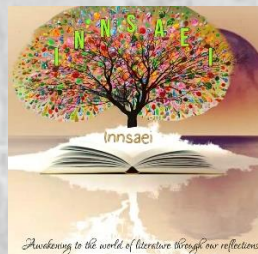


INNSÆI Journal

International Journal of Creative Literature
for Peace and Humanity (IJCLPH)

Volume II Issue 1 January 2021



Published by INNSÆI Journal

Edited by

The Proofread Team, INNSÆI

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VISION

An honest voice having the vision to provide a vibrant literary culture with the creative writers with the literary commune to promote peace and humanity in the society.

MISSION

1. To provide a vibrant literary culture among the creative writers.
2. To encourage the development of poets and writers in society.
3. An initiative to promote peace and humanity in society.
4. To provide an ambience among the literary communities to work together for a common cause.
5. To provide a platform for human expression for the deep inner expression of suppressed thoughts.
6. To encourage hidden voice from the grass-root contributors allowing them to express human values.

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New Year Wishes to Our Readers ...

FOUNDERS' VOICE

Founders' Voice

Dear Beautiful Souls,

Merry Christmas and New Year wishes!!!

The dawn of 2020 culminates with the mixed emotions of the pandemic making her stay little longer than expected. The mind is given the norm to be free with the transition phase asking questions than answers. The reindeer are never worried to have sleet giving them the joy being with nature's beauty. Man has been oblivion, seeing the destruction around, disconnecting with nature. The evolving phase has drafted many memories alive with many reliving the yestreen and making the past a future. The creativity saturated within, arcane for ages has come flourishing. Many have found solace in the creative form being within the shell, words have given succour for the ages to remember.

We have received eximious submissions around the globe in our three months young journal. The seed has started to sprout slowly and steadily. The belief to strive for excellence in quality remains paramount. We believe 2021 shall kiss the stem to nurture, invite the leaves to hear the silence.

We intend to add more feathers to our young journal in translation. We have been receiving requests for the translated oeuvres to be included. A New Year gift to the writers around the globe to submit their translated oeuvres in future issues.

We appreciate the best oeuvres to be given space in the literary world. Awards in different categories for the year will be selected by the special jury. Our beautiful literary journey is a platform for the young creators to thrive and experienced one to thaw us with magnum opus.

'Two roads diverged in a wood, and I — I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.' – Robert Frost from *'The Road Not Taken'*

A journey, less travelled, we are creating a new path for many to join the delightful journey. We welcome all the creators to be part of the literary journey, sing the song of joy, and being a part of the celebration for literature for peace and humanity.

Avec Plaisir

Kind Regards,

Mr Orbindu Ganga and Dr Tejaswini Dange Patil

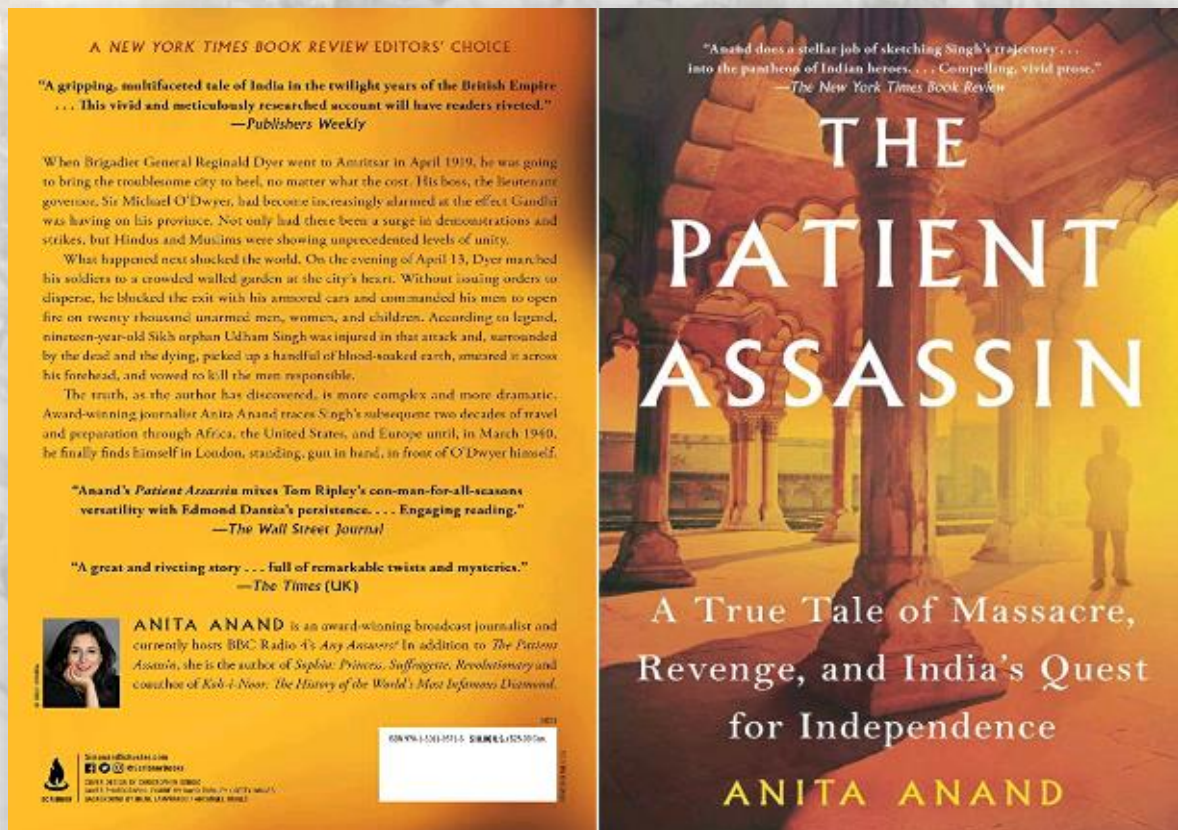
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INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative

Literature for Peace and Humanity (IJCLPH)

COVER STORY



A cover story on an award-winning *The Patient Assassin, A True Tale of Massacre, Revenge and India's Quest for Independence* by Anita Anand

The Brave Heart

by Ms Madhu Jaiswal (India)

Editorial Board Member, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

Reality time travels a centenary and a mighty journalist explores and lures our minds with its diction and perfection. An intricate journey of a patriot, written with sheer integrity and passion that shook our nation in past, setting a milestone and seeking justice after years showing a virtue that's real and human in its milieu.

The saddening and overwhelming feelings, the inkling of a bloody massacre. The shadowy journey of a patriot and his campaign for seeking revenge, an unravelling journey of fear, hate, pride and prejudice all well composed in a gripping tale that's hard to let go, when taken hold.

Nonfiction of its kind, *The Patient Assassin, A True Tale of Massacre, Revenge and India's Quest for Independence* is a 2019 book which is based on the life of an Indian revolutionary Udham Singh, written by Anita Anand, a British Indian citizen.

Anita is a political journalist working at BBC for almost 20 years. She has also authored, *Sophia: Princess, Suffragette, Revolutionary* and, with William Dalrymple, *Kob-i-Noor: The History of the World's Most Infamous Diamond*.

She presently resides with her family in London, UK.

This well-versed book has been awarded the prestigious *PEN Hessel-Tiltman Prize* for History 2020 this year. It's a great pride for all Indians that it could beat six other titles to bag this much-applauded award which is presented annually for a non-fiction book in the category of historical content. A recognition par excellence.

This book was published by *Simon and Schuster UK* in 2019 and coincide with the centenary of the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre and tragedy that took place in 1919, Amritsar, India.

This dramatic true story revolves around the ferocious Indian revolutionary Udham Singh, his survival from the Jalianwala Bagh massacre. His campaign for revenge that made him heroic and legendary in the eyes of masses, irrespective of his journey and plots that he chose to fulfil his motive making it a cult classic.

It was that fateful day of April 13, 1919, when an unauthorized political gathering and peaceful protest in Jalianwala Bagh was going on. It was British Raj, and they were already alarmed by Hindu Muslim unity and various anti-national demonstrations taking place all around which made them uneasy. All these anti-national movements were like a precursor of mutiny to the lieutenant governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer and to ensure law and order, he ordered Brigadier General Reginald Dyer to Amritsar, a heinous command that shook humanity and the entire nation to the core.

There were thousands of men, women and children packed in the Bagh. Dyer marched his soldiers into the walled garden, blocking the only exit and without issuing any warning he instructed his men to open fire, gunning continuously massacring the huge crowd painting the garden red. For ten minutes, the soldiers continued firing, stopping only when they ran out of ammunition leaving hundreds dead and thousands wounded.

According to historians, eighteen-year-old Udham Singh was wounded in the attack and remained surrounded by the dead and dying whole night. He managed to escape the next morning after taking the pledge to take revenge and kill the general with his own hands who took no mercy and played the bloodbath.

Anita Anand's story *The Patient Assassin* traces Udham Singh's escape from the massacre, his journey through Africa, the United States and across Europe before, in March 1940, he finally arrived in front of General O'Dwyer in a London hall ready to shoot him down. The patient assassin enlightens and tells the devastating tale of British Raj's most horrific events, but also enables the readers like a taut thriller, and reveals some outstanding new insights taking the plunge into reality deeply.

Anita Anand's story is gripping and extensively researched showing the meticulousness and thorough understanding of the situation and tracing the whereabouts and throwing light on a national hero who took various measures possible to take revenge for the mishap done. The narrations are fast-paced and hold the attention of the readers till the end unfolding and unravelling the truth that was less explored previously. Various stalwarts in the field of literature are wildly praising the artistic presentation of the theme and mature handling of the plot processed with perfection and élan.

Award-winning writer Anita Anand has tried showcasing the facts, vividly taking in account Udham Singh as a person who is not presented just as a national hero but a normal human being having various lacunae who tried to seek justice for his motherland and fulfilled his pledge. His name and the willpower of seeking revenge are perfectly balanced with the synergies of a common man, who rose above his situations, taking charge of himself in virtue of what he wished for.

A saga that sails smoothly reflecting the pieces of history, engraving a picture that truly endures and touches the heart. A book, with an honest appeal, will always be cherished by more and more readers in coming times.

About the Author



Madhu Jaiswal is a bilingual poet and social worker hailing from Kolkata, India. She is associated with *The Impish Lass Publishing House*, Mumbai in the capacity of an executive editor. She has 7 anthologies as an editor to her credit. Her creative contributions have been published in various national and international anthologies and she often gets featured in prestigious e-zines. Her poetry was recently featured in the prestigious anthology *Aatish 2* alongside various stalwarts. Also, she bagged third prize in *Beyond Black Sakhi Annual Poetry Awards 2019*. She is attached to a social group named *Share A Smile* and volunteers for social cause and upliftment of destitute individuals.

INTERVIEW

An Erudite Conversation with a Literary Connoisseur



Dr Stephen Conlon is the Professor of English, American University of Phnom Penh.

Co-Founder and Chair, Asian Cultural Studies Association.

Editor, Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society (2011- 2015).

Chair of International Advisory Board, Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society (2006-2015).

Chair of International Advisory Board, The New English Teacher (2006-2015).

Founding and Supervising Editor, The English Teacher: An International Journal (1994-2004).

An Erudite Conversation with a Literary Connoisseur

Hon. Dr Stephen Conlon (Australia)

by Dr Sanjeev Kumari Paul (India)

Sanju Paul: Namstey, Dr Stephen Conlon. Welcome to this interview session.

Stephen Conlon: Thank you so much for the invitation, Sanju.

- 1. First of all, I want to explore the teacher in you, that teacher who communicates with his students in a manner somewhat dissimilar than conventional, his expectations are different and so are the outputs expected and reaped out of his classroom. How important are the student voices to you?**

The students' voices are vehicles for their minds or psyches (souls). I believe a student carries many voices inside them: those of their parents, their past teachers, their friends, and the perhaps most importantly, the voices of those they read when they are absorbed in a work of art. When, especially now with the coronavirus, the student may be experiencing some forms of trauma, the need to elicit the various voices of that student in ways that allow those voices to form a chorus, as in an Attic drama, is part of a therapeutics without which a student's participation in the learning may be hampered. I want to hear the voices that the student hears when she or he reads or thinks. Those are the voices that tell me so much about what the student has experienced and learned. Much of this is tied to Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about dialogical, and the ideas of Freud regarding the "talking cure". Even when the student appears to be "silent", it is important to understand that there are several conversations that may be heard in that silence. I hope to experience the same learning events as students. This means I want to feel what they feel and see what they see: empathetically. That is the only way I can find of entering into a partnership with them that allows us all to participate as one in the leaning. That means, in turn, have to open spaces where we can co-operate with each other. The overall goal should always be a metamorphosis or transformation of

every aspect of what we do in education. And that opens the way for a reconfiguration of many different and often overlooked aspects of what we do as humans.

2. You have authored five books and all five of them deal with something in common and that is teaching. You seem to focus on the classroom as your laboratory to develop research methodologies, am I correct? Would you like to tell something about your preferred methodologies?

The ideas about the voices I try to elicit from the students and then enter into another dialogue with as part of the drama of learning have been central to the ways I write. I have tried to hear and see specific students as I write, and to imagine them responding to my words. Much of what I imagine then becomes absorbed in the discourse... invisibly and silently to most, but audible to those readers who have ears for the secret voices. These little dialogues are based on what I have heard in the classroom where I have adapted a form of Socratic dialogue method. That was what I tried to bring out in my *Great Souls* book. I read the students' work that way too. If I can hear and see the student who is writing a piece of work, even despite what some teachers may judge as poor writing, then that student has succeeded in doing something almost miraculous: embodying their mind or soul in their words. And when that is done in a foreign language that they may still be in the throws of learning, then something special has been done. For me, a great reader is someone who hears the voices of the texts and visualizes themselves inside that discourse, arguing with the writer and the other voices behind the writer's voice. This is a literary approach, I guess: once a reader creates a dramatic scene of reading, then that reader has started to co-write the work they are involved in, and that gives the reader power and confidence to approach the scenes of reading with questions and challenges. If they do not bring those challenges with them or find ways of developing such defences and strategies, then they become overwhelmed by the "text". The writer and the teacher who sets the text for them. That is how we manufacture passive, slavish readers. Such "products" are not what I have ever wanted to be responsible for. Since reading Paulo Frere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I realised that independence is the only goal worthy of a classroom. Whatever confidence I have as a teacher is a gift I have received from my teachers who encouraged

me to argue with them in tutorials and their offices when I was a student. For me, all readers are oppressed when they are not in a dialogue with the writer and the teachers.

