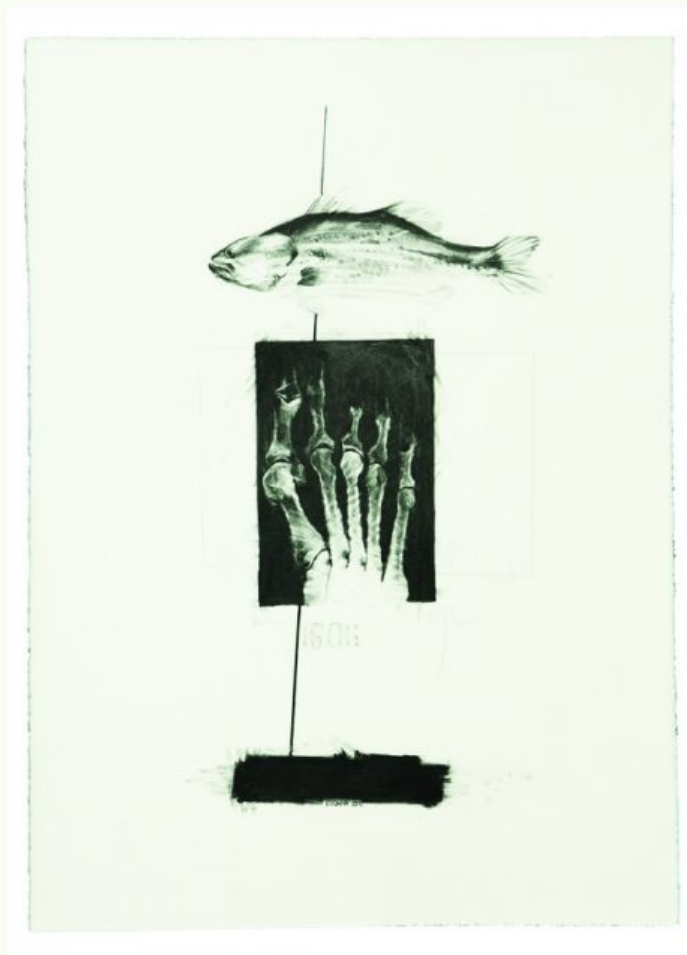


Issue 12

Guftugu

c u l t u r e m a t t e r s



Sukanya Ghosh, 'Incident I', pencil on paper, 22 x 30", Collection of Bishnupriya Ghosh and Bhaskar Sarkar, 2011

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.

Past issues of *Guftugu* can be downloaded as PDFs. Downloads of issues are for private reading only. All material in *Guftugu* is copyrighted. See Copyright.

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Contributions: *Guftugu* welcomes contributions from writers, academics, artists, cartoonists, film makers, performing artists and scientists. Please email us at guftuguejournal@gmail.com or indianwritersforum@gmail.com with your ideas and/ or work, and we will get back to you.

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From the Editors

Is this the India we want?



Conrad Marca-Relli, 'The Battle', oil cloth, tinted canvas, enamel paint, and oil on canvas, 179.1 cms x 331.5 cms, 1956/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

A country in which citizens are murdered or attacked for being rational, for being critical, for raising voices of dissent, for just being themselves; for being Muslim or Dalit or women. Intimidation, threats. Hatred. Lynching. Sickening violence. Students and teachers compelled to choose between being leashed in thought and word and being hounded as seditious. Institutions built over the years weakened. Economy and development turned into exercises that mock the needs and aspirations of most people in this country. Secularism, scientific temper and rights promised in our Constitution subverted every day. Our democracy, our India, frayed.

But this is our country. It belongs to us, and we belong to it. We have each other for support. We have our poems and songs and films and essays and fiction and art. Our diverse voices.

What kind of India do we want?

Listen to our fellow citizens speak of the country they don't want and India they want in the series India 2019 on Guftugu and the Indian Cultural Forum.

*K. Satchidanandan
Githa Hariharan*

September 2018

INDIA
2019

the country we want,
the country we don't want

ज़र्द पत्तों का बन

ज़र्द पत्तों का बन जो मेरा देस है
दर्द की अंजुमन जो मेरा देस है

जब पढ़े थे ये मिसरे तो क्यों था गुमाँ
ज़र्द पत्तों का बन, फ़ैज़ का देस है
दर्द की अंजुमन, फ़ैज़ का देस है
बस वही देस है,
जो कि तारीक है
बस उसी देस तक है
खिज़ाँ की डगर
बस वही देस है ज़र्द पत्तों का बन
बस वही देस है दर्द की अंजुमन

मुझ को क्यों था यकीं
के मेरे देस में
ज़र्द पत्तों के गिरने का मौसम नहीं
मुझ को क्यों था यकीं
के मेरे देस तक
पतझड़ों की कोई रहगुज़र ही नहीं
इस के दामन पे जितने भी धब्बे लगे
अगली बरसात आने पे धूल जाएँगे

अब जो आया है पतझड़
मेरे देस में
धड़कने ज़िंदगी की हैं
रुक सी गयीं

खंजरोँ की ज़बान रक्स करने लगी
फूल खिलने पे पाबंदियाँ लग गयीं
कत्लगाहें सजाई गई जा-ब-जा
और इंसाफ़ सूली चढ़ाया गया
खून की प्यास इतनी बढ़ी, आखिरश
जाम-ओ-मीना लहू से छलकने लगे

नाम किसके करूँ
इन खिजाओं को मैं
किस से पूछूँ
बहारें किधर खो गयीं
किस से जाकर कहूँ
ज़र्द पत्तों का बन, अब मेरा देस है
दर्द की अंजुमन, अब मेरा देस है

ऐ मेरे हमनशीं
ज़र्द पत्तों का बन, दर्द की अंजुमन
आने वाले सफ़ीरोँ की किस्मत नहीं
ये भी सच है के उस
फ़ैज़ के देस में
चाँद जुल्मत के घेरे में कितना भी हो
नूर उसका बिखरता था हर शब वहाँ
पा-बा-जोलाँ सही, फिर भी सच है यही
ज़िंदिगी अब भी रकसाँ है उस देस में
कत्लगाहें सजी हैं अगर जा-ब-जा
गाज़ीयोँकी भी कोई, कमीं तो नहीं

और मेरे देस में
रात लम्बी सही,
चाँद मद्धम सही
मुझ को है येयकीं
खलक उठेगी हाथों में पर्चम लिए
सुबह पाज़ेब पहने हुए आएगी
रन पड़ेगा बहारों-खिजाओं का जब
रंग बिखरेंगे, और रात ढल जाएगी

ज़र्द पत्तों का बन भी सिमट जाएगा
दर्द की अंजुमन भी सिमट जाएगी

- गौहर रज़ा

ज़र्द = पीला; अंजुमन = संस्था; मिसरे = पंक्तियाँ; तारीक = अँधेरा; खिज़ान = पतझड़; रहगुज़र = रास्ता; रक्स = नाच; क़त्लगाहें = क़त्ल करने की जगह; आखिरश = आखिर में; हमनशीं = साथी, दोस्त; सफ़ीर = दूत; जुल्मत = अँधेरा; नूर = रौशनी; पा-बा-जोलाँ = बेड़ियों में पैर; रकसाँ = नृत्य करती; जा-ब-जा = जगह-जगह; गाज़ी = जान की बाज़ी जीतने वाले; खलक = जनता; रन = टकराओ, युद्ध.

Text © Guftugu; poem © Gauhar Raza.

Gauhar Raza is a scientist, an Urdu poet, a social activist and a documentary filmmaker working to popularise the understanding of science among the general public. His poetry collections include the well-known *Jazbon Ki Lau Tez Karon*.

'The other gods don't need looking after'

The Many Voices of Kabir

Kabir was born in Benares in a Muslim family and is believed to have lived for nearly 120 years, from 1398 to 1518. The family belonged to the Julaha or weaver caste and was a recent convert to Islam because of its caste's low status in the Hindu social system.

There are a great many legends about Kabir's life. He was a dissident figure, a 'die-hard rebel' and the most 'outspoken' of all bhakti poets. In the introduction to his book of translations Songs of Kabir, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra tells us that while most people went to the holy city of Benares to spend their last days, Kabir went to an obscure place called Maghar, a town associated with Buddhists, Muslims and the lower castes since ancient times. He had no regard for religious orthodoxies and social hierarchies and his love for 'One Deity' is the most distinguishing feature of his poetry. But perhaps his dissidence is most strongly felt in his disregard for social divisions and his empathy for the voiceless. His is a collective voice. There is neither a single voice nor a single author of the 'songs of Kabir'.

To celebrate the many voices and the many sides of Kabir, Guftugu presents a riveting interview with one of his translators, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra; some translations of his songs along with three spectacular paintings by highly acclaimed artist Gulammohammed Sheikh from his series 'Kahat Kabir'; and finally a soulful rendition of a song by well-known performer Vidya Rao.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra speaks to Souradeep Roy about his translations of Kabir



From Songs of Kabir

I
जौ पै करता बरन बचिरै।
तौ जनतैं तीनडिंडकिनि सारै ॥टेक॥

जे तूं बाभन बभनीं जाया।तौ आंन बाट होइ काहे न आया ॥
जे तूं तुरूक तुरुकनीं जाया।तौ भीतरखितनां क्यूं न कराया ॥
कहै कबीर मद्धमि नहिकोई।सो मद्धमि जा मुखरिंम न होइ ॥

Were the Creator
Concerned about caste,
We'd arrive in the world
With a caste mark on the forehead.

If you say you're a Brahmin
Born of a mother who's a Brahmin,
Was there a special canal
Through which you were born?

And if you say you're a Turk
And your mother's a Turk,
Why weren't you circumcised
Before birth?

Nobody's lower caste;
The lower castes are everywhere.
They're the ones
Who don't have Rama on their lips,

Kabir says.

॥
भूली मालनीं है एउ ।
सतगुरु जागता है देउ ॥टेक॥

पाती तौरै मालनीं पाती पाती जउि ।
जसि मूरतकौ पाती तौरै सो मूरतनिरिजीउ ॥
टांचनहारै टांचयिा दै छाती ऊपरिपोउ ।
जे तूं मूरतसिंचि है तौ गढ़नहारै खाउ ॥
लाइ लावन लापसी पूजा चढै अपार ।

पूजा पुजारा लै गया दै मूरतकै मुंह छार ॥
पाती ब्रह्मां पुहुप बसिनुं मूल फल महादेव ।
तीन दैव प्रतखतिरहकिरह किसिकी सेव ॥
मालनि भूली जग भुलांनां हम भुलांनै नांहि ।
कहै कबीर हंम रांम राखे कर्पा करि हिररिाइ ॥

The gardener's wife
Cuts short the brief life
Of the flowers and offers them
To a lifeless stone idol
That a sculptor carved,
Feet on its chest,
Chisel in hand.

Had the idol been alive,
It would have
Lashed out at the sculptor.
It would have seen through the priest
Who grabs all the food
The faithful bring,
Leaving the scraps to the idol.

Not one, not two,
But everyone's a sucker,
Says Kabir. Not me.



Gulammohammed Sheikh, Kahat Kabir-1, Soor aur Shabda (Reversible), 56x76cm, gouache, 1996. Coll. Lalit Narula, New Delhi

Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Kahat Kabir – II, Ek Achambha Dekha re Bhai', oil on canvas, 213 cms x 167 cms, 2001

III

झगरा एक नबिरहु रांम ।
जे तुम्ह अपनै जान सौ कांम ॥टेक॥

ब्रह्मा बड़ा कजिनि रे उपाया । बेद बड़ा कजिहां तै आया ॥
यहु मन बड़ा कजिहमिन मानै । रांम बड़ा करिंमहजिनै ॥
कहै कबीर हौ भया उदास । तीरथ बड़ा कहिरिका दास ॥

Answer this and do it quickly,
If you care at all for your devotee.

Who's greater?
The lord of the universe
Or the one who made him?
The Vedas
Or their source?
The mind
Or what the mind believes in?
Rama
Or Rama's supplicant?

The question that's killing me, says Kabir,
Is whether the pilgrim

Or the pilgrim town is greater?

IV

अवधूँ अैसा ग्यांन बचिारी ।

तातैँ भई पुरखतिँ नारी ॥टेक॥

नां हूँ परनीं ना हूँ क्वांरी पूत जनमांवनहारी ।

कारे मूंड कौ न छांड्यौ अजहूँ अकन कुंवारी ॥

बांहमन कै घर बांहमनहोती जोगी कै घर चैली ।

कलमां पढिपिढिभिई तुरकनीं कलमिहफिरौ अकेली ॥

पीहर जांउं न रहूँ सासुरै पुरखहसिंग न लाऊं ।

कहै कबीर मै जुग जुग जीऊं अंगह अंग न छूवाऊं ॥

Tell me, wise one,
How did I become
A woman from a man?

I never got married,
Was never pregnant,
But gave birth to sons.

