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The Jaipur Literary Festival Comes to London

A special report by Rita Payne

Five decades after Agatha Christie died - what is the secret of her continuing universal appeal? This is the question that launched the first session at the Jaipur Literary Festival in London in 2026. Over three days in June the festival covered a myriad other topics. This is what Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts had to say about the popular themes of the books featured: "What stands out this year is the range of conversations we had from Iran and Israel, China and America, AI and innovation, Food and music, literature and poetry, history and biographies, crime fiction and travel.

A lot of the programme also reflects the way stories move across borders. Many of the writers are deeply rooted in specific cultures and contexts, but the themes they explore, from identity and displacement to power, democracy, technology and belief systems feel global in their reach."

Tickets to the annual event in London sell out weeks before it starts. For those like me, who have not attended JLF in its original home in the historic Indian city, the gathering in London is one of the highlights of the year. The relationship with the British Library came about at a reception arranged by

the then High Commissioner of India to UK, Navtej Sarna. According to Roy: "JLF London began at the South bank centres 13 years ago and the organisers were looking for a new alignment and the British Library was the perfect choice. The CEO British Library Roly Keating and head of International affairs Jamie Stewart were hugely enthused and that was the beginning of a marvellous relationship that brought ideas, diversity and dialogue to the British Library and gave us a perfect space to grow over the past 10 odd

connecting its intellectual heritage with present-day conversations in a direct and public way. At its core, the partnership works because both share a belief in openness, accessibility, and the importance of dialogue.

Every discussion is an eye-opener with topics which are provocative, challenging and sometimes quirky. Not surprisingly major global and regional issues scrutinised by high profile writers, commentators, politicians and diplomats attract the biggest audiences.



As old certainties fade and new alignments emerge, the global balance of power is being reshaped in real time, Vincent Cable, Sanam Vakil and Martin Wolf in conversation with diplomat, prolific writer and translator, Navtej Sarna examined China's rise, Iran's

years.

For JLF, the British Library provides a unique and meaningful home in London - a space rooted in knowledge, memory and public dialogue, which mirrors the festival's intent of bringing ideas and people together. For the British Library, the festival brings a living cultural platform that activates the space with contemporary global voices, debates and storytelling,

strategic positioning, and the shifting dynamics challenging Western dominance in an increasingly multipolar world.

It is not surprising that several sessions were devoted to India - its politics, economy and history. Gopalkrishna Gandhi in conversation with Manasi Subramaniam answered questions about his book

(continues on P3)

Editorially Speaking

Snow in Athens and France is on fire. This was the headline I read a few days ago while casually browsing news sites. A series of extreme weather events has battered many parts of the world this summer.

In recent weeks, Greece has faced both snowfall and severe flooding, while firefighters continue to battle relentless wildfires in Canada, France, and Spain. Historically cold-weather countries are now experiencing intense heat, while traditionally warm Mediterranean regions are confronting sudden and unpredictable cold spells. These shifts reflect a confused global weather pattern, and it remains debatable whether this is a man-made phenomenon or part of long-term natural cycles that have shaped mother Earth since its creation billions of years ago. However, it is important to highlight the fact that we the humans should not aggravate the situation further and take meaningful steps to prevent future catastrophes.

This issue arrives a little later than planned, and we're grateful for your continued patience as we work through a few publishing challenges. Even with these delays, our contributors have brought together a focused and engaging selection of content, including interviews with notable artists, writers, and cultural ambassadors. I hope you will find this insightful.

We look forward to reconnecting with you in the next issue.

Vijay Anand

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(from P1) *The Undying Light* which traces India's journey from the anguish of Partition to the complexities of the present. In this deeply personal chronicle, Gandhi—statesman, scholar, and witness to history—reflects on the ideals, upheavals, and enduring spirit that have shaped Independent India's democratic experiment. His *India and Her Futures* looks at India's cultural diversity and its rich literary and intellectual history.

India is the fastest growing and among the largest economies in the world today, today, demonstrating remarkable economic resilience in the face of global volatility. In *The Indian Era: A Growing Economy*, a diverse panel Jaideep Prabhu, Lord Jitesh Gadhia and Swati Dhingra in conversation with Vishnu Som mulled over the challenges, milestones and current economic discourse around the world's fourth-largest economy and the path it paves for the world.

In *The Unravelling of an Empire*, Navtej Sarna, and BBC correspondent, Justin Rowlatt, explored the unforeseen zenith that the British Raj in India rose to, and the compelling factors that led to its unravelling. Sarna's *Crimson Spring*, winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award 2025, revisits the Jallianwala Bagh massacre through the eyes of ordinary individuals - soldiers, farmers, householders and rebels of Punjab. Justin Rowlatt has explored the legacy of the British Empire in India through a personal and historical lens, covering the economic, cultural, and human consequences of colonial rule. In conversation, they discussed the tumultuous events that were a prelude to the independence of India.

In another session - *This Little World: Tudor Narratives of India and England* Nandini Das in conversation with Festival Co-Director and Author William Dalrymple, uncovered the entangled histories of England and India across oceans and centuries

highlighting encounters and exchanges that reshape our understanding of an interconnected world. Drawing on rich archival fragments, Nandini Das traces merchants, migrants, sailors and spies who moved between Tudor and Stuart England and India, unsettling ideas of nation, identity and belonging.

There is a sense that Afghanistan is dropping off the news agenda. It was, therefore, enlightening to hear top experts with a genuine love for the country throw light on the twists and turns that have marked the country's chequered history. Saad Mohseni, CEO and chairman of the MOBY Group, helped reshape the country's media landscape, offering reliable news and music to millions. He spoke about building his struggles to build a truly independent media company amid

highlighted. Tahmima Anam in conversation with Bee Rowlatt discussed her book *Uprising* set on a desolate, sinking island in Bangladesh. It follows a group of sex workers who resist their fate of servitude. Inspired by a real-life floating brothel, this unflinching drama is told through the collective voices of children.

The horrific killing and displacement of Palestinian children were graphically described by leading writers from the community. In *Being Palestinian*, Ghada Karmi, spoke from personal experience since she was born in Jerusalem, was uprooted during the 1948 Naqba and later settled in the UK. A trained medical doctor, she became an influential writer and public intellectual. Her acclaimed books offer

powerful insights into exile, memory and justice, making her a significant voice in global discussions on Palestine. She shared the dais with Nimer Sultany, and British surgeon Nick Maynard in conversation with Eugene Rogan in distilling how the conflict in the Middle East has affected the lives of Palestinians in

Britain today. Maynard gave a harrowing account of treating Palestinian children and babies severely injured in Israeli attacks, many of whom did not survive. The panel questioned why, with all this evidence of Israel's human rights violations, it was not being held to account.

The environmental crisis which is of urgent concern around the world was the subject of a compelling exchange. In *Energy Shift: Running on Fumes*, Shefali Khanna, Jaideep Prabhu and Justin Rowlatt, the BBC's Climate Editor, reflected on how Energy has become one of the starkest fault lines of our times. Today's escalating conflicts and the ever evolving geopolitics the world over has disrupted energy supplies and caused price



conflict and the constant threat of censorship. On the panel with him were renowned foreign correspondents Lyse Doucet and Christina Lamb who have assisted the global understanding of Afghanistan's layered realities through extensive firsthand reporting. Lamb highlights real stories from Afghanistan in *The Sewing Circles of Herat* and *Farewell Kabul*. Doucet presents a people's history of modern Afghanistan In *The Finest Hotel in Kabul*. Rashmee Roshan Lall is the author of *Pomegranate Peace*, a novel based on her year spent in Afghanistan. Together, they charted a nation's fight for its own voice.

The predicament of other global and regional communities were also

volatility while revealing how precariously reliant we are on fossil fuels. The speakers revisited flawed assessments of development and possible solutions for a cleaner and greener future.

In *The Philosophy of Science*: Archana Sharma in conversation with Roger Highfield

explored what shapes scientific truth—and who gets to define it? Sharma, senior Scientist at the CERN Laboratory in Geneva, talked about the philosophical foundations of science, from uncertainty and evidence to imagination and discovery. Traversing the boundaries between reason and wonder, she reflected on how science evolves, challenges itself, and redefines our understanding of reality in an ever-changing world.

Sanjoy K. Roy spoke to Oxford mathematician Marcus du Sautoy's about his recent book, *Blueprints: How Mathematics Shaped Creativity*, which demonstrates the transformative power of mathematics in the creative world. Drawing on examples from Shakespeare's use of mathematical axioms to Pixar's animation techniques, Du Sautoy argues that the intersection of math and art is more than just functional, rather, he sees it as a source of inspiration. It was illuminating to hear from him how mathematical concepts like symmetry, fractals, and primes have influenced music, art, and literature, and how creativity might unlock new mathematical insights.

The Indian Era: A Growing Economy: Jaideep Prabhu, Lord Jitesh Gadhia and Swati Dhingra in conversation with Vishnu Som. India is the fastest growing and among the largest economies in the world today, demonstrating remarkable economic resilience in the face of global volatility. A diverse panel examined the challenges, milestones and current economic discourse

around the world's fourth-largest economy and the path it paves for the world.

As the United States approaches 250 years of independence, the idea of its revolution, once a radical experiment in liberty and democracy was reviewed by a distinguished panel. In a session titled *The 250th Independence Day: America's*

Unfinished Revolution: Bruno Maçães, Sarah Churchwell and Fredrik Logevall in



conversation with Georgina Godwin addressed the central question - is it a completed project, or an unfinished promise, continually reshaped by history, conflict, and imagination? Bruno Maçães, known for his incisive analyses of global power and shifting world orders; Sarah Churchwell, whose work traces the cultural and ideological myths at the heart of America; Fredrik Logevall, a historian of U.S. foreign policy and its entanglements brought their layered perspectives to this issue. In conversation with Georgina Godwin, they revisited the American Revolution as an ongoing narrative marked by contradictions and reinventions.

Brave New World: Navigating the Digital Epoch

Ali Eslami, Roger Highfield and Harshul Asnani in conversation with Patricia Clarke engaged in a deep discussion that evaluates the evolving nature of human interaction with technology. Ali Eslami is a Research Scientist at Google DeepMind working on artificial intelligence. Roger Highfield, the

Science Director at the Science Museum Group and a prominent science writer, is a vocal critic of treating artificial intelligence as a purely data-driven black box. Harshul Asnani is President and Head of the Europe business, and part of the Leadership team at Tech Mahindra. He leads a strategic portfolio of businesses and subsidiaries operating at the leading edge of new-age technologies. In conversation with journalist Patricia Clarke, they explore the layered futures of our digital age.

Vishnu Som in conversation with Amit Roy spoke about his book *The Sky Warriors*, a vivid chronicle of aerial courage, where pilots, commanding officers and strategists recount making split-second decisions under unseen pressures. Layering reportage with the drama of warfare, the book explores modern air-combat

and the personal realities of those who navigate the skies in times of conflict and are on duty under fire.

It is not possible to do justice to all the topics that were expounded on and debated, however, a discussion on two debut novels merit attention.

Compelling new writers, Gurnaik Johal and Pia Ghosh-Roy, navigated the shifting terrains of inheritance and interiority in their works, *Saraswati, Mongrel and I Am the Arrow*, each tracing the search for self in distinct and resonant ways. In conversation with Maya Jaggi, they confronted who we are, what we inherit, and what we choose to leave unsaid.

Elaborating on writing and storytelling, Marina Warner, art critic and writer exchanged views with two other authors. In this discussion, Namita Gokhale, award winning author and co-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival, engaged passionately with the polyphonic Indian literatures and multilingual dialogue. Samantha Ellis

explores the dying language of Judeo-Iraqi Arabic in *Chopping Onions on My Heart*, a memoir on preserving language and culture across generations. Together, they reflected on storytelling as an act of shelter – travelling, adapting and imagining new forms of home and community in a volatile world.

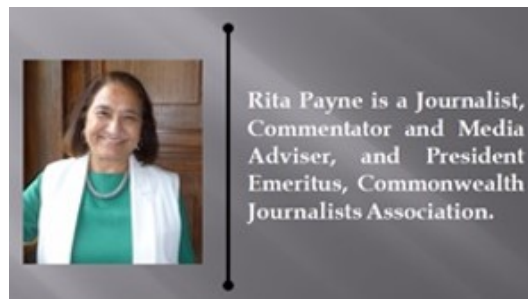
In conversation with Shrabani Basu writers Vaseem Khan and Abir Mukherjee pursued the trail of timeless noir and examined the enigmas of human nature. *The Edge of Darkness*, a 'rip-roaring thriller' by Vaseem Khan, former Chair of the UK Crime Writers' Association, is the latest in the award-winning series *Malabar House*. This who-dunnit follows detective Persis Wadia through the wild and mountainous Naga Hills District as India's first election since independence approaches. Bestselling crime writer Abir Mukherjee's latest, *The Pinnacle*, follows an American heartthrob who hates India, the murder of a Bollywood star, and a world of lavish opulence set against the contradictions of Mumbai city. In conversation with acclaimed author and journalist Shrabani Basu, they reflected on the enduring appeal of crime fiction, its moral ambiguities, and the ways in which it mirrors the anxieties and undercurrents of the societies it inhabits.

