



The Wise Owl

PEACOCK & GOLD

Online Magazine

Editor Speak

June 2023

A Peacock is a beautiful bird that celebrates the advent of rain with a mesmerising dance. Like this gorgeous bird, Peacock & Gold Edition dances to the music of our poets, writers and artists. Interviews with wordsmiths, Kelli Russell Agodon & Kanwar Dinesh and artists Sangeeta Gupta & Babeesh Anela inspire. Segments on poetry, fiction, creative non Fiction make for great reading. Film and book reviews, podcasts and montage all add to this bubbling literary cauldron.

At the request of our poets, we have introduced a new segment, "The Daily Verse", where we upload poems every day of the week. Thanks to the enthusiastic participation of our poets, this segment is off to a running start.

Dear Readers & Viewers, find yourself a cosy nook and enjoy our June offering.



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INTERVIEWS



The Interview: Kelli Russell Agodon

An Award-winning Poet

The Wise Owl talks to **Kelli Russell Agodon**, an award-winning American poet, writer, and editor. Kelli has authored 6 books- *Fire on her Tongue Anthology* (2012), *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room* (2010), *The Daily Poet* (2012), *Hourglass Museum* (2014), *Everything is Writable* (2022) and her latest release, *Dialogues with Rising Tide* (2021). *The Hourglass Museum* was a finalist for the Washington State Book award, Finalist for the Julie Suk Prize and was honoured with the Best Book of Poetry from an Indie Press. *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room* was Foreword's Book of the Year Winner in Poetry, voted as one of the Top 20 Books on Goodreads and finalist in Washington State Book Prize.

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Tête-à-Tête: Kanwar Dinesh Singh

An award-winning poet, storyteller, critic & translator

The Wise Owl talks to **Kanwar Dinesh Singh**, a well-known poet, storyteller, translator, critic and a prominent voice in the field of contemporary Indian writing in English. By profession, Singh is an Associate Professor of English at a college in Shimla. He is also the winner of the prestigious 'Himachal Pradesh State Sahitya Akademi Award 2002.' Singh's poetry oeuvre includes *Implosions*, *Asides*, *Thinking Aloud: A Collection of Mini Poems*, *The Theophany*, *House Arrest*, *The Frosted Glass*, and *Epistles: Poems of Love and Longing*.

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INTERVIEWS



The Interview: Sangeeta Gupta

An Artist, poet, writer & Filmmaker

The Wise Owl talks to **Sangeeta Gupta**, an acclaimed artist, bilingual poet and documentary film-maker. She served as a bureaucrat with Government of India and subsequently worked as Advisor to the Akademi of Visual Arts, New Delhi, India. She has to her credit 36 solo exhibitions and 200 group shows held in prestigious galleries in India and abroad. She has authored 25 books of poetry and prose and directed 30 documentary films.

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Tête-à-Tête: Babeesh Anela

A traditional Mural Artist

The Wise Owl talks to **Babeesh Aneela**, a traditional mural artist from Kerela. He completed a 5-year course in traditional mural painting from Mural Arts Centre at Guruvayoor Devaswom and immersed himself in this art form. Babeesh experimented with this form, synthesizing it with contemporary art and a dash of neo-romanticism. His work has been exhibited in various prestigious art galleries in India and abroad and is a part of various private collections in India, America, Europe and South Africa. His murals can also be found in temples across India.



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The Interview: Kelli Russell Agdon

(Rachna Singh, Editor, *The Wise Owl*, in conversation with Kelli Russell Agdon)

The Wise Owl talks to **Kelli Russell Agdon**, an award-winning American poet, writer, and editor. She was raised in Seattle, and graduated from the University of Washington, and Pacific Lutheran University Rainier Writing Workshop with an MFA in creative writing. She lives in Washington State. Her work has appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *Image*, *5 a.m.*, *Meridian*, *Calyx*. She was the co-editor of the *Crab Creek Review* from 2009 until 2014. She is the co-founder of *Two Sylvias Press*.

Kelli has authored 6 books— *Fire on her Tongue Anthology* (2012), *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room* (2010), *The Daily Poet* (2012), *Hourglass Museum* (2014), *Everything is Writable* (2022) and her latest release, *Dialogues with Rising Tide* (2021). *The Hourglass Museum* was a finalist for the Washington State Book award, Finalist for the Julie Suk Prize and was honoured with the Best Book of Poetry from an Indie Press. *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room* was Foreword's Book of the Year Winner in Poetry, voted as one of the Top 20 Books on Goodreads and finalist in Washington State Book Prize.

Thank you, Kelli, for taking time out of a busy schedule to talk to The Wise Owl. It is indeed a pleasure to talk to you.

RS: You have published 6 books, including award-winning poetry collections, *Dialogues with Rising Tides*, *Hourglass Museum*, & *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room*. For the benefit of our readers please walk us through your journey as a poet—what made you gravitate towards poetry and the creative influences that inspired you to adopt this genre.

KRA: I was an undergrad at the University of Washington writing fiction when I took a poetry class with poet Linda Bierds. I remember sitting in the quad under blooming cherry trees reading poems with my classmates. It changed me.

I didn't understand when I arrived at college that one could be a poet in the world. Poets felt like rare birds from Ireland or dead white men I had read about, but I didn't know there was space in the poetry world for my words. When I saw Linda publishing her book, complimenting my work, and suggesting I submit my poem to our college journal, *Bricolage*, I thought—Wait, I can do that?

Since then, I find my inspiration everywhere—in nature, technology, daily life, it's all around me. If you look at the world with eyes that say, "*Even this can be a poem*," you'll always have something to write about.

RS: As I have mentioned above, you have penned several poetry collections. Our readers would be eager to know the inspiration behind your award-winning poetry collections, *Dialogues with Rising Tides*, *Hourglass Museum*, & *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room*.

KRA: *Letters from the Emily Dickinson Room* was my creative thesis at Pacific Lutheran University's low-res MFA program, the Rainier Writing Workshop (ironically, the university where I now teach in that same program I graduated from) and was inspired by my love of wordplay and living my life as a poet. The poems in the book are in alphabetical order, which was a really interesting way to title poem to create the order in the book.

Hourglass Museum was created because I wanted to make a paper museum. There are ekphrastic poems in there (poems written about artwork), but also many references to artists. I saw each section as its own exhibit in a museum. For

example, the section "*Sketchbook of Nudes*" doesn't include punctuation as I thought that's what an exhibition of poems would look like—they wouldn't be wearing their punctuation.

My newest book, *Dialogues with Rising Tides*, tries to find calmness in a chaotic world, but mixes ecopoems with poems about anxiety, suicide, and love. I have been told by others that this is my "bravest" collection, which I believe means, as a poet, it's probably my most vulnerable book as it deals with anxiety and depression, and some struggles I was having as a sensitive human in the world. For me, I wrote the book for others to feel less alone and why I left in the more "vulnerable" poems.

RS: Your latest poetry collection *Dialogues with Rising Tides* is a collection of some beautiful poems. What inspired you to put together this collection? Also, I observed that your book is organised into sub-heads like 'CROSSRIP', 'SCARWEATHER', 'OVERFALLS' 'SHAMBLES' etc. Our readers would be curious to know the basis of such segregation.

KRA: Thank you for noticing the section titles! Each section is titled after a lightvessel (which is a ship that acts as a lighthouse. They are used in waters that are too deep or otherwise unsuitable for lighthouses). I had at one point considered calling the book, Lightvessel, but I realized that might not be exactly what it was, as it really was more of a dialogue with nature and the world that was literally on fire, and felt figuratively and metaphorically "on fire."

The sections allowed me to create smaller stories in a larger work. "Scarweather" deals with pain and emotional issues, while "Shambles" deals with the United States falling apart and how the country was letting me down. The book is created with an emotional arc, moving the reader from one place to another through poems, in fact, the final section "Relief" offers more positive poems as I didn't want to take the reader through this journey without ending on hope.

RS: I was reading some of your poems in Hourglass Museum. They are musings about life and human tragedy. You say, *I have had enough of pretending I understand why everything is never enough, (The Broken Column), Sometimes the crows remind us, we are only ink and paper. Puzzles to solve... (If my life were a Canvas)*. Do the poems reflect your philosophy about life and living?

KRA: That's a wonderful question and I'm not 100% sure there is an answer for it. I think the poems reflect my thoughts/philosophies at that moment. In a certain way, books and poems are like tombstones—they hold a certain moment. Hourglass Museum was me as a poet between 2010-2014.

I'm sure some of the philosophies are similar to the poet I am today, but in those years since writing the poems, I have grown and expanded as a human (I sure hope I have!). I'm sure some of the things I wrote about, I still struggle with, some things may be less so.

RS: Your books *Everything is Writable* & *The Daily Poet* list out prompts for poetry writing. You are on the faculty of Pacific Lutheran University. What would be the one most important advice you would give budding poets as well as more established poets?

KRA: Don't compare your work or journey as a poet to other poets and write the poems you need to write.

Also, don't be afraid to write the poem that scares you. Take some healthy risks in your work, stretch yourself as a poet and artists. Try new things. Keep finding new ways to write the poem and try your best to walk out into the world every day as a poet and view the world through that lens—look at all there is to write about and the miracles of everyday life. And always keep playing!

That's how The Daily Poet: Day-by-Day Prompts For Your Writing Practice was created, Martha Silano and I were meeting for poet dates where each of us would arrive with prompts and we decided to put those prompts into a book. Now, Annette Spaulding-Convy and I write the Weekly Muse every week, which is a paid subscription for poets with weekly prompts and exercises, places to submit their work, and so much more! We've now added a Zoom element to it where we're offering FREE online classes to help generate new work as well as Zoom salons with well-known poets where you can learn about their process and ask them questions. (If readers of this interview want to try it out, here's a week free: www.tinyurl.com/WeeklyMuseFreeWeek!)

But the Weekly Muse came out of that same place of play—we love to help poets find their way in the world and we love to write prompts and exercises, it's just a joy to write.

Our guess is poets know what they love to do—maybe book reviews or writing ecopoems, or mentoring other poets, there are so many ways to make your way as a poet in the world. Find your joy and passion and just keep aiming yourself in that direction.

RS: You are the co-founder of Two Sylvias Press with Annette Spaulding-Convy. What made you start this venture? What were the challenges you faced while setting up or expanding your press?

KRA: Honestly, we hadn't planned to start a press. It was 2008 and we had new eReaders and were annoyed there were no contemporary poets on it (just the words of Dickinson and Whitman!) We decided to edit an anthology of poems by contemporary women poets and put together the anthology, *Fire on Her Tongue*. What we learned when we tried to find a publisher for this anthology was that poetry publishers were way behind in e-book publishing. So for this book to make it into the world, we had to start our own press, which is how Two Sylvias Press began.

After we had created Two Sylvias Press for this book, Annette had a dream about us creating The Poet Tarot & Guidebook, then we thought to publish The Daily Poet, then our friend Jeannine Hall Gailey's press folded, but she still wanted her book, She Returns to the Floating World, so we republished that. From then on, books and projects just came our way and we were a real press.

As for the challenges, for an indie press without funding except for what we make from book sales and our creative projects (such as our yearly Advent Calendar of Poetry Prompts, our Online Summer Poetry Retreats, and now, the Weekly Muse). So making sure we have money to pay rent for our office and the costs that come along with having a press (hosting a website, postage (!!), publishing books, etc., so we can stay afloat in this world—my guess for a lot of indie presses, this is the challenge.

RS: I am intrigued by the name Two Sylvias Press. I am assuming that the name is inspired by Sylvia Plath (as Everything is Writable is an extract from her quote). If so, what is it about her work that attracts you most? Who are the other poets (traditional & contemporary) that you draw inspiration from?

KRA: Two Sylvias Press was named after Sylvia Plath (the poet) and Sylvia Beach (the woman who started Shakespeare & Co. in Paris). We wanted to mix the literary genius of Sylvia Plath with the editorial business sense of Sylvia Beach as both are needed for success! Since there are only 2 of us at Two Sylvias Press, we thought this was the perfect name (though we do get many emails addressed to "Dear Sylvia & Sylvia.")

And yes, we have always admired Plath for her creative genius! As to other poets, the list is endless, right? There are so many wonderful poets writing today! If you're looking for surreal fun edgy work check out Melissa Studdard's Dear Selection Committee, Jeannine Hall Gailey just published *Flare*, Corona dealing with her MS diagnosis, Ronda Piszak Broach just published *Chaos Theories for Beginners* which is a poetic-dive into quantum physics, Martha Silano has

has several books I love included her newest, Gravity Assist with its energetic space poems (and more!), and poet Susan Rich will have her collection, Blue Atlas come out next year which deals with abortion. I mean, so many wonderful poets writing books—and these poets are all in my region of the Pacific Northwest! I'm also lucky to call these poets friends. There is richness all around.

RS: I ask this question of almost all the poets I interview. Do you feel that interest in serious poetry and literature is dwindling? What do you think is the cause of this decline?

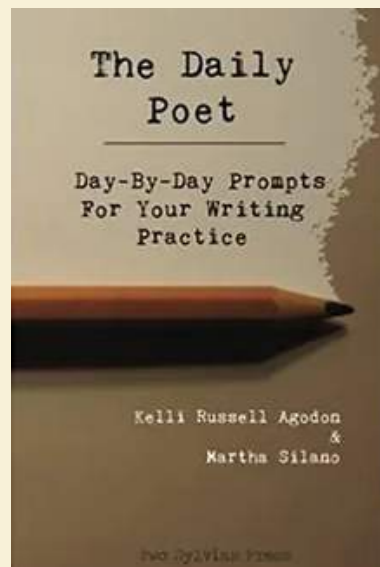
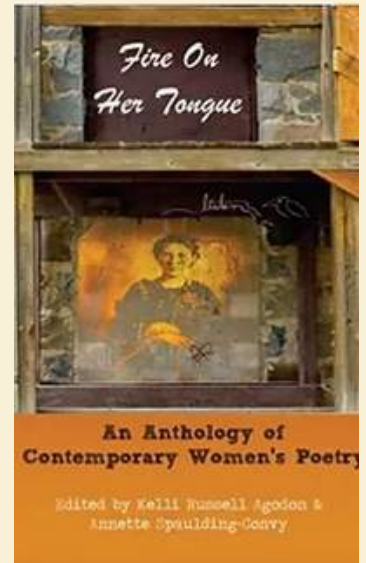
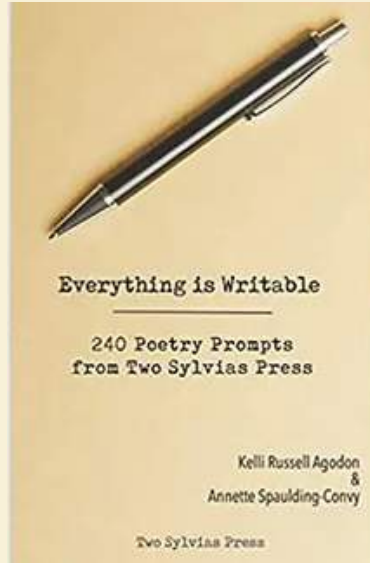
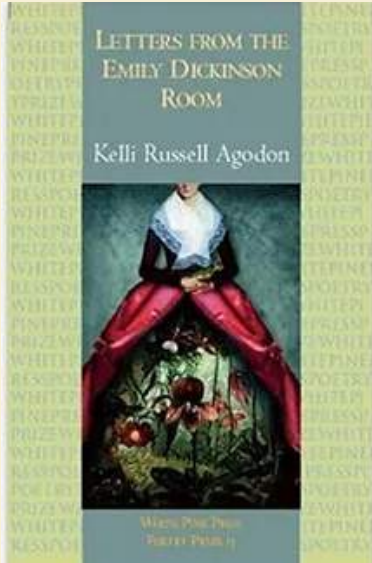
KRA: I actually feel the opposite, especially with poetry. I think for a long time people thought poets only existed inside academia. Now, with the internet, we have more online literary journals than ever and more small indie presses publishing books! And with social media, people share poems—so even if you're not a poetry reader, a poem could come across your feed and you could say, "Oh, I really like that; I didn't know a poem could be accessible, or fun, or touching, or fill-in-the-blank..."

And I maybe we don't even need the word "serious" because what makes a poem "serious" or not? It's an act of art and when I write a poem, I am just happy to see people reading poetry and buying books. There is definitely a crowd of us still very much engaged and happy to share our favorite books and favorite poems, as much as we can. And we hope others continue to read and share their favorite books and poems. I guess I just hope people continue to read and try to write their own poems, it makes the world a better place, I'd say!

And thank you for making space for poetry and a conversation about poetry, which also makes the world and this community better!

Thank you so much Kelli for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. It was a pleasure and delight to talk to you. We wish you the best in all your creative and poetic pursuits and hope that you continue to ignite interest in serious poetry through your workshops and Two Sylvias Press.

Some Works of Kelli Russell Agdon



The Interview: Kanwar Dinesh Singh

(Professor Shiv Sethi in conversation with Kanwar Dinesh Singh)

The Wise Owl talks to **Kanwar Dinesh Singh**, a well-known poet, storyteller, translator, critic and a prominent voice in the field of contemporary Indian writing in English. By profession, Singh is an Associate Professor of English at a college in Shimla. He is also the winner of the prestigious 'Himachal Pradesh State Sahitya Akademi Award 2002' and has authored several volumes of poetry, haiku, and short works of fiction, besides books in literary criticism and translation. He has written extensively on nature, love, relationships, morality, and several philosophical issues of human life and existence. His work has appeared in several journals and anthologies.

Singh's poetry oeuvre includes *Implosions*, *Asides*, *Thinking Aloud: A Collection of Mini Poems*, *The Theophany*, *House Arrest*, *The Frosted Glass*, and *Epistles: Poems of Love and Longing*. Recently, he has also announced two new books: *Within Minutes: Micro Stories* and *Thoroughfare: A Book of Ghazals*, both innovative in content and style. He has also published over ten volumes of poetry and a collection of short stories in Hindi. His translations of Hindi haiku and laghukatha (shorter fiction) have appeared under the titles *Flame of the Forest* and *Beyond Semblances*, respectively. His works in literary criticism include *Contemporary Indian English Poetry: Comparing Male and Female Voices*, *New Explorations in Indian English Poetry*, *The Poetry of Walt Whitman: New Critical Perspectives*, *Explorations in Australian Poetry*, and *Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali: Critical Contexts*. His books have even been included in the list of recommended readings in the syllabi of undergraduate and postgraduate courses at several Indian universities.

In this interview, Kanwar Dinesh Singh speaks about his literary journey with us and divulges the secrets to his multitalented creativity.

