

MYANMAR: SECURITY COUNCIL MUST ACT, SAYS UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR

The UN Security Council should issue a strongly worded resolution on the Myanmar crisis, the Special Rapporteur on the country's human rights has told the UN General Assembly in New York.

"The crisis in Rakhine State has not only been decades in the making but has for some time gone beyond Myanmar's borders. For a very long time now this issue has not been simply a domestic affair," said Yanghee Lee.

The Special Rapporteur condemned the widespread use of hate speech against the Rohingyas and other communities, stressing that it amounted to incitement to hostility and even violence.

"It has been cultivated for decades in the minds of the Myanmar people that the Rohingya are not indigenous to the country and therefore have no rights whatsoever to which they can apparently claim," Ms. Lee said, presenting her full report to the General Assembly.

The Special Rapporteur said she was concerned about how long it might take for the Government to establish conditions for the "safe and dignified" return of the Rohingyas, and to ensure they could rebuild their lives.

It was essential that all those responsible for human rights violations were held to account, Ms. Lee said, and this should begin with full access for the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission.

The Special Rapporteur said the plight of the Rohingyas remained her main concern, but Myanmar had numerous other human rights challenges.

Many communities had suffered from the development of "Special Economic Zones" and some people had had land confiscated, she said. Meanwhile civilians in Kachin and

nities which make up the population of Myanmar and use its majority in Parliament to strike down all discriminatory laws, to show that all groups in Myanmar have equal rights.

A recent public show of inter-faith solidarity could also be built on by the government to combat prejudice and bigotry, she said.



"I have in the past commended Myanmar's flourishing, widening democratic space. However, it seems to me that national legislation is effectively resulting in the criminalization of legitimate expression," the expert added.

She urged the government to press ahead with constitutional reform "to allow for proper operation of the rule of law", and to prioritize the reform of laws that contravened international human rights standards, noting that Myanmar had recently ratified the International

Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Ms. Yanghee Lee (Republic of Korea) was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in 2014 as the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. Ms. Lee served as member and chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003-2011). She is currently a professor at Sungkyunwan University, Seoul, and serves on the Advisory Committee of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea. Ms. Lee is the founding President of International Child Rights Center, and serves as Vice-chair of the National Unification Advisory Council.

Shan States were affected by reported clashes between the armed forces and ethnic armed groups, amid increasing allegations of serious rights violations and decreasing humanitarian access.

Ms. Lee said it was unclear whether Myanmar's peace process had advanced since the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement two years ago. Consistent reports about incidents of religious intolerance against Christians and Muslims had also reached her from across the country, she added.

The Special Rapporteur urged the government to publicly embrace all the commu-



RIGHT TO PRIVACY

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VICTORIA AND ABDUL

PAGE 21 & 23



AT THE TEMPLE DOOR

PAGE 19

The question of strong and moral leadership

Yet another year is almost in its way out! Despite the usual constraints I am very pleased to bring this issue of the magazine to you.

This year will be remembered for many things. In this issue, some writers have highlighted the leadership crisis in the world and the heightening tension in countries which are threatening world peace. In Myanmar, the Rohingya crisis has raised the question of moral leadership in the country. This could be considered to be the second biggest mass exodus of people across boundaries after the partition of India with Pakistan.

Last year in our November issue I mentioned the challenges faced by Great Britain in the process of leaving the European Union known as Brexit. Still, there is no light at the end of the tunnel! Britain is now facing political and economic uncertainties as there have been disagreements between Britain and Europe re financial settlements before our departure from the EU as well as re the future of Europeans in UK and British citizens in Europe. Mrs. May has been criticized for weak leadership.

On the other side of the Atlantic, America, once considered as a country of opportunity for migrants is now apparently lukewarm re immigration especially from Muslim countries due to Donald Trump's views on the matter even though migrants have been the backbone of America's economy.

I am delighted to say that the number of our contributors is steadily increasing as also the readership. Recently we formed an online forum of Confluence writers and many of them welcomed the formation of such an interactive forum. While more of our writers are to join this group, I would like to urge all our forum members to bring interesting literary conversations to the table. Once again, I would like to remind all our writers to stick to the prescribed length of submissions and the deadlines set by us. The subeditor would like our writers to try their best not to exceed the generous 1000 word limit in their submissions as that poses considerable editing difficulty.

I wish you all a very happy and prosperous festive season and look forward to meeting you in another issue in the forthcoming year: 2018.

Vijay Anand

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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

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SEVENTY YEARS AND ALL THAT

It is seventy years since the Union Jack was hauled down on the Indian subcontinent and we have been inundated by an overdose of media attention, some passable but mostly sensational, even sentimental. India, with its colour, complexity and frightening disparities makes good television. So-called experts and India lovers swarmed into the country and churned out thousands of feet of treacly tripe. However, the time has come to consider certain facts that might not sound like music to many Indian or British ears.

The British East India Company went to India to make money which it did. In fact, the wealth drained from India financed the industrial revolution in Britain. It so happened that the Company's ascendancy coincided with the decline of the Mughal empire and the Company's armies, composed mostly of Indian mercenaries led by British officers, had no difficulty in acquiring vast territories. The Indian princes were at each other's throats and the British played one against the other. It would be true to say that the British subjugated India with the collaboration of Indians.

Historically Indians never developed a consciousness of nationhood. The Greeks and the Persians had a sense of nationhood but an Indian would identify himself by his religion, caste or sector, at best, by the geographical region that he was born in. It was much later that those who had been exposed to British and European ideas cultivated, indeed barrowed, the concept of nationhood. In short, thanks to the British we recognized ourselves as Indians. And with that followed the demand for self government. Enslaved people have

always followed the example of their former masters. The British, for example, emulated the Romans.

The Indian National Congress after its first session in Bombay, held on Christmas day 1885, ended with three rousing cheers for Queen Victoria. "The founders of the Congress were proud to describe it as an offspring of British rule," wrote the Indian historian Masani. The speeches of loyalty to both Victoria and Britain were, by today's standards, embarrassing. Most Indian leaders would have been content had India been granted self-governing Dominion status like Canada and Australia. But at that time this was not on the cards. Dominion status was for Britain's white kith and kin and not for non-whites.

Mountbatten presided over the Partition which Jinnah insisted upon and which Nehru and the Congress acquiesced to. The Partition was hasty, ill planned and resulted in a blood bath. Vast populations were displaced. I witnessed what happened and have recorded my accounts. The following are the links for those who might be interested:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/panjab1947/>

<https://soundcloud.com/dominicrai>
(scroll down to 'Children of Partition')

Many have forgotten that the India Independence Act passed by the British parliament granted India and Pakistan Dominion status which made

George VI king of both countries. Mountbatten became Governor General of India and Jinnah was appointed Governor General of Pakistan.

Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, it must be admitted made many mistakes. He messed up Kashmir,

caused problems with China over border issues, and established (possibly unwittingly) a ruling dynasty. His economic policies resulted in chaos. However, his belief in secularism and his efforts to promote the interests of the lower castes and Untouchables were praiseworthy. His Non-Aligned Movement in collaboration with Tito, Nasser, Sukarno and Nkrumah had lofty principles but failed when confronting the realpolitik of the world's great powers.

Nehru had read Natural Sciences at Cambridge and being an agnostic had little time for religion or rituals.



The two world wars of the 20th century precipitated the dissolution of the empire on which the sun never set. Britain was in debt and short of men and materials. Gandhi who donned the garb of a "naked fakir" (Churchill's words) made the common people conscious of their rights with spectacular demonstrations such as the famous Salt March. But what shook the British most was when the Royal Indian Navy mutinied on February 18, 1946. They realized that their tenure in India had finally expired.

Attlee's Labour government decided that the sooner Britain washed its hands off India the better and sent Mountbatten, a relative of the King Emperor, out as viceroy to do the deed at any cost.

He believed that science, engineering and technology could provide the solution to India's poverty. Dams, nuclear reactors, steel mills and fertilizer plants were built and institutes of technology were established. He declared that these were the new temples of the new India. Whatever India has achieved to date is directly due to Nehru's vision but his legacy is being carefully written out of the history books. Indeed, Indian history itself is being given a communal interpretation even though established historians and cultural commentators such as Amartya Sen, Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and Vir Sanghvi have strongly objected to what is happening. Satyameva Jayate (Truth Alone Triumphs) which is the national motto of the country is being erased by right wing religious fanaticism and political expediency.

The tragedy of Partition did not on any count help to better the condition of the subcontinent's millions. It certainly served the purposes of Britain, the USA and even the USSR. These countries have been selling military hardware to India and Pakistan for the seventy years that we are considering. Other countries such as France and Israel have now joined the queue of India's arms suppliers. One wonders how many wars India is preparing for. The head of India's army has said that India can take on both China and Pakistan. I believe that as a serving officer he spoke out of turn and I am surprised that Prime Minister Modi did not demand an explanation.

Money that should be spent on schools, hospitals, social services, housing, clean water, sanitary facilities and the abolition of abject poverty and malnutrition is being squandered on weapons of mass destruction. Gandhi's soul must be tortured. Nationalism of the worst distorted type has been drummed up by the leaders of both India and Pakistan and in the process a tiny minority, the super rich, get richer and the poor majority gets poorer. Today the inequality in India is higher than it was 90 years ago.

In other words, economic inequality was less during British rule. It is also ironic that whereas during Congress rule there was one dominant dynasty ruling from Delhi, now there are many states ruled by powerful provincial dynasties. This is what happened in the 18th century after the Mughal empire disintegrated and fell apart.

The current government has mastered the art of prevarication and spin while the opposition parties are disorganised, disruptive and in retreat. Most economists reckon that the sudden hawkish



Gauri Lankesh

demonetisation harmed the country and particularly hit the rural poor and the small tradesmen, but the opposition has failed miserably to nail the government. Democracy falters and fails in the absence of an alert and efficient opposition.

Hence new state slogans are coined regularly and new campaigns are enthusiastically launched; but nothing actually happens. The environment is being poisoned, the rivers (many of them considered sacred) have become sewers, the railways are falling apart and the roads are littered with corpses. Every single day over 400 people are killed on India's roads. Meanwhile the population keeps rising and will soon surpass China.

And yet the military is expanding, billions are being spent on what are

termed defence requirements. No one dares to question this immense expenditure for fear of being branded anti-national and anti-India. Corruption is rampant from the top to the bottom; it infects not only the politicians, the bureaucrats, the police, the professions but now even the judiciary. Recently a maverick High Court judge went on a spree issuing writs against his fellow judges.

The old problems of religion, caste, sect, language and gender discrimination are getting worse. Muslims have been relegated to second class status but Hindus who espouse the spirit of the constitution are hunted down. At the same time fake god-men and god-women stalk the land unchecked. Rape and child abuse have become everyday events. The Untouchables, now called Dalits, still live in humiliation especially in the rural areas. Ambedkar said years ago that Mahatmas came and Mahatmas went but the Untouchables were always Untouchable. That is still true.

Journalists, writers, academics and intellectuals who question and criticise the government live in fear. The recent brutal murder of the journalist Gauri Lankesh who flayed the government's agenda has shocked those who still adhere to the principles of the founding fathers of the secular republic.

All is not well in the state of Bharat and one has to ask: Is India becoming a totalitarian state where freedom of expression is being suppressed? Is this state of affairs the sum total of seventy years of independence? What price independence?

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.



Fiction

SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

By Jameela Siddiqi

I'm not a regular commuter so on the rare occasion when I make a one-off journey, I'm like a kid in wonderland – all eyes and ears. But for most of my fellow travellers it's a grueling, repetitive, daily routine choreographed to be performed on auto-pilot. And it goes something like this: get on, look for somewhere to settle, (sitting or standing), and then whip out the smartphone. Either it's already ringing or, if by a rare chance it is silent, then you have to ring someone and the conversation must start with, "I just got on the bus..."

I thrive on these conversations – well, at least the one side that I can hear. But it's easy enough to fill in the blanks. The first and clearest voice is that of a beautiful young woman speaking Polish, sitting directly behind me on the 92 bus. I had noticed the purple and silver nail-art on her pointed nails as she had walked past me. She is busy detailing a particularly acrimonious break-up with her boyfriend, blow by blow. She's obviously telling her best friend all about it. Or it could be her sister and it might even be her mother. It's the same old story. He's been neglecting her. He has never been keen on getting engaged. He slips out of the flat on many evenings, claiming he's run out of cigarettes or that his travel card needs renewing. And, after he has gone out, she discovers two full packs of Marlboro in his laptop bag. When she confronts him he's always got an excuse. When she offers to end the relationship and set him free, he cries like a child and professes undying love. But she knows it's nothing to do with love. She knows he wants to hang on to her because her place is rather comfortable. And it's rent-free for him. She's the one working full time and footing all the bills. It's her fault. She initiated the arrangement because she was afraid of loneliness.