In *Eating the World*: Vivek Singh and Caroline Eden in conversation with Holly O'Neill reflected on culinary traditions as vessels of culture, history and landscape. As societies encounter each other, food becomes a site for

exchange where flavours and techniques are borrowed, blended, and reimagined. Vivek Singh is the executive chef and CEO of six London restaurants under The Cinnamon Kitchen, marrying Indian flavours with Western techniques. In her memoir *Cold Kitchen*, writer and literary critic Caroline Eden travels the world in twelve dishes and a hundred



journeys from her Edinburgh kitchen. In conversation with food editor Holly O'Neill, they talked about the eclectic vocabulary of a world of flavours.



At a time of conflict and uncertainty it was uplifting to hear a conversation between Alexander McCall Smith and William Dalrymple, who have known each other for years on *The Importance of Being Kind*. McCall Smith, who has produced a remarkably varied body of work explained what motivated him to

write the much loved *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series to his philosophically interrogative *Isabel Dalhousie*. The authors returns, time and again, to the small moral choices that shape lives and communities. He discussed his upcoming works and ever-expanding literary world, where humour and empathy accompany questions of how we live, choose, and care for one another.

These are just the highlights, there were so many other stimulating subjects ranging from the legacy of John F Kennedy, to the life of Jan Morris and a review of the remarkable Brontë sisters who produced masterpieces of intense emotional depth and psychological insight.

JLF International is a series of global festivals, travelling across continents, carrying with it the spirit of the Jaipur Literature Festival, held in the fabled Pink City. It is promoted as the grand dame of literary festivals. Its editions span several regions, including Australia, Europe, North America, Ireland, UK and the Middle East, seamlessly merging the rich multilingual literary traditions of South Asia with the unique essence of the host countries. Holding it all together are the remarkable trio, William Dalrymple, Namita Gokhale and Sanjoy Roy. With their dedication and sense of enterprise they work their magic every year proving that the power of stories, history, music and art has no borders.



Book Review

Mahua Sen's *The Dead Fish*Translation of Rajkamal Choudhary's Hindi novel, *Machhali Mari Hui*.

New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2025. Pages 177, Rs. 495/-

by Malashri Lal

As children, many of us have peered into fish tanks with curiosity, and then received a terrible shock when on a particular morning, a dead fish is suddenly seen to be lying belly up and the fins shrivelled. Rajkamal Choudhary's *Machhali Mari Hui*, translated as *The Dead Fish* by Mahua Sen conveys the same kind of shock as well as curiosity. Rajkamal's was the first novel in the Hindi language to openly present a lesbian relationship with no apologies for candid portrayals of same-sex love. *Machhali Mari Hui* (1964) presents a complex view of masculinity and femininity along with a borderless flow. It is surprising that despite the gender rights movement gaining high visibility through parades, posters, and publications, this book remained untranslated into English for so long. Mahua Sen's sophisticated and deliberate rendering, which preserves the raw energy of the original novel, is a valuable addition to the growing corpus of work on 'sexual dissidence'. More so because the new genres of Indian science fiction and fantasy are luring readers away from the stark realism of social truth.

The setting of *The Dead Fish* is the urban buzz of Calcutta in the 1960's. Nirmal Padmavat, a migrant from Bihar, has sneaked his way into many countries and tangled with many races to satisfy his craving for adventure. Arriving in Calcutta and meeting up with a doctor he had once known, the itinerant Padmavat decides to make this city his home. A clue to his character: "Nirmal is a stranger, Nirmal is a stranger to himself" (100). In this multi layered city where the Bengali *bhadraloks* created a haven for literature and the arts, Padmavat focused on wealth building, by fair means or foul. The stories of business deals, bargains and barter are hidden in the bricks of Calcutta's glitzy Park Street and the gracious facades along Chowringhee Road. Nirmal Padmavat with his dark, seven feet tall physique, his ruthless instinct for "profit", erects a thirty floors tall "Kalyani Mansion" which conceals his own bundle of

secrets. Can will-power and wealth compensate for his impotency?

Nirmal Padmavat and three women add up to the geometrical plotting of sexual encounters. Kalyani was his former lover who married the doctor, produced a daughter--the young Priya. Shirin is Padmavat's wife with scant respect for the man. Kalyani had passed away but that memory haunts Nirmal so intensely that all the women in his life morph into a spectral figure. Shirin demands marital attention from her husband and he too feels the need to assert his manhood, but each encounter is a disaster. The volatile Shirin is by turns disgusted, angry, self-

just like a cliff of iron" (113). Though their union is frustrating for both, the author has raised the larger question of spousal "rights". If a woman is trapped into a passionless marriage, what can she do? The question had been asked by DH Lawrence in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), and the book's answer was unacceptable to polite British society. Interestingly Lawrence's novel, in its unexpurgated version, was banned in the UK till 1960. It's about the same time that Chaudhury published *Machhali Mari Hui*. In conservative India, the novel was not banned but faced social stigma.



The bolder aspect in *The Dead Fish* is the lesbian relationship between Shirin and Priya, they are a generation apart—moreover Priya is the daughter of the dead Kalyani who is forever the 'lost love' in Padmavat's imagination. Although the scenes are graphic, Choudhury shrouds them with obliquity by dwelling upon images of the fish, water, air and breath. "Just a silhouette of two women. There were no arms, no hands, no fingers, no knees, no legs, just two fish. Blue fish. And the sea of darkness" (134).

pitiful and rebellious. Such subtle emotions at play would be hard to convert into words in the restrained environment of the 60's and one can see why *Machhali Mari Hui* would have shocked contemporary readers. But in 2025, Mahua Sen's translation is cast in vocabulary that is candid but not offensive: "Nirmal Padmavat embraced Shirin. After all Shirin was his wife...He has all kinds of rights—religious rights, social rights, ethical rights. Shirin cannot refuse his advances even if she wants to. Nirmal's arms were rock solid, and his chest,

Credit must accrue to Mahua Sen for her smooth and sensitive translation of a book that could have easily tilted towards a bias. As she says in the Translator's Note, "Whether it is sexuality, gender roles or ethical dilemmas of the characters, *Machhali Mari Hui's* treatment of homosexuality, in particular, is handled with sensitivity, neutrality and empathy that was both rare and revolutionary for its time." She has transmitted the author's goals admirably. Moreover, she has successfully retained the tonalities of the different characters which show up more easily in Hindi than in English.

I conclude with some reasons why this novel has appeared in English at a specially significant time in literary studies. The "lesbian consciousness" found prominence in Audre Lorde,

Alice Walker and others in America some decades ago. Theorising about homosexuality in Indian writing has not been prominent though several translations of novels and stories with this previously 'taboo' subject are now available. It would be academically rewarding to consider novels such as *The Dead Fish* as a political standpoint against patriarchy in the Indian context. Beyond the stories, is there a deeper note of social change?



Malashri Lal, with twenty-six books, retired as Professor, English Department, University of Delhi. Publications include *Tagore and the Feminine*, and *The Law of the Threshold*. Co-edited with Namita Gokhale is the 'goddess trilogy' on Sita, Radha, Lakshmi, and also *Betrayed by Hope* which received the Kalinga Fiction

Award. Lal's poetry collections are *Mandalas of Time*, shortlisted for the Tagore Literary Prize, and the recent book *Signing in the Air*. Honours include the prestigious 'Maharani Gayatri Devi Award for Women's Excellence' and the SETU award of Excellence. At present, Malashri Lal is the Convener, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi.

Word Masala Foundation Confers Poet of Honour Accolade on Sukrita Paul Kumar



The Word Masala Foundation and Yogesh Patel MBE are proud to announce that Sukrita Paul Kumar has been named the latest recipient of the prestigious "Poet of Honour" accolade.

This distinguished award, part of the Foundation's signature series housed at Ars Notoria, recognizes poets whose work transcends boundaries and enriches the global literary landscape. The series is curated by Yogesh Patel MBE and the Word Masala Foundation.

Sukrita Paul Kumar, celebrated for her profound lyrical depth and cultural resonance, joins an elite collegiate of honourees. Her selection underscores the Foundation's commitment to identifying voices that have internationally enriched English literature.

"The Foundation believes in elevating poets who carry the weight of their heritage across all boundaries," states Yogesh Patel. "Sukrita's inclusion as Poet of Honour is a testament to her extraordinary contribution to contemporary poetry."

Past honourees include George Szirtes, Imtiaz Dharker, Raymond Antrobus, Vijay Seshadri, Ruth Padel, Mimi Khalvati, Tishani Doshi, and others.

The official announcement and Sukrita's featured works can be viewed on the Ars Notoria platform: <https://arsnotoria.com/2026/06/29/sukrita-paul-kumar-poet-of-honour/>

About the Word Masala Foundation:

Dedicated to the promotion of diverse poetic voices, the Word Masala Foundation curates literary initiatives that bridge cultures and generations. It also supports the Orbis International Poetry Magazine Prize.

About Ars Notoria:

A digital sanctuary for literature and art, Ars Notoria fosters a global community of writers and readers and provides a home for the Word Masala Foundation's series.

London,

June 29, 2026

Yogesh Patel MBE

Recipient: Freedom of the City of London

Skylark Publications UK & Word Masala Foundation

www.patelyogesh.co.uk

Flash Fiction

A PLACE IN THE SUN

by Lakshmi Kannan

'I'm afraid there are no shortcuts, Madam. You have to go for walks. Every single day. That'll give you mobility, or else your OA* would worsen. Walks would also help in controlling your cholesterol which is on an upper level. Just popping pills wouldn't help,' said her orthopedician.

'Yes doctor. The problem is, I need to rest my legs every ten minutes because my ankles ache with the strain of walking,' said Gowri.

'I know. Your latest Xray is alarming. All the more reason for you to walk. Take rest in between walks, but make sure to sit in the sun while you rest. Your bone density check is not very encouraging. But sunlight would surely take care of your vitamin D.'

'Doctor, you see this protracted cold wave in Delhi? The sun rarely comes out and even that's quickly covered over by a thick fog. And my work entails long hours with the laptop.'

'It's like that for many of us. Find your own balance, Madam,' he smiled genially. 'Take a break from the laptop and sit in the sun. The best!' he said, *OA Osteo arthritis giving her a thumbs up sign. 'Ah...please don't forget your cane.'

*

The sun came out at last. She closed her laptop, took a book from her desk. *Only three more pages to complete it*, she thought, picking up the day's newspaper with her cane. She walked to the neighbourhood park. How nice. There was a vacant seat, right under the sun. Keeping the book beside her, she flipped through the headlines of the paper, grateful for the sun warming her limbs. It was refreshing to be out with sounds of birds chirping around and the flowers nodding their heads. She opened the Global page, her heart beating wildly. The fires in Northern California continued to rage wildly, it said. Gowri prayed it should not spread southwards as her dear granddaughter was studying in Los Angeles. The course was on in full swing. The students couldn't even think of leaving LA for another six months.

'Namashkar Gowri ji, long time, no see?'

She looked up. It was Pant speaking in pidgin English.

He was newly appointed as the President of the Residents Welfare

Association (RWA). He sat down on another end of the same long seat and glanced at the newspaper spread on her lap.

'Namashkar, Pant ji. How're you?'

'I'm fine. Please drop the "ji". I'm younger than you.'

'Yes indeed. But that doesn't mean one drops the "ji".'

'Heh, heh...' he chuckled. 'Please come over to my house for tea. It's just beyond this hedge,' he invited.

'Do excuse me. I must sit in the sun for a while. Doctor's order!' said Gowri, putting on her best neighbourly smile.

'Ah... surely you can come for about ten minutes.'

'Certainly, Pant ji. How can one refuse an invitation from the RWA Chief? Some other time, may be?'

He smiled, got up with another Namashkar, and sauntered off. Gowri returned to the paper, cursing herself for getting trapped by him on the seat. She had always avoided him by dexterously darting into another lane whenever she spotted him.

Gowri gathered her book and newspaper and went searching for a more secluded spot. It was heavily shaded by the large trees. She walked to the far end of the park near a gate and found a seat bathed in bright sunlight. It was in uncomfortable proximity to the garbage disposal, so not many people may come this way. She would quickly finish reading the paper and move on to page no. 403 of the book. She opened the Editorial, something she never missed for the perspectives it offered.

