

A DIVIDED WORLD WHERE TRUTH IS A CASUALTY

By Devi Rajab

On the 26th of July, 1920 H.L. Mencken an American journalist, satirist and cultural critic wrote in the Baltimore Evening Sun: "As democracy is perfected, the office of the President represents more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day, the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be occupied by a downright fool and a complete narcissistic moron."

Despite all the soul searching analysis of history, politics and personalities it would seem that Hillary Clinton simply did not stand a chance. A silent revolution unseen, unheard was brewing under Obama's reign to release the force of the "red caps" of the American proletariat. There are disturbing similarities with Hitler's Brownshirts or Storm troopers in the German Nazi Party, a paramilitary organization whose methods of violent intimidation played a key role in Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Has Trump released this faction of "commonness" within the American Nation?

During his first week in office US President Donald Trump has acted as predicted by all his supporters and non-supporters. He has caused inter racial mayhem banning in one large swoop Syrian refugees and other Muslims. The great religious war has begun. Video clips are depicting angry Americans insulting Muslims on the streets throughout the cities. One such clip showed an angry red cap shouting profanities outside of a mosque: You cover up you're women, you ban them from driving cars in Saudi Arabia, you kill people, and your prophet is a paedophile. The Buddhist doesn't kill, the Hindus don't kill and so the ranting goes.

My daughter was recently in the US and was accosted by a typical red cap brigade of heavy weights. Whilst standing in a queue at Rockefeller Centre she looked too long at the caption on the caps which read: We will make America great again. You hate with your eyes they growled. She said that she was not American but proudly South African and was just curious. They punched the air and said we are going to make America great again and you are all ignorant. At this point other people in the queue intervened and asked them to behave themselves. To which they replied "You Hillary supporters are all ignorant of the truth". What Trump has managed to do is to divide his people and the people of the world. Now as Trump causes havoc in his drive to oust and to keep out selective immigrants by racial targeting Muslim citizens he does so at his own peril. Where will all of this end?

Public opinion is rapidly gaining momentum throughout the world as people take to the streets demonstrating against Trump's callous treatment of Muslims. As thousands of mainly young protestors gathered outside Downing Street against Theresa May's pro Trump stance, plans are being made for a summer state visit when President Trump wishes to play a round of golf at the Queens Balmoral estate in Scotland. Ironically a year ago British MPs were debating as to whether they should ban Trump from Brit-

person can see that Donald Trump displays all the signs of a borderline narcissistic personality disorder with his inflated ego, little self-insight, inability to relate to people outside of group stereotypes and adopting a cavalier attitude to solving problems with little concern for adverse outcomes. Whilst he may display some strategic intelligence he does so with little depth and limited knowledge. He is clever in a Machiavellian sense but is he wise. Is he humane and benevolent? What Trump is doing is causing dissension within his country and across the world. There is much hatred in the world and President Trump is simply gathering all the agents of discontent and discord and creating an army of haters. They love US and WE without know who US and WE really are and so the message attributed to Pastor Martin Niemöller during Hitler's rise to power must surely be heeded by those who hate and are comfortable with their animosity: They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.

It is indeed time for all of us plagued by fears of racism and xenophobia to stick together and protect the values of goodness. In the words of SS Radhakrishnan "Rich Is not the person who has wealth but the person who has principles."

And so our prayer should be rooted in the thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
Into fragments by narrow domestic wall;
Where words come from the depth of truth;
Where tireless strivings stretches its arms
towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost
its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into
ever widening thought and action-

Into that heaven of freedom, my father let my
country awake.



ain. Today reports the Economist (Jan 28th 2017) "scorn is out, flummery is in" and some influential members of the Tory party are even openly declaring the election result a positive outcome for Britain. Unlike her counterpart in Germany, Theresa May is a clever and articulate politician but she lacks the humanness and maturity of an ethical leader like Angela Merkel. In comparison to Justin Trudeau in Canada who comforted all his people from every ethnic group, Theresa May disregarded British minorities threatened and insulted by Trump. For her being a leader is a blinkered task of national imperatives over global issues.

While the British public are loath to associate themselves with a man like Trump it seems that Theresa May and her party are determined to forge strategic links with the US. Convenient alliances have been forged in the past between disparate groups for the sake of expediency. Many of us will recall the alliance between Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan over the invasion of Grenada and Tony Blair with George Bush and Britain's entry into the Iraq War. But unlike past US Presidents, Trump threatens the economic and social stability of the 3rd world by his outlandish policies.

No psychologist has yet spoken. But a lay

AN INSIDER'S VIEW



**MODI'S
ROPE
TRICK**

PAGE 09

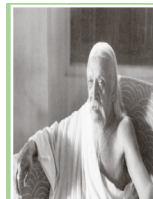
TRAVELOGUE - NEPAL



**LAND OF THE
MAGNIFICENT
HIMALAYAS**

PAGE 03

ART & SPIRITUALITY



**ART, ARTIST
AND
CREATIVITY**

PAGE 06

Every crisis yields an opportunity

Two major events that took place during 2016 in Europe and in America are still dominating the headlines. Britain's decision to leave the European union and the future of UK-Europe relations is causing huge uncertainties re likely economic challenges in the coming years.

In our editorial in last November issue we expressed concern for the welfare of refugees fleeing from many war-ravaged countries including Syria. The presidential election held in America proved to be very controversial and it has already started to affect the lives of many not only in America but all over the world. Last week, the President signed an executive order banning Syrian refugees indefinitely and everyone born in seven predominantly Muslim nations from entering the United States for 90 days. Even though terrorism is a serious threat in the main to Western countries, the current waves of protest demonstrations and condemnation of the decision to ban entry to America by people because of their birthplace is extraordinary to say the least. This extreme step has unexpectedly united many people against the controversial decisions of the new President.

Since the shock results of the Referendum as well as the American election, change is in the air and each day seems to bring rumours of more and more change. There is a question of the authenticity of what we hear and read in the social media and on the internet. The big question is: Will these 'alternative facts' become the norm?

One can only hope for the best as the Chinese proverb says 'Every crisis yields an opportunity'

Our first issue of 2017 is packed with a variety of interesting articles and poems written by our trusty band of writers once again. I hope our readers will enjoy reading this current issue.

Vijay Anand

To subscribe to *Confluence* online please register at www.confluence.mobi or www.confluence.org.uk

Published by
CONFLUENCE PUBLISHING
63A Morgan Road, Bromley, BR1 3QE
United Kingdom
Telephone: 0208 290 0410 / 07801 569 640

MANAGING EDITOR
Dr. Vijay Anand

SUB-EDITOR
Malathy Sitaram

FOUNDER EDITOR
Lte **Joe Nathan**

For subscription enquiries, please email:
confluenceuk@yahoo.com

Design by
Professional Systems Integrators Ltd

The views expressed by interviewees or contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect Confluence editorial policy. No part of this publication or part of the contents thereof may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the express permission of the publisher in writing.

© Copyright, Confluence Publishing 2017

CONTENTS

(CLICK LINK TO GO DIRECTLY TO THE ARTICLE)

- 1 **COVER STORY**
- 2 **EDITORIAL**
- 3 **NEPAL: LAND OF THE MAGNIFICENT**
- 4 **AN EXTRAORDINARY TALE**
- 5 **CHEATING LIFE**
- 6 **ART, ARTIST AND CREATIVITY**
- 7 **A JEWISH CEMETERY IN BANGALORE**
- 8 **THROUGH THE POETIC LENS**
- 9 **MODI'S ROPE TRICK**
- 10 **LOST PEOPLE**
- 11 **DEMONETIZATION: AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW**
- 12 **REGINALD MASSEY'S BOOK PAGE**
- 13 **A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS**
- 14 **RACE AND COLOUR**
- 15 **IN THE GALLERY**
- 16 **POETRY CORNER**
- 17 **SAWAI MADHOPUR, RAJASTHAN**
- 18 **TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FROM ANCIENT INDIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS**
- 19 **DAUGHTERS OF JORASANKO**
- 20 **FOOD FOR THE HEART**
- 21 **MUMBAI EXPRESSIONS**
- 22 **REASONS TO BE STILL...CHEERFUL**
- 23 **WHY SRI LANKA WILL NEVER**

NEPAL: LAND OF THE MAGNIFICENT HIMALAYAS AND A LIMPING COW

By Chandrika Patel

The most enduring image from my one month of travelling around Nepal is not the everyday sight of the snow-capped Himalayan range that sits like a dazzling crown but rather a sad-looking lame cow that I first encountered outside a restaurant in Pokhara. The sturdy black creature appeared close to my table as I was tucking into thupka (Tibetan soup). It paused for a moment next to me as if saying, 'Hey I am here so what are you going to do about it?' and then limped gracefully past, evoking a mixture of pity and an enduring spirit of life imbibed in its large frame, inviting questions behind her sorry state. There was something in her walk and the look on her gentle face that left a footprint in my mind and I wondered if a limping human would have aroused a similar reaction. A few days later outside a local fruit stall, the magnificent black beast appeared again where the fruit seller shared a story of how a Spanish tourist had nursed her infected leg and stayed with her till she got well. After a snack of a few bananas the mysterious creature limped on, disappearing among the street life never to be seen again.

Shrouded in a white mist of floating clouds, a first glimpse of the fishtail mountain (Machhapuchhare) can be a tantalizing sight in Pokhara, offering a wonderful welcome to Nepal. The tourist hub is based around the Phewa Lake which is where I began my journey, hastily leaving behind noisy and polluted Kathmandu.

Wandering aimlessly around the serene lake can be a fruitful experience offering many sights and sounds but the one image that comes to mind is that of a young beggar with contorted limbs and a beaming smile seated near the temple, flanked by a framed bio data written in English. Appearing more god-like than the gods in the temple behind him, the young beggar appeared to occupy a permanent space. There was a sense of quiet acceptance etched on his expressive face.

Under the shady trees by the lake, a palmist sits serenely waiting for his first customer as a motherly Tibetan lady lays her trinkets on a white sheet nearby, having travelled three bus changes from the Tibetan camp near the Jangchub Choeling Gumpa. A handful of shacks overlooking the tranquil lake offer places

of rest and reflection for tourists. The long meandering walk-way by the lake is a great 'time pass', offering changing panoramas and myriad images of local life. In contrast, the sprawling Durbar Square in Kathmandu offers a denser experience of everyday life-the spiritual, mundane and commercial all mixed up- where the devotees can be seen taking selfies with their loved ones next to the magnificent statue of Bhairava-the dark avatar of the Hindu god Shiva.

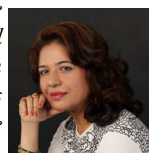
The Durbar Square in Patan appeared less busy but preoccupied with Dussein preparations as the locals crowded the shops decorated with hanging garlands made of green and red beads. The colour red appeared to be popular with Nepali women along with the tradition of having

dark statue of Vishnu at Budhanilkantha is an open air Hindu temple like no other where I found myself standing next to an engrossed devotee who was softly chanting the Gayatri Mantra along with other slokas with her bowed head covered by her sari and smelling faintly of sandalwood. The Nepali woman reminded me of my late mother and I stood next to her for as long as I could so that I could savour this unique Darshan on a beautiful sunny morning.

As I sat silently reflecting on my experience in the temple complex, I became aware of a priest watching me from the Ganesh temple nearby, expecting me to 'drop in' to his temple so he can give me blessings. Somehow I felt reluctant to leave this gem of a temple and I decided to pause further at the chai stall near the exit. Whilst I waited for my Nepali chai, I could see a group of elderly Indian women tourists arriving in a luxury twelve-seater, probably on a pilgrimage of Hindu temples in Nepal, accompanied by a male guide.

One of the elderly women stepped out of the vehicle in her new trainers and headed towards a fruit stall. A haggling over the price of dozen bananas ensued as the well dressed woman persisted in getting the same price as she would pay in India. After much debate and an intervention from a passer-by, the Nepali fruit seller relented and gave the elderly pilgrim what she wanted in exchange for Indian rupees. As I sipped my chai, I thought of that majestic limping cow in Pokhara and wondered what she would have made of this altercation if she had been here.

Chandrika completed her PhD in drama at the University of Exeter in 2008, studying British Asian Theatre. She works as a freelance writer, researcher and cultural commentator in arts, education and heritage sectors. Chandrika is a theatre reviewer for Confluence South Asian Perspectives.



surprise. It is performed by the monks during the Dussein festival in Patan. The fifteen young male dancers- said to be high caste Buddhist priests- hurriedly entered the Mulchowk holding the sacred masks, followed by crowds of locals and some tourists. The ritualistic performance lasted over an hour in which the masked dancers took their turns, often dancing in pairs to the sound of live music and singing, moving nimble-footedly with precise hand gestures resembling South Asian classical forms. Towards the end, all the fifteen dancers performed together, taking their colourful masks off in unison as they jumped in the air providing a mesmerising performance of Nepali tradition rarely seen outside the country.

Floating in water and reclining on a bed of the serpent Sesha, the larger than life

AN EXTRAORDINARY TALE

By Malathy Sitaram

It is very hard to choose one's best books of all time as it is painful to drop so many books that one has loved and which have made me the person I am. Today's children are television addicts but in my view watching telly bears no resemblance to reading. A good author is able to hold a reader captive from the beginning to the end of a story book and the power of written words, the manipulation of time, of characters and plot can keep a child spellbound and thirsty for more.

The best work of fiction that I have read is *Midnight's Children*, written in the 20th century by Salman Rushdie. I must now go back to 1981, the year that "*Midnight's Children*" was published and won the Booker Prize. I was elated because like Salman Rushdie I was a Bombayite and a large chunk of the book was instantly recognizable as having been the backdrop to my own life there. I had left my beloved Bombay after marriage and my husband and I are now living in Britain. When Rushdie's book was published in 1981, I bought a copy and for three weeks I was glued to the book, literally mesmerised by the ins and outs of the plot, the brilliant new style of magical realism that was so hilarious in parts, and this newish author's ability to manage so many characters and so many shifts in time and space. Reading it brought home to me how much I missed Bombay and I was thrilled to recognize some of the events in the complicated story. This must have been in early October, '81, because the Booker Prize winner is always announced in the third week of October. I was thrilled when the competition judges announced their choices for the shortlist. *Midnight's Children* was on the short list from which the judges would make their final choice of the winner.

On the evening that the winner was to be announced, I was glued to the telly because traditionally the short listed authors would be invited to a lavish dinner in some well-known place with a separate table for the judges with television cameras in attendance. Finally the name of the winner was announced on the news and I screamed and jumped for joy. *Midnight's Children* was the winner and the whole world would now want to read this brilliant book in which my city would play the part of most important character.