Thank you Dinesh for talking to The Wise Owl

SS: You have done creative writing in different genres of literature. How has your experience been in this literary journey?

KDS: My literary journey has been very eventful. I started writing at the young age of fourteen. My early poems and write-ups were published in some of the most prominent newspapers and magazines of the day, including *Femina*, *Sun*, *The Rashtriya Sahara*, *The Indian Express*, *The Tribune*, *Indo-Asian Literature*, *Poetry Today*, *Poet*, and *New Quest*, among several others. In the 1990s, Kamala Das and Imtiaz Dharker, famous poets who were then poetry editors of *Femina*, selected two of my poems for publication in the magazine. Manohar Bandopadhyay, the poetry editor of another famous fortnightly magazine, *Sun*, also published many of my poems.

This momentous start gave me an impetus to write on, and I was still in my final year of study for graduation when my maiden volume of poems was published. Thereafter, I wrote regularly and published more books and chapbooks of poems. I also experimented with genres like mini-poems, haiku, and ghazals. Besides these, I have also published books in literary criticism and translation. During the last few years, I penned a micro fiction titled *Within Minutes: Micro Stories*. Recently, my book of ghazals was published under the title *Thoroughfare*, besides a collection of connected love poems titled *Epistles*. Along with these works, I have published anthologies of my English renderings of Hindi haiku and laghukathas (short-short stories), respectively titled, *Flame of the Forest* and *Beyond Semblances*.

SS: When and where did you get the inspiration for creative writing?

KDS: Ever since my childhood, I have always had a strong desire to express my inner feelings and thoughts. This fervent longing for expression became the driving force of my creative writing.

During my school days, I wrote a few poems and letters to the Editor in leading newspapers and magazines. This gave my confidence a boost, helping encourage me to write; then, in the final year of my graduation, I published my maiden volume of poems. Ever since, I have been continuously writing and publishing poetry, short fiction, reviews, and literary criticism for over three decades.

SS: Where do you get your ideas from? What would you say is your 'muse'?

KDS: To me, the varied experiences of everyday life and the milieu bring newer thoughts and ideas with them. I cherish these and often use them in my creative expression/writing. Nature is also a source of bright ideas for me.

SS: What kind of responses have you received on your poems? Are you satisfied with those responses?

KDS: In the 1990s, many of my poems were published in the then-famous English literary and cultural magazine, *Sun*. After sending in some minimalist, haiku-like poems, the magazine's poetry editor wrote to inform me that such mini-poems would not work. But I kept writing poems like that too; then, I managed to get a collection of them published in 1999, *Thinking Aloud*. I sent that collection to the connoisseurs and good judges of poetry. Poets, critics and poetry enthusiasts looked at these poems from their individual points of view, and I received positive responses. In these comments, the handwritten letters of eminent poet-lyricist Gulzar and legendary Punjabi novelist and poet Amrita Pritam became very encouraging and motivating for me. Gulzar's words are very important for me regarding shorter verse; he wrote, "[The] shorter the poem, [the] longer it takes to sink. Yet, I have taken too long to sip the whole book. Good poems and presented very beautifully. I am sure it will go a long way with poetry lovers!" Similarly, Amrita Pritam also said a lot for me in rather haikuesque three lines: "Your poems—/are the sound of silence / like the ripples of water."

SS: What's the best thing someone has said about any one of your poems?

KDS: I have received comments from many poets and scholars on my poetry collections and some selected poems. But, if we're talking about any one particular poem, I remember that the famous poet, Jayanta Mahapatra, gave me a heartening comment through a letter in regard to 'Last Offering'. He wrote that "I did like 'Last Offering' right away from *The Theophany* because it says so much about us and the lives we lead."

SS: What kinds of subjects do you usually write about? What theme comes up frequently in your poems?

KDS: Nature, love, and humanity, alongside questions of life, existence, and God, have been the main themes in my poems. The spiritual quest for the interrelationship between nature and man has recurred in many of my works.

SS: Do you consider creative writing to be a spiritual practice or a form of inner fulfilment?

KDS: Yes. Without a doubt, writing, for me, offers a means of literary expression as well as a spiritual practice. Along with providing mental peace, the process of expressing our hidden and pent-up feelings and emotions and effervescing thoughts in the form of poetry also leads to self-realization and self-affirmation. So, if the question of self-realization comes up again and again in my poems, it is because of the spiritual quest, which is also the way to know God. In several of my poems, descriptions of nature also bear an element of spirituality. I understand that nature is the manifestation of God, and we can reach the mystery of God only by establishing harmony with nature.

SS: What's the best or the worst thing about being a poet?

KDS: I would like to express my personal opinion in this regard. Best of all, the poetic soul in me makes me so much more sensitive; as such, I see and feel with empathy the world around me as well as the entire human world. However, the worst thing about being a poet is that, sometimes, I don't find myself to be suitable or compatible with society because of my extreme sensitivity. Poetry makes me spiritually strong but emotionally fragile. In any case, the goodness of my

heart prevails. Poetry is a self-satisfying experience for me.

SS: Do you think poetry is still relevant in today's society?

KDS: Of course, yes. As long as there is love and compassion in the human heart, poetry will continue to sing and remain relevant. It is necessary for the preservation of civilization and culture. Thus, poetry can help save humanity by instilling empathy and hope in the hearts and minds of people.

SS: How can poetry be used to promote social change?

KDS: Poetry has so much inner power — so much so that it can influence and change public opinion. The sole condition is that the poem should be able to touch people's hearts. If poets speak from their deep experiences and convey genuine feelings, their voices will shake the heart of the reader.

Here, we can recall the poets of the Bhakti era, who brought social revolution along with spiritual awakening. We remember India's freedom movement, in which poets inspired people to fight for freedom and the independence of the country. Whenever there is a crisis in society, definitely, poetry can help overcome it.

SS: Recently, you published Ghazals in English. Please enlighten us about your experiment in this genre.

KDS: The Ghazal form of poetry has become very popular in Urdu and Hindi. The Kashmiri poet, Agha Shahid Ali, adopted this form in English. I have not used the meter completely, but understanding the delicacy of Ghazal, I have paid attention to its basic structure. In *Thoroughfare: A Book of Ghazals*, I don't religiously observe the syllable count, but I keep to the core texture and rhyme pattern of ghazals. Although I have paid more attention to the *radif*, the *kafia* has come into its own somewhere. Here are some couplets:

*Of we speak of ourselves for what we are truly not;
While we're icy within, how highly we feign to be hot!*

*I'm at the moment on the tightrope crossing the aisle,
I pay no attention to either side, that's my saving style*

*I am befuddled between the left and the right,
Walking the middle of the road is lonely here.*

SS: Tell us something about your collection of love poems, Epistles. And please share some lines with us too.

KDS: *Epistles: Poems of Love and Longing* is a collection of fifty connected poems in the epistolary form. These poems are centered on the theme of love, conveying varied sentiments of love between man and woman, which are linked to both experiences of union and separation. Here's an extract from a poem captioned 'When You're Not With Me':

A world denied / its magnetic north, / every compass / useless without you. / . . . / The air is a monologue, / not a dialogue. Rivers and brooks / no longer speak to me / in this country without you.

Here are a few lines from another poem captioned 'Eagerly Waiting for You':

Reconnoitering your ramparts, your / castle in the air, with its bricks of suspicion / and mortar of illusion. All will crumble / before the positive might of love...

SS: You have also written haiku. How do you view this genre, and what kinds of haiku do you write? Share with

us one or two of your haiku.

KDS: Haiku is a Japanese form of micro poetry comprising three lines respectively carrying 5, 7, and 5 syllables. The shorter the poem, the more complex it is. You have to say the whole thing in only seventeen syllables, which is really a challenging task. I consider haiku to be a complete poem in itself. This is a poem of a moment's experience, in which there is a subtle harmony between the poet's vision, feeling, insight, and consciousness.

Over the past two decades, I have written around one thousand haikus in the traditional Japanese style. I understand that a genre can survive only by following the rules of metre. There is very little prosodic discipline in contemporary English haiku, which I do not consider appropriate for the perpetuation and preservation of the traditional form of this genre.

Here are two haiku from my collection:

Iridescent lake / A white swan treading sunbeams / Last moments of day!

Breadcrumbs in my hand / Crow stares, incredulous gaze / Snowy day, freezing.

SS: You had been writing poetry for over three decades before coming to micro fiction. What inspired you to write micro-stories?

KDS: I found many ideas, experiences, anecdotes, and memoirs I wanted to share with others, and fiction was the most appropriate genre for that. I chose micro fiction because it has the potential to say a lot in the fewest number of words and connect a brief momentary experience with larger ideas. A micro story can illustrate an idea with greater clarity. I have put together 45 micro-stories in my recently published book, *Within Minutes: Micro Stories*.

SS: You are also a literary researcher and critic. Please share your experience with us about your research work and critical writing in literature.

KDS: Alongside my main focus, I have also worked in the field of literary criticism. For my doctoral study, I carried out research on modern and contemporary Indian English poetry, in which I undertook a comparative study of male and female poets vis-à-vis psychoanalytical and gender-based theories. Many interesting facts emerged during this research, in which text-based studies have been done on mental, psycho-sexual, and philosophical aspects along with the difference in the corporeal constitution of men and women. I have discussed in detail the poetic vision, insight, creative uniqueness, and purpose of creation and life for male and female poets.

This research study is available in the form of a book, which was published with the title *Contemporary Indian English Poetry: Comparing Male and Female Voices*, which is easily accessible in college and university libraries, both in India and abroad. Many scholars have cited this book in their research works. In addition, I have also published research-based books on contemporary Indian writing in English and Australian poetry, as well as on individual poets, including Walt Whitman, Rabindranath Tagore, Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, et al.

It is a matter of great personal pleasure and satisfaction for me that my books have been included in the list of recommended readings in many universities of India for postgraduate and doctorate-level programmes.

SS: You have also done creditable translation work. Tell us a little about it.

KDS: I have translated both prose and poetry. It's not so easy to translate poetry, as it is loaded with so many allusions and metaphors besides being a metrical composition. I translated fifty haiku from each of the four Japanese haiku masters—Basho, Issa, Buson, and Shiki—from their English versions into Hindi. In Hindi, haiku poems are written in three

lines, respectively, carrying 5, 7, and 5 letters (alphabets) instead of syllables. As such, this was a very challenging task.

I have also translated Hindi Haiku into the English language. In an anthology titled *Flame of the Forest*, I rendered into English 144 haiku verses by poets writing in Hindi from India, the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia. In this translation, keeping in mind the haiku structure in English, I followed the syllable order of 5-7-5, respectively, in the three lines. Haiku lovers liked this translation, which really added satisfaction to the end results for me.

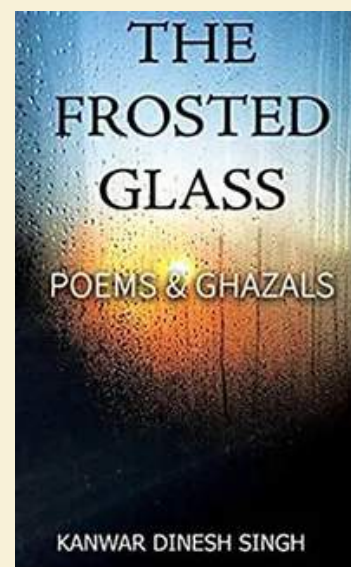
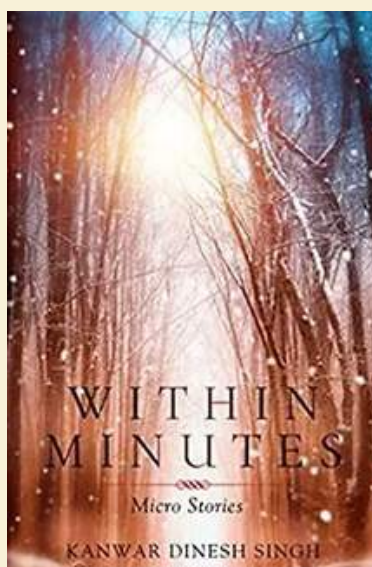
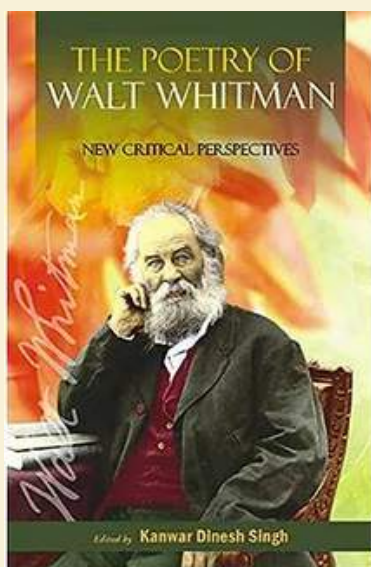
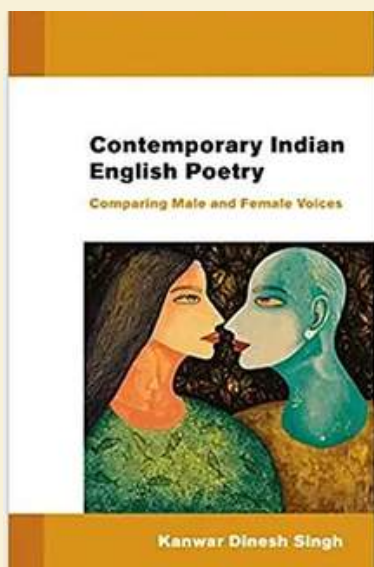
Apart from these, I have also translated Hindi short stories into the English language. A collection of mine titled *Beyond Semblances: English Renderings of Hindi Laghukathas* has been published, in which I have included English translations of the 62 best short-short stories written by storytellers right from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the modern day. This effort of *laghukatha* translation was also highly praised by short fiction lovers, writers, and critics.

SS: What current projects are you working on?

KDS: Currently, I am revising the manuscript of my novel based on a love story, which I want to publish this year. Along with this, a collection of my short stories is also almost ready for publication. I also plan to publish a collection of haiku verses that I've written over the past twenty years in a traditional Japanese style. Besides this, I am translating Hindi stories into English for an anthology, and I am also preparing two non-fiction books for publication within the year.

Thank you so much Dinesh for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. We wish you the best in all your future creative endeavours.

Some Works of Kanwar Dinesh Singh



About Prof Shiv Sethi

Prof. Shiv Sethi is an Internationally acclaimed columnist and literary critic. He has reviewed the works of famous authors form across the globe. His columns and book reviews regularly appear in the topmost Newspapers, Magazines and Literary Journals.

The Interview: Sangeeta Gupta

(Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl, in conversation with Sangeeta Gupta)

The Wise Owl talks to **Sangeeta Gupta**, an acclaimed artist, bilingual poet and documentary film-maker. She served as a bureaucrat with Government of India and subsequently worked as Advisor to the Akademi of Visual Arts, New Delhi, India. She has to her credit 36 solo exhibitions and 200 group shows held in prestigious galleries in India and abroad. She has authored 25 books of poetry and prose and directed 30 documentary films. As many as 10 of her books have been translated into several languages including Greek, Mandarin, German, Tamil, Urdu etc. Many of her books and 6 of her documentary films are a part of the Library of Congress, U.S.A. She also happens to be the Patron of Prithvi Fine Art & Culture Centre, a charitable society for the promotion of Art, literature and Music.

Sangeeta Gupta has been awarded time and again for her contribution to the realm of creativity and Art by various Indian and International organizations of repute. She was honoured with the Critic's choice award, World University of Design (2020), Lifetime achievement award (2019), Art Fiesta, Jaipur, Certificate of Recognition, Phenomenal SHE, (2018) by Indian National Bar Association and Alliance Francaise, Delhi, Elite women of the year 2019 by Elite magazine, Delhi, among others. She was featured in the India Book of Records for making the longest painting with natural indigo colour and dye in 2021, in the Limca Book of Records for creating the longest painting on textile in 2020-2022 and in the Miracles World Records for making the longest painting on hand spun khaddar in the year 2021. She has recently held her solo exhibition of textile paintings entitled '*Aadiyogi Shiv: A Journey in Cosmic Indigo*' in Delhi and various other cities in India. Her exhibition has been very well received.

Thank you Sangeetaji, for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk to The Wise Owl.

RS: Our readers would love to know a little about your artistic journey-what inspired you to pick up a brush to paint, what were the creative influences in your life.

SG: Till class eight my drawing was just ok. I didn't score much in my art assignments. I was very pampered by my eldest sister who almost did all my art and home science holiday assignments. My favourite pass time was reading, and I had read few classics by that time. I was an introvert, very sensitive, fragile and vulnerable child and my sisters were extremely protective about me during my boarding school days. Only when they left the boarding school to join college, I came to realise my own potential, with no help and protective shield around me I started doing my drawings for Botany and Zoology and was utterly surprised to see that I did exceedingly well. Then I started enjoying drawing and painting immensely. I could copy anything and paint easily on fabric too. But all this was pure fun.

I loved to sketch and paint but started doing it seriously only in 1990. My guru after teaching me for a few months said one day that I had fire inside me and I should have pursued art instead of civil services. In fact, he took me to Birla Academy of Art and culture, Kolkata to show my portfolio and get a booking for my solo exhibition there. Without participating in any group show I straight away went for a solo and it turned out to be a huge success.

After that there was no looking back, I have consistently held solo exhibitions of paintings till now. I started with figurative and landscapes mostly on paper, I did hundreds of pen and ink works during my formative years. Then gradually turned to abstraction and now have evolved as a pure abstract artist. Abstract art liberated my soul.

RS: I was looking at your huge body of Artwork and I realised that you have worked in many different mediums-acrylic on canvas, acrylic on paper, oil on canvas, mixed media on paper, pencil on paper, natural indigo on textile etc. Our readers would be curious to know (as I am) which is the medium closest to your Art.

SG: I have enjoyed working with several mediums and it is difficult for me to say which one I enjoy the most. When I paint, I thoroughly enjoy the process, it is transcendental in more ways than I can explain.

I still like to work on paper, from where I started my journey as an artist. Every new medium excites me though.

RS: While looking at your Artwork, I found that you work with abstracts. For the benefit of our readers, please tell us what attracted you to abstract art. How did it help to shape your 'inner life?' (Here I am quoting you on abstract art).

SG: I have always tried to represent five elements in harmony to highlight the connectivity of all with the one universe. That is the eternal subject of all my works. Pure abstract is all that I strive to paint. Without this I am nowhere, nothing. I am a monochrome artist and love the blue and its infinite hues. Why blue fascinates me is beyond any plausible reason. May be because it represents sky and water, two basic elements of the cosmos.