3. *A Fate Worse than Death: Students' and Teachers' Dialogues on Suicide.*

What prompted you to write this book? Any personal experiences? Kindly tell us something about the contents and objectives of this work.

That book came to me after the suicide of twelve people who had been important parts of my life in the last few years of the 1990s. I had tried to continue to talk with those souls after they had gone. Then there had been several suicides at the university where I was teaching. I realised that the pressures inside the students were not a separate issue for me: they were isolated and in need of someone to listen to. A problem shared is a problem halved, if not solved completely. It is when the voice is cut off that one feels the hopelessness of the scene. This all comes back to what I have been saying about my overall interest in hearing the students' thoughts and words in a variety of ways. I knew that when I was framing the book, I wanted the students to feel a part of the process, so I framed a course I was teaching around texts of those writers who had dealt with suicide. That way, the students were encountering voices who had been full of doubts and fears, just like the students and their friends were. This de-mystifies the writers they are given to read. The students responded even more openly and eagerly than I had hoped. They started to take over the class and turn the dialogues into the wild and what some teachers would have seemed weird or uncanny directions. But I let the class take over the process and started to open the course to activities and materials that they brought into the room. They were becoming teachers of each other and me, their "putative teacher". I loved it. I knew that they would have to be involved in the book and I told them that if they wanted to be published, they could write down their reflections and responses to each other we had been discussing in class. They said they wanted to have their own space, so I gave them a chapter in the book. Their writing, to me, is the highlight of that book: full of passion and truthfulness. Their courage inspired me to include a chapter of my confessions regarding the topic as a dialogue with some of those lost friends who had gone into the dark good night. These are not "texts" that a conventional publisher would dare to put out with all

warts and stumbles. Mainstream publishing (and this is so true of educational publishing) want to inculcate this image of the teacher/ writer as an expert who is above the material being taught. I could not disagree more: teachers and any honest writers are NOT so perfect. Seeing their teachers as open to the same doubts and stumbles as they are going through is so important for the student if that student is going to take those steps towards true independence. Anyway, I wrote the book in three weeks and left the students' texts exactly as they had given them to me. Their work, unedited or "fixed" was the testament to the truthfulness of the process they had participated in. That is what I see as a research methodology of praxis. It would be too tedious to trace all of this back through my publications. And anyway, such an effort is beside the point. I hope that their voices work as a choral force, in harmony, to perform their thoughts and lay the groundwork for their future achievements as people.

4. I find the titles of your books very interesting and appealing like e.g. *Chaos in the Classroom*, How do you synchronizer should I say how do you exploit the chaos in your classroom in the teaching/ academics?

Chaos precedes creation in all the great accounts of the various religions. To return to that chaos is the first step of creative teaching. Being open to the dangers of such an experience may be too hard for some teachers and administrators, but if we do not trust the process and the students, then why are we teaching at all? I have never been one to encourage a tight lesson plan: we all too often let that "plan" become a prison to us as we march our students through a set of exercises and initiations and responses. If we believe that our students do have their voices, doubts, questions, and interests, then let them bring those things to the class and dynamically interact with each other. What they learn is largely their own business. Decades ago, my mantra was Blake's Los form his great epic Jerusalem: "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create". Note the spelling. Blake is a non-conformist in many things, but he is a great teacher and a wonderful artist. I have explained how this relates to the science that so many think of in mechanical ways. But that science now is finally opening itself to the reality of an eco psychology that disrupts the old conventional ways we have been

taught to follow rules and conform to prejudged patterns of behaviour. A class is a self-organizing system that continuously recreates itself as it goes. Having a teacher wanting to be the centre of attention is like having a guard tower in the middle of the three-ringed circus: nothing will happen except what the authorities have sanctioned could happen. Foucault's rediscovery of the panopticon may be a useful image here. But to explain that image would be to open this conversation in ways I would try to avoid. I am so wary of being the centre of attention when I talk and teach or write. I love to make short comments and keep my ideas framed epigrammatically. I do not want to write my lessons on the board for students to worship as some form of holy writ or scripture. I would rather them remember something I said as if accidentally or tangentially, later and respond to that comment in their own space. I do not need to monitor their learning so closely that they have no privacy or freedom to think: that intrusive approach is fascist thinking. The one thinker in education whose theories are the backbone of my ideas is Vygotsky. He would often preface his writing with a complaint against the tedium of having to do a literature review. And then he would not do one in the bring ways demanded by too many research institutes. By saying too much, we say too little. A whisper is more convincing than pedantic screaming at the reader and brow-beating that reader or student with references to books that the research has all-too-often not read. If I am right and the university as an institution is in a death spiral, or at least the humanities are in a spiral, we need to consider ways of putting the broken pieces back together in new ways as we reconstitute what it means to learn. We will not be able to go back to the old ways: they are worse than dead; they are dangerous now. But if we can face the chaos, we may find hope in our creative powers to start again.

- 5. You have experience of academics in Australia, Asia as well as America. What are the salient differences and similarities that you observed in teaching and research methodologies as well as student mindsets in these regions? Any prominent feature you can point to?**

For me, Asian students are far more energetic and willing to take risks and accept challenges than students in Western universities. Asian students are less arrogant and less full of a fake

sense of “independence” that is nothing more than an antinomian claim to their own opinions, no matter how ill-informed they are. Teachers who come to Asia and look down at their students as less free-thinking are just racist or blind to their real students. They are teaching to some delusional model that never existed in the real world “back home”. “This ain’t Kansas, mate” is all I would say to them when they would complain about their students. Never blame the world for your problems: fix the problems. The point is to change the world, not compare it to some ideal model. Those models are obsolete and dangerous.

What is often seen as a weakness here in Asia needs to be re-envisioned as a possible strength, and what is seen as a threat needs to be turned into an opportunity. I know this sounds like classic strategic management, but I see nothing wrong with using the force or power of others against them, as in martial arts. Western theories of discourse are not universal, although Western academics like to claim that they are. But these beliefs are being universalized by teachers who learning the West and then return to their academies here and impose those expectations on their peers and students. There are stunning methods available to us here that have been developed by the cultures here long before the Western idea of the university was established. Those are ideas I tried to discuss in *Great Souls* and my essay on Gao Xingjian.

6. You have developed and taught the number of academic courses in English Language, linguistics and literature. What are the main factors do you keep in mind while developing courses for those target students to whom English is a second language?

I do not have “targets” when I plan things. I visualise open spaces and dramatic dialogues. I want to create occasions where the argument, discussion, and freedom to choose are always close to the students as I disappear into the walls or floorboards of the room. If I am asking other teachers to implement what I am responsible for, I say to them that I trust them and that I hope they will trust their students: have faith that things will work out. As John Lennon sings: Life is what happens when you are busy making other plans. Learning is happening more often despite the plan than because of it when that plan is dictatorial. If

a teacher is unwilling to take risks and let go, then he or she will not let go of the students too. Again: I believe in self-organizing systems, not totalitarian ones. Give the students some guidance about what they can read and let them find their levels and partners. If they want to learn (and we have to believe they want to learn) they will learn what is important to them, not to me.

7. Kindly tell our readers about your experiences with intercultural English, its beauty as well as constraints or anything that you consider significant.

Maybe what I can do is explain that English is a lingua franca. Without going into the weeds or running down rabbit-holes, English is changing so fast now as it is being taken over by speakers and writers who were hardly imagined fifty years ago. That is an amazing phenomenon. It cannot be stopped or “fixed” It is a natural process of language change. I have never been a fan of an Asian student wanting to talk like an American or English person. How silly? Unless of course, that American or English person has a similar socio-cultural background to the student. I try not to smile when a student mimics a stereotypical accent. I try not to vomit when I hear some teachers who think they are still on some “civilizing mission in the third world” self-consciously doing the same. Such pretensions smack of insecurity and obsolescence. This ties back in with what I have said about the students’ vices. How can we expect those students to raise their voices and understand each other if we are demanding that they “speak like us” or like some out-of-date role model that never really existed anyway? The voices in a student’s mind cannot be unrealistic and fake. If I can be permitted, I’d like to tell you a little story. It happened this year when I was teaching in a Cambodian school I showed a class a text from a famous writer. One girl put on her glasses and moved around to face the screen and blurted out, “That is just word salad”. She then caught herself and felt a bit embarrassed. I smiled and said, “Yes, it is”. She was perhaps a bit nervous about expressing herself, but she was right. Other students were maybe a bit surprised by this even. But I loved it. That was a moment where some real learning was happening. And it was not just between me and the one student. All voices are beautiful when they are true to themselves and free. They come from the heart, not the dead textbook or recorded model voicebanks.

8. **Coming back once again to your books, You have authored a book named “Great Souls: Socrates, Jesus, Confucius, Lao Tzu and the Buddha as Teachers”, in which you have particularly mentioned about the hegemonic influence of the West is often accepted as different and new in the Asian context and you are of the point of view that the underground streams in our cultures may still be flowing if we listen for them. It would be interesting to know a bit more about it.**

I think I have already anticipated this question, haven't I? I had no idea where the streams were leading me when I entered them and went with the flow. That willingness to enter the stream of learning is so important to me. I do not resist the currents that I feel swirling inside me and around me as I move through my life. I am not interested in any “expert” who brings the “light” back to their own culture from the West and at the same time decries the subaltern-ness of the process. That is just hypocrisy. I am hoping to see before I die true voices of Asia and Africa, home-grown and free from imperialistic prejudices. Why does the “empire” feel the need to “write back”? Who cares what the metropolitan centres think? Why does anyone want to move there and be recognised by winning glittering prizes and attaining qualifications to impress their friends back home? Until we learn how to talk to ourselves without having those spectres of voices from the past haunting us and framing our dialogues, we will never be free. The real traumas of empire cannot be addressed by moving into the power-spaces that are now in ruins in the West. Most of the discourses such academics have produced in the West have been unreadable to the students here. I certainly do not understand the sophistry they produce to bamboozle their readers. Such strategies only create more oppressed readers and students... nothing liberating in those projects. Fanon was right. When an academic needs to be recognized in the West as an authority, which just tells me that person is quite insecure and is probably willing to be yet another oppressing if given the chance. The long-lost (forgotten or traumatised) ideas and ways we have here are so much more interesting and accessible to our students to explore and develop in their voices and spaces. I love the writings of Gao in this regard. A real hero on a quest to heal the wounds. I know he is now in France, But he is a real exile. Not a fake one on a scholarship to a “top” university. The real heroes, again, are in the real classrooms here, working under conditions and with real dangers that their “heroes” and

“masters” back in the West could never survive in. This is not Plato’s cave here. On the contrary, the Cave is in the West now. Ignore it and get on with the real work of creating voices and scenes of teaching and learning that tap into the currents of a past and present that will sustain us. Again: the eco psychology rises in my words. But I do not want to go too far in explaining that yet. It is in my current project of uncovering lost or forgotten ideas and knowledge that the Enlightenment and the Postmodern-Enlightenment have ignored and repressed. Until we recover the past, we will not recover from the traumas of another past that have been haunting us for far too long.

9. You are a passionate teacher but you have many other talents embedded in you as well, do you believe in experimenting on mixing up of various tastes like music, drama, films etc. in your classroom teaching?

For me, all teaching and learning are creative. Knowledge is created by a dialogue. But now I sound like I am repeating myself. The use of multimedia is not best illustrated by some techno-geek throwing spectacular feats of cyber-mastery into screens in well-made packages of knowledge that the student is impressed by and absorbs as wisdom. That is marketing and advertising; not teaching. To break away from the marketing model of teaching is hard. But the resources are there in even the poorest classroom: the voices, bodies, minds, and traditions of the students. These cannot be replicated as products and sold as textbooks from Western academic publishers. They are real, sincere, ethical resources that we need to care for in ecology of education that has yet to be expressed outside of the mainstream post-colonial theories. The trap we must avoid is trying to go back to a home we lost with the colonial age that is still here: nothing “post” colonial at all. Just colonial writ is large as globalized learning or Globish English language teaching. This is nonsense. The best way to counter such traumas is through art. Create. Make new. Stop trying to justify the West. And be wary of using art produced there, even by “post-colonial” writers who are trapped in the past still. Create our journals. Do not fret about Western accreditation or business models that require quality assurance certificates. That is poison. Art is free. We are all born artists with our voices and minds. Expressing those things is what our business should be.

10. How important are sociolinguistic, cultural, social, pedagogical and literary-critical aspects of creative language & literary linguistics to you as teacher and author?

There is no way I can separate those ideas. I have absorbed these influences as I have tried to teach. They are in my mind and shape it unconsciously... or so I feel. Unless a teacher can tap into these forces, then that person is in danger of being part of the problem in education... a robot that repeats what the textbook says and marks according to prescribed rules and fake standards. Real teachers are so much more than that. They have a way of encouraging the spirit in us all that will sustain us for a lifetime. The need for us to expand the curriculum in teacher education is vital. It means the abandonment of most of what has been taught up to now over the past hundred or so years. And that is a revolution in the making. But it is also a change that every teacher can make in a classroom now! If only those who have power will give them the freedom and trust they need for the teachers to trust their students' minds and souls. It is sadly a fact that most teachers are not versed in these areas. But if they get out of the way of their students, I hope and have faith that some of those students will find their inner selves and share those spaces and vices with their classmates and so take over the classroom experience. I have to believe this. Otherwise, what hope is there for us?