The next morning I decided that I had to meet the author, one Salman Rushdie who I knew worked for an advertising firm in London as a copy writer. "Go to Work on an Egg" was one of his very successful adverts and possibly another one about Mars Bars. In reading about him I knew that he lived in Kentish town and had a wife named Clarissa. It did not take long to discover his phone number from Direc-

tory Enquiries and the next morning with my heart beating very fast I rang the given number. Unbelievably he answered and in a very excited tone, I told him that I too was a Bombayite and that I knew about all his references (and there were many) to the city, including characters, events etc. and please please could I come and see him. The story included some details of the famous trial of a Navy Officer who



murdered his wife's lover, an event that probably took place in 1960. The officer was a Parsi by the name of Nanavati and reputedly very handsome. The High Court in Bombay was very near my college and with two of my college friends I attended the first day of the trial. We were of course cutting college lectures to do this. Most remarkably our seats were just below the dock and the poor defendant found himself the object of intense scrutiny from 3 pairs of teenage female eyes.

What seems unbelievable now is that Salman Rushdie asked me to come over the next day! I spent some time jotting down bits of the story I wanted to discuss and took the train to London. His address was more Tufnell Park rather than Kentish Town and around 10.30 a.m. on a grey morning, I entered his fairly ordinary home. He had won the most important literary prize in the world just two days ago and here I was, with my heart thumping, in his home. And believe me we did not stop talking. In fact we talked for 3 hours! We delved into bits of his extraordinary tale peppered by my interjections about all the Bombay features that I recognized. He was actually happy to be with someone who knew and understood the ethos of his book. Every street, every happening was discussed. There used to be an Anglo

Indian man who walked the streets in South Bombay where both Rushdie and I had lived, usually round 8pm, strumming a guitar and who would sing old pop songs. This man appears in *Midnight's Children*. We talked about him as also about sounds in the day time of hawkers and how their voices carried up to the top floor of the typical five storey apartment blocks, other sounds at night and the cafes and restaurants and beautiful places that we had known and loved. He told me that he had written this book because he wanted to get Bombay out of his system. I remember that the phone never stopped ringing because the world had woken up to a new Booker prize winner. He did not take the calls whilst I was there.

This book became a runaway success throughout the world. The style adopted in this story became known as 'magical realism' probably because there is almost a fairy tale element in it. He used the same style in what became a life changing book: *The Satanic Verses* published in 1988. Of course at the point in time when we met he had probably not even imagined its contents and even less its consequences. The impact of this book on religious clerics in Iran led in 1989 to the issuing of a fatwa against Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme leader of Iran and one of the most prominent Shi'a Muslim leaders. The fatwa called for the death of Rushdie and his publisher. In their view, the book disparaged the prophet Mohammed and was blasphemous. For many years, Rushdie went into hiding and was on the run. The British government gave him police protection. In 1998, the new Iranian President Mohammed Khatami said he no longer supported the fatwa.

Midnight's Children became required reading in every university Dept. of English Literature and continues to be read and admired to this day. In 1993, The Booker Prize promoters decided to find out which Booker prize winning novel was the best ever. People the world over voted and the winner was *Midnight's Children*, the Booker of Bookers and again in 2008. It had played an important part in my life.

Malathy Sitaram was the first Asian to teach English in Wiltshire Schools and simultaneously, the first Asian to be appointed to the Swindon Bench of Justices of the Peace. Now retired, she is just as busy.



CHEATING LIFE

By Subhash Chandra

Everyone called him Babuji though after two promotions from the post of Senior Assistant he had retired as an Under Secretary from the Ministry of Surface Transport.

A huge crowd was milling at his house. People in small groups were talking about him.

"Babuji was a saint."

"He was so calm! I never saw him lose his temper."

"Oh, he was kind hearted."

"You can't find another like him, I bet. God is not making the likes of him anymore."

"But what a blessed, painless death he died! If only I could make my exit as peacefully!"

"And what an immaculately clean life was his! People make tons of hush money in the Ministry he worked in, but he was honest to the core."

There was hardly anyone in the neighbourhood whom Babuji had not helped. He routinely visited the old couples, whose children lived out of Delhi or India and helped them in every possible way.

He was in perfect health as he led the regulated and abstemious life of an ascetic. He practised and taught Yoga in the morning in the park and walked for an hour in the evening.

#

His wiry body lay on the floor, covered up to the neck with a white sheet. His eyes were softly closed, his mouth gently shut and there was such serenity on his face that he seemed to be teaching Shavasana to his Yoga group. Varsha, Babuji's only child, was sitting hunched up in a corner of the room, distraught with grief. Babuji was very fond of her, as he had brought her up all by himself, with indulgence and affection, after her mother died when she was just five years old. His son-in-law, Puneet, bustled about busily, a sad expression plastered on his face.

After a while he came up to me and said, "Babuji was so gentle."

I detested the guy. There was a mean look on his face. I looked up at him but did not respond.

He said shiftily, "Oh, I'll get along."

The pyre had started burning slowly. The tired sun had nearly finished its day's work and had reached the mellow, restful Western horizon. At this time, every evening Babuji and I used to sit on a bench in Swarna Jayanti Park and chat. I was his friend and confidant and he shared everything with me.

The day before yesterday, when we met, he did not give me the customary smile. His brows were knit with worry.

He said, "Puneet wants to start a new

business. He says there is lots of scope in computer hardware."

"So?" I asked though I knew what would follow.

"This time he came over personally."

"That was not my question."

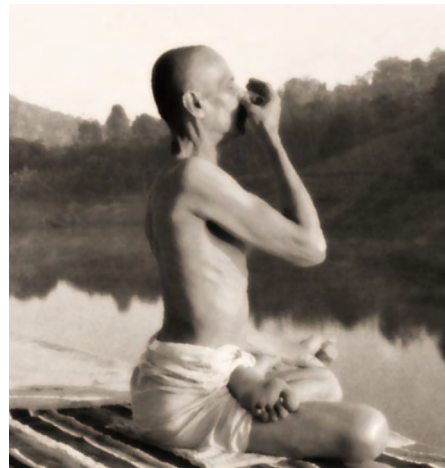
"He wants four lakhs."

"Did you commit yourself?"

"No. But before leaving, he said, I had cheated him."

"How?"

"That Varsha was older than him; had grey hair before marriage which she hid by dyeing it."



"Dirty dog!"

Babuji shook his head sadly."

"It's your fault. You always encouraged him. Every time he conveyed through Varsha he wanted money for a new business, you encashed fixed deposits before maturity. And why did all his businesses fail? Because he is a sluggard and a loser!"

"Actually, Varsha's hair went grey after marriage because of the worries and tensions into which she has been thrown," he said sorrowfully.

"Tell him, you'll report him to the police!" I suggested heatedly.

"Don't be foolish. I've to think of Varsha."

"What do you propose to do then?"

For some time he sat with his head bowed and then answered. "I'm insured for five lakhs."

"But you told me, Varsha is the nominee. He'll get the money anyway when the policy matures?"

"He wouldn't wait that long."

"What do you mean?" I asked horrified.

"I know you've guessed," Babuji said calmly.

"But that's dreadful ... and it's a crime.... A sin, too!" I spluttered.

"Taking a Samadhi is not a sin for saints and sadhus."

"But you are not a sadhu, for God's sake."

Babuji laughed ruefully, "Don't you people call me a saint?"

"But that's in a different sense."

He remained silent.

I threatened him to dissuade him from the horrific course he was contemplating, "I'll report it to the police, I'm warning you, and that wretch will not get a single paisa. And he'll go to jail, besides, on the charge of harassing his wife for dowry and for abetting your suicide."

"If you do that my soul will not be able to rest in peace, because Varsha will suffer more. Yes, he'll go to jail, but who'll look after her then?"

"But this is appalling!" I had become frantic.

"You'll rob Varsha of what little chance she has of happiness in marriage. Who knows this time he might succeed in his business. Besides, how much longer do you think I'm going to live anyway? I'm already seventy six."

"But you're fit as a fiddle; in fact, healthier than I am at fifty five. Anyway, that's not the point. Why should you lose a single day, even a moment of your precious life for that rascal?"

#

After his Yoga session, he had not come out of his house throughout the day. That was unusual. Once the Yoga class was over, he would come home and sit outside in a chair, reading the newspaper, greeting everyone who passed him. So, one of the neighbours went into his flat and found him lying motionless on his back. The police were called in. The post mortem report mentioned cardiac arrest as the cause of death. The police closed the case file.

Only I knew the horrible truth! He had performed a Pranayama: he had deeply exhaled, then stopped breathing, cutting off the supply of oxygen and blood to his heart. He had taught me the complete regimen of Yoga and Pranayama.

#

At the crematorium the people sitting under the shelter were praising Puneet for having completed all the rituals meticulously.

"I've not seen such a son-in-law. So caring! Babuji was really lucky."

"Yes, I wonder if a son would have done so much and with such warm feelings."

"Many sons today would consign the body to the electric crematorium."

"You're so right. They're short of time."

Subhash Chandra retired as Professor of English from Delhi University. He has published four books of criticism, several research articles as well as short stories in Indian and foreign journals. His latest collection of stories 'Not just another story' has been published in January 2017 by LiFi Publications New Delhi.



ART, ARTIST AND CREATIVITY:

UNDER THE LIGHT OF A SPIRITUAL ANGLE

By Ojasi Sukhatankar

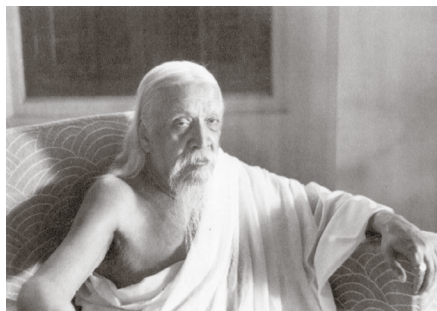
[Acknowledgement before I begin: I have been reading the spiritual literature of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for many years. All ideas in this essay come from my personal understanding of Their views on Art and its association with 'Truth' and 'Spirituality'. Few particular terms that were coined by Them are put here under double-quotes.]

Art is other-worldliness. There choreographies and compositions, drawings and writings, crafts and sculptures are 'born' out of a source (one may even say a 'mystic' source) the place of which is found deep within an individual being. What I mean by that 'source' will be understood without the need of any further explanation, by those who have known and experienced the meaning of 'creativity'. Indeed, can we explain what this creativity is after all? Where does it come from? By what process does it come? Why does it come only to some and not to all, or, more to some and less to others? And lastly, if 'creativity' as such is only 'one', if it is something 'common' to all dance-choreographers, music-composers, painters, writers and sculptors, then how is it that one artist constructs aesthetically audible sounds out of it, whereas another from the same source of creativity produces a picture that is visually beautiful? Perhaps, the core process by which creativity gets so translated and transfigured into distinct art-forms is one and the same. And that process along with its consequential product is what we call as Art.

I believe; creativity is one of the most natural gifts of being born as a human being. Though, I do not claim that it is uniquely present in humans alone, for there are some birds and animals that are creative as well (and, interested readers can watch documentaries on how birds build nests or dance in courtship), creativity is certainly a thing that comes from inside-out. The subjective difference – where one person seems more creative while another seems to have absolutely no relation with it, then remains a question of bringing that hidden potential truly 'out' – from 'that' world into 'this' one. One of the many factors which matters for this bringing-out, as far as we confine the application of human-creativity to the world of artists alone, is one's training and rigorous practice in art (prodigies or geniuses apart).

When an artist gets trained in his/her chosen art-form, what gets trained are the faculties that are relatively 'external' to that original source called as creativity. For example, a singer trains the voice, a dancer develops the whole body and its movements, and painter brings skill into the fingers and eyes. These faculties are at

first (in their crude sense), merely physical skills. A little deeper than physical, they are additionally mental and psychological. Since they belong to the domain of body-mind-and-heart, they are tangible and 'this'-worldly (for one can train them not only through art but through other various means as well). Thus a formal training in any art-form develops the external faculties

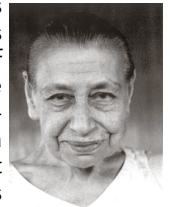


for a person, but not that hidden source of creativity. However, it does help an artist to reach up to that source either directly or indirectly, speedily or slowly. In short, by getting trained in an art-form, creativity can only be evoked. (Whether that creativity too can be trained or educated furthermore, is a different matter and is too huge for our current scope of discussion).



At this juncture, the question that needs to be answered is 'how' a new-creation comes out in the form of an art once its source (creativity) gets evoked in an artist? The answer lies in "inspiration". (As found in the writings of Sri Aurobindo, it is one of the "planes of Consciousness"). Once inspired, the creativity of an artist then

becomes like the waters of a river that flow as guided by the banks of his/her inspiration – if the path of that creative inspiration passes through a trained voice, then what comes out in 'this' world is a new music-composition; if it goes through a trained body, then what gets created is a new dance-choreography, and so on. Additionally, this explains why and how an artist who is creative in any one art-form is found to be capable of knowing, understanding, experiencing, enjoying and appreciating the new-creations of all other art-forms as well. Thus creativity is only 'one' irrespective of the art-form, just like water is only one irrespective of its rivers.



However, what exists more subtly but also more truly behind an artist's creative inspiration is a 'want' of expression. (The word found in Sri Aurobindo's writings is "will"). Furthermore, one can also feel that there exists behind that will, an unceasing passion. And, if one can go still deeper to see behind that passion and if one tries to look into one's own deepest self, then one realizes that what we call passion is actually a pure, sacred love – a selfless, divinely love felt towards all that exists in the world and also towards one's own self-existence. (The corresponding spiritual term for such selfless devotional self-existence is 'soul'). When one touches that deepest 'existence' through the means of an art-form or through any other means of yoga-sadhana, it becomes a celestial 'experience' which an artist then allows to flow through his/her art where the body-mind-heart act as active and useful tools. The artist then becomes a "channel" for the expression of Art which in the Mother's words is "Divine manifestation" or "Divine realization upon earth". This "Divine manifestation" justifies for us the truest aim, meaning, purpose and value of Art. It also justifies the art-bound life of every artist who indeed 'bridges' the two 'worlds' by expressing a human being's "relations with the Divine".

Ojasi Sukhatankar (M.A. in Dance Cultures, Histories and Practices from University of Surrey, U.K. & B.E.) is a classical Kathak exponent and software engineer. She has performed, choreographed and taught classical Kathak in India, U.K. and U.S.A. She writes performance-reviews, research-articles, and also lectures on Dance, Art and Women's issues.



