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Current Affairs

Chaos and Tragedy At The End of America's Longest War

by Kavita Mohan

"I don't think the Taliban will ever come back to take Afghanistan, no."

- Hamid Karzai

Much of the world watched with disbelief as the Taliban took control of Kabul on August 15, 2021, a mere four months after President Biden announced the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, when viewed in context of the history of America's presence in Afghanistan, the events that have unfolded in recent days have seemed almost inevitable.

It is certainly true that President Biden was forced to make a difficult choice when he announced on April 14, 2021 that it was time to end "America's longest war." However, even if one could argue that the decision to leave was correct, there is no question that the U.S. withdrawal has left chaos and tragedy in its wake, an unfolding and all but certain human rights crisis for Afghan women and girls, and, an ongoing national security concern for the United States.

Brief Timeline of A Long War

America's longest war began with the invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks. Then President Bush had issued an ultimatum to the Taliban, demanding that the Taliban "hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate." When the Taliban rejected his call, he made good on his promise, and by November 2001 had moved over 1,300 troops into the country. By mid-2003, the U.S. announced that major combat was over, and focused its efforts on reconstruction and nation building. However, with the U.S. focused on the war in Iraq, the Taliban began another resurgence. By the time Bush left office in 2009, there were more than 30,000 troops in country.

U.S. military presence reached its height under President Obama, with almost 100,000 troops in Afghanistan by August 2010. However, it was in Pakistan – not Afghanistan – where Osama Bin Laden was found and ultimately killed in May 2011. Obama began bringing troops home, and by the end of his administration, there were just under 10,000 troops left in Afghanistan. There was also an acknowledgement in Washington that the U.S. would not be able to achieve all its objectives of building a Western-style democracy in Afghanistan, and the administration had adopted an "Afghan good enough" policy focused primarily on keeping the Taliban in check.

In February 2020, Trump made a deal with the Taliban, without the involvement of Afghanistan's government. It was this deal that ultimately led to the fall of Kabul and collapse of Afghanistan's government. As a part of the deal, Trump agreed to release 5,000 imprisoned Taliban fighters and stated that the United States would withdraw its troops by May 2021. In exchange, the Taliban would sever ties with the al Qaeda and reduce violence. As part of that deal, Trump also agreed that the U.S. would "refrain from the threat or the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Afghanistan or intervening in its domestic affairs." By the time Trump left the White House, U.S. troops had reduced to 2,500.

A Difficult Choice For Biden And The Fall of Kabul

It is within this historical framework that President Biden announced on April 14, 2021 that, starting May 1, 2021, the United States would withdraw all remaining troops from Afghanistan. However, as the U.S. began to withdraw, the Taliban mobilized and began attacking vulnerable provinces and making territorial gains. In July, the U.S. conducted airstrikes to support Afghan forces but the Taliban continued to advance. Between August 6 and 14, the Taliban rapidly began taking multiple provincial capitals, and as Kandahar and Herat fell, the fall of Kabul began to seem like a foregone conclusion. On August 15, 2021, Taliban forces entered Kabul and President Ghani fled the country.

In an address on August 16, President Biden acknowledged that Afghanistan's collapse "did unfold more quickly than we had anticipated." He explained the difficult choice he had to make following the deal he inherited from the prior administration:

"The choice I had to make as your president was either to follow through on that agreement or be prepared to go back to fighting the Taliban in the middle of the spring fighting season. There would have been no cease-fire after May 1. There was no agreement protecting our forces after May 1. … **(continued on P3)**

Editorially speaking

Dear readers,

Journey continues! Even though there has been several delays in bringing this issue out, I am pleased to release this bumper issue with many interesting features. As in the previous issues, in this issue too we are introducing some talented writers.

Even though the Covid-19 situation has been improving in many parts of the world, thanks to the vaccines, it is still posing a major threat to mankind as its long-term effects are still not fully appreciated. While western countries have vaccinated a large proportion of their population, poorer countries and less developed countries are still lagging in vaccinating their citizens. This imbalance could cause many short term and long term implications, as more and more new variants are being identified among the unvaccinated populations. This is an unfortunate situation, but we hope the richer countries would do more to vaccinate all the people in the world before it will be too late.

Confluence is now in its 19th years of continued publication and despite many hurdles we are continuing our journey. Despite my previous editorial reminders, we continue to experience an imbalance in the type of writings we receive. We would like to encourage our writers to come up with new ideas and write more and more creatively. We are receiving a disproportionate number of book reviews, which is causing particular concern for us as we can only publish a limited number of reviews per issue.

I would again like to ask our readers and writers to give their feedback about the contents of this issue. Particularly if you have enjoyed reading any of the writings in this issue, please leave some comments on our facebook group and encourage our writers.

Thank you. **Vijay Anand**

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United Kingdom

Telephone: 01689 836 394 / 07801 569 640

MANAGING EDITOR
Dr. Vijay Anand PhD, MRSC

SUB-EDITOR
Malathy Sitaram

FOUNDER EDITOR
Late Joe Nathan

Editorial:
confluenceuk@yahoo.com

Design: Confluence Publishing Ltd

(From P1) *There was no status quo of stability without American casualties after May 1. There was only the cold reality of either following through on the agreement to withdraw our forces or escalating the conflict and sending thousands more American troops back into combat in Afghanistan, and lurching into the third decade of conflict."*

Nonetheless, President Biden stood by his decision, stating that he would not *"repeat the mistakes we've made in the past. The mistake of staying and fighting indefinitely in a conflict that is not in the national interest of the United States, of doubling down on a civil war in a foreign country, of attempting to remake a country through the endless military deployments of U.S. forces."*

Chaos, An Uncertain Future, And Terror Attack

In his August 14 speech, Biden assigned much of the blame to the political leaders of Afghanistan, for failing to unite, fight, or find a political settlement. Certainly many have argued that the U.S. staying in Afghanistan indefinitely was not desirable, and an effort in futility given the political and military dynamics that existed on the ground.

However, the events of recent days – scenes of chaos at the airport, reports of U.S. personnel stranded and not being guaranteed safe passage, images of desperate Afghans seeking escape, and most recently a terrorist attack at the airport in Kabul – suggest that the execution should have been handled better and evacuations of U.S. personnel and allies, as well as vulnerable Afghans, should have started sooner. In his August 16 address, President Biden said part of the reason for their delay in conducting evacuations was "because the Afghan government and its supporters discouraged us from organizing a mass exodus to avoid triggering, as they said, 'a crisis of confidence.'" And, of course, hindsight – as they say – is always 20/20. As of the writing of this article, 122,300 people have been evacuated since the end of July, with over 116,700 of those evacuations occurring after August 14.

America's withdrawal and the Taliban's reinstatement will have especially tragic consequences for Afghan women and girls. While Taliban officials have stated that women will be given rights ("in accordance with Sharia" as Taliban leader Abdul Ghani Baradar said on August 25), history would suggest differently. The horrors faced by women under Taliban rule are well known, and despite the rhetoric from Taliban officials that they have become more moderate, reports on the ground suggest that the reality is much different.

The events of recent days have also demonstrated that America's withdrawal will not end its conflicts in Afghanistan. On August 26, 2021, a terrorist attack carried out by ISIS-K at Kabul airport killed nearly 200 people, including 13 U.S. troops. President Biden vowed retaliation, and subsequently authorized an airstrike against ISIS-K. On August 30, even as the Pentagon announced that it had completed the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, reports emerged that several rockets were fired at the airport.

Whether Biden made the right decision is something that only time will tell, but history has shown that when it comes to Afghanistan, every solution is an imperfect one.

***Kavita Mohan is an attorney based out of Washington D.C. The views expressed in this article are her own.**

Hope and Despair

As I pen this column my mind wanders through a mine- full of contradictory thoughts arising from experiences that I have had throughout the week. South Africa is a living laboratory of human relationships from the sublime to the bizarre. At one moment one has hope at another one is in a state of despair. The recent attempts to unseat the present government by anarchic forces hell-bent on destroying property and causing havoc to citizens has had the reverse effect of bringing loyal South Africans of all hues together. But red herrings were tossed to divert attention from the real issues by inciting racial tensions of long standing.

My 105 year old mother born in South Africa hears Malema raving and ranting on TV. What's all this noise she asks? Oh,I say it's a man called Malema who is the leader of his political party called the EFF. Is he like Mandela she asks? "No very different I say. I did not tell her about the racial slurs and the scapegoating of a community. Yet as her immediate memory wanes some memories of the past still manage to come to the fore. If I probed she would have remembered the 1949 riots when she had gone shopping and her entire family was waiting anxiously for her to return before the angry crowds descended on Lorne Street. The Pillay family lived in Crystal Court in a block of flats which they owned. As a toddler I vaguely recall a white manager of the ice-cream factory owned by her family standing in front of the building and claiming it as his own. Like frightened mice we all ran up to the roof garden of Crystal Court. It was fearful times then. Stigmatising whole communities are toxic attempts to mobilise people into false perceptions of who their real exploiters are. And invariably it is the very politicians who claim to want to save them. Many of us will recall Jimmy Manyi's claim that there were too many Coloureds in the Cape. Instead Eusebius Mckaizer strongly argues for racial authenticity when he says: I am a Coloured male and I do not want to disguise who I am". Instead he urges us to focus on anti-racism. He makes a powerful point to young South African minorities who may show tendencies for being apologetic about their racial identities as non-blacks.

Leaders like Malema should understand that racial scapegoating of minority groups can have serious consequences for intergroup relations and national stability. Hostilities usually arise from competition over scarce resources and from the perception that one's lot in life is not improving relative to others. Whatever the sociological reasons may be to explain this sort of behaviour one cannot run away from the fact that Malema's ranting's are scandalous and highly irresponsible. Firstly the lot of the poor unemployed masses cannot be attributed to a minority group who are not in political or economic control and many of whom are themselves below the poverty datum line. Neither can the successful amongst them be blamed for their resourcefulness in business, education and politics. Despite the closeness of their leaders who fought alongside each other, young Indians and Africans at grassroots level today know little about this part of their history.

However history teaches us, all too clearly, that scapegoats are the product of perceptions rather than facts. The Nazis blamed the Jews for all the excesses of German society at a time when they knew full well that the country was in an economic recession and they needed a scapegoat.

So let's not feel embarrassed or apologetic about what is a natural inclination of human kind that one needs to come to terms with rather than hide in a closet of denial. In this respect both the victim and the persecutor need to reflect introspectively on each other's condition. After a long and painful struggle for freedom, why would South Africans want to destroy their own country? Why would they want to vandalise schools and jeopardise their children's future?. Why would they want to cut off their noses to spite their faces in an act of nihilism?

"The kind of damage colonial rule does is that you no longer have the ability to rule yourself" says Chinua Achebe. "They say, okay I give you your independence but that person has already lost the habit of independence over years, over centuries. So it is a question of beginning to reinvent yourself the ways your ancestors must have done thousands of years ago because they learnt to rule themselves….we don't have it…it's going to go on for a very long time".

Professor Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela who has published extensively on ' victims and perpetrators' of gross human rights violation and on forgiveness and remorse maintains that trauma can occur over many generations. We can carry it in our DNA as transgenerational repercussions". Healing she maintains can and must take place through the language of arts. In other words, through creativity in art, architecture, music and such forms of positive expression. Most certainly in building and not in destruction!

Now more than ever before, we need each other. South Africa is a country rich in human potential. Culturally it is endowed with diversity and when viewed in this light, the language, religion and customs of its peoples must surely be acknowledged and celebrated**.** From the Coloured labourer in the Cape to the Indian cane cutter in Natal, the white farmer in the Northern districts to the emergent black ruling classes, the composite picture ought to be framed by feelings of national unity. However with intermittent racial and ethnic tensions it would appear that the rainbow nation has lost its short-lived hue. Sadly, Malemas utterances are a tinderbox- a lighted match to a dry forest. In our infancy of nation building we do not need the likes of a racist high status role model to incite conflict and mislead the masses by tossing red herrings in their path. What is needed at this time is responsible attention to building harmonious race relations among all South Africans. The road is open to all now Mr Malema…. Apartheid is no more and we have black majority rule! Let's work together to unite our people! As the late Martin Luther warned "We must live together as brothers and sisters or Perish together as fools".

Dr Devi Rajab is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books. Now she is the Chairperson of Democracy Development Program. She is also the former Dean of Student Development at UKZN.

Flash fiction

EMPEROR OF THE PAST

by Cyril Dabydeen

Won Ling washes himself with vigour, pulling the cloth tightly on his head, then down his shoulders and to his thighs in a perfect rhythm. Unplanned, unrehearsed. The others in the showers look at him with curiosity or intrigue. Won Ling's indifferent to everyone, being in his own time and place.

Uninhibitedly he keeps being at it for almost an hour twisting his smallish body, as the others make faces.

"How much longer?" one taunts.

Won Ling's hard-of-hearing, see.

Water cascades, in almost perfect motion. "How much...longer?" he echoes. He crinkles his eyes on a round but marked face; his skin is light-brownish as toffee; a seventy-year-old he is, ah.

"Yes," he answers himself. And see, he knew venerable Chiang Kai-shek, I must know. "Really Chiang Kai-shek?"

"You Indian?" he glares at me.

And why did he come to Canada? Our being here now, like our foreordained place. "Why?" he asks, in an almost disdainful manner.

His English is without need of translation, see. He pulls the wash cloth harder looking at me. He was in the Kuomintang with Chiang Kai-shek, sure.

"Will you go back there?" I humour him, without mimicry.

His expression is gnomic; his teeth almost stained, some broken.

I imagine him next being during the time of the Qing dynasty.

Why not?

Ancient China, then the Boxer Rebellion, and the Opium Wars in our ken. Won Ling quavers, because of what ravaged a whole country when Chairman Mao Zedong led millions on the Long March and brought the Communist system to mostly rural places.

How Indian am I?

Won Ling whirs, telling me about another peasant revolt. He'd actually been with the masses; he challenges me to doubt him. His body is pristine-looking. Cleansing his soul too, yes. *Confucius, note well.*

The other bathers laugh slyly. Won Ling laughs back, yes.

Words, rhythm—a mixture of English and Cantonese, or Mandarin.

Broken phrases, intonation--surely his inflection. The Yangtze River and the Red River come closer, and masses of people moving over great long fields across China; and those waving embroidered parasols, the middle and upper classes, the bamboo-made parasols almost gaudy-looking. Won Ling in rain or sunshine, then in Shanghai and Beijing. *Where else?*

I keep travelling with him. Along the Great Wall of China next.

Let Chairman Mao stop him from going on another Long March.

Oh, you!

He'd been with the Cultural Revolution, then at the Tianamen Square revolt dramatically trying to stop a huge big tank coming at him! Bent on suicide, it seemed. Let the world's photographers take pictures that would last a lifetime.

The Red River and the Yangtze overflow their banks.

Won Ling winks an eye at me. The great big maw of a land mass with close-by islands. Hong Kong. Taiwan. *Where else?* The Great Wall keeps moving in a curve with terraces, hills. Mountains loom ahead.

The other bathers look at him more curiously.

Maybe he came from northern China, if Hubei Province. Won Ling goes up and down, then to the south again. His tattered family he'd left behind, see. Now being face-to-face with Chairman Mao, who insisted that Won Ling must join the Long March of workers and peasants. And he would never see his family again in the turmoil of war-cum-socialist revolution.

He pulls the wash-cloth over his face, eyes. Like what Confucius vicariously compelled him to do. Oh, my own mind-wandering way it is.

"Are you sure?" I ask.

"Sure about what?"

Newcomers or old-timers in one place, with one memory, like a collective unconsciousness only. Now ask him about the first Europeans who came to China to the fabled, Middle Kingdom. Imperial China with mandarins famous for their intricate letter-writing scripts, and the tapestry of paper drawings with exquisite shapes, contours. Eunuchs making art with delicate fingers in sheer symmetry. The perfect mind aimed for with harmony. Won Ling casts another sideways glance at me.

