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Jaipur Literature Festival Caffeinated Conversations and Literature Amalgamate

By Deepa Vanjani – our Special Correspondent

The 18th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) 2025, brought together writers, thinkers, publishers, musicians and creative thinkers from across the globe in a power-packed five-day event from 30th January to 3 February 2025 at the Hotel Clark's Amer in Jaipur. The festival was a coming together of not just writers and artists, but of people who still appreciate apolitical discourse and good writing.

Here are some glimpses of the three days I spent at the festival-

Interviews

"I write for people who have been through stuff...who want something with depth."

Charlotte Wood,
Australian writer,

author of seven novels, had a brilliant on stage session centered on her new work *Stone Yard Devotional*. "Her book is the kinds one commits to reading, which makes the reader sink into a certain quietude. Wood has a strong voice; "humans have hubris", she believes that makes the human race not listen to what scientists have been saying about climate change. "Polarisations," she says, "are catastrophic." In Wood we

come across a writer who brings meaning beneath the surface of the story. *Stone Yard Devotional* doesn't explain or teach as Wood "didn't want to didactic."

At the press lounge, she met me for an in-person conversation:

1. Do you design /plan a book structurally or does it come naturally during the course of writing?

--- I love the natural world. My mother had a deep connection with the earth and so I feel bodily connected to the natural world. What we are losing is terrifying. Australia has in recent times seen the hottest summers and the worst floods.

3. Do you follow the post-colonial, post-structural theories in your writing?

---I have no relationship at all with theories. The reader can do what they want with the book once it is there.

4. *Stone Yard Devotional* has a woman protagonist. Do you feel women



Akshata Murty in conversation with Sudha Murty

---It is largely the setting that dictates the style and story. The process is instinctive rather than rational. It remains though that the tone has to match the place where you set the book. I prefer writing in an unadorned language.

2. You talk of climate change and climate activism in the recent book. Are these subjects you hold close to your heart?

have a role to play as activists or change harbingers?

--- Relationships among women are interesting and the gap between what women want and what culture expects from them is an interesting space for fiction. The roles women have, in whatever capacity, are certainly important.

"(Shakespeare's) tragedies are about this remorse for a second chance."

(Continues on P3)

Editorially Speaking



Dear readers,

I am delighted to release this new issue after inevitable setbacks, and I am sure our readers and writers will understand the delay.

We are living in a world that is primarily dominated by social media. Even though social media can be a good companion and a source of knowledge, it is not a controlled media as opposed to the conventional one. Even the traditional media is seen as biased in many ways, so to what extent can we rely on social media? To add another dimension to this debate, technology has now invented a genie in the name of artificial Intelligence. Already, we can see how it is influencing many of us. In the context of literary publications, this new technology often robs our imagination and creativity. Some of the online images we see these days are one such example. I recently Googled for our own journal and was amazed to see a write-up about Confluence South Asian Perspectives, which was undoubtedly written by none other than Google's own artificial intelligence. I would also like to ask our readers to look at it by searching for Confluence South Asian Perspectives.

This issue comes with many interesting themes, as usual, which I am sure you will enjoy reading. I also want to highlight that we are proudly including a few new writers along with our seasoned ones. It is noteworthy that most of the poems have been written for publication in this humble journal by some celebrated poets. We receive many poems for each issue, but due to our editorial policies, we could accommodate only a few.

This year, many unexpected events have taken place that could affect people across the globe, including the writers' community. In particular, the recent trade war by America with many countries is badly hurting them and their economies. Let's hope this situation will change soon.

Confluence, a platform for South Asian literature, has showcased talented writers for nearly a quarter-century. Now, we want to organize a cultural event with participants worldwide. The date and format of the event have to be decided in the coming months, but I hope our writers, readers, and well-wishers will find this an exciting addition to our forum. I look forward to getting your feedback on this issue.

Happy reading!

Vijay Anand

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(From P1)

Stephen Greenblatt, discussed his recent book *Second Chances: Shakespeare and Freud* in conversation with while also bringing to the fore interesting tidbits like the first version of Hamlet was pirated, as the character who played Marcellus was asked to dictate what he remembered of the play! He also spoke of how women are extraordinary in the comedies of Shakespeare; In fact they are better than men.

Interestingly, I had, during the corona period, pursued an online MOOC Life and Work of Shakespeare offered by Harvard X on the EDX platform the course instructor being Prof. Greenblatt. I knew the kind of research he has done on Shakespeare's works and life. I had many questions to ask this learned gentleman during the conversation I had with him in the media lounge:

1. Shakespeare is said to have borrowed from many sources. How does that impact his writing?
--- This does not take away from his writing because he has transformed what he has picked from the source.
2. Are there discrepancies in the published text of his plays and the original manuscripts because Shakespeare wrote them in the long hand?

---Often there are mistakes and variations, though it is not clear.

Some samples of his writing have survived.

3. Is it true that Shakespeare's family got its coat of arms with the motto 'Non Sans Droict' which is old French and translates to 'Not without right' which was made fun of?

---Ben Jonson mocked it using a vulgar character in his play *Every Man out of His Humour* with a



parody of the motto as 'Not without Mustard'.

4. Shakespeare's clowns show an evolution from the boisterous clowns to witty, philosophical ones. How did this transition happen?

--- A major reason was the change of personnel. Shakespeare had a fallout with Will, who played the clown and he was then replaced, which probably corresponds with the change in portrayal as well.

5. Marlowe would have been greater had he not died untimely. What was his influence on Shakespeare?

---Marlowe mastered the art, but Shakespeare did it better.

Marlowe was an influence and Shakespeare even quoted his poem in *As You like It*.

6. What would you say about Shakespeare's sonnets?

--- His sonnets are mostly intense love poems.

7. There have always been varied opinions on Hamlet's madness in the play. What is your view?

--- Hamlet is pretending to be mad because he is going insane. In order to survive, he needs to get his uncle's (Caludius) attention to his being mad.

The sessions were intellectually engaging, with there being Telugu author Ravi Mantri on the one hand sharing a deeply insightful journey of his work Amma

Diary Lo Konni Pageelu, Ranjit Hoskote reading verses from his translation of Mir Taqi Mir's poetry, literary agents examining the pivotal role of literary agents in shaping careers of writers, Manav Kaul, Sudha Murthy, Amol Palekar and Imtiaz Ali stealing hearts of audiences in jam-packed sessions.

Press Conferences

Amidst these, there were press conferences in the media lounge, some of which I found particularly engaging. Here are excerpts from them worth mentioning:

Sudha Murthy: "Reading expands the scope of imagination. Imagination is dropped by digital media."

The endearing storyteller Sudha Murthy shared valuable words packed with wisdom. How she manages her work and creative exercises? "I am systematic, I don't waste time, don't attend birthdays and weddings as I convert them into units of time." For parents she had a simple advice, "Tell children what teachers cannot tell. Tell them to be mentally strong; it is life not a three-hour film. They should know how to handle failure, success or money." Words that transcend time and age: "Be

Imtiaz Ali: "The greatest take away for me from the work of people whose work I admire is the ability to uphold truth, although it may sound boring."

The director with a huge fan following spoke about how empowered women had been portrayed in films like *Mother India* and *Andaz*. Talking about his characters and their struggles he said, "Society will feel comfortable when there are set

impediment. This world has become much better in overcoming barriers of language."

Not going so much into the political aspects of the press conference, I would like to focus on Tharoor's thoughts on reading," Reading is important, it can be done for pleasure, for engaging with ideas. Reading opens up the world. We can spread the word that joys of reading are about acquiring



confident inside, you don't need validation. Success keeps changing with age, the permanent success is contentment."

Amol Palekar: "Freedom is something you have to demand," a kind of statement expected from a disciplined and seasoned actor. His take on the mainstream films and the media obsession with the 100 crore club was that media has to get away from this club syndrome because "lot of simple and good films are being made." The choices on the OTT platform are many, he opines, "it is upto the filmmaker to make something meaningful." I asked him how he could play a role so different in *Bhumika*, from the ones he played in *Golmal*, *Chitchor* or *Baaton Baaton Mein*. The wit and humour he has made an apt answer, "My friends told me for *Bhumika* that is the real Amol, not the goody-goody guy image seen otherwise."

rules. But if you ask any one person of the society, he would also want to rebel against those rules. Society expects fixed routines, while an individual might have his own set of ideas. What is it in society that has not happened if you look around and that has not been accepted? My characters are also struggling with an aspect of their minds which they think is society's voice and which will always be there in every human being and therefore also in films."

Is he contemplating sequels? Personally, he says, he doesn't enjoy the idea and he would not want to indulge in something he himself does not enjoy. How can then we expect the audience to enjoy it? A filmmaker who certainly takes the art seriously!

Shashi Tharoor: "Language should no longer be in

words and knowing other worlds." I think there cannot be a better way of concluding this article.

By the way, actress Huma Khan has penned a book and while discussing it on stage she made a worthwhile observation: "Go beyond the packaging, humans are capable of lot more."

Dr. Deepa Vanjani, Professor of English, is based in Indore. An animal lover, she is also an author, and a PhD guide, who freelanced with *Hindustan Times* and *Times of India* previous to writing for *Confluence*.

Dr. Deepa Vanjani, Professor of English, is based in Indore. An animal lover, she is also an author, and a PhD guide, who freelanced with Hindustan Times and Times of India previous to writing for Confluence.

Interview

Chaand Chazelle speaks to Gina Miller UK's most influential black person of 2017- Powerlist

When I first heard about Gina Miller, then saw her on our Television screens, her upright posture, her confident demeanour exudes certain power. I was awestruck with her towering personality. A woman born in Guyana of Indian descent stood tall adhering to her principles. A woman who had the guts and mettle to challenge the British government and take the parliament to court not once but twice and won. First for Exiting the European Union and the second, for implementing Brexit without approval from Parliament.

I really admire her for her brave stand. As an Indian I don't often see many women of my ilk, that I can connect with and can be proud of in UK. She was gracious enough to find time to speak with me despite her busy schedule.

I walked into the posh Kensington offices of Gina Miller to have an informal chat with her. I was cordially escorted by a gentleman to her conference room, where she waited for me. She got up and greeted me with a warm smile and a hug. She seemed friendly and approachable and offered me a comfy seat and a coffee. After our preliminary courteous exchanges, I got to the business of getting to know her a bit more.

"Where did you find the courage from to challenge the British government, the way you did?"

