to create portraits of female resilience and love. The poems on Kali, Shantha and Sita present different facets of the Indian women: her strength, her loyalty, her willingness to sacrifice for her family and her ability to fight evil demons. The power and resilience of women in the face of adversity is evoked in the three poems that refer to Kali or Shakti: 'Kali is Born', 'I Am Kali' and 'She'.

These are poems that seek to reinvent the past, yet hold it close and relish its simplest moments: from "The murg wrapped in succulent spices" to the "cuppa Darjeeling in my hand". But these poems also jettison painful feelings or transmute them into "the heavenly elixir of the moment – away from the world's clamor / and then nothing else matters."

Although Symphonies of Life includes poems that are playful and whimsical,

the volume is primarily an intense and intriguing exploration of the relationships among the different generations of a family and the complex world in which they live. This collection can be viewed as a poetic journey, on the path towards finding peace and contentment while weathering the pleasures and heartache that shape all human lives. It is a notable achievement by a diasporic Indian writer seeking to establish her unique voice in poetry.



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Mary's College, and Chennai, India. Her research focuses on contemporary Indian writing in English, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Cultural Studies and postcolonial literature. She is the author of *Transforming Spirit of Indian Women Writers* published in 2012. She has published papers in various national and international journals and has guided several PhD scholars.

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Poems by Gopal Lahiri

Timeless

Today the moon is silver grey
brighter than the vermillion box
in the closet,
and your dwindling memory
basks in the moonlight
sieving through the corner window,

It fades in the eyes, the retina detaches
itself on a sharp knife
and a door opens
where chalk lines are not ready
to type your mother's name,
and releasing the whiteness of the floor marble.

The wind peels it skin away like
a curling snake and a night
that burns itself down to cinder.
you write poems of a lonely raindrop
on the glass window, then erase
and begin writing again.

Time goes around the house, the
tiger lily dries on your
writing table, taking the smell with it.

Startling

All day two blue orioles slur on the tree tops
puffs, hulks and hisses,
they are restless no more, elegant by such balance,
full of dreaming and idleness.

Pools are filled to the last edges, the water
remains water- in the stubbled desolation
they are mired in nature,
In the ruckus of the fallen leaves.

I think serenity is not something you just find
the tiny lilies are holding up its petals
how important is to walk along the field,
The moss trees drop their silken hairs

The orioles are now down among the sloppy rocks
they are going crazy with happiness
looking at everything and calling out,
They are like that startling, winsome, alive.

@gopallahiri

Threshold fiction

THE POET PASSES BY by Cyril Dabydeen

The poet passes by, and everyone seems to be in awe. A new ambience, or almost reverence, in the making; time forbidding. Let the mathematician keep knowing numbers—for he sleeps and dreams about it; his face a complex mass of corpuscles as he reverts to more numbers, equations. Bengali-born Professor Naushad looks at me with askance, bent on creating new worlds with strange formulae, penumbras; everything definitive, if abstract only.

I acknowledge him, thinking or assuming all the world's forces are with Einstein and Oppenheimer; and Stephen Hawking about man's possibilities, and the many universes we carry in us, beyond the known cosmos. Never mind Professor Naushad's obsession with parabolas.

The poet passes by.

Black holes getting bigger and will eventually swallow up the solar system--with more to come in uncomprehending or mind-boggling ways. What abstract physics and equations cannot really tell? The Professor keeps being deep into himself with his many books published and conferences attended in America, Europe, Asia over the years. Famed Indian mathematician Ramanujan he knows about?

The poet passes by.

And at Cambridge, Professor Naushad had been told by an English seer, with satire in mind, that India has achieved only one thing--Zero. Yes, the numeral, zero. Everything now existential, you see. The poet passes by.

Shireen, a new college student deep in her studies of politics and international affairs, looks at us with her modesty, or anonymity. She's taken in by Professor Naushad's equations suggesting--and let real knowledge come to her--if a glimmer about stratagems; and now intrigues with geo-political paradigms at play, as more she dwells on it. Rationalism beyond the Cartesian each new generation must contend with. Human survival is at stake!

The poet passes by.

Now here in the West where Professor Naushad is convinced about the *raison d'être* about mathematical learning and coming to grips with the important purpose for our existence--beyond mere cognitive dissonance, or intellectualism.

Let the East be given to lack of preciseness bordering on fatalism, he asserts. Oh, the world given to harbouring tribalism with atavistic impulses we will continually wrestle with.

