September 2019

Ranbir Kaleka, 'Boy without Reflection', oil on canvas, 305x152cm, 2004

About Us

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

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

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

To sum up our vision:

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

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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

The Only Constant is Resistance

Gulammohammad Sheikh, 'Ark', 2008

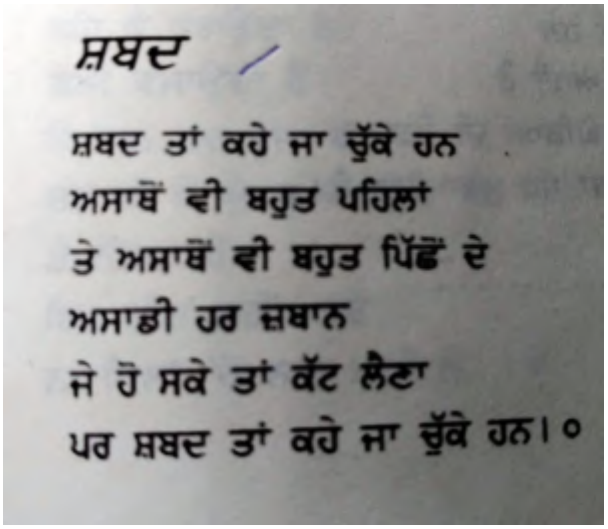
From 2015 to 2019, Guftugu has brought together diverse voices—through fiction, poetry, art, music, conversation. This insistence on the diversity of cultural practice in India has always been our fundamental premise. What holds the plurality of voices together, what emerges as the central note, is resistance.

Lal Singh Dil

Words

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

Translated by Chaman Lal


ਸ਼ਬਦ

ਸ਼ਬਦ ਤਾਂ ਕਹੇ ਜਾ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਹਨ
ਅਸਾਥੋਂ ਵੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਪਹਿਲਾਂ
ਤੇ ਅਸਾਥੋਂ ਵੀ ਬਹੁਤ ਪਿੱਛੋਂ ਦੇ
ਅਸਾਡੀ ਹਰ ਜ਼ਬਾਨ
ਜੇ ਹੋ ਸਕੇ ਤਾਂ ਕੱਟ ਲੈਣਾ
ਪਰ ਸ਼ਬਦ ਤਾਂ ਕਹੇ ਜਾ ਚੁੱਕੇ ਹਨ।੦

Keki Daruwalla

Hope in Our Times

Night bulletins are rife with Rafale and Sabarimala
As bare-chested devotees keep the pot churning.
Here the cold is dense, heavy, as a chowkidar adds twigs
and dry bark to keep chaff fires burning.
Hope and light, small-time thieves in the fog,
cling stealthily to something close to yearning.
And through a hole in the mist, suddenly
a barbet calls, ‘the year is turning’.

Our cultural practitioners—our fellow citizens—have resisted discrimination, division and hate on the basis of caste, community and gender.

Orijit Sen

जे वि पवार

पाणी प्यायची सुट्टी

असंच कुठल्याशा विचारानं आईला झपाटलं
माझं नाव शाळेच्या पटावर नोंदवलं गेलं.
जिल्हा लोकल बोर्डाची शाळा
तिने उदार अंतःकरणाने माझं स्वागत केलं
आणि केला बहाल
पाच बाय पाचचा राखीव कोपरा.

पुढे मोडक्या पडक्या शाळेचा जिर्णोद्धार ठरला
एका गावकऱ्याच्या पडवीत
भरू लागली शाळा
अंग आखडून कोपऱ्यात बसणाऱ्या मला
त्या दिवशी पडवीनेही
कोपरा दान दिला.

इतरांबरोबर आम्ही कोपरावादी मुले
म्हणत होते कविता
कंठशोष होईपर्यंत:
अजाण आम्ही तुझी लेकरे ...तू सर्वांचा पिता
घशाला कोरडा पडली

कविता म्हणता म्हणता
'प्यायला पाणी' गुरुजींकडे मी मागणी केली.