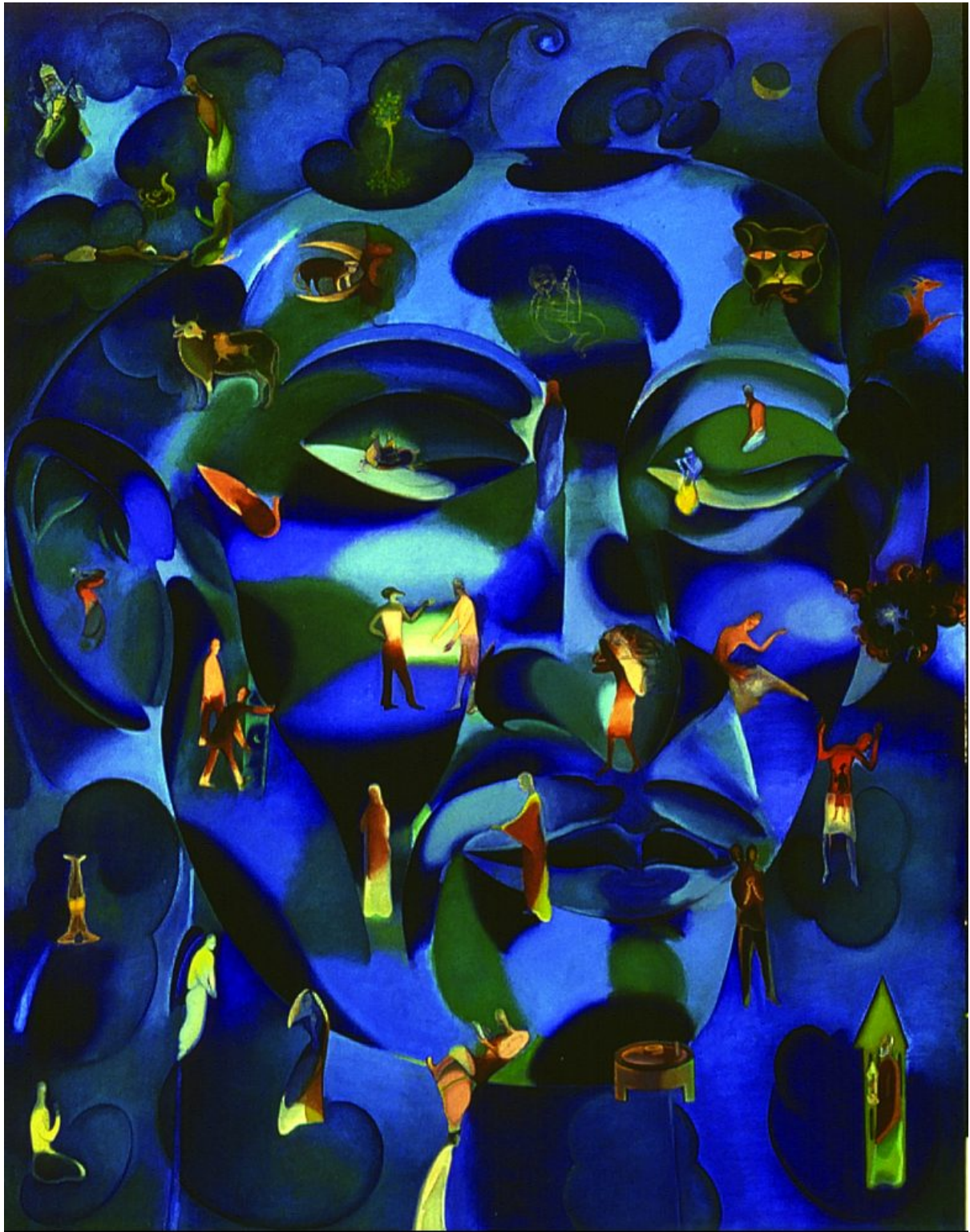
I fucked young men,
Too numerous to count,
And stayed a virgin.

In a Brahmin's house,
I become a Brahmin's wife;
In a yogi's, a lay yogini;

In a Turk's, I read the kalma
And do as Turkish women do;
And yet I'm always alone

Without a place to call home.
Listen, saints, Kabir says,
This is my body.

I don't let
My husband touch it
Or anyone else.



Gulammohammed Sheikh, Kahat Kabir-II: Ek Achambha Dekha re bhai... , 213x167cm, oil on canvas, 2001. Coll. Jyoti Limited, Vadodara

Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Kahat Kabir – II, Ek Achambha Dekha re Bhai', oil on canvas, 213 cms x 167 cms, 2001

V

धीरें धीरें खाइबौ अनत न जाइबौ ।
राम राम राम रमरिहबौ ॥टेक॥

पहली खाई आई माई । पीछै खै (खाई?) हूं सगौ जंवाई ।
खाया देवर खाया जेठ । सब खाया सुसार का पेट ॥
खाया सब पटण का लोग । कहै कबीर तब पाया जोग ।

god my darling
do me a favour and kill my mother-in-law
— Janabai (13th century)
— trans. Arun Kolatkar

Chewing slowly,
Only after I'd eaten
My grandmother,
Mother,
Son-in-law,
Two brothers-in-law
And father-in-law
(His big family included)
In that order,
And had for dessert
The town's inhabitants,

Did I find, says Kabir,
The beloved that I've become
One with.

VI

आऊंगा ना जाऊंगा, मरूंगा न जीऊंगा ।
गुरू के सबद में रमरिमरिहूंगा ॥टेक॥

आप कटोरा आपें थारी । आपें पूरखि आपें नारी ॥
आप सदाफल आपें नीबू । आपें मुसलमान आपें हद्दी ॥
आपें मछ कछ आपें जाल । आपें झींवर आपें काल ॥
कहै कबीर हम नाहीं रे नाहीं । नां हम जीवन न मुयेले मांहीं ॥

I won't come
I won't go
I won't live
I won't die

I'll keep uttering
The name
And lose myself
In it

I'm bowl
And I'm platter
I'm man
And I'm woman

I'm grapefruit
And I'm sweet lime
I'm Hindu
And I'm Muslim

I'm fish
And I'm net
I'm fisherman
And I'm time

I'm nothing
Says Kabir
I'm not among the living
Or the dead



*Gulammohammed Sheikh, Kahat Kabir-3 (Yaa Ghat Bheetar Soor Chanda Hai – 1),
76x56cm, gouache, 1997. Coll. Praful Shah, Surat.*

Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'Kahat Kabir – III, Yaa Ghat Bheetar Soor Chanda Hai – I, gouache, 76 cms x 56 cms, 1997

Lyrics of the song performed by Vidya Rao

रे साधो!

यह तन ठाट तंबूरे का

पांच तत्व का बना है तंबूरा
तार लगा नौ तुरे का

ऐंचत तार मरोड़त खूंटी
नकिसत राग हजूरे का

दूटा तार बखिर गयी खूंटी
हो गया धूर मधूरे का

या देहिका गरब ना कीजै
उड गया हंस तंबूरे का

कहे कबीर सुनो भाई साधो
अगम पंथ एक सूरे का



The poems and translations of Kabir were first published in the book *Songs of Kabir*, translated with an introduction by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and prefaced by Wendy Doniger. First published in India in 2011 by Hachette India Book Publishing India Pvt. Ltd (an Hachette UK company) in arrangement with Black Kite (an imprint of Permanent Black. Republished here with the author's permission.

Song by Vidya Rao and recorded by the Kabir Project, Srishti. Embedded here with permission.

Interview © Guftugu; translations © Arvind Krishna Mehrotra; images © Gulammohammed Sheikh; performance © Vidya Rao and the Kabir Project.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra is the author of several books of poetry including the volume of essays called *Partial Recall: Essays on Literature and Literary History*; the editor of The Oxford India Anthology of *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* and *Collected Poems in English* by Arun Kolatkar; and the translator of *The Absent Traveller: Prakrit Love Poetry*.

Gulammohammed Sheikh is a painter, poet and art critic from Gujarat, India. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1983 and Padmabhushan in 2014 for his contribution in the field of art. He is the editor of Contemporary Art in Baroda. Kabir has always been a source of inspiration for him. Over the years, the theme of Kabir kept returning to him and he created a relationship between his own images and Kabir's words.

Souradeep Roy is a member of the editorial collective of *Guftugu*.

Vidya Rao is a well-known academic and Hindustani classical singer. She trained under the legendary singer, late Vidushi Naina Devi, and continued her study under Vidushi Shanti Hiranand and Vidushi Girija Devi. She wrote a book on the late Naina Devi called *Heart to Heart: Remembering Nainaji*.

Bouldering: Two Poems

By Dion D'Souza



Atardecer en epecuén/Image Courtesy Wikimedia Commons

Bouldering

The boulders of Hampi cannot be left unsung.
No. They deserve their very own poem.
Very well then.
Millions of years in the making:
split by a punishing sun
and rain
blow-dried and chiselled by winds
like marbles
the boulders rolled down the hills
locating their nooks and niches,
their even-sided kith and kin.
Weapons in a fraternal feud.
Building blocks for a kingdom's capital.
Colour and character of a landscape,
texture, fortress, witness.
Rising high on every side:
How do these small bare hands,
this small millennial mind,
grapple?

From a sequence of poems on Hampi, the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Scenes from a Slum

'I never saw an ugly thing in my life: for let the form of an object be what it may – light, shade, and perspective will always make it beautiful.' ---- John Constable, 19th century English painter.

i.

When light enters the eye
see: sun
sky
slum
horizon.
See shanty
upon shanty
upon shanty
imbalanced
fractions of homes.
A halted convoy.
Yet each
an anthill of activity.
Like lovers
in evergreen glades or gardens
wisps of smoke
chase one another
upwards
languidly.
So much goes up in smoke.
So many dreams.
So many
burning nightmares.
Denied a spotlight,
a place in the sun,
who will capture them?
Who set them free?
What burns now?
A smell, acrid,
steals through the air.
Surrounded on all sides
by rubbish and bareness
a tree in an open space
flower-like,
in a gesture odd and sad,
of appeal or surrender,
has opened out its branches.
But the sky

starry eyes forever peeled
this hot autumnal day
has nothing to grant it.
A cloud slips away,
its exit breath-light, un-
premeditated.
What was in shadow shines now
with a clarity almost terrible:
See it.

ii.

A little girl clutching a scruffy
teddy bear
poised at the edge of a ditch
running
(with the rain/
from the rain/
because of it)
in the middle of the colony.
Murmuring something to the soft toy
very softly
she leaps.
Her small figure in her faded dress.
Her hair pressed against her forehead.
What gave her pause?
What took it?

* * *

Wave upon wave of massy blackness,
unwavering.
Sticks bob,
bags bob.
Bloated.
Pushed, dragged, tugged,
loosened up—
they go with the flow.

* * *

Bricolages of garbage:
ochre and cerulean,
emerald green and vermilion—
the richly hued bits we discarded from our lives—
see how they've reassembled.

* * *

A pipe leaks against a wall
coating it a lush green.
Walled outlines of houses,
inhabited by absence.
Confused
goats amble
as if through an enchanted forest
leaving behind a solid, if wasted, trail.

* * *

There is beauty in everything.
Can you bear it?

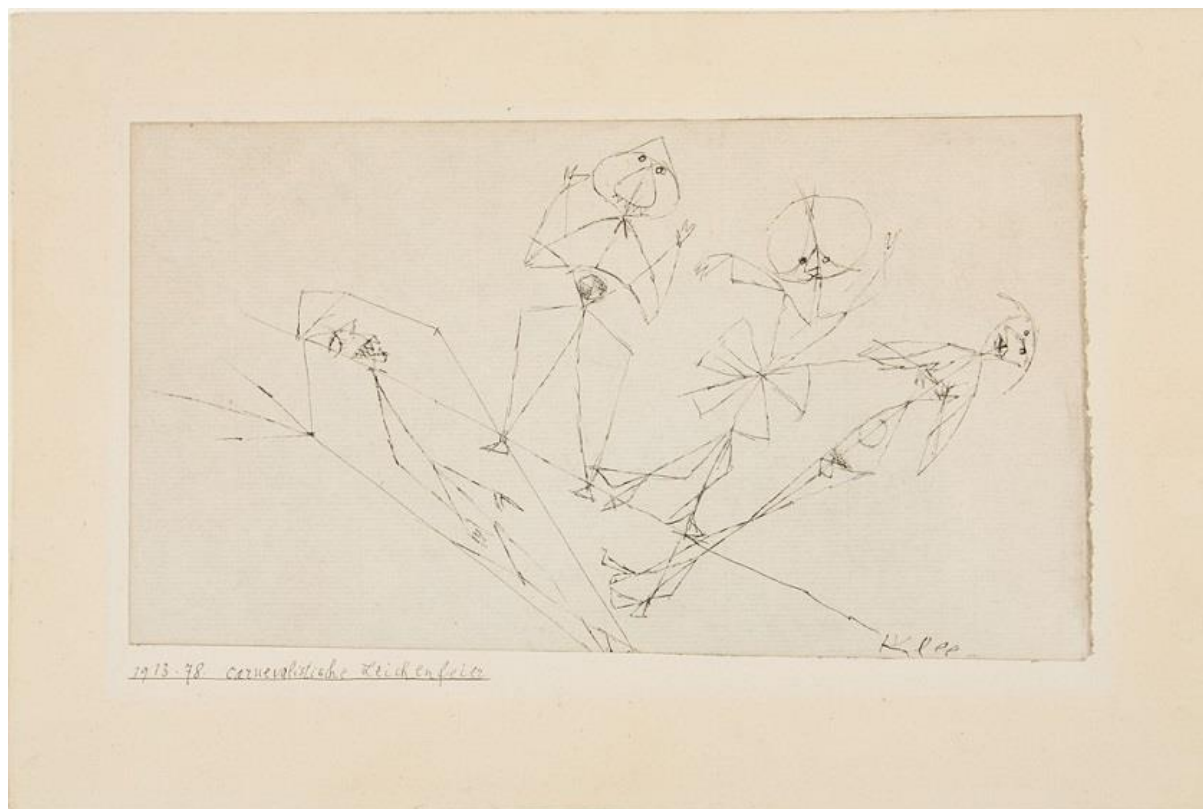
Poems © Dion D'Souza.

Dion D'Souza's first collection of poems, *Three Doors*, was published by Poetry Primero in 2016. He is currently working on a book of short stories. He lives in Mumbai.

Unframed

By Jayant Kaikini

Translated from Kannada by Tejaswini Niranjana



Paul Klee, 'Carnival-style Funeral', black ink on off-white laid paper, mounted to card, 18.3 cms x 27.4 cms, 1913/ Image courtesy Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Bequest of Richard B. Sisson

Gangadhar of Golden Frame Works was busy with his annual ritual of removing all the objects in his shop and washing the floors with phenyl. He would dust and wipe the frames, the glass panes and the sheets of plywood and put them back neatly in the shop. His assistant Vicky was throwing away all the rusted nails and filling the box with shiny new ones. The shop had been around since Gangadhar's father's time. Frames for women's embroidery, for actors and actresses, for Gandhi-Nehru, for school group photos, for couples from long ago who stood on either side of a plastic flowerpot with folded arms – this narrow shop, where there was always sawdust underfoot, existed to frame them all.