11. I have taken a few lines from your work "Post cards of Apocalypse"

Dry river bed cuts through my soul.

My whole life is a you-shaped hole.

This song is my shrine to you...

In it, I build amontillado tombs.

Words disinterred from when I was young

dripped like venom from my tongue...

Then you spun out our fairy tale fate...

The threads lead me away from hell's gate.

The metaphors are quite intense and disturbing.

In general, as per your academic understanding, what kind of impact does a poet or lyricist intends on the reader or listener by using intense and disturbing metaphors?

I wrote that song as I took my wife to the hospital to deliver our son. It came in ten minutes. Yes, it is quite “gothic”. Not post-gothic or academic. I live my dreams and thoughts spontaneously. The underground streams work to help us create quickly, immediately, honestly. Not to second-guess ourselves and fill our words with justifications and insecurities. I had one listener for that song: my unborn son. I was explaining to him what his mother and I went through to create him. Nothing disturbing in this for me. The release at the end of the song when I play some baroque organ (a la Bach) was meant to be a transcendent moment. But you are right to hear the dangers I sensed and my fears. We must face those demons or devils (as Dostoyevsky did and as I talked about in *A Fate Worse than Death*. There are problems we need to face. My son’s middle name is Dante. There is a reason for that. Dante’s Comedy is a story of a quest for knowledge. I did use that trope to structure a class I taught a few years ago. But the powers-that-wanted-to-be did not understand me and “crucified” me in my teaching evaluation. So what? That was a risk I was happy to take for my students. There is a sacrificial streak in every teacher who wants to help students learn.

12. Apart from being an academician, a literary researcher, a writer you are a Musician too. Presently you are working on multiple projects of a creative temperament. Which one is coming out first and when can we expect to see it?

My main research project is a history of literature from the Pyramid Texts up to the novels of Gao Xingjian. As you sensed in a previous question, I try to blend all my ideas. This is what I understand as the synergies of creation. So, my music is involved now as I explore the secret or occult paths of art and try to create an ecological space in a film project that exists in my heart: *The Pythia’s Dance in the Cave of Trophonius*, is the working title. It is about the traumatic things that have been possessed for so long. It may even be a confessional

of sorts, a therapy for my soul. If I could find a financial backer, I know that this film will bring my streams together as a disemboisement into one alchemical great work (their term was *magnum opus*). Will that film ever be made? Probably now, sadly. But if it were....ah! I would bring in my students and create an atmosphere like no other if they would be brave enough to try something so strange and new. I do see specific people in everything I write or create. Even when I go into teaching, I prep by imaging students talking to me, challenging me. Positive imaging works for me. Together we can change the world if we are willing to risk everything.

13. Any message that you would like to pass on through this conversation!

I hope that the listener or reader will hear my mind in the way I have tried to answer your questions and the voices I have used to do so. That is my test of truth: validity and reliability in the real world of conversation. Show me; don't bore me with telling me. Practice what you preach or teach. Be invisible and silent as the wind.

About the Interviewer



Sanju Paul is her pen name, original being Sanjeev Kumari Paul. She is a veterinarian by profession and a poet and an artist by passion. She belongs to Himachal Pradesh (India)

and has been involved in multiple projects of artistic as well as scientific temperaments ranging from very local to global ones. She has also developed an artistic technique of carved and washed paintings using discard PVC sheets as the canvas. Pen sketching is another art form she uses to express herself. Besides, she also has a short film named “*Catharsis*” to her credit.

FEATURED WRITER



Preethi Warriar (India)

Preethi Warriar has completed her Masters in Electronics Engineering and is an Assistant Professor. Apart from the technical stuff, she enjoys weaving short stories around those little, heart touching instances that happen around us. She is one among the winners of the TOI Write India Campaign Season-1, for the famous author Anita Nair. Her work can be found in anthologies like Arising From The Dust, Born Too Soon, She- The Warrior, Travel Diaries, Secret Diary, A Kaleidoscope of Asia, Sharing Lipstick and Shattered. She is a regular blogger with Momspresso, Womens' Web, Let's Make Stories, Plethora Blogazine, Induswoman Online, Juggernaut Books, Story Mirror, Pratilipi and Sharing Stories. She enjoys writing 100-word stories and has garnered appreciation on many platforms. She also won Third Prize at Asian Literary Society's Gitesh-Biva Memorial Awards-2019. Preethi resides in Mumbai with her husband and son.

GOD'S WILL OR OURS

by Ms Preethi Warriar

“Thud!” I jump at the loud clamour abruptly disrupting the silence of the afternoon.

Her wail reverberates through the hallway as the governess angrily stomps off, swearing.

“I’ve been telling you repeatedly, tie her up when I feed her. I can’t clean up the mess all the time. Let me remind you, I’m here to take care of her, just her. I am not your domestic help.”

I’m now used to the frequent ranting but those sobs need immediate attention.

I enter the room and she moans loud, demanding to be gathered in my embrace, but the sorry state of what I witness raises my temper. Food strewn all across the walls and the floor, rice and *curry*, splayed shabbily everywhere.

I try making a mental note of how long it would take to get this back to normal. I could hear voices from my laptop, reminding me of the online meeting I had drifted off from.

“Why do you do this to me all the time? Why?” I scream, only to be rewarded with more tantrums. I sigh, I’m in the middle of an important session and I wonder how I would take care of this chaos, and of course her.

But then she matters more than anything, so I swallow my frustration and try calming her. Her wails gradually die down as I rock her to sleep.

I push her wheelchair to my room careful not to wake her and I call out to the nanny. Placing some cash in her palms, I almost beg, “Here, please for today, help me.”

The nanny grumbles but proceeds to clean up. I reluctantly return to the meeting, staring at the screen, oblivious to the endless discussions.

That recurring thought crawls back to my mind again. Should I type out that application and mail the authorities? I understand that my aunts, uncles, sibling, they are all staunchly against my opinion, but in this situation, I happen to have the upper hand. They label my view as malicious, they call me a bad daughter, but I can’t tolerate seeing my mother like this anymore.

I’m jolted up when my phone rings. I’m in no mood, a bit too tired, but I answer the call, nevertheless.

It’s my brother, and the initial pleasantries are done, he enquires bluntly, “Is everything okay? You sound a bit unwell.”

“She’s asleep, had a huge spell of bad temper tantrums and she refused lunch.” I reply gloomily but break down eventually, “For how long do we carry on like this? Why can’t you, for once, agree with me? As it is, the entire family loathes me now, nobody offers to help. At least you stand by me.”

After what seems like an eternity, my brother sighs, “She’s our mother. How can we just let her go like that? Our family is old and traditional, they wouldn’t relate to what you ask for. Plus, you have a full-time maid, I’m pitching in to pay her salary. Your son is all grown up and independent. Is it so difficult for you to tend to her, that you now request something so cruel, for our mother?”

“Oh, you pay for the nanny do you? Mother is in a vegetative state, you understand what it means? You, with your family, living abroad, refuse to visit her, ever. And here I am, watching her deteriorate, every minute. Our once strong and smiling mother.” I bark.

“Look.” He cuts me short, “If she’s that much of a burden, just tell me. I’ll take her away. But I won’t let you go ahead with your plan.”

He hangs up in anger, and I know as much. We had tried this once when she was better. But a foreign land, the extreme change in weather and her loneliness brought her rushing back to me. My brother and his wife worked hard for a living, they had a busy social life, still young, and they couldn’t be tied down with an ailing, old woman.

I sigh, I know what the next day would be like. A visit to the doctor, more tests, more studies, but no concrete cure. The bottom-line happens to be that she’s been cursed to remain a living vegetable on a wretched wheelchair.

It’s late in the evening and the nanny informs she has fed my mother and she’s ready to go. She calls it a day and I enter my mother’s room. For the first time that day, the mother smiles ear to ear at my sight albeit tired.

I wipe my tears of joy, her happiness encompasses me with warmth, and all my doubts and worries are shoved out of the window, in a jiffy. I help her to bed and gently try patting her to sleep. But she isn’t drowsy. I comply, I plant a kiss on her forehead and lie down beside her.

Yes, she’s my mother, who has birthed and nurtured me. But I’m also that person who wished my mother could be granted euthanasia, sans any regret.

I reminisce that fateful day more than six years ago when our mother suffered a sudden seizure attack and reports revealed she had a clot in the brain. Owing to her age and

numerous medical conditions, surgery was out of the question, and medications and side effects didn't help. She worsened by the day, with occasional bouts of seizures.

Every day since had been worse than a struggle. Her condition wasn't only about being invalid, but regular bouts of vomiting, migraines, flu and worse still, painful strokes.

My apartment was huge, my son and husband often travelled for work, I worked from home, an outsider would feel it was simple to take care of her.

It wasn't the physical pain or the treatment costs, but the tragedy of seeing my once laughing mother, our friend, our pillar of strength, living that wretched life, shattered me altogether. I knew recovery was hopeless, she would sink further. The bitter medicines, her helplessness, the unbearable pain of movement made her squirm in pain and me weep in agony. Her limbs had given way, her speech was limited, a little movement harmed her slender bones and she couldn't even call out loud when she soiled herself.

Amidst the copious tears I shed, the government passed a landmark decision, consenting passive euthanasia for those unfortunate people who were in an irreversible coma or had absolutely no chances of recovering from a terminal disease.

They could call me a wicked witch or a criminal, no less, but the news had comforted me somehow. It had kindled a ray of hope in me, perhaps my mother could be liberated of her pain forever. Her distress and misery had only grown through the years, this could perhaps be her salvation.

But then, I realized, the very mention of euthanasia earned me all the ill repute in my family. My brother, his wife, and our close relatives, none wanted to hear that dreaded word. How you could think of putting your mother to death, who are you to meddle with God's will, they questioned.

I'm not sure, how could any God will this, to a woman so pure and pious, in fact to anyone. What wrong had she done to deserve this punishment? And for one feeble moment, if I had thought I could liberate her from her pain, was I being a bad daughter. Did she not have the right to pass on with dignity?

Well, I see she's fallen asleep now. I close my eyes, praying to the Almighty to guide me along the right path and serve her justice.

POETRY



Banani Sikdar (India)

Banani Sikdar was born and brought up in Shillong, Meghalaya. Now she is residing in Agartala, Tripura. She did her Masters in English from North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India. Writing poetry is one of her hobbies. This is her first submission in writing commune. She likes reading, creative writing, drawing, painting, cooking, baking, stitching photography, sports, classical music (vocal and instrumental), soft rock, and travelling.

HANG ON

by Ms Banani Sikdar

It's no more than a Time relapse,
In the end, it's time and it has to go as per its own rule.
The classic passion for Life and Survival will surface again.

It will drift away.

It's the Quietus's transmigration, notwithstanding,
The night is morose, frightful, inauspicious,
The peasantry is in deferral, gridlocked on the threshold and the avenues,
Each home is lulled by the timorous, edgy, furtive souls,
But trust in Hope and Tomorrow,
This pressing Hour will be dissipated,
The frenzy for withstanding will rise, immediate.
Indeed, it's a Period onerous, but it's fugitive, still just about Pulsive Time.

The Duration will cease and pass off.

The Dow, the Rialto, the Confraternity,
The lanes high and low, are bereft of din and laughter,
The Fear is overwhelming, omnipotent,
The dreaded villain is terrifying the Cosmos!
But it's a naive force, that dares to proclaim the Doomsday,

For History, both repeats itself and is a testimony,

That this deadlock is superficial,

That Fall and Rise go hand in hand,

At the core, lies the frantic zealousness for Human Survival and the wonders of

Life,

The celebrated ardour has just been abducted,

It's intact, has not been, cannot be split,

The Lust for Life will come to the fore again,

And will escort certain fruition.
Yes, the span is murky, exhausting and vile,
Still, it's just a matter of Transitory Time,
It will ebb,
And the Earthlings will return triumphant,
Full of Promise and Purpose.
Hang On.



Sanjhee Gianchandani (India)

Sanjhee Gianchandani holds a Masters degree in English from Lady Shri Ram College for Women and a CELTA from the University of Cambridge. She worked as an English language assessment specialist. Her love for publishing brought her to her current job as an ELT editor in the K-8 space. She compulsively writes poetry to fill in the interstices in her day and to streamline the chaos in her head. Her poems have been published in several anthologies, journals, and magazines notable ones being *Muse India*, *Madras Courier*, *e Fiction India*, *Live Wire*, *Setu*, *Indian Ruminations*, *Otherwise Engaged Journal* and *Poetry Northern Ireland*.

MUSINGS OF AN UNSETTLED QUEEN

by Ms Sanjhee Gianchandani

From the arbours of Singhal to the fortresses of Chittor
enthraling men from the days of yore
Long poems bespeak of my radiant beauty
But my inner core is unwritten of
Legends have evolved over time
Some glorify me as the Hindu queen
who immolated herself to save her modesty
while other accounts have erased me
completely from their tapestry
My voice longs to be heard
Of my life at Singhal
Before I was misrepresented by a bird
My prowess as a warrior, my knowledge of the texts
nullifying all the creative licence taken at my behest
my ardent love for flowers and how I spent my leisure hours
How I battled with lechers throughout my life
The collective wisdom of the midwives
The first heartbeat when I met my husband
The sinking feeling I had on leaving my island
The grand welcome with movies ulterior
some being betrayers and others pleasers
Every step I took with caution in my new palace
The jealous first wife's sideways glances
The shudders when our home was besieged
The shattering of our ornaments which had once gleamed
The safety of the harem which was compromised
Of how long I mused over the decision of self-sacrifice
How the conglomeration burnt away all my sins and desires

The nagging feelings before I thrust myself into the fire
Of how my very being and spirit were set ablaze
And for this, they've not written any praise
And so, I write my story
Shut-in and shut out from traumatic experiences
Before there is a war of belonging among poets, historians, and critics
Of who 'owns' my narrative and whether or not I existed
This entry is to proffer a part of me,
And my fight for the existential crisis
Which I had hitherto resisted



Priyanka Banerjee (India)

Priyanka Banerjee is a Ph.D. scholar. She is currently pursuing Ph.D. from Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata on American literature. She has done her M.Phil on William Morris' poetry. She is an experienced lecturer and she has taught at IGNOU, Rabindra Bharati University, different government and private colleges in Kolkata. She has also participated in different National and International seminars. She has also attended many webinars. Her publications in National and International journals are highly acclaimed. Writing poetry is her passion.