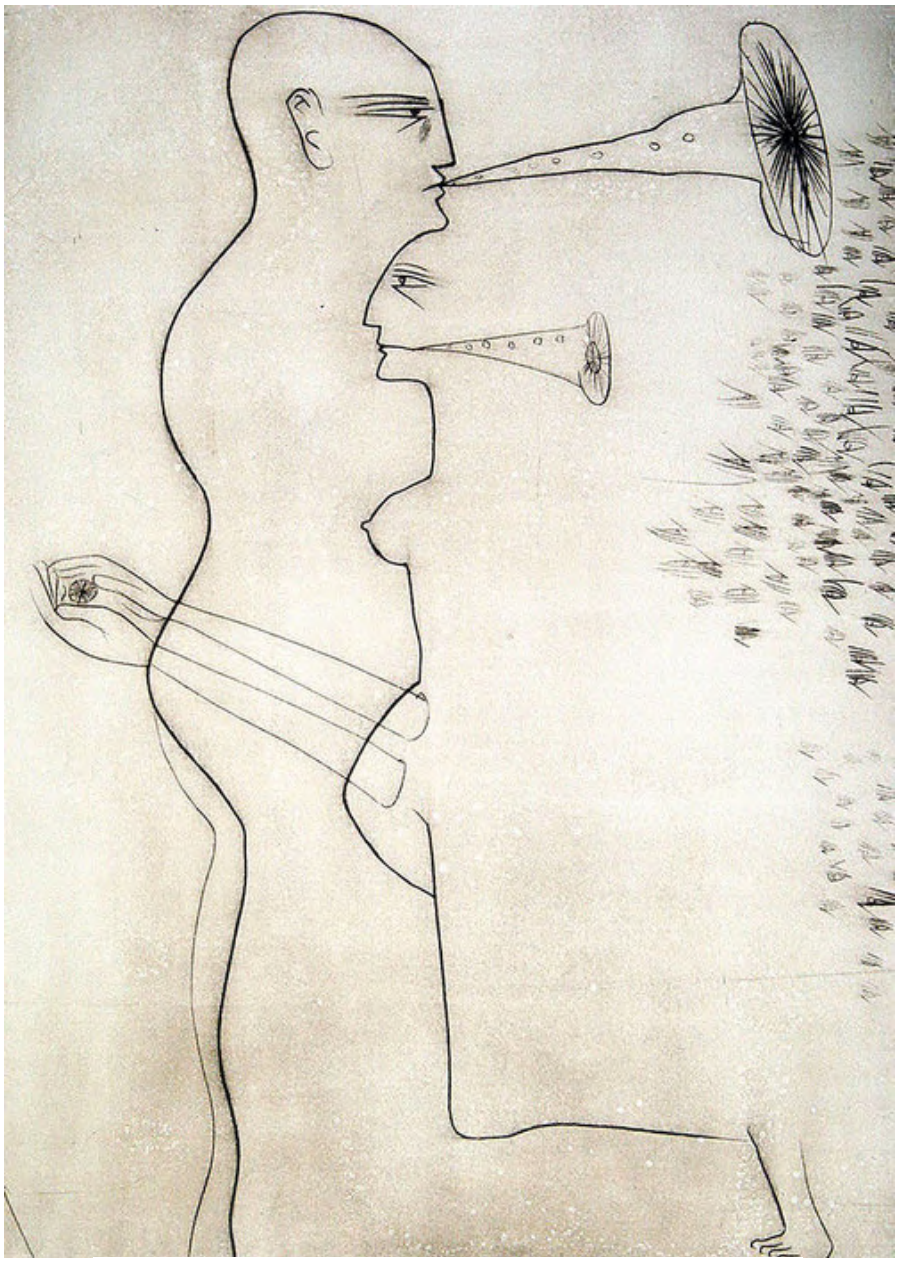
गुरुजींची अन माझी एकदम नजर
उंबरठ्यावर उभ्या असलेल्या
घराच्या कारभारणीकडं गेली
तिच्या डोळ्यातील विंचवाच्या फणकाऱ्याने
गुरुजी गर्भगळीत झाले