The poet passes by.

From ape-man to space-man I acknowledge in more than what's simply evolutionary. The conquest of worlds! Shireen's taken up with social media, Artificial Intelligence, advances in electronics with everything being more or less predictable, she imagines. Ah, Einstein's considered opinion that the imagination is more powerful than reason, I contend.

Professor Naushad's Bangladeshi beginning, as memory-waves bring us closer, you see; and the mind's grip, the ego, almost being unto itself. Atman combining selfhood derived from the Upanishads, yes. Maharajahs and nawabs in their distinguishable selves, in a manner of speaking.

The poet passes by.

Muslims being faith-bound, with the Mughals' empire-building. Akbar fostering religious tolerance; but Aurangzeb being singular, autocratic. The British Raj coming soon after. Military encounters being inevitable. Let scientific knowledge and the humanities be at odds--if East and West are becoming more common, in almost parallel ways. Robots, mechanical gadgets, drones in warfare. Isaac Newton...Freud, Jung, etc.

The poet passes by.

Latitude and longitude closing in! Do you know that the Himalayas had once been under the ocean? Fossils making up Everest--real markers of how we have evolved. Topography with continents reshaping themselves. And dinosaurs impacted by an asteroid! How much more fate-bound? Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* we come to grips with.

The poet passes by.

Shireen looks around uncomfortably. Professor Naushad is unimpressed. I instinctually drum up Rabindranath Tagore because of provenance: our presumably common roots. See, Naushad had been a young pupil in Bangladesh when Tagore was much talked about--his poems, plays, stories.

And Gandhi meeting Tagore in a more than an auspicious moment!

The poet passes by.

I dwell on W.B. Yeats' opinion about the celebrated Tagore volume, *Gitanjali*—Songs of Devotion—"I read Rabindranath every day, and to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world." Now let Shireen be at ease with metaphors, images, rhythms. "Light of my Life"...beyond mathematical formulae. Space and time as the centuries go by; mathematical exactness, it must be if beyond abstract principles.

The poet passes by.

Inner landscapes I inevitably come to grips with about life's uncertainties. "Negative capability," with John Keats, oh. Shireen's intuitive sense, or illumination--in her mindful awareness. Shakespeare's expression of fatalism in mankind's existential doubts, far more than a witch's brew. Characters with their dualities, ambivalences, the real self dramatized on stage.

The poet passes by.

More deceitful, shapes and forms come into being. Prospero's magical spells, yes. Hamlet's soliloquy: "To be or not to be ..." King Lear alone on the heath tragically declaring about his destiny. Macbeth's "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow," and life's brief candle burning out more than sound without fury, if a tale told by an idiot "signifying nothing." I will presume trying to know a little about the Vedas and deities with so many avatars. Symbolism, you see, beyond mere magic realism.

Shireen looks at the new volume of poetry, "Unknown Verses," she has now picked up. The poet passes by.

Cyril Dabydeen's new book to appear is *Forgotten Exiles (stories)*. Other recent books include *My Undiscovered Country*, *God's Spider*, *My Multi-Ethnic Friends/ Stories*, and *Imaginary Origins: Selected Poems* (Peepal Tree Press, UK). His novels include *Drums of My Flesh* (Mawenzie House, Toronto). His work has appeared in over 60 literary magazines. He taught Writing at the UofOttawa for many years. He is Ottawa Poet Laureate Emeritus.



Short Story

Thief's Birthday by Subhash Chandra

The phone does not ring. Most of my friends have journeyed to their heavenly abodes. Few in our Housing Society Complex can negotiate thirty-two steps up to the second floor because of knees and back problems. Our two sons had settled in the U.S. fifteen years ago, and my wife Mohini accompanied the younger one.

To top it all, I am an insomniac. Everyone ... everything sleeps – the residents in the Complex, the market that bustles during the day, the park that resonates with the squeals of kids, the laughter of the Yoga practitioners, and the housewives’

chatter. Even the night slumbers, shrouded in the dark. But I don’t. I can’t.

As was my wont, I went to the balcony around 1.00 a.m. to spend a few hours on my easy chair. He had climbed up the rainwater pipe and reached beyond the first floor. In a few more minutes, he would have plopped onto our balcony.

“Come through the door. I’ll open it.”

He raised his astonished face while clinging to the pipe.

Being impulse-driven I often act crazy. Once I had invited a group of Hijras singing in the neighbourhood to tea.