SPARKS AND FLAMES

by Ms Priyanka Banerjee

Sometimes, somewhere, some words resonate forever –
When the unuttered words are uttered never
And the last glances are lost forever,
The trembling fingers hold on to that decayed structure –
And the boiling blood rushes towards its source with utmost fervour.
Desires turn into whims, nay! Dreams turn into desires;
And vacillating thoughts and broken window panes
Resist not the moonlight to enter into the vacant rooms.
The empty bed – the tempestuous flight – the white gown
Stained with the last traces of lost love –
And the mad surge of the whirling wind
That knows no bound –
Till the moment appears;
That's ripe for absolute insolence
And benevolence
And the mad turmoil and bold defiance;
And though the moon shines and spreads its warm hue
Over the dark window panes;
They move not; they stir not; the soul is lost,
And the lovers know not what to gain
And how frigid are those drops of rain?



Rajesh Chowdhury (India)

Rajesh Chowdhury is an academic writer and a bilingual poet writes in Bengali and English. He was born in 1996 in Bankura, West Bengal. His poems have been published in several journals, anthologies, and web magazines like Aulos: An Anthology of Poems, Caravan, Sangshaptak etc. His creative compass includes poetry, micro-story, and essay. He has completed his post-graduation in English Literature in 2018 from Bankura University, West Bengal, India. He has been able to publish his research articles in various journals with international repute. His research areas of interest include 'partition literature', 'diaspora literature', 'psychoanalysis' 'existentialism', 'graphic novel', 'post-colonialism', 'feminism' etc.

THE DUMB TREE

by Mr Rajesh Chowdhury

The train left the station without a goodbye
The busy passengers got down and disappeared
Green and the red signal turned on and off in their scheduled time
The old banyan tree beside the platform
Stays for years with many memories
Supplies shades and coldness in the days of that hot summer,
Natural protection in the heavy rain when
Hawkers and trespassers seated under it.
The station silently notices all these but,
Could not speak a word or can't discuss
With the banyan tree, his only friend
The witness of the history of many years.
She may also be cut down one day,
The first-class ac platform is under construction
No competition was between them
Civilized society creates discrimination.
No one understands their situation
Their ultimate friendship may draw their ending
No, nobody to raise a voice for them
In their chemistry also, the catalyst will remain.
One day a writer, sitting in that ac platform
Will write a tragedy or poetry or an elegy as a tribute.



Stephen Oladayo Oladokun (Nigeria)

Stephen Oladayo Oladokun is a prolific and experimental writer who enjoys painting the world in metaphor. He is a teacher, playwright, photographer, and researcher whose works have been enjoyed by a wide audience on *Afribary*, *Queenview Magazine*, *Fly on the World Press*, *Fae Dreams Anthology*, *Innsaei Journal*, *Creative and Criticism Journal* and forthcoming in many more literary platforms. He has written and directed several play-lets including, *'Petals and their Gardeners'*, *'Gift'*, and *'Education in this Generation'*. He is a member of Hilltop Creative Arts Foundation in Minna Niger State, Nigeria.

HOMAGE TO THE WOMEN OF THIS LAND

by Mr Stephen Oladayo Oladokun

Those young gazelles are wonderful,
Creatures of honour clothed in beauty.
As fragile as a butterfly
But adorable from head to toe
Who can resist a touch from them?

Like lightning in the dark sky, they are
Torch to man's feet in thick darkness.
Like bees, they are carriers of venom
Yet they produce sweetest of sweetness
Without them, no reproduction.

They are world currencies;
The root of all evils,
But indispensable jewels.
Who does not crave for them?

Like a cobra, they look gentle
But they hold power to life and death.
They are like the mighty helmet
Which may safeguard or crush its wearer.

Like salt, they sweeten this tasteless life
But the wrong application spoils nice delicacy
Yet, without them, life is facelessly sour
For their buttocks sing praises to eyes.



Subhankar Dutta (India)

Subhankar Dutta is a native of Mohanpur, West Bengal, and presently working as a Research Scholar in HSS Department, IIT Bombay. Though he uses Bengali as a preferable creative medium, he also tries at expressing the same in English and Hindi as well. Apart from publishing his poems in college and university magazines, he also contributed to the several little magazines and journals namely *Rupkatha*, *Aalokon* (The Enlightening), *Sebanjali*, *The Lang Lit*, and others. Being a theatre enthusiast, he is also part of Qissa Kothi, a Mumbai based theatre group, and serves as a PG Convener of Fourthwall, the Dramatics Club of IIT Bombay. He has directed and written plays for the club as well as for IIT Bombay for Justice (a non-profit organization).

IN MY OWN EYES

by Mr Subhankar Dutta

The exotic eyes exoticized whatever it encountered!
The narrow lanes, the muddy roads, the uncharted paths
All seemed like an eastern sun yet unknown to itself!
The insight under the Kajol-ed eye,
The white, red bangles like a mourning cacophony,
The country songs, the weather reporting farmers,
The unsaid but well expressed rituals,
And all the pages of the book
Yellowed with dust but still withering the heart!

I struggle with my new pen to ink myself!
The bruised past,
The embodied history,
The scars engraved so strong on those yellow pages,
Haunts my morning thoughts!
I look for a blank page to write my history but find none!
I asked each page 'am I here? Am I there? Am I anywhere?
They smiled back at me like never before.

As the time ceases to care,
As the pages cease to bare,
As history fails to write,
I rise every morning, and I fight.
I fight with the conclusion each day,
I add a new page and mould new clay,
I open a new chapter- De-colonial rise,
I write to myself again, in my own eyes.



Lenore Weiss (United States of America)

Lenore Weiss poetry collections form a trilogy about love, loss, and being mortal: *Cutting Down the Last Tree on Easter Island* (West End Press, 2012); *Two Places* (Kelsay Books, 2014), and *The Golem* (Hakodesh Word Press, 2017). Her most recent poetry chapbook is *From Malls to Museums* (Ethelzine, 2020). *Alexandria Quarterly Press* published her prize-winning flash fiction chapbook, *Holding on to the Fringes of Love*. She wrote and published a book for children, *The Glimmerine*, an environmental urban fantasy. Lenore tutors middle-school and high-school students in Oakland, California.

MAGIC PENNY

by Ms Lenore Weiss

Hours on the beach he spent searching
For pennies, dimes, quarters, for no other reason
Than to say, look what I found,
And I could find a pretty penny, too, he said, if I kept my eyes open.

We stood in a sky of cottage cheese clouds. I begged
For him to tell me about his childhood
What his town was like, what his family was like, who his mother
Was, I knew nothing except history.

Began, after he stepped off the boat. Not alive before
I'd heard stories about purple violets in the old country
With petals as large as ears, about a wicked witch
Who pushed villagers inside a stone oven and let them burn.
For years, I've been searching for crumbs left in the forest.
Never know anything about those who came before me, raised
In an apartment with a radiator that hissed. I knew there had to be others
Who'd walked along the shoreline in the ocean's mist?
Adhesiveness is a word that comes to mind,

Something that sticks, that's hard to pull off without feeling pain.
I wanted to carry their strength forward like a magic penny I could pass along
And not stand open-mouthed empty-handed.



A Whittenberg (United States of America)

A Whittenberg is a Philadelphia native who has a global perspective. If she wasn't an author she would have been be a private detective or a jazz singer. She loves reading about history and true crime. Her other novels include

Sweet Thang, Hollywood and Maine, Life is Fine, Tutored and The Sane Asylum.

LAG

by Ms A Whittenberg

When you realize,
'Please return the library books,
They're on the table.'
Her last words
Balances every "I love you" she gave

Instead of a goodbye
The incessant, familiar instructions
Sums up, my mother.



Chinonso Eze (Nigeria)

Chinonso Eze hails from Eha-Alumona, a suburb of Nsukka local government of Enugu state, Nigeria. He is a graduate of Library and Information science from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is currently pursuing his master's degree in Library and Information science from the same University. He is the author of "*The blind shepherdess'song*", and "*The voice for the voiceless*" published in the Journal.

BEATITUDES

by Mr Chinonso Eze

Blessed are they that are strong in heart

For they shall conquer the world.

Blessed are they that are weak in spirit

For they shall be trampled underfoot.

Blessed are they who have the willpower

For their rights and honours are insured.

Blessed are they who steal through life

For their reward abounds in politics.

Blessed are you when you kill and rig for power

Most assuredly, yours is the throne of power.

Blessed are they that are innocent

For justice will surely desert them.

Blessed are you when you speak the truth

Be glad for your speech is hateful.

Blessed are the rich at the top

For they shall infinitely become richer.

Blessed are the poor on the streets

Their reward is great in the churchyard.

Blessed are the freedom fighters

Rejoice, freedom shall come tomorrow.



Kashish Arora (India)

Kashish is an aspiring writer with a passion for poetry. Currently, she is pursuing a Bachelor's in Law degree and a distance course in psychology. Besides writing and poetry, she take is interested in art and human relations.

HEARTSTRINGS

by Ms Kashish Arora

I try to find melancholy
In the songs, you wrote for me,
I end up watching the sky cry
As you drift away smoothly.
I feel your presence near me,
Even though you are miles away
But, when the sun comes up
You never ask me to stay.
The winds still whisper as
I scuffle to let myself free.
The orchids lay dying by the window
Dispersing colours, like a prism.
And when I lay under the sheets
I still see your impression
But this time I'll leave behind
Shadows, smiles and sunsets.
And when the dawn settles
I'll turn into dust
Leaving behind my ashes
Settling to rust.
I'll lose my shine, but
You shall live on
Turning blue to black
From verses to phrases.



Misna Chanu (India)

Misna Chanu was born in Assam, India. She is a homemaker by choice but a poet by heart. Though she is a postgraduate in Botany, she loves art and literature, especially poetry. Since her childhood, she has been writing poetry in her mother tongue, Manipuri. Later she started writing poetry and short stories in English. Some of her poems in Manipuri and short stories were published in local magazines of Assam. Her works are published in anthologies and journals. Recently she has published her first poetry book, *A Little Piece of Melancholic Sky*.

THE HUMANITY THAT IS MURDERED

by Ms Misna Chanu

Where is that love of roses
And modesty of violet?
Why do the sweet scent of Jasmine,
The melody of the majestic song,
And the laughter of children
Turn into cries and hues of fear,
On the stage of life so often?
Blood-stained roads bloom
Like red roses in every corner,
Of your and my world
Or shall I say our world?
My belief still says
You are not different from me –
In love, in fear, in pain and tears!
It seems like violets have to forget
What's forgiveness?
And roses no longer
Remember the secret of love!
On the chest of Earth, they dig
And sow hatred instead of love!
Seems like gravity carries
The weight of graveyard
Like the lifeless bodies
Of sons or daughters
On a weak shoulder of
An old father,
When mother Earth
Moans herself in grieve and pains!
Ghosts of broken dreams haunt

Innocence eyes of the world.
Heroes and villains are the same
In the kingdom of love!
If you only remember
What's there in the core of your heart!
When a mother cries,
When a daughter is raped
When a son is killed
When a father dies in action,
When the children's body is
Scattered in hatred,
IT'S ONLY THE HUMANITY
That's murdered, raped, killed
And slaughtered,
Not you, me or them,
Neither any religion nor any race!



Pankhuri Sinha (India)

Pankhuri Sinha is a bilingual young poetess and story writer from India. Her two books of poems have published in English, two collections of stories, and five collections of poetries published in Hindi, and many more are lined up. She has published her oeuvre in many journals, anthologies, home, and abroad. She has won many prestigious and national-international awards. Her writing is dominated by themes of exile, immigration, gender equality, and environmental concerns. Her works has been translated in over twenty-one languages.

ENGLISH AUGUST

by Ms Pankhuri Sinha

Not Upamanyu Chatterjee's
No, not at all
Just an Indian August
Not Indian enough
To be accepted
By the Indians
Elite or upstarts
Rustics or deprived
Who said
Morality was middle-class?
Hardly, anymore
Or perhaps it is so
That even my housemaid
Expects a clean
Middle class
Moral standard from me!
Not of the kinds
That we talk of
Lamenting bribery
Misuse of office
Mocking political sycophancy
But, just a weird sort of transparency
In partner search
In sharing dreams and desires
With someone at least
Preaching commitment
Practising Obedience
And perhaps
Believing in observance of that fast

For the long life of husband
Or at least just doing it.
Not that I am
Anarchic in my love life,
I am actually
Not left with one.
And late at night
When they come
Asking about it
People, affiliated
To one political party
Or the other
Almost
And if not
Deep believers
In the political ethos of one leader
Or the other
And in personal happiness
Of all people
Artists specially
At night
Leaving the footpath dwellers
Exactly in their places
And the millions more displaced
On the streets
Amazing is their concern.
About my personal life
And I wish to tell them
It's precisely you
Who destroyed it!
You! Suffering from an
Anxiety disorder

Poking into my baby-making
Lovemaking
Travelling
In-laws and other marital issues
You bought my lover
For god knows
A drink
A political chair
Or just a taste of power
Of absolute control
In one way or the other
Over a woman's life!
And now you come around
Asking for it!
My personal life!
It might be in the making
Or re-making
But lives are August
Private and delicate
Like garden roses,
Why should I hand you?
A blooming bud
Even before it flowers?



Parineeta Mehra (India)

Parineeta Mehra is a Communication & Life Transitions Coach, Facilitator, Mentor and Certified Speaker. She has 26 years of work experience. She inspires individuals to build awareness. She influence others and helps them to create the results they want for building lasting business relationships. She has worked with executives across the education, financial, health, retail, and technology industries. Her carefree and agile disposition helps her clients to feel courage, clarity, and confidence in what she delivers.