How perfect can it be?

And what European was bold enough to want to meet the Emperor with designs for a new China fashioned after the West?

The bathers look at me askance. Won Ling gestures officiously. Another parasol twists into a concave shape, as a strong wind blows. Unconsciously I hold up my own parasol, like an almost exotic tree that suddenly blooms. Ancient Chinese artefacts…wavering. Whose ancestry are we really talking about? Whither India where I might have actually come from? Forbidding places everywhere. I play along being Marco Polo. The others yet make faces...at him. Not at me?

"Really fooled you, eh?" Won Ling humours me.

A waterfall close to a river, like the Yangtze. Now I'm travelling along the totemic Silk Road. Yes, Won Ling braces himself for more with time inexorably passing. My not being far from the Middle Kingdom, like my own self-created Xanadu.

I take a deep breath with our being here in Ottawa, now like the only authentic place left on earth. Verisimilitude I aim for with narrative ease. *How far do I really want to go?*

Won Ling approves with a nod of his head. Water keeps pouring, like a waterfall. He turns and looks another way; and it's what's recovered from the past. Prisms…water and light. He rubs his body hard in more than a ritual cleansing, like his final act. Farewell now here in our own self-created Middle Kingdom in Canada. *Nowhere else*!

Cyril Dabydeen's work has appeared in over 60 literary mags and anthologies, including Poetry (Chicago), Prairie Schooner (US), The Critical Quarterly (UK), Canadian Literature, and the Oxford, Penguin and Heinemann Books of Caribbean Verse and Fiction. He's a former Poet Laureate of Ottawa (1984-87). He has taught Creative Writing at the University of Ottawa for many years. Born in Guyana, S. America. Contact: cdabydeen@ncf.ca

Book review

Anita Nahal's 'What's wrong with us *Kali* Women'?

Gwendolyn S. Bethea

I am moved to tears that linger just beneath the surface as I read Anita Nahal's deeply profound prose poetry in her latest book of poetry covering her life before and after immigrating to America from her native India. I hear and feel the deep palpable longing for freedom as she and her son are driven dispassionately to the airport by a close relative. The imagery in the poems is tremendous and leaves one in visual treat and awe.

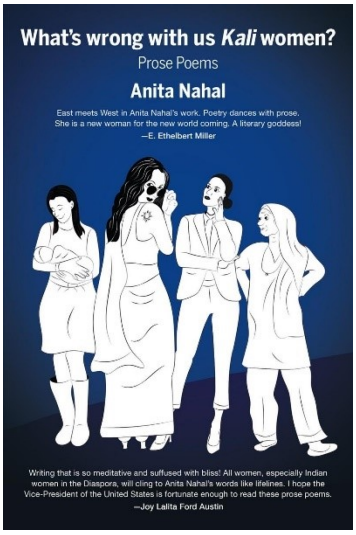
With this book of prose poetry, Anita Nahal, an Indian American poet, and children's writer, brings passion and sentiment with poignant renderings of life as an immigrant, professional woman, mother, and survivor of domestic abuse. She establishes herself solidly in the poetry world. This is her third book of poetry and reveals her innate, fervent, caring, empathetic and authentic poetry voice which is a voice that needs to be read and known. She is perhaps the best unknown poet I am aware of!

Nahal's poems are relatable universally, especially in the pandemic, several examples come to mind. In "What happened to their Clothes," we see inanimate objects in ways that we never would have imagined, occurring all too frequently in this scourge of our lifetime, the coronavirus. Nahal depicts the clothes of the deceased as no longer living, breathing, never again enwrapping their owners… they are the embodiment of what is no longer possible.

In another prose poem, "How easy it is for a Black life to be taken?" Nahal writes of black lives which not long ago actually mattered to loved ones before they were snuffed out, thoughtlessly, cruelly. Their names -- Castile, Floyd, Garner, Blake, Brown, Rice, Bland, Gray, Martin, Arbery, Taylor, Till, roll from her pen in rapid, seemingly endless horror as do their untimely deaths.

In "Democracy is in decline," she decries the state of America when a homeless man in a coffee shop whose barely clothed body sends her "into a spiral of sadness," while the man's companion announces outside,

. "there is something wrong with America where having food and health care are privileges and owning guns is a right..."



In "It's not all about sex," one encounters a sloth's heated pursuit of sexual satisfaction when "Mama sloth, holding onto her baby," signals the story of humans choosing maternal instinct over the sometimes shallowness of overcharged human sexuality.

"Mama sloth pulled him back to her embrace. The stud knew, it was only to be about consideration, today."

In "Finally, she showered," we see the immigrant mother reminiscing about her new home, across the ocean, in America, with her son, living and flourishing, yet experiencing life in all of its nuances; and understanding all too well that they have left behind the love of family and success of career, yet the horror of abuse, until finally she has time to "shower" after her son's magnificent Indian wedding earlier that day. She appears to cleanse away wistful thoughts of yester year, lovers lost, yet remembered with blissfulness, while embracing the oncoming dawn of hope for the present and future.

And in still another, "Corona and love-life layers," Nahal pronounces a new beginning for a refurbished earth, reminding us of when "the streets had ample fresh air and the ozone was stronger. Trees too were a lusher green.'

In these and other prose poetry compositions, in this endearing, thought provoking and heart touching book, Nahal is a messenger of hope for the survival of the human species. We see a full range of disappointments with love interests, aging, including physical and mental challenges, and musings about life's relentless superficial creations, based on skin color, cultural, social, and economic conditions. This book is a must read for all, and definitely to be included as required reading in courses of culture, gender, multiculturalism, and immigration.

Gwendolyn S. Bethea, Ph.D. Communications Consultant, Founder, Scotton Communications Network & Formerly Director, Preparing Future Faculty Program, Howard University, Washington, DC 20059

Poetry corner

Mukti – The Release

by Anjana Sen

They burst through the clouds, high on life,
The dashing brigadier and his beautiful wife.
A cheer goes up from the gathered crowds,
'Welcome,' they cry, 'now shrug off your shrouds.'
Beaming with joy, he shows her around,
this peaceful Haven they both have found.
Family and friends long gone from earth,
come up to them, almost skipping with mirth.
'Is it always like this?' Ma asks, holding on to his hand.
He'd arrived two months ago, to survey the land.
'Yes,' he replies, 'but I missed you so.'
She whispers back and says, 'I know,
but it was too soon, look how sad she is.'
They gaze down together and saw me writing this.
'She'll be fine you know, she's ours and strong,
And she's found a tribe in which to belong.
Her words will always cleanse her sorrow.'
You are right, my loves, come tomorrow,
I'll heal, I'll dance, I will be fine.
So, rest easy now, Mukti will be mine!

Opinion

Porous Borders

by Anjana Sen

6th May 2020

'You and your conspiracy theories,' I chided gently, knowing well how anxious he already was. A doctor himself, he had lost both parents to the virus in the last few weeks. And his wife had now tested positive. My cousin needed to rant, so I let him.

'You have no idea what the neighbours are up to,' he said. 'They have publicly announced on their national news, they are now the world leaders of Space Technology and Biological Warfare. Did you not see those disgusting images posted by the Chinese Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission?'

'Yes, I have,' I muttered, changing the subject to something more palatable.

Those images, continued to do the rounds on social media. Originally posted by an employee of the above mentioned CCPLAC, it had two pictures adjacent to each other. The first was a space rocket taking off, and the second, a raging cremation pyre. The caption read, 'How we light a fire in China, and how they light a fire in India.'

The thinking world had exploded in fury, the thinking press had demanded an apology. The post was subsequently taken down, but no apology has been made to date.

I use the words 'thinking press' with much deliberation. What we see on the news here in the UK, are shamefully sensational images and video repeats from irresponsible media giants.

A surprisingly large majority of the educated public in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and even Nepal (with the highest per capita positive cases today) believe this to be the truth. There are reports of findings of Chinese sleeper cells scattered across the sub-continent, poised to spread mass infection just before the elections. They ask if it was a co-incidence that the numbers began to spike just as the election rallies began?

Who can deny that the people of India are equally to blame? With their exuberant and excessive partying, lobbying, and worshipping, en-masse, after politicians declared, rather prematurely, that the beast had been slain?

However, that does not condone the world media's morbid obsession with images of open cremations and lofty declaration of a collapsed system. Were similar images being shown of mass burials in the US when the numbers had peaked there last year? Were fingers pointed in blame and accusation at Italy and Brazil when they were struggling?

A little compassion would go a long way to the help boost the morale of the million strong band of volunteers. How can a system collapse when not a single doctor has quit his post? Or a nurse fled from hers? Every hospital in the country continues to stand, albeit shakily, and fight as hard as they can.

For this is a war!

The young, the able, the internet savvy, the rich, the poor, everyone is doing something, anything they can to help. Well organised and networked groups have sprung up overnight as a go-to guide for hospitals with beds, oxygen, or medicine. These groups, mostly comprising very young people, have a three-tier manpower system. Those working the computers (or phones), updating information by the second, those out on their cars, bikes or even on foot who source the supplies relentlessly, and the third group who make themselves available to the greater public with their information dissemination.

Would it not be nice, if the Delhi BBC correspondent, stopped one of these kids on the streets, or in the hospitals and interviewed them? And relayed to the world that most people were good. There was hope for the future if these young ones were to inherit this earth.

The reason I choose not to engage with my cousin or other friends (sometimes, even my husband) on the neighbourly love from China, is, I believe this is not the time to point fingers.

At the media, irresponsible or not, politicians, corrupt or not, or even the public, answerable or not. The worst has happened, it is what it is. Let us all band together and fix this wretchedness, there will be an infinity for post-mortems, and systems **will** be put in place,

Was it not the same here in the UK last year, when the braying and hysterical media blamed the government for everything? We came out of that through sacrifice, discipline, and the positivity of collective clapping. India and her little brothers and sisters will as well.

Here are some statistics to enable you to properly grasp the size of the operation necessary in India. **(Please bear in mind that these are valid figures at the time of writing this article, early May 2021).**

The collective population of the US, Russia, Germany, Turkey, UK, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Romania, Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Czech Republic, Portugal, Sweden, Hungary, Switzerland, Bulgaria, and Denmark is 1053 million. Add to that the population of the smaller countries in Europe, plus Brazil and Argentina, and you add up to 1369.5 million.

Thus, we arrive at the population of India, estimated between 1360 to 1380 million.

India has vaccinated 160 million people till date. That is half the population of USA and two and a half times that of the UK. And still, that remains only 13% of the people.

Another fact which has been left ignored is that 66 million doses of the vaccine were sent from India to other countries, of which, 11 million doses were in the form of free aid to the less privileged nations.

Whilst it is easy to criticise, let us appreciate the monstrous scale of the operation and the supply chain. And the tremendous resilience of the nation to even think at this scale.

People continue to pour in.

Two years ago, the world news was headlined by the Rohingya Muslims fleeing from Burma (or Myanmar). Where do you think they ended up? Bangladesh could not accommodate them, so they are all in Indian West Bengal, creeping in through porous borders, being housed and fed by the government. Cynics might say the Chief Minister added numbers to her vote bank.

But they live to tell the tale. The tale which the world media chose not to tell.

Talking about porous borders… the government here has laid down strict rules for returning residents. When I returned to the UK from India last month, I self-quarantined at home, diligently for 10 days. Going without milk for the last two days. Folk advised me to leave my phone at home and nip out to shops. I did not.

My husband will return soon, hopefully, but because India is now in the red zone, he will need to quarantine at a Heathrow hotel for 10 days at his own cost (1750£). The advice we have received from well-meaning British friends will make you smile. They say he should travel to Sri Lanka or the Maldives, or even Istanbul. Stay there very cheaply for ten days, and then return home to the UK to avoid institutional quarantine. Apparently, this is what is happening under the noses of the authorities who make the rules.

And that, my friends, is how borders get porous!

Anjana Sen spent her childhood years, all over India, and later travelled the world before 'settling' in Scotland (Glasgow) in 2000. She has been writing in earnest over the last three years. She is a member of the Scottish Association of Writers, and also the Secretary for Eastwood Writers.

Book Review

T. Janakiraman's Wooden Cow

'A Reflection of Music and Life'

(Lakshmi Kannan's translation from the original Tamil)

Reviewed by Mini Nanda

T. Janakiraman an eminent Tamil writer belongs to the Manikkodi group of writers who laid the foundation of modernism by planting the seeds of new ideas, intricate plots, subtle narrative strategies and nuanced characterization. Janakiraman wrote twelve novels, plays, travelogues and short stories. He won the Sahitya Akademi award in 1979 for his short story collection *Sakthi Vaithiyam*. He was born near Thanjavur on 18th June, 1921. His novel *Marappacu* in Tamil was published in 1975; the translated novel is published in his centenary year-2021- is a timeless landmark.

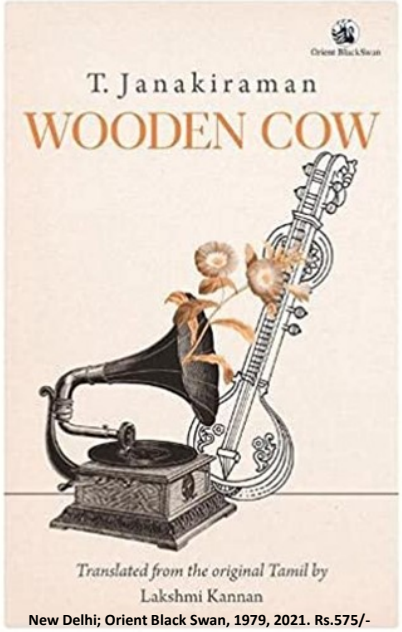
Thi Jaa as Janakiraman is fondly called wrote on varied themes, the reach of his works is extensive with translations in Hindi, English, Kannada, Malayalam, Russian and Chinese. Writing and translations are sustained acts and profoundly solitary they are also spaces of freedom and creation.

Lakshmi Kannan a novelist and poet of eminence in both Tamil and English; keeps the natural flow and cadence of Carnatic music. Gregory Rabassa has said that translation is a Sisyphean process, after 1979 first draft of translation; Kannan completes the second translation as a centenary homage. The prefix *Trans* in translation comes from the Latin word "Across", the translator ferries across unchartered waters, a precious unknown work and makes it accessible. Kannan recreates the author's cultural touchstone, unusual viewpoint, the rhetoric and tone with easy felicity.

The cover is a piece of art by designer Pinaki De, with a Gramophone spouting wood roses and the Veena; an alluring threshold to the world of wonder within. Structured in two parts, part one with the sketch of the Violin, deals with the life of four -year old Ammani from Annavasal her birthplace, to her new home in Madras. Ammani's monologue brings alive her milieu. Her ubiquitous laughter gestures to the hypocrisy around; whether in marriage pandals, replete with bride and groom; the puffed cheeked *nadaswarm* musician and 'toddlers immersed in their soliloquies' (3), or loud mourners in death congregations. Ammani is a child of nature, discarding clothes and wrapping herself in palm leaves; she is intelligent, sensitive and observant. As a young girl flooded with love letters, Ammani is also a silent witness to the spectacle of an upper caste, young widow caught in the trap of nine yard white shroud/saree, lying limp with tonsured head. In a moment, Ammani abjures marriage, tradition and her hometown as 'rancid buttermilk'. Her parents fail to straightjacket her and her aunt and uncle- Periamma and Periappa provide her a home, love and freedom.

Music brings her close to the iconic singer Gopali; whose mesmerising notes captivate everyone. Ammani moves to Madras for higher studies, to learn dance and into a house provided by Gopali. Her room with the play of light and shadow, spattering magical patterns on the floor of the skin of a dappled deer, is a metaphor of one chasing a mirage or entangled in a deep forest.

