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About Us

Culture matters. And it *has* to matter in India, with its diverse languages, dialects, regions and communities; its rich range of voices from the mainstream and the peripheries.

This was the starting point for *Guftugu* (www.guftugu.in), a quarterly e-journal of poetry, prose, conversations, images and videos which the Indian Writers' Forum runs as one of its programmes. The aim of the journal is to publish, with universal access online, the best works by Indian cultural practitioners in a place where they need not fear intimidation or irrational censorship, or be excluded by the profit demands of the marketplace. Such an inclusive platform sparks lively dialogue on literary and artistic issues that demand discussion and debate.

The guiding spirit of the journal is that culture must have many narratives from many different voices – from the established to the marginal, from the conventional to the deeply experimental.

To sum up our vision:

Whatever our language, genre or medium, we will freely use our imagination to produce what we see as meaningful for our times. We insist on our freedom to speak and debate without hindrance, both to each other and to our readers and audience. Together, but in different voices, we will interpret and reinterpret the past, our common legacy of contesting narratives; and debate on the present through our creative work.

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From the Editors The Power of Many Tongues



Image courtesy [NDTV](#)

As in our daily lives, *Guftugu* too faces the challenge of living up to the rich possibilities of our multi-lingual cultural practice. English helps as a “link” — but the daily task is to engage with as many languages as possible, and understand, and enjoy, if in a limited way, the plural linguistic cultures in India.

From the first issue of *Guftugu*, we have included translations from languages across the country, from Malayalam, Tamil and Marathi to Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. We have included the original texts, at least for poetry. We would certainly like to go beyond the languages in the arbitrarily conceived Eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution, something U.R. Ananthamurthy always wanted scrapped. His point was that it creates a hierarchy among languages; a hierarchy intensified in recent years by the equally arbitrary recognition of some languages as “classical”.

After the recent revelations of the People’s Linguistic Survey of India pioneered by Ganesh Devy, we know that even the division of India into linguistic states was more an act of the State’s will, rather than a response to popular need. There are dozens of languages spoken in each state; still, one language is given prominence to the point of hegemony in the affairs of the state, as well as in education. Languages are not just clusters of letters and words, but *cultures*. Unless we recognise them as cultures and strive to understand them, we do not do justice to our legacy: what Aijaz

Ahmad describes as “multilingualism and polyglot fluidity” when defining the central feature of Indian literatures.

India is said to possess a translating consciousness. Yet translation in India faces several problems, and this is particularly true of translation between Indian languages. Globalisation, and the cultural amnesia it imposes on countries like ours, marginalises this important activity. We are becoming more and more monolingual, at least in terms of linguistic competence. Inter-language translation requires competence in at least two Indian languages, including some knowledge of the regional cultures and literary traditions that inform the texts. Despite the level playing field supposedly available for inter-language translators, the field, in reality, is not always that “level”. Meenakshi Mukherjee, speaking of her experience of translating Alka Saraogi’s Hindi novels into Bangla, pointed out how Bangla resists translations from other Indian languages, including Hindi; even while translations from Bangla are plentiful in Hindi and other Indian languages. In the past, vertical translations — those from a hegemonic language like Persian or English to a non-hegemonic one — were more common than horizontal translations — between two non-hegemonic languages. The case is not very different even now.

Again, literary translation in India is mostly confined to certain genres such as the novel. This choice is dictated more by commercial interest than social or aesthetic concern. In some languages, poetry, drama, discursive prose or the short story may well be doing better than the novel. This creates gaps and unevenness in our understanding of other literatures. Truly contemporary works rarely get translated, as it takes time for a new work written in an Indian language to gain national notice, unlike a work written in English. Only works produced by certain movements sometimes get translated as they often appear in academic curricula, or have immediate political relevance. There is a dearth of competent translators in each language from many other languages. To take the case of Malayalam, direct translations into Malayalam happen only from Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Tamil and Kannada. Even here, excepting Hindi, it is often just one or two translators who do the job; and often, they are without followers. Our universities do next to nothing to create or upgrade skills in languages other than the mother tongues. This means we fall back on mediated, indirect translations, and end up using English versions (or at times, Hindi versions) which may be far removed from the original, and may well erase cultural markers. There is also a scarcity of journals in languages which promote inter-language translations. Publishers in many languages too are indifferent to them, and do not pay sufficient attention to quality editing. Whatever little translation happens here is also accidental, hardly schematic. The result, again, is unevenness of impressions. There are few impact/reception studies of the original works to ensure their reception in another language.

Translation is an attempt to retrieve our people’s histories — often lost, or distorted, because of colonial interventions. We need translation to resituate their past, reassess their present and grasp their modes of imagination and creativity. And this, no doubt, is best done in people’s own languages.

K. Satchidanandan

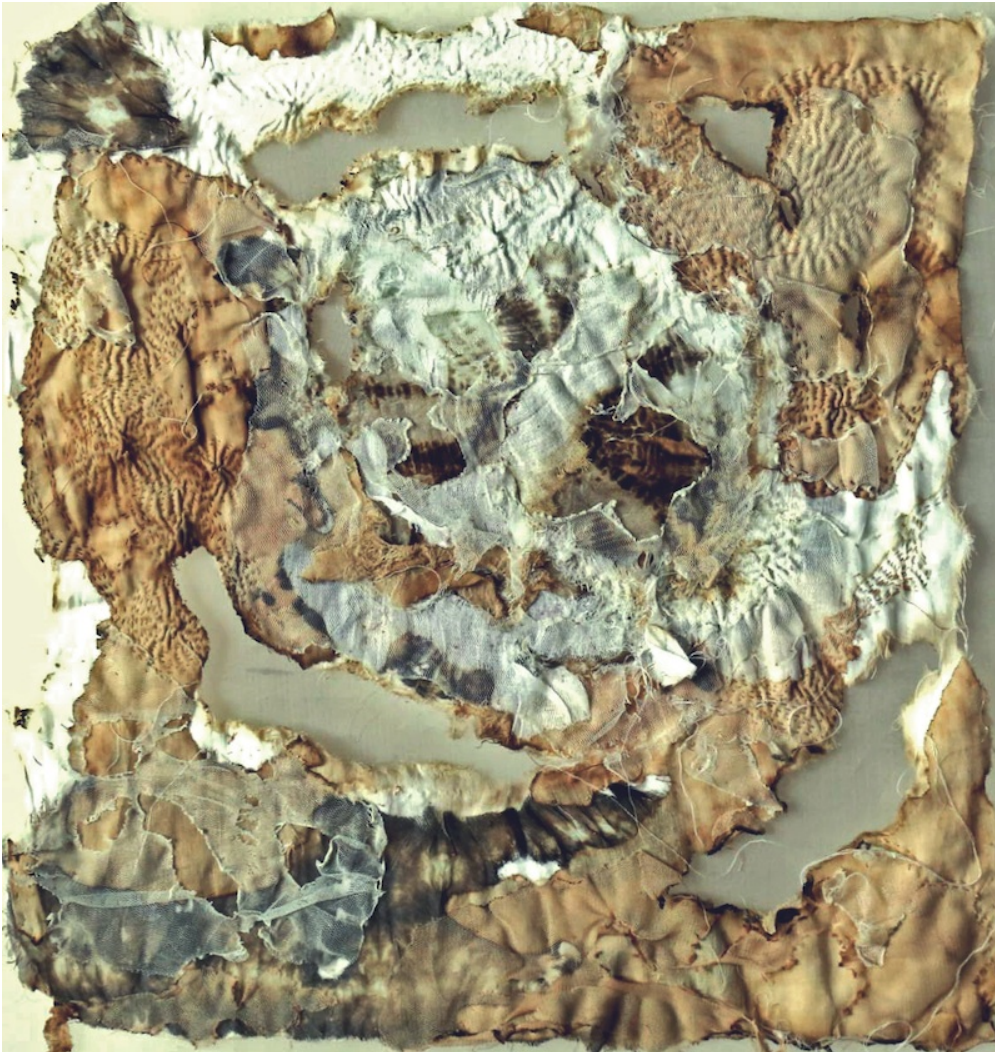
Githa Hariharan

October 2016

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Krishna Mohan Shrimali

Understanding the Idea of Indias



Gopika Nath, 'Fragments of the Whole', 2013. Photograph: Amitabha Bhattacharya

The long history of India is replete with examples of conquerors who established their authority over the conquered by refashioning old monuments and symbols. Quite often, this is done to humiliate the vanquished; mostly, it is to serve one's own political interests. The pillars of Emperor Asoka occupy a distinctive place in the history of Indian monuments. It is, by now, fairly well established that the emperor made use of many pre-existing pillars, which may have been the remains of a "pillar cult", for the dissemination of his own message, dhamma vijaya: conquest through dhamma, or righteous conquest. The famous Shore Temple of the Pallavas (7th to 8th centuries) at Mahabalipuram near Chennai was originally dedicated to Vishnu. Later, it was converted into a Shaiva temple.¹ Similarly, one of the ayaka stambhas of the Buddhist stupa at Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), which constituted the most important architectural characteristic of this Buddhist monument, was removed and installed in the neighbouring grand temple as Amaralingeshvara — a Shiva linga — by the thirteenth century Kakatiya monarch. During the long-drawn political struggle from the sixth to the eighth centuries between the Pallavas and the Chalukyas, a victor every generation would lift some monumental remain as a war trophy, and install it at a prominent place in his own empire as a symbol of his victorious power.

Sometimes, he would even engrave his own record on the famous monument inside the enemy's territory. This served as a perpetual reminder of the humiliation inflicted on the adversary. Such examples of transformation and/or distortion of religious monuments and remains can always be multiplied.² With such a long history of "theological iconoclasm", the "temple desecration and destruction" by Ghaznavids, Ghorids and Mughals from the tenth century onward can be located in historical perspective. The wanton destruction cannot be denied. But locating it within a larger historiographical context, Richard Eaton undertook an extensive documentation and mapping of as many as 80 instances of temple desecration between 1192 and 1760 CE. Arguing that the phenomenon of desecration was not indiscriminate, he pointed out that it occurred in those cases where it was strategically imperative — insofar as it happened in the territories of powers that were in the way of the state-building exercise.

Temple desecrations also occurred when Hindu patrons of prominent temples committed acts of treason or disloyalty to the Indo-Muslim states they served... These patterns also suggest points of continuity with Indian practices that had become customary well before the thirteenth century. Such points of continuity in turn call into serious question the sort of civilisational divide between India's "Hindu" and "Muslim" periods first postulated in British colonial historiography and subsequently replicated in both Pakistani and Hindu nationalist schools.³

There is the grand saga, without doubt, of tremendously dynamic syncretistic Indian mythology, as well as of gory narratives of sectarian turmoil. Notwithstanding the complete absence of Shiva in the Rigveda, the earliest literary text of India (ca. 1800 to ca. 1000 BCE), the transformation of the Rigvedic Rudra into Shiva, and subsequently into Maheshvar and Mahadeva; the mutation of the almost non-existent Vishnu (in the Rigveda) into Lakshmi-Narayana, which goes on to become a strong catalyst in absorbing numerous tribal cults through the avatar mechanism; the prehistoric fertility goddesses (not necessarily "mothers") evolving into numerous Ammas, and finally emerging as the Great "Mother Goddess", are just a few snippets of dynamism. The material milieu, varying ecological settings, corresponding social transformations and, of course, constantly evolving political structures constituted multiple determinants of this dynamism through several millennia.⁴

No less spectacular are the well-documented discourse of religious madness inherent in inter- and intra-sectarian rivalries; inter-religious acrimonies sometimes leading to physical violence and even extermination of adversaries; and humiliating acts of desecrating sacred spaces, even if rationalised in terms of political expediency or mere continuation of Indian practices. Despite this saga, there is also the great space that has always been accorded to voices of dissent and alternative visions. No wonder Amartya Sen could postulate the perennial "Argumentative Indian", whose unthreatened existence may be located even in the Rigveda. Though Indra was supreme therein, there were plenty who ridiculed his alleged exploits. The famous "Frog Hymn" of the Rigveda, which compared Brahmins with croaking frogs, was also an early attempt to ridicule the Vedas and their reciters. There is a long litany, even in the Sanskrit textual tradition, that questioned the authority of the Vedas.⁵ One of the cardinal contributions of the Jainas has been their exposition of the Syaadvada, a direct and potent onslaught on all notions of the absoluteness of the Truth, especially that which is enshrined in Vedic traditions. The Jaina view focused on the relativity, as well as infinite-sidedness, of Truth — what it saw as ananta-dharmaatkameva-tattvam. This deeply respectful treatment of multifarious

alternative point of views was intellectual ahimsa of the highest order. That it was not lip service is indicated by 1500-year long debates among Jainas of different hues on the question of women's potential to achieve salvation.⁶

The Idea of Indias

This long and undulating history of the formation of religions in India may lead to the impression that the life of common people revolved around religion. The ground reality is quite different. Even in the Rigveda, when people of different clans and tribes invoked scores of forces of nature as their divinities, material concerns were never forgotten. Signs of rank materialism are evident in demands made to almost all deities — demands for cattle, the chief form of wealth at the time; horses; and sons — for patriarchy seems to be quite pronounced. The millennia-long histories of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent show that they have been known through several identities; and sometimes all these identities at the same time. Mlecchas in the Shatapatha Braahmana (ca. 800 – ca. 700 BCE), for example, were thus identified because they had subterranean burials of a different shape, and spoke a language different from the “Sanskrit” speakers whom we generally tend to identify as “Aryans”.

At the launch of the Linguistic Survey of Punjab under the joint venture of the Punjab Government's Language Department and the Punjabi University in Patiala, noted litterateur Professor Hazari Prasad Dwivedi drew attention to the perils of naming linguistic identities. His argument was that very often such identities are not only thrust on people by outsiders, but also in a somewhat contemptuous manner. Such instances include Bengalis calling the language of the people of Bihar khotaa bhaashaa or some people in Bihar identifying Maithili as chhikaa-chhikii.⁷ We may, in this context, remind ourselves of how some tribal groups mentioned in the Rigveda were castigated by “Sanskrit” speakers as mridhrvaachiis — speakers of false/corrupt language. The exercise of establishing identities has been quite onerous. Getting to know self-perceptions is all the more problematic. Modes in which people have been situated include the ethnic, linguistic, regional, cultural, sectarian, and so on. Diversities in each such label have been recently expounded by Professor Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya by retrieving “voices from India's ancient texts”.⁸

There are two points, however, that need to be underlined. First, considerable emphasis on the so-called “regional” identities seems to lead to their subsuming other identities. Second, even when religious identities are invoked, they are far from monolithic or “sectarian” in character. Of the “regional” identities, their expositions in Sangam literature and Raajashekharas Kaavyamiimaamsaa provide two temporal and spatial poles. The composition of Sangam poems, if not their compilation into anthologies which may have taken shape at a later date, has been dated to the period between 300 BCE and 300 CE, and located in the modern state of Tamil Nadu. Raajasekhara was a Kaviraaja (poet laureate) at the court of Mahendrapala of the Pratihara family with its sway over Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and is generally placed in the late ninth/ early tenth century. The five tinai of Sangam texts are eco-geographic and cultural zones distinguished on the bases of landscape; flora and fauna; peculiar form of economic activity for subsistence (agriculture using irrigation and plough cultivation in marudam); their cultural equipment; their principal communities (kuravar in kurinji, idaiyar in mullai); and also their deities (Mayon=Krishna in mullai and Varuna in neydal). Tinai also constituted literary genres since each had its distinctive poetic mood — romantic dalliance of the kurinji

(forest tract), separatism of the palai (arid zone), and conjugal as well as illicit love of the marutam (settled agrarian tract).⁹ Following Bharata's Naatyashastra, Raajashekhar's Kaavyamiimamsa, too, talks about regions on the bases of vritti (nritya-giita-kalaavilaasa-paddhati), pravritti (vesha-vinyaasa-krama) and riti (vachana-vinyaasa-paddhati). Essentially, it is an attempt to establish regional identities taking cognisance of people's life-styles — their dress, hair-styles, language and speech, their love for dance and songs, and so on. Religion as a factor is apparently of no consequence in these criteria.¹⁰

Coming to religious identities per se, we need to take note of the following: (a) Not too long after the mahaaparinirvaana of the Buddha, his followers got split into several sects — Theravaadins, Sarvaastivaadins, Mahaasaanghikas, etc. — which in turn were further split into several sub-sects, which rarely identified themselves as Buddhists; (b) the case of the Jainas is no different — while the Digambaras, vetambaras, Yapaniyas represented the better known sects, the medieval svetambara Jainas were characterized by a division of the monastic community into several rival lineages or gachchhas, which argued vociferously over who among them represented the true practice and understanding of the teachings of Mahavira;¹¹ (c) when Islam entered India, we talked more about the ethnic identities of its followers, viz., Arabs, Turks, Turushkas, Afghans, Iranis, Turanis, Uzbegs, Mongols, Mughals, and so on, and not of Muslims or Mussalmans; (d) we had to deal with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and the French as traders before encountering them as Christians; (e) indeed, even amongst the so-called "Hindus", sectarian labels alone mattered, which they displayed through their forehead marks. Broadly, they were Shaivas, Shaaktas, Vaishnavas (with their further sub-divisions), rather than an omnibus term called "Hindus". This was the case at least till the arrival of the Arabs (7th – 9th centuries), who were the first to use the expression "Hindu" but that too in a geographical and ethnic sense, rather than a religious one. One would look in vain for any reference to a "Hindu" in any pre-Arab text. No wonder, some distinctive stages in the evolution of Sanskrit texts-based religions have been identified as "Vedism", "Brahmanism" "Puranic religion", and so on.

Where do we stand today?

The Anthropological Survey of India launched the People of India (POI) Project in 1985. Colonial ethnography studied communities in isolation, and covered British India and a few Princely States. In contrast, the POI project covered the whole country, each and every state and union territory. The project aimed to study the impact of change — the development process in all communities, and the linkages that brought them together. The project identified 4,635 communities, 325 languages belonging to 12 different language families, with the prevalence of bilingualism as high as 65.51 percent, and as many as 24 scripts all over India. The Survey also identified 91 eco-cultural zones. Obviously several Indian states had multiple cultural zones — six each in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, for example, and as many as seven in Tamil Nadu.¹² It was evident that poly-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic identities that have evolved over several millennia have defined India. This can truly be called THE IDEA OF INDIAS, with India in the plural — Indias of diversities, of conflicts and tensions.

Can we rest content with that? Perhaps we can do so only at our own peril.

This idea of Indias is under severe threat since the late 1980s, when the movement for the "Grand temple of Lord Rama at Ayodhya" was launched by chauvinistic

“Hindu Nationalists”. Recall that our present Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi also identified himself with such an appellation not too long ago. Till the mid-1980s, both Shrirangam and the Rock Fort temples at Trichy used to send their elephants to the Nathar Vali dargah for the annual Moharram procession. The practice has now been suspended. In 1990, Chennai recorded its first communal riot in recent history. The reason: the Vinayaka Chaturthi procession passing through the Muslim dominated Triplicane area raised provocative slogans, and went on a rampage resulting in three deaths. The grand old legend of the Snowy Shiva Linga Cave at Amarnath being discovered by a Muslim shepherd named Adam Malik has been contested. A folk hero of Rajasthan, Baba Ramdeoji, who has been worshipped by lower caste Hindus and Muslims for the last several centuries in his temple at Pokharan in the Jaisalmer district, has now been brahmanised. The lower caste pujari has been replaced with a brahmin priest, and the Baba is projected as an avatara of Lord Rama, purging his pir aspect. In a process akin to proselytisation, gods and goddesses of numerous Adivasis (tribals) in Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bundelkhand, Manipur, Odisha are being “Hinduised” in concrete ways.¹³

The last three decades have seen violent cultural policing in the form of prescriptions of dress codes for women; protests against the celebration of Valentine Day; “Honour Killings” and “Love Jihad” against Hindu-Muslim marriages; the burning of churches in Gujarat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and now even in Delhi; the passage of Anti-Conversion Laws in several states under the charge of the “Hindu Nationalists”; and the recent campaigns of “Ghar Wapsi”, or “Return of the prodigal son”, a pseudo-term for reconversion, and “Shuddhikaran” (“purification”). Nathuram Godse, the killer of the Father of the Nation is hailed as a “Patriot” and his statues installed.

The entire Indian cultural landscape is being transformed radically, and lamentably, into a regressive mould. The space for dissent diminishes by the day. The voices of “reason” get feeble. Are we going to lose the millennia old “argumentative Indian”?

The last three decades have also seen the new “cult of sants” and other religious preachers entering our living rooms through television channels such as “Aastha” and “Sanskar”. New age religious gurus take financial advantage of a growing sense of insecurity among large sections of the people because of neo-liberal and market-oriented economic policies. Religious fundamentalists of all hues package and market themselves. All kinds of religious fundamentalism is rooted in patriarchal and anti-women discourses. These dharma ke saudagars (merchants of dharma) spew venom, having forgotten the dicta of Asoka’s edicts and the Mahabharata. King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, said in his Rock Edict XII:

Growth of the essentials of Dharma is possible in many ways. But its root lies in restraint in regard to speech... Truly, if a person extols his own sect and disparages other sects with a view to glorifying his sect owing merely to his attachment to it, he injures his own sect very severely by acting in that way...¹⁴

And the Great Epic, too, reiterates in the same strain:

Dharmam yo baadhate dharmo na sa dharmah kudharma tat /
Avirodhii tu yo dharmah sa dharmah satyavikrama //

Dharma that stands in the way of another dharma is not dharma at all. It is evil dharma. O one for whom valour is based on truth! Dharma that does not conflict with anything is the right dharma.¹⁵

Those who claim that the entire world was originally inhabited only by the Hindus, and those who say things such as “Everyone is a born Muslim,” are but two sides of the same coin.

