



THE WISE OWL



Russet & Gold

ONLINE MAGAZINE



Editor Speak

August 2023

The colour 'russet' is awash with connotations of dignity, serious contemplation and moral rigor. All these characteristics form the framework of the August Edition, so we have baptized the August Issue as Russet & Gold.

Rosebud Ben-Oni, a Latina-Jewish American poet & writer, Jayanthi Sankar, a Singapore-based award-winning fiction writer and Hugo Keller, a fabulous artist from Illinois are The Wise Owl stars. Their creative journeys are an inspiration for all literary & art lovers. We also talk to Dr Varghese Mathai about his recently released book 'The Village Maestro & 100 Other Stories', a conversation that offers a powerful insight into his micro stories. Poetry, stories, musings, reviews, visual arts and podcasts brighten up our ezine.

On 10th August, we will be releasing our special BOOK REVIEW SUPPLEMENT, put together to celebrate The World paperback day and Book Lovers Day. To our delight, our contributors have come out in droves to make this initiative a success. Do watch out for our Special Supplement

Happy reading!!!



CONTENTS

1. INTERVIEWS
2. POETRY
3. FICTION
4. NON-FICTION
5. REVIEWS
6. TALKING BOOKS
7. VISUAL ARTS
8. PODCASTS
9. NEW SEGMENT
10. THE WISE OWL PUBLICATIONS
11. THE BOOK REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT



INTERVIEWS



The Interview: Rosebud-Ben-Oni

An American Poet & Writer

The Wise Owl talks to **Rosebud Ben-Oni**, a Latina-Jewish American poet and writer. She is the author of several collections of poetry, including *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* (March 2021), which was the winner of the Alice James Award (2021) and was also a Finalist for the 2021 National Jewish Book Award in Poetry. In 2023, she received a Café Royal Cultural Foundation grant to write *The Atomic Sonnets*, a forthcoming full-length poetry collection based on her chapbook *20 Atomic Sonnets* (Black Warrior Review, 2020), which she began in honour of the 150th birthday of the Periodic table in 2019. Ben-Oni has received several literature fellowships and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, CantoMundo, Café Royal Cultural Foundation, City Artists Corps and Queens Council on the Arts.

[Read More](#)

The Interview: Jayanthi Sankar

An Award-winning writer

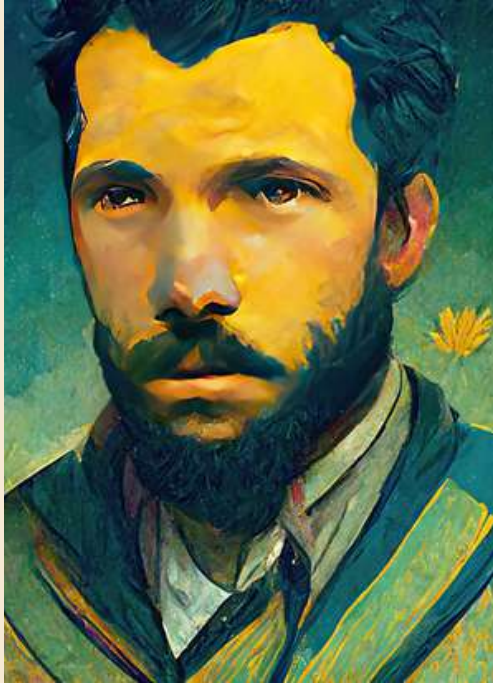
The Wise Owl talks to **Jayanthi Sankar**, an award-winning writer of several books on fiction. *Tabula Rasa* her third book, and second novel was a 2022 NYC Big Book Award 'Distinguished Favourite' in the category of Historical Fiction and received an 'honourable mention' in San Francisco book Fest award 2022. *Misplaced Heads*, was on the Eyelands Book Awards 2020 final list of historical fiction in Greece, making its mark as an outstanding postmodern historical fiction. The winner in fiction: short story in 2020 International Book Award -American book fest '*Dangling Gandhi*' also won the international The Literary Titan award. The title story *Dangling Gandhi* was shortlisted in the 2nd Twist & Twain International Short Story Contest out of the 165 worldwide entries. Her other recognitions include CLS Global award, the prestigious Tagore Ratna Award, among others



[Read More](#)



INTERVIEWS



The Interview: Hugo Keller

An Artist from Peoria, Illinois

The Wise Owl talks to **Hugo Keller**, an artist from Peoria, Illinois. Hugo Keller has shipped his works to all 50 states in USA and across dozens of countries. He has also participated in many art shows and exhibits throughout the country, but he ruefully admits that he is shy by nature and tries to stay out of public view letting his art do all the speaking. Taking up the advice of his friends, he eventually set up a website and began posting on social media. That's where everything really took off.

[Read More](#)

The Interview : Rosebud Ben-Oni

(Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl, talks to Rosebud Ben-Oni)

The Wise Owl talks to **Rosebud Ben-Oni**, a Latina-Jewish American poet and writer. She is the author of several collections of poetry, including *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* (March 2021), which was the winner of the Alice James Award (2021) and was also a Finalist for the 2021 National Jewish Book Award in Poetry and received a Starred Review from Booklist as an "*astonishing work for adventurous readers intrigued by science and literature...Ben-Oni draws on the odd properties of supersymmetry to create a dexterous collection of electric lyrics that defies conventions of science and syllabics alike.*" Her collection, *turn around, BRXGHT XYXS*, was published by Get Fresh LLC in Fall 2019, which Dorothy K. Chan in Poetry Magazine called '*a poetic striptease. The women speakers in these poems are wild, glamorous, and untamed... The speaker is vulnerable, and she exudes this vulnerability powerfully, from every angle.*' In 2023, she received a Café Royal Cultural Foundation grant to write *The Atomic Sonnets*, a forthcoming full-length poetry collection based on her chapbook *20 Atomic Sonnets* (Black Warrior Review, 2020), which she began in honour of the 150th birthday of the Periodic table in 2019.

Ben-Oni has received several literature fellowships and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, CantoMundo, Café Royal Cultural Foundation, City Artists Corps and Queens Council on the Arts. In May 2022, Paramount commissioned her video essay '*My Judaism is a Wild unPlace*' for a campaign for Jewish Heritage Month, which appeared on Paramount Network, MTV Networks, The Smithsonian Channel, VH1, among others. In January 2023, she performed at Carnegie Hall on International Holocaust Memorial Day, as part '*We Are Here: Songs From The Holocaust.*'

Hi Rosebud. Thank you so much for taking time out to speak to The Wise Owl. We are delighted and honoured to talk to you.

RBO: Likewise~

RS: You have authored several collections of poetry, including *If This Is the Age We End Discovery*, which was the winner of the Alice James Award and a Finalist for the 2021 National Jewish Book Award in Poetry. Please tell us a little about your journey as a poet and the creative influences in your life that inspired you to become a poet.

RBO: There are many~ I suppose it's a genuine curiosity about the world. I grew up not really fitting into any world in particular, partially due to my background: my Mexican mother converted from Catholicism to Judaism before I was born, but I was still very much influenced by Chicano and Mexican culture in Rio Grande Valley. It's a strange experience being mixed, but I am very close to my mother's family. Still, I had a difficult childhood, which taught me to never follow a crowd, and pursue my interests which was wild and varied, and even now in 2023, I get questions like, 'how can you write about pop culture and string theory?' I also get asked quite often how is it I take difficult concepts in science, use them correctly in poetry and still write innovative work, without sacrificing the lyrical. My answer to all that isn't complicated in itself: follow your own music, wherever it leads you. The music is what you make of it. I've said this before, but I really do believe I'm many things that refuse to make a complete thing, in terms of classical mechanics. This refusal came long before I understood it. I am here in part to break The Standard Model, and I don't just mean in particle physics, which really is about fields, not particles by the way. I reject this world because it is not real, and much of what is being created now will one day be not disproven but what I call "completely transformed by nullification" and I am a part of that something new— my last book *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* has a lot of clues, and how you interpret those clues will also determine what sort of world is next for you.

RS: Your poetry touches upon large existential issues such as creation, nullification, objective truth, among

others. Our readers and poetry lovers would be keen to know what themes inspire you to write.

RBO: That's hard to answer. I just follow the music. I am now what I call My Impish Era (and wrote about this recently), which flits in and out of existence, and part of the criticism going on in physics right now— that there's too theories being created that can't be proven or tested, too many hypothetical particles that can't be found— makes sense in my brain and then my rouge electrons take over and I think: it's not so much I am an undiscovered particle, and you can't find me.

It's that you can't invent me.

RS: Your poetry collection *If This Is the Age We End Discovery* was written pre-pandemic, and yet in this book you dwell upon themes of permeability, mortality, divinity, the inevitable rupture of both natural and familial ecosystems; issues that we all faced during the pandemic. Our readers would be curious to know, how you creatively divined or foresaw what was to come through your poems.

RBO: If I said I did, what does it matter now, no? When a thing happens, it cannot unhappen, or so says the Arrow of Time, one of the greatest unsolved problems in physics. All I can say is there are clues as to what's coming next in *If This Is the Age We End Discovery*. I'm not being difficult. Well, yes, I am. But it's because evolution is supposed to be hard. As I say in the book, the whole point of existence is solving problems but it's not to find answers; because as soon as you think you know the answer, the riddle changes. It's endless. It's impish. It's fields, not particles, that will win in the end, and I am a field, as expansive as my thirst and desire, and the moment you try to pin me down as a poet or person, I'm already and always somewhere else. I say all of this in the book and will explain more in others books. I've joined, so to say, the changing in the riddle, but it also wasn't a choice. And partially why the riddle changes is because Efes, like HaShem, (or whatever you want to call it or not call it or not believe in anything at all, doesn't matter) wants things to continue to evolve forever. But it's not without destruction as much as creation. The reason I can't give more specific "answers" is there are none, only clues, and how you interpret the book will indeed inform what you perceive as both your reality and possibilities, your present and your future. I am neither optimistic nor pessimistic about humankind. Everything has a potential. For both creation and destruction.

RS: Your poetry collection *turn around, BRXGHT XYXS*, has been described as 'unabashedly feminist, queer, punk, Latinx, and Jewish, making hers a unique and vital voice for our times.' How would you respond to this comment?

RBO: That's definitely true. Even with my waywardness, I was born a Jewish person, and will die one. My faith has been tested many times, but HaShem has never abandoned me, and I don't mean 'abandon' in the human sense. In *If This Is the Age We End Discovery*, I constructed my idea of Efes, and in a sense, I'm also a child of Efes. My nickname growing up was Matarose, which I suppose translates as 'kill rose' and it was meant to make me, a string bean of a longhaired, pretty child, fierce. Considering what I went through as a child it took me years to realize I was fierce. Matarose has her AntiMatter counterpart, AntiMatter{ose}. We are going to impel a new beginning together. Or rather, we already have.

RS: '20 Atomic Sonnets' intrigues me. It talks about bad-boy toxicity of Fluorine, commiserates with the unstable loneliness of Caesium, & swoons over the sensuality of Gallium et al. I loved them of course but am curious to know what made you write sonnets on atoms and electrons?

RBO: In 2019, the 150th Birthday of The Periodic Table was celebrated and I expected bigger fanfare from the general population in the U.S. I felt it was not getting enough attention, so I chose a form— the sonnet— in which to try to "contain" the elements, which of course did and could not— and began to write a series of poems which in 2020, Black Warrior Review published my chapbook *20 Atomic Sonnets*, which was (and remains) free and available to the public to read online during the first year of the pandemic. Some of the elements include Hydrogen, the origins of our universe; to Iron, destructor of stars; and elementary particles, too like the electron, reimagined as honey and killer bee, as interstellar love song I'm now working on a full-length collection of this project, *The Atomic Sonnets*, in which she will cover all

existing elements and a few more discovered and hypothetical particles (like the graviton)— but in the spirit of sheer curiosity, I also decided to create new ones, as The Periodic Table itself is not enough for her. This new collection includes two Crown of Sonnets, to honor existing poets by creating and naming new elements after them, to show how we as artists bond and become creative forces ourselves. It's going to be metal.

RS: Your poems have been acclaimed as electric and musical, with varying forms; tight stanzaic forms, or loose wispy phrases. How do you decide on the forms and innovate?

RBO: I don't decide. I just let it come out on the page and follow the music. The quantum world is fascinating and as a teenager, I did enjoy toying with classical mechanics, although I know have taken on more serious views, though I have not lost my sense of humor. Well, I did for a period, but it's back now.

RS: Are you working on any other collection as we speak? Do share particulars about your forthcoming book.

RBO: I am! I can't say much at the moment, but there's A LOT brewing. More quests, more curiosity. I want readers to enjoy the journey.

RS: You are an award-winning poet and have also been recipient of several prestigious grants. What advice would you give budding poets?

RBO: Take risks. Read as much as you can. Follow your inspirations, wherever they are. I mean that: there are so many beautiful things on TikTok, for example. Ignore gossip and people trying to derail you, steal your thunder, shrink your light — it took me years, and I mean in 2020, to figure this out that people's jealousy is their problem. Don't let cruelty in others stop you from being kind, but know it doesn't mean you're a doormat, and when those line gets blurred, ask yourself if that person's having a hard time, or if they really mean to hurt you. Above all, Take. Risks. On. The. Page. That's all I've ever done— and speaking for myself, almost always off the page too. Holy Moses, it's a wonder I'm still alive, to be honest. I have no regrets, even and especially with things that happened in my youth that were out of my control. And then later. Don't let someone diminish you. People are just people. They are not immortals. Remember that.

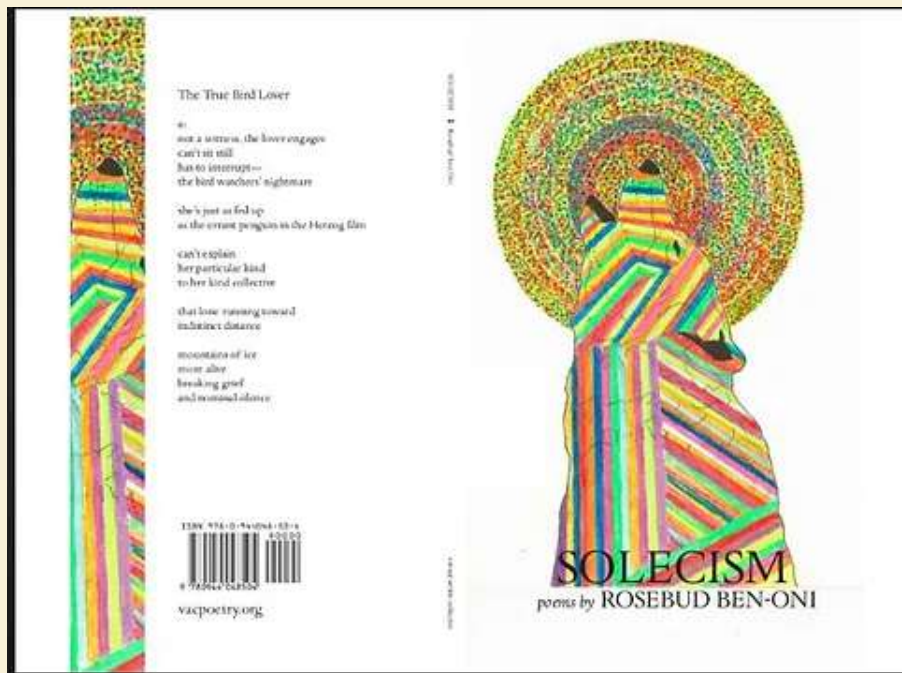
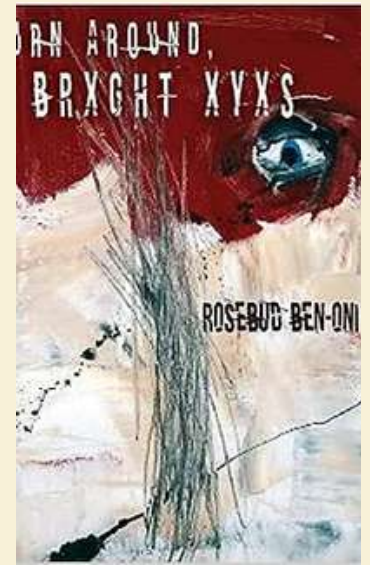
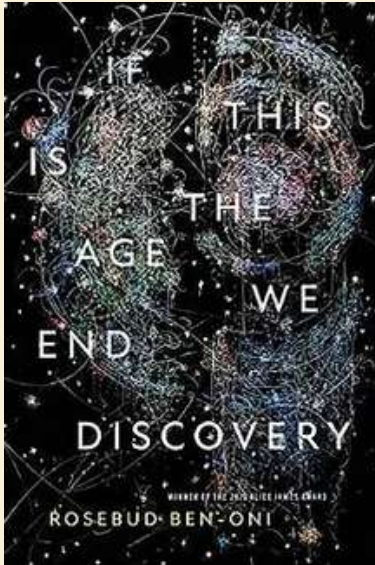
RS: If I were to ask you to describe yourself as a poet in three words, what would those be and why?

RBO: & & &

Thank you so much, Rosebud, for talking to us. It was such a pleasure to talk to you. We wish you the best in all your creative endeavours and hope you write more beautiful poetry and win more awards for your poetry.

RBO: Thank you. Here's to better life for this planet~

Some Works of Rosebud Ben-Oni



The Interview : Jayanthi Sankar

(Prof Shiv Sethi talks to Jayanthi Sankar)

The Wise Owl talks to **Jayanthi Sankar**, an award-winning writer of several books on fiction. *When Will You Die?* her fourth book, a novella, amazes her readers with its profound exploration of the human psyche. *Tabula Rasa* her third book, and second novel was a 2022 NYC Big Book Award 'Distinguished Favourite' in the category of Historical Fiction and received an 'honourable mention' in San Francisco book Fest award 2022. *Misplaced Heads*, was on the Eyelands Book Awards 2020 final list of historical fiction in Greece, making its mark as an outstanding postmodern historical fiction. The winner in fiction: short story in 2020 International Book Award -American book fest '*Dangling Gandhi*' also won the international The Literary Titan award. The title story *Dangling Gandhi* was shortlisted in the 2nd Twist & Twain International Short Story Contest out of the 165 worldwide entries. Her other recognitions include CLS Global award, the prestigious Tagore Ratna Award, Top 50 most influential Authors 2021 by Delhiwire and Lit fest excellence award and Sahityakosh Samman by NE8x apart from several other shortlists and nominations.

As part of her strong belief in creating and expanding the communities through literature, she has curated and edited two anthologies - *Dancing Gold Flecks* and *An Iron Fist In A Velvet Glove* published in 2023. While the former is a collection of 27 unpublished short stories from 18 writers of India and Indian diaspora, the latter is an international collection of 32 pre published short stories from 27 contributors from USA, Singapore, India, Philippines and Myanmar. Also a watercolour hobbyist, she works currently with the ministry of manpower-CRD as a full time (English, Tamil, Hindi) interpreter after freelancing for more than two decades excluding three years' experience in journalism. Sankar enjoys expanding the scope of her creative space has been in several international panels of literary festivals including the *APWT 2018 at Gold coast*, Singapore Writers Festival, Asean- India Pravasi Bharatiya Divas Writers Festival. While living in her fictional world most of the time, she constantly interacts with the characters as they form and shape up. So, writing a novel is more of a lively internal process that she truly loves and she's all into experimenting, especially in moving her story forward. Born and brought up in India, the Singaporean writer Jayanthi Sankar has been living in Singapore since 1991.

SS: Have you always wanted to be an author?

JS: Except for the natural interest in reading and writing commonly expected of a child, I didn't show any other noteworthy signs of a serious reader, let alone a future writer. A hardcore introvert during my formative years, I remember receiving comments like, "*Oh, she observes everything around, but never opens her mouth to express herself.*" And, after I started reading seriously during my twenties, I realised it took me a long time to hear the voice of the critic forming in me. That's when I had to find out how difficult it is to write before I could criticise others' works. And that seeking led to my writing '*Turning Point*', a short story based on my random and illogical early morning dream. It got published in print. It took me more attempts to write several short stories before I believed I could pursue writing. Even today, many elders in my extended family don't believe I write, after 28 years and multiple books.

SS: Which book made you cry?

JS: Although I've cried reading many fictions, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini sank so deeply in me like never before and the moving experience stays with me. And, I knew what to expect from his next - *Thousand Splendid Suns*, which again shook me.

SS: We know you as a passionate fiction writer, but do you have any plans to write other genres?

JS: I have a few in my mind, but they are only at the ideating stage. Usually, I share details only after half my execution. We can't forget we're caught in a loud and mad world of SM, constantly striving to suppress authenticity, can we? It can pose unprecedented challenges for passionate creators like me. So, it requires strong, sustained commitment to nurture my passions and pursuits. It's the same for many authors out there, I'm sure.

SS: Do you try more to be original or to deliver to readers what they want?

JS: I don't even come in the middle. I always strive to be original and creative in my work, which is why I'm able to reach more of the seasoned reader base. It is impossible for me to customise to meet your needs.

SS: How do you balance making demands on your readers with taking care of them?

JS: Both are significant. First, I love to challenge myself while writing and invite my readers to challenge themselves while reading. Although what I give to my readers is layered and often profound, I've always ensured my language and showing is as simple as possible. This is to facilitate a smoother reading experience.

SS: What in your opinion is essential for a protagonist to form effectively?

JS: Human beings are mostly flawed, so I believe any protagonist must shape himself or herself. Only then, credibility and therefore a better understanding of human psychology, is even possible. Natural rawness, therefore, might help. This applies more to realism. And importantly, vibrant organic characters can only emerge when we avoid idealism, which might to some extent suit other genres like pulp, romance or mainstream writing. But, in literary fiction it can totally ruin character building, and often also story telling. Idealistic thought and approach can prevent originality from happening, moving the story artistically forward and creating credible characters. And, last but not least, all characters thinking like the author can only be disasters.

SS: In that context, how do you come up with your book titles?

JS: Just as my fiction theme chooses its form, my title churns out organically as my chapters unfold to progress. Although I get other options later, the first one is mostly what I keep. It would either be the nucleus of the chosen theme or a subtle abstract microcosm to represent the larger perspective I wish to show.

SS: Share with us the most important features of your fiction that help it stand out.

JS: Over the years, I have learned from my readers that the absence of the author and her voice are one of the most striking features of my writing. My novel's rounded narration of incidents and problems offers more than one perspective. My explorations of different creative ways to 'show' or smoothly move my story forward.

SS: How do the characters' personalities affect your personality or vice versa?

JS: They've helped me understand human psychology better in terms of how the human mind works. While building my characters, I naturally live with them and therefore there are some obvious changes to my nature, subtly felt by those around me. However, they're just temporary. None of my characters have my traits. They wouldn't resemble me or anyone I know even if they had a bit of me, when blended with the features and nature of other fictitious characters or other fictitious elements.

SS: How long on an average does it take for you to complete a book?

JS: Since I mostly write fiction, I can't work with my clock ticking behind my back. So, it varies. I've written books for a few years as *Dangling Gandhi*, for several years like I did *Misplaced Heads.*, *Tabula Rasa* has brewed in me for almost eleven

years. *When will you die?* took me over two years and my current work in progress has been with me for over four years and might take me more time.

SS: Does writing energize or exhaust you?

JS: Both, as it is for most authors. The initial creative stages where I let my heart and mind lead bring energy. During rewriting and editing, where my intellect takes over, I feel drained from the constant debates within me. The exhaustion eventually spreads to my physical being.

SS: What is the most difficult part of your artistic process?

JS: I think where I begin with content editing to cut as many parts, is the most difficult. This is because I might enjoy reading certain parts I've written, but I give more importance to relevance and artistry are more critical. Deciding on what to cut and what to keep can be challenging.

SS: Does a fat ego help or hurt writers?

JS: We believe that ego while writing might help with character building, emotion, and to keep finer sensitivities and a good amount of confidence. However, it could hurt the author in various ways post publication. I've experienced my creative process nipping off a tiny portion of my ego, leaving me with less of it. I haven't deciphered the enigmatic feeling as I move on to another every time.

SS: What literary beliefs have you challenged through your works?

JS: Breaking the conventions, I've explored innumerable refreshing and engaging ways to move my story. I've shown my readers that the human brain can comprehend and enjoying the challenge reading such texts facilitates more participation in creativity.

SS: And, what do you ultimately aspire to achieve through your writing journey?

JS: Exploring different created lives and worlds, giving back to humanity innumerable perspectives.

SS: How much do you depend on the editing process for your manuscripts?

JS: It's much more than just my writing. I edit content for as long as my rewriting takes. And my happiness during these two stages is directly proportional to the number of breaks I can take away from my texts. This is because respites enable me to read afresh, not missing out on any issues that require fixing. When my manuscript is ready to move to the grammar, syntax, line, and punctuation phases, I rest it at least once.

SS: What's your most and least favourite part of publishing?

JS: Interestingly, editing is my most favourite at the initial stage and proofreading is my least favourite part of publishing.

SS: Which is better traditional publishing or indie publishing?

JS: I think such myths have dissipated in recent decades. Even the big names in the publishing industry cater to those willing to publish their works. Vanity is no longer a vice, you see! Hybrid and self-publishing are trends. We see many brilliant ones among an ocean of substandard books.

SS: We hear you designed the book cover of your novella. What would you suggest to an author who wishes to try to design his or her own?

JS: I'm currently designing the first draft of my WIP book cover. Sometimes, I'm also commissioned to design book covers by fellow authors for their publications. If I can do it, any creator should be able to do it as well. An author knows her book in-depth, better than AI, and so her cover idea might suit her fiction the best. She can at least use hers as a basis to show a professional designer.

SS: What are common traps for aspiring writers?

JS: Rushing to complete a book is as ineffective as not finishing the first draft. Reluctance to rewrite chapters, as if rewriting is an imposition ordered by the school principal, won't help. In avoiding practical concerns about the challenges of writing, following the so-called rules regarding story development and story arcs, and being trapped in the illusion of numbers and tags after publication, they won't be able to reach their full potential. They might only replicate what others have done and lack freshness.

SS: What is the most unethical practice in the publishing industry?

JS: Exploiting the increasing impulsive interest and desperation in young aspirants, mostly caught in the illusionary web of social media. They think becoming a published author is their ultimate achievement. They treat authorship similarly to SM. They are ready to pay through their noses to get published. As a result, substandard publications bury exemplary works. When money becomes the game player, it easily compromises the values of books and industry practices. Many debut authors disappear after their short-lived interest fades away.

SS: Has SM helped you promote your works?

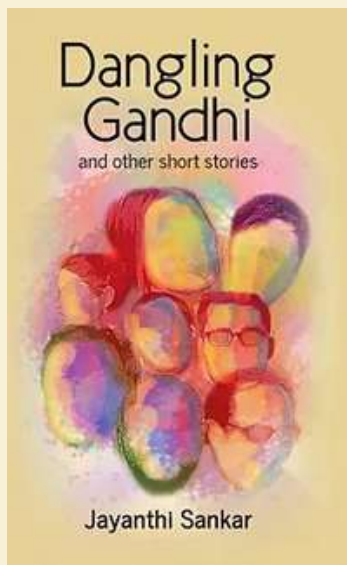
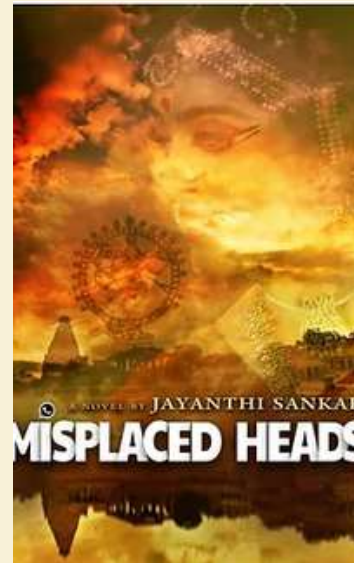
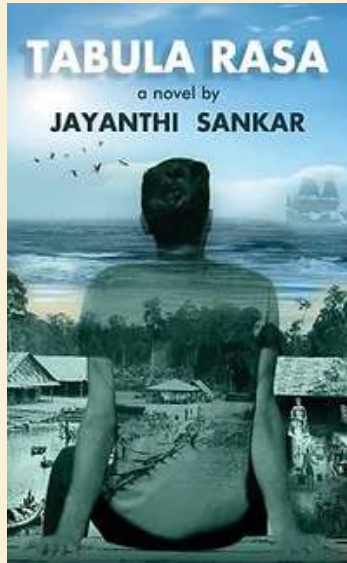
JS: The social media has certainly given my books some visibility. However, I think there are limitations to how much it can expand readership. And, I realise, it also depends on how much time and effort I can invest in it. Authenticity is becoming a rare commodity on SM, and everyone has quickly accepted it as the norm of our era. Many of the so-called *bookstagrammers* with all their hype are more interested in protecting themselves as book lovers than genuinely reading.

SS: Share with us about your means to fill your rice bowl.

JS: Appreciate your clarity of thought - writing rarely buys writers their daily loaf. That said, I have worked as a translator, transcriber, and interpreter for over 20 years. This excludes my three years as a journalist. My recent freelancing experience of eight months led the ministry of manpower to consider me as their full-time in-house interpreter and I've gladly accepted the role. It suits my desire to reduce screen time. Right now, I am an interpreter with MOM-CRD, in 3 languages: English, Tamil and Hindi.

Thank you, Jayanthi Sankar, for taking time out to talk to us. We wish you the very best in all your creative endeavours.