WHAT A CEMETERY IN BANGALORE REVEALS ABOUT INDIA'S JEWS

By Adam Yamey

Once in Italy, a religious Jew on learning that I am Jewish asked whether my Indian wife (who is a gentile – not a Jew) is a Jewess. I calculated that the chance of randomly meeting a Jew born in India was minute – less than 0.0005%. So, writing about the Jews of India is to describe a microscopic proportion of the country's vast population. That proportion is diminishing. This is not because Jews have ever suffered persecution in India.

While flicking through a street atlas for Bangalore, I noticed that the city has a "Jewish Grave Yard". I have visited it several times. It contains less than sixty graves, but together they open a window that provides an overview of the Jewish people who have lived in India. The story of India's Jewry has been described in detail elsewhere (for example: "India's Jewish Heritage" edited by Shalva Weil and "Shalom India" by Monique Zetlaoui).

This article reveals what examination of the gravestones tells us about the presence of Jews in the whole of India.

Jews have lived in what is now Kerala since time immemorial. They dwelled on the Malabar Coast in, for example, Kanganore and Cochin, where there is still a fine synagogue. It is said that St Thomas came to India to convert them into Christians. He failed, converting, instead, the other people, mainly Hindus, who he found living there. Today, there are only one or two elderly Jews still living in Kerala. A grave in the cemetery commemorates Elias Isaac, who came from Cochin to Bangalore to act as the *schochet* (ritual slaughterer) to the Moses family. Jews in India ate 'Indian cuisine', but modified so that it did not contravene Jewish dietary laws.

The oldest graves in the cemetery mark the resting places of Subedar Samuel Nagavkar (1816-1904) and Benjamin Nagavkar (1877-1910). Samuel served the Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wodeyar, who donated the land for the cemetery in 1904. The Nagavkars were members of the Beni Israel community, whose origins are obscure. According to HS Kehimkar, they claimed to have come from "the North" to India in about 175 BC (BCE). Many of their community still live in and around Maharashtra State.

There are several other graves of Beni Israel Jews. Their stories and those of the others buried in the cemetery reveal something of the range of activities in which Jews were involved in India. Sion E Nissim (1900-58) was a horse-trainer; one of his horses, Commoner, won the Indian Derby. Mrs Abigail Jhirad, daughter of the Subedar (a military role); and Joshua Moses Benjamin Bhonkar (1920-2005) was both a writer ("The Mystery of Israel's Ten Lost Tribes and the Legend of Jesus in India") and a Chief Minister in the Government of India.

Whereas the origins of the Malabar and Beni Israel Jews are obscure, this is not

the case with the Iraqi Jews, who came to India from the Middle East beginning in the eighteenth century. Many of them settled in Bombay and Calcutta, where they were involved with commerce and trade, the most famous of them being the Sassoon family.



The Bangalore cemetery contains graves for the following families from Calcutta: Ezra, Elias, Earl, and Moses. Edward Earl (1910-1953) was the proprietor of the once well-known Earl's Pickles Company.

Calcutta had a large Jewish community, including the Moses family, who are buried in Bangalore and originated in Iraq. Ruben Moses (1871-1936) left Iraq to join the California gold rush. He left California for India in 1906, following the San Francisco earthquake. He headed for the Kolar gold fields, but ended up in Bangalore, where he founded a shoe store in Commercial Street. The store, which is now occupied by Woody's veg fast-food outlet, was once the largest shoe retailer in southern Asia. His home, now long since demolished, contained a prayer hall where the city's few local Jews and Jewish visitors from all over the world came to worship along with the Moses family.

What else did the Jews do in Bangalore? Poor Moses Ashkenazy (1957-1982) was a student, who died of an overdose of drugs. Sassoon Saul Moses (d. 1975) was a 'hawker'. The widow Rebecca Elias (1927-1992) lost her husband early, and then worked in a needle factory in Bangalore. GE Moses and Isaac Cohen, neither of whom is buried in the cemetery, were, respectively, a clothes retailer and an auctioneer. The grave of RE Reuben (1877-1939) records that he was "Malarial [sic] Supervisor of the C&M Station Municipality". He might have met the Nobel laureate Sir Ronald Ross (1857-1932), the pioneer of the fight against malaria, who visited the C&M Station.

Anti-Semitism in Europe and the outbreak of the Second World War ('WW2') led to other Jews entering the Indian Judaic scene – refugees and soldiers. They are well represented in the Bangalore cemetery. But, before describing them, let me describe the Russian-born Saida Abramovka Isako, who died in 1932. She was the wife of FY Isako,

who was proprietor of the 'Russian Circus'. Her coffin was carried on a bier drawn by white circus horses. I imagine that the burials of the German refugees Siegfried Appel (1906-1939) from Bonn, Gunther and his mother Mrs Rahmer from Gleiwitz, and Dr Weinzwieg, were less memorable. Carl Weinzwieg (1890-1966) and Gunther Rahmer were both dentists practising in Bangalore.

Amongst the military personnel that passed through Bangalore during WW2, was the future President of Israel, Ezer Weizman, who was stationed at an RAF base in the city. His name appears in the Moses family guestbook. The cemetery records the casualties of war, who died in the city. These include Yusuf Guetta (1921-1943), evacuated from Ben-Ghazi in Libya by the British in 1941, and Private Morris Minster (1918-1942). Morris served in the South Wales Borderers Regiment and was initially buried in the grave yard. His stone stands, but his remains have been moved to a Commonwealth War Cemetery in Madras.

The "Jewish Grave Yard" in Bangalore encapsulates the story of the larger of the Jewish 'groupings' that have lived in India. The cemetery is so unknown that even a few of the Jews who have lived in the city have been unaware of it. I have met the heirs of the Jewish refugee from Germany, Mr Jacoby, who introduced popcorn and machines (for making it) to India and settled in Bangalore. Their nearest and dearest are resting in peace in Christian cemeteries, of which there is no shortage in Bangalore.

I mentioned that India's Jewish population is diminishing. Over the years many Jews left India. My wife, who went to school in Calcutta, remembers that the city had many thriving synagogues and that there were several Jewish girls in her class. When we visited Calcutta four or five years ago, we saw three synagogues. Two of them were well-maintained, by Moslem caretakers, as is Bangalore's Jewish cemetery. The third that we saw appeared to be about to crumble.

India can be proud to remember that, unlike so many other countries, it was not anti-Semitism that caused Jews to migrate. Just as so many other Indians have left the country to better their economic prospects, so did the Jews.

I would like to thank the Moses family in Bangalore for much help in gathering some of the information that appears in this article. Also, they gave me permission to photograph the cemetery and to publish my pictures in a photographic album "Buried in Bangalore".

Adam Yamey is a Dentist and author. He has published several books about the Balkans and South Africa. He lives in London with his Indian wife and visits South India regularly.



THROUGH THE POETIC LENS

by Yogesh Patel

Poetry is a gateway to our soul. While all material things, including money and politics, corrupt - however essential they may be - blinding our souls, art rescues us as a door to our true essence.

'Happy the hare at morning, for she doesn't read,' is a celebrated line by W H Auden. The poet distils here the pollution of trifling knowledge of trash out of hare's life; our life. This includes the mountain of trash at the Facebook, Twitter, and other social media, where



a culture of cut and paste is an enemy of the originality. The exhibitionist users of these media, corrupt the true spirit of communication, which includes and articulates a communication by all arts, including

music. Auden makes us observe the existence of a carefree being thriving in moments, not in day's planning and mundane invented needs of life. Not all knowledge is good. Rare nuggets are always under the messy terrain of waste. Poetry is able to see such third reality. It also is able to give us an essence that is not a cliché because it puts the same object with a tarnished meaning in a dissimilar context to highlight a fresh insight.

Reginald Massey is one of our great diaspora writers, an amazing tour de Force as I have coined him, but secretly, he was always a poet, in spite of his 'tempestuous' years, and 'Have had my fill of bread and wine,' and the questions like, 'Why, I often ask myself, Have I returned to the craft of verse?' I recently penned a poem for him to capture his impression:

Waiting for Godot

Dedicated to Reginald Massey

*Yours was a tour de Force, my friend
When we met briskly once, and then
Here and there, both our lanes were apart
You always with an urgency of a blitz
An October storm with a rushing objective*

*And then all these decades late
The postman delivers your 'Lament of a Lost Hero'
In fact, a heart sitting on a bench in a park, lonely
Pulling all posters down, robins singing,
Waiting for Godot!
A discovery I shall treasure.....*

I used to run into him at the BBC and other places in the seventies and the eighties, keeping distance, as he was the firebrand journalist of the day, one of the pioneering forces of Asian journalism, well ahead of me and Prabhu Gupta, trying to break through the glass walls of establishments. But his poetry was hidden in the conqueror's quest of all things journalism and media. He sent me

his old collection and I was startled to come to know the man of forceful precise prose who was a poet too! It proved my theory that there comes a time when the prose has its limitations; then a want for more articulate expression requires poetry to speak, concisely, precisely and succinctly.

Any writing by Reginald Massey has always been required reading for me with his dynamic point of views, substantiated by his trait of deeply researched and well-argued details. As my poet friend Divya Mathur of Vatayan will put it, he is an exceptional writer you just cannot ignore. Last year, Lord Desai launched his new book, Shaheed Bhagat Singh and the Forgotten Indian Martyrs. It reminds us of those martyrs whose actions contributed to India's freedom while getting forgotten as if Gandhi did it all on his own! All factors contributed to the Indian freedom while one man may have been an icon.

I was privileged to honour Reggie at Word Masala with the lifetime achievement award in presence of Lord Parekh and Baroness Prashar at the House of Lords in June. The poem I choose to point out his craft is

Time and Auden

*Old Auden's poem in the Underground
Reveals the Master's richest fruits.
How many, I wonder, have had the time
to ponder its eternal truths.
Too hassled for abstract thoughts sublime-
You may've noticed it's a difficult time-
Outstanding bills, weekend chores, rude faxes,
Holding down a decent job, and now higher taxes,
Domestic problems, errant offspring.
Time doesn't heal a thing
It only says I told you so
Then, quietly, gets up to go.
Furrow-faced Master, you knew so well
Life's a cheat: only Time will tell.*

from Lament of a Lost Hero

©Reginald Massey

Reverting back to my premise at the opening of this article, this poem reminds us how my friend Judith Chernaik puts poetry to us on the Underground to instil it at the heart of daily and diminutive chores. As Reggie asks, 'How many, I wonder, have had the time/ to ponder its eternal truths?' How many of us indeed stop to read a single poem in a day? Even when Judith tries to give this to us amidst 'Outstanding bills, weekend chores, rude faxes/Holding down a decent job, and now higher taxes' and many other dissecting distractions, do we really know that 'Time doesn't heal a thing/ It only says I told you so'?. And yet as Reggie puts it, this is the same Master, who tells us, 'Life's a cheat.' Only a poet can take you in brief speedy tube journey of life to an abrupt, often startling end, embracing Auden, London Underground, Poetry on the Poster, daily chores to Time, the master, who is ruthless, to jolt us to our reality.

Yogesh Patel edits Skylark and runs Word Masala Foundation to promote South-Asian diaspora poets.



MODI'S ROPE TRICK: An insider's View

By Our Chennai correspondent Innamburan

In the long vanished Indian Rope Trick, a boy climbs a rope, stood erect magically. He is dismembered and the scattered limbs are reassembled by the magician; the boy reemerges like a cherub. Mr. Narendra Modi (NaMo) is the Jadoo Samrat (Exalted Magician) of its 2016 Avatar (incarnation).

He escalated his war against the dare-devil parallel economy likewise ~ election promise, persuaded surrender of subsidies, customising Jan Dhan (for the poor) accounts, tracing loot buried overseas, targeted tax raids, disciplining the officialdom, enacting unifying fiscal measures, pouncing upon money launderers, tax amnesty for the timid, repentant and the

and such-like enemies of civil society, is welcomed by the Nation. Wars wreak havoc on all. The poor got terribly harassed as they could get neither survival rations nor earnings. They acquiesced, endorsing the goal and enjoying the discomfiture of their exploiters. The dishonest, who created a new black market in SBN, apprehend a 'surgical strike' from NaMo.

Know your NaMo. Born in 1950, he became a Hindu zealot in his teens, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), ruled Gujarat state as its Chief Minister for fourteen years and is our 'no-nonsense' Prime Minister. Fond of travel and elegant attire, he had befriended the 'Who Is Who' in the global diplomatic circuit.

He is assailed by condemnation and adoration all the time. He made it to the TIME & FORBES celebrity lists. Dr. B. M. Hegde, the renowned academic, commends him for the Nobel ~ no mean tribute!

I listened to NaMo's telecast Live. The surveillance, secrecy, mind mapping, brain trusts and sticking to his guns were manifest hallmarks. I expected demonetisation on October 2, 2016. NaMo terms the fifty odd amendments of the 'war book' as responses to public opinion. I demur. Some screws were loose in the Finance Ministry and the RBI.

Witness to all demonetisations (1946, 1978), devaluations (1966, 1991) and

and a shield against the average Indian's penchant for quick money at government's expense.

3.2 million debit cards were compromised in October 2016. NaMo could have placed plenty of ₹ 100 & ₹ 50 on tap,



declaring that he favoured cash dealings! That red herring could have helped the hapless poor and caught the guilty in the act. I surmise that physical possession of the junked SBNs was necessary to gauge the dimension of counterfeit currency that funded terrorism. Hence, the window, which was abused as a gateway for mischief! The ₹ 2000 note is an irritant; no wonder Mahatma Gandhi vanished from some notes!

Coins facilitate barter, having common measures of value. Currency notes are holier! A ₹ 2000 banknote, for example, 'represents a public debt of the State, ultimately to be serviced by the taxpayer'. The mafia doubled that burden by hoarding bulk of SBN. Counterfeit notes burdened them with debt not incurred. All are, indeed, weapons of mass destruction. NaMo's war must be won. Money sieved through the banks leave a trail, tax is paid, access to cheap credit becomes feasible and the Economy quivers in the short term to perk up in the medium term.

A provisional appraisal of the ongoing cleansing process exposes 'an opaque uneasiness about the moral side of the response to demonetisation, as Satish Deshpande put it. Analysis of validated data may have to wait for May 2017.

Continued on Page 24.....



savvy beforehand and another for punishing the die-hard evaders, after wards. In between these deceptively benign concessions, he kicked the wasps' nests 'to mitigate counterfeiting, terrorist financing and black money' by demonetising Specified Bank Notes [SBN] (old ₹500/1,000) - 86% of cash) on November 8, 2016, having tweaked Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and his Cabinet disarmingly. All hell broke loose, hopefully paving the way for heaven!