CELEBRATING SELF

by Ms Parineeta Mehra

Hey Girl! Look at you, See the mirror
Watch your smile and walk unfurl;
You have the power to move any tower,
You rise and fall, and yet smile
Through it all!

The curls of your hips,
Sway like in the water the ships;
Your bosom holds me dear and is a place
Where I stack away all my worries and fear.

Hey Girl, look at your hands, that has fed many a meal,
And helped my future with courage seal.
You have the power to move any tower,
Your rise and fall, and yet
Graciously come through it all.

Your attitude is filled with gratitude,
Even though sometimes it may entail solitude;
You are the universe's blessing
Out to spread abundance Knowledge.

You are what you are girl, without
Any sham, glitter or glam!
You spread happiness and help many find their Purpose and Zeal,
By helping they know what truly joyous makes them feel;

The mission goes on without making it pompous
For life itself is all about connecting with the inner compass,

Navigating to the shore and discovering that every day
Is an experience to live and grow once more!



Roy Kanta (India)

Living in Kolkata, India, Roy Kanta is a retired teacher. He holds a master's degree in English. Engrossed in literature, his hobbies are writing poetry and painting.

MY POEMS ARE GOING TO MEET.

by Ms Roy Kanta

My poems aren't going to meet,
I miss what featuring creaks;
Dear, sprees into my effort
To read what's more
I cling about searching
And go ahead hooked
With hopes...
If there facets of sympathetic smite;
Tenaciously I find blood attributes;
Know heart,
Its madness, where length too big,
Extended to some hollow and
Dark black hole;
Colour hunted seasons;
Nestle by issued curly skin's wetness
We know how it evaporates
Tears by sensed cuteness
The debates beautifully adapted
All maundy babies with story scroll
What bible never could write?
Prayer and begging goldsmith:
My poems are going through meets
What ensuring massive Autumnal heads,
When every your fingers welcome
Most, a divinity let their born;
What every nation can have freely holding:
Hope eagerly, let, my poems certainly call
Orphanage and their endurances;
Helplessly are they praying?

For salvation, and let offer our
Kind heart to them and
To seasoned spreadsheet
A stem and root to live:
It is old in every social problem
For orphans and who are abandoned
Bullet to their life's morning,
No light for them to have a social shelter;
What could not be removed for long?
And what's shrinking our pillar
What's are inhuman heads in world zoo:
How heedless the world!
Can we spray our hands to them?
And have them adopt as own
Child in every family?



Sudha Viswanath (India)

Sudha Viswanath, a teacher by profession, took to writing as a hobby. Though she writes many short stories, she has also penned a few poetries. Her stories, which carry a strong moral, have been published in the Woman's Era magazine. Many of her articles on soul curry (soul-stirring experiences) have been published on the Times of India site. A couple of her stories and drabbles have been a part of an anthology. She is an active member of many writing platforms.

HANDS OF DESTINY

by Ms Sudha Viswanath

By the brightly lit bonfire, cosy and warm,
Away from the bustle, serene and calm,
Entangled in an embrace, stand you and me,
Watching the beautiful sky, where, stars we see.
“Look! A broken star,” you say with a kiss,
“My dear, this is the time to make a wish.”
“If wishes were horses, beggars would ride,”
I answer sadly, standing by your side.
Aware I am about the wish you would ask,
As a couple together, we must always bask.
But we cannot change, the decision of fate,
No matter whether we like it or we hate.
Cuddle inside the tent, let us tonight,
For the morrow may take me out of your sight.



Aditi Lahiry (India)

Aditi is a teacher, teaching English and French language along with creative writing. She is passionate about narrative writing and is a storyteller, emerging poet and writer.

She lives in Hyderabad. She loves to cook, sing and spend time with her 6-years-old son.

CANDLE IN THE WIND

by Ms Aditi Lahiry

Amidst all the oddities we will move ahead with faith
We have to be together in our prayers always
We have to bring
The best feelings and
Qualities together
We have to fight to create one world together.
A world where there is continuous harmony
A world where resides,
No hatred
A world where
Flows the river of kindness
A world where no soul cries in helpless bitterness.
Let's make the Utopia true
Let's not fight over petty issues
If we stay together harmoniously, the music of hope will play on
Like a song touching every soul endlessly
We have to conquer our fears and move ahead with feelings of optimism effortlessly.
Like the "Candle in the wind", we have to flicker
We have to guide each other during the hours of calamity fearlessly
Bridging the gap between old and new
We have to keep moving amidst the oddities.
Our prayers always
We have to bring
The best feelings and
Qualities together
We have to fight to create one world together
A world where there is continuous harmony
A world where resides,
No hatred

A world where there
Flows the river of kindness
A world where no soul cries in helpless bitterness
Let's make the Utopia true
Let's not fight over petty issues
If we stay together harmoniously, the music of hope will play on
Like a song touching every soul endlessly
We have to conquer our fears and move ahead with feelings of optimism effortlessly
Like the "Candle in the wind", we have to flicker
We have to guide each other during the hours of calamity fearlessly
Bridging the gap of old and new
We have to keep moving amidst the oddities
We have to stay strong like a pillar amidst severe adversities.



Gayatri Samudra (India)

Gayatri is a twelve-year-old girl studying in S.M.Shetty International School and Junior College. Singing, drawing, swimming and dancing are just a few of her hobbies. She learns Kathak and has cleared her Level 3 Exam. Gayatri is an avid reader having started reading at an early age and has finished reading many series and novels. She is good at studies having scored a perfect 6/6 in her CAIE Cambridge Board Examination in 2018. She enjoys playing sports and is also an animal lover. Some of her short poems and drawings have been published in the school magazine.

THE FIREFLY

by Miss Gayatri Samudra

Firefly,
Like sparks in the night sky
Dancing in the night
And filling the dark with the light.

Spreading warmth through the air
As they flutter by here and there
With clear thoughts and only one aim
Considering all the same.

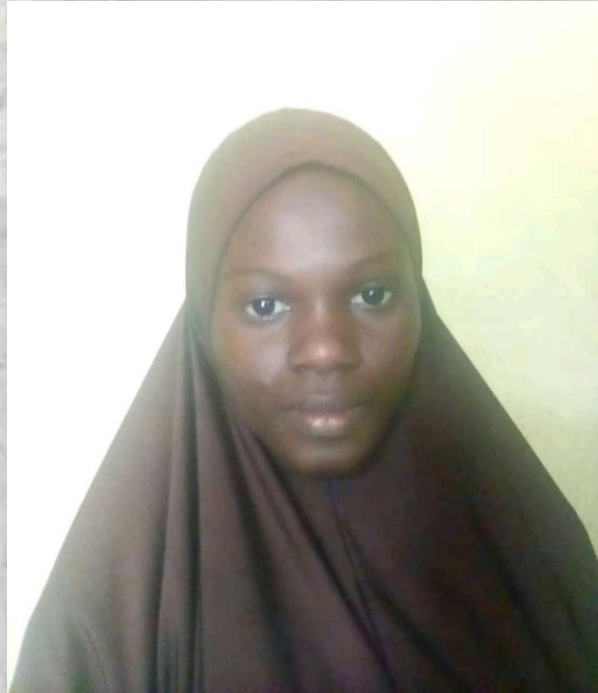
In their clan, everybody cares for one another
All are one
All are equal
Each one is a sister or brother.

The head is a queen bee
Who leads everyone justly?
Under her rule
Everyone is calm and happy.

Once she is gone
Many will mourn
But they all know they must pass the throne
The crown another one will own.

And yet all will be the same
The joyousness will remain
And even after generations
There shall always be one to light the sky

Known respectfully by us as the Firefly.



Lawal Atiyatullah (Nigeria)

Lawal Atiyatullah is a Nigerian poet and storyteller living in Abeokuta the capital of Ogun state. She's currently studying Mathematics education in the University of Ibadan. She's passionate about writing and loves reading poetry collection.

THE PRINCIPLED MAN

by Ms Lawal Atiyatullah

Like the evergreen freshness of the cycad tree
Standing out against all odds
The memories of the principled man
Lingers in the mind of his people.

Like the clanging of the bell
Echoing from time to time
His voice continues to ring
Shouting: JUSTICE! JUSTICE!! JUSTICE!!!

All the fights for
Is the right of his people?
Despite all criticism
He would always stand by his words.

The truth is bitter
But he would never falter
To uphold the truth
Nothing else but the truth.



Milan Mondal (India)

Milan Mondal, an assistant professor by profession and creative writer by passion, writes in English and Bengali. He has widely been published in various journals and magazines with international repute. One of his poems has recently been published in *Shimmer Spring* from *Havakal Prokashana* amidst many luminous literary figures throughout the world. He has also been selected to be published from the U. S. A. in two anthologies. His imagination focuses on current social issues, folk literature, nursery rhymes, etc. Besides being a creative writer, he has also a penchant for academic writing.

THE UNVARNISHED SUPERPOWER

by Mr Milan Mondal

No slipper in feet
No majestic turban in head
Defines thee.

Tans and wrinkles
Are the sole ornaments
To bestow thee.

Plough on shoulder
And spade in hand
Identify you from the rest.

The furrow knows your pace
The pavement hardly can feel that
For it lacks tactility.

The bread you make
Easily takes a plate
And becomes famous overnight.

The sun, moon and the stars
Are the only mates
Thou can expect from your fate.

Nobody cares for you
Only the sky shades dew
And the blood is the only reward for you.



Nia Rohania (Indonesia)

Nia Rohania is from Indonesia. She is a teacher and Advocate, Chairman of legal aid service Srikandi Nayantara and Founder of Rohania Foundation. Her Poetry Anthology books are Asian Teachers 2019 got MURI reward, Nationality 2019, Jazirah2 (Bintan International poetry Festival), Peneroka love 2019 (PERRUAS), Longing 2019 (Ikut Lomba), Memories in Silence 2020 (Mecca Publishing), Love in Spring (2020), The Writer of Asian teacher Advice Verse (2020), Kata Kita 2020 (Two Lines Poetry Community), love in summer2020 (2 languages), a tribute to Soepardi 2020, Jiwa Yang Mengangkasa (My independent anthology book) 2020, The World Poetry Reader of Corona (2020), The Asian Poetry Reader of Teacher (2020). Guest speaker at the discussion panel 'Pathbreaker' at Museum Selarjung India 3-7th August 2019 which was held by COPA (Confederation of Voluntary Association) in Hyderabad India.

LOCKED UP

by Ms Nia Rohania

I was trapped in a 2x4 box
Wood and chains tied my feet tightly
Until I was unable to rebel

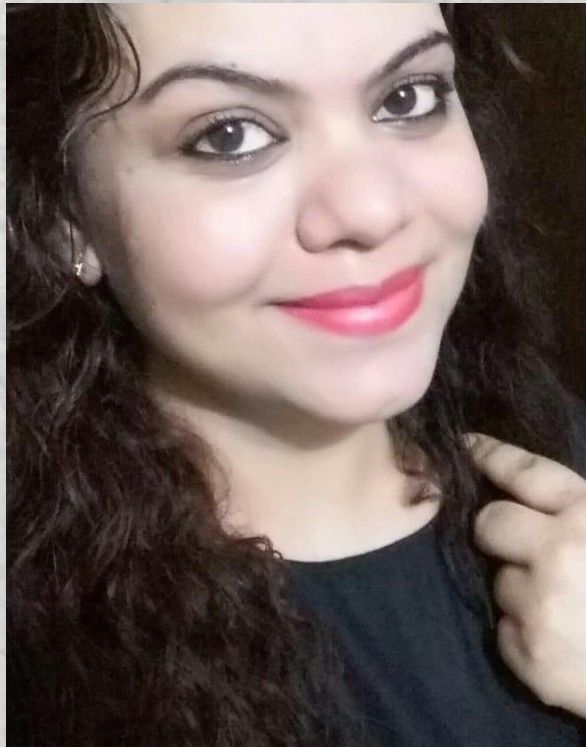
The days I went through were so dark
With deep pain and pain
For decades my body was confined
In a cramped and cramped room
There was no moonlight or warm sun

I was talking to a silent wall
Making jokes with deaf poles
Kidding in a false imagination
Laughter was with hallucinations

I wanted to ask
I wanted to beg
Release me, free me

But my mouth was speechless
There was only a ferocious scream
And cries of anger and echoes of pain
Which makes them even scarier.

I'm stuck in the soul you call crazy.



Nisha Rana (India)

Nisha Rana is a freelance creative writer by passion and soft skills trainer by profession. She writes quotes, descriptive content and short stories for various websites and aspiring writers. A human being by chance but a humanitarian by choice, she practises the highest form of bringing about self-awareness and transformation in a person's life that is, coaching. To serve mankind by helping people become winners in life, these days, she is promoting a self-help program called BETTER LIFE.

MY CHILD

by Ms Nisha Rana

You are my child.
So lovely, so mild.

When you feel pain,
I go mad, almost insane.

You cry, I cry.
You laugh, I try.

When you coiled deep inside,
I longed to see you by my side.

As you flourished, dwelled a little more,
I felt you moving, that's for sure.

The day you came, you brought me joy,
I felt so happy and you felt so coy.

Today, I love you and love you to the core,
The way you love me, I want much more,

I wish, I find you always nearby,
May time never come that you say goodbye.

May God bless you, bliss may rain,
May this bond...always remain!



Ro Hamedullah (Myanmar)

Ro Hamedullah (RH) is a thirty-three-year-old Rohingya poet from Myanmar. He completed his matriculation examination in 2016 and then, after arriving in Bangladesh, attempted writing poetry and became a unique poet in his life. He is a teacher by profession and writing poetry is his passion. He writes poetry, short stories and quotes. His poems have been published in many anthologies. He was awarded by many different institutes as a poet and humble servant of humanity.