There is a brief pause. The person she is speaking to has either said "I told you so", or they are playing devil's advocate and reassuring her that there might be another explanation for why he has to keep slipping out in the evenings.

But she's not listening. Her mind is made up. It seems she now has some concrete proof of his misdoings with A.N. Other. She has confronted him with this piece of evidence and the relationship is over.

She stops mid-sentence as the other person seems to have interrupted her to ask what that this concrete evidence is, how she came by

it and what did he say when she confronted him? This is it. This is the moment the entire lower deck of the bus has been waiting for. But before we can be any wiser about this doomed relationship, the person sitting next to me, juggling several big-name shopping bags on her lap, jumps up as the phone in her designer-bag plays a tired old jingle. She is so encumbered that one wonders why she's on a bus at all. That sort of woman usually gets into a taxi where there's more room for twenty or so shopping bags. Perhaps she spent so much on shopping she has no money left for a taxi?



She is exceptionally loud and she is speaking in Arabic, but it's a particularly guttural form of that language. It completely drowns the Polish voice, just as we were about to get the rest of that story. The shopaholic Arabic-speaker is having a loud and heated argument with whoever is at the other end of her latest iPhone with its diamante jacket...no wait, it's not an argument at all. It just sounds like that. She's actually detailing the contents of her many shopping bags, her latest acquisitions, item by item. The pink wasn't quite the right pink but it will go with the top she's already got. The earrings were not long enough but they look real. There's a sale on at Christian Dior. And she's found a fantastic place which has a basement for fake Luis Vuitton handbags. But you'd have to be quick to grab one as news was getting out and there could soon be a raid. Why do speakers of this language always sound like they're having a fight even when they're engaged in mundane consumerist conversations? She is particularly shrill and the conversation seems all one-way. I don't think she's letting the other person get a single word in. With each sentence, she gets louder and louder. But I've lost the plot. I can follow neither this conversation nor the previous one...now it's just a cacophony of voices, one from behind me and one right next to me.

There's a middle-aged Indian woman standing not far from my seat. She looks like she's just finished a hard day's work and is now headed home. She has been gazing at her phone all the time we've been on the bus. No doubt, she's catching up on messages and e-mails or checking to see how many likes she got on her last Facebook photo. Suddenly, she starts speaking. I thought she was asking me something because her phone didn't ring. Luckily, before I could reply I realised she's just called someone on speed-dial. The conversation is in Tamil. Her voice is very clear although not unduly loud. She is spelling out detailed instructions, presumably to a son or daughter at home, as to what to prepare so that she can start cooking the minute she gets home. The instructions are so excruciatingly detailed, (including the exact dimensions in which the vegetables to be cut) that I conclude it must be to a son, or even a husband. Surely a daughter would not need so much guidance to peel potatoes or slice aubergines? Then again the daughter could be an under-40 in which case maybe the mother would also have to detail the exact location of the aforementioned vegetables and the knife with which they were to be cut.

All through this conversation, the woman doesn't get to speak a single full sentence without being interrupted by "the child" at the other end, presumably either protesting against having to do kitchen work or arguing that it might be easier to send for a pizza. The woman ends her conversation by saying "Okay", which means the kid, whether boy or girl, has won the day.

I still want to know how that young Polish woman ended her relationship. What was that piece of concrete evidence? And what exactly did that Arabic-speaking girl buy and did she manage to get the fake item before that basement was raided? And what will the Tamil-speaking family eat for tonight's dinner? Did they finally decide between homemade Indian and takeaway pizza?

I'll never know. Not only has my stop arrived but I don't actually understand a word of Polish, Arabic or Tamil.

Jameela Siddiqi is a lecturer in Indian classical music and an alumnus of the London School of Economics.



CLAIRE SCOBIE 'S THE PAGODA TREE

Reviewed By Malashri Lal

The 'Pagoda' denotes both a coin and a temple in 18th century India in the sacred town of Tanjore in South India. The stamp of the goddess was inscribed on the local coin, the instrument of commerce. Australian writer Claire Scobie explores the link between the two in a tightly scripted novel about devadasi culture (the temple dancers) in south India and the human trade that it propelled. Maya, born to a lineage of the Big Temple's female dancers learns the art first at home and then from the most famous but ageing courtesan Palani who sees the little girl as the inheritor of her position in the Royal court. Gifted with a supple body, an intelligent mind and the discipline of immaculate practice, Maya excels in dance, music, poetry, languages and the erotic arts fit to please the most fastidious of men, presumably the King. But history intervenes and the colonising British spread the tentacles of commerce, expanding the East India Company and becoming the rulers of India in due course.

By layering the long history of the Madras region, Tanjore included, with the process of British colonisation, Scobie traces the degradation of temple culture and the selling of female talent and body to the highest bidder, no longer determined by caste but by the content of his wallet. Hence the two meanings of Pagoda are played one against the other in a dramatic outburst of power--Maya's ability to command a price for her beauty and sexuality and the powerful men making their bids for her in money and authority.

Historically, the novel captures Tanjore's temple practices in 1765, and moves towards cosmopolitan Madras in 1773 and political developments until 1778. Essentially it is the troubled negotiations between East and West that Claire Scobie highlights. The priest, Walter is a white man with his burden of saving the natives. Mudaliar is the Tamilian 'dubash' or trade contractor who first buys Maya at a high price, Thomas is the shifty Company man who becomes the next proprietor of Maya and the father of their 'half breed' daughter. While Maya has to compromise her reputation in becoming the bibi or mistress of a firangee (foreigner), her own people are devastated by poverty, colonial oppression, flood and famine. At least she is 'safe' and has the gift of plenty through her sahib.

But the money pagoda plays its own games of profit and loss. Thomas is more confused about his paternal role than about being an Englishman 'keeping' a talented, beautiful, local woman. His child must grow up Christian, civilised and given in custody to the British family system, he thinks. The author's brilliance lies in depicting his tragic confusion and his fumbling decisions. Yet the novelist does not lay blame on individuals who are presented as being prisoners of a British-Indian relationship that is fraught with problems.



Published by Unbound in the UK and distributed by Penguin Random House, India

Culturally divided yet contending for material gain, the characters meet on the common turf of trade, business and the needs of the body. The Englishmen are in India without their families, the Indians are without the means to sustain dying cultural traditions.

But the novel's centre is Maya who, like her name, is illusory and protean. "On the day of Maya's birth, the sky had deepened to indigo,

and a twisting spirit wind blew around their house and no other on the street". Tutored in the finest aesthetics of alluring sexuality, she tries to control her destiny with intelligence and calculated choice. "Maya again thought about choice. Hadn't the choice already been made for her: by her birth, by her mother, by the muttirai (branding mark) on her upper arm? If so, at least she could claim it as her own. The goddess might be the one to lift her up." Maya knows the sixteen adornments required by the ancient texts and she understands enough about contemporary politics to manipulate the men. But can a woman ultimately overcome her dependency is the question implied in Maya's story.

The novelist avoids the pitfall of polemics and lets the story itself grip the imagination with the vivid details of time and place. The temple friezes come alive to the music and footwork of devadasis; the devastating poverty of the artists, cultivators, fisher-folk, and the ordinary people wrench the heart. The colonial power of the state and the church is not pushed too hard but sufficiently reflected in the perversions of the lesser functionaries. Claire Scobie's novel is about lost artistry and lost humanity, both eroded by the compulsions of history determined in England for a people disdainfully dubbed as the 'natives'. The same history written on the tablets of the Tanjore temple show the colonisers as brutal because they are weak, marauding because they are cowards. Maya is about the illusion of power.

Claire Scobie's first book Last Seen in Lhasa won the 2007 Dolman Best Travel Book Award. As a journalist who writes for the Daily Telegraph in London and the Sydney Morning Herald, Scobie is a familiar name in many cities. Her fondness for South India brought about a fascination for the elusive culture of the devadasis and resulted in this fictionalised tale, The Pagoda Tree. This is a page turner even as it cleaves to history.

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



Fiction

THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT

By Sunayana Panda

"How many times have I told you to switch off the lights when you leave a room," shouted Madhav standing in the passage between the bedroom and the bathroom. Then, under his breath, he muttered, "Stupid woman!"

His wife answered, "I thought that you would go back into the bedroom." She spoke as she packed his lunch into the three compartments of a lunchbox.

"I thought! I thought!" repeated the husband, imitating his wife. "Do you know how much the electricity bill was last month?" Picking up the keys of his motorcycle he came into the kitchen and took the lunchbox. "And remember," he said "I am going to eat at the office canteen tomorrow so don't make lunch for me."

"This afternoon I'll go and buy some tea and other things from Balu's store. Do you want me to get some coffee also?" Kusum asked.

"Yes, get some coffee. Put the bill on my table so that I can check everything. Write the amount you spend on vegetables on a separate piece of paper."

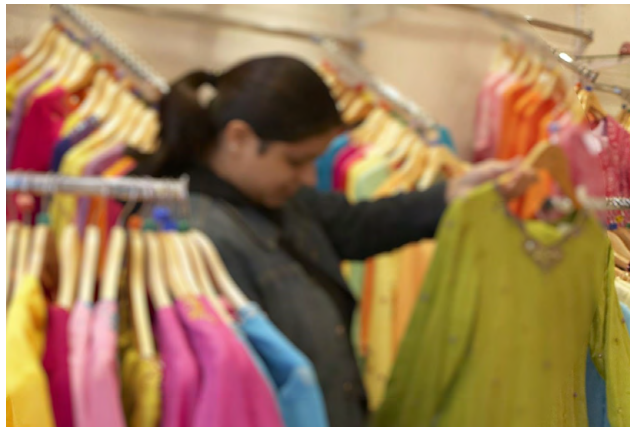
"Yes, yes. Now hurry or you will be late. Then you will blame me," said Kusum with a smile.

She stood on the balcony and saw Madhav ride away on his motor cycle, then came into the kitchen and had her breakfast.

At four o'clock when the heat of the day was gone, and she had finished cooking and cleaning, she got ready to go to the market. There were still two hours before Madhav would be back. In a small town like theirs everything was only a few minutes' walk away. Opening her parasol she walked as close to the edge of the road as possible. The pavements had all been taken away by hawkers. Her mind was drifting away already. She had decided that she would put a few rupees away each month so that she could buy herself a new sari in December for her birthday. Her husband checked every rupee she spent on grocery but she could easily show that she had spent a few more rupees on vegetables. If she saved fifty rupees every month then she would have four hundred and fifty rupees by December and she could buy a new sari. It would be her present to herself.

Balu's little shop was full of people and he was busy with other customers so she took her

time to get everything she needed. There were several brands of tea and coffee on the shelf. She turned each packet around and got the cheapest one. Then she changed it for the one which was a few rupees more. She was worried that her husband might find that it had no taste. It was such a dilemma. If she took a brand that cost a bit more he would shout at her and say that she was wasting money but if she took the cheapest one he would say it tasted like dishwater.



The vegetable market was empty. Everyone else bought their vegetables in the morning. She was too busy then but she enjoyed coming in the late afternoon when she had all the time in the world and she could bargain to her heart's content with the female vegetable-sellers.

She held her parasol in one hand and the two bags of all that she had bought in the other as she walked towards her house. Again her mind drifted in and out of so many thoughts and dreams. She had no children now but she often thought of the son she would one day have and who would look after her in her old age.

Hardly had she reached the main crossroad that she stood rooted to the ground. She could see Madhav coming out of the new shop that had opened. The woman who owned it had come from Kerala and was selling clothes that she had herself designed. What was Madhav doing there? She stood to a side while he started his motor-cycle and rode away through the crowd.

Then she headed straight to the shop. Kusum shut her parasol and entered the tastefully decorated place. There was no one inside except the owner. She placed her bags of vegetables and grocery near the counter and walked freely across the large room. There were beautiful hand-embroidered tunics hanging from bars. The colours were muted in shades of beige and

browns. Stretching out her hand she looked at the labels and noted the prices.

The owner of the shop came up to her. "Beautiful, isn't it?" she asked Kusum.

"Yes. It is."

"Many people still don't know about my shop. Please tell your friends about this place."

"Yes, I will," assured Kusum.

"It's only the end of March and already it is so hot," said the woman trying to keep the conversation going.

"By the way, there was a man who was here a little while ago. What did he buy?" Kusum asked.

"Oh, he couldn't decide. He said he wanted to buy something for a woman he knew but couldn't decide what to choose. He said she was very fussy about what she wore." The woman laughed as he said this.

"So what did he do?" asked Kusum.

"First he chose a skirt and top set then he saw a salwar-kameez set and liked it too. He asked me to keep those two sets aside and he would ask the woman for whom he was buying them to come and select the one she liked. I thought it was a good idea." The woman pointed to the two sets which were hanging from a rod a little away from the rest. "He said it was her birthday tomorrow and it was a present from him."