'Vanakkam, Amma!'

'Good morning, Mr. Natarajan.'

'Please call me Nattu. You're so much my senior.'

Gowri made no move to make space for him on the seat. She let the book lay beside her with her cane resting on it, the paper still spread open on her lap.

'You're reading the newspaper here.'

'My doctor advised me to sit in the sun for my arthritis,' she said, stealing a look at the editorial.

'Oh. So, you brought the paper along, ha, ha,' said this man from the Deep Dark South of India where women seldom got to read newspapers in the mornings. By a tacit code, they had to read it only after the men in the

household had read it, after the ritual of a second round of coffee which they sipped, sitting in the front porch.

Gowri didn't respond. Undeterred, he went on.

'My God, you've brought a book too!' he chuckled.

'Excuse me. I must walk a bit,' said Gowri, getting up.

'Then how can you both walk and read your paper, and the book, heh...heh...?' he laughed, shaking his head as he walked away.

*

When Gowri turned sixty, she was secretly pleased. From now on, no man would waste his time talking to me. Peace at last, she thought naively, despite her age. She walked to the eastern side of the park where the sun streamed its warmth generously. Ah...She was lucky to find a vacant seat. At some distance sat a woman who was occasionally seen around in the neighbourhood. Gowri finished reading the Editorial, glanced at the Sports page, folded the paper and opened the book on p. 403.

'Namaste. I'm seeing you outside after a very long time.' The woman had walked over to where she was sitting.

'Namaste. None of us could come out because of the cold wave. Also, it rained,' said Gowri, squinting her eyes at her.

'True. You're reading a book!'

'Yes. I want to finish reading it,' she said, turning to p. 403.

'You also brought a newspaper to read!'

I might as well have brought a gun, for all the shock on her face, thought Gowri, seeing the woman staring at her with her mouth open.

'*Maaf karna*, I must walk. Doctor's advice,' she smiled as she got up, took her cane, the newspaper and the book.

Gowri's back absorbed the two eyes that stared behind her.

*

She went out of the park and resumed her walk on the driveway opposite her

house. It was bathed in bright sunlight that poured on the cars gleaming after the morning wash. Some cars had pulled out of their reserved parking space. Others waited for their masters with the drivers hovering around. The car next to hers was getting readied.

The driver brought it out, then got out of the car to put a strong iron chain around the reserved parking space, following the decision taken by the RWA to prevent people from encroaching on the space of another resident. Gowri brought out her garden chair and sat in the vacant, sun-lit space barricaded by the heavy iron chain. She read the book from p. 403. The drivers threw curious glances at her even while they namasteed to her.

This Madam has strange ways, they must've muttered, under their breath. Yet, not one of them intruded on her

time. Gowri opened her book and read on till p.405. Just one more page to finish reading the book.

Maaf karna Excuse me.
Namasteed A respectful way of greeting someone with folded hands.

Dr. Lakshmi Kannan is a poet, novelist, short story writer and translator. She taught English in colleges in Delhi, Calcutta and at IIT- Delhi before she joined a corporate multinational organization as a Senior Writer and Language Coordinator. Kannan's

recent publications in English include Nadistuti, Poems (2024, Authors Press) and Guilt Trip and Other

Stories (2023, Niyogi Books) which was chosen as 'The Best Book of the Year' by Literature, Critique and Empire Today, London (UK), formerly known as The Commonwealth Journal. www.lakshmikannan.com



Two Poems

by Gopal Lahiri

Grief

Bones scattered all around,
a cloth to wrap myself in
that autumn was in the habit of the friar.

Snow fell, lightless, under a blurred moon
on chestnut tree lined avenue, blooming
with violet, clover, primroses.

There where the cedar kisses the sky
brings a peace leaf from the war zone
in that sea and sand
wakening or wound- frostbitten feet, noses,
ears.

None of the birch or pine allow me their
solace,
remove my sorrow.

My sister's hair was never white.

Dandelion, so green is the mountain valley
the leaves glance white into the dark
unburied bodies piled up on the roadsides.

She did not come home.

@gopallahiri

Paper Lanterns

There is a room without windows.
a man cracks the glass doors
a woman drops a pearl earring.

My father's face rises from my sleep.
He tries to say something but his silent
words turn into paper lanterns.

In the portico, autumn sunlight pools turn
into squares, a crimson splash, a riot
of colour in the trees.

The chaos and noise make a kind of sense,
a few streetlamps cut the twilight,
the city outside is geometric and bare.

Inside the shadows spilling into a rectangle
are we wormholes to the other planets?
No one speaks above whisper.

There is no clear path, clear surface,
not all footprints echo, nor shout
I stand before myself before a broken mirror.

@gopallahiri

Gopal Lahiri's poem Own Sky-Path appears on page 17

Short story

Unequal Fight

by Subhash Chandra

We do not pick and choose. We do our job clinically – jab our proboscis into human flesh and suck blood. We do this not for fun or from malice. We need protein in the blood to develop eggs to perpetuate our species.

One evening, I flew into a house and saw a hirsute fellow. He was a loan shark who had amassed wealth by loaning money to the needy poor at usurious interest. He stayed at home mostly – to the misfortune of his family – did nothing but gorge on home-made goodies soaked in pure ghee, or get something from the nearby sweets shop. He would keep a plateful of savoury by his side while drinking, and devour them while watching television, which he recognized. I took an instant dislike to the fellow.

Second day:

Mosquitoes have a life span of about two weeks.

I settled on the ceiling, taking stock of the situation. He was watching the Fashion Show and drooling over the models walking on the ramp. I flew around to look for the other family members. The wife, a homely type, was in the kitchen; the two grown-up daughters – twins – were studying in another room.

After she finished cooking, she said, “We watch *Mahabharata* at this time, don’t we?” and asked for the TV Remote.

He growled, “Can’t you see I’m watching a useful programme?”

“Eh? ... useful?” she said, surprised.

“Yes, I’m taking note of the latest fashions in saris. Our girls have grown up.”

“But they wear jeans,” Adarsh said.

“Now they should take to saris. Jeans attract lustful gaze.”

She picked up a copy of *Sarita* and went into the children’s room.

I decided to punish the lecher-bully, notwithstanding his hairy body – the kind we generally avoid; one might get caught up in the thicket and lose one’s life. But I turned into a female Knight-at-Arms and courted danger. I didn’t know it’d turn into a fight to the finish.

I meandered around in the hairy thicket, causing an itch here and there. He’d scratch and bring down his hand on me. But I was vigilant and would quickly wing away.

Third Day:

I found him bawling at Rini and Kini. They were bright students and were doing well in their studies at college. He went off his rocker because they had gone to a friend’s birthday party in the Housing Complex and got back late.

“But they had taken my permission,”



said Adarsh, taking up cudgels on their behalf.

“Who the hell gave you the authority to act as the head of the family?” he snarled.

“I am their mother,” she said mildly.

“Oh, shut up, you dimwit,” he yelled—reason enough to punish him.

I circled in front of his face and then hovered around his ear.

I kept switching between his two ears. Every time he heard the hum, he would raise his hand and bring it down on me, but each time he ended up slapping his own face. When he had spanked himself several times, he got up, trembling in rage and determined to squelch me. But his body movements were slow, and his brain was dull.

I kept helicoptering on his head, sometimes flashing away in front of his face, and he would flail his arms in an attempt to catch me. In five minutes, I had sent him crazy. His arms aching, he slumped into the sofa, exhausted. Rini came to the kitchen to pick up some snacks and saw his limp figure. She joined her sister and mother, and the three shared a muffled laugh.

Fifth day:

His wife served him dinner.

“Why so early?”

“I have a migraine.”

“One of the girls could have taken care of the dinner.”

“They have exams from tomorrow.”

His mercury shot up as he put the first morsel into his mouth; he hurled the thali at the wall.

“What the hell! There’s no salt in the curry. Damn it!”

There was a clanging noise, and the curries and daal were splattered on the

wall, staining the sofa too. I had a narrow escape.

“You’ve dirtied the wall and the sofa. And what will the girls think?”

He got up and whacked her across the face.

“You bitch!” You dare talk to me like that. Get lost, you whore!”

This sealed his

fate. Death till dead, I pronounced on the spot!

Eighth day:

Today I brought an *Aedes Aegypti* sister along who, like me, could inject the hemorrhagic fever (DHF) virus into the body. About five to six days left for me. So today I was determined to inflict the deadly blow, but before that, I would make him wriggle and dance to my tunes. He was on the lookout for me. When he saw the two of us, he was confused but soon recognized me, as I was bigger than my sister.

“Yes, this is the one,” he wagged his index finger at me menacingly. He picked up a newspaper, folded it a few times, and turned it into a weapon. He was sure he would squash me today.

The fight was going to be dangerous. He stood still, with the weapon in his hand by his side. Then slowly, imperceptibly, raised it, kept it poised in the air for a few seconds and then struck me with full force. But a nanosecond before, I dashed to the left and sat at a little distance, rubbing my antennae in glee. He tried again, and this time I flew high up by a couple of feet.

Frustrated and enraged, he stood on the sofa, not bothering about the new cushions, on which he did not allow anybody in the family to sit, and he hit me. But I escaped again and went further up on the wall. He climbed onto the backrest of the sofa, just about three inches wide, and perched himself precariously. This time, he struck at me hard. Of course, he failed. At this moment, my sister joined the battle and bit him hard on the neck. Stung, he lost balance, tumbled down the sofa, hitting his head against the backrest first. He lay flat on the floor, staring at the ceiling, stupefied. I flew down, hovered around both his ears, and then pushed my proboscis with a

vengeance into his upper arm and then behind his right ear. My sister and I left the house. Mission accomplished! We had sucked in enough blood for the day.

Fourteenth day:

Today is the last day of my life. I again went to his house. There is a deafening silence! His sentence has been successfully executed. He has left for his abode --- Hell.



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.

Arts & Culture

Jaipur's Walled City: Frescoes, Faith and Fading Light

By Tanusha Nagrath

"To walk through Jaipur's Walled City is to wander through a living manuscript, where frescoes are verses, temples are pauses, and every fading wall carries the fragrance of centuries."

In the heart of *Rajasthan*, where the sun-kissed stones blush the same shade as the city beneath it, lies *Jaipur's Walled City*, a *UNESCO World Heritage Site*, not merely an architectural marvel, but an unfolding scroll of dharma, devotion, and design. Here,



within the grid-like sprawl of India's first planned city, envisioned by *Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II*, every corner carries the weight of Vedic prayers, every window whispers lore, and every mural is a fading breath of bhakti.

Jaipur was never just built; it was invoked; conjured into being with

Yagyas, aligned to *Vastu Shastra*, blessed by the chants of Devotees and the dream of a king who saw the city not only as a state, but a sanctuary. As the *Shilpa Shastra* guided the placement of temples and *Chowks*, the spirit of *Braj*, the land of *Govind*, seeped into its very mortar.

The city was meant to be an extension of Lord *Krishna's* dominion, local

Frescoes, Faith, and Fading Light

In the oldest ward, one stumbles upon *Shri Krishna Bhawan*, a modest *Haveli* bathed in fading *Jaipur* green. The murals that grace its façade are sun-kissed frescoes of devotion: *Krishna* with *Radha*, flanked by *Lalita* and *Vishakha*; *Rama* and *Sita*, *Hanuman* in eternal reverence; *Shiva* with *Parvati*; and *Ganesha*, the eternal guardian. The weather beats the gods, and yet, the colours now flake like time shedding its skin; too delicate to restore, too sacred to erase. As *Shri Iqbal Khan Sahab* said, "There is a beauty in letting things be," eyes fixated on the peeling face of the *Haveli*. "Sometimes, preservation is in witnessing, not fixing."

Braj Breathing in the By-lanes

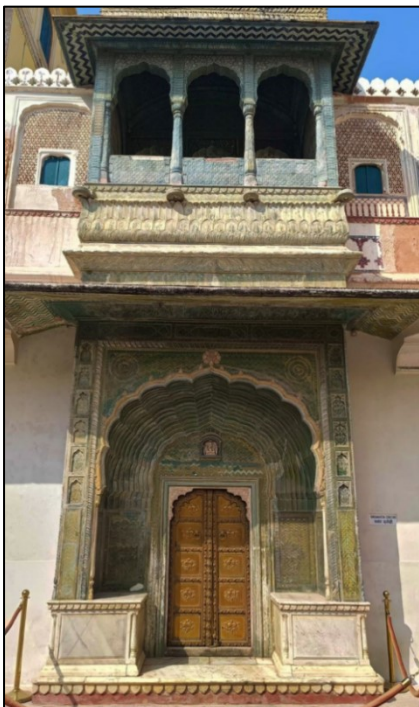
This city, *Sawai Jai Singh's* city, honours not only the grandeur of *Rajput* courts but also the delicate, almost feminine aesthetics of *Braj* culture. From the lilting scent of ghee and sandalwood, to the worn-out *Ghungroos* of a temple

historians say, pointing to the sacred hills of *Amber*, once known as *Brinjawati*. The *Dark-Hued One* is believed to have grazed his cows and played his flute here, and today, that rhythm today still beats to the tune of *Mridangams* and *Raagas*, of artisans humming to themselves as they repair yet another *Jali*.