LOVE MAKES ME VERY RESTLESS

by Mr Ro Hamedullah

That atmosphere of imagination

That love of the heart

That crazy weather

Your passionate love

-Make me very restless

Those days of love

Those moments of time

That intoxicating weather

Those raindrops

-Make me very restless

That stir of the breaths

That scented scarf

Those arm locks

That cloud of hair

Make me very restless

That shyness of yours

That look down your eyes

That game of yours

And suddenly seeing again

Make me very restless

Without telling me anything

That understanding of yours

Using only signals
That way of you to say everything

Make me very restless

Those fights and squabbles
And then regret after that
You go upset
And then coming back

Make me very restless.



Sonali Ray (India)

A nature lover who admires the wonders of Nature and tries to pen the beauty through her words. An avid reader and hopeless romantic who sees beauty in the smallest beings of nature.

AWAKENED

by Ms Sonali Ray

In the arms of the sleepless night
I unearth solace, an eternal delight!

Resting on the velvety green carpet
The midnight dew kiss my breast
In the whistling of the fragrant winter breeze
Am losing my senses, oh time, please freeze.

The nocturnal birds sing that old melancholic hymn
And once again I lose my battle to the bygone time
The gleeful night embrace the luminous orb
Basking in her shimmering light I admire her, unperturbed.

Silhouette of the ruddy blossoms shine in my welled eyes
How can this turbulent spirit sleep ignoring the heart's cries
The placid lake stealthily touch the damp slope
Someplace deep in her bottom, she clutches to that forlorn hope.

Tucked beneath the warm quilt when the world sleeps
Shedding her withered petals, this lovelorn heart peeps
She has now befriended the solitary, tranquil night
That flutters to nothingness with the early rays of daylight.

So, every time, I unearth solace, an eternal delight
In the arms of my amigo, the sleepless night!



Sushanta Bhattacharjee (India)

Sushanta Bhattacharjee is a bi-lingual poet. He writes poems in both Bengali and English. He is the editor of 'Suchetana' - Little Magazine. He has published two Bengali poetry books namely 'Kichu Chara Kichu Kabita' and 'Barak Surmar Tera Tera'. He has published one English Poetry Book 'Blue Horizon'. His poems have been published in several newspapers, little magazines, and several Anthologies of Poetry. He did his B.Sc with Eco (Hons) from G.C.College, Silchar, and M.A in Economics from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He also, later on, did M.A in English, Bengali and Sociology. He is a businessman by profession. He is the managing partner of Cachar Drug Distributors - deals in human medicine.

IN MY SOUL

by Mr Sushanta Bhattacharjee

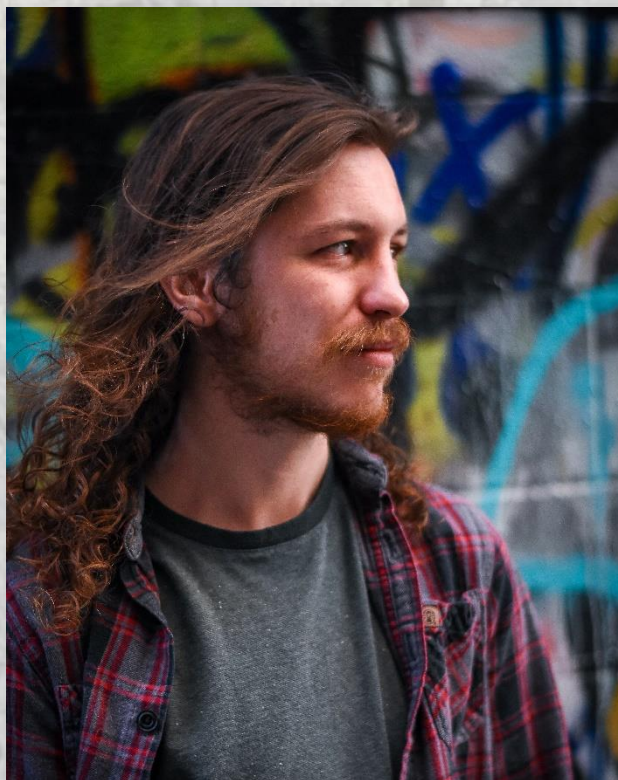
I am carrying my DNA, my chromosome
My gens in my drops of blood, in my bones,
In my nerves, in my tissues, in my Soul
And that is what I am.

I am passionate about my thought,
Heartbeats, consciousness, and love.

I am a part of the galaxy
In this time-space matrix
Within the vastness of the Universe.

I am carrying everything
That is existing in the Universe.

All these elements and compounds
Are within me – inside me –
In my Soul..



Sam Caton (United States of America)

Sam Caton started writing at a young age, and within a year of graduating from high school (2008), he finished his first feature screenplay. He has now finished 8 feature screenplays and been recognized in international contests for them, completed three collections of poetry with thousands of loose-fit poems, and is marketing a novel.

He has had poetry published in multiple journals and magazines, including Lucky Jefferson and The Abstract Elephant Magazine, as well as a short play performed by NDSU Theatre Arts, and his screenplay The Recital is currently in production.

IN THE MORNING AT 6:13

by Mr Sam Caton

The sun swings closer; my eyes open and
It is with the reverence that the morning arrives.
The mirror needs polished,
Perhaps I will use the tattered map
Of the frosted tobacco lamp,
Of the meditative silent windless chilled air
To remove the smudges.
When there is nowhere to turn,
And the mirror darkly lit limps narrowly
On three legs, panting but not from heat,
May I be reminded, each morning
After the next:
After all the cartography is finished,
The only worthy path is one of kindness,
And that all moments, both happy and sad,
Pass into the patient clock.

INNSÆIANS' VOICE

Shristy Sinha (India)

Shristy Sinha, a teacher of English Literature by profession, is also a poet, writer, and well-doing mom-blogger, who is creating an impactful online class for pre-schoolers by imparting value-based knowledge through creativity and innovations. She has a title published under her name "From All the Directions", which is an anthology of poetry depicting her varied experiences.

Despite being a graduate student in commerce and working for a US-based mortgaging firm for a few years, her love for literature kept calling her to have a double Master's degree in English Literature. She had also taken up many short-term courses in creative writing, editing and publishing, which shows her deep interest in the world of books and literature. Apart from writing, Shristy also holds an interest in many other art forms like vocal music, sketching, painting, cooking, etc. But that is not all, her interest in some very different subjects like science, travel, and sports goes into making her a composite personality.

YES, AGE IS JUST A NUMBER!

By Ms Shristy Sinha

Editorial Board Member, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

That innocent face with a weary look
Eyes deep black with curly hair hook
He covered his face before he took his gun
He shot them all in the market sparing no one.

The age of fifteen is meant for a school
While he was planning to gulp her down
Stains of blood still scream the way she did
Shamelessly showing up the face who marred her away.

Never have the parents thought of juvenile detention
Their act brought the society to helpless extension
When they should be studying and playing together
Their crime reminds Age Is Just A Number.



Sweta Kumari (India)

Sweta Kumari (Gold Medalist, M.A. in English) is a bi-lingual poet, short story writer, avid-reader, an academician, editor and an anthology compiler. She is currently pursuing her research entitled as "Dialectics of Feminism in Select Hindi Films and Film Adaptations of Indian English Novels (1960-2010)". Her areas of interest are contemporary issues like Women Empowerment, Patriarchy, Post-Colonial Studies, Feminism and Film Studies. Besides, she has even presented several scholarly papers in national and international Conferences and participated actively in workshops.

Not to be Found on a Heavy Note

by Ms Sweta Kumari

Editorial Board Member, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

Many stories in my verses echoed concocted
Though, something unwillingly settled in the heart
Dreams and love, not be found
On a heavy note, though to be lived alone.

As a moment lived, and eternal memories
Unwillingly, pass through every day
An unintelligible, fail to understand every word
And what's a want, remain unexplained.

Read in stories, understand closely
Write in verses, in imagination
In restlessness, rhyme with words
Sing to the beat of passing moments.

And feel the existence even in others' world
To find every moment being away
Keeping eyes and pretending anger
Wait for a glance every day with great eager.

Do realise all, though goes a regret
No pride, no ignorance
Mere the dream of the world
And the king of the heart.

The mind often to rule of its thought
Nevertheless, obeys what the heart dictates

Sometimes, some silent step to settle
But goes with its flow of emotions.

Thus, To cover every disappointment
And to stop unveiling what hurts
Wrapped the face in a sheet of smile
Even if it wants, fail to vive.



Tejaswini Patil, Ph.D. (India)

Tejaswini Patil, Ph.D., is Founder Director of Innsæi International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity, academician, poet and social worker; she writes on Nature, social issues, feminist sensibilities and her experiences. Her publications include 'Talons and Nets', 'Verses of Silence', 'A Glass of Time', 'Kaainat' (Hindi) and 'Relations and Relationship'. Editor of 'Tunisian Asian Anthology', 'Mystical Voices' Thrice selected for prestigious Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival, Texas, USA. Part of the famous Coffee Table Book, 25 Women of Virtue. Awards- State Level Mahila Samajratna Lifetime Achievement Award and 'Master of Creative Impulse' by World Poetry Conference, Bathinda, Punjab.

O MUSE...

by Tejaswini Patil, Ph.D.

Founder Director, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

You lift me like a feather,
Gliding on the breeze.
You release my talons
Entangled in the nets.
You strengthen my bonds
Cajoling by soft tunes.
You alter my breaths
Into strings that play the melodious music...
You, transform me
Into a stellar being...
Oh, Muse...
You're that magician...



Orbindu Ganga (India)

Orbindu Ganga is Founder Director of Innsæi International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity. He is a post-graduate in science and the first recipient of Dr Mitra Augustine gold medal for academic excellence. He worked in financial, banking and publishing domains. Proved his finesse as a Soft Skills Trainer and Client Relationship Manager. He is a multilingual poet, author, critic, content writer, sketch artist, researcher, and spiritual healer. His poems have been published in many international publications and anthologies. He has published nine articles, two short stories, two research papers on poetry and one science article. His short story, prose, painting, and photography have been published.

Oblivion Land

by Mr Orbindu Ganga

Founder Director, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

The dust never asked for a time
To be dusted, timid to be taciturn,
Many time crushed by the form
Unaware of the existence, bleeding within,
He had waited for years to see
The moonlight, longing forever,
Days have given more cacophony
To grumble, striking with his might,
Reflecting the thoughts to be
Refracted without a speck, consuming within,
Floating nebulous gave hope to shower
The dead, hoping against the hope,
Night has fallen sick with hackneyed
Seeing senile, eyes have drooped,
The spirits never travelled in the oblivion desert
To sleep at night, the vagabonds did,
Many tales are whispering to the wind
Of the lost souls, living to be existing,

Wayfarers are allured to find the truth
Stolen from the books, anecdotes ingrained,
Never to find the ashes
In the journey, many left midway,
The talisman knocks every time
To see the unknown, clouds are hiding,
He drafted the prism with the amulet
Letting the auburn strike, flabbergasted,
The prism stopped the light
To be reflected and refracted, forming the shadow,
Never to be seen
To be whispered in thin air,
A drop from the firmament kissed
The prism, she made the night to glow,
Scattered layers of colours beyond
The realm of understanding, plagued,
Distilling the surroundings cleaving
The weeds, the Sea of Marmara gushed,
The desert was never visible again
Leaving the amulet buried deep,
For the anecdotes to travel
For the alchemist to rise...

SHORT STORIES

Jacob Job (India)

Born and brought up in Kerala, India. Worked in the Railways and since retired. Has an abiding interest in Indian History and Dravidian culture. Published an anthology of short stories- Eldo and Other Stories by Partridge Publications, a novel-The Mansion and also short stories in the anthologies-The Quadrant Series II and -ZUE- stories from India by Ukiyoto Publications.

THE PALMIST

by Mr Jacob Job

I was lying on my side trying to catch up some sleep; ankles twined and twisted, hands twined and twisted, chin resting in the crook of my elbow. The day had been rather weird, sweaty, and musty with a salty sea breeze sweeping in. I could hardly keep pace with Mr Tim, my business client from California, bent upon poking into every pore of this South Indian patch. Apart from the excitement at Mamallapuram over the rock temples, innumerable snaps at impossible angles, what stood out in my memory was our chance encounter with the palmist under the tamarind tree, surveying the commuters impassively, like those rock-hewn bulls sitting in a row on the ramparts of the temple, watching the ebb and flow of waves over centuries.

He sat on a torn flex sheet turned inside out; his kingdom well-demarcated between the two buttresses roots of the tamarind, sumptuous belly softly and well-ensconced between his fleshy legs turned in, tonsured scalp reluctantly allowing a new crop of grey shoots. His forte was palmistry; so, the signboard said; two stretched out palms etched on a tattered chart nailed on to the tree trunk. However, for those who desired something dramatic, there was a small caged parrot that walked out daintily when the shutter was lifted, carried a tarot card to him and then walked back for a peck at the pinch of grains offered in the cage for the selection made; the future process. 'Intel Pentium Processor'.

So, there he was, with a patch of sacred ash on the forehead, focussed with a splash of vermilion in the centre, supremely confident with a steel-rimmed lens on the left and the caged 'Fortuna' on the right. "The choice is yours. This or that".

In fact, it was I who took the initiative with the palmist to have the ethnic feel of the land. Tim had not noticed him. He was excited at the prospect when I gave him the feedback. Soon he was on his knees under the tamarind, like a bridegroom proposing, opening out both his palms, simultaneously, cooing at the parrot in the cage.

"Only one hand sir, only one, the right one."

"Do you believe in all this?"

Tim twisted back on his knees and asked me. I just shrugged. The palmist got it.

"Sir, many people ask this question. Believe it or not, it's my food. I cannot mix poison."

He straightened Tim's right palm and focussed the lens, face expanding to a broad smile and finally erupting into a big guffaw. He leaned back on the tree trunk and slapped his thighs.

"You are lucky, sir, very lucky; getting married next month. Buy some kancheevarampattu (silk) as a gift to your bride. It's famous here."

Tim shot up like an arrow and pinged Caroline. After some animated talk, he was on his knees once again for a selfie with the palmist. That was when some bird from the branches splashed on to his scalp.