About ₹15 trillion of the ₹15.4. trillion SBN - black, white and counterfeit - have returned to the system in 2016, in a country cosy with underhand dealings. ₹5.92 billion worth of new currency (20.4 billions: ₹ 10s, 20s, 50s and 100s & a modest 2.2 billion of ₹ 2,000s & ₹.500s) were placed in circulation by then. The scarcity should, hopefully, ease by end February 2017, heralding the cherub of a prosperous India. This is a watershed in good governance, dogged at every step by the scheming dishonest among us from all walks of life. NaMo, in good faith and against his grain, had not factored this depravity in. Or?

This war against the ruinous corruption, tax evasion, money-laundering, counterfeit currency, terrorism, drug lords, antique thieves, naxals (a guerrilla group), Maoists, havalas ('smugglers' illegal finance route, benami (a transaction/property paid by one person, but held by another person.)



oscillations of the Rupee (from ₹ 1.30 in 1948 to ₹ 68.33 per dollar in 2017 - steep downfall attributable mainly to unbridled financial skulduggery), I sorely missed, in his paradigm shift, an algorithm for automatic self-correction ('When we solve problems for India, we solve for everyone in the world' - Sundar Pichai in 2017), red herrings to mislead the crooks in the cross hair, government assurance against digital abuse and mature teamwork in handling hiccups, hardships and tension.

Srinivasan Soundararajan (Innamburan) is a Tamil scholar with degrees in Economics, Applied Sociology and Tamil Literature. He has long retired from the Indian Audit and Accounts Service in which he served as Additional Deputy Comptroller & Auditor General of India. He has also spent some years working in the UK as an Adviser for the Citizens' Advice Bureau.



LOST PEOPLE

by Cyril Dabydeen

"So where do you come from?" he asks, with sanguine ease.

"Where?"

Some nerve he has, this man with bonhomie accosting me here at the busy shopping mall on St Laurent Avenue in the city's east end. He's gimmicky, sure—with his immigrant's instinct, you bet. Origins, in our quest; and from Ethiopia or Somali he is, maybe. Where does he mark out a place for me? Canadian, eh?

I humour him. Yes, with our inner rhythms intact.

Where are you really from?

We keep being at it, in a manner of speaking. Parlaying, as if from a time past. Why not? Swarthy-hued, and thin-boned: he is, being in his forties. He genuinely wants to know if I am a stranger—not a player?

"You do know where I come from?" I ask with scepticism, in my immigrant play-along. Rigmarole, maybe. He demurs with his south-Saharan pride, I sense. But our being here in the North, as he keeps trying to guess where I come from—but figuring he already knows with his intuitive sense.

Where really?

Oceans crossed...Indian or Pacific, if not the Atlantic. Or somewhere along the Cape of Good Hope with Vasco da Gama, or Christopher Columbus. Whose discovery of the New World are we talking about? Explorers being "discoverers"? Where are you really from?

An island-archipelago with St Lucia, Jamaica, Trinidad, coastal Guyana in my ken. Or French-speaking Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique. Then Spanish-speaking Puerto Rico, Cuba. An image of bearded Fidel Castro with umbrella in hand in the stark sunshine, a strange or befuddled expression on his face because of political change. American change, d'you know?

This African man with his own heft with places like Djibouti, Nigeria, Kenya, also in his mind. West Africa too, where the slave-trade commenced more than two centuries ago. What the West Indies sugar plantations were linked to. But his being here now in a posh shopping mall with Dollar Stores, grocery stores, myriad shoe and fashion clothing

outlets. People maundering along, their bags filled with "trophyies."

Who wants a new identity, nothing less wholesome? Oh, somewhere else in my ken is Ghana's Elmina Castle—a slave-dungeon, yes! History, yes.

"You're not from India, are you?" he asks.

"Oh?"

"You're not who you think you are, maybe," he replies, sensing conceit. He pulls at his jacket lapels and tries to look suave, and muses on about me. My not being definitively, or, selectively Asian? Who's really exotic these days? I call him Mohammed—like a made-up name, or moniker. He mumbles to me with his own bearing and pride. Yes, faith mixed with self-knowledge tied to a special longing and desire. People removed from origins, yet with their ancestry intact, I conceive.

Now this man brings more of sub-Saharan Africa to me, and Mother-woman Lucy from genealogy, anthropology, prehistory in my ken.

"Fooled you, eh?" He laughs suddenly. I also laugh.

We look at each other eye to eye, then turn to others here at the shopping mall. And our being in this capital city with our own burgeoning "idea of the North" tied to our immigrant selves. Like a declaration, he lets out,

"See, you're the lost people."

I blink an eye.

"Lost...from where?"

"From your original homeland."

Mohammed with a past civilization of the Pharaohs, and pyramids built by the Nubians in North Africa. His muscles stretched tight on his face.

I deny being lost. I never was. Others passing by looking at us with puzzlement or quandary: people of different hue and ethnicity. Nothing I will lay claim to, no race-markers, no other identity. I try to regain my composure, thinking of what's lost and never found again. Other journeys remembered...and oceans, rivers, and mountains crossed.

I aim to move along. Voices I carry in me, momentous or perplexing.

Not falsifying? Mohammed, with guile or gumption, still seeing me as the "lost people"—as shoppers, passersby clutching bags, I look at in a multicultural walk-about. Everyone indeed being lost, or found again. What I say to this man with my own conceit. Yes, he leaves me alone without the sense of a demarcated place or country. Moving along!

A former Poet Laureate of Ottawa, Cyril Dabydeen was born in Guyana, South America. He teaches Writing at the University of Ottawa. He has written a number of books including novels and poetry. He is included in the Heinemann, Oxford and Penguin Books of Caribbean Verse. His novel, Drums of My Flesh won the top Guyana Prize and was nominated for the 2007 IMPAC/Dublin Literary Prize. Contact—cdabydeen@ncf.ca




UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
The Rowett Institute

FISH MEAL Study

We would like to investigate the long term effects of eating mackerel fish on glucose control and heart health among South Asian population with diabetes.

We are looking for

- South Asian men and women aged 25-65
- Diabetic controlled by diet and lifestyle
- Non-diabetic
- Overweight to obese (classification for Asian population - BMI ≥ 23 kg/m²)
- No other chronic health problems

Contact

Khairun Sumali
• 01224 438689
• r01kns15@abdn.ac.uk

Dr Nigel Hoggard
• 01224 438655
• n.hoggard@abdn.ac.uk



DEMONETIZATION: AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW

By Dawood Ali McCallum

Imagine a country of over one thousand three hundred million individuals which functions predominantly as a cash based economy yet where the highest value currency notes very roughly equate to a fiver and tenner in pounds sterling. Hard to see quite how that would work. Then try to imagine what would happen if the government of that huge, diverse land takes those notes, a whopping 86% of the currency, out of the system virtually overnight. What do you think would happen next?

Doubt the Benefit or Benefit of the Doubt?

I spent a few hours trailing around Delhi in early January, from Connaught Place to Civil Lines, from a hospital to a girl's college in search of that elusive ATM that someone said that someone else had heard was still dispensing cash. I suppose on this basis I could try to claim some first-hand experience of the resulting difficulties, but that would be a conceit, way too far. I was in the back of a comfortable car, with a thin but far from empty wallet, bits and pieces of 4 different currencies, credit and debit cards and kind friends willing to advance me cash if and when needed. No, my experience was at worst a minor inconvenience and in truth, something of an adventure. Especially the memorable ticking off we got for entering the girl's college. However, I am neither the victim nor the hero of this tale. Rather I am the interested outsider observing a huge experiment first hand, struck by two things: First, the breath-taking audacity of the government's action. Second, the way in which the impact of such a profound and massively disruptive action has been received.

Of course, depending on your perspective you could replace the word, 'audacity' with arrogance in the sentence above and 'acceptance' with passivity. But that's not what I saw. And anyway, the word I want to focus on is disruptive, because at the heart of this move lies disruption.

In the short term, massive disruption to everyday lives. Countless transactions frustrated, postponed and abandoned. Surgery, weddings, vital journeys, business-critical deals. And the hours and

hours of queueing, often only to be frustrated as the cash to be dispensed runs out before you get to the front of the queue. Then there's the longer-term disruption and that is even more profound and potentially far more positive. For as well as a step to disrupt corrupt practices, India's demonetisation is an ambitious attempt to force and fast track a leap of the decades to an electronic, recorded, accountable and taxable financial system.

In countries like the UK, this transition



has not required significant government intervention. It has been convenience driven and commerce led, only occasionally needing a little nudge along the way to replace cash filled pay packets with computer generated salary slips and electronic alerts. Today we buy on Amazon, sell on e-bay and bank online. With ever more aggressive regulations to combat money laundering, cash is increasingly the inconvenient option and the suspect preference. But in India, whilst the advances in communications offered by the digital revolution have been passionately embraced, cash has remained king. Thus the longer term disruption is also, and perhaps most significantly, to the existing way of doing things. Global experience and common sense tell us that the opening of a bank account and the replacement of cash in hand with interbank transfers are steps from which there is no going back.

Those supportive of this move talk of omelettes and eggs. Short term pain for long term gain. Its detractors point out that the serious black money is in property or resides overseas. That the banks have connived to siphon off the bulk of

the new currency being printed to the mega-wealthy long before it ever reaches the cashier's counter. Then there are the creative solutions found by the rich and the quick to spend large amounts of soon to be worthless cash before the deadlines imposed: Jewellers working 24 hours a day yet still unable to meet the demand for gold. High end electronics stores staying open long into the night to enable frantic spending. Imaginative forward buying. As one friend observed: Modi and half a dozen phenomenally smart men versus 1.3 billion pretty smart citizens. Who would you bet is going to win?

Which brings me to my second observation. I think I glimpse in the resigned faces of those silently lined up at the few, briefly functioning ATMs something profound happening here. For I see not the hopeless resignation of the abject and the down-trodden. I see weariness and frustration too but also an acceptance. A belief, or a hope, that this just might achieve some positive, long lasting change.

I have only ever seen anything like it once before. It was around a decade ago in Kenya. At a time of hope for a cleaner future, where there was a real breath of change in the air. The new government issued a ban on Matatus, the privately owned mini-buses which were, and remain, the mainstay of the mass transport system, until they were safety-checked and properly licensed. With these overcrowded, battered death-traps off the road the hundreds of thousands who depended upon them to get to work every day had no alternative but to walk, often for several hours every morning and evening along dusty, unlit, potholed roads. Yet there too, I saw first-hand the same patient resignation I think I saw in India last month, fuelled too by a willingness to accept massive inconvenience and immediate suffering in the hope that this just might turn out to be worth it in the long term.

Sadly, significant change did not come to Kenya. For all those currently queuing and compromising, losing and suffering, I truly hope that for India this great leap proves worth the immediate pain. At least for the moment the patient majority seem to think it deserves the benefit of the doubt.

Dawood Ali McCallum is the author of a series of novels published in India and the UK. Learn more at www.dawoodalimccallum.com



REGINALD MASSEY'S BOOK PAGE

Many years ago I met Gopi Warrier, poet, Ayurvedic expert and successful businessman. He hails from a leading Malayali family in Kerala and has established an Ayurvedic hospital in London. The Delhi London Poetry Foundation (delhilondonpoetsfoundation@gmail.com) involves poets from Delhi, London, Mumbai, New York, Paris, Sydney, Antigua and Accra. An imposing intercontinental combine of international poets. On November 22 last year a collection of remarkable poems titled *Shivoham: Poems of Spirituality, Politics and Human Descent* was launched at the Lansdowne club in London's Mayfair. The poems are the joint effort of Gopi Warrier and Jesus Fullman (the nom de plume of a British poet educated at Eton and Oxford who became a Cistercian monk and travelled in the Himalayas integrating Buddhist philosophy into his spiritual life).

The Indo - British connection is further cemented by the fact that the fifth Marquess of Lansdowne who owned the grand building in exclusive Mayfair became the Viceroy of India in 1888. Apart from Warrier the trustees of the foundation are Princess Gauri Lakshmi Bayi of Travancore, Lady Morritt, Amanda Brett and Shyamala Shiveshwarkar. Poem after poem strips the blatant materialism and exploitation in this Kali-yuga, an age in which virtue degenerates and rulers plunder and destroy. While extolling higher values the poems are scathing towards current standards of culture not only in society but in international relations. Children are mercilessly bombed every other day in Syria and Yemen by 'advanced'

countries. Michael Wood, Professor of English at Princeton, writes that Warrier's verses remind him of Kahlil Gibran, Baudelaire and Ramakrishna Paramahansa as well as Alexander Pope.

Gopi Warrier and Princess Gauri are Keralites and it would be pertinent to mention that Kerala has a long history of religious tolerance. There were Christians in Kerala before there were Christians in many parts of Europe. Also, there were Arab traders and sailors in Kerala before the birth of Islam. There is a claim that a ruler of Kerala named Cheraman Perumal decided to make his way to Arabia where he met the Prophet Mohammad and converted to Islam adopting the name Taj-ud-Deen. However, on his way back to India he fell ill and died in Oman. Apparently he was buried in the town of Salalah. Before he died he gave letters of introduction to an Arab friend to hand over to important princes in Kerala.

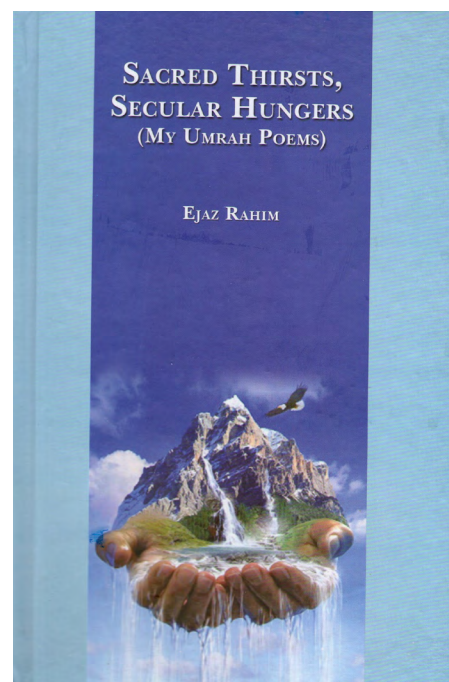
His letters were respected and permission was granted for the construction of a mosque

in 629 AD in Methala which is situated in Thrissur District. Thus the Jum'ah Masjid became the very first mosque in India. Hindus of all castes are allowed to enter and tend to the ancient oil lamp there. Non-Muslims take their children to the mosque to be blessed. In April last year when Prime Minister Modi visited Riyadh he took a gold-plated replica of the mosque as a gift for the Saudi King.