Kusum went up to the clothes hanging from their bar and looked at the price tags. The skirt set was Rs. 1500 and the salwaar-kameez set was Rs. 3000.

The shop owner was obviously happy to have someone to talk to. She continued to speak waving her arms freely in the air. She didn't notice that Kusum had started walking towards the door. "If I were his girlfriend I would choose the salwaar-kameez set because I would be able to wear it even after marriage... and because it's more expensive!"

Kusum's hands trembled as she picked up the bags with vegetables and grocery. "Yes, yes, of course," she managed to say as she stepped out into the crowded street.

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



CHANGING HISTORY

By Malathy Sitaram

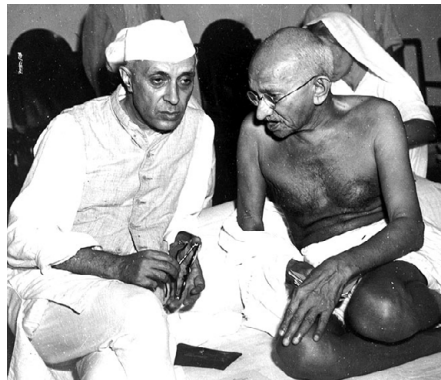
How dispiriting it is to read news from India these days. This week (mid-October) we hear that a BJP MLA, one Sangeet Som by name, believes that the Taj Mahal is not part of Indian culture as after all the man who commissioned it, who although being the Emperor of India was a Muslim and apparently therefore to be ignored. The Taj Mahal has been struck off from a list of tourist sites in U.P! So are we to strike out hundreds of years of Indian history because the players were not Hindus? It is difficult to imagine that anyone in India can be so culturally impoverished as to make asinine remarks like this. India is a country that can boast of its multi-religious and multi-cultural population who have been free for a long time to practise their individual religions and culture. Our past history does include wars between invading Muslim hordes and the resident Hindu population but we have been ruled by Muslim rulers for hundreds of years, in the past, followed by almost a hundred years of British rule, the British being Christian. Will that period of foreign domination be axed? Are we to blot out a more than a thousand years of Indian history because the actors over the centuries were not always Hindus? What a pathetic and soul-destroying outlook that is so mean and narrow. Has the man read the Indian Constitution which starts off with saying that India is a secular Republic? Something to be proud of in most sane people's view. We used to be so proud that we were secular with everyone free to worship their own gods without interference.

The question is can History be rewritten? Can children grow up without learning about our Muslim rulers? If text books now are dropping names of our most recent beloved activists such as Gandhi and Nehru then the current liberal culture and outlook will change into a mean, diminished world view.

A few months ago I read some news in the London Times from its reporter in India, one Hugh Tomlinson that in Rajasthan there was no mention in history text books of our first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru whom thousands of people including my family adored. Long before that I was shocked to hear that in Maharashtra followers of a rigidly Hindu group were suggesting that a statue in honour of Godse (Gandhi's murderer) should be erected. All over the world Gandhi has been held in high esteem, affection and respect for his creed of non-violence and respect for all religions. He was much loved in India and regarded as saintly. So it would seem that with the now

new, repressive right wing political faction in power, Gandhi and Nehru, two stalwarts in the fight for an independent India are not worthy of mention in school texts. It is unbelievably shocking.

As is the harassing and killing of people who eat beef. I have not heard of Christians and Parsis being attacked but Muslims have been singled out, pursued and lynched, which brings to mind the anti-black activities of the Ku Klux



Klan in America and of course the actions of the murderous Nazi regime. I don't recognize this India. This is not the culture prevalent when I grew up there and those of my family and friends who live there now must find it hard to adjust to such retrograde ideas. Live and let live used to be the motto subscribed to by millions of Indians.

In early September I went to London to see a play at the Sam Wanamaker Theatre which is part of the Shakespeare's Globe theatre complex. I went because I was interested in the play, "Lions and Tigers" written by Tanika Gupta. She was drawing inspiration from her own Bengali family's life experience. Her grandfather's younger brother was one Dinesh Gupta, a highly educated young man who took part in planning and engaging in violent insurrection against British rule in India. It has to be

said that Bengali intellectuals are in a class of their own as they seem to have a fighting spirit and would not avoid violent means in order to get rid of our foreign rulers. They saw themselves as revolutionaries and their vision was quite different from that of Gandhi and Nehru who eschewed violence in the struggle for independence. These leaders and their efforts were rejected by the young revolutionaries. The play is about Dinesh Gupta's short life.

I must confess that I was too young pre-independence to understand and choose which direction was preferable. Non-violent action or bombs and even murder? My parents were totally committed to Gandhi and his teaching. I was totally engrossed in the play throughout as I realized that there had been separate paths to independence. I knew very little about the life of Bengalis who were often regarded as intellectuals. Dinesh is involved in the killing of a policeman, is arrested and sentenced to death. The play was based on his prolific letters from prison written in Bengali and English in which he talks about books and other interests as anything political would have been censored. He and his friends admired Subhash Chandra Bose, the revolutionary dear to most Bengali hearts who fell out with Gandhi and Nehru as he did not have any confidence in their tactics. We heard a lot about British jails in the Andaman Islands where prisoners were tortured and from where they usually never returned from. So violence met violence. The colonial govt used its powers to deprive Indians of various rights if they had been involved in violent protest. I found the argument most interesting. Which path would I have chosen? Gandhi's way or that taken by Bose? The play ends with the hanging of Dinesh and I felt very emotional at that point. Apparently there is a statue of him in Kolkata.

I know very little about Bose who of course had a large following in Bengal and who is revered to this day. He was befriended by the Japanese whom he perceived as allies as they were enemies of the British. The prevailing wisdom is that he died in a plane crash in Taiwan in August, 1945. Most Bengalis would see him as a hero.

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.



THREE MICRO FICTIONS

By Anita Nabal

Homelessness Can Happen To Anyone

"Wait, wait, is that her?" In clothes too big and dirty for her that my Dettol-ed mind shattered. "But she has a home. A family," my voice trailing as...

...the car turned right, I saw a final glimpse of her limping to the side walk beneath the bridge. She passed away in a local church soon after. Alone. Tired.

"We tried to bring her home but each time she would run away," cried her father sitting next to her step-mom.

The Toast

"Meet Satinder's wife, our bhabhi (name for sister in law)." The Indian heat scorched Priya, frizzling her hair. Her heels dug into the browned grass in distress.

"What difference does it make if people think we are married?"

"It does, to me. If people don't know the truth, they misread and misjudge your story and struggle.

"Thank you so much for gracing my son's wedding. I have a daughter now too! Oh, I am not married to Satinder. We got divorced eleven years ago. I am not his wife, nor anyone's bhabhi." Her hand went up in toast.

The Treacherous Tattoo

"Nice tattoo! What is it?"

"A dragon walking up a hill."

"A hill?"

"Yes, the hill signifies struggles and efforts we all have to make in life."

"Why the dragon?"

"Dragons are supposed to symbolize wisdom, strength, power, longevity, prosperity, and even good luck. Perhaps I will be your charm?"

Window panes outside misted from wild rain, and Priya felt the same inside.

"What happened?" asked Susan.

"He wanted to give me his number...I said no."

"Why?"

"His arms are fully covered with huge dragon tattoos. Did you see them?"

"But, you just got a tattoo done, Priya, isn't that hypocritical? And, you are from India, where women your age hesitate to get tattoos...you are the brave one!"

"...but mine is small and hidden."

Priya quietly took out her tiny diary in which she wrote poems and started a new one...

Treacherous tattoo, too out there...

Anita Nabal, Ph.D., CDR, is a poet, flash fiction writer, children's books author, D&I consultant and former professor. You can find her recent works in Aberration Labyrinth, Confluence, Better Than Starbucks, aaduna, River Poets Journal, and Colere. She received an Honorable Mention in the Concrete Wolf 2017 chapbook competition. Nabal is working on her first novel.



RIGHT TO PRIVACY

By Innamburan

All of us cherish our privacy. Globally, internet tools invade it. The governments do it for public good or at least claim so. Identities and money get stolen often. In that context, this is a path-breaking judgement of the Indian Supreme Court.

"the house of every one is to him as his castle and fortress, as well for his defence against injury and violence, as for his repose ..."

Sir Edward Coke: Semayne's Case (1604)
"... Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."

J.S.MILL: On Liberty (1859)
"... as a man is said to have a right to his property, he may be equally said to have a property in his rights..."

James Madison (1906): Vol. 6

Legal luminaries and framers of Constitutions are pygmies before the majestic concept of Privacy embedded in the natural Right to Life, shouldered by custom and usage viz., Common Law, from time immemorial. Natural rights, inalienable from the very human personality and its dignity, should need no written reassurance; alas! they do! Amazingly, it comes from minority dissenting judgements. A nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India (SCI) upheld them in Justice K S Puttaswamy (Retd) vs Union of India (2017) on August 24, 2017. It looks as though we would have been safer, if natural rights were not reduced to writing in our Constitution! The polarity between the Right to Life and Public Purpose could have been deftly handled by the Rule of Law.

The Rule of Law, an amalgam of law of Nature, Common Law, legislative intent, subordinate legislation and judicial precedents, is the gold standard of good governance. The Declaration of Delhi 1959 by an international conclave of jurists attributed certain rights and freedoms, an independent judiciary and social, economic and cultural conditions conducive to human dignity to it. This template is conspicuous by its absence in that judgement.

Magna Carta: 1215 placed the English Law above the king. In U.S. constitutional law, Fourth Amendment: 1789 articulated both the rights of persons and the responsibilities of law-enforcement officials. The Constitution of India : 1950 withstood 101 amendments and has been '...supplanted by the rule of judges...' (Harish Khare). Like the boy in Casablanca, India stood on the burning deck when the 39th amendment made mincemeat of the Constitution as framed, SCI playing second fiddle. I still hold a grouse that the Constitution deprived literacy to generations by relegating the Right to Basic Education to the toothless an Directive Principles.

This 547-page judgement held:

'...The right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution...'

This demolished the Union Government's imprudent stand against such a protection, by

intelligence of a future day, when a later decision may possibly correct the error into which the dissenting Judge believes the court to have been betrayed..'

He was denied the Chief Justice throne. Justice RF Nariman cites Nani Palkhivala's poignant sentence, "To the stature of such a man, the Chief Justiceship of India can add nothing."



Justice K. Subba Rao's Dissent in Kharak Singh 1964 enjoys an iconic status in jurisprudence. In Puttaswamy 2017, Justice Chandrachud cites Justice PN Bhagwati:

'...in view of the decision of this Court in Cooper (1970), the minority view (Justices K Subba Rao's and J.C.Shah's) must be regarded as correct and the majority view must be held to have been overruled...These rights, so recognized in Kesavananda Bharathi, are primordial rights. They constitute rights under natural law.

In other words, my oeuvre stands vindicated.

In sum, Justice Chandrachud, on his own behalf, that of CJI and Justices RK Agrewal & SA Nazeer, alluded to Justice Fazl Ali's celebrated dissent in Gopalan: AIR 1950 SC 27, listing a notice, a hearing, impartial adjudication and an orderly course of procedure as the essential ingredients of 'procedure established by law'. Justice SA Bobde cited Artha Sahstra favoring the 'Castle' concept. Justice RF Nariman, in an inestimable summation of all the aspects, zeroed on the 'Three great Dissents'. Justice AM Sapre cited the very Preamble as the fountainhead of privacy jurisdiction. Justice Chelameswar read 'the silences of the Constitution' - the dark matter - by rereading the Constituent Assembly debates; others also did likewise. The unanimous verdict ending with the predictive sentence, 'The old order changeth yielding place to new,' is exciting regarding the decision on freedom of speech, a pending issue. Back at full strength, the US Supreme Court may decide on Privacy v Cell phones in the future.

Why conclude in a hurry?

In Puttaswamy 2017, Justice SK Kaul 'buried the majority opinion in ADM Jabalpur v Shiva-



kant Shukla (1976) 2 SCC 521, ten fathoms deep'; Justice Chandrachud joined him and others in overruling his father. An aberration, that judgement denied access to the judiciary for the citizen during emergency. Justice HR Khanna made short work of Article 21 of the Constitution in his immortalized Dissent by tracing the right to Life to principles held dear for long. Presciently, he quoted Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, Sr,

'...a dissent in a court of last resort...is an appeal to the brooding spirit of the law, to the

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.



Fiction

HARAKIRI

By Subhash Chandra

"Chetna, the Savings Bank account is in joint names. So are all the fixed deposits. Both have the Either/Survivor option."

"Why all this suddenly?" she asked, surprised.

"For the insurance, you are the sole beneficiary. So no problem there too."

"Have you gone crazy?"

"As for the plot left to me by my father, I'll make a trip to Indore, sell it and deposit the money in our joint account."

Chetna noticed he was talking like a zombie. She felt anxious.