In his father's time there were only wooden frames. But now there was aluminium and plastic too, and coloured frames and glass. Among the pictures hung up to attract the attention of passers-by – pictures of landscapes, gods and goddesses, President Radhakrishnan, Tirupati Venkateshwara – hung the photograph of Gangadhar's father lit by a red zero-watt bulb burning like a small piece of coal. For them, it was as though one day, after years of framing and hanging pictures, he had suddenly stopped his work and climbed into the frame above. Gangadhar began to hurry. He wanted all the frames and the glass sheets back in the shop before the sun rose higher in the sky. One by one, Vicky picked up all the framed pictures ready for delivery. Gangadhar separated them into lots and arranged them. The embroidery, 'Welcome', button ducks, peacocks made from coins – these on one side; wedding photos in

one pile; gods and goddesses in another; and individual portraits that had been blown up on yet another side. Gangadhar was always very careful about the last category. These portraits were usually of people over fifty, and were often brought to the shop by youngsters. Gangadhar could tell at one glance that these were mostly photos selected for framing after the person's death. Some would bring pictures cropped and enlarged from wedding photographs, or from other group pictures. These photos had a funereal look to them. Sometimes such pictures would be of very young boys and girls, or someone in NCC uniform, and the parents who came to fetch them would have trembling hands when paying their bill. When the cleaning was almost over, Vicky placed before Gangadhar some pictures tied in cloth, and asked, 'What should we do with these?' These were the pictures left undelivered every year. Perhaps customers got transferred, or forgot, or had money troubles. Most of the uncollected frames contained embroidery, landscapes, and gods, with a few being those of actors and actresses. As was his habit, Gangadhar started sticking slips on these, saying 'For Sale'. Since these pictures cost just the price of the frame, people who had acquired a new kholi in a chawl, or moved up from a hutment to a chawl, often bought them. And this lessened Gangadhar's burden too.

But this year, as he was pasting the 'For Sale' slips, Gangadhar sat up in shock. In the midst of these pictures were three portraits – a woman past fifty, an old man, and a middle-aged man. The three did not seem related to one another. Different people must have given the photographs in at different times for framing. But those who brought them had not come back. And the pictures stayed here, like prisoners no one comes to visit. Gangadhar looked at them again. The woman's photo had been extensively touched up. A brush had been taken to the flowers in her hair, her bindi, the flowery prints on her sari. The two men's pictures seem to have been blown up. Even though the pictures had been wrapped in paper all year long, the eyes hadn't closed, thought Gangadhar, feeling a strange fear. The woman's photo had an expensive frame. Then why hadn't the customer come back? Vicky laughed mischievously and asked, 'Shall we put stickers on these too?'

'Cheh, cheh,' said Gangadhar sombrely. Hesitantly, he looked up at his father's portrait. The ash from the incense had fallen here and there on the garland around the frame.

The entire afternoon Gangadhar worried about who might have left those pictures. Did they not feel the need to collect them, or had they also left this life behind, or did the urgency with which they had handed in the picture diminish with time?

'Let's re-use the frames and the glass, and tear up the photos,' said Vicky.

'Why are you in such a hurry?' asked Gangadhar. He would speak to Maayi when he went home that night, and ask her what to do. After his father died, Gangadhar would not take a step without consulting Maayi. Except for his father, everyone in the chawl and the locality, including her son Gangadhar, called her Maayi. She was hardly ever at home, but this was not a new thing. Since Gangadhar's childhood, she spent more time outside the house than in. When Gangadhar was born, her milk was sufficient for a number of infants born at the same time in the hospital. It was said that even after she returned home, she would go regularly to the hospital to feed the babies whose mothers did not have enough milk. Gangadhar's father was irritated by what he saw as her crazy behaviour.

Having fed so many infants, Maayi used to wonder how many of the young people she saw in the bazaar or the fair she had suckled. With Maayi usually looking after a boy in the neighbourhood who had jaundice, or nursing some young girl with a fractured leg in plaster because there was no space in her house, Gangadhar never felt that he was an only child. He seemed to be part of a large undivided family. And the fame of Maayi's amritaballi decoction was another thing altogether. No one knew how and from where she managed to get hold of the herb. She used to dry punarnava and amritaballi and prepare a kashaaya. Everyone with a fever wanted Maayi's amritaballi decoction. Those who liked the taste would come up with any excuse, like a fake back pain, to be able to drink some kashaaya. Amidst all this flurry, Gangadhar and his father were grateful to get a little of her attention and a morsel to eat. In later years, Maayi had developed another habit. She would go to the city's hospitals, seek out those who did not have any friends or family, and feed them gruel. The city's loom which wove lakhs of helpless breaths came as a boon to Maayi. Whenever she had some free time, she would carry gruel and pickle to the municipal hospital wards. She did this even on the day after her husband died.

At night, Gangadhar brought up the topic of his abandoned photographs.

'You have lots of space in your shop to hang up all those useless pictures of fruits and flowers and gods. And you don't have any room for these three poor memories?' said Maayi. 'If you don't want them in the shop, bring them home,' she added.

When Gangadhar's father died, Maayi had virulently opposed the garlanding of his picture. All this framing business seemed to Maayi like part of the funeral rites. 'Why put a frame around memories,' she argued. But it was not that she was stubborn about it for long. One year after her husband died, she said, 'Let's have one photo of his in the house. Is it enough just to keep him in our minds? Shouldn't we look at him from the outside too?'

Gangadhar thought he would display his abandoned portraits in the shop front. 'Why should you think they're dead?' said Maayi. 'Maybe they will come themselves to pick up the pictures.'

The next day, Gangadhar wiped the portraits clean, changed the rusted nails, and hung them up among the samples. Surely someone amongst the millions of people who walked by would be drawn by them, surely there would be some relative who would see them. Maybe at least one of them would reach its proper home. Vicky did not like this idea.

'Why put dead people's pictures in the display?' he wanted to know.

Gangadhar answered with ease, 'Why do you imagine they're dead? They might come in person to collect their picture.' Vicky laughed.

Soon, these three people who hung there disregarding the dust, the heat and the wind began to seem to Gangadhar like people he knew well. It also seemed as though there was some connection between those three – an old husband, a housewife, and her younger brother perhaps. Gangadhar went on stringing these wires as he worked. Customers who came to

order frames looked blankly at the three portraits. What feelings they must have invoked in them!

One man asked: 'Are they your relatives? These pictures have been here for a long time, haven't they?'

'No, no,' said Gangadhar vehemently. He wondered later why he had denied the suggestion with such force.

One day a friend of Vicky's, a young stage actor called Bandya, was standing around the shops, chatting. 'Arre,' said Bandya. 'This photo is so large, so clear. One can see it from the balcony seats too. It would be first class to have this on stage.' And he went on: 'The drama companies of this town need pictures like these. You know, when we have to show the dear departed parents in a social play? Can I have them?'

Since they had featured in his display for a long time now, Gangadhar didn't feel as strongly as before about them. 'All right, let them find a new use,' he said, agreeing to let Bandya take them. When Bandya offered to pay for them, he said: 'No, no money. But only one condition – if someone comes looking for the pictures, you have to return them.'

'Certainly,' said Bandya cheerily, wrapping the portraits face to face in newspaper.

As he prepared to leave, Gangadhar felt odd, and called out: 'One minute.' And immediately he added, 'Nothing. Carry on,' and sat down quietly in the shop.

At night, he summoned up courage to tell Maayi what he had done.

'Son, what would have happened if they had remained in your shop is exactly what could happen on stage. There's no connection between those poor creatures and your frame business. Is yours the only shop in town? There are probably thousands. That means abandoned photos in every shop. Think how many there might be. If you all took an advance, this wouldn't happen at all,' said Maayi, laughing strangely. It was a laugh that put paid to Gangadhar's curiosity about which stage the photos would appear on, or whose parents they would represent.

In his nightmare he saw thousands of photographs being burnt in the city square. The housewife's touched-up sari, the veins on the old man's forehead – the fire did not affect them. Gangadhar sat up in fright, sweating. The light was still on. Maayi was putting dried pieces of amritaballi into a pot of boiling water on the stove.

The following day, communal riots broke out in some parts of the city. The leaders, having set two communities on each other, sat back on the sofas in their houses and watched appreciatively as the TV channel put up the numbers of those killed. Those who had homes, locked themselves inside without going to work, and those who lived on the streets offered their bosoms up to the knives. When names were asked, they hesitated. The art of stabbing where one plunge took the gut out of a man was perfected. In the hospitals, barbers smelling of spirit waited to shave those who would be operated on. No one came to claim the bodies

lying in the morgue, or the people suffering in the hospital beds. Because there too one had to provide a name, and an address, and thus reveal one's religion. Once again a bosom bared, once again a stabbing. Respectable citizens phoned each other to find out if all was well, while labourers on the footpath stayed under the sky with their eyes open, spending the night like ghosts. Laughter was banned on the streets. Looking someone in the eye was banned. Schools wore the silence of hospitals. Ambulances shrieked through the night streets, requesting relatives to take away the wounded since the wards were overflowing.

Stealthily the shops began to open again. Gangadhar did not know what to do. Outside the suburban trains station there were pasted sheets showing the names of those admitted in the city hospitals. People were jostling to read them as though they were looking for their children's SSC results. Who knows what they were looking for? Maayi, however, wandered from ward to ward with her flasks of gruel and kashaaya, not listening to anybody.

During this terrifying time of curfews, a boy came to Gangadhar's shop. 'Namaskar, I need some help,' he said.

Gangadhar asked him to sit down and listened to his request. He speculated that the boy had lost something or someone in the riot, but that turned out not to be true. The boy's story was this: he was an orphan who had grown up in the city's armpits without a mother or a father. He had caught the pulse of the city, and shaped his life according to the clock tower's hands. Now he drove an autorickshaw. He had fallen in love with a beautiful girl. He would do anything for her. He wanted to marry her – had already bought a real gold mangalsutra. He had purchased a jhopdi with a running water tap in Subhash Nagar. The girl knew he had no family, but had told his parents that his father and mother were dead. If they learned he was an orphan, they would not agree to the marriage. So when her parents came to visit him in the jhopdi, he wanted to display the photos of an old man and woman. He was even prepared to keep the photos with him forever. Gangadhar was shocked. He didn't expect this turn of events. The boy seemed honest and helpless. 'If you had come one week ago, your problem would have been solved. Cheh,' said Gangadhar, wringing his hands. He asked Vicky about Bandy.

'How can you think you'll get those photos back?' said Vicky. 'Who knows which drama company they've gone to? Why don't you ask the owner of the frame shop on the western side of the station?'

Gangadhar took the boy and crossed the bridge to the west. 'No, sir,' said the owner. 'We shouldn't get caught up in this kind of mess. Above all, there's a riot going on. A time of death. Lots of work for us. In the next two months, we'll have to make a lot of frames. So why get involved in this kind of lafda?'

Gangadhar regretted that he had given the photos to the drama company when they could have gone to as good a place as the young man's hut. 'Don't worry, your marriage will definitely take place,' he said to the young man.

'I'd look after the photos carefully. Our marriage will take place in front of the photos. We'd give them all due respect during the ceremonies,' the boy said pleadingly. Gangadhar thought

of another idea, and went looking for the photo studio on the upper floor of the market on the eastern side. The studio owner did not listen to Gangadhar's request.

'What if tomorrow the photo owners come and raise a fuss about loss of reputation?' he said reasonably.

'Look here, sir, we're using them for an auspicious ceremony. No one can object to that,' cajoled Gangadhar, but the studio owner would not budge. Gangadhar returned to his shop with the young man. 'Come back tomorrow,' he said. 'We'll think of something.' The boy put out both his hands and shook Gangadhar's before leaving. When he closed the shop before dusk to go home, the neighbouring shop owners were reading aloud the news of the riot casualties from the evening newspaper.

When Gangadhar reached home, Maayi was filling gruel in two large flasks. She had put her kashaaya into a thermos flask. 'I won't be coming back tonight. I'm going to J.J. Hospital. There's a young man there, the same age as you. Patient Number 2132. The nurse was saying he was admitted a week ago with thirteen stab wounds. He has three fractures, including one in his skull. After he bled in the street for two hours, someone brought him to hospital. He's lucky – they saved his life after a number of operations. But he's lost his memory. Can't remember his name, his family, his age, his address – nothing. He's like a newborn infant. If I stroke his back and look into his eyes, it looks as though he's smiling,' said Maayi, as she put a pair of Gangadhar's pyjamas and a shirt into her bag. 'If I hadn't been there today, they might have discharged him saying there's no space for new admissions. Where will the child go in this tomb like city?'

Maayi continued: 'If needy people come asking for clothes, don't hesitate, And don't give them torn clothes. See, there's your father's wedding coat. It's quite sturdy. Give that away too. It will come in handy against the cold. And my saris are here.' Saying this, she went away. Maayi did not come back that night. Gangadhar took out clothes to give away. As he pulled out his father's coat, he thought how all the clothes would acquire a new life. As he lay down to sleep, Patient Number 2132 appeared before his eyes.

Having lost his religion, address, age, name and surname, and become a human infant, this 2132 is being fed by Maayi as he lies on the bed. Unprotestingly, he is swallowing the gruel in small gulps. At the corner of his mouth, a sliver of a smile is slipping out. He is wearing Gangadhar's blue shirt.

When would the sun rise, when would he open his shop, and when would the young man in need of photos appear? Gangadhar waited anxiously. In the morning, he put the bundle of clothes in the neighbour's house and strode rapidly to his shop. The boy was there, as if he had been there all night. Opening the door hastily, Gangadhar climbed up on a stool. He removed the garlands from his father's portrait, unhooked the picture, wrapped it in newspaper and handed it to the young man.

As though he had found a hidden treasure, the boy stammered: 'This is enough for me, sir. Anyone would understand that the mother is anyway there...' He shook Gangadhar's hand and sped away like an arrow.

Read the original story 'Amritaballi Kashaaya' in Kannada [here](#).

First published in the collection *No Presents Please* by Jayant Kaikini, translated from the Kannada by Tejaswini Niranjana by Harper Perennial 2017.

Story © Jayant Kaikini; translation © Tejaswini Niranjana.

Jayant Kaikini, Kannada poet, short-story writer, columnist and playwright, with six short-story volumes, five poetry collections, three collections of non-fiction, and three plays to his credit, is also a much sought-after award-winning lyricist, script and dialogue writer for Kannada films. He won his first Karnataka Sahitya Akademi award at the age of nineteen in 1974 for his debut poetry collection, followed by three more in 1982, 1989 and 1996, for his short-story collections. He has also received the Dinakar Desai Award for poetry, the B.H. Sridhar award for fiction, the Katha National Award and the Rujuwathu Trust Fellowship for his writing. He is the recipient of the Karnataka State Award for best dialogue and lyrics, and the Filmfare Award for best lyrics in Kannada four times – in 2008, 2009, 2016 and 2017. Born in the coastal temple-town Gokarn, Kaikini is a biochemist by training and worked with pharmaceutical companies in Mumbai for two decades before moving to Bangalore, where he lives presently. A well-known television personality, he was given an honorary doctorate from Tumkur University in 2011 for his contribution to Kannada literature, film and television. He was honoured as Zee Kannadiga of the Decade in 2016. He was the first recipient of the Kusumagraj Rashtriya Bhasha Sahitya Puraskar in 2010. His latest book is a collection of essays on cinema.