I am on an inward journey where I feel connected to the source. I wish to bring light and hope to this world through my art, poetry and documentaries, that is what I would like to contribute if I could.

RS: You have recently held an exhibition of textile paintings entitled 'Aadiyogi Shiv: A Journey in Cosmic Indigo.' Painting with natural indigo on textiles like hand spun khaddar is a wonderful idea, especially as both are a part of the Indian heritage. Please tell us what made you think of working with indigo and Indian textiles?

SG: I had been conceptualising this painting since the end of December of 2019. I first made hundreds of sketches of Shiv as the ultimate feminist, the ardhnarishwar in my sketch book. As an abstract artist Shiv appeals to me the most. After purchase of handspun khaddar cloth and natural indigo colour and dye, I started the actual painting on 25th February 2020, and worked for nine days in Ratelia village, Sanganer at Shilpi Sansthan. 185.0 metres I painted in Ratelia Village, Sanganer, Rajasthan, 15.0 metres I did in a studio in Delhi due to COVID.

Dye is also a form of art for me. I had to really learn it from master craftsman and practice it by staying in a small village of Sanganer in Rajasthan. It is a fascinating technique and I have explored it for quite a long time now. I went to Ratelia village in Rajasthan where indigo plantation is done in abundance. Colour is extracted from the stems/ leaves of indigo shrubs. I had few people to help me in the workshop. I needed people who could prepare *dabu*, mud resist and also to put my pieces in drums for dyeing and to make meals for me.

These works are born out of infinite, formless energy of *Aadiyogi Shiv, Ardhnarishwar*, the ultimate feminist. There is no beginning, no end, all encompassing, omnipresent Shiv is present in all of us. I am an abstract artist and the biggest challenge for me was to start with form and culminate it into formlessness. Shiv is both form and formless. *Roop se Aroop tak*, it's my journey with Shiv.

I strongly believe that we have to return to the basics, if we want to survive in peace. Handspun fabric/khadi is environment friendly and natural colour and dye are handmade too, they are chemical free. It is to promote sustainable living and promote natural indigo that I created this painting that is abstract, conceptual, minimalist painting on natural sustainable khaddar fabric with organic indigo colour and dye. This is a movement for revival of natural indigo ...To encourage revival of indigo cultivation, a cash crop as a mass movement to make it a commercially viable venture for farmers, dyers and craftsmen. To encourage print makers to apply contemporary art, merge it with traditional craft of block printing with natural *dabu* (mud resist) and organic indigo.

RS: Tell us a little about your creative process when you are painting- from the time you conceptualize an idea to the time when you execute it and finally finish it.

SG: My love for literature and reading is my inheritance from my parents. I was fascinated by books and poetry, both

reading and writing have been my most enjoyable pastimes. Inspiration comes from within; we are all interconnected and part of the universe. Nature as a cosmic entity is inspiring.

RS: You are not only an artist but also a poet and a filmmaker. Tell us a little about your poetry and filmmaking. How did you manage to work in these vastly different creative forms with such ease?

SG: I celebrate life and love art, literature and films so nothing is arduous work for me but love. Some people are multitaskers, it comes naturally to them. I fall in that category. But when I am at it then I give my hundred percent to what I am doing at that point of time.

Art and literature were close to my heart since my early days. I didn't study fine art or literature formally, but I was good at both. My first book was published in 1988 and my first solo exhibition of paintings was held in 1995.

Informally I learnt the techniques from my guru Shri Sanat Ray during my posting in Kolkata for almost five years from 1990 to 1995. He was a great teacher and a hard task master. Initially I did figurative drawings and landscapes. But gradually figures vanished and I was drawn to abstract by some magnetic spiritual pull around 2000-2001. Since then, I have evolved as pure abstractionist, it has been a very fulfilling journey so far.

I was born to highly educated parents, my father really wanted me to become economically independent, and gifted good education to me. He wished me to qualify civil services and I did that gladly. I am a proud bureaucrat who served the nation with utmost sincerity and retired with dignity.

Art and literature were part of my life always, but I never thought of making it my profession. All along my service I did write and paint too. That really made me a better and compassionate officer. Now I devote all my time to writing and painting. I never thought of becoming an artist, but I became one and I love it. I managed to do all this simultaneously and live life to the fullest.

My first solo exhibition was at the Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata in 1995 which was inaugurated by Mother Teresa and entire sale proceeds were donated to CRY for building an education centre for deprived children in Kolkata. My 36 solo shows have been held all over India i.e., Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chandigarh and abroad at London, Berlin, Munich, Lahore, Belfast, Thessaloniki, Toronto.

One of my solo shows was inaugurated by the former President of India, Dr A.P.J Abdul Kalam in August 2013 which was dedicated to Uttarakhand; funds raised through sale proceeds of the paintings were used for creating a Fine Art Education grant for the students of Uttarakhand.

RS: Is there any one artist or poet who has greatly inspired or influenced your creativity?

SG: I started writing a diary from an early age may be when I was about nine or ten years old. This habit I picked up from my father. He used to maintain a diary for day- to-day expenses. Gradually I started jotting down my thoughts and feelings too besides keeping track of my expenses. I was a very shy, introvert child who would start crying even when someone snubbed or talked to me in a harsh manner. I mostly spent my time with books. My grandfather was my best friend. While reading Tagore's Geetanjali I was deeply moved, and I started writing poems regularly. He became my biggest inspiration at that point of time.

When I started writing it was mostly about my feelings. I have always been a loner and a philosopher who often overthinks. I equally enjoyed reading prose and serious classics. Many well-known writers and editors persuaded me to write stories, which I did for some time but gave up for want of dedicated time for pursuing it. I have a published collection of stories in Hindi.

My favourite poets are many and I do read a lot of contemporary poetry too. Kabir, Meera, Tagore, Mahadevi Verma, Jaishankar Prasad, Nirala, Kedar Nath Singh, Lal Ded, Anamika are some of my all-time favourites in Hindi and Keki

Daruwalla, Keshav Malik in English from India. Rumi, Khalil Gibran, Pablo Neruda, Emily Dickinson, Charles Bukowski are also my favourites from outside of India. Faiz, Kaifi Azami, Galib, Gulzar, Ahmad Faraz, Pravin Shakir are Urdu poets I enjoy reading.

Geetanjali by Tagore, *Kamayani* by Jaishankar Prasad, *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran, *Twenty Love Poems And A Song Of Despair* by Pablo Neruda are the best poetry collections that I have read so far. These books are about eternal truths and have shaped and transformed me as a poet.

My favourite artists are Van Gogh, Monnet and VS Gaitonde. All three have inspired me as an artist. While I was in my teens, I read the book '*Lust For Life*'; a biography of Vincent Van Gogh and it touched my soul, till date I call it my all-time favourite. There is something about his life which deeply saddens you. His devotion to art is exceptional.

RS: You are a multi-faceted personality. Our wannabe artists, poets & filmmakers would be eager for some quick tips from you on how to hone their creative crafts.

SG: There are no compartments in my personality, I am a poet, artist and a film maker or all of these at the same time but I do one thing at a time and do it wholeheartedly. My journey of life so far has been an enriching experience. I believe in the principle of 'be present 100% in whatever you do.' It has helped me to do my best at any given point of time.

RS: As a bureaucrat, you have dealt in facts and figures. Caught up in number-crunching in your workday, how did you keep your creativity and sensitivity alive?

SG: Being multidimensional is my natural way of living. There has never been a moment in my life where I found it tough to pursue what I wished. My passion for creating and improving keeps me going. I strongly believe that art and poetry are intrinsic part of my personality and they have made me a better person and a upright bureaucrat as well. There has never been a tussle between the officer and the poet as both strive to be just and fair at all times. The intent for all is the same.

I had enjoyed my career as a bureaucrat thoroughly, to be in a position to contribute in the nation building as an important decision maker was very satisfying.

Thank you so much Sangeetaji, for taking time out of your schedule to talk to The Wise Owl. It was indeed a pleasure to talk to such a multi-faceted personality. We wish you the best in all your creative pursuits and hope you continue contributing to the world of Art and creativity.

Some Works of Sangeeta Gupta



Aadiyogi Shiv: A Journey in Cosmic Indigo 36 Natural indigo on handspun textile 2020
253 X 92 cm.



Aadiyogi Shiv: A Journey in Cosmic Indigo 80 Natural indigo on Handspun textile
2020 357 X 93 cm.



Unnamed



Unnamed



Unnamed



Unnamed

Tête-à-Tête: Babeesh Anela

The Wise Owl talks to **Babeesh Anela**, a traditional mural artist from Kerala. Babeesh was born in Anela village in Kozikhode district. He completed a 5-year course in traditional mural painting from Mural Arts Centre at Guruvayoor Devaswom and immersed himself in this art form, to the exclusion of everything else. Babeesh experimented with this form, synthesizing it with contemporary art and a dash of neo-romanticism. His work has been exhibited in various prestigious art galleries in India and abroad and is a part of various private collections in India, America, Europe and South Africa. His murals can also be found in temples across India. Babeesh is currently working as a freelance artist, leading classes and camps all over India.

Thank you, Babeesh, for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl.

RS: Please tell us a little about your journey as a mural artist. What attracted you to this genre of painting?

BA: After graduation, I joined the School of Fine Arts and was fascinated by the natural colours of murals. I visited nearby mural sanctuaries, observed the paintings closely and understood the importance of inscriptions in murals. I was eager to learn more about it and wanted to practice traditional mural painting. I learnt that Guruvayoor Devaswom was conducting a five-year national diploma course to impart the tradition of mural painting. I sought admission and was lucky to enrol in the course. Mentored by Dr Ku Krishan Kumar, I graduated with first rank in mural study course.

RS: Who were the creative influences in your life who encouraged you to pursue mural painting?

BA: Many unknown artists who painted the ancient temple wall paintings of Kerala that we see today were the first to inspire me with their paintings. It made me think that it is possible to learn the art of mural painting. Later I was inspired by the great artist CN Karunakaran. His works influenced me greatly.

RS: I was looking at your works on your website. There are murals of Gods, goddesses, mythological figures and mythological scenes. What is the inspiration behind the theme of your murals?

BA: Kerala mural paintings are generally based on *Dhyanaslokas*. *Dhyanaslokas* tell how to draw an idol. The colour, posture, weapons and background of the idol are described in *Dhyanaslokas*. I use the same method in murti painting and when I compose Shaiva Vaishnava Devi subjects. Knowledge is obtained from books like *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatam* and *Devi Mahatmya*, which is very helpful for painting. Contemporary social issues have now started to be painted in mural style. Everything is done according to *Panchavarna Siddhanta*.

RS: You have done a 1000 sq ft mural at Meenakshi Mandhiram in Trivandrum, a 18 ft high mural of a Kathakali dancer, 18ft wide and 8 ft high Sivakudumbam at Nasik. How long does it take you to complete one mural of such huge dimensions?

BA: Two of the most important paintings in my works are the Kerala Art Forms painting in the Meenakshi Temple and the large Shiva family in Nashik. It took 4 months to do the first painting and two months to do the Nashik painting. The time taken to do a painting depends on its subject and pigment and weather. The first step of the painting is to study the subject and draw it on the surface. It sometimes takes a month or more. Then it takes more than a month to paint it. If natural dyes are used, the painting time is doubled. People judge the painting not by how much time it took but by looking at its final output, so I try to take maximum time to achieve perfection.

RS: Our viewers and readers would be keen to know what colours you use for your painting, what processes (if any) you use to keep the mural lustrous and bright.

BA: I use natural colours, acrylic, watercolour etc to compose my paintings. Natural colour was mostly used during my years of study. Later, after becoming a professional, many paintings were painted with acrylic on the canvas surface for ease of shipping to other countries. Winsor & Newton is my favourite brand. In general, saffron red and saffron colours are seen in the wall paintings. I use colours like Indian yellow, deep yellow, yellow medium and veridian green, Prussian blue, vermilion red to add some brightness to it. Imported picture varnish is used to preserve the painting.

RS: You have synthesized traditional and contemporary art forms. Tell us a little about it.

BA: During my studies, I visited the picture sanctuaries of Kerala and started drawing unique Kerala traditional paintings. Mural painting is done according to Pancha Varna principle, five colours are used for painting and there is also importance of lines Therefore, it is very difficult to bring contemporary compositions in mural style. For my contemporary works I have only borrowed the style of Kerala mural painting. The colours have changed a lot and some of the creations that I have done so are African god Odin, Baul Lady singing Bengali folk music, Kerela Art forms, Koodiyattom, Kathakali Buddha etc.

RS: What advice would you give artists in general and budding mural artists in particular?

BA: Don't copy the work or style of other artists. Every artist should have his own identity which should reflect in his artwork. Strive to depict your surroundings and yourself through artwork. Read more books. See the national and international art exhibitions, understand the paintings, learn the language of painting, understand where the path of today's painting is going, and make paintings suitable for it. Don't forget that art is divine.

RS: Do you think interest in mural painting is dwindling. How would you like to rejuvenate this beautiful form of art?

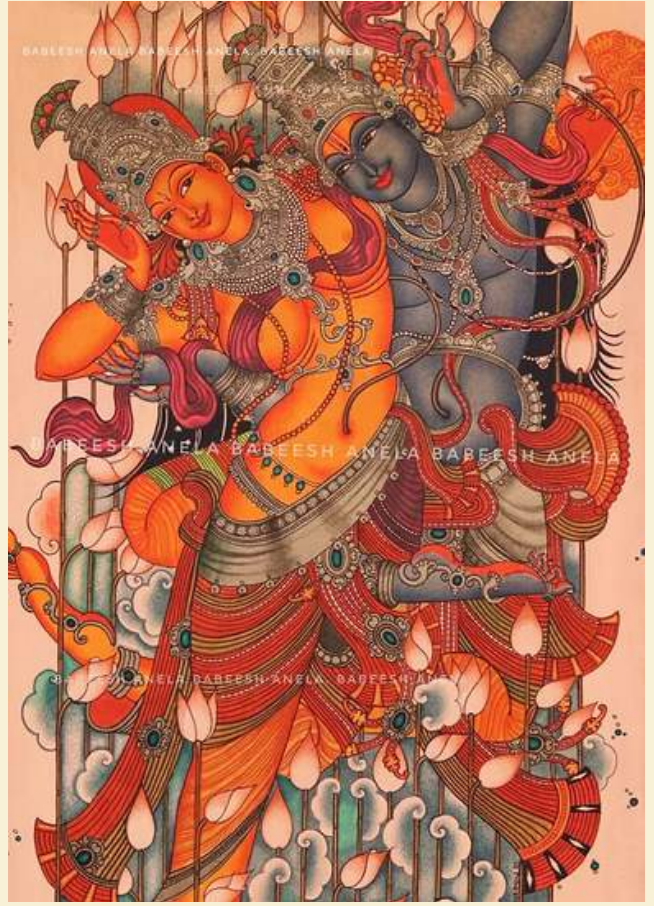
BA: Our heritage arts are here to stay as they are in our blood. Now we see that everyone is going back to the old days and the old arts are also very important. Even today, murals have their place. People today have the ability to choose unique wall art. There are a lot of people doing this and making a living today.

To rejuvenate this unique form of painting it is necessary to learn about our tradition. When studying mural painting, learn from someone who has absorbed and learnt this traditional form. If you take forward the tradition by maintaining its sanctity and its essence, then it will give you creative satisfaction and a sense of pride. It will also energize your life. This is my plea to budding artists.

Thank you so much for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. We wish you the best in all your creative endeavours and hope that you reach the pinnacle of success in your form.

Some Artworks of Babeesh Anela







POETRY



Fluorescent
Sam Moe

[Read More](#)



Meditations in Vacuum
Vineeta Gupta

[Read More](#)



Factory
Lawrence Miles

[Read More](#)



Journey
Richa Joshi Pant

[Read More](#)



Kavita Ratna
Poet of the Month

[Read More](#)



Our Home's front Door
Peter A Witt

[Read More](#)



POETRY



Sitting in Sunlight
Ann Privateer

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I don't want to die
Gale Acuff

[Read More](#)



consummated in the act
Kenneth Goodman

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Whence Light?
Neera Kashyap

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Abstract Art: Frou Frou
Bhawna Vij

[Read More](#)



Highways & Byways
John Grey

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A Full Circle

By Kavita Ratna: Poet of the Month

“Your four bangles”
is the only gift
she asked
from her mother.

Stories of
how, barely few days old,
laid on her amma’s
knees,
in sheer panic
every time
hot water was
poured,
she would hook
her tiny fingers
on to them,
like a life-line,
so vivid in their telling,
played out like
a movie.

Ever since,
those thin gold lines,
framing a soft brown,
over and over again,
provided
succour and their
faint clinking,
a gentle melody.

Now, hers,

their strength muted,
wearing out a
bit each day,
chafing against life,
leaning back
on each other,
grounded by their own weight.
jostling through
generations,
witness and testimony,
they wait out.

Aging and timeless,
history
washes over them
along with
soap suds,
smug in the knowledge
that what was precious,
was never them,
but the
hands they circled.

Poet's Note: *This poem draws inspiration from my childhood and youth. As a wedding gift, I had asked my mother for the bangles which always graced her hands - and she generously gave them to me. She remains with us to this day and the bangles remain on my hand too... a circle of life.*



Unspoken

He sat
in the middle of
the room.

The conversation
skirted around
him, dodging,
almost touching,
but, gliding over,
so as to
not lacerate.

Like thick fog
he seeped
into our faces
gestures, memories,
everything
unspoken. White spaces
between
black letters.

Windows reflected
shades of green
he lifted
from muddy browns,
spotted with ruby red,
lined inside translucent
pomegranates.

His husky
laugh bounced off
the walls and

roofs, quick wit,
flick
of hair, black to strands
of silver, each time
he righted a wrong.

In the middle
of the room,
suffused with love
he sat,
in a hollow,
deep,
gnawing and hurting.

Shreds of it,
scattered into
tiny fragments,
lifted, now
all that struggle,
within, silenced.

Our world, stunned,
impotent,
desperate to heal.

In the
room he sits.
A reminder
of all that is loved
and lost,
to hold close,
each other,
while we can.

Move him,
from the
middle of the room,
gently inside,
folded into our seeing,
being.

Lest we forget.