Hawa Mahal Jharokha

dancer, from the lotus motifs in *Jharokhas* to the chants drifting through *Maniharon Ka Rasta*, every layer is laced with *Krishna's* mirth and *Radha's* longing. Postcards of Eternal Designs Wander a little deeper into the *Topkhana Desh* quarter, and you'll see time folding in peculiar ways. Amid the military ward's stone bones lie whimsical touches: terrazzo vines



creeping across dado panels, antelopes frozen in stone beneath a nameless tree, and above a doorway, a miniature

Hawa Mahal etched into stucco. These are not the *Jaipur* postcards tourists chase, but the city's whispered poetry. *Amish plaster* gave way to terrazzo as artisans dwindled and fashions evolved; and yet, even in that phosphoric atmosphere, the essence of form and beauty held fast. Some lanes here are so narrow, you can't photograph the whole *Haveli*. But perhaps that's the city's gentle defiance; not everything needs

be captured. Some things must only be seen and felt.

Treasures of the Heart and

Intellect

Then there stands the *Maharaja's Public Library*, stoic and pink, at the bustling crossroad of *Chaura Rasta* and *Tripolia Bazaar*, a place where intellect and heritage meet. Built in 1866 by *Sawai Ram Singh II*, it is one of India's oldest public libraries. A treasure chest of books, maps, manuscripts, it was *Jaipur's* gesture of sharing its royal knowledge with its people. While its northern façade stays true to *Jaipur's* pink-and-green palette, its front hints at the *Maharaja's European* leanings. As Govind Ji shared, "*Ram Singhji wanted the East and West to converse,*" and "*the building itself became that dialogue.*" Today, the *Pustakalaya* continues to breathe amidst a world rushing past it; a slow inhale of silence, scholarship, and syncretic design.

Jaipur is not a city; it is a *Veena* indeed, the *Walled City* isn't preserved in amber; it breathes, it adapts. Its *Havelis*

wear both tradition and time like silk and patina. Its murals fade, but the devotion behind them doesn't. Its temples still ring with *Aarti* bells, and its courtyards still gather whispers of old women shelling peas under the winter sun.

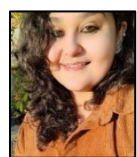
Jaipur, where culture is carved into pillars, spirituality is woven into ceilings, and design orchestrates like a *Raag*, beauty does not shout, it lingers. It lingers in the shadow play of *Jharokhas*. It sings in the temple's bells at sunrise. It lives in the unnamed trees on unknown streets, and in the silence,



Topkhana Desh

softness, and spirit. As *Shri Iqbal Khan Sahab* said, "*Jaipur doesn't just exist; each street a string, each Mahal a note, and each breath a wind of prayer.*" Within these walls, the divine and the aesthetic are not opposites, but echoes of each other. And in walking their shifting labyrinths, one doesn't merely see *Jaipur*. One feels it.

Tanusha Nagrath is a *Jaipur-based* media freelancer, storyteller, performer, and voice artist. A Registered Talker with *Prasar Bharati*, she has appeared on *Doordarshan Rajasthan* and leading FM channels.



Fiction

The Weather of Belonging

Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar

"What a pleasure to see you after ages!" Anita chirped, taking Savita in a warm hug.

For a moment, the years dissolved.

The reunion hall pulsed with overlapping voices, perfumes, nostalgia, and the brittle brightness of people trying to appear unchanged before those who remembered them young.

The hotel lawn shimmered beneath strings of amber fairy lights. February mist hovered gently over the city of Chandigarh, softening the sharpness of the evening. Somewhere beyond the laughter and clinking glasses of the college alumni gathering, the scent of raat-ki-rani drifted like an old memory refusing to fade.

Savita held Anita a little longer than necessary.

"You still crush people in hugs," she laughed faintly.

"And you still cry too easily," Anita replied, brushing a thumb beneath Savita's damp eyes.

The same gesture.

The same teasing words.

Only their faces had altered -lined now with years, responsibilities, departures, and griefs too intimate to display openly. For a fleeting second, they were back in 2010: two research scholars in the university hostel, sharing watery tea at midnight, and eating aloo parathas from the same dented steel tiffin Anita's mother sent every Monday, arguing over literature, underlining Virginia Woolf and Mahadevi Varma in the same notebook, dreaming impossible dreams beneath rattling ceiling fans. Sometimes the electricity failed entirely, and they continued talking in darkness, their futures glowing more brightly than the hostel corridors ever did.

"If Woolf can survive patriarchy," Anita would declare in the darkness, "we can survive this hostel food."

"Woolf never tasted our mess dal," Savita would groan.

Their laughter would ripple through the corridor, earning predictable complaints from neighbouring rooms.

Back then, life had seemed astonishingly symmetrical.

After their doctorates, fate had placed them in the same college as lecturers. Then came marriages, arranged, respectable, unexpectedly pleasant. The greatest coincidence of all was that their husbands, unknown to either family, had once been classmates.

"See?" Anita had joked at her wedding.

"Even destiny likes repetition."

They had believed happiness, once attained, remained permanent.

But life, Savita thought now, was not a still photograph. It was the weather.

Changing quietly.

Unannounced.

Inside the banquet hall, old professors exchanged anecdotes. Someone recognized Savita and exclaimed about Australia with admiring envy.

"You people settled abroad are lucky," another woman said. "Such a perfect life!"

Savita smiled politely.

Perfect life.

How deceptive language could be.

Later, when the music grew louder, Anita pulled her aside toward the quieter verandah overlooking the lawn. Rain threatened in the distance; clouds clustered like unshed thoughts.

"You've become thinner," Anita observed gently.

"And you've become wiser," Savita replied.

"No. Just tired in a more sophisticated way."

They laughed softly.

Then silence arrived -not awkward, but lived-in.

The silence of old friendship.

Anita suddenly smiled.

"Do you remember the night before my viva?"

Savita laughed immediately.

"The night you convinced yourself you would fail?"

"I was absolutely certain."

"You locked yourself in the bathroom and refused to come out."

Anita groaned.

"Please don't remind me."

"You were reciting every possible question the examiner might ask."

"And you sat outside the door for two hours."

The memory unfolded with astonishing clarity.

The hostel corridor.

Flickering tube lights.

The smell of damp books after winter fog. Anita's panic.

Savita's stubborn patience.

At one point, exasperated, Savita had slid a handwritten note beneath the bathroom door:

If brilliance alone guaranteed confidence, you would be the most confident woman in India.

Anita had preserved that note for years.

"You know," Anita said quietly, "I found it recently."

"That old note?"

Anita nodded.

"I nearly threw it away."

"And?"

"I couldn't."

She looked at Savita.

"Some people become part of your internal voice."

Neither spoke for several moments. This strengthens the ending enormously.

Savita watched the drizzle begin.

"In Melbourne," she said slowly, "rain always felt disciplined. Even the weather there behaved properly."

Anita turned toward her.

"But my heart..." Savita paused, searching for words. "My heart remained stubbornly Indian."

Certain smells refused geography, mustard oil crackling in hot pans, incense after evening prayers, wet earth after the first monsoon rain. They arrived unexpectedly in Melbourne and undid her with homesickness.

"Do you remember that old steel tiffin?" Savita smiled faintly. "I still carried it to school in Melbourne for years. Everyone else brought polished lunch boxes. I carried turmeric stains from home."

Her voice grew quieter.

"When Aarav's annaprasan happened there, everyone was smiling. The Indian community arranged everything beautifully. Yet all I could think of was a line from The Namesake..."

She closed her eyes briefly.

"She can't help wishing her own brother were to feed him, her own parents to bless him with their hands on his head."

Anita nodded.

"Ashima."

"Yes. I understood her only after living there."

What she never confessed to anyone was that homesickness had eventually changed shape.

At first, she missed India.

Later she missed the version of herself who had lived there.

The young lecturer who spoke effortlessly, belonged instinctively, and never rehearsed conversations before making a phone call.

Migration had not merely altered her address; it had subtly rewritten her inner weather.

The drizzle thickened into silver threads. Savita remembered those Australian years in fragments: grocery aisles smelling faintly of unfamiliar cheese, hurried festivals in community halls. Her husband, Raghav, had flourished magnificently.

Brilliant, ambitious, relentless.

He had left a prestigious MNC job in India believing Australia promised "better quality of life." Eventually he became CEO of a multinational firm. Awards came. Conferences came. Photographs in magazines came.

But contentment never arrived.

"He was always chasing another horizon," Savita murmured. "Promotion... bigger house... better suburb... more investments."

"And you?"

"I kept waiting to feel at home."

Her mind wandered like a drifting lantern through years of accumulated loneliness. The births of her children without her mother beside her.

Her father's funeral was attended through a trembling video call because flights were impossible during the lockdown.

Her sister lit the pyre.

Her inability to touch grief physically. Mourning through screens felt strangely incomplete, as though sorrow too required geography.

Sometimes, at three in the morning, she would wake with the terrifying certainty that she no longer belonged wholly anywhere. Australia had taught her efficiency, independence, and measured politeness. India survived within her through smells, idioms, recipes, old songs half remembered while driving home. Between the two countries, her identity had become like luggage perpetually waiting at an airport carousel tagged, delayed, unclaimed.

Anita listened quietly.

Her own life had not been untouched by sorrow either.

Her husband had suffered a paralytic stroke in 2021. Their son worked in Bengaluru and visited rarely because his job demanded time and Chandigarh was far. He wished to come but had professional compulsions.

"I used to envy you," Anita confessed suddenly.

"Me?"

"You were abroad. Independent.

Successful. Your children studied in top universities."

Savita smiled sadly.

"And I envied you for remaining rooted."

The words lingered between them.

Rooted.

Uprooted.

Two forms of ache.

One suffered from leaving.

The other from staying behind while everyone else departed.

Neither woman had admitted it before, but envy had quietly accompanied affection through the years.

Savita had imagined Anita surrounded by family, festivals, and familiarity.

Anita had imagined Savita liberated by foreign skies and limitless opportunity.

Both had been mourning lives they had never actually lived.

A gust of wind scattered bougainvillea petals across the verandah.

"We have grown old."

"And the world still remains unterrified."

This time their laughter came easier amid yard chat.

Warmer.

The years loosened gently.

After Raghav's sudden heart attack in 2024, Savita had returned to India permanently. Her children, now almost entirely Australian in accent and temperament, stayed back.

"They love me," she said. "But India is nostalgia for them, not identity."

She looked toward the rain-darkened lawn.

"Raghav wanted to belong everywhere. In the end, it created a strange nowhere around us."

Anita placed a hand over hers.

"Maybe home is not geography."

Savita looked at her friend.

"Then what is it?"

"Perhaps," Anita said slowly, "it is the place where someone remembers the version of you that existed before the world exhausted you."

Something inside Savita trembled.

For years she had carried her loneliness like concealed glass. Tonight, in the company of an old friend, it felt lighter.

Not vanished.

But lighter.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun.

Music floated again from the hall—old Hindi songs from their youth. Someone called Anita's name from inside.

Neither moved.

The night smelled of wet earth and memory.

Somewhere nearby, someone opened a steel tiffin, and the faint aroma of pickle drifted briefly through the rain-cooled air.

Savita leaned her head briefly against Anita's shoulder.

"You know," she whispered, "all these years abroad, I thought I was searching for a country."

"And?"

"I was searching for continuity."

Anita squeezed her hand.

"We still have some left."

Anita hesitated.

"There is something I never told you."

Savita looked up.

"When Raghav died, I called your number three times."

"I know," Savita whispered.

"You knew?"

"I saw the missed calls."

Anita stared.

"Then why didn't you answer?"

Savita looked away.

"Because if I had heard your voice, I would have broken."

Their eyes met.

Neither woman mentioned mortality, yet both felt it standing quietly nearby.

At twenty-five they had spoken endlessly about careers, books, ambition and love. At fifty-five, their conversations had altered.

Time itself had become visible.

Parents disappeared.

Colleagues retired.

Friends moved continents.

Children built lives elsewhere.

The circle grew smaller each year.

Perhaps that was why old friendships acquired a sacred quality.