Tejaswini Niranjana won the Central Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of M.K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* (1989) and the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of Niranjana's *Mriyunjaya* (1996). She has also translated Pablo Neruda's poetry and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar into Kannada. Her translations into English include *Vaidehi's Gulabi Talkies* (2006). She grew up in Bangalore, and has studied and worked in Mumbai. She is currently professor of cultural studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

The Revolt of Monkeys

By Saadat Hasan Manto

Translated from Urdu by Muhammad Umar Memon



'Rubbing of Monkeys', ink on paper, 113.7 cms x 59.7 cms, 20th Century/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The alarming news that 'monkey-ism' was on the rise was trickling in from all parts of the country. The government turned a blind eye to it at first but when it noticed that the matter was threatening to become serious, it immediately propelled the state's machinery into action.

It is appropriate that the reader should be told right in the beginning what 'monkey-ism' or 'apishness' stands for. Of course, we can't go into much detail here because it's a fairly long story, but briefly, the apish movement was set in motion by none other than the monkeys themselves and was directed squarely against humans.

Their gripe was: 'Now, when it's an incontrovertible fact that humans are our descendants, why do they treat us with such apathy, and not just with apathy but entirely contrary to the

manner of apes? They tie ropes around our necks and make us dance to the tune of their dugdugies¹ in every lane and by-lane while they stick their hands out to beg for money... as though we were humans..." They stated furthermore: 'While it is indisputable that we're their ancestors and that our blood flows in their veins, it is pretty dubious to say that they have climbed the evolutionary ladder to become humans. If there is such a thing as evolutionary stages, then why didn't we, billions of monkeys (you may call us a minority if you like, but if a census were ever taken, we would outnumber humans by far), go through them?'

The monkeys maintained: 'Why should these evolutionary stages remain the exclusive prerogative of only certain monkeys? Evolution! Hah, it's pure hogwash. Hell, they haven't evolved at all; if anything, they've regressed, for they failed to hold on to the status that was bestowed upon them. They tumbled so far down from apishness that they became humans. 'Their evolution is, in fact, a sign of their downfall. We want these fallen monkeys to revert to their original apishness all over again. And we have started this movement to do just that: bring them back to the fold. We bear them no ill will or enmity; in fact, we consider them our siblings. The purpose of our movement is to compel these monkeys who strut around as humans nowadays, and who've grabbed power and influence because of our laxity, to embrace their true primary nature and return to our social habitat.'

Speeches were given publicly, out in the open, and in the privacy of homes, and sometimes even in clandestine meetings. In essence, they underscored the point that vigorous protests should be made against the tyranny and violence the monkeys had unleashed in the guise of humans and that demonstrations should be staged in every part of the city, raising cries of Down with humanity! Long live apishness!

At first, humans thought this was some kind of farcical spectacle and had a hilarious time of it. Gradually, though, the monkeys' speeches, their irrefutable arguments and their point of view began to find a place in the hearts of some humans. As a result, those in power discovered from the reports of the secret police that several humans had become the monkeys' disciples, and, as trustworthy sources verified, numerous had renounced their humanity and returned to being apes; they had sprouted long tails and started walking on all fours.

High officials in the government dismissed this as pure nonsense. That a monkey can become human is an established fact, but how can a human become a monkey? Such reverse progression had never been seen or heard. So, after consulting their superiors, they countered the monkeys' claims by unleashing an equally relentless propaganda campaign of their own: A human can never morph into a monkey.

But among the monkeys too, there was no dearth of able and resourceful personalities. To squash the government propaganda, their savants came up with the ingenious argument that if a man can be transformed into a woman and a woman into a man, why not a man into a monkey, which is his true form.

Still, humans' arguments didn't entirely fail to have an effect on the monkeys. Those humans who hadn't yet completely transformed found themselves hesitating about whether to

complete the process of transformation or revert to being humans. But the monkeys' powerful rejoinder sustained them in their wavering mental and physical state.

The monkeys' propaganda secretary promptly mounted an especially aggressive campaign. The one incontrovertible truth was: 'Humans have come forth from us, and only because of some regrettable deviationist streak. Can they deny that they are a distorted form of us?'

In truth, humans had no response to this crushing argument. But they kept babbling: 'Well, no, we don't deny that we were once monkeys. But we had to toil hard and go through difficult stages to achieve our status as humans. It was our granite willpower, our protracted effort, our spiritual awakening, our thought and action, our evolutionary struggle that has brought us to this sublime and lofty state... a race that we won and others lost. The losers are still wallowing in their simian state. When these lower primates see us in our lofty state, they fume with jealousy. So let them stew. We'll march ahead, holding the resplendent lantern of evolution, until one day, who knows, we might even become gods.'

Quick came the answer from the apes' camp: 'Brethren, what lofty state have you reached? As we see it, you're plunging ever deeper into the depths of degradation. Evolution is something we don't deny, but just tell us, where do you stand today after climbing so many steps of the evolutionary ladder and after centuries of setting up one society after another? Your entire history is filled with warfare and carnage, murder and bloodshed, with rape and the defilement of women's honour, with oppressing others and being subjugated by them.

'On the other hand, look at our — your ancestors' — history. Can you cite one such dark episode in our history? Yes, we frisk about from one branch to another, but have we ever fought over them as our property? You, you humans, have been writing story after story about us in your books—including the well-known story of how we grabbed on to one another's tails to build a bridge over the river. You too build bridges, so massive that your human brains are knocked out in astonishment. But then you blow them up. Whereas who can blow up the bridge we devised? Not a single monkey's tail has behaved treacherously to this day, nor has a single monkey's wife gotten into bed with another monkey. Our wives pick lice from our bodies and comb our hair daily, but they don't forfeit their rights doing so; they continue to be the same as ours. You're not unaware of the way your wives idle away their time, nor are your wives unaware of how you mess around. What you imply by calling us monkeys applies more appropriately to your own selves. Conversely, 'human' is an apt term for us considering the meaning you give it in describing yourselves. The plain fact is that you belong to our race. And when the same blood runs in our veins, it is no wonder if at times some resemblance should crop up and, equally, no wonder that it should result in the kind of row that has erupted between us now. We invite you to return to our fold. Come back to us, and raise the cry "Down with humanity! Long live apishness!" You'll be the better for it.'

The retort from the human side came loud and clear: 'These monkeys are shouting nonsense. They're green with envy that we've reached such glorious heights. A single story written about them under God knows what perverse influence, and that too for our children, cannot be taken as the definitive word about them. Otherwise who isn't aware of the kind of justice this monkey doled out to two cats regarding their quarrel over a piece of cheese? He weighed the piece on his scale and, little by little, gobbled it up himself.'

The monkeys rejoined: 'Scales and weights are human inventions; we don't use them at all, we don't even know how to use them. Now, if you want the truth, it was no monkey who swindled the cats out of their cheese, it was a human. Is it any wonder that he would dupe the poor cats? We can show thousands of such cats whom these humans, once our brothers, are feeding lentils and cauliflower instead of their natural diet of sinews and membranes and thus, having already distorted their own nature, are hell-bent on destroying that of others. Instead of ridiculing our sense of fairness, cast one more glance at the institutions of justice you've created. Don't your courts ride roughshod over any notion of justice every day by sending hundreds, indeed, thousands of people who have committed no crime to the gallows? We say again, they are our brothers who have somehow gone astray. Our arms are forever open to take them back, our prayers forever for them. We wish to take no revenge.' Gradually this amicable bearing changed and, instead, a defiant cry rose from the monkeys' camp: 'We want to take revenge... for this evolution... for this so-called progress these monkeys have foisted on themselves and turned into humans.'

The humans took severe measures of their own. Thousands of apes were taken into custody; hundreds dragged to the courts and subsequently hanged. But the movement in support of apishness continued unabated, until, finally, the human government declared it illegal. As a result, while some apes were arrested, the rest just disappeared into the trees, frustrating every attempt to apprehend them. Who had the mind or the foolhardiness to chase after them in their jungle hideouts? Some monkeys, rumour had it, settled in the trees around the bungalows of some high officials, where they were well looked after and provided every comfort. This because those officials were themselves secret partisans of apishness, but loathed embracing it openly for fear of losing their high positions.

This went on for quite some time. Arrests continued, gallows were erected in the middle of chowks, the culprits were whipped, skinned and forced to crawl on their stomachs. Numerous acts and ordinances were put into effect. Nothing worked, but the monkeys were not about to call it quits. They stubbornly stuck to their position. Now and then they organized agitations, got together and stormed humans, chewed through electric cables, snatched bread from people's hands, smashed the little dugdugies to whose beat their monkey-masters made them dance, chewed through their ropes and fled.

They secretly converted several humans over to apishness, detonated home-made bombs, spread terror and, as often, risked their lives. Though the powers had broken up their organization, still they were as relentlessly united and well organized in their mission as ever. When man is faced with this sort of situation, he nearly goes mad. I say this because I too am one of the humans. But the strange truth is that the monkeys appeared smugly impervious to any change. They remained what they had been all along—monkeys. Their antics lost none of the playfulness. They would swoop down and snatch from the hands of humans whatever caught their fancy. Grab a gun from someone and march on like an army cadet. Batons, tear-gas grenades, nothing stopped them. They were, one might say, as restless as quicksilver. If you drew a gun on them, took aim and fired, they would take a leap and, before you knew it, would be sitting comfortably on your shoulder laughing their monkey heads off. If you threw a tear-gas shell at them, they'd jump and quickly turn it towards you.

The government was thoroughly fed up with their antics. A classified intelligence service report claimed that this monkey movement, or conspiracy, or whatever, could never have been launched by the monkeys themselves. A group of influential humans, supporting apishness just for kicks, must be working behind the scenes and, on further investigation, this fact was established beyond the shadow of a doubt. This disclosure was even more upsetting for the government; some officials panicked lest they should fall into the trap of apishness and, after reaching the top of the evolutionary ladder, lapse into being apes, a state their forefathers had fought long and hard to escape.

In spite of the government's countless strategies, the rising tide of the monkey movement couldn't be stemmed. Some monkey or other would appear on a rooftop or a steeple somewhere in the city several times during the day or night and begin to trumpet through his megaphone: Down with humanity! Down with dugdugies! Long live apism!

One day the matter got out of hand. An audacious monkey stole into the living room of none other than the country's highest authority, opened the cigar box, picked one up, lit it and started puffing away leisurely. His Honour was furious. The monkey screeched at him. His Honour scolded and threatened. The monkey couldn't care less and leaped, landing on the sofa. The next moment he took another leap and alighted on one of the chairs, leaving His Honour with the distinct feeling that the monkey's movements were mimicking his own image in the mirror. He felt so riled up and incensed, writhing inside with anger and utter helplessness, that he finally broke down in tears.

We heard about this episode from our special sources, otherwise, the next day's papers had a different story to tell: An audacious monkey made an attempt to break into the government palace but the sentries gunned him down on the spot. After the incident, all pertinent government departments have been issued strict orders to take whatever steps necessary to quell the uprising of the monkeys.

The chief of the secret police wasn't worried so much about the monkeys. He called together his subordinates and told them, 'These antics of the monkeys don't scare me. What I'm afraid of are the humans who have already reverted to being monkeys. I'm a man of keen intelligence. I think that if we can, as the descendants of monkeys, kick up so much trouble in the world and wreak such utter chaos, what might we do if we ever went back to being monkeys? Evolution, even when reversed, cannot but spell danger, no matter how one looks at it. So my instruction to you is this: Go and ferret out the humans who have embraced apism. If you can round them up, that will be the end of apism.'

Now the secret, as well as the ordinary, police intensified their efforts to apprehend the neo-monkeys who were wreaking havoc every night with one mischief after another. Several monkeys were caught and were subjected to the 'third degree'² inside the fort to make them squeal the whereabouts of the neo-monkeys. But they didn't let a word slip out of their mouths and bore the harshest torture with fortitude. They didn't relent even when their females were raped before their eyes. Exasperated, the police mowed them down and their corpses were doused with kerosene and set afire.

The next morning cyclostyled copies of a poster appeared everywhere in each city. In moving language, it revealed the atrocities humans had committed and appealed to those who felt compassion to abandon their humanity and return to the fold of the monkeys, which was their original domain.

Within minutes the posters were pulled down, but by then thousands of humans had already seen them, and consequently, hundreds joined the circle of apism. None of the countermeasures of the government worked. All the zoos, now converted into prisons, were filled with monkeys. One count put the figure of thirty thousand behind bars, but the incarcerated monkeys couldn't be happier.

The authorities were caught in a strange predicament: if they turned a blind eye to the monkeys, it was feared they would unleash a veritable revolution; if the authorities tightened their control and resorted to torture and atrocities, more and more humans would feel disgusted and turn against the government—after all, the same blood flowed in their and their ancestors' veins.

At long last, the authorities felt pressed to collectively think the matter over and devise some way that the ban on the monkey organization could be lifted; and further, the monkey leaders were to be invited to a conference and asked to explain their point of view so that some step towards reconciliation might be taken.

-
1. *dugdugi*: kettledrum. The plural dugdugies has been rendered here as in English.
 2. Refers to the intense brutality of 'third-degree torture.'

Read the original story 'Tavēlē kī Balā' in Urdu *here*.

Story © Saadat Hasan Manto; translation © Muhammad Umar Memon.