"And this flat I'll register in our joint names before I..." he could not bring himself to complete the sentence.

She caught hold of both his shoulders and shook him.

"Look at me, Deepesh, what's wrong with you?"

He raised his stricken eyes and looked at her. "I'm dying, Chetna."

"Nonsense. Nobody died of cough."

"But this has lasted six months."

"So what? Allergic cough can last for years. How can you be so stupid?"

"Let me tell you everything, Chetna, about what has been happening for the last few months. During my last visit our physician, Dr. Bansal said, it was worrying that my cough and fever were not responding to the strong medicines he had prescribed. And then there was the partial loss of appetite too."

"Is that all?"

"No. There is more. And much worse. Dr. Bansal referred me to Dr. Girotra who is the best Oncologist in Delhi. He is on the International Circuit of Oncologists and is consulted by patients from all over South Asia on Skype."

"So?"

"Dr. Girotra got some advanced tests done and asked me to meet him after a week. I did. Examining my X- Rays and other reports, he turned grim and silent. After a while he said, 'Bad news, Mr. Ansh.'"

Chetna was silent and full of dread.

"Dr. Girotra went on to say that it was cancer of the nodes and was in the last stage. All he could do was to minimise my pain during my last days. He advised me to wind up my affairs in six months, the approximate time left to me."

Chetna felt shell-shocked.

But keeping her outward composure, she said, "I still think it's not possible. You do Yoga and go for a morning walk every day. You travel by Metro and use the stairs rather than the escalators or the lift. Isn't exercise known to strengthen the immune system?"

Deepesh remained silent.

"Besides, you don't smoke, nor drink, nor consume tobacco in any form. And we don't eat junk food."

He only let out a deep sigh.

Deepesh took long leave from office. He also

informed the Convenor of the Khsitij Theatre Group of which he was an active member. Acting was his passion and whenever Khsitij planned to stage a play, he went for rehearsals in the evenings, straight from his office.

Now he would sit in the balcony most of the time, moping or looking disinterestedly at the flow of life in the lane. He watched television, or glanced at the newspaper, but nothing registered. Everything had lost meaning.

Slowly, over the months, as death drew nearer, he became very introspective. Latent guilt simmered. Chetna was so upright! She had values to which she adhered steadfastly. She was not like some of his friends' wives, who flirted outrageously with men right in front of their husbands. But how had he repaid her fidelity and sweetness?

One evening he said, "Chetna, I want to talk to you."



The expression on his face was unsettling.

"I want to make a confession."

She grew apprehensive.

"I've been unfaithful to you, Chetna."

She was aghast.

"Yes."

"This can't be true," she said. But a dying man would tell no lies.

"I had multiple affairs."

"But you always criticized infidelity and promiscuity."

He seemed not to hear her and went on, "With almost all the actresses who played heroines against me."

"How far ... did you go?" she asked with trepidation.

"All the way."

"Oh my.... No wonder you gave outstanding performances in the plays. In the two plays I watched you were so realistic in the love scenes."

Your dialogues sounded like coming from the heart. I applauded your super acting along with the others," she said ruefully.

And then without another word, she got up and went to the bedroom. Something had irrevocably snapped in her. At night she slept in the drawing room. She cringed at the thought that she had shared a bed with him while he was sleeping with other women. Suddenly, she felt a rancid smell pervading the house and felt choked.

Deepesh got prepared for the worst. She would leave him, for sure. His sins were grave and he deserved the severest punishment. However, a gossamer hope still flickered.

One night Chetna resolved to leave. But the next morning she prepared breakfast and served it to him. She knew he could not stand spicy hotel food. So, she cooked lunch and dinner, too. Then she was caught up in the debate in her mind whether to walk out on a dying man.

With every passing day, his depression deepened and he did not feel like shaving or bathing, or even moving his limbs.

#

A month later, Dr. Bansal phoned and asked Deepesh to come over immediately."

"I can't, doctor. I am feeling too weak. I can't climb down the stairs. You know we live on the second floor."

"No, you have to come. Leave home now, this minute."

#

"This is Rameshwar," said Dr. Bansal pointing to a bony, puny man, sitting in his chamber.

Before Deepesh could give him a look, the man jumped from his chair, caught hold of his feet and began to whine, "Sir, please accept my apologies ... please, Sir, forgive me... I humbly implore you to kindly forgive me."

"I don't know what you are talking about?" Deepesh said and looked at Dr. Bansal.

"He is the Senior Technician at Cheergive Labs."

"Sir, I had been under intense stress. My wife had died a fortnight back. Our son had failed the B.A. exam for the third time. I don't know how the reports got mixed up."

Deepesh was aghast.

#

After the man left, Dr. Bansal said, "What is it Mr. Deepesh? You are still looking morose. You should be doing a jig right here, inside my chamber."

"But I'm already dead!"

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.



QUEST: MY PASSION, MY DREAM SCIENCE LABORATORY FOR CHILDREN!

By Malti Kelkar

When I returned to Pune, India after a short stint of two years as a Science teacher in Malpi International School, Nepal, I faced the problem of how to occupy myself usefully. Reading all day, watching television and meeting friends were some of the typical activities in which I could happily spend my time. After all, I had to retire sometime.

But that was not enough, I needed something more! I felt quite energetic enough to commit to doing something useful for children! As a Science teacher, I always felt that too much theory is taught in the classroom when instead children should get some 'Hands on experience' with science activities. The idea of starting a science laboratory grew and I started working on it.

I have long had this dream of a beautiful Science laboratory which children would love to visit and have hands on experience with simple Science experiments. Since I had moved into a new apartment in a better locality, my old apartment was empty and I thought I could base my Science activity there, rather than sell it.

In my neighbourhood lots of construction work was going on. Men and women were busy at work as labourers. Their children did attend a School nearby, but were just loitering around after school hours. There were both Primary and Secondary School children. I talked with the parents and they now send their children to my apartment where I had started collecting equipment for doing some simple Science experiments. The experiments had to be absolutely basic and something that suited these children, who barely knew the local language. I also thought the children should learn things that were congruent with their life and experiences. I carried out some simple experiments using common objects like water, air, plants and animals in order to attract them to the lab.

Before doing anything else, I taught them to grow plants from sowing seeds, each child owning a container and taking responsibility for caring for the plant. This practice continues even now in the Quest lab.

The first and the easiest activity I thought of was to teach them to make solutions of salt and sugar in water. I introduced them to terms like soluble, insoluble (in the local language, Marathi). Water used for making solutions was made colourful by adding a chemical known to most of us, Potassium permanganate. It dissolved in water and made it pink. Children like to see colourful objects. The idea behind teaching about solutions came to my mind because I believe that the activity should have an immediate application in real life. They are familiar with drinks like lemonade, so immediate application of the experiment was understood by them. The children came up with many more examples

of solutions like soap and water used for washing clothes, etc. Salt dissolves in the curry making it tasty. These are the children's day to day experiences hence the 'making solutions' activity turned out as a very basic but effective Science activity. I was delighted.

An immediate application by the children of the experiment done in the lab gives me immense pleasure. One day, after doing an experiment with



bar magnets, one girl from the group brought me a pair of scissors and told me that there must be magnetic power in the two blades of the scissors and both the blades must have similar poles because that is why they stay apart when we are not cutting anything with them. Had they got opposite poles they would have stuck to each other all the time. That, I thought, was an immediate application of what she had learnt just the previous day in the Quest lab. I appreciated her comprehension of the subject and rewarded her.

The best and simplest reward in Quest is clapping, and children love to do so. The other day I was demonstrating an experiment on Density. An egg sinks in plain water but when it is put in salt water (using the previous knowledge of making solutions), the same egg starts floating! This experiment is introduced to the children as the 'Magical egg'.

It was explained to them that by dissolving salt in water, it is the density of water that was changed and there was actually, no magic involved. While watching the experiment, one of the children suddenly exclaimed "the egg appears big in water." Now this is a very important observation made by the child, quite unknowingly, that water can magnify an object!

Such experiences encouraged me to no extent and I thought of establishing a proper Science laboratory in a bigger place and named it Quest.*Quest stands for:-

Q - questioning
U - urge to find out more
E - enquiry
S - searching answers
T - testing, verifying

It is a well-established big and fully equipped science laboratory for children.

The inauguration of the new lab was done by some of the children and they were the VIPs for ribbon cutting. Soon another branch in another area was established, with the same name 'Quest'. Today, I run activities in this lab as well as in the other branch and entertain approximately 200 underprivileged children every week, with science and math activities. Children from other NGOs like Swadhar and Vanasthali also have been given the Science-Math boxes and their teachers are trained at Quest to perform experiments.

After performing simple experiments, children draw conclusions. This happens to be an excellent method of learning science.

Children from an organisation called the Doorstep schools started coming regularly to Quest for science activities. The idea behind the Doorstep schools organisation is to take education to the child's doorstep literally. All construction sites make hutments for their workers. Their children are sent to Government Schools for elementary education. But when the children come back from school, the organisation takes care of the kids till their parents come home and see to it that they do their home work and learn some other skills like reading, sewing, craft etc.

There are many children, who, I believe, tell their respective teachers in their School about the fun they have at Quest and what they learn there. At the end of the academic year, Quest organizes a Science - Math exhibition for the kids in which these children participate enthusiastically - a feather in my cap! A big achievement that gives me a feeling of fulfilment.

Even now, in my late seventies, I attend Quest regularly, with a sense of pride and I experience the 'joy of giving', by disseminating knowledge. All this could not have been achieved single handed. I have very dedicated and qualified help from two ladies, Saguna and Shilpa.

When I see children excitedly doing science experiments in the laboratory called 'Quest', I know that my dream has been fulfilled!

Malti Kelkar, an educator, runs a Science math laboratory named Quest, in Pune. It was established by her in 2004, when she was 65 years of age. Quest website: www.questsc-mathlab.com



Fiction

PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

By Mona Mohanty

The day had begun like any other. My eyes opened like clockwork at the appointed time; five A.M. That was the only movement in the room. The rest of my body had not moved an inch. By now, I thought wryly, even my body was attuned to the whims and fancies of my Lord and Master, my husband, Ritvik. Woe betide anyone who disturbed his slumber. It was a different matter that his snoring kept me awake almost through the entire night. Maybe, if the pattern of snoring had followed a soothing rhythm, I could have been lulled into slumber. But, unfortunately, such luck was not meant for me. It would begin innocuously enough: first, initiated with a few gentle hiccupping sounds, the volume would gradually rise like the rumble of distant thunder and then, all of a sudden, there would be a startlingly loud sound like that of a tyre bursting. The man slept through it all. I had heard of people being awakened by their own snoring but, it didn't happen in this case. It was, therefore, a relief when he was out of the city, travelling on official tours.

In spite of the sleepless nights he caused me, snoring being one of the minor reasons, I loved him and knew that the feeling was not reciprocated. How did I know that he did not love me? The answer was very clear. Certainly, he had not been attracted to me for my looks, because, I was the plainest of all Janes around. We had met as trainees while interning at a reputed multinational company and in a strange coincidence, both of us were picked up as management trainees by the same organisation after we completed our MBAs. One day, a month into our internship programme, he saw me getting off my chauffeur driven Audi and after having ignored me until then, he was suddenly hovering all around me and, believe me when I say that once he set out to charm anyone, even a butterfly would have paused in mid-flight. And, understandably, I was smitten by the handsome hunk who showered me with gifts and constant attention. After a whirlwind wedding, we had moved to a luxurious apartment gifted by my parents.

It did not take too long for the kid gloves to be taken off and chucked away. Phrases during our courtship like, 'Queen of my heart', 'My cute soul mate' changed to 'why isn't my breakfast ever made the way I have asked you to', 'No, you can't come with me to the party, it's a glamorous do and you will stick out like a sore thumb,' after the nuptials. The transition was almost instant and brutal in its suddenness. He had married me for only one thing; the fact that I was loaded and the only heiress to my parents' fortune.

I did muster up the courage to ask him one day what had happened to make him change drastically overnight. He laughed sarcastically and said, "My dear, you are a married woman now. I can't be behaving like a teenager in love pandering to all your whims. Grow up and stop acting like a kid!"

I had protested. "That does not mean that you can't speak or use terms of endearment. I think love should always be expressed verbally".

At that, he had lost his temper and, in a menacing manner, had come close to me and, looking straight into my eyes, snarled, "Listen and listen to me properly for I shall not repeat this again! Thank your lucky stars that you got a person willing to marry you. Have you ever looked at yourself in the mirror? Your parents are beholden to me for having taken you off their hands. Face it, woman, you were not really in demand. Don't want me to send you back to them, do you?"

That was the day I broke down. What a life I had led till then, I thought. Always having been made to feel unwanted by my parents, in spite of my brilliance, because I was below average in the looks department. In continuation of my bad luck as far as



love and affection were concerned, I was unwanted also by 'my new husband'. But, masochism has a way of rearing its ugly head in such situations; for a weakling like me had no strength of will to break away and lead a life of my own, unencumbered and unshackled.