The decades since the 1980s have also rejuvenated Vir Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, whose vision of India stands in total contrast to the Idea of Indias we are concerned about. While the RSS supremo has, of late, been making overt references to “Hindu Rashtra”, our “Hindu Nationalist” Prime Minister masquerades as “Vikas Purush” — the “Development Man”. Behind this façade of “development” is the project to create a “monolithic Hinduism”, a Hinduism that has never existed. Homogenising several identities into a single mould is the brazen undertaking. More important is the attempt to identify the “nation” with a particular religious identity: BEING HINDU IS BEING INDIAN. Some people seem to have arrogated to themselves the right to impose such a religious identity on others — by, for instance, describing Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists as “Hindus” despite their protests. The Sikhs once proclaimed loudly — *maans gau ka khaayenge, Hindu nahin akhwaayenge* (We shall eat beef and will not let any one call us Hindus). The followers of all non-Indic religions (Islam, Christianity etc.) are demonised and labelled “The Other”. With these new demons in mind, new iconographies are created, so that violent and ferocious forms are imposed on Rama, Durga, and even Ganesha.

The Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevaka Sangh with their slogan of “Hinduise India and militarise Hinduism” constituted only a fringe element of the early twentieth century nationalist movement in India. They represented “fragmented nationalism” then. Today they stand for fascistic “homogenisation” in the name of a singular religious identity. Today there is every danger that they may come to occupy centre stage, and demolish the millennia-old “idea of Indias” in the same way they demolished the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992. The “Idea of Conflicts and Tensions” needs to remain inherent in numerous diverse identities. It is in such conflicts, tensions and struggles where we will find the seeds of fresh and enriching creation, possibly compassionate humanism.

This essay is an edited extract from a keynote address entitled “The Formation of Religious Identities in India” delivered at the Paschimbanga Itihas Sansad 31st Annual Conference, January 22-24, 2015, Kolkata. Read the entire paper [here](#).

1. John R. Marr, “Note on the New Excavations at the Shore Temple, Mahabalipuram”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol.54, No.3, October 1991, pp. 574-576.

2. Richard Davis, “Trophies of War: The Case of the Chalukya Intruder”, in Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf, eds. *Perceptions of South Asia’s Visual Past*, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta, 1994, pp. 161-77.

3. Richard M. Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States”, in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, op.cit., pp.246-281. This essay has also been reprinted in Eaton’s *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 94-132. See also Romila Thapar, “Destroying Shrines”, *Frontline*, January 9, 2015, pp. 51-56.

4. Some insightful glimpses of this dynamism can be found in Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of the Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Puranas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, pp.12-13; Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973; and Thomas B. Coburn, *Devi Mahatmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

5. For a recent enumeration of such allusions, see D.N. Jha, "Eternal India and Timeless Hinduism", in idem, ed., *Contesting Symbols and Stereotypes: Essays on Indian History and Culture*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2013, pp. 32-36.
6. Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Gender & Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*, first published by the University of California Press, 1991, reprinted in India by Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1992.
7. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhasha, Sahitya aur Desh*, Bharatiya Jnanpitha Prakashan, New Delhi, 2nd ed., 1998, pp. 45-52.
8. Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, "Interrogating 'Unity in Diversity': Voices from India's Ancient Texts", General President's Address, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Platinum Jubilee (75th) Session, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2014, (Aligarh, 2015), pp. 10-13. A case for diversities in religious practices has also been made on the basis of the form and structure of early "religious" architecture in Himanshu Prabha Ray, "The Archaeology of Sacred Spaces in India: From Multi-Religious Sites to Monuments", Presidential Address at the Indian Archaeological Society Meeting (2013), *Puraatattva*, No.44, 2014. However, Ray's indiscriminate use of "Hindu temple" throughout this "Address" is absolutely unwarranted and, therefore, not acceptable. For some details of diverse religious identities and sectarian tensions and conflicts, see D.N. Jha, "Of Conflict, Conversion, and Cow", in Idem, ed., *Contesting Symbols ...*, pp. 52-63.
9. Cf. Noboru Karashima, ed., *A Concise History of South India: Issues and Interpretations*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.45; Rajan Gurukul, *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2010, pp. 77-94, 136-54; Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils*, The Scarecrow Press, Maryland-Toronto, 2007, pp.278-81. Recently an attempt has been made to study textual evidence on *tinai*s in the context of material remains from excavated burial and habitation sites belonging to the iron age and early historic period in the Thondaimandalam area of Tamilnadu (cf. Smriti Haricharan and Naresh Keerthi, "Can the tinai help understand the Iron Age Early Historic Landscape of Tamilnadu?", *World Archaeology*, Vol.46, No.5, December 2014, pp.641-660). The study brings out some perils involved in establishing a direct correlation between the two sets of evidence, viz., literary texts and archaeological remains.
10. Pandeya Rameshwar Prasad Sharma, *Rajashekhara aur unka Yuga*, Bihar Hindi Granth Academy, Patna, 1977, chs. 2 & 3.
11. P. Granoff, "Other People's Rituals: Ritual Eclecticism in Early Medieval Indian Religions", *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol.28, No.4, August, 2000, pp. 399-424.
12. K.S. Singh, *People of India: An Introduction* (National Series, Volume 1), Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 13-16, 102-107.
13. Cf. Dharmendra Kumar and Yemuna Sunny, *Proselytisation in India: The Process of Hinduisation in Tribal Societies*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2009. See also Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, first published in 2011 by State University of New York, Albany, Indian Edition, Dev Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2014, in which a distinction is made between "missionary" and "proselytising" religions, and Hinduism included in the former category.
14. D.C. Sircar's translation in *Inscriptions of Asoka*, Publications Division, New Delhi, fifth edition, 2009, p. 42.
15. *Mahabharata*, Critical Edition, VI. (Aaranyakaparva) 131.10: Translation: Bibek Debroy, *The Mahabharata*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2011, Vol. 3, p. 144.

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Jitish Kallat

Modus Vivendi: Two Images



'Modus Vivendi (1000 people – 1000 homes)', 2000, Mixed media on canvas, 96 x 216"



'Public Notice 2', 2007, Resin, 4,479 sculptural units, display dimensions variable

Listen to Jitish Kallat's talk on these works [here](#).

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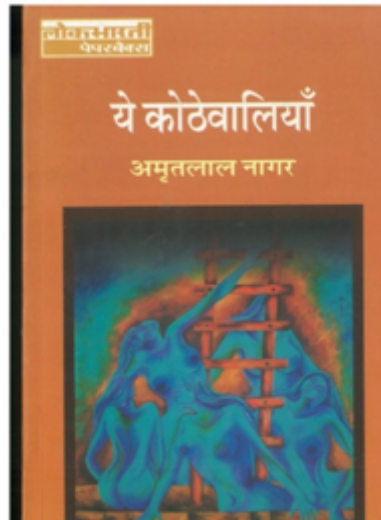
Shubha Mudgal

Vidyadhari Bai's "Chun Chunke Phool Le Lo": A Tawaif's Voice in the Freedom Struggle

<https://soundcloud.com/user-667906003>

चुन चुन के फूल ले लो अरमान रह न जाये, ये हन्दि का बगीचा गुलज़ार रह न जाये...

The lyrics for this track were sourced by Shubha Mudgal and Aneesh Pradhan from Amritlal Nagar's fascinating book on courtesans/tawaifs titled *Ye Kothewaliyan*, first published in the 50s in a hardcover edition.



via Scribd

Amritlal Nagar quotes from a previous publication, *Varvadhuvivechan* (Sahitya Sadan, Amritsar, 1929), to make the point that amid the clamour of reformist movements against tawaifs, Mahatma Gandhi addressed a "Tawaif Sabha" in Kashi, now Varanasi. Husna Bai, a veteran singer from Kashi chaired the Sabha, and a transcript of her speech on the occasion is said to have been included in *Varvadhuvivechan*. She is supposed to have urged tawaifs to participate actively in the struggle for independence. She is also said to have acknowledged the contribution of Vidyadhari Bai, then an acclaimed singer of Kashi, in organising the Sabha. Amritlal Nagar then wrote to Vidyadhari Bai asking for information about the Tawaif Sabha in Kashi. He received a response from the ageing singer. Vidyadhari was about 86 years old when she wrote to Nagar. She apologised for not being able to remember facts clearly, but recalled Mahatma Gandhi's request to perform songs of resistance and protest against British rule, at the many riyasats she was invited to.

Taking Gandhi's request to heart, Vidyadhari Bai would include protest songs in her recitals, which were often conducted under strict police surveillance.

The lyrics to the track चुन चुन के फूल ले लो अरमान रह न जाये, ये हन्दि का बगीचा गुलज़ार रह न जाये... have been extracted from those Vidyadhari Bai sent to Amritlal Nagar. She did not provide any notation or reference to melodic composition. The current composition could be described as a reconstruction of the song by Aneesh Pradhan.

Lyrics: Vidyadharibai as quoted by Amritlal Nagar in "Ye Kothewaliyan"
Composition: Aneesh Pradhan
Voice: Shubha Mudgal
Tabla: Aneesh Pradhan
Harmonium: Sudhir Nayak
Dholak: Nirmal B. Pawaar
Additional Percussion: Pratap Rath
Published in the album "Swadheenta Samar Geet"

© Shubha Mudgal and Aneesh Pradhan; image adapted from shubhamudgal.com, © Prakash Prabhu

S.G. Vasudev
Tapestries in Silk









Photographs by Mallikarjun Katakol

© S.G. Vasudev; photographs © Mallikarjun Katakol

Makarand Sathe

They Went Ahead

Translated by the playwright and Ajay Joshi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48UD7IOR3dE>

An excerpt from the performance: the final moments of the play

(In his late forties, an urban, spectacled, middle-class man, 'A', is sitting in a semi-nude state. He gets up with a start, and puts on the clothes lying around. He walks about restlessly, and looks around time and again as if waiting for someone. His face shows the somewhat arrogant realisation that he is an intellectual. In the background, two unknown people, a man and a woman, are sleeping on the floor in the darkness. [It is not necessary for them to be physically present, but a mattress and blankets can be arranged to indicate they are asleep.] 'A' turns and looks at them now and then, as if twitchy at their presence. Another man enters. This man, 'B', is a middle class city dweller in his early forties, and looks somewhat hassled. 'A' quickly steps forward and pulls him under the spotlight. The stage is partly lit. The entire play takes place in tight spots. Circles of extreme bright light follow the action. The surrounding areas are pitch dark.)

A: Come...come in. Come here please *(In a tone that a shopkeeper in a small market place would call out to a buyer, beckoning him to his shop. A realises this. As a result he is a bit awkward. Still, he persists in his efforts.)* You are an Indian, right? Marathi? *(B hesitates.)* ...Yes, Marathi. I realised that as soon as I saw you. I was nearly convinced... and you were mumbling something to yourself. *(B looks down, abashed.)* No, no, don't worry. I like people who mutter to themselves. Even I talk to myself, na! Someone who talks to himself considers all aspects of an issue. *(Now 'B' has completely stopped in his tracks.)* Come, please, come inside. Good, now sit... So you were mumbling something. I couldn't follow what it was. But the words were in Marathi...which is great! I wanted just that kind of a man. Perfect. *(Bewilderment and doubt on B's face)* No... No, I mean I wanted somebody like you...for communication...brotherhood...otherwise just about anyone could have come here, isn't it? You're aware that this place is like that. It feels good to have someone like yourself, like your kin. Sit, please sit...Oh, no, don't be scared. For one, I am not one of them. I mean one of those who you met on your way here. Now, what would you call them? Servants...or administrators or...well it is difficult...huh...forget who they are...what is important is that I am not one of them. At least if you look at it from the point of view of our world... I mean the previous one... Even then, the two of us are like... What do they say? Birds of the same feather... *(B tries to say something. A stops him.)* No, no! There is no need to introduce yourself. It is quite clear that you are a Maharashtrian. Your clothes tell me you are middle class and urban. Your face says the same thing. The twist of your lips, the way in which surprise flits across your face...and you still haven't sat down. It means you are judging me, trying to decide whether to stay or leave. It means you think before you act...you don't make hasty decisions...Look at your hands, just look at them. *(Grasping his hand, A pulls him closer under the spotlight.)* Just like mine — delicate and soft. Your finger and toenails are neatly trimmed and moisturised. Your face looks polished...how suave you are! You're a good man...just like me. That's enough for us to come

together... Oh! It's only me doing the talking. And I can see that you're annoyed... But this urge of mine to talk to you...this...your muttering to yourself...what else could it mean? We're birds of the same feather... (*B gets up to leave.*) Sir! Please...please do wait. Don't you think I look just like you... see, like this...? But I am talking again... I'm sorry...sit, please do sit (*B sits down.*) Now speak.

(*Pause*)

A: Go on. Speak. How are you?

B: I'm fine.

(*Pause. B looks beyond A's shoulders at the two sleeping figures. Realising this, A promptly gets up and stands between B and the sleeping figures. A is a little frightened, his face both guilty and restless.*)

A: No, don't worry about them...they won't do a thing. They're harmless, absolutely harmless. They too are Maharashtrians... but they're not like us. In fact they don't even talk, unless they are forced to. I've spent days with them. Believe me Sir, I defended them for so many days, just as if I was their lawyer.

B: You mean...you're a lawyer...

A: (*Smirking.*) Yes, in a way... I am a lawyer by profession...but when I said I defended them...I meant their being here...in this place...

B: Here? You mean even here —

A: No, this is not a court. This is not a place that doles out justice...but it's close, very close. Still... you don't get 'Justice' as you would think of it in the literal sense. This place is rather weird, the unexpected happens here... (*B gets up. A restrains him.*) Please don't leave. Wherever you go, the result will be the same. At least here you have the company of a likeminded person...quite similar... forget caste and religion...let all that be... I will talk of that later... The point is that I need you. You are useful to me. I know you are a good man, like most of us. You need proof? Let me explain... Take for example...during the Tsunami you must have donated money to the relief fund. And very often you must have gone out of your way to help senior citizens and the blind to cross busy roads. You are a socially conscious person, just like me. You still want more proof? You must be philanthropic...I know. Yes, sir! People like us don't speak of such things openly... Finding time despite my hectic schedule, I defended poor clients and fought on behalf of NGOs for low fees... cases which were socially important... That apart, just look at you...it's so clear that whoever you may be... I mean whatever caste, religion, occupation... you have some intellectual social interest in this world... Do you watch a play or two? Read newspapers or Shekhar Gupta's editorials in the *Indian Express*... Magazines? Which ones? *India Today*? *Frontline*?

B: Not that. *India Today*, yes. That's better...

A: Look, didn't I tell you? You will definitely help me. In fact, we need each other. Now tell me. How are you?

B: Fine.

(*B looks restless. He looks at the two at the back again. A is now very agitated.*)

A: Sir! Don't look that way. Didn't I tell you they do nothing? You will see lakhs of people all over the place like these... even here, if you look carefully! It's we who are

in the minority! That's why we must cling to each other... Just ignore them...as if they don't exist... Why is that so difficult? They are asleep. Let them sleep. They sleep a lot... And just in case they wake up, don't be terrified... If they wake up I will speak to you in English or then maybe in Hindi... They don't know a word in any language but Marathi... I'm telling you they're not like us... Bloody shit... This place is weird anyway, and on top of that if you keep looking there, it'll make things worse! Listen, I'm going to tell you about something that happened here...and you... (*B is restless.*) Sit, please sit.

(*Pause*)

A: Huh, See... Let me assure you of one thing. I wish you well. Look here, if I don't do this, you'll suffer the same fate as me. Then a terrible guilt will eat into you. Guilt makes life unbearable... We are suspended in limbo, you see... see, it's we who are affected... In this place it's we who brood and die...people like them will sleep like this...and the remaining bastards move ahead... It is sensitive people like us who get trapped. Are you a sensitive person? Huh? Are you?

B: Yes...I mean...I think I am. (*Again glances towards the back.*)

A: (*Yelling*) Don't look at them! (*Momentary pause. He controls himself with difficulty.*) See, I'll try and explain. But mind you...I'm in a hurry...I'm tired of these hardships...can't take it any more...I don't want to wait... Do you understand? I know you're sensitive, you can understand. I'll try to explain everything briefly and properly. But like a person completely shattered, suspended at the edge of an abyss, a person with self-contempt, helpless because of human limitations, my talk is bound to go a bit off track. (*Now he is very restless, nearly breaking down towards the end.*) Even after death, look what destiny has in store for us! For us middle class simpletons! See, people like us must cling on to each other...don't you understand?

(*B, though a little apprehensive, gets up, puts his hands on A's shoulders to comfort him. A grasps his hand firmly. B frees his hand from his clasp. Gently patting him, he goes back to his place. A is now composed.*)

A: Thank you, I feel better now...sorry... How are you?

B: I'm fine.

A: Don't you feel restless?

B: I do...a bit.

A: Relax...Sit back. There's no hurry here.

(*Pause*)

B: What did you die of?

A: Accident.

(*Pause*)

A: You?

B: Heart attack.

(*Pause*)

B: (*Looking back*) And these two...

A: (*Again irritably*) Just leave them alone, will you? I will tell you about them. But only after a while. Have patience...ok? First tell me something. Did you fill up a form on your arrival...at that first place? That small place like a closet... with that person sitting at a table? And in front of his table, a smaller one, for us to sit on and complete the form?

B: Yes, I did fill up the form.

A: What did they ask? Name? Place?

B: No.

A: Occupation?

B: Nothing of that sort.

A: They only asked you to write twenty lines about yourself, didn't they?

B: Yes. And I wrote just that...Name, occupation, address, children, likes and dislikes, what else could I write? So they —

A: Tore it to pieces? Correct. Then what did you write the second time?

B: Briefly from my childhood to...

A: History! They tore it too, your history was torn... Sir, they know all that... Then after this happened a couple of times, you handed back a blank form. Correct?

B: I simply don't understand... what do they want from us?

A: Forget it. We don't have the time. I just want to know whether you have come here through specific channels. See, finally, will Man ever be able to unravel the secrets of the universe?

B: Right. And the irony is that if people decipher it, it may become even more difficult to live!

A: Why do you speak of facing life? Don't you realise that we are now dead, once and for all?

B: You're right. But it doesn't feel the same. This is an entirely different feeling — I mean what we imagine what it would be like after dying.

A: So do you believe in it? What happens after death according to this religion or that... but first tell me... do you grieve when you remember your wife and kids?

B: Not at all! That's what I'm trying to tell you. I had a feeling it would happen this way, but...

A: That's because of the second chamber. Second place! Intense purple light, lit circles, thumping sounds... it felt like an MRI or a CT scan, right? You stand in that light, and some of our common feelings simply freeze. I mean they don't die, they just freeze — all those feelings about wives, children and parents left behind, or all those unfulfilled cravings... Correct?

B: Absolutely right! But why? If it was to be this way, then why keep those memories alive?

(*Pause*)

A: Since coming here I have thought about it a lot. You know what I think? I think they want to keep us as we were. The same as when we lived our earlier lives. But...

but now, after we are dead, those memories elicit entirely different feelings... We no longer behave as we did when we were alive. We change... they may not want it to happen that way! Those bloody bastards... *(Pause)* But "THEY" means who? ...Shit! Whom do you trust?

B: Wasn't that precisely what they asked in the third chamber? Do you have faith? What kind of a fucking question. I told them I believed in —

A: Let that be, I got what I wanted. Now it is confirmed that we came here by the same route as the life we led. It's not like the earlier ones. Horrifying things happen here. Just thinking about it makes my hair stand. This place strips you of everything. Then decisions have to be taken. It makes you act. Waiting too long without action and submitting blank forms just doesn't help. You'll realise that now that you are so restless. How will you manage yourself here, huh?

(B gets up and struggles to get out of the confines of the lit area around him. A follows to catch hold of him. B leaps ahead. But he can't get out of the lit, in spite of repeated attempts. A, who had tried to hold him back out of fear, now eases down.)

A: *(Fearfully)* Don't... don't go anywhere... Wherever you go... it's the same... Look! Look outside... believe me... at least here we have each other for company... *(B, realising that he can't go outside, sits down. A relaxes.)* Huh... you can't go outside, can you? It's been more than ten minutes. You had ten minutes to make a choice. Now you're stuck here. Sit down.

(There is a pause after the struggle. B is still standing.)