They became living archives. Witnesses to forgotten versions of ourselves.

As they walked back toward the glowing hall together, Anita suddenly repeated their old hostel line in an exaggerated theatrical tone

"Come quickly, Professor Savita, before life gives us another thesis to suffer through!"

Savita laughed, a full laugh this time, ringing clear through the damp night air.

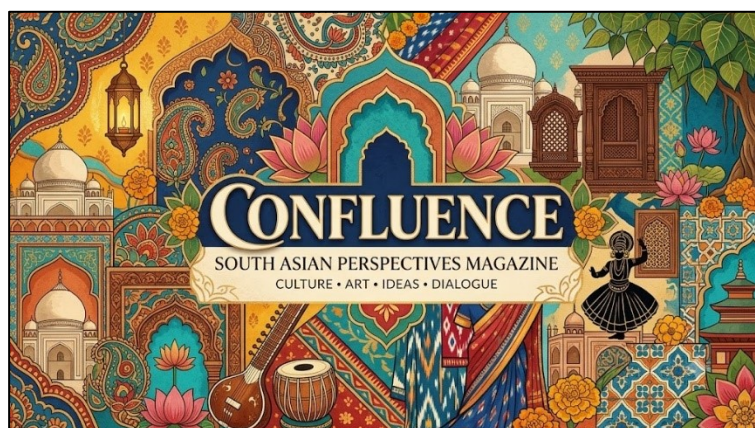
For the first time in years, Savita did not feel like a visitor in her own life.

Some reunions arrive too late to alter destiny, yet precisely in time to rescue memory.

And somewhere within that laughter lay the quiet realization that while migration could fracture identities, friendship—steady, patient, enduring friendship—could still gather the scattered pieces home again.

Dr. Ritu Kamra Kumar, Retd. Officiating Principal and Associate Professor of English at MLN College, Yamuna Nagar, is an acclaimed academician, poet,

and writer. With over 400 contributions to leading national newspapers and magazines, she has published 70+ research papers in reputed national and international journals and edited books.



A celebration of Hindi literature at the Houses of Parliament-London

Vatayan Europe's International Awards Ceremony

by Antareepa Thakur Mukherjee, General Secretary, Vatayan

The gilded halls of the Houses of Parliament played host to a memorable evening on 29 April 2026 as Vatayan Europe held its annual international awards ceremony - a prestigious occasion celebrating outstanding contributions to the promotion and propagation of Indian languages and Hindi literature. The event was a testament not only to the achievements of those honoured, but to the enduring mission of an

Varshney, Antareepa Thakur Mukherjee FRSA, Richa Jain, and Astha Deo.

This tradition of honouring excellence in literature continued at the ceremony at the House of Lords, where the Vatayan Shikhar Samman and Vatayan Sahitya Samman were conferred across two years. For 2024, the Vatayan Shikhar Samman was awarded to Dr

have yielded landmark international festivals exploring figures and themes as varied as Ghalib, Maulana Azad, Premchand, Deccani culture, Sufi voices, and the inner life of translation. Alongside these festivals, Vatayan has organised thousands of programmes including book launches, seminars, interviews, poetry and story recitals, and theatrical productions, steadily weaving South Asian literary culture into the fabric of British public life, for



The delegates at the House of Lords

organisation that has, for decades, been a steadfast bridge between India and Britain.

When Vatayan's Trustee and host of the event, the Hon. Baroness Prashar CBE, was taken ill, she entrusted her place to The Lord Uday Nagaraju, the youngest Indian-origin Lord in the British Parliament. His presence proved an inspiration, particularly to the younger members of the audience. Equal admiration was extended to Dr Saloni Sahay, First Secretary (Public Diplomacy) at the Indian High Commission in London, whose warmth and grace were widely noted. Divya Mathur welcomed both with flowers and books.

Under the chairmanship of Mira Misra Kaushik OBE and the direction of Dr Padmesh Gupta, the ceremony proceeded with quiet dignity. In a gesture that delighted the room, Lord Nagaraju, though not a Hindi speaker himself, opened proceedings with a welcome address in Hindi on behalf of the British Parliament. Citations were read by Vatayan core members, Shikha

Jawahar Karnavat, and the Vatayan Sahitya Samman to Dr Achla Sharma. For 2025, Ms Surekha Chopra received the Vatayan Shikhar Samman, and Mrs Shail Agarwal the Vatayan Sahitya Samman.

Founded by Divya Mathur FRSA, Vatayan was established with a clear and purposeful vision: to promote Indo-British dialogue by bringing international writers and artists together, to organise social, artistic, cultural and educational activities, and to foster an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Over the years, that vision has translated into an extraordinary breadth of programming.

Vatayan has collaborated with some of the most prestigious literary and cultural institutions in the world. Among them are Jaipur Literature Festival, Keats House, Royal Shakespeare Company, Prabha Khaitan Foundation, Bagri Foundation, Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, The Nehru Centre London, ICCR, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Urdu Majlis, InFocus and Faiz Academy. Together, these partnerships

which Ms Mathur was awarded the Windrush Award of the Arts Council of India.

Since 2025, multi-award winning organisation, Vatayan has published *Vatayanam*, an online magazine that has garnered a wide international readership and appreciation. Vatayan's contribution to literature extends into print. Sponsored by Arts Council England, the organisation has published two anthologies of poetry by UK-based poets, a welcome acknowledgement of the linguistic diversity within the South Asian diaspora. It has also released an album of songs written by UK-based Indian poets, composed and performed by Radhika Chopra. In 2015, with support from Arts for All, Vatayan published two further anthologies: *Desi Girls: Stories by Indian Women Writers Abroad* and *Native Scents: Poems by the Indian Poets of Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu* both of which gave voice to the rich, layered experience of the South Asian diaspora in Britain.

Among Vatayan's most beloved traditions are its poetry picnics, intimate literary gatherings held at sites of historical and cultural resonance. Past picnics have taken place at Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, the Roman ruins of Verulamium in St Albans, and the poet John Keats' home on Hampstead Heath. These occasions have brought together an exceptional range of voices, including former UK Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, Dr Ruth Padel, India Russell, Mevlut Ceylan, Yogesh Patel MBE, and numerous poets of regional Indian languages.

Vatayan instituted its annual Poetry Award in 2004, a distinction that invites an Indian author to spend a week in the United Kingdom, engaging with British-based thinkers, scholars, and the wider literary community. The roll call of Vatayan Poetry Award winners reads as

a who's who of contemporary Hindi and Urdu literature: Nida Fazli, Javed Akhtar, Prasoon Joshi, Manoj Muntashir, Rajesh Reddy, Kunwar Bechain, Laxmishankar Bajpai, Dr Kamal Kishor Goyanka, Geet Chaturvedi, Yatindra Mishra, Prof. Rekha Sethi, Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler, Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Manisha Kulshreshtha, Alka Sinha, and many more. Each visit has enriched the dialogue between India and Britain in ways that extend well beyond a single evening or event.

The ceremony on the 29th also saw the launch of *Pravasi Sahityakar: Divya Mathur*, a new scholarly work by Dr Aruna Ajitsaria, Professor at the University of Cambridge. Dr Jawahar Karnavat also presented a special issue of a collection of stories, *Britain ki Chayanit Rachnayein*, published by Tagore University (AISECT-Bhopal).

Among the distinguished writers, media personalities, and senior guests present were: Nareesh Kaushik (BBC), Parvez Alam (podcaster and Director, Cine Ink UK), Dr Vijay Anand (*Confluence* magazine), Dr Gyan Sharma (Sangam organisation), artist Nand Ajitsaria, UK Hindi Samiti members Shashi Walia and Surbhi Wadgama, Mrs Lata Karnavat, Dr Narendra Agarwal, Dr Sanjeet Agarwal, Shruti Ajitsaria, and many others. Two new young members, Neil Mathur and Avya Srivastava, joined the Vatayan fold, a quietly significant moment for the organisation's future.

The evening closed with a gracious address by Mira Misra Kaushik OBE. The absence of MP Mr Virendra Sharma, called away to India due to a family bereavement, was felt and noted with sympathy.

Own Sky-Path

**All night the snow falls softly down
All day the robin open and closes her eyes.**

**Even the chirping from the cold leaves
cannot brighten the insensible light.**

**Then she flies up out of the leaves
chilled with white feathers and still singing.**

**I walk carefully up the tiny hillock
there she is there in apparent sleepy loops.**

**Evening gloom and another day of blank
pages
and the bird is weary of looking at me.**

**She will be in search of sprays of seeds but
where to get in this snow-white evening.**

**A long quiet time and then she flies with her
shadow as though she dances in her own sky
path.**

@gopallahiri



Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, critic, editor, writer and translator with 33 books published, including eight solo/jointly edited books. His poetry and prose are published across more than one hundred journals and anthologies globally. His poems are translated in 18 languages and published in 16 countries. He has been nominated for Pushcart Prize for poetry in 2021. He has been conferred First Jayanta Mahapatra National Award on literature in 2024 for his significant contribution in Indian English Writing. Recent Credits: The Madrid Review, Shot Glass Journal, Masticadoreusa, Verse-Virtual Journal, Ink, Sweat & Tears, International Times, Dissident Voice, The Piker Press, Confluence, Literary Revelations, The Wise Owl Journal and elsewhere.

South Asian Festival of Art and Literature (SAFAL) 2026

By Sharon Rundle

The 9th SAFAL Fest at Pioneer Theatre, Castle Hill, on 3 May, supported with grant funding by The Hills Shire Council, got off to a splendid start with the Literature events from 11am to 4.15pm. President, Founder, and Curator Ash Gholkar, Secretary, co-founder and festival chairperson Kedar Pagaddinnimath, and Saliya Tennekoon organised enlightening discussions by some of Australia's best and emerging Indian subcontinent diaspora authors from Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Presentations were in English but narrations were in many sub-continental community languages, keeping the ancient languages alive in Australia. The annual SAFAL Fest is a platform for those having heritage and interest in South Asia, to present, and participate in showcasing talent and content.

The 2026 program included 'Creating Writing' by Nim Gholkar of the Nim Institute a motivational speaker and author. Panel discussions included 'Facts to Fiction' The Art of Writing with moderator Nim Gholkar asking pertinent questions of the panellists Shweta Shirma author, co-founder of Safety Pin, lawyer and mental health advocate; Sarah Malik Walkley Award-winning journalist, author of *Desi Girl* and *Safar*, editor and podcast host who teaches creative writing; and Yasasi Malmeewala from Sri Lanka who works full time as a technical officer in microbiology, Yasasi won the 2024 SAFAL Poetry Slam and has just published her debut collection of poetry and prose *Coming of Age*. The audience learned a great deal about the process of writing from this panel of excellent speakers.

Rekha Rajvanshi curated 'Multilingual Australia Poetry for Cultural Enrichment'. Panellists Shisherendu Jha, Girjeet Kaur, Ingita Thakkar, Leela Tewani, Shatadip Som, Arifur Rahman, Adil Suddique and Indranil Halder, recited their brilliant poetry in ways that resonated, moved, inspired, and affected the audience listening to them. "I feel truly honoured to be part of such a beautiful event. My heartfelt gratitude and love to everyone for inviting me," said Bangladeshi writer Arifur Rahman, who has published ten novels which have gained strong popularity among readers. His love and



Anandamath the concept of Vande Mataram; followed by Bengali poetry

Michael Madhusudan Datta and Rabindranath Tagore who became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature for *Gitanjali*. Others such as Kazi Nazrul Islam (National Poet of Bangladesh), Jibanananda Das, Sharatchandra Chattopadhyaya, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, Buddhadeva Bose and Mahaseta Devi. We discussed the golden period of Bengali literature with host Ash Gholkar who shared his love for Bengali literature while Md Istiaque Alam from Bangladesh highlighted several authors from his country who have contributed to the Bengali literature too. For me, the Bengali novel *Chowranjee* by Sankar and poem by Amalkanti by Nirendranath Chakraborty are impressive," Indranil Halder said.

The 'Anthologies' panel discussion gave great insight into compiling, editing, and publishing story and poetry collections. Panellists Susanne Gervay OAM author of several novels, short stories and picture books who was awarded the Social Justice Literature Award by International Literacy Association and other significant awards (far left); Rekha Rajvanshi Hindi bilingual poet, translator, author of more than a dozen books, president and founder of the Indian Association for

attachment to Bangla literature are profound and lifelong, shaping both his voice and vision as a storyteller.