Janakiraman changes the typography to italics for Ammani's interior monologue, letters and observations and writes of a very strong female protagonist without rancor or judgment. He leaves it to his readers to reflect on the guile, intrigue, pain and passion of Ammani.



New Delhi; Orient Black Swan, 1979, 2021. Rs.575/-

After Gopali's first embrace, Janakiraman delineates her dilemma sensitively, implicating the landscape, the river Kaveri flowing in limpid green and the new bridge moving to the west and the old bridge to the east, Should Ammani take the trodden path or cross over to new pastures? In all her decisions Periamma supports Ammani, testifying to an ancient bond both share. Periamma cooks an elaborate meal for the two of them and lavishes her love on Ammani.

In Part 2 with the motif of Mridangam, we meet the twenty-three year Ammani as a very successful dancer, performing in India and abroad, supported by her lover Gopali. The young Pattabhi, Gopali's nephew and ward is a contrast to the sexagenarian singer, he has no ear for music, is muscular, an excellent cook, companion, nurse and lover to Ammani. Bruce the American soldier, a Vietnam veteran, loves Ammani as a pure soul who gifted a clear conscience to him. She is one who lives unafraid on her own terms. It is only with Pattabhi that Ammani voices her apprehensions in letters, her anguish and longing for a personal god.

The novel is a *bildungsroman*, Gopali, Pattabhi, the alluringly beautiful Maragadham and Bruce each serve as a catalyst of change, with their resounding question- "What do you want"? Bringing her dilemmas to the mirror, Ammani sees a 38 year old woman, with grey hair appearing 48 years old and an ancient head teeming with observations which is 78 years old. Bruce had concluded that there were only two types of people in the world, the educated and the ignorant, the educated leaders were the real exploiters, worried about their guns and bombs turning into scrap. In adolescence Ammani had seen her Marx spouting friends, holding forth on poverty and the corrupt system, only to fly back to their families, prosperous matrimonial alliances and inheritance.

The narrative unfolds the spectacle of the dead, discarded cow, swarming with flies at the edge of the street, avoided by all. The dead cow had once provided calves and life sustaining milk, is now an anathema. Ammani turns her gaze inward and reflects on her journey, her travels and lovers. The conviction of Pattabhi, his rock solid support and love for her, Maragadham's quiet dignity in rebuffing Gopali's overtures with a simple, "I am a married woman. I have a family"(183); her house with its amenities, flood of admirers, the weave of kanjeevarams and the glitter of jewelry, all appear worthless and mock her out of her complacency. Once the outer world dissolves, Ammani confronts the truth in the mirror.

A remarkable novel comes alive to us in Kannan's evocative and smooth narrative flow, to reflect on the hard hitting realism, the vibrancy of characterization, the ephemeral passion, the thrill of music programmes and the lush landscape teeming with human foibles.

Professor Mini Nanda taught in the Dept. of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur and guided Ph.D. and M.Phil dissertations on diverse themes. She coordinated, taught and designed courses for Guelph-India and Minnesota-India Programmes; on Indian Writing in English & in Translation. She has been invited as resource person to Conferences in India and abroad. Her areas of interest include Culture, Film Studies, Women's Writing and World Literatures. She has recently edited a book of translated short stories for Sahitya Akademi and co-edited a book Literary Constructs of the Self.

Remembering Radha Pant (1916-2003)

A Pioneering scientist in more ways than one

By Kusum Pant Joshi

Radha Pant was a pioneering Indian woman scientist who contributed conspicuously to plant, insect and nutritional Biochemistry. At a time when the formal education of girls was frowned upon and opposed, Radha's determination to become a scientist saw her overcome significant challenges, both personal and societal. She thus became not only a scientist but was also internationally recognised for her contributions in her chosen field.

To Radha belongs the credit of establishing a brand new Department of Biochemistry in the University of Allahabad and of introducing a course leading to a Master's degree in the subject. Here, Radha with her team of scientists, undertook research in applied and basic science. Their field of investigation included heart disease and diet, legumes, cactus seeds, silkworms and plant latex and their findings were published in leading international journals. Very importantly, Radha's seminal work in developing a simple method to extract and detoxify proteins from non-edible, wild leguminous seeds growing abundantly in various parts of India, is recognised as a novel and outstanding contribution in combating famine in the developing world.

The youngest of six siblings, KS Radha was born into a Brahmin Iyer family in Palghat's Kalpathy village in Kerala. Her father, Shivarama Krishna Iyer, was an officer in the Military Accounts Department and her mother Subbulakshmi, was a highly intelligent though traditionally educated woman. The children were brought up with loving care, but the rigid social conservatism of their community regarding the education and marriage of girls, hung over them like a dark shadow. Thus, Radha's older sister about 10 years her senior, learned the 3 Rs at home and was married off when barely in her early teens.

Despite their community's social control, Radha's mother was increasingly aware of the merits of formal female education. Being literate and open to ideas, she wanted to provide formal education to her younger daughter. Radha became the first in her family - and her community - to receive such education when at the age of 5, she was enrolled as a boarder at Hingne's Mahilashram High School near Pune. A pioneering institution, the Mahilashram established in 1896, was a brainchild of Maharishi Karve, who supported female education. Though it was difficult to be separated from her family at this tender age, the arrangement helped Radha to continue her primary education undisturbed while her father was transferred to various cities in the country.

Radha's desire to continue her studies also won her mother's support. Convinced that further education was essential, she allayed her husband's fears regarding violating established social norms antithetical to female education. After enrolling as a boarder at Delhi's Indraprastha High School, Radha passed the High School examination with flying colours.

However, Radha's desire to pursue Science met with stiff resistance. This was the early 1930s when the idea of females entering the field of science at Intermediate level was unheard of. Radha faced bitter disappointment as college after college, including Delhi's progressive institutions –St Stephens and Hindu College – refused her admission on the ground that it was totally unprecedented!

Radha's determination and strength of character now came to the fore. To galvanize her father into action, she took the extraordinary step of resorting to a 36 hours' hunger strike. This was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's ongoing anti- British agitations. Though adopted in a big way in modern times as a powerful tool against British misrule by Gandhi, he had actually dug out this weapon from India's ancient armory. Pressured by her determination, Radha's father approached the Principal of Delhi's Hindu College again to admit her and this time he succeeded. Thus, Hindu College became the first in northern India to take the revolutionary step of enrolling Radha as its first and only girl to study Science at Intermediate level with males.

Radha's challenges did not end there. Unused to having a female in their midst, some of her male classmates heckled and bullied her. But when Radha calmly ignored them and besides excelling in academics, shone in extracurricular activities winning prizes and medals in debates and writing competitions, their objectionable behavior turned into admiration. Radha not only passed the Intermediate Exam with a First Class, she also stood second in order of merit. Next, she began her graduation at Hindu College and was soon awarded a BSc degree with the highest marks in her class. She thus distinguished herself as a topper and the first woman Science graduate of Delhi University.

In 1936, she moved to Bombay to join the prestigious St Xavier's College where she was awarded the MSc degree. Soon she also obtained a PhD in Chemistry from Bombay University. Radha was awarded a coveted four-year Fellowship from Bombay University and during this tenure completed pioneering research. Many grants and positions followed. Radha soon moved to Bombay's G.S. Medical College with a Research Fellowship (1940–1942) and next joined Haffkine Institute as a Nutritional Biochemist. Then in 1945, Radha was headhunted and offered a Lecturership in Biochemistry at the University of Allahabad by its dynamic Vice Chancellor, Amarnath Jha (1897-1955).

The switch from metropolitan Bombay to a provincial town was huge! Radha missed Bombay's cosmopolitanism and her circle of friends. But, Allahabad University was in its heyday and she gradually grew accustomed to it. She became the first woman lecturer in the University's Science Faculty. It was here that she met and in 1946 married the eminent Professor of Palaeobotany, Divya Darshan Pant, then a young Lecturer in the University's Botany Department. She thus became one of the first women in India to have to balance her professional life alongside being a young wife and mother. With no role models to follow to balance these demanding roles, Radha always credited her success in this delicate balancing act to her mother who she said offered her constant support and encouragement.

Around the mid-1950s, Radha was awarded a Fellowship by the British Council to conduct post-doctoral research at University College London. Fortunately, her husband also received a similar Fellowship. So, together they set sail for the UK in 1954 to pursue postdoctoral research for the next two years.

Upon returning to Allahabad in 1956, Radha was eager to continue her research work and obtained a grant from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, but she had absolutely no research facilities. Describing the starkness of the situation in her autobiography 'Ever a Fighter', she writes: "All I had were six bare rooms — not even a shelf or rack, not to mention any sophisticated instruments. I had no laboratory, no chemicals and no library!"

Once again Radha's determination came to her rescue. She persevered in building research facilities over the next two decades. Funding from the University Grants Commission and grants from the USA's USPL480 funds helped Radha to continue achieving her goals.

As Radha's research gained recognition, she was admitted as a Fellow of the Royal Chemical Society and was invited as a Visiting Professor for collaborative research by top academic bodies in Europe and America. These included Germany's Physiologisches Chemisches Institut, Wurzburg, the Institute of Science, Halle am Saale, as well as the Stanford Medical Centre, Palo Alto, California.

Though an avid academic globetrotter, Radha remained attached to her base in Allahabad and continued her academic pursuits well after her retirement from the University in 1978. In her spare time she wrote a book of popular science articles for children, was a regular contributor of radio talks for All India Radio and wrote English short stories and poems.

This pioneering lady has still to receive due recognition from the institution she served lifelong with distinction. Her seminal role and her contribution to Biochemistry were, however, prominently commemorated by the international community and her peers. In the 1980s, a monograph of her vital contributions to the field of sericultural research were published by Sericologia, France's reputed academic journal of the International Sericultural Commission. After 2001, Radha moved to Mumbai to live with her son's family where she passed away in 2003.

Dr. Kusum Pant Joshi is a Social Historian, Researcher and Writer. Kusum was Project Manager for Publications & Digital Media in London's Central Office of Information (COI).

Cinema

The Pandemic and Indian Cinema

by Sunayana Panda

We have spent a year and half in a completely transformed world. The pandemic came out of the blue and created havoc in the lives of those who own businesses. We tend to say that the travel and hospitality businesses have been the hardest hit, but if you look closely you will notice that the performing arts have had a difficult time too. Musicians, singers, dancers and theatre actors have been forced to find other ways of earning a living because not all have been able to take their performances online.

In this context how has Indian cinema fared? Film making requires large sums of money and large groups of people. When the lockdown was announced many shooting schedules were cancelled and actors had to sit at home and wait for work to resume. Producers had to stop the promotions of their films which were about to be released. At that time everyone was convinced that the lockdown would last only three weeks and the world would go back to normal. Of course, we have all understood since then that we were completely mistaken. As the pandemic continued the producers faced a dilemma: either they had to wait until the theaters reopened or they could release their movies on OTT platforms. For those who are not familiar with this term, it means "Over the top", which means internet sites on which you can watch films, such as Netflix and Amazon prime.

Amitabh Bachchan starring in "Gulabo Sitabo"

It's a difficult choice to make. When a producer sells a film to an OTT platform on the internet he is paid only once. This being the case, the OTT platforms are very advantageous to small art films and experimental films because these types of films are never certain if they will get back the money they have invested. By going to an OTT platform they are assured of a certain sum which is generally the cost of production and about 30% added to that. The big commercial production houses, on the other hand, hope that they will get much more than this fixed sum if their film becomes popular, if it has a theatrical release in a cinema. So, the OTT platforms are not so interesting from the commercial point of view for mega productions which have big stars in their cast.

Although it looks like the producers were suddenly forced into a corner, the truth is Indian cinema was anyway going to change in a drastic way. The pandemic only made it go faster. The way we watch films has changed over the years. A large number of young urban people consider movie-watching as a solitary pleasure now. Watching a film on a computer screen does not mean that it will not be enjoyed. Many even watch films on their phones. People's lifestyles are such that watching a film sitting in one's living room or on one's bed after a tiring day is more relaxing than having to negotiate traffic and taking the trouble of going to a cinema hall. Also a cinema ticket is not as cheap as it used to be.

Already two years before the pandemic in a group discussion with producers, film critic Anupama Chopra had asked the question, "How do you see the future of Indian cinema?" Karan Johar and Zoya Akhtar, two of the top producers, had said that Indian cinema would go digital in a very short time. They both said that the way people watched films was fast changing and going to the cinema was no longer a social activity with friends and family. Zoya Akhtar said, "We have to adapt ourselves to the changing trend." So, it was clear that even if the pandemic had not come along most films would have moved to the OTT platforms.

Change is inevitable. Nothing is static and time pulls everything forward. Cinema is a reflection of society, so it was inevitable that Indian cinema would change, but probably no one expected that it would change so drastically. Not only have films moved from the cinema halls to the internet but also the content of films has changed.

The urban population of India has developed a taste for ultra-realistic films, the grittier the better. These films go into the dark spaces of the human mind. These kinds of films have become popular with the urban Indians. But in the small towns and among the less educated audience in cities there is still a demand for the old style Bollywood films with songs, dances and action. This is why some producers in Mumbai continue to make films in the old fashioned style.

After the initial dilemma and indecision many producers decided to release their films on the internet because they didn't want to wait endlessly. At the same time there are still a hundred films which are waiting to be released in cinema halls because the producers feel that their films were made for the big screens and that is how they should be seen. The debate continues about which is better but by now most people have understood that the internet has a wider reach and can bring many more viewers. This in turn can bring more fame and recognition to the actors and directors. And the one-time payment can be a good thing for big production companies too because if the film is not popular and is seen by only a few people they still recover the money they have spent.

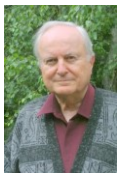
Now that most people are indoors for the greater part of the day it has been a blessing for many to be able to watch new films, sitting at home, on the internet on OTT platforms by spending only a small sum of money for getting access to them. As they say, every cloud has a silver lining and this is a positive change that the pandemic has brought about.

Sunayana Panda is a writer and an actress. She divides her time between London and Pondicherry in India.

Yogesh Patel

Through the Poetic Lens

Alexander Shurbanov is at peace with trees



Alexander Shurbanov

THE TEARS

How fragrant the cedar's tears!
How silently they trickle
down the rough trunk's deep wrinkles.
How clear those tears are
and, oh, how heavy.
It's as if
they've been held back for years.
And what is this weeping for?
Such a huge tree!
Why doesn't it say anything?
To anyone?

When you read such an elusive narrative at the level of tree's minimalism, juxtaposed with profoundly revealing complexity of human emotions, you cannot but get haunted by its construal. You marvel at how the poet has zeroed into poetic beauty with no distractions. Shurbanov has received The Honorary Medal of Sofia University, the Hristo G. Danov National Prize for overall contribution to culture, and the ASKEER Award for contribution to the art of theatre. His poems are as unassuming as any tree standing in the forest, not bothered about us, but emphatically drawing us in their contemplative presence. Over the decades, he has taught English literature at the Universities of Sofia, London, California, and Albany. That leads to a surprise that he is a poet of extreme *elegance and refinement with no weighing of academic words in his poems; you can say he stands more like trees in his poems. As in his other poem, 'The Crown', their language is no language at all and yet spoken through their presence and other media, such as birds. In it, he also confronts us with the human*

The tree
obtains its growing plot
without a title deed.

****

How does it captivate the birds?

The possessive humans with greed have land grabs, while a tree lives indifferently to such triviality. A question remains: how much have we learnt from nature and its magnanimity? Maybe this is the reason it speaks through birds from its branches. It captivates them. The poet questions but with knowledge of the true answer. A question is posed to highlight it to you.

And you are on the threshold,

a few pages fallen at your feet, rooted in the thought that you will feed the earth,

that you will grow into a tree and the words will come back green.