My wife cringed and the two adolescent sons angrily stomped out of the house. They talked loudly, clapped, and guffawed exchanging smutty jokes amongst themselves. Then they started appearing frequently. They would troop into the house, occupy the dining table, and order Mohini, “Chai pilao Bibi.” I managed to stop them with the help of the local MP who had an account with the branch I headed as the Manager.

Another time I brought home a baby monkey with a festering wound. After I nursed him back to health, he took

over the house, picking up fruit from the bowl, opening the casserole and polishing off chapatis, and jumping from the sofa to the bed to the computer table. Once, he hopped onto the kitchen slab, frightening Mohini who dashed out

screaming. I had to call the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to get rid of him.

I waited for some time but the thief did not show up. I was about to return to the balcony when I heard a soft, hesitant knock.

I opened the door, but he tarried near the threshold.

“Get in,” I said and pointed to a chair.

He moved cautiously.

“I feel like having tea. Will you join me?” I asked.

He perched on the edge of the chair, slouching forward, ready to sprint out at the slightest hint of danger.

Before going to the kitchen, I bolted the door.

He sprang up from the chair and hissed, “Unbolt!”

I turned and saw him standing with a shining dagger in his hand.

“Don’t be mad. What can a frail seventy-five-year-old with multiple ailments do to you?” I asked. “I have done it for our safety.”

He looked at me quizzically.

“A rabid dog prowls around our Complex. He has mauled three residents.”

“Okay, just close the door.”

He seemed fidgety and tried to peer through the bedroom door.

“Don’t worry. There is nobody else in the house.”

His gaze lingered on the mobile phone. I switched it off.

I served him a few Britannia Five Grains biscuits with tea.

“Why do you thieve?” I asked him conversationally.

“Because of you.”

“What?”

“I mean because of the bourgeois like you. You have so much that you don’t need. And I need so much and have almost nothing. Cursed capitalism! ...

Destructive, unequal distribution of wealth.”

“Oh, you are educated!”

“Yes, I graduated from Burdwan Raj College, West Bengal.”

“Why didn’t you try for a job?”

“How do you know I didn’t,” he said wryly. After a brief pause, he asked, “Can you find me one? ... Any job... Even that of a peon.”

I had retired from the Bank eighteen years ago. The present staff were strangers to me. It was almost an impossibility, yet I said, “I’ll try.”

I have always found it difficult to say ‘No.’ which often caused me trouble later.

He relished the biscuits and asked for more. I recalled the cake in the fridge that our immediate neighbours had given me the day before.

He looked at the cake and smiled.

“Why the smile?”

He did not answer.

“Come on, share it.”

“Today ... is my birthday,” he said hesitantly.

“Oh wow! ... What a pleasant coincidence! ... Then wait, let us celebrate it the proper way.”

I took out a candle from a drawer in the kitchen, lit it, and placed it on the centre table.

“What’s your name?”

He hesitated.

“I’ll never harm you. Give you my word.”

“Tathagata.”

I could not help reflecting on the irony of it. That is one of the titles of Buddha! I sang ‘Happy Birthday’ tunelessly and put a piece of cake into his mouth. He was overwhelmed ... touched; his face softened and he looked gentle.

As he got up to leave, out of habit I said in Bangla, “Aabaar aashbe” (Come again).

He sat down and looked at me with renewed interest.

“Aapni Baangali?”

#

The rest of the conversation was in Bengali.

"The tea you made was good. I am a tea addict."

"That makes the two of us."

As we sipped tea I asked, "What did you steal the first time?"

"A toy ... a remote-controlled car for our son."

"Where is your family?"

"In Kolkata."

"Do you intend to bring them to Delhi?"

"No ... Here even a hovel costs the sky."

"Where do you sleep?"

"Anywhere ... Parks, railway platforms, or the pavement."

Suddenly, a troubled expression drenched his face. He quickly got up and left without a word. I thought I had seen the last of him. But after two days, he came again.

"Oh, good to see you... How are you? Let's have tea."

"No, thanks. I've to go," he said, put a pouch on the table, and left in a huff.

I recognized the pouch. It contained Mohini's gold chain with a pendant that I had gifted her on a Wedding Anniversary!

I thought such things happened only in fiction!

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



Meenakshi Mohan in Conversation with Gopal Lahiri on his book, *Anemone Morning and Other Poems*.