The 'Golden Era of Bengali Literature' panel featured speakers Md Istiaque Alam, Indranil Bengal Halder, and moderator Ash Gholkar. The panel spoke about authors such as "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who wrote

Literature and Art in Australia (ILASA) (left); Sharon Rundle author of many short stories and essays, IPed editor of five South Asian-Australian anthologies (right); and Anu Shivaram bi-lingual author, editor and translator (far right) all provided in-depth answers to wide-ranging questions from moderator Sukruti Narayanan Author, Journalist, Global Award-Winning Technologist,

Head of All-women Lunar Space Mission (centre). The comprehensive discussion included topics such as liaising with authors, publishers, copyright, selecting stories and poems, translating from and into other languages and even the use of artificial intelligence in literature and writing.

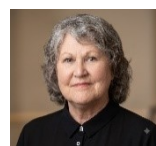
"Safal Festival is a unique platform showcasing diverse South Asian culture, art, languages, and literature. The SAFAL Festival brings diversity and inclusion by organising hands-on workshops; literature and book fair; short film screenings; a bazaar; trade stalls and cultural displays. As well as literary panels and discussions,

interactive sessions included creative writing, craft making, painting, doll-making, Japanese stitching Sashiko, and patchwork; and a live song and dance concert in the evening," Susanne Gervay said.

The 2026 program concluded with 'Melodies and Borders', an evening of music, singing, and dancing.

The SAFAL Fest has become a highlight on the events calendar bridging cultures, languages, literature and bringing Australians and South Asians together to celebrate the arts.

Dr Sharon Rundle is Chair of the University of Technology Sydney



Writers Alumni, and has an Alumni award for Excellence. She taught the Bachelor of Education in Adult Education degree at

UTS. She served on the Board of Directors of the NSW Writers' Centre. She co-edited five anthologies of stories from Australia and South Asia. Her work appears in books, anthologies, journals, magazines, and on radio. She was an Australia India Business and Community Impact Awards finalist. She is a Commonwealth short story prize winner. <https://sharonrundle.com.au>

Two poems

by Ananya S Guha

Music And Solitude	Raiment Of Rain
Rains spill from oceans Or slightly demonic forms Lay waste to hills And macabre ironies Rains prefer to be autonomous And somewhere in the hills of Sohra, the rain's transitions Lie silent among mountainous Terrains Rains play truant washing skin And bones And all the while these hills Live in stupor, cast ghostly Apparitions among people Who love them and touch The hills in their promontory Oh these hills they stay, live With you, hasten change Interplay of music and solitude...	Importunate hills Blocking the rain's Move to disruption Rains When schisms are shallow And the hard dry earth Swallows insects in Cracks of mud, soil Or leftovers of the wet earth Solitude is A song, Skies are murky and stones Pave way for dying Rains, you leave me in stupor You hide among cracks of these Hills, you disappear when we Simply dream (of you) You can never tell the fireflies Chanting death strains of a long time Narrating stories Of, when you first came to these ancient hills Or those of the rains, For a hill town whose ancient rites Meander into The raiment of rain
Ananya S Guha lives in Shillong in North East India. He has been writing and publishing poetry for over forty years.	

Anindita Bose's When the Storm Comes in Life Reading the Soul: A Reflection on Anindita Bose's Journey Towards Healing

Some books are meant to be read, while others are meant to be experienced. There are books that inform the intellect, books that entertain the imagination, and then there are those rare works that quietly enter the inner chambers of the heart, inviting us to pause, reflect, and rediscover ourselves. Anindita Bose's book belongs unmistakably to this last category. It is less a manual on healing than a companion for the journey inward, written with tenderness, humility, and the quiet authority that comes only from lived experience.

Anindita Bose is not simply an author; she is a healer, a spiritual practitioner, a poet, a translator, and an attentive observer of the human condition. Each of these identities finds expression in her writing, but none overshadows the others. Instead, they converge into a voice that is compassionate without becoming sentimental, wise without becoming didactic, and spiritual without distancing itself from the realities of everyday life. One has the distinct impression that Bose writes not from theory alone but from years of listening—to stories, to silence, to suffering, and to the resilient spirit that quietly survives beneath life's many burdens.

The central invitation of the book is deceptively simple: to look beyond appearances. We often know people through the roles they inhabit—parent, colleague, spouse, stranger, friend—or through the labels society assigns them. Bose gently dismantles these superficial identities and encourages readers to encounter themselves and others as human beings carrying invisible histories. Every individual bears memories, fears, disappointments, hopes, and wounds that remain hidden beneath ordinary conversation. This recognition becomes the foundation of compassion. The moment we begin to see another person not merely as a personality but as a soul navigating unseen struggles,

our judgments soften and our empathy deepens.

The architecture of the book itself reflects this inward journey. The chapter titles are not merely descriptive but deeply evocative: The Architecture of Struggle, Mind Crisis: Fight, Flight, Freeze, and Fawn, The Invisible Scars, When It Feels Like Too Much, Reframing the Narrative, The Power of Meaning, Daily Practices to Strengthen the Self, Healing Through Connection, and finally, Becoming Your Own Anchor. Even before one enters these chapters, they reveal a carefully considered progression. The movement is from recognising pain to understanding it, from understanding

courage, reflection, and self-compassion. Bose respects this complexity. She neither romanticises suffering nor promises instant solutions. Rather, she acknowledges that recovery is an ongoing practice—one that requires patience with oneself as much as determination.

The philosophical heart of the book resonates strongly with the Buddhist understanding of *dukkha*, the recognition that suffering is an inevitable dimension of human existence. Yet Bose's interpretation remains inclusive rather than doctrinal. Her purpose is not to persuade readers towards a particular spiritual tradition but to illuminate a universal truth: pain is not an interruption of life; it is part of life itself. What determines our growth is not whether suffering visits us, but how we respond when it does.

Importantly, this acknowledgement never descends into pessimism. Bose refuses to allow suffering the final word. Running quietly throughout the book is a current of hope—not the naïve optimism that denies reality, but a deeper confidence that healing remains possible even after profound loss. Her optimism resembles the first light of dawn rather than the blazing certainty of midday. It arrives gently, almost imperceptibly, illuminating rather than overwhelming.

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its integration of contemporary psychology with ancient spiritual wisdom. Modern readers often experience these traditions as opposing worldviews: psychology concerns itself with the mind, while spirituality addresses the soul. Bose demonstrates that the two need not exist in opposition. Concepts such as trauma responses, emotional regulation, mindfulness, resilience, and self-awareness are woven naturally alongside reflections on compassion, forgiveness, acceptance, and inner



to acceptance, from acceptance to transformation, and finally from dependence upon external validation to discovering an inner source of stability.

This structural movement mirrors the psychological and spiritual process of healing itself. Healing is rarely linear. It does not proceed through dramatic revelations or miraculous breakthroughs. Instead, it unfolds slowly, often through repeated acts of

peace. The dialogue between psychology and spirituality feels organic rather than forced. Each enriches the other.

The discussion of trauma deserves particular appreciation. Increasingly, public conversations acknowledge that many emotional reactions originate not in personal weakness but in experiences that overwhelm the nervous system. Bose approaches this subject with notable sensitivity. She explains difficult psychological concepts without technical jargon, making them accessible to readers who may have little formal background in mental health. At the same time, she never reduces people to diagnostic categories. The individual remains larger than the wound.

Equally significant is the author's emphasis upon narrative. Human beings are storytelling creatures. We constantly interpret our experiences, often without realising it. The stories we tell ourselves about failure, rejection, abandonment, or success gradually shape our identities. Bose invites readers to revisit these narratives with gentleness rather than accusation. Reframing the narrative does not mean denying painful events; it means recognising that we possess the freedom to interpret them differently. A scar need not remain evidence only of injury. It may also testify to survival.

The practical dimensions of the book are equally valuable. Reflection alone cannot transform life unless accompanied by daily practice. Bose recognises this. Her discussions of grounding, mindfulness, emotional awareness, journaling, gratitude, and meaningful relationships encourage readers to cultivate habits that strengthen psychological resilience. Importantly, these practices are presented not as rigid prescriptions but as gentle invitations. Readers remain free to adapt them according to their own circumstances and beliefs.

The chapter on healing through connection is particularly timely. Contemporary society often celebrates independence while quietly neglecting our profound need for belonging. Bose

reminds us that healing rarely occurs in isolation. Relationships founded upon empathy, trust, and genuine listening become spaces where fractured identities begin to mend. Yet she balances this insight with an equally important truth: while others may accompany us, no one can undertake the journey on our behalf.

This naturally leads to the book's culminating insight: becoming one's own anchor. The metaphor is beautifully chosen. An anchor does not eliminate storms; it provides stability within them. Likewise, emotional resilience does not guarantee a life free from uncertainty, grief, disappointment, or fear. Rather, it enables individuals to remain rooted amidst inevitable change. Bose's vision of self-reliance is therefore neither individualistic nor isolating. It is grounded in self-awareness, self-compassion, and inner steadiness.

Perhaps the most memorable gesture in the entire work lies beyond its final chapter. Bose leaves several pages intentionally blank. At first glance, these empty pages may seem merely decorative. Gradually, however, their symbolic significance becomes apparent. They acknowledge that no book can complete another person's healing journey. The reader must become a co-author. Reflection cannot remain confined within printed pages; it must continue through lived experience.

This decision transforms the relationship between author and reader. Rather than presenting herself as the unquestioned authority, Bose steps aside and creates space for the reader's own voice. It is an act of humility and trust. The blank pages become an invitation—to write, to remember, to grieve, to forgive, to question, and perhaps most importantly, to begin again.

The book's greatest achievement lies precisely here. It refuses easy certainties. It neither promises permanent happiness nor suggests that healing is a destination from which one never departs. Instead, it presents healing as a lifelong conversation with oneself—a practice of returning, again

and again, to compassion, awareness, and hope.

In a world saturated with noise, distraction, and quick solutions, Anindita Bose offers something increasingly rare: stillness. Her book does not demand admiration; it invites participation. It asks readers not simply to acquire knowledge but to cultivate presence. It reminds us that beneath our accomplishments and failures, beneath our identities and histories, there remains an essential humanity worthy of care.

Ultimately, this is a book about courage—not the spectacular courage celebrated in public life, but the quieter courage of facing one's own inner landscape with honesty and tenderness. It is about learning to sit with pain without surrendering to it, extending compassion to oneself without self-indulgence, and discovering that healing is not the absence of wounds but the capacity to carry them with wisdom.

Some books end when we turn the final page. This one begins there. It continues in the conversations we initiate, the relationships we nurture, the stories we rewrite, and the silences we finally learn to hear. Anindita Bose has written a book that gently accompanies its readers towards themselves. That is perhaps the highest achievement any work of healing literature can aspire to.

Dr. Purnima, Assistant Professor of English in Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Kamachha, Varanasi, India is an author of three books: *In Search of (Me)aning: A Collection of Poems* ISBN: (978-1948-390668) published by Pen It! Publications, USA (2018) and has co-authored two books titled *Mirari: A Collection of Poems* ISBN (978-93-87230-59-0) published by Pigeon Books India, New Delhi (2019) and *Dararon ki Roshani*, a collection of poems.

Book Review

Vijay Anand's 'From Curry to Crumpets'

Adventures from the lifetime of a mild-mannered Brit Indian

A review by Anuj Kapoor

The author of the memoir "From Curry to Crumpets" Mr. Vijay Anand, who happens to be my uncle, has long been seen as the family's intrepid pioneer abroad—someone who moved to the United Kingdom in the 1960's and whose life has always seemed wrapped in exotic stories, humour, and a certain unmistakable ability to turn a phrase. Even today, in his neighbourhood of Chislehurst, he remains something of a familiar fixture, often spotted driving around in his cheerful yellow Volkswagen Beetle, a car that feels perfectly in keeping with the man himself.

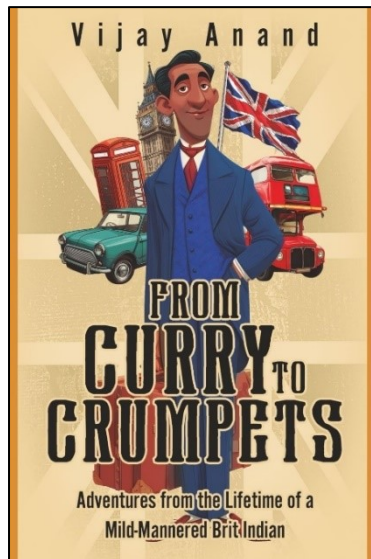
On a wintry evening in the early 2000s, I first met him near the London School of Economics where I had come to pursue my master's degree, when he greeted me near the Old Curiosity Shop with a warm coat in hand against the London cold. Over tea and a ham-and-cheese sandwich on the Strand, we had the first of what were to be several lively conversations about life in England. Over the years that have followed, the home he shares with my aunt in Chislehurst became something of a sanctuary—an escape from the demands of student life and later work life, where one can count on warmth, generous food, spirited banter, and, invariably, fascinating conversation.