In Shurbanov, words are emphatically coming back green!

There are no ambiguities in Shurbanov's poems. Art is always suggestive and he fulfils that promise.

A BOUGH

out my window
is shaking in despair.
Before I looked up
there was a bird there.

There are two ways these lines play out. In both, poet's desperation is reflected by a bough; as a cliché would have it, no one knows which way the wind is blowing! For the last two lines; the first impression is that the poet is listening to this despair and his gaze is grounded. But he hears a bird, a change, and looks up in hope. In the other, it implies that before this despair, when the poet looked, the bough had a bird perched on it. Now that it has abandoned the tree, a song that was life is no more; leaving the tree waving its bough in despair at the loss. When poems are simple and well-distilled, they are less drilled, but more subtle in creating layers of different perceptions and meaning. That is a trick to the beauty Shurbanov has mastered in his poems. There is a contradicting and deceptive parallax in this poem. It creates its own anguish.

BEFORE LEAVES FALL

Chestnut trees are stained with rust.
Like the back of my hands.
The morning sun makes them
look handsome,
more handsome than ever.
But we know better.
We – trees and I –
look at each other
and one by one
(for the umpteenth time)
silently count our leaves.

In BEFORE LEAVES FALL, he tackles ageing in more reflective manner. Rust of our life can be perceived as patina. A bark of a tree can make us imagine a skin of an old person. Weathered by a tree or a man, the battering is forgotten, but the sign, the rust, remains with both. It depends on us how we look at things in our life. Once, while training for a management job, I remember it hammered into us that managers don't have a bad day!

Hence, 'The morning sun makes them/ look handsome,' points to a positive outlook we can have of what we have. However, like a contemplative tree, a poised look allows us to accept reality in a more philosophical manner: But we know better./We – trees and I –/look at each other/and one by one/(for the umpteenth time)/silently count our leaves.

Scalino, ISBN 9786197043624

In Shurbanov,, I have discovered calmness, poise, and a balanced view we all must learn from standing next to a tree and understanding their being. What is dissimilar can often only be observed or extracted in a meaningful expression by a great poet with profound imagination.

See how **Imtiaz Dharker** plays with fruits and trees in these lines:

Don't bring me mangoes or guavas
or figs in your suitcase from Lahore,
she said. Bring me instead
from the giant tree on the magic continent
the plump jamun fruit with the bloom
of longing on the skin.

Be sure to get there before the thieving
parakeets. Under the tree spread out
white sheets. Take a long stick
and tap at a branch to surprise the fruit
out of the tree. It will shower down,
waterfall, fruitfall, on the shock of sheets
that will turn purple with love.

That brings me to a conclusion ending with lines from Shurbanov's THE BLACkBERRY IS PEEVISH, in which he tackles the taste in his own way:

These simple berries
hold no attraction for the eyes
but to the taste
they are sweet and fragrant,
and a tiny bit
tart on the tongue.
Like an unspoken love
that has been mute too long.

Yogesh Patel *received an MBE for literature in 2020. His new collection of poems, The Rapids, is just published by The London Magazine.* He runs *Skylark Publications UK* and a non-profit *Word Masala* project to promote SA diaspora literature. Extensively published, an award-winning poet, he has also received the *Freedom of the City of London*.

A Retired New Jersey State Prosecutor follows his artistic passion!

Astounding, hyper-realist graphite pencil art by Anthony Gartmond

Anita Nahal

2021 MIPS BLACK HISTORY MONTH ART EXHIBIT FEATURING: ANTHONY GARTMOND

For a poet increasingly looping into ekphrastic writing, and inherently a visual learner, the creative arts lead me to a plethora of contemplations. What, where, why and most importantly, how did they draw that! The latter is exactly my thought, every time I look at New Jersey retired prosecutor nee graphite pencil artist, Anthony Gartmond's compelling artwork. I am mesmerized and enthused to deliberate upon the process and the final product. As a child I used to doodle with pencil a lot--flowers, houses, clothing designs, and my friends. Naught came of it as I was effectively urged to pursue a "real—put food on the table career"! It was similar for Anthony Gartmond. After earning a bachelor's degree in Political Science at Rutgers University, and later a juris doctor degree from Rutgers Law School, Gartmond established his professional legacy serving as a skilled and respected courtroom attorney and assistant prosecutor in New Jersey for thirty years. After retirement, he has been focusing on reviving his childhood dream of creating great pencil art, leading to splendid outcomes with several exhibitions and purchases by art connoisseurs and art lovers.

Anthony's artwork has been successfully exhibited at WBGO Jazz 88.3 in Newark, NJ, Astah's Fine Art Gallery in Maplewood, NJ, Moody Jones Gallery in the Philadelphia, PA metro area, the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, NJ, and at the celebrated Art in The Atrium exhibition in Morristown, NJ. His work also currently appears on the online gallery of Philadelphia's renowned October Gallery. In addition, Gartmond has been honored with a fine arts award by the Association of Black Women Lawyers, and by the New Jersey State Bar Association, for whom he was the featured artist in a 2021 Black History Month exhibition.

It's not been an easy or quick journey for Gartmond. He has spent the last several years, since retirement, honing his skills. His work-ethic is rigorous and acutely disciplined… hours and hours of drawing, meticulously ensuring scale, depth, and emotions, and spending innumerable sleepless moments perfecting his work.

While relatively young to the field of graphite art, Anthony Gartmond holds promise that will far outstretch many. His greatest strength as he says, and others acknowledge, is in his, "patience and perseverance to draw without hurry." His attention to detail as seen in hands, eyes, wrinkles, tears, and varied expressions, as well as in the play of light and shade depicting night and morning is remarkable. In Gartmond's art, I am reminded of the mysticism in the hyper-realist drawings of Italian artist Diego Fazio, or the photographic impressionism found in the drawings of German artist Dirk Dzimirsky, or the everyday life found in the drawings of Scottish artist Paul Cadden. This eclectic combination makes Gartmond's work at times striking with heavy pencil strokes generating urgency in the viewer, and at times the light strokes give the feeling of looking at an old photograph in a memory filled album of yesteryears. There's an element of a unique ethereal dimension in Gartmond's drawings, and one feels like stepping into them, being part of the moments depicted. I am delighted to share that some of my poems in my next volume of poetry have been written on his highly thought provoking and appealing art.

https://artspaces.kunstmatrix.com/en/exhibition/4338149/2021-mips-black-history-month-art-exhibit-featuring-anthony-gartmond

Or visit his website at:
https://www.gartmondcompositions.com/about

Anita Nahal is an Indian American poet, children's writer, and professor at the University of the District of Columbia, Washington DC. More on her at: https://anitanahal.wixsite.com/anitanahal

Book Review

The Partition of Indian Women

Editors: Carole Rozonelli, Allessandro Monti, Jaydeep Sarangi

Reviewed by Malashri Lal

Authors Press, New Delhi (India), 2021. Pages 259. Rs. 995/ 40 US dollars

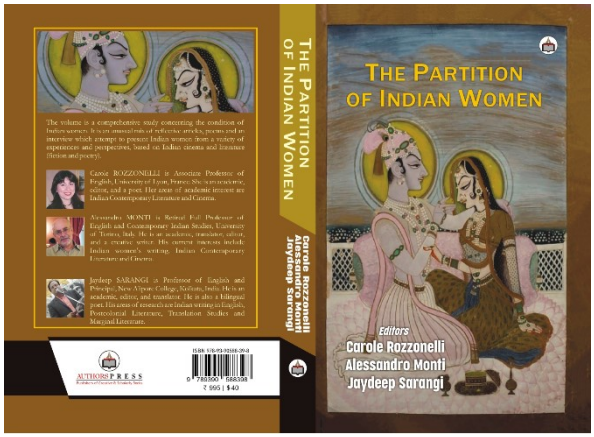
The book is a timely reminder that the word 'Partition' has several connotations. In the context of South Asia the word invariably brings up images of 1947 and the division of the Indian subcontinent by the Imperial Govt. The dismemberment of the land and its people is a tragedy that continues to cast its long shadow even 74 years later. The title of the book and its contents allude, in a way, to the pain of similar fragmented destinies but the articulation is different. The editors Carole Rozzonelli from the University of Lyon, France, Alessandro Monti, retired from the University of Torino, Italy, and Jaydeep Sarangi, Principal, New Alipore College, Kolkata, have collaborated to publish an extraordinary collection on Indian Women in literature, cinema and creative writing. My congratulations to the editors, and also to the publisher, Authors Press for an attractive and meaningful volume. Looking at the book's trajectory the query is: how are women imagined? Across languages and cultures they seem to be compartmentalised into roles, partitioned into social functions, broken into convenient fragments by patriarchy and often by the literary gaze too.

Let me explore some of the key points made by the contributors.

In the Urdu ghazal we are aware of the tradition of a male speaker's dialogue with God and a double enunciation of the "beloved". However to what extent does the woman become an object of male gaze? Alessandro Monti gives several examples of a favourite trope of the "ringlets of hair" and the enormous poetic possibilities of this image. The "unsolved ambiguity" about the addressee adds to the mystique of the figure, but, according to the essayist, a partition from reality has already occurred.

My interest is aroused in the dismembered body of the female subject that is often invoked in Indian literature. Most of us are familiar with the analysis of the New Woman of 19 C Bengali literature. Partha Chatterjee and Sugata Bose's perceptive analyses have expanded the terrain to include the politics of representation. In the present book, the writers engage fascinatingly with the issue of "Female Leadership" and the contradictions between the "Devi" and the "Dasi" in the literary heritage from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee onwards. All of this is tracked well in the essays. Bringing the argument to current times Jawaharlal Nehru's opinion on "the Hindu worship of the mother" is cited with good effect in an essay by Carole Rozzonelli and Alessandro Monti. A sacrificing mother or a woman in the lead? The film Mother India reigns over the Indian imaginary in this regard, and discussing other classic films—Ankur, Nishant and Andaz for example-- the entire section on Cinema is perceptive and useful.

Another section engages with fiction that illustrates the broken identity of the Indian woman. Whether it is Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine, or Hindu Tamil narratives, the restlessness of women caught in the binds of societal expectations is repeatedly fore-grounded. For instance, the novella Pethavan (The Begetter) by Tamil author Imanyan raises the question of a "mismatched love" in rural Tamil Nadu between the daughter of poor farmer and a dalit sub-inspector. The panchayat orders the father to kill the girl because of her transgressive actions. The matter of private and public control on women within the hegemony of a caste-based structure is an old theme, but here and in other cases, authors find new and powerful ways to express the struggle for woman's freedom.



No story about partitioned women in India can be authentic without examining the dalit underclass that much modern critique is turning to. Jaydeep Sarangi and Bidisha Pal's probing interview with Kalyani Thakur Charal, a Bengali Dalit feminist writer, deserves to be highlighted. Though she is a prolific poet, the book of essays and speeches, Chandalinir Bibriti is both autobiography and a social exposure of the gross inequities suffered by a marginalised section. Kalyani insists on the word 'chandalini' as her identity marker, and this is a vigorous strategy of attributing positive meaning to a word of denouncement. We might recall that Rabindranath Tagore's play Chandalika (1938) is based on the same principle of exposing the cruelty of 'untouchability' (oke chuo na chuo na chee, o je chandalinir jhee/ do not touch her, she is the daughter of a chandal). With Kalyani Charal we have arrived at an era of self assertion and a refusal to accept discrimination.

Given my interest in mythology and folklore, I can't but help noticing that many essays allude to the ethereal link of Radha and Krishna. In the book, Finding Radha: The Quest for Love that I co-edited with Namita Gokhale, we had noted the embodiment of ultimate love in a spiritual paradigm. Rozzonelli and Ponti take this further by referring to several films where the Radha-Krishna narrative of 'illicit' love is justified by separating it from commonplace sexuality. Many such points will encourage further research.

The book has a section of poems by five writers (three from India, one from France and one from Italy). "A garland of friendship across cultures", the topics are diverse and yet bound to the common cause of empathy with women. I don't have the time today to comment on the unique voice of each writer—much as I would like to—but I express my appreciation for so many of them speaking about the violence against women in India. There are personal moods too, of loneliness/ akelapan, solitude, nocturnal musings, and the transient shades of nature.

May I add a comment about the cover illustration of the book. It picturises Bani Thani who was a singer and poet in Kishangarh, Rajasthan, in the time of Raja Sawant Singh (1748–1764), whose mistress she became. It is believed that artists were commissioned to paint them as Radha and Krishna. One can read several aspects of 'partition' in this narrative. Bani Thani which means "the beautified one" is separated from her birth name Vishnupriya, and known only by her function of entertaining her master. Second, and most crucial from the feminist research angle, Bani Thani is said to be poet but no record exits of what she wrote, so a woman and her literary production are separated. Furthermore is the irony of Sawant and his paramour being cast as Krishna and Radha, the divine pair who are the epitome of love but could never be married. In the earthly terrain in which Bani Thani lived, she seems to be an emblem for woman's "partitioned" or fragmented identity. I'm not sure these thoughts went into choosing the cover design, but the selection is fortuitous.

Altogether, the book is a compendium of thoughtful material on Indian women. The subject is endless, but given the nature of this volume—the product of an international research project and its intercultural thrust-- the viewpoint is refreshingly new. It also opens the gateway to more research with such a pedagogical frame.

It is my honour and privilege to speak at the launch of the book The Partition of Indian Women.

Prof. Malashri Lal is a former Professor of English at the University of Delhi. She is a member for the English Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi and Bharatiya Jnanpith's advisory committee. Lal has been a Senior Consultant to the Ministry of Culture, UGC nominee on Committees and a member of international book award juries. E mail: malashri@hotmail.com

AN ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY: 2021

by Innamburan

"Socrates continues, when the discussion is not about technical matters but about the governing of the city, "the man who rises to advise them on this may equally well be a smith, a shoemaker, a merchant, a sea-captain, a rich man, a poor man, of good family or of none"

-Plato, Protagoras: 319

The town of Dorset (Chartered in 1761) is a dynamic and self-governing community since long, in the State of Vermont, USA. Authentic descendants of a 'Small is Beautiful' bygone era, its 1941 residents contemplated a new Town Office on March 2, 2021, debated their options in an Online Survey on July 7, 2021 and will cast ballots in August 2021 on building it. Sixty miles ' far from the madding crowd' of Albany NY, the historic Manchester town (population: 4210) is cast in the classic Vermont mould. The agenda for its public hearing on July 13, 2021, on the 'amendments to Manchester Land Use & Development Ordinance' and other civic issues, does carry the Athenian tinge. Counties - Chittenden and many others - will be holding Public Hearings on Energy Compliance Determination during July and August 2021…At the State Level, Vermont's Department of Public Service proactively pursues the public interest in many areas, while its Public Advocacy Division's remit ranges from reviewing utility tariffs to appearing before federal circuit courts in Boston, New York, New Orleans, and Washington D.C.

-excerpts edited for brevity.

This idyllic descent from Athenian Democracy among these nine cities and 237 towns of the State of Vermont, with a whiff of English flavor, like Andover, Bristol, Cambridge, Dorset, Essex,

Hyde Park, Plymouth, Salisbury and so on, is such a surprise, that I hunted and found a counterpoint, in the alert of Professor Ceasar McDowel of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "The classic New England town meeting, with voters gathered in a large hall to decide issues directly, is often cited as the purest form of American democracy. But historically, those town meetings gave a voice only to certain classes of people.". Such academic alerts notwithstanding, a typical Vermonter (he favours not the'double e'!) is earnestly engaged in having a finger in every 'good governance pie! Letters to the Editor in Burlington Free Press, The Rutland Herald and Manchester Journal etc. over a long period and the surveys and standpoints that emerge from many virtual Public Hearings in diverse towns across the State, echo the sentiment of a reader citing Lincoln, '… government of the people, by the people, for the people'. The public may seek proclamations from the governor's office on any specific cause or event and also can also reach an informal message to him on any subject. Mailing of ballots to all voters is an embedded feature in Vermont general elections.