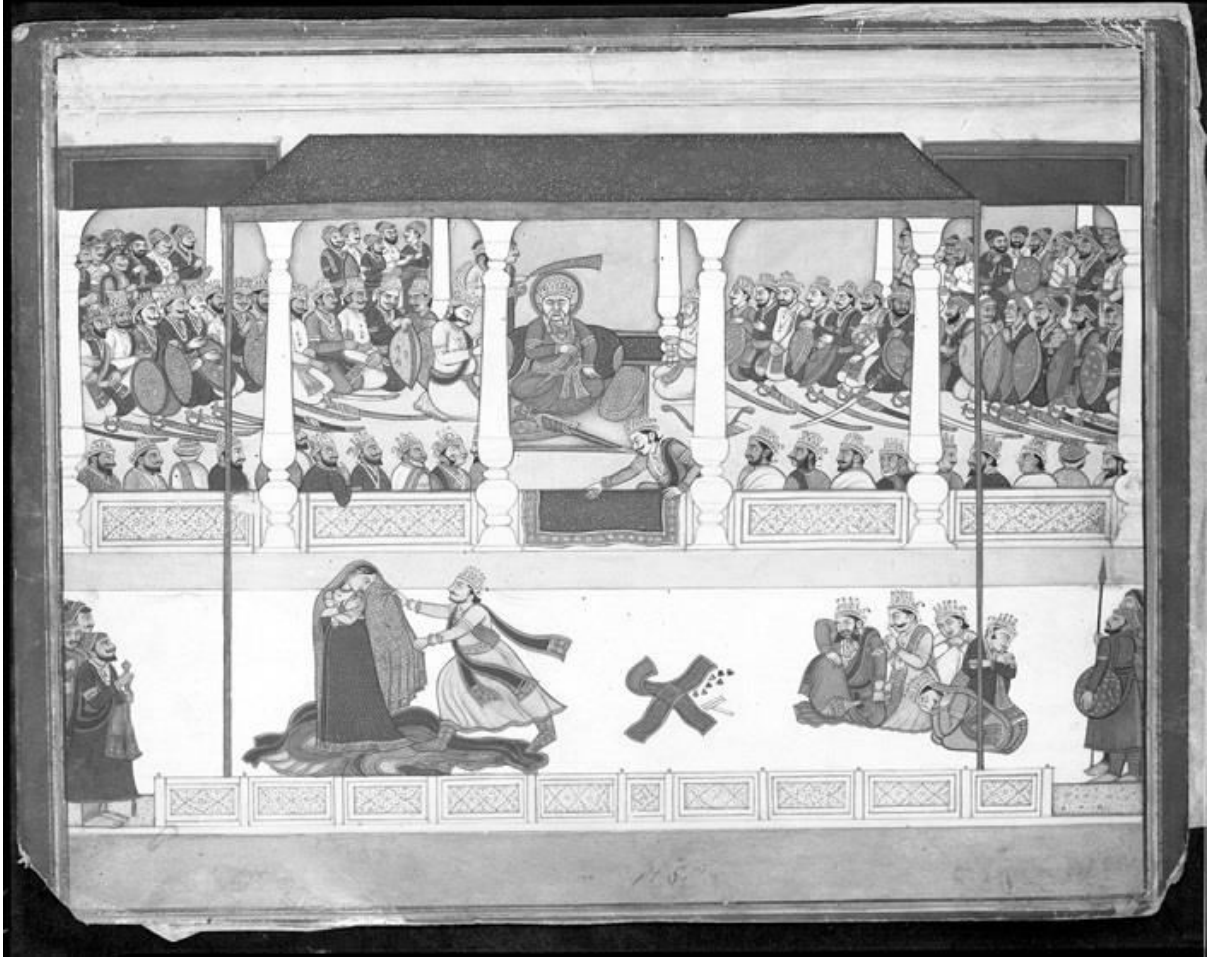
Saadat Hasan Manto was a Pakistani writer, playwright and author born in Ludhiana, British India. Writing mainly in the Urdu language, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, two collections of personal sketches. Manto was tried for obscenity six times; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but never convicted. 'Boo', 'Khol Do', and 'Toba Tek Singh' are some of his renowned short stories. On January 18, 1955, Manto passed away.

Muhammad Umar Memon was an accomplished scholar, translator, poet, Urdu short story writer, and the editor of *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. Memon served as the Professor Emeritus of Urdu Literature and Arabic Studies at the University of Wisconsin for 38 years. Besides working on the translation of Urdu works into English, he served on the editorial board of *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* and was also an advisor to the Urdu Project. He died on June 03, 2018.

Draupadi and Other Poems

By Suman Keshari

Translated by Linda Hess and Aparna Bhagwat



Unknown artist, 'Bride Choosing in the Palace, from a Draupadi Charshar', opaque water colour and gold on paper, 25.5 cms x 33.3 cms, 19th century/ Image courtesy Harvard Art Museums

द्रौपदी

क्या परिचय दूँ मैं अपना
द्रौपदी... पांचाली... कृष्णा... याज्ञसेनी
सभी संज्ञाएं विशेषण हैं या संबंधसूचक
कभी गौर किया है तुमने
मेरा कोई नाम नहीं!
द्रोणाचार्य के अपमान का बदला चुकाने को
पिता को चाहिए था एक योद्धा
और धृष्टद्युम्न के पीछे
यज्ञ की अग्नि से अचानक ही निःसृत मैं

सबको स्तब्ध कर
 खुद ही प्रयोजन बनती रही आजन्म
 सुई की नोक बराबर भूमि न पाने वालों के औरस
 अब तक मुझ पर उंगली उठाते थकते नहीं कि
 लाखों लोगों की मृत्यु का कारण मैं रही
 और भी कई कहानियाँ बुन ली हैं उन्होंने
 महज इसलिए कि मैं कभी रोई नहीं
 गिड़गिड़ाई नहीं
 न माँ के सम्मुख जब उन्होंने बाँट दिया पाँच बेटों में
 और न
 कुरुसभा में
 जहाँ पाँच पाँच पतियों के बावजूद मैं अकेली पड़ गई
 इतिहास गवाह है
 मैंने केवल कुछ प्रश्न उठाए
 कुछ शंकाएं और जिज्ञासाएं
 और तुमने मुझे नाम से ही वंचित कर दिया
 क्या परिचय दूँ मैं अपना
 द्रौपदी... पांचाली... कृष्णा... याज्ञसेनी
 सभी संज्ञाएं विशेषण हैं या संबंधसूचक
 कभी गौर किया है तुमने
 मेरा कोई नाम नहीं!

Draupadi

(Translated by Linda Hess)

How do I introduce myself?
 Have you ever realised –
 Draupadi, Panchali, Krishna, and Yagyasenya are
 all adjectives or conjunctions and not one of these is a proper noun!
 Father had rather wished for a warrior to avenge Dronacharya
 Astonishing, surprising everyone I followed Drishtdunm
 all at once from the Yagya-agni
 The ones who were not thought worthy of land measuring a middle-point,
 blame me for the death of millions
 they have spun several stories around me
 only because never did I cry
 nor ever lamented
 not even before Kunti-Ma
 who distributed me amongst her five sons

nor in the Kurusabha
where I was left alone
in spite of my five husbands
History is witness
That I only raised some questions and
You deprived me even of my name!

कृष्णा

मैं पांचाली पुंशचली
आज स्वयं को
कऋष्णा कहती हूँ
डंके की चोट!
मुझे कभी म भूलेगी कुरुसभा की अपनी कातर पुकार
और तुम्हारी उत्कंठा
मुझे आवृत्त कर लेने की
ओ! वे क्षण...
बदल गई मैं
सुनो कृष्ण मैंने तुम्हीं से प्रेम किया है
दोस्ती की है
तुमने कहा –
‘अर्जुन मेरा मित्र, मेरा हमरूप, मेरा भक्त है
तुम इसकी हो जाओ’
मैं उसकी हो गई
तुमने कहा –
‘माँ ने बाँट दिया है तुमको अपने पाँचों बेटों में
तुम बँट जाओ’
मैं बँट गई
तुमने कहा –
‘सुभद्रा अर्जुन प्रिया है
स्वीकार लो उसे’
और मैंने उसे स्वीकार लिया
प्रिय! यह सब इसलिए
कि तुम मेरे सखा हो
और प्रेम में तो यह होता ही है!
सब कहते हैं

अर्जुन के मोह ने
हिमदंश दिया मुझे
किंतु मैं जानती हूँ
कि तुम्हीं ने रोक लिए थे मेरे कदम
मैं आज भी वहीं पड़ी हूँ प्रिय
मुझे केवल तुम्हारी वंशी की तान
सुनाई पड़ती है
अनहद नाद सी!

Krishna

(Translated by Aparna Bhagwat)

I, Panchali, depraved as they describe me,
Call myself – Krishna,
 from the rooftop!
I can never forget my woeful cries in the Kuru-Sabha,
And your yearning
To cover me up...
Ah! Those moments changed me!
Oh Krishna, I have always loved you and only you,
And you are my sole friend!
You said –
 ‘Arjun is my friend, my image, my devotee,
You be his.’
And I became his.
You told me –
 ‘The mother has divided you among her five sons,
You get divided.’
I split myself amidst them all.
You stated –
 ‘Subhadra is dear to Arjun,
Accept her.’
And I embraced her into our lives.
Dear, all this was done... because,
You are my soul mate.
And to do so...
Is what love is all about!
Everybody talks of my love for Arjun
Which gave me the frostbite,
But I know for sure,
That you made me stay behind.
I still lie there, O Beloved!
Listening to your flute – the anhad nada*...
O my eternal love...

(**Anhad nada* – It is the internal sound within the body, signifying spiritual growth (*Anahata*), there are ten types of sound a spiritual practitioner hears within him/ her, known as *dashavida nada*, such as the sound of the blowing of conch shell (*shankha nada*), of flute (*venu nada*), of bell (*ghanta nada*), of drums, of string instruments (*veena*), of trumpet (*shehnai*), of thunder, of the flow of water, and so on. Hearing such sounds is a sign of spiritual growth).

कल

मैंने तथागत से पूछा
क्या तुमने कल को देखा है?
एक हल्की स्मित कौंधी
मैंने तो बस कल ही को देखा है...

Tomorrow

(Translated by Linda Hess)

Have you ever seen tomorrow?
I asked Tathagat
What else have I known?
answered He with a faint smile

एक निश्चित समय पर

एक निश्चित समय पर नींद खुल जाती है
करवट बदल, चादर लपेट फिर भी सो जाने का लालच परे ढकेल
उठ बैठती है वह
उँगलियाँ चटखाती
दरवाजे से घुस पलंग के दाहिनी ओर सोई वह
पाँवों से टटोल-टटोल स्लीपर ढूँढ लेती है
और सधी उँगलियाँ उठ खड़े होने तक
जूड़ा लपेट चुकी होती हैं
चाय का पानी चढ़ाने
कुकर में दाल रखने
डबलरोटी या पराँठा सेकने
सब का एक निश्चित समय है
सब काम समय पर होता है
घड़ी की सुइयों-सा जीवन चलता है
अविराम

एक निश्चित समय पर नहा धोकर
बालों में फूल और माथे पर बिन्दिया
वह सजाती है
और निश्चित समय पर द्वार के आस-पास वह चिड़िया सी मँडराती है
इस टाइम-टेबल वाले जीवन में
बस एक ही बात अनिश्चित है
और वह है उसका खुद से बतिया पाना
खुद की कह पाना और खुद की सुन पाना
अब तो उसे याद भी नहीं कि
उसकी अपने से बात करती आवाज
कैसी सुनाई देती पड़ती है...
कभी सामने पड़ने पर क्या
वह
पहचान लेगी खुद को?

At a definite time

(Translated by Aparna Bhagwat)

She wakes up at a definite time,
Shirking the longing to turn over and wrap herself in a quilt,
She sits up, popping her knuckles.
Her feet feel for her slippers and find them,
and by the time she is up,
her accustomed fingers,
have already rolled her tresses into a neat bun.
Life runs like clockwork for her,
ceaselessly,
to heat the water for tea,
to cook the dal,
to toast a bread or a parantha,
everything is clearly defined,
and to be carried out punctually.
Having bathed at the fixed time
with flowers decked in her hair
bindi on her forehead
she flits about her door
like a restless bird
At a fixed time!
In this life of precise routine
the only uncertain thing is
talking with and listening to herself.
She does not even remember

the sound of her voice...
Would she recognise
who this is
if confronted
with herself?

जाने किस आस में बूंद

ये तो अजब वाकया हुआ
कल सवेरे टीले के बगल से गुजरते हुए
पत्ते पर पड़ी जलबूंद
अचानक पुकारते हुए साथ होली
जाने वह बूंद ओस थी या
पानी किसी आँख का
क्या वह बीत गई थी
या है वह अब भी
मौजूद इस देह में
जाने किस रूप में...
जाने किस आस में...

In an unknown anticipation

(Translated by Aparna Bhagwat)

It was a strange incident!
While passing by a hillock yesterday,
A droplet on a leaf,
Called out and accompanied me.
I wonder if it was a dewdrop,
Or a tear-drop from someone's eye?
Has it ceased existing or does it still survive?
Present in this constitution,
In an unknown form,
And in some un-apprehended hope...

मोनलिसा

क्या था उस दृष्टि में
उस मुस्कान में कि मन बंध कर रह गया
वह जो बूंद छिपी थी
आँख की कोर में

उसी में तिर कर
जा पहुँची थी
मन की अतल गहराइयों में
जहाँ एक आत्मा हतप्रभ थी
प्रलोभन से
पीड़ा से
ईर्ष्या से
द्वन्द्व से...
वह जो नामालूम सी
ज़रा सी तिर्यक
मुस्कान देखते हो न
मोनालिसा के चेहरे पर
वह एक कहानी है
औरत को मिथक में बदले जाने की
कहानी...

Monalisa

(Translated by the poet)

What was there in the gaze
in the smile
that entangled my heart
swimming across the tear-drop
hiding in the eyelid
I went
deep into the heart
where dwelled a restless soul
burning with
temptation
pain
envy
conflict...
The almost invisible
curved smile
that you see on Monalisa's face
is actually
a story
of a woman
being transformed
into a myth!

'Monalisa' appears in her collection *Monalisa ki Aankhen*, published by Rajkamal Prakashan. It has been republished here with the poet's permission.

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Suman Keshari is a poet and freelance writer. She has published four collections of poems namely *Yagyavalkya se Behas*, 2008, *Monalisa ki Aankhen*, 2013, *Shabd Aur Sapne* (e-book, 2015) and *Piramidon ki tho Mein* (2018). She is well known for her rewritings of Indian mythological figures such as Draupadi, Karna, Gandhari, Seeta and Savitri. Her poems have been received with much appreciation at forums like ICCR, Sahitya Akademi, Raza Foundation, Benaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Central University of Gujarat, Bhartiya Jnanapeeth, All India Radio, IIT Mumbai and various literary festivals held at Patna, Ajmer, Bikaner, Dehradun, Port Blair, among others.

