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Current Affairs

Results of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election: A Tectonic Shift in American Democracy

by Kavita Mohan*

The United States held its 2024 Presidential Election on Tuesday, November 5. On November 6, 2024, Donald Trump was elected the 47th President of the United States, defeating current Vice President Kamala Harris. It had been an unprecedented election cycle. President Biden dropped out of the race just four months before election day. His performance during the first Presidential debate raised concerns of his cognitive decline and many in the Party leadership had called for him to step down. Kamala Harris quickly gained the support of the party, raising a staggering [\\$100 million within a mere 36 hours](#) of President Biden's announcement and endorsement. Two assassination attempts against former President Trump also took place during this election cycle – the first in July 2024 at a Trump campaign rally and the second in September at the Trump International Golf Course in Florida. In [May 2024](#), [Trump was also found guilty on 34 felony counts](#), making him the first convicted felon to be elected President.

The Candidates

The candidates represent two diametrically opposed visions of

American leadership. Vice President Kamala Harris is the first woman, the first Black American, and the first South Asian American to serve in the second highest office in the country. The child of immigrant parents, both of whom came to the U.S. to pursue doctorate degrees,



[Harris was part of only the second incoming class to integrate her elementary school](#). She went on to go to law school, served as a criminal prosecutor, and rose to become [Attorney General of California](#) – the first woman, first African American, and first Asian American to hold that role. From 2017-2021, prior to becoming Vice President, she was [the second Black woman](#) and first South Asian American U.S. Senator.

Donald Trump is a billionaire and former reality television star. He inherited his

father's real estate business in 1971, renaming it to the Trump Organization in 1973. Prior to being elected U.S. President in 2016, he served as Chairman and President of the Trump Organization, and was host of the reality television show *The Apprentice* for fourteen seasons, before the television network NBC decided [to cut ties with him](#) for his remarks about immigrants. Although he ostensibly stepped down from the Trump Organization after becoming President of the United States, he [retained ownership](#) of the company. His first presidency was marked by multiple scandals and [conflicts of interest](#), a disregard for political norms, and a global pandemic. He infamously refused to accept his defeat in the 2020 election, as a result of which his supporters attacked the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

The Results

Trump's electoral victory was decisive – he won [312 electoral votes](#) while Kamala Harris won only 226 electoral votes. He also won the popular vote, in contrast to his election in 2016, when Hillary Clinton won the popular vote

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Editorially Speaking

Dear Readers,

This is our last issue for 2024.

This bumper issue comes with many interesting contents which, I hope, all of you will enjoy reading. Editing and compiling a literary magazine is more difficult than producing a movie in some ways. Yes, unlike a movie, the production of a magazine involves many tasks that are time-bound. The writers rely on the publisher to present their creative work in the best possible way, so they must work in collaboration with the publisher to achieve their goal. I hope, our contributors will take this into consideration and discuss their thoughts with us in advance before making any submissions.

Over the past few issues, readers may have noticed that the number of pages has increased; this was the result of the requests from some of our contributors to give more space for their writings. While we appreciate the need for more space, we also want the submissions to be focussed and succinct.

Even though, this year has seen a number of unexpected events in many parts of the world, the recently held US elections were of special importance to South Asians in several ways. Though a wider section of South Asians and Africans wanted Kamala Harris to win, Donald Trump's win came as a surprise in the end. Kavita Mohan, one of our political analysts, has written a comprehensive analysis of this election and, I hope, our readers will find her article an eye-opener.

Our next issue will be in February 2025, and we would like to receive all submissions on time by the middle of January to make sure they find a place in the next issue.

We wish all our readers a wonderful Festive Season and a Happy New Year.

Vijay Anand



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despite losing the election due to fewer electoral votes. Furthermore, Republicans won both the House and the Senate, thereby gaining control not only of the executive branch, but also the legislative branch of the U.S. government.

However, despite Trump's claims of an "unprecedented and powerful mandate," a deeper analysis of the popular vote and his margin of victory tells the story of a deeply divided nation. Although Trump received approximately 2.5 million more votes in 2024 than he did in 2020, he nonetheless received less than 50 percent of the popular vote. Based on the most current voting results, he received 49.9 percent of the popular vote, while Kamala Harris received 48.3 percent of the popular vote – a difference of only 1.6 percentage points. Indeed, based on raw votes, Trump's margin was smaller than in any election going back to 2000. At about 2.5 million, it was the [fifth-smallest popular vote margin since 1960](#). In addition, while Trump obtained a decisive victory at the top of the ticket, Republicans did not perform as well in down ballot elections in key battleground states. Of the seven battleground states, five held Senate races, and one held a gubernatorial election. The Republican candidate won Pennsylvania's Senate race, but Democrats won the Senate races in Arizona, Michigan, Nevada and Wisconsin, and the gubernatorial contest in North Carolina.

What Happened?

Trump's record during his first administration and a comparison of the two candidates on paper would seem to make Trump an unlikely victor. So, what happened? The prevalence of racism and sexism among voters – in a country that has never elected a female President, let alone one who was a woman of color – no doubt played a role. Trump's rhetoric of hypermasculinity also seemed to appeal to male voters

across racial divides. But multiple other issues were also at play. Chief among these reasons was a perception among many voters – albeit largely misplaced – that the economy was underperforming. The economy has actually performed well under the Biden-Harris administration. Unemployment reached [historically low levels](#), inflation reduced substantially by 2024 to approximately 2 percent, the stock market generated large gains, and most economists agreed that the economy under the Biden-Harris administration was generally growing and strong. Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody's Analytics, even stated that he would give the economy an ["A+,"](#) noting that he has "rarely seen an economy performing as well as it is." The misalignment between perception and reality was mostly driven by anger over inflation, which had peaked at just over 9 percent back in June 2022, and the fact that consumers were still feeling the effects of higher prices. In June 2024, [16 Nobel Prize-winning economists stated](#): "The outcome of this election will have economic repercussions for years, and possibly decades, to come. We believe that a second Trump term would have a negative impact on the U.S.'s economic standing in the world and a destabilizing effect on the U.S.'s domestic economy." Despite this, voters apparently had more confidence in Trump over the economy.

There is no doubt that Harris also lost voters over the Biden administration's handling of the war in Gaza and Lebanon, and frustration that Harris would not depart from her predecessor's support of Israel. Many Arab American voters and other traditionally liberal voters either didn't vote or cast their ballot for third-party candidates.

Key Appointments So Far

Since the election, Trump has been quickly filling key positions within his

administration. Despite his populist platform and appeal among many lower- and middle-income voters, he has appointed an unprecedented number of billionaires into key positions. U.S. News & World Report recently estimated that the total net worth of billionaires in the Trump administration equals about [\\$344 billion, which is more than the GDP of 169 different countries](#). In contrast, the net worth of Biden's administration was about \$118 million.

Some key appointments include Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, who have been tapped to lead Trump's new "Department of Government Efficiency." Musk, in particular, has much to gain in his new role, raising significant conflict of interest concerns. SpaceX and Tesla account for approximately [\\$15.4 billion in government contracts](#).

Other controversial picks included former Congressman Matt Gaetz (R - Florida) as Attorney General. Gaetz withdrew his name from consideration after a series of allegations of sexual misconduct surfaced, including sex with a minor while he was Congressman, and were being investigated by the House Ethics Committee.

Trump also selected Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to head the Department of Health and Human Services. Kennedy is a prominent anti-vaccination conspiracy theorist. He has also committed to removing fluoride from public water supplies. Fluoride in water is widely considered a public health achievement because it significantly reduces the occurrence of tooth decay.

While the Senate will still have to confirm his cabinet and senior leadership, with a Republican Senate majority, it is unlikely his nominees will face any significant obstacles.

Continues on P4

What's At Stake

The United States will need to brace for a seismic shift under the next Trump administration. Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail, combined with the appointments he has made to key posts, leave no doubt that he intends to make significant changes to the way the U.S. government is run. Almost every aspect of American life could be affected. A brief summary of just a few critical issues is provided below:

American Democracy: It is not an understatement to say that American democracy itself could be at stake. The Republican party has largely become the party of Donald Trump, and with the Republican victories over the House and Senate, there may be almost no checks on Trump's agenda from the legislative branch.

In his first term, Trump also appointed three conservative justices to the U.S. Supreme Court, thereby securing a 6-justice conservative majority over the Court. This Court handed a significant win to Trump in July when they ruled that presidents and former presidents have immunity from criminal prosecution for "official acts" taken while in office. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, on behalf of the three liberal judges on the Court, wrote in a [dissenting opinion](#) that the Court had "effectively create[d] a law-free zone around the President, upsetting the status quo that has existed since the Founding," and that "[t]his new official-acts immunity now 'lies about like a loaded weapon' for any President that wishes to place his own interests, his own political survival, or his own financial gain, above the interests of the Nation."

Trump also favors a "strongman" style of politics. New York University Professor Ruth Ben-Ghiat, told [Time magazine](#) that "[s]trongmen are a subset of authoritarian who require total loyalty, bend democracy around [their] own needs, and use different

forms of machismo to interact with their people and with other rulers." Trump seems to fit this definition. He's promised retribution against political opponents, expressed admiration of authoritarian leaders, and promised to be a dictator on day one of his presidency (though he later claimed he would be dictator only on day one) so he could "close the border, and . . . [drill, drill, drill.](#)" In July, Trump [told a group of Christian voters](#) to get out to vote "just this time" because "[i]n four years, you don't have to vote again, we'll have it fixed so good you're not going to have to vote."

Immigration:

Trump has promised to declare a national emergency and use the U.S. military to conduct mass deportations of undocumented immigrants. Trump's top immigration advisor [Stephen Miller has explained](#) that this would entail creating "vast holding facilities that would function as staging centers" for immigrants as their cases progressed and they waited to be flown to other countries."

There is no reason to believe that Trump will not follow through with his campaign promises on immigration. During his first administration, Trump's "zero tolerance" policy led to the separation of families and included the detention of small children in warehouses lined with metal cages. Thousands of children were separated from their families, and it later came to light that the administration deliberately did not keep records to reunite the families it had separated. To this day, hundreds of those children have still not been reunited.

Climate Change: Despite the fact that 2024 has been the warmest year on record, Trump has promised to roll back many national climate change policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions that warm the planet. President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, which was expected to [reduce U.S. emissions by](#)

[approximately 40 percent by 2030 by directing money towards clean energy technologies and giving credits to businesses building solar and wind farms](#). In contrast, Trump has promised to "drill, baby, drill" and boost production in planet-warming fossil fuels such as oil, natural gas, and coal.