I have the good fortune to holiday in one of those enchanting towns, a veritable Shangri- La, indeed. Nature is indulgent to Vermont. Its sylvan environs of verdant forests, nestling between hills, vales and dales and brooks that sally forth 'and sparkle among the fern…' (Tennyson) make my day, as that of millions of tourists; many New Yorkers maintain second homes in Vermont. The red-gold leaves of the trees in Fall, spring water sourced from own garden, pure milk from grass-fed cows are attractions enough for a tranquil holiday nurturing music, dance, painting, photography and, yes. creative writing as well. Equine events too. Visit from bears, foxes, groundhogs and mooses is a frequent occurrence. We are in deer country.

A deer & her fawn in our yard

The iconic Green Mountain looks down upon us benevolently. Vermont was known as République des Verts Monts till 1777. Yes. Vermont, an independent country that minted her coins (bearing the legend Vermontis. Res. Publica) and operated a postal system, almost joined Canada. That was not to be. Instead, it gave itself that year, the shortest and farsighted Constitution in USA, guaranteeing personal freedoms and individual rights and banning adult slavery. The freemen (read:Universal Suffrage) elected the governor. Montesquieu published his 'The Spirit of Laws' anonymously in 1748. Vermont was quick to revise her Constitution towards separation of powers, within forty years in 1786, ahead of the United States Bill of Rights. (Continents were far apart those days). Vermont was admitted to the Union in 1791.

Reverting to good governance, as the very Directive lifting COVID -19 restrictions says, it 'makes Vermont, the envy of the nation, the safest state in the United States and a global leader.' Vermont's Republican Governor Phil Scott (whom many Democrats voted for) handsomely complimented Vermonters when he said, "When America needs to find its path forward to solve problems and help people; when, in dark times, our country needs a state to light the way, Vermonters will always step up and lead the charge." adding civility and respect as their attributes. Rightly so, given the 'less opportunity for mutations and more virulent strains' as explained by Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD.

Handling of Covid 19 is not the only theme. Vermont's well-oiled government apparatus - division of labor and responsibility and delegation of powers - is buttressed by the active and constructive participation by the people all along. Gathering these threads together, I find in Vermont, a robust affinity to Walter Lippmann's Public Opinion, which echoes Socrates.

Endnote: Vermont joined the United States following the defeat of the British in the Battle of York on October 19, 1781. It pleases one to read, "Vermont …its people and land have poured into their country a strength and a sense of continuity that joins the achievements of the nation's past with the purposes of its present…" in Encyclopædia Britannica.

Innamburan (Srinivasan Soundararajan) is a Tamil scholar with degrees in Economics, Applied Sociology and Tamil Literature. He has long retired from the Indian Audit and Accounts Service in which he served as Additional Deputy Comptroller & Auditor General of India.

Celebrations

"In a small village in rural Bengal ……."

Celebrating 250th Birth Anniversary of Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833)

by Prosenjit Dasgupta

Radhanagar is not widely known even among Indians; it lies about a hundred kilometres to the northwest of Kolkata. In this once small village of rural Bengal was born on 22nd May 1772, an illustrious son of India, held by many scholars to have been the pathfinder for modernity of outlook in the country. He was Raja Rammohan Roy. His 250th birth anniversary is being widely celebrated this year

His life started in the usual manner of a person born into an orthodox Brahmin landlord family. He was initially educated in his native Bengali and in Sanskrit. He was then sent to Patna to study Arabic and Persian, being the then court languages, as was usual among the gentry, followed by about three years of further training in Sanskrit at Benaras. He married, but lost his first wife soon thereafter and married a second time and joined, as did many of his background, trading and financing of trade in the company of officials of the British East India Company.

Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833)

However, in 1804, when Rammohan was about thirty-two years old, he came out with a treatise, written in Persian, titled as *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin,* or, "A Gift to Monotheists". While this was contrary to the polytheism then prevalent, it was in keeping with the spirit of many verses of the Rigveda as well as the metaphysics of the Upanishads. Notably, it is found that towards the conclusion of the *Tuhfat*, Rammohan referred to another note prepared by him, entitled as "*Manazarul Adyan*", or a discussion on various religions. It may therefore be said that in a way, Rammohan was also sowing the seeds of a comparative study of religions.

His major pre-occupation thereafter was reform of the current social and religious rituals and practices. He drew on his deep knowledge of the Hindu scriptures to controvert several of the practices such as "sati" or the burning of widows on the funeral pyre. He also campaigned against child marriage and the practice of polygamy among the "kulin" or high-born Brahmins and the giving of "dowry" to bridegrooms. Through meetings and discussions, pamphlets and memoranda, Rammohan argued his position. He advocated providing of a share in the family assets to the daughters, as much to the sons; in this he anticipated by about one hundred and fifty years the post-Independence Indian statute providing a share of the family income and property to daughters. Last but not the least, the caste system then prevalent in a virulent form, came under severe attack by Rammohan. All this alienated him sharply from his father and family, but he persisted. His eclecticism began to attract Indian followers and, he came to be supported by liberal minded British, such as David Hare; his views were sought after by the then Governor General, Lord William Bentinck.

By end of 18th century he had possibly learnt about ideas of the American War of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. This led him to take a bold stand against unjust social practices and to favour modern, ethical and humanistic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. By early 1820s, Rammohan was publishing two weekly news journals, which dealt with diverse topics like freedom of the press and induction of Indians into higher positions of responsibility. In the field of education, Rammohan's sponsorship of the Hindu College in 1817 for the higher education of Hindu boys was opposed by some orthodox persons on grounds that this would corrupt young minds; the Hindu College was, however, duly set up. In 1826 Rammohan set up the Vedanta College to teach the sacred texts in the original. He collaborated with Alexander Duff in setting up of General Assemblies Institution in 1830, which later emerged as the Scottish Church College.

Rammohan also gave shape to the reformist movement through the "*Atmiya Sabha*" set up in 1815 and went on to establish the "*Brahmo Samaj*" in 1828, which was the precursor to the "*Prarthana Samaj*", founded in Mumbai in 1863 by seers and intellectuals like Dadoba Panduranga and Mahadev Govind Ranade. Progressively these movements brought to bear their rational and reformist ideas on contemporary society. In time, he came to be increasingly respected in the Unitarian Church in both UK and the USA.

To be sure, his reformist views and arguments were strongly criticized and indeed opposed by some conservative and orthodox sections of the Bengali Hindu gentry on grounds of being contrary to established practice and precedence. These conservative elements were relentless in their opposition to the prohibition of "sati" as introduced by Lord Bentinck in 1929 and went on appeal to the Privy Council in London. It devolved on Rammohan to defend the reformist measure and he left in 1830 for Britain to argue against the appeal and had the satisfaction of seeing the Privy Council turn it down. However, Rammohan died after a short illness near Bristol on 29th September 1833. He was buried by his Unitarian admirers at Arnos Vale near Bristol.

In hindsight, it does seem that Rammohan appeared as a colossus among men at a particular cusp of time. There was the large population of Hindus following their age-old sacred texts and traditions while Islam was still prevalent in the vestiges of Mughal rule in the last quarter of the 18th century. But some winds of change were in the offing. The rationalist views of John Locke, David Hume, Voltaire and others were being read and discussed. It may well be said that Rammohan provided an authentic, indigenous vision of a modern, resurgent India unshackled from the time-worn and stultifying beliefs and practices engaging with a changing world. Thus, in observing the 250th Birth Anniversary of Rammohan, India and Indians are honouring a great son of India, who personified India's ageless pursuit of truth, reason and rationality and provided a lead to a more egalitarian and humane future.

Prosenjit Dasgupta, was born in Kolkata. After education at St. Xavier's School and Presidency College, Kolkata, he joined a leading chamber of commerce in 1966 and retired in 2008. He has written occasional articles on wildlife and folk culture in The Statesman, The Telegraph, and Indian Express and in Sanctuary magazine. He has written several books, the first being on Kolkata (Harper Collins, 2000), then one on his experiences with wildlife in "Walks in the Wild" (Penguin 2002). He is single and occupies himself with reading, writing, travel and wildlife photography.

Tribute

Remembering Jamila Verghese
by Rehana Hyder

She was a lady who lit up every room she entered with her smile, her presence imbued with the fragrance of the flower she wore in her hair always.

Jamila was born Jamila Meherunissa Barkatullah into a Punjabi-Pathan family. I recall meeting her kind, learned, and dignified Dad at their home in Delhi, and her charming sisters Leela and Seeta. She was educated at Kinnaird, Lahore, and was as an alumna a special guest whenever she travelled from India to Pakistan to grace its Reunions. One can imagine how she shone and sparkled as a student there; later at St John's, Agra; and then in Florence where she learnt Italian.

In the 1950s she married the able - and personable - young journalist George Verghese, from a Syrian Christian family of Kerala, himself educated at Trinity College Cambridge. This was when my parents, stationed in Delhi as Pakistani diplomats, first met and made friends with them. The Vergheses were the perfect couple and then the model family: with shared interests and passions including music and monuments, traditions and travel. They often picnicked as recounted by their sons at sites such as Tughlaqabad, the mediaeval capital outside Delhi.

Jamila melded marvellously into her husband's family from the other side of the subcontinent. They too adopted her as their own; and she became an adept in their customs and traditions - including the preparation of George's Grandmother's revered recipe for banana jam! Her elder son has conveyed and captured her quality of enchantment in recounting his parents' honeymoon in Dalhousie, graced by a gathering of 'bewildered but beaming Malayalees'.

Too small to remember much from the 1950s era, the Vergheses are an integral part of my Delhi in the late 1960s when my father returned as High Commissioner. By then Uncle George was the highly respected Editor of the premier Indian daily The Hindustan Times, and Aunty Jamila and he among the most sought after guests and hosts among the Capital's diplomats, intellectuals, and civil servants.

I remember their wonderful Christmas parties, overflowing with laughter and love, the apartment crowded from wall to wall with gaily chattering guests, and the perfectly-wrapped presents for each: on one such occasion ours an enchanting, white-and-green silver-spangled candle that still adorns our study. I recall them gracing events such as qawalis and mehfils arranged by my mother at Pakistan House: Aunty Jamila graceful in grey gharara ensemble with red rose in her hair. Nor can I ever forget her gentle but firm advice at a dinner we were both attending at some top bureaucrat's residence to 'stop slouching and always sit up straight!'

Jamila, thus conversant with several cultures and traditions thereof, and devout in her own Christian faith, gave their sons names both Hindu and Muslim: Vijay Khurram and Rahul Saleem. She named their first grandchild Kanishk after the famous Raja of the Kushans who ruled the Buddhist kingdom of Udyana in Swat and gave the Gandhara statues of that era and area their Chinese features. The granddaughters she named Naina and Diya, and was like George a doting and devoted grandparent to them all.

She was a committed but - unlike many of the sisterhood - endearing activist for women's rights, her book 'Her Gold and Her Body' - autographed and given to us - being her 'javelin' (her sport of preference at school and college) against the deservedly dreaded custom of dowry. Another book in our library is a collection of Indian folk tales signed 'from Rahul with best wishes to Saad' (my younger brother and his friend).

Keeping intouch across time and space, in the 1980s, newly back in Pakistan, we were thrilled when after a Kinnaird Reunion in Lahore - where she always sought out family viz her cousins, and friends such as the Nawazes - she visited us for a few fabulous, fun-filled days. She came typically bearing gorgeous gifts; old anecdotes were swapped over the table and on the balcony with my parents; and she again gave me, then working at a UN agency, golden advice such as to give fruit and vegetables preference over 'these dubious vitamin and mineral capsules!'

In the 1990s in Hong Kong, where I had introduced Amer and Alp Arslan to Vijay and Kanishk, we were delighted when Aunty Jamila's visit to the 'Fragrant Harbour' was announced. We spent an entrancing afternoon with her at Vijays spacious apartment in Pok Fulam, where several friends & families - sons of Uncle George's Cambridge contemporaries - were present also in her honour. I recall excitedly telling my parents on the phone, having conveyed their fondest regards to her, that 'She was wearing a pastel sari and her hair is now snowy white, with the flower of course - and she looks as elegant as always!'

The next time I met her, though correspondence betwixt the families was continuous, was in 2006 when I accompanied my elder brother Tariq to Delhi on the occasion of some strategic Indo-Pak talks. Uncle George, and she, charming and vivacious as ever, came to our delegation's dinner at the magnificent Taj Man Singh along with our other old friends the Chandioks, Mahmudabads, Ethan Stein and Omi Marwah, and Tariq's counterpart Ambassador KC Singh.

In Delhi in 2012, Alp and I were made to feel at home in the Vergheses' serene space on the 13th floor near India Gate, where we met Rahul, and wife Jamuna, likewise. He was taken by Aunty Jamila to the balcony overlooking 'about 3,000 years of history, including Qutub Minar' in order to 'appreciate our heritage - whether in Delhi or Lahore - before proceeding to study abroad'.

Not having had the opportunity of meeting since, but always holding her and family in one's thoughts, and remembering Uncle George's and her kindnesses to us and doubtless so many others inside and outside India, it was with real sadness that one learnt she had left us.

She was a wonderful woman, to be remembered with love, for 'the greatest of these (faith, hope, love) is love', as cited in her favourite passage (1 Corinthians 13) from the Bible.

Rehana Hyder who was born in London and educated at Oxford hails from a diplomatic family and has lived in many countries. She now resides in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Short story

Cherian

By Subhash Chandra

Senior citizens – a euphoric honorific bestowed on the aged to lift their sagging spirits – are the favourites of doctors, pathological test labs, chemists, muggers and ruffians.

The latest in the list is Corona V.

In the first wave, they were the main target.

"Don't stir out of the house, Corona will snuff you out," was dinned into them by Virologists and doctors.

In the second wave, the young joined the list (sad!). But the aged were not excluded. The looming third wave might not spare the kids either (sadder!), the experts have warned.

But the old would remain where they were!

Therefore, Saroja Devi did not relax Corona protocol -- masking, hand-washing, distancing – and continued the services of Cherian who had been procuring milk, fruits and veggies, medicines and such for a mutually settled amount. But she generally erred on the side of generosity.

Cherian would check the money and mumble, "Thank you, Amma."

When he had appeared at her door the first time, she sized him up from behind the wire-mesh door. Tall, well built, swarthy, healthy. It will not be easy for Corona to down him, she thought.

"Sanitise your hands."

She had kept a bottle of sanitizer outside."

Cherian did that.

"You'd always wear the mask above your nose."

"Yes, Amma."

"And stand three feet away from the wire-mesh door after dropping the stuff into the bags tied to the railing pipe."

"Yes, Amma."

She had cross-checked on him a few times at random by phoning up the shopkeepers. Not a rupee siphoned off.

She had got her Man Friday!

At the cusp of seventy, Saroja Devi's thin, frail-looking, slightly stooping frame disguised her bodily agility and mental alertness. She could do Rubik's cube in five minutes flat and solved a Sudoku every day. In the normal times, she'd walk about three kilometres to the temple, perambulate seven times around it, and offer puja and prasaad.

She'd argue with her friends about issues national and international, and her arguments were sound and incontestable.

She had retired as Joint Director from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

#

Cherian had moved to Delhi from Kerala with his wife and two daughters -- 16 and 13 years old -- with the dream of making it big in the capital. He was a graduate and bright and hard- working. His wife sold her jewellery and he raised loan to buy a Maruti Versa to ferry children to and fro two schools. In the spare time he used his van as a taxi, earning enough for the family to live comfortably, pay monthly instalments, and put by a little for their daughters' marriage.