त्याचवेळी गुरुजींना आयडिया सुचली
पाणी पिण्याची सुट्टी त्यांनी जाहीर केली.
बांध फोडताच पाण्यानं धावावं
तशी आम्ही मुले कारभारणीच्या उंबरठ्याकडे झेपावलो
'अं... हं... आपापल्या घरी'
पुन्हा एकदा मास्तर गरजले.

पायात गोळे भरल्यागत मी घरी आलो
साथीला होतेच
तिचे लाल लाल डोळे... गुरुजींचे अं... हं...
नंतर बोर्डाने एक टुमदार शाळा बांधली
बाजूला पाणवठा... माणसासाठी आणि गुरासाठीही
मास्तर बदलते... शाळेचे रंगरूपही

पाणी पिण्याची सुट्टी –
ती मात्र अजून चालू
कोपऱ्यात बसून शिकलेल्यांच्या चिल्यापिल्यांना
घरीच जावे लागते: पाणी प्यायला.
केवळ बाजूचा पाणवठा बाटू नये म्हणून
केवळ बाजूचा पाणवठा बाटू नये म्हणून.

Read the English translation here.



Savi Sawarkar, 'Devdasi and Brahman with Dhammachakra', 2001

Together, we have resisted the right wing dream of homogeneity, seeing it for the nightmare it is. We have resisted attacks on freedom of speech and reason. We have resisted the erosion on institutions, and the crushing of dissent.

कहाँ तो तय था चिराग़ाँ हर एक घर के लिए

दुष्यंत कुमार

कहाँ तो तय था चिराग़ाँ हर एक घर के लिए
कहाँ चिराग़ मयस्सर नहीं शहर के लिए
यहाँ दरख़्तों के साये में धूप लगती है
चलो यहाँ से चलें और उम्र भर के लिए
न हो कमीज़ तो पाँओं से पेट ढँक लेंगे
ये लोग कितने मुनासिब हैं इस सफ़र के लिए
ख़ुदा नहीं न सही आदमी का ख़्वाब सही
कोई हसीन नज़ारा तो है नज़र के लिए
वो मुतमइन हैं कि पत्थर पिघल नहीं सकता
मैं बेक़रार हूँ आवाज़ में असर के लिए
तेरा निज़ाम है सिल दे ज़ुबान शायर की
ये एहतियात ज़रूरी है इस बहर के लिए
जिएँ तो अपने बग़ीचे में गुलमोहर के तले
मरें तो ग़ैर की गलियों में गुलमोहर के लिए

Poem courtesy: Hindi-Kavita.com

Hear Shubha Mudgal sing Dushyant Kumar's poem

S. Vijayaraghavan, 'Procession'

With this, our fifteenth issue, we issue notice: we will continue to resist. We will write poetry, make films, sing music, march the streets, storm the classroom and courts. We will listen to more and more people—their dreams and hopes, their ideas for how to make a better India. We will build our hope day by day.

We make a promise to ourselves and each other: Governments can come and go, but we will battle for India.

Githa Hariharan

K Satchidanandan

June 2019

Not Anonymous

Ranbir Kaleka

From 'House of Opaque Water', 2012

"The question to ask is where does a work of art come from? It comes from lived life, from what impacts you. It takes from art history, cinema, literature, poetry, theatre or even stories told by people. I don't think there ever really were good old times. That's why in some great literature and works of art, darkness has been a crucial source. It also comes from the possibility of redemption, because one can't live entirely with darkness, and, if one could, one wouldn't be self-reflective when making art."