Some Works of Jayanthi Sankar



The Interview : Hugo Keller

(Rachna Singh, Editor The Wise Owl, in conversation with Hugo Keller)

The Wise Owl talks to **Hugo Keller**, an artist from Peoria, Illinois. While attending college, art was only a hobby for Hugo, but he decided to take several art classes anyway, just for fun. That's when his eyes were opened to innumerable possibilities. The more he watched others, the more he learned and the more he learned, the more comfortable he felt trying new and different techniques. Hugo Keller has shipped his works to all 50 states in USA and across dozens of countries. He has also participated in many art shows and exhibits throughout the country, but he ruefully admits that he is shy by nature and tries to stay out of public view letting his art do all the speaking. Taking up the advice of his friends, he eventually set up a website and began posting on social media. That's where everything really took off. He started getting sales from his website almost immediately and began building an ever-increasing fan base on social media. Since then, he says 'I've never felt freer to explore and try new things. Each and every one of my artworks reflects my sensitivity, feelings and passion from my soul.'

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

RS: You are an artist with a diverse canvas of art forms – portraits, nature, flowers, animals, water scenes, abstracts etc. For the benefit of our readers please tell us a little about your journey as an artist and how you developed and evolved these different art forms.

HK: I have had other artists tell me to 'pick a style and stick with it' but that's never really worked for me. I tend to paint when I am inspired. And when I am inspired, I keep going until I feel that I am able to achieve on canvas (or paper, wood, etc.) what was really in my mind. Most of my art is nature driven. It may be something that I see, hear or imagine but then most often, I take it as a challenge to try to emulate what I am seeing and turn it into something completely different. I've always loved using a palette knife and find that I can translate something that looks ordinary to most people into something really bright and colourful using this technique.

I tend to go on streaks of certain forms for a while or until something else inspires me. I only recently was able to create an antique look on my paintings, particularly still life. I've struggled for years but have finally created something that I feel satisfied with and that really matches what I saw in my mind.

Abstracts bring balance to my creativity because I feel freer to do whatever I want and express however I am feeling at that moment. I love work with nature and animals very much, but I still have to create an animal that looks just like that animal or a cabin that looks like a cabin. With abstract, I can do anything.

RS: Our readers would be eager to know what and who were the creative influences in your life?

HK: I have been blessed with a tight knit family that has always been supportive of me but most of all, my mother nurtured my creativity from a very young age. Whether it was my writing, my painting, my music or anything else, she always appreciated my imagination and gave me the confidence to express myself.

RS: Are there any traditional or contemporary artists who inspire you. What is it about their artwork that attracts you?

HK: You'll probably laugh but I absolutely loved watching Bob Ross. He brought calmness to his painting that I've really taken to heart in my own. I am also a huge fan of Thomas Kinkadee as he showed that you can really bring the entire painting to light by just highlighting a few key areas that draw your eye in and seem to radiate light across the entire

painting. Last but not least, since I love the palette knife style, I have to include Leonid Afremov. His work (and several others similar to his) really combined the bright colours and light that I love along with the oil/palette knife combo.

RS: I was looking at your artworks displayed on your website. I notice that you do watercolours as well as oils and acrylics. You also use canvas as well as textiles. Our readers would be curious to know which is your favourite medium and why?

HK: Most of what I paint ends up being oil on canvas. The rich and lustrous quality of oil paints adds a unique depth and vibrancy to my artwork. The pigments in oil paints have a smooth consistency that allows for easy blending and layering, enabling me to achieve subtle transitions and intricate details in my compositions. The slow drying time of oil paints is another aspect I appreciate. Unlike other mediums, oil paints remain workable for an extended period, allowing me to make adjustments, blend colours, and create complex textures. This characteristic of oils grants me the freedom to explore different techniques and experiment with various brushstrokes, resulting in a more nuanced and expressive outcome. Furthermore, the archival quality of oil paints ensures the longevity of my paintings. When properly cared for, oil paintings on canvas can withstand the test of time, preserving their colours and textures for generations to come. This gives me a sense of confidence and satisfaction, knowing that my artwork can be enjoyed by future audiences.

The versatility of oil paints is also a major factor in my preference. They offer a wide range of applications, from smooth and precise brushwork to thick impasto textures. This versatility allows me to adapt my painting style and technique to suit the subject matter and concept of each piece, providing me with endless creative possibilities. There is also a certain traditional and timeless allure associated with oil paintings on canvas. The history and legacy of this medium, dating back centuries, add a sense of connection to artistic traditions and masters of the past. Working with oil on canvas gives me a profound appreciation for the art form's heritage and the craftsmanship involved.

While most of what I paint ends up being oil on canvas sometimes acrylics bring out the best of what I'm going for and sometimes it's watercolour but more often than not oil on canvas just works for me.

RS: Your website shows that you pick up varied and diverse subjects and themes in your artworks- from a flower vase to a sailing boat to a lion tamer to a couple waltzing. Please share your creative process with our readers- from the time you decide on the subject for your painting to the finished product.

HK: Since I usually pull my inspiration from my life & travels, I keep a journal of notes and ideas on my phone so that I can jot down anything whenever I want. From there, the idea may take on multiple forms over days, weeks, months or even years on occasion. But the vast majority of the time I know pretty much what I want immediately. Once I feel that I have a solid idea and plan, I either pencil out a sketch or just jump right into painting. That being said, I still have many times when I have to completely start over and begin again from scratch and often with a slightly new idea and plan. Some details take me more time than others and depending on the overall detail I'm going for on the painting it may take weeks before I'm completely satisfied with my work. Once I'm done, I move the painting to another room to get different light on it and just leave it there for a few days. Often, I may make a change or two and then have a completed painting.

RS: Your paintings are a beautiful swathe of bright colours (especially your abstracts and the 'blue boat' series). They energize the viewer with their brilliance. What inspires you to pick up such gorgeous colours for your paintings?

HK: The inspiration behind my choice of vibrant colours in my artwork stems from a variety of sources. Firstly, I find inspiration in the sheer beauty and power of colours themselves. Bright and vivid hues have a way of capturing attention and conveying a sense of energy and vitality. They create a visual impact that can evoke strong emotions and engage the viewer's senses.

Additionally, I draw inspiration from the world around me. Nature is a constant source of awe-inspiring colours, from the breath-taking sunsets to the vibrant flora and fauna. The interplay of light and colour in the natural world fuels my

imagination and finds its way into my paintings.

I am also influenced by my own experiences and emotions. Colours can be deeply connected to personal memories and feelings. By selecting and combining specific colours, I aim to convey certain moods, express emotions, or depict a particular atmosphere. Each colour has its own symbolic meaning and associations, and I take advantage of these nuances to enhance the message or narrative of my artwork.

Lastly, I embrace experimentation and the intuitive process of creating art. I am constantly exploring new colour combinations, experimenting with different techniques, and pushing the boundaries of my creative expression. This exploration allows me to discover unique and striking colour palettes that bring life and brilliance to my paintings.

RS: While looking at your artworks, I was particularly intrigued by your collection of 'Roaring Animals' & 'Humming bird' series. Tell us a little about these works which are reflective of a blend of traditional craft and innovation.

HK: My Roaring Animals series all began from seeing the roaring lion at the beginning of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movies for decades. One night when I was beginning to watch a movie, the lion came on as usual. I quickly paused the movie and went straight to canvas. After the lion was completed, I jumped to other animals that would have a good roaring face and just ran with it from there. My final painting in the series was the Roaring Monkey. It was the second one to sell (after the Roaring Lion) and then became one of my best-selling prints to date.

RS: You are a marvellous artist with a huge portfolio of varied works. What advice would you give budding artists about how to hone their craft?

HK: As an artist, honing your craft is an ongoing journey of growth and exploration. If you love what you do, keep doing it. It's okay if you can't jump right in full-time right away. Just keep at it and keep enjoying what you do. For years, I only painted in my spare time and kept it as a hobby. I then found myself trying new techniques and new methods; really just exploring what came more naturally to me and what I needed to work on. The more I kept at it and kept experimenting, the more comfortable I came to be with my paintings. With the help and encouragement of friends and family around me, I was eventually able to paint full-time. Dedicate regular time to create art, as it is through practice that you develop your skills, refine your techniques, and find your artistic voice. Embrace both quantity and quality in your practice, exploring different subjects, styles, and mediums to expand your artistic horizons.

I suggest seeking inspiration and to learn from others. Explore the works of established artists, both past and present, studying their techniques and styles. Attend art exhibitions, workshops, and classes to gain insights from experienced artists and expand your artistic knowledge. Engage with art communities, both online and offline, to connect with fellow artists, share ideas, and receive constructive feedback.

Next, be open to experimentation and take risks. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and try new techniques or subjects. Push yourself to explore different artistic approaches, as it is through experimentation that you'll discover new possibilities and find your unique style.

It's important to seek constructive criticism and feedback. Share your work with trusted mentors, fellow artists, or art communities who can provide valuable insights and suggestions for improvement. Embrace this feedback as a means of growth and learning, while also staying true to your artistic vision and voice.

Additionally, develop a habit of self-reflection. Take time to evaluate your own work critically. Analyse what works well and what can be improved. Celebrate your successes, but also embrace failures as learning opportunities. Keep a sketchbook or journal to record ideas, observations, and artistic experiments.

Lastly, nurture your passion for art by staying curious and exploring diverse sources of inspiration. Immerse yourself in different art forms, literature, music, nature, and cultural experiences. Allow these influences to shape your creative expression and infuse your work with depth and originality.

Remember, honing your craft is an ongoing journey. Embrace the process, be patient with yourself, and celebrate your progress. Artistic growth takes time and dedication, but with passion, perseverance, and a willingness to learn, you can continue to develop your skills and create meaningful art.

RS: If I was to ask you to define yourself as an artist in three adjectives, what would they be and why?

HK: Bold – Some artists paint in such a way that you can instantly tell who painted it because they stay within certain boundaries. I feel that I take chances with my work by painting such a wide variety of art and trying to stand out amongst the vast amount of other talented artists. I strive to create artwork that captivates the viewer's attention and leaves a lasting impact. I embrace boldness to push the boundaries of artistic expression. Boldness allows me to take risks, challenge conventions, and create artwork that stands out with its audacity and visual strength.

Vivid – If there's one thing that I try to keep consistent through most of my work, it's bright vivid colours. Bringing out colours and being overly creative with my palette is basically a challenge that I make to myself each time I sit down to paint. I gravitate towards vibrant colours, using them to convey energy, emotion, and a sense of vibrancy. Through the use of light, shadow, and colour harmonies, I aim to create artwork that feels alive and exudes a sense of vitality. Vividness allows me to evoke strong emotional responses, transport viewers into dynamic visual narratives, and create a visually immersive experience.

Private – I mentioned before that I'm quite shy and because of this I do my best to keep my life more private. I truly love social media as I get to interact with many artists and all of the wonderful people who love my work and buy my artwork but at the same time keep myself more on the private side. Art serves as a means of self-expression, allowing me to explore my thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Through my artwork, I invite viewers to glimpse into my inner world, offering a personal and intimate connection. The private nature of my work allows me to create pieces that reflect my individual perspective and invite viewers to engage in their own contemplation and interpretation.

RS: Are you working on any specific project or exhibition? Do share details with our readers.

HK: Currently I am focused on just a couple things: Enjoying the freedom to travel, explore and search for continued inspiration for my work and being able to continue to build my brand through my website and social media. I do also have my artwork entered into a few prestigious art competitions and I am really hoping the exposure from those will add to being more well-known and more people being able to see my paintings. I've only recently tried entering art contests (other than the traditional contests at art fairs) and will hopefully be showcasing my work alongside other amazing artists at more exhibits.

Thank you so much, Hugo, for taking time out to talk to The Wise Owl. We wish you the best in all your creative & artistic endeavours and hope you keep brightening the world with your fabulous paintings and the magic of your art.

Some Works of Hugo Keller



Ready for the Sea



Roaring Monkey



Dancing Unencumbered



Ready for Anything



Peace at last



Flowering Water Can



POETRY



Songs of Lorelai & Other Poems
Mykyta Ryzhykh

[Read More](#)



Cosmic Dancer
Vineeta Gupta

[Read More](#)



Great Escape
Pris Campbell

[Read More](#)



Learn to stop Singing
Jyothsnaphanija

[Read More](#)



Breaking Bridges
Kavita Ratna

[Read More](#)



A Night At The Cafe
George Freck

[Read More](#)



POETRY



A Picnic
Sekhar Banerjee

[Read More](#)



Not Enough Time
Deby Cedars

[Read More](#)



Four Poems
Robert Witmer

[Read More](#)



Did You Know?
Vineetha Mokkil

[Read More](#)



Pink Petals
Sherin Mary Zacharia

[Read More](#)



Out of Fashion
Kathlynnne Somerville

[Read More](#)



Songs of Lorelai & Other Poems

By Mykyta Ryzhykh

Boy

Will die inside of me during the annual meeting with the snow
The boy inside me will die in time
The boy will die when his nails become screams
Peppa Pig climbs into the Christmas oven
Sexually burning fires of anti-missile launcher
We swim to land to drown
The lizards of minutes scatter
One perspective is expectation
God's assistant pressed the wrong button
The tree temple grew in the wrong place
The boy sits under the tree temple and collects pieces of greenery
Drowned stones are silent in the language of air
Red redery green greenery
Greenery mimics in khaki
My love wears a sweater of roses instead of a body
In the mimicry of stone the river trembles
The boy will die inside the phallus of the rectum of the rifle
The stars will be witnesses in the court of the past tense
Here is the wing hold it and fly



What did I do while nuclear plants grew like mushrooms
Probably scolded the daughter beat the cat
Dragged a piece of halva
Filled the chambers with gas
And did not notice how my daughter turned into
In the Virgin Mary
And I don't know how to deal with her now



diaphragms of misfortune
torn tongue bites the tongue
the word touches a deaf ear

a man stands by the old cemetery
and does not know what to say



small lights
in the eyes
of the pupils
and in the sky
its a birthday when
we flew like birds into the world
of fireworks and colors
this is the day when we stopped
being birds and became earthly people



Cosmic Dancer

By Vineeta Gupta

The world is charged with the energy of cosmic dance.

The moon dances to the tune of the earth, the earth
to the sun; synergy, synthesis, rhythm and mirth.

Oh! the Satan, ready to unsettle and disturb the balance;
jubilant, hidden, coiled around the pedestal - a menace.

Loosening of footholds, unearthing and the still birth!

The stamp and stomp, the spin and toss and the death.

The ashen bodies and the contracting circumference.

O! the void reverberates with sweet cadence
and swing; the overarching nothingness, and formless
Lord; the entwined fingers and the deep trance,
the whirling hair and the hand raised in benediction to bless;
The primordial nature and the fireball in alliance;
Nataraja! creation, sustenance and destruction, all encompass!



Great Escape

By Pris Campbell

The escaped parrots gather
in our Black Olive tree,
grown old, feathers molting,
too tired now to fly further south.
They squawk about pollycrackers
and sometimes utter strange
obscenities to the setting sun.

They hiss at my dog,
jump one branch higher, days
I venture too close to the tree.

I wonder if they tap
into archetypes, dream
about steamy jungles,
roaring tigers
and chest-thumping gorillas
before two-legged predators
caged their land—

or do they dream
of small faces pressed
in wonder at the green
and gold feathers
chained to a perch
before their escape
by way of a night watchman,
bored and a bit tipsy,
with a yearning
to see wild things fly free.



Learn to stop Singing

By Jyothsnaphanija

*One day you forget the camera in your throat and pick up handful of lines.
You map the softness of fire.
all the nerves and cells
Trying to catch a sedating tune
you feel like folding your voice and tucking in a fruit platter.
You remember laryngologist's words
"speak only if it is very much necessary".
You need no clock
You know when an hour walks into your glass of neglected water.
Activated*

*water toned voice.
You make a censorship on listening
not to listen leaves, not to listen twinkling
anything that urges singing.
You simply gaze
at the unblinking microphone.
You will never stop
you come to know*

listening.



Breaking Bridges

By Kavita Ratna

*Breaking bridges
is not
as arduous
or demanding
as it sounds.*

*Even desultory
neglect will
suffice
to crumble
them to such fine
dust
that looking back,
nothing
is visible
except the
miasma
of a void.*

*Underneath it
all,
gently flows
the shimmering river
in which
we will
never ever step in,
twice.*



A Night At The Café

By George Freek

I walk home into a black night.
A wind like a steel broom
sweeps leaves from the trees.
A month ago, I was married.
but my wife is dead.
I know what it means to be alone.
Is there a heaven somewhere?
I look at the sky
and beyond. Wherever
it might be,
I don't believe it's up there.



A Picnic

By Sekhar Banerjee

Rhododendron-smell hangs like an old French empire,
(almost as decadent as old Baudelaire
would have approved) down the slopes,
near the water stream and by the main road in a valley
in Sikkim north, to ultimately die
for the picnickers' sweet petrol smoke

Picnic - a two-note birdcall
from the woods,
as though a Beethoven cover-artist wakes up
again, in spring
and sets the score for a cuckoo in falling major third
for his forthcoming pastoral
to be staged in Sikkim

We contribute
like the classical socialists to indulge
in a collective merriment
because we haven't smelt so much fragrance, such acute
otherness for many months

It tries to remind us of Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*:
a female nude
and a scantily dressed female bather on a picnic
with two fully dressed men in a rural setting,
profane yet interesting

Since then, we have learnt to forbid ourselves
from our own smell - the armpits and the heady smell
of our mistakes
in a pastoral setting though each one of us

is the last attestant
of something disappearing – rustle of leaves, the impressionist
spring, a ritual of feast, a sigh, the decadent sunlight,
a fragrance, our mauve desires,

some failed ways of life



Not Enough Time (Ghazal)

By Deby Cedars

I remember as a child, her and I baking with an easy-bake oven,
Having our quality time.

I remember her and I going to the mall quite often,
Enjoying our shopping time.

Playing cards or dominos while having wine coolers,
Or Miller time.

Trying to tell her I was working as a stripper,
But it always seemed the wrong time.

And calculating the three-hour difference when I was in CA,
And she was on Eastern time.

Or watching Wheel of Fortune on TV,
Trying to figure out Rhyme Time.

Then she told me she was dying,
But it didn't seem like the right time.

I guess some people have an awareness,
When it's their time.

In her closet, a half-knitted sweater,
She didn't have enough time.



Four Poems
By Robert Witmer



hooded waves
reflect the failing day
a chronic echolalia
in the pendulum
of a faceless clock

words without wings
a war-torn playground
sand for things
slipping through the hourglass
childhood brings





balancing
on a ball
the thin child
holds his breath
and waves his arms like a bird

a marble god
rests his ruined stare
on the thin smile
of a new moon
slipping into her bath





Did You Know?

By Vineetha Mokkil

RTs are not endorsements
Dinosaurs are not ballerinas
Words shapeshift as they please
Promises are not forged of steel

April is not the cruellest month
Eliot got it wrong, ask January
if you don't believe me
or December, deep and dark.

The witches were not
looking to make trouble
Macbeth was hungry
He had murder on his mind

Sometimes one plus one
Doesn't add up to two
Depends on who is counting
Depends on whose data it is

Democracies can be autocracies
Dictators wear smart disguises

Just because votes are cast
Just because elections are held
Freedom is not a given

Elections are not guardrails
Democracy can be shot dead
as polling booths fill up
And the firing squad takes aim
singing the nation's praises.



Pink Petals

By Sherin Mary Zacharia

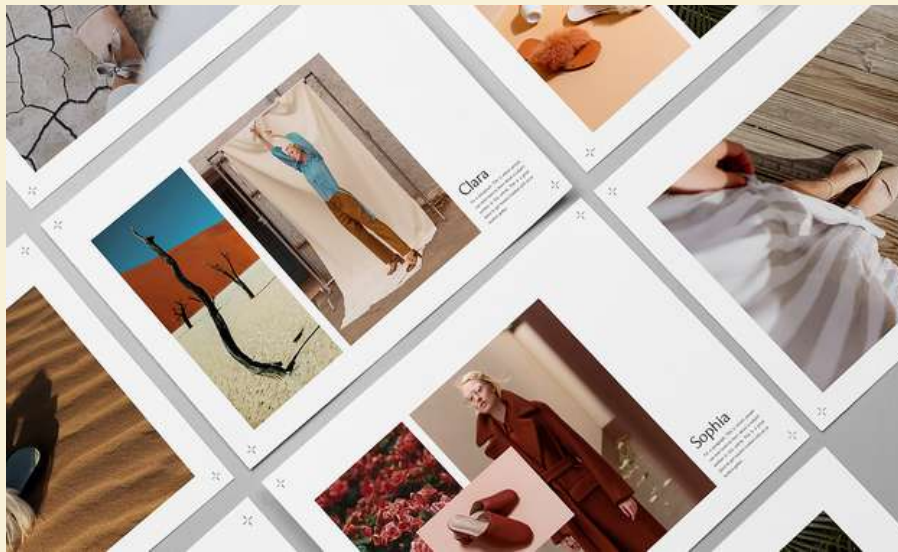
Water hesitates to come in
fears the merciless sun will
soon turn her into vapour.
Breeze too busy to pause
spend some time here whirling
the island has little news to share.

Pain filled the pink bright flower
the lonely blossom on the lonely island.
Shrubs invited no birds or bees
Thorns kept off the singing cicadas.
Butterflies painted themselves in other skies
The pink flower left unknown.

The lonely island longed for a footfall,
flapping of wings and scurry of paws.
Ripples touched the shores gently
moved back unsure, quickly.
Moonlight caressed the water bright
rocked it back and forth to sleep tight.

The lonely island cold, slept blanketed
in its own shadow dark, like a heart-
unwilling to trust, unable to feel.
Thunder clapped, lightning drew bright lines
across the sky that could no longer withhold
the agony of witnessing every day,
the loneliness of the flower, the pink flower.
Water gushed along,
pouring rain incessant resolute.

floating the pink petals to distant shores
a poem etched on each petal, deep;
in the language of the lonely mind
of the wild flower, the pink flower
waves read them again with pleasure
water drops wrapped themselves in the verses
with pride.



Out of Fashion

By Kathylynne Somerville

You exploded into my life like a closet bursting open stuffed with vintage garb salvaged from consignment stores stocking a collection as varied as a decanter of gum balls.

Kitten heels clicking, A line dress swaying, your forearm hooked through the handle of a handbag, you ordered a black cold brew with plastic tender.

Gingham, houndstooth, tartan, pashmina, silk, suede—my existence dressed up in fabric and accoutrements fit for an actress in a tv program now trending.

Your French tipped nails clawed off my Spanx, your soft fingers caressed the goo of my muffin top. My bed bustled by coitus, hospital corners messy, my mind tidied of malaise.

Patchouli gel, and hibiscus perfume scented my bathroom. A pomegranate clay mask you egg me into slathering on, saying, I could get into Tosca if we put this on?

Our countenances fresh from sediment, moisturized palm-in-palm, the soprano pleading for mercy I wish for you to sit with me here, there, wherever, anytime, at all-times.

Cereal boxes, sour milk, uncapped orange juice, coffee splotches, leftover take-out on pink marble counters, plates soaking in wet piles in the sink – what pleasant disarray.

Your presence primed the make-up of myself, polished it with foundation I eschew, because it suffocates my skin, and is a cunt to apply.

Sun kissed Sundays. Mondays collected in a drawstring bag brimming with a motley of marbles. Fridays glimmering gold in amiable gangstas mouths. Wicked weekends.

Days disappear as the sun does in a peach and orange sunset enveloping a city built of buildings and a population awakened by dreams you need sedatives for.

Then Tuesday arrived and attired in couture suitable for the funeral of a family member you strut out the door, a poof of smoke billowing from your vape, without a word or a wave.

Your burgundy lipstick stained my ceramic coffee mug and cannot be dishwashed out or scrubbed off with bleach.

It lives in the blue hutch accompanied by former cracked crockery, fractured goblets, and the amputated champagne flutes I can't dismember from memory.



FICTION



Citizens of the Empire
Richard Lutman

[Read More](#)



That Song in Dee
Doug Jacquier

[Read More](#)



Light After Darkness
Brent Bosworth

[Read More](#)



Citizens of the Empire

By Richard Lutman

Petka, the cobbler, wants the Queen to see his boots. Can he fulfil his heart's desire?

The twenty brown and black horses of the Empress's Royal Cavalry, urged roughly forward by their riders, plowed through the snowy confection of trees and rocks on the way to Ursk. For a moment the wind ceased, then muttered again as it shook the trees.

"Fast. Faster," said the captain, his voice rising in anger. His fur coat made him seem large and dark against the sky. His breath a thick steam in the raw air. "Hurry up back there hurry up."

He pushed at the peasants from the rear of the line with his horse as they stumbled, fell and scrambled up. Then he rode forward.

"Fast. Faster," the captain snarled. "The Empress does not wait."

Jonas Petka, the cobbler from Lurska, felt his chest tighten once again. He stopped for a moment until his head cleared, then continued, feet dragging heavily over the hard ruts of the frozen road.

"What a sorry lot, Captain," said the lieutenant, who rode at his superior's flank.

"Yes, they are, Lieutenant, but they do their task well. These people always do. You will learn that. Promise them a bowl of soup, and they will do anything."

The captain reined his horse to a stop. The line shuffled by three hundred tired and poorly clothed peasants, he had to escort to the crossroads between the lowland villages of Ursk and Litvna. The muscled flanks of his battle-trained horse tensed beneath him, hoofs pawing impatiently at the frozen ground as if waiting for the command to charge.

Four horsemen, led by the young lieutenant, circled the small church, which stood outside Ursk. They banged on the roof with their sword handles until the priest stepped out. For a moment he stood as if dazed, then was squeezed in roughly in among the peasants, dropping his eyeglasses to the snow. One of the horsemen toppled a woman into the snow as she

ran back for the priest's glasses. She raised her head once, and then fell still. A rider poked at her with his sword. When she did not move, he rode away. The lieutenant sat in his saddle, looking down at the body. His face was hard and pale, and then he spurred his horse forward. The people of the lowlands stood silently by their gates, watching the file of strange figures cross the log bridge outside their village. Smoke from the village chimneys smudged the sky.

At a signal, the villagers were shoved and pushed as each tried to find footing in the slippery snow behind the priest. Some had their feet wrapped in rags against the cold, some limped, and others walked steadily ahead as if in a trance.

In a large field by a ruined wall, the group straggled to a stop. The soldiers swore and tried to get the peasants and villagers in a line. Petka found himself next to an old woman; her black shawl covered a warty face.

"I come all the way from the Ul River because they promise me a bowl of soup if I serve my Empress," she said. "I was hungry. But there is no soup, just black bread."

"I come all the way from Beloskya by the mountains near the steppes," said Petka,

"That is far."

"I was promised soup, too. They made me leave my shop. I am Jonas Petka, cobbler. In winter I make boots, in summer I repair them. I did not want to come. I am a poor man."

The deep snow spilled over the tops of the boots he had made especially for the journey. If the Empress saw them, perhaps she would ask him to make boots for her. Perhaps. The leather was wet, and his feet were numb.

The soldiers formed a line in front of the villagers. For a moment, the wind caught its breath and then howled once more. Fifty of the Empress's mounted guards and a black and gold carriage lurched into view. At a nod from the leader of the fifty men, the captain gave an order, and the peasants and villagers cheered.

"Cheer, cheer for your Empress. Cheer, cheer for your Benefactor."

Hands reached out and bodies squeezed up against the Empress's mounted guard. Their cheering swelled into the wind.

A fat woman in pink waved and smiled from the carriage. Petka's chest tightened. He grabbed the arm of the woman next to him.

"Let go," she said. "Let go. I have to cheer, or the soldiers will come."

She pulled her arm away. Petka lost his footing, fell and rose. Tiny bits of snow glittered on his face. He rose once again, took a step, and then tumbled forward.

The carriage moved away, and the cheering faded. The captain raised his sword, and the soldiers regrouped the peasants as they continued across the lowlands to the next crossroads of the Empress's journey.

The wind spat, whirled and began its dance again, sifting snow in a cloud of beautiful and sugary dust to the contours of his body as the lieutenant pulled at Petka's boots.



That song in Dee

By Doug Jacquier

Will Dee be able to extract herself from a toxic relationship that is draining her music & creativity?

Matt waited in the darkness of the veranda, his cheek against the stripped timber of the front door he'd meant to stain one day. As he waited, Dee played the piano and sang at the end of the corridor, on the other side of the door.

Sounded like an original. It suited her voice. At the end of the song, he banged loudly on the door again and stood back, rehearsing responses. The door swung open decisively.

Dee said "Matt."

She might as well have been saying 'Door' or 'Window' or 'Fridge'. A non-committal statement. He waited. She stood. She blinked first.

"I don't want you to come in. I'm working."

He waited. She blinked first again.

Dee sighed. "Just don't get in a huff when I ask you to leave in half an hour."

She left him to close the door and walked towards the light at the end of the hallway. When he reached the lounge room he nodded at the piano.

"When's the big comeback?"

"Saturday week. At the Railway Hotel." (Dee thought What the hell, he'd find out anyway.)

He looked at the bottle of wine in his hand as if he'd just discovered it and said, "should I get two glasses?"

He didn't wait for an answer as he moved into the kitchen with a familiarity that she hated. Returning with the glasses, he started to pour.

"Just a small one", Dee said. "Otherwise, I get lazy."