So began a my marital journey replete with daily taunts, insults and also the ignominy of being made to quit my job for my darling husband had said in a voice that brooked no argument and a smirk in his tone, that women in his family did not work. It was a different matter that his mother was a housewife and he did not have any sisters. I had no choice but to acquiesce to his demands. To quell any feeling of rebelliousness, it was also ensured that I conceived soon after. So I stayed put at home while he essayed the role of the breadwinner in the family.

Back to the present! Shaking aside my rapidly meandering thoughts, I tiptoed out of bed. After a bit of pottering around the house, I got around to making tea and preparing breakfast. There was a lightening up of the skyline as I watched the sun weave its way upwards on its proclaimed path. Towards the right, I could see some clouds slowly moving inwards. The forecast was for rain and thunder showers in the evening. Well, the weather man, I thought, usually made mountains out of mole hills. The clouds didn't look like carriers of rain.

The tea was almost ready when I felt the first movement in my swelling belly. Dropping everything, I ran excitedly towards the bedroom to tell

Ritvik about it, when his voice suddenly wafted through the half open door. "Of course, darling, I will definitely drop in to see you. No, no, don't cry, sweetheart. I shall stay over. Yes, I shall give the silly cow here some cock and bull story about having to go out of town suddenly..." My horrified gasp could not have gone unheard. As his face turned towards the sound that had emanated from my lips, the handset slipped from his hands. He quickly picked it up and mumbled into it, "I shall call you later", disconnected the call, got out of bed and moved towards me.

I sprang back and screamed, "Don't you dare come near me, you two timing bastard!"

He came bounding up to me and caught my hand. With a look of pure guilt and remorse on his face, he said, "I am sorry, darling." My irrational mind did a joyous somersault! "Yipee, he called me darling" and as I struggled to control my galloping thoughts, I heard him say, "I know what you overheard cannot be unsaid." He touched my bulging tummy and said, "I cannot live without both of you. I was speaking in that particular manner because I am trying to find a way to end it." Tears coursed down his face. In a little while, he disengaged himself from me and said in a pleading manner, "I have to go to office. But, I shall be back soon and we will go out in the evening for dinner. Just you and I." He kissed me and left.

The weatherman turned out to be right. The heavens were split asunder by thunder and lightning since late afternoon. It was 7 o'clock and there was no news of Ritvik. His mobile was unreachable. Once again I stepped into the balcony and looked down. Except for a drenched white cat that was lying down miserably near the gate, there was not a soul to be seen anywhere. Thunder rumbled in the distance. Did I hear a soft knock at the door? I turned back and walked towards it. I opened it and then two things happened simultaneously. The bedraggled cat was right in front of my door and the telephone bell rang shrilly.

Ritvik's car brakes had failed and a massive crash on the busy thoroughfare in the heart of the city had transported him away to hitherto unknown territories. He was not alone in his journey. He had a female for company on an unending date.

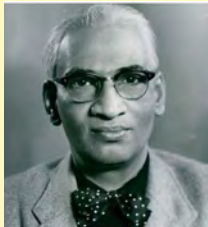
The baby kicked, the cat had found her corner and all was well in my world.

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.



THE FORGOTTEN STORIES

By Anjana Basu



Sudhindra Nath Ghose (1899–1965)—best known as Sudhin Ghose—was born in Bardhaman in Bengal. He moved to Europe as a student in the 1920s where he first studied science and art history before completing a doctorate in literature. Though he spent his entire writing career in the West, Sudhin Ghose, like his contemporaries Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao, based his work on India, drawing material from the villages and towns of Bengal. An impeccable prose stylist and a master of sprawling narratives which draw inspiration from myths, fables, legends and epics, Sudhin Ghose is among the greatest writers in Indian English literature.

*Sudhin Ghose wrote journalistic pieces, a scholarly tract, and three volumes of Indian folktales apart from the work for which he is best remembered: a quartet of novels comprising *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949), *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951), *The Vermilion Boat* (1953) and *The Flame of the Forest* (1955).*

Sudhin Ghose wrote a series of four novels within the span of six years and was one of the earliest Indian writers in English, a contemporary of Mulk Raj Anand with whom he was often compared. His peers declared him to be one of the greatest novelists in English but Sudhin Ghose gradually vanished from the Indian literary canvas until his books have recently been reissued by Speaking Tiger. Ghose is a man who plays with the form of the novel which is why his oeuvre was misunderstood later. Is he a fable writer, is he someone who mixed autobiography with parable? It was because of these difficulties of comprehension that his novels lost out in a later post-Independence time.

The world he described was the innocent rural idyll of his childhood – even though he spent most of his later years in Europe. His first two novels *And Gazelles Leaping* (1949) and *Cradle of the Clouds* (1951) begin with childhood and move to early adulthood. There is one central character surrounded by a cast of people and animals. The character grows up in a rural patch of Calcutta, land belonging to a Rani that can by no means be impinged upon. Ghose's story telling style is flexible – events happen with no particular order which becomes more pronounced by the time the second book comes along.

And Gazelles Leaping (1949) is easy to slot as a children's book since it is about a cosmopolitan batch of children, Chinese, Jamaican and blacks, not to mention others from all parts of India, being taught by a nun, Sister Svenska and her helper. The narrator, like many fairy tale heroes is the orphan child of rich parents who is being brought up by others. There is a stunted elephant, a group of juvenile delinquents who stray from the evil commercial parts of Calcutta and want to kidnap the narrator, land grabbers foiled

by the Rani's wisdom and the smart Moti Didi who manages to save the elephant from confiscation by the government. (Speaking Tiger; Rs 299.00)

Cradle of the Clouds takes the narrator through conversation after conversation in a

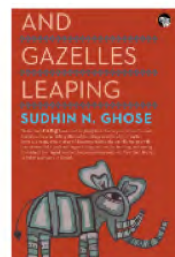
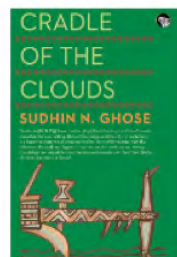
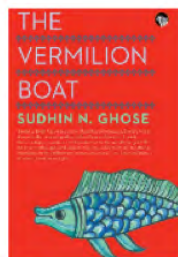
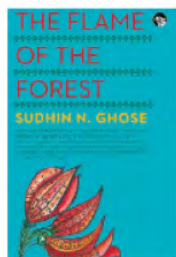
Diwan's ferocious bulldog while acting as the Diwan's secretary and writing for a magazine destined for American readers. The episodic style of the other three novels continues and ultimately the narrator leaves the material world to follow the mysterious Myna on her pilgrimage.

In Ghose's books women have an important part to play – they come in as advisors or quick witted rescuers who do not always follow the standard mores of child rearing from the Rani to the nun and downwards. Neela, Roma, Mashima, to name just a few, women who move from advice

to love and vice versa.

Ghose has a light touch and his prose is refreshing – the only point is that the modern reader tries to give the place and people a context which is not always successful. There is about Ghose's work a sense of fantasy that is hard to ground, though his stories very often are thought provoking and some of the issues that they raise are still relevant today. His technique can be linked to classics like the Panchatantra where one story leads to another and animals and people have lessons to give. Everything that is mentioned is explained through example, like the simple wisdom of the villagers or their penchant for giving advice. This is a style which modern day readers might find difficult to relate to because it requires a certain patience and a whimsical outlook. (Speaking Tiger; Rs 299.00)

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



land plagued by drought. The watch menders, potters, priests and teachers who were there in the first book return. From Cromwell – whose name takes some deciphering – to long haired cranks and communists the story meanders on. Everyone has a piece of advice to give or a story to tell, including the narrator himself. There are puns – Calcutta can with a twist of pronunciation become the Black Dog that Yama rides – and Sanskrit references since the whole novel is ultimately about tradition and rainmaking. (Speaking Tiger; Rs 299.00)

Vermilion Boat continues the story with the orphan coming to the big city to study and again finding betrayal in unexpected places. The clash between glorious past and narrow present continues though he finds a mentor in an old professor, as has been Ghose's trend, love, and an unlikely animal friend, a Ganges dolphin needing rescue who transforms him into a 'sea god'. The New York Times in fact labelled this book as one of the greatest works of Indian literature. (Speaking Tiger; Rs 299.00)

Flame of the Forest is the last in the series – the Penhari scholar continues with his mingling of almost magical realism incidents and political crises. He nurses the

Through the poetic lens

SALEEM PEERADINA: A POET WITH INCURABLE INNOCENCE

By Yogesh Patel



Saleem Peeradina is Professor Emeritus at Siena Heights University, Adrian, Michigan, but to our surprise he is able to write memorable poems of minimalism well away from the academic poetry posse. Their beguiling simplicity camouflages the perfection of craft and art of the uncompromising genius. Peeradina knows in what the true light and meaning inhabit. The reality - the interaction of the flesh - to him is a hotbed as he indicates here:

(Poem) 3
Only in the abstract
can words attain
such luminosity.
On contact
with the flesh
they burn up

Here is a poet who connects us to prevalent objects, animals, birds, heart's affairs, or our immediate ambience, and leads us through a magical or almost gentle passage to a universe from where we can observe ourselves in some new light or delight. Such gifted poets are rare.

Juan Ramón Jiménez a very icon of artistic purity once said, 'Literature is a state of culture, poetry is a state of grace, before and after culture.' Peeradina is also not in any rush to enlighten you with the scrambled net of culture or its politics, nor does he rush us or tangle us in the labyrinth of references where the joke is on the readers. The grace of his poems holds our hand and angelically walks with us in a serene spirit. His poem, The Lesson, is a perfect example of it where he takes us on a magical journey beginning with:

'Take a sheet of paper the size of a drawing pad. The universe,
as we perceive it, must be accommodated within the borders
of this triangle.'

The journey exploring the map of one's mental universe always ends in the reality. So the poet emphatically reverses us into the journey home after our great escape.

'We have to make the journey back to reclaim the earth.'

This is typical Peeradina, anchored in his relationships (family) and his everyday life with which he hardly shows any quarrel. So he always returns to them as a sanctuary, to cuddle them fully with his all five senses simultaneously. Yet, he finds time to think absorbing his world in this process.

Heart's Beast, New and Selected Poems (Published by Copper Coin, ISBN 978-93-84109-10-3)

Hence, one of his collections is aptly entitled Meditations on Desire (Ridgeway Press, 2003). Some twenty-six poems from it appear in his latest book, Heart's Beast, New and Selected Poems. As in meditation, there are no distractions in these poems oozing purity in buckets.

(Poem) 10

Like the mist
that descends
into the valley
to hug the trees,
nuzzle the houses,
you are
real enough.

First Offence published in 1980 draws us in more nostalgia as it takes us to the then Mumbai/Bombay. It includes a poem or two I published in early issues

of Skylark. Heart's Beast is a title adopted for the collection from a long poem in which every word is weighed in lyrically. The poem tries to chart the heart's journey as an evolution from an ape to a man. That long journey through the Darwinism of various insects and animals develops his clear message of the beast's true nature.

The heart's a rodent,
a hog with a hard nose, all
mouth and hands, hair
on end, nostrils flaring.
A toad, a crab, a creature
without antennae
*
Once it is violated, it loses all tact.

It will show itself plainly, spit
in the eye of custom,
lead its object by the hand.



And who doesn't know the beast that resides in our heart and the mayhem it offers in its raging rampant anger and aggression!

There is no other excellent poem I have read about the experience of visiting the talkies in India than Peeradina's The Real Thing. Again, it is a long poem but with every bit of roadside (textual) picture box excitement and magic you will ever come across! If for nothing else, do buy Heart's Beast, New and Selected Poems (Published by Copper Coin, ISBN 978-93-84109-10-3) to read this poem. Peeradina takes fun at every Indian's expense, not leaving out Pran and Dharmendra in the stride. His mastery of humour is evident in these lines:

'When Dharmendra says Truth
is greater
than love.
Three-fourth of India nods
its head. Already brimming with truth, the rest
of India cannot conceive of anything
greater
than love.'

This streak of humour trickles in elsewhere as well as in his short poem 64 on page 98:

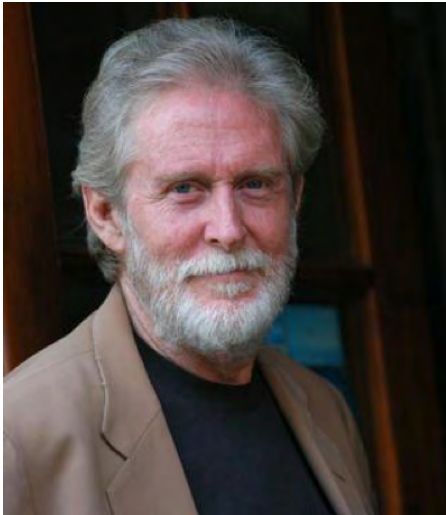
I have said all
there was
to say. The rest
is strictly
between
you and me.