Without hesitation she revealed – "My parents were upright people, my father, Doodnauth Singh became the Attorney General in Guyana. I was raised to conduct myself with dignity, loyalty and to be just. Justice is the pillar that any society leans on. He taught us to be humane."

"Tell me a bit about your background and upbringing" I asked.

"I was born in Guyana, sent to England, when I was only ten to Moira House boarding school in Eastbourne. At age fourteen, I was compelled to take up a job in a hotel in Eastbourne as a chambermaid, because – under Guyana's strict currency controls, my

parents were prevented from sending me any funds. Later I enrolled at the Polytechnic of East London to study law. But before I could complete my finals, I was badly attacked by a bunch of Asian thugs, they were my fellow students. I was too western for their liking."

Double whammy for us poor women I thought; from both groups – white and Asian, we seem to fit nowhere. She continued – "My parents were worried for my safety; so, I was recalled to Guyana."

"Did you manage to complete your degree?" I was keen to know.

"Yes, I later secured a degree in marketing and an M.Sc. in Human



Resources Management. Then I went on to own a photographic laboratory in 1987, in 1990 I became the marketing and event manager at BMW. In February 2009 I co-founded the investment firm SCM Direct with my husband Alan Miller. I campaigned tirelessly against hidden charges in pensions and investments. In 2009 I Set up the – 'True and Fair Foundation'. The aim being: in the face of growing inequality and social fragmentation, I wanted to increase philanthropy for the common good.

When I said -

"You seem to have nerves of steel, I can't even imagine how did you cope with the stress of taking such a bold step, I mean taking the British parliament to court?"

"It was not easy for a woman like me to challenge the establishment; but what I had not expected was that - my children became the target of that spiteful hatred", she paused, "that was very hard to handle."

Although she had won both the cases in the court, but the backlash in the social media and the evil nature of humanity showed its true colours, I cannot really find words to describe how shocked to the core I felt when Gina told me that the 'Mob'

threaten to 'burn her children. What? Really? She received those threats, because she dared to stand for what was right?

"My prime concern was to safeguard my children's lives. Although I was provided protection by the Scotland yard officers; nevertheless, the danger to me and my children's lives was palpable and petrifying. Not an easy thing to handle for a mother."

I saw the sadness on her calm demeanour which betrayed her pain. Apart from what I had watched on TV and read in print; I learnt the horrific facts first hand from her, which made my blood boil. It brought to the surface for me the ugly under-belly of the so-called civilized society and a nation – which prides itself to have ruled the waves with a mission to civilize the world! That pink on the world map and all that Jazz (I can use a better word, but...)

That made me think – the people who threatened violence against her children and trolled her on social

media had stooped to such depths - they not only lacked humanity but were devoid of any decency. Certainly, had no conscience or had any social values.

But I guess that the path to any success is not an easy one. In October 2017, Gina Miller was named by 'Powerlist' as the "UK's most influential black person." In July 2017 – Rhodri Philipps, the 4th viscount St Davids offered someone – "£5000 for the first person to 'accidentally' run over this bloody troublesome first-generation immigrant."

I was absolutely incensed. So, people like him, who hold such views, still tread this earth? I like to ask him – who invited the British to India or Guyana? (formerly British Guyana). What the hell were the British doing there?

People like Gina Miller is a philanthropist, provides jobs to the natives, contributes towards British economy, what on earth is this decadent man Rhodri is contributing to the society?

He described Gina as a – "Fucking boat jumper." And said, "If this is what we should expect from immigrants, send them back to their stinking jungles."

Oh, so people from Guyana came on boats? He is so ignorant. I ask again, 'What on earth were the British doing in - those stinking jungles then? Looting the wealth of those countries.'

I have a mixed feelings about the remarks by the judge in the case, since she did not find certain racist slurs by Rhodri – 'not menacing.'

When I reminded Gina of that incident - she waved her hand in a dismissive manner, as if – 'why waste breath on that low-life Rhodri...'

Having lived in UK for the past fifty years, once again, my observation and analysis of such incidents is – that the indigenous/natives - just cannot swallow, tolerate or accept when a dark-skinned person is cleverer intellectually, has better skills or is more talented and is financially doing better than many; they find it difficult to square that fact and are not just envious but jealous. And my definition of Jealousy is – you are only jealous of

something or someone's talent, because that's what they lack in themselves.

I wish Gina all the luck in the world and hope her company to be more successful by leaps and bounds. Keep fighting. We are proud of you. We need more women like you on this planet.

Chaand is a writer, Producer and a broadcaster. Broadcast on AIR & on BBC world service. She wrote, produced and directed her 1st feature film- THROW OF A DICE. Her new screenplay is - Heritage Reclaimed-about theft of the KohiNoor diamond. She is busy with its pre-production. She is also busy editing her novel - Girls Will Laugh. She was also a Labour Councillor.



Faded Laminas Pressed Between the Leaves of a Diary by Meenakshi Mohan

once vibrant and live yellow petals of roses
symbol of our love -- today, desiccated and sere
sleep in silence between the leaves of a diary,
yet they speak of love -- eternal.

snuggled inside, the fragrance of eons still
resonant,
their color spilling over the lines
my love wrote in his impeccable calligraphic,
to my love, my friend, my wife
who has given me
years of cherished memories
may we have many more ...

alas! with tear-brimmed eyes,
I touched those time-stilled veins
they smiled consolingly
you have him around everywhere -
in his books, his writings, his pen collection,
in the pictures, in your children
and above all, in your heart.

I looked at the picture on the wall,
you smiled lovingly; the rose petals smiled
the diary, embracing so many memories, smiled
yes, you have never been away.

faded laminas pressed
between the leaves of a diary
remain a symbol of our eternal love.
I embraced the diary to my heart
and my love spilled over my tears.



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.



Re-evaluating History

Did Alexander the Great Really Conquer India?

By Balananthini Balasubramaniam

For centuries, historical narratives—primarily shaped by Western historians—have asserted that Alexander the Great "conquered" India. However, a detailed re-examination of the geography, military strategies, and socio-political realities of the time reveals significant inconsistencies in this claim. The argument that Alexander subjugated the Indian subcontinent ignores historical, archaeological, and contemporary evidence, while misinterpreting the political landscape of India during the 4th century BCE.

This paper contends that Alexander never set foot in the Indian subcontinent. His military campaign was limited to the northwestern frontier (present-day Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan), and there is no evidence to suggest that he conquered any territory south of the Beas River. Such a misconception demands rectification through a historically accurate, evidence-based approach.

The Misinterpretation of Alexander's "Indian Conquest"

Alexander's Indian campaign, which began in 327 BCE, involved crossing the Hindu Kush into the regions of what are now Afghanistan and Pakistan. He faced opposition from local rulers such as Ambhi of Taxila and King Porus of the Paurava Kingdom. The Battle of the Hydaspes in 326 BCE is often cited as a major engagement of Alexander's Indian conquest. However, following this battle, Alexander's army reached the Beas River, at which point his soldiers, exhausted, demoralized, and fearful of the Nanda Empire, mutinied and refused to proceed further into the subcontinent.

This pivotal moment in history raises a critical question: How can Alexander be said to have "conquered" India when he never ventured beyond the Beas River? (Source: *Arrian, The Campaigns of Alexander, Translated by E. J. Chinnock, Harvard University Press, 2013*).

The Strength of the Nanda Empire: why Alexander feared it

During Alexander's time, the Nanda Empire, ruled by Dhana Nanda, was a highly centralized and militarily advanced power, headquartered in Magadha (modern-day Bihar, India). The Nanda military was formidable, comprising: 200,000 infantry, 20,000 cavalry, 2,000 chariots and 3,000 war elephants.

Unlike the fragmented and tribal societies of Persia and the northwest, the Nanda Empire represented a cohesive, centralized entity with a well-trained army. The use of war elephants was particularly effective in battle, posing a significant challenge to Alexander's cavalry-dependent tactics. The Greek forces, unaccustomed to fighting against such an overwhelming force, would have faced devastating defeat had they attempted to march southward into India.

The fear of the Nanda Empire's might is evident in the mutiny of Alexander's army at the Beas River, which marked the end of his campaign in the Indian subcontinent. (Source: *Aziz, K. K. The Nanda Empire and Its Decline, Oxford University Press, 1997*).

Chandragupta Maurya's Rapid Conquest: The final evidence

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence that Alexander did not conquer India is the swift rise of Chandragupta Maurya after Alexander's retreat. Within a few years, Chandragupta Maurya overthrew the Nanda Dynasty and consolidated his power across much of the Indian subcontinent. Not only did he conquer parts of Afghanistan, but his Maurya Empire eventually extended over almost the entire subcontinent.

If Alexander had truly dismantled Indian power, how could Chandragupta Maurya have achieved such a rapid unification and expansion? The answer is simple: there was no lasting Greek conquest of India. Source: *Miller, J. C. P. The Greeks*

in India, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Geography, climate, and military logistics: Why Alexander's army was doomed

Alexander's military strategies were developed with the Mediterranean and Persian battlefields in mind, where dry climates, flat terrains, and short-duration campaigns were the norm. However, India presented a completely different environment:

Monsoons, extreme heat, and dense jungles posed severe logistical challenges for Alexander's forces.

Greek cavalry was ill-equipped to fight in the humid and tropical climate, while Indian armies had long experience with prolonged campaigns.

War elephants in India further complicated any potential Greek victory, as they were a force untrained horses could not confront.

In contrast to the relatively short military campaigns in the Mediterranean, ancient Indian warfare was built around long-drawn conflicts, a far cry from Alexander's model of rapid conquest.

The modern Russian-Ukrainian conflict provides a contemporary analogy: even well-equipped, technologically superior armies struggle in foreign terrain, showing that successful military conquests are rarely achieved swiftly or easily. (Source: *"Logistics and Military Strategy in the Russia-Ukraine War: Lessons for Modern Warfare," Foreign Policy, 2023*).

Conclusion: Correcting the Historical Misinterpretation

The historical record shows that:

Alexander never entered the Indian subcontinent; he engaged in battles only in present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He never confronted the Nanda Empire, whose army vastly outnumbered and outclassed his own forces. Alexander's troops mutinied at the Beas River, signaling the end of his

campaign. Chandragupta Maurya's rise to power and the subsequent expansion of his empire directly refute the notion that India was conquered by Alexander. The geographical and logistical challenges of India made the Greek-style military tactics impractical in the subcontinent.