"How do you think you'll go?"

"Hard to know. Five years is a long time. People have short memories, except for your failures."

"Are you scared?"

Dee laughed. "Of course. But it won't stop me. By the way, I thought you were off the booze."

"Yeah, well ..."

"So, Matt, how have you been?"

"Awful."

Dee thought 'You bloody idiot, Dee. Now you're going to get the full catastrophe. And I can't do this anymore.

"Is it your job?"

"No, I left."

"Why?"

A half-smile slipped belied his face of studied torment.

"I want to concentrate on my writing. I've been writing about you."

The ringing of the phone jolted them both and it was a moment before Dee got up to answer, as though weighing the arguments for and against. Matt poured himself another drink and pretended to leaf through the pile of novels on the table.

Dee picked up the phone and said "Hello ... How are you? ... No, I've got someone visiting. I can't talk now. OK, I'll see you Saturday night, about seven ...Yeah, and you too. Bye."

As she hung up, Matt said "New boyfriend?"

"None of your business. How's your love life?"

"Non-existent."

"Are you trying to tell me you haven't slept with anyone since we split?"

Sheepishly he muttered, "No. The odd one-night stand when we first split but I soon got sick of that."

I'd almost forgotten. Serial monogamy is more his thing really. An endless list of significant relationships and bad, insignificant poetry. I wonder if I should tell him I burned it all when he left.

Matt put down his drink and went to his knees in front of Dee, burying his head in her lap and putting his arms around her waist.

"Dee. Dee, please let me stay with you tonight."

Dee, sometimes you are a complete and utter moron. Now look what you've let yourself in for!

"Matt, it's no good. I know you're lonely and you must know I still (careful, he'll hang on every word) ... that I'll always be concerned about you. But it wouldn't solve anything."

"I know that. I just need to be held. Dee, I'm afraid."

"What of?"

"Everything. Oh, Dee, I'm lost."

Bloody hell. This is new.

"Hey, hey, calm down, it can't be that bad."

"Dee, I think I'm going mad. Help me. I need you."

Matt collapsed onto the couch, covered his face with his hands, and only gradually regained control of his breathing. Dee, her hands shaking noticeably, struggled to light a cigarette. She puffed nervously for a while until she regained her composure.

Alright, now that he's in here I've got to get him out. He's not staying and I'm not going to let him touch me.

"I'm sorry" sniffed Matt.

"You can't go on like this, Matt. You've got to get some help."

"If you mean a shrink, I'm not interested. I want you to help me."

"I can't. And I won't. Not now. I wanted both of us to see someone when you first left but you wouldn't. Now that I've made a new start I'm not prepared to go back. You're going to have to do it on your own."

"But I'm afraid, Dee."

How did I ever love this shell?

"I know. And it will probably get worse before it gets better. When you left me, I thought I was going to die. I felt totally worthless. (You'll love that, you bastard.) But I was determined I wasn't going to waste my life."

Matt flashed "It was easier for you though. You were in the right, and you got all the sympathy and support."

Wonderful. I got the kick in the teeth, and you wanted the support.

"You helped to make our bed, Matt, and you chose not to lie in it anymore. Sure, I got support, but I also got questions from my parents about what I'd done to drive you away."

Matt's head dropped.

"Oh, Matt, can't you see that you have to change. Nobody else can do it for you."

"I just don't know where to start."

"Try starting with what you really want to do for a change."

"Like all your touchie-feelie drop-out mates?"

Dee was angry now. "You left me, you've thrown in your job, and you're probably drunk most nights of the week. If you haven't dropped out, I don't know who has. The trouble with you is that the world's in your head. Try to stay with your feelings for once in your life."

"I am but ..."

Rubbish. I bet you're still doing the rounds of the same old friends and the same old places, sucking for sympathy and waiting for the perfect job or the perfect relationship or the one true cause to drop on you like a bombshell.

Matt moaned "I just wish I had your guts and energy."

God help me, I have to say this.

"I know you do but I need it for myself. It's time you found your own."

Matt whispered, "I guess you don't have much respect for me these days."

How right you are but I'm not going to be stupid enough to say it here and now.

Choosing her words carefully, Dee said "I respect the things in you that are worth respecting. But I only ever see them when you take off that ridiculous suit of armour you've made up out of bits and pieces of other people's approval."

Matt's face distorted as he said "It's ironic really. I'm the one who left and now I'm wondering if I'm the one who's still in love."

Dee didn't answer.

It's not me you love, Matt. It's the hidey-hole that our relationship was for you. I didn't realise how much you'd drained from me until you left and, speaking of irony, it's probably the most important thing you ever did for me. That's why I could never go back to the way it was or anything like it. I want to be a lover not a wet-nurse. I just wish it was safe enough for me to say that.

Matt said resignedly, "I guess it would be better if we didn't see each other for a while."

Dee said, "That had been my plan".

He got up to leave, struggling with what to say. "Well ..."

Dee quickly stood and said firmly "Goodbye, Matt, and good luck."
Matt moved towards her, smiling as he said, "Let's say 'au revoir'."
He tried to kiss her, but she dodged him and headed for the front door.
"Just leave, Matt. I've got work to do."

As he was going through the doorway, he started to turn, only to find the door closing in his face.

Dee returned to the lounge, sat at the piano and sang and played her song through, ending with a flourish. She laughed and clapped herself, silently, but for a long time.

In the crisp evening air, Matt's shoulders hunched. Patting his inside pocket to check for his latest sheaf of poems, he wondered if Caroline was home. She was keen on him once. He quickly hailed a cab.



Light After Darkness

By Brent Bosworth

A forever bond

Dorian looked down at Margaret watching her shallow breaths barely raise her chest. She'd been deteriorating rapidly for the last month, although the signs of disease started a year prior. First it was just a slight tremor in her hand and tightness in her muscles. The next thing he knew, they were sitting in the waiting room for Doctor Helen Grey, their longtime general physician, and longtime friend. Dorian was patting his best friend on the shoulder and telling her that regardless of what happened that everything was going to be okay.

He glanced at her eyes momentarily but couldn't focus his gaze there for long. Her constant blank stare ate away at his heart. Her glossy grey-green eyes wandered off absently, into nothing but space itself. Below those eyes were cheekbones, sunken in as if someone deflated all the air from her face. Her mouth was slightly ajar, showing dying teeth stripped of enamel.

He had to shift his gaze elsewhere for the time being, so he chose the mirror on top of the dresser. Stepping over to it, he looked at his reflection and had to admit he didn't look much better. This came as no surprise to him. When he took her off of the machine yesterday, the doctor told him that today would be the day. He picked up the prescription bottle on the dresser and popped the cap off with some effort. He popped two of the football-shaped pills into his mouth and swallowed. His doctor insisted that he take the anxiety medication, and today, he wasn't going to argue.

He quickly glanced back at Margaret and decided he needed some air. He crossed over to the casement window, swung it open, and took a deep breath of fresh air. He peered into the garden below, looking at the dead roses frosted over with the first signs of winter. A chill swept through the room, and he decided to close it. Crossing back to the bed he was painfully aware of how labored Margaret's breathing had become.

Dorian sighed, grabbing the pill bottle from the dresser again. He took two more pills and put the bottle into his pocket this time. He went to the bed and took her hand in his own. "I love you, Margaret. We'll be together again soon." He kissed her hand and laid it back at her side. A moment passed before he realized her labored breathing had stopped,

and her chest lay still. Tears welled in his eyes as he took all of her in. Over the past month, her legs and arms had shrunk to the size of his wrists. Her bones were clearly visible under her paper-thin skin. Her favorite silk nightgown was too big on her now, as if she were a child playing dress up in her mother's closet.

Before he realized what he was doing, the pill bottle was in his hands again, and he was taking two more. He stared at his hands, noticing his vision was starting to blur. Dorian decided that he needed a drink. It wouldn't clear his head, but it felt right. He'd make the call later. His wife wasn't going anywhere. He knew that. Truth be told, she'd been gone for a while. He stepped into the hallway and stared over the railing of the spiral staircase. Looking down into the foyer, he fondly remembered the first time he and Margaret stepped through the large double doors. They'd fallen in love with the place instantly. They were younger then and full of life. The house seemed to light up with their energy. He knew it was right for them because when he'd first started courting her, Margaret had joked, "the quickest way to a girl's heart is to buy her a house out of a Jane Austen novel," and he had never forgotten. The entryway was dark now, and visibly covered with a thick layer of dust. A cobweb hung in the corner to the left of the doors.

Dorian became suddenly aware that he couldn't feel his legs. He tried to move toward the stairs and staggered back. With great effort, he was able to steady himself on the banister. His vision was still blurry but seemed less so when he was moving. Unfortunately, his eyes and legs did not want to work together to resolve the matter. He made his way down the stairs at a turtle-like pace to ensure he wouldn't fall.

Once he made it to the bottom, he staggered to the bar and sat on his stool. He grabbed a bottle labeled fourteen-year-old Light Whiskey. It had been a special gift from Margaret when they vacationed in Italy. That had been ten years ago now, but he had always said he was saving it for a special occasion. He popped the cap off and poured it into his favorite glass, not bothering with ice. It didn't have to be good, just strong, and it was. The burn was immediate but oddly satisfying. Dorian took the pill bottle out once more and chased two more tiny ovals down with liquid fire. He downed the rest of the glass, which was filled quite generously, and almost instantly regretted it.

His head was spinning, and soon it began to flood with memories of the past. First, he was taken back to high school. He approached Margaret, surrounded by her friends, and held out a pink rose to ask her to prom. Her friends giggled, but she blushed and said yes. Before he had time to register it, the scene changed, and he was looking at the two of them in a diner. Pop's Greasy Spoon, he remembered it clearly.

He took her there for their first date, simply because it was the only place to go in town that wasn't fast food. The food was terrible, but the company was pleasant. They talked for an hour or so, letting most of what was on their plates go to waste because it turned out they had a lot in common. He remembered being seventeen and knowing with all his heart that he meant to spend the rest of his life with this girl. Then the walls of the diner started flickering in and out of the picture, and the next thing he knew they were in college.

They were in the library at OSU. Dorian was sitting at a table next to the piano pretending to read *Jane Eyre*, but he'd really been fixated on Margaret who sat at the piano hammering out *Hey Jude*. Watching her play was one of his favorite pastimes, and she knew it. The books he'd skim while she played never fooled her, but he didn't want her to feel like she was being stared at while playing. God what I'd give to hear it one more time, he thought, or *Für Elise*.

His brain skipped again, and suddenly he was standing hand in hand with Margaret, in Saint Paul's Cathedral on their wedding day. She wore a beautiful, vintage black dress with frills and lace. He was also dressed in all black, down to the rose he wore on his lapel. They shared a soft embrace and a passionate kiss, and then everything went black.

For a moment, Dorian felt as if he was floating in the void, and then the shape of his bedroom began to form. Margaret's bony frame was perfectly outlined under the blanket. Those bones, those feeble, tiny bones, that had wasted away from her in betrayal. He had tried to tell himself that when it was all over, she'd be in a better place, but that didn't feel right now. It didn't feel destined. His vision blurred again, and he hoped for more happy memories but was disappointed as it came back into focus.

She was thrashing, her old bones cracking and popping as she spun. A terrible screech was coming from her mouth and her head snapped back. It looked as if her skin was melting off and leaving the solid bone in its place. He shook his head in an attempt to come back to consciousness.

Then he was staring into hollowed-out eye sockets that had tears flowing freely from the depths. His love sat at the edge of her bed, sobbing soundlessly, almost unemotionally. She was there, but seemed to have accepted fate, and decided not to dwell on it. She stood now and walked toward the entryway.

He came to, lying on his back by the bar stool. His eyes made their way to the Latin cross on the wall. It had the phrase *Post Tenebras Lux* inscribed underneath. Light after darkness. He glanced up to the top of the stairs and saw Margaret standing there on the landing. Her hair was brushed back, and her body looked full and well again. A touch of blush appeared on her face; she was gorgeous.

He tried to call out for her but couldn't speak. She held up a finger, as if to shush him, then motioned him up the stairs. He was expecting his legs to betray him again but found that he was able to move with ease. In fact, it felt as if he was gliding. He hesitantly followed her into the bedroom. He walked through the door to find Margaret standing over their bed, and saw that she was looming over her lifeless corpse.

She looked back at him, and though he expected her to be shocked, her expression was calm. She reached out and brushed the arm of her lifeless body, causing it to disintegrate and blow away into nothingness.

She led him out of the bedroom, and back to the top of the stairs. They looked out over the railing, down to the bar. His own lifeless body lay on the floor next to it, the empty pill bottle still in his hand. He felt as though he should've been upset, but instead he felt peaceful. Dorian turned to Margaret and smiled. He'd told her they would be together again, and here they were. She held out her hand, and he entwined his fingers with hers.

They would stay together in the house even after it was sold, resold, and sold again. They watched new couples come and go but paid them no mind. Every now and then when the residents would leave, they'd visit the study, and Margaret would play the piano. Dorian just watched these days, not pretending to read anymore, but simply adoring his love.

NON FICTION



Anecdote

Classified Ads

Leroy B Vaughn

[Read More](#)



Musings

A take on Pani Puri

Richa Joshi Pant

[Read More](#)



Classified Ads

By Leroy B. Vaughn

Interesting ironies of life

January 3, 1999. I walked into my home office and saw the fax from the corporate office in Indianapolis informing me and seventeen other regional investigators that our service would no longer be needed.

I worked out of my house in California, about seventy-five miles north of Los Angeles. It was a good job, skip tracing and contacting dead beats that had stopped paying and had taken off with cars that were financed by the company that I worked for.

The fax advised me to turn in the company car at the auto auction in Fontana and to send the laptop computer and cell phone back to the company by UPS. I could keep the Polaroid camera and fax machine.

I started checking the classified ads in the Los Angeles Times that day. Newspapers were the main source for job searches back in the day. And I was kind of an old school detective. I hardly used the laptop that the company had provided for me.

I didn't find anything in the paper that day, but on the second day I found an ad that interested me. The ad did not have a lot of detail about the job that was being offered. It said bodyguard needed for estate in Beverly Hills area. There was a phone number to call between eight and ten in the evening and to ask for Roger.

I called at a quarter after eight that night and Roger answered. He asked me a few questions about my background. I told him I had been a Marine, a cop and a detective for a finance company, and had worked as a bodyguard for the world's largest toy distributor in the 1980's.

Roger gave me an address in Holmby Hills and asked me to meet him there at nine thirty the next night. After I hung the phone up, I looked up Holmby Hills in a map book and found that it was a district bordered by Beverly Hills and Bel Air, two of the most exclusive areas in Los Angeles County.

I shined my shoes and put on my best business suit and headed out for Holmby Hills the next night. I knew the routine about going to job interviews at odd hours. It was a way for the person doing the hiring to see if you were willing to take orders without asking questions.

The address was not hard to find, and I could see a huge house as I pulled into the long driveway. There was a buzzer at the gate and a male voice answered asking what I wanted. I identified myself and stated that I had an appointment with Roger. The gate opened and a man with a flashlight signaled for me to approach him. I saw a gun in his other hand as he waved the light showing me where to park.

I got out of my pick-up truck and walked towards Roger. He wasn't the friendliest person I had met, and he told me to follow him. We walked into a door that led to a mansion. Roger took me to a room that he used as a security office. He pointed to a chair and said, "sit down," before he asked if I knew where I was at. I told him that I was in Holmby Hills according to the map. "I know that," he told me as he gave me a don't be a wise ass look.

"Have you ever been in this house before," he asked. I told him that I had never been in Holmby Hills before, and he said, "Do you know who lives here?"

I told him I had no idea who lived in the house, but I figured that there must have been a reason for the questions, and I needed a job.

"This is the biggest mansion in the Beverly Hills area. The owner is Aaron Spelling, do you know who he is." I told Roger that I had heard the name but really did not know anything about him.

"Aaron Spelling is a television producer and is super rich. Do you know anyone that ever worked for him?"

I said I worked with a guy named Gomez six years ago that told me he worked for Aaron Spelling, but I have no idea what he did. "I never heard of Gomez. I'll check it out," Roger said as he wrote something in his note pad, before he handed a one-page job application to me.

"Fill this out. I'm going to be in the other room for a few minutes. Do not leave this room, I have three Doberman pinchers that are loose in the house, and they will kill anyone that they don't recognize."

I started filling out the application while I thought to myself, why would I be walking around in a mansion while this big guy in the gray slacks and blue blazer was out doing whatever he did in the house. Roger came back about twenty minutes later and took the completed application from me. He reviewed it and said "The ad in the paper says bodyguard, but it's more like a house-sitting job. I hardly ever see the owners and their kid. The only time I hear from the lady of the house is when she calls on the house phone to tell me one of the dogs shit in the house. I just tell her yes ma'am and I hop to picking up dog shit."

He looked at the application again and said, "Looks good. What kind of money are you looking for." I knew what this type of work paid, and I told him somewhere around thirty-five thousand a year.

He walked me to my truck, shook hands with me and said, "Don't call me, I'll call you." I knew what that meant, and I would be looking at the want ads first thing in the morning.

I didn't mind a little down time, and it took me several months before I got hired as a security contractor for the US Army in the middle east. I did a year on the contract and came home in June, 2000. I had made some good money and was looking forward to taking a month or two off, but the old habit of checking the want ads wouldn't let me. I got home on Friday and the following Monday I was at an office in the San Fernando Valley interviewing for a job as a contract security manager for a large hospital chain in the valley.

I got the job and reported to work the following Monday. As I walked into the security office, I saw a tall man wearing blue blazer and gray slacks talking to the security officer behind his desk. I introduced myself as the new manager to the desk officer. The tall man in the blue blazer looked at me and said, "Mr. Vaughn, my name is Roger Paine. I was hired as your assistant."

I reached out to shake the man's hand and told him that we had met before. "We have," he asked, "where"?" "At the house, about a year and a half ago." I replied.

"The house," Roger repeated as he got an oh shit look on his face.

I asked the desk man to show me to my office and told Roger that it was time to go to work. Once we sat down, Roger tried to explain that the rich lady made the decision not to hire me because I asked for too much money. I told Roger not to worry, these things happen. In the next two years Roger turned out to be one of the best men I had ever worked with.



A Take on Pani-Puri

By Richa Joshi Pant

A gastronomic delight that leaves you drooling

#SavePanipuri #WorldPanipuriDay

Save the *PaniPuri*. Save it from sophistication and hygiene. From getting served in sealed packs with a spoon to fill up the spicy syrup into the puffed puris. These DIY *Panipuris* are a travesty of tradition! It is like butchering the Japanese tea ceremony. Eating *Panipuri* or *Golgappe* as it is called in the Indo Gangetic plains is a collective, synchronous act. Requires relaxed alertness. Eating alone is like attending your convocation online. You get the degree while still in pyjama and miss out collective joy. Or it is like one cilium beating in the windpipe. The spirit is lost. And what a loss!

Wikipedia page on *Panipuri* says, and I don't believe this, that this slurpy snack exists since the *Mahabharata* times. Someone has pulled a fast one, though *Kauravas* slurping *Panipuri* may shift their collective impression on the Indian psyche. Imagine *Dushasana* asking for more mint chutney, *Dhritrashtra* nudging him to try the tamarind flavour.

The guy who invented this must have been inspired by the Rutherford 's model of atom which is mostly empty space. The empty space in this delectable snack is occupied by spicy water which is its soul. A soul which is a smorgasbord of conflicting, coexisting, different flavours. *Panipuri* is thus a delicious lesson in inclusivity. Perhaps the only dish to be served bite by bite. It is like a performance. The server is not an ordinary server...he keeps count of the *panipuris* gulped by each member of the group. He is quick to adjust flavour of which he gets immediate feedback. Who knows an MRI scan might reveal a larger hippocampus in their brains just like those of the London cabbies.

This devilish treat is tastiest when eaten as street food. I am confidently suspicious that an undiscovered bacterium thrives in the soul of *Panipuri*. It gives it the flavour that an upscale restaurant misses and tries to compensate by making hygiene its USP. One day in the future they will tell you that a bacterium found in the tamarind and mint water is what lends *Panipuri* its luscious flavour.

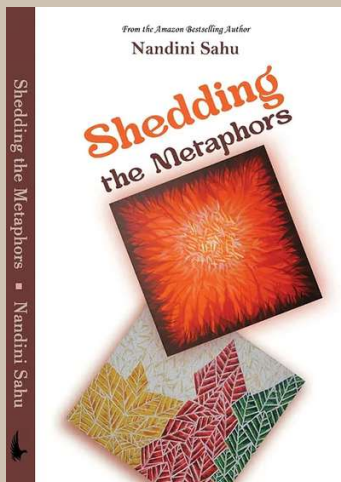
Some podcasters of Indian origin will add that this microbe is responsible for the robust Indian gut and how invitro

studies show that its live culture can provide immunity against the new lurking pathogens that are waiting to usher in another pandemic. Patents will be filed and an association of progressive *Panipuri* vendors will fight it with the support of a certain Baba who believes modern medicine to be the root of all evils.

The stereotype that depicts women eating *Panipuri* and gasping with excitement as the concoction conquers their mindfulness causing them to become gluttonous *Panipuri* gulping machines is overused by stand-up comics. This has a clear misogynistic origin. It appeals to men who imagine women to be eternally cheerful and mostly frivolous. Such men have trouble truly enjoying this dish. They suppress an involuntary poppysmic delight induced by each bite. This suppression causes them to become awkward and later angry. May be watching a man eat *Panipuri* can be a barometer of his hidden persona. Also, there should be world *Panipuri* day. A day that not just celebrates differences but also desires and savours them as a lip-smacking necessity.

REVIEWS

Book Review



Shedding the Metaphors

A review by Santosh Bakaya

[Read More](#)

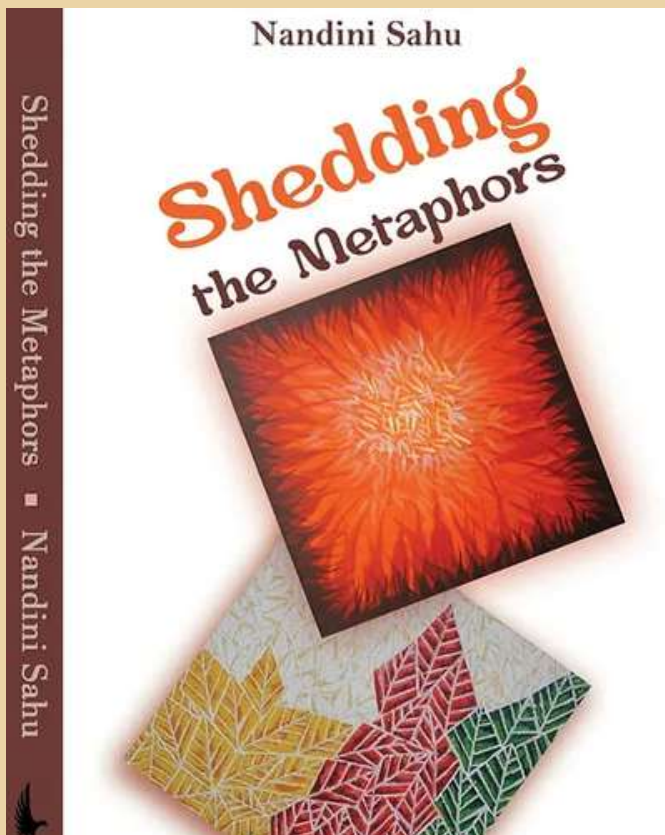
Film Review



All that Breathes

A Review by Ramandeep Mahal

[Read More](#)



Shedding the Metaphors

Dr. Nandini Sahu

Black Eagle, Books

Dublin, USA

A review by Santosh Bakaya

As I closed the book, *Shedding the Metaphors*, all the flesh and blood characters, complete with their warts, bruises, flaws, and gullibility, crafted so deftly by Nandini Sahu, snuggled next to me, whispering in their strong, individual voices, making me privy to their heartburn, their desires, ambitions, hopes, whimsicalities and idiosyncrasies. Be it the highly intellectual, effervescent Madhavi, of *A Very Different Story*, or Mami Pradhan of *The Wild Stream*, or Neelu of *Octopus*, or Lata of *The Scarlet Fly*—each character has been so ingeniously delineated that one starts thinking that one has known them all along.

The dialogues in all the stories have a very natural flow and, let me mention, even the monosyllables encapsulate a sea of roaring emotions.

The erudite preface itself offers the reader immense scope for self- introspection and looking anew at the multiple layers of a myriad- hued life, which leaves one highly enriched. Honestly, it is a preface which needs to be read over and over again, with its emphasis on inclusivity, universality, acceptance, reconciliation and persistence. Yes, I plead guilty to the charge of dwelling a little more on the preface, and that is because it is one of the most insightful and intellectually stimulating prefaces, I have had the opportunity of reading, lately. In her words:

“My creative fiction is my social-mobility-platform, with the agility of love’s touch, pungent through my mind’s wanton complexity. Precisely, my stories do not preach”.

Yes, in none of the stories does the writer sermonize. With an effortless dexterity, we find her weaving stories around themes, which the judgmental might crinkle their noses at, look the other way, or squirm with unease. We find her writing about friendships cultivated on dating apps, long distance relationships, and platonic love and about what is natural what is not. What struck me about her writing style, is a certain lyrical lucidity and an honesty that shines through all the stories.

When one finishes reading the book, one is drenched in a snug and warm epiphany, that it is the different shades of love that move the world. Her powerful words, have a stunning impact, as though hit with a tender hammer, the underlying allegories, and metaphors leaving a lingering impact, heightening and honing one's sensibilities. In the preface, she further says, that when life comes full circle, all metaphors are shed, putting an end to misapprehensions and misunderstandings.

"It is a new beginning, being inclusive, empathetic, universal, accepting, reconciling and persistent. Now one is complete, it's a commencement, at the same time it's the end. It's the mode of nirvana, abyss, all-inclusive, nihilistic, irrationally-rational, non-judgmental, romantic. It's difficult to contain all such finer metaphors of life in one living, thus, shedding the metaphors and shedding my Id, Ego and Superego, now I am the Brahma."

Through these twelve powerful stories Sahu has done precisely this –shed all the metaphors attached to her in the past, present and future, dealing a death blow to the universal so-called rightness of long entrenched negativities. The stories are marked by a heart-warming, spontaneous and seamless flow giving the reader immense food for thought.

A Very Different Story, the first story in this collection, is a poignant story of a virtual, long-distance friendship between two scholars, which remained veiled from the outside world, but infused a new vigor, rejuvenating two lost souls. I cannot stop myself from reproducing a few lines from the story:

Madhvi had qualities even she didn't know that she had. We were of the same age-group, but she was the mature one. She was someone with whom I could be as romantic as a Bollywood hero, as stupid, as insecure, and as good or bad as I wanted to be. There were no judgments passed. I wanted her to be my mistress in youth, friend in a mature age and nurse in my old age. I took personal care of every small detail of her life, but from 2000 kilometers away.

She had this tremendous capacity to hide her pain and smile, laugh all the time. She was actually two people. The one whom the world knew--the serious academic, creative writer, glamorous, practical, adamant, jovial with friends, helping and caring Prof. Madhvi. Then there was the other one – elemental, romantic, emotional, sensuous, true, honest, ready to capitulate and vulnerable, my Meeta.

The concluding lines of the story left me with limpid eyes.

Today I am far in the expanse, amid a cobalt stroke of sprays; in front of my eyes, a golden haze. I still hark back to you from a sky of molten gold.

This story and, the last- a memoir, *Being God's Wife*, touched me very deeply. It came straight from the heart of a devoted daughter, the concluding lines of which also left me with glistening eyes.

I have had a great life with your Baba. I have seen it all- being God's Wife.

By the time I finished reading the stories, I realized that Sahu has a sharp eye for detail, a keen sense of humour, a very tender manner of talking about the vulnerabilities of her characters, and that her prose has a lyrical cadence. Let me again quote from the Preface:

It is my empirical and experiential connection, which scrutinizes age, sex, race, class and colour to shelter the naked empirical evidences—talking about subjugation of women and nature as well as mental health of men and women and the jeopardy thereof. The characters, major or minor, ever created by me, fall sick, fall in love, have mood swings like Nature, suffer both physically and psychologically or accept death without fuss.

Alternative Masculinity, the second story in the collection, left me with an unending smile, and also food for thought. Savita's perennial concern about how to deal with every trivial matter of her husband's day to day existence, and

Harihar's irritating habits made me gnash my teeth at his sense of husbandly entitlement. *'To me, it looked as if poor Harihar was under a panoptic surveillance.'* This sentence evoked such a powerful imagery of a husband, forever under the critical, disapproving eye of his forever solicitous wife- the illiterate wife, behind the success of her academician husband.

Echoing in a lullaby, was another story which spoke to me in soft, tender whispers- of love, innocence and purity. *The Shadow of a Shadow*, deals with a very sensitive theme of an intimate friendship between two girls, Ragini and Sunita which has been very tenderly and commendably handled, dwelling at length on what is natural and what is unnatural. Are *'Stony dead eyes, chopped wings and blue-black bruises'* natural in a newly married girl? Is it natural for a middle-aged couple to live under the same roof for convenience, and carry on their own affairs? *"Such moral degradation? Such violation of the laws of nature! Other girls may get misguided. Unpardonable! Most unnatural!"* was the verdict of the hostel authorities of the university, when they came to know of this *'unnatural' friendship, this errant sexual behaviour, leaving in its wake two shattered hearts, two shadows and a 'wretched feeling as if they were in a bottomless pit.'*

This book is indeed highly recommended for every lover of short stories. The searing sincerity and the impassioned intensity with which hammer blows are dealt to conventional wisdom add to the stunning impact of the book. I can go on and on about the rest of the stories, but I want the readers to read this honest book and savor it.