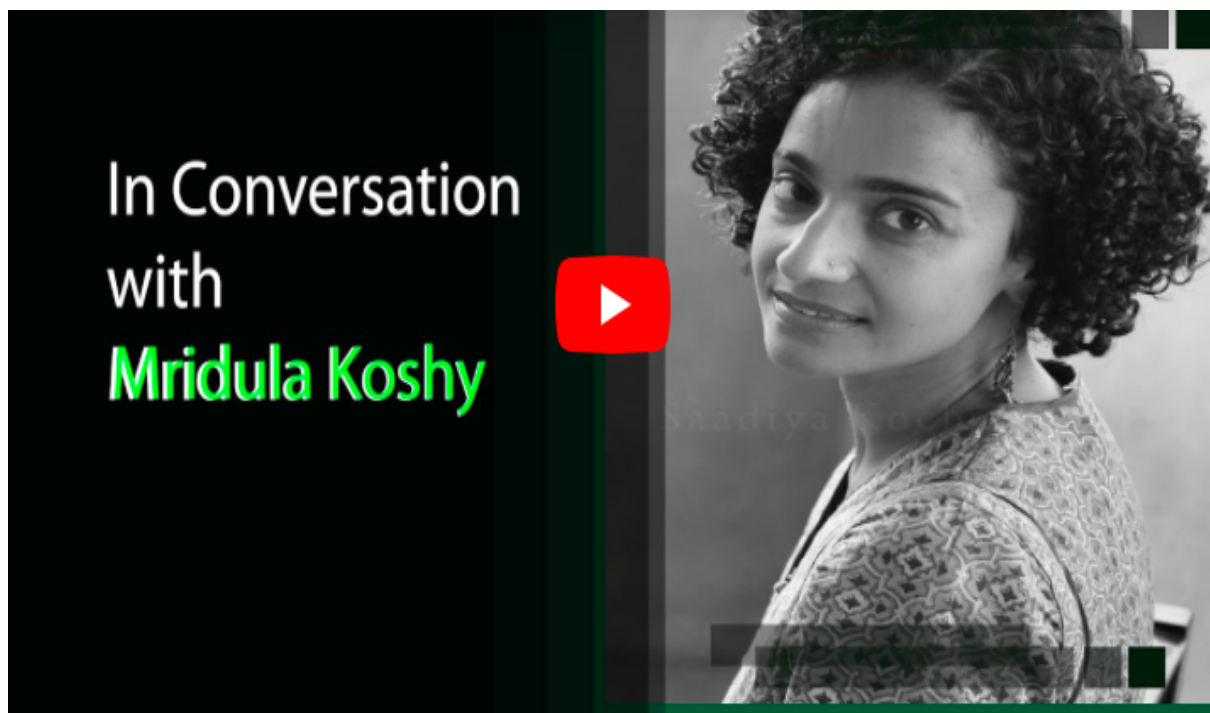
Linda Hess teaches at the Department of Religious Studies at Stanford University. She is a renowned Kabir translator and scholar. She is deeply involved in translating poetry and studying ways in which it functions. Her latest publication is *Bodies of Song* (2015).

Aparna Bhagwat has an M.Sc and an M.Ed. She is keenly interested in English, Hindi and Marathi literature. She draws on her own experiences and views and her understanding the writers' perception to write poems and translate. She is a resident of Bhopal.

In Conversation With Mridula Koshy

Souradeep Roy in conversation with the author

In this series of three conversations with library activist and author Mridula Koshy, she talks about the inner life of her characters, about bilingualism and about her latest novel Bicycle Dreaming. She explains how her first book, If it is Sweet, a collection of shorts stories, had several working-class characters, characters who are often only used as foils in fiction. She defines her urge to change this aspect of writing, to shed light on their interiority, as her politics. In the second conversation, she talks about her bilingual self and the process of navigating this bilingualism through English. Finally, in the last conversation, she talks about her latest book Bicycle Dreaming, a novel set in a waste-workers community of Chirag Delhi. The conversation is followed by the 'Prologue' to the novel and a reading.



Prologue

Landfill was the wrong word for it. This was no modest depression at the edge of town, filled with garbage and covered over with soil, green grass over the top of that. This reared, mountain-high, compacted black—nearly indistinguishable from the less compacted grey soot of the horizon. It was miragelike, but not in the distance; it was right here in the city.

Soon enough, the nose was assaulted. The stench was not the lesser stench of Delhi's naalas, those creeks and rainwater runoffs smothered with garbage and rooted over by translucent-skinned pigs. This was the septic scent of faecal matter dredged from the sludge at the bottom of the naalas, and transported in tankers to the landfill. The tankers released the sludge as they travelled the winding road up the garbage mountain. When they were done, the road was pasted in slime and left to dry. Now there was a high shine to the road's black surface,

but the tinsel effect when the sun struck and broke elsewhere on the mountain's sides was not from the sludge; it was from the thousands upon thousands, from the hundreds of thousands upon hundreds of thousands, from some incomprehensible number of hundreds of thousands of halved and discarded razor blades aglitter underfoot in the soft dust.

There were no pigs. There were dogs. They were not rabid. There was even a litter, eyes shut, tumbling by feel as they did in the womb, in dust that was so soft, it was nearly as soft as the fluid in which they recently swam. This dust hung in the air, lighter than the air, filtering the last light from the setting sun. It was time for herds of cows to give over picking through rotting garbage; it was time for them to head down the slippery mountain and find rest elsewhere in the city.

Two children descended the mountain. Were they the last stragglers? Earlier in the day there had been scores of children. And men and women. They had worked the mountain, pushing their legs in shin deep, anchoring themselves at impossible angles in its yielding sides so that, hands free, they could dig from it buried glass and metal and plastic.

The two were midway in their descent. They appeared to have had no luck today; they trailed deflated bags. On the other side of the mountain there were three different couples, loading their respective carts with bag upon bag of garbage they would haul away to recycling factories. The children laughed when asked the reason for their empty bags.

They looked away when asked their names. The girl continued to chatter. She boasted of making two thousand rupees yesterday. They'd found iron. Broken down machinery. At twenty rupees a kilo.

Did they haul a hundred kilos of iron off this mountain?

The girl's skin was clear, and her eyes clearer still. The boy's skin, though, was pitted all over. The black that settled over the whole of it was the black of the mountainside; the brown and yellow patchwork underneath spoke of long acquaintance with hunger. It was impossible to see his eyes. He kept them fastened on the ground but neither was he timid. He shrugged, shoved his free hand deep into the pockets of his two-sizes-too-large pants and spat to the side. But he answered the question amiably. Yes, of course. There was no way other than by carrying. What was a hundred kilos? They only carried it two kilometres. His home was two kilometres away, in a bustee. The thekedar, the contractor, kept a storage shed there. It was on the other side of the mountain. Today though, they had no need to rush to cover the two kilometres before the thekedar took in his weighing scales and closed shop for the day. They were headed in the opposite direction, into the city.

Why?

The boy made a scoffing sound and repeated the question to himself as if disbelievingly. Why? Because we have money. And there are many good things to buy.

What will you buy?

Nothing. He just talks about buying things. He doesn't actually buy anything. He is saving his money.

All this tumbled from the girl, and though the boy never stopped making his scoffing sound, it now had a quality of being pleased with what the girl was saying. Something like a smile flickered across his face. Did he like the idea of himself as thrifty even as he scoffed at her need to explain him?

What about her? Did she not want to buy something for herself?

Not really, she said. But we will see a movie.

There was a loud snort from the boy and she dissolved into helpless laughter. Were they laughing at the credulity with which their story of Rs 2000 had been swallowed? They couldn't be making a tenth of that in one day, could they?

The girl explained the laughter. He doesn't like movies, but we see them because I like movies.

Yes, he agreed, she likes all things that are not real. Again, the flicker of a smile, and as quickly his long lashes swept across his eyes and he returned to looking down. Perhaps what seemed to be hostility was actually shyness.

He said the bag wasn't empty. There were books in the bag they were dragging. He said this dump used to be good till the incinerator plant was built down the road and they started dumping the ashes from it here. No, the sludge did not do the damage that ashes did. The sludge was confined to the road. Malba, that fine dust left over from the constant reconstruction of the city, fogged the heap, but it did not do the damage the ashes did. Books could survive malba, but not ashes.

Would he sell the books for pulp?

The boy looked up, and even in the waning light, his anger was clear to see.

I can read, he said. I will use them for my studies.

Do you attend a school near here?

They did not answer though the girl straightened her back and stood erect, possibly in a sly pantomime of the school neither could possibly have attended that day. Their hands were black with the dirt and ashes they had been digging in, their clothes filthy. And even the clear-skinned girl's nose ran a trail which she now carefully wiped with the inside hem of her green dress.

She put her hand out and he took his hand out of his pocket to allow her to hold it. They returned to the path they were descending. The words he flung back up the mountain were spoken loudly, they might have been angry, or perhaps not. They were not without the indifference and possibly indolence that seemed to be his way of being in the world:

What do you care what our names are?

And he turned and looked over his shoulder and up at you, and you studied his face for the brief moment he held it open to you. But it was increasingly difficult in that grey light to know what was meant by an expression, or a few words, or their inflection. By the time the two children had rounded the road ahead, disappeared into another fold in the mountain, and emerged again, they were mere silhouettes against the night sky. What had been invisible in the day now came into sight: the small fires everywhere fed by gas escaping from deep within the heap leapt and subsided and leapt again. Now it was night and the next day was far away.



Mridula Koshy reading from her novel *Bicycle Dreaming*

The 'Prologue' appears in the novel *Bicycle Dreaming*, published by Speaking Tiger Publishing Private Limited in 2016. It has been republished here with the author's permission.

Text © Mridula Koshy; video © Guftugu.

Mridula Koshy is a community organiser and library activist who works for The Community Library Project. She is also the writer of three works of fiction: *If It Is Sweet*, *Not Only the Things That Have Happened* and *Bicycle Dreaming*.

A Slip of Paper and Other Poems

By Udayan Thakker

Translated from Gujarati by Rochelle Potkar



'Ten Elements for East Window of an Architectural Ensemble from a Jain Meeting Hall', teak with traces of colour, last quarter of the 16th century/ Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

|

આણંદજી કલ્યાણજીની પેઢી
(પરંપરતિ)

દેલવાડાનાં દહેરાંઓ રચાયાં કેવી રીતે?

આરસપ્હાણને સપનું કદીક આવ્યું હશે?
 દેરાસરોનાં દ્વાર પર ઝૂલે છે તકતી
 “આ જગાનો સર્વ વહીવટ
 શેઠશ્રી આણંદજી કલ્યાણજીની પેઢીને હસ્તક”
 કોણ આ આણંદજી?ને વળી કલ્યાણજી?
 શાહસોદાગર હતા? રાજસ્થાન બાજુના?
 વીસા?દશા? કે ઓસવાળ?
 સાચું કહું?
 આવી કોઈ વ્યક્તિજિ નહોતી!
 આ બે તો કેવળ ભાવવાચક નામ
 જો તમે યાહો
 તમારે ઘેર પણ એ તકતી ઝુલાવી શકો

M/s Anandji Kalyanji

How were the temples of Dilwara created?
 Did the marble have a dream?
 A signboard at the gate says,
 ‘This place is managed
 by M/s Anandji Kalyanji.’
 Who were they? Anandji and Kalyanji? *
 Wealthy merchants?
 From which sect of Jainism?
 Veesa, Dasha, or Oswal?
 Natives of Rajasthan?
 If truth be told
 there were no such men.
 These are but two
 abstract nouns.
 You may jolly well
 put that signboard up
 on your door.

**Names of Indian men, which literally mean happiness and goodness.*

II

‘ગોટી રમશુંને?’
 ભગવાન પણ ઓછી માયા છે?
 પારદર્શક કાચની લસિસી લસિસી પાંચ ગોટી

ભગવાને મને આપેલી,
 અને પાંચ મારા ભલિલુને
 હું કોણ?
 ખેલાડી નંબર વન!
 રમ્યો કોઈબા, ટરાચેગલ,
 કરી મૂકી પાંચની પચ્ચીસ,
 અદલીબદલીમાં લીધો ભમરડો,
 એવું તો ચક્કર ચલાવ્યું
 કે થઈ ગયા, પાંચ ગોટીની જગાએ
 પાંચ કોટી!
 ભલિલુ ભોળારામ
 પાંચમાંથી એક તો નાખી ખોઈ,
 બે દઈ દીધી કોઈને,
 એક મે આંચકી લીધી
 બચ્યું શું? તો 'કે
 એક ગોટી
 ને એક લંગોટી
 એવામાં રંગેચંગે આવી ચડી
 ભગવાનની વરસગાંઠ
 કીમતી ભેટસોગાતો લઈને ચાલ્યાં સૌ:
 સો-સો રોલ્સ રોઈસ લઈને આચાર્ય,
 હજાર-હજાર મછવા લઈને શાસ્ત્રીજી,
 પવત્તિર-પવત્તિર એરોપ્લેન લઈને બાપુ
 મે પણ બનાવડાવ્યાં, ફૂલ
 મારા (અને ભગવાનના) સ્ટેટસને શોભે તેવાં,
 ખાસ ઓર્ડર આપીને:
 ચાંદીની પાંખડીઓ અને સોનાના કાંટા,
 ઉપરથી દસ-વીસ કેરેટનું તો,
 મોઘામાયલું, ઝાકળ છાંટ્યું!
 અને ભલિલુ? છટ...
 એની પાસે શું હોય?

એક ગોટી

ભગવાન પણ ઓછી માયા છે?

ત્રણ-ત્રણ તો એનાં ભુવન

ઉભરે આવીને ઊભા

રોલ્સ રોઈસ અને મછવા, એરોપ્લેન અને ફૂલ

સ્વીકારી-સ્વીકારીને નાખ્યાં, સ્વર્ગ નામની વખારે

પછી ભલિલુના હાથમાં હાથ પરોવીને, ભગવાન બોલ્યા,

‘કેમ વહાલા, ગોટી રમશુંને?’

‘How about a game of marbles?’

God gave me five glass marbles,
sparkling and transparent,
and five he gave to my buddy.

I played Ringer, Bull’s Eye, and
five turned to twenty-five.

Swapped them for a top,
put a spin on it, and
glass turned to gold.

My buddy dropped one,
gave two away,
one I snatched.

Once God was celebrating his birthday.
All were invited.

Swamy came with a decorated ratha,
Baba with a palanquin,
Bishop with a tiara.

I walked in with flowers,
befitting God’s status and mine:
petals of silver, thorns of gold,
sprinkled with twenty carats of dew.

My buddy carried what he had:
a marble.

God is no less.

He stood at the doorstep.

Ratha and palanquin, tiara and flowers,
he accepted and put away
in the storehouse of heaven.

Then putting his arm around my buddy,
God asked:

‘Hey, how about a game of marbles?’