#

Then Corona struck out of the blue! Everyone's life fell apart. Lockdown, no jobs, no money, nothing to eat! A massive number trekked back to the distant villages they had left for want of work. Better to die at home!

But Cherian was a doughty fighter. He went around requesting guards of Housing Complexes to get him work … any type of work. Before long he was running errands for six families. His family kept hunger at bay!

Slowly the old woman came to like Cherian. Now she allowed him entry into the house with the stuff he brought – of course, both maintaining distance.

Cherian counted the money she gave.

"Keep the balance," she'd tell him, whatever the amount.

"Thank you, Amma."

Whenever she needed something urgently, she'd call him on phone. In about ten minutes, he materialised at the door, like a genie.

"Yes, Amma?"

He'd often look yearningly at what he carried for the old woman from the market and think of their daughters who loved bananas, his wife who was fond of cashew nuts. But he'd avert his eyes immediately. However, the seed of envy had sprouted.

#

Saroja Devi had enough cash at home when the pandemic started, but since she shunned plastic money and digital transactions for fear of frauds, she ran out of it. Now a trip had to be made to the bank which, with its cramped space, was a den of Corona Virus.

"Get me some money from the bank, Cherian," she said handing him the cheque.

The ten thousand lasted just a week. Over time, the amount in the cheques increased. Then one day, she gave him a cheque for one lakh -- with anxious flutters in her heart.

He did not come back for half an hour. She called him, but his phone was switched off. Temptation had overtaken Cherian, she was sure. He'd never show up now. Money was no issue with her. Her deceased husband's retirement dues, interest on savings and her own pension worked out to a tidy sum.

But she felt bad that her trust was shattered! And Cherian lost!

However, the bell rang. She opened the door and Cherian stepped back as usual.

"Charging of the phone had exhausted, Amma."

He entered, kept the things, walked back to the door and bolted it from inside.

"What're you doing Cherian?" she said, alarmed.

He did not answer, turned and pinned her down to the floor.

A knife lingered in the air.

#

He felt disembodied. His mind was in a haze. A medley of thoughts knocking against each other… pay two instalments … buy dresses for the girls and a sari for wife … darned patches on their clothes… get lots and lots of bananas, cashew nuts …the rest … the rest deposit in the bank... blood on the floor.

Suddenly, his phone started trilling shrilly.

"Cheri, where are you? Have you forgotten today is Sunday? We've to pray to the Lord together," his wife said.

Cherian jerked out of the trance and found himself holding the knife aloft, the old woman sprawled on her back, her eyes shut, lips moving silently doing japam.

Oh no! Fie!! How could he allow the devil to seize his mind!

He got up on his contrite feet, kept the money on the table and dashed out without a word.

Dr Subhash Chandra, former Professor of English, Delhi University, has published two short stories collections, Not Just Another Story, and Beyond the Canopy of Icicles, about sixty short stories in journals, 4 books of criticism and several research articles.

Book Review

Review of The Rapids by Yogesh Patel
Published by The London Magazine Editions, 2021

I sit and gaze at fountains and pigeons

watching mobile users driving

unable to prosecute ***bored***

I'm also here ***illegally***

Lions of Sanchi Capital ***lost***

Truth locked away ***in a museum***

(Lions on Trafalgar Square)

A moment like this comes but rarely in the history of poetry, when a new poetic form gushes forth like the fountains dancing to life at Trafalgar Square. There is a sense of disorientation as metaphor and myth collide (like pigeons and passersby) to give meaning to language which flourishes in a fresh revelation. This is Yogesh Patel's contribution to modern poetry in English – the Rapid poem which carries the rhythm of our heartbeat and flows like the rivers that seamlessly flow through Yogesh's new collection – the Ganga and Yamuna, the Nile and the Thames in The Rapids.

Reading the 60 poems in this book, thoughtfully arranged and visually presented on the page like paintings in a gallery (like those referred to in 'Arrangement' or 'A Quest for Art') has been an aesthetic journey for me in poems which traverse continents (Asia, Africa, Europe and America) and are transcontinental in scope and appeal. I have been reading Yogesh's poems in his previous collections (Swimming with Whales, Bottled Ganges, The Manikin in Exile) which have explored the themes of climate change and a sustainable environment, departures and arrivals, nature, the city and of the migrant self recording memories, loneliness, loss and resilience in verse that is poignant, in a voice that is distinguishable for its unflagging integrity. The themes are continued in The Rapids, and it is as if Yogesh rides on the crest of a breaker here with the confidence of a Neptune taming the waves, conscious of the depth and the vastness of possibilities that the poetic form offers.

He can move from the mundane in 'A milkman's round' which evokes an old tradition, now abandoned:

history doesn't repeat bottles

at four in the morning

- to the current cold reality of soldiers returning with PTSD from continuing contemporary wars:

when you're lost and when you're pissed

a world is a sniper you're now jihadist.

('A turn of an hourglass')

The realism in each poem cuts deep like a sculpturing chisel.

In 'A game of twigs', the innocence of an invitation to play a child's game of Pooh sticks by the narrator positioned on a bridge, becomes a powerful ironic tool, invoking the epic battle at Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata, while playfully daring the onlooker to play a game of Truth:

Be a friend,

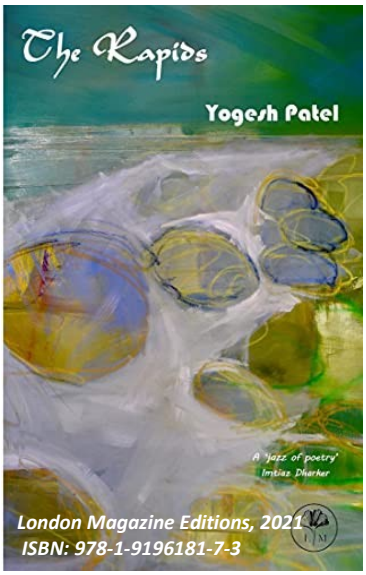
Drop stick with me

to disturb my rippled image:

no more an image

that twigs can race through.

The voices of old masters through the poems in letters from a lost doll to Dora, Mark Twain's affinity with the 'deep silence' of a lake landscape, Ezra Pound's imagist insistence and Walt Whitman's gulls who survey and laugh, advise 'Hide the conker, find the conker; its's a game lost'However, it is not a game lost, rather it is meaning rediscovered where the river is urged to 'Go downstream;' where 'you will find rivers/cities and finally the ocean'.



While the vastness is evoked, there are moments of intimate divulgences e.g., in 'Thali' where a joyful wedding game with coins in later years spins under 'centrifugal forces/at work' with 'coins flying like bullets', or the invocation of 'A single diya brighten(ing) the night' willing 'the words find their mother tongue' in 'The anger management.' In 'A florid breakup' the 'night blooming jasmine/in friendly black space' mirrors 'All florid breakups (which) mark a season's end'.

The environmental concerns and the migrant experience merge with alacrity in the image of 'the migrant/Wilma the whale,' who realises that its arrival on 'the banks of the Thames are also/Harmondsworth prison', but all is not lost, as 'There is always hope for/the prisoner transfer: it comes!' The narrator divulges 'I am a project restoration.' And when this drifting being 'enter(s) a new home', if asked his name, the identity of the narrator becomes interchangeable:

I am Moses

Or

I am Krishna?

('Restoration) – a transnational soul, floating through time, across the globe, in a seamless, continuous presence. The compassion for Wilma can turn to burning anger in 'Clotho's tangled thread' where rape victims are commemorated in

Adikia bloody on the ground

Trying to split Dike's staff.

The Rapids has the appeal of jazz music, where the poet improvises with spontaneity, taking the reader with him on a journey of delightful revelations. Through these poems, birds sing and soar, make nests and rest in arbours. The poet notes

How wonderful to be

an intruder in these

woods…

amidst dunnocks and blackbirds

engaged in a symphony.

And goes on to say,

I am just a migrant

in this part of the world'

But Yogesh's verse does not intrude on our consciousness. It flows through us and envelops us like a symphony, no longer that of an eternal migrant, but of one who embodies multiple departures and affirms he has arrived on our poetic shores to reassure, revive and to stay.

Dr Bashabi Fraser, CBE, Professor Emerita of English and Creative Writing, Director, Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies, Edinburgh Napier University.

Short fiction

Visible/invisible

by Sunil Sharma

---There!

---Where?

---Look again. Up there.

---Hmm.

A pregnant pause in the room.

---Again hiding from us.

---No Mom. It is there only, flapping its wide wings.

---Hmm. I cannot see!

---Oh! Come on, Momma. You always say so.

---I am trying, son. I cannot locate it.

---Oh! Such a fabulous creature! And you cannot see it.

---OK. Let me again try. Your mom is getting old, son.

And she sits up slightly and peers out. The kid waits for the customary declaration about the discovery there in the sky.

The conversation is invariably hushed, conspiratorial, fun.

A secret game played between two players that are already initiated into the arcane mysteries of the nightly ritual of locating a sacred object in the space from their earthly station.

A tough challenge!

Especially, during the monsoons.

The script runs like this:

---Where has it gone now?

---There. Can you see?

---I cannot. Point it out. My vision is not that clear.

The child smiles, pain easing in eyes, bald head shining under the night-light.

A wind, damp and fierce, enters the room and rattles the papers on the side table.

The child says patiently: Mom, see! It is circling in the sky. There.

A work-weary mom again scans the Mumbai skyline and then smiles back, replies tenderly, knowingly: Yeah! Yeah! There.

---Could you see it now?

---Yeah. Sure. Hovering there, opposite building. I see now. T-H-E-R-E. WOW!!

---Is it not incredible?

---Yes. It is. No doubt! Never seen such a beast except in the comics or films.

---Radiating light, is it not?

---Yes. Light. All white, son. How long has he visiting you dear?

---Often. On long nights, my friend from the heavens.

---How do you notice him?

---Flaps his white wings near the window.

---Then?

---I fly with him to strange places across the vast sky. New places that I wished to visit but could not! He takes me there on his back.

---When do you go out?

---After you and dad sleep. We travel to exotic locations. He is fastest, mom.

Mom holds the hands of the bed-ridden kid. They sit there watching the sky and talk in whispers about this creature. The child's breathing is a bit labored due to excitement. Mom caresses the child. Then she goes to the kitchen to finish the chores and fix up the next day's schedule..

---What is up?

A rough male voice asks the child, absorbed in watching the heavens, alone, as the pale moon filters in.

---See that winged horse, dad? Come on in. I will show you a marvel.

--- Horse in the air? How it can be possible, boy?

---Look out there. Mom just saw him there. Up in the sky.

Laughter, cold and metallic, echoes inside the room full of medicine smells.

---Nothing---only darkness and rain there. Go to sleep. You are imagining things again, Appu.

---No, dad, I am not imagining things.

---Then? Am I telling a lie?

---No. You are not.

---Then? You, telling a lie?

---No. I am not telling a lie either.

---You are wasting time, kid. There is nothing there.

---it is there, dad. Only thing---you cannot see it.

---Oh! That sums it up, son. I cannot really see it/him there. Anyway, time to pack up. I have to catch an early local train. Good night, dear Appu. Go to sleep, after saying prayers!

The kid says nothing and covers his head with the soft blanket. Dad leaves the tiny room, humming a tune, switching off the light as well.

The kid says nothing. He knows he cannot win with dad who is always busy with clients and calls and planning business trips.

Appu knows when to withdraw safely from an ugly situation.

Mom has seen it.

That is OK with Appu.

At least, Ma believes me and does not take me for a nut---a sick nut!

.

Soon the sounds die out in the apartment. Parents retire to bed. Silence descends on the working-class neighbourhood.

The child tries to sleep in the darkness, clutching a story book in his hands.

A story book that has opened up magical pathways to a curios child with a limited mobility---and no friends. Mostly confined to bed. Taking heavy medicines. And weekly visits to the hospital.

The story book and a teddy bear are his only companions in the long days and short nights.

The apartment remains his theatre in the day.

Nights are lonely---occasionally scary.

Then he recalls his winged friend.

It is a fact.

Whenever he calls it out, the creature materializes.

As it does tonight.

A soft landing on the narrow balcony!

A gentle hiss outside the window.

His ears pick up the familiar sounds of flapping wings.

It has landed quietly, some spot, out there, waiting for Appu.

The kid can strongly feel the presence, the sign of the arrival, at his bidding.

He strains and discovers the usual sight: A majestic animal, powerful, hypnotic, pure-bred and white, suspended in the air, its wide body balanced between two realms of reality and meta-reality, this and that dimensions; its eyes kind, calling him out.

In an instant, Appu gets pulled out of the soft blanket and becomes air-borne and the adventure of the spirit begins most poetically:

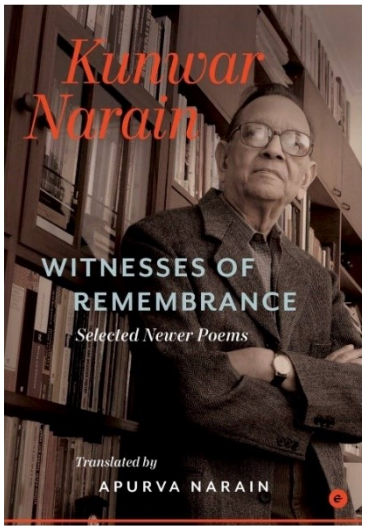
---the fabulous horse with white wings neighs again, the young rider gives it a nudge, both fly off. The moon hides inside a cloud, while a bike sputters on the road but the child is light years away---from pain and humdrum existence in a metro milling with millions of stories untold---roaming new territories, riding on the wonderful creature called Pegasus that has taken many authors worldwide on similar journeys across time-space continuum.

Sunil Sharma, Ph.D. (English), is a senior academic, critic, literary editor, and author with 22 published books: Seven collections of poetry; three of short fiction; one novel; a critical study of the novel, and nine joint anthologies on prose, poetry, and criticism, and one joint poetry collection. He is, among others, a recipient of the UK-based Destiny Poets' inaugural Poet of the Year award---2012. His poems were published in the prestigious UN project: Happiness: The Delight-Tree: An Anthology of Contemporary International Poetry, in the year 2015. https://www.setumag.com/p/setu-home.html

http://www.drsunilsharma.blogspot.in/

Book Review

Kunwar Narain's Witnesses of Remembrance
Selected Newer Poems translated by Apurva Narain
Reviewed by Shanta Acharya



Kunwar Narain (1927-2017), one of India's finest poets, thinkers, and literary figures of modern times, wrote in Hindi. His oeuvre embraced poetry, short story, epic, criticism, essay, translations as well as writings on cinema, music, arts, and culture. Within poetry, too, his reach was wide ranging. His literary reach was richly diverse.

Chosen from five of Narain's collections published between 1956 and 2002, a selection of his poems, No Other World, translated into English by his son, Apurva, was originally published by Rupa in 2008. An abridged edition was released by Arc Publications, UK, in 2010. The poems in Witnesses of Remembrance: Selected Newer Poems are from five books that appeared between 1979 and 2018. With about a hundred poems, this bilingual edition is divided into eight sections – each starting with a picture of one of the poet's belongings and a short poem or excerpt. In his excellent 'Introduction,' which is worth reading, Apurva Narain informs us that many of the 'poems recall a place, person or period; these are then universalised.' These poems are purer 'witnesses of remembrance.'

Witnesses of Remembrance is a timely publication, a much needed antidote to a world no longer centred in a shared moral awareness, a down-to-earthness to which one can respond wholeheartedly. Narain's belief in poetry's ability, even responsibility, to speak the truth is refreshing. The poems may appear simple and unadorned, they are expansive in their evocations. Apurva Narain reminds us of his father's 'inability to deal with the world on worldly terms – my world or his, your world or ours – to the limit of being aloof, impractical, even other-worldly.' The poet's other-worldliness and reclusive temperament reflected an 'inner sight' – not just a metaphysical or spiritual sense – confirming poetry's restorative and humanising aspect. Kunwar Narain's engagement with poetry is more like 'loving or praying, a personal act' in which one is totally immersed.