The Pakistani poet Ejaz Rahim has produced *Sacred Thirsts, Secular*

Hungers (my Umrah Poems). Here is an example of his magical fluency:

On the Kaaba's tabula rasa
Anyone reaching out



With a lofty pen
And a humble mien
Can craft a poem

But the Divine permits
Only a lover's lips
To steal from it
A passionate kiss

Words wait
For a loving touch
Before breaking
The ice.

This collection is available from the poet: ejazrahim@hotmail.com

In September 2015 one of Reginald Massey's poems was awarded the first prize in the all-British Forward Poetry competition. He has been writing a regular Book Page for CONFLUENCE for years. Most of his books are available from Amazon UK.



NADIA HASHIMI'S A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS

Reviewed by Meenakshi Mohan

Zeba's chest tightened. A white heat flushed her face and made her jaw clench tightly on a day that could have been . . . ordinary. Zeba debated for a moment before deciding . . .

On that fateful day, which could have been ordinary – the clothes hung on the line outside their home. Stewed okra simmered in an aluminum pot . . . Basir and the girls were on their way home – something extraordinary happened which completely shattered Zeba's life. Kamal, the abusive, alcoholic husband of Zeba was brutally murdered with a hatchet on his neck. Villagers, her children, and her husband's relatives found her on the courtyard of her house, catatonic with shock, her hands soaked with her husband's blood, his dead body lying in front of her. Sixteen-year-old Basir, Zeba's oldest son, for whom the word "home," denoted a broken place – broken dishes, broken ribs, broken spirits -- knew in his heart that his mother was innocent.

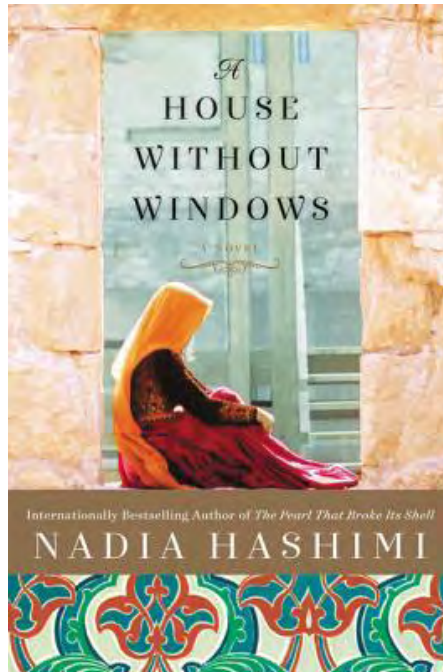
Zeba was a loving wife, a caring mother, and a peaceful villager. She hid her wounds inflicted by her husband with her headscarf, so Basir, and his siblings would not see that. She concocted rhythmic words to soothe herself from the pain of his brutalities, "Men love for a moment because they are clever, women are fools because they love forever."

Her husband's family proclaimed her to be a cold-blooded murderer.

Zeba refused to explain what happened that day, and gave herself up to the authorities. In Afghanistan, women are guilty until proven innocent, and often of no fault of their own. If Zeba was not guilty of this grim crime, why was she concealing the truth?

In 'A House Without Windows', Nadia Hashimi adds a lot of depth to the tale by intricately weaving the mystery around Kamal's murder whilst also highlighting women's issues in Afghanistan. Khaled Hosseini, the author of 'And the Mountains Echoed' and 'The Kite Runner' (in his review of Hashimi's book, 'The Pearl that Broke its Shell') reflected on her writings, "Her always engaging multigenerational tale is a portrait of Afghanistan . . . and a mirror into the still ongoing struggles of Afghan women."

The story of Zeba mirrors the fate and misfortunes of many other women in that male dominated society where they are deprived of all their rights. Zeba reflected,



"A woman was only as good as the drops that fell on her wedding night, the ounces she bled with the turns of the moon, and the small river she shed giving her husband's children "

Zeba ended up in Chil Mehtab, a prison for women, awaiting her trial, and a possible execution. In the prison, she befriended her cellmates who were there with their own adversities. Some cell mates found the closed walls of prison more forgiving than the outside world. Here, they formed a sisterhood, shared tales with each other, and remained protected from the horrors of the real world. The women employees were gentler than men. The food was served on time, they moved around freely inside, and a beauty salon within the prison was a special favorite with them.

Her brother hired a young Afghani lawyer from America to fight her case. Yusuf was brought up, and educated in America. When Yusuf was in college news from Afghanistan was all over the place – suicide attacks, battered women, corruption, murder, dehumanizing refugee camps, and corrupt warlords. He had taken a course in human rights – and the optimistic rhetoric of professors made a strong impression on his mind. Yusuf had lived and breathed the American belief that one person could make a difference. Full of these ideas, he returned to Afghanistan where he decided to take on Zeba's case. In meeting Zeba, he had the gut feeling that Zeba was not a murderer, and therefore wanted to save her from possible execution. Zeba knew how the judicial system worked in her country. She was ready to accept whatever punishment the Qazi had in mind. She reflected, "I am a sparrow in love with my solitude, all my secrets contained within me."

Would Yusuf be able to find the secrets behind Kamal's murder? Would he be able to fight the corrupt judicial system? The title, A House without Windows is metaphorical of women's life in that world – dark and gloomy. It is a heartbreaking story of women's plight told with effective simplicity, and poetic flavour. It gives voice to women who do not have one. It is a call for many young Yusufs to come forward to make the change.

Nadia Hashimi is of Afghan origin, born and brought up in New York. This is her third novel each of which exposes the dark perils of the Afghan world. In this novel, she has portrayed the inhumane treatment of women. Hashimi's book resonates particularly in the year 2016, the year of U.S. elections when the concepts of divisiveness and misogyny were shown to be at home in America. Hashimi seeks to understand what it is like to live, as Kirkus Review said, " . (as) . an honourable woman living amid dishonourable men."

Beautifully Written and a powerful book! Kudos to Nadia Hashimi!

Meenakshi Mohan has taught for over two decades in America, having earned a Doctoral degree from Chicago in Educational Administration with a focus on Early Childhood. She has published papers and books and has been included twice in the Who's Who among American Teachers.



RACE AND COLOUR

By Devi Rajab



As Donald Trump beckons in a new era of fraught race relations in US politics can America reconcile its recent progressive past with a new colour conscious regime? Was it all an illusion? When Obama was sworn in as 44th, first black President of the USA in 2008 my husband and I found ourselves reacting in a most unexpected manner. It was 2am in the morning and we were riveted to the TV. I lay next to him in bed and said: I have a lump in my throat. It's all too much for me and when I turned to look at him I found that he too was emotional. An analysis of our behaviour led us to the conclusion that as 'darkies' it was a great feeling to win. It was a sense of justice that overcame us. A recent flash of pride returned when Trevor Noah interviewed Barack Obama in the white house last week. It was a most touching sight to see two powerful and attractive men of colour making history for the Coloured people all over the world. "How does it feel to be on the fringes of two racial worlds; white and black," inquired Trevor after acknowledging their common mixed ancestry. While Trevor was seeking to have a real conversation about race, Obama would not step down from his Presidential role as leader of an entire nation. So he talked in generalities and held on to his belief in the ability to unite people around a politics of purpose. This is precisely the collective dilemma of Coloured people in SA and indeed in America.

The Trevor Manuels, Wilmot James, Rhoda Kadalie, Franklin Sonn, are all twilight people of mixed heritage with rich political credentials, and indigenous roots who have been marginalised by virtue of their mixed identities. Will they ever have a chance to lead their country? Or would they have to bury one side of their ancestry before they can claim authenticity/ But this would be like pulling threads out of a growing tapestry of mixed marriages. In the case of Trevor Noah whose mother, Patricia Nombuyiselo Noah, is of Xhosa ancestry, and his father, Robert, of Swiss German descent, the racial distillation would not be possible. His parents' relationship was illegal at the time of his birth under apartheid. His mother was jailed under the Immorality Act and his father later moved back to Switzerland. Noah was raised by his mother and maternal grandmother, and he appears to be an interesting product of both worlds.

For Barack Obama whose father was Kenyan and mother from the mid-west of America his socialization was middle class with strong family values. To add to his rich heritage he was born in Hawaii and lived for a while with his mother's second husband. The principal figures in his life were his mother's parents who focused on educational and civic values. They protected him from racial encounters as best they could and in his book he tells a touching story of the lengths that his grandfather would take to challenge racists in stores and pubs and public places. Finding one's true racial identity is paramount in racist societies like the US and SA.

Halle Berry, the famous actress of mixed parentage was told by her white mother that she should always remember that she was not white. After three and four generations one wonders who is really an American. I watched an amazing video entitled "The Colour of Fear" in which 8 American males of diverse racial backgrounds (Chinese, Black, White, Spanish, Mexican) with the help of an analyst spend a week-end in search of their identities as true Americans.

Everyone feels marginalized as ethnic Americans except the white participants who cannot seem to

understand the anger that the ethnic groups feel towards them. The discourse is extremely candid, rough and electric bringing forth tears and anger in grown men who after generations cannot find their place in the American dream. Ronald Takaki, an eminent authority on multiculturalism and ethnic studies, has written a book titled, *A Different Mirror*, which tells of an incident when he was riding in a taxi. "The rear-view mirror reflected a white man in his forties. "How long have you been in this country?" he asked. "All my life, I replied wincing. "I was born in the United States". With a strong southern drawl, he remarked: "I was wondering because your English is excellent!" Then, as I had many times before, I explained: "My grandfather came here from Japan in the 1880's. My family has been here in America, for over a hundred years". He glanced at me in the rear view mirror. Somehow I did not look American to him; my eyes and complexion looked foreign. Suddenly we both became uncomfortably conscious of a racial divide separating us."

Generally most people in the US have a narrow but widely shared sense of the past- a history that has viewed American as European in ancestry. "Race" says Toni Morrison, the award winning black American writer, has functioned as a metaphor. In the creation of our national identity, American has been defined as "white". The reality however is that with the diversity of America's ethnic groups, white Americans will become a minority group. The significance of America or Britain becoming a majority non-white society is what this would ultimately mean to the national psyche. How would individuals view themselves and their nation? Would there be a hierarchy of citizenship based on race, as we are rapidly experiencing in SA today. Would some people be more American or more South African than others?

Dr. Devi Rajab is a respected South African journalist and former Dean of Student Development at UKZN and the author of several books.

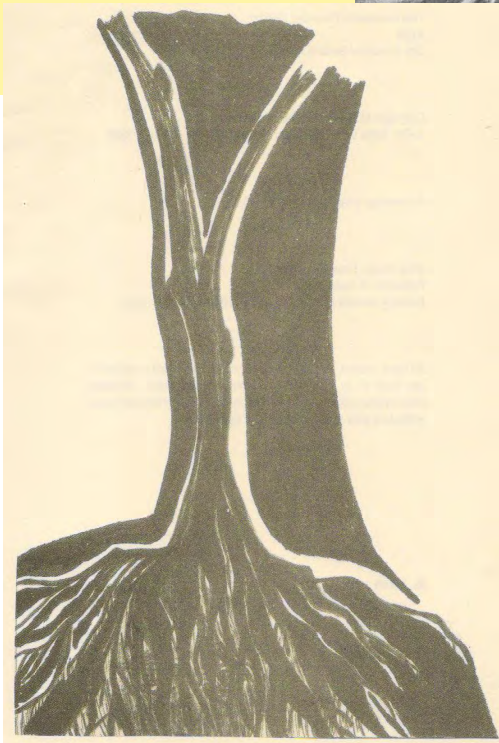
IN THE GALLERY

By Sukrita Paul Kumar

Souls wrapped in gunny bags
Stiff creases
and starched stitches

Headless bodies
Regimented in rows
Chests waiting for bullets

Nature's finishing touches.



They are
"Coming and Going Pieces"
of art
She said,
created
Out of live tree trunks

Always in transition
Always waiting for
Something to happen

A withering or a blossoming



Steel shadows
Fluid contours

Passing into

Darkness
Within and without

Born and brought up in Kenya, Sukrita Paul Kumar is a well-known poet and critic, who held the Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at the University of Delhi till recently. A recipient of many prestigious fellowships, she has lectured in many universities in India and abroad. Her paintings have been exhibited and published in several journals. She has been the Guest Editor of several journals in India and abroad, including "Manoa: Crossing Over" (University of Hawaii), "Muse India" (Indian Literatures) and "Margaret Lawrence Review".



CONFLUENCE

Poetry Corner

SAREE

by Vasanta Surya

It came wrapped in desire's eager rustling
a gift I did not choose.

Though warp and weft obeyed
an ambiguous design the shade beguiled.
The texture satisfied
a hunger, not merely of the eye.

I shook it loose and shaped it to my use.
Line and colour clung to breast and thigh.
The border's thread of gold
repeated in each pleat and fold
"It's grand!" they said "Beware the evil eye!"
But one who called herself my friend
warned, "That red will run, and leave you stained!
All blotched you're going to be, with memory!
It's flimsy stuff — won't last you till the end!
Don't mistake me, but that jari's fake!
I'm only telling you this for your own sake."

She was right, and wrong.
Though the colour bled, the fabric held.
The texture satisfied
that hunger, not merely of the eye.
The gold proved genuine
silver — a not unacceptable exchange
when time came to trade desire and greed
for plain and simple need.

I have stripped the borders and bleached out the stains.
Rich decoration gone, each tantalising line
obliterated, it needs no defence
against the evil eye. Of design,
promise, and pretence, nothing remains.

What's left is unglossed warp and weft.
A sturdy weave as natural as air.
A seamless second skin
concealing and revealing what I choose
like clouds shaped and reshaped
to the sun's ever-changing use.
Worn thin, the texture still satisfies
that hunger, not merely of the eye.

Vasanta Surya is a well known poet, translator, journalist and children's writer. She has been observing the dynamics of social, cultural and linguistic changes in today's India, and specifically in Tamil Nadu over the past four decades.