All I can say is, that it is a must read for every bibliophile.

About the Author

Nandini Sahu

Prof. Nandini Sahu, the Amazon Bestselling Author(2022), is a major voice in contemporary Indian English literature. She has accomplished her doctorate in English literature under the guidance of Late Prof. Niranjan Mohanty, Prof. of English, Visva

Bharati, Santiniketan. She has been widely published in India, U.S.A, U.K., Africa, Italy, Australia and Pakistan. Apart from numerous other literary awards, she is a triple gold medalist in English literature; she has received the Gold Medal from the hon'ble Vice-President of India for her contributions to English Studies in India in the year 2019. She is the author and editor of twenty books, *The Other Voice*, *The, Recollection as Redemption*, *The Post-Modernist Delegation to English Language Teaching*, *The Post Colonial Space: Writing the Self and the Nation*, *Silver Poems on My Lips*, *Folklore and the Alternative Modernities (Vol.I)*, *Folklore and the Alternative Modernities (Vol. II)*, among others.

She is the Former Director, School of Foreign Languages and currently a Professor of English at Indira Gandhi National Open University [IGNOU], New Delhi, India. She is the Founder Editor of Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Language (IJLL), a bi-annual peer-reviewed journal in English. Professor Sahu has designed multiple academic programmes on Culture Studies, American Literature, Postcolonial Literatures, Children's Literature, Indian Folk Literature and Indian Philosophical Thoughts for IGNOU and many other universities. You can find her on www.kavinandini.blogspot.in www.nandinisahu.in





A Kinship with Birds: All That Breathes

By Dr. Ramandeep Mahal

All That Breathes by Shaunak Sen, is a documentary that catches one's eyes and leaves a strong impression on one's thoughts. *All That Breathes* successfully combines a verité-style (the actual recording of events and opinions) human study with stunning landscape photography. The camera shots include the litter darkened landscapes of Delhi. The garbage on the grounds is food to the local animals and scavengers. Rats scurry in and out of the frame as the traffic passes in the background. However, 'dirty' Delhi may be shown with garbage littered around; bugs drinking from the pool of water to pigs crossing the roads: The industrial world of Delhi has left a huge impact on the wildlife especially the birds.

Sen has shot the documentary marvellously. Sen's documentary is about two brothers Nadeem Shehzad and Mohammad Saud These kind, humble boys of New Delhi have reportedly treated over 20,000 wounded black kites over the course of the last twenty years. These majestic birds of prey are prone to falling from the sky due to the lack of visibility and poor air quality. The brothers bathe, tend, bandage and feed these birds in a dingy, claustrophobic basement. In one of the scenes the boys are grinding meat to feed the birds, but the machine has broken down in the blistering heat, the cash flow is slow and the basement space is cramped and one of the brothers remarks that he would die of a heart attack sooner or later. While the brothers occasionally enjoy themselves by playing indoor cricket, their work is a never-ending, generally thankless endeavor. We watch them do everything, from rescuing sick birds from filthy waterways to persuading butchers to give them inexpensive meat to grind up as feed; they also never seem to receive the funds they keep applying for. They dedicate themselves to a mission they started as children: safeguarding the bird of prey known as the black kite, together with their somewhat funny sidekick, Salik. Probably one of my favorite moments in the documentary is when Salik is sitting in a rickshaw, talking to his mother, and suddenly out pops a squirrel from his front shirt pocket. He plays with it for a good ten seconds and then the squirrel jumps back into his pocket.

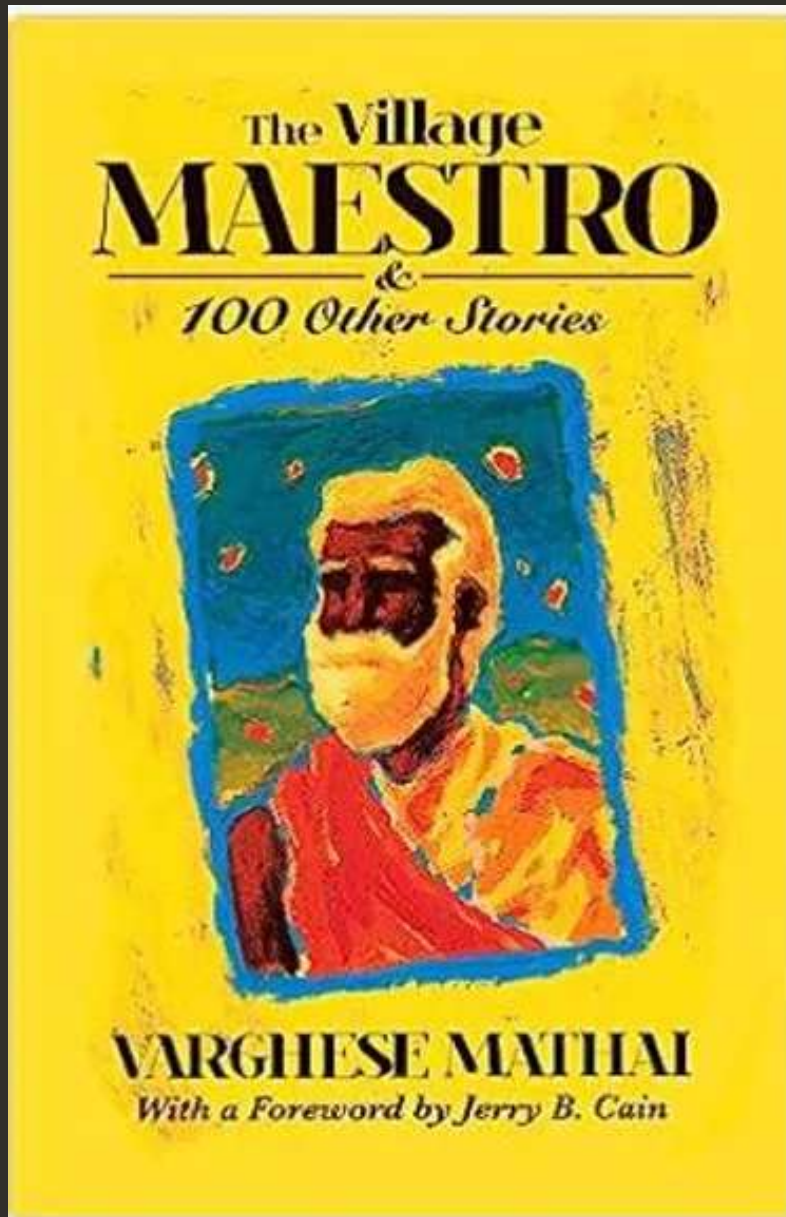
Sen follows the disagreements between Saud and Nadeem as they struggle to continue their excellent job in the face of

economic pressure and new laws targeting Muslims. The title is actually adopted from the boys' mothers' remark when she says '*har ek cheez saans leti hai*' (everything breathes). This is actually very touching. When you actually enter the boys' house it is actually cinematic and real. Both set out on a whim to preserve these birds because they had a faith-based idea that serving kites meant they would eat away at one's ill luck or sadness. But there aren't many birds in the sky anymore. Nadeem and Saud's story plays out against the background of riots in the Northeast Delhi. They now see the value of living for themselves. "*Humans tend to forget that they are also meat,*" Shehzad comments at one point. In a city that is self-destructive with religious hate and toxic politics, the brothers are insistent on looking after the voiceless. Their haphazard chats reveal a sense of hopelessness, but *All That Breathes* continues to heal these birds' wounds with perseverance and patience. Nevertheless, as Saud reveals, "*Delhi is a gaping wound, and we're just a Band-Aid on it.*" My eyes welled with tears at the tender compassion of the brothers for the vulnerable avian friends and at the cruelty of the world we live in. The ninety-two-minute documentary ends with Nadeem looking into the camera and saying '*Sunn pa raha hai mujhe?*' (Can you hear me?) We must all listen before it's too late.

Ben Bernhard, Riju Das, and Saumyananda Sahi's cinematography deserves praise. It is intriguing to see Shaunak Sen's films because of his quiet passion and bravery as a director. A number of prestigious accolades, including the Sundance and the Cannes, have been given to the documentary. It was nominated for the Best Documentary by the Oscars. This documentary is an absolute must-watch for the young—for students and everyone who believes in the magic of the movie camera—even after it has passed its prime. The traditional value of beauty and empathy are both taught in *All That Breathes*.

TALKING BOOKS

Talking Books



Publisher : Pippa Rann
Books (December 16, 2022)
Language : English
Hardcover : 296 pages

Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl, talks to Dr Varghese Mathai about 'The Village Maestro', his collection of micro stories

Talking Books



(Rachna Singh, Editor, The Wise Owl, talks to Dr Varghese Mathai about 'The Village Maestro', his collection of micro stories)

Thanks for talking to The Wise Owl, Dr Varghese.

RS: Please tell us what inspired you to put together your collection of micro stories, 'The Village Maestro.'

VM: Delighted to be here, Dr. Singh. Thank you for your kind invitation.

The idea of a class opener story struck me at my career start in an American classroom. The college that hired me had a practice of volunteer 'class devotions' which was a quick sharing of a word of spiritual inspiration. However, the students generally were not much upbeat about it. Noticing their apathy, I asked them if it would be okay if I did it for them every time we met. Oh, their joy and relief at what they heard were of no ordinary measure. So, from the next day onwards I started every class with a quick tale, told within 3-4 minutes. Initially they were a bit puzzled. As the event played over the next day and the next, the story was set to stay. Pretty soon I had students come to my office asking for the story of the previous day if by chance they missed the class. I worked at this institution for five years, and then moved on. Either necessity or beguiling opportunities baited me away to other institutions, but at every place the story stayed on as my vocational signature, as it were. The story became a kind of campus news. All students, even those I was not teaching, knew about it. Some shared the tales with their parents. "Is the man writing it all down somewhere?" a student's mother reportedly asked her. There were frequent queries to see if the stories would come out as a collection. At times, the alumni would call for a fresh telling of a story here or there, or for permission to use the stories in their own writings or presentations. So, in a word, this collection is a response to my primary audience's request.

RS: How did the idea of starting a class in college with a parable or a moral story come to you?

VM: I always knew that a well-told story is a power tool with a ready heart-connect. There is use and pleasure in a story. Whereas dry theory stresses out a learner, a parable or a pleasing fable wins grateful friends. It has an inherent ability to edify, without being preachy. I treasure my daily story like Israel gathering the daily manna in the desert. I can't recall a day I didn't have it. Sometimes multiple stories would be vying within me for their chance to be voiced. Every story that I would have the instinct to use, I have also found, would have a "spiritual quotient" in its "personality." I won't have to do anything to manifest it.

RS: As a child studying in a convent, I remember that our morning assembly always ended with a moral story. We had separate 'Moral science' classes where we were made to read and discuss parables or stories that came wrapped in a moral. As children we would absorb it all. But as we grow up & become worldly-wise (?), we unfortunately tend to become sceptical. Clearly your storytelling abilities would have been phenomenal to breach the barrier of scepticism and achieve a student fan-following with your micro-stories. Do tell us how you made your classes so special.

VM: You are blessed to have come through those houses of excellence that both taught you great stories and shaped your own stories of success in life.

I am certainly no star power storyteller. I have learned, however, that truth has a bold power of beauty in it, which lends

an automatic moral authority to its possessor. When that truth is couched in a simple tale, it rocks.

Good humans are always ready for yet another story, especially one told in crafted brevity. Also, no story exists that is not moral or spiritual. Humans are spiritual beings primarily, although regrettably we let our spiritual capacities fade out.

RS: As I browsed through your book, I realised that your stories encompass all cultures the world over and draw upon literature, science, economics, scriptures et al. Stories of King Solomon's temple, the Jewish brothers, Cicero's slave, Asimov's ego, the young czar, the village maestro, the Sudras in India, John Donne, all rub shoulders in your book. Our readers would be eager to know what was the main source of this fount of knowledge—were they stories told by word of mouth by family elders or was it extensive research and reading on your part that led you to these nuggets?

VM: Good question. You have met many of the denizens of my tales. Thank you very much! I am always gathering narrative material with inspirational pulse. I spot it in readings, conversations with people of sharp insight or rich life experience, and certainly of spiritual intelligence. Spiritual people say things that others can't, and they sound simple, yet original. When something strikes me as too good to let go, I make a note of it, especially when it could lead to the birthing of a story. Invariably, the quick story also tends to come with its own simple, or even pithy, core lesson, a moral thesis, if you will.

RS: Each story in your collection offers a nugget of wisdom. In fact, the more spiritually inclined reader might like to begin the day with one such story. What was the idea or value you looked for specifically when picking a story for your book?

VM: Fantastic! I have had some readers already write to me that they are going to read the book over as a meditation cycle of a parable a day. A reviewer wrote that the book should go bannered, "teachable lessons and preachable parables." The "nugget" that you speak of is the soul of the story. It is not mine at all. It lives in the story's spiritual core. It may take a brief service of natal care for its public showing. The prime value I look for in the story is the soul's assent from within, saying something like, "Ah, I needed to hear that, thank you!"

RS: We have been fortunate enough to grow up with RK Narayan's Under the Banyan tree & The Malgudi Days and the characters of Nambi and Swami. You have alluded to the character of Nambi in your introduction. Do tell us a little about how and why the character of Nambi influenced you as a storyteller. As the omnipresent narrator in your book, do you see yourself as Nambi or an avatar of the village maestro or perhaps a mix of both?

VM: I suppose you have sensed my tender sentiments toward both men. The common ground the two share, as Narayan speaks of himself elsewhere autobiographically, is their "non-economic" manner of living. The story is Nambi's only asset in life. In the abortive delivery of his final nightly tale Nambi performs his tragic finale. The Maestro belongs to a loftier world. He cannot be bribed or bullied. His music is the breath of life that never dies. Dispossessed of his song, the Maestro will die, like Nambi. I'm not sure how my own journey will end, but when the time comes, I would be content to end it with one more tale for a cordial crowd under my own banyan tree.

RS: My favourite stories among your collection are 'The Village Maestro' & 'A Pair of Legs.' Which stories did you enjoy putting together most, in terms of the moral values they expound and the framework of the story they tell?

VM: Thank you! Your pick of the Maestro is a great vote for the book's title. "A Pair of Legs" is an image that can only come from a gifted, spiritual intellect like John Donne's. For me, every tale was a pleasure to construct, some from memory and some from spot impressions. The critical test was whether or not the tale had your "nugget" in it that none can argue with. "The Trees of Belize," for instance, was simple yet profound as its entire projection occurred in two

minutes—two trees, the POISON TREE and the MEDICINE TREE standing fifty feet apart, the sting of evil in the former getting undone by the provision of healing in the latter. What better way can there be to show that for every malady, there is a remedy in this universe? Or if you would like to go a bit deeper, if a forbidden tree brought death to the world as Milton sings, didn't, as a result, "one greater Man [also] restore us, and regain the blissful seat"?

RS: I believe you are working on a translation study of the works of poet K V Simon of South India called 'the Milton of India.' Please tell us a little about what made you pick up this project. When is your translation likely to hit the bookstores?

VM: K. V. Simon is a very learned, 20th century poet and reformer of Miltonic caliber. Whatever Milton has done in England in Literature and Faith, Simon did in Kerala, his home state in India. Like Milton, he was a polyglot, who knew at least twelve languages. At the age of 7 he composed samasyas or poetic riddles, which only seasoned poets could have done. At 13 Simon became a licensed teacher. He composed music and was a talented vocalist. In his early twenties he had the first edition of 250 hymns in over 70 ragas published, now appearing in classical hymnals across denominations. Newspaper baron K. C. Mammen Mappilai of Malayala Manorama offered him any position of his choosing with Manorama, but Simon declined the offer because his mission was spiritual. Mammen Mappilai requested Simon to write a singable verse narrative of a book of the Bible just as Ezhuthachen, the Father of Malayalam, has done with the Ramayana. Within twelve months Simon completed his 12,000-line VEDAVIHARAM, a verse rendition of the fifty chapters of the Book of Genesis in fourteen Dravidian meters. The work stands as a ready peer to Milton's Paradise Lost.

In oratory, Simon was unexcelled; he could disarm any opponent by his learning, yet in humility, as a teacher to thousands. Simon stilled the interreligious hostilities of his era through dialogue and debate. He founded knowledge magazines which became the official voice of his own Reformation movement called Viyojitha [nonconformist] in Kerala where Christianity had existed from AD 52 onwards. In his public life of four decades from WW I through WW II Simon addressed massive gatherings just about every day. He wrote thirty books of prose and thousands of articles for a range of publications. His home was a gurukula where learners of all ages lived as one household, all gratis.

As a literary man, Simon is in the ranks of the great laureates. As a spiritual man, he was a Reformer who did for Kerala no less than what Luther or Wesley did for their nations. I felt that a country grave in South India should not obscure such a poet-prophet to the non-Malayalee world. Yes, I am pleased to tell you that Bloomsbury Publishing is set to release MAHAKAVI K. V. SIMON: THE MILTON OF THE EAST in October 2023. The book offers a biography of Simon, a quick overview of the Malayalam language in which Simon wrote, and translations of his touchstone texts.

RS: In a day and age when books and stories mostly dwell upon dark themes of dysfunction, frustration, black sorrow and anger, it must have taken courage for you to walk a different path. Where did you get this courage of conviction? What advice would you give budding writers?

VM: Your comment on the times and trends is beyond contest. I have often wondered why we would want to espouse the damning power of the dark when the healing virtue of light is for us to own. All I can say, or perhaps need to, is that it is a matter of election. Our choices end up shaping us.

RS: Thank you so much Dr Varghese for taking time out to talk about your book. We wish you the best in all your literary endeavours and hope that you make the world a better and wiser place with your tales of sagacity and wisdom.

VM: So glad that the Village Maestro made this meeting possible. Thank you for your kind invitation and our time together. My warm regards to The Wise Owl readers.

About Dr Varghese Mathai



Dr Varghese Mathai is a successful professor and program leader; curricula and course writer for degree, graduate and customized programs; designed and directed Honors and Study Abroad programs; trained and mentored faculty through Teaching & Learning Centers; taught courses in British Poetry, Writing, Literature of Spirituality, and World Literature; current focus on Translation Literature, specifically the writings of South India's Malayalam Poet K.V. Simon and his contemporaries..

Dr Varghese has authored *The Malabar Mandate: A Life of Volbrecht Nagel*. GLS, 2013, *The Malabar Mandate: A Life of Volbrecht Nagel*. Second Edition. Zurich: ICHE, 2015 & *The Village Maestro and One Hundred Other Stories*. Cambridge, UK: Pippa Rann Books & Media, 2022. His forthcoming book is *Mahakavi K. V. Simon: The Milton of the East*. London: Bloomsbury, 2023

About Rachna Singh



A doctorate in English literature and a former bureaucrat, **Rachna Singh** has authored *Penny Panache* (2016) *Myriad Musings* (2016) *Financial Felicity* (2017) & *The Bitcoin Saga: A Mixed Montage* (2019). She writes regularly for National Dailies and has also been reviewing books for the *The Tribune* for more than a decade. She runs a YouTube Channel, *Kuch Tum Kaho Kuch Hum Kahein*, which brings to the viewers poetry of established poets of Hindi & Urdu. She loves music and is learning to play the piano.

VISUAL ARTS



Painting

Limited Edition Replay:
Tom Verano

[Read More](#)



Seasonal Snippets by Debbie Strange

Digital Collage work

[Read More](#)

Limited Edition Replay
Tom Verano





Artist Speak

For upcoming artists, like me, all I can say is, just do what makes you feel like yourself. Enhance and develop what God has given you. And don't stop creating. You'll never know how far can your gift and talent can bring you in the future.

An extract from an interview with Tom Verano, featured in the Tulip Edition (April 2022) of The Wise Owl.

Seasonal Snippets by Debbie Strange

Every season , be it spring, summer , winter or autumn, has its own beauty and charm. Debbie Strange puts together seasonal snippets that showcases the beauty of each season.

Artist Statement: The Seasonal Snippets series features digital collage work with various embellishments.



Spring Collage by Debbie Strange



Summer Collage by Debbie Strange

Seasonal Snippets by Debbie Strange



Autumn Collage by Debbie Strange

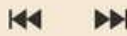


Winter Collage by Debbie Strange

PODCASTS



Robert Witmer
Four Poems with Robert Witmer
Four Poems



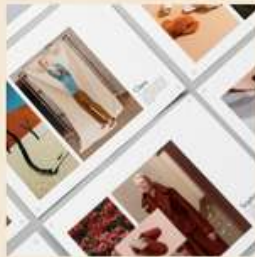
00:00 / 03:27



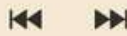
Vineetha Mokkil
Did You Know by Vineetha Mokkil-
Did You Know?



00:00 / 01:14



Kathylynne Somerville
Out Of Fashion by Kathylynner Somerville
Out of Fashion



00:00 / 03:11



NEW SEGMENT

To make The Wise Owl more dynamic, we have introduced The Daily Verse & The Weekly Yarns, segments where we will upload poetry all days of the week & stories/flash fiction/anecdotes & musings on a weekly basis. Just send in your submissions to editor@thewiseowl.art



THE DAILY VERSE

[Read More](#)

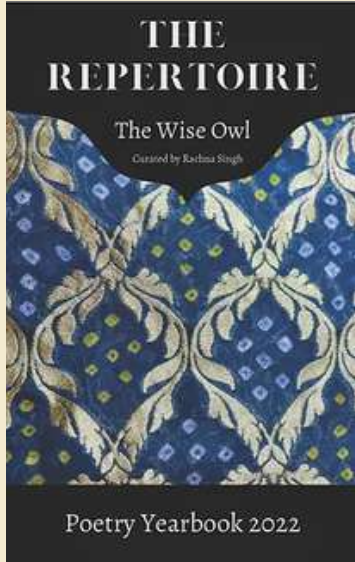


THE WEEKLY YARNS

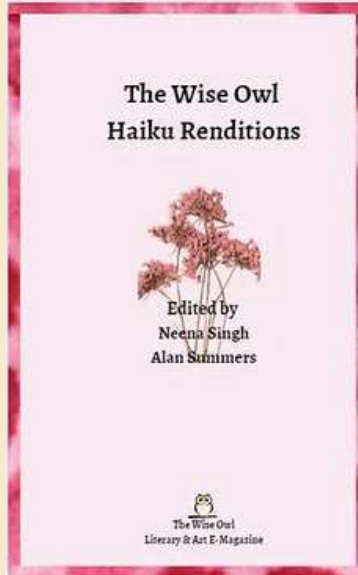
[Read More](#)

THE WISE OWL PUBLICATIONS

BOOKS



Print Version (January 2023)



E-book (January 2023)



E-book (March 2023)

[Read More](#)

E-MAGAZINES



The Wise Owl
PEACOCK & GOLD
Online Magazine



[Read More](#)

BIOGRAPHIES

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

Mykyta Ryzhykh is a poet from Ukraine. The poet's poems have been published in magazines and on the portals Soloneba, Littsentr, in the Ukrainian Literary Gazette, Bukovynsky Journal, in Stone Poetry Journal (USA), Tipton Poetry Journal (USA), divot poetry journal (USA), Alternate Route (07/2022, USA), dyst journal (USA), Better Than Starbucks Poetry & Fiction Journal (USA), Allegro Poetry Magazine (USA), Littoral Press (UK).

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.

The poems of **Pris Campbell** have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. The Small Press has published twelve collections of her poetry. All In, with Scott Owens, comes out June 2023.

Jyothsna's poems have previously appeared in The Hopper, Quail Bell, Shotglass and others. Her first poetry collection Ceramic Evening was out in 2016. Currently she is teaching English Literature at ARSD College (University of Delhi), India. she blogs at phanija.wordpress.com

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.

George Freek is a poet/playwright living in Illinois. His poems appear in numerous Poetry Journals and Reviews. His poem "Written At Blue Lake" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His plays are published by Playscripts; Blue Moon Plays and Off The Wall Plays. George Freek's poem 'Enigmatic Variations' is currently nominated for Best of the Net. His poem "Night Thoughts" is also nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His collection is (still) published by Red Wolf Editions.

Sekhar Banerjee is a Pushcart Award and Best of the Net nominated poet. The Fern-gatherers' Association (Red River, 2021) is his latest collection of poems. He has been published in Stand Magazine, Indian Literature, The Bitter Oleander, Ink Sweat and Tears, The Lake, Better Than Starbucks, Muse India, The Bangalore Review, Kitaab, Thimble Literary Magazine, Madras Courier, Outlook, The Wire and elsewhere. He has a monograph of an Indo-Nepal border tribe to his credit. He lives in Kolkata, India.

Deby Cedars was diagnosed with a mental illness. She uses creative writing of both short stories and poetry as one of her many forms of therapy. She now lives a stable happy life with her husband in Florida, where she enjoys the many beaches and amusement parks. Her work has been published in Writing in a Woman's Voice, poetryformentalillness.com, as well as Highland Park Poetry. You may have seen her poems & short stories in various editions of The Wise Owl.

Robert Witmer has resided in Japan for the past 45 years. Now an emeritus professor, he has had the opportunity to teach courses in poetry and creative writing not only at his home university in Tokyo but also in India. His poems and prose poetry have appeared in many print and online journals and books. His first book of poetry, a collection of haiku titled *Finding a Way*, was published in 2016. A second book of poetry, titled *Serendipity*, was published earlier this year (2023). An author's page for Robert Witmer can be found at both the Poets & Writers and AuthorsDen websites.

Vineetha Mokkil is the author of the short story collection *A Happy Place and other stories* (HarperCollins). Her fiction has appeared in Jellyfish Review, Fictive Dream, The Bombay Review, Asian Cha, Quarterly Literary Review Singapore, the Santa Fe Writers' Project Journal and in The Best Asian Short Stories 2018 (Kitaab, Singapore) and the Punch Magazine Anthology of New Writing (Niyogi Books, Delhi). She was shortlisted for the Bath Flash Fiction Award and was a nominee for Best Small Fictions 2019.

Sherin Mary Zacharia a young poet of 21 expresses herself through her verses. She loves to write about nature most but some of her poems are on topics like mental illness and disability. She is a regular blogger (www.musingsofsher.in) and often contributes to English anthologies. She has received several awards and recognitions latest being the selection of her poem by the United Nations as part of observing World Autism Awareness Day 2023. A self-learner she likes to read, watch visual lessons and travel. Being a non speaking autistic she lets her poetry be her voice. Moonlight is her collection of poems and short prose(2017). She is a co author of Talking Fingers(2022) and Discourses on Disability (2021) Sherin is from Kochi , Kerala, India where she lives with her parents, younger sister and pet cat.

Kathlynn Somerville loves writing and can't get enough of it. With a background in screenwriting, and a foreground in fiction, she has just begun to be published, and is smiling, stoked about it. Originally from Australia, she now lives in Los Angeles, and is hard at work on her first novel.

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.

Doug Jacquier has lived in many places across Australia, including regional and remote communities, and has travelled extensively overseas. His poems and stories have been published in Australia, the US, the UK and Canada. He blogs at [Six Crooked Highways \(wordpress.com\)](http://SixCrookedHighways.wordpress.com)

Brent Bosworth is a writer focusing on horror stories. He's a new writer with publications through HellBound Books, and Horror Sleaze Trash. He can be found on twitter @brentbosworth_

Leroy B. Vaughn's short stories, fiction and non fiction have been published in print, ezines, anthologies and podcasts. He is retired and lives in Arizona, USA.

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

Dr Santosh Bakaya, award winning poet, novelist, biographer, TEDx Speaker, acclaimed for her poetic biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Ballad of Bapu, has authored twenty three books encompass multiple genres. Reuel International Awardee [Poetry, 2014], Setu International Awardee for 'stellar contribution to world literature', 2018 [Pittsburgh, USA], WE EUNICE DE SOUZA [WE Literary Community, 2023], for 'rich and diverse contribution to Poetry, literature and Learning', she runs a very popular column, Morning Meanderings [Learning and Creativity. Com.] Her collaborative e-books [Blue Pencil] Vodka by the Volga [With Dr. Ampat Koshy, 2020, From Princep Ghat to Peer Panjal [With Gopal Lahiri, 2021] are # 1 Amazon bestsellers. Recently published: What is the Meter of the Dictionary? [AuthorsPress. 2022] The Catnama [With Dr. Sunil Sharma, AuthorsPress, 2023] For Better or Verse [With Ramendra Kumar and Dr. Ampat Koshy, AuthorsPress, 2023]

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.

Debbie Strange (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet, visual artist, and photographer whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world, to others, and to herself. Thousands of Debbie's poems and artworks have been published worldwide. Her most recent book, *The Language of Loss: Haiku & Tanka Conversations*, won the Sable Books 2019 International Women's Haiku Contest, and Haiku Canada's 2022 Marianne Bluger Chapbook Award. Debbie's haiku collection, *Random Blue Sparks*, was the winner of the 2020 Snapshot Press Book Award, and is forthcoming in 2023. Please visit her publications archive for further information at <https://debbiemstrange.blogspot.com/>



THE WISE OWL



Russet & Gold

ONLINE MAGAZINE



The Wise Owl
Literary. Creative. Aesthetic.