Education: Among other things, Donald Trump has pledged to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education. His plan to "[save American education](#)" includes broad provisions for "cutting funding for any school or program that pushes 'critical race theory, gender ideology, or other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content for our children.'" [Critical race theory](#), which is the study of how race and racism have shaped American law and society, has been the subject of fierce debate over how children are taught about history and race relations. His reference to "gender ideology" or "inappropriate . . . sexual" content appears aimed at protections for LGBTQ+ students. Other provisions include creating "a new credentialing body to certify teachers who embrace patriotic values," and "[d]rastically cut number of school administrators, including the 'DEI' bureaucracy." DEI refers to "diversity, equity, and inclusion" and how the administration will define "patriotic values" will need to be seen. Trump has also promised to eliminate what he refers to as "left-wing indoctrination." While States and local school boards, not the federal government, have direct control over curriculum in schools, it is possible that the new Trump administration could set certain requirements on curriculum that schools must meet to receive federal funding.

International Trade:

In his first administration, Trump placed tariffs on steel and aluminum products from most countries and separately placed additional tariffs on goods imported from China, leading to a trade war.

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For his second term, Trump has promised a 25 percent tariff on all products coming from Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10 percent above existing tariffs on all products coming from China. Ironically, despite claims that he intends to beat inflation, Trump's proposed tariff plan is more likely to significantly [increase inflation](#). Tariffs are not paid by foreign manufacturers but by U.S. importers and ultimately passed on to U.S. consumers, making imported goods more expensive and driving out competition, which would otherwise help keep prices down. In their June 2024 letter, 16 Nobel Prize winning economists noted that "[m]any Americans are concerned about inflation, which has come down remarkably fast" and "there is rightly a worry that Donald Trump will reignite this inflation."

U.S.-India Relations: While Trump consider considers India's Prime Minister Modi to be a "friend," India did not escape the brunt of Trump's trade policies during his first term. The U.S. placed import duties on steel and aluminum from India and terminated India's preferential market access under the [Generalized System of Preferences](#). Furthermore, Trump's tough stance on immigration may make it more difficult for skilled Indian professionals to obtain H1B visas. While Trump's anti-China stance may result in more favorable policies towards India, and he has – for now – not included India in his plans for additional tariffs, his unpredictable style makes it difficult to assess how things will play out between the two countries.

There are many other important issues at stake on both the domestic and

international fronts. However, while it is uncertain if Trump will actually accomplish all that he sets out to do, there is no doubt that the United States will be entering a turbulent season of change. Only time will tell how it will fare over the next four years.

***Kavita Mohan is an international trade attorney based in Washington D.C. She has written**



frequently on issues relating to international trade law, U.S.-India relations, and U.S. politics. This article was prepared in her personal capacity and the views expressed in this article are hers alone.

Two poems by Shailja Sharma

Poets

it rained and stormed. water
poured on everyone. some
wiped the storm water off
their houses and bodies. others
felt the gush in their bones each
minute of the remaining life. they
were poets. they faced
the feeing and let it bleed
with a lightweight pen while
the others could not pause to
explore the effect. they soaked
the water in their bodies. covered
the swelling with heavyweight
jackets and lived on. they
were not poets.

Shailja Sharma (Ph.D.), USA, is a mental health provider and a widely published author. Apart from scholarly publication and editorial service, her literary writings have been internationally acclaimed. Her publications have appeared in numerous literary journals/forums of repute across the USA, Canada, UK, and Asia.

The River

Forcing her limbs
through slanting rocks
coaxing her breath
to pass through stinking algae
then rewarding herself on
lotus beds and running faster
to embrace the waves
She closes her eyes
to taste the churning of
the mighty ocean--
The River

She finds her
permanent home
away from her origins
losing herself in the arms
of the deepest waters
deepest waters --
The River

Report

THE WORLD THROUGH A PORTHOLE Sheila Malhotra's Exhibition of Paintings at London Nehru Centre

An exhibition of paintings by Sheila Malhotra at the Nehru Centre, South Audley Street, Mayfair, London, was inaugurated by Dr. Ravi K. Mehrotra, CBE, on the evening of 14th October 2024. The paintings were displayed from 14th to 18th October.

The exhibition, titled 'THE WORLD THROUGH A PORTHOLE,' depicted the artist's vision of her experiences at sea. The event was well attended and appreciated. The depiction of storms and calm seas, combining the rough and tumble with tranquillity at sea, was particularly notable. The shadows and the fish added to the atmosphere, enhancing both the paintings and the evening.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, at the turn of the century, Sheila was deeply touched by the passing of the millennium. She expressed her

adoration by incorporating news clips into her artwork, capturing this moment in a way unseen in her other displays. Her exhibition continues online.

When asked why she had chosen such a unique theme, she replied, "I was raised in Shimla, India, 2204m above sea level. While watching Hollywood war movies, I saw submarines with small round portholes deep underwater. The reverse came true when I joined the ship along with my husband, the captain. Four large portholes in the cabin. Wow! How thrilling it was for me. I could connect with the outside world from within the confines of the cabin." The two paintings RIVIERA and T.R.S (TROPICAL REVOLVING STORM) portray two different types of weathers Sheila encountered during her voyages.



Left: T.R.S (TROPICAL REVOLVING STORM) – A very violent sea, where the porthole had to be tightened with a 'butterfly nut', as can be seen in this painting. Right: RIVIERA – A very calm sea.



'TITANIC II' - The painting symbolises the Maiden voyage of the Titanic. The splintered glass is a metaphor of the disaster. She set sail on 10th April 1912. Sheila has used torn facsimile newspaper of 16th April 1912 within her porthole.

SYMPHONY – As the curtain is pulled open, a soft symphony plays to the movement of maple leaves and to the two small boats below.

EPHEMERA – the shades of blue, enhanced by the use of marble powder and mixed media



Left: A section of the audience during the inaugural session. Right: **'TITANIC I'** - While the Titanic was sinking and the end was imminent, Sheila visualised a room where four people were sitting around a table. At this hour what were their thoughts. The written words in the painting tells it all.

I am a weaver of moments by Meenakshi Mohan

I am a weaver of moments
constantly flowing
knitting the tapestry –
sweet and sour,
I am time.

I am a whisper
between the first breath
and the last call,
I am time.

I am a cosmic pause
between the dawn's ascents
and dusks fading light,
I am time.

I am a silent journey
from winter's white
to summer's green
and autumn's tears,
I am time.

I am the silent beat
a constant march
a ticking heart
in shaping the world
peace and mist,
I am time.

I am a weaver of the moments,
to sketch life's path
on sands and stones
I leave behind footprints
a mark on time
or a silent dream.
I am time.



Watercolor Inspired by an unknown artist

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.



Book review

Mahendra Ved's @75 As I Saw It: A Reporter Recounts

A review by Rita Payne*

I have known Mahendra Ved for more than fifteen years as a colleague and committed journalist who draws on his breadth of knowledge to write about an extraordinary range of topics ranging from politics in India, international affairs, space, music and films. His most striking trait is his modesty as becomes apparent in his memoir *@75 As I Saw It: A Reporter Recounts*. In the forward, the Indian journalist, author and columnist, Jug Suraiya, captures the essence of his personality: "By and large, readers tend to be wary of memoirs written by journalists, for many prominent media personalities tend to be I-specialists, the first person pronoun being the favourite word in their lexicon...Mahendra Ved is a refreshing exception."

Mahendra has reported on political upheaval in India and abroad, at times coming close to losing his life, but at no time does he place himself centre stage or brag about his role. He remains at all times the consummate professional journalist reporting dispassionately on what he observes. He belongs to the golden age of journalism in India and is acutely aware of how much has changed, not necessarily for the better: "I am

writing this when my type of journalism - news is sacred, the comment is free - is past".

Mahendra takes us on a journey from his childhood, the family's move to Bombay (now Mumbai), his school, college and his path to journalism. Mentors played a big role in spotting his writing prowess and giving him

His move to Delhi in 1969 shaped the rest of his life. In five decades he has seen the demographic changes in Delhi. "Delhi is now cosmopolitan, even global; no longer "an overgrown village", as I used to call it". His early days were a challenge. His pay was poor and deprived of home comforts he had to fend for his next meal. Acute hunger in the cold Delhi winter and

loneliness were testing to say the least.

He recalls his first big story in 1970 when the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, made the surprise announcement on TV and All India Radio about the dissolution of the Lok Sabha and a general election. She won that election, the first he had covered from Delhi.

The move to Delhi also gave him an opportunity to secure his ground-breaking international political interview. It was with Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, Vice-President of the African National Congress, who had come to India to canvass India's support against South Africa's apartheid regime. The

***Rita Payne is a Journalist, Commentator and Media Consultant, President Emeritus, Commonwealth Journalists Association.**



access to media jobs. Several of his contemporaries at Bombay's prestigious St. Xavier's College, rose to high-profile positions in government, private and other sectors. The college boasts of alumni with Bollywood connections, several of whom, like Shabana Azmi, and many others before her became award winning movie stars and producers. This brush with Bollywood glamour got him hooked and led to his lifelong passion for films. Subsequently, Mahendra interviewed several stars who he had admired from a distance.

interview was picked up globally and became the lead in All India Radio news bulletins. Mahendra was making a mark as a reporter.

Over the years Mahendra closely observed the workings of the machinery of government, the relationships between ministers and civil servants and how successive Prime Ministers interacted with the media. He comments wryly on the machinations and backstabbing among senior civil servants who jealously guarded their power to grant access to the Prime Minister in office at the time.

He earned the trust of influential figures which resulted in him filing exclusives for his newspaper. However, he paid a high price professionally and personally for sticking to his principles as a journalist and refusing to disclose the source of one of his scoops. This had a devastating and lasting impact on his career and health, but he insists that he has no regrets.

Mahendra was posted in Dhaka for United News of India (UNI) in 1975 at a critical period when India was placed under emergency rule and martial law was declared in Bangladesh. He is a vivid story teller and his accounts of the febrile atmosphere after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the murder of founding father and President of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, make fascinating reading. He touches on conspiracy theories that the CIA may have been implicated in the killing of Sheikh Mujib. These are only the highlights of Mahendra's memoir of an eventful life. I will leave it to readers to discover more themselves. The chapter

headings are enticing and make it easy to follow the different phases of his life.

Mahendra succeeded me as President of the Commonwealth Journalists Association. In one chapter, he refers to an episode in which I was involved. One cannot undo the past, but it remains a matter of great sadness to me that Mahendra was deeply hurt by what transpired.