Final Argument

The widely held view that Alexander the Great conquered India is an historical misrepresentation, unsupported by evidence. Alexander, though a brilliant military strategist, could not overcome the vast, powerful, and well-defended Indian subcontinent. He reached its doorstep, but was forced to retreat—a fact that must be acknowledged in historical discourse.

The misrepresentation of this "Indian conquest" should be corrected, so that history reflects the truth: India was never conquered by Alexander the Great.

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Balananthini Balasubramaniam is a UK-based political analyst, poet & social activist. She is the Founder & CEO

of Small Drops – an NGO working actively across India, Sri Lanka, and the UK to address women's empowerment, modern slavery, and human rights abuse. She has over 25 years of experience in journalism and 20 years in financial advisory. <https://www.smalldrops.org/blog>

Three Poems by Pramila Venkateswaran

A Lover's Entreaty

If only you could step
into my doorway, see
seawater lapping on sand
you will remember
your old world—the same
slap of water against boats
trailing the moon.
So, darling, come in
through my doorway
and walk with me,
the drone of choppers
will soon become ambient
noise, our kisses shielding
us from black clouds.

Hindsight

Years later, I knew
that which offers you shade
and fruit,
has people of various
traditions and faiths
flowing
like streams,
whose banks offer
sweet respite
is a homeland.
A State
only draws blood
from drawing borders
to sate
itself.

What is the Grass?

The child born among the rubble asked,
never having seen
the earth produce this fragile beauty
to cool our feet and eyes.
You have to wait, mother said,
for peace.

There was a time when grass grew
like weeds. Patches sprang
between stone surfaces,
as if softness could be summoned
anytime, even by hard matter.

Feel the touch of silk and blade,
hear its rustle, whistle
and ocean heave.
You simply roll onto your side
your ear to the ground,
place a tuft in your mouth,
taste its mustard, musk, and pepper,
onion, chives. Inhale its sharpness
of earth and bitter root.



Pramila Venkateswaran, poet laureate of Suffolk County, Long Island (2013-15), is the author of many poetry volumes, the most recent being *We Are Not a Museum*, winner of New York Book Festival award and *Exile is Not a Foreign Word* (Copper Coin 2024). *Tamil Dalit Feminist Poetics* (Rowman and Littlefield 2024) is her latest book of literary criticism. She is the co-director of Matwaala: South Asian Diaspora Poetry Festival.

The Timeless Tapestry of Lac: A Tribute to Jaipur's Enduring Artisans

"Who will buy these delicate, bright Rainbow-tinted circles of light? Lustrous tokens of radiant lives, for happy daughters and happy wives."

by Tanusha Nagrath

These immortal lines by Sarojini Naidu beautifully encapsulate the charm of bangles, their vibrant hues symbolizing life, celebration, and tradition.

In the heart of Jaipur, Rajasthan's fabled Pink City, an ancient art flourishes—a craft as delicate and enduring as the lac bangles it creates. The intricate artistry of lac jewelry has been woven into the cultural fabric of the region for generations, bringing to life the vibrant traditions and spirited celebrations of its people. This poetic journey takes us into the workshops and stories of the artisans who, with their skillful hands and timeless wisdom, keep this age-old craft alive.

An Heirloom of Generations:

"Sixteen generations," says Mohammad Sabe of B.J.

Bangles, pride illuminating his face. His family has been in the lac jewelry business for centuries. The knowledge and traditions of his ancestors flow through his veins as naturally as the lac itself flows from the jungles of West Bengal. The process begins in nature's lap, where lac is derived from the resinous secretions of insects dwelling in the forests of Balarampur, Puni, and Bandra.

The word bangle itself originates from the Hindi term bungri, meaning glass. Historically, materials like seashells, copper, bronze, gold, agate, and chalcedony were used for bangles, but

Jaipur's lac bangles, handcrafted at the Maniharon ka Raasta, are a league of their own. This bustling lane offers a sensory feast: the dazzling display of colors, the music of jingling bangles, and the cheerful chatter of women exploring the shops. The process of crafting these vibrant pieces is as captivating as the bangles themselves.

In Rajasthan, festivals and rituals often

gokhru, timaniyan, and the iconic maang tika.

The Lady of Lac: A Legacy of Innovation

Shamim Aara of Ayaz Arts speaks with reverence of her father, Ayaz Mohammed, whose ingenious creations earned him a national award in 1970. His celebrated pieces, such as a bejeweled lac elephant and a lac-

crafted royal swan light, showcased the boundless creativity of this art. Shamim, now known as the Lady of Lac, perpetuates this legacy with pride, often seen adorned head-to-toe in her own lac creations.

"We don't use machines," she emphasizes. "Everything is handmade, from coloring to shaping. Each design is unique." Her

work, rooted in heritage, is admired globally, with pieces exported to Dubai, America, and Africa. Yet, she remains devoted to the traditional methods, her artistry resonating with generations past and present.

Challenges of a Dying Craft

Despite its beauty, lac artistry faces modern challenges. Deforestation has severely impacted India's lac reserves, escalating raw material costs. Few realize the toll this has taken: from 1,500 lac-processing furnaces 25 years ago, only 200–250 remain today. Artisans are forced to explore



Shamim Aara, the Lady of Lac

dictate specific traditional ornamentations. Bangles become central to these occasions, with sales surging during Teej, Gangaur, Karva Chauth, Holi, weddings, and ceremonies for mothers-to-be. Each event is associated with a distinct style of bangle design. Weddings demand the gulali choodha (red bangles) or hare bandon ka choodha (green bangles), while Holi is marked by pink-hued bangles. Beyond bangles, the markets offer a plethora of jewelry, including rings, toe rings (bichchua), anklets (payal), nose rings, necklaces, bala, bajuband, rakhi, gajra,

alternative livelihoods, threatening the continuity of this craft.

Yet, Jaipur's artisans persist, their dedication a beacon of hope. As Shamim poignantly states, "Lac is like gold to us. We refine it, mold it, and transform it into beauty." Their resilience is a testament to the cultural and emotional value of this art.

The Poetic Legacy of Lac

The lac bangles of Jaipur find echoes in the Rajasthani folk song "Mainda sheher su mangwa do lakh ko chudo"—a melodic plea to adorn oneself in the finest bangles. This connection between song and craft illustrates how deeply ingrained these ornaments are in the region's traditions. Each bangle is more than an accessory; it is a symbol of identity, celebration, and the artistry of Rajasthan.

The poetry of lac lies not just in its vibrant colors but in its symbolism. The green hues capture the essence of spring, promising new beginnings, while the crimson shades symbolize the warmth of love and the timeless bond of marriage. Silver and blue hues evoke calm and pink represents the playful spirit of Holi. These tokens of tradition adorn women at every stage of life, embodying their dreams, joys, and strength.

There is a lyrical beauty in the making of lac bangles, as though each bangle is a stanza in a poem sung by the artisan's hands. The molten lac, pliable and golden like a sunlit stream, transforms under their touch into radiant circles of life. The soft whisper of tools shaping the lac is a symphony, merging with the vivid pigments that bring the colors of joy, hope, and celebration to life.

Each bangle carries within it a story, not only of the skilled artisan who shaped it but of the wearer whose journey it will adorn. These vibrant bangles are more than ornaments; they are woven verses celebrating womanhood, culture, and the spirit of Rajasthan.

Even the act of wearing a lac bangle feels poetic—a connection to a legacy of grace and resilience. As they jingle with every gesture, they echo the laughter of bygone generations and the music of festivals past. They



become the rhythm of life, a daily reminder of the beauty in craftsmanship and the joy in tradition.

A Living Heritage

The artisans of Jaipur remind us that the true essence of lac is not just its timeless beauty but also the stories of those who craft it. Their art bridges the gap between past and present, blending tradition with modernity. Whether it is the bride's gulali choodha or a contemporary design worn on global runways, lac jewelry continues to captivate hearts across the world.

As we admire these creations, let us remember the artisans—the keepers of tradition—who pour their soul into every piece. Their craft, like their stories, is a legacy of resilience, innovation, and poetry. Through their hands, the ancient art of lac jewelry shines brightly, a timeless tribute to the spirit of Rajasthan.

Acknowledgments:

This article would not have been possible without the generous insights of Mohammad Sabe of B.J. Bangles and Shamim Aara of Ayaz Arts. Their stories, dedication, and artistry inspire us to cherish and celebrate the timeless beauty of Jaipur's lac jewelry. Thank you for opening your world to us and for sharing your invaluable wisdom and passion.

Currently a media freelancer, Tanusha



Nagrath is a storyteller, performer, and voice artist with a passion for impactful communication.

A Registered Talker with Prasar Bharati, she has been featured on Doordarshan Rajasthan, Akashvani Jaipur 101.2 FM, and Vividh Bharti Jaipur 100.3 FM. She has co-anchored a literary talk on BoxFM with renowned storyteller Amandeep Khayal and lent her voice to Voice ATM organizations, showcasing her versatility in voice modulation. As an experienced live anchor, she has hosted prestigious events like the Pink Festival Jaipur (Anugunj 2025) and the Know India International Cultural Conclave 2024. A published writer and poet, Tanusha's work has appeared in distinguished national and international anthologies, reflecting her deep literary sensibility.

Review:

Rajmohan Ramanathapillai's *Turtles without a Sandy Beach*

Reviewed by Rizana Zubair

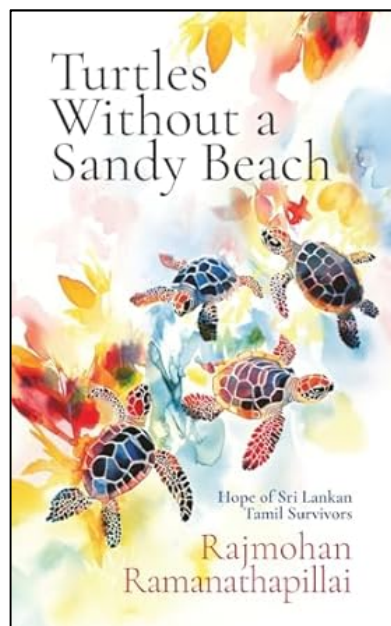
Turtles Without a Sandy Beach is an intriguing choice for the title of this anthology, capturing the terror and trauma endured by victims of Sri Lanka's thirty-year war. However, as one delves into the collection, the metaphor becomes clear. Dr. Rajmohan Ramanathapillai's life journey—from the sandy beaches of Sri Lanka to Canada, North America, and now Australia—mirrors the symbolism of the turtle in Indigenous Australian cultures: a sacred cycle of life, rebirth, and resilience. Through his poetry, art imitates and reflects his life's trajectory, weaving together his personal transformation and the collective experience of his people.