Photo by Kumar Gokhale

A: Do one thing. Take a deep breath. And thank your luck that I'm around... this place is weird. Strange things happen here. But from what happens here, on those historic facts, our progress is decided...understood? I haven't a clue what lies ahead...because I don't believe in religion, God and such things. Chitragupta, Kayamat... Apocalypse and the rest... I don't think they exist. But here, I've realised we will get justice. See, I am a lawyer. I can recognise the tell-tale signs... But don't involve yourself in these matters. It's not easy to follow these structures... and I have my experiences, right? See, I'm a unique person. I have gone through what happened here once, and I am going through it again — how often does one get a chance to go through the present more than once? To amend history itself? And who gets a chance — *(B looks at the two at the back. A again gets irritated and nearly charges at him)*. Bastard! How often have I told you not to look at them? *(Pause. Deliberately steadies himself.)* Ok! Yes, even they have been around here for some time. They too got the chance... to pass through the same situation again. And the fear is that they might behave differently this time. But... but I know it won't happen that way. To take advantage of such historic opportunities, you need privileged people like us... with our kind of background. *(Momentary pause. B faints. A holds him and gets him to sit down.)* Sit, please sit. See, actually I am trying to help you. I too am a very, very sensitive man...just like you. Usually you have to wait here for a long time, a long, long time. But I am going to steer you through quickly. I have been through it once, you see! Let me tell you that history. Then we can learn from it. You will, won't you?

B: Yes! Otherwise history repeats itself. Those who don't learn from history make the same mistakes again.

A: *(Flaring up)* What do you mean, history repeats itself? Marx himself has already stated that. But that statement is of no use to us. Because now we have understood that it isn't that straightforward. *(Pause. Restless with memories, yells.)* History doesn't teach us a thing! It only punishes us because we don't learn from it, that's all! Understood?

B: Why are you shouting? I'll do what you ask of me...

A: I don't want you to do it because I say so. Then it will lose its purpose. It doesn't happen that way here. I want you...to do what I ask you to do, ON YOUR OWN. And that is a difficult thing. *(Pause.)* Anyway forget it, forget everything... Let's do it this way, let's first calm down. Now pay attention to what I have to say. Take a deep breath... release. Good, how do you feel now?

B: Relaxed.

A: Don't be scared, tell the truth. I won't shout.

(Pause)

A: Come on, tell me...

B: It's like this, what will happen next... I mean that — I am waiting for something... I mean I feel that way... But I don't know why... because of which... I feel restless.

A: Correct. This is like the life we lived, keep that in mind. The same thing happened to us. It started the same way. *(Gets up, turns, and looks behind.)* When I came here, of these two, this gentleman was already present... Now I can't avoid talking about them. Let your curiosity be satisfied for once. This gentleman's name is

Khanduji. Khanduji Kale. He — (*A stops mid-sentence, as if immersed in his thoughts, and comes forward and sits with his head down. Pause.*)

B: Then?

A: Then what?

B: What of Khanduji Kale?

A: He died.

B: That's obvious. But of what?

A: He committed suicide.

B: Oh! I see. So that's what you meant when you said they were not like us. Why did they commit suicide? A jilted love-affair?

A: No.

B: Less marks in higher secondary exams? Share market? I tell you it's stupid to commit suicide. Even I put in my stakes in the share market. But I always took precautions. I played within my limits you see... I mean one should always play within one's limits.

A: He didn't die because of the share market... he is a farmer.

B: Farmer... huh...then why did he... Oh! Oh!

A: Yes! He is a farmer. And he committed suicide. The rest we already know. Loans, cotton, daughter's wedding, money-lenders...

B: No...I mean, yes! Meaning actually I don't know the details. I... meaning I know that many farmers are committing suicide. But I don't know the intricacies involved. Anyway, so he is one of them, is he? I mean one of those farmer suicides we hear about all the time? In that case I want to see him. (Gets up and heads towards the back. A grabs him and pulls him back.)

A: Sit here, sit. I can understand your curiosity. But their waking up at this point will not be convenient for us... For once listen to what I have to say.

B: You tell me all about that, but... and you do appear to know about various things... I can imagine... a while ago you even had important information on Marx, and so I ask... can't we find a simple solution? I mean —

A: Don't you think it's too late now?

B: Yes, but isn't it alarming that so many people are committing suicide... I mean we can't do anything... but I ask just out of curiosity. I know a little... but I am always interested in knowing about things. A lot of social work is done in India now. The RSS activists even work among the adivasis, that's what I read in *India Today*. Do you —

A: (*Annoyed*) Look here. I am not one of them. I believe in secularism. Whatever this Sangh activism did in Gujarat against the Muslims...

B: Exactly! I agree. Caste, creed is all humbug... The same for religion... One should have respect for all religions... I agree. But at least after death —

A: We are already dead... There is no time to discuss all this now. It's pointless. Listen to what happened next... So when I came here, I saw this Khanduji. I came to

know him, and since I was well aware of the nitty-gritties of all these problems... you can imagine how sympathetic I felt. I was trying to make him speak... but it's difficult — he doesn't speak easily with people like us —

B: Why?

A: He feels... but leave that. What happened is more important. As I was trying to convey this to him, a group of eight to ten people barged in. All men from the same work place... middle level managers from the same company. Two were youngsters. The others were middle-aged and some could pass off as elderly. But what is more important is that all of them were mostly like us. Suddenly I felt relieved. I introduced Khanduji to them. All of them were sorry. Just like you. Now I won't get into details about all of them. Of the lot, two were believers. Another one was an economist, financial advisor...an atheist like me. It was he and I who gave the information to the others — about this farmer and his woes. (*While he presents the following theory, looking pleased with himself, his face assumes an expression of the high moral ground.*) We clearly presented both sides of the situation. I mean at one end: poverty, the condition of agricultural practices, exploitation, globalisation, American subsidy... and at the other, the mad scamper of farmers to shift from traditional crops like jowar and bajra to cash crops like cotton, increasing expectations of farmers, the global market, capitalism... And on the third front, new technologies – yes, and also about how the entire system is changing, how we are progressing on the social and economic fronts, how attitudes are changing as one moves from the agricultural system of production to industrialisation and its compulsions. But in spite of all this, what was equally important was that people mustn't die. So why is there no alternative? You observe England from the middle of the eighteenth century to the Second World War. (*B is now listening, awestruck.*) Look at Europe, look at America. Consider Japan till the Second World War. It is a 'DARK' period, a period of hardships for the poor. There is no way out. It happened to them earlier, and now it is happening with us. It does not mean that men should die. But this is inevitable... And no matter how strongly we feel that this technological, capitalistic, democratic establishment must collapse, there is no sign of its happening in the near future. This system is going to flourish, that's obvious. So there's no point harbouring false hopes. We have to find a way out ...yes I repeat...suicides are deplorable but —

B: What you are saying is very important! You are so knowledgeable... May I repeat what I just asked you? See, is there no simple solution? There must be... Does no one give this a thought? I mean, has this been thought about at a global level?

A: Look, there's no time for that now. Like you, everybody was moved... And they all asked this same question, Is there an easy solution? (*B wants to ask something.*) No! We don't have the time. Listen. As these people came here, like this, together...

B: But how did so many of them come here together?

A: Hmm! From what I've gathered, they were in a company bus on their way to a picnic. There was a road block because of a farmers' agitation. It's not clear if the driver was drunk, but he rammed the speeding bus to the right side of the road, toward a pit in some agricultural land. The bus crashed. All of them died and came here. As they said all this, Khanduji stood there, listening. The others were jostling each other, excited, there was total mayhem. I tried to calm them down. Just then this woman arrived —

B: (*Surprised, his voice louder than usual.*) Which woman?

A: That one, sleeping at the back...

B: (*Gets up and moves to the back.*) That one? The other one sleeping behind him is a woman?

A: (*Pulling him back.*) Sh...! Sit here...yes, that's a woman...Godavaribai. She was standing with the others there...protesting where the bus that plunged... on that farmland. The bus ploughed into her... she died... her name is Godavari. She is Khanduji's wife.

B: Oh! That's why they are sleeping together.

A: No. And they're not sleeping together! They're sleeping wherever they can find a place to lie down... (*Pause.*) Then everybody quietened down a bit —

B: Oh! I see! It means this woman finally found her way here... I mean a woman here — I mean just like that... amid all these men... a woman.

A: It's not that way... I think we should talk frankly. We are both men so why be shy? Look here, that woman came here, but she's not like the women of our class. She is like Khaduji. Ever since she arrived she hasn't uttered a word. She is absolutely horrible... (*Suddenly irritated.*) It's not like that, you see, and... what can you say of such a woman...emancipated...but what can you expect Khanduji's wife to be?

B: Oh, no! That's not what I meant.

A: Then what did you mean? Are we going to deceive one another...you know this guilt...In the end, it's all meaningless. But men die of that, what the fuck. For so many days that's what has been happening... the same thing —

(*Temporary pause.*)

B: I'm sorry... I mean —

(*Long pause*)

A: Tell me one thing. What part of a woman's body do you fancy the most? Should I guess? Should I? You are just like me. You like breasts, like I do. What a miraculous creation... a marvel of nature. They are the most beautiful thing in the world. Her breasts...the possibility of milk in them...that's what you favour the most, right? (*B is silent.*) Don't be shy. (*Suddenly raises his voice.*) But this is not true of Godavari's breasts. With such sexual fantasies, at that crucial moment people like us just... anyway. So this is his wife Goda — Godavari. Even when she came here her forehead wasn't adorned with kumkum. That means he obviously died before his wife. That's why she was standing there in protest. She is not too bad...kind of charming in fact. But...her face is so numb...dreary. Just like his. Seeing her, they went kind of insane...excited. Khaduji and Goda stood in a corner. They hadn't even spoken a word to each other. They just stood there. We sat down all over the place. Now and then we would look. (*B too looks at them. This time A does not protest.*) Look... now look. And why're you so restless?

B: No, I'm not.

(*He gets up and tries to peer out of his contained space.*)

A: Look, look outside as well. That would be even better. You can see what's outside. Spaces just like this, even out there... Look. (*Sharp lights on the audience, moving all around.*) Look, just like us, people all queued up, waiting... (*B walks about restlessly.*) Hey, such restlessness is not good... You're waiting? For what?

B: Why aren't we going ahead? What happens next?

A: The same feelings haunted us. Just then my attention was drawn to these two. They were sitting calmly. Then it struck me. I spoke to – you know that financial adviser I spoke of a while ago — I spoke to him first. Then the two of us, once again, explained a few things to the others...

B: What things?

(*There's a pause. A doesn't reply immediately. Cautiously goes near the two sleeping at the back and returns. Then looks at B.*)

A: Actually that should be told a little later. We had to linger over it for a long time. So why should it be any different with you?

B: But why waste time? There's nothing as boring as waiting... (*Looking behind.*) I don't know how these people can sit about so coolly —

A: How can these people! (*Pause.*) You're correct. Let me tell you. You must be put through these stages. Otherwise people like us see exactly the unwanted side at a very inconvenient time. Then a momentary asceticism envelops us! ...For once, let there be a purging of all the wrong ideas. Let no unwanted thought come to us at the crucial time. Otherwise we lose the vigour just when we need it. Our friends who were here before us — they didn't have such unwanted thoughts, so they went ahead. And I stayed behind. (*Momentary pause.*) Who tried to stop all this from happening? Me! (*Glancing backward.*) Who went out of his way to protect them? Me! ...You know, just five minutes after these two arrived, the others immediately got them to do their work — "Lay out the mattresses, fetch water"... I pleaded with them not to do that. But they went ahead, and who remained behind burdened with a feeling of guilt? Me! Fuck, there's no place for the fair-minded in this world... Others do fine... whether it's those from that crowd or these two... (*B gets up and glances about.*) What do you want now? (*B gestures for water.*) Water? Look, it's there... to the left of those two sleeping... No! Don't wake up Goda. Fetch it yourself... Go get yourself a drink, and get one for me too.

(*B goes in the dark to get water. There's a pause. A has calmed down.*)

A: Ok. So you're bored, waiting. And you're surprised that those two are not bored. Even the others were equally surprised. At that time, I once again stood up for those two.

B: And earlier? When did you stand up for them?

A: Oh, come on, didn't I explain the reasons for his committing suicide to the others? Did you know of them before? ...And then I tried to stop the others from getting them to do all sorts of work... But let that be. With you, everything will happen quickly. Some things will have to be explained to you. There's no option. Listen... Pay attention. Just as I have been laying out the facts till now, I'm going to continue to show you both sides of everything. For people like us, such subtleties, such intricacies, matter. Now this sensitivity itself gets us into... but that apart... listen

carefully — we are waiting, aren't we? Don't you feel it's the same as the waiting when we were alive?

B: Absolutely.

A: That's the beauty of this place. We remain what we had become. What had become of us when we were alive remains intact. We have got used to waiting for something or the other. Look at it this way: we have got into the habit of waiting for something or the other — what is yet to come, a good future. Once we progress to a certain level, this invariably happens... (*A's face amply exhibits his self-absorbed, pretentious, high moral stand.*) Look at Khanduji... after quite a bit of time, he too became a bit restless. Because he too has entered this new system, this capitalist world, you see. When that happens then...people, that is, us, become greedy... see, we must accept it. There's nothing wrong in it. It happens to everyone. It's like this — even as we begin to rejoice at the birth of a new baby, different worries befall us. Can the child hear well? Are his growth parameters correct? Hope he is not retarded? And his memory? ...Teach him songs...Which school will admit him? ...What about his profession, foreign education, monetary planning...his marriage? Then his children and their problems! And to top it all, what if it is a girl? Hope she will not be assertive, and the "women's liberation kind"... Take another example. Now if I win a nice case as a lawyer, I won't enjoy this victory in itself... See, I am openly using myself as an example. What happens when I win a case is that I get worried, wondering whether the next case will be better than this one, or if I will get good publicity. ...See how openly and frankly I am saying all this... but that's the point... we look at everything in an instrumentalist way in this modern world. I have some American friends who worry whether the next Christmas party they are invited to will be better, and they're restless for the whole year. It's as bad as commodity fetishism, the other problem of today. It's the other side of the coin...an avarice beyond one's needs...and then this greed is satiated by somebody, in fact used by somebody. And our participation decreases. Someone else starts controlling our lives — whether it is the advertising world or the corporates or the media...we have become extremely greedy...there's solace even in understanding and accepting it. You feel relaxed for a while, even by that... (*Temporary pause.*) Sorry! It's only me who has been talking. I am an extrovert... And to top it, because of all that transpired here... Somehow I need to get over it.

B: No! No, you speak very well. You are absolutely right... any easy solution?

A: Why, are you feeling restless?

B: Yes I am a bit restless — is there no solution?

A: There is... Don't you feel a little comforted knowing this? At that time we felt the same. Later we felt we should become like those two. That was the solution. Do you too feel the same? You feel envious of them, right? One should be able to be like them. Quickly, let's do what we did then. Let's first do some Yoga...a bit of Shavasana...Anulom, Vilom...

B: Because of that will we go ahead? It's unbearable here, claustrophobic... what a fucking small place this is —

A: What do you mean by "a fucking small place"? This is SPACE... call it a space. Pay careful attention to this entire space... then you will realise that after death, space becomes elastic. When all those other people were here, it had become huge, this same space... After they left... (*B more restless.*) And as restlessness

increases, the space shrinks and time gets stretched...as restlessness increases, the space shrinks even more, and then time is stretched to the extreme... What is space according to Jain philosophy? Space is something that can accommodate things...and time is a thing that accommodates events... According to the Jains...

B: Let your Jains go to hell... how long do we wait —

A: You have to wait here for a while. Still, I am taking you ahead, on the fast track. It took us three to four days to get to the stage of Shavasana.

B: Oh, my God! This is killing.

A: Come on, lie down over here. Now do as I tell you. Take a deep breath. (*B is prostrate. A is constantly talking, but it's obvious he's agitated. His words and his actions contradict each other. He walks about restlessly. Occasionally he goes to the back and looks at the two sleeping figures.*) Take another deep breath. Release. Now without moving a single part of your body, do as I say. Imagine that you're sleeping on the shore of a calm ocean. Now imagine that you're looking at your own body from outside...at your Shava...your corpse. Do as I tell you and concentrate on different parts of your body... now one at a time, relax your toes... now the soles of both the legs... relax your ankle joints... rest your entire weight on the ground — don't burden yourself with anything. Loose... relaxed... Let both the calves loosen up... both the kneecaps... the part below the knees... loosen both the thighs... outer side loose... relaxed... slowly pay attention to the slackened breathing... the inner part of the thighs... the fork between the legs. (*B abruptly jerks his legs, shaking his neck as if in the midst of convulsions.*) Hey, why are you moving? (*B sits upright.*) Huh, you got up? You completed this phase much faster than we did. Your body is now nothing but a corpse — Shava — and still you can't do Shavasana... do you follow anything? Actually our sensitivity increases here... and yours has, much more —

(*Pause. B sits upright.*)



Photo by Kumar Gokhale

B: I'm sorry. I'm troubled. What you say is correct. But — (*Pause. Sitting up, B shakes his hands and legs.*) What happens next? Um? Re-birth?

A: No! What are you talking?

B: Then why is this happening only to me? Am I at fault? What is to happen to me?

A: Don't be afraid. The same thing happened to us too. Just that it happened faster in your case... because I am preparing you. Think of this as a preparation for the life ahead, for our future —

B: But I don't seem to be able to handle it.

A: There's nothing wrong with that. There's another side to it, as I said earlier. Every time I will present the other side of the story. We people are like that. We probe deep... into subtleties...sensitively. You know why it is happening like this? Because, basically, there's nothing wrong with such a thing happening to us. See, this society has regressed by being satisfied with the little we have... there's no positive attitude. We've stopped being proactive. We must look to the future... what's wrong with that? Um? Consumerism and commodification, it's fine mouthing such big words, but basically what is wrong in wanting a better life? Um? And then these things, anyway, are beyond us... we are not to be held responsible. That man progressed and came this far, is that our fault? There are problems at every stage. In the earlier days, people died of influenza and malaria — what was the life expectancy then?...Haven't we progressed? It's bound to be like this... What is the harm in being ambitious? And what's wrong with being restless because of that?

B: You're right! If everyone thinks of his own good, eventually everybody will benefit. One should think only of how good things will come your way — then automatically —

A: (*Suddenly annoyed.*) Oh no, it's not that way. That's not what I meant to say. What you're saying is all wrong — it doesn't happen that way, that's been proved beyond doubt. What I'm saying is deeper, more subtle...try to understand. You're saying what that bald, fair, sloppy man from the other group said, condemning Khanduji. We had a fight, with Khanduji and I on one side and the rest on the other...And in spite of all of this, if one of them asked for anything, Khanduji would promptly comply...I tell you it's just this way with such people, but that apart...What I'm saying is entirely different. You said that one should only think for oneself, that is not what I'm saying...it is such an escapist logic. How can you say such a thing? You are all scoundrels —

(*Abruptly stops. B astounded. After a while, unable to bear it, B speaks. He is irritated.*)

B: What do you mean? Huh? You can't yell at me like this...I am not a nonentity like those two friends of yours — like that Khandu, and that Godavari or Narmada, whatever she is called...Defended them? You defended them? Then what should I do? Because I am stuck with you here, you... It's only because you have been here from the start that I'm listening to you. Now I feel you're manipulating me. You have a hidden agenda. You're not as saintly as you claim to be.

A: I'm sorry. I'm not saintly. I'm a simple man, you see —

B: Now look here, stop talking from every side. Anyway it's getting unbearable, waiting here so long. If I could have gone outside, I wouldn't have waited here even a minute.

(Pause.)

A: Please listen to me. Now I'm feeling even guiltier. Believe me, I am doing all this for our own good... It was fine till now. What will happen here after this is even more —

B: What is going to happen here? You keep harping on that.

A: Just look around you. Like in an apartment in a city, you can look into the neighbouring apartments here too. Don't you see the same scene all around you? As if all the walls are of glass. Look, there are numerous spaces all over, just like ours, as far as the eye can see. *(Here the harsh lights are on the audience.)* Look there to your left. A while ago there was a big group, remember?

B: Yes. You're right.

A: It went ahead... and that girl there, who was all alone some time back? A sweet, adolescent girl of sixteen — you remember, you were ogling at her? She too left. Now some others have replaced her. That... that old man there — *(Indicates with a wave that he too has left.)* ... In the last ten minutes — I mean from the time we started doing the Shavasana, half the people around us have been replaced —

B: That's right. But where did they go?

A: Where? They went ahead... further. After having gone through the chaos, the restlessness, they went ahead... See, there are numerous spaces — see how many people there are — between them and us, do you feel any difference?

B: Yes. I feel it... we are relatively calm... they are more restless. They are desperately in wait—

A: Correct — they are moving about in tortuous circles, glancing at their wrist watches... pulling at their hair... thrashing each other... once it becomes uncontrollable... moving ahead. *(Looking at him.)* But we are still stuck... people are trooping in... getting restless... when sufficiently restless, they move ahead... if you keep looking, it gets maddening... and a frightening feeling takes over. It is just we, alone, who are stuck. The rest are moving ahead. We alone are stranded. The rest are going ahead. Stuck alone, the rest all —

(B is extremely restless. A is also in the same condition.)

B: I can't stand still like this any longer.

A: That's good!

B: Good?

A: Yes, that means now you have a chance to move ahead.

(B feels a bit elated. Pause. B paces. Both look outside.)

B: My hands seem to be twisting—

A: I know.

B: I mean they are twisting but not hurting... Twisting —

A: In medical jargon, it is called a state of Extreme Muscular Discomfort.

B: You're right. It's extreme... muscular... discomfort. Why are we waiting? ...Oh, my legs and my back, even they are twisting. That's the worst.