The last line is a typical Indian trait I suppose! But it also allows me to conclude here pointing out Peeradina's easy style and that this extraordinary poet is always live in conversation with us through his poems. I only hope the Alzheimer doesn't separate our company with him for a long time.

Yogesh Patel is a poet from the UK. A former editor of Skylark, he currently runs Word Masala Foundation and Skylark Publications UK to promote the diaspora poets. By profession, he is an optometrist and an accountant.



By Reginald Massey



Over the years I met him and had the most interesting conversations on a variety of subjects which included cricket and the acting profession.

After attending Woodstock, a school with American affiliations, Tom went to Yale for a year but did not fit in there. He returned to India and became a schoolteacher. It was then that he was bitten by the acting bug and enrolled at the Film Institute of India where because of his excellent command of Urdu, its

Persian nuances and its poetry, he made a mark. On graduation he cornered the roles of British officers in Indian films. Satyajit Ray cast

Alter's appearance in various TV serials made his face familiar to millions and his stage productions which he directed and acted in gained an almost cult status. His one-man theatrical pieces attracted much attention. I remember his vivid portrayal of the Islamic scholar Maulana Azad who loved tea but detested the very notion of an Islamic state for India's Muslims; a clever juxtaposition. Alter's Urdu script and his flawless delivery of the monologue were brilliant.

Cricket was his passion; he was a lively commentator and wrote about the game for leading Indian nationals. He recognised the potential of the young Tendulkar and did the first television interview of the cricketer who later became a record breaker. In 2008 he was awarded the Padma Shri title and the Indian president and Prime Minister sent their condolences to his family. He is survived by his wife Carol, his son Jamie, his daughter Afshaan, his sister Martha Chen and his brother John.



South Africa Calling

SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE: FROM POTS TO POLITICS

By *Devi Rajab*



1997 marks the end of indenture proclaimed by the Viceroy of India a century ago, but finds us still struggling with its aftermath. Little is known about this period in the lives of our ancestors. Who were we as a people outside of a stereotype? Today in S. Africa we are labelled as the people of the Guptas, i.e. rich capitalists involved in state capture. But history reveals another face and this is why it is so important to clear fact from fiction. The contribution of South African Indians in the struggle against apartheid is not widely known in contemporary South Africa today particularly amongst the youth. Even less recognised is the part played by Indian women in the struggle. Little is known of their role in the Indian resistance movements as they fought alongside their men to change the course of history. As recently as 1996 when the Indian Government honoured a young 16-year-old martyr of the South African freedom struggle, Ms Valliammah Munusamy Moodaliar who died soon after her imprisonment for resisting apartheid, few South Africans knew her story. Buried in the Braamfontein cemetery she lies unrecognised not far from where President Mandela unveiled a memorial stone to Enoch Sontonga, composer of the South African national anthem, Nkosi Sikelele' Afrika.

According to Professor Uma Mesthrie, the exclusive political focus and neglect of social history has given rise to a situation where only a small fraction of the Indian population has been acknowledged. As women did not play a formal role in the Indian political organisations at least until the late 1930s, their presence in history books and in collective memories remains noticeably absent.

It was Gandhi the revolutionary leader who brought a dramatic change in the role and status of Indian women in South Africa and in India when at his bidding they came out in large numbers from the shelters of their homes to play their part in the struggle for freedom of their respective countries. Indian women first entered the struggle in 1913 by way of an open invitation from officials of the Satyagraha Association to join their men in retaliation to the

Searle judgement which invalidated all non-Christian marriages. By a stroke of a pen all Hindu, Muslim and Zoroastrian marriage rites were declared null and void. This meant that all married Indian women in South Africa were reduced to the status of concubines whilst their progeny were classified illegitimate and deprived of all their rights of inheritance. The honour of India's womanhood had been insulted. In uncharacteristically strident behaviour the women relinquished their traditional roles as homemakers to join the struggle against their oppression. In 1913 the year of the mass resistance of African and Coloured women of the Orange Free State against passes, Indian women joined the last stage of the Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi.

In the struggle that followed, women played a glorious part. A batch of women from Tolstoy farm crossed the border into Natal in defiance of the immigration law which prohibited Indians from moving between provinces. When left unhindered by the authorities they went as instructed by Gandhi to the mines and urged the indentured labourers to stop work. On the 23rd September, 1913 according to plan, sixteen women were arrested for crossing the border and entering the Transvaal without permits. They were tried and sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour in Pietermaritzburg jail.



Among the group were Kasturba Gandhi, two of their close relatives who lived in the Phoenix settlement, Mrs Kashi Chaganlal Gandhi and Mrs Santok Maganlal Gandhi and Miss Jayakunvar Mehta daughter of a close friend of Gandhi. These events stirred the heart of the Indian community in South Africa and in India. In jail they were harassed, poorly treated and abused. Many grew ill in the process and one brave 16-year-old died of a fever a few days after her release on the 22nd February 1914. Gandhi recalls her thus in his book, "Satyagraha in South Africa":

"How can I forget her? Valliama R Munuswami Mudaliar was a young girl of Johannesburg only sixteen years of age. She was confined to bed when I saw her. As she was a tall girl her emaciated body was a terrible thing to behold" Recalling his conversation with her he recounts:

"Valliamma, you do not repent of having gone to jail?" I asked

"Repent? I am even now ready to go to jail again if I am arrested," she said.

"But what if it results in your death" I pursued.

"I do not mind it. Who would not love to die for one's motherland?"

The contributions of these brave women have to be seen in the context of the historical and social period in which they lived. That these women resistors helped to transform the Satyagraha into a powerful mass resistance movement in which ten thousand people from a small community went to prison and 60 000 workers went on strike in what was described as the largest general strike in South Africa at that time, is truly remarkable. The major demands on which the Satyagraha struggle had been waged were conceded to the Indians. Once more the women came to the fore again in response to a national call to join the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946 when the Government passed the segregationist Asiatic Land Tenure and Representation Act that effectively prohibited Indians from procuring land in controlled areas. Addressing a gathering of about 800 women at the Avalon cinema in Durban in June 1946, a Passive Resister, Ms Zainab Asvat who had been arrested the previous night and released later, unwavering in purpose, ignited the fervour of the crowd thus: "Let us pledge that we shall continue the task which we have undertaken. We have sown the seed of our struggle; let it not perish; let us water it with our heart's blood; let us pledge: Long live resistance".



Speaking in Tamil, Mrs Veeramah Pather, who took part in the Passive Resistance at the time of Gandhi said that though individuals would disappear from the mortal scene, the struggle would go on. Speaking in Urdu, Ms Khatija Mayat urged all Indian women to heed the call of the Transvaal and the Natal Indian Congress to support the battle against the Ghetto Act. Ms Z Gool of Cape town stated "South Africa is witnessing the real beginning of a national struggle which is still in its infancy. Therefore I plead to the women to come out boldly, because without them, our struggle will be weakened".

In response to these calls hundreds of men, women and even children went to prison. In turn their determination in the face of brutal assaults spurred the community thus swelling the ranks of volunteers. From the point of view of its effect on Indian women the Passive Resistance Campaign was an important politicizing event.

The Indian community in South Africa has much to thank their womenfolk for the valuable and crucial role that they played towards the liberation of their people. In relinquishing their traditional role to don the mantle of resistance, they sacrificed their material comforts for a higher order principal so succinctly captured in the words of the great Valliammah ".....who would not want to die for one's own motherland?"

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

MUMBAI EXPRESSIONS

By Anju Makhija



This year has been one of landmarks and memories. It signifies the 70th year of India's partition which resulted in one of the largest mass displacements and refugee crises of the 20th century. Over 14 million people were displaced between 1946-1948 and about 500,000 people lost their lives. Women were abducted and countless children were orphaned. These unsettled migrants went on to create a large diaspora around the world.

In Mumbai, Godrej India Culture Lab, organised a huge event: Remembering Partition: Museum of Memories. Several curated exhibits were on display accompanied by performances, discussions, and screenings. The memories of Sindhi migrants, who lost their state, were explored. I belong to this minority community and still recall the horror stories my grandparents told me about displaced people from Sind, living in refugee camps and barracks. Some of these were documented in a book I co-edited, *Freedom & Fissure: an Anthology of Partition Poetry from India and Pakistan*.

Other events are taking place across the country. The Indian Memory Project: Partition Edition is creating a digital archive of India's rich history through personal narratives and visuals. The Partition Museum was developed by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust. Lord Meghnad Desai, who had helped to set up the Mahatma Gandhi statue outside Parliament in London in 2015, is among the driving force behind this Partition Museum. It will serve as a memorial to preserve history for future generations. The museum is housed in the Town Hall within the old city of Amritsar, near the famous Golden Temple.

Despite of all the suffering the world seems to go through, negative focuses continue to operate in full swing. Even creative people are facing all kinds of atrocities these days. Activist and journalist, Gauri Lankesh, who has been writing openly about several controversial issues, was shot point blank at her residence. That caused a huge furore with demonstrations taking place in every city. Other Kannada writers and activists are also under threat. They have been provided police protection—a clear indication of the prevailing threat against the progressive forces. The President of the Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations sees Hindutva organizations and religious institutions behind all this. Investigations are on presently with no conclusive results.

Two days after Lankesh was murdered in Bengaluru, Pankaj Mishra was shot in Bihar's Arwal district. TV reporter Shantanu Bhowmick was killed in Tripura. It is reported that since 2015, there have been 142 attacks on journalists, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. As many as 70 journalists have been killed in India between 1992 and 2016. Mumbai Press Club and other organisations are working tirelessly to stop this and protests have been held across the nation. 'Murder' said V.S. Naipaul, 'is an extreme form of censorship'. This is an idea that has become prevalent in India over the past few years. Hansda Shekhar, a Jharkhand-based writer, found copies of his short stories collection, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, seized. The government has accused him of obscenity and of portraying women of the Santhal tribe in a bad light.

In all this chaos, my recent trip to Auroville reminded me there is still hope. This is the 50th year of its existence and celebrations are on in a big way. Several books will be launched including *Auroville: City for the Future* by Anu Majumdar. Aurobindo, the Indian visionary and leader of India's independence movement, sought refuge in Pondicherry. Mirra Alfassa, the wife of a French politician, who later came to be known as the 'Mother' joined him and was instrumented in the development of Auroville. The place was set up as an attempt to forge a new humanity, where people can find an inner knowledge that empowers them. As Prime Minister Modi unveils his plans for smart cities in our country, Auroville can serve as a model.

Disappointed with governments, many have started their own initiatives here. Mumbai-based, Women Empowerment

(WE) is one such group. Despite the cut in funds, NGOs and individuals continue to make efforts to improve our environment. Recently, Hema Malini's Synergy brought Indian classical dance and Georgian folk together. The National Ballet Sukhishvili and the Vaibhav Arekar Group performed in Chennai and other places across the nation to help create positive energy in these difficult times. Indian feminist, author and publisher, Urvashi Butalia, who established Zubaan Books is another such individual. Butalia is also the author of *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. This year's Goethe Medal was presented to her.

Sadly, some dedicated personalities passed away. We lost Eunice D'Souza—poet, English literature teacher, novelist and critic. Her last collection, *Learn from the Almond Leaf* was published earlier in the year. Eminent classical singer Ustad Sayeeduddin Dagar, who kept the Dhrupad tradition of Indian classical music alive, also left us. Considered as one of the oldest style of classical singing of North Indian music, Dhrupad was known during the period of Tansen. Tom Alter, the film and theatre actor died of cancer. He acted in Richard Attenborough's masterpiece, *Gandhi*, and in the film, *Sardar*, he played Lord Mountbatten. In his theatrical outings, Tom enacted the role of Mirza Ghalib, the great Urdu poet. I recalled the time, a few years ago, he also helped me in presenting poetry of the Sufi, mystic, Shah Abdul Latif.

The humble elephants in India are also going through a bad time. Hundreds of captive creatures are tortured, overworked, starved and continue to be slaves for their owners. They are exploited commercially and often used for temple ceremonies. Fortunately, Elephant Haven, a project of Wildlife SOS, created in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, rehabilitates these severely-abused elephants. In these grim times, it's hard to find places of refuge. In Mumbai, even temples and churches are no longer peaceful. My simple solution is to spend time with children—many are still pure and have a sense of humour. But, that too, may change with the negative exposure and overuse of technology.

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

Poetry corner

REFUGEE OR MIGRANT

By Ananya S Guha

When you are an immigrant
It is status, illegal
When you are refugee,
It is non status status quo
You don't know what you are
Who you are;
You are left to fend from bins
Pick newspapers;
The homes that shelter you totter,
Torn plastics cover your head
You are migrant
Not refugee, how dare
You or others call you one?
You are Rohingyas
Not Myanmarese
At best you are Bangladeshi
Who also are immigrants- illegal
So you see it is full circle;
This debate cause- effect- cause
But you are not refugee
You have no legal sanction
For such an honoured position;
In the meantime scrape dirt
And weep.
Nations sign treaties
You sign on sands of time.