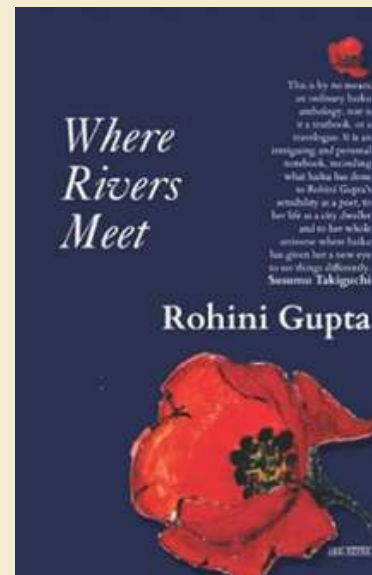
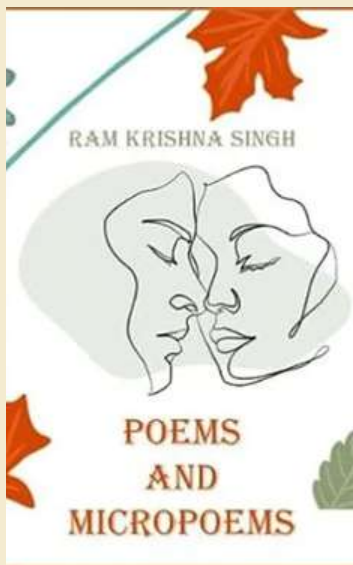
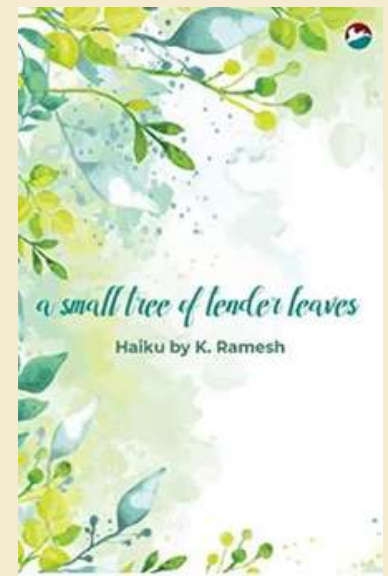
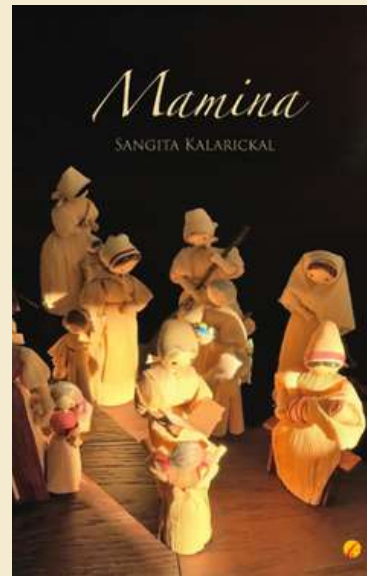
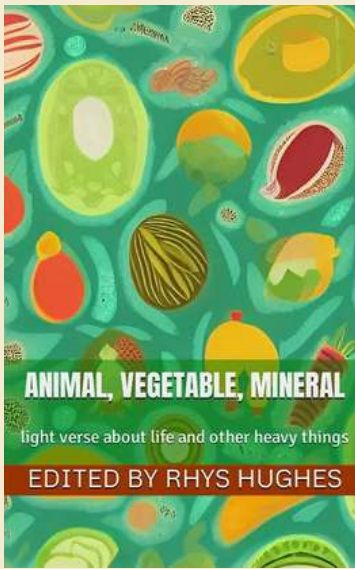
www.thewiseowl.art

analyt bad book exposition ob profes recommendation W
THE BOOK REVIEWS SUPPLEMENT review
magazine quality
literary product write

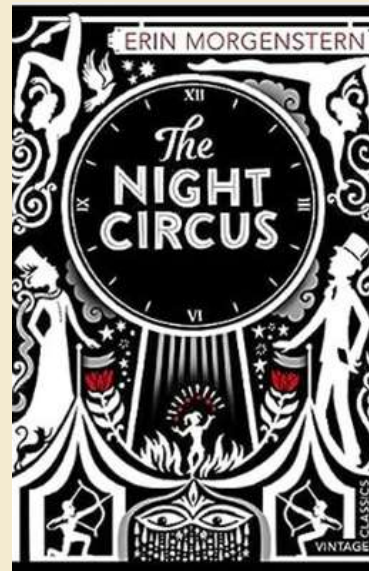
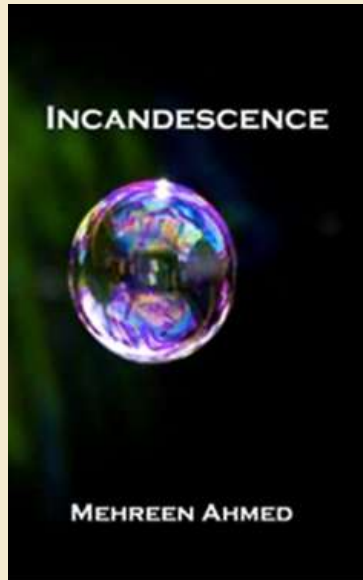
In Celebration of Book Lovers day that falls on 9th Aug 2023

Click image to read review

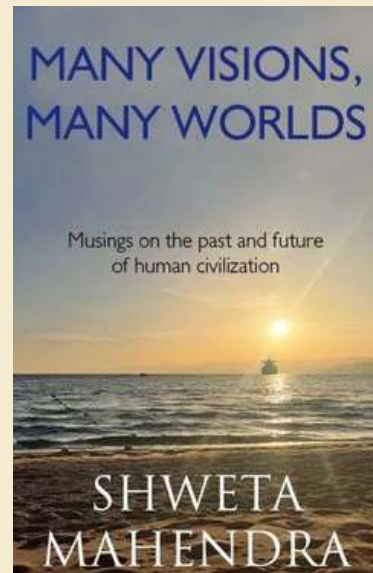
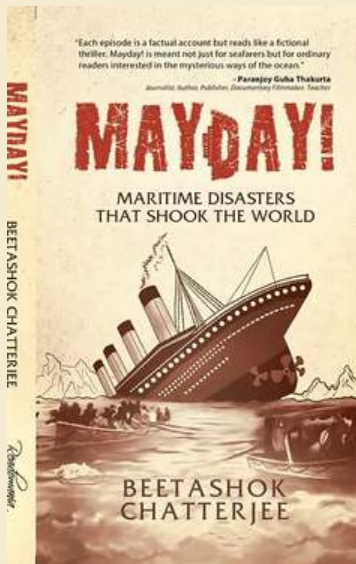
POETRY



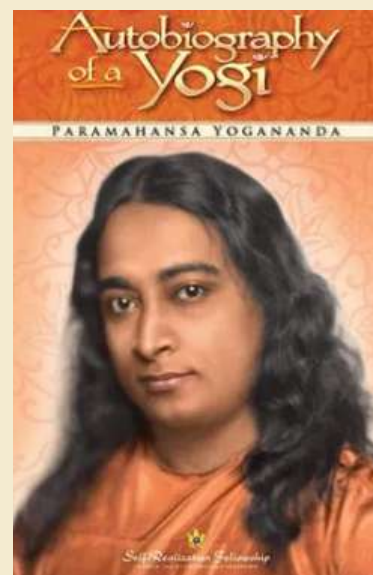
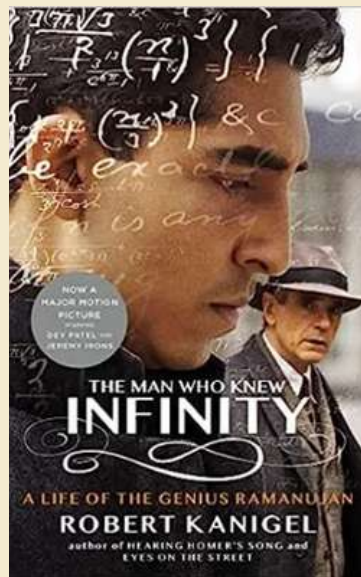
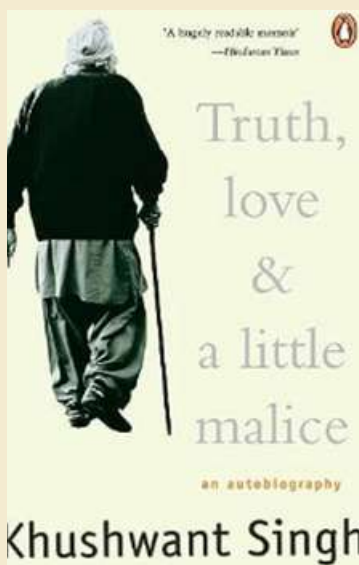
FICTION

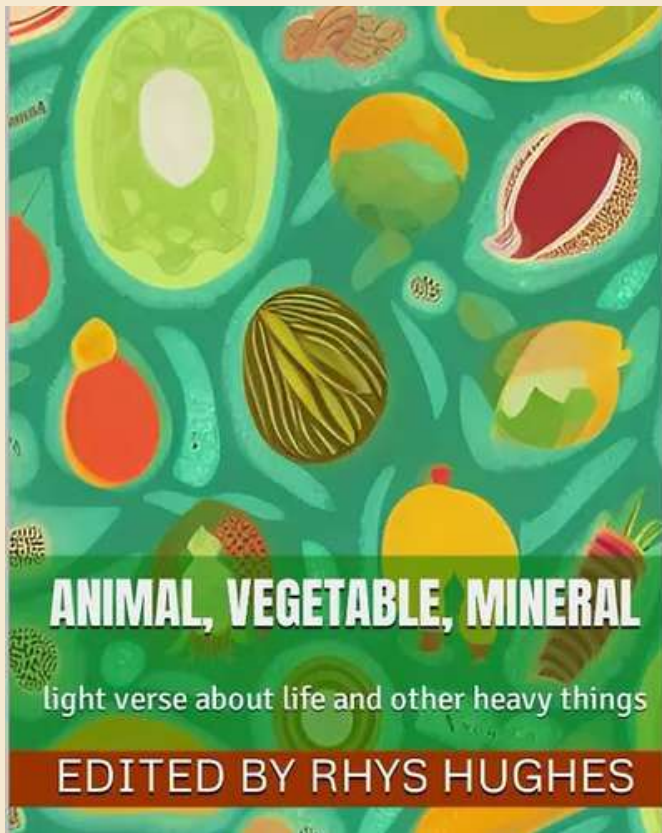


PROSE



OLD CLASSICS





**Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Light Verse
about Life and other Heavy Things**

Editor: Rhys Hughes

Gibbon Moon Books, Bangalore, India, 2023

A cornucopia of comedy, absurdism, paradox, satire, whimsy and irony
A Review by Santosh Bakaya

As Writing humour is pretty serious business- and, seriously speaking, I have been creating humour since the day I started staggering around on toddler's feet. My family believes that I lost part of my brain when I fell from the neem tree as a kid, in our lawn in the University Campus, Jaipur. So, whenever I glimpse humour in the vicinity, I run towards it in helter-skelter haste.

This delectable anthology is a compilation of tongue-in-cheek humorous poems and prose pieces, brimming with trenchant wit, and puns which make the reader laugh endlessly. There are also some pieces with a note of poignancy. We find animals, plants and minerals existing cheek by jowl, with a phlegmatic equanimity, while established and new voices, satirize and lampoon them.

In the book's foreword, tongue firmly wedged in cheek, editor Rhys Hughes says:

"Poetry is a comfort, often, but I don't know why this should be. Animals and plants are comforting too, and even minerals can soothe anxiety. Not all animals, plants and minerals. A cobra in the bed is no fun, nor is a cactus in the bath, nor a landslide in the garden, unless you are peculiar, which you may well be. This is not for me to judge. Most of the continents are represented here by at least one contributor. However, no poems were received from Antarctica and that's a shame. It would have been lovely to have included a poem from that continent. Especially, if it was a poem about penguins written by a penguin and rejected by Penguin Random House in a random house. But are any houses really random? I tend to regard that possibility as slim."

He further adds:

"Snakes are also slim, so are reeds, but hippos and the minds of good people are broad. I hope you are one of those broad-minded folks and will be indulgent of the whimsy you encounter in the following pages ..."

In the book, there is a costumed phoney masquerading as an attacking yeti, a grandmother knitting with porcupine quills, a *Sweet Sabre-Toothed tiger*, [Hughes] there is the *Funeral of a Hen* [Ryhor Cisiecki] *Mushroom Meditations* [Samantha Underhill], Rebecca Lowe has many poems here, but *Raining Cats and Dogs*, takes the cake. This ingenious take on the phrase 'raining cats and dogs', where we have a 'dripping Chihuahua', 'bedraggled beagles, doused dachshunds and deluged Dalmatians', 'is absolutely hilarious.'

Mitali Chakravarty's limericks\ poems tickle the funny bone. Here is one:

*Pigs popping popcorns in a party,
Fly with wings singing 'Me Hearty'.
But when they loom
Lighted by the moon,
Their shadows can frighten even Moriarty.*

But *Camels in Cambodia* left me teary eyed. Tim Newton Anderson who also has many poems here, writes, in *The Inhuman Race*:

*It's a truth acknowledged Universal
A monster needs a bride
Your first creation's a rehearsal
A test of Faustian pride
When Dracula uses his vampire bat
The umpire guards the wicket
But if he gets it in the neck
You know that's just not cricket*

Oh, Albatross! [Vandana Kumar], unlike the others, has a somber tone. Her albatross is different from that of the albatross of *The Ancient Mariner* of Coleridge. It can teach us how to:

*revive the art of
loving
Little by Little
I want to spend my Sabbath day
Resting my shoulders
On your gigantic wings*

Suchita Parikh-Mundul's four equally poignant and profound metaphorical poems stir the soul, making one introspect. '*Onions don't care to be Peeled*', left a lingering impact:

*It's difficult to see past
the tears
contra- inflicted, but
once
our deed is done,
and last words are pronounced,
the guillotine is
cleared*

*of its victim, and the
world
begins to sound
with protest songs
in memory of its spirit.*

Maithreyi Karnoor in her delightful poem, *Mango Pulp Fiction* says,

*Like vanquished kings and
squished nothings
The alphonsos here, have
no show
Without the ring of the
hype and bling*

Joji Mathew has many poems in the book. In one he is being plagued by a cockroach ghost, in another, he is reciting poetry to 'Soul-Folks of my Pasture'. You read on, enthralled by the lyrical cadence, and then the last lines hit you hard. I am still reeling from that poetic punch, hidden under fleecy words:

*Until that day, I had never
imagined
common flocks could be
cajoled into silence, by readings of poetry.*

Boris Glikman's many pieces intrigued me. I found the wordplay in the prose and verse version of *The Be[e]jing of a Tyger*, where he maintains that the tiger is actually a configuration of bees, 'a pun of evolution,' innovatively captivating.

*Eeny meeny, miny moe
catch a tiger by the toe.
Shake him hard
and make him hiss.
This reveals he is made of bees.[Verse version] .*

Anita Nahal's three pieces are all thought provoking. *Smooth Operators*, has an edge of the seat feel, where animals, humans and spaceships all seem to be watching everyone else, which ends with the moot question, "Who is watching whom?"

I have yet to come across a more prolific wordsmith than Rhys Hughes, who, besides being the editor, has also contributed many pieces to this anthology. His panache for poker-faced punning sparkles through his words. In *Gustave the Bear*, he writes:

*He was a liquid Grizzly
and he roared across the land
Carving channels in the sand
as he hastened to the sea.
Gustave was his name and painstakingly
you may find he wrote a novel in his mind
that stood the test of time.
Gustave Flow Bear!*

[We, of course know, that he is talking of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert and his controversial novel *Madame Bovary!*]

Just the other day, someone asked me, *"Do you ever sleep? You seem to be forever writing!"* "Yes, I do have my thirty winks", I told him, without batting an eyelid. But then I came across Rhys Hughes. This wordsmith never sleeps. He is forever making words dance to his tunes. I slunk away in inferiority at his pace, and vigor. Every book of his is a delightful read, and every piece in this multiple-author anthology is exquisite too. Compiling and editing such an anthology is no easy task, but he has done it commendably well.

Hughes writes elsewhere, *"Many, many years ago, when I was about 15 years old, I watched a rider on a rollercoaster accidentally drop an ice cream cone at the highest point of the ride and it landed on the bald head of a man passing far below and stuck upside down on his shiny pate like a unicorn horn with a raspberry ripple filling. Forty years later I still occasionally laugh about this."*

Something tells me that, following Wordsworth, *'oft when on my couch I lie, in vacant or in pensive mood'*, many years hence, I will still burst out laughing, remembering these tales and verses.

Hughes also says:

"Literature is a continent. I have decided to mostly make my home in one small corner of this landmass, on the peninsula where comedy, absurdism, paradox, satire, whimsy and irony are the geographical features..."

So, this anthology is a cornucopia of' comedy, absurdism, paradox, satire, whimsy and irony.

I plead guilty to the charge of sneaking an audacious peek into something that he wrote on his timeline,

"Come here, mosquito. Don't you know this is a Buddhist country? I won't hurt you. I just want to chat, find out something about you. We humans don't take the time to talk to our buzzing insectoid comrades. Come on, just a little closer. Don't be so suspicious.... WHAM! Got you, bloodsucker! Fell for it, didn't you, you long-nosed crepuscular twit! Yeah, splattered now, pal. Squashed to buggery, you jumped up dangly-legged micro-vamp..."

Maybe, we should be on the lookout for another whimsical solo book, where a mosquito is the protagonist!

You never know with writers like Rhys Hughes!

About the Author

Rhys Hughes

Rhys Hughes is an incredibly prolific Welsh writer of speculative fiction, and comedy, who has a panache for punning, paradox, intriguing word-play and innovative ideas. He had embarked on the ambitious project of writing a story cycle consisting of exactly 1000 linked tales, and I think he has completed it. His writings sparkle with the profound, the lighthearted, the spontaneous, the precise and the whimsical.

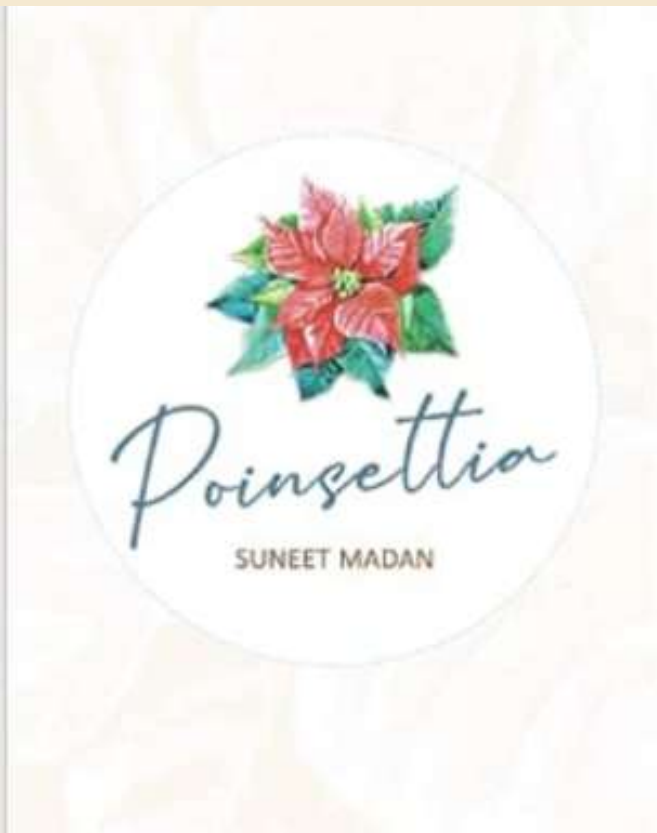




About the Reviewer

Santosh Bakaya

Santosh Bakaya is a Ph.D., a poet, essayist, novelist, biographer, Tedx speaker and has authored as many as twenty-three books across different genres. She is the Winner of Reuel International Award for poetry [2014] and Setu Award for her stellar contribution to world literature [2018]. She has been acclaimed for her poetic biography of Mahatma Gandhi, Ballad of Bapu. Her biography on Martin Luther King Jr. Only in Darkness can you see the Stars has also been critically acclaimed. Her latest book is Runcible Spoons and Pea-green Boats. She pens a weekly column called Morning Meanderings in Learning and Creativity. Com.



Poinsettia

By Suneet Madan

Bluerose Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

February 2023

A complex tapestry of thought and emotion

A Review by Rachna Singh

Last year, sometime in August, our Editorial team was sifting through poetry submissions for our forthcoming edition of *The Wise Owl*, when we came across a poem that was a beautiful blend of emotion, thought and lyricism. It was 'Autumnal Manoeuvre' by Suneet Madan. We were, of course, more than happy to feature it in our poetry segment. So, when her recently released poetry collection 'Poinsettia' came to us for review, I decided to go through it, hoping for more of the beautiful lyricism, I had encountered in her earlier poem. And I was certainly not disappointed. It had all the lyrical beauty twined with deep thought and touching emotion that I could hope for.

Poinsettia, a plant associated with the season of Christmas cheer, is not what it seems. The bright red leaves that look like a whorl of flowers, that brighten up a cold December winter, turn into green leaves, come summer. The poet admits that this juxtaposition of what seems and what is, was the inspiration behind the poems and the title. As we turn the pages of this collection of 60 poems, we are surprised by a sense of the unexpected at every turn.

Madan's collection is divided into 2 sections- duplets and free verse. And it was the 'duplets' that intrigued and attracted me the most. They create and attribute different nuances and meanings to an image or a phrase and also leave the reader space to create his own silo of symbolism. As we absorb the meaning of the words woven into a poem, we are also inundated with varied images and slowly, the seemingly simple duplets appear as multi layered, complex tapestries of thought and emotion. I, for one, enjoyed peeling the duplets layer by layer, to enjoy the images and thoughts they engendered, which insidiously made their way to my emotional and intellectual core. *Enigma Lost* and *The First Light* are some of the poems which evoked a host of images that I savored and dwelt upon in my moments of leisure. So, *Enigma Lost* dwells upon rain in its myriad avatars- the rain we associate with 'savory fries', the 'ruthless rain', 'the inimical rain' et al. *First Light* also evokes a cascade of images- 'Kaleidoscopic hues' and 'tangerine slivers' of a rosy freshly-minted morning, 'tinkling bells' of prayers, 'clicking beads' of monks with their rosaries. *Borrowed Smiles* is another

duplet which brings to mind the idea of forced smiles, smiles with a wealth of pain and suffering behind their apparently cheerful facades, be it those of a 'lonesome soldier' caught in 'perennial snow' with 'limited supplies' or of the 'shattered families' that were singed and ravaged by the pandemic or the grimace-like-smiles of a poverty-stricken populace:

Humble dwelling
Occasional meals
Insufficient clothing,
Borrowed smiles.

Digital Lives was another poem that caught and held my attention with its pithy take on the contemporary world caught in the fetters of a digital, AI world with its fake networks and dismal relationships engendered by social media:

Wired dwellings
Temporary affiliations
Faltering relationships
Cellular manacles

Although my favourite was the duplet segment, the free Verse segment also has some philosophical nuggets like 'Smothering Silence' which whips up a montage of loneliness and internal monologue or 'Transcendental Escapade' which paints the picture of a seeker 'surrendering to the elements' in a revelatory journey that entails 'disentanglements.' 'The Incandescent Moon' 'kindling coquettishness' and 'releasing creativity' also enraptures and attracts.

Madan's *Poinsettia* offers a beautiful whorl of well-crafted poetry that encompasses different themes and leaves the reader happily absorbed in peeling away the varied transcendental layers to reach the nub of its philosophical core.

About the Poet

Suneet Madan

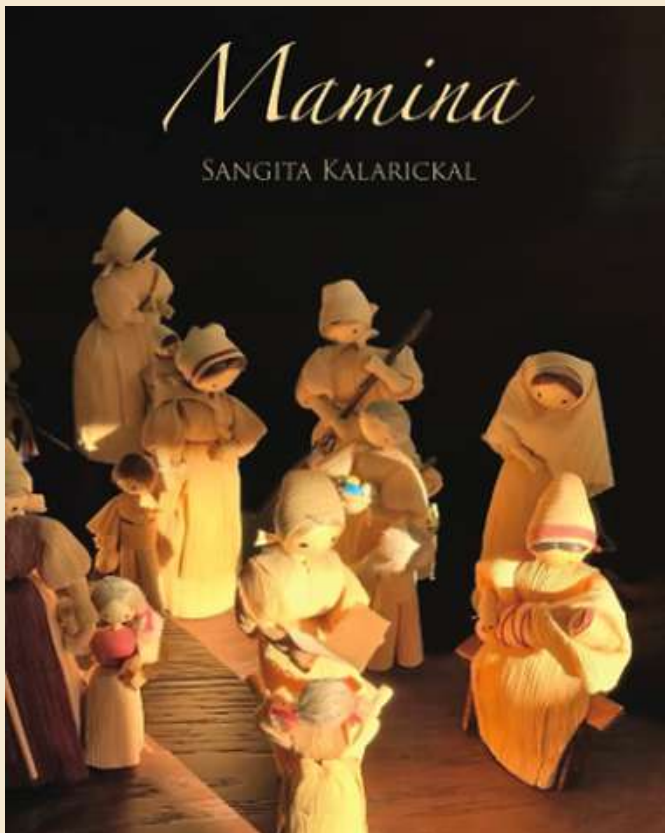
Suneet Madan exemplifies creative diversity. Her work as a poet, artist and storyteller titillates the audience on many sensory levels, inspiring them to celebrate the essence of life in different ways. Her poetry is special and Suneet conveys the profoundly deeper meaning of life and living to her reader. Suneet's writing has found its way into many an anthology and online platforms. Her on-stage poetry recitals leave the audience enthralled and mesmerized. Over the years, Suneet has developed her very own unique style of poetry of which you will get a glimpse in this book. Numerous literary groups have acknowledged her talent by showering her with recognition and awards.



About the Reviewer

Rachna Singh

A doctorate in English literature and a former bureaucrat, **Rachna Singh** has authored *Penny Panache* (2016) *Myriad Musings* (2016) *Financial Felicity* (2017) & *The Bitcoin Saga: A Mixed Montage* (2019). She writes regularly for National Dailies and has also been reviewing books for the *The Tribune* for more than a decade. She runs a YouTube Channel, *Kuch Tum Kaho Kuch Hum Kahein*, which brings to the viewers poetry of established poets of Hindi & Urdu. She loves music and is learning to play the piano. Her forthcoming book '*Phoenix in Flames*' will be in bookstores shortly.



Mamina

By Sangita Kalarickal

Adisakrit Publishing Services,
Chennai, India, March 2023

A heart-warming Chapbook A Review by Neena Singh

Mamina is a heartwarming poetry chapbook written by Sangita Kalarickal, a US based physicist, that delves into the joys, trials and exploration of motherhood. A collection of eighteen poems penned in free verse and Japanese short forms of poetry straight from the heart. The beautiful cover photograph of Slovak corn husk dolls **Šúpolky** has been designed by Pavol Krivosik.

This is Sangita's debut published collection and in the words of Richard Grahn, Poet, Editor & Founder of Drifting Sands Haibun, "with it she has established herself as a potent creative force through poetry that bubbles from the wellspring of her heart. In "Mamina" we come to know "Mother" as we have never known her. Between these covers, there is beauty, wisdom, joy, pain and love—all woven together brilliantly with soft caring words."

The first poem *Congee memories* in free verse is triggered by the memory of *Ammamma* (grandmother) pouring bowls of steaming rice gruel (*congee*) and the poet dipping jackfruit leaf (*plavila*) spoons woven by the grandma into it.

*Aroma from a distant time crawls its way
Through transient moments
And rests upon long lost memories.*

The poet's journey in time flows through her family relationships—her niece whom she considers her first baby, her mother whose image she sees when she herself looks into a mirror.

*I stare at the the mirror on
my bathroom wall.*

*And see you
through each of my eyelashes
and in my crow's feet.
This is the portal of time travel
that they say they have yet to invent.
(~ from Mother's days)*

'*Earth renews*' and '*Missed the bus*' are powerful poems about the loss and pain of lost motherhood and unborn joy. Poignant and heart-breaking, the words spring from the deep well of swirling emotions which are experienced by a mother.

The prose interspersed with haiku poems called haibun are about the joys of motherhood. '*First Minutes*' shares the arrival of her child from the first ultrasound to the mother's cry.

*snow skies pink
through the inky night
blue and white crocus*

'*Ziping along a curve*' is a lovely and heart-warming haibun about the baby's crawling. 'Crawling' is perhaps an exaggeration. Little paces with one knee and one foot. Somewhat strange perhaps, but it gets the work done, She is all over the place, and a little underfoot. Propelling herself a few paces in a hurry, she hears our laughter and stops. Eyes twinkling, she glances at us, then continues rushing on towards nowhere in particular. She gets there, She gets there fast.

*rain puddles
under tiger lilies
mud in in her toenails*

The writing style of *Mamina* is evocative and lyrical. Kalarickal's poems are rich in sensory details, painting a vivid picture of the lush landscapes, the aroma of spices, and the sounds of the village. The dialogues are realistic and peppered with Malayalam phrases, adding an authentic touch. The pacing of the book is steady, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the lives of the characters and feel the resonance in their own lives.