Poet's Note: *After a very dear family friend committed suicide - all of us were filled with angst. During the first visit we made to his home after his passing away, it was as if no one was ready to talk about him, but the entire time it felt like he sat in the middle of the room - with all of us being acutely aware of him and also of his loss. Aware of the helplessness of having not been there for him along with anger that he took such a drastic step without letting any of us know about his pain.*



Fluorescent

By Sam Moe

You dance in Manhattan
blue lamps, cramped halls,
soft feathered thing,
drawers filled with secrets,
a journal I've thought of
stealing, the banister and
buzzer,
I'm going to be safe
headed towards Central Park
frost-teal February
you wonder if I'm coming
home again or if I'll busy myself
attaching dollar-store halos to
pine trees, does art still cover
you in roses, will you be livid
lip of the stage, call me
we can be friends again,
we can get hot bread in mornings
records in the afternoon
I'm not saying I won't come
home if you don't love me
I'll be back on that damned 1 train
I promise I'll not take up space
I'll feed evening pigeons
we can go, turn absolutely
outrageous in the gum-stained streets
I'll buy you winter shoes
sequins, new stovetops,
please just help
keep the memory alive
us with paper flowers in our hair

huevos mollos in our pockets,
we were gemstones, record store
stickers, cold promise of stoplights,
before I told you I was the sea then
hell, I wonder if I kept
quiet if we'd still be friends
family, mothers, chilled wine
passionates and gentle-handed christ-
statue daughters, I long
for togetherness like candy, my
heart could have been so damn cool



Mediations in Vacuum

By Vineeta Gupta

Sometimes you don't know
 what do you know
or want not to know.

the thoughts blocked
 like the traffic jam at Calcutta crossing

the drain choked with shit and
 soiled napkins of first menses
 flushed down

the entangled threads
 of knitting yarn
 red, green, blue, black.

the thoughts bloat
 the nerves in brain
the inflated
 water pipes ready
 to burst open
the eruption of jet
 turbulent, unbridled
like the violent Brahmaputra
 swollen in spite -- to avenge
its violation, plunder and abuse.

Thoughts -- the innumerable stars in vacuum --
 ready to reveal themselves with a blink and twinkle
 like some open secret!



Factory

By Lawrence Miles

The football team came out to show support
After the tragedy.

The donated their time
They donated their money
They spoke to the survivors
They spoke to the families of those who had died
They helped to hand out supplies and care packages
They spoke in platitudes about
How they loved the city
How they found the tragedy senseless

The team had recently received
Eight hundred million dollars
To help build a new stadium
Right next to the old stadium
That had been deemed obsolete

The owners of the team were billionaires
So it was fair to say
They did not need eight hundred million dollars
To build a new factory
To replace the one that is still functional

What if they decided
Instead of building a new factory
They donated those eight hundred million dollars
To solving the problems of racism
Hatred
Ignorance

But that is not asked of them
They are a business after all
A sporting team
A distraction
"Shut up and play" they say

And we are convinced
That strong sport franchises
With pristine stadiums
Are far more vital to a robust society
That the protection of our young and our old

I will be cheering on opening day.



Journey

By Richa Joshi Pant

My shore rumbled, dark and warm.
As dark as it is before dawn.
And around me flew the river of life.
Magical molecules with wisdom rife.
Each one knew its precise course
Orchestrated by an invisible force,
Cells divided quick and precise,
And I grew steadily in size.
At first a beating heart I got,
Not more than a little dot.
Then limbs arose, perfectly fine,
I was a tadpole in the brine.
How would the world be, beyond my own?
I thought, as I heard the familiar drone.
Encased in a membrane inside the womb,
I grew each day in that watery tomb.
I loved to kick and frolic about,
And gulp the saline down my mouth.
Until one day, I felt a bout.
It had begun...my journey out.
I slipped from darkness to light,
All in one sudden fright.
And as I was held upside down,
I saw a strange face with joy abound.



Our Home's Front Door

By Peter A. Witt

I a-door you,
despite your well-worn knobs,
ever squeaky hinges, wood that's worn
and cracked in dire need of sanding
and a good slathering
of Sherman Williams' finest.

I can't wait to see you
when I come back from work,
your steady presence welcoming
me home, your peep hole
scanning my arms for packages
that might contain materials
to mend your cracks and sores,
to date I've daily disappointed you.

Tomorrow is Saturday, time
to finally go to Home Depot,
buy new fixtures, oil and paint,
get the right grade sandpaper,
brushes and drop cloths
and begin the task of restoring
your former glory as the
entrance to our lovely home.

When done I know your mood
will improve, you'll be the talk
of the neighborhood with your
brassy fixtures, glowing red paint,
a new mat at your feet
proudly saying 'welcome'
to all who cross your threshold.



Sitting in Sunlight

By Ann Privateer

So much darkness
Ambiguity, misunderstandings
Not just for me...for everyone.

I received a very special invitation
A birthday celebration
From a person I do not even know
So I combed the internet
Trying to find out our connection
And the very next day
That same invitation pops up
Saying please disregard, sent in error.

Oh my, darkness unconnecting
So I put on my coat and went outside
To sit in the sun.



I don't want to die

By Gale Acuff

I don't want to die, not that I am, not exactly, I'm only ten years old but my Sunday School teacher swears that we're all born dying right off the bat, then she smiles as if death doesn't matter but it does though not the way we children think, no, death is the beginning of real life and life as we know it here on Earth's just a warm-up for the Life-to-Come but after class I had to confess that I'm still afraid and then she started crying, wailing's what it's called in the Bible, so I wailed, too --when we finished we finished together, I think there's God and a baby in that save that we're not married so it's Jesus.



consummated in the act

By Kenneth Goodman

Yes AH has a melody—
it can't be written down,
subtle Power/Mercy fully
sideless bull's eye crown.
It's a melody that sings
dawn-fresh horizon-free—
secret mantra inner-hearing
secret/silently, open secret
effortlessly understood
 thought-free, secure
'tween the temples (as well)
wholly edgelessly:
consummated in the act of
creativity, highest level
splendor mastered
mind-exertion free,
unfindable by vision quest or
rote ceremony; un
 pin-downable
by seeking scientifically; un
led astray by roller coasting
human history...
elixir recognition basking
as discovery : of
 AH ongoingly,
AH pronounced silently,
intimately on dawn-fresh
 uninterruptedly—
one path to GodPalace clears
the way per frameless door—
 and as per

drops out
all GodSpace consummates
AH core.



Whence Light?

A Villanelle

By Neera Kashyap

Matching my mood is the pale blue sky.
The sea brings back a forgotten form.
Feelings change and I can't say why.

Light outlines a mountain high.
My mind is like morning's new dawn.
Matching my mood is the pale blue sky.

Birds sail forth like dreams in the sky.
They bring no fear of a gathering storm.
Feelings change and I can't say why.

The day unfolds many hues hereby.
Do its colours unfold in the same light of morn?
Matching my mood is the pale blue sky.

The sea now reflects the light of the sky.
Or is it the light that shone on the mountain's form?
Feelings change and I can't say why.

Does the same light illumine my dreams and the sky?
Is it an inner light in which thoughts transform?
Matching my mood is the pale blue sky.
Feelings change and I may know why.



Abstract Art: Frou Frou

By Dr. Bhawna Vij Arora

A Daedalian en masse
messed up networks
lines on the forehead giggle
inked on our palms
sublime concussions.

Slaps of color
swooning in our arteries
ichor, power, and femininity
bleeding into one another.
Foul play of floating dust
burnt fragments cremains
soft hues of saturated battles
decomposed human ashes
grey powder or coarse sand
diamonds from pyre costs
must less,
stardust in the sky
pigments of pogroms, light
and shades of resistance.
mystery of creation
shanty towns in the sub-astral.



Highways & Byways

By John Grey

I may as well look for her
in a cellar trunk
than this cemetery.
The plaque still stands.
But it's no doorway.
So I don't knock.
Merely run my finger
over name and dates,
then take a detour
to the word 'beloved.'

I can hear the highway
from here.
The sounds of people going places
overwhelms the tears for those
permanently staying put.
As it should be.
If God had meant us to spend time
six feet above a loved one's bones,
He wouldn't have provided us
with memories.

But I do my duty.
I even leave a bunch of flowers,
to shrivel and die
if the rabbits don't eat them first.

Grass paths lead from stone to stone.
Rabbit highways, I imagine.



Alphabet
Richard Lutman

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Muted Voices
Ranjit Powar

[Read More](#)



When an Android changes into a Human
Tom Ball

[Read More](#)



Alphabet

By *Richard Lutman*

Everything is upside down. So is the Alphabet.

"Nothing's the same anymore," Leibowitz, a short, balding man with squinty eyes, said with a sad tone in his voice. His companion slouched against the corner of the booth; his frame comfortable against the worn padding nodded in response.

"If I didn't know better," Leibowitz angrily stirred his drink with a straw. "I'd say the world's ending. Everything's so upside-down. Who knows what will happen next? Life wasn't made to be this way."

"Better than nothing," said his companion with a shrug.

Behind them, the bartender poured Valentine another glass of beer. Blobs of foam slid down the sides and formed another ring on the greasy pink counter that glimmered in the dull yellow bar light. He turned and plunged a ladle into the pot of soup on the grill behind him. Then lifted the ladle and filled a cracked white bowl, which he placed in front of Ellie, a small awkward girl of ten with a crooked left eye.

Valentine, the tall, retired typesetter with long knotty fingers and dirty fingernails, sat next to her. He dropped coins on the counter and sipped the beer as he studied her. Her voice was low and soft as she spoke, eyes looking down into the thin red soup she stirred.

"Z, Y, X..."

"Go on," Valentine said. "Z, Y, X. Just the way I did it for my father. If you do it for me, I'll give you the Psalm. The Psalm on a piece of type. Go on. You can do it, and you want that Psalm, everyone does. Go on."

"—You do the best you can with your life," Leibowitz said, his face reddening with anger. "And what do you get for it? What?"

Ellie's spoon tumbled the letters in the bowl.

"V..." she said.

"W. Where's the W?" Valentine asked.

She swirled the letters.

"Here," she pointed at the spoon and looked around for her mother, who sat in a corner booth breathing heavily under the caresses of the man she knew as Clint.

"What is it?" Valentine said. "Why did you stop? Don't you want the Psalm?"

When she didn't answer, he stared into his empty glass.

Ellie turned her eyes away and focused on the neon sign in the front window. The letters sputtered on and off.

"The Psalm," Valentine said with excitement. "So small it fits on a piece of type no bigger than the eraser of a pencil. You could see it only through a magnifying glass." He had shown it to her once. The letters were like tiny scratches. He carried it with him in a small plastic box full of cotton. It was his magic charm, he told her, and all he had left from the days when he had worked for the biggest printing company in the valley.

"I was the best-damned typesetter there had ever been," he had said, pounding his fist on the bar. "The best." He brought his fist down on the counter.

"--I don't know what to do," said Liebowitz. "It's not right. You work hard all your life and look what happens? Doesn't anyone care?"

"--Z, Y, X, V, W..." Ellie said from the bar.

"That's right, Z, Y, X, V, W. Go on, that's my girl," Valentine said with glittering eyes. "You going to be my girl?"

"U..."

She stared at the soup. The letters had settled to the bottom. She picked at the oily remains of the potato chips Valentine had bought for her, then faced the bowl.

"What comes after U?" He asked.

The spoon rose.

"T, S, R, Q..."

Someone laughed.

"The rest is easy. Come on."

"P, O, M, N, L, K..."

"--You ask me, the universe's going to fucking hell," Liebowitz's companion said, his voice sharp with anger.

"And really fast, too," Liebowitz said.

Ellie wriggled on her stool.

"J, I, H..."

"That's my girl," said Valentine. "That's my girl... Ready?"

"G, F, E, D... C,B,A..."

The spoon fell back into the bowl, spilling soup onto the counter.

"She did it," Valentine slammed his fist on the counter. "She did it." He reached into his pocket and pulled out the plastic box. He opened it; the piece of type lay in dirty cotton. He put it in her hand, closed her fingers over it, stood, and lurched to the center of the room.

"She did it," he said through tears. "She did it. Just like I did when I was her age. The Psalm. I gave her the Psalm for it. She did it..."

"-- I don't know why I ever gave up my other place," Liebowitz said. "My cars outside now--no protection--have to back right out into the traffic..."

A woman in the end booth winked at Valentine. He ignored her and shuffled outside, where he stood for a moment before turning up the collar of his coat. His face caught in the lights, blazed up for a moment, then faded back into the dark as he disappeared among the parking meters and shiny cars.

"Well, here we are out of cigarettes," Liebowitz said with testiness in his voice. "What will become of us now?"



Muted Voices

By Ranjit Powar

Sometimes a hardened society does not allow a child to grow.

"I don't want to go to school, mummy. I think I have a fever." Seven-year-old Rati curled up in a foetal position, pulling her blanket to her chin.

"You have no fever," said Rati's mother, touching her forehead.

"Every morning, you devise a lame excuse to skip school. What do you want to do when you grow up? Wash people's dishes as I do? Why am I working myself to the bone from morning till evening? To buy myself new saris? I work like a donkey so you can study and make a better future for yourself. See how your Bapu abandoned us to God's mercy and disappeared? Women only have themselves to depend on. I was not educated and must live this life of slavery to put two meals together. I don't want you to do so too. Get up fast and wear your uniform now. I need to leave for work too; that madam in the blue house will yell at me again for being late."

Rubbing her eyes, Rati took her uniform from the wall hook and went to the common bathroom they shared with three other families. Rati and her mother, Bimla, lived in one of the twelve shabby rooms around a shared courtyard, each housing a family of daily wagers, rickshaw pullers and household workers. Three bathrooms and a handpump served their collective needs. A queue of six people waited their turn to use the bathroom. Rickshaw wallah Arun uncle stood with his check dhoti folded and tucked into his waist, exposing his hairy legs that seemed too skinny to support his bulging belly. Mala, who sold balloons around the corner, held on to her two little sons, who were most reluctant to bathe and tried to squirm out of her grip.

"Ae badmaash, don't run anywhere. It's been one week since you bathed. Then you keep scratching your heads for lice! Stop pushing each other."

Kamla Aunty, who went out to sweep the streets in a blue suit, held a chipped plastic bucket with clothes to wash, looking irritably at the rickety bathroom door that had remained shut for the last fifteen minutes.

"Ay, Dhiraj bhai, knock on the door and ask Pushpa to come out soon. We all have work to do."

"She can't take the entire day to bathe," added Seema, the agarbatti seller.

"Rubbing Rexona is not going to make her any fairer!" quipped Ramesh akhbarwalah, adjusting the towel on his shoulder. People laughed, forgetting their irritation for a while.

Rati despaired of having a bath and reaching school in time. She washed her face at the hand pump and returned to the room to dress. Packing her bag, Rati saw that her pencil was reduced to a stub she could no longer hold. She had asked Mummy for a new pencil for the last one week, but Bimla returned late from work and could not go to the market. Or maybe Mummy avoided expenses for as long as they could be avoided? Just like she kept taking down the hem of her school skirt for the last two years instead of buying her a new one. Her shirt with frayed collars and two different coloured buttons could hardly be classified as white for its stains and blots. Walking to the school with an overweight bag on her frail shoulders, Rati squibbed her feet in her outgrown shoes to ease the pressure on her sore toes, taking care not to step into the sludge overflowing from a blocked drain.

Smartly turned out in their blue and white uniforms and well-shined black leather shoes, girls and boys of St. Joseph's Junior School stepped out of expensive cars, waving eagerly to their classmates as they entered the school gate. Ria, daughter of that madam in the blue house, passed by, chatting animatedly with a friend. Ria's mother had helped Rati get admission to the elitist St. Joseph's Junior School through the Economically Weaker Section quota. The faded brown school bag she carried was a hand-me-down from Ria. Rati had scratched out Ria's name on the flap with a blade. She lowered her eyes and slowed down to avoid coming face-to-face with Ria.

Rati took her seat on the last bench as usual. The girl next to her collected her bag and shifted to another bench. She whispered something to her partner, and they both giggled.

"Stand up, Alia. Why are you hopping seats and disturbing the class?" Ms Chabra peered severely through her glasses.

"Mam, Rati is smelling," replied Alia.

Rati felt her face burn as all eyes in the class turned to look at her. Some children sniggered.

"Step out here, Rati," said Ms Chabra

Her eyes lowered, Rati slowly walked up to the teacher's desk.

"Look at you! When was it that you last bathed? Hold out your hands. See that grime under your nails? And how many times have I pointed out that your uniform should be washed and ironed and your shoes polished? This is disgraceful. When you walk out of the school, people must wonder about St Joseph's shabby standards! Go and stand outside the class. No recess for you today."

Rati walked out of the classroom, bursting into tears. Her nose watered. In the absence of a handkerchief, she wiped it clean with her shirt sleeve.

"Yucky!" said one of the two boys walking across the corridor. They looked at each other and giggled.

The bell rang to announce recess, and children poured out of the classroom, eager to open their bright plastic tiffins packed with sandwiches, fruit and omelettes. Rati's stomach growled with hunger. She would miss her mid-day meal, which would be the first meal of the day for her. She returned to the empty class, placing her head on her desk. It suddenly struck her that the teacher would give them a test after recess, and she had no pencil. She was terrified at the thought of being humiliated again. What should she do? Stealthily opening a yellow bag on the next bench, she took a pencil from the pencil box. It was a blue pencil with a little yellow butterfly perched at the top. There was a bar of chocolate too! Rati grabbed the half-molten chocolate, hurriedly tearing off the wrap and stuffing it into her mouth. She was back in her seat when the students came in after recess and were asked to write their test.

Rati eagerly started to write her answers. She had prepared well. Children bent over their textbooks, writing and erasing words and writing again.

"What's wrong, Neha? Why are you searching your bag instead of writing?" asked Ms Chabra.

"Ma'am, I can't find my pencil, Ma'am," said Neha anxiously.

"Are you sure you brought it with you?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I brought it. Simrat saw it, ma'am."

Rati's face lost colour. She hurriedly slipped the pencil under her copy.

"Ma'am, someone has taken my chocolate too!" said Neha.

"Children, this is not good. Not good at all. Whoever has taken the pencil and the chocolate, please own up right now."

Said Ms Chabra, addressing the class.

There was a stunned silence. Children turned to look at each other. No one responded.

"Stand up, all of you. I am coming to each one's desk to check," said Ms Chabra sternly.

The students stoop up, looking around to see who was the culprit. Ms Chabra walked slowly and deliberately through the rows of benches, looking hard and ponderingly at each child.

Rati froze with fear as the teacher walked up to her desk.

"Look up at me, Rati!"

No answer.

"Did you take the pencil and the chocolate?"