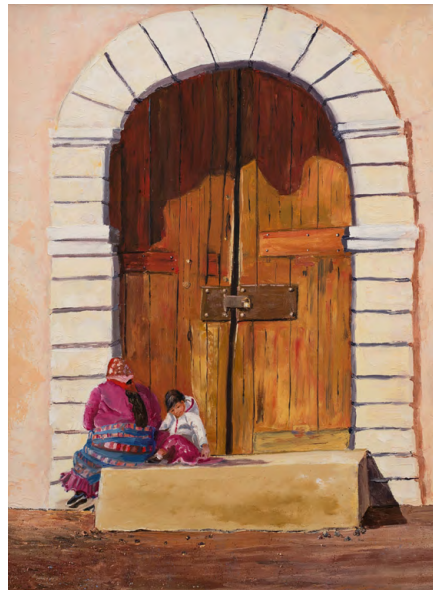
THE LIFE AT DOORS AND WINDOWS

By Meenakshi Mohan

THE DOORS:

Greetings and goodbyes
A few tears and some separation anxiety
Instant laughter and exhilaration,
Pretend play and make believe world
Finger paintings and clay sculptures,
The Michelangelos and Picassos of tomorrow,
The "once upon a time," and "what if games,"
Explorations and wide-eyed amazement.
An Einstein may yet spring.
Imagination, stories, songs and rhythm,
Cooking with smeared flour and chocolates,
Chuckles, giggles, worrisome laughter,
A Children's World -
Nurturing, growth, and promises of tomorrow,
A place full of wonders,
And many, many doors, yet to explore . . .

This poem reflects my imagery of the same day visit to a preschool and a Senior Center. Doors and Windows depict the journey of life we all go through.



We have come to thy door,
Lighten our path,
The Author of our destiny

THE WINDOWS:

One door after which the road ends,
Some sad, some stark, expressionless gazes,
Blank.
Looking out through many
windows of life-time reminiscences –
Childhood pranks, first kiss, and
high school prom,
The wedding outfits, and honeymoon,
Choosing names of children,
The first home,
The family vacation –
Now, confined –
Home for seniors,
Wheelchairs and walkers,
The rattle of medicine carts.
The weary nurses with charts,
Odor of antiseptics, Lysol and, withered lives,
Helpless, incapable, powerless,
Thinking perhaps,
Meaningless words,
Where life stands still.
Windows, yes!
But, where all the doors shut
One-by-one.

Dr. Meenakshi Mohan is an educator, author and artist. She had a solo exhibit of her works for the whole month of May in the Potomac, Maryland area in USA.



FIRST FOOTSTEPS IN INDIA

By Adam Yamey

I am a contrarian.

When my school friends began smoking at the age of fourteen, I did not, simply because they did. Likewise, when I finished taking my A-levels in Summer 1970 many of my fellow pupils, celebrated the end of the A-levels by travelling overland to India. Those were the days that buses such as 'The Magic Bus' travelled through places like Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, to India, often seeking a 'guru' or similar. Because everyone else went, I did not. Now, I realise that visiting India at that time would have been even more special than it is now because the country was then far less subject to outside influences than it is today. It was romance that finally got me to India, and that was long after I had passed my A-Levels and graduated at university!



After a Christmas spent with good friends in their large cold house in rural Buckinghamshire, my recently wedded wife and I set off for India in late 1993, where our marriage was to be celebrated once again, but with a Hindu ceremony instead of a Registry Office formality. It was to be the first of many visits to India – a country about which, at that time, I was very ignorant.

We flew on a Sri Lankan airline. In those days, the airline provided generous amounts of tasty food, which, in contrast to most other airline food, seemed very flavoursome and home-made. In addition, we were plied with as much alcohol as we could manage!

As we flew into the dawn and began descending towards Colombo, I peered out of the window and to my great delight saw what looked like an endless forest of palm trees. I had never seen so many together before. Before this flight, the palm trees that I knew best were the scraggly specimens outside St Johns Wood Underground station near Lord's Cricket Ground in London.

We had to spend a few hours waiting for a connection in Colombo's heavily guarded

airport – we had landed during a civil war. During that stay, my wife managed to get something in her eye, and this caused her to shed large tears. I remember that all of the other travellers in the lounge, almost all South Asians, looked at me accusingly. I suspected that they were wondering what the nasty 'white man' had done to upset their lovely Indian 'sister'.

This brought to my mind the earlier stages of my 'courtship'. My future wife and I used to make frequent use of a corner

grocery shop run by some Pakistani men, who used to chat to her in Hindustani. We could see that, at first, they were concerned about their Indian customer's welfare when she entered accompanied by me. After quite a while, when they realised our situation, their suspicions about me evaporated, and then they became very friendly with me.

When we eventually landed in Madras, as it was then, my wife warned me that Indian Customs could be awkward occasionally (even though our baggage was quite 'innocent'). In 1993, many goods, which were then unavailable in India but are now common-place in Indian shops, were subject to duty. Fate was on our side. Just as we approached the customs inspector, my wife had a nose-bleed. The possibly squeamish customs official waved us past as quickly as he could without even glancing at our baggage.

It was late at night when our domestic flight from Madras arrived at Bangalore. In those days, passengers walked across the tarmac to the terminal building at the old HAL Airport. When, later, we used to fly into Bangalore's old airport on international flights, we would enter the immigration hall, which used to be

open to the outside. Stray, ownerless dogs mingled with the passengers. Even today in Bangalore's 'state of the art' Kempe Gowda Airport, it is not unusual to share the departure lounge with tiny birds that flutter around unconcernedly, and without concerning anyone.

On my first visit, the family was waiting to greet us. We piled into a Maruti van, and headed off into Bangalore, stopping on the way at a shop, which, to my surprise, was still open during the earliest hours of the morning. By now, I had been deprived of meaningful sleep for more than twenty-four hours, and everything was beginning to seem rather surreal.

We arrived at my wife's family home at some god-forsaken hour, and disembarked from the van. I noticed that there was a garland hanging above the front door, a 'toran'. The door was closed, quite sensibly at two in the morning. We gathered outside it, but did not enter. Had someone lost the keys, I wondered. Was there no one indoors to let us in? These and other questions flowed through my, by now, befuddled mind.

We waited in the warm night air, and then it happened. I heard an enormous bang behind me. I shuddered. Was someone beginning to shoot at us? I dared not turn around to look at first. When I did, I realised all was well. Someone had just used an axe to split a coconut to provide an auspicious beginning to our stay in India.

This was the first of many things that have surprised and delighted me about India, a land, which I have grown to love and respect, a land where the unexpected must be expected.

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.



Film Review

A BRIEF COMMENT ON 'VICTORIA AND ABDUL'

By Charles Sarvan

Looking back at its great empire, the "greatest" (that is, the biggest) the world has ever seen, Great Britain has a special place for India, as witness the many books, novels and films produced and 'consumed'. Among recent films is 'Viceroy's House', the palace in India occupied by Lord Mountbatten and his wife, plus staff and servants numbering about two hundred. Films set in imperial-ruled India bring back the taste and scent of past power, of grandeur and opulence. The word "kitsch" which has entered the English language denotes bad taste; often the result of an excess that leads to cheapening or vulgarising. 'Victoria and Abdul' teeters on the brink of kitsch but is redeemed in some measure by the superb acting of Judi Dench, and by touches of humour verging on satire. Produced by Stephen Frears, the film is based on a book by London-based Shrabani Basu, the result of research undertaken by her.

The rest of the royal court, from the Crown Prince down to the servants, disliked and resented Abdul Karim intensely. In the film version of events, palace staff threaten to walk out en masse if Victoria bestowed a knighthood on him: a person of colour who had come as a servant would, thereafter, be placed higher than many others in the royal household, and would have to be addressed as "Sir". As soon as the Queen died (1901), Abdul and his family were evicted from the accommodation granted by the Queen and deported back to India. (Though decades younger than the Queen, Abdul died a few years later.) All letters between them were burnt and the Queen's daughter, Beatrice, painstakingly erased all reference to Abdul in Victoria's journals. The attempt was to wipe out those near-fifteen years; and indeed his very existence.

The sense of insult and affront leading to hatred can be explained on lines of class but

bestly niggers with us". Indians were required to bow obsequiously whenever a European passed by, and carriages raced with arrogant recklessness down streets with servants running behind them.

The great shoe question of the 1830s was whether natives could appear before the Governor General without removing their shoes. Physical suffering included the capricious brutality meted out to servants by English men and women [...] Emily Eden records that an indigo-planter hunted natives with his bull-dog [...]" End of quote.

Looking beyond the time-frame of this film, after the Amritsar massacre of 1919, there's General Dyer's notorious 'crawling order' by which all Indians passing through the street where an Englishman had been attacked had to do so crawling on their bellies. Still later in history, contemptuous Churchill found it "nause-



Twenty-four year old Mohamed Abdul Karim (1863-1909), and another fellow-Indian arrived in England in 1887 as servants to Queen Victoria. That they were the only two Indian representatives at the royal court is appropriate. 'The Indian Revolt' (long known inappropriately as "the Indian Mutiny") of 1857 had been crushed and imperial rule re-asserted. Abdul was tall and handsome, and the Queen took an immediate liking to him, an affection she did not attempt to conceal. A good part of his attraction was that he gave her insights and glimpses, into a completely different country and culture of which she happened to be "Empress". Victoria bestowed benefits and privileges on him, and called him her Munshi (teacher). During the almost fifteen years Abdul Karim served the Queen, he was awarded the CIE and CVO. The Queen was more than four decades older than Abdul; isolated by the role she played; lonely in life, her beloved Albert having died in 1861. Victoria's affection, trust and reliance on Abdul can be seen as maternal, if not grandmotherly.

far more because Abdul was not white. He was simply one of those "natives" ruled by England, plucked from obscurity and meant to be a servant. To sketch-in something of that context; the reality of that time, I quote extracts from an article of mine which appeared in Wasafiri, London, many years ago (No 26, Autumn 1997):

"India was 'the Jewel' in the imperial crown not only because of the precious stones which still adorn the British crown, but more because of the vast wealth drained off from the sub-continent. Whatever the pretence of 'the white man's [moral] burden', and the civilising mission, the reality was forcible control, exploitation and suffering, of which humiliation was a major component."

In the 1840s, increasing contempt led to the term 'nigger' replacing 'native'. Charles Acland tells of a holiday-expedition to the Nilgiri Hills. The local Rajah had courteously offered to accompany them, but the party didn't want "the

ating to see Mr Gandhi [...], striding half naked up the steps of the viceregal palace". The raw truth of imperialism – racist and exploitative, vicious and degrading – is politely pointed at but not confronted in the film. 'Victoria and Abdul' is interesting for what it depicts; significant for what it leaves untold.

Shrabani Basu is owed thanks for rescuing Mohamed Abdul Karim from oblivion; for restoring him, however much on the margins, to history.

With thanks to Liebetraut Sarvan for feedback,

Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan obtained his M.Phil and PhD degrees from Univ. of London. His specialisation was Commonwealth Literature. Now retired, he lives in Berlin, Germany with his German-born wife, a published poet.



WOMEN'S RIGHTS

By Migel Jayasinghe

A right is, in Western systems of jurisprudence and law, a 'legal or moral entitlement to do or refrain from doing something or to obtain or refrain from obtaining an action, thing or recognition in civil society.' It is only in modern societies that equal rights are accorded to all citizens universally. In antiquity, rights were unequal and hierarchical. For example, the monarch was held to have a divine right to rule with absolute power over his/her subjects. Parents had greater power over their children and the children had little or none. Married women were regarded as no more than chattels belonging to their husbands.

Even in the modern industrialized nations of the West, there has been an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women.. The movement that came to be known as 'feminism' in the mid-20th century came into being as a reaction against the persistence of this bias. However, precursors to this movement can be traced as far back as the end of the 18th century. The Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft is identified as one of the founding daughters (mothers?) of feminism. In 1792 she wrote the philosophical treatise 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'. A year before that in 1791, the now almost forgotten Frenchwoman, Olympe de Gouges had published 'Declaration on the Rights of Women', only two years after the French Revolution. What is thought to be the first scientific society for women was founded in Middelburg, in the north of Holland in 1785.

In the 19th century, women began to agitate for the right to vote alongside men who had fought for universal suffrage. The slogan 'one man one vote' came to include 'one woman one vote' too. Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst were two British leaders of this movement, while in the US, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony led the fight for Women's suffrage.

In the USA, national women's suffrage did not come until the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1920 while in 1918 the British Parliament finally passed a bill allowing women over the age of 30 to vote. In 1928 the age limit was lowered to 21.