One of the highlights of *Mamina* is the theme of self-discovery and empowerment. As *Mamina* embarks on her journey to explore the world, she discovers her own voice and learns to stand up for her beliefs. Her struggles, triumphs, and self-realization make for a compelling and inspiring read.

In conclusion, *Mamina* is beautifully written and captures the essence of family, tradition, and self-discovery with tenderness. Through its authentic portrayal and the journey of its strong-willed protagonist, the book offers readers a thought-provoking and emotionally resonant experience. *Mamina* is a compelling read that will leave readers with a deep appreciation for the power of determination and resilience of women in the face of societal norms.

About the Poet

Sangita Kalarickal

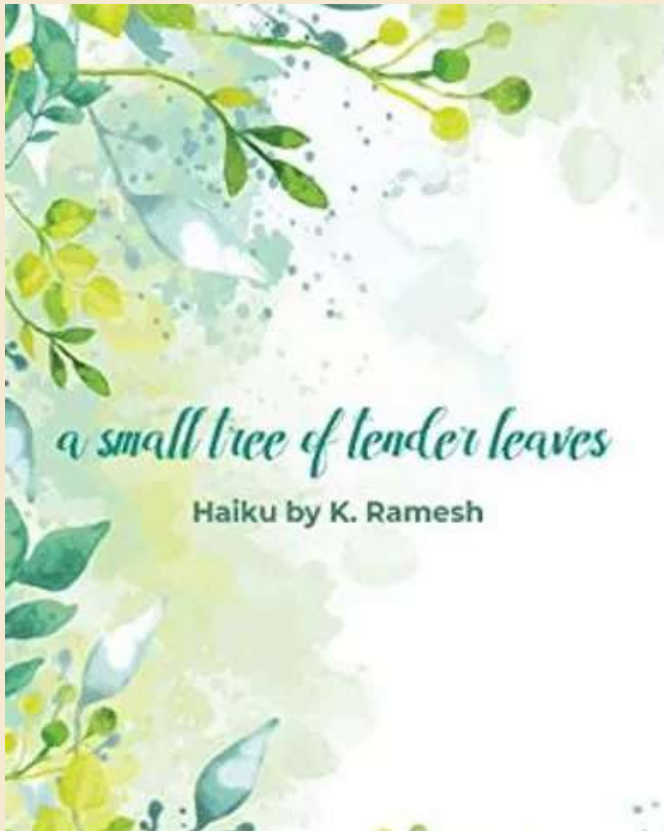
Sangita Kalarickal is a wordsmith crafting poetry and fiction. Her work has been published in several e-magazines, journals, and anthologies. She is also the podcaster for Drifting Sands Haibun - A Journal of Haibun and Tanka Prose. The poems in her first chapbook *Mamina* (Kavya-Adisakrit, 2023), range from free-verse poetry to haikai form and emphasize the angst accompanying the journey to motherhood for several people, as well as the joys of the relationships that mothers, aunts, grandmothers bring. Dr. Kalarickal lives in Minnesota, USA with her husband, kid, and her little garden.



About the Reviewer

Neena Singh

Neena Singh, a Touchstone nominee in the Shortlist for Individual Poems in 2021, is a banker turned poet. Her haikai poetry is regularly published in international journals and magazines. She has published two books of poetry – 'Whispers of the Soul: the journey within' and 'One Breath Poetry'. She runs a non-profit for quality interventions in the education and health of underprivileged children in Chandigarh. Neena loves to play 'fetch ball' with her pet Rumi, and sit in the garden conversing with squirrels and pigeons.



a small tree of tender leaves

By K Ramesh

Publisher: CinammonTeal Publishing

July, 2020

A Haiku Spell

A Review by Dr Pravat Kumar Padhy

K Ramesh is one of the finest voices of contemporary Indian haiku. Being a teacher in Physics, I think he follows the aesthetic principles of haiku with sensibility and honesty. He is a great admirer of rural beauty and through his well-crafted words, enlivens the moment with simplicity and grace. He chooses to infuse images with poetic energy. He observes the happenings in the present; his poetic articulation allows the readers to rejoice and in the words of Gary Snyder “*help us live where we are now.*” He crafts haiku as a metaphor for aesthetic search with imaginative rendering and thus readers enjoy the ‘life-fullness’ of poetry.

Ramesh explores aesthetic essences from nature including tiny creatures like ants, butterflies, cicadas, lizards, crickets, beetles etc. When you read the beautiful lines of the collection, you will feel “*small is beautiful and the beauty lies in its simplicity.*” I recall the opening stanza of the poem, ‘*Little Things*’ by Catherine Pulsifer:

*Simple things are the little things
Such happiness they can bring
From watching a sunrise
To giving a child a simple surprise.*

Gazing gently at the tender leaves under the evening breeze, Ramesh crowns his collection with tenderness:

*a small tree
of tender leaves...
evening breeze*

I feel in his poetic endeavour, there has been an intuitive playfulness of transgressing the observations into cadences of human fulfilment. Many a time, we knowingly or unknowingly overlook the nuances of nature: whispers of breeze or muse of silence in between the chirpings. But Ramesh as a poet is very sensitive to every note preserved in nature. This is where he ignites the poetic spell as a worshiper of nature with the Zen feeling. He tries to script the silence in between and interacts with a meditative language, thus exploring the unseen to unveil with the touch of 'poetic surprise'.

Interestingly, honouring the basic elements of haiku, he quite often blends the 'whitespace' and creates intra-juxtaposition in the phrase section of haiku:

*winter morning...
I open my hands
to a newborn calf*

*summer dawn...
listening to one cuckoo,
I hear many more*

Rightly so, HF Noyes says, "When we let go of all our preconditioning, discarding our habitual mental sets, biases and stagnant emotive states, our brush with the small and ordinary connects us with the universal and eternal. The absence of the period at the end of the modern haiku is meant to leave the haiku open-ended for an echoing extension into what Blake termed "eternity's sunrise." Ramesh exhibits a sense of nostalgia and gratification for nature. He discovers the sound of silence, hidden stories of the universe in a pebble and metaphorically steps, with a quantum shift, into the night of the Milky Way:

*daybreak in the forest...
the silence between two calls
of a Malabar thrush*

*on the pebble
so many stories
of the universe*

*power failure...
I step into the night
of the Milky Way*

His sense of observation is so vivid that it lingers with the readers for all times to come. Some of his memorable senryu reflect light-heartedness (*karumi*) with keen observation (*ugachi*):

*performance over...
the dancer removes her earrings
with a smile*

*in the cart
the garbage heap taller
than the street cleaner*

Fay Aoyagi blends the spirit of haiku with senses and says, "With haiku eyes, I see my inner self. With haiku ears, I listen to my surroundings. With haiku tongue, I taste my past. With haiku nose I sense my future. With haiku fingers I open and close tiny drawers in my mind." Nature restores with care the sublime manifestation of ethical goodness. Ramesh tries to

explore this quietude in a meditative way. I find Ramesh tries to embody the sensory language with brilliance.

*daybreak...
I drink tea facing
the hill's silence*

*forest guest house...
scent of the teakwood bed
throughout the night*

single call of the night-heron so many stars

The beauty resides in the rural landscape. Ramesh tries to reflect 'Indianness' with diligent lyrical quality in his haiku. The modulation and structural configurations of haiku uplift and he often believes in a 'communicative and interactive' model to celebrate the moment. This is unique in his poems:

*sunlit valley...
the little shepherdess talks
to a calf*

He is concerned about the ecological aspects and skilfully blends the socio-religious aspects. The pulse of juxtaposition is crafted with the shades of reality:

*a heron's pulsing throat...
the river thin
on the riverbed*

*long afternoon...
the church spire shade
reaches the beggar*

The usages of metaphorical phrases like 'night of the Milky Way', 'world of pebbles' etc enrich the intensity of images. In places, the magic of haiku is manifested through innovative language and structural framework. The following haiku elucidates his self-interaction and care to portray the dynamics of image construction. This is a unique art of assimilation of self with the 'other' thus entering into a philosophical milieu with a subtle twist. Let us observe the metrical framework, rhythmic beats and linguistic braiding within the phrase section of the following haiku:

*if not for the moonlight
I wouldn't have noticed...
glide of a heron*

Ramesh unveils his poetic excellence in a brilliant style. A few poems like 'balcony breeze.../ a full red moon / between the apartments'; stormy weather.../ the sway of two trees/ entwined together (depiction of sort of cause and effect) modestly portray the observations and could have been poetically augmented.

There has been great pleasure in exploring poetic sparks in Ramesh's haiku. His haiku are at the best of exploring the depth of simplicity (*iki*) and nuances associated with common images. James Hillman once wrote: "Mind is fundamentally poetic in nature". Soul is "that which deepens." I think poems by Ramesh have hidden souls that will amaze everyone. Nothing could be more poetically profound and weave a haiku spell as does the concluding poem of this collection:

*hillside view...
I don't mind waiting
for the waiter*

About the Author

K Ramesh

K Ramesh writes haiku, tanka, and free verse. His poems have appeared in Indian and International journals that cater to free verse and Japanese forms of poetry. Some of his works have been featured in magazines such as Presence, The Heron's Nest, Mainichi, Mayfly, Acorn, Wednesday Haiku (Lilliput Review), Modern Haiku, bottle rockets, Frogpond, Wales Haiku Journal, among others. His works have also been featured in various anthologies such as muttering thunder - an annual of fine haiku and art vol 1 edited by Allan Burns, photographs by Ron Moss, muttering thunder - an annual of fine haiku and art vol 2 edited by Allan Burns, photographs by Ron Moss, montage a haiku gallery edited by Allan Burns and The Wonder Code: Discover the Way of Haiku and See the World with New Eyes edited by Scott Mason.

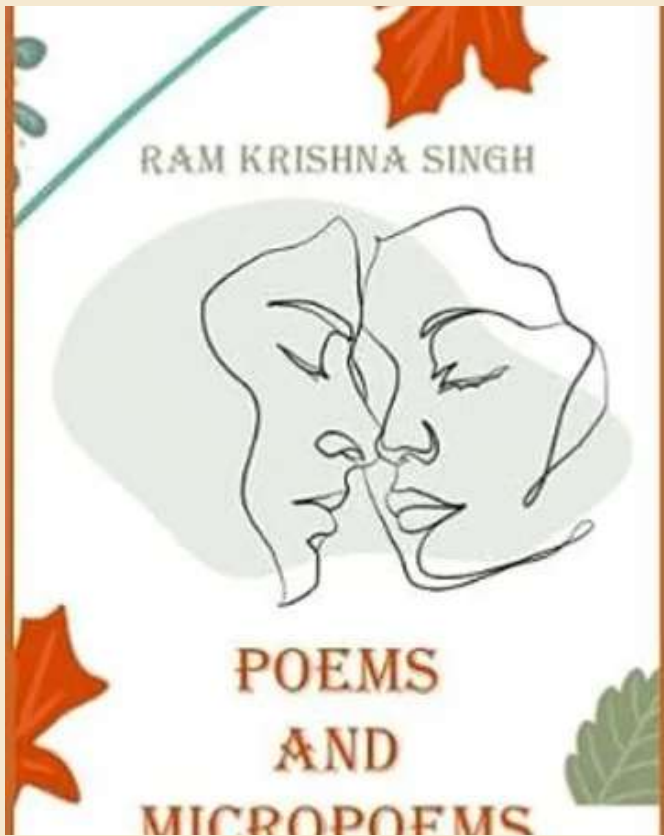


About the Reviewer

Dr Pravat Kumar Padhy

Pravat Kumar Padhy is an awarded Indian English Poet, haikuist and essayist. He has obtained his Master of Science and a Ph.D from Indian Institute of Technology, ISM Dhanbad. His literary work is featured in Interviews with Indian Writing in English, Spectrum History of Indian Literature in English, Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Poetry, History of Contemporary Indian English Poetry, etc. His poem, "How Beautiful", is included in the Undergraduate English Curriculum at the university level. His Japanese short forms of poetry have been widely published and anthologised. Pravat served as the panel judge of 'The Haiku Foundation Touchstone Awards Committee', USA, and is on the editorial board of the journal 'Under the Basho'. He devotes time to writing scientific papers on 'Planetary Geology', listening to classical songs, music and exploring poetry behind paintings.





Poems and Micropoems

By Ram Krishna Singh,

Southern Arizona Press, USA

February 2023.

A Thought-provoking collection

A Review by Neena Singh

'*Poems and Micropoems*' is a thought-provoking collection of poetry by Ram Krishna Singh that delves into the depths of human emotions, the intricacies of life, and the wonders of nature.

R K Singh, Professor, IIT(ISM), contributed a lot to popularizing haiku literature during the early eighties. In an interview with Prof. R B Singh in 2012, he candidly says, *"I have been practicing these difficult Japanese forms for over 25 years. Initially, I used these as stanzas of my regular poems, but it took me about 15 years to understand the essential spirit of haiku and tanka as independent poems."* He further says, *"It is the spirit behind the words that counts: the pauses, hesitations, and the silences between words and between the lines, the silences that make a poem live and breathe. That is what makes a good haiku."* Dr. Lyle Glazier opines, *"R K Singh writes with the directness of an overheard whisper, or a wind through trees, a ripple in a stream, or a cry in the street after dark."*

Spanning various themes and styles, this collection showcases Singh's versatility as a poet and his keen observation of the world around him. The book carries 35 regular poems, 80 haiku and 44 tanka. The collection is divided into two sections: poems and micropoems. The poems are longer and delve into a wide range of topics, such as nature's beauty, the complexities of human emotions, social issues like poverty and inequality, spirituality, and the passage of time. Singh's poems are thought-provoking and introspective, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives and the world around them. The poems also touch upon themes of the metaphysical, inviting readers to ponder on the deeper questions of existence. The first poem in the book:

Nature is Me

Nature is me

*Nature is me
seeking my place
in the star through births*

*now memory
wild maze of conceit
and darkness*

*yet a tiny part
a dew drop
dotted with beauty*

Another poem that I liked:

On the Edge

*She rises from stone gate
with searching eyes
for passion flower
stays for a while and goes
making promise of return
to sleep with me once
before the last good bye*

One of the standout features of this collection is Singh's ability to convey profound emotions and complex ideas through concise and evocative language in his micropoems. These micropoems with just a few lines, pack a powerful punch, leaving readers with lingering thoughts and emotions. Singh's micropoems are like miniature paintings, a montage capturing the essence of a moment or an emotion with precision and depth.

*I am a man like millions
who dream struggle and die*

*and nobody mourns my
drifty silence*

The poems in this collection cover a wide range of topics, including love, spirituality, nature, politics, and social issues. Singh's poems are deeply introspective, reflecting on the human condition and the mysteries of life. His words are imbued with rich imagery, sensory details, and metaphors that create vivid and memorable images in the reader's mind. Singh's language is both accessible and lyrical, making his poetry a delight to read and savour.

One of the strengths of 'Poems and Micropoems' is the diversity of themes and styles. Singh's poems vary in form, including free verse, haiku, tanka, ghazal, and more, showcasing his versatility as a poet. He experiments with different poetic techniques and structures, creating a dynamic and engaging reading experience. The collection also delves into contemporary issues, such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and political unrest, showing Singh's keen awareness of the world around him and his ability to use poetry as a medium for social commentary.

Singh's poetry is deeply rooted in his Indian heritage and spirituality, and his reverence for nature shines through in many of his poems. He captures the beauty and mystique of the natural world, from the whispering winds to the blooming flowers, with a keen eye and a poetic sensibility. His poems are infused with a sense of wonder and awe, inviting readers to pause, reflect, and appreciate the beauty of the world we live in. Singh's poetry requires careful reading and

contemplation to fully grasp the depths of his words and ideas. For readers who enjoy thought-provoking poetry that challenges the mind and stirs the soul, this collection is a treasure trove. Singh invites readers on a journey of introspection, reflection, and appreciation for the world we live in.

*clicking jaw and cracking knees
I touch the sounds of ageing*

One of the defining features of this collection is the author's skillful use of language. Singh's poetry is marked by his command over words and his ability to paint vivid pictures with his imagery. Each poem is carefully crafted, utilizing metaphors, similes, and other literary devices to create a multi-layered and evocative experience for the reader. The language is rich, yet accessible, drawing readers into the world of the poems and allowing them to fully engage with the emotions and ideas presented.

Another notable aspect of this collection is the emotional depth of the poems. Singh's poetry is raw and honest, delving into the human experience with all its complexities, joys, sorrows, and contradictions. The poems evoke a wide range of emotions, from nostalgia and longing to love and compassion, making the collection relatable and emotionally resonant. Sample haiku:

*searching truth
a homeless wanderer—
shoreless sea*

*sunny morning
no kites flying in the sky:
Makar Sankranti*

*old diary—
finding phone numbers
of friends still alive*

Tanka in the book are spontaneous and experiential—

*her lips
crimson with paan
stings my heart:
smell of saffron and cardamom
melts in my haiku*

*dream-incited
I awake with a start
to her promise
sleeping together once
more before we depart*

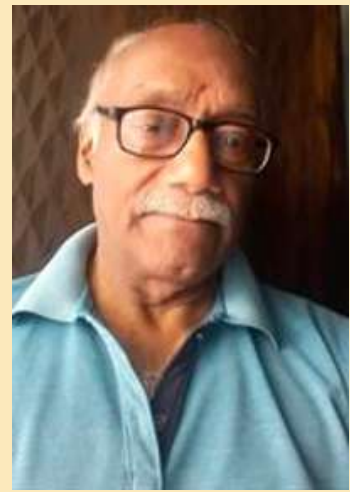
'Poems and Micropoems' by Ram Krishna Singh is a captivating collection of poems that offers readers a rich and introspective journey through various themes and emotions. Singh's mastery of language, depth of emotions, and thought-provoking insights make this collection a compelling read for poetry enthusiasts and those who appreciate profound reflections on the human condition. In conclusion, 'Poems and Micropoems' is a poignant and resonant collection that leaves a lasting impact.

About the Author

Ram Krishna Singh

Prof. Ram Krishna Singh, also known as R.K.Singh, has published poems, articles and book reviews in various magazines and journals over the years and taught English for Science and Technology, Indian Writing in English, and Criticism at IIT-ISM, Dhanbad for nearly four decades.

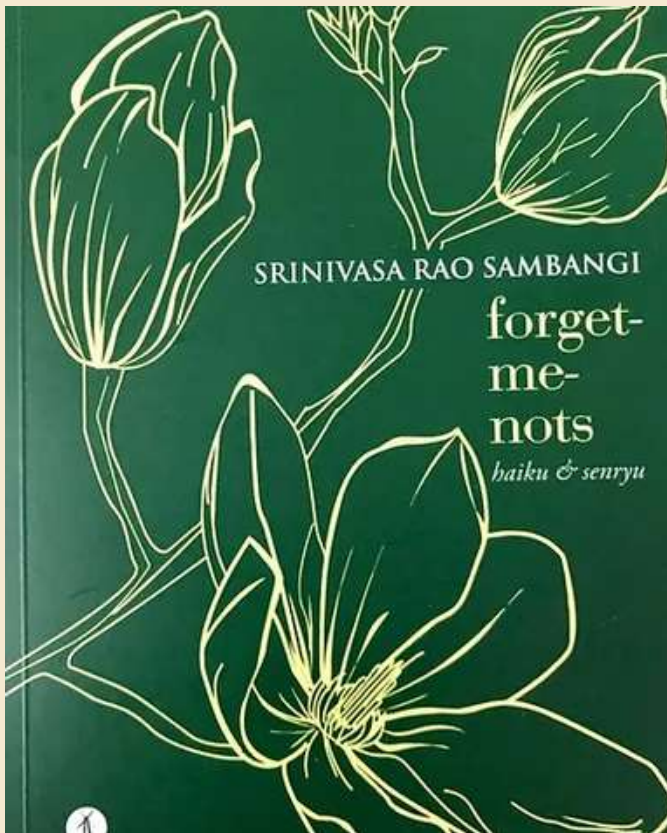
His latest poetry collections include *Covid-19 And Surge of Silence/Kovid-19 Hem Sessizlik Tokîni* (English/Tatar, 2021), *白濁 : SILENCE: A WHITE DISTRUST*(English/Japanese, 2022), and *Poems and Micropoems* (2023). His work has been widely translated in over 30 languages.



About the Reviewer

Neena Singh

A Touchstone nominee in the Shortlist for Individual Poems in 2021, **Neena Singh** is a banker turned poet. Her haikai poetry is regularly published in international journals and magazines. She has published two books of poetry –'Whispers of the Soul: the journey within' and 'One Breath Poetry'. She runs a non-profit for quality interventions in the education and health of underprivileged children in Chandigarh. Neena loves to play 'fetch ball' with her pet Rumi, and sit in the garden conversing with squirrels and pigeons.



forget-me-nots

By Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

Publisher: Hawakal Publishers Private Limited

(December 2022)

A book that exemplifies the haikai spirit

A Review by Geethanjali Rajan

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi's forget-me-nots reminded me of something I had read a few years ago by Lao Tzu.

"The snow goose need not bathe to make itself white. Neither need you do anything but be yourself."

This maiden collection of haiku and senryu, forget-me-nots, published by Hawakal Publishers, is filled with sensitive, honest and authentic poems about life, which makes it a delight for a reader to engage with. There are no pretensions in this world created by Sambangi. Only moments to savour or ponder over. Smile or join the poet in his stillness.

Sambangi's haiku and senryu are about brevity and simplicity - two qualities that are worth aspiring for and practising in haikai forms. The poet excels in leaving much unsaid and he leaves it to the reader to interpret the poem and carry it along. The haiku reach us effectively, carrying us along in a river of emotions created by us, as a response to the poem itself.

*pumpkin tanpura
the street monk's song
about hollowness*

This poem, with its circular shape and comparison of the tangible and the intangible, points to how the monk's song can be felt aurally, the tanpura seen visually, and the metaphysical apprehended subliminally. The last word in the poem links back to the hollowness of the pumpkin tanpura. The poem is laced with understatement that is often seen in Sambangi's work. I was taken back to a childhood scene where the singing monk and his gourd tanpura were a regular on my street.

The haiku form is rooted in observation and this collection contains many poems where the poet's strength in this area comes into play. While it is more common to come across poems of close observation in the visual arena, here is one that I enjoyed auditorily:

*the chorus
becomes a solo
receding rain*

The poem scores in that the third line reveals the source of wonder – the 'aha' as it is often called. It isn't a concert that the poet is attending, but one that nature is playing for our enjoyment.

Many of the poems in this collection are layered and can be interpreted at different levels. One of my favourite poems:

*stone Buddha—
all the blows
that made him*

The stone that the sculptor worked on to make the Buddha is the first image that comes to mind – a concrete and tangible action. However, Sambangi manages to create the wide space for the reader to maneuver – what about all the blows that make a Buddha? What about all the blows that make us, the non-Buddhas?

Sometimes the haiku are disarmingly simple and that's where the poet creates an impression:

*nameless flower
my daughter too
when she was born*

This innocent observation can be read, enjoyed, and we can move on to the next poem if we so wish. But tarry a little, and more profound interpretations come streaming in. Yes, before we are given names, labels, and classification tags, we are but simple, nameless flowers without fixed identities. The comparison of the fresh newborn and the flower is gentle and unobtrusive.

Sambangi's haiku and senryu also explore the serious subjects of war, refugees as well as economic displacement. A haiku that catches my attention:

*country fair
the weight of
an unsold parrot*

The image of a parrot and its weight when it is unsold! At the small country fair, every little transaction counts, even if it is selling caged birds. Sambangi points to the larger story of survival, hunger, poverty, economy. But none of this is stated by the poet. The poem itself is a perfect semi-circle, waiting for you to complete it.

The poet does not intrude into the poetic moments he writes about. The descriptions are muted, restrained and yet, convey gravitas. Here is an example:

*father's grave
before I reach
the blossoms fall*

Not all of the collection makes the reader think or delve deep. There is a good balance of understated humour, seen mainly in the senryu.

history class
my girlfriend whispers
forget what happened

One can't escape the irony of the history class where one is urged to forget the personal past.

Another senryu that brought a smile:

zen haiku
this urge to know
the contest results

In this world, whether the poem is zen or not, contest results are definitely a thing of the moment! Here, the poet's honesty is almost child-like and disarming. It also is a commentary on the travesty and complexity of human existence. On one level, we are in zen meditation and on another, we crave to be on the honours rollcall of poets.

This book gets its name from the following haiku:

forget-me-nots
the garden mower
put to rest

This simply stated moment is one that stands out for the choice it makes. The mower gets a rest and lets nature survive, perhaps even thrive. And in return, we get the beauty of forget-me-nots.

This may be Srinivasa Rao Sambangi's maiden collection of verse, but here is a book that exemplifies the haikai spirit and displays the quietness that haiku can bring in a world screaming for attention. Here is someone who has grasped the elusive Japanese aesthetic qualities of haiku even while conveying his search for the meaning of life.

Truly a good read!

About the Author

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi is a management post graduate working with a Pharma Company in Hyderabad, India. He has been writing haiku and senryu for the past 7 years. His work is regularly published in leading haiku and senryu journals like Frogpond, Modern Haiku and Heron's Nest . He won several international awards including winner in VCBF haiku contest in international category.

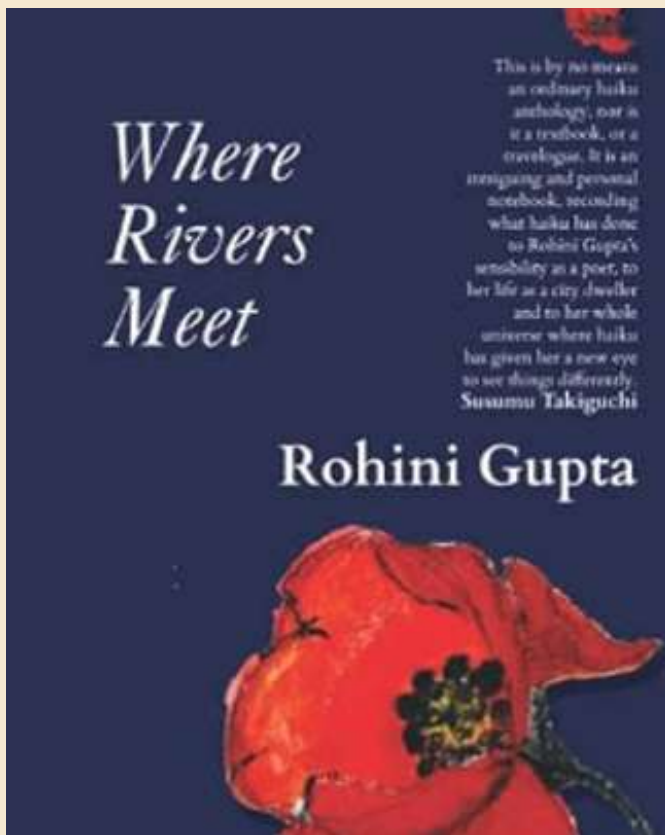




About the Reviewer

Geethanjali Rajan

Geethanjali Rajan teaches Japanese and English in Chennai. She has been writing haiku and haibun for around two decades. Her poems have appeared in online international journals and print anthologies. She is currently the editor of haiku at cattails. She is also on the editorial team of Café Haiku. Geethanjali's poems with Sonam Chhoki (Bhutan) can be read in the book *Unexpected Gift* (November 2021), a book of haikai collaboration. Another book of haikai poems with Sonam Chhoki, *Fragments of Conversation*, is forthcoming. Her interests include music, books, and Japanese calligraphy.



Where Rivers Meet

By Rohini Gupta,

Red River Press July 2022

A Thing of Beauty

A Review by Dr Brijesh Raj

Rohini Gupta's *Where Rivers Meet* comprises cherrypicked haikai pieces published over several years. The haijin, poet, writer cum artist offers living memories carefully collated into an almost autobiographical mosaic. Cats and flowers are closely observed, old graphite sketches of quiet moments painstakingly selected and interspersed, unique travel experiences shared and the poignance of the pandemic poured on to paper. Interestingly she also shares backstories on what she actually went through at the time of writing that particular piece, presenting the reader with a more immersive experience. There is wisdom here, joy, sorrow and surrender to life. All this crammed in less than one hundred pages. She begins with...

A worm introduced me to haiku...Matsuo Basho's worm.

*autumn moonlight
a worm silently
devours a chestnut*

Surfing on one idle weekend I ran head on into the worm...I was moved and shaken and had fallen in love...Three lines, a mere fistful of words...an entire story in seventeen syllables. Life after the worm was full of haiku and it stayed with me even as I published fiction and non-fiction books.

*plucking
the last red apple
now I feel the cold*

She shares...

A poet's job is to slow down time or even bring it to a complete stop. And the cheapest of tools will do it. More important, the clear intention to be there... to show up as life happens...I might run out of shelf space but all those wandering years of my life—those I get to keep.

*vacation's end
my small black notebook
brings home the mountains*

Offerings is a particularly nice vignette from Rohini's travels in Rajasthan. One among my favorites from her work.

*temple ruins
only the wind still
offers flowers*

Himalayan Sun is an endearing piece that speaks of shared spaces.

Clearly it was his rock and I was the intruder here – but he was generous...I don't speak lizard and he or she did not speak human but at a deeper level, we communicated... Years later, the rest of the trip is hazy, but I remember my friend and his hospitality on that high mountain.

Rohini looks beyond the obvious and creates simple, multi-layered, honest wordscapes.