The poems in this anthology are deeply moving and thought-provoking, capturing the layers of fear and trauma experienced by the Tamil people: the horrors of war in their homeland, the perilous sea journeys to escape, and the prolonged uncertainty in their host nations.

Rajmohan vividly portrays the horrors of war, bringing to life the anxiety, dread, and fear through poems like *Footprints* and *His Only Window*, which hint at the terror of torture. *Whispers* and *Cleansing in Red Soil* amplify the haunting trauma of rape survivors, while *Writings on My Skin* and *The Mango Tree* reveal the turmoil of children caught in the crossfire of violence. Yet, amidst this darkness, Rajmohan also highlights human resilience, as seen in *Courageous Compassion*, an ode to an inspiring woman's strength.

The anthology also delves into the perilous sea journeys undertaken by asylum seekers. *The Little One*—a heartbreaking poem about a father losing his three-year-old daughter at sea—brought me to tears. Similarly, *A Puzzle in Healing* and other poems in this chapter underscore the anguish of statelessness, as refugees endure years of waiting, rejection, and fear in unfamiliar lands. These verses convey the profound hopelessness that drives many to the brink of despair.

Rajmohan's professional experience as a counsellor for asylum seekers is deeply intertwined with his poetry. Having lived through similar experiences and having worked closely with survivors, he brings an unparalleled depth of empathy and understanding to his work. His academic and personal insights make him a guiding light for those seeking healing and wholeness after unimaginable loss.



One of the most striking features of this anthology is its use of nature photography. Rajmohan's captivating images accompany the poems, adding a visual dimension that amplifies their emotional impact. These photographs—thoughtfully chosen and deeply relevant—often serve as a gentle counterbalance to the harsh realities depicted in the verses. They also emphasize a recurring theme in the anthology: the devastating impact of war on nature and wildlife.

Chapter Three, in particular, focuses on this lesser-explored perspective, highlighting the story of Sama, a two-year-old elephant who lost a leg to a landmine. Rajmohan's stunning photographs of elephants in their natural habitat drive home the tragic

disruption of ecosystems caused by violence. This theme ties in with his academic work, including his PhD on ecological non-violence theory.

Each of the anthology's five chapters begins with the author's reflections, providing context for the poems that follow. These personal insights, drawn from both Rajmohan's own experiences and the accounts of others, add depth and authenticity to the work. Revisiting such painful memories is no easy task, but as Rajmohan explains, "Revisiting is necessary for healing; it provides a comforting path toward post-traumatic growth." This sentiment underscores the book's purpose: to ensure that these stories of trauma and resilience are heard and, in doing so, to offer solace and healing to survivors.

The anthology also serves as a bridge between generations. Suruthi Thirumavalavan, a second-generation Tamil university student who reviewed the manuscript, aptly describes it as "a bridge between diverging worlds, connecting the past to the present, and linking survivors with those seeking to understand." Her perspective, particularly on the gendered impacts of war, enriches the work and resonates with the younger Tamil diaspora who carry the weight of their parents' and grandparents' memories.

By deliberately keeping politics out of the anthology, Rajmohan focuses solely on the human experience. He presents even the most distressing scenes with poignant sensitivity, avoiding graphic violence to ensure the work is accessible—even to survivors. The mesmerizing beauty of his photographs complements the poetry's pathos, creating a balance that makes this collection an outstanding tribute to lives lost and a lifeline for those who continue to endure.

Turtles Without a Sandy Beach is not merely a collection of poems; it is a testament to resilience, an archive of untold stories, and a call to remember and heal. Rajmohan's work is a profound contribution to literature, compassionately preserving the voices of the past for the future.



Rizana is a dedicated English Language and Literature teacher with over three decades of experience across four countries—Sri Lanka, the UAE, New Zealand, and Australia. Her diverse teaching background has given her valuable insights into different education systems and the ability to work with students from a wide range of cultural and age groups. Currently, she teaches in the Adult Migrant English Program in Melbourne, helping new arrivals develop their language skills. In addition to her teaching career, Rizana is an active social worker, organizing events to raise funds for worthy causes.

Two Poems by Anju Makhija

Lightness of Being

Scuttling across the desk,
going about daily chores, he spins
a hammock on my typewriter keys.
Like married couples,
we ignore each other intuitively.
Sometimes, face-to-face, we react:
pressing capital 'D' I declare death penalty.
Cute or detestable —
all depends on life in the web.

Escaping the onslaught,
he drops half-way down the cliff,
bounces back. An acrobat,
master of the game.

Spiders survive all odds —
flap them, they flee; chase them,
they hide 'n seek.
Spraying, the only solution.
A whiff of poison. Amen.

Seconds later,
the corpse descends on my papers
as if mummified, fully intact.
Unyielding to the touch, crisp as a wafer,
it slides, glides, inspires an obituary:

of your industrious nature,
the gossamer of your web,
much has been said. I'll remember you
for the lightness of body,
ready to float away, to call it a day.

Annihilation

Veil over Gateway of India,
smoke shrouding the sea.
Put off the blaze —
flames over water, I shriek.

Environmentalists hound politicians
for plundering land and sea.
Villagers dump debris in rivers
spared from industrial carnage.

I'll sail away,
heal the wounds,
bury memories,
unfog my thoughts.

Knot by knot, the island
drifts into extinction.

In my elements...
Air
Earth
Water

I swirl under the sky to the strumming of winds,
I loop over bluish-grey waves of the Arabian sea,
I quiver on smooth sand, a maiden supreme,
I warm up to the bonfire...
Fire!

A rage chars my fingertips,
devours my insides.
I rise
under the shadow of the cosmos,
smouldering
over the Gateway
with men, many men, watching.



Anju Makhija is a Sahitya Akademi, award-winning poet, playwright and translator. She has written four poetry collections incl. *View from the Web* and *Pickling Season*; co-translated *Freedom & Fissures* and *Seeking the Beloved: the mystical verse of Shah Abdul Latif*; co-edited three anthologies related to women, Indo-English theatre and young readers. Her latest book is *Changing, Unchanging: New and Selected Poems (1995-2023)*. she was a regular column for Confluence for over ten years, writing about Mumbai culture. www.facebook.com/AnjuMakhijaPro
www.instagram.com/anjumakhijawrites

Indranil Bengal Halder in Australia

by Sharon Rundle

Indranil Bengal Halder is a Corporate Consultant, Influencer, Global Heritage Tourist, Writer, Video Producer and much more. He promotes Indian and Indian-Australian culture, heritage, literature, literary influences, film, art, music, fashion, history, business, and philanthropic support for Australian education. He aims to foster an enduring partnership between India and Australia with shared values while encouraging partnerships to improve grassroots understanding between people of the two nations.

In 2023, at the UK Parliament, Indranil was awarded The Bengal Pride Award, which celebrates excellence of Bengal across the world.

He was a former ambassador for the India Australia Business & Community Alliance for several years. IABCA is the largest platform to strengthen the India-Australia relationship while simultaneously contributing to its development, by honouring our people-to-people links. He attended the Welcoming Cities Symposium 2021 in support of making Australia a multicultural powerhouse and cites the recently released *India Economic Strategy* report by Peter Varghese AO which focuses on three pillars, economic strategy, geo-politics and people-to-people contact which includes education, cultural heritage, and fashion to emphasise this point." Originally from Kolkata (Calcutta) Ballygunge, West Bengal, India, Indranil lives in Sydney, Australia, with his multicultural family. Indranil came to Australia in 1994 as an international student, to study Bio Medical Science at the University of Wollongong and has a degree in BioMedical Science and an MBA. He founded the Halder Chowdhury Prize to award merited archaeology, finance, and medical students at Macquarie University Graduate School of Management (MGSM) in appreciation and gratitude for the Australian education system. He worked with former Indian

diplomat Amit Dasgupta AM, and former Premier of NSW and Australian High Commissioner to India Barry O'Farrell AO to provide safety and support for international students in Australia during a time of unrest. In a podcast by [SBS Hindi, Indranil Halder - Giving Back to The Australian Education System](#), he "talks about the challenges and benefits of being an

the Jaipur Literary Festival in collaboration with OzAsia Festival, Adelaide, which brings a three-day Festival to celebrate the stories and heritage of South Asia in the 'Land Down Under'.

Indranil has published articles in several newspapers and magazines, including [How the Indian Game of Cricket Evolved from the Bengali Society](#).

He has contributed short stories to anthologies, and the [Agathokakological Aussie Summer Story Mosaic](#) for which he was a creator in 2020. This is freely available to all online. He said, "Bengalis came to Australia in 1797. As contributions of business growth and sustainable living by the Indian Diaspora in Australia rise, it is now time to undertake a literary project to bring short stories from across the globe involving India and Australia". Authors responded by contributing

illustrated stories that connect Indians with Australians, both memoir-based and purely fictional, with the added element of an Australian summer (real or metaphorical). These stories portray birth, death, marriage, ageing, relationships, friendship, food, polo, dangerous beaches, lost souls, living through a pandemic and, of course, cricket – what Indian-Australian collaboration could ignore stories about cricket? The High Commissioner to India, HE the Hon Barry O'Farrell AO, wrote the [Foreword](#), and the Consul General of India, Sydney, Mr Manish Gupta, an [Introduction](#). Deputy-Consul General in Kolkata Daniel Sim gave his kind support for this collection of stellar stories as well as launching online the *Agathokakological Aussie Summer Story Mosaic*.

In addition, Indranil highlighted artworks by artists from India and the Indian diaspora in Australia which



Citizenship Ceremony in Parramatta NSW, Indranil Halder (left) with Dr Andrew Charlton, Parramatta NSW Member for Parliament (centre).

overseas student in Australia, and his book *Warrior in the Sanctuary* about his journey as an international student, which aims to promote high quality Australian education to people abroad".

He commissioned and wrote a short film [The Oneness](#) – An Indo-Australian Documentary, hosted by Jane Alison Wilkins, and directed by Dave Sidhu. Productions by 18 Carat Pictures. The current Australian High Commissioner to India, HE Philip Green OAM invited Indranil to the celebration of Australian Cinematic Excellence at the 29th Kolkata International Film Festival where he [spoke about Australian films](#).