It was through these years that I came to appreciate not only his deep affection for Britain but also the extraordinary breadth of his experiences and associations with London—a city he has come to know intimately over six decades. So when he asked me to help shepherd the manuscript of his memoir towards publication, it was both an enormous privilege and a pleasure. Watching his remarkable gifts as a storyteller and wordsmith take shape in print has only deepened my admiration for a life richly lived and keenly observed.

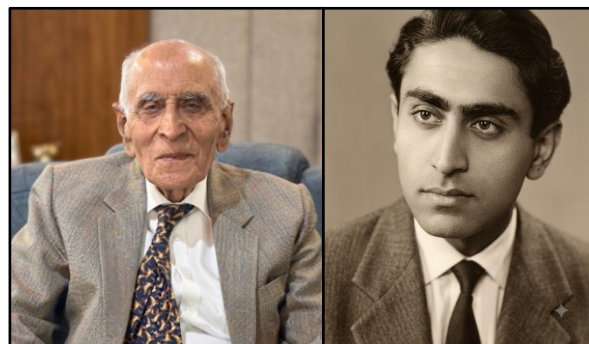
This personal connection acknowledged, *From Curry to Crumpets* deserves to be judged on its own

considerable merits—and happily, it rewards the reader abundantly.

At one level, the memoir **chronicles the experiences of a young Indian man arriving in Britain in the early 1960s**



with modest means, uncertain prospects, and little by way of institutional guidance. Yet to describe it simply as an immigrant memoir would undersell its breadth. **It is equally a**



social history of post-war Britain, a portrait of London through immense cultural change, and an affectionate meditation on belonging, memory, humour, and resilience.

The title itself neatly captures the spirit of the journey: **a life lived between worlds, where curry and crumpets coexist not merely on the plate but in identity itself.**

What makes the memoir especially engaging is Anand's singular voice. He

writes with an old-world charm that is by turns **observant, philosophical, mischievous, and deeply humane.** Everyday details—boarding buses, seeking accommodation, surviving harsh winters, navigating workplaces, encountering strangers—become unexpectedly **vivid through his eye for detail and gift for anecdote.**

His recollections of arriving in Britain, for example, are particularly evocative. Readers encounter not grand historical moments but the realities of immigrant life: modest rented rooms, awkward job interviews, moments of loneliness, cultural misunderstandings, and occasional prejudice. Yet what distinguishes these passages is their refusal to lapse into bitterness. Instead, Anand writes with curiosity, humour, and no small degree of self-awareness. The memoir's sections on Germany, where he briefly sought professional opportunities, are among some of its most entertaining. Here, Anand's observations of food, language, customs, weather, and social manners reveal his comic instincts at full stretch. His descriptions are often **delightfully eccentric**, but always **grounded in genuine wonder** at unfamiliar worlds.

London itself emerges almost as a character in the book. Anand writes lovingly of a city in transformation: **post-Empire Britain**, shifting neighbourhoods, changing demographics, fading social codes, and the quiet dignity of ordinary people encountered along the way. For readers interested in London's social history, *From Curry to Crumpets* offers something unexpectedly valuable—**not history from above, but history lived at street level.**

Particularly moving is **Anand's appreciation of kindness.** Across the memoir, strangers appear unexpectedly at moments of vulnerability: a helpful landlord, a generous colleague, a sympathetic official, a hospitable family

encountered abroad. Running through the narrative is a **quiet recognition that lives are often shaped by fleeting acts of decency.**

The book is not without its idiosyncrasies. Readers accustomed to tightly edited contemporary memoirs may occasionally find the narrative wandering, with digressions and philosophical reflections interrupting the forward momentum. Anand often follows memory where it leads him, moving from anecdote to observation to reflection with conversational freedom. Yet, oddly enough, this becomes **part of the memoir's appeal.** **Reading *From Curry to Crumpets* feels less like consuming a polished**

autobiography and more like sitting across from a gifted raconteur over tea, listening to stories unfold in their own rhythm.

What finally emerges is more than the story of one individual. It is, in many respects, the story of a generation—of immigrants who arrived in Britain armed more with optimism than certainty, navigating unfamiliar systems while quietly helping shape the multicultural country Britain would become.

For those who already know Vijay Anand, much of the memoir will feel instantly recognisable: the wit, the curiosity, the unabashed love of language and observation. For those encountering him for the first time,

From Curry to Crumpets offers something increasingly rare—a warm, intelligent, deeply human account of life lived across continents, cultures, and eras told with a unique sense of humour towards life and the many experience and human connections it provides.

Readers opening this memoir are in for a genuine treat.



Anuj Kapoor is an entrepreneur and writer focused on innovation and social change, and holds an MSc from the London School of Economics.

Two poems by Deepa Vanjani

That Song

The song you sang the other day
When you called me your's
When night lights bathed in the trembling waves
When the soft breeze ruffled your hair
When your eyes were drowsy with dreams
That song-
Travelled across time and space
Into several worlds
Poured back as raindrops
On a quiet autumn afternoon
Dropping from the window eaves
Into the earth's bosom.



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.

That Meeting

The evening we met at the cafe round the street corner
the yellow lights glowed
showing the soft contours of your face,
you wore a white satin frock
your hair, the colour of honey
you talked of so many things
i could not hear any of it
i could only see lit up eyes- glow worms.

Louis Armstrong's voice filled the air
we danced, a slow dance of love
it had started to rain a
we walked hand in hand in the rain
we did not speak
the silence between us was embalming
the pitter-patter of raindrops
the lights falling on water puddles
you and i, just us-
it could not have been better.

Corridor Talk or Couch Talk? Knowing the Space Your Story Deserves

By Rashmi Sahi

Imagine this: You and your friend are walking casually side by side chatting about basically nothing. The conversation is light, and unencumbered, just like the day around you. In the crevices of this light-hearted conversation your friend drops a sentence, something that in retrospect it feels heavy, but in that moment, engulfed in the mundanity of life, it was an extension of the laugh.

The conversation continues for some time and then you both go your own way. The parting is pleasant, nothing out of ordinary. After a day or two, you get a message from your friend. They had felt that you had ridiculed what they had shared and that you had not given it due sensitivity and weight as it deserved. Now you sit there in disbelief, replaying the conversation multiple times, to check where did you miss the in-road to the heart to heart. Where did you overlook the sign?

You sit there and wonder. Then you realise it is not who is right and who is wrong in this situation. Both are right: You were joshing but when your friend shared something serious you should have paused and turned the conversation into a serious direction. They should have read the room and shouldn't have shared the sensitive bit when the space to hold it was mishmashed with frivolousness. I was doing what I call: a corridor talk whereas my friend was getting into a couch talk. There is a time and there is a place for both of this, might not be side by side.

What I call a Corridor talk is a talk which can be done quickly, without any layers, while passing each other in the corridor. These talks are easy to the brain, don't need much cognitive space or input and don't always require a deep conversation. They are easy on the brain, and topic. That is why they can be done anywhere and everywhere. Metaphorically, they don't need a lot of space to hold it. So, my friend and I were indulging in Corridor talk initially, laughing and chatting without any expectation of any outcome or direction. It could have taken the direction of the wind blowing, for all we cared.

So where did the conflict begin?



My friend suddenly started with the Couch talk without dropping any hint of the sensitivity and the space it would have needed. Couch talks are that. They need a proper ceremony of sensitivity: The ritual to bring yourself physically, mentally and emotionally to the space between you and the other person. These conversations are layered, most of the time need some backstories or at least some hooks to tether them to their history of origins. They need the recreation of a safe space to contain the emotional burden that the speaker has decided to put down for a moment in their journey of life. It needs to be bound by delicate threads of trust that are so

necessary for these conversations to even happen. Do it without thinking on the notion of trust and you might find your sharing in a corridor conversation free flowing filled in a cheap roadside cup rather than in a delicate Bone-China container that it deserves.

Alternatively, if we insist Corridor Talk to be given the same space and sensitivity like Couch Talk, it will feel like a farcical. The spool would not have enough length and depth to unravel. It would feel like a stretch of the topic, flimsy.

The question is not should we share or not share our stories. That has already been sorted by Maya Angelou when she said 'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.' We don't want to agonise ourselves. Human beings live in stories, they survive in

stories, they narrate their life in stories. The problem is not the stories. They need to be shared with someone somewhere.

The question to ask is when and where? To decide the worth and salt of our story and choose the correct spaces. To give due respect to our stories and choose a corridor or couch depending on the space it deserves.



Dr Rashmi Sahi is a Hong Kong based academician and a Mental Health counsellor.

Book Review

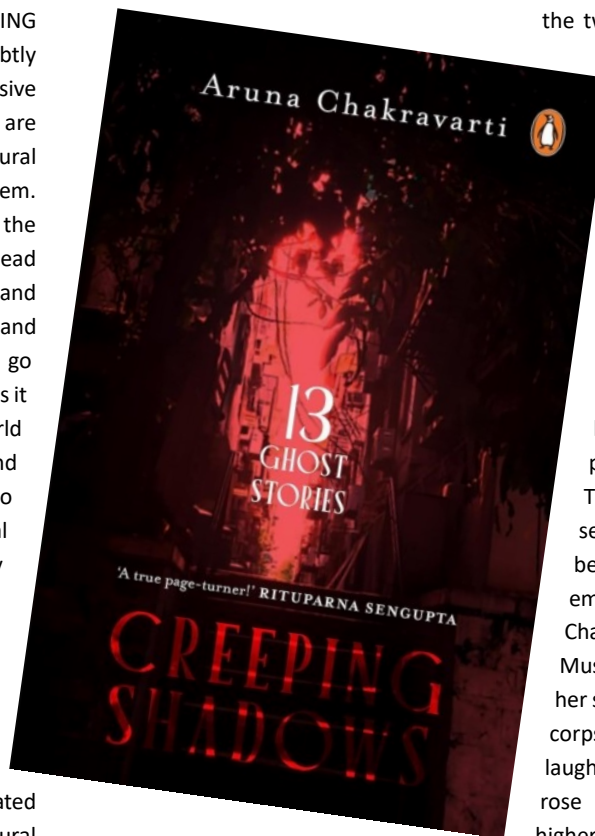
Aruna Chakravarti's CREEPING SHADOWS: 13 GHOST STORIES

by Taisha Abraham

Aruna Chakravarti has contributed immensely to Indian writings in English both through her creative writings and works in translation. She is the recipient of several prestigious awards including Sahitya Akademi Award and Surat Puraskar. Her latest collection of short stories, set in Bengal CREEPING SHADOWS: 13 GHOST STORIES, subtly pushes the readers to an immersive experience in which their senses are heightened to witness unnatural happenings without questioning them. These stories are not frightening in the traditional sense of ghost stories instead the author gives us subtle hints and makes unusual remarks and observations in the narration that go beyond the realistic realm. She makes it conceivable to envision a world outside the one in which we live and she does it seamlessly. Her ability to weave psychological and emotional dimensions to these stories by exploring the fragile guilt-ridden mind of her characters provides them with great depth. Creeping shadows in the title could also refer to the past and its feelings of loss and longing. The number 13 in the title is significant because it is associated in several religious and cultural traditions with bad luck.

In this collection, Chakravarti covers unequal distances of historical periods, cultures, race and class in a society that is undergoing transition and change and it is in the interstices of these categories that her compelling stories emerge. Her stories are set in different locales: China, Calcutta, Delhi and Bangladesh. "The Road to Karimganj" talks about the mother and son duo who want to go to Bangladesh to relive their past but is

spooked by a ghost that prevents their trip. "They Come Out After Dark" deals with the 1947 partition violence and "There Are More Things in Heaven and Earth" along with "The Motorcycle Rider" deal with violence in Delhi and the ghosts that emerge.



The first story in the collection, "The Caregivers of Gazipur" sets the tone for the others. It has a sepulchral quality about it like in several other stories in the collection in which words like grave and vault are strewn. This story depicts a normal day but slowly unfolds into a disturbing narrative. Early in the story we are given subtle hints by the author about the strangeness of the couple (Hindu priest Radharaman and his wife Molina Devi) with whom Subal, a physically tired and mentally

exhausted character stays. About Radharaman Subal says, "There was something about him; the way he looked, the way he spoke, puzzled Subal. He seemed to belong to another age, another time..." (11). He also talks about a light burning on each of the grave and the two figures who sat under the tree. They were "speaking in

an alien language." (13) Later he comes to know that both Radharaman and Molina Devi had died fifty years ago in mysterious circumstances. We also come to know that it was their son, Bolu who informed the villagers that his father had converted to Islam and betrayed the villagers by polluting their "Narayan Shila." This is the only story where we see the underlying hatred between Hindus and Muslims emerging under colonial rule. Chakravarti usually portrays Muslim figures with empathy in her stories. The story ends with the corpses of the couple bursting into laughter "spine-chilling hoots which rose to a crescendo, higher and higher till the walls of the mouldering mansion shuddered with the impact" (24).