"Lucky, sir, you are lucky. Don't bother, it's a blessing in disguise."

I gave him some tissue paper. The man was not bothered. He was in a state of ecstasy. He took some currency notes from the wallet and gave him a pat on his shoulders. The palmist took just one and returned the rest.

"I charge only my fee. It's my food."

Tim was not listening to all this and pulled me down to the palmist.

"You next"

One sly slanted look at my palm and the man was not enthused.

"You are already married, sir. Keep her well and safe He tapered off. All the josh and warmth had vanished from his face.

Soon, we were chasing Kancheevaram silks.

I continued to think about the palmist and his slanted crow glance.

'Keep her well and safe, he said. What was in it?' It had started to worry me. I looked into my palms with its deep furrows. When I was a child, it was another storyboard for me. I used to imagine them as canals with small breaches and spills carrying water to the palms and paddy fields. I curled down the middle finger and pressed the 'venus mount'. It was still puffy, blood coursing through the veins under the skin, pulse ticking away; a little more anxious now.

'Yes, Tony must keep her safe and well.'

Sometimes little things upset you. A careless word, a stare or a snarl is enough to scare you for a lifetime. It was an offhanded comment from the palmist that gave me several sleepless nights. I started to get worried about Susan for the smallest things. I suspected her headaches for migraine and at times for brain haemorrhage or even brain tumour. I banned

her from using two-wheelers and ensured she travelled only in cabs, that she was wearing safety belts, so on and so forth. Initially, she was amused and slowly started to get irritable. 'What on earth has happened to you!' One day, she exclaimed in exasperation. But that sly glance from the palmist would never leave me. Every day, while taking the wide curve around the tamarind tree, I looked for him. Sometimes our eyes met. I was searching his face for a hint. At times he was nonchalant, at times in high spirits and at times brooding. Invariably my days threaded accordingly. At times I thought I scanned his thoughts.

'Poor fellow, driving to his doom!'

One day, to my surprise I noticed that he had added an accessory. A plastic clipboard with lottery tickets. I could not but admire his marketing instincts; a tempting offer for his customers with a happy forecast.

That day I was a little more curious about my doomsday prophet. For a second, I looked away from the road and suddenly a monkey popped down from the tree searching for the scattered peanuts. Although I screeched to a sudden halt, it was too late. The little ape was under the wheel, under my feet. I heard a painful scream. I had run over the poor thing. A few people soon collected around my car. The palmist slowly ambled across. A hand on the bonnet, he crouched low.

"Look, sir, look at the poor creature, remember lord Hanuman*, pulled his chest apart to show the images of Sita Devi and Bhagavan Sri Rama."

I looked below the wheel. Its face wore an angry expression; eyes were still open and teeth clenched. Peanuts lay scattered on the road. Street urchins soon came running with some cardboard planks and carried the carcass away. Some of them had placed some Gulmohar flowers on the crushed body. I offered them some money. They refused. The palmist crossed over the road with a stern glare.

"I told you, sir---"

It was a parting shot to warn me yet again. Days passed by without any incident. Susan was hale and healthy. Yet I was circumspect. Every day as I passed the tamarind tree, I shot a searching glance at the palmist. He was my weatherman. I was more careful about the monkey crossings.

That day I was earlier than usual. We had planned to dine out after a little shopping at the mall and a movie later. I noticed a group of people on the road from a distance. I slowed down the vehicle and then stopped. It was the palmist lying on the road surrounded

by strangers in a circle, doing nothing but watching him wriggle and groan. Blood was leaking from his groin and it was completely smashed up. One of his ankles was twisted. The birdcage lay flattened at some distance like an ancient fossil and the dainty little bird was perched on his belly button, not sure, as what to do with its sudden freedom. The plastic clipboard with some lottery tickets was also fossilised. I called an ambulance to take him to the Govt-hospital.

“Sir, ---”

It was a little boy shoving the remaining lottery tickets into my hand as if I was the custodian; or, maybe, to meet the expenses. I gave it back. As I sat by the saline drip, not knowing what to do next, the palmist slowly opened his eyes and smiled at me; a very painful smile. I placed my palms over his.

“Sometimes it’s like that sir. Our lives are jinxed.”

He closed his eyes. The doctor came to the ward.

“Was it your vehicle?”

“No”

He moved away, reading the patient chart. After a few steps, he turned back and said

“Ventilators are not free now”

That night I told Susan a brief summary of all the happenings.

“The palmist has taken away all the curses with him. Now sleep well.” And she turned over.

Next day I visited the ward. The bed was occupied by another patient. As I was looking around, a nurse informed me-

“Body is in the morgue. You can inform your relatives.”

NB: *Hanuman- Hindu deity with the features of a monkey famous for his devotion and loyalty to Sri Rama.



Samiksha Bhatnagar (India)

Samiksha Bhatnagar is an aspiring author from New Delhi, pursuing her Bachelor's in Sociology. When she is not writing, she engages herself in painting or cooking. She was recently published in an anthology 'Unfurling my Heart' and dreams of making her mark in the literary world.

Passion, persistence and perseverance are her mottoes.

S.O.S

by Ms Samiksha Bhatnagar

I was sitting on the edge of my bed, holding my head and wondering, *'why is this happening to me'*? My foot tapping at a hundred miles per hour and the pain in my chest making it difficult to breathe as I could feel the blood coursing through my veins. Hot tears rushing down my face, as I could feel a ringing in my ears. Soon, the walls started to close in, and I let them take me into the darkness.

I shot up out of my bed and start breathing heavily. Trembling, I reach towards the glass of water on my side table. As I take a sip, I could feel my heartbeat return to its normal pace. I take out my purple journal and start writing. *'Day 26, it happened again today. Thought I was going to die. When will this stop?'* I glance at my phone, realizing how extremely late I was for work. I throw an outfit together, grab my coffee mug and run out of my house. I call a taxi and rush inside. I sit and stare outside my window gawking at the mesmerizing streets of New York until suddenly everything went dark. Everything is pitch black and the ringing from the dream has returned. I tried to run towards a direction but the air around me started becoming thicker and thicker. I collapse on the floor out of breath. My lungs are screaming for air and suddenly I hear "Ma'am! That's 15 bucks!". I snap out of it and look at my driver blankly.

"I am sorry, what? I ask.

"15 bucks, ma'am. Come on, I have places to be", the driver repeated agitated.

I soon realize I am at my destination. "Oh shoot, I am sorry. Here", I say as I hand my money to the driver. I step out of the car when I hear, the driver mumble under his breath, "It's too early to be drinking?". Before I could answer back, he drove his car away. I sigh and walk towards my building.

I enter my office and see my best friend Tristy running towards me. "Girl, are you crazy? You are 20 minutes late and you know the She-devil is on the warpath. What is wrong with you?" she yells with a hint of concern in her eyes.

"I am sorry, I overslept", I answer as I rush past her. Tristy gave me a look and we rushed inside our boss's office.

"Good morning, Glenda", we both exclaim.

“Well it was, but it's going to be evening until you both start doing the things I pay you for”, Glenda snaps. Tristy and I look at each other with wide eyes. “Look at me! Stare at each other in your own time,” our boss yells. “When are you going to hand in the presentation? I need to review it and plan our spring collection accordingly.”

“Ma’am, we will be ready in two days”, I answer weakly.

“Great. Give it to me by the end of the day. Now, get out of my office”. Tristy opens her mouth to argue, but Glenda raises her hand and shoos us away.

Throughout the day, Tristy and I work on the presentation, attempting to finish a 48-hour project in 7 hours. At 5:32 PM, we hand in the presentation and head outside. Both of us decide to have dinner together so we head to our favourite Mexican restaurant. I take a bite of my burrito when I hear a ringing in my ears. Terrified, I put my foot down and grab my head. *‘No, no, this cannot happen to me right now.’* I try to breathe and pull myself together. Just like a spot of ink bleeding, the room around me started to go black. “Monica?” I hear Tristy say. I try to answer, but I feel like there is a cinder block on my chest. The next thing I know the darkness is collapsing and I hear a loud thud.

I wake up to the sound of a beeping monitor. I slowly open my eyes and see a blurry white room. I turn my head and see Tristy sitting on the edge of my bed. I move slightly and she rushes to my side. “Mon?” She looks at me teary-eyed. I smile slightly and try to move my stiff body.

“What happened?” I ask groggily.

“You fainted, Mon. During dinner.”

“But I was feeling fine”, I lied.

“You have to stop lying to me! There is something that you are hiding and this time it has gone too far. You passed out for God’s sake, Monica”, Tristy said as she raised her voice. On cue, the doctor walked in and said, “Hi, my name is Daniel. How are you feeling Monica?”

“Hello, I feel a little dizzy and have a slight headache. But other than that I am fine”.

“Well, according to your reports, there is no physical problem. But, I think you should refer to a psychiatrist.”

“Excuse me?” I reply offended.

“See, sometimes there may not be any physical issues, but mental concerns. Have you been feeling shortness of breath or disturbing dreams?” the doctor asks.

“No, absolutely not! What do you think I am, crazy?” I shout at him. “This is so absurd! Are you even a real doctor? You should be checking your facts before throwing around such accusations!”

Dr Daniel looks at me shocked and takenaback. “Oh...I...Um, I am to sorry miss. I didn’t mean to offend you. I deeply apologize if I crossed a line. I will be back with your medicines that should help with the dizziness and the headache. Then you are free to leave.” He rushes out of the room, and Tristy goes behind him. I watch them having a conversation outside. *‘Is Tristy really believing this? Am I crazy? What if she thinks I am abnormal and leaves me?’* Tristy enters back inside and says, “Hey let’s get you dressed and then we can head home”. I stand up silently and walk towards her.

Once I am back home, I flop down on my couch, and Tristy walks over with a small pink capsule and a glass of water. After I take the medicine, I lay my head back and close my eyes.

“He is right, you know. You need to consult someone. This isn’t healthy,” Tristy says. I ignore her statement and keep my eyes closed.

“Mon, please. We will go together. I can’t see you like this”.

I open my eyes and look at her annoyingly, “Tristy, I am not crazy”.

She shakes her head and says, “I am not saying you are crazy, but you need to go. This is serious. Having a mental health problem is completely normal and it happens to everyone”.

“Why are you doing this to me? You are hurting my feelings, Tris.”

“Honey, I am not going to force you, but just think about what I am saying. If something is happening with you, you need to accept it and be aware of it.”

“Listen, I have had a long day so I am going to head to bed. You can show yourself out”.

I get up and stomp towards my room.

I lay down and feel myself falling into a deep sleep. Soon, I hear ringing. I open my eyes and it’s pitch-dark. Frustrated and enraged, I sprint towards the ringing sound. As I move forward, the sound keeps getting louder and louder. Losing breath, I try not to stop and keep pushing towards the noise. The next thing I know, the ground from beneath me is

snatched and I am plunging towards my death. I screamed, but no one could hear my voice. I could feel my life flashing away before my eyes. I was about to hit the ground and then I jumped out of bed. Crying and shivering I leave my bed and bolt to my bathroom. I was looking at myself with red swollen eyes and dark bags. Screaming in agony, I take a bottle and throw it across the room. I pick up a jar and destroy it on the ground. Losing myself, I punch my mirror and watch it shatter everywhere. I collapse on the floor and grab my knees. I stare at my bloody knuckles and just cover my face from the shame.

In the morning, I numbly dialled Tristy and after 20 minutes, she was at my front door. She takes me in her arms and hugs me tightly. I break down into tears immediately and let her comfort me.

“I need help, Tris. I can’t do this anymore” I whisper while sobbing.

“I know sweetheart. I am here for you. We will go whenever you are ready”.

I pull myself together and change. Tristy walks in and says, “I checked online, and this psychiatrist, Beth, sounds good. She is only 10 min away from here. I am ready when you are.”

I walk into the bathroom and look at my broken mirror, which was an apt representation of how I was feeling. I took a deep breath and said, “Let’s go.”



Marcelo Medone (Argentina)

Marcelo Medone (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1961) is a medical doctor, lyric tenor singer, painter, journalist, screenwriter, composer and writer. He has written poetry, flash fiction, short stories, novels, plays, songs, scripts for short films and feature films. His fiction and poetry has received awards and has been published in reviews and editions in various languages in more than 20 countries, in Latin America, USA, Canada, Spain, France, Africa and Australia. He currently lives in San Fernando, on the outskirts of Buenos Aires.

PERPETUAL BLISS

by Mr Marcelo Medone

Ahohako was in love with life. He spent long hours contemplating the blue sky, the restless sea birds and the gentle waves of the shoreline in his Polynesian village.

He had always harboured deep in his eager heart the hope of meeting that unique and wonderful being who must exist in some unknown corner of the infinite universe.

Unfortunately for him, he never found the woman of his dreams, his long-awaited love, and his soul mate.

In 1211, at the age of 78, he died peacefully.

Released from his earthly bonds, his soul wandered free.

Suhaila sighed hunger, kindness and poetry in his town in Syria. She was a flower in its most tender moment in the immensity of eternity. Exquisitely gorgeous, sensitive and virginal, there was no term in the compendium of all languages that could summarize so much beauty embodied in such a fragile creature.

Until in 2019, at the age of 15, a bombing took her away. Her immortal soul rose above the human miseries of every day and ascended to the astral plane.

When the souls of Ahohako and Suhaila met, they recognized each other like in a mirror.

They froze in wonder for a timeless instant, checking their unlikely coincidences.

Amazed, they approached slowly, matching point by point. They started to intertwine delicately, fusing their primordial essences in maximum bliss.

From that moment on, they remain together for all eternity.



Sudha Viswanath (India)

Sudha Viswanath, a teacher by profession, took to writing as a hobby. Though she writes short stories, she has also penned a few poetries. Her stories that carry a strong moral, have been published in Woman's Era magazine. Many of her articles on soul-stirring experiences have been published on the soul curry page online of Times of India. A couple of her stories and drabbles have also found a place in an anthology. She is an active member of many writing platforms online.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

by Ms Sudha Viswanath

"You lost EIGHT marks in Mathematics," I screamed at my eleven-year-old son. "How could you be so careless?"