Ranbir Kaleka, Interview in The Indian Express

Not Anonymous: Waking to the Fear of a New Dawn

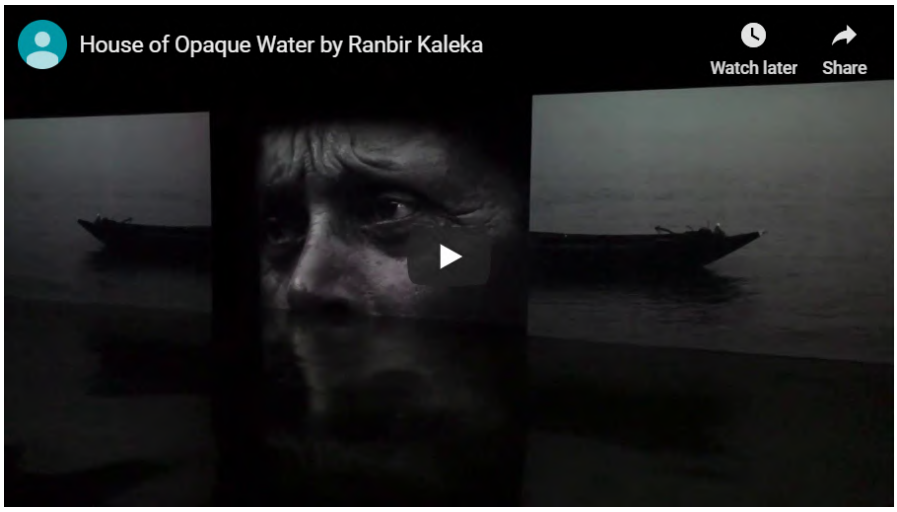
The multimedia work *Not Anonymous: Waking to the Fear of a New Dawn* projects its narratives – and mysteries – through videos on six surfaces at various depths. There's a man with his head practically in the clouds, shooting arrows, one after another. There's a partially visible man – a target? – riddled with arrows. And there's a donkey that bleeds when an arrow hits its target. In an interview, Kaleka says of donkeys: "My uncle once commented on how intelligent they (donkeys) were, how they helped build towns and cities that became great civilisations. To me, they seemed to be mistreated. In one of the works in this exhibition, we see the severed head of a donkey which bleeds every time some innocent unwary victim falls to random but insidiously fired arrows."

From 'Waking to the Fear of a New Dawn', 2017-2018, single channel projection on burnt wood, 275cm x 122cm, 9 min 18 sec loop.

Camera: Pradip Saha and Raj Mohanty; Editing: Raj Mohanty; Sound: Pradip Saha (variations on the score by Mihály Vig); Special thanks to protagonists: Shambhu, Naresh and Girish.

House of Opaque Water

How do you cope with the loss of home? By using memory, maybe making miniature clay models of your home? Then letting it go again, immersing it in water as if you are celebrating the last phase of Durga Puja? Part narrative documentary and part installation, this work of video art set in the Sunderbans dramatizes the lives of people—and their loss—as they face the effects of climate change on their low-lying island-homes.



From 'House of Opaque Water', 2012, 3 channel projection with sound on 3 panels, 171.6cm x 914.4cm (variable), 10 min 33 sec loop.

Camera: Pradip Saha and Gautam Pandey; Research: Pradip Sah; Sound: Pradip Saha; Editing: Pradip Saha and Rajan Kumar Singh; Special thanks to the protagonists: Sheikh Lal Mohan and Tushar Jiwarajka and the islanders of Sagardweep.

Can Our Future be Handmade?