Long after the abolition of slavery in the mid-19th century, the US constitutional declaration that 'all men are born equal' did not extend to the 'black' population of the country. Note the reference to 'men', although of course the statement was not deliberately meant to exclude women. Such biased terminology did not escape the criticism of feminists in later years. In comparison, Australia excluded their Aboriginal people from the franchise until the late 1960s.

The historical 'divine right of kings' was curtailed by the Magna Carta (1215) where the king of England was required to be bound by the law of the land although the monarch could not be tried in his/her courts. This is enshrined in the principle 'the king/queen can do no wrong'. In 1689, the Bill of Rights, again in England, declared the supremacy of the Parliament granting the citizens inalienable civil and political rights. In France following the French Revolution ('liberte, egalite, fraternite'), Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (1789) spelled out individual and collective rights of the citizen. However, it did not include any mention of women's rights. An equivalent United States Bill of Rights was enshrined in the first ten amendments of the United States Constitution (1789/1791).



We would not have an equivalent document until after the Second World War when the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). This is an over-arching set of standards by which Governments, organisations and individuals would measure their behaviour towards each other.

The Random House Dictionary defines feminism as '1) The doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men, 2) An ongoing movement for the attainment of such rights for women.' (1987: 708). As someone writing on the topic in 1992 stated:

The demand for equality between the sexes is a demand for justice. Essentially this means that the rights of women must be protected with the same vigour that is expended on the rights of men. In the economic institution this translates into equal pay and promotional opportunities. In the realm of politics it means equal treatment before the law as well as appointment, or election to all positions of authority.

In the USA, the National Organization for Women (NOW) inaugurated in 1966, with its Political Action Committee (PAC) has campaigned for women's rights to include affirmative action and reproductive rights of young women. They put forward candidates for the House of Representatives and the Senate on the feminist agenda defying conventional political advice telling them to stick to safe subjects like education and social security. NOW/PAC candidates won with strong views on abortion rights, hate crimes, violence against women, health care and lesbian and gay rights. An important piece of legislation that NOW has fought for, but has not been made law yet, is the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Essentially it states that equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex. Roughly, the history of feminism has been identified over a period separated into three waves. The first wave during the 19th and early 20th centuries in the UK and the US, concentrated on claiming equality in property rights and in opposition to chattel marriage and the ownership of women and children. Towards the end of this period efforts were concentrated on gaining political power (suffrage), but also sexual, reproductive and economic rights.

The second wave concentrated more on social and structural equality and gained anti-discrimination measures through legislation. Carol Hanisch's famous slogan 'The Personal is Political' belongs to this period. Bell Hooks is another well-known representative exponent of such an extension of the feminist creed.

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels.- sex, race, and class to name a few – and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.

The third wave of feminism is said to have begun in the 1990s as a response to the backlash against initiatives taken during the second wave and is continuing apace. While there still are grumbings that a 'glass ceiling' exists in business corporations and women's promotions to senior positions are blocked in practice, whether consciously or otherwise, women's march towards equality appears irreversible.

Migel Jayasinghe is the author of 'Solace in Verse' (2013) SBPRA. He is also a retired Occupational Psychologist in the UK.



Film Review

THREE FILMS: VICEROY'S HOUSE, BLACK PRINCE AND VICTORIA & ABDUL

By Chaand Chazelle

In the past couple of months, three films were released with Indian content on the 70th anniversary of Indian independence. This is the first time that documentaries about the Partition of India in 1947 were shown on BBC Television & broadcast on Radio-4 etc. The world needs to know the truth about the tyranny of the colonial past and its impact today.

Viceroy's House: directed by Gurinder Chadha focuses on the partition of India and the aftermath which followed the Indian independence on 15th August 1947, overseen by the Last viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, who was ill- advised, ill- prepared, ill-equipped and not qualified for the job to which he was hurriedly given. The film reveals that it was not the last minute ill thought out plan suggested by Mohammed Ali Jinnah (who led a cushy Bohemian life in sunny Hampstead) to create a homeland for the Indian Muslims but that this plan was hatched in London by a judge who had never been to India. So the British used their age-old strategy of -Divide and Rule, which resulted in a death toll of one million Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs and ten million people made homeless. One of the tragedies of wars around the world is that masses of women get raped, be it in Bosnia, Bangladesh, Algeria, Congo or Korea etc.

The story revolves around two young lovers, a Hindu man and a Muslim girl, whose relationship was frowned upon although love has no religion. It is a well directed film, good camera work and well executed tale. But the ending is too sickly sweet for my taste. It is not believable that in the chaos and mayhem when neighbour is killing neighbour ruthlessly and brutally that the young couple could find each other. It would have been a stronger ending if they had not been united. The reality was that- 1000s of people were massacred and separated from their dear ones. However, it's a film worth watching and Chadha deserves credit for making it.



Black Prince: is produced by Brillstein entertainment based in Los Angeles. The story is about Maharaja Dalip Singh, the last Maharaja of Punjab, who was only six

months old when his father Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in March 1839. Dalhousie, the governor of Punjab at



the time had his eyes firmly fixed on the Koh-i-Noor diamond and the huge treasure of the Punjab estate. The less I say about this film the better. The script, casting, direction etc everything seems diabolical. Dalip Singh was only 13-14 years of age when he was brought to Britain. But the actor who plays him seems to be in his 20s. He almost remains the same at 55, save a bit of dusting of talcum powder on his moustache. He is wooden, uninspiring and unconvincing throughout. His English accent was uncomfortably jarring on my eardrums. Strangely his servant 'Aroor Singh' who was an absolutely illiterate man speaks better English than the Maharaja. The film is badly directed and a lot of time wasted on the infighting within the Punjab province at that time

The producers must have imagined that the casting of Shabana Azmi might just bring some Kudos and publicity to the film. Although she is a wonderful actress she fails to bring to life the character of Ranji Jindan who was exiled by the British when Dalip was a young child. Her lines- "I've seen these cups before..." & "No pakoras with tea...?" Really silly lines! Kavi Raz's Screenplay is pretty weak. All in all this film fails to impress.

Victoria & Abdul: I went to watch it with huge expectations, but didn't find it all that instructive or alluring. For me Stephen Frears, a clever film director, falls short of his usual brilliance. The first 20 minutes feel like a banal comedy, purely enacted for cheap laughs which cheapened a meaningful story, which should have been informative and essentially with some substance. It should have shown that a powerful British Monarch could be tender and humane towards a humble Indian servant.

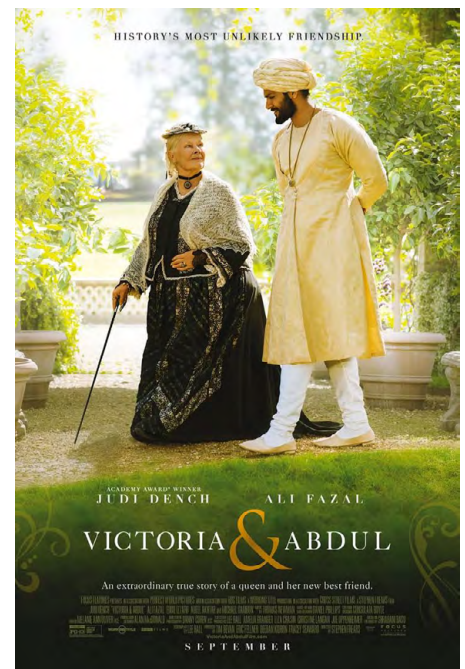
The two servants transported to England from Agra are the focus of some mirth; A tall one is not available, so a 'Shorty' is dispatched. That 'short one' played by Adeel Akhtar was the only one who injected a dose of reality and reason, unpalatable to a British audience

perhaps but nevertheless true depiction of those times. I am sure this was offensive to some of the audience who left. When said- 'Bloody Empire and Barbarians etc'

Judy Dench of course is absolutely superb, she captures the spirit of the character and is convincing in making us believe in her genuine affection for Abdul. Nobody seems to know what 'Munshi' means!! Although he teaches the queen how to read and write Urdu, a Munshi is never a 'Teacher' but a 'Ledger Keeper'. The producers should have consulted a Linguist! It also seems implausible that Abdul seemed to have such easy access to her Majesty at all times, while even Bertie did not!

As soon as the queen dies, Bertie brutally throws Abdu Karim out of the royal household which is already hostile to Abdul's presence. He burns every scrap of paper and all the letters or notes written by Queen Victoria to Abdul. The Prince wanted to make obsolete the presence of Karim from the life that he shared with the Queen. Back in Agra, showing Abdul kissing the feet of Queen Victoria's statue seems far-fetched to me. Also presenting his wife and her mother in Burqas is to ridicule them. They could have been easily left out and do not add anything to the story. Still it's an entertaining film, worth watching even for its small contribution to history. I do like Frears' attempt to expose and mildly ridicule the so called Royal protocol.

But maybe these three films have paved the way to a new production which will reveal the truth of the colonial past.



Chaand Chazelle, who lives in London is a successful Writer/Producer/Director/Actor and Broadcaster. Her poems have been published and she is now working on a novel. The title of her new screenplay is Stolen Goods.



CONFLUENCE

London Diary

ALLAHABAD- CITY OF POETS, PILGRIMS AND PRIME MINISTERS

By Jay Visvadeva

Lalit Mohan Joshi's 'Sanniddhya', programme held recently at the Nehru Centre, brought Allahabad to life. This event invoked the spirit of the pilgrims, poets and politicians who once straddled across it.

Dr Kusum Pant Joshi, vivid historical analysis of the city's ancient past through centuries of dynastic rule and into the present day Allahabad was much evident as the discussion which followed proved so in the making it as one of the great cities of India.



A. S. Rajan, Minister (Coordination),
Indian High Commission,

Although, Allahabad is one of the oldest cities in India, it used to be known by its original name Prayag, or "place of offerings", well referenced in the Vedas— which comes from its position at the Sangam (confluence) of the Ganga, Yamuna and Sarasvati rivers, popularly known as the Triveni, a meeting point of the rivers which has played a pivotal role in every Hindu life as one of the holiest of pilgrimage places of India and the place for The Kumbh Mela. This is where the wishes for a good omen and cleansing of one's sins, become a circle of life.

In the 6th century BC, Gautam Buddha came to 'Prayag' and it was here that a Buddhist gathering was held every five years in the reign of Harshvardhan. It is reported that Guru Nanak and later Guru Tej Bahadur who strongly resisted conversion to Islam during Mughal rule, also visited Allahabad in the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb.



Yavar Abbas Saheb and
Lalit Mohan Joshi light the lamp

Allahabad had witnessed ravages of time throughout its long history with the succession of empires and dynastic rule including Maurya, Gupta, Kushan, Kanauj, Mughal as well as Marathas before succumbing to the British under the East India Company and later by the Empire itself.

However, at the turn of the 20th century Allahabad became a revolutionary centre, a home to thousands of Satyagrahis. The city was a witness to many important events in India's freedom struggle such as the emergence of the first Indian National Congress in 1885



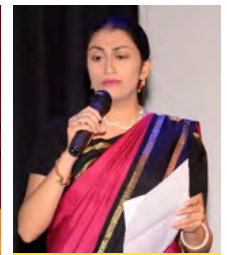
and the beginning of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence movement in 1920.

After much turmoil, the British Empire came to an end in 1947 and India became

independent, following which Allahabad gave India seven prime ministers who either came from or were connected to Allahabad and included Jawahar Lal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, Gulzarilal Nanda, Vishwanath Pratap Singh and Chandra Shekhar.



Mamtha Gupta Sings



Uttara Joshi Sings

Lalit Mohan Joshi who convened the evening spoke about Hindi literature and the writers and poets who made Allahabad their home specially the Chhayavadi poets New Romantics—amongst whom were Jai Shankar Prasad, Mahadevi Verma, Sumitranandan Pant and Surya Kant Tripathi 'Nirala' all considered pillars of this tradition. Prasad's Kamayani, Varma's Nihar, Bachchan's, Madhushala are all considered important pieces of works. However, this poetic tradition did not last long as it gave way to a more social and nationalistic approach.

The evening included songs and poetry of some of the poets .

Uttara Joshi sang two poems with passion which included Mahadevi Verma , "Dhire Dhire Mere Deepak Jal" and Harvanshrai Bachchan's, Pyar Ke path me jalan bhi to madhur hai".

Mamta Gupta sang ghazal of Firaq." 'Jane kya baat hai kis cheez ki yaad aati hai shaam ko roz meri tabiyat ghabrati hai'

Akbar Allahabadi. had an original style and was a trendsetter in humorous poetry for his times. The ghazal "Hungama Hai Kyuun Barpa, Thodi Sii Jo Pii Lii Hai", became famous through Ghulam Ali's rendition.

Jay Visvadeva is the Chief Executive of London based Sama Arts Network