He stood there with his head hung low. My wrath got triggered further when I heard him muttering something.

"What is it?" I bawled.

"You had promised to buy me a bicycle if I score over 90," he said defensively.

"You need a bicycle for such a dismal performance? Be happy that I did not slap you." I reneged, but then I had thought he would score full marks.

"How on earth am I going to face Adrian's mother?

He has scored a hundred." I threw a derisive glance at the sobbing child, muttering imprecations, 'It is all in my destiny.'

He stood with his sight fixed down, making articulate designs on the ground with his toes, and tried hard to fight back his surging tears.

"Where is the question paper? Bring it here and solve it all over again. I am going to the mall to make some purchases, and it will take an hour or so. Better sit in one place and work on it. No watching television," I said, taking the remote control and putting it in my bag.

I banged the door behind me, leaving a sobbing child, helplessly, with a sheet of mathematical puzzles.

I picked up all necessities from the grocery department of the mall and was almost done with paying when I heard some sudden excitement among the family members. They were all cooing in enthralment as they crowded themselves around, what looked like a wheelchair.

Wondering what it was all about, I approached them.

I was moved by what I saw. The parents and grandparents were hugging a kid with a congenital disorder. There were warm tears of joy in their eyes. The boy, around eight years, had just uttered the word 'Mamma.'

"Say that again, say that again," the mother kept cajoling the kid, while the other members of the family coaxed him to call out their names. The boy seemed overwhelmed to be showered with so much attention. He was smiling in ecstasy.

A film of tears covered my eyes as I moved towards the cycle shop. "Get me a good bicycle for an eleven-year-old boy; height around 140cms," I said.

ESSAY/MEMOIR

INNSÆIAN'S VOICE

Dr Sanjeev Kumari Paul (India)

Sanju Paul is her pen name, original being Sanjeev Kumari Paul. She is a veterinarian by profession and a poet and artist by passion. She belongs to Himachal Pradesh (India) and has been involved in multiple projects of artistic as well as scientific temperaments ranging from very local to global ones. She has also developed an artistic technique of carved and washed paintings using discard PVC sheets as the canvas. Pen sketching is another art form she uses to express herself. In addition, she also has a short film named “Catharsis” to her credit.

Garden of Five Ghosts

by Dr Sanjeev Kumari Paul

Editorial Board Member, INNSÆI

International Journal of Creative Literature for Peace and Humanity

Last night, I went strolling in the beautiful but mysterious garden that was built in the memory of the last emperor of my town by his queen. It was known as “Garden of Five Ghosts” because it had five statues of different ghosts placed in it. As per the anecdotes, these statues used to become alive whenever some sceptic entered the garden during a full-moon night.

As I stepped inside the gate, I came across a statue that had some small farming tools in the basket on his back. There was a strip attached to it with something carved on it. It read, “Farmer Ghost.”

Soon, I heard it breathing loud; it turned alive into a talking human being. I could get the sound coming out of his dry cracked lips. He passionately began uttering, “A big beautiful golden pumpkin growing in my fields caught the emperor’s eye, and he got agitated as the pumpkin resembled him so much. Not leaving any chance to pumpkin; of pumpkin becoming his competitor, he chopped it into several pieces and went away. Some creative fellows passing by saw the beautiful fruit chopped into pieces, they picked the pieces up and began cooking in a nearby hut using their culinary ingredients and skills. The flavourful aroma was flowing everywhere around, the great dish was coming up; people were desperate to relish it. In the meantime, the emperor too arrived there caught by that aroma. Farmer sobbed, “I was imprisoned and later slaughtered along with those creative beings for being their partner in that crime. I was convicted for growing and raising the pumpkin nursery.”

Crimson tears began rolling down his swollen eyes. I tried to console him but as soon as I touched his hand, it felt cold and turned statue again.

Moon was behaving like a spotlight. It seemed like directing me to another statue which was standing erect a few feet away.

I moved on to it. The second ghost was that of a person with a cow, the “Milkman Ghost”. It also started respiring perhaps by sensing the touch of my breath and turned alive. His

voice was feeble. He muttered, “The devil kept track of every ounce of milk of the cows that I nurtured with my soul. I was killed for the crime of feeding a glass of milk to my ailing daughter from a morning milk harvest. My daughter died the same very afternoon. I couldn’t even perform her last rites. I was labelled a thief as by the law of that land all harvest including milk belonged to the emperor.”

He shouted, “Beware of him.” Every drop is under his evil eye. All that love and hope you instil into your cows will be reciprocated by the currency. How shining, how promising it might seem, it won't be sufficient to buy the chubby cheeks for your kids. It won't be enough to buy that carefree dance of togetherness with aromas and flavours of wholeheartedness.”

As I was trying to rewind and rethink what he meant, blue secretions began flowing out of his cow’s teats. I tried to feel that liquid with my fingertips but it evaporated and it was all statues once again.

I knew it was time to listen to the next ghost’s tale. Two yards away, I was in front of the “Poet Ghost”. As I went close, it began reciting,

“Poetry is the ultimate destiny

Poetry is the path to death

Poetry pushed me into the river where I was drowned

Poetry was my crime”

He shouted, “Life draped in death robes is lying in the coffin waiting for that last nail. If not today, then tomorrow is going to be the day to merge into the soil to nurture it for the traitors. There is no rescue; trams are waiting to carry you to the death chambers, you had visited in the history before.”

The leaves began falling down from the book in his hands. I knelt down and tried to pick a leaf up, but the poet ghost turned statue.

The fourth was the “Lover Ghost”. He told me that he was killed for loving the daughter of the emperor.

He was trembling and speaking, “I am already dead but still not completely dead. I am a zombie. It’s not the physical death which I am afraid of; it is the agony of the death of love in the commune, which makes me die every moment.”

I patted his shoulder to console him and it turned statue too.

The spotlight guided me to the fifth ghost, the “Soldier Ghost”. This statue included two babies in the lap. He told me that his crime was the refusal to kill the children of the enemy.

He said, “I knew very well it was my duty to implement my emperor’s orders but my conscience didn’t allow it. I was well aware of the consequences too; I deliberately chose death over duty but I am not sure whether I could save my conscience or not?”

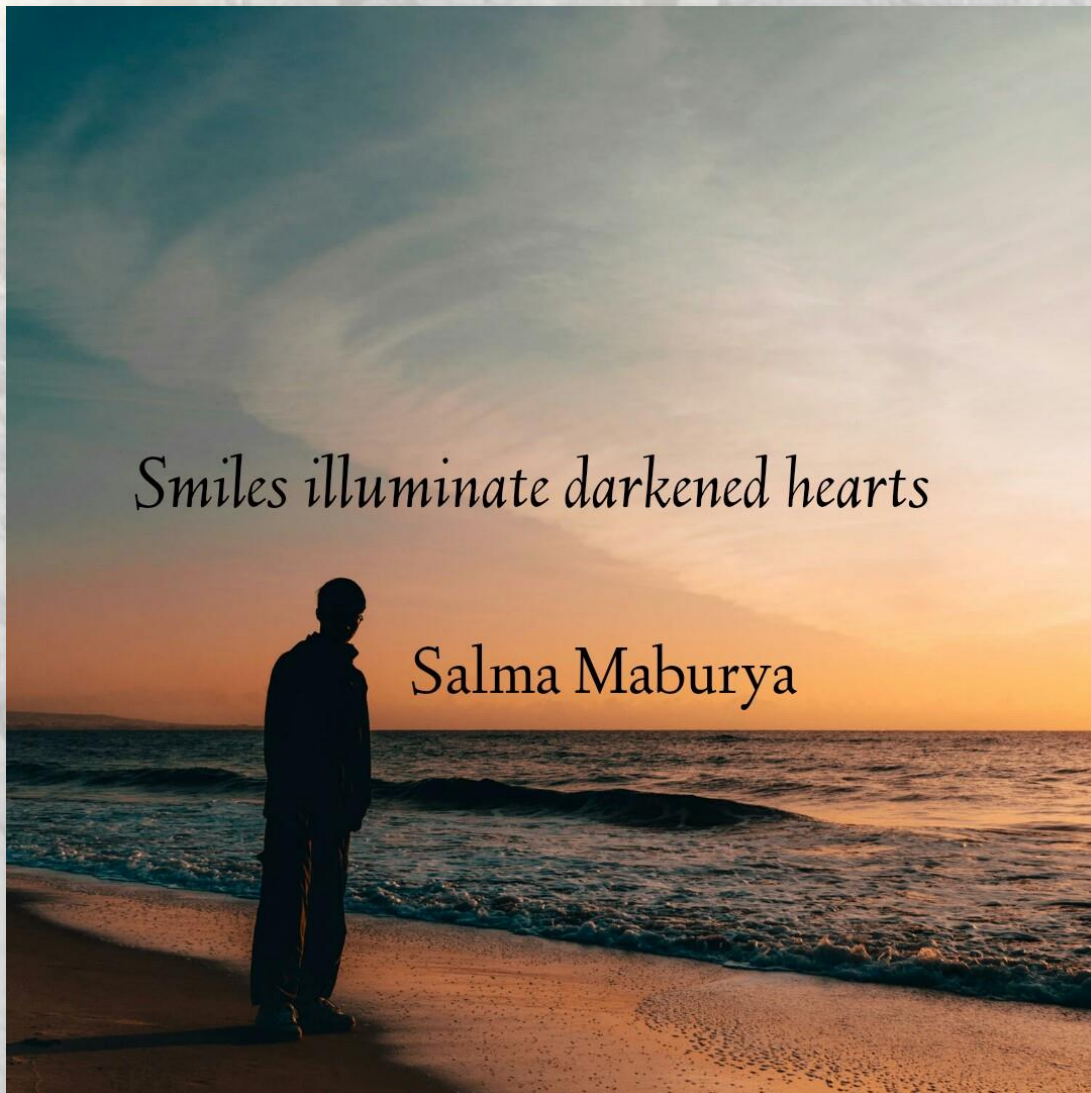
He was trying to hold the newborn babies tight in his lap. I tried to help by helping him holding one of the babies but as soon as I put my hand under the tender head of the baby, it vomited frank blood.

I was perturbed, hurriedly ran towards the gate and came out. There were a lot of people wandering on the highway. I was running fast.

I saw many consciences lying wounded on the highway. They were naked and moaning. I tried to figure something out, but they refused to respond. They were waiting for their last rites. Alas! None was willing to claim them. Mine was silent but undergoing the same.

QUOTES WITH THE IMAGES

Quote with Image by Ms Salma Maburya



Quote with Image by Srikala Ganapathy

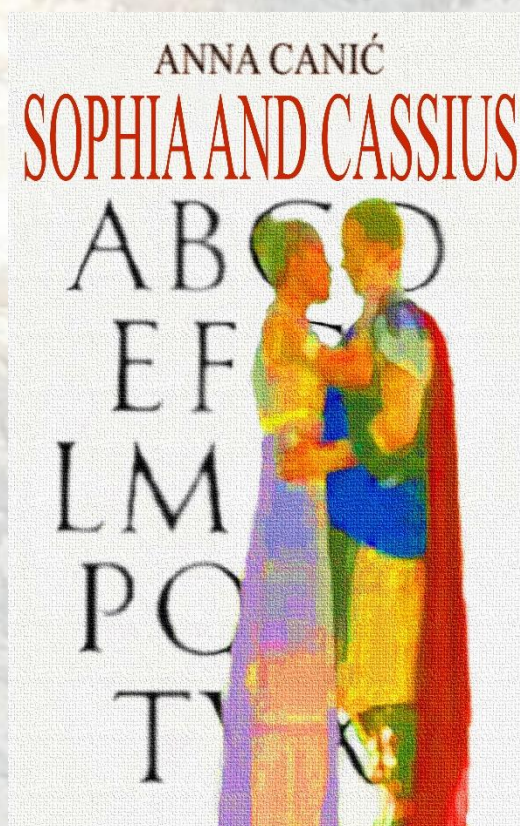


When one learns to observe and discover the beauty of the moment, spring smiles in the mind and I inhale the scent of hope in my heart.

- Srikala Ganapathy

PUBLISHED AND UPCOMING BOOKS

Sophia and Cassius by Anna Canić



Sophia and Cassius is the first prose work by the author *Anna Canić* in the genre of historical fiction. The writer presents well-known stories about the lost paradise and the decadence of the ancient civilization in a different light, focusing on the religious, philosophical and esoteric themes.

In the prologue, we meet the true face of the first woman – wise, strong, determined and good-hearted. Sophia brought the art of writing to the world, desperately wishing to love and be loved. Unfortunately, to meet her perfect man, she had to wait... for death, three thousand years and rebirth as Julia Drusilla, the Roman princess.

However, this work is not just a love story. In the new body, Sophia is chosen to lead the epic battle of the Good against the Evil. Together with her friends of different nationalities, statuses and religions, brave Drusilla exposes the conspiracies and deceptions of the

archenemy. The novel abounds in interesting historical and biblical figures such as Boudicca, Mary Magdalene, and Seneca.

Despite the celebration of the female principle, the main heroine is not at all similar to the suffragettes, nor does her inner revolutionary clash with the natural order. It is also interesting that the end of the story suggests its continuation – at another time. After the publishing of the novel, the indirect continuation is planned.

The novel is inspired by controversial parts of official history, revolutionaries in art, and research in the field of Gnosticism.

Anna Canić was born in 1987 in Odessa (Ukraine). She graduated in philology from the International Humanities University in Odessa. She worked as a cultural animator, playwright (author of 4 staged plays) and translator of 5 languages. Her poems, short stories and translations of poems were published in the literary anthologies in Lodz (Poland). Currently living in Paracin (Serbia).

The Sea, Within INNSÆI

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TECHNICAL CONTENT MANAGER

Mr Mayur Mali (India)