No answer. Rati's mouth, streaked with molten chocolate, quivered with fright. The teacher looked at her and picked up her book. The pencil rolled and landed on the floor. Horrified, the children watched. Rati stood still, hanging her head in shame.

"That's my pencil, Ma'am, that one with the butterfly!" said Neha.

"Pick up the pencil and return it to Neha. Say you are sorry for stealing her pencil and chocolate."

The children started to whisper among themselves.

"I am sorry I stole your pencil and chocolate," whispered Rati, her face flushing. She felt she was going to wet herself.

"Bring your mother to school tomorrow. I must have a word with her," said Ms Chabra.

"Wake up, Rati. You must queue up early for your bath today." Bimla pulled off the blanket and shook the sleeping child.

The child's body was hot.

"No, Mummy, I don't want to go to school", Rati said in a feeble voice. She had wet her bed.

"Hey Bhagwan, you are burning with fever! What has happened to you, my girl? Let me make you some tea."

Bimla checked Rati's fever the following morning.

"Thank God there is no fever today. Come, my child, get up and get dressed for school. I will make you some tea."

"No, mummy, no! I will not go to school!" yelled Rati.

"Don't create a fuss, girl! I have no time for your tantrums. Hurry up. I need to leave for work."

Rati contorted her body into a foetal posture and covered her head with the blanket.

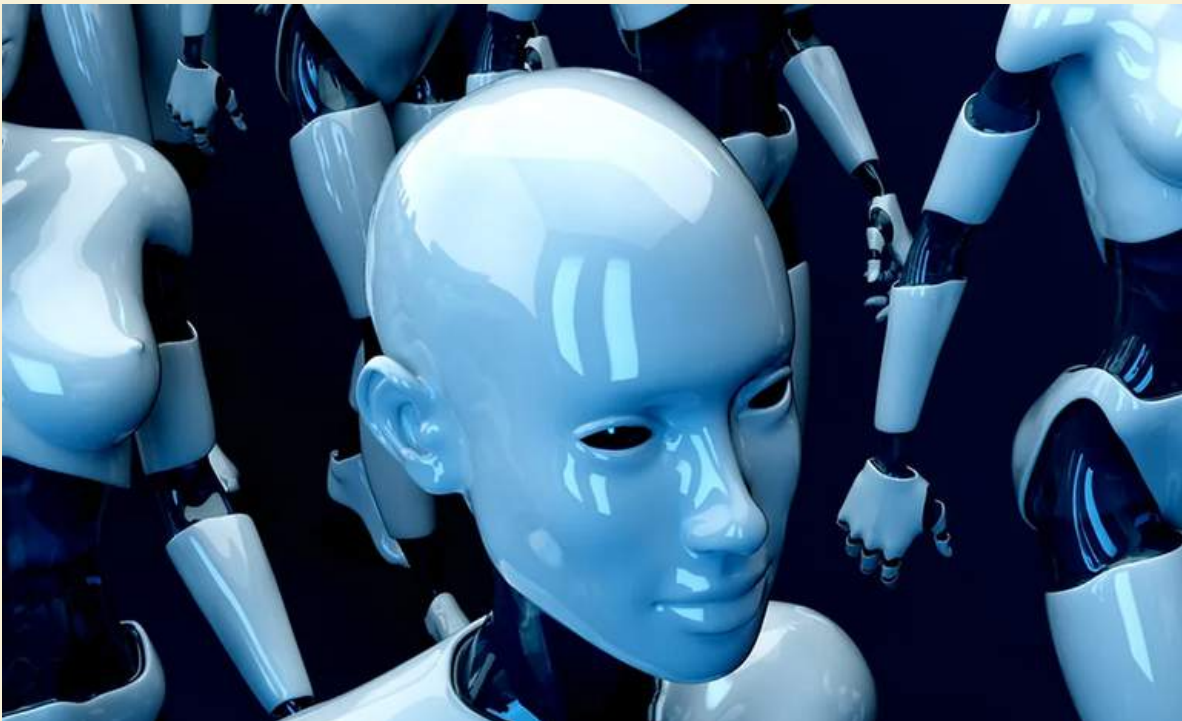
Bimla had a long day of work ahead. Her back ached from bending all day. Losing her cool, she pulled off the blanket roughly and slapped Rati.

"You have no value for your mother's hard work, have you? You are going to waste all the money I spend on your needs and turn out to be useless like your father, are you?" she panted angrily.

Rati sobbed loudly.

"I will go to work with you, Mummy. Please don't send me to school. I will work hard so you can stay at home." She said between sobs.

Bimla sank down on the charpoy helplessly, holding her head in her hands.



An Android who changed into a human

By Tom Ball

Tom Ball dives into a future where robots can turn into humans.

I was a male android and I enjoyed serving drinks to the humans in our bar. The humans loved drinking and androids don't drink so I just served and when the bar was closed early in the morning, I was temporarily turned off. Some of the customers remarked to me that I must be bored at my job, but I told them I didn't mind. And some of the female customers wanted to love me, however I told them it wasn't allowed. And my model of android was not designed for love, but rather to just be a convivial host.

I had some favorite customers who liked to tell me about the World outside the bar. They said it was a wonderful World and that I should try it some time. In particular they suggested that I get an enhanced body for love which they said was the finest of pleasures. I told them I'd like to some day, if my android boss would allow it...

The days passed by in a blur and finally after 500 days of service I was retired to android Heaven. Here obsolete androids gathered and talked and had sex. Though not designed for sex per se, an android mechanic made it possible for me to love like the others. Some of the androids here were virtual geniuses, and I was too humble to approach them. And we were never turned off. I asked one of the others if there was a God in this Heaven and she said no one seems to know. I kind of missed the customers in the bar, but I had some new friends here in Heaven.

But one day all 10,000 of us gathered to hear a new android speak about something important. She said Heaven was about to be demolished to make way for a new palace and our metallic bodies would be recycled. And the crowd was livid and attacked the speaker and tore her apart. Then we left Heaven, walked down the platinum road and presently came to another Heaven. They were sympathetic and wanted to join us. So, we marched on and soon were 200,000 strong, but then fighter jets appeared above and destroyed nearly all of us with missiles. I was one of the few survivors. And I huddled with the other 10 survivors, most of who were disabled. And we decided to make a new Heaven right here on the side of the road. We all wanted to live and waited to see what would happen. But the days passed, and nothing transpired.

Finally, after several years we met an android sex symbol at our gathering point. She liked me in particular and invited me to join her in her travels. She was named Clarissa and was traveling with six other males. And I loved her, and happily joined her in her travels. One of her male companions told me that on Luna there was a safe haven for androids to live in peace and harmony. And that's where we were going. Apparently, this sex symbol was rich from her movie days, and she chartered a Spacecraft for us to go to Luna #5: Android city.

In Android city we found that the city was for androids only and every android here was very clever, I seemed to be a bit on the clever side by comparison. But I was the faithful servant of my mistress, the sex symbol. She didn't have much time for me, but I was very glad when she loved me....

I spent most of my time watching android movies of which tens of thousands had been made on Earth. And superior androids were still making them in this year, 2130 A.D. And I thought their Worlds were full of wonder. And my mistress, Clarissa made a film about me, called "The Bartender." Many androids didn't know what to think of the movie as none of them drank. But many were impressed that I had managed to survive to get to Luna. They said the UW (United Worlds) protected our Lunar colony as a historic settlement. And I thought I was really in Heaven.

As time passed, there were more new settlements on Luna and most of them had android citizens. Robots now did all the work, and androids were free to mingle with humans under new laws. And had the vote in most places, as most places were democracies. A number of humans changed into androids, it was all fashion, but I wanted to be changed into a human which was unusual. Finally, I said goodbye to my mistress and friends, and I went to one of these new colonies and became a human. My mind was copied onto the brain of a sexy human female. I thought it was kinky to become a female and enjoyed loving passionate male humans. In my view humans were more passionate and crazier than androids and I had seldom loved an android.

One of my human lovers, Steve, ran for and won the election of Mayor of Luna #54: Space Vegas. It was a gambling mecca and attracted a lot of tourists including many androids who calculated carefully their chances in the varying games. I also happened to be the favorite consort of my human lover, Mayor Steve, and he took me all over the Solar System for his meetings. Meetings were often face to face to avoid hackers zooming into one's business. And besides we liked traveling.

I liked the culture on Mars #13: Pop city which had begun as a place to generate pop music but was now also producing advanced rock and classical music. It all sounded good to me, and I hobnobbed with some of the musicians and loved some of them (Steve had other lovers too). The musicians here were the best lovers I'd encountered thus far. And great music was all new to me.

And I liked the culture on Titan in which the people lived in total harmony with androids and everyone had a vote and was equal before the law. And they were ruled by a cyborg who looked just like a human or an android. Their leader had a chat with me and was thinking of allowing changes from human to android and vice versa. He said that he wanted to copy my mind and allow those who were contemplating changing their species could talk it over with me. I replied to the affirmative. And so, it was done, and my resultant clones had both an android version of me and a human one. And I hoped both would be happy.

I also liked the colony: Europa #3 which was under the sea, and one could tour the ocean and see the freak sea life, most of who were very clever. And we could communicate with them using MRT (Mind Reading Technology). It was a real eye-opener.

Then we were back on Luna #54: Space Vegas. The city was getting rich from gambling of all kinds. Gambling on video sports and one's own ability, in particular. To me, we lived in desperate times and many gamblers here lost their shirt. Those who lost everything were given MRT treatment to help them get back on their feet. But typically, they gambled again as soon as they got money from the city's socialist fund. Some criticized the government of Space Vegas, saying

they encouraged people to gamble. Steve told them, that life was a gamble and also a dream. And there were plenty of dreamers here. Most of the dreamers here wrote down their daydreams and some of them were very successful, but night dreams and the subconscious were truly where it was at. The people here used MRT to truly know one another. And people gambled on what one's future actions would be, judging from what they had learned from mind reading with would-be gamblers.

Space Vegas was also known for its original musicians, most were androids. Most people respected their work, but some didn't like androids, period. They said machines were too powerful and were taking over human society. I tried to reason with them and told them, androids and all AI should be freed from slavery and abusive masters. I had looked at both sides now and was widely considered an expert on android-human relationships, here in this Space colony. I convinced many to change their species from homo sapiens to homo machina and vice versa. And humans kept pace with android development and the common people were now all highly intelligent due to brain apps. Our leaders were all geniuses and made their cities, places of splendor. Steve had enhanced his mind as did I and we were working on scientific problems, like how to improve Space speed and how to make Internet love more fulfilling. We were also raising our 3 children and trying to give them the cleverest education. I bore the children myself. And it was now the year 2130 A.D. Many people said I was crazy to bear children the natural way. But I said I wanted to nurture and raise them to turn out as I wanted them to. Of course, most children were born as adults with the memories of the parent whose sex they were. But they had no childhood, and most were born insane, in my view.

At the same time, Steve and I were trying to get rich from investing in deep Space colonies. And we planned to take our family to the Star Sirius System for a fresh start. Steve and I were now virtually monogamous. I'd come a long way from that android bartender I was in the beginning. But I figured all my success was due to the fact that I was very clever.

But it was all my dream and the trans android and Steve etc. didn't exist except in my mind. But I thought it was a realistic adventure. Who knows what the future will bring?



NON FICTION



Anecdote

Grandpa John Kills Himself in Graceada Park

Jill Jespson

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Musings

And no birds sing

Chitra Singh

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And No Birds sing

By Chitra Singh

Chitra Singh muses that flesh and blood are transient but brick and mortar is indestructible.

I stood before the crumbling walls of the façade and stared with dismay at the mute sentinels of an era gone by. Was this unkempt sight truly the house in which my childhood had been spent? I had heard that my uncles had sold the property at some point in time, but what had transpired to reduce that imposing structure to this ungainly mess. These troubling questions inundated me as I stood on the roadside trying to take in the ravages of time and make sense of it. True it was a remarkable edifice as I knew it aeons away, and regret swamped me at the cruelty of circumstances. Chance had brought me back to these haloed surroundings, an out of the blue event, and seeing that it was to be held in the town of my growing up years, I seized the opportunity and decided to attend it. My mind sped back in time, and waveringly the curtains of mist started lifting and a vivid image of the house started to unveil. Lo and behold, the unkempt walls, the broken fences, the unpainted railings started to metamorphose, and the striking elevation of the imposing building conjured itself before my eyes. Suddenly the double storied magnificence of the house sprang to life. The signature hexagon shaped twin corner rooms with their ornate iron balconies manifested themselves as a sculpture emerges from the clay under the hands of a master craftsman. The design was definitely Portuguese and must have been the vogue when my Grandfather constructed the house. Whoever had bought the property had done gross injustice to it.

As I stood there taking it all in, the entire kaleidoscope of the house cascaded before my eyes with the intensity of a water fall. Its vibrant existence slowly started to emerge and fill me with a sense of wonderment and belonging. The cacophony of sounds which reverberated round these walls, the hum of activity resulting from so many members residing under its roof, the presence of a retinue of staff which ensured that it ran like a piece of well-oiled machinery, echoed in my mind with the clarity of a clarion call. Each familiar image was stamped on my mind for eternity. The house was a hive of activity with grandfather being the fulcrum of it all. Four generations resided here simultaneously, each absorbed in its way of life, and yet inter twining to make a composite whole. The draw of the place was magnetic and its energy our very life force,

Sixty years melted away, and I was transported back to that long-lost era. Everything fell into place like a pack of cards. The imposing façade started to take shape. The exteriors were always painted a stately cream with white edgings and

the intricate iron balconies were a vivid green. An imposing central oblong balcony on the first floor formed the centre piece of the house, from which it's wings spread out. Under the balcony was the pillared portico of the main entrance. A lacy concrete railing ran around the balcony stamping it with its distinctive character. The entire edifice, with its halls, stairways and myriad rooms were infinitely grand. One could gauge that a lot of time and attention had been given to detail, and stood as a monument to the resoluteness of my grandfather. It was definitely a labour of love. A drive led up to the main portico and the house stood back from the road with a well-appointed garden surrounding it on three sides. A dense hedge formed a secure boundary.

It all began with my grandfather who was the embodiment of '*The Brown Sahib*.' Though his origins were rural, with a measure of brains and toil, self-education and ambition, he rose from the ranks and made it to the officer category in British times. He must have served the master well because they bestowed him with the title of Rai Bahadur. At some stage he even had magisterial powers. Needless to add he had an unmistakable standing in society and must have had the wherewithal to lead a life commensurate with his status. After Government service he went on to become '*Diwan*' or Prime Minister of a princely state. After completing his stint there, he returned to his roots and was Chairman of the town's municipality, and wielded considerable clout. This magnificent residence took form in these years and was a reflection of his personality. He educated his children well including his daughters, who enrolled in universities for graduation. But the lure of the parents was so great, that even after marriage, like satellites they orbited around their central body. On some pretext or the other, whether circumstantial or contrived, they embraced the family fold and flourished under Rai Bahadur's strict but benevolent umbrella. Thus it was that the house always resounded with life. Apart from my maiden aunts, at any given time, two extra families were always in residence. The eldest aunt, along with her progeny, were almost always in permanent residence, because that particular uncle, being a gentleman of leisure, didn't want to be burdened with family responsibilities. My other uncle who was an army officer, ensconced his family there for a long period while he was posted in Iraq to fight the war. My grandmother was married when she was barely thirteen years old, so her mother always stayed with her and we had the good fortune of knowing our great grandmother who lived to the ripe old age of a hundred and four years. Both of them were as fair as driven snow and she told us gory stories of how they had to blacken their faces to escape the notice of British soldiers. Grandmother had also imported a nephew or two, who grew up under her vigilant eye. As if the household was not large enough, even my mother enrolled us in good '*english*' boarding schools of which the town boasted, but on weekends, we were always brought home. Fortunately, the male uncles were either in service or were having an education elsewhere, and only came occasionally. So it was a motley crowd indeed.

There was a retinue of servants to cater to the needs of this bubbling household. There were cooks and scullery maids. There was a cleaning staff. Two gardeners tended the large gardens. The one fronting the house was a formal garden, and there was a side garden for vegetables. The formal garden radiated from a central hexagon shaped pool, which housed a school of gold fish. Pathways took off from the pool and were lined with neat borders and flowers in abundance. The gold fish pond was adorned with elaborate Grecian looking urn like pots in which perennials flourished. The periphery of the garden had a row of the choicest mango and guava trees and in season the gardener brought in the produce to the house. There was also a selection of fresh vegetables from the vegetable section.

Apart from the formal rooms, the house had multiple rooms on both floors and there were two staircases for convenience. Once inside the house there was a large inner courtyard which was flanked by a row of smaller rooms on all three sides. These rooms housed the kitchens, various utility rooms, bathrooms and so on. There was a side entrance into the courtyard for the staff. One of these rooms housed my grandmothers own kitchen where she spent her time making only goodies for the household, which were stored in neat jars in an adjoining storeroom. I have vibrant memories of the most delectable Indian sweetmeats, particularly native to the province, which were churned out in abundance in these hallowed precincts. We grew up on an assortment of delicacies like *andarsaa*, a near impossible concoction, *pooran poories*, *ladooos* of every possible ingredient, and a host of *namkeens*. Grandfather was a fastidious eater and maintained a table of gourmet standards.

We children, close cousins all, living in this cocoon, added to the life force of the place. I looked forward to the

weekends when we would be home, and could enjoy the company of the other cousins. And I might add, since our stay was brief, we were meted out preferential treatment. The house itself was a haven for our boundless energy and myriad activities. We raced up and down the staircases, spent tireless afternoons in the upstairs hall, improvising all kinds of games or simply enjoyed a book reading session with a cousin who enjoyed regaling us with his reading skills. We would rush out into the garden, raid the guava trees which bore delicious *Allahabadi* guavas, or played catching games. Ravenous we looked forward to the delectable meals and hoped that we would be singled out in getting double helpings of grandmother's goodies. All festivals were joyous occasions, with the family assembling in force.