A: This is what happened to us. The body turns about grotesquely... it is uncontrollable... like squirming out of an unbearable sexual urge... wriggling, writhing, insatiable, ravenous... and that's just the beginning. And do you know what one of them thought of? He was thin — short guy with thick soda glasses... seemed like an accountant. He had a runny nose. You know what came to his mind? He thought he we would get relief if someone gave him a vigorous massage. Then all of them got a massage by Khanduji and Godavari.

(B looks back at the two. Moves in their direction.)

A: *(Loudly)* Please don't wake them up. It was wrong on my part to have told you everything... Please, please control your twisting body and listen. I need you, we need each other. If they get up and if we keep looking at them, a feeling of camaraderie will develop between sensitive people like us and them. What we are expected to do later gets delayed... then we get left behind — look what happened to me. I have observed all these spaces, studied everything carefully. People like my erstwhile friends move ahead, and millions like Khanduji and Godavari are left stranded. In fact they are the ones in the majority. But they are not easily visible... they simply merge... just like that... into the darkness! They do not shine, you see. But basically they don't experience this restlessness, so they don't see it as a problem. But we can't be like them. So we don't belong to either group... then where do we stand?

B: Now you are speaking against them—

A: *(Shouts.)* No! You're stupid!

B: You're yelling again. I can shout too.

A: Look, I've spent a lot of time here. It's maddening. I tell you, even when the others got their massage, I stood firmly in support of these two. I tried to get away from the others, sit near these two. It's not easy. People like us can't manage it. I've spent a lot of time here and you've just —

B: Shut up —

A: Listen to me. It took us a lot of time to see the solution. Actually it's not out of this world. It has always existed... we always knew it but it was at the back of our minds...now we have to put it into practice. I'll tell you what happened, it'll save time.

B: You're manipulating me — keep quiet. I'm not going to listen to you.

(A tries to say something. Then keeps quiet. He clutches the chair firmly till his face reddens. He sits firmly, unmoving, suppressing his restlessness. B's restlessness increases. He is staring outside.)

B: *(At his wits' end)* Hey, all of them keep going ahead... that old lady who was there a while ago, even she can't be seen... and all them over there —

(A is quiet. B looks at him angrily, but A remains quiet. B gets even more restless.)

B: *(Again looking outside, bellows.)* Look, look! If this continues, only people like these two will remain behind. And the two of us in their crowd! Even that long-nosed, beggar-like person who had been waiting so long has left... Say something... I beg

you...I apologise...I am at fault. I don't want to get left behind. Please... tell me why it's happening this way? Why is it that only the two of us are left behind?

A: I'll tell you, but don't interrupt. Even speaking coherently is getting strenuous. I can't concentrate any more. If I wait another ten minutes, I'm not sure what will happen. Maybe I will beat you up...clobber you. Even if we are dead, our bodies still exist. Remember we're able to feel pain even now... If it gets unbearable I will gouge your eyes out... I —

B: Talk, please! Don't stop now... I'll agree with everything you say.

A: *(In a restrained but chilling voice, like a cold fire, trying to be matter-of-fact, but also trying to influence and manipulate B with the sheer horror of the narrative.)* The same thing happened to us. Then we realised that the people moving ahead — the ones released from here — mostly moved ahead as a group from a specific area. The entire group would be restless, then move ahead. We realised that Khanduji and Goda were still calm, never restless. And till this restlessness was felt by everyone, we would be stranded. Everybody had to be restless or we had to find an alternative so only those who were restless could go ahead. Some of the group asked these two to be restless. They couldn't manage that. One of them — the economist I spoke of — he tried explaining it to them. No change... No! Don't you go near them. All our efforts were exhausted. One smart youngster tried coaxing them with a description of all the goodies they could get ahead, as if he was running a marketing campaign... assured them that if they became restless they would go to heaven next... Khanduji was partly carried away by this... I noticed his hands curling up. But Godavari was numb — a cold glob. It was also difficult for Khanduji to be restless for too long.

Then someone abused them, slapped them, and much more. Still it was difficult for them to make them restless... Goda, the poor thing, she was trying, her sari pallu fell off her withered breasts... they harassed her to the extreme ... but all in vain...

(There is an uncomfortable silence. B attempts to say something. A gestures that he should remain silent.)

Our bodies throbbed, just like yours is now. We hit our hands and legs against the walls and the floor. I was convinced we would begin to thrash one another... No one could contain their anger at these two. In the end — do you remember that bald, fair, fat guy I spoke of? He dragged Godavari onto the floor. That long-nosed person pushed Khandu to one side. The others encircled the two. I spoke up, but the two of them held me back. That fatso ripped Godavari's torn sari, stripped her of her undergarments. Lowering his trousers, he fell on her. I freed myself, turned away. I could hear the sounds — of struggling, of the fat man and the others grunting. Goda made no sound... That fat man raped her.

Fatso got up and sat across from me. The thudding of his body gradually eased off. His face still contorted into grotesque expressions. But his face also showed a sense of confidence about the future. There was no worry. Every breath of his was confident. *(Pause.)*

He said to me in a husky voice, "Now you do it... don't think twice... that's the only way. Let's see if at least this will make the bitch restless...Let's see if she can crave for the future... How can she not long for a better future? The future can't be worse than this... it can only get better. At least now she will want, crave... Let's see...this fucking breed of women...and whatever happens...I'm already feeling good. I have

this gut feeling...my work will get done...now it's your turn...go." I yelled at the fatso. I called him a motherfucker... he just laughed.

Hearing my shout, the others stood frozen. I felt a little better but the restlessness was intense. Fatso sat there, looking at us. His body grew steady, but his face continued to twitch. He was now laughing with self-confidence.

Nobody knew what exactly to do next.

Suddenly, something charged in from the darkness on the left. It wasn't clear if it was a man or something else. It looked like a human, but it was pellucid, translucent. The creature went up close to the fatso and muttered something in his ear... then immediately disappeared into the darkness.

Remember I told you there was a short, thin guy with thick soda glasses? He was the first one to gather his courage and approach the fatso. The fat man with the twitching face lay prostrate. Despite the twitch on his face, it looked carefree, completely satisfied. He looked at the bespectacled man silently, his hands raised as if blessing him, then ordered him to go to Godavari. The bespectacled man went to her. The others encircled them once again. The sounds of scuffling once again, but less grunting this time. And this time, a momentary moaning sound from Khanduji... The bespectacled man raped Godavari.

He too became calm and his face began to twitch. Looking at this, the financial advisor moved forward with determination. I couldn't bear it anymore. I had spoken at length with him. I had found him far more sensible than the others. I moved, stood between him and Goda. I didn't utter a word. He said, "See, we are dead. These bodies of ours are not real... In fact, if these two cooperate like we did, this illusory body you seem to have — this maya — even that won't remain... Even this rape is illusory... all you see is unreal... Look at the fatso, then these two... See, they should actually join hands with us. But instead they...try to understand. I mean it's they who are responsible for this whole goddamn thing."

I was dazed. I didn't even register his going past me. When I came to my senses, he was pushing Godavari, who lay groaning on her side, onto her back. He spread her legs, bent forward and lay on her.

There was no sound this time. I looked away. After a while, that intellectual, that economist and financial advisor came to me and said it was my turn.

I shook my head in denial.

He raised his fist the fatso pulled him away.

In twos and threes they went to the back and did the same thing. Now that youngster. Then the one with the big nose... the others pushed and dragged him to Godavari. They removed his trousers and pushed him on top of her.

(Pause.)

Once they were all done, they lay on their backs, writhing and moaning. If you ask me, that long-nosed youngster was not able to rape Godavari. I'm sure of that. I think that's also true for a few others. But all of them acted as if they had done it.

Then they sat up and waited. Only the fatso still lay on the floor. The others didn't have to wait for long. The apparition of the man-creature reappeared. He whispered something in each one's ear, even the ear of the long-nosed youngster, the one who

feigned the rape. They quietened, rolled about, their faces twitching, laughing now and then.

I turned. Godavari lay motionless. Khanduji was restless. But he couldn't do a thing. There was not a single sound from him...

Crouching in a corner, my head tucked between my knees, I sat, clasping my twisting hands and legs. I wept bitterly... pitying myself. Only I remained restless. It was unbearable. The loneliness was eating me up. Then I decided I too should rape her. I too wanted to meet that illusory man. I became aroused, looked at them. Khanduji and Godavari sat silent as before. I looked at the others for support, but to my horror the entire lot had disappeared! I got a terrible shock. I stood up with difficulty and went toward Khanduji. I shouted, "Where are the rest?! Where have they gone?"

He sat dumb, the motherfucker. I charged at Goda. She... whether she was sleeping or unconscious, God alone knows. I had to rape her without any support... They'd all left...those bastards. They should be shot...only I remained. Alone! As I bent to straighten Goda, I heard a tiny sound from Khanduji. I looked up, startled. Khanduji hadn't moved, but suddenly I was shit scared. I hated myself. I tried, but... Try to understand... It's difficult for me to say this... You see, I was left alone...without help. I didn't have even the courage to pretend to rape like that youngster. I accept this.

I turned away, terribly upset with myself. I slapped myself till I bled... how could I have so little courage? I hit my head against the floor, right here at this spot. Khanduji just sat there, numb.

(There is an extremely uncomfortable pause. A is again sitting, tightly clutching his hands and legs. B, highly agitated, writhes. That B is not yet ready to commit the rape is obvious. He attempts to say something to that effect. But A stops him with a wave of his hand and continues to talk.)

I realised it fully. I would need help... I am not impotent, but I need help...I need help to commit the rape... This is a fact and I have to accept it. I know you too will need help...we are sensitive people. I knew this the moment I saw you! See, it's nothing to feel ashamed of... It was easy for the group because they knew each other, you see —

No, don't speak... I know we're horrible...that's a given fact... What now... what do we do about it? What he said earlier was so true. These aren't our real bodies...and these two are the ones really responsible — shit, why should we suffer? They have to be rammed...I mean we have to act. We can't sit about passively...

And look here... you can confess at the end. Just accept the whole thing and forget it... that's what I've been doing all this while after you came. Now I am drained... It's catharsis — but somewhere down the road you have to participate in the actual act... And such an opportunity is rare. There will be many occasions to confess later — that's invariable... it's always there for people like us...please trust me... *(A momentary pause. B is still in two minds, petrified.)*

Look here, are you getting unbearably restless or not? It's not happening to them. Let me repeat: they're responsible — finished. There's only one way out... rape... That's it!

Like I said earlier, we are always doing it anyway. Always raping, always using our might to exploit somebody. But the systems are such that it goes unnoticed. The only difference here is that it is bare, visible to all. At one stage of progress this happens. History proves it... Your hands and legs are twitching, aren't they? Now is the point of no return. You're addicted to it...

(B is still flabbergasted. A abruptly changes his stance, and assumes an aggressive tone.) Do you wish to become like them and stay here? If you're committed, you can become like them. There is a need for people like them. Otherwise who will we rape? Would you like to become like them?

(B takes a few steps forward, stops. A is aware that he can control B. This makes him even more impatient.)

But like I said, it's your choice... Nobody can force you... This is a democracy... You may stay here with them if you wish... But at least help me... please. I'm not asking for much. She is completely bedraggled. How can she resist? But even on such a bedraggled... I mean, it's tough! Spread her legs like this... here... *(B goes towards them. A sees this.)* Good! Come... come quickly.

(B stumbles toward A. A pulls him up. Both stand there nervously in a moment of silence. Then holding hands, they move, roll Godavari onto her back. Suddenly it is pitch dark. The continuous, deep, moaning sound of a woman can be heard. When the lights come on, A and B are no longer on stage. They have gone ahead. Goda and Khandu are lying in a dishevelled state. Goda's torn saree is spread out in the front.)



Photo by Kumar Gokhale

The original play in Marathi was titled *Te Pudhe Gele*.

Play © Makarand Sathe; translation © the playwright and Ajay Joshi; photographs © Kumar Gokhale

Farid Mohammed Mansuri “Adil”
Eighteen War Poems and Bosnia Sequence

Translated by Gopika Jadeja



Photograph courtesy Githa Hariharan

Eighteen War Poems

To realise the dream of world peace
cover the sleeping metropolis
with a blanket of missiles

*

A soldier in fatigues
stares deep into the mirror
looking for his face

*

To wait each day with restless gaze
at an unknown military post
for a letter bearing
a familiar hand

*

Let me drink the last sip
of cola at the trenches
Let me swim across the mirage of death

*

In the rain of bomb fire
where did it suddenly flash from
the face of a wife asleep after childbirth

*

Mid-desert
amid the urgent caravan of tanks
a lone camel
stands confused

*

A lost Bedouin
with a herd of camels
asks directions of a tank

*

Mid-desert
looking for the marks of his lost camel's feet
in the tracks of a tank
— an Arab

*

All engulfing sandstorm
A lost camel asks a tank
the way

*

A soldier atop a tank
stretches his arms high
trying to reach for some dates

*

A camel cries in the desert
How many soldiers
fell into this pit
in just a moment

A camel cries in the desert

*

Familiar with the sound of the azaan
the camel wriggles its ears
to decipher the blasts of a bomb

*

The camel has made its way
into the tent
The Arab will have to move out

*

Blood now flows
from oil wells
in the middle of the desert

*

The hungry thirsty camel
looking for an oasis
stumbles upon
a pool of blood
in the desert

Read the Gujarati original here: <http://guftugu.in/4171-2/>.

Bosnia Sequence

Bosnia I

The road to the hospital pants
in 60,000 empty stomachs.

Drenched in blood
Drenched
lies
each moment
each age
each body
each dream

In the chopped arms of a child
the bucket of water overflows
with blood
In this thick darkness
nothing makes sense
Not the road of return
Not the broken minaret
Not even the blood that smears
everything in sight
The sight that will be born
The country
that lies broken
in 60,000 empty stomachs

Bosnia II

Darkness in all eyes
Silence on all lips
A city sinking slowly
into a quagmire of blood
A country disappearing from the map
A heap of dead bodies
in the ruins of time
Debris of arms
Pools of dried blood
Dreams of a rising sun
A sobbing prayer in every eye
The fear of hell
trembling on dry lips
Deep inside prayer halls
the pain of hopelessness
in all eyes
on all lips

Bosnia III

All walls, bullet riddled
All homes, ruins
Placing the severed head lying on the ground
Back on the neck, I think —
All thought is now futile
I stop my breath
Push my hands through the hollow
Between my ribs, searching
Who throbs here?
The hand goes through the back
With the severed arm fallen to the ground
I hold the head rolling down the neck

All walls, bullet ridden
All homes, ruins

Bosnia IV

Arms raised to the void in prayer
Severed from shoulders
Heads bowing to the earth
Severed from their necks
Through bullet-riddled breasts
The city burning
Smoke rising from the holes
Smothers all eyes
All dreams.

Read the Urdu original here: <http://guftugu.in/4166-2/>

Translator's note: Thanks to Jayant Parmar and Ayaz Khan Babi for help in transcribing the Urdu to Devanagari.

Poems © Adil Mansuri; translations © Gopika Jadeja; photograph © Gittha Hariharan

Chandrakant Patil

Ahmedabad 2003 and Aurangabad 1986

Translated by Vishnu Khare



Vasudha Thozhur, 'Travelogue – The Aesthetics of Tragedy II'

Two Poems : Ahmedabad, 2003

For Adil Mansuri

Adilji, where are you?
Are you well?
Your heart dancing on many-hued waves
Your mind jostling with words
And your bold protests
Is your world
As unbroken as it used to be?
How easily you bade farewell
To your city

And went away to a deceitful world
Beyond seven seas
A Sufi poet likewise arrived in your city
From my village
And made his peace with the Almighty
Nearly three centuries ago

Adilji,
I am talking of Wali Dakhani
Whose grave has been razed to dust
By devils in the armour of power
You know that, don't you?

Do you still hold a brush in your hand?
Do fond words fluttering their mystic wings
Still descend on your canvas?
Does your conscience
Still darken
With sad ghazals?

Or, abandoning all deep memories
On the shores of the Arab Sea,
Have you got lost
In a heaven
Where all messengers of God turn into strange passengers?

[Read the original Hindi here: http://guftugu.in/4137-2/](http://guftugu.in/4137-2/)

For Jenab Mohammed Alavi

Jenab Alavi Saheb,
You once said
God is like a lantern thrown into the attic of junk
When there is an outage
This remark of yours comes to mind
Then the lantern is searched for, dusted and
Wiped clean and lit
Till electricity is restored

Jenab Alavi Saheb
This happened probably twenty or twenty-five years ago
Meanwhile how fast everything has changed
God is no more a silent lantern
He is now a blazing torch
That has extinguished the lamps of the entire city
In broad daylight

Jenab,
What are you writing these days?

I ask because
Time is bent upon murdering poetry
Yet human beings exist, living has to be done,
And so does creation.

[Read the original Hindi here: http://guftugu.in/4144-2/](http://guftugu.in/4144-2/)

Safe in a Dirge: Wali Dakhani, Aurangabad, 1986

Is this the same as your city
Mohammed Wali
The same gardens and birds
Canals tanks mountains forests
That awoke in you
The feelings of a poet?

Is this the city where you were born
And after your death
Did your body
Mingle in the dust of this city?

Mohammed Wali,
At the age you arrived in this land
Leaving Delhi because of a crazed King
The first time with your father
The Bandanawaz Baba Gesudaraz,
At nearly the same age
Did I arrive in this city of yours,
Half-a-century is about to expire
I have made your city my own
And filled it with my breath.

Under the hovering shadow of death
In every lost battle
This city has given me refuge
Buried under the debris of defeat
I have managed to claw my way out
After these many years
This city of yours
Cannot be wrenched away from my body and soul.

In my youth
A strange madness would possess me
And with my friends at midnight
I would reach the graveyard
Where before the grave of Siraz
We would sit under the neem tree
Looking at the trembling leaves
Playing with moonlight
We would be immersed in our own solitude.

Passing by the graveyard
I would often wonder
How did you transform your life's humdrum routine, Wali,
Into your ghazals and mathnavis?
How was your evergreen language born
Amid universal decline?

I don't know
In which city
My last day my last evening
My last night of eternal sleep be spent
But I shall remember this city of yours
Even after my death.

Mohammed Wali,
Ever since I have come to my senses
I have drunk the honey and hemlock
Of this your city
I have wandered through the arteries of this city
In resignation
I have passed through all localities and lanes
Every quarter, each open space of this city
Without fear or worry
I have known each house and each wall, each stone
The magical canals, open gardens
Like my own breath.
Have known
The sunshine shying away from
The narrow by-lanes of this city
I recognised how deep the dark was in every quarter.

Mohammed Wali,
Having spent my entire life in this city of yours
I have seen
How the winds of language
Inflame the shoals of religion,
How people arrive from alien lands
And terrorised by tongue
Divide the city
Into religious camps.

Mohammed Wali,
The terrifying Satan of communalism
Grows each day now in this city,
Its canals are poisoned with
The potion of racial hatred
Carnivore plants breed in its climate
Man-eating beasts emerge from its lanes
In broad daylight
Terrorised darkness
Descends on your city with regular monotony.

Yet this city
Grows incessantly like a nail
As the two banks of a river
Run away from the midstream
Terrorised by a deluge
So are the borderlines
Running away from your city
Look, how immersed in peace this city of yours
Changes into a metropolis
How the crowd has pasted its mask
On its body
How people who belong here are turning strangers
On their own land.

Mohammed Wali,
Were you living in the present
You would perhaps have imprisoned yourself in some dark lane
Spat on civilisation and sat down
Before a carrom-board in a decrepit tea-house
Or gambled on a raised platform in the lane
Or got caught
Touting black-market cinema-tickets
Or robbing people on the desolate highway,
Or maybe as a boy you would have become a garage-hand
Mastering the esoteric language of nuts and spanners and screwdrivers
Might have got a driving licence from somebody benevolent for
An auto-rickshaw, a taxi or straightaway of a truck;
Whenever the call of Jihad
Would come riding high on a whirlwind
Your eyes too would be sanguine
Sharpening rusted knives, daggers, spears.

Mohammed Wali,
This city cannot be yours now
The people of the city have forgotten your name
And wish to forget even the city's name
Which they claim hurts who they are
And so should be changed.

Mohammed Wali,
This is no longer my city either
Carrying a history of six hundred years
I am collapsing within
Searching for my city lost in this metropolis.

Mohammed Wali,
The words I played with my entire life
Do not know what a dirge is
But it is true
That the name of your beloved city can now
Remain safe only in a dirge.