WHY LABEL?
by Cyril Dabydeen

I am teaching
my cat, Zeus,
to listen to
sitar music

Ravi Shankar
is best, I say,
as Zeus nods
his head

Bending forward,
coming closer
to me--
I know

Being not far from
Mount Olympus,
the strains of
the sitar I hear

As Zeus turns,
looking out from
the window--
sounds far away

I GIVE YOU
A CHAMELEON

I give you a chameleon,
a life with vestiges of green,
a sunset parakeet's call

A rainbow vestment next
stepping out among shadows,
the sun at my fingertips

Looking closely at each
twig as the ground swirls
under my feet

Being in a citadel too,
moving around with the
El Dorado of lost time
Thinking of who first
came here: a turnaround,
a life simply lived

Without regret, imagining
what might have been
in years gone by



SAWAI MADHOPUR, RAJASTHAN

Training underprivileged women in Geriatric Care -- By Malalshri Lal

Rajasthan's famous tiger sanctuary, Ranthambhore, is part of the backward district of Sawai Madhopur, about 160 km from the tourist destination of Jaipur. The stream of tiger seeking visitors and environmentalists is in sharp contrast to the everyday life of the growing population of young men and women in the dusty district town of Sawai Madhopur. Within the area of 4,498 sq. m., the male population of 7,04,031 is much higher than that of women which is 6,31,520. On an average day, women are not too visible in public forums and in the evening hours they are completely absent. This is fairly typical of rural Rajasthan but in this district there remains a historical anomaly.

History and Reality today

The Ranthambhore fort, in ruins today, has a chequered history. A seat of power for the Chauhan Rajputs in the 8th century, it was taken over by Akbar in 1558. With the

just a metropolitan phenomenon in India but has percolated to the smaller towns. Trained help is the call of the day in hospitals, nursing homes, senior housing colonies and in families too. This cadre must understand physiology, psychology, nutrition, and the basic amenities required by aging people.

The steps in this journey

The initial survey in January 2016 brought history and sociology together and the visiting team was overwhelmed by the request for professional training from local leaders, teachers and potential students. The Geriatric Care course was started on 19 September 2016 at the Guild's own premises. Nurse- Teachers Ghanshyam and Rubina were recruited, and senior medical professional Dr. Sohan Lal Meena agreed to teach and oversee the quality. The dedicated permanent staff of the Guild, Dilip and Vidya Yadav attended to the myriad coordination

of medical services. The students are taking blood pressure and temperature, using the stethoscope, assisting with basic equipment, bandaging, bed-making, and general patient care.

There is a market for people willing to be geriatric care attendants which can be channelled for employability with the inherent care giving skills of the girls being harnessed to enhance earning capacity. While contact has been made with placement agencies in Sawai Madhopur, Delhi and Jaipur, given the socio-economic background of the students, overcoming traditional barriers may not be easy.

Path-breaking initiative

The Geriatric Care course at Sawai Madhopur has created a new paradigm for skill development in Rajasthan. In spite of



Jaipur rulers struggling for supremacy, Sawai Madho Singh renamed the adjoining village and later took charge of Ranthambhore. After India's Independence in 1947, when Rajasthan was configured as a State with Jaipur as its capital, Ranthambhore-Sawai Madhopur receded from importance.

Through all of this, the economy of the region has slid dismally and 21.5% of the families at present are below the poverty line. The current economy is dependent on tourism and agriculture, both seasonal. A landlocked district, scarcity of water, lack of electricity, dependence on rainfall, and an inefficient cropping system have caused agricultural incomes to become negligible, except for guava cultivation.

The Guild of Service initiative

Between the history of a prosperous past and the reality of a depleted present, the Guild of Service, a civil society organization with four decades of commitment to women's empowerment, is trying to bridge the gaps. It has been conducting a three month Geriatric Care course in collaboration with the Govt. of India. Thirty young women have enrolled with great enthusiasm and with a will to succeed in breaking the cycle of poverty and unemployment. The local survey has shown that nuclear families with ageing people in need of care givers is not

activities in keeping up progress. In Sawai Madhopur where female literacy rate is merely 47.51 per cent, it was an optimistic step to educate women in geriatric care and make them amenable to employment. During counselling sessions the girls were asked if they would be allowed to work if offered, and whether they could live in another city such as Jaipur or Delhi. The students answered firmly in the affirmative that they would 'persuade' their families to give them such freedom.

Using professional guidelines, the Guild has evolved a curriculum comprising of the following units: Ageing and Concepts of Gerontology and Basic Geriatrics; Fundamental Health Care of the Aged; Rehabilitation, Hospital/Field Visit. Keeping in mind, the local problem of hospital access, lessons in first aid and home remedies are also discussed. Having completed two months of in-house teaching and practice, the Guild has placed twenty two successful students for temporary internship at the Ranthambore Sevika Hospital which offers a range of medical services.' An exam will be held for the final certification.'

Having completed two months of in-house teaching and practice, the Guild has placed twenty two successful students at the Ranthambore Sevika Hospital which offers a range

under-development in this region, the Guild has taken a bold step in bringing updated and non-traditional learning to girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. The local community has been supportive and helped the coordinators at every step.

The Guild office in New Delhi is closely monitoring this programme as a pilot for similar unconventional but contemporary training programmes for women in backward areas. It is important to recall that historically Ranthambhore - Sawai-Madhupur was once a prosperous area and home to tribal people. Now it provides new occupations and modernisation for its population but has lacked vision and a plan for a training facility. The Guild will hope to change the direction of women's lives which in the words of Rajasthan's premier writer Vijay Dan Detha: "Are women allowed to have any will of their own? Until they reach the cremation ground, they must be in the bedchamber, and when they escape the bedchamber, they go straight to the cremation ground." (Short story "The Dilemma" trans. Ruth Vanita)

Malalshri Lal is a retd. Professor of English and the Dean of Academic Activities at the University of Delhi.



WITH TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FROM HINDU, BUDDHIST AND JAIN CANONS

By Sheela Reddy

For over a month, the mild, balding professor of history, Dwijendra Narayan Jha, has been shuffling to his classroom in Delhi University escorted by a police constable. Teaching ancient history does not usually endanger one's health, but ever since Jha went public with the best-kept secret in Indian history - the beef-eating habits of Hindus, Buddhists and even Jains -- in a book entitled *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Conditions* - his phone hasn't stopped ringing.

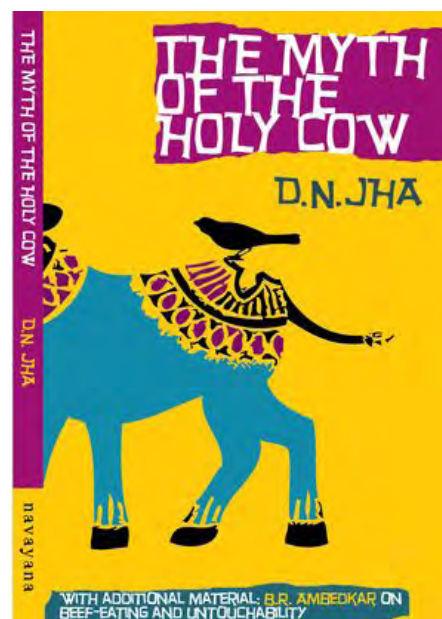
"The calls are usually abusive," says Jha, "but sometimes they demand to know what evidence I have, and one day late in July it was an anonymous caller threatening dire consequences if I ever brought out my book."

The calls had two effects on the 61-year-old historian: he called the police and braced himself for battle. "There is a cultural war going on and academics have a role to play," Jha says calmly. But it's not the kind of war that he had anticipated. Even before his book could hit the stands, the VHP exhorted its cadre to confiscate and burn copies. The BJP followed suit: one of its MPs, R.S. Rawat, wrote to the Union home minister demanding not only a ban on the book but also the arrest and prosecution of its author and CB Publishers.

But before the book could be burnt or banned, the Jain Seva Sangh stepped in. Outraged by Jha's reported assertion that their founder Mahavira ate meat, the Hyderabad-based organisation sought a court injunction against the book, leaving the nonplussed historian without the words to fight his war. Anticipating controversy and debate, Jha meticulously scoured ancient texts, culling material from original sources for over two years. "If they want to ban my book, then they will have to ban the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Sutras and the epics. Where will they stop? I have given evidence, if they have counter-evidence, they don't they come forward with it? But why are so illiterate, they haven't even heard of those texts, let alone read them. I have texts and they go by blind faith," he says. "That is what a historian can and should do: Counter faith with facts," he adds.

Jha's interest in dietary history began a few years ago after reading French historian Fernand Braudel's history of early modern European diet. But he soon became intrigued by the beef-eating habits of Indians which existed in Rig Vedic times and continued till the 19th century and after, despite repeated Brahminical injunctions against cow-killing. That ancient Hindus, including Brahmins, were beef-eaters, willing to incur the minor penalty that an agrarian society began imposing on cow-killers, and that this fondness for cattle meat had nothing to do with Islam or Christianity, came neither as a shock nor surprise to this unconventional Brahmin, whose first

name Dwijendra means 'holiest of Brahmins'. "No serious historian, not even 'Hindu' ones like R.C. Majumdar or K.M. Munshi, has ever disputed that ancient Hindus ate beef," says Jha. However, convinced that repeated Brahminical injunctions to not kill cows reflected a popular proclivity for beef, Jha went further and unearthed irrefutable evidence of cow slaughter and consumption by Hindus of all classes, including Brahmins, until as late as the 19th century. "I was expecting this," says Jha, who tasted beef for the first time nearly 30 years ago at Cambridge.



"It was difficult to believe Brahmins were laying down norms without a reason. I think there is much more evidence than I got." The cow as a sacred animal, Jha believes, did not really gain currency until Dayananad Saraswati's cow protection movement in the 19th century. "The cow became a tool of mass political mobilisation with the organised cow-protection movement," the historian points out. "The killing of cows stopped gradually with the agrarian society and caste rigidity. The Brahmins found it convenient to say that those who ate beef were untouchable. But they themselves continued to consume it, recommending it for occasions such as shraadh. Simultaneously, they trivialised the beef taboo by saying that eating beef is like cleaning your teeth with your fingers. It was never a sin to eat it, merely an indecorum. There was never a taboo, only discouragement."

With this discovery, culled from ancient scriptures, medical texts, the Manusmriti and religious commentaries, Jha impishly "decided to take the bull by its horns" and publish a book on his findings. "There is a saying in Hindi: Laaton ke bhoote baton se nahin mante (Those used to force are not persuaded by words).

So I had to give them the shock treatment," he explains. Only, Jha's "shock treatment" did not stop with Hindus. Buddhists, he claims, citing canonical texts like Mahaparinibbana Sutta and Anguttara Nikaya, also ate beef and other meat. "In fact, the Buddha died after eating a meal of pork," he says. "Vegetarianism was not a viable option for Buddhist monks in a society that loved meat of all kinds—pig, rhinoceros, cow, buffalo, fish, snake, birds, including crows and peacocks. Only camel and dog meat was taboo in India."

Similarly with the early Jains. Citing the Bhagavatisutra, Jha points out that Mahavira once ate a chicken meal to gain strength for a yogic battle with an adversary. "His only condition was to ask the woman who cooked the meal to find a chicken already killed by a cat instead of slaughtering a fresh one," says Jha. "This has upset the Jains, but why are they not upset with the texts that carry these stories? I found these in bookstores run by devout Jain booksellers like Motilal Banarsidass and Sohanlal Jain Dharam Pracharak Samiti."

Despite Jha's avowed dislike of "being conspicuous", the man whose family consists of "a wife and three servants" has never shied away from controversy. His family is accustomed to his "mad ways" and his upbringing has been unorthodox enough to allow him to experiment even with beef.

But his community of orthodox Maithili Brahmins in Bihar has not taken kindly to his book either.

"They didn't like me citing sources from Mithila to prove my point," says Jha nonchalantly. "Indian Society has come to such a juncture that historians have to play an active role in countering superstitions and unreason," says Jha. He took up cudgels during the Ayodhya dispute and even objected to the TV serialisation of epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. "It politicised the myths and propagated a value system and religiosity not in keeping with a state-run broadcaster," he says. "Ramanand Sagar's version of the epics is not real history."

"Old and tired out," Jha may call himself, but there's something irrepressible about him. Bans and fatwas haven't stopped him from beginning work on his next book. "It will be called," says Jha with deadpan face, *Adulterous Gods and their Inebriated Women*.

(Source: <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/A-Brahmins-Cow-Tales/213159>)

DAUGHTERS OF JORASANKO BY ARUNA CHAKRAVARTY

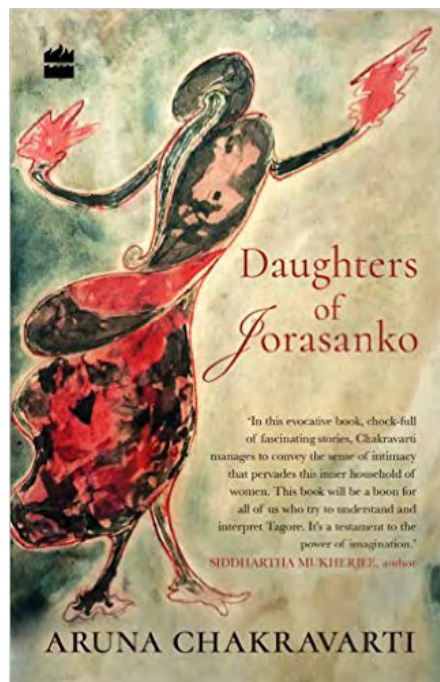
Reviewed By Taisha Abraham

'Daughters of Jorasanko' by Aruna Chakravarti, set during the time of the Bengal Renaissance, is a sequel to her earlier novel, 'Jorasanko' the ancestral home of the Tagore family. Jorasanko essentially talked about the pioneering Tagore women. Set between the years 1859 and 1902 it delineated the gradual change from feudal to liberal mindset and its effect on the women of the Tagore household. The novel left a deep impression that haunted me for days. I had often wondered what happened to the younger generation. Daughters of 'Jorasanko' takes up the story from 1902 onwards. The book is well researched and the author dexterously weaves fact and fiction. It deals with the lives of the poet Rabindranath Tagore's daughters, daughter-in law, cousins and nieces and the impact of the lives of these lesser known women (unfolding against historical events of the partition of Bengal, Jallianwala Bagh tragedy and the Independence movement) on the poet.