The CJA organises an international conference every two or three years which is traditionally hosted by the serving President. Since it was the turn of India, Mahendra and his colleague, Jayanta Chowdhury, surmounted many challenges to organise our international conference from Delhi in 2021 with prominent speakers. Unfortunately, because of Covid restrictions it had to be held online which was naturally disappointing for everyone.

Mahendra has become a recognised figure in India because of his appearances on television as a presenter, commentator, author and lecturer. He is a role model for aspiring journalists and sets standards which transcend the proliferation of outlets in an internet age when the distinction between news and opinion is blurred and misinformation and disinformation are rife. His memoir is a treasure trove of experiences and ideas to inspire and give hope to those who believe in democracy and yearn for a media they can trust.

ANOTHER FREEDOM

by Laksmisree Banerjee

Hold me tight as Eternity comes

In darkness and in light

A sudden aurora borealis,

A tremorous flash of the unknown

A bouquet of misty alien clouds

Wisps of fear wrapped in free faith

A sky of love with truth and beauty

As I trance into another space

Hold me tight as my breath leaves

Flutters away like a free butterfly

To regions of unknown ambrosia

In the swaddle of fulfilment

To the open fields of abandon

Away from Home to Heaven

My nest of illicit well being

My rest in unharnessed life---

@laksmisree banerjee

Phuket, Thailand, 28th Nov. 2024



Laksmisree Banerjee is a Multi-Award-Winning Poet, Litterateur, International Sr. Fulbright and Commonwealth Scholar. As a Former Vice Chancellor and University Professor of English and Cultural Studies, she has taught in premier universities of the world. Widely anthologised she has Twelve Books of Poetry and several Academic Publications.

South Asian Films at 68th London Film Festival

by Lalit Mohan Joshi

Started in 1957, London Film Festival holds a unique place in the international film map. "It always brings us a diverse range of films where promises of exciting stories make us sit up, watch and think. In the current global context where strife appears to be a constant, we need even more to see and hear from each other in pressing ways", says Professor Rajinder Dudrah, of Birmingham City University.

The recently concluded 12-day 68th London Film Festival (9th to 20th October) showcased more than 200 films at the BFI South Bank, Picturehouse Central, Piccadilly Circus and many other venues in London. A good number of these were Indian and South Asian films.

Ever since its commencement, it has always carried a clout. In 1958, during the second edition of the BFI London Film Festival, Yasujiro Ozu's 'Tokyo Story' received the first Sutherland Award. The following year, Satyajit Ray took the trophy with his classic 'The World of Apu'. Ever since then, Indian and South Asian filmmakers have longed for their films to be showcased here.

What was unique in this year's package of South Asian films was the fact that most of them had been produced in USA, Canada, UK,



Belgium, France and Germany.

Many of these filmmakers were born and raised in the west but the content of their films is earthy, rooted in the ethos, politics and culture of India.

Santosh (UK-France-Germany, 2024), a film by a British born Indian filmmaker Sandhya Suri, has created a buzz for being a taut, north India-set thriller, where a housewife-turned-cop, is sucked into a high-profile case that has polarised the local community.

Having been recently widowed, *Santosh* is considered a liability in a community where casteism and misogyny are an inextricable part of life. Furthermore, her reluctant inheritance of her husband's job as police constable, is problematised by her having to deal with the death of a murdered teenager. Sandhya Suri's deft thriller is a complex character study of a female cop whose moral conflict lays bare the oppression perpetuated in the name of caste.

"A very good selection, three of them, '*Santosh*', '*Sister*

Midnight' by Karan Kandhari and '*All We Imagine as Light*' by Payal Kapadia have been to Cannes", says Suman Bhuchar, Associate Editor for Asian Culture Culture.

Another strong film is Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* (France-India-Netherlands-

Luxembourg, 2024) where the lives of three women intersect and overlap in a haunting drama that sees the city of Mumbai play a central role.

In the film, Prabha, Anu and Parvaty are employees at a hospital in Mumbai. They grapple daily with the opportunities and hardships of existence in the city. Balancing an immersive verité style with a touch of the surreal, Payal Kapadia's Cannes Grand Prix-winning drama, captures the many shades of working-class life in Mumbai. The result is a profound and deeply humanist meditation on urban migration and dislocation.

The most entertaining film of this package is *A Nice Indian Boy* (USA-Canada, 2024) by Roshan Sethi. It's an oft repeated run of the mill film where

Naveen meets Jay and a whirlwind romance quickly leads to an engagement. But there's an issue: Naveen has yet to introduce Jay to his family, and he isn't quite what that they are expecting. Putting a fresh queer and Indian spin on the tropes of the rom-com, *A Nice Indian Boy* is a charming, warm-hearted celebration of love and acceptance.

Min Bahadur Bham's captivating film *Shambhala* (Nepal- France-Norway, 2024), finds a young Nepalese woman embarking on a quest to find her missing husband in the Himalayas.



Tashi and Pema live in the Nepalese Himalayas. When Tashi goes missing around the time that Pema discovers she is pregnant, and with gossiping neighbours questioning her fidelity, Pema decides to embark on a search for her husband. She is joined by Tashi's brother, a Buddhist monk. But as Pema begins to reflect on her own spirituality, the journey soon becomes one of self-discovery.

In filmmaker Reema Kagi's *Superboys of Malegaon* (India, 2024), a ragtag crew of filmmakers with no resources, end up creating a cult phenomenon. Malegaon is only six hours driving distance from Mumbai, the filmmaking capital of

India. For Nasir Shaikh, one of the city's residents who pretty much eats, sleeps and dreams movies, Bollywood is a distant yet alluring dream.

Director Reema Kagi chronicles the heartwarming true story of Shaikh as he crowdsources a wave of ingenious spoof films that become a national phenomenon.

Sister Midnight (UK, 2024) by Karan Kandhari is a genre-bending comedy about a frustrated and

misanthropic newlywed who discovers certain feral impulses that land her in unlikely situations. Uma, a disillusioned newlywed with zero domestic skills, lives in her husband's cramped one-room flat. Trapped in an unending domestic hell, she sets out to explore the city on her own, only to embrace fresh impulses and desires. With its dark physical comedy, feminist undertones and impressive mashing of genres, *Sister*

Midnight is a strikingly distinctive feature that defies easy categorisation.

Finally, the audiences saw Shyam Benegal classic *Manthan* (1976). Shyam Benegal's wife Nira Benegal was invited as a special guest who could not attend as Benegal has not been keeping well. *Manthan* is a potent, political landmark of Indian independent filmmaking – funded by

500,000 farmers. It is a film that explored the ugly truths of class and caste in rural Gujarat and how a social movement creates a social unity that transcends class as well as caste.

Ben Roberts, Chief Executive of the British Film Institute, feels that in an age when we have everything, everywhere, all at once, it is still in these film festivals where films come

to life with filmmakers and audiences in the same forum.

Editor's Note: Another version of this article was previously published by the author in Tribune India

Lalit Mohan Joshi is a film historian and a documentary filmmaker.

Luminosity A poem by Toolika Rani

*Return to me
the luminosity
of my wondrous soul,
by sponging out the
ions of dust
sprinkling a few dew drops,
in the corners where
the negligence hurts
kindly place some marigolds.
Let the petals open
and soak the mighty sun
May the varnish fade
and the pearl within glisten!*

*The lightness of my laughter
a spring on my tongue
my tresses filled with wind
tinted dark auburn,
At the sacred time of dusk
when life and death
together hum;
Come, kneel at my altar
Let the eternal lamp burn!*

Poet's Profile: Squadron Leader (Dr) Toolika Rani is an ex-Indian Air Force Officer, Mountaineer (Everest Climber), International Motivational Speaker (twice TEDx), Author, Poet, Assistant Professor of History, and was the G-20 Brand Ambassador of Higher Education Department, U.P. Government (2023). Her books include *Beyond That Wall: Redemption on Everest*, *Sherpas of Solukhumbu: History and Evolution*, two collections of Hindi poems titled, *Dayron ke Bahar* and *Hasratein*, two collections of English poems titled, *The Song of the Sky* and *A Wild Flower*. Email: tulich83@gmail.com.

The Keeper of Life: Remembering Keki N. Daruwalla

by Jaydeep Sarangi

Keki N. Daruwalla's house of poems is evocations of a sensitive individual who though distraught by injustices of the home and the world, has not lost hope, energy and zeal. Born in Lahore in 1937, Keki N. Daruwalla is a prolific map maker in Indian Writing in English. Among his amazingly rich volumes of poetry include *The Keeper of the Dead* that won the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984 and *Landscapes* which won the Commonwealth Poetry Award, Asia, 1987. His historical novel, *For Pepper and Christ* was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Fiction Prize in 2010. Among his short story collections are *Swords and Abyss* (1979), *The Minister for Permanent Unrest & Other Stories* (1996), and *Love Across the Salt Desert* (2011). His latest short story collection *Going: Stories of Kinship* came out in 2022. His stories are among the finest explorations of kinships in the family domain. Keki's *Under Orion* published by the Writers Workshop, 1970 announced the arrival of a great author.

The wind knocks our door and we let it in. Soul-master Keki philosophises, "But you were so much in love with light you couldn't hear a shadow knock you wouldn't let a shadow in." ('The Knock')

There is a sincere, humanist voice that celebrates cultural uniqueness as well as embraces the diversity of the country's cultural mosaic. I know Keki since February 1997. This emotional return to Keki's prolific contributions to Indian literary scene can trace its genesis to when

Keki N. Daruwalla and I stayed at IAS, Shimla in October 2006 where we spent almost a week together, and discussed matters of contemporary Indian poetry, criticism and other different genres of literature. Like an ardent student I was hypnotised by his intimate style of descriptions of the things/objects and other matters of life and poetry. One day we forgot to order for lunch.