Ashoke Chatterjee

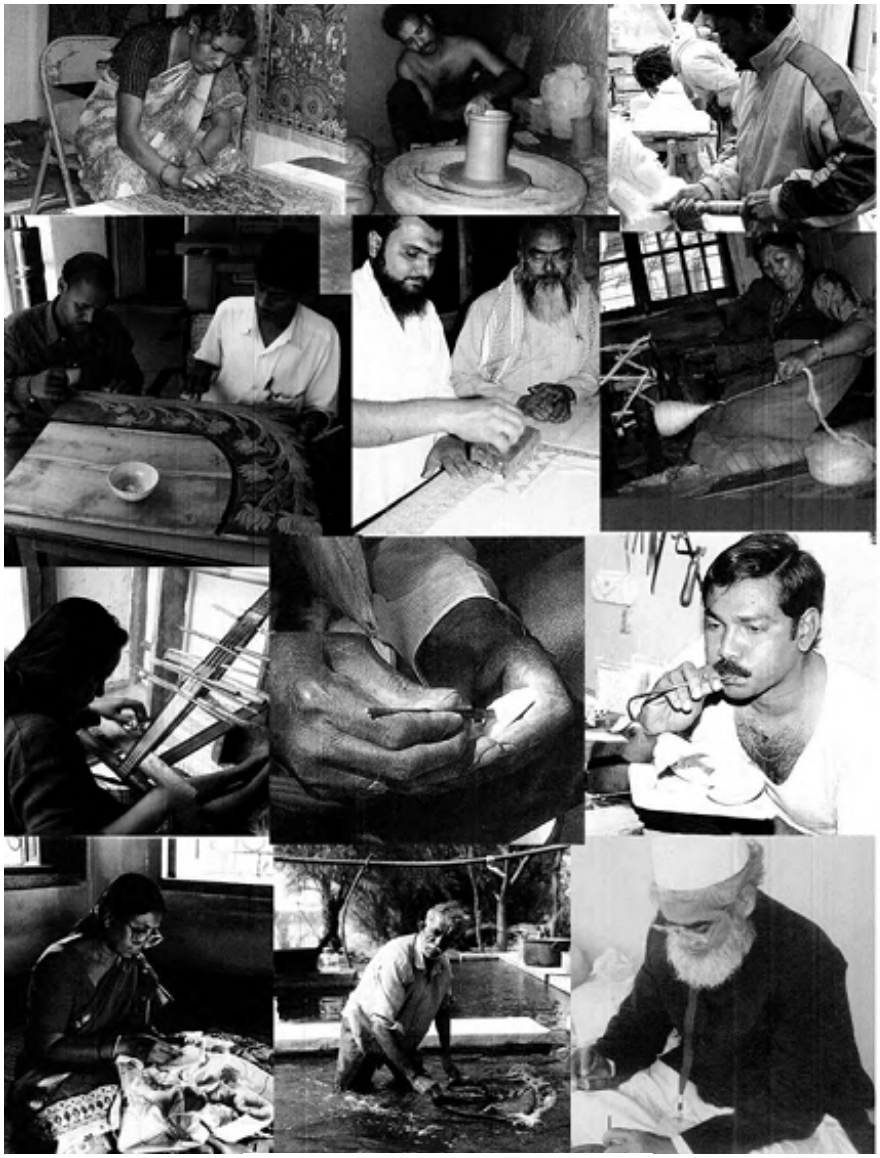


Image courtesy Crafts Council of India

Background: A crisis in the making

The dichotomies of India's craft experience reflect the centrality of hand production to the freedom struggle under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership; bold experiments in craft development as part of national planning once India was free; and contrasting notions today of what should represent modernity and progress. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay pioneered a range of

institutions and approaches intended to empower artisans, and to secure a lasting position for craft in India's culture and economy. Her efforts, and those of craft masters and other leaders, registered many achievements, as Indian crafts swept the country and the globe, demonstrating an ability to evolve and change with new times and new challenges. A craft renaissance was achieved over many hurdles and India's craft leadership became unquestioned. Yet in more recent times there has been a distinct retreat in understanding and support. Suddenly, the artisan and her culture and skills have been interpreted as representing a primitive past that is out of step with ambitions of global power and influence. New attitudes were revealed in the term 'sunset industry' that began to be applied to the craft sector. A sense of crisis now threatens the legacy of India's craft pioneers and the achievements of another generation of activists. Meanwhile, industrially advanced societies are striving to recover their own craft heritage as a source of creativity indispensable to contemporary need. New approaches in the understanding of development also suggest the incredible value of India's craft advantage. What is now at stake, and where can we go from here?