Indranil also promotes the South Asian Film, Arts & Literature Festival (SAFAL Fest) in Australia, which is an annual event celebrating arts, film and literature of the South Asian Region comprising India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Afghanistan, and Pakistan; as well as

were exhibited at Sculpture by the Sea: Bondi, which was “made possible due to the support of Presenting Partner, the Centre for Australia-India Relations, the Howarth Foundation, the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre and Consulate General of India”.

He has written extensively about the 220-year historical connection between Bengal and Australia, including the story of Bengal Rum, and livestock from Bengal which nourished the Australian colonies in the late 1700s and early 1800s. In *Forgotten Generations*, he brought into focus the “recent discovery of a 19th century Bengali book which confirmed the fact that Bengalis lived in Australia at that time”; as well as a book of Bengali poetry mistaken for the Holy Quran found in a 19th century Mosque, both discovered in the gold mining town of Broken Hill, New South Wales. He says, “The rich worlds of non-European peoples who are missing from historical records such as Bengalis are part of a literary revival”. He ensures that Nobel Laureate Tagore’s birthday is celebrated at Macquarie University where Tagore’s statue emphasises the connection between Tagore, India, and Australia.

He was former Ambassador of Fabrics of Multicultural Australia. FOMA is dedicated to nurturing sustainable economic development within our creative sectors, with a particular focus on cross-cultural and intercultural fashion. Indranil was privileged to attend ‘The Polo in the City’ tournament to celebrate polo heritage with Mariano (Nano) Gracida, Australian polo player Nik Wayland (son of polo veteran John Wayland), and Rebecca Higgins, owner of the Sydney Polo Club. He announced a great line up of designers and an exhibit of foreign embassies to foster social cohesion, generate trade opportunities and demonstrate the diversity across Australia through the FOMA Platform.

He is a member of the NSW Polo Association and assisted with the 2017 World Polo Championship in Windsor NSW with the Sydney Polo

Club, where HH Padmanabh Singh, Maharaja of Jaipur, played on the Indian team in the tournament. “Polo enthusiast and India Australia Business and Community Ambassador Indranil Halder told the *Gazette* that the world cup itself was donated to the Federation of International Polo in 1987, by Maharaja Sawai Bhawani Singh, the grandfather of Padmanabh Singh. Mr Halder said India and Australia had



many close links through polo and said he hoped the World Polo Championship would help those links grow. [The Maharaja] is actively promoting bilateral engagement between the two polo playing nations with history and heritage, he said.”

As reported in an [SBS Hindi podcast](#), “At the gala, ‘100 Years of Celebrating in Style’ in aid of Dress for Success Sydney charity, Indranil walked the ramp in his traditional dhoti and kurta (also called dhoti punjabi in Bengali) by designer Agnimitra Paul from Kolkata. ... The traditional dhoti/punjabi worn by Indranil Halder showcased the rich Bengal handloom heritage”. He told [SBS Hindi](#) that he was “happy to wear a dhoti for this event. The charity organisation seeks to improve the employability of women in need in NSW by providing them with professional clothing free of charge, a network of support, and career development tools to help them achieve self-sufficiency.”

In 2023, he attended the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, Indore, in his dhoti to ensure non resident Indians do not forget the contribution of their grandparents in dhoti.

Indranil also supported World Saree Day at Halder Bari, Sydney, Australia, “to pay tribute to the multiple weaves and weavers of the Indian subcontinent. He said that he “strongly feels that Indian textiles should be celebrated for its thousand years of history and heritage”.

He nominated Bengali women among others to be part of a book titled *Inspiring IndoAustralian Women who made a difference* dedicated to 75th Republic Day of India. He was acknowledged in the book. He was also acknowledged by author John Zubrzycki in his book *The House of Jaipur*.

A man of many parts and interests, Indranil has contributed a great deal to Australia, and continues to promote both nations that he clearly loves dearly.

Dr Sharon Rundle is a University of Technology Sydney Friend of Distinction and registered



member of the Institute of Professional Editors. She has presented conference papers, and lectured courses for the Bachelor of Education degree as well as writing workshops at universities, colleges, and institutions in Australia, UK, and India. She served on the Board of Directors and Management Committee of the NSW Writers' Centre. Her family connection to India stretches back for at least six generations. As a writer and editor, she has co-edited five anthologies of stories from Australia and the Indian subcontinent, published in Australia and India. She is a regular contributor to Confluence South Asian Perspectives.

<https://sharonrundle.com.au>

Gopal Lahiri's *Anemone Morning* and Other Poems

Reviewed by Radha Chakravarty

Perhaps the most striking thing about *Anemone Morning and Other Poems*, Gopal Lahiri's latest collection of poems, is the projection of the chameleon-like poetic persona, the seeing, speaking I/eye. The voice we hear in these poems inhabits a myriad co-existing selves, ranging from lover, philosopher and visionary dreamer to stringent social critic, artist with words, nomad, sky gazer and naturalist. A veteran bilingual poet who writes in Bengali and English, Gopal Lahiri is also a widely published critic, translator and editor. In this new book, he demonstrates his continued urge to reinvent himself as a poet.

Arranged in five sections, titled 'Resurrection', 'Dreamer's Search — Green Path', 'Mind's Eye', 'Miscellany' and 'Haibun', the poems carry us away on a fascinating journey through a landscape that belongs at once to inner and outer worlds. The poems are reflective and self-reflexive. They cross easily between different realms: real and surreal, personal and social, mundane and spiritual.

"Resurrection", the first section, creates a romantic aura with mystical overtones. In these poems, the sensuous immediacy of a particular moment often opens a sudden window to deep philosophical insights "a pin-hole/ showing me the/ largest canvas possible" (25). A profound loneliness coexists with a deep sense of connectedness with the universe.

The second section, "Dreamer's Search — Green Path", brings ecological concerns centre stage, adding another dimension to Lahiri's preoccupation with time, survival and evanescence:

*With two sharp cries,
The night bird reaches the top of the tree
Breathing in the toxic air. (48)*

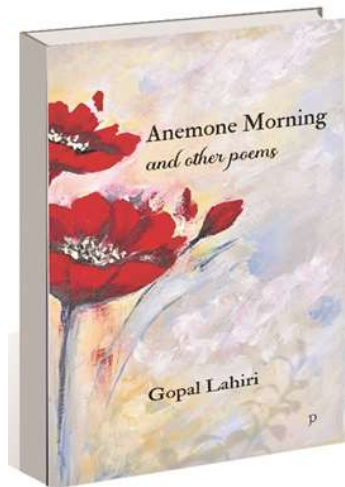
In a prophetic vein he warns us: "What will happen is already happening" (49).

"Mind's Eye", the third section, ushers in an unexpected change of tone. Here we encounter the harsh reality of war, shattered bodies littering the trenches after gunfire and bombings, the hunger of those who live on the streets, and the pain of loss and deprivation. The poems force us to confront the grim truths that make up much of our world: trenches, gunpowder, prisons, garbage, slums, slavery and pollution. In "Frontier", he writes:

*The stinking bodies and half-living are
strewn
like matchsticks under the blue sky,
many large and small bones under ash. (73)*

And in "Hunger":

*I ate garbage day and night.
In those days if I was lucky,
Got leftover cold rice and salt
that would make my day. (71)*



Such horrors are as intensely brought to life as the anatomy of the "Red Hibiscus" and the romantic aura of love and loss.

The poems in *Anemone Morning* reveal the poet's fascination for form and his ability to experiment without surrendering to the rigidity of formulae. Economy of the image is Gopal Lahiri's forte. This is especially true of the fourth section titled "Miscellany", where he experiments with Japanese forms, such as haiku, senryu, gogoyika and gogoyoshi:

*river flows
she spun stories
in her fingers (131)*

In these poems, suggestion, juxtaposition and compression work to telling effect. Sometimes, as in "Starlight", the poet embraces silence as the most effective form of eloquence:

*I make unseen and unborn poems for
others...
The secret is in the reflections on the
wall,
let the people come to their own
conclusions. (18)*

In a self-reflexive mode, Lahiri reflects on his own practice: "Words agonize over sentences, weeping the heart of all things" ("Drunken Brass

Lamp", 27). He remains haunted by the longing for inspiration, and the search for the right word: "I do not know/how to speak before/my own silhouettes" ("Dyad", 40). The verses sometimes carry echoes of other familiar poets. "Where are those woods, I think I know" (15) he writes, for instance, in "Anemone Morning", invoking the famous words of Robert Frost.

In Section 5, devoted to haibun, limpid prose melts into poetry. "Down Diamond Harbour Local" melds a state of mind with the dynamic outer scene:

A small knocking at the centre
of all life, while the morning twists words
out of their meaning, I aggregate all my
choices and get down at the next station.
*down local train
whizzes past
through live wire*

The poems in the different sections vary widely in tenor and style, drawing attention to the shape-shifting poetic persona. But some themes persist: time, love, desire, creativity, change, natural phenomena, social concerns, human struggles, and overarching questions about existence and the universe. Permeating the entire collection is the poet's dream of universal freedom and peace:

*Each of us going in our own way Building
a peaceful universe. (24)*

Author: Gopal Lahiri, Publisher: Penprints

Radha Chakravarty is a widely published writer, critic and translator. Subliminal her recent collection of poetry, was listed by Ars Notoria (UK) as one of the best books from South Asia in 2024. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. She contributed to Pandemic: A Worldwide Community Poem (Muse Pie Press, USA), nominated for the Pushcart Prize 2020. She has published over 20 books, including translations of major Bengali writers, anthologies of South Asian writing, and critical studies of Tagore, Mahasweta Devi and contemporary women writers. She was Professor of Comparative Literature & Translation Studies at Ambedkar University Delhi.



Musing

How Does It Matter?

By Lopamudra Banerjee

Poem

The Mother and her

Whosoever needs a lousy woman who scribbles insane words and makes love to them, dripping in spurts of orgasmic nothings in a world seeped with homely chores, death tolls and life peppered in between, in recycled habit?

How does it matter if her new releases pant and writhe inside the suffocating warmth of a makeshift traveler bag, dying to be opened up, caressed, pronounced with love and ownership in front of a somber, sinister world?

A world in which the tender bones of pomfret fish, chewed, cuddled, piled up along with staccato bursts of selfsame conversations require more monitoring than asking, even for a fraction of a moment, how and why starving artists are born, how the body and its wants rechristen poetry and art, how the polka dots of memories and cognition twinkling in splinters and shards inside a lame, poetic heart flare up, only to be crushed to brittle dust.