During our meeting Keki mentioned his travelogue *Riding the Himalayas* and I was tempted to get a copy of his travelogue from a shop at Shimla Mall, and found myself reading, and re-reading it, marvelling at the mastery of his craft. Keki, a seasoned poet, novelist, critic, and storyteller explores the heart of a nation admirably in *Riding the Himalayas*, by capturing its mythology, wildlife, politics, customs, gastronomy, history,

linguistics, culinary and cultural ways, aesthetics, modes of living, human values, and landscape, with allusions, facts, and legends that bind a nation to its citizens. I took it as a source book when I visited some parts of the Himalayas mentioned in this book. It was my impression that this book could serve as a source book for future trekkers. *Riding the Himalaya* is a very special travelogue—a car-trek odyssey starting from the Siachin Glacier across the entire Himalayas right up to Kibithoo, the easternmost point of the Himalayas. The narrative is supplemented with rare photographs of stunning mountain photography by Ashok Dilwali, who relied on his Nikons 35 mm and Linhof to capture some beautiful images of Himalayan life. The end result is an unforgettable book, a fabric of happiness, and exotic excitement. Keki's book explores how the Eastern part of the Himalayas is a biodiversity hotspot, with exotic bicultural assortment. Keki poignantly narrates the political immigration from undivided

Bengal. Keki's narration gives a lucid pen-picture of the Khasi language, and its philological development from the Roman script. Keki's vivid details of wildlife reminded me of his love for bird watching, and of his many poems invoking birds. I was struck by the magical ending of the book—a beautiful and simple image drawn from life—women carrying firewood on their backs. The poet artist is at his best! As a poet, Keki is subtle, never bluntly head-on. For him,

**“memory sabotaging memory past
subverting past.” (‘What
Lights Up...?’)**

Standing under Keki’s Orion of truths, unique of his writing style, there is absolutely no extravagant mystification of real-life facts. Daruwalla is a first-grade story teller, even his poetry tells stories. Keki is a map maker of culture of the country. He is *Magna Graecia* (Great Greek):

**“Behind them are tearful
women—
wives and mothers always
in black.”
(‘Greek Vases’)**

Keki wrote for more than five decades. I read Keki in all seasons, discovered his rare ability to evoke poetry in his observations, aesthetics and his narratives. He also provides minute historical details in his travelogue. To be particular, the sunset over the Rapti river, and elephant ride in the Rapti river at Chitwan National Park are described with felicity. Though it is not a travelogue’s fundamental duty to include all factual information, Keki includes factual titbits to strengthen his story-telling and narrative skills. Mentor for many poets, Keki is a committed artist who is attentive to politics at home and the world.

We shall not hear from Keki now. He is at peace now. But this language he reminds me, is his. With Jamshedpur-based poet Basudhara Roy I was fortunate to host Keki in many online poetry events through *The Hearth Within*. Keki was generous enough to send us ten of his poems in our jointly edited

poetry anthology, *Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map* published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. I remember his sincere guidance during this book project. Keki never said, “No”. He never said, “I’m

contributions and multidimensional personality, including his professional engagements with the Indian Police Service. Keki witnessed many strategic missions of the central government. But, he was cool at all those.

Keki’s writings leave a permanent mark asking us to return to his texts again and again. I must travel to his innocence to the falling awake to rejuvenate my friendships with poetry and the poets. My land, too, shall be his home of words. His immortal lines linger deep in me, between the soul and the crossroads of life, this silence,

**“Not that Gandhi seemed
the only anchorite.
Jinnah looked ascetic too—
how the years passed!”
(‘Partition Ghazal’)**

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Jaydeep Sarangi is an Indian poet, poetry activist with ten poetry collections in English latest being *Memories of Words* (2023). Sarangi is



currently the President of Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics (GIEWEC) and Vice President, EC, Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata. Living with poets and poetry, Sarangi is principal of New Alipore College, Kolkata. He may be reached at: jaydeepsarangi1@gmail.com <https://jaydeepsarangi.in/>

MY POETIC TRIBUTE

**The Map-Maker
for Keki N. Daruwalla**

**I have always thought that if I were a
river, I’d be the sacred Ganges
keeper of life in a landfall of truth
flowing deep in time and fire-hymns**

**Sad but joyful, history on my back
windy but restful, caring yet desirous
and tempting my everything
when I have almost nothing left in slabs**

**Standing under his Orion of winter poems
Sappho to Aphrodite, all underwater notes
Every one of us is the Ganges
between the soul and the night river.**

**Let’s return home to heaven with Keki’s
‘deftly angled’ light...**

- Jaydeep Sarangi

busy.” Many of us taught his poetry to the students. Many of us inhabit him personally. Many of us call him as a ‘mentor’. Keki and I met many times in different places. Each meeting is vivid and live in my mind. My conversations with him remain magical, on-going.

Keki was the Himalayas for many of us. Keki in his poem ‘History’ writes:

**“This too was history
Though no one ever wrote it.”**

Sahitya Akademi has recently published *A House of Words* edited by poet Usha Akella, a festschrift (a collection of writings) that celebrates his staggering

Two poems by Cyril Dabydeen

ABOUT THE DIASPORA

About the diaspora I know,
having come here to live--
from one place to the next,
a new or old consciousness.

What's laden below, you see,
Shelley's unacknowledged
legislator I will think about--
memory & landscape.

Given to a new country
where I belong with pride
of place, indeed my
dedication & quest.

Loyalty I bring to you
with the Romantics of old
I will say again with
words from long ago.

MEETING AGAIN

Silence she brought him
thinking they have never
met before with words
--now expressed.

Another passage or gateway
crossing boundaries, but only
erecting barriers, you see
--time between them.

Moving along and again
making faces at each other
with indifference, if only
--with compliance.

Looking back with affection,
their meeting once more, and
soon after separating again
--like never before.

The Paper Boat by Anant Mohan

The desk becomes an ocean,
And I am just a paper boat,
Drowning in a sea of ink,
Barely keeping myself afloat.

The papers rise like tidal waves,
Pulling me further from shore,
The tasks stack like looming cliffs,
While I yearn for the calm I once wore.

The clock is a distant lighthouse,
Its light flickers, faint and thin,
I'd rather have you wrapped in my arms,
Then, lost in this tide, I'm caught within.

Your laugh is the wind that fills my sail,
A whisper of warmth through the cold air,
But I'm chained to this desk, a prisoner,
In a storm that I simply must bear.

I fight through the current with all that I have,
Chasing the dawn of a golden tide,
With every stroke, I carve out a path,
Drawn to the hope you keep inside.

One day, I'll fold this storm away,
The sea will calm, the waves will cease,

I'll find the shore where you wait,
And let your embrace bring me peace.



Anant Mohan is a student and rising architect with a passion for cars and photography. His metal steed is his beloved car, passed down from his grandfather, which he intends to cherish forever.

Short Story

The Good Samaritan by Subhash Chandra

"We've done our part by our children. Our son is doing well in an MNC in the U.S. and our daughter is happily married," she said.

Mr. Khurana knew something momentous was in the offing. Years of togetherness made them instinctively understand the drift of each other's thoughts. She continued, "Now that I've retired, I want to help the poor. Most students are weak in Mathematics and need guidance. The wealthy can afford coaching for their wards, but the poor can't. I'll teach them for free. It'll be a Thanksgiving to the Almighty."

#

Mr. Khurana did not quite like the idea. It'd rob him of the afternoon siesta he had got used to since his superannuation as an Upper Division Clerk from a government office. He knew there would be a racket with the kids around, but did not have the pluck to oppose it. She was domineering, more qualified, and earned a higher salary.

#

She had topped in Mathematics Honours, completed B.Ed., and easily got a job in a government school. She loved the company of small children – their guileless smiles, tinkling laughter ... even pranks and requested the Principal for the primary classes."

"The school would like to benefit from your capability," the Principal said. "If you insist, you will be placed in a lower pay scale."

#

"I think, it is time to relax and rest your tired bones," said Mr. Khurana.

"You've slogged all your life. Did all the household work, taught at school, and visited homes to give tuition to supplement our income."

Her face hardened.

"I won't be trudging distances as I'll teach them at home."

"It might aggravate your chronic back pain," he said mildly but knew once she had made a decision, nothing could make her resile.

#

Usha began with five children and in a few months, the number swelled to fifteen. They were from the families of rickshaw pullers, vegetable and fruit vendors, dhobis, daily wage labourers, and such. In a few months, the word spread. More parents approached her, but their MIG (Middle-Income Group) flat in Sukhdev Vihar had limited space.

She devised games for the lower classes to make the subject engaging. For addition and subtraction, for example, she

narrated stories about birds on two branches of a tree, some of whom kept hopping from one to the other. For the higher classes, she constructed easy formulae to solve sums. None of her students ever failed Math's exam, some performed exceptionally well, scoring eighty-plus percent marks.

#

A few months into her teaching, problems began to crop up. Now and then a spoon, a fork, or a comb disappeared.

Mr. Khurana expressed concern. "I don't think it's a good idea to have the kids at home."

"These are small things ... and novelties for them," she said dismissing his objection peremptorily.

One day Mr. Khurana's wristwatch vanished. He got very agitated.

"Usha, I think you must stop this social work," he spoke in an uncharacteristic loud voice for the first time in their lives.

"I will retrieve it, don't worry." However inwardly she, too, was anxious.

"Actually, you are turning them into thieves."

"How?" she asked tersely. By throwing temptations their way."

She ignored him and Mr. Khurana's pusillanimity did not allow him to raise the issue again.

She suspected twelve-year-old Mohan, who used to take unusually long when he visited the loo. Mr. Khurana had objected to the use of the bathroom by the kids but she remonstrated, "Where will the little girls go? We have two bathrooms, anyway."

One day, she asked Mohan to stay back.

"Did you take it?"

"What Ma'am?"

"Uncle's wristwatch."

He shook his head vigorously. "Bhagwaan kasam," he said and touched his protruding Adam's Apple.

But she did not believe him as he had a roving eye and furtive manner. She fixed her scathing gaze on him. He stopped coming to the class.

#

Once her former colleague invited them to dinner. She could not find her gold chain. It was a Wedding Anniversary gift from Mr. Khurana. She seldom wore it, because the chain-snatching incidents in the neighbourhood had become rife. Once a lady's neck had been gashed when the snatcher violently tugged at her gold chain.

When they returned from dinner, she told her husband, "I so much wanted to wear the gold chain but I could not find it anywhere. I

had worn it on our Wedding Anniversary last year."

You have always been careless with things. You might have kept it on the dressing table like you did many times before and one of the children took it away." Then he gratuitously added, "Registering a complaint with the police is useless. They'd do nothing and would harass us."

#

She stopped teaching. But after a couple of months, there was a drastic change in her. She no longer hummed songs, lost her vibrancy, and went almost silent, speaking only when talked to. At times, he saw her sitting on the balcony and staring vacantly ... far into the horizon.

His conscience twinged and he visited their family doctor to discuss her malady.

"Hmm ... any traumatic event in the family?"

"No."

"Any crucial change in her routine?"

He told him everything.

"Look, she is slipping into depression. Get her to resume teaching immediately or else it would take a serious turn."

He tried to persuade her but she vehemently refused.

"Why?"

Silence.