*waiting
at the window
night comes first*

In *You Are Never Ready*, Rohini speaks of death and how difficult it is to accept and write about.

*under my hand
her heart stops beating
so does mine*

On Haiku gives you a distillate of Rohini's haikai learning in two priceless pages. The section delivers a masterclass on haiku writing. One couldn't have had the process explained in simpler or more explicit terms.

Haiku is what happens when you cut a diamond... Dress the experience, pare it down to its very essence... No imagination, no abstractions, no philosophies... It is tough to fit into that matchbox and demand that only your pure self goes in. There you are shedding those encumbrances, the kind which you collect as excuses for worrying rather than living...I don't know if that can be taught—but it can be learned.

She shares her experiences of, and some pieces from, her collective writing in the On Renku section. Written at times at a furious pace.

*summer reading
the wind flutters
to the last page*

*butterfly
if only I could replace
the flower I plucked*

*single cricket
labouring to fill
the whole city*

The haijin traces her journeys all over the world, and through life, in an interesting travel haibun section. Physical, mental, emotional, spiritual moments that draw out a smile and an aha. Unpretentious, relatable, poignant and light, her haibun flesh out a lot that has touched Rohini.

*three lines
how to fit in a lifetime
of skies*

These are followed by some poignant pandemic/lockdown centric haikai pieces.

Covid reduced us all to hunter-gatherers again...We hunted online or on the shelves of shops which still allowed us in... nature decided to take a hand and when she speaks all we can do is listen...She rapped us on the knuckles and put us in detention.

In *Memoriam* she writes

To those who will not return-

*dawn light
the memory of one
who will not see it*

Where Rivers Meet is a confluence of a frugal haijin sensibility and the wordcraft of the lifelong poet-writer. What emerges is Rohini Gupta's raison d'etre...a thoroughly enjoyable thing of beauty.

About the Poet

Rohini Gupta

Rohini Gupta lives by the sea in downtown Mumbai, India, surrounded by trees, cats and dogs and crows, books, coffee shops, art galleries, poetry readings and a sprawling metropolitan city. She has published several books, written for major newspapers, websites and magazines, organized art festivals, taught workshops on haiku, storytelling, publishing and other subjects, at colleges and literary conferences. She writes haiku, fiction and non-fiction. Her haiku collection, with her drawings, is *Where Rivers Meet*. She is editor of online magazines, *World Haiku Review* and *Cafe Haiku*. Her books are available on Amazon. She blogs at Wordskies.wordpress.com

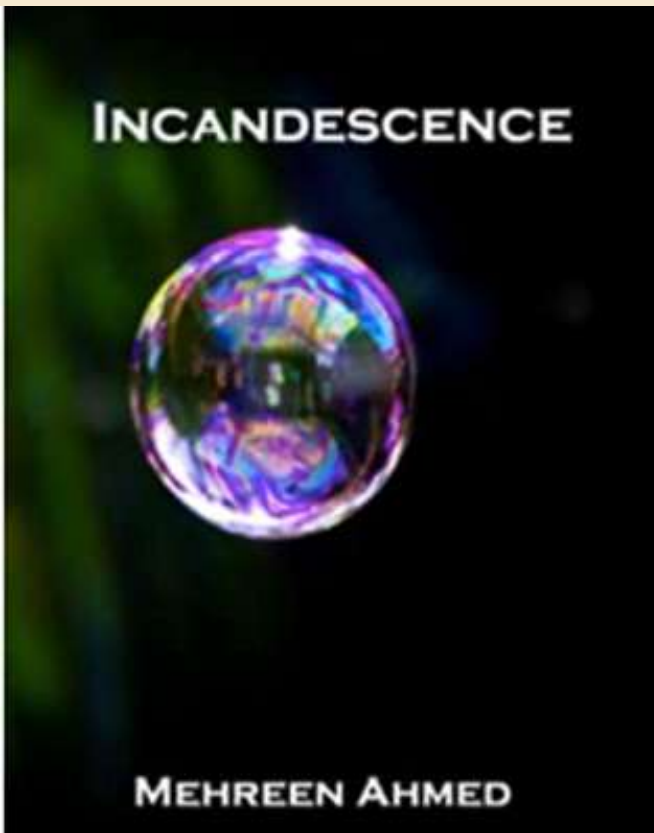




About the Reviewer

Dr Brijesh Raj

Dr Brijesh Raj has been writing haikai forms for over ten years and is an editor for the online e-zine, *Cafe Haiku*. His work has featured in online haikai journals, e magazines and anthologies. He is a practising companion animal veterinarian and a certified veterinary acupuncturist. Together with wife Kashmira Raj he runs the Tai-Qi Touch, which teaches Tai Chi.



Incandescence

By Mehreen Ahmed

Impsired, UK, December 2022

From A Candle To A Flame To A Wildfire Of Hope A Review by Chitra Gopalakrishnan

Mehreen Ahmed's *'Incandescence'* folds into its pages the intriguing story of the making of Bangladesh as a nation in 1971. A mere gleam of an idea in the eyes of visionaries in the earlier years, this yearning emerged as a revolution and then a nation with a suddenness, with seemingly nothing preordained about the upsurge other than a swelling of protests and rallies.

But the bridled energies and emotions of people suppressed over centuries, gathered high amounts of precipitation in a short period of time like the monsoons in this region, exploding hard and fast into unrelenting violence, one that cleaved this region from its earlier geographical loyalties and devastated lives, lifestyles and destinies. Restoration has been slow in the making and is, as yet, an enterprise in progress. After all, social engineering takes time to come to fruition and comes at a price.

While the book subtly yet tangibly juxtaposes the past history of the region against the revolution and its entailing current realities, what runs as a leitmotif is the many other contrarities that prevail within this milieu. An elitist way of life with ancestral homes, manicured gardens and orchards that contrasts with the popular will of people and their lives in the filth of slums. The raw-edged contradictions between cultural continuities and cultural pluralism. Secular values at variance with polemical views. Community cohesion in dissimilitude with individualists seeking a discrete identity for themselves. And, outgrown traditional values of morality turning incongruous with the unfolding new norms, the tentative new normal. And just so many more of such thorny anomalies.

Mehreen Ahmed's *'Incandescence'* opens strikingly with the exploration of the intense longings of Mila who is torn between staying in her marriage that has lost its appeal and integrity and following the trail of a promising romance, one nipped in the bud. It follows the contours of her emotional fault lines and keeps up with her storyline with meticulous attention to detail till she arrives upon her decided-upon destination. The tale, meanwhile, also, draws us in effortlessly

and completely into the lives and incipient dreams of several women in her family and friend circle, across four generations, all associated with the House of Chowdhury. This is an enormous, magnificent residence, whose glory, riches and values are caught in a double whammy: its already diminishing influence now plummeting into irrelevance with the change in the societal matrix; the pincher effect proving too much to withstand for its residents.

In this regal, elegant house, Mila's grandmother Raiza Chowdhury fights to retain the legacy of her home and her values even as she tries to control the lustful ways of her sons. Her mother Nazmun Banu holds on to her thrice-married husband which on the surface may appear to the readers to be submissive and weak-willed but if one cared to take a closer look it reveals her tenacity to stay rooted against all odds. Her aunt Lutfun follows her childhood sweetheart's dreams by marrying the second Chowdhury son but eventually finds her own felicity with a spry that defines her. Prema, her other aunt, who in an audacious move abandons her husband and three children to marry the youngest Chowdhury son, says her truth is hers alone and she will stand by it even if others don't understand or empathise with it. Shreya, her best friend, has her own journey to make, to find closure and her peace for the horrors of the revolution visited upon her sister, and, thus, on the family as a whole. Her orphaned maid Shimul has to find the courage to create her own new world when hers literally collapses on her and injures her severely. And, Saima, her very own daughter, in complete contrast to her, wants to retrace her steps and find her paternal roots from which she has been severed.

Each of these women attempt to find their inner incandescence in their own way as the accepted and right way stands subverted. Are they all completely, perfectly and incandescently happy as they find the lives they have been denied? Maybe, maybe not. But their personal breakthroughs and choices are theirs, theirs alone, theirs to own and theirs to spurn. Some accept the conditions as they exist and others take responsibility for changing them. It is their journeys recounted with such vibrancy that lends the book its *élan vitale*.

The men in the book are given to licentious behaviour and don't waste time agonising over their wildly oscillating moral compasses. But the author's gaze sweeps through their lives with compassion as the world as they know it begins to collapse before their alarmed eyes with each passing day and they increasingly lose control over their lives, their self-assuredness. So despite their flaws, they demand our empathy as they are treated with compassion.

Binding all her character's individual struggles survival together is the larger issue of the real nature of life, its elemental truth seeded in the daily-ness of living. One that has the potential to lift one from sadness to hope, from darkness to incandescence. That is if one wishes to discover it, dares to explore it and take it to an afterlife, an issue touched upon repeatedly through the book and not so fleetingly.

Mehreen's control over the storyline is masterly as she switches from the large historical canvas to the everyday routines within a home and then into the intimacies of personal spaces, into the language of longing. The spare and sprawl of her content is in balance.

Her prose is one of liquid grace like the rains of Bangladesh, evocative and flowing. Both the rains and her words gird us and hold us within their spell. She captures the volley of gunfire as brilliantly she does the whooshes of bamboo groves.

Her gift of description is such that you can taste the history, culture and daily experiences of Bangladesh. An inkling of just how is here in these lines: *"No one would understand or even care, why her love had increased lately for the incessant rainfall, and the swishes of the gusty winds, or the mists of the opaque drizzles, the frolicking birds such as the crows with their measured picks off the lake's surface."*

About the Author

Mehreen Ahmed

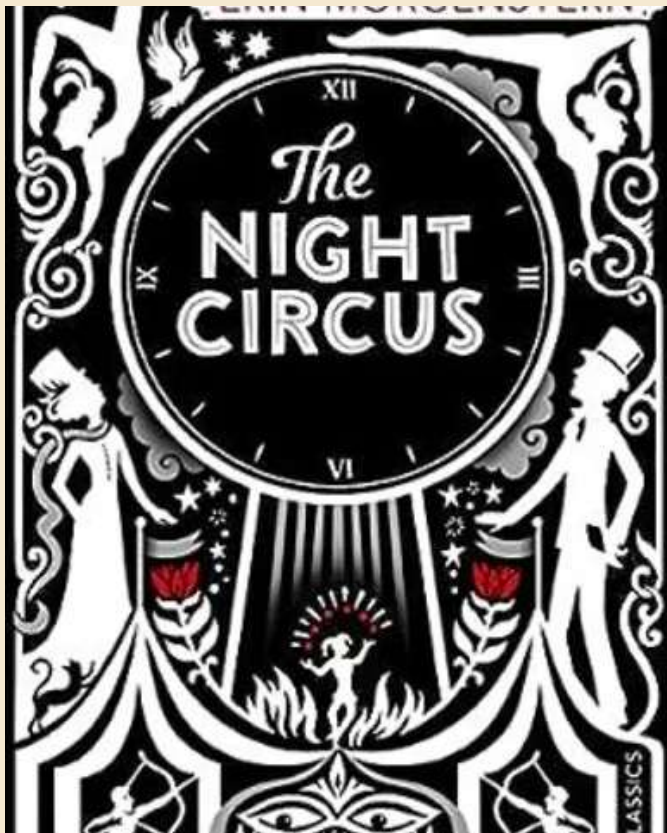
Mehreen Ahmed is an award-winning Australian novelist born in Bangladesh. Her historical fiction, *The Pacifist* is an audible bestseller. Included in *The Best Asian Speculative Fiction Anthology*, her works have also been acclaimed by *Midwest Book Review*, and *DD Magazine*. and nominated for *Pushcart*, *botN* and *James Tait*. Her recent publications are with *Litro*, *Otoliths*, and *Alien Buddha*.



About the Reviewer

Chitra Gopalakrishnan

Chitra Gopalakrishnan, a New Delhi-based writer, uses her ardour for writing to break firewalls between fiction and poetry, narratology and psychoanalysis, marginalia and manuscript and tree-ism and capitalism. www.chitragopalakrishnan.com



The Night Circus

By Erin Morgenstern

Anchor Books, A division of Random House, Inc,
New York, 2012.

An Old, magical Gem A Review by Ishita

The Night Circus by Erin Morgenstern is a remarkable literary work that captivates readers with its enchanting narrative and mesmerizing prose. It is a tale of love, enchantment and magic. This in-depth book review will delve into the intricacies of Morgenstern's writing, the themes she explores, and the profound impact this novel has on its readers.

Morgenstern's imaginative prowess takes the reader to a realm where dreams and reality converge. At the center of it, all lies '*Le Cirque des Rêves*', that is the Circus of Dreams, a magnificent spectacle that appears mysteriously and vanishes without a trace. The author's exquisite attention to detail brings this enchanting circus to life, with its black-and-white striped tents, ethereal lighting, and awe-inspiring attractions. From the fantastical Ice Garden to the enchanting Wishing Tree, each element of the circus unfolds like a carefully crafted painting in the reader's mind. Morgenstern's vivid descriptions evoke a sense of childlike wonder and curiosity, making the circus itself a character that beckons readers into its world.

The heart of '*The Night Circus*' lies in the captivating story of Celia Bowen and Marco Alisdair, two young magicians who find themselves entangled in a dangerous game orchestrated by their mentors. Celia's inherent power for illusions and Marco's mastery of manipulation sets the stage for a captivating competition, where the circus becomes the battleground for their magical prowess. Morgenstern expertly delves into the complexities of their characters, peeling back layers of vulnerability, ambition, and longing. As Celia and Marco navigate the intricacies of their contest, their connection deepens, defying the boundaries of their rivalry. Their relationship is beautifully developed, showcasing the enduring power of love amidst a backdrop of magic and uncertainty.

While Celia and Marco form the backbone of the narrative, the story boasts a rich ensemble cast of intriguing characters, each contributing their own unique thread to the tapestry of the story. The enigmatic clockmaker, Herr Thiessen, with his mastery over timepieces, adds a touch of mystery to the proceedings. Tsukiko, the contortionist,

fascinates with her ethereal grace and unspoken secrets. Bailey, an unsuspecting visitor to the circus, finds himself inexorably drawn to its enchantment. These characters, among others, add depth and complexity to the narrative, further enriching the reader's experience.

Morgenstern's narrative structure in the book is a remarkable achievement, skillfully intertwining multiple timelines and perspectives. The story unfolds non-linearly, jumping seamlessly from one era to another. This masterful technique enhances the sense of mystery and anticipation, pulling the reader deeper into the intricate web of the circus. As the narrative threads converge, the pieces of the puzzle begin to align, leading to a climactic finale that is as satisfying as it is spellbinding. Morgenstern's ability to craft such a complex narrative structure without sacrificing clarity is a testament to her skill as a storyteller.

Beneath the surface of the magical spectacle lies a profound exploration of the themes of Love, Sacrifice, and the nature of Creativity that resonate deeply with readers. Love, in its many forms, permeates the pages of the book. The romance between Celia and Marco is tender and profound, defying the constraints placed upon them. Morgenstern deftly examines the sacrifices made in the name of love, blurring the lines between duty, desire, and devotion. Additionally, the novel explores the nature of creativity and the boundless possibilities that arise when imagination is unleashed. It delves into the question of what it means to be an artist, the power of creation, and the role of the audience in shaping the art itself.

Morgenstern's prose is a symphony of words, weaving a spellbinding narrative that entrances readers from beginning to end. Her language possesses an ethereal quality, mirroring the enchantment of the circus itself. The vivid imagery she employs stimulates the senses, allowing readers to taste the caramel apples, feel the soft velvet of the circus tent, and hear the murmurs of awe from the crowd. Morgenstern's meticulous attention to detail creates a sensory experience that fully immerses readers in the world of *'The Night Circus,'* making it feel tangible and alive.

I find *'The Night Circus'* a literary gem that enthralles readers with its enchanting world, complex characters, and profound themes. Erin Morgenstern's skilful storytelling and captivating prose bring the circus and its inhabitants to life, leaving an indelible mark on the reader's imagination. This novel is a testament to the enduring power of love, the transformative nature of art, and the magic that resides within our own hearts. *'The Night Circus'* is a must-read for anyone seeking a truly immersive and unforgettable reading experience.

About the Author

Erin Morgenstern

Erin Morgenstern, the author of *'The Night Circus,'* is a remarkable storyteller whose imagination knows no bounds. Born on July 8, 1978, Morgenstern grew up in Marshfield, Massachusetts, and from an early age, she showed a deep affinity for creative pursuits and the power of storytelling. She is an exceptionally talented author whose imaginative storytelling and captivating prose have enchanted readers worldwide. Her debut novel, *'The Night Circus,'* is a testament to her creative genius and has solidified her as a formidable force in the fantasy genre. With her evocative descriptions and vivid imagery, Morgenstern continues to transport readers to otherworldly realms, inviting them to experience the power of imagination and the magic of storytelling. Beyond her debut novel, Morgenstern has contributed to various anthologies and publications, showcasing her versatility and creativity in shorter formats.

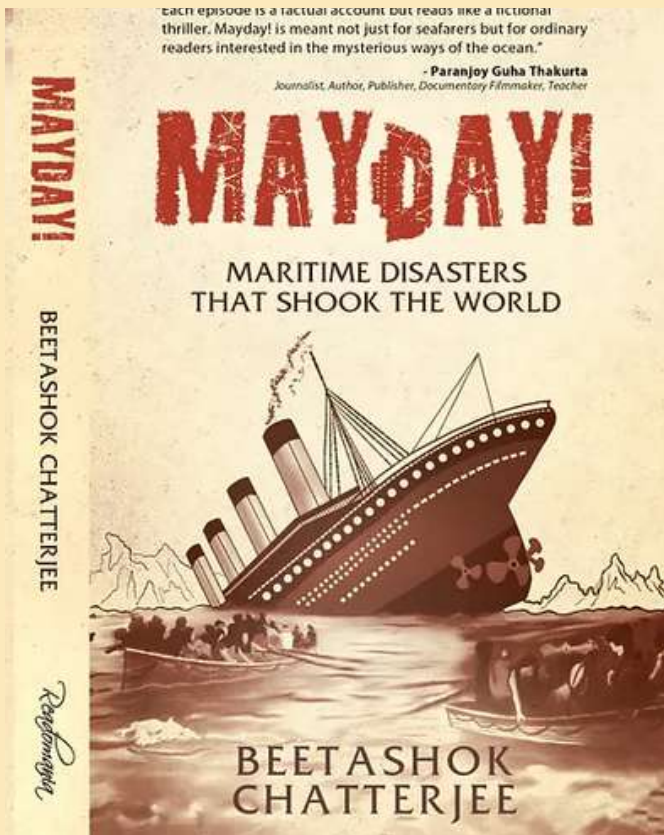




About the Reviewer

Ishita

Ishita is an aspiring 18 years old artist, a writer, and poet, and most importantly an ardent learner. She started to sketch and draw as soon as she could hold a pencil. Just like how she tries to describe emotions in her art she attempts to do the same with words. Apart from this, she also cradles other hobbies like reading books and playing chess. She wishes to become a designer and revel in as many experiences as she can.



Mayday

By Beetashok Chatterjee

Publisher: Readomania (June 2023)

An imprint of Kurious Kind Media (P) Ltd

An Engaging Reading Experience

A Review by Urmi Chakravorty

"There is something infinitely sad about shipwrecks. Whether destroyed by the forces of Nature or by human folly, every wreck has a story to tell."

The opening sentences of Captain Beetashok Chatterjee's latest offering *MAYDAY!* are steeped in a sense of foreboding, danger, and loss, and set the mood for what follows. Published by Readomania, the book is a collection of real-life civilian maritime disasters that shook the world and changed the face of sea-bound travel and commerce, in more ways than one.

The monosyllabic title – iconic, no-fuss, using a jagged font in red – symbolises distress. The stories are thirteen in number, further stirring a sense of intrigue and portent in the reader's mind.

Documenting real events into a literary non-fiction has always been a daunting task. A single click on Google and the reader has a tsunami of information, as it were, at his fingertips. Hence, it takes literary mettle, understanding and a deep sensitivity to compile bare facts and present them as an intelligent and gripping page turner. And that is precisely where Beetashok Chatterjee's masterful narration come in handy. Although one has an inkling of the outcome of each story, Chatterjee succeeds in keeping the reader hooked right till the end.

Arranged in a chronological order, the reader is treated to thirteen diverse maritime situations – from 1872 to 2014, from the familiar shores of Kerala to the remote seas of Portsall or the far-flung island of Leyte. Whether the vessel hit an iceberg, ran into a sandbar or burst into flames, the devastation has always been colossal. And the loss, heart-breaking.

Among the thirteen stories, one that resonates the most with us is probably that of the Titanic, for obvious reasons. But as a reader, what I found particularly heart-warming were the fascinating details that Chatterjee has included here – the

VIP guest list, the wide variety of professionals catering to the needs of all on board, the deeply moving scenes of their last living moments, an utter disregard for rules, and a misplaced optimism that eventually sounded the death knell of this magnificent carrier.

Captain Chatterjee has bolstered each story with a body of carefully curated details that paints a vivid, life-like image of each accident. The reader can effortlessly hear and visualise the breaking of the carrier parts, the agonised cries of the crew and passengers, the unbridled sea water whooshing in, the raging fire engulfing man and machine, and finally, the accumulated debris waiting to 'rust in peace' deep down on the ocean floor. The vocabulary is simple and restrained, yet evocative and impactful, aligning with the theme. The impressive illustrations prove to be a useful prop in this.

The forbidding, unpredictable seas operate in mysterious ways, often challenging human faculties and questioning technological acumen. How else does one explain the secret behind the deserted Mary Celeste bobbing upon the waves, all by itself? Or the complete disappearance of the Kairali with no trace of even its debris? Reading about such incidents makes us shudder and reinforces our belief in the invisible hand of God.

A striking feature of this collection is the display of abiding human emotions and values, even in the face of extreme adversity. Chatterjee has cited multiple examples of empathy, compassion and heroism shown by mariners, passengers, and also bystanders, often disregarding their own safety and chance of escape. Andrew Parker and Brian Bunker selflessly helping people move out of the capsized Herald of Free Enterprise, the smaller passing vessels rallying around the marooned Estonia, Captain Mangouras trying to salvage the doomed Prestige, the services rendered by the first responders on shore – all point to the triumphant human spirit.

While we extol such enduring acts of kindness, our hearts go out to the survivors and the kin of the unsuspecting victims who are, till today, looking for answers. Human complacency or 'hubris', as Mr Bee calls it, has been that one extrusive factor that contributed to most of these mishaps. Captain Chatterjee, with his laudable seafaring experience and expertise, has offered incisive analyses, inputs, and inferences on each of these accounts. Be it the debate between Pilots and Masters in Mont Blanc, the slipshod investigation of the Kairali, the delayed communication and decision-making in Amico Cadiz, a criminal oversight in the Herald of Free Enterprise, gross overloading aboard the Dona Paz, or the inadequate response in case of the Estonia. While ill-advised man-made geo-political policies catalysed the Le Joola tragedy, the ageing Prestige was done in by foolhardy cost-cutting measures. Chatterjee's accounts are a discerning commentary on maritime laws, the lack of accountability, human greed, selfishness, negligence and administrative corruption.

Concern for the environment forms another pivotal theme of this collection. Most maritime incidents leave behind a mammoth spillage of fuel, metal, chemicals and cargo, adversely impacting countless species of aquatic flora, fauna, and the quality of seawater. The livelihood opportunities of thousands stand impaired. The dismemberment of the Torrey Canyon, the Amoco Cadiz, the Exxon Valdez, and the Prestige, bear testimony to such ecological disasters.

The one account that has impacted me the most is the Sewol disaster in which around 250 school students died, only because they were used to obeying instructions and hence, did not try to escape. The facts, and the narration, have both left me moist-eyed. The harrowing final paragraph will stay with me for quite some time.

The only downside of this book, I feel, is an occasional overload of maritime jargon, and minute details of distances, measurements, angles, places, and timings that, at times, impede the reading tempo.

MAYDAY! is not just a compilation of factual pelagic events. It chronicles human emotions and foibles; teaches us enduring life lessons; talks about mechanical goliaths perishing before nature's fury; sensitively documents the unheard pleas of obscure communities; and most importantly, it gives us, the land-bound readers, a peek into the bottomless, enigmatic seas and the secrets that lie buried in their womb.

Certainly recommended for an engaging and immersive reading experience!

About the Author

Beetashok Chatterjee

Beetashok Chatterjee was a ship's captain by profession. He joined the Merchant Navy at a young age and loved it, retiring only after having completed more than 45 years at sea. This old sea dog lives in New Delhi, India, with his memories and a wife, son and daughter. His hobbies include listening to Western music, reading fiction and watching cricket. He also loves good Hollywood and Bollywood movies. And chilled beer. His first collection of short stories '*Driftwood—stories washed ashore*' surprised him with the favourable response it got and he decided that this is what he wanted to do for the rest of his life—write. He is also the author of a second volume of stories '*The People Tree—stories about us and them*', that have nothing to do with the sea. His poems have been published in an anthology '*Monochrome Verses*'. '*Mayday!*' is his first venture into nonfiction.

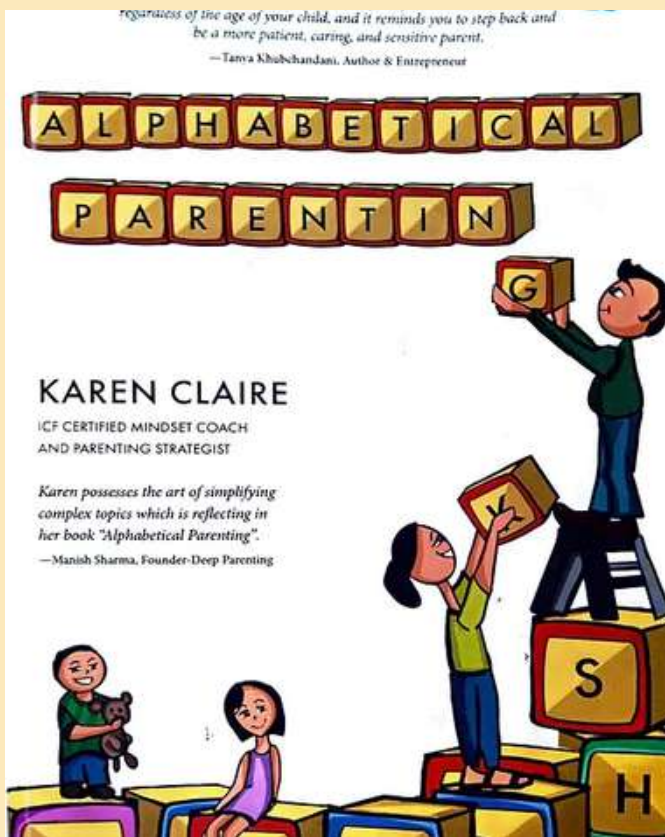


About the Reviewer

Urmi Chakraborty



Urmi Chakravorty is a former educator and presently, a freelance writer whose articles, short stories and poems have found space in The Hindu, The Times of India, and more than twenty national and international literary journals and anthologies. Reviewing and editing are other areas she dabbles in. Urmi has won national awards for her poetry and for writing on LGBTQIA issues. She believes in the therapeutic power of words and her pieces enclose a slice of her soul. Her other interests include music, travel, and spending time with community dogs. Urmi's writings can be read here: www.wordsnverses.com



Alphabetical Parenting

By Karen Claire

Publisher : Inkfeathers Publishing

August 27, 2022, Pages 130.

Skill of Parenting

A Review by Navneet Kaur

Doubtlessly parenting is a duty which is assigned to us by the lord Almighty. But the fact cannot be refuted that it is an arduous task to bring new souls on this planet earth and be a biological parent of a child. But the real roughs and tumbles of the journey of parenthood are encountered when post birth the process of rearing a child in the right way begins. Therefore, it will not be fallacious to remark that the actual dynamics of parenting are a lot different and many of the parenting patents unfortunately fail to fathom the depths of this otherwise quite painstaking process. Caught up in the trap of this ultra fast-paced modern day world of cut-throat completion(where a man has to constantly struggle to survive and rustle up his sustenance),most of the parents unknowingly turn derelicts and start neglecting their children. However, a section of parents will tend to feel exasperated and rather choose to deploy a counter argument in their defence by saying that they have been meticulously and sedulously looking after the varied material needs of their children. Hence, it would be rather impertinent to drag them in the dock on this account.

Here, the most confounding question which crops up is that can the role and responsibility of parents be restricted to the sheer fulfilment of the material needs of a child and giving him/ her a comfortable and luxurious childhood only. This is indeed a half narrative and a half- baked approach to the art of parenting- a very crucial subject which the author Karen Claire rakes up in her latest book *Alphabetical Parenting*. Karen who has been a successful author and an excellent mother fervently and ardently dwells on the different dynamics of the art of right kind of parenting which is undeniably quite essential in order to help a child blossom into a well groomed individual.

As it is imperative to learn the alphabet of a language for relishing the flavour of that language completely , likewise in order to have the best experience of your parenting journey, there are a few significant but basic aspects which need to be understood by a conscientious parent. Happily, for the readers and parents, Karen Claire dwells on these aspects at length and sheds adequate light. While reflecting on her viewpoint on the much needed skill of parenting, the writer has elegantly used the sequence of the English alphabet.