Read the original Hindi here: <http://guftugu.in/4148-2/>

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E.P. Unny
Scrawl



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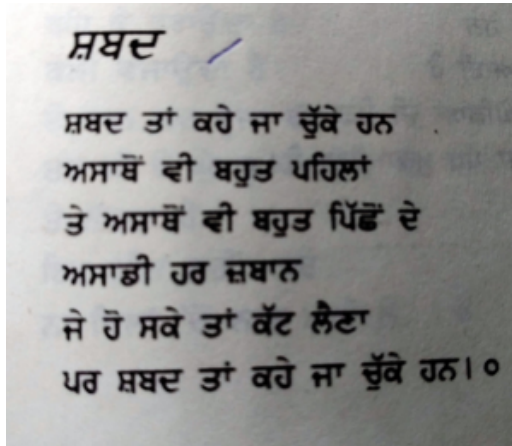
The Colour of Pain: Five Punjabi Poets

Selected by Chaman Lal



Image courtesy the [Himmat Project](#) led by Vasudha Thozhur

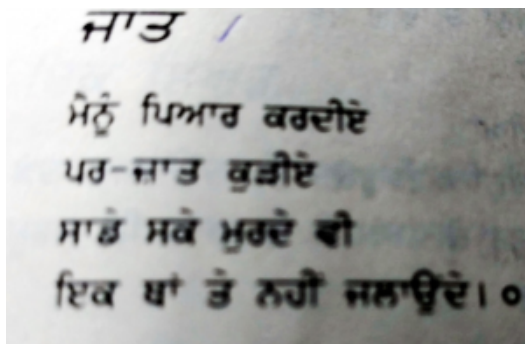
This selection is dedicated to the first death anniversary of Professor M.M. Kalburgi on 30th August 2016. The day was marked by a gathering in Dharwad of cultural activists, as well as many of the writers who returned their awards in 2015 in protest against the murder of Kalburgi and the rationalists Narendra Dabholkar and Govind Pansare. Of the five poets in this selection, Surjit Patar, Darshan Butter and Jaswinder were among the writers who returned their awards in 2015. Returning his award, Patar said, “The murder of writers, scholars and thinkers in this diverse country is painful... Even more painful is that these murderers get away...”



Words

Words have already been said
much before us and
much after us.
Cut off every tongue of ours
If you can,
But words have already been said.

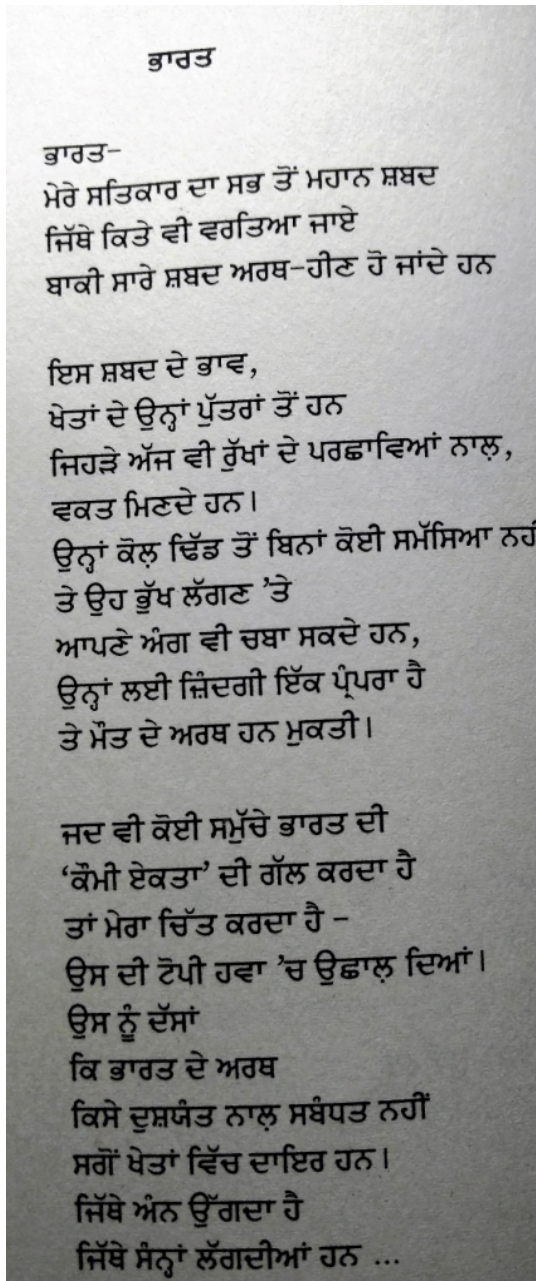
Translated by Chaman Lal



Caste

You love me, do you?
Even though you belong
to another caste.
But do you know,
our elders do not
even cremate their dead
in the same place.

Pash (Avtar Singh Sandhu)



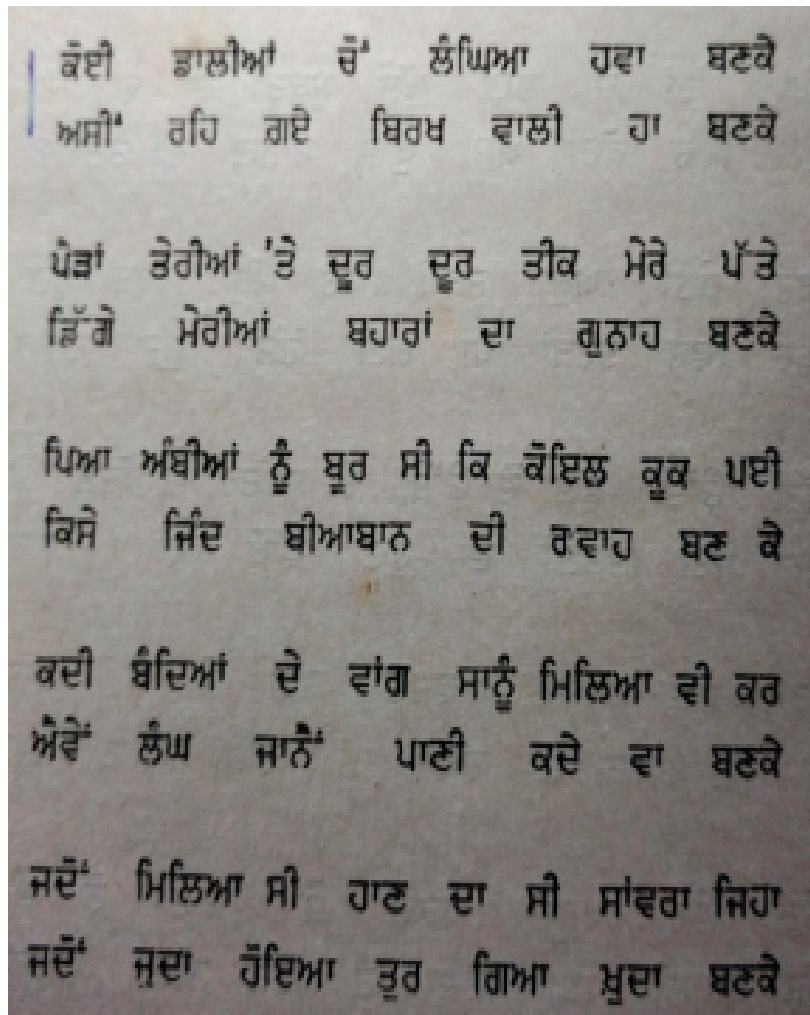
Bharat (India)

the word I respect most —
whenever it appears,
all other words lose importance.
This word means —
The children of the land
who still measure time
by the shadows of trees.
They have no problem but that of the stomach.

And when hungry
they can chew even their own limbs.
To them life is a tradition
and death means nirvana.
Whenever someone talks about
the “National Unity” of all Bharat
I feel like
knocking off his cap
and telling him
that the many meanings of Bharat
do not relate to any Dushyanta.
Instead they are registered in the farms
where food grows, where break-ins happen.

Translated by Surjeet Kalsey

Surjit Patar
Two Ghazals



I

Someone passed through the branches like a breeze; I'm left behind, the sigh of a tree.

On your footprints, far away, my leaves fall, stains of my youth's desires.

The mango blossoms bloomed, the cuckoo cried out, witness to some life in the wilderness.

Please meet me sometime, the way humans meet, instead of passing by like water or breeze.

When we met, we were both young.

When we separated, you left as a god.

ਬਲਦਾ ਬਿਰਖ ਹਾਂ, ਖਤਮ ਹਾਂ, ਬਸ ਸ਼ਾਮ ਤੀਕ ਹਾਂ
ਫਿਰ ਵੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਬਹਾਰ ਦੀ ਕਰਦਾ ਉਡੀਕ ਹਾਂ
ਮੈਂ ਤਾਂ ਨਹੀਂ ਰਹਾਂਗਾ ਮੇਰੇ ਗੀਤ ਰਹਿਣਗੇ
ਪਾਣੀ ਨੇ ਮੇਰੇ ਗੀਤ ਮੈਂ ਪਾਣੀ 'ਤੇ ਲੀਕ ਹਾਂ
ਜਿਸ ਨਾਲੋਂ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਚੀਰ ਕੇ ਵੰਝਲੀ ਬਣਾ ਲਿਆ
ਵੰਝਲੀ ਦੇ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਮੈਂ ਉਸ ਜੰਗਲ ਦੀ ਚੀਕ ਹਾਂ
ਅਗ ਦਾ ਸਫਾ ਹੈ ਉਸ 'ਤੇ ਮੈਂ ਫੁੱਲਾਂ ਦੀ ਸਤਰ ਹਾਂ
ਉਹ ਬਹਿਸ ਕਰ ਰਹੇ ਨੇ ਗਲਤ ਹਾਂ ਕਿ ਠੀਕ ਹਾਂ

॥

I am a burning tree, exhausted. I will last only till night.
Still, I wait for some spring.

Though I will not remain, my songs will.
My songs are water, I am only a fleeting line on its surface.

I became a flute, and as that flute,
I am the crying call of the jungle from which I was torn.

On a page of fire, my words a row of flowers.
They debate whether I am wrong, or right.

Translated by Randi L. Clary

Darshan Butter

The Colour of Pain

Thorns spread across the paths
Piercing meaning into the journey.
The thorn piercing the heel:
A reason for walking.

Some thorns pierce the breath,
Not paths.
Some thorns pierce souls,
Not heels.

Some words are reserved
To make poetry out of conscience,
Some sayings flower
In the muddy earth of the soul.

When does life stop complaining about hardship?
When does time stop
To argue with Sun and Shade?

The bird sitting on the cross
Knows
The colour of pain
A glow-worm lights
The tunnel
Showing the way to live

Thorns spread across the paths
Piercing meaning into the journey.
The thorn piercing the heel:
A reason for walking.

Translated by Chaman Lal

[Read the Punjabi original here: http://guftugu.in/4232-2/](http://guftugu.in/4232-2/)

Jaswinder

Two Ghazals

I

What play is this, what is being played out onstage?
The wound plays the dagger.
The promise was a melodious tune; what noise is this then?

What did we hear about and what is being made?
What kind of war is it? I am on both sides.
Why do I have to fight myself?

II

The words I am writing on these lifeless papers:
I write a certificate that I am alive
(Words) which don't burn with the body, remain alive till doomsday
Writing to identify those wounds
The day history was pierced thorn-like into the heel
Since then I have written the scene of the city's cross
Listening to which the heart full of blowing wind was pierced
I write the scream of that deer in the desert
Guard in my heart the anxiety of the other shore
I write hymns to control the wrath of the Chenab
What helplessness despite butterflies and flowers?
When I wish to write it, I find I'm writing about ruins!

Translated by Chaman Lal

[Read the Punjabi original here: http://guftugu.in/4230-2/](http://guftugu.in/4230-2/)

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K. Satchidanandan

The Idea of India: The Case for Plurality

The concept of plurality is central to any idea of India as a nation. We have had conflicts whenever any agency has tried to impose forms of religious, ethnic, cultural or linguistic hegemony in the name of unity. At the same time, however, we have lived happily for centuries with the idea of plurality, which to our people has been the very organic nature of their environment, natural and enriching like bio-diversity itself. This plurality is part of the very essence of our democratic polity.

Let me digress a bit to explain what I mean by democracy: The first condition for understanding democracy is to detach it from the instruments of the State and see it as people's power. It is not the people who resist the power of the State, but the State that resists, constrains, contains and suppresses the power of the people through its institutions of law and order. True democrats speak of expanding the base of democracy, overcoming its constraints through popular action aimed at social justice, and going beyond its present limitations and curtailments of rights. But the enemies of democracy fear even the exercise of existing freedoms by the common people. They want to curb them further and confine their availability to the upper layers of society.

Jacques Rancière, the radical French thinker, in his treatise *Hatred of Democracy* (Verso, 2006) remarks how the "government of anybody and everybody" is bound to attract the hatred of all those who wish to govern men by their birth, wealth, or knowledge. "Today it is bound to attract this hatred more radically than ever since the social power of wealth no longer tolerates any restrictions on its limitless growth, and each day its mechanisms become more closely articulated to those of State action... State power and the power of wealth tangentially unite in a sole expert management of monetary and population flows. Together they combine their efforts to reduce the spaces of politics. But reducing these spaces, effacing the intolerable and indispensable foundation of the political, means opening up another battle field — it means witnessing the resurgence of a new radicalised figure of the power of birth and kinship. No longer the power of former monarchies and aristocrats, but that of 'the peoples of God'". Rancière takes the examples of radical Islam and the American evangelists, fighting democracy in different ways, and in our context it could well be the apologists of "Hindutva". Democracy that is destroyed in the name of a holy book or religion, and the bellicose expansion of democracy into other countries using the power of weapons, are two sides of the same coin. Democracy is neither a form of government that enables oligarchies to rule in the name of the people, nor is it a form of society that governs the power of commodities. It is the action that constantly wrests monopoly over public life from oligarchic governments, and omnipotence over lives from the power of wealth. No institutional form can guarantee democracy unless it is constantly active and can wrench its power from its alienated forms.

This is where politics begins: to use Rancière's phraseology, when "noise" is converted into language, and when men and women having the time to do nothing other than their work, take the time to prove that they are indeed speaking beings, participating in a shared world, and not furious or suffering animals. Thus the inaudible is rendered audible, the invisible becomes visible and what was animal noise becomes human speech. Political activity reconfigures the distribution of the

perceptible. It resists “policing” of every kind and challenges the watching eye — the one we find in Bentham’s concept of “Panopticon” that Foucault uses as a paradigm for the master’s omnipresent eye (in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prisons*). The challenge to Indian democracy comes precisely from those sections that hate democracy as an idea, in spite of paying lip service to it or bowing before the steps of Parliament House. One needs to clearly distinguish hatred from critique. Critique is essential in order to expand the base of democracy and redeem it from hollowness. This hollowness is caused by the constant depletion of meaning, turning into a formal structure with no democratic content. We can see this continually happening to our democracy. Hatred, however, comes from a deep contempt for the people with their plural natures and aspirations. This is what forces the rulers to look at opposition as enmity and criticism as treason and conspiracy.

The hatred of democracy manifests itself in India chiefly in four ways: one, intolerance towards India’s religious, ethnic, linguistic, literary, philosophical and cultural plurality; two, the suppression of difference, silencing of popular and intellectual opposition and the consequent thwarting of the freedom of expression; three, the enfeeblement of the federal polity and increasing centralisation of power; and four, contempt towards those sections of the population whose welfare constitutes the very goal and measure of democracy, viz., women, peasants, workers, dalits, adivasis, and religious, ethnic and sexual minorities.

While speaking of plurality, the contending notions of plurality must be noted. One of them is the market idea of plurality propounded by globalisers and champions of the neo-liberal economy, where it means no more than the diversity of consumer products. Ethnicity in their jargon is but a trademark, regions are merely product-labels and tourist destinations, and people are producers for a centralised market. Once products enter the market chain the producers are completely alienated from them, globalising what was till then local. Languages are meant only to reach the diverse clientele, with “copies” made available in different tongues.

The second is the “statist” idea of plurality, which is from the point of view of governance. The attempt is to make it “governable”. To some extent it is a colonial legacy as the British saw India’s diversity as an obstacle to governance. They attempted to divide the people in order to easily control them. In the “statist” idea, plurality is acknowledged, but formatted as manageable: While we have several hundred mother tongues, only 22 find place in the eighth schedule of the constitution, Hindi being given prime place as the “official” language (English being the associate official language), and we have linguistic states in each of which there are anything from 20 to 60 languages according to the recently concluded “People’s Linguistic Survey of India”. The State, whatever its intentions, ends up creating hierarchies among languages as well as regions, leading to identity wars. A forced unity inevitably leads to balkanisation. The great principle of federalism enshrined in the constitution is seldom reflected in the actual practices of governance. Regions in the northeast seldom appear in our picture of India, especially when it comes to the cultural discourse. Arts and literature are cleanly divided into classical, folk, and modern, a division legitimised through cultural institutions. In practice, however, they have all taken from one another, proving the clean and rigid divisions to be unreal and arbitrary. Certain aspects of our diversity get overlooked in the creation of the “imagined community” of the nation (to borrow Benedict Anderson’s famous term), assisted by symbols. Plurality often becomes a colourful mask worn during spectacles like the Republic Day parade — a reductive, governable idea worthy of

exhibition along with the nation's military strength, with the masked "theyyam" (a ritual performance of Kerala) behind a tank.

Political Hindutva does not even recognise this diversity except as an unwelcome and disturbing presence. It is built over the tomb of India's pluralist ethos that believes in dialogue, exchange and debate. Anyone who tries to argue with its proponents will see that it is like talking to a wall that only hurls stones instead of putting forward reasoned counter-arguments. We see it on social media everyday: every criticism, even one made in the most rational and decent language, is countered with the worst forms of abuse by the self-appointed rowdy guardians of the Hindutva ideology.

Political Hindutva, let us not forget, despite its false claims to patriotism, is a colonial construct which borrows elements from Western Orientalism, the Judaic idea of religion, and the fascist ideas of cultural nationalism as manifested in Germany, Spain and Italy. Its murderous intent has been expressed many a time in recent history from Gandhi's assassination to the destruction of the Babri Masjid; the Gujarat pogrom; several bomb blasts and manufactured riots; the silencing and murder of dissenting writers and intellectuals; isolation and even lynching of those belonging to minorities; persecution of tribal people and Dalits; the taking over and ruination of public institutions; selective action based on false accusations against non-governmental organisations; destructive interventions in autonomous bodies including universities; bans on everything from beef to books and labour strikes; calculated acts of censorship; labelling every dissenter as a traitor worthy of sedition charges; the shameless promotion of chosen corporate houses through loan waivers, subsidies and tax exemptions; and the brutal and blinding attacks on common people including children, as we are witnessing in Kashmir.

It is only proper to remember what Umberto Eco in his *Five Moral Pieces* calls "Ur-Fascism". It is a kind of universal, omnipresent fascist trend with the following features, some of which have been elaborated by Wilhelm Reich in his treatise *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*: the cult of tradition that considers truth as revealed or known, going against the grain of scientific thinking; rejection of modernism; action for action's sake done without reflection; suspicion of culture and of intellectuals; seeing any dissent as betrayal; fear of difference and the consequent rejection of a pluralist ethos; appeal to the frustrated middle classes; a negative and exclusivist way of defining the nation that leads to xenophobia; the creation of an "other", blamed for all that is wrong with the society; an obsession with conspiracies; and seeing pacifism as collusion with the enemy. This comes from a vision of life as a permanent battle that will finally lead to the lost "golden age" that never existed. Other features include: a form of popular elitism that results in scorn for the weak; machismo that condemns non-conformist sexual habits, and a contempt for women and sexual deviants; the cult of death ("Viva la Muerte" was the slogan of the Falangists of Spain) that prefers death to life which justifies their readiness to kill; qualitative populism that treats people as a monolith, and belief in some abstract "common will", hence opposing all parliamentary governments; and the "newspeak" (a term George Orwell uses in his novel *1984*) that sees everything in black and white, abhors all complex thinking and strives to limit critical thinking.

It is not difficult to see these symptoms in transformed, veiled or diluted forms in the ruling Hindu right-wing in India. Hindu cultural nationalism is nationalism shorn of respect for regional identities and cultural differences on one hand, and of the

socialist and internationalist dimension on the other. In its atavism, faith in racial and religious superiority, opposition to egalitarianism, its rootedness in the middle classes and its collaboration with capitalism, it is no different from Nazism. Outfits like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Rashtra Sena, Sanatan Sanstha, Sri Ram Sena and Hanuman Sena take after the Nazi storm troopers. Their use of symbols like the lotus, ganga jal and semi-mythological figures like Rama remind one of the Nazi deployments of Nordic symbols. What the Jew was to the Nazi is the Muslim (and minorities generally) to the HMS-BJP-RSS-VHP. The Muslim (who could well be Christian, Parsi, Buddhist or Jain) is the first “other” to be held responsible for all the ills of the society and the sufferings of the majority. Add to this their vain, racist faith in their “Aryan” origins and you have the making of classical fascism modelled on Nazism. To top it all, the revelations about the Hindu right-wing’s terrorist activities under the cover of “Abhinav Bharat”, with its proven involvement in the Malegaon blasts (2008), the Mecca Masjid blasts (2007), the Samjhauta Express Bombing (2007) and the Ajmer Sharif Dargah blasts (2007) — that made even the Congress Prime Minister of India say that saffron terror was a worse threat to India than even the Lashkar-e-Taiba — and you have a perfect combination of fascism and terrorism.

The hegemony of the Hindutva ideology poses a great threat to the plurality of India’s civilisation and history, which is the basis of its cultural richness. The hegemony of a monolithic Brahmanical Hindu religion that challenges our religious plurality, and the belief in the “Aryan” origins of Indians (against Romila Thapar’s contention in her book *Aryans* that the word is no more than the name of a group of languages and that such a race never existed) threatens our ethnic plurality. The silencing of dissent on the environmental front in the name of “foreign funding” of NGOs, the mega-idea of “development” that helps only the richer sections of the society (all recent studies prove wrong the “trickle-down theory” of its proponents), and the dilution of environmental regulations go against the idea of ecological diversity. At the same time, on the intellectual and cultural front, various forms of surveillance and suppression, combined with the systematic destruction of liberal public institutions, are silencing the plurality of ideas and ideological debates. On the political front, one sees what Professor Anthony King calls “the theatre of celebrity” where all the ministers and bureaucrats are made to listen to the commands of one man who is supposed to have won the votes for the new regime. Linguistic plurality is already under threat with the false characterisation of Hindi as the “national” language and the proposed teaching of Sanskrit at the school level. Opposition from labour has also been silenced through the new anti-labour laws tested in Rajasthan and other states.