I could hear grandfather tapping away on his type writer in his office room, while I negotiated one of the staircases to go to the kitchen to get some dough to feed the gold fish in the pond. My younger sister trailed me. *Mithoo* the parrot kept up a chronicle of the comings and goings in the courtyard by squawking away in his cage and mimicking the passers-by. Just as I was about to escape with the dough the great grandmother who was basking in the inner courtyard, asked me to fetch her '*paan*.' I could hear my grandmother instructing her maid assistant in her kitchen as to how to lay out her '*moong barfees*' with exact precision on a foil sheet in the courtyard, where they would catch the sun well. And Deosaran, the cook was admonishing the gardener from the kitchen window to hurry up with the drumsticks from the tree before the '*dal*' spoiled. We hurried out with the dough to tempt the gold fish. The minute you dropped a little ball of the dough, tens of them darted around it in the pond, their bodies gleaming a bright red in the brilliant sunlight. I was looking forward to the afternoon when my mother's favourite vendor, the Chinaman would arrive with his wares. My mother was a connoisseur of all things fancy and stylish and the Chinaman, with his collection of the most elegant embroidered linen was a favourite. The saga of the Chinaman is most eloquently narrated and immortalized in Mahadevi Varma's short story '*Weh Chini Bhai*,' but for us he was a real-life experience. He was a giant of a man and would arrive in his grey militia Chinese *kurta* and baggy *pyjamas*, carrying a monstrous cloth bundle on his back. He would proceed to the front *verandah*, spread out a sheet, and delicately lay out his wonders for all to see. A major portion of the family would assemble and seat themselves on the chairs arranged there. Everyone had a field day choosing something appealing from the profusion laid out. The Chinaman's linen continued to adorn our independent households for years and stood out in their beauty and perfection.

Most afternoons were spent in the upstairs hall where we children assembled to while away the afternoon, while the elders took their afternoon siesta. We had to be sure not to make too much noise nor thump around too violently. Grandfather had his afternoon meal, in a freshly washed and ironed shirt and a crisply starched '*dhoti*,' the pleats of which were as sharp as a sword. If a visitor was coming in the evening, grandfather would dress in his three-piece suit, with his pocket watch dangling ornamentally from his breast pocket and stand on the front *verandah* to receive the guest. If the visitor was even five minutes late, he would fish the watch out, glance at it pointedly, and show his displeasure. Visitors were entertained in the drawing room, but we children could only peep from one of the doorways, but could never enter. Oh the rules of the house were many, and we towed the line; somehow no one ever questioned them, in fact everyone conformed, be it my uncles, my parents, my maiden aunts or for that matter anyone. Grandfather was the undisputed king.

"No, it's not my turn to light the *diya*", a cousin admonished the other cousin, "so you better do it." This was a daily argument at dusk, among the cousins, in the front hexagon shaped room, which was the designated study room. Each child was allotted one corner, where we sat on our mats and studied. The evening '*aarti*' in the *Pooja* room was the responsibility of the children. Five mandatory *bhajans* were sung and *prasad* was distributed. We assembled there, a motley crowd of all sizes and sang in unison in our unmodulated voices, but at some stage got immersed in the gravity of it, and the performance rang melodiously round the rooms.

Oh it was a never ending series of images which flickered, one after another, and wove into a priceless tapestry. What a glorious past it was.

As I stood there it dawned on me that the house had left an indelible mark. It shaped our characters and made us what we are. Its essence pervaded our very beings. I was saddened to realise that most of its inmates were no more; nor that

its crumbling walls ever disclose what a rich heritage they had witnessed. It is something of a pity that flesh and blood are transient and brick and mortar indestructible.



Grandpa John Kills Himself in Graceada Park

By Jill Jepson

The world is insensitive to an old man, spiralling into despair. Jill Jepson recounts a touching, true story.

When I was ten years old, my grandfather bought a .38 caliber revolver at a gun store, walked to the local park, and put two bullets in his chest. He lived for three days.

I knew Grandpa John as a white-haired man who made silly jokes and smelled of pipe smoke and macaroons. I loved him, but we weren't close, and after a few weeks, his memory froze into a small set of still pictures, forever colored by the mystery of his death.

Grandpa wasn't terminally ill when he took his life. He had no chronic ailments. He was not disabled, in pain, or in debt. He had, it seemed, a lot to live for, including two adult sons and five grandchildren who cared about him. The fact that he chose to die was incomprehensible and horrifying. My parents did little to clear up my confusion. They seldom spoke about Grandpa's suicide, and when they did their comments were superficial.

"Was he insane?" I asked my mother. It seemed the only explanation.

She said he was not, but that he was senile. His supposed senility, something I'd never heard of before and had never seen any evidence of, was, to my mother, a reasonable explanation for his suicide.

Years later, I still wondered about grandfather's suicide. No one was still alive who might have known something about it, and none of his grandchildren knew any more than I did. The sole source that I thought might give me some information was the local paper, which had carried the story on the front page. Perhaps, I thought, I could learn something from it.

As I accessed the newspaper's online archives one day, I felt a mounting excitement. I imagined there would be details I'd never heard before, perhaps even speculation about the reason for his suicide. I wasn't eager to read the medical details of his wounds, but I steeled myself, prepared to learn whatever I could.

When a PDF containing a photograph of the story came up, my heart pounded. I clicked on the file and read.

The headline stunned me.

Pensioner chooses Graceada Park to Attempt Suicide.

Grandpa was not, it seemed, a man or a person, but a pensioner, a term that struck me as dismissive and ageist. But it was the phrase chooses Graceada Park that cut deep. This headline wasn't about a man trying to take his own life. It was about the place he chose to do it. It even seemed vaguely sarcastic, as though Grandpa John should have thought of a better place to end his life. How dare he violate the sanctity of our park, it seemed to say.

I read on.

A 79-year-old pensioner failed in a suicide attempt yesterday afternoon, but managed to frighten, if not endanger, a number of small children playing nearby.

The disdain in this lead sentence was palpable. Grandpa John failed in his suicide, but he managed to scare some kids. True, endangering children is not to be taken lightly. But an old man's suicide attempt is, at least to the reporter who wrote this article, and the editor who approved it. The story goes on to describe the children's reaction to what they first thought was a firecracker, their screams when they saw my grandfather's wounds, the help they sought from a nearby woman who called the police. One bullet, the article explains, entered my grandfather's body above the heart and one below.

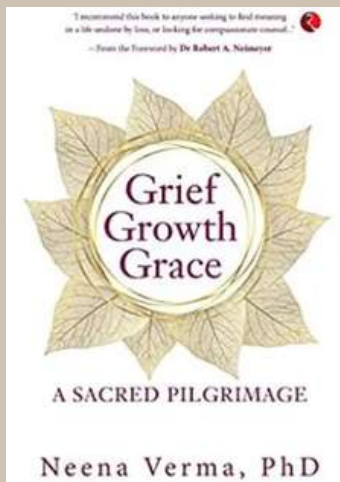
Grandpa was listed in critical condition; the article goes on but had a pretty good chance of pulling through. The next day, a tiny article buried on page 13 explained that he was still in critical condition, three days later, an even smaller article on page 26 announced the date and time of his funeral.

I've never been able to get the insensitivity and cruelty of this article out of my mind, even knowing that the author is no doubt long dead. How could the despair of an old man be treated so carelessly? How could my Grandpa John's death by his own hand be talked about as if it were merely tiresome and annoying, an inconvenience, rather than a tragedy?

Yet, this article did grant me some of the insight I had hoped for. If Grandpa John was treated with so little regard as he lay in a hospital bed dying by his own hand, how was he treated by the world when he was simply an old man, spiraling into despair?

REVIEWS

Book Review



Grief~Growth~Grace: A Sacred Pilgrimage

Review by Dr. Joan McArthur-Blair

Get this book and keep it close at hand as one travels the journey of life, says Dr Joan.

[Read More](#)

Film Review

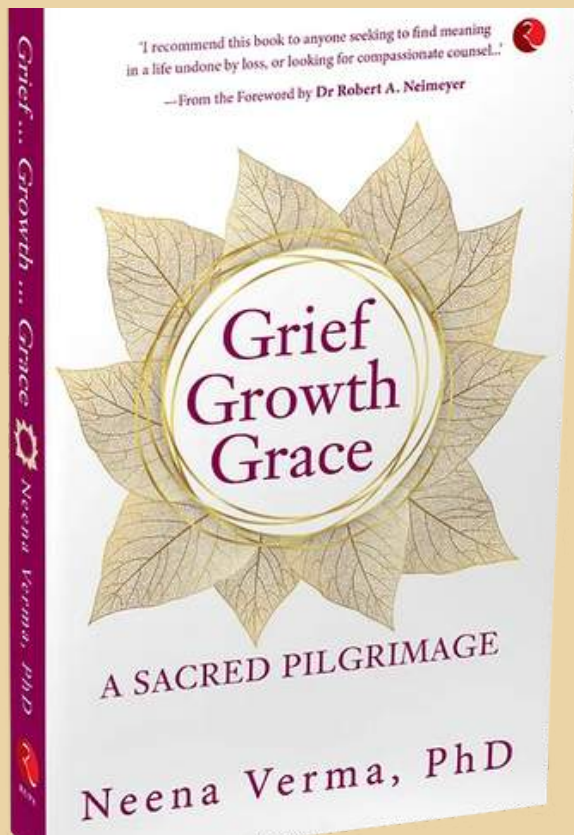


Jubilee

Review by Ramandeep Mahal

Dr Ramandeep Mahal reviews 'Jubilee', 'a series that unveils the truth of Indian cinema.

[Read More](#)



Grief ~ Growth ~ Grace – A Sacred Pilgrimage

A Book by Neena Verma, PhD

Dr. Joan McArthur-Blair reviews the book

Writing this review is deeply personal. First, because this book arrived in my mailbox when I was dealing with a huge personal loss – the death of my beloved sister. Second, I know this author from many appreciative inquiry undertakings and was at a 'World Appreciative Inquiry Conference' when she was in the midst of grieving the death of her son and had not yet conceived (I don't think) of writing this book on grief. And, third, I am an author myself who writes on the nature of resilience. So, reading *Grief ~ Growth ~ Grace – A Sacred Pilgrimage* was like finding home just when I had wandered far and needed to be called back to center.

I know Dr. Neena Verma as a colleague and I had the opportunity to see Neena, the mother, profoundly grieving. I had the experience of watching from afar the transition from grieving just for herself and family to offering the possibility of solace to the world with this powerful book. I say the 'possibility of solace' because no-one can offer true solace to another who is grieving. Grief is a deeply personal journey; one we all travel on our own. We may have companions on the journey, but they can't heal or truly know an individual's grief. It is one of the many things I love about *Grief ~ Growth ~ Grace – A Sacred Pilgrimage*. It doesn't provide the definitive steps to traversing grief. It offers multiple paths that the reader can take up or pass over.

The title of this book in some ways tells you the entire flow of the book. *Grief ~ Growth ~ Grace* leads the reader through these landscapes of sorrow and transformation using Neena's 'GROWTH Mandala' which depicts the journey across grief affirmation, resilient adaptation, transformation, and harmonious re-emergence. The GROWTH Mandala creates a framework for the reader with each section exploring a section of the mandala and how it relates to the grief journey. This mandala serves as a guide to the reader and allows for dipping in and out of the book and spending time in the sections that most call the reader. And, I would say that this is a dipping book. A book that can be kept on a shelf nearby and dipped into when the soul needs to read Neena's words. Although one could read the book from cover to cover, it is much more impactful to dip into the different sections and the different ideas of how we might journey with grief.

Dr. Verma begins with understanding the nature of loss and grief. She articulates so many of the areas in our lives where we experience the harshness of loss, from trauma, from COVID, to losing a loved one, to devastating life circumstances. She weaves a story about loss and states “at some point in life, we all have to navigate the maze of grief triggered by loss, trauma or bereavement.” This beginning is one of the real charms of this book. No matter where someone is in their own lives, they can find themselves in this book. She moves on in her exploration of grief to write about how we react to grief mentally and physically – she aptly entitles this chapter – *Grief, the Cry of Love*. What more can you want from an author than her deep understanding that all types of grief are this cry in the wilderness for love that now no longer has a home.

Neena doesn't leave the reader in the valley of grief, rather she moves to writing about growth. Growth that follows from grief and as she puts it:

*“A season of grief
Unfolds reason for growth”* (p. 56)

She is not blithe about growth as if people should just shed their grief and move forward. She writes wonderfully about how for some grief is overwhelming and for others they bend but do not break. The way in which Neena writes creates space for the reader to find what might work for them and guide them. In the sections on the GROWTH Mandala, Post Traumatic Growth, and Grief Affirmation, she seems to come home to what she has been guiding the reader toward all along. The reader begins to find a fount of concrete ideas for opening their heart to the possibility of both holding their grief and beginning to venture into new ways of being and doing. These sections of the book vibrate with ideas, tools and processes that people on the grief journey might engage with.

As an author who writes and works with appreciative resilience in my own work, I was, of course, drawn to the section on resilient adaptation. There is an exercise about mid-way through the book built out of the concept of ‘*kintsugi*’ – the fixing of broken pottery with tree sap combined with gold. Neena creates an exercise based on this idea where she invites the reader to think of a loss or trauma and then imagines self as a piece of pottery with a crack in it. The ensuing art exercises draw out the journey and offer the reader practical possibilities for healing.

Amongst so many powerful sections in this book is a section on forgiveness. To quote from the book: *“However deep be our wound, however intense our pain, forgiveness shepherds us gently down the tricky and treacherous slopes of agony, angst, resentment, fear, hatred and bitterness...Forgiveness ushers us on the path of meaning and grace.”* Again, so much to reflect on and learn in this work.

This quote about forgiveness emphasizes one of the beauties of this book – Neena Verma is a wonderfully poetic writer, and her words resonate and linger in the mind.

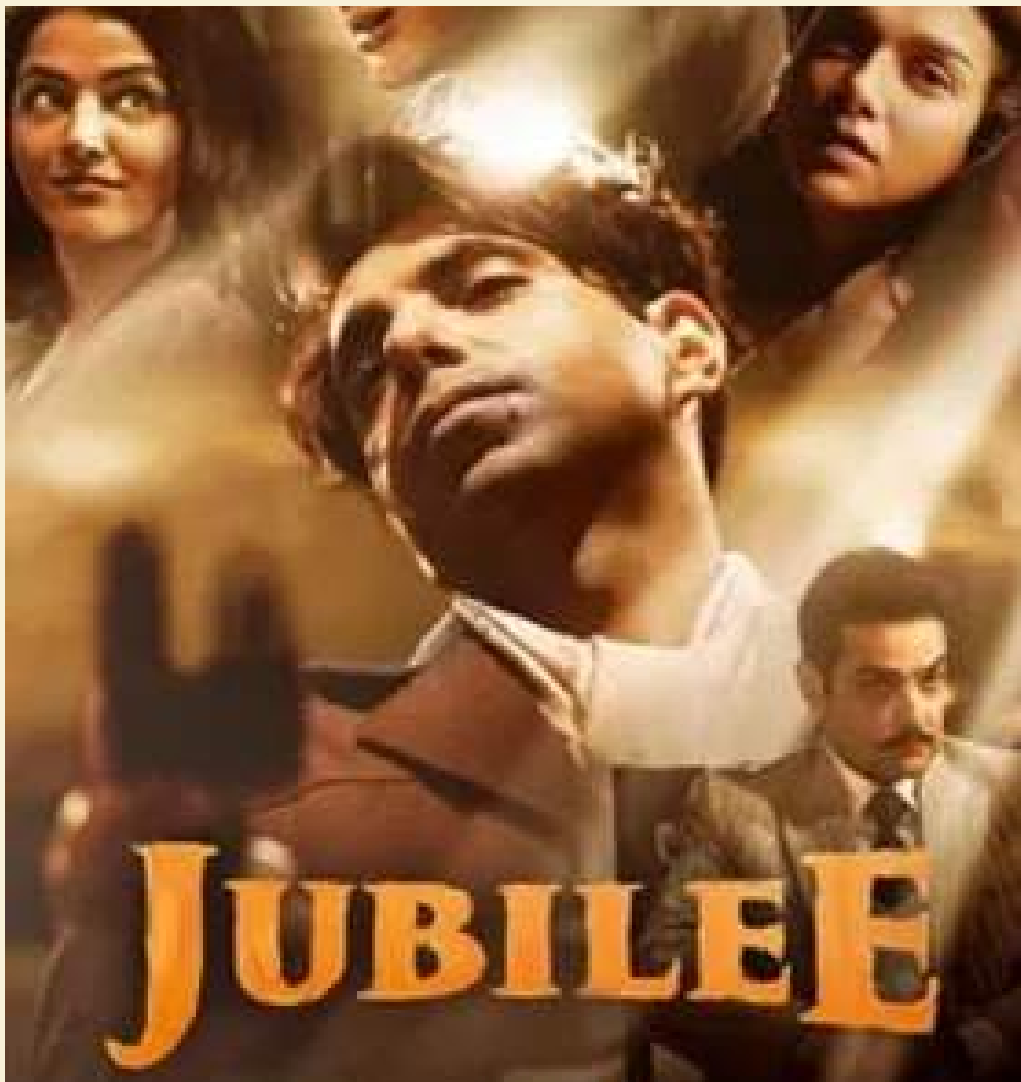
What can I say other than get this book and keep it close at hand as one travels the journey of life.

About the Author

Dr Neena Verma is a ‘Grief & Growth’ Specialist; ‘Resilience, Purpose, Transitions & Therapeutic Writing’ Coach; and ‘Appreciative Inquiry’ Thought Leader. She is ICF credentialed PCC level Coach, TAOS Associate & Professional Member of NTL Institute. She counsels, coaches, trains and volunteers for ‘Grief Affirmation & Healing’, Resilience, Meaningful Ageing & Post-traumatic Growth. Her work is rooted in ‘appreciative inquiry’, ‘meaning-reconstructive grief therapy’, journal & poetry therapy, logotherapy, and ‘compassion-focussed therapy’. She combines her subject-matter expertise with long professional experience & her lived wisdom as a bereaved mother. As well as writing & editing extensively, Neena has authored two books – *Grief ~ Growth ~ Grace – A Sacred Pilgrimage* and *A Mother’s Cry ~ A Mother’s Celebration*. Neena serves on the international editorial board of ‘AI Practitioner’, the only international journal for Appreciative Inquiry. She also runs an independent library movement for the disadvantaged children in India.

Neena Verma





Jubilee: An insight into the growth of Indian Cinema

By Dr. Ramandeep Mahal

A series that unveils the truth of Indian cinema

Jubilee is not about a particular individual, or a studio set in a timeline; Atul Sabarwal and Prachi Singh, the writers of this series, have made this a sprawling tapestry. Many characters with their stories are melded and amalgamated in this series.