Poetry for Narain 'is not a declaration, but a witness', taking in everything around us –

… one cannot stop
its testimony in language
which only means truth,
only seeks a gentler being

it is in no scramble

to be pasted up like ads
marched out like parades
chanted like slogans
or won like elections

in the language of people, it be
alive somewhere, somehow, that's all.

The second section of 'Poetry' continues to define Narain's credo:
it can give a lot
for so much can be poetry
in life, if we give it space
as trees give space to flowers
as nights give space to stars

we can keep saved for it
somewhere inside of us, a corner
where the schism between earth and sky
between people and God
is the least…

of course, if one wants
one can
love without poetry
live without poetry

In giving us this choice, he bestows on us the freedom and the gift to be ourselves. Narain comes across as a thinker, holding on to opposites, like a scientist able to see both sides of the question. With a reputation for being a 'true intellectual' among poets, thanks to his extensive reading, the burden of his learning though sits lightly, both on the man and his writing. Firmly rooted in the Indian literary and philosophical traditions, his sensibility is cosmopolitan.

Born on 19 September 1927, Narain came from a business family. Initially, he studied Science in college, which may have enhanced his overall spirit of enquiry. Later, he switched to English Literature and got a Masters from Lucknow University in 1951. Uninterested in the family business, in 1955 he went travelling in Eastern Europe, Russia, and China, met with poets like Nazim Hikmet, Antoni Słonimskie, and Pablo Neruda. Narain read extensively, across literatures, languages, and disciplines. Upanishadic, Buddhist, Sufi, Western, and Marxist thought all played a role in shaping his work. One encounters an eclectic arc of references – Kabir and Amir Khusro, Cavafy and Kafka, Ghalib and Gandhi, Stéphane Mallarmé and Jorge-Luis Borges.

By refusing to look at life and by extension literature as a transactional construct, poetry for him was a means to connect to the inner sanctum of wonder, peace, and truth. Poems can be a memory, a comment, a discovery – all at once. 'We have a language / in which I learnt to live – … We meet / sometimes in the shadow of wars / sometimes in tranquil forests, searching / the most sentient codes of amity / that are truly universal.' (Amaranthine) In 'A Shop that Sells Peace,' Narain points out that 'in a developing country like India / where prices are sky-rocketing / if a hundred rupees per month can buy / even two hours of peace a day / it is not expensive.' Knowing that he 'can't change the world/ nor even fight it /and win,' he reminds us that 'living ordinary lives too / people have been seen / quietly getting martyred.' (Living an Ordinary Life)

The epigraph to his poem, 'Words That Disappear,' a quote from Wittgenstein reminds us of our limitations: 'The limits of my language are the limits of my world.' His own sense of purity, peace, and love, the oneness of life – lived and written – at a time when these words are leaving us, when 'perhaps they turn into hermits / and make themselves so infinitely solitary / that then no language is able // to reach them again.' Yet, we encounter 'words fluttering like flags' (An Evening in Golconda) and learn that 'the books of good faith will/ never close in the world.' (Errors & Omissions Excepted)

Narain belongs to a tradition of poets who are seekers and seers, witnesses. Such poets display an openness of heart and mind. The poet does not always choose his or her poems, they choose the poet. In seeking to reinstate the sublime values of the human and natural worlds to literature – of patience, moderation, and giving – Narain's poetry is an exploration of that original wonder, the pristine expanse, which he attempts to re-create and restore. It is also an ecological imperative – greed being as much a human as an ecological sin – and a feature of his poetry is how the human and the ecological coalesce, how our inter-being becomes 'the wish of a leaf.' He sardonically laments a kind of helplessness in the face of evolution itself when he says 'I reached this world a little late.' A quest for what it really means to be human runs through his poems. Witnesses of Remembrance begins with: 'If I am the truth / nothing has been lost.' (Amaranthine). Immersing oneself in these poems is richly rewarding.

Shanta Acharya, DPhil (Oxon), was born and educated in Cuttack, India. She won a scholarship to Oxford, where she was among the first batch of women admitted to Worcester College. She was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy for her work on Ralph Waldo Emerson. She was a Visiting Scholar in the Department of English and American Literature and Languages at Harvard University. Her poems, articles, and reviews have appeared in major international publications. Her recent books are What Survives Is The Singing (2020) and Imagine: New and Selected Poems (2017). As director and founder of Poetry in the House, she hosted monthly poetry readings at Lauderdale House, London, from 1996-2015. She served twice on the board of trustees of the Poetry Society in the UK. www.shanta-acharya.com

Book Page

Origin of Novel writing in India and the British Raj

by Reginald Massey

The novel as a particular form of literary expression did not exist in India.

It was the British Raj that brought the novel to India and therefore the first novels set in an Indian background were written by British authors.

Consider the following titles: The Adventures of an ADC, The Rajah's Second Wife, Coffee Coloured Honeymoon, Dust Upon Wind. The Story of a Romantic Subaltern.

A Utopian Romance, Gunner Jingo's Jubilee, Fleas and Nightingales, Jungle Jest, The Romance of a Nautch Girl, Indrani and I, With Rifle and Kukri, With Sword and Pen, The Secret of the Zenana. Now none of these is my invention; they are actual books written by actual people, none of whom was an Indian. They bear names to match their titles: names such as Thomas Bland Strange, Max Joseph Pemberton, Alfred Fredric Pollock, Maria Henrietta Crommelin, Septimus Smet Thorburn, Flora Annie Steel, Theodora Edward Hook, Cyril Argentine Alington and the prolific Fanny Emily Farr Penny.

It was these and others like them whose vivid imaginations have stamped forever their image of the subcontinent on the minds of the English speaking world.

Millions got their entertainment and thrills from these purveyors of popular fiction who could certainly tell a rattling good yarn.

They churned out endless tales of maharajahs and monkeys; tiger hunts, fakirs and fakes, turbulent Afghan tribesman and thugs, dashing cavalry officers and loyal Indian servants. However, the Indians in these books were not by and large pleasant. Indeed, with many of them one would not relish a midnight encounter. And those who were noble were sickeningly so. A stock figure was the funny Indian who gushed out fractured and convoluted English. In some novels this character was over corrected to become the Oxford-accented English gentleman with a divine tan. No Indian was seen as normal and so far reaching was the effect of these fictions that the images they created persist to this day.

Nothing about Hindustan was real; it was all larger than life, exaggerated. The picture was confused and confusing but always provocative, mysterious and intensely exciting.

I have advisedly refrained from starting with the obvíous books and their authors for they are the tips of the iceberg or, since we talking about India, the everests of expression.

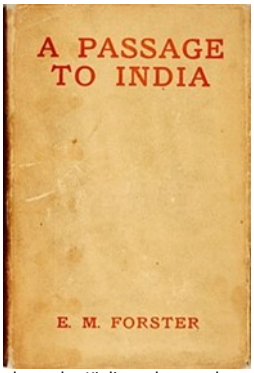
The foreign interest in India, sometimes healthy and sometimes morbid and obsessive is as old as the Himalayas. Outsiders have possibly been enticed by moods and aromas to which we have become so accustomeed that we hardly notice them. That is why the travelogues of foreign visitors are so fascinating.

The seventh century Buddhist pilgrim Huien Tsang, for example, noted the large number of courtesans at the Surya temple in Multan; the eleventh century Arab scholar Al-Biruni in his work India catalogued the country's achievements in science and the arts. Three centuries later another Arab, Ibn Batuta, recorded that they were two thousand musicians in the service of Sultan Mohammad bin Tughluq. The Memoirs of Babar, the founding father of the Mughal empire are a mine of information and later, in the 18th century, the French missionary Dubois wrote his justly well known, and often unjustly vilified Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies. What has disturbed Indian prudes, faithfully following as they do their late Victorian masters, was his graphic account of the devadasis (female 'servants of the gods') of south India.

We do not burn books or their authors but like the British we disregard the uncomfortable ones. One would have thought that after several decades of freedom Indian and Pakistani intellectuals would have acquired the intellectual maturity to consider honestly the assessments of commentators such as Katherine Mayo and Beverly Nichols.

Our verdict must be must be on the basis of reason, not emotion. India might not be a continent of Circe nor even an area of darkness but I am sure that anyone who essays a discovery of India will always come up with something rich and strange. And also, most surely, something ugly and unpleasant.

The novel form came to India with the English language and significant imaginative writing tells us more about a people than statistics and census data. In George Grella's words: "Because it arises from and speaks to emotions, because it deals with the spirit of man, because it delights as well as instructs, fiction can help us know India deeper and broader ways than the reports of scholars and scientists." He continues:



"Dozens of books about early 20th century Indian conditions of class, race, climate and history cannot replace the world of Mosque, Cave and Temple created E.M. Forster's novel Passage to India." How true.

But for my money the master will always be Kipling who was born in India. Poet, careful craftsman and wizard of words, he conjured up time and again the vast kaleidoscope of Mother India and her many millions and wrote of them with an acute understanding of the cultural context within which they functioned.

He has been justly accused of being an apostle of imperialism. True. But he was a prisoner of his cultural conditioning. However since we are talking about fiction his storytelling was unbeatable. It is no wonder that he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the youngest writer to have ever received that honour.

Following Kipling's example, writers such as Henty and Talbot Mundy fired the imagination of generations with books such as The Tiger of Mysore, or Name and Fame, Red Flame of Erinpura and King of the Khyber Rifles. India has also provided material and locale for the very considerable talents of J.R. Ackerly, W.S. Maugham, John Masters, Rumer Godden, Louis Bromfield, Paul Scott, M.M. Kaye, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, H.R.F. Keating and a host of others.

Thus far the discussion has dealt with foreign writers; in other words, those who did not, or do not, belong to any of the ethnic groups native to the Indian subcontinent.

However, Indians have been using English for the purposes of creative writing for about two centuries. Examples of such writing can be found in Bengal where the British influence was strongest.

Rajmohan's Wife by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhya was the first novel written in English by an Indian. It was published in 1864. In fact, it wa the English language that triggered off what we now call the Indian Renaissance. The great Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for Literature wrote in both Bengali and English.

Today matters stand differently. Hundreds of Indians and Pakistanis have authored novels in the English language and have been recognised internationally. An example is Salman Rushdie but I can list many others had I the space to do so.

Paradoxically, an ever increasing number of Indians and Pakistanis have begun to write in English since 1947, the year of Indian independence and the creation of Pakistan. This is wholly to the good for it has channelled the subcontinental genius to flow into fresh, new and virgin fields. The harvest has been rich and often unexpected because English is to India and Pakistan today what Latin was to medieval Europe.

The philosopher Radhakrishnan, who became President of India, remarked that the British legacy to us consisted of Shakespeare, the King James's Bible and the limited liability company. The first two concern language and for this we must be thankful. For all the appliances of expression ever devised it is the English language that stands pre-eminent. It is tooled for both science and the soul. Supremely malleable, it is fitted for enquiry and argument. The fight for Indian independence itself was conducted in English. In fact, the founder of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah conducted his campaign for Pakistan wholly in English. And let us not forget that memorable speech in English made at the midnight hour when Jawaharlal Nehru addressed his fellow citizens

Reginald Massey, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Freeman of the City of London, has authored many books on South Asian subjects which are available from Amazon UK.

Memoir

We Are Never Apart (For my mother)

by Meenakshi Mohan

We are never apart
It is a celestial bond of souls
There is a vast abyss between us
As you live up there
In Elysium, where Gods reside
And I am here bound to earth
Yet, you live in my pain and happiness
In my tears and joys
I seek you, my mother
In the blues of night
You must be the brightest star
In the cluster of stars
Watching over me
As we are never apart.

"Ammi!" I cried in pain.
To this date, it is always my mother's name that instinctively comes when I am in some kind of crisis. The distance of thousands of miles, now of eternity, has not been able to break the connections of our hearts and souls.

It was the summer of 2005. We were in Chicago at a friend's wedding, staying with a friend. One night while coming out of my room in a dark hallway, I misdirected myself towards the staircase, lost my balance, and fell from a flight of twenty-five steps. I remembered landing on a flat marble floor with severe neck and head pain. I was taken to the hospital and released the next day with some minor injuries. What saved me? My mother, in India, at the same time, was taking her afternoon nap when she got up with a start, saying, "My Child! God, please save my daughter. Give her my life!" It was the siesta time in India. My father had also dozed off with his catnap. So, he got up too and asked her, "What happened?" She confided that she had a terrible dream about me. My father convinced her that it was just a dream and went back to sleep, but my mother stayed up.

It was a miracle that nothing major happened to me, but I lost something very precious. Two weeks later, I landed at Delhi airport at an odd hour of 2:00 am, neither night nor day. My heart said that my mother would be there, as usual, to pick me up. As I walked out of the security, sure enough, I could make out her silhouette in the dense cloud of people. I swallowed my tears. Were they of sadness or happiness – perhaps both! I was seeing her after one whole year. Little did I know that would be the last time she would ever come to pick me up as she always did without fail on my every visit to India. When I came home with her, I noticed she had already laid out my nightclothes on the bed, so I would not have to open my suitcase at that hour of the night. The following morning, she came with a hot cup of tea and gently stroked my hair. Oh, how much I craved for this love and caring!

Mother and daughter

Soon after my visit, we discovered that she had an advanced cancer stage and had only a few months to live. The rest of my trip that summer went in visiting various doctors, hospitals, multiple tests, and treatments. No ray of hope seemed visible in the farthest of the horizon. I was numb with pain. How could something so terrible happen to such a full-of-life, spirited, positive person? My mother was my advisor, my mentor, and above all, my best friend. She was the person I could share my sorrow, happiness, worries, my achievements. I could not even think of losing her.

I was there with her for the whole summer. I was with her when she was struggling for her last few breaths. I held on to her hand, trying to soothe her pain, when she took her last deep breath and said, "Hey Prabhu," translated into English, "Oh God!" Then she closed her eyes forever. All her sufferings, pain, anxiety froze at the moment. All I remember next is that I spent the whole night holding her beautiful hands – hands of a painter with long slender fingers, not a trace of wrinkle. A strange silence and melancholy took over my whole being. Teary-eyed, when I looked at her serene, calm face, it seemed like she was consoling me. I learned there was such a little distance between life and death and yet an expanse of a gulf between being and not being.

Life is a maze of mysteries. I wondered what saved my life from that terrible fall? Did she save me by giving her life? Was it her mother's intuition, a gut feeling that she could vaticinate what was happening to her daughter, and God listened to her? My Ammi is physically no more with me, but a cord still binds us, soul to soul. She is there in the aroma of my cooking when I prepare one of her favorite dishes. She is there in my saris, matching *churis* (bangles), in her books that she signed for me. She is also with me through her old letters to me. She is also with me through her writings on my prayer book, in which she wrote some *shlokas* for me, which I read every day. Yes, mother, you are in me, and I am in you. No distance can ever keep us apart.