After a couple of days, offering her a small square wooden box, he said perkily, "See what I have found, Usha ji."

She looked at it and brightened up.

"Where was it?"

"In the cupboard. I was looking for the House Tax file."

#

Mr. Khurana consulted the spiral diary in which she had noted down the addresses of her students. The next day he led ten of her students into the house. She regained her vivacity and was her old cheerful self; the house resonated with hummed songs again.

One day while cleaning up the bookshelf she stumbled onto all the missing items, including Mr. Khurana's wristwatch, hidden behind books!

Showing them to Mr. Khurana, she said scornfully, "And I trusted you all these years!"



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.

Life and work of Rekha Rajvanshi by Sharon Rundle

People from South Asia have been coming to Australia for hundreds of years. In recent years, particularly, they have enriched Australia in so many ways. Rekha Rajvanshi is a prime example; through her work she has informed Hindi readers all over the world about the rich multicultural nature of Australia.

A teacher by profession, she moved to Sydney, Australia, twenty-four years ago and from the time she arrived, she has been making a significant contribution in Australia in the fields of the arts, languages, culture, as well as strongly supporting communities and charities.

She studied Hindi and Sanskrit at graduate level and has a master's degree in psychology and education, and an M. Phil in education from India. She began teaching Hindi soon after arriving in Sydney, to students at the beginning stage through to Higher School Certificate level at the Saturday School of Community Languages and Indo-Aust Bal Bharthi Hindi School. She has taught Australian adults at the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sydney. She feels that in order to prevent languages from dying out, literature and languages must be passed on to the next generation. With more than 200,000 Hindi speakers in Australia, Hindi is growing amongst 2nd-gen of migrants from South Asia, who want to stay connected with their roots'.

Rekha believes that 'language learning and teaching opens a window to compassion'. She says, 'I get immense satisfaction when my students accomplish a task or achieve a goal'.

She also has a postgraduate diploma in Special Education from Macquarie University, and runs Literacy and Numeracy programs, supporting children with special needs such as Dyslexia, ASD, ADD, Emotional Disorder and Behaviour Disorder.



Rekha is a well-known published Hindi author. In 2011, she founded the Indian Literary and Art Society of Australia (ILASA Inc.) ILASA's contribution was acknowledged by Vishwarang-Tagore International Film, Art and Literature Festival in 2024. She has organised numerous other literary and cultural events including Hindi Diwas (day) celebrations at the Indian Consulate in Sydney. She has brought us the Kavi Sammelans, Poetry Competitions, Hindi Dramas, as well as conferences to promote Hindi

literature in Australia. She says that 'Poetry is an expression of my emotions, a kind of catharsis'. She says that she takes on this work because 'these events bring people together and create awareness of many vital issues'.

In 2013, she was invited to speak on the Creative Practitioners Panel of a conference titled, Gondwana Landings: Voices of the Emerging Indian Diaspora in Australia held in Melbourne. In 2014, The National Academy of Letters, Sahitya

Akademi, India invited her to represent Australia in the Waves IORA Poetry Festival. Rekha worked as a literature director for the South Asian Film, Art and Literature Festival from 2017 – 2023, and was presented with a 'Significant Contribution to Literature' Award at the SAFAL Festival at Macquarie University. She was Festival

Director for Vishwarang Festival in Australia in 2020. This festival brought together sixty artists representing a wide range of the arts from all over Australia to discuss and present their work and creative practice which was pivotal in embracing and celebrating the Australia-India relationship in multicultural Australia. It was supported by the High Commissioner of India Gitesh Sharma, as well as Australian Members of Parliament, and the festival was broadcast around the world.

As a NAATI accredited English-Hindi translator, Rekha won a prestigious national level Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) Excellence in Translation Award for translating Aboriginal Dream Time stories (animated films – an Aboriginal Nations Australia's Production); and the Dr Sarojini Naidu Award at the Global Literature Festival in 2020. She was invited to speak at the World Hindi Conference in Fiji. She received the 'Hindi Videsh Prasaar Samman' Award from the Uttar Pradesh Hindi Sansthan Lucknow for promoting Hindi in Australia on November 28th, 2021. A report in Desi Australia magazine in February 2022 highlighted Rekha's "extensive work which includes poetry (blank verse, geet, ghazal, and nazmas), stories, articles, children's poetry, and translations. The Lucknow Doordarshan anchor interviewed Rekha after the Hindi Videsh Prasaar Samman Award and said that she's amazed at how a poet can write in so many genres so well. Rekha's poems touch people's hearts and take them on a rollercoaster of emotions". I asked Rekha what receiving these awards means to her. She said, 'Awards give validation and boost confidence, but they also generate a sense of gratitude and the desire to keep going'.

In addition to her work as a teacher and Hindi practitioner, she is a breast cancer survivor and runs the annual Pink Ribbon Breakfast which successfully supports and raises funds and awareness of breast cancer research, early detection, and services for South Asian communities, which has been acknowledged in Hansard, the official record of the NSW

Parliament. Her fundraising efforts benefited the Queensland Flood Relief on March 25, 2011, and the Diabetes Council of Australia in 2014, as well as other charities.

Rekha Rajvanshi has written and published twelve books of poetry and stories and edited five anthologies of Australian Hindi poets and authors, including Boomerang, Australia se Kavitaen, and Australia



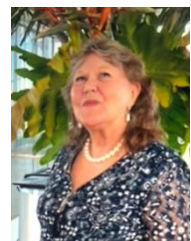
se Kahaniyan. Rekha's poetry and stories are being taught in six Indian Universities in India. She has motivated young and upcoming Indian writers in Australia and published their work in books and magazines. Rekha has also presented programs as a casual broadcaster for Indian Link Radio and SBS Radio and is an approved Radio artist from All India Radio Delhi.

Her stories, articles, and poems have been published in numerous prestigious international anthologies, online books and print publications in India and throughout

the world. Rekha has been writing for Indian Down Under, Indian Telegraph and Desi Australia since 2002. She has promoted many artists and performers, interviewed dignitaries, and has written thought-provoking multicultural articles. People she interviewed include previous High Commissioner of India in Australia, Dr Ian Woolford, Dr Peter Freedlander, Charles Thompson (media personality and Hindi activist), many Bollywood personalities, dignitaries, and Parliamentarians. Some of her articles and reports are available on <https://muckrack.com/rekha-rajevanshi/articles>

What's next for Rekha Rajvanshi? ILASA Inc is publishing an anthology of stories in English in 2025; and a coffee table book on immigrant breast cancer survivors Tryst with Breast Cancer – Migrant Stories.

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. 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>

Fiction

TAKING HER LEAVE

--Serendipity

by Cyril Dabydeen

He takes her hand naturally, or
unconsciously.

She balks.

"You?"

"Yes." He only nods to her.

"Indeed...you?"

He forces a smile.

She makes a face. A
sourpuss face, you see.

Oh, nothing sanguine
between them, but unexpected
laughter, without familiarity: their
being who they are, like of the same
tribe, or background, if you can really
tell--as the impulse seizes him.

Not her!

His hand reaches out
further, twisting his fingers into hers
to form a knot. Twirling...an Indian
trickster, do you know?

She seems not taken by
surprise. What could be more
beguiling?

"Are you from...?" he tries,
hoping for assurance, not
connivance--in a whimsical way.

She breathes in hard, a little
pulsating. "Do you mean if I am from,
well...Asia?" *Maybe India.*

Her attractive face, and her
languorous manner; but she's
sitting, not standing. Like a tall tree
unfurling with her poise, her
elegance--but not being a dilettante.

He becomes, well,
somewhat unnerved, but not
animated because of his self-belief,
his sense of self-worth; and yes,
where does she come from, well, by
her physical appearance? New
ports, territories, forming over

arches, like the Gateway to India in
Mumbai commemorating royalty.

Neuronal pathways.
Metonym being all.

And rivers like the Ganges,
Brahmaputra, and the Yamuna
crossed in an instant. New valleys,
plateaux. A coastline, not far from
the Arabian Sea as they drift along;
then to Varanasi, or some other
place like it with holy men: sadhus
and yogis being prayerful seeking
illumination, or transcendence.
Karma, karma.

Time to unburden the self,
if only with the disappearing ego.

Atman...where? Brahma-
Vishnu-Shiva in the background,
never the foreground. A new life-
story, let it be. Oh dalliance, with
fingers still intertwined, for a
moment longer. Yes, with promises
to keep.

Whispers behind a closed
door at this special event they are
attending at the Governor General's
Residence: an elite gathering--
narrative less contrived, but natural
or organic, in a manner of speaking.
Verisimilitude, yes.

Laughter, from
somewhere, distancing tradition and
esoteric belief, let it be. Who is she
really, with growing intrigue?
Who...being himself only? London
calling. New York, Toronto,
Montreal, Mumbai...and Kolkata,
Dubai, Vancouver, New South
Wales, Port of Spain, Dhaka, Karachi,
Jaipur. More places to go, or to come
from.

A book-reading gathering, you must
know, more than the performative.

Fingers binding them in a
wreath, it seems. A juggler
transforming as someone else: like a
cobra coming out of a weaver's
basket in front of the iconic Taj
Mahal hotel in Mumbai. How much
more magical...as perhaps only what
god Shiva knows.

Flashback: to the renowned
Taj Mahal mausoleum in Agra
because of enduring love for
Mumtaz Mahal. Let the Mughals
take pains being clever with
decorative art. New pillars, columns,
come from Persia and elsewhere.
Emperor Akbar being himself with
his known religious tolerance. And
the Vedas being unparalleled with
sagas, epics. Arjuna...as warrior.
Gandhi and the Gita being
inseparable!

Krishna, as Godhead.
Vishnu coming into being as the
ocean churns symbolizing the birth
of life. Mohini...do you know?
Eyelids tremulous. Turn the page,
please, like turning a new leaf. A
lotus flower unburdening itself from
a calyx. A flowerpot.

Wedlock, you see, in the
offing.

*

After a while she reluctantly
starts taking her leave. He demurs,
and maybe he doesn't want her to
leave. His expression, well...what to
ask for in more than in an auspicious
moment. Almost confounding, you
see: this is no love-match in the
making, with expectancy, because
astrological charts weren't
consulted--what's less

commonplace in a city without a

long tradition, here in conventional, secular Ottawa.

Narrative unfolding, of what initially drew him to her here at this special award ceremony. A vaunted book event taking place, you see, more than a backdrop, but breath-taking. Now let literature take its own course with aesthetic form and manner. Emphasis on plot, if only with a symmetrical beginning and ending.