This same tomblike quality is seen in other stories too. In "One Winter Night" a group of elderly men wrapped in overcoats sat in a room with poor lighting on a cold winter night. The room with its "vast expanse of stone floor and high ceiling turned it into an eerie space resembling a tomb" (75). When the kind doctor Dibanath who is among the group is asked to go for a house visit by

a poor man from Achhyut Palli to attend to his sick wife, his hut is described by the author as a "vault of impenetrable darkness." Chakravarti's sensitivity as a social critic is seen in her description of Aschhyut Pali where the lowest of the caste and the poorest of the poor lived. We later discover that the couple were both dead a week before. In "Possessed" set in nineteenth century Calcutta, Teenkari who had astonishing skills in music and dance despite the fact that she was raised in one of the most notorious brothel, Sonagacchi, is chosen to play the role of Lady Macbeth by the founder of the Bengal National Theatre, Girish Ghosh. The author's fictional recreation of the notorious brothel in Calcutta, Sonagacchi, is etched in the reader's memory. Strangely, Sarah Siddons the famous eighteenth-century actress who was famous for her performance as Lady Macbeth in England seem to mentor her through the rehearsals. On stage during her performance Teenkari spoke her lines "not her usual voice they heard. It had turned powerful and sonorous with undertones and nuances so chilling that goose bumps broke out on the arms of her audience"(273). As the play progresses Teenkari transforms within a column of white smoke that acquired the shape of a tall "Blue-eyed woman" with broad shoulders--perhaps Siddons herself—and slowly glides past the door. The collection has a looplike structure symbolized best in the story "Twenty-Nine years, Seven Months and Eleven days." In this story a figure comes "hurtling towards the fire as though on flying feet" to claim Shona Bou for which he has waited twenty-nine years, seven months and eleven days."

Chakravarti is an amazing storyteller who can embrace vast expanses of historical periods and cultures with ease. "The House of Flowers" talks about events that took place one hundred and fifty years ago in faraway China. Snow Lily who died of typhus fever was embalmed and kept in a coffin in her room waiting for an auspicious day for burial. Strange things happen in her room to Zihan who spends a night there. Not only does he feel a "reed-slim" body of a woman beside him which slowly bloats into a colossal size but he notices Snow Lily's coffin is open and empty too. Horror stories like "The Necklace" and "Vendetta" unsettle the readers in more ways than one. "The Necklace" deals with the Anglo-Indian community in Calcutta. The horror of the beautiful snake necklace given to Gwendolin by Jaiwant from whom she was parting ways metamorphizing into a long and thick snake with several coils around her neck lingers in the mind of the readers with dread. In "Vendetta" nature takes its revenge on humans who abuse them. Chakravarti's dexterity as an author lies in her balancing of horror within the broader framework of the ordinary. This enables her to contain the extraordinary without pushing the reader into a deep abyss and pulverizing them. "Grandmother's Bundle" is an excellent example where the author uses Bengali superstitions to talk about various kinds of ghosts. She even gives the various spirits religion and caste. Mamdo bhoot was once a Muslim male. Women usually become petnis and shanchunnis. Like the grandmother, the author too humanizes everything. The only story that borders on a typical ghost story with

all its ugly twists is "Truth is Stranger Than Fiction." She starts the story by calling it true and authentic. It is set in the eighteenth century when Hansdwani migrated from West Punjab and eventually reached Bengal in search of new opportunities. In the huge mansion that he has built and in which several generations have been living strange things happen and eerie voices lead some of the inhabitants to commit suicide. Unlike the other stories this one leaves a bitter taste in the readers. Interestingly, Chakravarti's fictitious rendering of events in the other stories are far more powerful than the factual narration.

Undoubtedly, Aruna Chakravarti is an extremely gifted writer, one of the best we have in Indian writers of English. Her easy prose style, her repertoire of historical knowledge and her ability to go beyond the annals of documented history is unparalleled.

TAISHA ABRAHAM is Associate Professor, Department of English, Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi. She has published, among others, Education for Sustainable Development; Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman; Introducing Postcolonial Theories; Women and the Politics of Violence; and Feminist Theory and Modern Drama. Dr. Taisha Abraham has been the general editor of Shakti Series that deals with global issues and women in South Asia.



Home Across the Horizon

A Report by Sharon Rundle

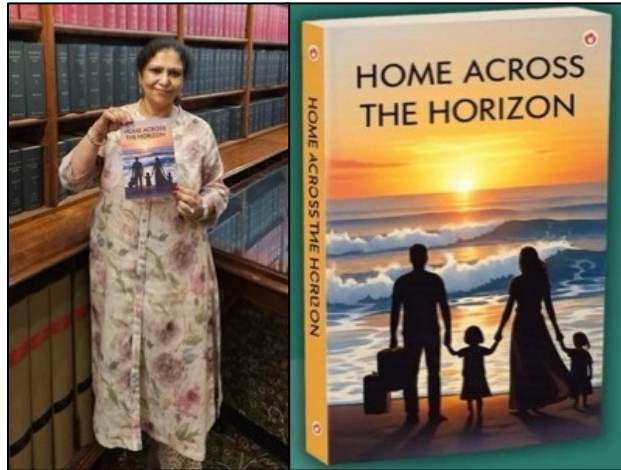
Thirty-two authors contributed stories to *Home Across the Horizon*, edited by Anu Shivaram (pictured), Roanna Gonsalves wrote the incisive foreword A *Note About the Stories*.

Each compelling story in the anthology depicts an aspect of crossing a horizon, from migration to another country and culture to contemplating what may confront us when life ends. The stories together give a rare insight into what it means to come to Australia from the Indian subcontinent and how people encounter and resolve difficulties as they adjust to what is often a significantly different life here. The

women between seventeen and seventy-nine years of age, with equal enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment representing every state in Australia.

The Indian Literary & Art Society of Australia (ILASA) presented and launched *Home Across the Horizon* at the Parramatta Art and Cultural Exchange. Neeru Saluja smoothly and expertly MC'd the program. An atmosphere of excitement and achievement reigned as the authors and guests met, mingled, and celebrated.

Distinguished guests Counsellors Sameer Pandey, Sreeni Pillamarie, and Raj Datta officially launched *Home Across the Horizon*, pictured here with Rekha Rajvanshi founder and leader of ILASA, with a lamp lighting ceremony at the beginning of the book launch.



This book is dedicated to the memory of late Ms Neena Bhadwar, Editor of *The Indian Down Under* and a pioneering



striking cover image invokes the emotions experienced by people embarking on the transition to a new horizon.

journalist and community builder," Anu Shivaram said.



ILASA presented Anita Barar with the Lifetime Achievement Award for her remarkable contribution to films, literature, and the arts.

The anthology "brought writers from sixteen different mother tongues together, men and



Print and broadcast Media were present at the occasion and later Authors spoke



about their stories in *Home Across the Horizon* on Sydney Kannada Vani radio: what inspired them, what motivated them to write, how they enjoy the creative process. SBS also featured the anthology on a Tamil podcast.

NSW Parliament House gave a reception for *Home Across the Horizon* and authors on 18 March, in the Jubilee Room, where Ms Julia Fynn, MP acknowledged the relevance of the stories in the anthology to the delight of all who contributed to this significant collection. Contributing author Indranil Halder said, "Being part of this literary project has been an enriching and humbling experience, one that affirms the power of storytelling to bridge worlds."

"*Home Across the Horizon* invites readers to reflect on a timeless question: Where is home? Perhaps it is not a place, but a horizon that continues to expand with every journey," he said. Indranil's story, *A Jacket Pin*, "weaves a personal thread connecting Australia, India, and France." Indranil is pictured here with SWW former President Gwen Bitti.

ILASA The Indian Literary and Art Society of Australia Inc. founded in June 2010 by Rekha Rajvanshi is a Not-For-Profit organisation promoting Indian Languages, Literature, Art and Culture in Australia, to build bridges between the two countries. Rekha expressed heartfelt thanks to all who came to show their support for the writers, literature,

and ILASA, and gratitude for the community, creativity, and collaboration that made this event so memorable.

Home Across the Horizon is available from Dymocks.

<https://www.dymocks.com.au/home-across-the-horizon-by-ilasa->



[9789371224567](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09789371224567) Amazon, and other bookstores.

Photos courtesy of ILASA, Rekha Rajvanshi, Elaine Rundle, and Indranil Halder. Appreciation also to Sameet and Siddharth for their wonderful photography.

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Book review

A Stage of Fragments Naveen Kishore's *Ode to A Grieving Angel*

Reviewed by Anjana Basu

Naveen Kishore is best known as the founder of Seagull Books and as a theatre practitioner, and both influences are evident in *Ode to a Grieving Angel*. This is a collection that draws as much from the visual language of the stage as from poetry. The poems unfold like scenes from a play, filled with haunting images of grieving angels, wounded wings and shadowy figures moving through dimly lit spaces.

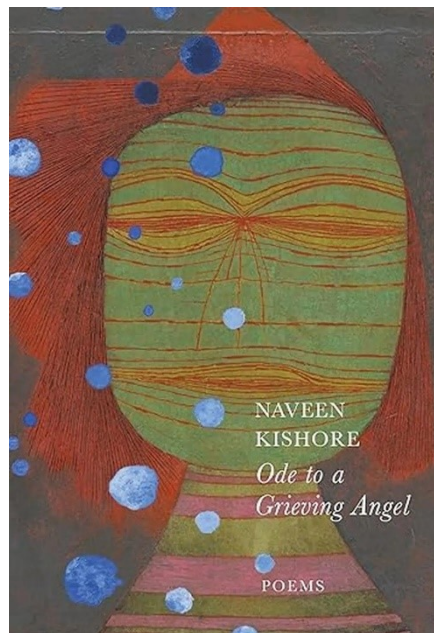
The collection is divided into four parts and is deeply rooted in the world of Shakespeare. References to *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* appear throughout, bringing in themes of grief, guilt, loss and the frailty of human life. At the same time, the poems echo the British Modernists, especially T.S. Eliot, with their broken structure, shifting images and stream-of-consciousness style.

Kishore depends more on mood than on narrative. The poems are built from images and fleeting impressions rather than stories, inviting readers to respond emotionally rather than search for a clear plot. They explore the intimate, often unspoken nature of loss, with recurring figures that seem suspended between light and darkness, trying to give voice to grief that resists expression. There are moments of striking beauty, especially in the recurring image of the grieving angel, which becomes a symbol of suffering, memory and the burden of being human.

At their heart, these poems are about memory, how it survives, how it fades and how it is preserved. Kishore looks at the way the mind rearranges the past, holding on to some moments while letting others disappear so that life remains bearable. The verses blend pain with beauty as shadow-like figures move through bare, dreamlike

landscapes where the imagined and the real merge. The collection becomes an elegy for the work of mourning itself, revealing not only the sorrow of loss but also its strange, enduring beauty.

At times, however, the fragmented style works against the collection. Modernist poetry often leaves room for many interpretations, but it usually has an emotional or structural thread running through it. In *Ode to a Grieving Angel*, the movement from one image



to another can sometimes feel abrupt, making it difficult to find that thread. Some readers will enjoy this openness, while others may find the poems too elusive.

The collection is best read slowly, allowing each poem and image to stand on its own. Read a few at a time, the poems reveal a rich visual imagination and a deep engagement with literature, theatre and philosophy. Read straight through, however, the repeated themes and lack of a stronger narrative shape can make the experience feel uneven.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its language. Kishore writes with a painter's eye, creating vivid images that stay with the reader long after the page has been turned. His references to Shakespeare never feel merely ornamental; instead, they become part of a wider meditation on mortality, loneliness and the search for meaning. At the same time, the influence of Eliot and other modernists is unmistakable, sometimes so strong that Kishore's own voice seems to retreat behind those literary echoes.

Ode to a Grieving Angel is not a conventional collection of poetry, nor does it try to be. It asks readers to accept uncertainty and to value atmosphere over explanation. Those who enjoy experimental poetry and literary references will find much to admire, while readers looking for clarity and a stronger narrative may find it challenging.

Although the collection does not always achieve the emotional depth of the writers who inspire it, it remains an ambitious and visually rich work. Like a piece of experimental theatre, it is less interested in telling a story than in creating an experience—one that is haunting, thoughtful and, at its best, quietly moving.

Anjana Basu works as an advertising consultant in Calcutta. She has had a book of short stories published by Orient Longman, India, the BBC has broadcast one of her short stories and her poems have featured in an anthology brought out by Penguin India.