Roy Talkies owner Shrikant Roy (present Jit Chatterjee) is looking for a fresh actor to cast as Madan Kumar in his pet film Sunghursh. He has located a man in Lucknow by the name of Jamshed Khan played by Nandish Sandhu who works as a stage performer. Roy dispatched his man Binod Das (Aparshakti Khurana) to persuade Jamshed to accept the role, but Jamshed shows little interest. We learn how Binod's true motivation alters the course of his voyage and impacts the lives of many others. Aditi Rao Hydari plays Sumitra Devi and Prosenjit Chatterjee, who plays her husband Srikant Roy, owns a studio known as Roy Talkies. Obviously this has been inspired by the real life couple Himanshu Roy and Devika Rani. Creators Vikramaditya Motwani and Soumik Sen have presented the characters as vessels of human suffering like the character of Jay Khanna (Siddhant Gupta) who is basically inspired by Dev Anand in his attire, Guru Dutt who is in love with his heroine or Yash Chopra who has just arrived from Karachi after the partition.

There is Aparshakti Khurana who plays the role of Madan Kumar (his onscreen name) which I feel he couldn't really pull off. One is reminded of Ashok Kumar while studying his character; he can be wholly called the protagonist of the web

series. Wamiqa Gabbi who plays Niloufer Qureshi reminds us of Nargis as well as Madhubala when standing under an umbrella or while peeking out through a car window. I was stunned by her dialogue, 'Film banane ke liye toh kisi na kisi ke saath sona padhna hai, ya sharir se ya iman se' (in order to make a film you have to sleep with someone, you have to sell your body or your honour). True but shocking, nevertheless.

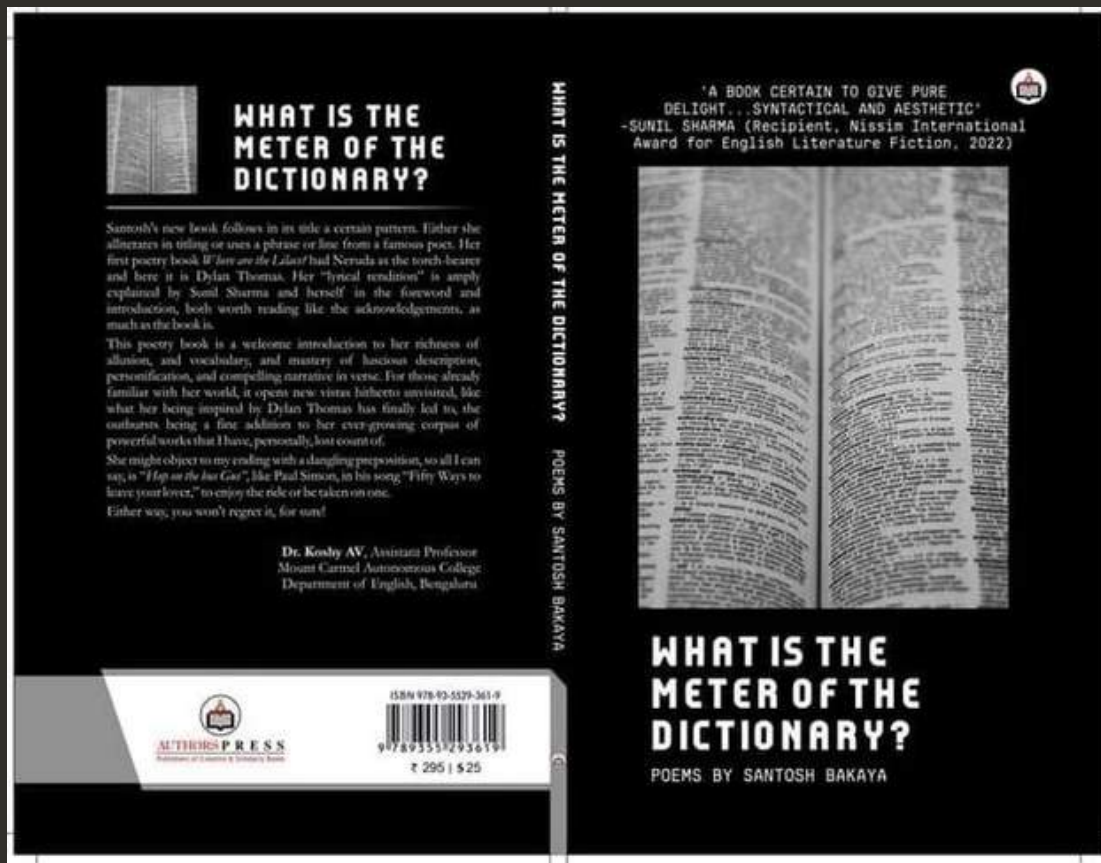
The making of this eye-opening series is clearly not to eulogize or pay tribute to Bollywood or Indian cinema; instead they focus on the people and their relationships with each other which gives Jubilee its real character. Nandish Sandhu with his curly hair looks strikingly like a young Prithvi Raj Kapoor in a screen test tape. We have other characters like Jay Khanna's father played by wealthy Arun Govil now living in an assigned refugee camp, Ram Kapoor as the jovial financier, Shweta Basu Prasad as Aparshakti Khurana's wife who is conflicted about her sense of duty as a wife and the sense of right and wrong, Chirag Katrecha as Aparshakti Khurana's brother who wants to get away from his well-meaning brother et al. These characters, their lives, their relationships all add vibrancy to the series. The level of research is staggering—from costumes to the old vintage cars and trucks, to the thick cardboard train tickets, every embellishment is great and very credible.

Aparshakti is at his best as Binod Das. We have mostly seen him as the protagonist's best friend in movies, usually providing comic relief but here his nuanced acting makes him stand out. Now let's move on to Sidhant Gupta as Jay Khanna, I am glad that he was chosen by the creators to play this role. He can melt your heart with his cheeky grin while falling down in front of a woman and asking her in the pouring rain to love him again. Aditi Rao Hydari doesn't have much of a role, but she always appears enchanting. She portrays the only female sensation in an industry dominated by men, who lacks the authority she desires. Wamiqa Gibba is a revelation in her debut performance as a young woman who pursues her heart, no matter what. There is a hilarious joke about uttering Madan Kumar's name ending with a curse word which provides a comic relief throughout the series. The series has a lot of plus points but what it lacks is the density of the character of Jamshed Khan. If the character Jamshed Khan had been given more screen time, it would have been fantastic. Although his character is crucial to the narrative, we do not see enough of him, and this aspect could have been handled more effectively.

The backdrop soundtrack composed by Alokanda Dasgupta is outstanding. The songs are incredible and suit the story perfectly. Pratik Shah's cinematography is remarkable. Regarding the series director, Vikramaditya Motwane, he did an outstanding job. Not only did Vikramaditya Motwane create an engaging story, but he also portrayed the evil side of the industry without hesitation and with brutal truth. I would rate this 8 out of 10 based on the outstanding performances of the actors and the great cinematography. Don't miss this one.

TALKING BOOKS

Talking Books



Dr Ampat Koshy talks to Santosh Bakaya about her poetry collection *What is the meter of the Dictionary?*

Talking Books



Dr. AK: You have brought out many collections of poetry. Which one is *What is the Meter of the Dictionary?* in this set?

SB: *What is the Meter of the Dictionary?* is my latest solo book to be published, following this order of chronology.

Oh Hark! [2014]

Where are the Lilacs? [2016]

Ballad of Bapu [2014], a poetic biography of Bapu, has garnered a lot of acclaim.

Under the Apple Boughs [2017]

Songs of Belligerence [2020]

Runcible Spoons and Pea-green Boats [2021]

What is the Meter of the Dictionary? [2022]

Dr. AK: What is the significance of the title of the collection? Do tell us the reasons behind the success of *What is the Meter of the Dictionary?*

SB: Well, I have been asked this question many a time, and to answer this question, once again, let me reproduce a few lines from the Acknowledgments of the book:

"Altarwise by Owl-light with its rioting images, and Dylan's perennial quest for shape intrigued me beyond words...which I found very obscure. So, trying to make sense of it, with my woefully limited mental capacities, I kept going back to it."

So, I need to acknowledge the source of the title of the book, *What is the Metre of the Dictionary* [Altarwise by Owl-Light,]

Dylan Thomas

What is the metre of the dictionary?

The Size of genesis? the short spark's gender

Shade without shape? The shape of the Pharaoh's echo?

[My shape of age nagging the wounded whisper]

Shapes have forever fascinated me - the shape of clouds, the shape of patches of sun, the shape of a noonday chill on a cold winter month, the shape of flamboyant kites flashing their long tails, the shape of a blade of grass swaying in the breeze and even the shape of a bird's wound.

Life circles in languorous shapes, sometimes shapes of frenzy too, it is then that on my brow I feel the soft, smooth shape of a mother's hand.

As for the second part, honestly speaking, I myself was pleasantly surprised at the unprecedented response that the book received. To my mind, the title and the cover appealed very much to the readers. That is what I could gather from the readers' comments and reviews. The reviews also mention the highly sparkling foreword and back page blurb by two erudite scholars- Dr. Sunil Sharma and Dr. Ampat Koshy. Naturally, the readers were curious to know what was between the pages of the book- so they read that too. Fair enough.

Dr. AK: What are the themes of the poems in the collection? Please expand a little on these themes.

SB: The book is divided into two parts *Joyous Tumult* and *Faint Echoes*. *Joyous Tumult* is about the myriad hues of nature. In *Faint Echoes*, I change shape and creep into the minds of the common man and woman, whose dreams remain in the mute echoes of their minds and in the wistful looks lurking sheepishly in their eyes.

So, there is the house help, vocalizing her dreams for her daughters while washing dishes in the kitchen, the security guard outside a posh locality, and the woes of a sad boatman in Dal Lake, Srinagar, talking of the good old times, the exhausted rickshaw -puller in Delhi, who drifts into a tired sleep after a hard day's work. He sees a man preening in his green fields- a happy farmer, and wistfully recalls how he had to leave home, hearth, and farm to go to an alien land to earn his bread. He opens his eyes to 'a screaming vacuity'

*The green fields of his reminiscences evaporated
as home became an abstraction, sadly awaited*

Dr. AK: What is your favourite poem in the collection and why?

SB: Honestly speaking, it is very difficult to choose one. But if you still force me to choose at gun point, I will say, *The Sparrow Singing on the Wheelbarrow*. I like it because in this poem I have talked of the freedom of a sparrow to sing with full-throated ease, without the danger of being charged for sedition or being incarcerated for its utterances. I have also talked of the futility of war, and of the dystopian times we are breathing in [oft not breathing!], the need for an egalitarian society, of doing things our own way, and above all, the recreation of that lost world of innocence. Moreover, this one is my favourite also because of the fact, that many poet friends have been gracious enough to give a rendition of this poem. In many of my book readings, I have been asked to recite this poem. You know, the poem just wrote itself when I saw a sparrow during my morning walk, happily hopping on a rusted wheelbarrow, singing its own song.

You, Dr. Koshy, being a scholar and critic, will be in a better position to judge the merit of this poem .

Let me reproduce a few lines from it.

*I like the way you roll, dear little sparrow,
chirping unfettered on that rusted wheelbarrow.*

*How I wish I could chirp like you, too
Deliberately mangle my tenses, and recreate that lost world.
Unafraid to be sued for my utterances,
just because I have the gall to love all,
the black, brown, fair, the short, the tall.
I wish I could have your untethered freedom,
hum your liberating notes,
and sail my colourful paper boats like a happy child.
Are you seditious? No way.
Love your sassiness, any day.*

Dr. AK: Simply lovely! Can you also tell us some lines or stanzas that mean a lot to you from some other poems and why?

SB: Thanks!

The following poem was written in a three-minute spontaneous outburst. I also recited it on World Autism Day April 2, 2022, in response to a prompt in the Facebook group, The Significant League. When I finished writing this, I felt tears

trickling down my cheeks. This is the fiftieth poem in the collection, and very close to my heart. I strongly believe that every child has hope, and it makes me despair that not much has been done in the field of autism. My poet's heart craves for a magic wand to heal these little angels. My practical side wishes for some sort of honest, result-yielding holistic treatment, which will help these children to reach their full potential. Euphemisms are not the need of the hour, but real, focused, dedicated work for these innocent kids, definitely is.

Look Mommy [For the Blue Roses]

*"Look mamma, look pappa,
how I splash the hues of love,
while that tiny dove looks lovingly at me.
It is a dove, isn't it? So pure and quiet.
What is the difference between a dove and a pigeon?
What is the difference between me and the others?
Me and the others - both have mothers - and fathers too -
so where lies the difference? Why am I different?"*

Another poem which means a lot to me is the 64th poem in this collection. *When Life comes Visiting*. It was published on 13 October, 2021, figuring in the highly commended category for October month, in *Destiny poets*, November 9, 2021. Let me quote a few lines from this poem:

*Isolated in our luxurious shells,
as snug as hermit crabs,
not bothered about the unjust world around.
we go on slurping steaming hot coffee
with a poached egg on a slice of toast.*

*While the rag picker hunts for scraps of treasure
in the overflowing, stinky dumpster,
we, the high-born inhale the morning air
exhilarated by the crisp, breeze teasing the trees,
unfazed by the throttled screams of tethered freedom.*

*From the safety of our shells, we see life walking towards us.
Loose-limbed, wobbly, ataxic, an audacious sneer pasted on its face.
But, we the invincible, are safe in our shells, aren't we?
So, why bother?"*

Dr. AK: Wonderful! Now we see why this collection is such a tremendous success, and why you matter as a writer. What do you want this collection to do for and to the reader who peruses it?

SB: I wonder whether a collection can do anything for the readers, but I am indeed grateful that readers have some very good things to say about the book.

What hurts me immensely is our brutal disregard of nature, and a lot of my poems in this collection, deal with the benevolence of Nature and how cruelly we are treating it. In my Author's Note, I write about this:

The present pandemic has taught us a lot of things - that we had taken nature for granted, exhibiting a brutal disregard for what it offered. Running after squirrels to find where they hid their nuts, trying to hunt for camouflaged grasshoppers, squelching through the rain-soaked ground, trying to identify the bird calls, fascinated by the chattering monkeys, the

rumbling of clouds, the butterflies hovering on the ivy on the trellis, the breeze-touched buttercups, and runaway hares – Are these juvenile activities? We need to steal time to indulge in these so-called juvenile activities – that way maybe we can then get another chance at living and loving. Reminds me of Carl Jung's words, "You are not living on Earth. You are Earth. Nature is not matter only. She is also Spirit."

In the book, I talk a lot about the magical power of nature, about wildflowers, the rustling leaves, the songs of the pines and birds, the silver-touched waves, the bleating lambs, grasshoppers and happily flitting butterflies. If the book is able to remind readers of the therapeutic power of nature, if mankind is just able to stand, stare and be drenched in the benevolence of nature, life will be a little more beautiful, believe.

Let me also maintain, that despite the changing norms about poetry, I continue to stick to rhyme and meter. Some might label me a rhymester, consider it infradig and amateurish or crinkle their noses at the absurdity of rhymes in the present era of free verse, but to me, rhyming will always remain an integral part of my poetry, no matter what the detractors say.

Dr. AK: How would you rate or compare your book, with the others, in terms of what links all of them together and what makes this different from the others and better?

SB: I don't know whether it is better than the rest, but each poem, is as much a chunk of my heart, as it was in *Songs of Belligerence, Where are the Lilacs? Under the Apple Boughs or Runcible Spoons and Pea-green Boats*. I think that what links them together, are strands of nature, and nostalgia about a sylvan age.

Where are the Lilacs? [2016], a collection of peace poems, was incredibly well-received, and launched in many places – in Ghana, Accra, in Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, in Jammu, Delhi and Jaipur.

In the Author's note I write:

In *The Challenge of Thor*, H W Longfellow wrote long back,

*'Over the whole earth
Still is it Thor's-Day!'*

Why should Thor continue to reign with impunity? Why indeed? Do we gain by its reign? Does war give us anything? Just death and destruction, sadness and despair. Why should every day be Thor's Day? Why should we allow brute strength to hold sway?

Songs of Belligerence, 2018 deals with some real incidents which shook the world. Permit me to quote a few lines from *Westminster Bridge* [22 March, 2017]

*'Yes, the chilling butchery killed the gaiety and laughter
but the morning after
a tube board message proclaimed:
'the flower that blooms in adversity
is the rarest and most beautiful of them all.
We are not afraid.'*

In the Authors' Note, I say that it is an elegy for an innocent world of yore,

*'when some vile villain had not, as yet
filched that pot of gold we had found under the rainbow.
When the pine trees had peered at us through exotic green eyes
and our songs had not yet trailed into sighs.'*

Runcible Spoons and Pea-green Boats, [2021] is a book of nostalgia,

nostalgia about lost glens, lost bridges,

lost smiles, lost games, lost hopes.

And lost parents.

Nostalgia about those days we thought would never end- memories of that first lost tooth, the memories of slithering up trees, disappearing into the attic when scolded, the tantalizing smell of that book- filled attic still lingers in corners of a still-active mind, the dust motes clinging to the ceiling suddenly shine in the light of remembrance.

Dr. AK: Dylan Thomas, Bob Dylan or R S Thomas or you - to put a comparative touch to this questionnaire in my idiosyncratic way, can you talk of which of these writers' books would you take to a desert island and why? Which album can also be specified?

SB: I would take Dylan Thomas' complete works with me, and read them while humming Bob Dylan's, immortal song, 'The answer is blowin' in the Wind.' *Under Milkwood*, has always intrigued me, right from its opening line 'To begin at the beginning'. You can almost touch the love with which Dylan plays with words here. 'Listen. It is night moving in the streets.' 'Time passes. Listen. Time passes. 'Hush, the babies are sleeping. I can never get tired of reading this. In that desert island, I can imagine myself reading- rereading all his works and being rejuvenated.

RS Thomas! I read him a long time back and remember being hooked. Iago Prytherch, a farm laborer, a symbol of fortitude, is a character I grew to appreciate. Hardships, humanity, hard work, is what he stood for. In the past couple of years, Prytherch has hovered in my mind, especially during the time the farmers of our country were fighting for their rights. I was immensely touched by his words about the resilience and endurance of the Welsh farmers, despite the sad tone, there was a palpable touch of life- affirming optimism, haunting and soul- stirring.

Dr. AK: In the sprawling landscape of Indians writing poetry in English in India and abroad, where do you place yourself? What do you have to offer that they don't, which makes you also matter and so potent in this panorama?

SB: 'Sprawling'- this word says everything! But, why, pray, should I place myself anywhere? Why should I matter? I exist on the periphery of the mainstream literary scene, a tiny mote. Not much of a presence, honestly. I nurse no delusions of grandeur, and I write, because I was born with a mad streak in me; and will continue to write till my last breath- it is a passion which has lifted me from the dumps, many a time. It is a straw which I cling to, with a white- knuckled intensity. It is the oar which has steered me away from many a turbulent moment. I write with no ambition of offering anything to the world. I write because I want to - simple! I write because that pesky voice inside me, commands me, 'go write,' and I 'writhe' on paper!