It is indeed a matter of immense delight for literary reviewer that in her book, *Alphabetical Parenting*, Karen Claire quite meticulously attempts to depict simple but fully effective methods to enable all parents around the world to be the parents the kids actually aspire to have. Every alphabet plays the role of a chapter which provides a deep insight into the idea of parenting. It in fact offers a gentle reminder, one could say almost acts as an epiphany.

The chief objective of every book is to resonate with its readers. It is the intensity of the connect on which the success of a book hinges. With a heart to heart connect with the readers, authors are able to drive home the message. Any message conveyed in complex or too scholarly a language fails to hold water. Keeping this in mind the author has quite succinctly and artistically adopted an easy to comprehend syntax, perplexity free morphological items and smooth phraseology.

At the end of each chapter, there is a torrential shower of several thought-provoking questions that will help all parents to re-direct the trajectory of their intent and make the bond with their children more healthy and wholesome.

Here's a book which will help cultivate a strong value system in every family and provide a perfect, practical tool-kit for giving children the best grooming possible.

About the Author

Karen Claire

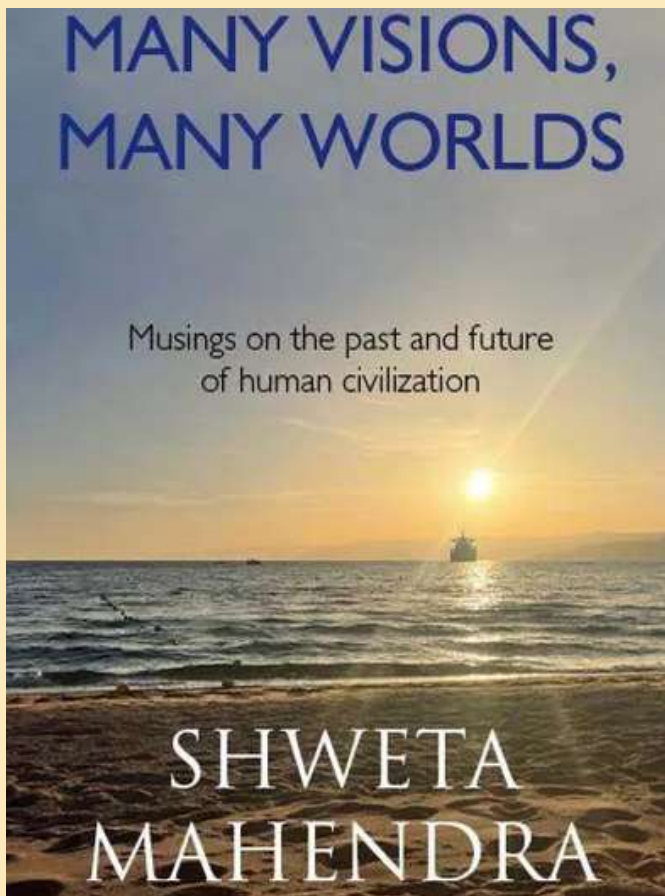
Arts-based therapy practitioner, **Karen Claire**, is also an ICF-certified mindset coach and parenting strategist. What began as a childhood game of 'playing teacher' evolved into a passion as she taught in real-life classrooms for over 2 decades, Karen has worked with parents and empowered children as they climb the ladder to emotional and academic fulfilment. Today, she facilitates effective, engaging workshops and individual coaching sessions with a mission to help individuals from all walks of life re-discover their '*astitva*' or unique identity and find fulfilment in their relationships with others.



About the Reviewer

Navneet Kaur

Navneet Kaur is a freelancer columnist, literary critic and book reviewer. She reviews books and writes columns for prestigious Newspapers like *The Tribune*, *The Deccan Herald* and *The Hitavda*. She has a Masters in English Literature & a passion for teaching English Language and Literature.



Many Visions, Many World

By Shweta Mahendra

Publisher: Griffin Publication, 2023

Exploring the Metaverse and its impact on our daily lives

A Review by Prof Shiv Sethi

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown had a momentous impact on our lives, leading us to live in a 'new normal' where practices such as working from home have become more frequent than ever. The idea of the Metaverse got a huge boost after the pandemic crisis as people began to find new ways to interconnect through virtual means of communication.

Shweta Mahendra's book *Many Visions, Many Worlds* is an interesting, inspiring and extremely useful book, which meticulously deals with the concept of the Metaverse and its possible implications on our lives. The author makes a compelling argument that through the Metaverse we can conceive a world of our own which we often imagine and yearn for. The author believes that many conceptions and visualizations of mythology are becoming true in today's era through new technologies. This book is important for people of any age group who are using technology and are engaged in working as active participants in the development of virtual future society.

Many Visions, Many Worlds is Shweta Mahendra's outstanding work as it is somewhat different from the books written earlier in this category. By bringing together interesting facts and ideas from varied subjects including history, mythology, philosophy, sociopsychology and technology, she has presented a great work in her inimitable style. This book is certainly a reflection of her distinctive vision of life as well as brilliant know-how and resourcefulness in the subject. As a technology leader, Shweta has examined historical accounts, myths and legends alongside current realities and recent technologies, and thoroughly explored the potent possibilities for the future world.

The author has also extensively travelled to ancient places in Europe, America, Turkiye, Egypt, Jordan and some other countries apart from all over India with the aim of confirming her own belief and point of view on the subject of the book. The conclusions and recommendations that the author has presented in this book for understanding human civilizations through these travels are highly informative. In the illustrations given in this book, the author has collected most of the

pictures from antique sites and has also given her comments on them to enlighten the readers about their significance.

This book tells us how mythological beliefs are linked to the technological development of the human world. Mentioning various incidents from Hindu epics, the author has made it clear that human civilization has never remained unaffected by the influence of technology. The author believes that various forms of technology compared with mythology and the technological capabilities of ancient times can prove to be helpful in developing many alternatives for the future.

The author also gives credence to the idea of rebirth, karma, and the existence of an afterlife or a parallel world, and she vividly recounts her own confronts and happenstances with such phenomena and beliefs. She explains with evidence the importance of life in ancient civilizations in relation to medicine, education, and various spheres of life and social management.

The book places particular emphasis on the needs of Gen Z, as they will be the key stakeholders in harnessing the benefits of all technological advancements. The author has focused on the fact that the society is constantly evolving with the fast-changing digital age, and the needs of people are also changing accordingly. The author has specifically underlined that it is most important to precisely understand human behaviour in order to find solutions to the complexities and problems of the future world. She has also prominently highlighted the fact that the way we all are living life in a hybrid style of both real and virtual all together, is affecting the psychology as well as lifestyles of human beings.

The present book remarkably states the author's reasoned belief that the Metaverse can bring together people of different cultures, religions, and backgrounds, fostering a sense of unity and camaraderie. Undoubtedly the author's belief that the Metaverse can really materialize the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, that is, the whole world is one family, in the coming decades is very pleasant for humanity and reflects the optimistic outlook and thinking of the author. The book well examines how the Metaverse is going to change the corporate world and the economy, besides affecting the lifestyle of the common man. The author is of the opinion that the Metaverse can certainly revolutionize our ways of working, learning and other activities.

In all, Shweta Mahendra's *Many Visions, Many Worlds* is a thought-provoking book, full of logic and insight. This book is an important and useful work, providing a fascinating glimpse into the future of technology and its potential impact on our lives. I would highly recommend this book for anyone looking to explore the positive implications and possibilities of the Metaverse for the time to come.

About the Author

Shweta Mahendra

Shweta Mahendra is a technology leader with corporate work experience spanning over 25 years, in business verticals. She is currently associated with Reliance Jio as Asst. Vice President in R&D department. She has done her engineering from IIT Roorkee and product management course from ISB Hyderabad. She has keen interest in future of technology, has knowledge of *Dharmalipi* which is an ancient Indian script which exhibits her passion for history, archaeology and ancient scripts. She also has keen interest in fields like sociology, politics, travel, fashion, fitness and keeps herself aware of global happenings in these areas. She is an avid traveller specially to historical sites across world and India.

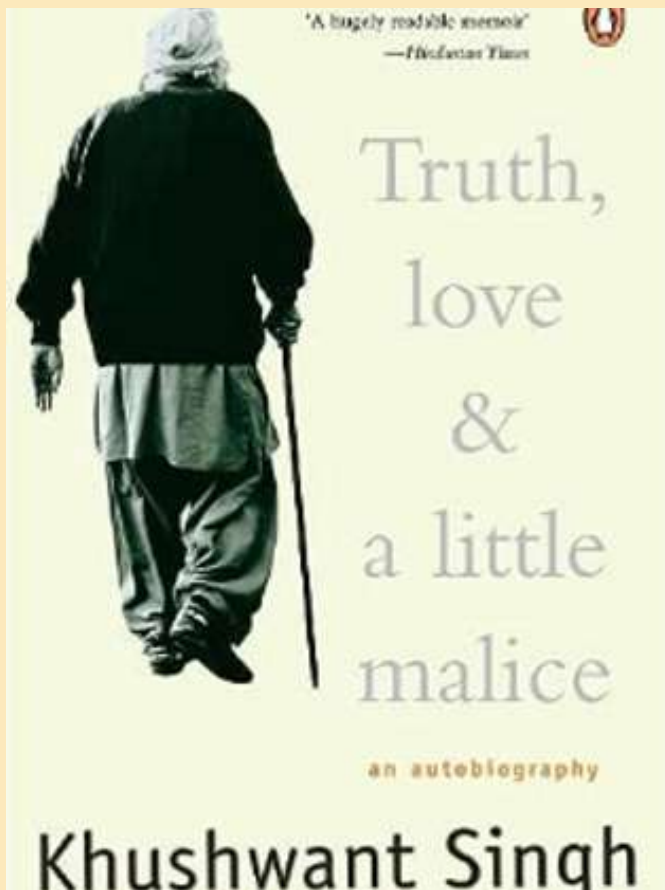




About the Reviewer

Prof Shiv Sethi

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



Truth, Love & A little Malice: An Autobiography

By Khushwant Singh

Penguin India; New edition (10 February 2003)

Of candid wit & sarcasm

A Review by Haimanti Dutta Ray

There are some books which remain with you - deep within - long after you've finished reading them. They shape your ways of looking at life as well as your perceptions. Khushwant Singh's *Train To Pakistan*, is one such book in my life. His experiences, during and after the Partition, surface with graphic details.

So when I received my first voucher from blogging, I decided to purchase his autobiography. *Truth, Love & A Little Malice* surprises us with its candidness, wit and caustic dry humour. Recently, I sat down again to read the book. K.S. or Khushwant Singh, had a varied, colorful and enriching life. His name is written in glowing letters in the portals of Indian journalism. He served with almost all the major newspapers of the country. His columns, written with precision and wit, were hugely popular among the readers. Published under the Penguin umbrella, the book has the writer's back - holding a walking stick - in its cover. Originally completed in 1995, the book was published as late as 2002. The very first lines in the Prologue runs thus:

"I started on this autobiography with some trepidation. It would inevitably be my last book, my swan song penned in the evening of my life ... Both my parents were long-lived ... I hope that when my time comes, I too will be able to raise my glass to take one for the long road."

The book offers a roller-coaster ride to the reader. It amazes, moves us to tears, surprises and makes us bow our heads in respect to a genius of a persona. Khushwant Singh had been in close association with politicians, fellow writers, film stars and these had provided him with experiences which he fondly recollects in his book. He spent considerable time in Lahore as well as in England in his student years. In this no-holds-barred autobiography, this renowned personality has wielded his pen in an open and frank manner. He had come in close contact with people during his editorship of *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and *The Hindustan Times*. But it is the chapter "With the Gandhis and the Anands", which

enlightens the reader about the kind of relation he shared with the then-Prime Minister of our country, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Her two sons, Sanjay and Rajiv, were hurled on and off the arena of Indian politics by accident and sheer chance. The role of Sanjay Gandhi during and before the period of Emergency, the marriages of both Sanjay and Rajiv and lastly, the tussle when Maneka – wife of Sanjay – was at loggerheads with her mother-in-law after Sanjay Gandhi's demise, are described at length. Singh's ability to interact with people of all ages, gender and racial discriminations, is something which the readers are bound to admire. He belonged to that generation who never bent double or compromised with their ideals.

Is it sheer coincidence that the year this book was first published – 2002 – the same year the copyright over Tagore's works was also lifted? Whatever maybe the case, Khushwant's joie de vivre is something to be envious about, to be emulated and is surprisingly, infectious. The book teaches us to look at life from a positive angle, take the oncoming days in our stride and be in awe of a personality who'd seen many personal and collective turbulences and upheavals. His raconteur-style of writing teaches us – without moralising – how a writer should evolve his or her writing style.

Born in 1915, in pre-Partition Punjab, the writer had seen and experienced a lot. But far from bogging him down with depression, these had prepared him for the future. His novel, *Train To Pakistan*, was later made into a film by Pamela Rooks. The autobiography ends with a description of his life companion – his wife – who died suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

Truth, Love & A Little Malice teaches us without being didactic. Readers must read the book with an open mind – clutter free and inclusive. The writer criticises people – often those at the helm of affairs – and it is balanced out by his empathy for those in need of attention. This controversial figure whose gift of the gab was feared and venerated by everyone, deserves a salut – from all sections of society.

About the Author

Khushwant Singh

Khushwant Singh was an Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and politician. His experience in the 1947 Partition of India inspired him to write *Train to Pakistan* in 1956 (made into [film](#) in 1998), which became his most well-known novel.

Born in Punjab, Khushwant Singh was educated in Modern School, New Delhi, St. Stephen's College, and graduated from Government College, Lahore. He studied at King's College London and was awarded an LL.B. from University of London. He was called to the bar at the London Inner Temple. After working as a lawyer in Lahore High Court for eight years, he joined the Indian Foreign Service upon the Independence of India from British Empire in 1947. He was appointed journalist in the All India Radio in 1951, and then moved to the Department of Mass Communications of UNESCO at Paris in 1956. These last two careers encouraged him to pursue a literary career. As a writer, he was best known for his trenchant secularism, humour, & sarcasm. Between 1980 and 1986 he served as Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament of India.

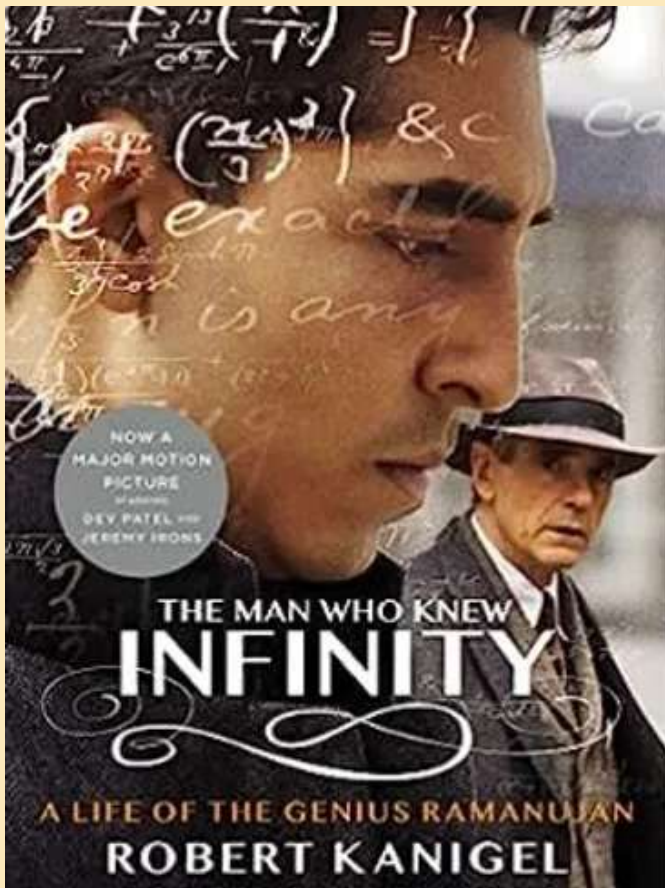




About the Reviewer

Haimanti Dutta Ray

Haimanti Dutta Ray is a Kolkata-based poet whose poetry collection 'Yesterday in Tomorrow' has been released recently.



The Man Who Knew Infinity: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan

By Robert Kanigel

1230 Avenue of Americas New York NY 10020

The captivating biography of a mathematical genius

A Review by Dr Chetna Sharma

'*The Man Who Knew Infinity*' by Robert Kanigel is a captivating and moving biography that brings to life the extraordinary story of Srinivasa Ramanujan, a brilliant mathematician whose genius defied all conventional norms. The book paints a vivid picture of Ramanujan's life, struggles, and profound contributions to the world of mathematics.

The narrative takes readers on a journey through Ramanujan's life, from his humble beginnings in a small town in India to his eventual recognition as one of the greatest mathematical minds of the 20th century. The author skilfully weaves together historical context, cultural insights, and mathematical concepts to provide a comprehensive understanding of Ramanujan's unique contributions to mathematics. The book follows the life of Srinivasa Ramanujan, a young self-taught mathematician from a humble background in South India. Living in poverty and facing numerous hardships, Ramanujan's passion for mathematics was his guiding light. Despite lacking any formal education, he independently discovered ground-breaking mathematical theorems and formulas that left even seasoned mathematicians astounded.

The book brilliantly portrays Ramanujan's unparalleled talent for numbers and mathematics. His ability to intuitively perceive complex mathematical truths and arrive at new theorems without conventional proofs sets him apart as a true prodigy of his time. Kanigel explores how Ramanujan's insights were often met with scepticism by the mathematical community and how his work eventually garnered recognition and admiration. While the book delves into complex mathematical concepts, it does so in a way that is accessible to non-experts. Kanigel skilfully explains Ramanujan's work, allowing readers without a strong mathematical background to appreciate the significance of his contributions.

'*The Man Who Knew Infinity*' not only delves into Ramanujan's mathematical journey but also explores the cultural and social challenges he faced as an Indian during the British colonial era. It highlights the difficulties he encountered in gaining recognition and respect in the academic community due to racial prejudices and cultural barriers. The book provides valuable cultural context, shedding light on the social and political landscape of India during Ramanujan's time.

It delves into the challenges faced by Indian scholars seeking recognition in the Western academic world and the cultural exchange that occurred during Ramanujan's tenure in England.

The book focuses on Ramanujan's collaboration with the eminent British mathematician G.H. Hardy, who recognized the young Indian's brilliance and invited him to work at the University of Cambridge. Their partnership led to ground-breaking research and the publication of numerous papers that had a lasting impact on the world of mathematics. The dynamics between Ramanujan and Hardy, with their contrasting personalities and mutual respect, add depth to the narrative. The biography reveals the personal sacrifices Ramanujan made in his pursuit of mathematical truth. It depicts the emotional toll of leaving his family in India and facing isolation and health challenges in England.

The book describes some of Ramanujan's most significant contributions to mathematics, including the partition theory, modular forms, and Ramanujan's constant. These achievements continue to have a profound impact on the field of mathematics. Ramanujan's work and legacy continue to inspire mathematicians and researchers to this day. The book highlights how his ideas have paved the way for further advancements in the world of numbers and mathematics. The book also addresses the ongoing efforts to preserve and promote his legacy through various mathematical institutions and societies.

In conclusion, 'The Man Who Knew Infinity' is a remarkable and thought-provoking biography that celebrates the life of an extraordinary mathematical genius. Robert Kanigel's meticulous research and engaging storytelling provide readers with a captivating glimpse into Ramanujan's life, struggles, and remarkable achievements. The book is not only a homage to the brilliance of Ramanujan but also a testament to the power of passion, determination, and the boundless potential of the human mind in unlocking the mysteries of the universe.

'*The Man Who Knew Infinity*' stands as a testament to Kanigel's ability to breathe life into historical figures and bring their stories to a wide audience. His dedication to chronicling the lives of influential individuals has solidified his place as a respected biographer and a compelling voice in the world of non-fiction literature. In conclusion, 'The Man Who Knew Infinity' is a captivating and well-crafted biography that celebrates the life of an exceptional mathematician and his indomitable spirit in the face of adversity. Robert Kanigel's meticulous research and engaging storytelling bring Srinivasa Ramanujan's journey to life, offering readers a glimpse into the mind of a mathematical genius and the enduring legacy he left on the world of mathematics. The biography explores Ramanujan's lasting impact on mathematics, inspiring generations of mathematicians and researchers. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of mathematics, the power of human intuition, and the triumph of the human spirit.

About the Author

Robert Kanigel

Robert Kanigel is an American author and journalist known for his compelling biographies and engaging storytelling. Born on August 24, 1946, Kanigel has made significant contributions to the literary world, particularly in the realm of non-fiction writing. He has a knack for exploring the lives of extraordinary individuals and presenting their stories with depth and sensitivity. Kanigel received his undergraduate degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and later pursued a masters degree in science writing at Johns Hopkins University. He has worked as a journalist, writing for publications such as 'Science,' 'The Baltimore Sun,' and 'The New York Times Magazine.'

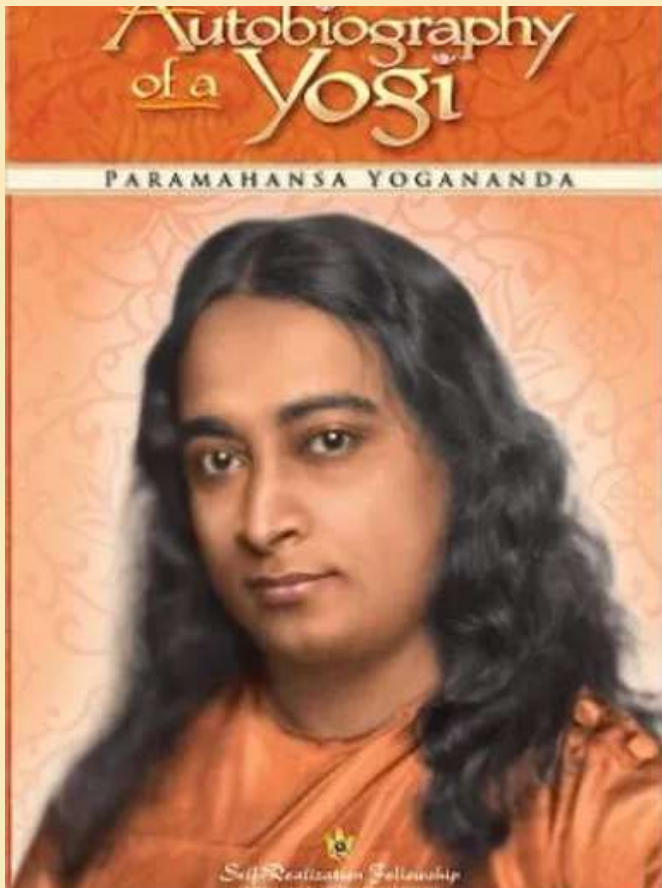




About the Reviewer

Dr Chetna Sharma

Dr. Chetna is presently working in the PG Department of Mathematics at M.M. Modi College, Patiala, Punjab. She holds a Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) and a Ph.D. in the area of Mathematics. She has one book and many research publications to her credit. She has more than Twenty years of rich experience in teaching and research. In her free time, she loves writing, painting, and photography.



Autobiography of a Yogi

By Paramahansa Yogananda

Authorized by the International Publications Council of Self-Realization Fellowship.

A compelling spiritual journey

A Review by Dr Dhiraj Sharma

It was during my matriculation days that I first stumbled upon the book titled '*Autobiography of a Yogi*' by Paramahansa Yogananda. It is a compelling spiritual memoir that chronicles the extraordinary life of the author and his journey toward self-realization. First published in 1946, this timeless classic has inspired millions worldwide and remains a significant work in the realm of spiritual literature. As I delved into the life of Paramahansa Yogananda, I felt an inexplicable connection with his spiritual quest for self-realization. His encounters with saints and sages, his devotion to the divine, and his unwavering pursuit of truth resonated deeply within my being, as if I was tracing my own spiritual footsteps. In my pursuit of knowledge, I revisited this profound work during my graduation and then again in my post-graduation. Each time, the words spoke to me in a different way, revealing new layers of wisdom and insights. Yogananda's spiritual journey, his encounters with saints and sages, and his unshakeable devotion to the divine left an indelible impression on my mind and soul.

This book became my guide, leading me through the maze of life's complexities and mysteries. It became a constant companion, offering wisdom and solace during the trials and tribulations of my life. During those formative years, like Yogananda's encounters with spiritual luminaries, I felt the presence of divine grace guiding my steps, even when the path seemed obscure. The experiences mirrored the teachings of the great yogi, affirming the universality of spiritual truths and the interconnectedness of all souls.

Mukunda Lal Ghosh, later known as Paramahansa Yogananda, was born in Gorakhpur, India, to a devout Bengali Hindu family. In his inspiring autobiography, he beautifully shares his life journey and the profound encounters he had with spiritual luminaries from both the East and the West. The book commences with tender glimpses of his childhood and family, leading us on a captivating path to the momentous discovery of his spiritual mentor. Embracing the life of a monk, he went on to establish and propagate his profound teachings on the transformative path of Kriya Yoga meditation.

From an early age, Yogananda displayed a deep interest in spirituality and a longing for self-realization. At the age of 17, Yogananda met his guru, Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri, who became his beloved mentor and spiritual guide. Under Swami Sri Yukteswar's tutelage, Yogananda received formal training in the ancient science of Kriya Yoga and embarked on a path of profound spiritual realization. In 1920, Yogananda made a momentous decision to travel to the United States to share the teachings of yoga and meditation with the Western world. He founded the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in Los Angeles, California, in 1920, with the mission of disseminating the transformative teachings of Kriya Yoga and guiding individuals on the path to self-discovery and inner awakening.

Throughout his life, Paramahansa Yogananda tirelessly lectured, wrote books, and established numerous meditation centers to spread the message of spiritual harmony and universal brotherhood. His teachings emphasized the unity of all religions and the essential oneness of humanity. Yogananda's magnetic presence, boundless love, and profound wisdom drew people from all walks of life, including prominent figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and Albert Einstein. His message of peace, love, and inner realization resonated deeply with people, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. In 1952, at the age of 59, Paramahansa Yogananda left his physical body, an event he referred to as *mahasamadhi*, while delivering a speech in Los Angeles. His passing was considered a divine departure by his followers, who believe that he consciously left his body to merge with the infinite.

The book offers profound insights into the ancient science of yoga, meditation, and self-realization. It introduces readers to spiritual concepts and practices that can enhance their understanding of consciousness and the human experience. Paramahansa Yogananda's life story is a source of inspiration for seekers and spiritual enthusiasts. His unwavering dedication, devotion, and miraculous experiences serve as a beacon of hope for those on a quest for inner transformation. Despite being rooted in Indian spirituality, the book transcends cultural boundaries. Its universal themes of love, devotion, and the pursuit of truth resonate with readers from diverse backgrounds and belief systems. *Autobiography of a Yogi* portrays the profound bond between the guru and his disciples, depicting a relationship based on love, trust, and mutual respect. This portrayal humanizes the guru-disciple dynamic, dispelling misconceptions surrounding it.

What sets *Autobiography of a Yogi* apart from other spiritual memoirs is the sense of universality it conveys. Yogananda's teachings transcend religious boundaries and speak to the innate spirituality within every human being. His encounters with saints, yogis, and masters from various faiths demonstrate the underlying unity of all religions and the shared quest for spiritual realization. Moreover, the book transcends its role as a mere biography and becomes a spiritual guidebook for those seeking answers to life's most profound questions. It encourages readers to embark on their own inner journey, inviting them to explore the depths of their consciousness and find spiritual fulfillment.

The book illustrates how spiritual practices can be integrated into everyday life. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between material and spiritual pursuits, making it relevant to modern readers seeking harmony in their lives. However, the use of terminology and practices unfamiliar to Western readers may require additional research for a deeper understanding. Autobiographies inherently contain elements of subjectivity, and *Autobiography of a Yogi* is no exception.

As I write this review after many years, I realize that *Autobiography of a Yogi* has been a constant companion on my spiritual journey. It has instilled in me a deep sense of reverence for life, an appreciation for the interconnectedness of all beings, and a profound understanding of the human experience. In conclusion, '*Autobiography of a Yogi*' is more than just a book; it is a guiding light, a timeless treasure of wisdom that has shaped my perspective on life and spirituality. To read it is to embark on a journey of the soul, seeking to unravel the mysteries of existence and find the eternal truth within. May its teachings continue to touch the hearts and minds of readers for generations to come, just as it has touched mine.

About the Author

Paramahansa Yogananda

Paramahansa Yogananda, born as Mukunda Lal Ghosh on January 5, 1893, in Gorakhpur, India, was a renowned spiritual teacher and a pioneer in introducing the ancient teachings of yoga to the Western world. He is best known for his seminal work, 'Autobiography of a Yogi,' first published in 1946 which has touched the lives of millions of people and continues to inspire seekers of truth and spiritual wisdom worldwide. Today, the teachings and legacy of Paramahansa Yogananda live on through the Self-Realization Fellowship and the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India. His profound influence on the world of spirituality and his contributions to the field of yoga continue to inspire countless individuals on their own spiritual journeys, guiding them towards a deeper understanding of themselves and the divine within.



About the Reviewer

Dr Dhiraj Sharma

Dr. Dhiraj Sharma is presently working as a faculty member at Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab. He has fourteen books and more than fifty published papers to his credit. Professionally, he is actively involved in writing, teaching, and research, and personally working outside his academic comfort zone, he is a keen Birder; Nature & Wildlife Photographer; Realistic and Semi-Impressionist Painter.