How does it matter if the words, borne, printed and ready to embrace the world die the death of a pauper and the heart that had mothered them in a compulsive frenzy, watches, in a delirium, their melting into a dark, bottomless oblivion?

How does it matter, if the selfsame words rot in the dark and a lover who had promised them a robust, vibrant space never turns up to retain his vows?

How does it all matter? Let it be, let the words unfolded go back to their elemental mother's womb and be the stories ever untold.

Lopamudra Banerjee is an author, poet, translator, editor with nine solo books and six anthologies in fiction, nonfiction and poetry. She teaches creative writing courses at various universities and institutions across the DFW area. She has received the Journey Awards (First Place category winner) for her memoir 'Thwarted Escape: An Immigrant's Wayward Journey,' the International Reuel Prize for Translation (2016) and also International Reuel Prize for Poetry (2017) and other honors. Her collaborative poetry collection with Priscilla Rice Titled 'We Are What We Are' has been 1st Prize Winner at New York Book Festival 2024 and her translation of a famous Bengali historical/biographical novel titled 'The Bard and His Sister-in-Law' has received Honorary Mention at Paris Book Festival and New England Book Festival 2024.

*'Won't you celebrate with me?
In your womb of tomorrow, I breathe.'
The unborn child gulps the water,
The translucence of the air
And emerges, an invincible revolutionary
A fistful of life gushing in his bloodstream.*

*'Celebrate the child, welcome the new life force!'
They said, as they made him gush out, in torrents.
In her racing heart, she cradles him with her moist embrace.
Isn't he born from the serpents of her desire?
Her single, noncommittal status sprouting wings
From the fissures of her past wounds.
Her fantasies twirl and swirl in the furtive winds
tumbling around the cherubic child.
They grow on both the mother and her progeny,
weaving his freedom songs with the thread of her life.*

*'Won't you celebrate with me?'
The child prances and preens, his whims come alive.
His toddler smells, the soapy bubbles dance in her shriveled
fingers.
With baffled eyes, the toddler spills over his primordial quest
Covering, uncovering the sudden spurts of his travails between
lives.
In the mother's eyes, a labyrinth in which
years of her cracked earth tumble down.
In her progeny's mouth, half-formed words
of a new universe explode.
Both collide in their fire and earth,*

*'Won't you celebrate with me?'
The mother croons and sings in a thousand rhythms,
As the child chirps incoherent.
'Blow a kiss, say peek-a-book!' She imparts him toddler lessons
Her progeny, a rebellious flame flickering in her bosom.*

*'Won't you celebrate with me?' Voices cheer in unison
As she slaps shut the deep blue door of her melancholy.
Her progeny sleeps amid lullabies and awakens, re-emerging
As subtle brushstrokes in her canvas everyday
In a remembered pattern of toys, spilled milk and a cycle
Revolving around gaiety and oblivion of their deep, dark space.*



Threshold fiction

NORAH NEXT

DOOR

by Cyril Dabydeen

Nora came back from Africa, and her manner seemed strange, but unaffected-looking she was. Insouciant, maybe. She laughed, and I laughed with her. A newly-minted lawyer, she might have started having doubts about her life. And why had she chosen to go to Africa on behalf of the Red Cross, if only "to save the world"? She imagined people with traumas, afflictions, occurring in unpredictable or hapless ways.

"It's for real," she said.

I waited to know more. And her dog yapping, with people moving about the adjacent row of townhouses in the city's east-end where we lived. Sure, she contrasted it with being in the narrowest places in Africa, like Benin and the Ivory Coast.

Real voices calling out, Welcome! Yes, Africa came closer. Streets, alleyways, cul-de-sacs, and those in the marketplace being bawdy, and tintinnabulation like in busy-body central Nairobi.

Norah talked in a matter-of-fact way, all she'd observed and imagined. She opened her eyes wide.

I took in a new shape or form, you see. What more would she tell me, and not tell Josh, her boyfriend--about what she'd actually seen in Africa? The dog yapped louder at the window.

Norah lowered her head; and her boyfriend was with his own trauma; and he would take the dog outside as the animal barked.

At me?

Josh indeed took good care of the big German Shepherd. He was a dogman, Norah called him; and the dog indeed was her father's, and Josh "volunteered" to look after it when her father died.

Who likes who better?

Norah having returned from Africa where dogs seemed to be everywhere, I must know. Strays, mangy-looking ones, more than

pariahs in Ghana, Gabon, Cameroon. She was shocked, she'd told Josh.

"No," he let out back at her.

"Oh, yes."

"Did you touch them?"

"I didn't take them up in my arms, if that's what you mean."

Norah didn't want to tell Josh about a special affection she developed for pariah dogs as places drifted in and out of her mind. Whole landscapes, you see, as the sun scorched over vast plains, the veldt and savannah. And a safari as tribesmen called out to her, "Hey, you!" Hooting at her.

"Where's Canada? How many tribes?"

"In what jungle?" another rasped.

"How far away is British Columbia with real Native tribes, eh?"

Norah simply smiled.

And elephants rampaging through forested areas on the West Coast and East Coast of Africa she might have imagined. Lions casting dark, sombre looks, in the Serengeti. Lion-cubs watching her with a malign glare. No special meal here!

Norah with more images coming to her like in a dream. Going across a great big wide savannah, and meeting the likes of Rhodes, Burton, Stanley, venerable Dr Livingstone. She'd really been sent by the Red Cross, I must know, and making history out of nothing, it seemed.

"How real?" I persisted in asking. About Josh I meant?

The Dogman looked at me from the window with his own intent. The German Shepherd sensed something as it barked, eyes with a wide glare. Never watch a dog long in its eyes, I'd been told.

Fierce, growling the animal was. Oh, knowing what animals did best in their own time, you see.

Norah wanted to go again with the Red Cross to Africa because she had no fear really, not of pariahs, nor of genuine predatory animals following her around. She was special, you bet.

I imagined her wandering into darker areas, obscure corners beyond known frontiers. Hyenas making eye-contact with her. Orangutans and chimpanzees turned sideways. They weren't real?

What more did Norah want to admit to herself?

Josh laughed when she told him about it. What more would she tell me? About animals following her around in Canada more than shadows. Bears, buffaloes, moose--do you know?

What I've come to know, in a manner of speaking.

How territorial must it be? And the local tribesmen, the Masai and Bantu, had looked at her with long spears bursting out from a National Geographic

special. Yes, the pariahs liked a woman's scent most of all. Really a meal? I didn't believe her, I told her.

But Josh, the Dogman, did.

*

He walked the big dog outside the doors, as it looked back at me with eyes hard as stones. Because of Norah, you see. Then she really disappeared. Gone back to Africa! The German Shepherd kept looking at me as Africa called out from alleyways, narrow corners, dead-ends.

Norah told no-one about it, and I absolved myself from knowing more, or anything that was real. Josh blinked an eye. More snarly beasts moved around in every corner of the world.

Where really the dark continent?

He put his hands to his face, Josh the Dogman did.

The German Shepherd growled louder. I simply waited for Norah to appear at the front door one long night to come. I also tried imagining the Dogman in Africa searching for Norah with his own Masai spears, mimicking, and marking out one spot for himself. He painted his face black, Josh did. Boundaries, landscapes, all coming together, what only Dr Livingstone knew; as Norah perhaps knew too...what the Red Cross might have never told her about--her being a lawyer and all.

The German Shepherd sniffed and barked louder at the window.

Africa calling, you see.

No-one looked back--in my own calling out to her, searching or wandering far--more than surreal. Africa, oh Africa! And what the Dogman found out for himself about Africa. Fuck it! He kept searching for Norah, and no one really knew where she'd gone. Once upon a time, oh. Now believe me.

**Cyril Dabydeen--
Canadian poet,
short story writer,
and novelist.
Recent book is
Forgotten**

Exiles/fiction. Other titles include *My Undiscovered Country*, as well as *God's Spider*, *Imaginary Origins: New and Selected Poems*, *My Multi-Ethnic Friends*, *Jogging in Havana*, *My Brahmin Days*, *North of the Equator*, and *Drums of My Flesh* (IMPAC/Dublin Prize nominee, and Guyana Prize for best novel). He won the Okanagan Fiction Prize and the Canute A. Brodhurst Prize.



Short Story

If Only He Knew

by Subhash Chandra

Nikhil Chatterjee was a pathetic sight. A forlorn look on his face with dark half-moons under his eyes, wearing a Brace - a special type of belt that supports the whole spine - and clutching a Quadripod walking stick in his right hand. He was sixty-two, retired from government service two years earlier, but looked eighty-plus.

Dr. Bhaskar's clinic overflowed with patients and their attendants, squeezing against each other on the three benches lining the waiting room's walls. More waited outside on the chairs in the corridor through which icy breeze sliced unfettered. His consultation was a measly fifty rupees at a time when the GPs charged between 500 and 1200 and the specialists up to 2000. But that was not the reason patients flocked to him. He had been blessed with the healing power which people believed was because he practiced medicine, not to pile up money, but to serve the suffering. He seldom prescribed pathological tests which he scoffed at as unreliable. He arrived at the diagnosis by checking the pulse rate, tongue, and eyes.

#

Nikhil struggled to push open the glass door. A young man who had brought his grandfather for his gout treatment pulled the door from inside. He entered and stood in a corner, leaning against the wall, his piteous gaze panning the waiting patients.

A girl stood up, "Uncle ji, please sit here."

"God bless you," he mumbled in a weak voice.

After a couple of patients had consulted the doctor, a bout of racking cough rattled his frame. Multiple voices spoke up, "Sir, you go in first."

#

Dr. Bhaskar was a jovial man, who enjoyed telling his patients jokes. Two of his favourites were:

My wife consults another doctor because she thinks I'll kill her and marry again.

The second: The difference between a general practitioner and a specialist is that one treats the ailment you have, and the other thinks you have what he treats.

He would laugh at his own jokes, emitting a funny sound, 'khi, khi, khi,' his shoulders heaving up and down. While laughing, he tended to wink at the patient. In the early years of his practice, he was bashed up by the husband of a pretty woman-patient. However, that was long in the past and now he had a roaring practice!

#

The doctor checked Nikhil's BP and blood sugar.

"Normal."

"Thank you, doctor."

"How many times do you visit the loo during the night?"

"Four to five."

"Hmm ... we'll bring it down to twice, maximum."

"Thank you, doctor."

"Any dribbling?"

"No."

"Good."

'Repeat for one month. Ultra Sound, KUB,' he scribbled on the prescription and said, "We should know the size of the prostate."