(Penprints Publications, 2024)

Poetry perhaps teaches us to nurture the charming illusion of how to be reborn out of ourselves over and over again. - **Mahmoud Darwish**

The above quote is true about Gopal Lahiri's writings. His new book, *Anemone Morning and Other Poems*, is no exception. Every time I read his writing or writing reviews and forewords, I learn something new. In "Recreate," he says. "Let me begin, I revive myself in my dreams..."

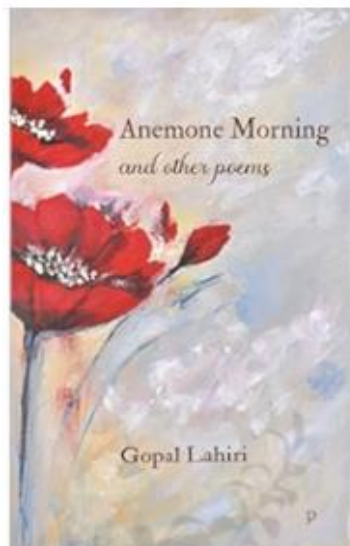
I have known Lahiri, a prolific writer and recipient of several awards, including the Jayanta Mahapatra Award, Pushcart Prize Nominee, Setu Award of Excellence, and many more, for several years now. I am in awe of the velocity and profuseness in his writings.

When I read *Anemone*, John Keating's remarks about *Carpe Diem* kept ringing in my mind – get out of conformity and create yourself.

MM: Welcome Lahiriji! It is an honor to converse with you regarding your book, *Anemone*. I had not heard of the word *Anemone*. However, in reviewing your book, I researched and found that it is a type of flower that symbolizes fragility, sorrow, anticipation, and renewal. There are mythological stories about this flower also. Why did you choose this title for

your collection? How do the symbolic references relate to your poems?

GL: *Anemone* is a fragrant flower blossoming in the morning and



signifies many attributes of life. I consider morning light's muteness to be an essential association here. Let morning light stream forth into the mind of us. Let light descend in the fragrant morning and awake us. I am inspired by Tagore's lecture 'Seeing' where he says, "The fully bloomed

seeing hasn't yet happened. We haven't seen the 'abundant seeing.' Yet every morning light comes from far afar and says 'See.'"

I wish my poems in this book could provide that morning light, that quietude, renewed fragrance, and a sense of connection.

MM: How do you explain the meaning of these lines from *Anemone Morning*, "Let myself sink deep until I get carried away. The remnants are here, there, and everywhere."

GL: Sometimes, poetry asks the readers to take a break and introspect in the lines mentioned above. I talk about the immersive state of the mind where my thoughts, whole or fragmented, accumulate and deliver the results recorded in my emotional registers. I allow everything to sink and settle inside.

MM: There are four sections in this book. How and why did you decide to put your poems under certain sections?

GL: It is a collection of meditative, eco-critical, nature, real, and surreal poems. In addition, there are Japanese form poems, like Gogyoshi, Haiku, Senryu, and Haibun. The book has four segments: Resurrection, Dreamers' Search-Green Path, Mind's Eye, and Miscellany.

These sections instigate a different possibility in poetry and a more sustained attention to language. With images and metaphors, these poems create a poetic landscape. And they flow with a quiet ferocity, urging the readers to join me in my poetic journey.

MM: Thank you! When I review your poems, "Neoliberalism" keeps coming to me. It is an approach that gives the poet freedom to modulate the writing style to his choice. What do you say about that?

GL: Modern poets and writers embrace rightfully 'Neoliberalism'. They explore newer literary themes and techniques to break the shackles of conceived barriers. Exploration of alienation and disconnection, highlighting marginalized voices, non-linear narratives, eco-critical issues, and use of paradox and sarcasm encompass 'Neoliberalism.' I also believe that my poems should foster critical thinking, challenge the traditional notions of identity and community, and encourage experimentation with the form and narrative.

MM: What are your thoughts on using Japanese poetry styles? *Gogyoshi* is something new. Why do you prefer using these styles? Do they follow any particular syllable counting techniques?

GL: Japanese poetry features short verse forms, which I find very significant because of concision, yet it speaks more, and the silence between the lines challenges the reader's mind.

Gogyoshi is a Japanese poetic form with a title and five brief lines. Modern Gogyoshi has no syllabic

restrictions, fixed line breaks, or a rhyme scheme. This form differs from other five-line forms, such as Tanka and Gogyokha. It is indeed the most unrestricted Japanese poetry form.