A few years back, the Government of India mooted a plan to assist handloom weavers by attaching a small electric motor to their looms. Official worthies further proposed an amendment to the definition of handloom fabric, a move that would be to the great advantage of the dominating power-loom sector. The logic of the motor was to increase productivity and therefore the earnings of deprived weavers — estimated by some at 13 million — competing against power-looms, mills and imports. No questions seemed to have been asked as to why these millions of weavers were still deprived despite global demand for their production, decades after Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay had helped establish institutions and systems that were meant to empower artisans and to sustain their crafts. No questions seemed to have been asked about the logic of converting handlooms into power-looms, removing at one stroke the quality of the hand that distinguishes handloom fabric from power-loom and mill alternatives and providing the handloom product with its global USP. No questions seemed to have been asked about what weavers might think of this extraordinary strategy to serve them by destroying their craft advantage, nor of where the power would come from to get those motors moving. For decades, weavers have been awaiting functioning light-bulbs that could illuminate their cramped workplaces. No questions seemed to have been asked about what clients of handloom production all over the world might think of the motorised fabric that would now be offered to them, devoid of that handmade quality that created demand. This incredibly foolish or diabolically wicked plan — the choice depends on one's faith in humankind — may well have gone through. Fortunately, it did not. The credit for this goes to one vigilant soul in the now defunct Planning Commission — who happened to notice that this project defied both Twelfth Plan allocations as well as the definition of handlooms on which Plan allocations had been made. Her vigilance was supported by weavers and craft activists around the country. A nationwide movement followed to protect India's great handloom advantage from an official threat that compounded the harsh competition from mass production. That *abhiyan* is still ongoing, with the need now to deal with a new political environment committed to what we must welcome as 'market forces'.

Image courtesy Scroll

The sunset syndrome

The recent crisis in the handloom sector demands understanding, not merely because millions of Indian lives are at stake. More critical is the crisis of values and of mindsets that is the root cause. How and when did pride and confidence in India's artisans transform into apathy and contempt, their skills dismissed as obsolescent and their culture as defeated? A nation that lacks basic data for its second largest industry is clearly not committed to it. If even economic potential is ignored or regarded as a threat to modernity and power, what chance is there for those other craft values that are cultural, social, environmental and spiritual? Has an India emerged that no longer values the need for different knowledge systems to coexist and enrich one another? The only constant over these years has been showcasing of crafts and artisans on festive occasions, to the accompaniment of mantras extolling our ancient heritage and cultural superiority. Walking the craft talk has been another matter altogether. While Kamaladevi's generation epitomised India's capacity for synthesis, diversity and tolerance, today's schizophrenia mixes mantras of an ancient past with cultural intolerance masquerading as pride, and garnished with Singapore/Silicon dreams. Crafts and artisans are caught in a bind — simultaneously needed for cultural window-dressing and dismissed as irrelevant relics. The handloom crisis is a symptom of this malaise.

The concept of cultural industries

Almost at the same moment that influential Indian planners were declaring craft a sunset activity, the European Union could be heard proclaiming that the 'future is handmade'. So what would Kamaladeviji, Pupul Jayakar, LC Jain and so many other stalwarts of the past make of these contradictions? How would they respond to the contrasting message given out from the