Books and book-lovers, note well. Words combining the alphabet with volatile elements of the soul. Let readers be all!

His hand still in hers. Days and nights passing in expectation or suspense. *Scheherazade, I tell you!* Plot being only the silent artillery of

the heart. A real love-match, without a familiar story-line. She with filigree on her hands and feet, and her face and neck with decorative tiara. He affects a princely posture, with a solid ring on his finger--being regal on a horse or elephant, How much more splendiferous-looking, as he comes to her.

Turn the next page, please.

Arms and legs moving, deliberately. Thighs, hips. Diaphanous, a bridal gown in silk or satin. Denouement, as they keep curling in and out with fingers, toes—more than the surreal. Applause all around, everyone coming closer, more than once upon a time.

They discreetly cast glances at each other, with apprehension.

An ongoing fairy tale, it must be. The rope twisting, the knot unbinding. Closure, never predictable--their growing further apart.

**Cyril Dabydeen--
“a noted Canadian
poet” (House of
Commons,**



Ottawa), short story writer, novelist, and anthologist. His latest collection of stories is *Forgotten Exiles* (Mosaic Press, Canada). He has read from his books across Canada, the USA, Europe, Asia, and in the Caribbean. He is of indentured Indian background born in Guyana where he won the Sandbach Parker Gold Medal for poetry at an early age.

Three Short Poems by Debjani Chatterjee

Why we Call it ‘Mother Tongue’

Adam, you were not the first
to label the birds and beasts
with whom we share this planet.
They had already been named.
You exercised memory’s
encyclopaedic recall,

your prowess forever marked
by the Bible.

God and I witnessed it all:
Indulgent parent, loyal spouse.
When Cain and Abel first lisped
of all around them, it was
at my breast. Our Creator’s
thoughts and dreams were words you spoke.

‘Mother tongue’ is what we call
each syllable.

Journey’s Goal

O traveller, look to right and left;
God is not at your destination.
Divinity is in the journey
and in the entire population.

A Resolve

I won’t be swallowed
by the dark night. I will walk
steadfast to the light.

Debjani Chatterjee is a poet, writer and arts psychotherapist. Awarded an MBE for services to Literature in 2008, and an honorary doctorate by Sheffield Hallam University, she has had over 75 books published, including eight poetry collections, most recently *Laughing with Angels* (2022). She has been called ‘Britain’s best-known Asian poet’ (Elisabetta Marino) and ‘a national treasure’ (Barry Tebb).
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debjani_Chatterjee

Book review

LAKSHMI: AN ELUSIVE GODDESS

by Lakshmi Kannan

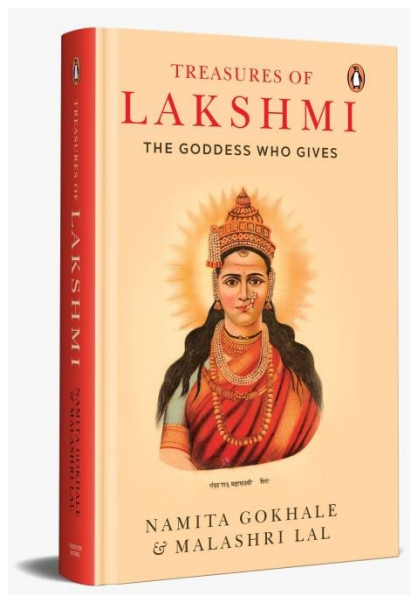
***Treasures of Lakshmi: The Goddess Who Gives*, Edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, Penguin Random House India Pvt Ltd, Gurugram, 2024. 332 pages. Price Rs.499/- ISBN 9780143459866**

The book launch of *Treasures of Lakshmi* on 8 October at India International Center, Delhi was a soulful experience. It started with a melodious rendering of *Lakshmi Ashtakam* by the renowned singer Vidya Shah, followed by a recitation of *Shri Suktam*, the earliest Sholka on Shri Lakshmi by Alka Tyagi that resonated with all of us. This is the third book in the Goddess Trilogy edited by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal, after *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology and Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*.

Gokhale, co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival is an eminent writer who has received many prestigious honours including the Sahitya Akademi award. Her books include *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, a celebrated debut novel and *The Blind Matriarch*, an unusually prescient novel on Covid times, to name a few. *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* that she co-authored with Malashri Lal, won the Kalinga Fiction Award.

Malashri Lal, former professor of English and dean, University of Delhi is the acclaimed author of *The Law of the Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English; Tagore and the*

Feminine and Chamba Achamba: Women's Oral Narratives. Her recent book of poems *Mandalas of Time*, is creating ripples on the review scene. The two editors spoke about their challenges collating the wealth of materials for this anthology.



Dr. Lakshmi Puri, a distinguished academic and scholar, spoke on the almost 'encyclopedic scope' and range of the book while talking about the significance of Lakshmi's *vahanas* and symbols such as the lotus, the elephant and the owl. Usha Mujoo Munshi, Chief Librarian, IIC and a Fulbright scholar, moderated the event with great poise and sensitivity.

In her Introduction, Lal talked about the paradox of 'Lakshmi's eternal relevance in every time and

context' on the one hand, and the absence of collections on Lakshmi that 'anthologized the various traditions in which she played a key role...Nor was there much creative writing.' She said 'Lakshmi's significant presence in social reality and her surprising absence from comprehensive literary scholarship fuelled our resolve to compile and edit this book.'

In her "Afterword," Gokhale says 'Our anthology delves into the enigma of Lakshmi'. She speaks for many of us when she explains that it took her a while to realise that Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and Saraswati, the goddess of learning 'were emanations of the same force', concluding with a punchy line that the book is 'is in its small way, a tribute to Lakshmi from her sister Saraswati.'

The book spills over with a profusion of knowledge in its earnestly researched essays from scholars and translators. Thankfully, the four sections help us navigate our way through.

Section 1 'Unveiling Lakshmi's Essence: Divine Interpretations' has essays by prominent writers such as Bibek Debroy, Jawahar Sircar, Devdutt Pattanaik, Meghnad Desai, Renuka Narayanan and others. Addressing the sub-title of the book "Goddess Who Gives", Desai does not gloss over unpleasant gender discrepancies. "Lakshmi's Southern Sojourn" by Narayanan introduces readers to her Tamil and Telugu devotees as "Vara Lakshmi", 'Vara'

denoting the boon granted by her. It is celebrated in the lunar month of *Shravan* (July-August). Her lines about women who came for the occasion and 'chatted away', taking turns 'to sing Carnatic songs to the goddess,' are laced with her signature humour.

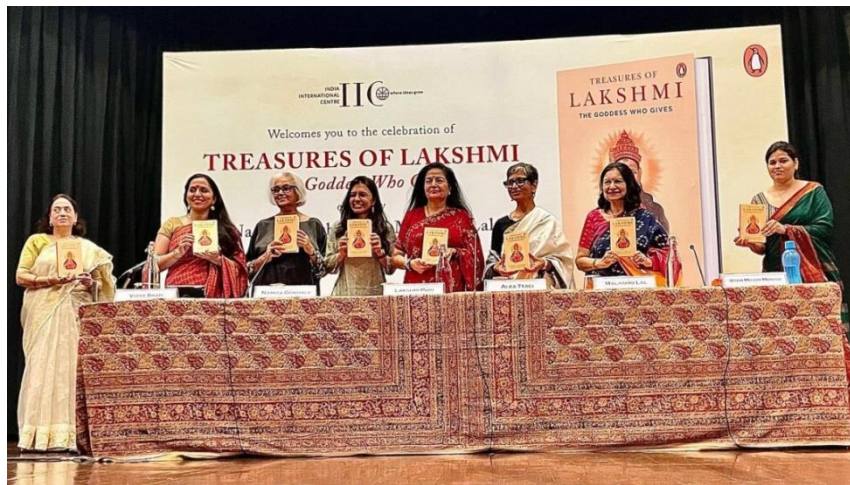
Section 2 'Exploring Lakshmi's Mystique: Creative Interpretations' includes translations of a story by Bonophul, the poem "Nagarlakshmi" by Rabindranath Tagore about the daughter of Sudatta, a follower of Buddha, who offers to help during the famine in Sravastipura. Sanjukta Dasgupta's poem in English "Binary" takes up the polarization between Lakshmi and Alakshmi with hard-hitting lines that always marked her poetry. To the males brandishing brooms, muttering

harshly, *Get out, Alakshmi*, Lakshmi tells a trembling priest '*Alakshmi and Lakshmi are immortal twins, my mortal kin.*'

Section 3 'Weaving Lakshmi's Tapestry: Cultural Interpretations' has translations from a wide range of classical texts such as *Bhagavata Purana*, *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam*, *The Skanda Purana*, *Vishnudharmottara Purana* and Jataka Tales along with interesting essays that show Shri Lakshmi as a contemporary deity. "Gajalakshmi" by Niharika K. Sankrityayan has photos of *Samudramanthan* from Mallikarjuna temples in Pattadakal and other photos from temples in

Aihole, Badami and Siddhanakolla that enliven the content. The cultural details regarding Alakshmi, aptly subtitled as "Symmetry and Asymmetry" by Tanushree Redij and P.P. Joglekar, help us in orienting ourselves to the complexity of life.

Malashri Lal's delightful essay "Lakshmi: The Brand Rhetoric" brings the goddess to her context in contemporary India. Backing the friendly banter is her well-researched data for the story that takes us back to yet another Ratan from the Tata family. Way back in 1947, the industrialist Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoy Tata resolved the



economic crisis of a newly independent India with the then Prime Minister Pandi Nehru, to wean people off from buying foreign goods. Lakshmi's blessing was needed, but with a name that was both politically savvy and stylish. The French collaborators Robert Pigué and Renouir came up with the brilliant idea of "Lakme"...as a French version' of Lakshmi, says Lal. It was not just a serendipitous discovery. Her adventurous research unearthed the making of a French opera named '*Lakme*', first performed in 1883 in Paris. Lal also talks about other welfare schemes

for women affixing the name 'Lakshmi' for an auspicious start, showing a goddess who 'is no longer on a pedestal but walking freely among the populace in contemporary India'.

Section 4 'Unravelling Lakshmi's Narratives: Folk Interpretations' has a translation of *Manabasa Lakshmi Purana: The Redeemer of the Poor* by Balaram Das. The holy Tulsi, according to Nilima Chitgopekar is 'The Sylvan Form of Lakshmi' in her essay and Mahalakshmi's description of the eight facets the goddess in *Ashtalakshmi Stotram* takes us to the sea-facing temple on Marica Beach, Chennai.