Nikhil nodded.

"You'll be fine soon, old fellow."

This was his tagline to all the patients - with minor linguistic variations -- irrespective of the disease they were suffering from. Even the Cancer patients some of whom miraculously survived the dreaded disease, earning him deep gratitude and goodwill.

"Thank you, Doctor," Nikhil said and took out a fifty rupee note. Dr. Bhaskar said, "Keep it. Smile at me, instead. It will do you good ... and to me... I don't like doleful faces."

#

Doctor Bhaskar was around seventy but looked not a day more than fifty-five. Reed-thin and pale with a pinched face, he appeared in dire need of an iron supplement, but he was a storehouse of inexhaustible energy.

He left his clinic around midnight after he had examined the last patient. Yet during the past thirty years, he had never taken ill. Even the mighty Corona bypassed him, though he was the only doctor in the locality to not shut shop.

"You are trying your best to turn me into a widow soon," his wife had said ruefully.

"But it is you who keep falling ill repeatedly. Promise you will not depart till I am alive."

#

On his way out of the clinic, Nikhil mumbled loud enough for everyone to hear, "You are kind souls, all."

He walked up to his car, in which his friend was waiting at the wheel.

"Back so soon? His clinic is always crammed with patients."

Nikhil smiled enigmatically but said nothing.

#

"Do you see that girl at the far-end table, sipping coffee?" Nikhil asked his wife.

They were at a Mall and he was without the Brace and the Quadripod.

"She turned twice to look at me. Her face seems familiar. I guess she has recognised me and might ask for my autograph."

His wife, Shompa, sneered, "You'd better downsize your self-assessment, please. You were never a celebrity...You were mediocre all your life."

"Always demoralizing me," he said pulling a long face. "In fifty years, never a compliment from you. Actually, your cynicism pulled me down in life."

"Okay ... okay. Now get something to eat. I'm famished."

#

During his next visit to the doctor, which was his fourth, he noticed the girl he had seen at the mall. She ignored him this time. Soon it was her turn to go into the doctor's chamber. When she came out, she walked past him with a stern face.

After half an hour he repeated the coughing trick and got a chance to see the doctor promptly. As he lowered himself on the revolving steel stool, Dr. Bhaskar shouted, "Get up and get lost. I don't treat dissemblers!"

Shocked and puzzled, he gawked at the doctor.

"You have been playing a fraud on my patients ... and me."

Those waiting outside the chamber wondered what had caused the good-humoured doctor to blow his top. Nikhil slunk out of the clinic like a whipped dog.

When he narrated to his wife what had transpired at the clinic, she said, "I told you several times, you were a mediocre actor. Thank God, I did not let you give up your job for your sideline interest in theatre."



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.

Dr Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy – A Scientist turned Polymath

His contributions to the Western perception of Indian Music & Dance (Part-2)

by Dr Kusum Pant Joshi

In 1913, after venturing into the field of Indian music, AKC published another pioneering book: 'Thirty songs from the Panjab and Kashmir: Recorded by Ratan Devi with Introduction and Translations by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and a Foreword by Rabindranath Tagore.' It had the notation of all the songs included in the book.

Rabindranath Tagore and Coomaraswamy mentioned in the title, need no introduction, but Ratan Devi is presumably almost unknown to most people today. Ratan Devi originally, Alice Richardson, was a musician who AKC married in 1913. They left for India and while putting up in a 'shikara' (or houseboat) in Srinagar Kashmir, she started learning Indian classical music from Abdul Rahim of Kapurthala, a princely state in the Punjab.

Describing Abdul Rahim in his book, AKC wrote about Alice's music guru or ustad as follows: "A few words must be said about our Ustad, Abdul Rahim of Kapurthala. Between him and Devi there was formal acceptance of the relation of teacher and pupil, with all due solemnity and offerings. Thereafter Abdul Rahim came with us for about ten weeks to Kashmir, and Devi studied daily, until State orders re-called him from his period of leave, to Kapurthala, where he is a State-pensioned kalant. His ancestors were Brahmans, forcibly converted in the time of Aurangzeb. Like many other Panjabi Musulmans in the same case, the family retain many Hindu customs, e.g., non- remarriage of widows. Abdul Rahim's faith in Hindu gods is as strong as his belief in Islam and Moslem saints, and he sings with equal earnestness of Krishna or Allah, exemplifying the complete fusion of Hindu and Moslem tradition characteristic of so many parts of northern India to day. He is devout and even superstitious; he would

hesitate to sing dipak rag¹, unless in very cold weather."

Based on his own deep study of Indian classical music and interaction with Indian musicians, AKC explained the roots of Indian music in his book. He stressed that Indian music had its origins in the divine hymns composed



AKC's 2nd wife Alice Coomaraswamy or Ratan Devi

and sung in the Vedic age as far back as the 2nd millennium before the birth of Christ. He tried to introduce westerners to the beauty and divine connections of Indian classical music. He mentioned the rich diversity and different styles of Indian music. He talked about the various 'talas' or beats, 'tans' (or fast rhythmic movement in a song), and the 'ragas' ('melody mould' or 'musical patterns') of Indian music and how each raga was to be only sung at specific times of the day or night and that ragas were known to have the power to create a particular mood through a selection of notes and using them in a particular manner. In addition to a book, he wrote detailed articles on Indian Music in 'The Musical Quarterly' of April 1917 and in USA's 'Vanity Fair' of October 1917. He referred to the universal appeal of

music and its power to cross borders.

After their return from India, Alice presented Indian songs before English audiences in various places under the stage name of Ratan Devi. Before each recital, AKC would provide an introductory talk after which Ratan Devi would sing a selection of Indian songs. Besides winning praise from Rabindranath Tagore who admits being most pleasantly surprised by her musical talent, Ratan Devi was also praised by G.B. Shaw and W.B. Yeats.

Ratan Devi also won fame as a singer of Indian songs in America after moving there with AKC in 1917. They were helped by a famous but notorious magician, Aleister Crowley, in launching her career there. Crowley introduced them to some influential Americans and is also reported to have written a poem in praise of Ratan Devi, in USA's 'Vanity Fair'.

Soon, AKC ventured into translating an ancient Indian text on Indian theatre and dance. This was an extraordinary step because by doing so, he was introducing classical Indian dance to audiences in the West as well as to Indians who were becoming westernised due to their English education. This was, moreover, really groundbreaking work, because in the early 1900s the general understanding of Indian arts and culture, (especially in the UK), was tainted with an anti-colonial bias.

For translating his book on Indian dance and theatre, he partnered with south Indian scholar, Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala. The book's title was 'Abhinaydarpanam' (or The Mirror of Gesture) that had been written by Nandikeshwara. The English translation was an abridged version of a Sanskrit or classic, the

¹ It is believed that Rag Dipak has the power to create light lamps and create intense heat that can even burn the singer and their surroundings.

'Natya Shastra' (or Dramatic Science) of the 2nd century BC by Bharat Muni. Published by Harvard and Oxford

University Press in 1917, the 'Abhinaydarpanam' was interspersed with numerous 'shlokas' or Sanskrit prayers. It also had detailed descriptions of classical Indian dance, music and theatre. This unique and copiously illustrated publication, showcased the various body postures, head movements and representation of various emotions, forms of life, the nine planets as well as Nature including birds, flowers, insects etc. through human fingers and hands (known as *mudras*) that were used in Indian classical dance. AKC reprinted this book with improvements a few years later.

After settling in the USA, AKC worked in the Boston Museum of Fine Art where he continued until his death.

A scholar and a prolific writer, he went on to literally write thousands of articles, academic papers and published numerous books on various aspects of Indian, South Asian and other eastern cultures.

He intended to move and spend his last days in independent India, but his wish remained unfulfilled for he passed away before this could happen on 9 September 1947.



Dr Kusum Pant Joshi is the Principal Researcher and Press Officer at the South Asian Cinema Foundation (SACF) in London, UK

Poems by Meena Chopra

Digital Nomad: Triptych of Time

In between the digital lines
my breath
an endless thread
sways, sweeps, circulates.

I am a nomad. travelling through ages.
gravity anchors me firmly to the ground
.
desires weave my existing karmas.

Destiny through ages
reflecting the trinity
Past, Present and Future
Brahma, Vishnu Mahesh*—
A muted trilogy
ciphered in digitized spaces
Triptych of Time.

Silver Moments on Canadian Rockies

I inhale the mist
rising from the glaciers
where fog veils mountains
beyond turquoise waters
exhaling sultry dreams, relinquished
brewed in melting desires
on the shores of this stunning lake.
My vision calm
drifting over the fading droplets.

Engulfed in icy blue hues
I become a pebble
rippling along the velvety waters
crystal clear.

Many rivulets flow through me
draped in silver-gray
ascending into a stainless sky.

A Mythical Chronology

Reminiscences ripple
wrinkling along
a shrinking river
escaping time's clasp.

A raging stream cuts through
the rough, jagged red rocks
and majestic mountain peaks.
An upheaval looms
striking my hidden existence.

Currents extinct
flowing tales of natives
Arizona's rugged edges—
hewn by time
etching canyons upon me
Running through my crimson
veins.

Realities and yearnings entwined
legends buried in stones
engraving narratives
The truths of a Mythical
Chronology
carved on the rocky riverside.



Meena Chopra, a Canadian-Indian poet of English and Hindi, author, visual artist, and curator of art and literary events, has seen her poetry featured in numerous magazines and anthologies. She champions the fusion of literature with various art forms, boasting a track record of successful collaborations in this innovative realm. www.meenachopra.art

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REVIEW

Soulful poems

Jaydeep Sarangi's *The Half-confessions*

By Nikita T Gawande

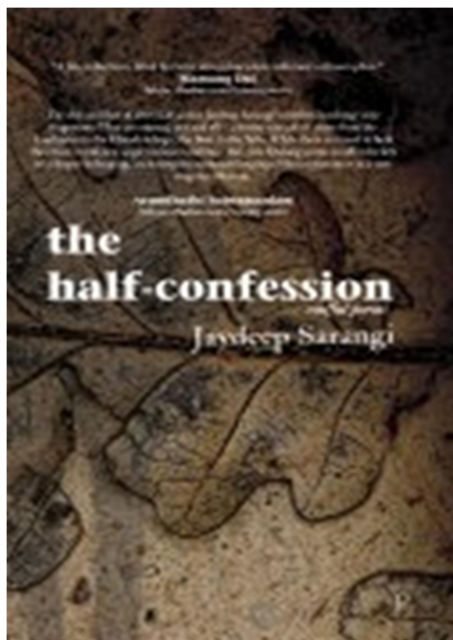
Dr. Nikita T Gawande Jaydeep Sarangi "Bard on the banks of Dulung", one of the most anthologized and reviewed bilingual poet-activist, who gathers fame for his beautiful poetry collection in English. Jayanta Mahapatra and Jaydeep Sarangi share a deep engagement with Indian poetry in English, though they belong to different literary generations. Mahapatra, as one of India's foremost poets, has significantly influenced contemporary Indian poetry, including poets like Jaydeep Sarangi. Sarangi has filled his life with poetry, a thoroughly devoted and committed contemporary poet.