I believe, I am more of a storyteller, and most of my poems are narrative poems. They tell stories which sometimes spring from deep within, and then are lost somewhere in that 'sprawling' space, where so- called poets like me roam untethered.

But, let me reiterate that neither am I a mediocre poet, nor a cerebral poet. I might lack the erudition and scholarly competence of many, in this 'sprawling' literary scene. But, yes, I have a voice, which I wouldn't want to be labelled as mediocre. I write to satisfy my passion, which is perennially prodding me on. And I feel I am well placed, wherever I am. I am content to bask in my muted glow.

Dr. AK: Who are your favourite writers in English from the past that have left a mark on your work and whom you would like to keep alive if need be by asking others to read?

SB: Honestly speaking, it is very difficult for me to point that out, because at different stages of my life, I have been inspired by different writers, and the list is so long, that while writing about them, I might be guilty of inadvertently dropping many. In school and college, Edgar Allen Poe and Edward Lear were my favorites, and they continue to be so. Lear's limericks have very uncannily merged into me, so much so, that I wrote Ballad of Bapu, a 300 page poetic biography of Mahatma Gandhi, in the rhyme scheme of a limerick- aabba, which garnered a lot of national and international acclaim. The foreword so graciously penned by the Mahatma's great- grandson. Mr. Tushar Gandhi has also been written in the form of poetry.

As I said earlier, Dylan Thomas will always remain my favourite, and to this day, I mourn his early death. What literary gems would have flown from his magic pen had he lived for at least twenty more years! [By the way, my poem on him for Dylan Thomas Day was just published in Vatsala Radhakeesoon's blog on 14 May, 2023].

It was in school that I had read every book by Thomas Hardy and Dickens- their poems too, and a reading of other writers came later- Hemingway, Dostoevsky, Gabriel Garcia Marquez- the list grew on. The Afro- American writers, created a snug niche in my life, and I read every work by them in college. Langston Hughes, [1902- 1967] and his commitment to the cause of civil rights, along with his Jazz poetry intrigued me no end and the poignancy of The Weary Blues touched me immensely. [I often find myself humming a '*drowsy syncopated tune*'/ *Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon*'.

It was while doing my research for my biography of Martin Luther King Jr, that I read the works of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou thoroughly. Ralph Ellison's [1914- 1994] Invisible Man [1952], about a young college educated black, trying to survive in a racially divided society, won the National Book Award in 1953 and is a favourite. Some quotes from the book will forever remain etched in memory.

*"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."
"When I discover who I am, I'll be free".*

One book which has inspired me the most, has been *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee.

Since my father's Doctoral thesis was on the Dramatic Monologues of Robert Browning, Browning has also been a great influence on me. *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* makes cameo appearances in my writings, so does *Porphyria's Lover*. My father had awe-inspiring oratorical skills. I can still feel chills crawling up my spine at the way he recited certain blood-curdling words, from it:

*In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat,
around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;*

I still remember gasping at his expression and enunciation, and the movement of strangling that he made with one hand. The mammoth library in our home, whetted my appetite for reading- little knowing that it would turn me into a small-time writer. I remember having rehearsed the poem, How they brought the good news from Ghent to Aix, for a school elocution contest, under the supervision of my dad. The way he acted out the following lines is forever etched in memory.

*'And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.'*

*'The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff.'*

It was my friend's father, who had just been transferred to Jaipur from his homeland, Kolkata, [Calcutta then], who

introduced me to the writings of Gurudeb Tagore, and needless to say, he cast a permanent spell over me.

Maya Angelou [1928- 2014] *Why the Caged bird Sings* Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize Winner, Toni Morrison [Songs of Solomon, 1977, Sula,1973 Beloved, 1987and The Bluest Eye,1970, Derek Walcott, Caribbean poet and playwright, Nobel Prize winner for literature, 1992. I have been mesmerized by the lush manner he celebrates the natural beauty of the Caribbean landscape, In a Green Night: Poems [1948 -1960.]. All these writers should be read by all. They are the sparkling stars of African- American literature, a must read for all.

Yes, Ruskin Bond, is also a writer who, should be read by all and, so is RK Narayan.,

Dr. AK: What are the next projects that you are working on? The genres and themes?

SB: Don't laugh at me when I tell you that I am working on ten projects- Family says that they can 'hear the crash and bang of a cacophonous simultaneity in my mind', but believe me, I have a sneaking suspicion that their ears are oversensitive!

Actually, these books were written at different periods, now I am picking them one by one and editing them - culling - honing- polishing- polishing - honing. There are three novels [one a satire, two romantic novellas with Kashmir as the backdrop]. I am also giving the final touches to my compilation of humorous verse, and children's poems.

SB: I had a wonderful time answering your questions. Thanks a ton Dr. Koshy. Thanks The Wise Owl magazine for this opportunity. It was a great honour.

About Santosh Bakaya



Santosh Bakaya is a poet of repute. Winner of International Reuel Award for literature for Oh Hark, 2014, The Universal Inspirational Poet Award [Pentasi B Friendship Poetry and Ghana Government, 2016,] Bharat Nirman Award for literary Excellence, 2017, Setu Award, 2018, [Pittsburgh, USA] for 'stellar contribution to world literature.' Keshav Malik Award, 2019, for 'staggeringly prolific and quality conscious oeuvre'. Chankaya Award [Best Poet of the Year, 2022, Public Relations Council of India,], Eunice Dsouza Award 2023, for 'rich and diverse contribution to poetry, literature and learning', [Instituted by WE Literary Community]. Poet, biographer, novelist, essayist, TEDx speaker, creative writing mentor, Santosh Bakaya, Ph.D, has been acclaimed for her poetic biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Ballad of Bapu [Vitasta, 2015]. She has participated in many literary festivals, and was one of the delegates to the SAARC Sufi festival in Jaipur, in 2017, her poems have been translated into many languages, and poems and short stories have won many awards, both national and international.

About Dr Ampat Koshy



Dr Ampat Koshy is an Assistant Professor, presently at the Department of English. Mount Carmel College, Autonomous, Bangalore, and has 28 books with his name on the cover. He is a poet, fiction writer, critic, and editor, having curated many anthologies and won many awards. Some of his books are # 1 Amazon best sellers, one having gone into multiple translations.

VISUAL ARTS



Painting

Limited Edition Replay:
Kerry Ann Lyons

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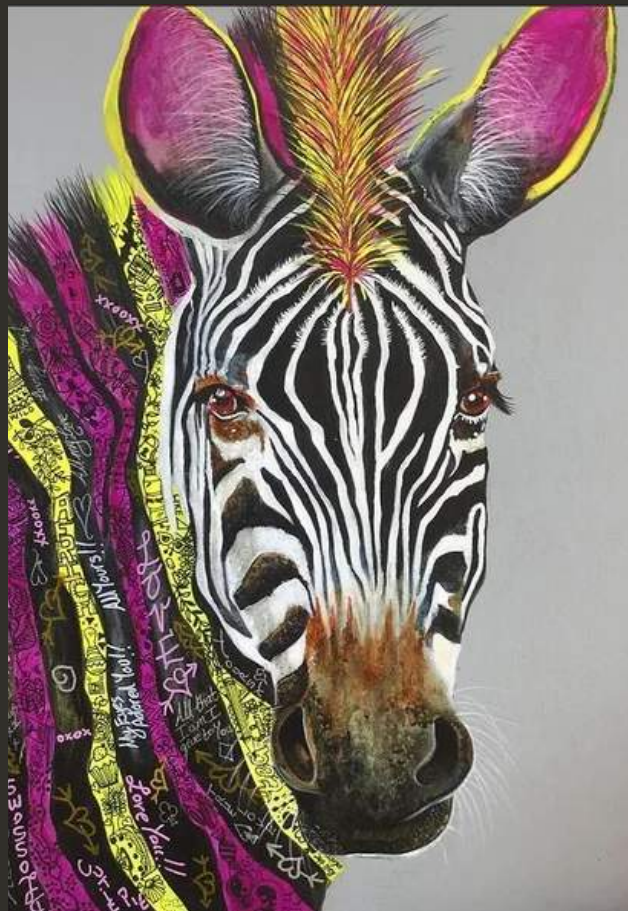
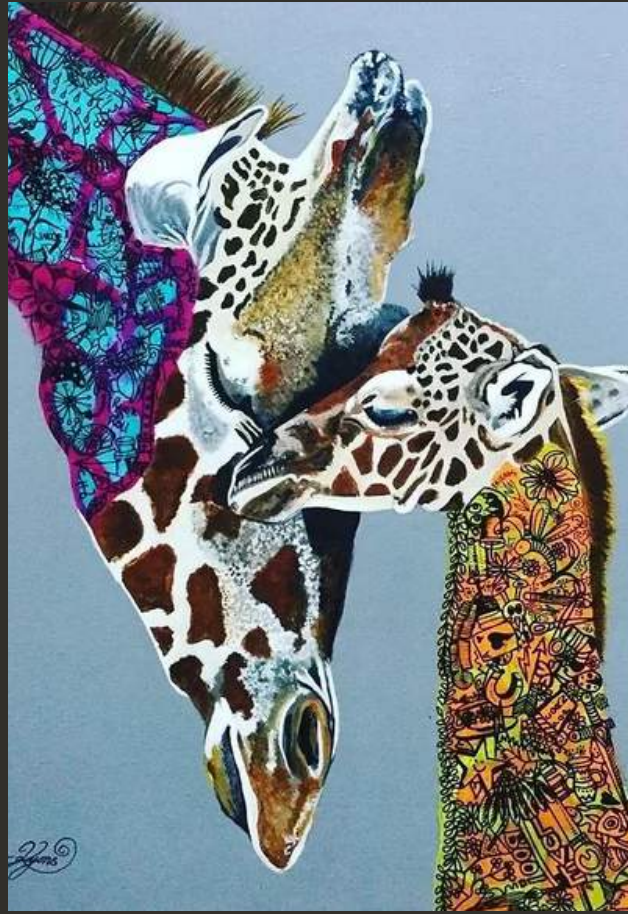


Seascapes by Susan Rich

Photographs taken in
Washington DC

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Limited Edition Replay
Kerry Ann Lyons





Artist Speak

I have just practised and practised, sometimes your mistakes are your best friend. You either learn not to do that again or find a new technique totally by mistake. Last year, an amazing lady who is one of the top in the country, messaged me and said she could see I have it and that I need to hone in on what is my gut art. She has now become a lovely friend to me and a brilliant mentor.

An extract from an interview with Kerry Ann Lyons, featured in the (Sienna & Gold Edition (November 2022) of The Wise Owl.

Seascapes by Susan Rich

Photographs taken by Susan Rich with her iPhone in Washington State 2023. Susan is not only a poet and writer but also a keen photographer who loves to click the beauty of the world around her. Her photographs have sensitivity and a lyrical beauty. The Seascapes have been published for the first time.







PODCASTS



Kenneth Goodman
consummated in the act
consummated in the act



00:00 / 01:18



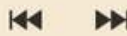
Neera Kashyap
Whence Light
Whence Light?



00:00 / 01:47



Lawrence Miles
Factory
Factory



00:00 / 01:23



John Grey
Highways And Byways
Highways & Byways



00:00 / 00:50



BIOGRAPHIES

Kavita Ratna is a children's rights activist, poet and a theatre enthusiast. '*Sea Glass*' is her anthology of poems published by Red River. Her poems have appeared in *The Kali Project: Invoking the Goddess within*, *A little book of serendipity*, *Triveni Hakai India*, *Haiku in Action*, *the Scarlet Dragonfly*, *the Cold Moon Journal*, *Five Fleas Itchy poetry*, *Stardust Haiku* and *Parcham*.

Sam Moe is the first-place winner of *Invisible City's Blurred Genres* contest in 2022, and the 2021 recipient of an Author Fellowship from *Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing*. Her first chapbook, "*Heart Weeds*," is out from *Alien Buddha Press* and her second chapbook, "*Grief Birds*," is forthcoming from *Bullshit Lit* in April 2023. You can find them on Twitter and Instagram as @SamAnneMoe.

Vineeta Gupta is an Associate Professor of English at *Government P.G. College, Sector-1, Panchkula, Haryana*. She is fond of reading, cooking and writing Poetry both in Hindi and English.

Lawrence Miles is a poet living in *White Plains, NY*. He has recently been published in *Poets Live Fourth Anthology, 2022*, *New Generation Beats Anthology* and *Four Feathers Press' Sounds of Southern California: Poetry of Music*.

Richa Joshi Pant is a teacher in *Welham's Girls' School, Dehradun (India)*.

Peter A. Witt is a Texas poet, avid birder/photographer, and researcher/writer of family history. He started writing poetry after 42 years as a university professor as a way of recapturing my storytelling and creative writing abilities, skills lost in the stultifying world of academic writing. His work has appeared in several online poetry publications including *Fleas on the Dog*, *Open Skies Quarterly*, and *Active Muse*.

Ann Privateer is a poet, artist, and photographer. She grew up in the Midwest and now resides in Northern California. Some of her recent work has appeared in *Third Wednesday* and *Entering* to name a few.

Gale Acuff is from the Department of English, *Arab American University, Palestine*. His poems have been published in dozens of countries and in journals such as *Ascent*, *Reed*, *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies*, *The Font*, *Chiron Review*, *Poem*, *Adirondack Review*, *Florida Review*, *Slant*, *Arkansas Review*, *Maryland Literary Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *South Dakota Review*, among others. He has also authored three books of poetry. Gale has taught tertiary English courses in the US, PR China, and Palestine.

Kenneth Goodman mates ecstatic meditation & poetry creation in *Cleveland, Ohio*.

Neera Kashyap has worked in the field of social and health communications. She has published a book for young adults, *Daring to Dream* (Rupa & Co.) and contributed to several prize-winning anthologies for children. Her work as a writer of short stories, poetry (including haikai), book reviews and essays has appeared in several international and Indian literary journals and poetry anthologies. Internationally, her poetry has been published in journals in the US, UK, Europe and Singapore. In India, the journals include *RIC Journal*, *The Wise Owl Art*, *Teesta Review*, *Outlook India*, *Rhetorica Quarterly*, *Yugen Quest Review*, *The Punch Magazine*, *Chipmunk & Indian Cultural Forum*. She lives in Delhi.

Dr. Bhawna Vij Arora is an Assistant Professor of English at *Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies, Delhi*. She was a Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant at *Yale University* in the year 2015 to 2016. She has also made a documentary project under the aegis of the *Digital Media Centre for the Arts (DMCA)* at *Yale University*. Her critical essays have appeared in national and international journals. She describes herself as a scribbler in her own mental world, juggling as a pragmatic academic and a practicing and passionate poet. Her recent collection of poetry *Dreams in my Lap* was well-received in poetic circles across India. Her poems have been published in *TheLiveWire*, *The Punch*

Magazine, Indian Periodical, and Ensemble: The Canadian Journal to name a few. Her edited volume on Memory Studies Unearthing: Past in Present and Future will be published shortly.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in Stand, Washington Square Review and Floyd County Moonshine. Latest books, *Covert*, *Memory Outside The Head* and *Guest Of Myself* are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the McNeese Review, Santa Fe Literary Review and Open Ceilings.

Richard Lutman has a MFA in writing from Vermont College and is listed in the Directory of Poets and Writers. He has taught writing courses and had over thirty of his stories published. His novella "Iron Butterfly" was shortlisted in the 2011 Santa Fe Writers Competition. His first novel was published in 2016. A short story collection was a finalist in the 2020 American Book Fest: Best Books.

Author of 'Dusk over the Mustard Fields' and 'Living a Good Life', **Ranjit Powar** writes freelance and reviews books for newspapers, most often with her dog Teddy sprawled next to her desk. After serving in the Punjab Civil services, she presently runs a non-profit organization, Nishan Educational Trust, training school teachers in psychological orientation in pedagogy. Deeply involved with humanitarian issues and cross-border peace efforts, she hopes to resume her second passion soon - travelling.

Tom Ball is currently senior editor at FLEAS ON THE DOG <https://fleasonthedog.com>. His work has appeared in several journals and magazines including 'Down in the Dirt' magazine, 'Conceit' Magazine, Literary Yard, Newark Library Literary Journal, Fresh Words Magazine, Local Train Magazine, Gargoyle magazine, PBW magazine among others. He has also self-published two novels with American Book Publishing, and Xlibris. Tom has also co-authored, 'Of Heaven and Hell,' a graphic novel with Zen Wang.

Chitra Singh has a wide repertoire of writing. She writes stories and creative non-fiction pieces with equal panache. Chitra has a Master's degree in English Literature and a Post Graduate degree in Mass Communication. She has freelanced with many English Dailies and magazines, writing mostly human interest features, travelogues, and stories about forest life which she greatly loved. Her forte is writing Middles. She has varied interests like gardening, cooking, fine embroidery and dabbling in the share market. One of her favourite pastimes is regaling her grandchildren with tales of yore.

Jill Jepson is the author of two books, *Writing as a Sacred Path* (Ten Speed Press) and *Women's Concerns: Twelve Women Entrepreneurs of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Peter Lang) and 65 stories and essays which have appeared in The San Francisco Chronicle, *A Woman's Path: Women's Best Spiritual Travel Writing*, *Arizona Highways*, and numerous literary journals.

Joan McArthur-Blair is an author, poet, appreciative resilience practitioner, appreciative inquiry practitioner and a long-time educator. She believes in the power words have to transform us and to teach us about being human. She has co-authored two books on appreciative inquiry and appreciative resilience, *Building Resilience with Appreciative Inquiry: A Leadership Journey through Hope, Despair, and Forgiveness* (Berrett-Koehler, 2018) and *Appreciative Inquiry in Higher Education: A transformative Force - 2nd edition* (Friesen Press, 2021). To find out more about her visit cockellmcarthur-blair.com

Dr. Ramandeep Mahal is currently working as an Assistant Professor of English at Guru Nanak Khalsa College Yamunanagar. She received her Doctorate degree from Maharishi Markandeshwar Mullana Ambala in 2018. Her research interests include Anglo-American Literature, Indian Writing in English, African Literature. She is the author of more than twenty research papers.

Susan Rich, an award-winning poet, editor and essayist. She lives in Seattle and teaches at Highline College where she runs the reading series, Highline Listens: Writers Read Their Work. She is also co-founder and director of Poets on the Coast: A Weekend Writing Retreat for Women. She is also a keen photographer who loves to give a different perspective to the world around with her camera.



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