With some Mumbai based writers, during the recent launch of the book

I am tempted to quote Layne Browne, "Form is a container, a direction for words, a frame. Think of form as different ways to direct your lens of vision. Something to try on, walk into, a temporary dwelling, a borrowed manner or means of locomotion."

These poems evoke a resonance of feeling and insight in so few lines.

MM: Carl Sandberg said, "Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance." Do you have any comments regarding this quote for your book *Anemone*?

GL: In one way or the other, Sandburg's quote echoes my poetic landscape. I love nature, and I have memories of writing poems about nature in the school magazine, which continues to this day. As it happens, I am more enchanted by the surroundings, including their smell, sound, fissures, lineaments, and intricate relations with the people. Writing, especially poetry, is an essential part of me. Poems that I am creating are just part of me. They echo reality and surreal beats and want to explore the unknown. I never fume in the lines, and I feel comfortable doing this.

MM: I am a great admirer of your poems. You are a poet who is passionately in love with language. You are a school in yourself. Who are

the other poets and writers whose work you admire most or who influence your writing?

GL: There were a few English poets. I was wild about Byron in my early days. It doesn't come in a moment. Later, I look to Eliot, Pound, Dylan Thomas, Browning, Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and many others. Shakespeare and Tagore are always there. I am inspired, not influenced by them.

I am very much interested in Indian English poets like Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, Adil Jussawala, Ranjit Hoskote, Arundhati Subramanyam, and a few others. I am reading more about Sunil Sharma, Sanjeev Sethi, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Sharmila Ray, and others.

MM: Thank you so much for allowing me to chat with you. Do you have any other comments?

GL: My advice to the upcoming poets and writers is to read more of others' works and develop a relationship with your subjects. In that relationship, you have to be able to identify expressions and nuances of creative writing. There is a sense of belonging in it, and you have to cultivate that.

It's nice conversing with you. Thanks for the insightful questions. Stay Safe.

MM: Thank you so much again!

Meenakshi Mohan is an educator, writer and an artist. She has published widely in UK and USA. Currently she is serving in the editorial committee of Inquiry in Education, a peer reviewed journal for National Louis University in Chicago. (Also see page 12 for her painting with a poem – Let's Get Old Together)

Co-editing to publish over 100 short stories

By Sharon Rundle

As a co-editor of anthologies of fiction from South Asia and Australia, I have the privilege of reading original, creative, and gripping stories. My work with South Asian, Australian and South Asian—Australian writers and academics led me to my research for my Doctor of Creative Arts (UTS) in which I examined the work of South Asian—Australian novelists published in Australia.

The most important aspects for me in my work as an editor are mutual respect and making a book the best it can be. Trust is essential, as are excellent communications skills.

It is an utter joy to work and co-edit with someone of Professor Meenakshi Bharat's calibre and dedication. We have now collaborated for twenty years. I realised what a task-master Meenakshi can be when she invited me to co-edit our first anthology of stories from South Asia and Australia to be published in both

These anthologies are issue-driven, in that we spend a great deal of time discussing current issues that affect both continents. We choose an issue as a theme, for example, how terrorism affects our daily lives (*Fear Factor Terror Incognito*), or our response to refugees

horizons. We have worked together in the same room, in Australia and in India. We have worked thousands of miles apart using technology to communicate.

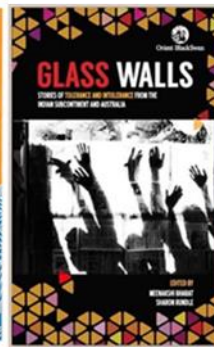
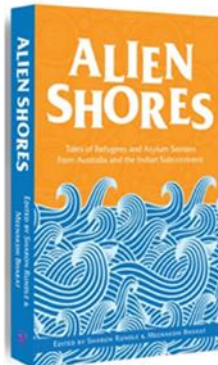
Naturally, there are times when we disagree. We work through this by each presenting our case and listening to each other. Sometimes one of us will realise the other has the better outlook or perspective; at other times we employ the art of compromise.

We successfully published our anthologies in Australia and in India, which achieved our goal of bringing stories from South Asia to Australia and stories from Australia to South Asia. We were fortunate to receive wide media coverage and book reviews in Australia and India each time we released an anthology. Our anthologies have been cited in academic papers and books.