He presides on the editorial boards for the journals of repute, thoroughly given to poetry and its criticism in his professional career. His scholarly poetic wealth has provided him name in foreign countries and acts as a connection between different nations. Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map: Twenty Contemporary Indian English Poets, Sahitya Academy 2023 was his recent book with Basundhara Roy.

Jaydeep Sarangi's poetry collection "The Half-Confession" released in November 2024, officially launched during the Delhi Poetry Festival, Season-8, on November 24, 2024, at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi. The collection is a visualisation of life with lot many fragments weaved together under a single compilation. The collection has wonderful composers from India and abroad. Every poet has used the form to communicate their emotions, that encourages curiosity among the readers. Half -Confessions is a hidden treasure in itself containing precious poems of various gems, that cannot be found easily. While reading the poems we step outside our own-self and merge into the flow of the poet's thoughts, as poetry is an energy of a poet described with full attentiveness and clarity in the form of an imagery.

"Half confessions" has a touch of obscurity, it demands and deserves full

attention of the reader. Some ideas are difficult to interpret that gives it an obscure reflection. The metaphors and imagery are like riddles given to the readers to solve. explores themes of love, life, history and longing, offering readers a multi-layered emotional experience. The poems are described as deeply introspective, often carrying a dreamlike or surreal quality. They challenge societal norms and personal beliefs, serving as both critique and



exploration. The collection also draws on traditional and ancestral wisdom, described metaphorically as "messengers of the old spirits, uniformed in yellow."

While detailed reviews for The Half-Confession are still emerging, Dr. Sarangi's previous works have been highly regarded. For example, his earlier collection, *Silent Days*, received acclaim for its deep insights and enjoyable poetic style. Based on Sarangi's literary reputation and the depth of this latest work, *The Half-Confession* is expected to resonate with readers who appreciate thoughtful and socially engaged poetry. The table of contents lists titles such as "Speaking with My Unspoken Words," "An Acre of Love," and "Rain on My Stories," indicating that the

collection comprises multiple poems from cultures around the world.

Dr Jaydeep Sarangi amalgamates nature and human life through his excellent diction, that makes him "the emperor of words", a highly respected person, an inspiration to new budding poets. He propagates to develop a kind of madness for poetry. His adoration that he possesses for poetry the same he aspires to transfer. He creates "good homes on different shores" in every collection of poetry.

A unified work consisting of a wide range of ideas from different countries gives the readers an insight into the experiences as seen through the eyes of various poets. This abode of poems offers a curated selection to analyse and learn from. He has taken on board 11 poets from different spaces, what a marvellous collection indeed! As we dive deeper, we find ourselves on a journey of different thoughts, emotions and memories. As we move ahead in reading the poems portrays experiences in every form – complex and ambiguous. This inspires the readers to reread the poems to find a new experience. The poems speak about the little sighs of life to the depth of human journey. The collection consists of the first poem by Agha Shahid Ali who says "I hold my pain in my silent palms" make us imagine the thought process of the poet and the struggle of her life in one sentence. Her another poem "Knocker-uppers" describes the industrial revolution in England and compares his own native land Kolkata. Reminiscing the loss and recollecting the past is found in "the half – confession" where the poet recollects the childhood memories, and respect for his ancestors

Sarangi has included three poems by Jayanta Mahapatra, one of India's most renowned poets writing in English, often explores themes of

memory, loss, desire, history, and existentialism. His poetry is deeply rooted in the Indian landscape, particularly Odisha, and is known for its lyrical intensity and evocative imagery. His poem "A Giant Tongue" the "tongue" might symbolize language, power, or cultural imposition, swallowing identities and reshaping histories. Mahapatra's love poems frequently carry undertones of longing, nostalgia, and the passage of time. A fragment about the same is his "A Whiff of Love" this poem likely delves into the fleeting nature of love, portraying it as something transient, like a scent that lingers momentarily before dissipating. Thesaurus of My Wine Moments" this title suggests a collection of sensory experiences and memories associated with wine used as a metaphor for indulgence, nostalgia, or even poetic inspiration.

Mahapatra's poetry is known for its subtle yet powerful imagery, much like Sarangi's, which is deeply rooted in cultural and natural settings.

Both poets employ free verse with a lyrical and meditative quality, making their poetry introspective yet socially aware. Mahapatra, as the first Indian poet writing in English to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award, paved the way for many poets, including Sarangi, to explore Indian themes in English poetry. Sarangi, as a poet-critic, has acknowledged and critically engaged with Mahapatra's work, highlighting its impact on Indian poetry.

Dr. Sarangi inspired by John Keats, Stephane Mallarme, Kalidasa, Salvatore Quasimodo and Bibhu Padhi. The poems are full of metaphorical

expressions. Many poems are confessional; some are love offerings.

The beauty of this collection of poetry that inspires us to visualise the thoughts of the poets. Our visualisation is a picture of their word. The interpretation made by us is a combination of poet's ideas and our experiences. The poems hit us through the honest statements to show the reality of the world. The imagination in our mind takes us to reality of our lives –our own half confessed truths.



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POEMS by LAKSMISREE BANERJEE THAT GLISTENING EDGE

The veiled hue of my organza ghunghat
The muted sheen of my nail enamels,
My lip gloss, the muffled glitz of a caked make-up
No longer lures me to the shadowy
enclave of fraudulent dreams---

My sharp, kohled eyes have dimmed with
the shades of life
Now embedded in the hallowed hues of the blues,
greens and whites of transcendence
While the soft scents of my bosom rise
like the smoky spirals of holy incense,
The under-tonal rhapsodies of the hills,
skies, rivers and cascading frills
Resonate with my tinkering anklets tuned
to that unknown drum and lyre
Playing beyond evanescence
And my dark, cloudy curls tonsured
into gleeful waves to embrace
This new life of explosion, expansion, vision---

Your sapphire skies, emerald seas,
carnelian horizon, ruby rose-love
Iridescent butterflies, energizing breeze,

Aromatic flowers, gleaming glow-worms
Circulate,
Activate,
Simulate
On the periphery of the penultimate zone
Hovering around that pivotal aura I search for
Far away from shrines
From prayer
From faith
From benediction
From hope
From hopelessness
From delusion---

The pink horizon stretches out
To the thin films of the deepening night,
The hide and seek baby sunrays peep
At that glistening edge:
I wait while life goes on ...
I wait still, as always, for the answer
As always, one thumb away from my clutch---



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 to her credit.

Press Release

The Gala Launch of Vatayanam Reported by Ajay Jugran

London 13 April 2025: Vatayan Europe, launched its quarterly flipbook magazine 'Vatayanam' in a well-organized programme, attended by the local literati and glitterati, besides the educationists and writers from around the world. The Chief Guests were Baroness Usha Parashar, CBE, Vatayan's new Patron, and Mrs. Anuradha Pandey, Attaché (Hindi and Culture) of the High Commission of India, who has recently come to London, was the special guest.

Whilst the eminent educationist and author Dr

Rabindranath Tagore University Bhopal, and Founder of Vishwarang, the poster of 'Vishwarang International Hindi Olympiad 2025' was also launched at this function. Mr. Chobey said that this Olympiad is going to be held in more than 50 countries and that there is a great enthusiasm around this extraordinary event already.

Prof. Francesca Orisini joined online to deliver the keynote address. She said that the magazine should give space to more varied non-resident Indian



Padmash Gupta, introduced the guests, the eminent author and the conceptualizer of the magazine, Divya Mathur, Founder of Vatayan, welcomed them with bouquets of flowers. Dr Gupta then spoke about how the magazine evolved and its aim to be a touchstone for the Indian diaspora writers.

The first and special issue of Vatayanam is dedicated to Prof Kamal Kishore Goyanka, who recently passed away. He was a great scholar of the legendary Premchand and an active promoter of Pravasi literature world over.

Presented by the well known writer and translator, Richa Jain, the formal programme began with the audio of Vatayan's Mission Song written by the eminent poet, Prof Madhu Chaturvedi, and beautifully sung and composed by Dr Shiv Darshan Dubey.

Baroness Parashar CBE formally launched the magazine, recounting how she learnt Hindi as a teenager in the UK and has ever since used it as the language of her heart, together with Punjabi and English. Anuradha Pandey spoke about her new job at the High Commission and how excited is she to meet and work with the diaspora writers, promoting Indian culture and languages. Introduced by Mr. Santosh Chobey, Chancellor,

experience of living in the UK, their struggles in their adopted country, practicalities of life and interaction with other ethnic communities. Members of the Editorial Board of Vatayanam, Arpana Sant Singh, Ajay Jugraan, were invited to share their vision. Antareepa Thakur Mukherjee spoke on behalf of the technical team including Shivi Shrivastava each one of who worked tirelessly to design this beautifully created magazine. Prof Madhu Chaturvedi, Prof Rekha Sethi and Prof Rajesh Kumar were sorely missed.

Some comments were invited from the online and offline eminent authors including Mr Vijay Sharma, eminent lawyer, veteran author Nasira Sharma, whose article on Dastangoi is specially commissioned for Vatayanam, renowned poet painter, Leeladhar Mandloi, whose painting adorns the cover of Vatayanam, Prof Tatiana Oranskiya; journalist and historian Dr Vijay Rana, global Hindi activist Dr Anil Joshi, Dr Yuri Botwinkin, Dr Divik Ramesh, and Dr Jawahar Karnavat - all of whom briefly expressed their views on Vatayanam. Some video messages were also screened including those from the eminent novelist Suryabala ji, Dr K S Rao (Secretary, Sahitya Akademi), Dr Satchidanand Joshi (IGNCA), Prof Tomio Mizokami and Prof Liudmila Khokholova. The function concluded with a vote of thanks by Astha Dev, IT engineer, author and presenter.