કાપલી

પેટમાં ફાળ પેઠે પડી હવેલીમાં
 તરિડ. આવ્યા વેલ્ડર, બલ્ડિડર
 મસિતરી, ઠેકેદાર
 તપાસ્યાં સ્તંભ, કમાન
 તારીખ લખીને કાપલી ચોટાડી ચપોચપ
 તરિડ પર
 ‘આનાથી હવેલી પડતી અટકી
 જશે?’ પૂછી બેઠું કોઈ
 કેવળ કાગળ ને અક્ષરથી
 ક્યાં કશું બાંધી શકાય કે સાંધી?
 હવે આવશે તેઓ, વારે-
 તહેવારે, વરસે-
 પાંચ વરસે. જોશે-
 કાપલી કેટલી છે તંગ
 ઝોક કઈ તરફનો, કેટલી ઝડપથી
 ભાંગી રહી છે ભીત
 કાપલીથી ક્યાં કશું
 બાંધી શકાય કે સાંધી?
 આ તો વળગણ છે એને
 પુરાણી હવેલીનું
 તે લકીરો ઉકેલતી બેઠી છે
 પાયાની વાત કહેતાં કહેતાં, કોઈએ તો
 ફાટવું રહ્યું

A slip of paper

The mansion shook
 like a leaf, walls cracked,
 welders, builders, contractors, fabricators
 appeared on the scene,

examined beams and columns,
wrote down the date
on slips of paper,
stuck them up
on the cracks.
'Will this prop up
the mansion?' someone asked.
What can be built or buttressed
by mere paper and words?
These professionals will keep coming
once in two years
or five, to see how strained
the slips are,
give opinions on the tilt
of walls, or how slowly
the mansion is sinking.
What can be built or buttressed
by a slip of paper?
Attached
to this mansion, it tries to understand
the writing on the wall
torn between
reticence and urge
to reveal the truth.

Poems © Udayan Thakker; translations © Rochelle Potkar.

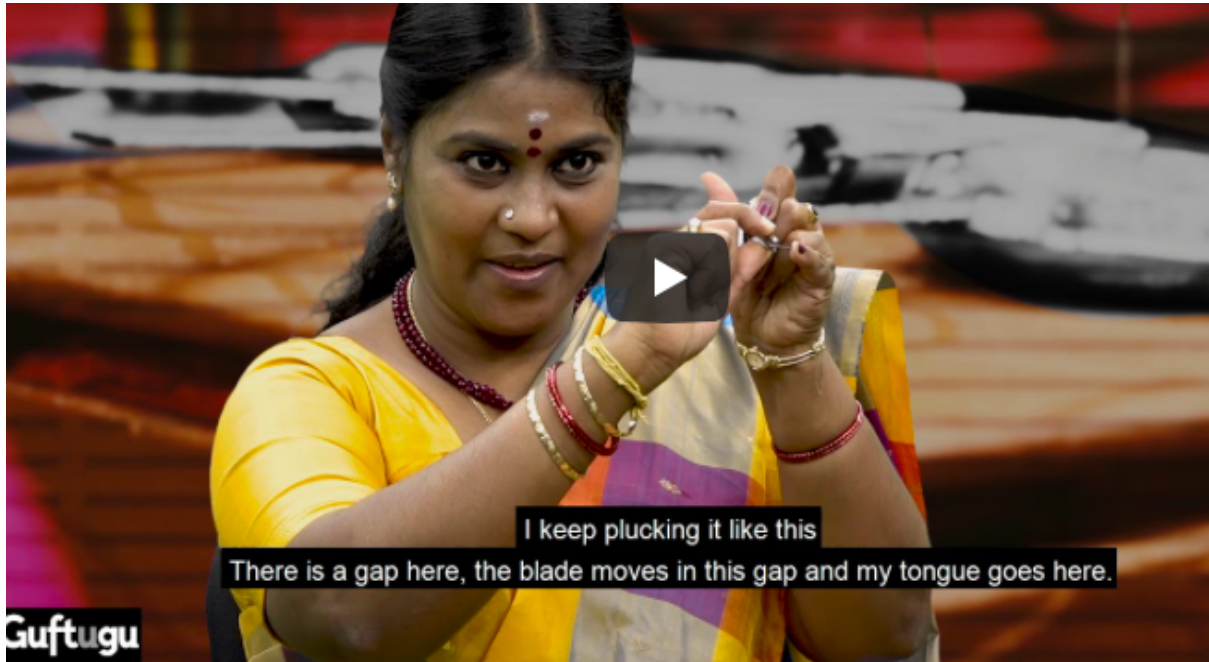
Udayan Thakker is an Indian poet who writes in Gujarati. English translations of his poems have appeared in the following journals or magazines: 'Poetry' magazine (Chicago), 'Young Indian Poets' edited by K Satchidanandan, 'Digest of West Indian Languages' (Sahitya Akademi), 'Indian Literature', 'Modern Gujarati Poetry', 'Modern Indian Poetry' edited by E. V. Ramakrishna, 'Breath Becoming Word' (Government of Gujarat), 'Beyond the Beaten Track' (Gujarati Sahitya Parishad) and 'Stand' (Leeds). A volume of English translations of his poems has been published by Onslaught Press, England. He writes a weekly column on world poetry in the newspaper 'Janmabhumi'. He is the editor of poetryindia.com.

Rochelle Potkar is a fiction writer and poet. Her book, *The Arithmetic of Breasts and Other Stories* was shortlisted for The Digital Book of the Year Award 2014, by Publishing Next. She was a writer-in-residence at The University of Iowa's International Writing Program, Fall Residency 2015. She has read her poems in Hyderabad at Ten Thousand Waves, Our Sacred Space, Hyderabad Literary Festival (HLF); in Chennai at the *Prakriti Festival*, The American Library; in Hong Kong at Out Loud, Fringe club, and with the Peel Street poets; in Goa at *Goa Arts and Literary Festival* (GALF); and in Iowa city.

Morching Player Bhagyalakshmi M. Krishna Talks to *Guftugu*

A story of the 'unseen' instrument

In this conversation with Guftugu, morching (also mukharshanku, mourching, morsing or morchang) player Bhagyalakshmi M. Krishna eloquently talks about the instrument, its history, her journey as a musician, and the lack of women morching players in the world of Carnatic music.



Video © Guftugu.

Bhagyalakshmi M. Krishna is India's only woman morching player. She is the daughter and disciple of morching exponent Vid. Dr. L. Bhimachar. An 'A' grade artist of All India Radio, Bhagyalakshmi has widely performed in India and abroad, accompanying eminent artists like Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, Vid. Neela Ramgopal, Vid. A. Kanyakumari, Vid. Sanjay Subramanyam, Vid. Sudha Raghunathan, Vid. Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi and several others. She was the recipient of the 'Ananya Yuva Puraskar' in 2014 and the 'Best Senior Upapakkavadyam' award from Madras Music Academy in 2017.

'Your own loudspeaker'

Five images by S. Vijayaraghavan

Through his artwork, S. Vijayaraghavan is determined to exploit the potential of socio-political, personal and emotional expressions developed with the help of his personal politics and consciousness. His drawings and mixed media artworks evolve through a process that has immense complexity, combines subversive expressions while juxtaposing the realm of linear sensibilities that help an artist to produce abbreviated expressions with the reality of the mundane experiences of human life. He tries to articulate these experiences in an implicit, allegorical and symbolic way. The notion of these activities and the varied interrelated images and objects help him develop a visual conversation which acts as a vehicle for the many dichotomies of rhetoric. This rhetoric is often expressed in the following binary terms: purity and kitsch, noise and melody etc.



'Black Promises', water colour on paper, 4.3 feet x 2.3 feet, 2006/ Text on the image translates as "Your own loudspeaker"



'Existence', water colour and mixed media on paper, 22 inches x 32 inches, 2006



'LOC', diptych water color and photographs on board, 9 cms x 63 cms, 2006



'Panic Field', oil on canvas, 7 feet x 3.5 feet, 2006 – 2007



'Balance', water colour on paper, 42 cms x 29 cms, 2008

Images © S. Vijayaraghavan.

Born in Madurai, India, in 1981, S. Vijayaraghavan is a visual artist, video artist, painter and photographer. He holds an MFA in painting from the College of Art in New Delhi and has also participated in an advanced studio art program at the Berlin Art Institute, Berlin. He has had major exhibitions and has participated in various shows and biennials internationally, and across the country. Some notable exhibitions were held at the Lily Agius Gallery, Malta, CCA Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, UK, Casablanca International Video Art Festival, Casablanca 25th and 28th Nomadic Festival Les Instants Vidéo, France, 10th Berlin International Directors Lounge, Berlin, Espacio de Art'es Multimedia Performance and Alliance Franchise de Coimbra in Portugal; Sarai Reader '09 curated by the Raqs Media Collective in collaboration with Devi Art Foundation and Sarai CSDS and supported by the Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi. He currently lives and works in India. He can be contacted at vijay.svhavan@gmail.com; and +91-9100774769. For more information visit his [website](#).

Towards a Deeper Understanding of Photojournalism Now

In Conversation with Sehar Qazi

Photojournalist Sehar Qazi's first assignment was to report and write on the 2014 September flood in Kashmir. Since then, her work has focused on social issues, particularly those involving facing refugees and marginalised communities. Guftugu spoke to her about her work in progress as well as the convergence of artistic and journalistic practice.

Guftugu (G): What inspired you to become a photographer?

Sehar Qazi (SQ): I think a lot about the dynamics of human emotions and felt that I could represent them best with photos. Born and brought up in a conflict zone like Kashmir, I realised that words, and later photos as well, have an immense reach and can be used to humanise stories and events. In 2014, when I completed my post-graduation, my first assignment was to report on the September 2014 floods in Kashmir. I would often carry a small notebook and a mobile with me. In 2016, when I got the opportunity to work on a photo desk, I came across the work of many photographers on a daily basis. I started looking at photos on various agencies, started following the work of photographers globally and finally decided to pick up the camera and start a new chapter in my career as a journalist.



A Kashmiri man stands near the concertina wires at Hazratbal, in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir on 7 June 2018/ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This photo is part of a series of an ongoing photo project in Kashmir.



A man soaks in a moment of quietness inside the Makhdoom Sahab shrine in Srinagar on 6 June 2018./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi



Taja, 85, looks out of a window in her house at Jawahar Nagar in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, on 14 November 14 2014. 'We could hear the screams of people before they drowned. When we rushed to check on our neighbours, all we could see was dust. The people living in house number 354 disappeared underwater. Living in the oldest house of the locality with a concrete plinth saved us during the floods. We stayed on the second floor for almost five days and were later rescued by our neighbours,' says Taja./ Image courtesy Sehar Qazi. The photo is from the 2014 Kashmir floods, reported as one of the worst floods in 60 years.



Reshim Jan inside her one-room house at Bahrar, the region's last leper colony, in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. She is from Hayhuma in Kupwara and remembers the day she arrived at Bahrar. She hides her fingerless hands under her pink dupatta when she steps out of her room. Her left hand has an open wound, pale yellow and brown, and the inner flesh is clearly visible. Her black eyes have lost their vision and all she sees now are shadows. 'I came to Srinagar with my nephew for an eye surgery. It got delayed and my nephew went back. I was sent here. I lost my eyesight after that. I don't have a bathroom, nor do I have any tap for water. I starve for days in winter. My hands can't bear the cold. I miss home, but I have spent the last seventeen years of my life here. I will die alone in the darkness of this room. This room is my graveyard.' Tears trickle down her face as she finishes her sentence./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This picture was taken on 16 June 2015.

G: As a photographer, what is your understanding of the medium of photography?

SQ: I want my pictures to first make sense of my thoughts and then portray my feelings about the way events and situations unfurl. When we look at a photograph, we can feel the emotions and the mood the visual medium hopes to deliver. When we represent a story with photos, it communicates a different and a deeper understanding of the scenes and details of a person, a place, or an event. If we use photos with a story, they help a reader to understand things in a better way. I like to do narrative photography or long-form photography projects where I get to spend a lot of time with my subjects. As Joan Didion puts it, 'I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I see, and what it means. What I want and what I fear.' I feel and think about photography in the same way, what powerful photographs hold and what they can communicate to the world.

G: Is photojournalism different from regular photography? If yes, can you tell us how they are different, and why?

SQ: Yes, photojournalism comes with more responsibility and requires a more structured method. It comes with greater challenges than day-to-day photography. Nowadays, a prime motivator towards photography is an image's 'Insta-worthiness', and an urgency to deliver to social media. When we talk about photojournalism, it engages a viewer into looking at something more serious and something important. A photojournalist has to be more responsible for his/ her work, representing the facts as they are. Also, when it comes to editing pictures, it can be done extensively in regular photos, but we just can't stage photos or manipulate the scenes in news story photos.



Rajma Begum reads the Quran while fasting during Ramzan at a Rohingya refugee camp in Shaheen Bagh, New Delhi, on 17 June 2017/ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This photo is from an ongoing project on refugees in Delhi. For more, [click here](#).



Muhammad Ilyas, a Rohingya refugee, sits, surrounded by few clothes and things donated to him after he lost everything in a fire at the Kalindi Kunj refugee camp in New Delhi on 15 April 2018. Over 225 Rohingya refugees were rendered homeless due to a massive fire in the early hours of 15 April, losing everything to ashes. 'I couldn't save anything. I am left with this torn T-shirt and some borrowed clothes. How will I start everything all over again? Who will help me? I had saved some money, but now I am left with nothing,' says Muhammad Ilyas who has been living in India for the past six years, in broken Hindi./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This photo is from the same series.



Children rest as their parents (not pictured) collect material for a makeshift tent after losing everything in a fire on 15 April 2018 at the Kalindi Kunj refugee camp in New Delhi on the same day./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi.

This photo is from the same series.

G: Does a photographer's political ideology affect her photography?

SQ: I think that we all have biases, manifesting from our upbringings, our socioeconomic backgrounds and also the politics of life around us. They most certainly have an impact on the way we see the world. If we say that we are not biased at all, we will be denying an important fact of our existence. I think that a photojournalist's job is to report and bring photos while recognising the personal bias and making conscious choices that represent content outside the purview of our perceptions.

G: As a photojournalist, how do you reconcile your politics with your obligation to remain objective?

SQ: I believe that the relationship between a photographer and the collaborator (subject) is unique, irrespective of the background we come from. When I approach them, the first thing I have in my mind is the consent, whether they are fine with being photographed or not. Coming to the objective part, whenever I shoot, I try and capture a situation in its true version, keeping aside my perception, my ideas, my thoughts regarding that particular situation or how I want it to be, avoiding any kind of stereotypical portrayal in my pictures.