EU of all places? Would they ask bemused whether Europe is planning to abandon the machine and revert to its pre-industrial artisanal past? And if that is unlikely, then how indeed is the global future to be handmade? The European response would have resonated with their own deep understanding of craft cultures within the larger human consciousness. The call from Europe is a reminder that creativity and innovation are the only human capacities available to any economy if it is to survive and to flourish in today's globalised economy. This creative ability to respond to change is embedded in cultures that harmonise the hand, eye and mind. Destroy these deeply-rooted capacities, and not just crafts but all national creativity is endangered. Japan, Taiwan and South Korea have long attributed their success in electronic, computer and automotive industries to craft attitudes embedded in their national psyche. One example is Kanazawa in Japan, now registered as a City of Crafts in recognition of "The spirit of artistic production that made possible Kanazawa's own industrial revolution and made it the home of top engineering companies". Switzerland, Scandinavia, Germany and Italy recognize their craft heritage in the success of precision and engineering industries as well as in design leadership. Thailand and China are making major investments in craft strategies, while the USA and the UK are rediscovering the potential of their craft sectors. There is today a growing literature of cultural economics as a discipline which appreciates that cultural goods and services actually add much more value than what is realized in the market. We Indians have neglected this link despite brilliant demonstrations that range from Dilli Haat and the Festivals of India to Titan watches and the machine tool industry of Surat. In 2005 India was host to a world symposium that culminated in the Jodhpur Consensus on Cultural Industries which recognized these industries "as a source of capital assets for economic, social and cultural development" and as "a vital source for the cultural identities of communities and individuals which lead to further creativity and human development… What cultural industries have in common is that they create content, use, creativity, skill and in some cases intellectual property, to produce goods and services with social and cultural meaning."

Image courtesy Down to Earth

The reminder that artisans "produce goods and services with social and cultural meaning" addresses those for whom the term 'cultural industries' can be disquieting, with possible overtones of selling out. What protection is there in the marketplace for the culture of the spirit through which craft traditions travelled through the centuries, not as mere products but as rich expressions of the mind engaged in service? In Kamaladevi's words, it is the artisan's tender care of the substance of everyday life and of nature's own rich store house that adds a finer dimension to our being. Is there place in the market for such caring?

Perhaps a first need is for a respectful acceptance of the marketplace as a space familiar to Indian artisans throughout history, and the only space that can deliver meaningful livelihoods. Today's challenge is to empower the artisan to negotiate effectively with market forces, rather than to fear them. Gandhi's respect for the customer, the ultimate user of the handmade, was legendary. His understanding and ability to use the market enabled the swadeshi movement and made possible the handloom revolution. To my generation, Cottage Industries, Contemporary Arts & Crafts, Sohan, Handloom House, Sasha, landmark Khadi Bhavans and the Fabindia of John Bissell were among the craft experiences that moulded us while also delivering to artisans the possibility of dignity and hope. It was the changing market in India and overseas that forged partnerships between craftspersons and designers to develop an idiom of Indian craft that could responds to contemporary need. The challenge therefore is not one of market threat but rather fostering the capacity of artisans to negotiate effectively with the market, and effectively protect their own interests within a situation of constant change and unrelenting competition.

Building demand for hand quality

To do this requires building consumer awareness of craft quality and thus generating a demand for the quality that only the hand can deliver to markets at home and around the world. Demand requires awareness. Awareness begins with education — education that can sensitise the Indian child and tomorrow's consumer to her craft heritage and its relevance to her own well-being. An important opportunity is now available through the craft curriculum offered to Indian schools through the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training). The curriculum reflects the though and effort of Professor Krishna Kumar. He shared his perspective from this podium through the second Kamaladevi Memorial Lecture "Hastkalayein aur Shiksha" in February 2011. I would urge CCRT (Centre for Cultural Resources and Training) to translate Professor Kumar's lecture not only into English but into every language so that his insights can reach and engage the entire sector.