When the novel opens the two branches of the Tagore family--the Hindu and the Brahmo branch--are leading their separate lives in house No. 5 and house No. 6, respectively. The grandeur of the life in 'Jorasanko' has waned. Financial problems have set in and there is talk of mortgaging one of the houses by members of the extended family. The pioneering women of the earlier novel have aged. Many are no more. Natun bouthan (Kadambari) his muse in the earlier novel--who had died a tragic death--has been replaced in its sequel by Ranu, the daughter of Phanibhushan Adhikari (a professor of Philosophy in Banaras Hindu University) and Victoria Ocampo whom he met at Buenos Aires. What ties the two bars (houses) together are memories of a shared life in 'Jorasanko'. Some of the scenes from the earlier novel are repeated in its sequel. For example, Rabindranath's memory of the evening he spent with Kadambari (his sister-in-law and muse) on the roof of the house in Sudder Street resurfaces. But such repetitions are not intrusive or boring, instead they add to the richness and continuity of the narrative line.

The 'daughters of Jorasanko' lack the energy, volatility and vision of the women of the older generation, although we do see occasional sparks. In the Rakhi Ustav, for example, we see the women of 'Jorasanko' come together to protest against the partition of Bengal. But in general, Tagore's daughters and daughter-

in-law are mired in their own problems of disease and childlessness. Aruna Chakravarti's artistic skill lies in her ability to arouse readers' interest in the troubled lives of the not so strong characters of the younger generation. We hope for the recovery of Tagore's "long suffering daughter" Rani who eventually dies of consumption. We are by the bedside of a depressed Meera whose husband Nagen has not only used her for her father's wealth but has also

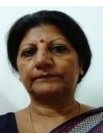


totally neglected her since their marriage. We also feel the pain of Madhurilata called Beli, Rabindranath's older daughter, when she loses her much awaited child within three months of her pregnancy because of Nagen's improper sexual conduct with her and the trauma that followed. We also feel for Protima, the poet's daughter in law, who is in a loveless and childless marriage with Rathi. But most importantly, the author makes us empathize with the poet Tagore--who is also ailing and aged with "long pepper-coloured locks" (9)--in his inability to take strong positions on crucial family situations. He is a loving father and aches to bridge the widening gap between his "best-loved" Beli who was resentful about her father not taking a firm stand against Nagen for molesting her. The author makes us understand the deeply sensitive complexity of the situation for the poet who is haunted by his own attraction to Natun bouthan (Kadambari): "Wasn't Natun bouthan his sister-in-law?" (149).

Aruna Chakravarti's openness as a writer is most felt when she deflects the responsibility for actions of the characters to the judgment of the readers testing their sensitivity. This is one way she sets the stage for the readers to judge Tagore's responses to situations in the family. If he dithers in taking strong positions it is not because he is callous but because he "was the scion of the Tagores of Jorasanko". Delicacy and restraint had been bred into this character over centuries of education and culture" (149). Moreover, he is a poet and sublimates problematic domestic and national situations into "soul stirring lyrics" (64). When his daughter Beli dies he does not go for the funeral but instead he catches the train to Bolpur station and walks to Dehali. Once he reaches there he goes to his table and writes a beautiful song that is heart rending: "On this moonlit night..." (166). His tears like "pearls"; some fell on the song he had written" (167). Similarly, when Bengal is heading for partition, he wrote "aami tomay bhalobashi" (My golden Bengal / I love you) which not only captured the imagination of the public but also became the anthem for the protest movement against partition. Chakravarti makes us aware that Tagore is pulled by his poetic muse in directions that he himself has not foreseen. She never lets us forget that he is no ordinary man but the poet laureate who is the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize for literature. He is also a man with a vision in building his dream project for holistic education at Santiniketan.

Chakravarti's textured use of language, her encapturing of the beautiful sounds and colours of Bengal and her easy, vibrant style makes Daughters of 'Jorasanko' stand on its own as a novel in which we see Tagore, the poet, despite his multiple filial, health and financial problems, at his productive best and vindicated from the accusations of being a callous father. His final moments are graphically and movingly described by the author but what lingers in the reader's mind is the chanting of the crowds, "Jai Rabindranath jai!"

Taisha Abraham is an Associate Professor in the Department of English, Jesus and Mary College, Delhi University. She also teaches postcolonial theories to students in the Master's programme of the University of Delhi and has taught postcolonial theories in American and European universities as well. She has published extensively and is presently the editor of an international, interdisciplinary journal of social sciences, The JMC Review.



STORY: FOOD FOR THE HEART

By Mona Mohanthy

It had been a busy day at 'The Magic Eatery'. The weekends, usually, were hectic. It was a popular joint, serving no-frills, wholesome and, unlike all advertisements for nutritious food, surprisingly tasty fare. Ramneek had opened up this restaurant at Gangtok, six months earlier. A banker by profession, she quit her job after her husband of two years died in a freak helicopter accident. He had been an engineer and was on an official trip to a project coming up at a remote destination when the mishap occurred.

Heartbroken, her first thought had been of committing suicide. The night after the funeral, she frantically looked for a release by hunting for a sturdy rope to hang herself. She found one but as she went to her room to go about it, she stumbled on the carpet and fell flat on her face next to the bed. She lay down stunned for a while with her eyes closed in pain, for she had hit her head at the edge of the bed as she fell. Gradually, she opened her smarting eyes and as they cleared up her gaze fell on the slippers placed under her bed. Those had been her husband's.

She remembered that she had been planning to throw it away because it had a broken strap. Her husband had stopped her. He got it mended that evening itself and wore it with great pleasure. It was not that they could not afford another one but one did not discard things which looked as if they had become useless, he had said. Remembering that episode, her eyes welled over and she got up with the feeling that he would have hated her for giving up on life so easily.

And so, she had gathered up all her savings and much against the wishes of her concerned parents relocated to the new place. It did not take long to settle in. The people in that town were warm and helpful. The eatery which she set up was a great hit both with the locals and tourists. Some of her customers also came in daily to partake of the fare on offer.

But, even in the midst of her busy schedule she noticed one customer who fascinated her. He was a regular who had been coming to her place from day one. He usually walked in at dinner time, ordered a meal which was enough to feed six people, ate a bit and took the rest away. He was an extremely handsome man in his thirties,

tall, clean-shaven and perfectly turned out. However, he never smiled, nor looked at or chatted with anyone. After observing his actions for a week, one day she went up to him and said, "If you don't mind, Sir, can I ask you a question?"

He looked at her expressionlessly and nodded.

"Sir, I notice that you are carrying home

shock. That smile totally transformed his face from its usual deadpan expression to something amazingly attractive. Her heartbeats quickened. Belatedly, she realised that he was speaking to her. Very patiently, he repeated his question. "Can you leave your joint for ten minutes? Please come with me. I want to show you something." She nodded.

"Okay," he said, and pointing at the pup in her arms added, "bring the little one along." Having informed her cashier that she was stepping out for a short while, she joined him. They walked ahead and after a few minutes they came to the gates of a huge mansion. He opened the gate and stood aside to let her pass. Puzzled, she asked him, "Where are we going?"

"Patience!" he quipped amusedly. They walked up to

the imposing door and he opened it. All of a sudden, there was pure cacophony. A bevy of dogs, of all shapes and sizes, came and jumped on him in greeting as she watched on in utter confusion. As the noise died down, the little pup also struggled to get out of her arms. From his position on the floor where he had been perched on his haunches, Ravi said, "Let him join the gang." As the pup leaped in and amalgamated with its new friends, he looked at her and said, "Your food was bought by me for my babies. Seeing you handle the pup today opened my eyes to the fact that there are people unlike my ex-wife who left me because she disliked my attachment to my dogs."

Two months later, the dogs and Ravi welcomed a loving new mom and wife into their residence

Mona Mohanty is a serving bureaucrat in the Indian Revenue Service. In her spare time, she revels in observing the activities and antics of all living beings especially humans and those from the animal kingdom. Such behaviour results in a mind collating sights observed and translated into the written word. 'Betwixt Twists And Turns' is an output of such a hobby.



stuff that you do not eat. I can send someone with fresh food to your place during the day." He heard her out and replied, in a surprisingly pleasant voice, "No, thanks. I prefer this routine because it suits me. I am a writer and I don't like being disturbed by the ringing of the bell at home. He smiled to take the sting out of his statement.

And so, the days passed on. They never talked but he did deign to smile whenever he came face-to-face with her on certain occasions. His name, she gathered, was Ravi.

That evening, she had not seen him come in at his usual appointed time. She was wondering about it when, suddenly, her thoughts were interrupted by the sounds of a ruckus outside. It was already dark. She went out to investigate and saw a little pup being pelted upon with stones by street urchins. Seeing her furious face, they vanished in a jiffy. Running towards the little pup, she picked it up and nuzzled it close to her. Thankfully, it was not hurt. She looked at it and said, "Come, little one. Let me get you something to eat and then we will go home."

Just then someone put a hand on her shoulder. She almost yelped in fright. "Steady, steady, it's me," said the voice. The pup wriggled in her arms as she turned to see who it was. It was Ravi. He smiled at her widely. She gaped at him in

MUMBAI EXPRESSIONS

By Anju Makhija



Political leaders in India have always had a 'larger than life' presence right from the days of the Nehru dynasty. Narendra Modi, our present prime minister, recently shocked the nation by demonetizing all 500 and 1,000 rupee notes. Total chaos prevailed. Weddings and cultural events were cancelled as funds froze. The spiraling line-ups at banks made regular life almost impossible. Worst hit were the villages which lack banks and ATMs--people walked miles to get money for daily needs.

The purpose was to unearth 'black' money and that has been achieved to an extent. Crores of rupees have been found stashed away in nooks and corners of India! P.M Modi has also made a point: he is in charge of the country's future. No doubt, the man is a powerhouse of energy, but the question remains: Have we raised our leaders to dangerous heights? Without a strong opposition party, is there enough debate? Was such a drastic step really necessary? These questions will be answered best in the long run.

At Tata Literature Live, the recently-concluded festival in Mumbai, political writers, like former Union Minister, Shashi Tharoor, and editor Vir Sanghvi, discussed several issues. Tharoor also launched his new book, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, which debunks what he terms as, 'the rose-tinted view of the Empire'. Some other topical issues were also discussed: 'Verse case scenario: Should songwriters be considered poets', was a lively session with Martin Amis,

Prasoon Joshi and Simon Armitage. Among much criticism of songwriters getting major international awards, Joshi, a lyricist and writer, pointed out that in our oral tradition, poetry and songs go hand-in-hand. Our great epics were written in verse and sung with music. Our best-known Hindi poet and song lyrics, Gulzar, won the Lifetime Achievement Award at the festival. The Sultan Padamsee Playwriting award was revived after 25 long years and many dramatists were honoured.

At the 14th Crossword Book Awards, which has gained respectability over time, Ruskin Bond our celebrated children's author was felicitated. It's good to see writers for youngsters get attention. According to Nobel Peace prize winner, Kailash Satyarthi, 40 percent of India is below the age of 18, and at least 10 percent of resources should be allocated to their education, healthcare and protection. This, of course, is not the case. On the positive side, he feels that demonetization will reduce trafficking of children as black money is often used in transactions.

While our children may not be first priority; Indians have always adored their Gods. Now Lord Krishna's abode is set to scale new heights with a 700 ft temple--the tallest in the world--to be built by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON). In this futuristic place of worship, the Vrindavan Chandrodaya mandir will be three times the height of Delhi's Qutub Minar! The temple is being built at a cost of Rs. 300 crore, entirely from donations. A multimedia 3D show is planned at Krishna Lila Theme Park and a Bhagvad Gita exposition as well.

A memorial of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj is also being planned in Mumbai--right inside the Arabian Sea. Naturally, this has caused much controversy. The fishing community has been fighting it, but to no avail. An estimated expenditure of Rs. 2300 crore is allocated for the first phase! Sure we have always adored our kings, politicians and Gods, but what about the poor? Why are these enormous sums not spent on them?

On-line tributes may be a better way to pay respect to great souls. Google India is paying respect to social reformer, Savitribai Phule, in a novel way. An original illustration is presented on the occasion of her 186th birthday. She is considered the first feminist in India who played an important role in fighting for women's rights during the reign of the British. In their continu-

ing effort to help cause of women, Zubaan Books have created a virtual exhibition titled *Women in India: Unheard Stories* featuring pioneers who shaped our society.

Our Culture Ministry has expanded its promote Indian culture campaign to encourage dance /drama and introduce moral education and social responsibility in schools. In its attempt to help cultures mingle, Max Mueller Bhavan organized a huge poetry festival, *Poets Translating Poets*, in Mumbai. The focus was on the translation process and how it can be enhanced among regional languages on diverse linguistic continents such as South Asia and Europe.

Ruhaniyat, our annual Sufi music festival, brought artists from diverse cultures together. Siberian musicians played with Tibetan monks and Sindhi Sairaiiki groups. This blissful path of spirituality continues to remind us that beyond man-made divisions of class, caste, religion, race, language, spirituality has a single goal--the direct experience of the divine.

The end of the year saw several outstanding performances by many artists, but audiences were sparse. Due to the monetary crises, people were not on a spending spree. Aastad Deboo, India's internationally-known contemporary dancer, held his own. Even at 69 years, he performed a 60 minute solo on a bare stage! He was accompanied by the music composer of Japanese origin, Yukio Tsuji. Bulleh Shah's poem, *Maati*, was the inspiration for his piece *Eternal Embrace*. The artist interpreted the poem by marveling at the way the world behaves despite the certainty of ultimate annihilation.

Besides demonetization, 2016 will also be remembered for the year of student movements. The country saw youngsters rebel against the system fighting caste bias, religious bigotry and free speech. India is certainly undergoing massive changes, and Modi recently announced that his goal was to make India a 'developed' country in one generation! It will all depend on how he define 'development'. Will we blindly continue to follow the western model or create one of our own?

Anju Makhija is a Sahitya Akademi award-winning poet, translator and playwright based in Mumbai who has written/edited books related to partition, Sufism, women's poetry and theatre. Her articles and columns have appeared in several newspapers. anjumakhija17@gmail.com

REASONS TO BE STILL...CHEERFUL

By Shridhar Phalke

I am looking back at 2016. It is 5.30am. I have dropped my cousin and his partner at Manchester airport bound for a New Year's in Ireland. Post luggage reshuffle and passport panic over, I am vicariously enjoying their departure lounge vibes.

I return home to frost and a crystallised back garden. Winter has arrived. There is something reassuring about the cold snap. Seasons arriving and leaving on schedule.. My numb fingers and toes do a stiff dance to the hum and crank of a boiler soldiering past retirement. I am grateful for the warmth. The CD player whirrs into action. Ustad Shujaat Hussain Khan's 'Jaana Meri Jaana' soothes the mind.