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

Book Review

Poetics of Locality
Jaydeep Sarangi's *From Dulung to Beas: Flow of the Soul*

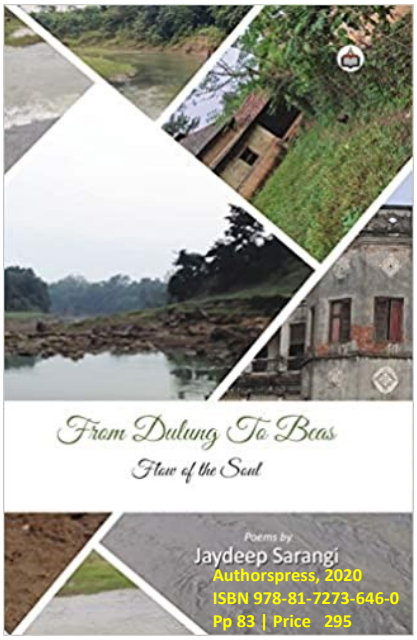
by Basudhara Roy

"One writes to make a timely home for oneself, on paper and in others' minds. I write to make peace with the things I meet with. […] I write to begin a dialogue. […] I write as a daily act of improvisation. I write against oppressive machinery and for democracy in all spheres. I write myself out of my land and people and figures in my dreams," responds poet-critic-translator, Jaydeep Sarangi to the question why he writes. To meet a corroboration of his statements, one needs only glimpse into his fertile poetic corpus comprising nine volumes of verse, each of which offers a compound perspective into the poet's writing imagination and layered material world. Among the various themes that Sarangi deftly handles in poetry – nostalgia, apprehension, relationships, history, society, protest and revolt, one finds him returning in collection after collection to the idea of place, of locality, and an interweaving of the self with its natural world. In *From Dulung to Beas: Flow of the Soul*, this sense of place is overwhelmingly manifest.

The title itself prepares the reader for a journey with the firm reminder that pleasures are to be sought not in the arrival but in the 'flow' itself. What is the direction of the flow, one would like to ask. In seeking an answer to this question, the reader is gently led into an imaginative topography where many topographies intersect, a world that shares its boundaries and longings with other worlds and a history that rests ontologically on other histories. The epicentre of the poet's consciousness is undoubtedly constituted by his native soil of Jhargram but the poet is concerned less with Jhargram itself than with the vision of Jhargram in the world. This, one realizes, is baffling terrain where the local and the global are determinedly brought together and yet, there is a conscious politics in Sarangi's poetic journey – a distinct postcolonial reclamation of the minor and the local within the spatial-cultural narratives of globalization.

To assess the precise coordinates of this political stance, one may simply examine the names of the two rivers in the collection's title – Dulung and Beas. Beas is among North India's most well-known rivers with a length of four hundred seventy kilometres and a drainage basin of around twenty thousand three hundred three square kilometres. Deriving its name from Veda Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata*, the river is of considerable mythological and cultural significance. The Dulung, on the other hand, is a small rivulet in the Jhargram district of West Bengal. The main tributary of the river Subarnarekha, the Dulung remains largely undocumented in the country's cultural archives despite its beauty and active nourishment of the land it flows through. In Sarangi's postcolonial poetic geography, the flow of the soul is from Dulung to Beas – two points in Cartesian space that assert equal value and prominence. Again, it must be pointed out that the flow being spoken of is that of the creative consciousness which inherently defies linearity so that the privilege of location is entirely absent here.

In *Writing for an Endangered World*, Lawrence Buell observes, "In the literature of place, what often makes the difference between pious obeisance to lococentrism and a more critically aware place-connectedness is a sense of inhabiting different places simultaneously." (66) *From Dulung to Beas: Flow of the Soul* is a montage of locations -Jhargram, Kolkata, Rotang, Bangladesh, Turin, Uruguay,



Athens, New Zealand, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and more, mapped through rivers - Dulung, Beas, Ganga, Titas, Meghna, Triton, Wai-ti, Rio de la Plata, Murray and Darling. Each location, the poet urges, is unique in terms of geography, culture and its impressions on the creative mind so that any assertion of spatial dominance or privilege can only be a result of inequal distribution of historical or cultural power. Running through the fifty-one poems of this collections, one encounters a strong historical sense poignantly aware of the dense strategies of power that architect the official production of history. It is this power that Sarangi wishes to challenge through his committed desire of linking places via an act of empowered imaginative cartography.

Talking to Giovanni about his poem 'The Watcher', Borges says, "It is something deep down within myself - the fact that I feel constrained to be a particular individual, living in a particular city, in a particular time...." For Sarangi, the poems in this collection attempt a similar negotiation with spatiality and temporality as they draw into a postcolonial dialogue the past and the present, the mainstream and the margins, the dispossessed and the privileged. Fluid, disruptive, connective and regenerative, the river becomes an important metaphor here. In 'Your Identity', the poet writes, "The river is your energy,/ It writes your history./ Unfurls memory frozen/ In cool folk dance/ And your identity generation." A site of both personal and communal memory, it is a distinct agent of locality that is also, already global if one views it through the right cultural lens. 'A Sense of Place', says:

In the bare earth my ancestors rest in peace.
I choose a place, call it native

You are my brother. I am your river
Of life flowing downstream.

Carrying history
Of our land, your land and my people.

An exploration of the narrative voice in the above lines leads to a profound ambiguity. Is the speaker of these lines a person or a river? Does the river choose its place? Is 'native' then a category merely constructed? One cannot help but admire the intense eco-consciousness of theses lines as man and river establish an undeniable dialogic brotherhood. Historically conscious, ecologically empathetic and politically radical, *From Dulung to Beas* will be read and remembered alongside books of Indian English Poetry such as Keki N. Daruwalla's *Crossing of Rivers* and Mamang Dai's *River Poems* to discover the spiritual strength that lies in India's riverine annals.

Basudhara Roy is a poet, academic and faculty of English at Karim City College affiliated to Kolhan University, Chaibasa. She specializes in diaspora women's writing and gender studies. Her reviews have featured in Café Dissensus, Muse India, Setu, Borderless, Devour, Contemporary Voice of Dalit, Poetcrit, Teesta Review and Education as Change among others. Stitching a Home (New Delhi: Red River, 2021) is her recent (second) collection of poems. She loves, rebels, writes and reviews from Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India.

Two poems

He Called Out My Name
by Cyril Dabydeen

He called out my name
with real excitement--
the handsome Indian youth
at the grocery-store counter
seeing me here in the North
(cold Ottawa, in December)
with his greeting smile,
but more than a greeting--
asking if I think Rohit Sharma
--Yes, Rohit Sharma
would be selected for the next
cricket text match
between India and Australia.

I smiled back, indeed--
Sharma, why not?
Acknowledging him I did
with a wave, and more than
what we have in common--
"Indian" style—or what's
only Indian, now with
genuine excitement, see--
beyond borders or boundary
lines on a very cold day
(far from Mumbai,
Kolkata, or Delhi), keeping
us warm with a New Year
to come, being here now,
nowhere else.

Cyril Dabydeen is a former Poet Laureate of Ottawa (1984-87). He has taught Creative Writing at the University of Ottawa for many years. Born in Guyana, S. America. Contact: cdabydeen@ncf.ca

Swati Pal's *In Absentia*

Hawakal Prokashona (India)/ Hawakal Publishers (UK/US), June 2021

Reviewed by Ruma Sen

GRIEF is a cruel kind of education; it is inevitable and inescapable.

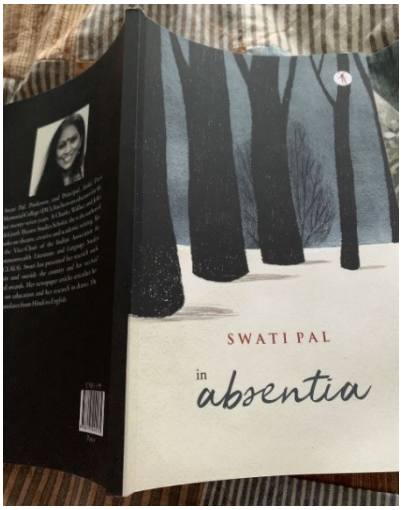
Grief is also about language; the failure of language to express our grief, and our inexplicable grasping of language to articulate what we feel. Where solace becomes an echo chamber and has little impact. Words of condolences are also largely unwelcome, because no matter how heartfelt, they make grief's cruelty an irrefutable reality.

There are so many truths to the experience of loss, death and grief – the inescapable, ever-present certainty that somebody else will die, that more will be lost, and no matter how forcefully Cher belted it out, there is no turning back time.

As inevitable as its presence, grief teaches us to find our own ways to cope or deal with, and eventually survive the pain – through prayers, meditation, reading, counseling and all other mechanisms made available to us through our civil society. Those among us who are particularly brave, work through our angst in public presence, express the rawness of feelings through expressions of art, and elevate this experience to the sublime.

Swati Pal, the author of ***In Absentia***, has seen the depths of grief's cruelty. In her anthology of poems, she has poured her heart out through words that reveal both the darkness and the light. Brace yourself for the impact of her words, embrace her emotions as if they were your own, and reconnect with that cruel education which we will all inevitably experience at some point of time in our lives.

Wounds of the heart do not heal. To vocalize the shards of the broken heart with power and beauty is an unmatched talent. Swati's poems tell us not only of the experience of loss and all that it can encompass, it also vividly marks the passage of time, the ordinariness of life that surrounds this extraordinary pain (Material Things Matter), the anguished voice of a mother calling out to her son to return home. Whether it is her muted anguish (Thy Kingdom Come) or the searing agony (Then and Now) you can feel the presence of absence. Most of her poems speak either directly to her son, Mohan (Divakar Sinha), or of him, and capture the brightness and agility of the young mind, recalling their shared memories, and all that she continues to savor about him.



To mark a crescendo of this powerful collection of words, Divakar Sinha's words are included at the end of the collection. His poem titled *AE (Drastic Alter Ego)* is a poem with many phrases with double or implied meanings. It is a quirky, lighthearted insight into that vibrant young mind. Not that the point needed to be reinforced, but these concluding pages make it ever so real that there will be no more words from Divakar, at least in this lifetime.

Memories are treacherous; they creep in and wreak havoc when you are least expecting. Such is the power of these poems, they evoke memories of moments from one's own life and that of lives lost that makes one catch their breath, or be still in that moment.

As one of Swati's friends responds on social media, "Some of the poems find echo in every heart for all of us have experienced grief in some form or the other."

In Absentia is a collection of poems that will resonate, not just for its powerful and evocative words, it will connect because we all share this one universal experience, of loss and coping with the pain of losing. In this particular moment in time, when humanity grieves for the loss of our loved ones, her words echo the struggles of our times, just as it connects with us at a personal level. Collectively, I hope that we all heal, even if it takes us a lifetime to do so.

In Absentia is about keeping Divakar alive, not just in memory, but in a deeply-felt yet absent presence.

"You will not be
A memorial.
You will
Stay alive."

Dr. Ruma Sen is a Professor of Global Communication at Ramapo College of New Jersey, USA. She has taught in institutions across multiple nations, consulted for international development agencies, and published her work extensively. Dr. Sen's areas of scholarship include transnational flows of neoliberalism and migration. Currently she teaches courses on globalization, media and Indian culture, alongside leading a study abroad program in India.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani

Kishwar Desai

Westland

INR 599

THE LOST HEROINE

Vinu Abraham

translated by C.S. Venkiteswaran

Speaking Tiger

INR 299/

Reviewed by Anjana Basu

These two books both centre on India's nascent film industry and the first heroines of the time. Kishwar Desai's is a work of detailed research while Vinu Abraham's is the story of the heroine who starred in the first Malayalam film. While both heroines are different – Devika Rani was hyped as Rabindranath Tagore's grand niece and had an education in the UK, while Abraham's PK Rosy is a poor Christian Dalit girl who because of her beauty attracts the attention of director JC Daniel and comes to star in Vigathakumaran (The Lost Child, 1928) .

While the Longest Kiss is the story of Devika Rani and Himanshu Rai, their relationship and the studio, Bombay Talkies that they struggled to set up in what was then Bombay, what comes through is a woman's struggle against a patriarchy that judges her on the basis of her beauty and assumed behaviour.

The first film that they starred in is fittingly called Karma. Launched in London's Hyde Park, Karma dazzled all beholders and became infamous for the longest kiss in Indian cinema, two minutes of screen time. Hyped as Tagore's great grand niece she began attracting attention at a time when Indian cinema was in a nascent stage and when most actresses were women from doubtful backgrounds.

Desai's research is based on 4,000 letters and studio documents and lockdown helped the author to organise the papers.

The fact that a beautiful actress' life is not easy emerges from the book – driven to elopement by Rai's abusive behaviour, Devika Rani chose to be branded a seductress rather than reveal Rai's psychological issues and weaken the foundations of Bombay Talkies. The kind of strength that enabled her to hold her tongue while being misunderstood on all fronts – Manto shredded her character in his story of the actress Lateeka Rani – would seem strange in these kiss and tell tabloid days.

The Longest Kiss: The Life and Times of Devika Rani is as much a story of the setting up of Indian cinema as it is the story of the actress who became a studio head and who could sing and develop film concepts with ease.

Ultimately internal politics shredded Bombay Talkies which had survived so much and Devika Rani found the love missing from her life in Svetoslav Roerich and abandoned the tumultuous film world for the peace and quiet of the Himalayas. Her life is the stuff of films – and was the subject of a successful play scripted by Kishwar Desai. The star struck as well as film historians will find much to relish in her story.

PK Rosy's story on the other hand is undocumented. Her parents were labourers and she did not have the benefit of Devika Rani's connections. Her accidental rise to stardom resulted in an overflow of bigotry because she, a Dalit girl, was playing the part of a high caste Nair heroine. Conservative Hindu groups were furious at this presumption and demanded that the film be banned. In any case, Rosy's beauty drew the wrong kind of attention and the fact that she was acting in a film made men think she was no better than a prostitute. Ultimately her presence at the film premiere resulted in a riot and she and her parents had to slink away before they were harmed – stones were actually thrown and her hut was set on fire. Not surprisingly, the director went bankrupt and no trace remains of the first Malayalam film, unlike Devika Rani's Karma. PK Rosy moved to Tamil Nadu married and changed her name to Rajammal and her children never knew that she had acted in a film. JC Daniel also left Kerala for Tamil Nadu and earned his living as a dentist since he was tarred by the same brush as PK Rosy.

Vinu Abraham therefore had very little information to go by so he had to create a fictional reconstruction of her life enabling him to fill in the blanks one way or the other. In fact he first heard of Rosy at a film festival in Kerala where the Dalits were protesting that she should be given her right to be recognised for what she truly was – Kerala's first film heroine – and the outline of the story inspired him to put the words on paper. In Malayalam it went through various editions before film scholar C.S. Venkiteswaran took the initiative of making it available to the wider world beyond the boundaries of Kerala.

Though slim, the book does give readers an in-depth account of what would-be actresses and their directors had to undergo in the days when film was young, bringing new life to a lost heroine.

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

MARCUS HODGE'S SOLO EXHIBITION IN LONDON

ARTIST WHO EXPLORES THE WORLD OF THE HORSES

'MY QUEST IS TO SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE HEART'

From Andalusia to India, this collection of paintings brings together images from a number of trips over the last two years. Marcus Hodge explores the world of the horse, from the Marwari horses of Rajasthan, the international circus horses of Monaco, to the thoroughbreds and Arab horses of the Middle East.

These paintings have a unifying theme – a celebration of festivals and religious gatherings where animals play a part or merely stand by as part of the spectacle.

Marcus Hodge is a restless spirit who finds expression in the medium of painting, drawing, and sculpture. His work is conceived more instinctively than intellectually. To quote William Packer, art critic for the Financial Times, 'He goes off into the wilderness, on which to register, with remarkable freedom and spontaneity, whatever takes his eye.'

Hodge originally made his name as a portrait painter. He studied Old Master techniques for five years at the Escuela Libre Del Mediterraneo in Palma. On completing this rigorous training, he became only the third person in the school's history to be invited to remain as a tutor.

Following success as a portrait painter, he first travelled to India in 2000, which was the start of an intense fascination with the country, the driving force behind his first solo show, and a continuing powerful element in his art.

From classical beginnings, his style constantly evolved to become bolder and simpler, and sometimes figurative painting gives way to abstraction.

TWO MOST IMPORTANT LOCATIONS ON HIS EQUESTRIAN TRAVELS - WHERE MARCUS HODGE FOUND INSPIRATION: PUSHKAR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

5th - 27th October 2021

Venue:
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Entry: Free Admission to the Gallery

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