Lord Acton once said, “It is bad to be oppressed by a minority, but it is worse to be oppressed by a majority, for there is a reserve of latent power in the masses which, if it is called into play, the minority can seldom resist”. Read this with Rosa Luxemburg’s famous statement in her arguments with Lenin that freedom means the freedom to oppose. Today, having an opposition is becoming more and more difficult and therefore exceedingly necessary, for without dissent democracy dies. While speaking of the 31 percent who voted for the BJP, let us also speak of and for the 69 percent that did not vote them. Since political parties have been abdicating their responsibilities towards the people, it is for the people to play the role of the opposition and re-educate the parties in the art of dissent. Writers and artists have a definite role to play in countering the fascist onslaught on the freedom of expression;

it is a question of the very survival of art and literature and ultimately of democracy itself. This can be done both as artists and writers as well as citizens who want democracy and diversity to flourish in India — that is, through art and activism, or maybe a combination of both.

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Mamang Dai

An Obscure Place: Five Survival Lyrics



Shoili Kanungo, 'Thwarted Quest'

An Obscure Place

The history of our race
begins with the place of stories.
We do not know if the language we speak
belongs to a written past.
Nothing is certain.

*There are mountains. Oh, there are mountains.
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet.*

An obscure place haunts the hunter.
The prize slips away.
Yesterday the women hid their faces,
they forbade their children to speak.
Yesterday we gave shelter to men
who climbed over our hills
for glory of a homeland, they said,
those who know what knowing is,
and now the sleeping houses,
the men and the villages have turned to stone.

If there is no death the news is silent.
If there is only silence, we should be disturbed.
Listen, the tone of a prayer is hushed.
If a stranger passes this way
let him look up to the sky.
A smoke cloud chases the ants,
See, they have slain the wild cat
and buried the hornbill in her maternal sleep.

The words of strangers have led us into a mist
deeper than the one we left behind;
weeping, like the waving grassland
where the bones of our fathers are buried
surrounded by thoughts of beauty.

*There are mountains. Oh, there are mountains.
We climbed every slope. We slept by the river.
But do not speak of victory yet.*

Flowers

The house is full of gardenias.
All these months we were waiting
for these white flowers, not knowing at all
how terror and pain would find us
in the midst of this tender perfume.

Now the people are asking for wreaths.
Hush, you said,
the dead are but asleep,
caught unguarded in dreams.

But my heart is burning.
I am afraid.
Red poinsettia in the garden
I weep for my children.
Open the window, you said.
Let the world come in.
Let the world know about sleep and death.
Tears have their alchemy.
So I opened the window
and hid my heart.
Now, in my hometown, no one knows
how the rose tree grows,
deepening colour for the sadness
of a new life,
and its similarities with the old.

The sorrow of women

They are talking about hunger.
They are saying
there is an unquenchable fire
burning in our hearts.
My love, what shall I do?
I am thinking how I may lose you
to war, and big issues
more important than me.
Life is so hard like this.
Nobody knows why.
It is like fire,
it is like rainwater, sand, glass.
What will I do, my love,
if my reflection disappears?
They are talking about a place
where rice flows on the streets,
about a place where there is gold
in the leaves of trees.
They are talking about displacement
when the opium poppy was growing
dizzy in the sun,
happy, in a state of believing.
And they are talking about escape,
about liberty, men and guns.
Ah! The urgency of survival.
But what will they do,
not knowing the sorrow of women.

Transparent heart

In the days when we were hunters,
hunting with our mouths and eyes,
every triumph and error was one more reason
to respect the other, suspended in a dark ocean
awaiting the arrival of nutrients, supply of air,
rising to the surface,
coveting the same things.

There is a burden of the deep.
A history of war when water rose up
chasing fire into rigid stone,
and tearing the branches off trees
for algae and seaweed,
to feed a tribe of exiled giants
separated in space,
with a memory of yearning, dreaming of land.

It was the fire god who changed the lines.
The territories of sea ice, swamp, a coastline,
separating the eagle and the whale
one day, when a glimmering eye
pierced the curving darkness
driving away the hard cold,
and conjured up the birth of time,
when our world was but a thought
waiting to be born.

A slow tide brushes the edge of continents.
Transparent heart,
It is your time to rise.
There is a way to re-enact the past,
to say whatever can be felt, is language.

Perhaps this life is but a spark, imagined,
but a spark loved, nurtured through centuries
that buries me knee-deep in hope
with songs of courtship
and heat trapped in my bones,
washed with wind and water,
smeared with the colours of the sun,
rising with the songs of dead ancestors
with one hand stretched to the sky
and this, my footprint,
on a clay tablet.

The desire of ink

They say a landscape drops from heaven
tangled with possibilities;
and a summer sun that directs the perfect
balance between the moment and the word
when everything falls into place.

Your laughter opens the world, creating space.
We could have diverted boats and nets
and claimed the words of the rose
entering a house, shy as a dove,
exchanging words to help each other survive.
But words are like water, flowing away,
these floating lines
but the tender scars of witness on a page,
replacement words, shaped around a hope.

Right from the start we knew how it would be.
It was about truth, or the recognition of it,
but the journey of words proved nothing.
We neither gave up nor decided anything.

In another world someone holds my hand.
My life is changing every day.
Restless, becalmed, in open water
the plume of water rising to fly
is the surrender of letters into the great circle
beyond language and the desperation of words
where the world is scalloped like a shell,
and the waves are roaring
in no direction,
turning with the growth and bend of the sun.

All poems from *Midsummer – survival lyrics*.

Poems © Mamang Dai; image © Shoili Kanungo

Najwan Darwish
We Never Stop: Four Poems
Translated by Kareem James Abu-Zeid



Hani Zurob, 'Flying Lesson 10' / hanizurob.com

نتوقف نكن ولم

إليها لأرجع بلدٌ لي ليس
منها لأنفى بلدٌ لي ليس
يجري نهر ماء جذورها شجرةٌ
تموت توقفت إن
تموت تتوقف لم وإن
*

الموت ذراع وعلى الموت خدّ على
أيامي أفضل قضيتُ
يوم كل خسرتها التي وبلدي
يوم كل أرباحها كنت
واحدةً بلدٌ للناس وكان

الخسارة في تتعدّد بلدي وكانت
الفقد في وتتجدد
الماء في جذورها ومثلي
تجف توقفت إن
تموت توقفت إن
الشمس شعاع من نهر مع يجري وكلانا
أثرية جراح من المصاعد الذهب غبار من
نتوقف نكن ولم
يجري كان كلانا
لنلتقي نتوقف أن مرّة نفكر لم
*

منها لأنفي بلد لي ليس
إليها لأرجع بلد لي ليس
أموت بلدي في توقفت وإن .

We Never Stop

I've got no country to return to
and no country to be banished from:
a tree whose roots
are a running river:
if it stops it dies
and if it doesn't it dies

I spent the best of my days
on the cheeks and arms of death
and my country that I lost each day
I gained each day anew.
The people had a country
but mine multiplied in loss
and was renewed in absence.
Its roots, like mine, are water:
if it stops it will wither
if it stops it will die
We're both running
with a river of sunbeams
a river of gold dust
that rises from ancient wounds
and we never stop
We keep on running
never thinking to pause
so our two paths can meet
I've got no country to be banished from
and no country to return to:
stopping in a country
would be the death of me

تعرف لو

الموت من أصحابي أشتري أن أستطيع لا
يبيع ولا يشتري الموت .

لي قالت الحياة:
الموت من شيئاً تشتتر لا
موتاً إلا يبيع لا الموت
الأبد إلى لك هُم
الأبد إلى معك هُم
الحياة هُم -تعرف لو- أصحابك .

If You Only Knew

I can't buy my friends from death
Death buys
but does not sell

Life told me:
Don't buy anything from death
death only ever sells itself
They're yours now, forever
they're with you now, forever
If you only knew, your friends
are life itself

المعلقون تَعِب

أنزلنا
لنستريح .

توارىخ نجر
أرض لا
سماء ولا .

رب يا
ذبيحتك أرح .
*

أبُّ لك يكن ولم أمُّ لك تكن لم
البارد الفجر بمخالب معلقين إخوتك تر ولم
إنساناً تحبَّ لم
إنسانٌ يهجرُك لم
الموت يدك من يأكل ولم
...

عذابنا تفهم لن أنت .

*

داود الملك لستُ
الندم باب عند لأجلس
المزامير لك أنوح
الخطايا بعد .

*

أنزلني
أستريح أن أريد .

The Ones Hanging

The ones hanging
are tired
Bring us down
so we can have some rest

We haul histories
bereft of land and sky

Lord
sharpen your knife
and give your sacrifice its rest

You had no mother or father
and you never saw your brothers
hanging
from the cold talons of dawn
you loved no one
and no one ever left you
and death never ate from your hands...
You cannot know our pain

I'm not King David
to sit at contrition's gate
and sing you psalms of lamentation
after the sin

Bring me down—
I want some rest

أحد لا

قلتُ ما قال أحد لا
يذهبُ الأرضُ وتركتُهُ
لشأنِي أذهب أن الآن أحاول
لكتِّها
القتيل والدها أسمال يديّ بين تضع
الضائع ابنها صورة تضع
المختطف وابنها
باعها الذي وابنها .
العبيد من تنتهي لا قوافل
الجور من تنتهي لا قصصُ
أمامي تضعها
أهر أن حتى أستطيع ولا
وشأنِي تدعني لا الأرض.

No One

No one has said what I've said
while the earth let them go
I'm trying, now, to go my own way
but
she puts the rags of her dead father in my hands
and the picture of her lost son
and her kidnapped son
and the son who sold her.
She puts endless caravans of slaves
and endless stories of injustice
in front of me
and I can't escape.
The earth won't let me go

Poems © Najwan Darwish; translations © Kareem James Abu-Zeid; image © Hani Zurob

“Why not live more than one life?”

K. Satchidanandan and Githa Hariharan in Conversation with Mini Krishnan



Image courtesy Scroll.in

Mini Krishnan began a [newspaper column](#) with two profound questions in the context of translations in India. She wrote, “Why not live more than one life? And through writers who lead us to the language-experiences of which we know so little?”

Mini Krishnan sources and edits fiction, plays, autobiographies and biographies from 14 Indian languages into English for Oxford University Press. She was formerly with Macmillan India where she edited the series *Modern Indian Novels in Translation*.

Writers K. Satchidanandan and Githa Hariharan, editors of *Guftugu*, spoke to Mini Krishnan about some critical questions on translations in the Indian context.

On a hierarchy of languages in translation

K. Satchidanandan: Do you believe in a hierarchy of languages when it comes to translations? For example, “vertical” translations from a “global” language, or even a “national” language into a “regional” or “local” language; or “horizontal” translations, say between two “regional” languages – say from Tamil to Malayalam, or Punjabi to Marathi?

Mini Krishnan: I think this language hierarchy keeps shifting. At one time in our country, Bengali not only led the scene of into-English-translations but dominated it. Reasons: heads of publishing lists were Bengalis and the Bengal Renaissance, and a certain culture of literary values pushed that region into high relief. Hindi and Marathi also had their publishing strengths; but most of all, there was an academic Eng-Lit mafia from those regions (I mean this in a gentle sense!) who crowded out other languages. So yes, I recognise this hierarchy but do not believe in it. I feel great works in fiction and poetry, as well as important sociological documents like memoirs and journals, are lying about everywhere, but publishers cannot reach them, nor can the texts reach the publishers. An exception, which made me wonder about how many other such works may be “hidden” from us, was *The Sharp Knife of Memory* (2015) published by Zubaan. The book is a translation of Kondapalli

Koteswaramma's memoirs. (Her husband Seetharamaiah was the founder of the Maoist movement in South India.)

Then there is the hierarchy created by prizes and awards. A writer who has not been translated into English cannot even hope to be considered for a literary prize. As for horizontal translations, I don't know enough. But shared experiences and proximity to understanding the landscape of a bordering region might make people sit up and think, "Let's see what is happening in Tamil Nadu among educated women and the difference their lives have made," or some such thing. A gap I have never been able to understand is why that great and sweet language Telugu has lagged so far behind the other three South Indian languages. And then there is Tulu. I have the most marvellous novella from Tulu, all translated and edited, but I simply cannot get that horse out of its box. Likewise Oriya — why hasn't anyone other than Manoj Das and Gopinath Mohanty got the kind of attention that the language and region should be getting?

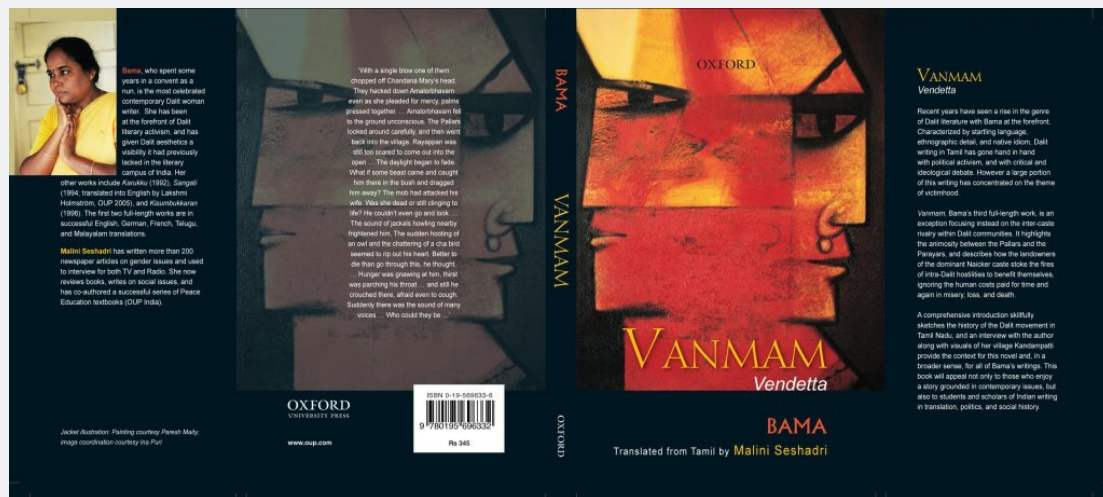


Image courtesy Oxford University Press

Githa Hariharan: The question seems to be: How do we, as a first step, balance translation into English as a sort of overall “link language” with translations to and from the other Indian languages? Then, as a second step, how do we foreground the latter, the horizontal exercise, as the natural expression of our multi-lingual literary culture? Can this ever happen? Would shedding a neo-orientalist view of translation help? Would tweaking the education system to use translations from one Indian language to another, and not English, make a difference?

Mini Krishnan: First — if the primary education system was more supportive of our languages and culture, it would certainly strengthen translations and translation study. But there is a traditional mistrust of translation as a hybrid genre not worth studying. In fact, this section of education isn't paying attention to any language — not even English which may be the medium of study. The “sponge” time of a child's years are spent memorising and attempting to understand subjects for which his or her vocabulary is not yet developed. Coming to the second part of your question — a translation into English always pushes the same work into other languages. Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in English (OUP) fired its movement into Malayalam and Tamil. The same thing happened with Sarah Joseph's books, and

Bama has probably moved into more languages than any other woman writer. It all came from English as the decoding language. The difficulty is that the author has no way of checking the quality in the regional language into which her book moves, whereas there are always three or four persons she can depend on to give her an accurate assessment of the English translation. Perhaps if there was more coordination between academia, the regional language publishers and the English press, this machinery would be better oiled. To come back to translation in education — some women’s colleges have taken bold decisions. The Ethiraj College (Chennai) prescribed Chellappa’s *Vaadivasa* translated from Tamil by Kalyan Raman (OUP) for their Foundation English course; Stella Maris, also in Chennai, has gone a step further and prescribed Na D’Souza’s *Dweepa* translated from Kannada (OUP) for their Foundation English course. I think it is the first time a translated work from a language other than that of the region has been prescribed for the whole college. Two years ago the Thiruvalluvar University adopted a textbook outlining the basics in translation for undergraduate students.

With reference to “horizontal” translations:

Read an extract from *Koogai* in Tamil (<http://guftugu.in/4128-2/>) and in Malayalam (<http://guftugu.in/4122-2/>).

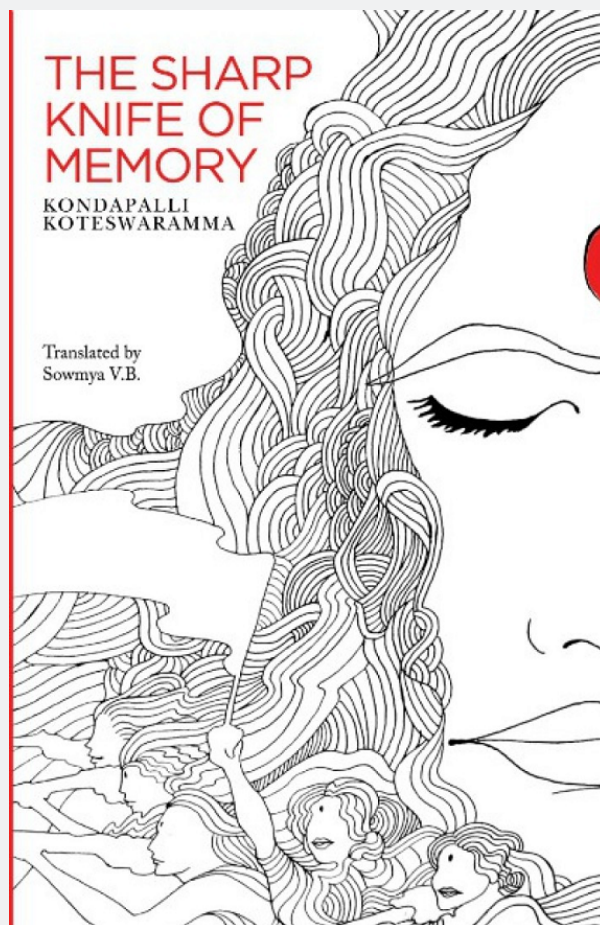


Image courtesy [Zubaan Books](#)

On the ideal reader for translations

K. Satchidanandan: Who is the ideal reader you have in mind when you edit translations from an Indian language into English: an Indian reader who does not follow the original language, or a Western reader who does not even know the culture and ethos behind that language? How do you find a means — if there is one — by which both these kinds of readers can be satisfied?

Mini Krishnan: My ideal reader is a committed and emotional person who is willing to take a flight from her armchair. My primary target reader is the Indian language orphan who can speak, maybe even function well, in the language and culture, but cannot read her language. It is worthwhile getting a headache and damaging my eyes for that reader. I also always, always hope that I will catch the eye of the researcher and academic reader who might take that text into an Indian classroom. The non-Indian reader is welcome to the feast but I'm not going to reduce the chili for him!

Githa Hariharan: I am struck by your phrase “the Indian language orphan”. Can we extend this to include not just those who are no longer bilingual, but also those who have to go to English to read texts in a language they do not know rather than reading it in the Indian language they know?

I also have a question about the chili. How do you translate, for example, colourful swearing into English? I remember my disappointment when I read two translations of one of Mahasweta's stories — there was an old woman in the village who could curse seven generations of a bullying policeman. In English, the more faithful one sounded both quaint and ridiculous; the better translation used “Fuck” all over the place but lost out on the old woman's imaginative variety.

Mini Krishnan: Swearing is abusive as well as exaggerated — go sleep with a donkey, may your food turn to menstrual blood etc. And oh, English is quite muscular in that department and can handle a lot of swearing. When the special ethos of a place comes up, such as the bad luck associated with rites gone wrong, or what's considered a bad omen, then you have a problem. “May you wake to the hoot of an owl!” has a special significance which the non-Indian is unlikely to know. Not just swearing: think of a phrase like “ghee in a frog's belly”. Now ghee is a precious commodity in India. Someone who grew up in the West may not grasp that straightaway. I admit that it would be tedious to have to explain that.

On footnoting in translations

K. Satchidanandan: Does footnoting really help in such situations? How much can we footnote after all? I am asking this question keeping in mind two facts: one, there is an increasing tendency to avoid/ reduce the number of footnotes. Two, with the Internet, a lot of information can be accessed by the responsible reader, making such notes superfluous.

Mini Krishnan: In this regard I'm very cautious and traditional. Never mind what the worldwide trend is. But if you are using up resources and printing x number of copies of a translation, and the author and translator are hoping to see their child run, you shouldn't cripple that child, tie its hands and say, now let's see you run. If words like irrikapindam or shaligramam appear, you darn well tell your reader what they are. How can we destroy the pleasure and flow of reading by expecting a reader to break off and check the net for information which may not even be right or complete? Let us gloss or die. I think it is both laziness and arrogance to leave words tucked so

deeply into a text that one cannot extract their meaning as one reads. Who is important in the exercise of reading? Is it not the reader? So when there are so many other distractions competing for attention, you have to make the road comfortable, not strew it with stones.