This is when I find time for myself before the household awakes and a disorderly queue forms at the bathroom. I am occasionally stalked by our 6 year old as he finds ever more inventive ways to surprise me. Meg, the recent feline addition to our family (a 7 month old kitten entrusted to us amateurs by the local cat sanctuary) is taking some persuading that Earl Grey is not her cup of tea. She eats a rose petal, rubs her chin on the end of my pen, ignores her breakfast and is then off to stalk the 6 year old.

Writing in the early hours I find provides good therapy for the mind and particularly, at a time where I am struggling to find peace of mind, craving a simpler life and trying to make sense of turbulent times. A friend has a wonderful idea for an antidote for the odd senseless action.. Each month note down and place in a jar an achievement, a moment of joy and then revisit at year end.

It is difficult to pause and feel at ease with stillness in our technologically crowded times. Maybe there will be a time where just as in an Audie Murphy Western, the sheriff confiscates all pistols which in our world translate into mobiles, tablets, fit bits etc. before one is allowed to enter 'The Last Solitude Saloon.' Without these distractions, we would be less frenetic in our activities and we might even achieve some tranquillity. Try 'accidentally' squirreling away your partner's phone and see if this induces panic or the calm resignation

of 'Oh well, it will turn up.' In the interests of a happy marriage I have not yet acted on that temptation..

A Guru once instructed me to take pleasure in life and gifted me a simple mantra: 'I am alive, I feel alive.' I fail to remind myself of this simple truth and should tattoo it to on my knuckles (a laminate may be less invasive and cheaper). Helping our son negotiate a world of joys and disap-



pointments has helped me appreciate the randomness of this life.

The same guru also asked me to "embrace chaos and smile." In some small way, I've tried to pursue that philosophy. With a lot of family support, I've hit the reset button, resigned from 20 years of office life and opened my mind to a different way of living. It has been a quiet revolution and I think after 2 years of trying I have found a path. I first found myself being a stay at home Dad, part time plasterer's mate, charity shop worker, arts reviewer, warehouseman and recently civil servant.

But these changes bring with it a fresh set of tensions; financial insecurity, pockets of resistance along the way and deep questions as to my place in the world. Who am I? Carer? Father? Freelancer? Whilst getting comfortable with my 'parent at home' status I had recently visited the USA, where on entry a quizzical Border Force officer asked, "So you're a retired lawyer, in your 40s?" Feeling insecure, I blurted, 'Yes, but, I'm looking for work.' I quickly added, "But not here, I'm just visiting here but looking there." There are times when it is better not to pass 'hello.'

I am still searching for that life free of anxiety. I get a small high in running. I was initially sceptical as I pounded streets and

then lay on the grass of the back garden panting, heart and lungs cursing, not yet appreciating the natural high that follows. Very rarely do I listen to music and instead get caught up in two mental battles: firstly not to stop, and, secondly, trying to tackle the problems of the moment and reason them out, unshackling oneself from anger, casually tossing aside bad eggs and smiling and repeating 'it does not matter,' and re-visiting that jar of joy. I remind myself that I have been lucky to run for the charities MIND and the Alzheimer's Society and as a selfish by-product found greater peace of mind and fulfilment in trainers than I ever imagined. If you ever want to delve into the science of running, I would urge you to seek out the former war correspondent, Christopher McDougall's book, Born to Run. It is a brilliant page turner about the simple and perverse joys of running and about a tribe of Mexican super athletes as well as a celebration of one of our lost skills and most primitive of instincts.

It is a happy coincidence, that whilst on the topic of seeking peace of mind (in a week where our PM has opened up the mental health policy debate) that I found myself participating in a blessing ceremony at a Buddhist centre. We were greeted warmly as a family at our first prayer session. Initially my brain struggles with stillness as mantras sound out around us, but, gradually I let go and I am lost in it and find by the end of an hour session that I am feeling energised, 'calm full' and sugar high, our hosts generously sharing tea and cake and telling us the story of what brought them to Buddhism.

Whatever your methodology on seeking and enjoying good mental health I wish you every happiness and success in 2017 and beyond on your path. My quest to enjoy stillness and reconnect with life continues with renewed hope.

Shridhar Phalke: 40 something Swindonian now enjoying life in the North and the Mancunian way. Grateful for the chance to parent, cook, photograph, write, run and volunteer, following retirement from life as a litigation lawyer.



WHY SRI LANKA WILL NEVER BE SINGAPORE

By Eranda Ginige

If I had a dollar for every time somebody said "Sri Lanka should be like Singapore", I'd be a rich man. The odd thing is most of those people have never visited Singapore. Somehow we are made to believe Singapore as the perfect development standard, a utopian state where everything is so organised, a chewing-gum-less world, and a heavenly place where its people live happily ever after. But that's a different debate.

There is an urban myth that the father of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew saw the great city of Colombo in the 1950s and vowed to make Singapore modelled after it. I'm yet to see hard proof he ever said that. The closest statement is him saying that "the British left behind a sound social and economic infrastructure (in Ceylon)" which is debatable. The iron-fisted patriot who ruled Singapore for over 30 years has been rather critical about Sri Lanka's choices time after time. He clearly learned from our mistakes, but it's naïve to say that Singapore was modelled after Colombo.

It's easy to be a genius in hindsight. Lee Kuan's choices were as risky as Bandaranaike's or Jayewardene's or Premadasa's; his contemporaries. Different circumstances lead to different outcomes. All we can do is learn from the past. And the one lesson we can learn from the past is that no country can copy another country's development. Perhaps we should stop trying to be like Singapore or the USA or China, instead start creating our own identity of development. Here are three places to start from:

1. Understanding who we are

Whether you like it or not, and unlike many other countries, Sri Lanka has a long history. Over 2,600 years of written history is no joke. It's a fascinating and complex history corroborated by ancient engineering marvels and artistic masterpieces.

Despite the current lack of support by the Government, the known history and pre-history keeps revealing a sophisticated ancient civilisation which dates back to at least 6,000 years. If Rome had as much history as we do, we could've seen how brilliantly they would market it. When many young nations are desperate to make-up history, it's too bad most of us are ashamed of ours.

A nation with such a long history is bound

to be superrich with culture and traditions. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we should dwell in the past glory. But without deep understanding and appreciation of everything that makes us, it is impossible to shape who we want to be. No matter how much we try to ignore, the fact is that over the millennia and through war and peace, the people of this country had evolved into a unique identity of coexistence. I don't understand why Sinhala-Buddhists and Tamil-Hindus can't live in one country, when the Hindu gods have been living peacefully inside Buddhist temples for centuries. All our cultural activities and traditions are a beautiful mix of different ethnic and religious systems. Which is why every Lankan must learn their history and cherish their traditions. Some people ask, if Singapore could become so developed starting later than us, why couldn't we do the same? I remind them that we had a 30-year-long war. Some people talk as if we never had such a war. But that's just fooling ourselves. The war really happened and it's a part of our history. A learned Professor asked me recently, 'why can't Sri Lanka be like Japan?' My answer was Japan's war ended 70 years ago, and our war ended just seven years ago.

A nation is built by its people, by the people who love their country and want to see it prosper. The unmistakable quality of Lee Kuan is his deep love for his country. We have made a generation of Lankans who do not love their country. We habitually insult our country, constantly degrading it against other nations. Can we expect any genuine effort to build our country, if we don't believe in it? If we are not proud of it? If we are not inspired by it?

Nation building must start by building its people.

2. Agriculture-first economy

If we study our history even superficially, it's obvious that our core-strength is in agriculture. We have been perfecting it for at least 6,000 years. There was no reason for our ancestors to build such massive lakes and so many of them, an advanced irrigation system if we didn't have a large agriculture sector. We can estimate how large the population would've been to have the need to cultivate such vast fields.

Even the colonists knew the best way to exploit this country is agriculture. But

here we are trying to become a trade hub like Singapore. Desperately trying to build industrial cities and ports. The previous government went on a weird Western-Chinese hybrid development model building highways cutting across paddy fields. Every government so far failed to craft an authentic Sri Lankan development agenda. Sri Lanka is not China and never will be. China's history, its resources, its people and their aspirations are different from ours. And it's okay to be different.

I'm not saying all of us should wear a loincloth and get into mud. What we need to do is transform our agriculture sector. The gentlemen who wear ties, jackets and pure-white national costumes in the parliament should first of all understand that there is no shame in farming. We need people who understand the history, resources, geology, geography, climate, and the people of Sri Lanka. Instead of trying to build a "new" Sri Lanka, we need to build the "real" Sri Lanka. I have seen vast fields of farms in scorching deserts in the Middle East. There is no excuse to stop farming in droughts. I wonder what our Ministers and Government officials learn when they are sent on foreign trips on public money.

We need a bold-new vision to become not just self-sustainable in food but also to be South Asia's most innovative centre of agriculture. The factories we need are not some Chinese plastic manufacturers next to Hambantota Port, but factories that make modern tools to increase agriculture productivity and the supply chain efficiency, and factories that make serious value-added agri-products. We need a group of entrepreneurs who can make innovative food and food-based products to compete with global brands.

This is where the Government needs to heavily invest in, not in building mega-cities or ports or highways. The one industry that will never go out of business is the food industry. That's how we can create a million new jobs. Why is it so hard for our leaders to understand that?

3. Economy for the future

Highways and mega-cities are nothing new. We are chasing obsolete development symbols and standards. Highways maybe new to us, but it's an old technology built for the dying fossil-fuel economy. The

CONFLUENCE

Blog

USA is struggling to maintain its highways. Mega-cities with concrete structures are so old and dysfunctional. We are already 30 years behind the game, and trying to replicate 100-year-old failed development models is useless.

We need to build a vision for Sri Lanka to meet the global challenges and opportunities of the next 100 years. Instead of trying to catch-up, we need to innovate for the future. The future cities are 'Sustainable Cities', not mega-cities. The future roads are made of solar panels and have wider bicycle lanes, not highways. Future consumer is an informed buyer who wants their food to be organic. We have the opportunity to build a global brand for Sri Lankan agri-products by making them organic, ethical and sustainable.

Perhaps we need to stop using the old development indicators, or at least not be blind-sighted by them. In pursuit of higher GDP, desperate to get ahead of others in the list, we tend to lose sight of what is more important to us and what is more suitable for us. I know this is an impossible feat

for the pundits who have been moulded in the obsolete Smithsonian economics.

Let's face it, all you people have so far failed to come up with a working solution. That's why we need a new generation of modern leaders who are sensitive to the world's and Sri Lanka's biggest problems, those who understand the new and future realities, and are brave enough to disrupt age-old systems. The current political and corporate leaders are too old for the job.

Globalisation is dying. It has failed to deliver its promise of global prosperity. Instead it has created a vicious cycle of ever deepening inequality, injustice and environmental catastrophe. The unprecedented wins of Brexit and 'Make America Great Again' are the undeniable evidence of this new trend. Thanks to technology, the once thought globaliser, countries are now turning inwards.

In a virtually connected world there is no need for globalisation. The simplest example is language. It was once thought that English will be the global language.

But we are now experiencing communication independent of language. We don't need to know English to read a website anymore, and soon we will not have the need for a common language. A world-wide renaissance of national identities is in the making. We can start early, or wait for another twenty years before we realise it's too late.

We don't need to be like Singapore, or like the USA or like China. We need to be like us. We need to build our own version of Sri Lanka. Let's stop the meaningless comparisons. Let's get out of the global rate race. Let's start loving our country, our history, our culture and our people. Let's be brave enough to build our own version of a developed Sri Lanka.

This article was originally published in www.ft.lk

(The writer is Chairman – Social Enterprise Lanka.)

- See more at: <http://www.ft.lk/article/595546/Why-Sri-Lanka-will-never-be-Singapore#sthash.uWrn3wgn.dpuf>



by Eranda Ginige

Continued from Page 9

I end this interim appraisal with comments that speak for themselves for the present.

- Dr. B.R Ambedkar advocated demonetisation every ten years for curbing black money. The Congress party disowned him on this, in 1978 itself.

- Common sense dictated separate queues for the cash-needing poor, depositors and the illegal brokers. The single queue was a disaster.

- Two tonnes of gold jewellery were sold at jacked up prices, throughout the night on 8/9th November 2016 in Delhi against junked currency and another two tonnes, next day, brazenly violating all the rules. Such perversion pervaded throughout the country. Venezuelans, who successfully rioted against demonetisation, were less vindictive.

- The illegal deposits in the 258 million Jan Dhan accounts of the poor was about ₹746,100 million. The looted, looters and 'trusted' bankers had colluded.

- SBN stuffed temple donation-boxes cannot be legal tender, by definition. The Lord God was cheated that way, trustees welcoming it. It will be a sad day, if government accepts such sullied junk as legal tender.

- A raid on a Chennai mining baron

yielded 127 kg of gold, 340 million new ₹2000, ₹970 million old currency, incriminating documents a host of documents, links with politicians, the Chief Secretary of the State and his brat and dubious characters all over the country. He was a temple trustee, who is rumoured to have mishandled the donations.

- A Mumbai politician hid ₹57 million in his toilet locker!

- Some hoarders bought bus companies, sago factories and real estate at premium for billions of SBN, in a southern district

- 4,30,288 dormant accounts were credited with ₹64005 million and debited with ₹7990 millions.

- 1138 income tax raids detected black money of ₹48,070 million and seized millions of new notes and ₹6094 million worth of jewellery.

- Some crafty dodgers filed false revised income tax returns, inviting the wrath of that department.

- In a flip-flop, an ATM paid ₹80,000 against ₹4,000 sought, because of a tray mix-up. An earlier plea by the Finance Minister about tray calibration is less convincing now.

- Windfall 1: Excise collection linked to manufacturing is up by 31.6%. Income-tax revenue showers like a waterfall!

- Windfall 2: Banks are bulging with

deposits of billions.

- Windfall 3: Lending rates are coming down steeply.

- Windfall 4: Mobile wallet transaction quadrupled to 6.3 million per day. Two villages have become, totally cashless.

- Windfall 5: Paytm founder raised ₹325 million for himself by selling 1% stake.

- Sops to farmers, small traders and seniors by interest waivers and higher interest announced by NaMo.

- Most importantly, NaMo announced a New Year gift - BHIM, an Unified Payment Interface for cashless transactions. Government assuring safety, it should become the universal tool, absorbing the mushrooming ones.

- Update 1: The Standing Committee on Finance and the Public Accounts Committee, chaired by the Opposition, have summoned the Reserve Bank Governor and others on 19th and 28th January 2017 respectively. It is moot whether they would cut across party lines as prescribed by the Constitution, given their aggressive stance. I wish they had waited for the Comptroller & Auditor General's Report.

In sum, India should regain her glory of rectitude in all spheres.