We went home with Vidya Shah's rendering of *Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma* in impeccable Kannada reverberating

in our ears with the timeless lyrics of the 15th century philosopher-poet Purandara Das.



Lakshmi Kannan, Ph.D., is a poet, novelist, short story writer and translator. Her recent books

include *Nadistuti*, *Poems* (Authors Press, 2024), *Guilt Trip and Other Stories* (Niyogi, 2023), and *The Glass Bead Curtain* (Vitasta 2020 c2016). For more details, please see her entry in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Writing in English* and the Home Page of her site www.lakshmikannan.in



Yogesh Patel

The Art of Allusion A Masterclass in Poetry

First, let me quote **Sylvia Plath's** poem "Lady Lazarus," and then discuss the use of allusions in poetry. It's important to remember that poetry occurs organically and is not artificially constructed. Therefore, allusions should also arise naturally. In the biblical story of Lazarus, a man is resurrected by Jesus. Plath alters this narrative in her poem and alludes to herself, hence the use of the word "Lady" in the title. Furthermore, her version portrays multiple resurrections witnessed as a spectacle by the "peanut-crunching crowd" to inspect her "scars". In these lines, she expresses her defiance, which holds many nuanced meanings:

*I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.*

Allusion can shift a poem to a new level. In poetry, it is a literary move that enriches the idea in your work by referring to a person, place, event, or thing which can be historical, mythical, or current, but often common knowledge. This technique of dramatically layering images enhances a poetic theme by adding deeper meanings, extended contexts, and tangential connections, and offers a rich artistic experience through its unexpected and fresh visual perspective. Instead of saying I am a lost alien, undesirable, and a misfit—as in one of my whale poems—I allude to the famous Wilma, the Thames Whale, that strayed into the Thames in 2006: 'My skin is the Thames whale'. Whale also conjures up a mammoth problem it can become for its incongruity! In writing poems, you should be subtly indirect while stating the tarnished obvious. To create this plane, poets need not limit their imagination.

Instead, the archaic aspect of the art of allusion can open new pathways that can be explored further. Poetry is the craft of economical use of words. This device helps in that regard. However, the poet should be conscious of its reliance on the reader's readiness to find out more if they do not recognize it. Rewards are rich for the reader if it happens, but the chances of a poem's failure are high too. Hence, someone once called it a bridge of shared knowledge between a poet and a reader. Sometimes, allusions can work without knowing the original, as in **T.S. Eliot's** "April is the cruellest month" (The Waste Land), which alludes to Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales'. Another example is **Sarojini Naidu's** poem, The Gift of India, in which she alludes to the sacrifices of Indian soldiers during WW1 by comparing them to the ancient warriors of India, but overall, it taunts the Raj for forgetting these soldiers' gift of life to it highlighted by the last line of a poem (Remember the blood of thy martyred sons!):

*Gathered like pearls in their alien graves
Silent they sleep by the Persian waves,
Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.*

In my collection "**The Rapids**," I introduce and explain a form called the Rapid. Allusion plays a significant role in this form, as a poem can use a snappy, short-broken form and syntax to create intricate layers of meaning on a larger canvas. In this example, the Garden of Eden and the event of Samudra Manthan are borrowing a snake from each other! The apple and love inject extra dynamics into the poem.

Not an earth-apple, not a love apple

I won't pick it on command
I will wait for the apple to drop
There aren't any schemes plots
for me to discover Gravity
The Garden of Eden
Snake's gone to Samudra
Manthan

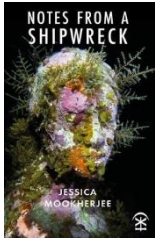
Jess Mookherjee is a poet who never disappoints because of the rich landscapes of poems. In her recent poem, "Cracked Actors," she refers to characters from Shakespeare's plays to create a complex characterization for her lover, including herself in the mix. Each character adds its unique story without overwhelming the reader, showcasing the skill of an accomplished poet. Even the car represents the everyday, common family vehicle to set the period in the poem. The key takeaway from this poem is that the references are not used by the poet to show off, but rather to serve a purpose.

*That summer I became Puck, Miranda,
Titania,
you turned Romeo, Ferdinand and
Antonio.
Let's run away you said. Peter Pan the
fuck
out of here. You stole your dad's Vauxhall
Cavalier,
I stole my dad's chequebook, and we
drank as you drove*

And ends the poem with these lines:

*I was a vixen when I was back at school.
You, Oberon,
had a line or two to get through. I was
playing
kitchen sinks and gin until you were out of
my system.*

(From [Notes from a Shipwreck, Nine](#)
[Arches Press £10.99](#))



Mimi Khalvati, The King's Gold Medal for Poetry winner in 2023, enjoys the status of a queen of sonnets. Carole Rumen wrote in *The Guardian*, "The author of this week's poem Mimi Khalvati tells that she refuses to avoid nostalgia in her work. There's no choice – or shouldn't be – for a poet but to be true to her own perception and feeling, and if nostalgia is at their heart it has to be honoured." It highlights the aspects of allusions a poet can play with. Allusion is not just used to make a point—in a good poet's hands, it can be vibrant. Khalvati's poem *Afterwardness* refers to *chaharbagh*, a quadripartite garden based on the four gardens of Paradise mentioned in the Qur'an, as explained by the poet.

An eleven-year-old boy from Aleppo
whose eyes hold only things no longer
there

– a citadel, a moat, safe rooms of
shadow,
'afterwardness' in his thousand yard
stare –

years later, decades even, might turn
around
to see, through the long tunnel of that
gaze,
a yard, a pond, and pine trees that
surround
as in a *chaharbagh*, four branching
pathways.

The physical isotropies of Aleppo
and Paradise Garden are
juxtaposed here to mark the loss
through ruins, wars, and
brutality—urgently expressed in
these lines:

Where do memories hide? the pine trees
sing.

In language of course, the four pathways
reply.

What if the word be lost? the pine trees
sigh.

The quest and sense we seek in poetry
don't come only from talking about our
time and its plethora of contexts with
which it stews in a hotpot, but they also
arise in context to our past. To be at
any one moment also means to be in a
timeline. That is where allusion helps
us to extract any sense from our
context to everything around us and
beyond.

Handles

As you gather fragments of the world
of your poems, connect them with
allusions.

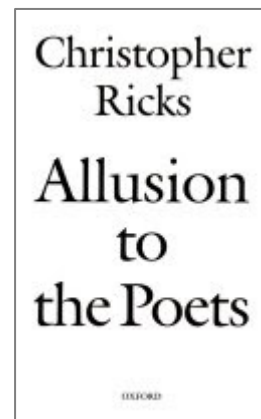
- When you research the connections to your poetic theme, jump to its tangents, leading to their literary, historical, cultural and religious wealth.
- Ponder over what works. Enhancement and resonance are the keys. Ruthlessly discard that doesn't.
- Be selective and conscious that it will work for readers. Create a sense of mystery and allure without divulging too many details, motivating the reader to seek more information. This could be in the index of references in the last pages of your book.
- Make sure the allusion appears not as an adage, but somehow integrated seamlessly into your linguistic rhythm and theme.
- Deploy allusion to remove the concrete nature of the word, image, or idea. As you noticed in the above examples.
- You are not including an allusion to honour the past; it must be there to be part of your work.

- The context and the inherent narrative of the allusion must complement your message. Hence, grasp all contexts represented in the original orientation, not just one facet, as it may confuse or kill your poem.

- As shown in my example of the whale allusion, don't shy away from a personal connection. It can make your poem more powerful.

- Be sparing! In your draft, play with various allusions to see what works best, but also what happens if you do away with it!

Recommended reading:



[Allusion to the Poets](#)
[by Christopher Ricks](#)
[OUP Oxford](#)

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*.

Interview

Meenakshi Mohan in conversation with Sunil Sharma on his book, *Minotaur*

(Setu Publications, Pittsburgh, PA, USA, 2022)

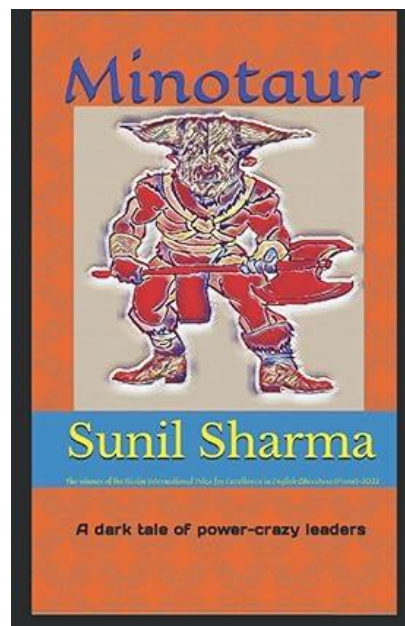
There is no calamity greater than lavish desires. There is no greater guilt than discontentment. There is no greater disaster than greed. - Lao-Tzu

From Ambitions to Ruins: In the Labyrinth of Greed

While reading *Minotaur*, a quote I read somewhere kept coming to my mind. When Shri Ram returned to Ayodhya, His mother, Devi Kaushalya, blessed him with his victory and slaying of the Ravana, then Ram responded to her that he did not kill Ravana. His “*aham*” killed him. *Minotaur* is the story of Caesar, the Marxist, who started with good intentions but turned into a Minotaur with the characteristics of half bull, half man (Greek mythology) - once a charismatic doctor-turned-guerilla leader. In the author’s words (p 256), “Grandpa de Merret had told me once: ‘Always discover your inner voice, child. Listen to your heart. Follow it. Do its biddings. It is the authentic voice. All others are false.’ I paid a heavy price for not listening to it.” *Minotaur* is an intriguing tale of the power-crazy world in which Dr. Sunil Sharma blends various literary techniques, including realism, surrealism, futurism, fictionalizing real characters from history, art, philosophy, and religion and fantasizing a dystopian world where a theocratic and authoritarian regime seizes control and declares itself the ruler.

I have known Dr. Sharma for a few years. He is a prolific writer, editor

(Setu Bilingual Journal, published from Pittsburgh), and recipient of many awards, including the Nissim International Prize for Excellence and UK-based Destiny Poet’s Inaugural Poet of the Year Award. *Minotaur* also received recognition as the Best Book of the Year (2022) by the Writers Capital Foundation’s Panorama Golden Book Awards.



MM: Welcome Dr. Sunil Sharma. Conversing with you regarding your intriguing book, *Minotaur* is an honor. I have been an admirer of your writing for a long time. After I read this book, *Minotaur* stayed in my mind for a long time. What inspired you to write this book?