A Tamil Nadu farmer's blistered feet during a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on 29 March 2017 demanding loan waivers, revised drought packages, a Cauvery Management Committee, and fair prices for their products./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This photo is from a photo series on Tamil Nadu farmers who protested at Jantar Mantar in Delhi for more than 100 days.



A farmer from Tamil Nadu sits with the poster of Mahatma Gandhi tied around his neck during the same protest./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This photo is from a photo series on Tamil Nadu farmers who protested at Jantar Mantar in Delhi for more than 100 days.

G: Nowadays, due to the widespread and easy availability of a camera, photography has become an inextricable part of mass media. How does this affect the photographer's work, her perception, and representation of reality?

SQ: From clicking selfies to never-ending Instagram feeds, yes, photos are really an important part of our day-to-day life. I see people clicking graphic images and uploading them on social media without a second thought. Talking about photojournalism, it is a completely different story because it comes with obligations, with more responsibility, objectivity and with ethics towards a particular situation.



A girl carries her younger sister to a makeshift playground outside their tent in a slum near Kalindi Kunj, New Delhi, on 21 April 2018./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This image is from a photo series called 'Growing up in slums in Delhi'.



Children look at the camera while playing outside their tent in a slum near Kalindi Kunj in New Delhi on 21 April 2018./ Image courtesy, Sehar Qazi. This image is from the same series.

Images © Sehar Qazi.

Sehar Qazi, 29, hails from Srinagar, Kashmir. She completed her postgraduate degree in Convergent Journalism from the Central University of Kashmir. In 2016, she started her career as a photojournalist in New Delhi. Presently, she is experimenting with black and white photography instead of using a variety of vibrant colours for a long-term project (Refugees in Delhi) which she intends to complete by the end of this year. She currently lives and works in New Delhi. She can be contacted at shrqazi@gmail.com.

A god grieving

Three poems by Amlanjyoti Goswami



Detail, Sayed Haider Raza

Aabu

Deep dark gravy
The river still.
Sometimes, pigeon
Sometimes, duck. Venison.
Thick with memory
Furrowing ancient tastes,
Tongue a plough,
Red earth.
Crops dark as kitchen soot,
Dark as sesame.

Eat, child, eat,
Grow tall as the
Bamboo lining
The cows come home.
See your face, brass
As the plate,
Round as planets
Large and small.
Eat some green as well.

Blow smoke into my face,
Blow hard, the fire
Must glow,
Red as my streaming chin,
My lips, betelnut red, original
Red, earth red.

My hair is white as
Summer noon sky.
A banyan creeper,
Ancient, the village we gather,
For one last Bihu feast.

Tomorrow, the sky will turn
An empty canvas
No one ever knows, with time.
The crops came in the
Cart, carrying sunshine.

I am grandmother.
Aabu.
Your daughter will remember me,
In her tongue,
Whenever you mention gravy
In microwaves.
Whenever, the trace of tongue
Hints curry.

A god grieving

When Karna fell,
A passing soldier asked: Why?
Why didn't the better archer win?
And by far, the better man.

This isn't just.

Another, smoking a chillum,
Dead of night,
The blood dry:

That would change nature's wheels.
Imagine Krishna, driving the chariot, with no Arjun
Into the crowd of battle,
We would all make way,
But a god grieving?

How could humankind survive
a god grieving?

The Weather in Benares

Older than death, Benares survives time.
Her houses creak with sunrise.
Her waters pure as typhoid.
Her temperature, otherworldly.
Mind trumps matter in Benares.
But matter isn't far behind,
It is everywhere.
Even in these ashes.
Evening boats sink slowly
Into darkness, the other shore
We cannot see
Even with a third eye.
By dawn, the lamps too
are no longer there.

Poems © Amlanjyoti Goswami; image © the Raza Foundation.

Amlanjyoti Goswami's poems have been published in India, Nepal, Hong Kong, the UK, USA, South Africa, Kenya and Germany, including the anthologies *40 under 40: An Anthology of Post Globalisation Poetry* (Poetrywala) and *A Change of Climate* (Manchester Metropolitan University, Environmental Justice Foundation and the University of Edinburgh). He grew up in Guwahati, Assam and lives in Delhi.

In Conversation with Ghatam Player Sukkanya Ramgopal

The percussionist extraordinaire shares her experience of learning, playing and popularising the ghatam



Correction: At 7:00, the text should read 'We cannot do anything.'

Video © Guftugu.

Sukkanya Ramgopal is one of the frontline musicians of India and the first woman ghatam artist of the country. Over the last four decades, Sukanya has mastered unique ghatam fingering techniques and is today considered one of the torchbearers of the Vikku baani of ghatam-playing. She is also a proficient performer on the Konnakol (vocal percussion). Sukanya hails from a family of musicians and Tamil scholars. The Ghata Tharang is a unique idea conceptualised by her. Her commitment to breaking new ground has inspired her to play the Ghata Tharang with 6-7 ghatams of different shruthis, thereby creating a unique melody on a percussion instrument. Sukanya leads an all-women instrumental ensemble called Sthree Thaal Tharang. She was the winner of the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar for the year 2014. [Read her full bio here.](#)

Contributors

Amlanjyoti Goswami's poems have been published in India, Nepal, Hong Kong, the UK, USA, South Africa, Kenya and Germany, including the anthologies *40 under 40: An Anthology of Post Globalisation Poetry* (Poetrywala) and *A Change of Climate* (Manchester Metropolitan University, Environmental Justice Foundation and the University of Edinburgh). He grew up in Guwahati, Assam and lives in Delhi.

Aparna Bhagwat has an M.Sc and an M.Ed. She is keenly interested in English, Hindi and Marathi literature. She draws on her own experiences and views and her understanding the writers' perception to write poems and translate. She is a resident of Bhopal.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra is the author of several books of poetry including the volume of essays called *Partial Recall: Essays on Literature and Literary History*; the editor of *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* and *Collected Poems* in English by Arun Kolatkar; and the translator of *The Absent Traveller: Prakrit Love Poetry*.

Bhagyalakshmi M. Krishna is India's only woman morching player. She is the daughter and disciple of morching exponent Vid. Dr. L. Bhimachar. An 'A' grade artist of All India Radio, Bhagyalakshmi has widely performed in India and abroad, accompanying eminent artists like Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna, Vid. Neela Ramgopal, Vid. A. Kanyakumari, Vid. Sanjay Subramanyam, Vid. Sudha Raghunathan, Vid. Lalgudi Vijayalakshmi and several others. She was the recipient of the 'Ananya Yuva Puraskar' in 2014 and the 'Best Senior Upapakkavadyam' award from Madras Music Academy in 2017.

Dion D'Souza's first collection of poems, *Three Doors*, was published by Poetry Primero in 2016. He is currently working on a book of short stories. He lives in Mumbai.

Gulammohammed Sheikh is a painter, poet and art critic from Gujarat, India. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1983 and Padmabhushan in 2014 for his contribution in the field of art. He is the editor of *Contemporary Art in Baroda*. Kabir has always been a source of inspiration for him. Over the years, the theme of Kabir kept returning to him and he created a relationship between his own images and Kabir's words.

Jayant Kaikini, Kannada poet, short-story writer, columnist and playwright, with six short-story volumes, five poetry collections, three collections of non-fiction, and three plays to his credit, is also a much sought-after award-winning lyricist, script and dialogue writer for Kannada films. He won his first Karnataka Sahitya Akademi award at the age of nineteen in 1974 for his debut poetry collection, followed by three more in 1982, 1989 and 1996, for his short-story collections. He has also received the Dinakar Desai Award for poetry, the B.H. Sridhar award for fiction, the Katha National Award and the Rujuwathu Trust Fellowship for his writing. He is the recipient of the Karnataka State Award for best dialogue and lyrics, and the Filmfare Award for best lyrics in Kannada four times – in 2008, 2009, 2016 and 2017. Born in the coastal temple-town Gokarn, Kaikini is a biochemist by training and worked with pharmaceutical companies in Mumbai for two decades before moving to Bangalore, where he lives presently. A well-known television personality, he was given an honorary doctorate

from Tumkur University in 2011 for his contribution to Kannada literature, film and television. He was honoured as Zee Kannadiga of the Decade in 2016. He was the first recipient of the Kusumagraj Rashtriya Bhasha Sahitya Puraskar in 2010. His latest book is a collection of essays on cinema.

Linda Hess teaches at the Department of Religious Studies at Stanford University. She is a renowned Kabir translator and scholar. She is deeply involved in translating poetry and studying ways in which it functions. Her latest publication is *Bodies of Song* (2015).

Mridula Koshy is a community organiser and library activist who works for The Community Library Project. She is also the writer of three works of fiction: *If It Is Sweet, Not Only the Things That Have Happened* and *Bicycle Dreaming*.

Muhammad Umar Memon (1939-2018) was an accomplished scholar, translator, poet, Urdu short story writer, and the editor of *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. Memon served as the Professor Emeritus of Urdu Literature and Arabic Studies at the University of Wisconsin for 38 years. Besides working on the translation of Urdu works into English, he served on the editorial board of *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* and was also an advisor to the Urdu Project. He died on June 03, 2018.

Rochelle Potkar is a fiction writer and poet. Her book, *The Arithmetic of Breasts and Other Stories* was shortlisted for The Digital Book of the Year Award 2014, by Publishing Next. She was a writer-in-residence at The University of Iowa's International Writing Program, Fall Residency 2015. She has read her poems in Hyderabad at Ten Thousand Waves, Our Sacred Space, Hyderabad Literary Festival (HLF); in Chennai at the Prakriti Festival, The American Library; in Hong Kong at Out Loud, Fringe club, and with the Peel Street poets; in Goa at Goa Arts and Literary Festival (GALF); and in Iowa city.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) was a Pakistani writer, playwright and author born in Ludhiana, British India. Writing mainly in the Urdu language, he produced 22 collections of short stories, a novel, five series of radio plays, three collections of essays, two collections of personal sketches. Manto was tried for obscenity six times; thrice before 1947 in British India, and thrice after independence in 1947 in Pakistan, but never convicted. 'Boo', 'Khol Do', and 'Toba Tek Singh' are some of his renowned short stories.

Born in Madurai, India, in 1981, **S. Vijayaraghavan** is a visual artist, video artist, painter and photographer. He holds an MFA in painting from the College of Art in New Delhi and has also participated in an advanced studio art program at the Berlin Art Institute, Berlin. He has had major exhibitions and has participated in various shows and biennials internationally, and across the country. Some notable exhibitions were held at the Lily Agius Gallery, Malta, CCA Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, UK, Casablanca International Video Art Festival, Casablanca 25th and 28th Nomadic Festival Les Instants Vidéo, France, 10th Berlin International Directors Lounge, Berlin, Espaco de Art'es Multimedia Performance and Alliance Franchise de Coimbra in Portugal; Sarai Reader '09 curated by the Raqs Media Collective in collaboration with Devi Art Foundation and Sarai CSDS and supported by the Norwegian Embassy, New Delhi. He currently lives and works in India. He can be contacted at vijay.svhavan@gmail.com; and +91-9100774769. For more information visit his website.

Sehar Qazi, 29, hails from Srinagar, Kashmir. She completed her postgraduate degree in Convergent Journalism from the Central University of Kashmir. In 2016, she started her career as a photojournalist in New Delhi. Presently, she is experimenting with black and white photography instead of using a variety of vibrant colours for a long-term project (Refugees in Delhi) which she intends to complete by the end of this year. She currently lives and works in New Delhi. She can be contacted at shrqazi@gmail.com.

Souradeep Roy is a poet, translator and member of the *Guftugu* editorial collective.

Sukkanya Ramgopal is one of the frontline musicians of India and the first woman ghatam artist of the country. Over the last four decades, Sukanya has mastered unique ghatam fingering techniques and is today considered one of the torchbearers of the Vikku baani of ghatam-playing. She is also a proficient performer on the Konnakol (vocal percussion). Sukanya hails from a family of musicians and Tamil scholars. The Ghata Tharang is a unique idea conceptualised by her. Her commitment to breaking new ground has inspired her to play the Ghata Tharang with 6-7 ghatams of different shruthis, thereby creating a unique melody on a percussion instrument. Sukanya leads an all-women instrumental ensemble called Sthree Thaal Tharang. She was the winner of the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Puraskar for the year 2014.

Suman Keshari is a poet and freelance writer. She has published four collections of poems namely *Yagyavalkya se Behas*, 2008, *Monalisa ki Aankhen*, 2013, *Shabd Aur Sapne* (e-book, 2015) and *Piramidon ki tho Mein* (2018). She is well known for her rewritings of Indian mythological figures such as Draupadi, Karna, Gandhari, Seeta and Savitri. Her poems have been received with much appreciation at forums like ICCR, Sahitya Akademi, Raza Foundation, Benaras Hindu University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Central University of Gujarat, Bhartiya Jnanapeeth, All India Radio, IIT Mumbai and various literary festivals held at Patna, Ajmer, Bikaner, Dehradun, Port Blair, among others.

Tejaswini Niranjana won the Central Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of M.K. Indira's *Phaniyamma* (1989) and the Karnataka Sahitya Akademi Prize for her translation of Niranjana's *Mrityunjaya* (1996). She has also translated Pablo Neruda's poetry and Shakespeare's Julius Caesar into Kannada. Her translations into English include Vaidehi's *Gulabi Talkies* (2006). She grew up in Bangalore, and has studied and worked in Mumbai. She is currently professor of cultural studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

Udayan Thakker is an Indian poet who writes in Gujarati. English translations of his poems have appeared in the following journals or magazines: 'Poetry' magazine (Chicago), 'Young Indian Poets' edited by K Satchidanandan, 'Digest of West Indian Languages' (Sahitya Akademi), 'Indian Literature', 'Modern Gujarati Poetry', 'Modern Indian Poetry' edited by E. V. Ramakrishna), 'Breath Becoming Word' (Government of Gujarat), 'Beyond the Beaten Track' (Gujarati Sahitya Parishad) and 'Stand' (Leeds). A volume of English translations of his poems has been published by Onslaught Press, England. He writes a weekly column on world poetry in the newspaper 'Janmabhumi'. He is the editor of poetryindia.com.

Vidya Rao is a well-known academic and Hindustani classical singer. She trained under the legendary singer, late Vidushi Naina Devi, and continued her study under Vidushi Shanti Hiranand and Vidushi Girija Devi. She wrote a book on the late Naina Devi called *Heart to Heart: Remembering Nainaji*.

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