Githa Hariharan: Ah, I can see we are in dangerous waters now. Even those of us who write in English but happen to be Indian, fought for the right to not have a glossary. There are ways in which the meaning can be embedded in the text, not just for foreigners, but other Indians. I really hate footnotes in a work of fiction. I suppose you could have some Notes at the end, but only if it is unavoidable. Maybe an Introduction or Afterword if it is really important? After all, we read so much from elsewhere and sort of figure out new words and cultural practices in context. Why should we continue to museumise our work?

Mini Krishnan: Well, everything is important if you want the whole picture. Indians who write in English are safe because you can translate your ethos with delicate explanations as you go along. Food for instance. The preparation of, say, idiyappam, or the way a paan is assembled, can provide a nice cultural filler if you are arranging the setting for a scene in a novel in English. So also wedding or puja rites. You can, magus-like, construct the setting before turning to your characters. Just describing the door of an old house or the scent of those hanging thattis, or the way books stored in a wooden cupboard through many monsoons smell, would be so evocative for an Indian writing in English. Let me give you an example of the difficulty when the opposite is the case. In U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Bharathipura*, when Jagannatha decides to rebel openly, he enters the puja room to grab the shaligrama from its casket: "The priest was horrified to see the way the master had polluted the room the way he had entered it." What was that pollution? He hadn't taken off his shirt. Now not even every Indian knows that it is disrespectful for a man to keep his shirt on in a temple. If URA were an Indian writing in English he would have slipped in something about pollution and purity rules, but since he was writing in Kannada he didn't have to inform his readers.

What's so irritating about glosses? I think it would be more irritating to have to dig about and guess. To readers who have never visited India or read anything connected with the country, except perhaps a menu in an Indian restaurant, or a novel in English set in New Delhi (which has already translated itself), an Indian language translation certainly has linguistic tics folded into it. To add to the reader's difficulties, sometimes explanations are wrong or only partially right, or they blithely presume that another Indian word would make this one fly. What's the use of explaining pottu as bindi? In a recent translation of a novel set in Varanasi, the footnotes are, at best, lazy. A deva is a celestial being, not a god, and a yogini is a powerful female spirit, not necessarily a goddess. She could be part of Durga Devi's retinue, but she could also be a witch. Tricky, right? The book which carries these blurred meanings also includes a footnote describing puja as a religious ritual, when the more accurate explanation could be a ritual of worship. In a translation of a Ki Rajanarayanan novel that reads beautifully (to me, because I don't need the region-specific explanations), words like brahmastram, kadukkan, Ezhumalaiyaane and udan kaadu are left unexplained.

On translating specificities of dialect

K. Satchidanandan: How do we translate dialects and slang and community inflections, kinship terms, the names of flora and fauna, tones and modulations that abound in Indian fiction and now also in poetry, especially with the rise of Dalit and Nativist kinds of poetry?

Mini Krishnan: We can't. These words come from the land, which cannot be replicated efficiently, so all the more reason to run glosses and perhaps even illustrations as I did in *Antharjanam* (2012), Devaki Nilayamgode's memoirs of a time long gone, or C.K. Janu's *Mother Forest* (Women Unlimited, 2003). A project I've toted for about 15 years without success is a retelling of our classics in the form of supplementary readers for children, supported by artwork/ sketches done by regional artists. These could be used as non-detailed readers in English language classrooms in India.

Githa Hariharan: I see your point entirely, but I am also a little nervous of the ethnographic project or even the didactic project overshadowing the literary one.

Mini Krishnan: I hate to agree with you even partially, but let me quickly turn this around and say that the voice is what locates the literary work, isn't it? Why is Basheer's Kerala more convincing than Arundhati Roy's? I feel that this voice has to be served and serious readers would want to know everything. Entering another culture should be done with respect.

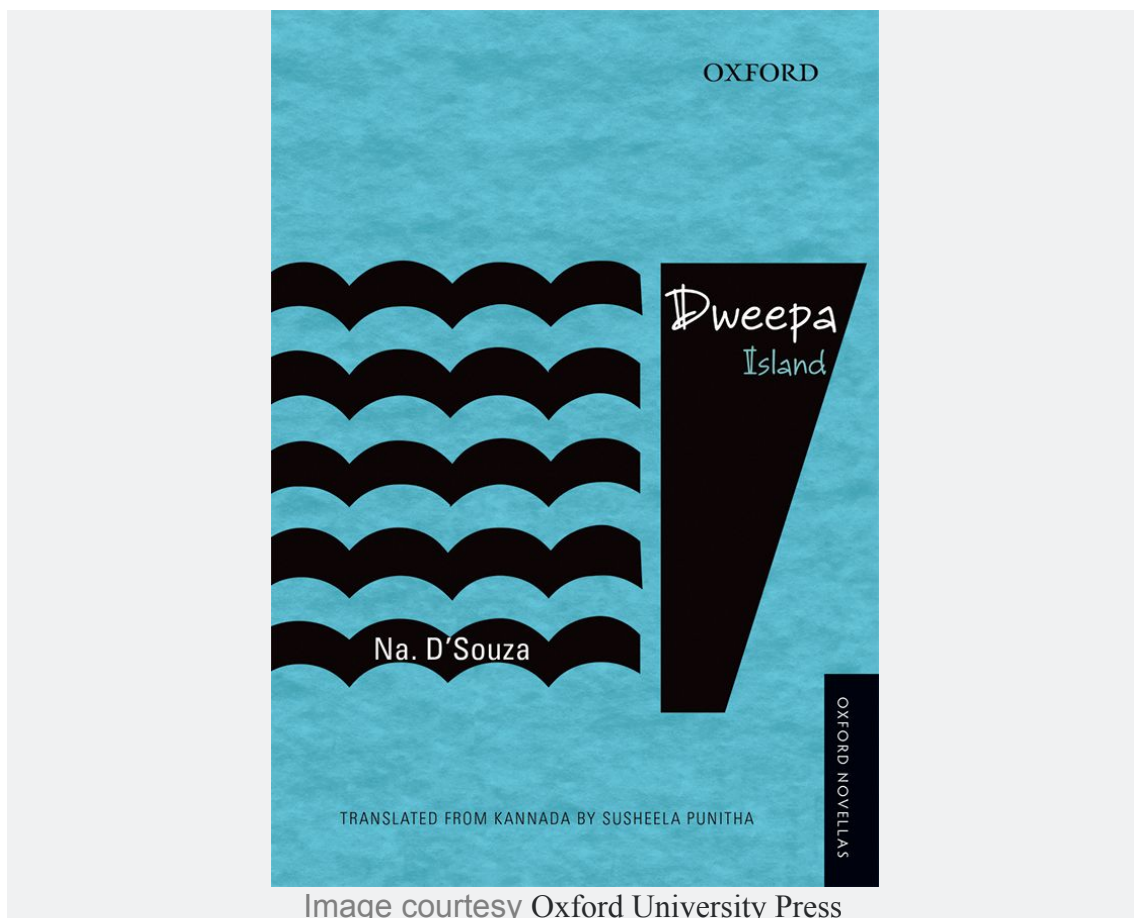


Image courtesy [Oxford University Press](https://www.oxfordup.com/)

On the politics of translation

K. Satchidanandan: Is there a politics to the editing of translations as there surely is for translation per se — reflected in the selection of texts as well as the contexts and modes of translation?

Mini Krishnan: Like everyone else, I too am carrying baggage, so I tend to keep close to the shore of a certain standard English that developed in India over the 1950s and 60s, which is when I studied the language. But having worked on many translations, I know that at least 20% of the words covering the material aspects of our culture have no equivalents at all, so my key to that door is just a footnote or a gloss. After all, do we know what jollof rice is in texts that come to us from Nigeria? No. But give me a description and I would be happy to look at jollof rice through that lens. But I have some other concerns. One is the unthinking use of Latinisms. Even very experienced translators tend to use “assuage” instead of “satisfy” without checking whether the speaker or the context can take the weight of “assuage”. No uneducated or partially educated person would use that word in real life. So that is an erasure I apply quite regularly. I also look carefully for bombast because Indians tend to be melodramatic and introduce rhetoric where none existed in the original! We like fine-sounding words, don’t we? I understand the instinct but it would be wrong to let it go. Then there is structure, where I meddle quite a lot. For example, I would move the translator’s “Dipu di was hurt” and “Apala was embarrassed” to the end of the sentences about them, with the advice that the translator should avoid, as far as possible, add-ons like “he said” and “she answered”:

Dipu di was hurt — “Apu, are you leaving?” **Dipu di was hurt.**
Apala was embarrassed — “I have to Dipu di, you know how it is, don’t you?” **Apala was embarrassed.**

I keep reading translations into English from languages other than ours to see how they achieve their rhythms. I equip myself before I start the day’s work. Then I put down that book and read a contemporary work published in the UK. Then I read something published 50 years ago. Then I read a page or two of Macaulay, then Nehru’s *Glimpses of World History*, switching from simple to literary, to a non-native speaker’s use of the language in letters to a young girl. Call it a sort of tuning! I discourage the use of other foreign words and terms (usually French) and encourage the translator to stay with formal language in the narration and experiment but to take risks when it comes to dialogue. I often think of what Frances Pritchett once said: “I want to give the reader an agreeable double experience.”

Here are some variants Devika and I worked on a few years ago, when she was translating Sarah Joseph:

“Please look at a revision of the opening sentence. I want to keep the sense of your ‘bizarre’ but a wolf’s howl is never that. It is haunting, it is eerie...”

— Along with the howl of the lone wolf, a terrible gale rose up in the desert and came tearing out.

— Accompanied by the howl of a lone wolf a terrible storm roared out of the desert.

— A terrible storm roared out of the desert accompanied by the eerie howl of a lone wolf.

— Accompanied by the eerie howl of a lone wolf came a terrible storm.

Githa Hariharan: Yes, this is where I too feel it's worthwhile to be traditional, and not make the English translation so literal that it again museumises, and intrudes into the pleasure of the reading experience. But I think Satchidanandan's question needs more by way of response. Why do you pick this text and not the other? An accident? The theme? The author? It's important to address this, particularly in the context of translation into English. In our power structure, this would mean taking the chosen text into a wider world, not just of readership, but also "representation". And, as you have said yourself, into a world of wider recognition and rewards.

Mini Krishnan: It is impossible to stay in touch with everyone everywhere! Some books suggest themselves. Quite often friends, translators, academics, or even publishers from the regional languages send word, or write, or call to discuss an important work. Sometimes when I read interviews with authors, a book catches my attention. Though the best and the latest are usually sought out by publishers, I also look out for someone who has not got his or her due. One such writer was Johny Miranda, the first Paranki novelist who wrote a sort of Creole Malayalam. His community (Portuguese descendants in Kerala) is a minority within the Christian minority. One of my ambitions has been to record through translation a way of life that has either faded completely or is on its way out — both in rural and semi-urban India. Hence my interest in memoirs and autobiographies as well as fiction. We need these records of our social history and the struggle pre-modern societies went through to reach where they have. A large section of India is still in near-medieval conditions and we must not forget that. I always feel amused when there are discussions about "working women" as if it were something recent. Perhaps it is, for the moneyed classes? Women from the poorer classes of India have always worked. They have not had a choice. That too is in the many stories that lie untranslated. The unique Indian Muslim experience is something I would like to do justice to. It's very difficult to find the right translators.

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Subhro Bandopadhyay
Translated by the author and Ranjit Hoskote

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZtx59QjvQ>

Subhro Bandopadhyay reads the poems in Bangla

About Presences

(for Bhaswati)

I

It is not broken
yet
we are walking through a lawn covered with glass
Why do we have to hide the dew
on the bodies of question-less evenings?

You moved away without saying anything
Serenity occupied your space

Your name is nowhere
There is only your presence

II

I stabbed a broken piece of mirror in my proper noun
No search is left
Neither answer nor direction

Is a piece of stone enough for the self?

You are the sole recipient

Of the presence that isn't there...

Glass pronouns

(for Bhaswati)

I

You are a broken song, nailed to the body of April.
This rocky fall of morning is a shivered glass
Exposing, liberating you to a fragrance
of boiling rice

a tune is born on the line of dawn,
when a metallic trunk of a leafless tree grows violently —
Can the shadow of my cheek still offer flesh? To whom?
Why do the fletched blades fly towards refugee camps?
Time curdles on the yellow of classical music...

Tell me
are the old songs now
letters to be read alone?

Read the Bengali originals here: <http://guftugu.in/4533-2/>

Poems © Subhro Bandopadhyay; translations © Subhro Bandopadhyay and Ranjit Hoskote

Rahman Abbas

The Melancholy of the Soul

Translated by Sabika Abbas

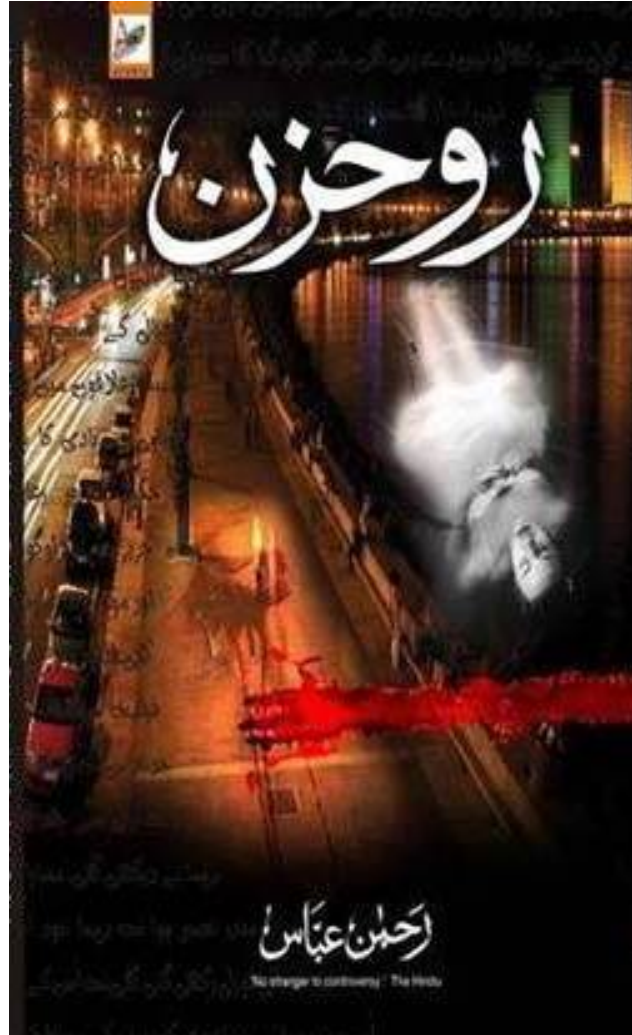


Image Courtesy [The Indian Awaaz](#)

From the novel *Rohzin*

Chapter 2

Will I find a way to return or not? If I want to.

The kholi of the jamaat was on the ground floor of an old-fashioned three-storey building. The residents had lived there through the pagadi system of rent, for the past five decades. The owner of the building, Salahuddin Memon, belonged to a family involved in business; he was a religious person. The building was decaying, but its residents wouldn't agree to have it refurbished. When Asrar came out of the dark alleys of the building with his friends, the May summer sun blinded his eyes.

There were two other boys with Asrar; they had come to Mumbai for the first time. As soon as they came out of the kholi, they seemed to have turned into statues. It was an unforgettable moment in their lives. They gazed at the tall buildings, the curtained

windows, the roads, the passers-by and the clothes they were wearing. Along the road and on the footpath, as far as their eyes could see, there were hawkers and vendors. A kiosk before them sold children's clothes, caps, miswak, rosary, zamzam, various Islamic prayer books, rehals and Qurans in different sizes. A black dog slept comfortably under the stall. Asrar looked at the dog. Half its body was submerged in the dirty water that made a puddle by the footpath. The dog's eyes were shut; a big fat fly sitting on a sweet gaped at its nose like a lazy donkey. The nose was like a tunnel for the petty fly. To newcomers, Mumbai itself seems a tunnel. Asrar spotted three or four holes dug into the footpath. The dog suddenly wagged its tail; a mouse that had been nibbling at the trash stuck to it was disturbed and it ran into the nearest hole. The same moment, two mice emerged from a second hole, fighting with each other, and used the dog as a bridge to enter the drain. On hearing the commotion the fly flew, but the lazy dog, drowning in his existence, lay there unperturbed. Maybe this was his routine. In a life spent on the footpath he had risen above avenging the small, daily infringements of lowly mice. When Asrar's eyes were accustomed to the brightness, he spotted a few perfume shops nearby. These shops had boards written in Arabic calligraphy. One shop was named "Khalis Atariyat-e-Jameel-ul Assam". It was open, and he could see how it was adorned with small and beautiful glass bottles of varied shapes and sizes filled with atr. "Where did you lose yourself?" said Mohammad Ali, putting his hand on Asrar's shoulders. "There is so much more to see!"

They couldn't have walked more than a few feet when they found themselves drawn to the Minara mosque. Saleem said a few lines in its praise and remarked how the area always lit up in the month of Ramzan, overflowing with people so that there was no place to take a step forward.

Qasim playfully said, "If there's no place to put your foot, where *do* people put their feet?" They laughed. Saleem was silent, then relented with a quick smile. Mohammad Ali bought three paans from the shop round the corner. Asrar could only gape at the minarets. Their beauty, the inscriptions and expert engravings — everything amazed him. He was unaware that just as he stared at them, they had, for so long, stared at both the days of spring and the dark nights of this city. The minarets had seen huge gatherings and long processions. They had witnessed chaos and political strife. They had watched the competition between religions and sects. The minarets also knew the uniformed policemen who had, like barbarians, killed so many in the Umar Ali Usman Lungi Cut Bakery during the communal riots, still unpunished by the court. They had also seen Imam Mehjur al Bukhari al Maaruf al Hijr Ghilman in the dark nights, helping place RDX boxes on the silent roads after some months of rioting in Mumbai. No one ever knew at whose behest Imam Mehjur al Bukhari al Maaruf al Hijr Ghilman had done it. The enigma of the RDX boxes surfaced for a few days, and became a debate, when the Imam was mercilessly murdered in broad daylight a few kilometres away from the mosque.

Asrar was intrigued by the minarets of the Minara mosque. He was sure they were home to a number of djinns. Asrar was oblivious to the doom the surrounding areas had repeatedly witnessed — events that had made the minarets sombre and ashamed. These minarets had seen the day when thousands of Muslims had gathered to protest against Salman vald Mansoor al Hallaj, a.k.a. Kitab-ut-Tawaseen, and the police had blindly opened fire on them. It was here that dozens of young men were pushed down death's dark tunnel. The drain running below the Minara mosque had overflowed with the blood of the victims of this and other such

incidents. Blood that falls into dirty waters loses its smell; but demons and djinns can scent fresh blood. Whenever innocent blood is shed in the vicinity of Mohammad Ali Road, and the blood flows through underground drains and mixes with dirty water, then runs through the drains of the temple of Mumba Devi nearby before heading towards the sea — at such times demons dance the tandav in the temple courtyard. This is what is said. It's quite possible that these belong to the same lineage of blood-drinking demons who were defeated by Mumba Devi. They perform the dance of destruction to add to her sorrows and grief. After the dance, they enter the drains which carry blood. They enter the tunnels underground and separate the blood from the water, drinking the blood of innocents that comes from Mohammad Ali Road. These demons can remove what they don't need from the water. Then they come back and dance again in front of Mumba Devi. This aggravates her fury; but since she promised Brahma that she would not attack the demons till the seven islands of Mumbai returned to their original state, she swallows her anger. Brahma had told Mumba that a time would come when it would rain for forty nights and forty days in Mumbai. The torrential rain would inundate and destroy everything. History would end. The islands would be submerged in water, to reappear as one big island after forty years. Then a demon named Gujratam Desham Kaldam would rule the island. When all limits of barbarism, cruelty and injustice reach their pinnacle, the walls of Mumba Devi temple, which stayed intact even after being submerged, will break; and Mumba Devi will rise to defeat the demon. Brahma foretold the battle between the Devi and the demon but not its outcome. Which is exactly why there is anger and fierceness on her face, along with deep thought and wonder.

Rahman Abbas Reading from *Rohzin*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rv6iJyVVeZ8>

Courtesy Mumba Books India

Mohammad Ali presented Saleem with the paan and he put it in his mouth. The chuna that came free with it he put on his tongue.

They moved ahead.

Cars, taxis and buses crawled down Mohammad Ali Road. People crossed the road running in the path of vehicles. Horns honked relentlessly; some people spoke loudly at the turn of the road. Below the JJ Flyover, two rickshaw pullers sat on their vehicles, smoking bidis. A taxi driver argued with a Bohri woman. A crippled man stood across from her, wearing a green cap, as if waiting for alms, as if in anticipation of his wish being granted once the argument had ended. In Mumbai even the beggars seem very hopeful. Asrar really liked the red, green and blue beads around the beggar's neck. The argument had not ended when a young girl joined the beggar, spreading her hands in hope of alms. The lame beggar did not like her being there; he hit her on the hip with his crutches. She ran, but before she crossed the road, she abused him. The abuses faded into the traffic's din. No one noticed. Asrar still stared at the flyover, a sleeping anaconda in the sunlight.

On Mohammad Ali Road, a delicious smell from the Umar Ali Usman Sweet Shop dissolved in the air. They looked at the nannkhatai. A boy in a lungi entered the shop

carrying a tray of sweets on his head. The smell of fresh sweets overpowered Qasim. "Which mithai is this?" he asked.