Sharon and Meenakshi at the Australian Short Story Festival in Melbourne, Australia.

(*Alien Shores*), how we connect through electronic communications (*Only Connect*), tolerance and intolerance (*Glass Walls*), and truth and deception



countries. We are both self-motivated writers and editors who enjoy a challenge. We had each previously co-edited anthologies. Meenakshi and I discovered we could work seamlessly together. Although we live many kilometres apart and have experienced different lives, we found we have similar ethics and goals. One goal we could achieve best by working together collaboratively was to publish anthologies of stories from Australia and the Indian subcontinent.

(*Relatively True*). We each have our complementary strengths. We each have our day jobs as university lecturers, writers, and editors. When one of us needed to take time out for professional or personal reasons, the other could be relied upon to keep things going. In the twenty plus years that I have known Meenakshi, we have come to trust each other absolutely. We know each other's families and have visited each other's homes. We have met each other's friends and colleagues and widened our

Nonetheless, publishers need to be convinced to publish a book. They take a risk with each book they commission that they will cover the cost of production and make a profit. Thus, books go through a lengthy assessment process. For each anthology, we put together an irresistible pitch to publishers, including projected readership, markets, publicity and promotion in media. We are reliant on their good graces to take it on and publish.



His Excellency the Australian High Commissioner to India the Hon. Mr Barry O'Farrell AO wrote the Foreword to 'Relatively True, Stories of Truth, Deception and Post-Truth.

From our first *Fear Factor Terror Incognito* – ten short stories from Australia and ten from South Asia, with a Foreword by Professor Yasmine Gooneratne AO, published by PanMacmillan Australia, India, and UK, in 2009 and 2010 – to our fifth anthology, twenty-five stories in *Relatively True*, with a Foreword by the Australian High



Authors Amit Dasgupta AO, and Sukrita Paul Kumar with Professor Meenakshi Bharat, and HE the Australian High Commissioner to India Ms Harinder Sidhu AO, at the Delhi, India, launch of "Glass Walls, Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance".



Author David Malouf, Meenakshi Bharat, authors Dr Andrew Kwong and Sujata Sankranti at the Sydney, Australia, launch of "Fear Factor, Terror Incognito".

Commissioner to India, published by Orient BlackSwan in 2022, we have been encouraged and heartened by the response from so many people in Australia and in South Asia. The dedicated support and response from our authors who generously contributed their stories have made publishing our anthologies worthwhile.

Authors include such luminaries as HE Australian High Commissioner to India The Hon. Mr Barry O'Farrell AO (Foreword), David Malouf, Sir Salman Rushdie, Kate Grenville, Neelum Saran Gour, Tom Keneally, Anita Heiss,

OAM, Meera Kant, Rosie Scott, Arnold Zable, Annie Zaidi, Roanna Gonsalves, Keki N Daruwalla, Rashida Murphy, Ali Alizadeh, Michelle Cahill, Sophie Masson, Anu Kumar, Sujata Sankranti, Manisha Jolie Amin, Anu Kumar, Tamsula Ao, Julie Simpson, Kamala Wijeratne, Bijoya Sawian, Libby Sommer, Alex Cothren, Denise Leith, Abdul Karim Hekmat, Devika Brendon, Felicity Pulman, Sunil Badami, Anne Benjamin, Priya Sarrukai Chabria, Mitra Phukan, Niharika Chibber Joe, Matt Lupton, Gayatri Gill, Julia Prendergast, Rupleena Bose, Trilok Chand Ghai, Vashti Farrer, Malik Sajad, Sue Parker, Julia

Bruce Pascoe, Amitav Ghosh, Gulzar, Joginder Paul, Jamil Ahmad, Yasmine Gooneratne AO, Amit Dasgupta AO, Deepa Agarwal, Tabish Khair, Linda Jaivin, Tony Birch, Kiran Nagarkar, Shirley Hazzard, Debra Adelaide, Elizabeth Jolley, Bashabi Fraser, Bem Le Hunte, Jaspreet Singh, Sujata Sankranti, Janhavi Acharekar, Cate Kennedy, Eugen Bacon, Susanne Gervay

Mackay-Koelen, Mridula Koshy, Jeremy Fisher, Guy Scotton

For more details about the anthologies, audio readings, photos, and reviews, please see <https://sharonrundle.com.au>

<https://sharonrundle.com.au/media>

Dr Sharon Rundle is a University of Technology Sydney Friend of Distinction, who encourages international people-to-people links.