SS: Thanks, Meenakshiji, for your kind words. I'm humbled! It is a study of absolute power. A totalitarian system. A democratic firebrand leader fights for progressive values then turns into a total despot by force of circumstance and clings to power at any cost.

It is as much about Julius Caesar as about Hitler, Pinochet, Franco, Mussolini, or any other leader obsessed with absolute power.

MM: Why did you choose the title *Minotaur*? As I read your story, I wanted to refresh my Greek mythology, and I read that the Minotaur is both a victim and a monster. His character depicts wisdom and folly. How does the character of Caesar fit into that category? And how did you balance such contradictions in your story?

SS: The title of the politico-philosophical novel is a tribute to Picasso's painting *Guernica*, which features the mythic Minotaur as one of the central motifs. The title links mythic consciousness to a contemporary understanding of the symbolic creature. The novel is inspired by that iconic work and develops the narrative by fusing myths with reality in a strange alchemy. Constantin Ceasar is the reincarnation of the hybrid creature that represents

bestiality underneath human skin—how power corrupts some!

MM: In your book, ghosts and skeletons appear – what metaphorical themes do these apparitions convey? What significance do they have in the story of *Minotaur*?

SS: The hauntings tell their own stories. These come as forewarnings. The way ghosts and witches appear in *The Bard* as tools and tropes, symbols to heighten the effect of macabre messages delivered from the beyond. They function as cautionary figures from the underworld, and any dictator or political leader can ignore the apparitions at their peril. In a way, it is also the past and guilty conscience catching up in the most unlikely moments in the present.

MM: As I mentioned earlier, you have used various literary techniques, including realism, surrealism, and futurism – how did you develop this multi-layered discourse, and how did you balance its coherence in your narratives?

SS: Well, coherence is part of the narrative- strategically seamlessly welding different modes of storytelling. A dialectical relationship between form and content. You employ these to advance the story for better dramatic effects. Like extending the frontiers of narration, realism is dominant by including these strands in vogue, trying to capture the nuances, lapses, and gaps to the best of your abilities as a writer.

MM: The novel also explores various political philosophies of communism, liberalism, dictatorship, socialism, and democracy – what was your aim in presenting these

ideologies? How do these ideologies affect the global canvas?

SS: As you can see, it is about power discourse, its corruption and degeneration into dictatorship---and final overthrow by the people's resistance. The cycle continues across the global political landscapes. Ceasar never dies and gets reincarnated.

MM: In your book, you mentioned the white *man's burden*. How do you relate that to Caesar's journey and, in a broader context, global dynamics?

SS: White man's burden as a justifying theory of imperialism is critiqued from a post-colonial perspective---and debunked as the false and pompous claim for exploitation of the natives internationally.

MM: The novel entwines fiction and history, such as Napoleon, Mussolini, Conrad, Shakespeare, and Marquez, to name some into the story. What led you to bring such figures into a fictional space, and what is their significance to the central theme of the story?

SS: It is for an alert reader to figure out their overall relevance and significance.

History is enmeshed in our lives. Failure to listen to history can have tragic consequences.

MM: I kept thinking of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* when reading your book. In this novel, anthropomorphic farm animals rebel against their human farmer, hoping to create a society where the animals can be equal, accessible, and happy. Is *Minotaur* a political allegory?

SS: As I said earlier, it is a political novel. Also, a book of and about the big ideas. The kind you saw flourishing in Europe and Central America in the 1960s-80s, now no longer in fashion, in a market of fantasy, gore, and vampires.

MM: I see a similarity between Caesar's earlier life with an abusive father and Hitler's similar experiences – Freudian theory suggests that unresolved childhood trauma and repressed aggression can lay the groundwork for destructive tendencies and a desire for power later in life. What are your thoughts on that?

SS: His father exemplifies the best and worst of patriarchy. His relationship with his son changes later. Ceasar stands for the best values that went wrong in pursuing justice, freedom, and democracy. The scenario depicted in the novel plays out in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and some Central American nations even today.

MM: Finally, I would like to ask what message of hope or change you want readers to take away from the novel's exploration of humanity and power. I am also curious to know what genre best describes your book.

SS: Well, straightforward message, the takeaway from history: Ultimately, it is the people who triumph and demolish and dismantle any totalitarian system.

The genre is the book of ideas. It is a philosophical novel rooted in a dialectical reading of history.

MM: Thank you so much for allowing me to chat with you.

Dr Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy – A Scientist turned Polymath

His contributions to the Western perception of Indian Music & Dance (Part-1)

by Dr Kusum Pant Joshi

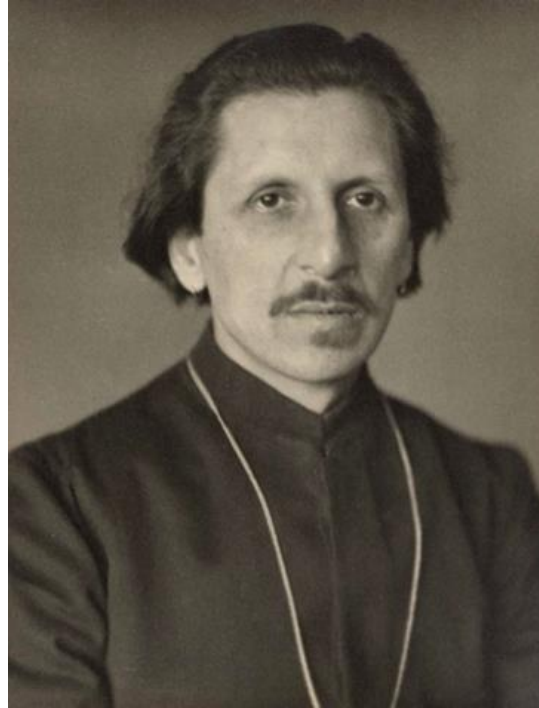
It is not easy to uncover a multifaceted personality such as Dr Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (AKC). So, after, briefly looking at his family background and education and his transformational Ceylon (or Sri Lanka) trip between 1902-1906, let us focus only on his contribution towards the understanding of Indian music and dance in the West.

Birth, family background and education

AKC was the product of a mixed marriage. His father, Muthu Coomaraswamy (1834-1879), was known for his erudition, accomplishments and wealth. He hailed from a family or community of hereditary landowners known as the Mudaliars whose ancestors had migrated from South India to Ceylon. His mother, Elizabeth Clay Beebe, was from an English family of Kent. His parents had met and married during one of AKC's father's trips to the UK between 1873-75. The couple left for Ceylon soon after their marriage and it was there, in the city of Colombo, that AKC was born on 22 August 1877.

Due to the sudden death of AKC's father in 1879 when he was only about two, his mother decided to settle with him in England where her family was based.

As a child, AKC attended an independent school in



AKC's father, Muthu Coomaraswamy

went to London where he studied botany and geology at University College. In 1902, he married Ethel Mary Partridge (1872-1952) who

was linked with the Arts and Crafts Movement and is still remembered as the 'Mother of English Handloom Weaving'.

The following year, AKC and his wife sailed to Ceylon to enable AKC to start his assignment as Director of the Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon.

Work in Ceylon (1903-1906)

Though he lived and worked in Ceylon as a scientist, it was while he was there that he developed an awareness and a deep interest in the arts, crafts and culture of the people of the East.

His gifted wife, Ethel, played an important role in his new learning. She travelled with him all over the island and assisted him by photographing and keeping detailed records of every piece of art and craft that drew their attention. Explaining his position, AKC is reported to have said as follows to a group of Tamils in Jaffna in June 1906: "I ... have been through the Western world more thoroughly than any but a very few Tamils and have been brought up entirely as an Englishman and have come out to the East and have felt the ties of national and racial affection and have been drawn towards eastern ideals, feeling them after all to be my own, in a way that few Englishmen could do. Fortified by such considerations I have occasionally ventured to give expression to the impressions I have gathered from such a

combined inside and outside point of view ..."¹

AKC's exposure between 1902 and 1906 to British rule in Ceylon and the way it appeared to be



**AKC's mother,
Elizabeth Clay Beebe**

impacting on its people, transformed him and set him on a path that became a prelude to the work for which he is remembered to this day.

While in Ceylon, he appears have been well received by the local people. This was due not only to his position as an important government officer, but also to the high social and economic position enjoyed by his father's family. At the same time, his Ceylonese and South Indian roots also enabled him to establish rapport with the indigenous people and gain a sympathetic understanding of their culture. Thus, he felt disturbed when he noticed a tendency among the local people of embracing the western or European identity of their colonial masters. To raise an alarm against this trend, he wrote several articles and addressed gatherings to stress the importance of preserving almost every aspect of Ceylonese life and culture, including its

Buddhist buildings, paintings, costumes, religious and agricultural songs and music, literature and drama.²

Work after returning to the UK & USA (1906-1917)

AKC's work after returning to England via India in 1906, is highly significant. Due to his English mother, the way she had brought him up since his childhood and his English education, he was able to connect with some of the leading lights of his times in the field of art, culture and the arts establishment.³ This enabled him to both gain from and impact on the psyche of those who were part of such circles. Because of his unique position, he became an arch interpreter of Indian culture to the West or a bridge between East and West.



AKC's 1st wife, Ethel Mary Partridge

To make his views on the art of the east, he published his *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908). James Crouch described this illustrated book, as "an encyclopaedic account of the methods of Sinhalese craftsmen drawn from a study of ... and based upon materials collected and observations made jointly with his wife Ethel during their time in Ceylon."⁴ But, as he himself has

mentioned in the Foreword of his book, it was "written first of all for the Sinhalese people, as a memorial of a period which at present they are not willing to understand." In other words, its purpose was to awaken the people to a realisation of the value of their indigenous traditional arts and culture – something vital and invaluable – of which they seemed to be unaware.

AKC, then moved to studying various aspects of Indian life, art and culture. This resulted in a series of books that included: 'The Indian Craftsman' (1909), *Essays in National Idealism* (1909), 'Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists' in 1913 (with Sister Nivedita) and 'Rajput Painting' (1916).

To be continued in the next issue

¹Quotation cited by James Crouch in his "Ananda Coomaraswamy in Ceylon: A Bibliography", p.65 as follows: "Reprinted, under the heading: "Dr.Coomaraswamy's Reply", in *Sandaresa*, English supplement, Vol. II, No.6, 22 June 1906.

²Ibid., Ref nos....

³ These included important members of the English intelligentsia and the ruling class such as E.B. Havell, William Birdwood, William Rothenstein, Roger Fry and CR Ashbee.

⁴ Crouch, James, *Ibid.*, p.55.



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