"Aflatoon!" the boy replied.

Mohammad Ali asked Qasim, "Do you want to eat some?"

Without waiting for an answer, Mohammad Ali bought half a kilo of aflatoon and offered it to the newcomers. Spitting out some betel juice, he showed off his knowledge of the various kinds of sweets in Mumbai. Saleem added that the sweets of Dum Dum were also delicious. They were enjoying the mithai when some children rushed toward them, palms spread, asking for a share. One was wearing only trousers. The oldest wore a torn cap. Saleem also spat some betel juice onto the footpath and said irritably, "Kya re, kami dvandva nail hair? Chal hat." When he heard this the older boy pointed towards the younger one's mouth, probably to show he was hungry. "Abe saale, you live right here on the footpath behind this lane!" Mohammad Ali shouted.

The boy stared at Mohammad Ali.

Ali told the newcomers these kids were actually drug addicts. They begged and ate and were usually in a drugged stupor.

On hearing this, the boys ran away.

There was routine traffic on the roads. Two buses bound for Churchgate arrived. The friends were still enjoying the aflatoon when Saleem said, "The buses are empty, we should catch one!"

They boarded a bus which had empty seats on the upper storey and sat down. Asrar sat next to Mohammad Ali in the front row. They were both from the same village but were meeting for the first time. Mohammad Ali told Asrar that he worked for a diamond businessman, and if Asrar wanted Ali could put in a word for him. Asrar said he would discuss it with Qasim before making a decision. The bus reached the Hajj House. The engraved Quranic verses made Asrar happy, and he looked in wonder. He asked Mohammad Ali, "Such a tall mosque?"

"It's the Hajj House," Mohammad Ali smiled.

"What do you mean by Hajj House? Don't you know that for Hajj people go to Saudi Arabia?" Qasim enquired.

"You idiot, the entire world knows the pilgrimage happens in Saudi. This place makes all the arrangements," Mohammad Ali told him.

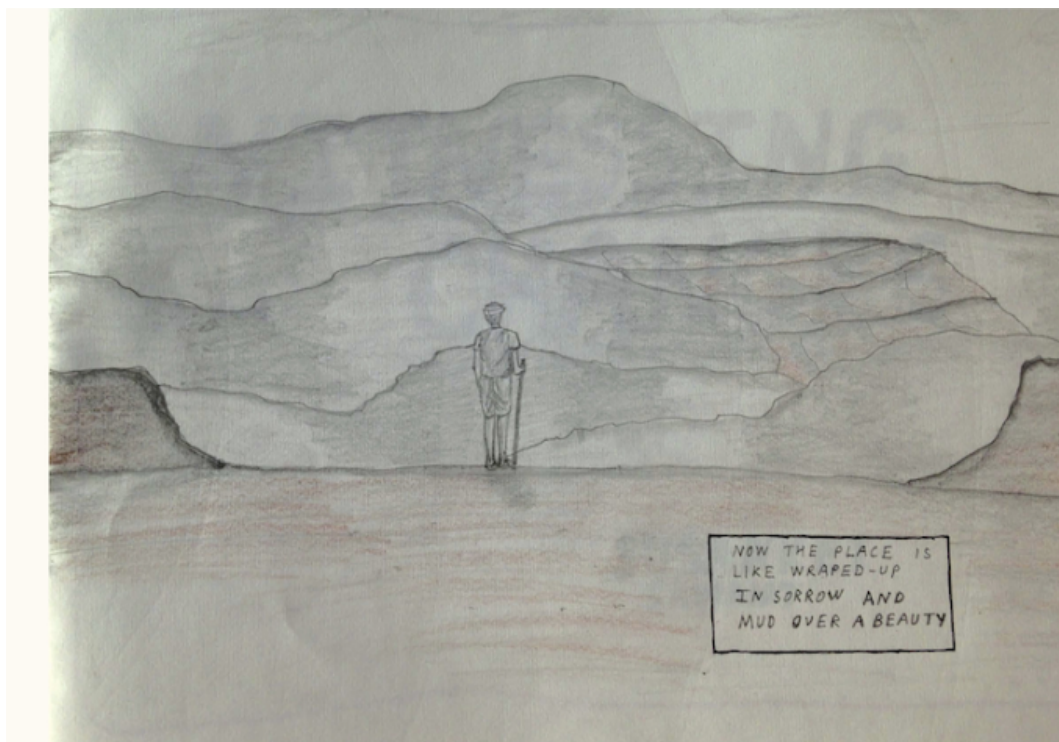
Asrar continued to look quietly at the grand building. He had never seen a more beautiful building. Mohammad Ali also showed him Churchgate Station, the Anjuman-e-Islam School and the Times of India building, giving him the little information he had acquired. Asrar was impressed with Mohammad Ali's knowledge. The Mumbai he could see after crossing the Churchgate signal was very different from the Mumbai which lay before Mohammad Ali Road and the Umar Ali Usman Sweet Shop. He did not ask any questions. His eyes widened as he gaped at the Mumbai that can take your heart away.

They got out of the bus a short distance from the Taj Hotel. The newcomers looked at the hotel from the Gateway of India with such intensity as though they were carving it into their memories and saving it forever. The magnificent building stirred a

feeling of inferiority in their hearts, and this made the building more grand and intimidating. They were standing at the same place from where, five years later, the world media would report on a terrorist attack on the hotel. The friends would remember this memorable journey, the Gateway of India and the Taj Hotel for a long time. Seven years later, in the last days of July, on a Sunday afternoon, Mohammad Ali dreamt of Asrar. They had a long conversation about life. In the dream, Asrar had found himself in some other country. Mohammad Ali began to talk about the terrorist attack in detail. Asrar replied, "I am no longer there, where the terrorists live, what would I do with all this information?" This saddened Mohammad Ali. In that dream state, he realised which world Asrar now lived in. Heartbroken, Mohammad Ali opened his eyes, feeling the wetness gathering in them. He missed Asrar terribly. He got up and called for a taxi to the Haji Ali Dargah. There, in the dargah's courtyard, he sat in a corner with his memories of Asrar. He cried for hours.

Text © Rahman Abbas; translation © Sabika Abbas

Student Comics on Environmental Destruction in Goa



These comics on mining in Goa were made by students who attended a course titled “Digging Deeper: Creating Short Comics about the Story of Mining in Goa” held at the University of Goa. It was conducted by Orijit Sen, who is Mario Miranda Chair in Art, Illustrative Art, Cartooning at the university. We publish a selection of these pieces for this issue of *Gallery Guftugu*.

Tales from the Pissuriem Mine

Five comics on mining in Goa by Ashish A. Naik, Deepali Sawant, Pradnya Gaonkar, Jyoti B. Jankar, and Susankaet Sawant from the course on comics conducted by Orijit Sen at the University of Goa.

Goa conjures several impressions in one’s mind. The name usually smells of a riff of touristy destinations; but it can have other resonances: the bombing of the Indian Air Forces that took away Goa’s sovereignty in 1961, the poems of Manohar Shetty, and also, the increasing menace of mining. In a new-liberal economy, mining has only

shown its ugly face more shamelessly. Orijit Sen, the graphic novelist and designer, offered a two-week course on representing mining through the form of comics.

Called “Digging Deeper — Creating short comics about the story of mining in Goa”, the course was open to the students of the University of Goa, as well as to the general public. In this issue of *Gallery Guftugu* we feature five comics done by the students. Prior experience in drawing comics was not required for this course, and these comics form valuable archives into the perception of mining for these students.

One of the recurring motifs in these comics is the loss of an idyllic past as a result of mining. This past is usually narrated through stories by another character, or by a third-person narrator. Ashish A. Naik’s “Beauty with Destruction”, for instance, begins with the convention of the fairy tale: “Once upon a time there was a place so rich in beauty that a God called Pisu decided to go there and make a home”. The use of a mythical past is a way in which Naik shifts the much nearer, historical past of pre-mining Goa further back. The implication is that the landscape of Goa has changed irrevocably. There is no way one can restore the disappearing hills, and so the only recourse one has is that of storytelling: the story of a mythical Goa, the story of Pissuriam. In Pradnya Gaonkar’s “Village with Destruction” too, the child narrator is bewildered when her hopes of seeing “natural beauty” are dashed in her first visit to Goa. Then, it is her grandfather who tells her the story of the village before 1990, the year when mining started. The visual is of a rising sun behind the hills, and an abundance of fishes, rivers and trees in the valley. Gaonkar’s depiction is more historically grounded, but it also looks towards the future. It proceeds with younger villagers organising themselves, and ends with a clarion call to action: “Let’s protest against mining”.

In all the representations of Goa in a pre-mining period, the community is foregrounded. They are seen working together, not just with each other, but also with the resources around them. The anthropomorphism is always balanced with representations of a bountiful nature. This balance is completely ruined in representations of mining: there are no trees, no rivers, no birds, but a mountain of dust with a handful of men. Journalist and thespian, Hartman De Souza, in his book *Eat Dust*, too raises pertinent questions of environmental destruction:

The idea that a hill just disappeared left me fuzzy-headed. How does one come to terms with the deliberate destruction, in peacetime, of agricultural practices and the everyday life of people whose only crime is that they live here? Or the wasteful hacking of trees, the seismic upheaval of mud, the conscienceless blasting of aquifers? All of the forest’s original inhabitants — the fish, otter, crabs, spiders, beetles, butterflies, moths, lizards, frogs, birds, hares, porcupines, deer, wild cats, wild boars, leopards, bison and even tigers turned refugees. Keeping aside the problems faced by an entire community whose way of life is altered, there is also the individual who faces a tremendous psychological crisis.

The tragedy of an individual who cannot bear to see the sight of a changing landscape is best represented in Susanket Sawant’s “Witnessing Changes”. The narration is by a farmer who has experienced these changes first-hand. Unlike the other comics, the pre-mining past is not narrated by another older figure, but witnessed in the first person. Sawant uses grey pencil sketches in the first half to depict the idyllic life, but the shift comes with the use of red that offers a stark contrast to the sombre grey. The last panel is a stunning depiction of an individual

completely alienated from his surrounding: the solitary farmer is seen facing the entire landmass of hills of dust. He is, quite literally, eating dust.

Souradeep Roy

"Beauty and Destruction" by Ashish A. Naik:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hjFJVzkQBEbINqcTRXaEdmSk0/view>

"Riya and Natasha" by Deepali Sawant::

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hjFJVzkQBETGRlakhRUHdwdXc/view>

"Village with Destruction" by Pradnya Gaonkar:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hjFJVzkQBENzJfOXZkTUxISEU/view>

"Our Earth and the greedy Human Beings" by Jyoti B. Janker:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hjFJVzkQBESHdpdXBNb2tFTzA/view>

"Witnessing Changes" by Susanket Sawant:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0hjFJVzkQBEduXTaUswWkRMcW8/view>

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Contributors

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Avtar Singh Sandhu, known by his pen name Pash, is a poet and revolutionary. His first collection of poems *Loh Kath* (The Iron Story) came out in 1970, while he was still in jail. After his release, he published *Uddade Bazan Magar* (Behind Flying Hawks), *Sade Samian Vich* (In Our Times). He was assassinated on 23rd March 1988.

Chandrakant Patil is a Marathi poet, critic, translator and editor who has also written 15 books in Hindi. He is the recipient of several national and regional awards. He lives in Pune.

Chaman Lal was Professor in Hindi Translation at the Centre of Indian Languages in Jawaharlal Nehru University. He compiled Pash’s collected poems in Punjabi and translated them into Hindi; the translations won the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize. He returned the award in 2015 to protest against growing intolerance in the country.

Darshan Butter has written seven collections of poetry. He received the Sahitya Akademi award for his poetry collection *Mahakambni* (The Great Shivering). His poems have been translated into Hindi, Urdu, English and other languages. He returned the award in 2015 to protest against growing intolerance in the country.

Deepali Sawant was one of the students in the course conducted by Oriijit Sen titled “Digging Deeper — Creating short comics about the story of mining in Goa” held at the University of Goa.

E.P. Unny is a well-known cartoonist who has worked for a range of newspapers, from *The Hindu* in Chennai to *The Sunday Mail*, *The Economic Times* and *The Indian Express*, where he is currently Chief Political Cartoonist. His most recent publication is *Business As Usual* (*Journey of the Indian Express Cartoonist*). He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Indian Institute of Cartoonists in 2009.

Farid Mohammad Mansuri is a bilingual poet. He writes in Gujarati and Urdu, and has adopted the pen name Adil. He moved from Gujarat to Pakistan with his family at the time of partition, only to return again to live in the city of Ahmedabad. His family finally moved to the USA in 1985. He is also an accomplished calligrapher.

Githa Hariharan has written fiction, essays and columns over the last three decades. Her most recent book is *Almost Home, Cities and Other Places*. For more on the author and her work see githahariharan.com.

Gopika Jadeja is a poet and translator. She publishes and edits a journal and a series of pamphlets for a performance-publishing project called *Five Issues*. Her work has been published in *Asymptote*, *The Wolf*, *Indian*

Literature, Vahi, Sahcharya and elsewhere. She is currently working on English translations of poetry from Gujarat.

Gopika Nath is a textile artist and craftsperson working toward redefining the value of hand-crafting in India. She is a Fulbright Scholar and alumnus of the Central St. Martins School of Art and Design, UK. She is also an art critic, blogger, poet and teacher.

Jaswinder is the author six collections of poetry. He received the Sahitya Akademi award in 2014 for his collection of ghazals called *Agarbatti*. He returned the award in 2015 to protest against growing intolerance in the country. He lives in Canada.

Jitish Kallat's solo presentations include "Circa" at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia (2012); "Fieldnotes: Tomorrow was here Yesterday" at the Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, India (2011); "Likewise" at Arndt, Berlin, Germany (2010); "The Astronomy of the Subway" at Haunch of Venison, London, UK (2010); "Aquasaurus" at the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Paddington, Australia (2008) and "Lonely Facts" at the Kunsthalle Luckenwalde, Luckenwalde, Germany (1998). He was a curator for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India in 2014.

Jyoti B. Jankar was one of the students in the course conducted by Orijit Sen titled "Digging Deeper — creating short comics about the story of mining in Goa" held at the University of Goa.

Lal Singh Dil (1943-2007) was born in a dalit family in Ludhiana district in 1943. He was part of the Naxalite movement and was arrested by the police. His first poetry is *Bahut Sare Suraj* (Many Suns), published in 1971. He went on to write his autobiography *Dastan*. His poetry has been translated into Hindi, Urdu and English. A selection of his translations and memoirs, *Poet of the Revolution*, was published in English in 2012.

K. Satchidanandan is a widely translated Malayalam poet and a bilingual writer, translator and editor. His most recent works available in English are *While I Write* and *Misplaced Objects and Other Poems*. For more on the author and his work see satchidanandan.com.

Kareem James Abu-Zeid is a prolific and award-winning translator of poets and novelists from across the Arab world. He is currently completing his PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of California, Berkeley, with a focus on spirituality and modern poetry. He is also translating Najwan Darwish's second book.

Krishna Mohan Shrimali was Professor of History at the University of Delhi. He has written several research monographs and papers on ancient Indian history and archaeology. He was President of the Ancient Indian History Section, Indian History Congress; General President of Numismatic Society of India; and History Congresses of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and West Bengal. He was also Secretary of the Indian History Congress from 1992 to 1995.

Mini Krishnan is Editor, Translations, at Oxford University Press. She sources and edits fiction, plays, autobiographies and biographies from 12 Indian languages into English. She was formerly with Macmillan India where she edited the Modern Indian Novels in Translation series. So far she has edited 62 literary translations, four of which have won the Crossword Award for translation. She is an advocate of translation education in universities and colleges and is on the National Translation Mission, which operates under the National Knowledge Commission. She is

Founding Editor of the South Asian Women Writers Website hosted by the British Council and was also literary advisor to *The Hindu* from 1992 to 1998.

Makarand Sathe, an architect by profession, has been writing plays, novels and articles in Marathi for the last three decades. His plays have been performed in many national and international festivals. His works have been translated into English, French, Russian and many Indian languages. His three-volume socio-political history of Marathi theatre was published by Oxford University Press in 2015.

Mamang Dai is a poet and novelist from Arunachal Pradesh. She is a former journalist and was President of the Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists. Her poetry, fiction and articles have been published in numerous journals and anthologies. She also worked with the World Wide Fund for Nature in the Eastern Himalaya Biodiversity Hotspots programme. She lives in Itanagar.

Orijit Sen is a graphic artist, cartoonist, muralist and designer. He is author of the graphic novel *River of Stories*, as well as many other works of graphic fiction and non-fiction. He is one of the founders of People Tree — a collaborative studio and store for artists, designers and craftspeople. Sen is also Mario Miranda Chair Visiting Professor at Goa University.

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Rahman Abbas’ novels include *Nakhlistan Ki Talash* (In Search of an Oasis), *Ek Mamnu Muhabbat Ki Kahani* (The Story of Forbidden Love), *Khud Ke Saaye Mein Ankh Micholi* (Hide and Seek in the Shadow of God) and *Rohzin* (The Melancholy of Souls). His collection of essays is called *Ekkiswin Sadi Men Urdu Novel aur Digar Mazameen* (Urdu Novel in the Twenty-First Century and Other Essays). He was awarded the Fiction Award in 2011 for *Khuda Ke Saaye Mein Ankh Micholi* by the State Academy of Maharashtra.

Randi L. Clary is a doctoral student in the Religious Studies department focusing on Sikh Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She completed her M.A. at Rice University in Religious Studies. Her dissertation is on Bhai Vir Singh and gender, focusing on the tracts she translated while in India on a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad grant.

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet, cultural theorist and curator. His collections of poems include *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems 1985-2005* and *Die Ankunft der Vögel*. His translation of the poems of the fourteenth-century Kashmiri mystic Lal Ded has been published as *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*. He is the editor of *Dom Moraes: Selected Poems*, the first annotated critical edition of a major Anglophone Indian poet’s work.

Saba Hasan is a multidisciplinary artist working on book installations, photographs, paintings, videos and sound since 1998. She has an M.A. in Cultural Anthropology with certification in art/ art history from the Ecole D’Arts Visuels, Lausanne, and Cambridge University. Her work was showcased at the 55th Venice Biennale at Fondazione Querini Stampalia, as part of the Imago Mundi Collection (2013). She received the Raza National Award for painting in 2005 and international fellowships for the “Book of Disquiet” from Syracuse University, New York, the French Cultural Ministry, Paris (2006), the George Keyt Foundation (2002) and the Oscar Kokoschka Academy, Salzburg (2010).

Sabika Abbas is a poet, short-story writer, and translator. She is a graduate in History from the Lady Shri Ram College for Women (LSR) and a postgraduate in Conflict Transformation and Peace Building from the ASSK Centre for Peace, LSR. She is currently pursuing an M.A. in Modern Indian History from the Department of Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Delhi. She has worked with the Youth Forum for Foreign Policy Adhay and Pehchan, Chehel, and Sandrishti.

S.G. Vasudev obtained his diploma from the Government College of Arts in Chennai. He has won several awards, including the National Award from the Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi. His works have been included in important national collections and have travelled widely all over the world. He is one of the founder members of the Cholamandal Artists' Village in Chennai. He lives and works in Bangalore.

Shoili Kanungo is a graphic designer, illustrator and visual artist. She has worked on a range of communication design projects in Sydney and New Delhi. She is currently visiting faculty at the School of Planning and Architecture. For more on her work see shoilikanungo.com.

Shubha Mudgal is a singer of Hindustani classical music. She was awarded the 1996 National Film Award for Best Non-Feature Film Music Direction for "Amrit Beej"; the 1998 Gold Plaque Award for Special Achievement in Music, at the 34th Chicago International Film Festival, for her music in the film *Dance of the Wind* (1997); and the Padma Shri in 2000. Her first guru was Pandit Ramashreya Jha, in Allahabad. After completing inter-college, she moved to New Delhi and enrolled at Delhi University for her undergraduate studies. In Delhi she continued her musical education under Pandit Vinay Chandra Maudgalya.

Subhro Bandhopadhyay is the author of four books of poetry, one of which fetched him the Indian National Award for Young Writers (Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar) in 2013. Two of them were translated into Spanish and published in Spain. He has written a biography of Pablo Neruda in Bengali, and also received the Antonio Machado International Poetry Fellowship from the Government of Spain.

Surjit Patar's first collection of ghazals is called *Hava Vich Likhe Harf* (Words Written in Air); he is one of most celebrated Punjabi poets at the present. He was given the Sahitya Akademi award for his poetry collection *Hanere vich Sulgadi Varnmala* (The Alphabets Smouldering in Darkness) in 1994. He returned the award in 2015 to protest against growing intolerance in the country.

Susanket Sawant was one of the students in the course conducted by Oriijit Sen titled "Digging Deeper — Creating short comics about the story of mining in Goa" held at the University of Goa.

Vasudha Thozhur was born in 1956 in Mysore. She studied at the College of Arts and Crafts, Madras, and at the School of Art and Design in Croydon, the UK. She lived and worked in Chennai from 1981 to 1997 and in Baroda between 1997 and 2013. She is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Art, Design and Performing Arts at Shiv Nadar University, Dadri.

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- (iv) An indication of whether you are the owner of the content, or if you are acting on their behalf (details of all parties must be supplied including the relationship between them);
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