She lives on the east coast of Australia and 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>

Nandini Sengupta's The Blue Horse and Other Amazing Animals from Indian History

by Anjana Basu

This slender volume unveils a rich tapestry of animals from the annals of Indian history, both familiar and obscure. Nandini Sengupta, through meticulous research of various renowned and lesser-known texts, has curated these fascinating stories. As a journalist, she has combed through the works of Abul Fazl and Mughal historians to bring forth tales of Akbar's cheetahs, Rani Durgavati's elephant, and Rana Pratap's valiant steed, Chetak, who lends the book its captivating title. The animals depicted range from the cosseted to the fiercely loyal, with many willing to sacrifice their lives for their human companions.

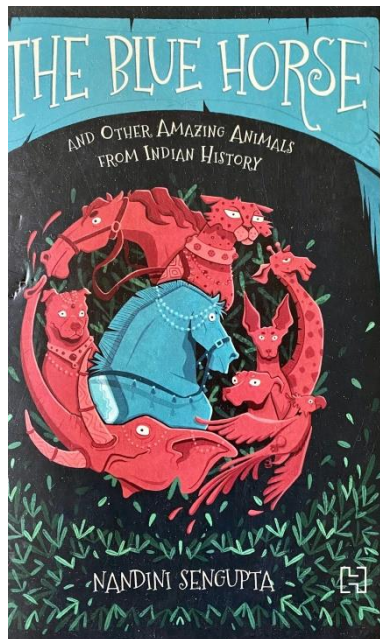
The most contemporary tale is that of the extravagant wedding of the Nawab of Junagadh's cherished dog, Roshanara, to her Golden Retriever groom—a story that made its way into Gita Mehta's Raj. Sengupta highlights that despite the Nawab's indulgence in wealth and his dogs, he was a committed conservationist.

Sengupta vividly details the battles and strategies drawn from Mughal historians, including descriptions of the armour worn by elephants and horses, and their intoxication with mahua or arrack to steel them against the horrors of battle. Dogs dominate the narrative with tales of their bravery in combat, leading Sengupta to uncover one of the earliest 'hero tablets' for a dog in South India.

Each story is narrated in the first person by the animals themselves, occasionally exhibiting an astonishing omniscience as they traverse between past and present, recounting events from their lives and their lasting impact. These narratives offer a treasure trove of knowledge for children eager to delve deeper than their history books. Sengupta also includes a collection of stories from across the globe, featuring Jefferson's grizzly bear

cubs and the mummified gazelle of an Egyptian queen.

The author's exploration goes beyond merely recounting these tales; she brings to life the vibrant historical contexts in which these animals existed. The bond



between humans and animals is portrayed with depth and sensitivity, highlighting how these creatures were not just pets or tools of war, but companions and symbols of loyalty and courage. Sengupta's narrative is rich with historical detail, yet accessible, making it an engaging read for both young readers and adults.

In addition to the central stories, Sengupta provides insightful commentary on the historical sources she used, offering readers a glimpse into the rigorous research process behind the book. This adds an educational layer to the reading experience, encouraging readers to appreciate the value of historical research and storytelling.

The book's structure is thoughtfully designed to captivate readers. Each

chapter focuses on a different animal, weaving a tapestry of diverse narratives that collectively paint a vivid picture of India's historical landscape. The illustrations accompanying the stories add a visual dimension that enhances the reader's immersion in the tales.

Sengupta's passion for history and animals shines through in her writing. Her ability to humanise these animal characters and imbue them with personality and voice makes for a compelling and memorable reading experience. This book is not just a collection of stories; it is a celebration of the rich and often overlooked contributions of animals to Indian history.

The Blue Horse and Other Amazing Animals from Indian History is a must-read for anyone interested in the interplay between animals and human history. It offers a unique perspective on historical events, seen through the eyes of the animals who witnessed and influenced them. Sengupta's work is a testament to the enduring bond between humans and animals, and the remarkable stories that arise from this connection.

By the end of the book, readers will have gained not only a deeper understanding of Indian history but also a profound appreciation for the animals that have played pivotal roles in shaping it. Sengupta's engaging storytelling and meticulous research combine to create a book that is both informative and intriguing, making it a valuable addition to any reader's collection.

Born in Allahabad and schooled in London, Anjana Basu is a writer based in Calcutta. She has 5 novels, a book of short stories and two anthologies of poetry to her credit.