India's artisans themselves represent a great educational advantage. They are unmatched in their ability to communicate through their hands an understanding of materials, technology, function and aesthetics. Yet our master artisans are excluded as educators because they lack the formal degrees and certificates of the so-called qualified. This must change because without another generation of Indians who understand the value of the handmade through direct encounters with the craft culture and wisdom, respect for artisans and demand for hand-made quality may be impossible to ensure. Education and awareness cannot be restricted to formal and informal channels of education. The father-to-son and mother-to-daughter channels to

which crafts have passed through generations represent not just vocational education and training but lessons in aesthetics and in the human spirit that no school can match. Today these traditional channels can be challenged by the need to distinguish between craft paramparas on the one hand and the issues of caste barriers and of child labour on the other. What education must offer to the children of artisans is the option of a hereditary profession by choice and not by compulsion. For other children, it should be the option to join and to participate in a shared legacy of heritage. This is not an impractical dream. It is happening in Maheshwar, Kutch and elsewhere.

Image courtesy Scroll

Transformed landscapes, tectonic shifts

Many of us who have been trying to manage the challenges of traditions in transition tend to ascribe failures to our own incapacities, or to the poor framing and execution of national policies, to bureaucratic insensitivity, or to the absence of any clear strategy to raise demand for handmade quality. Perhaps we need also to go beyond these symptoms of crisis to an even deeper understanding of tectonic shifts taking place on our ground. These shifts include those which I have described of attitude and perception. The aspirations of artisans and their clients have also changed from acceptance of past identities to those associated with new concepts of progress and modernity. There are also huge market transformations, transitions demanded by urbanisation, the impact of political forces, and the colossal influence of environmental change. Perhaps the most obvious shift has been that of a transformed market. The struggle for livelihoods is bereft of pre-Independence barter systems and the patronage of temple, mosque and palace. Systems of support from Central and State authorities made major contributions to the sector, keeping it alive within a protected economy. In the so-called free market of

liberalised globalisation, past schemes have become increasingly irrelevant. The self-sufficient village of centuries, the gram rajya of Gandhiji's dream, is now a space invaded by urban dreams and demands for urban services. The user of what the village artisan makes is now a distant, most often unknown entity located in the cities of India and the world. To understand her and to influence her choices requires a range of 'middleman' functions: access to market knowledge, to design and technology, to finance and to channels of distribution. Each function can be exploitive or supportive. Which it will be now depends primarily on the artisan's capacity to negotiate and to influence the market chain with its demands of timely delivery, quality control, merchandising, trade regimes and, above all, of competition from alternatives. The need now is for building greater management capacities and services at the grassroots, for entrepreneurship capacities that can negotiate unlimited market opportunities at home and overseas, as well as the range of market threats. Self-reliant entrepreneurship rooted in inherited wisdom and combined with current knowledge is perhaps the most essential prerequisite for sustainable livelihoods from handcraft. The most essential, but certainly not the only prerequisite.

Rural crafts or a rural myth? The challenge of sacred spaces

Access is another. Access to markets and to services that have failed to reach the village doorstep, forcing the movement of artisans away from villages into town and cities. Many of us are still obsessed with the myth of preserving a rural culture —- 'cottage' industries, handmade in kutirs. The truth is that many of our craft traditions have moved into urban slums and pavements. Every Indian city reveals this fact, with artisans working and selling at whatever corner of space they can find. Hovels, not kutirs, crowded with artisans in search of markets, materials and finance. This trend will accelerate as India evolves as an urban society, a transformation to which the present administration is wholly committed. The implications are huge for re-defining or re-discovering the cultural integrity of Indian craft.

The shift is not just physical. It is a movement of the mind.

Image courtesy Indian Ministry of Textiles

Earth Mother and her artisan children

The shift is not just cultural. The natural environment is degrading at a pace that threatens not just the craft inspiration but its materials as well. Crafts have depended on nature for so many resources, elements and benchmarks of excellence: woods, grasses, fibres, stone, natural colours, earth and water, not to speak of design inspiration. Yet today each of these essential elements is threatened and often far removed from direct experience. Resources that once were free or accessible within habitats have disappeared due to environmental degradation, natural disasters and greed. How can motifs drawn from nature retain their freshness if new generations are denied the inspiration of having lived with nature and having absorbed the inspiration of changing seasons? And what of climate change that today threatens us with intensifying disasters of the kind Jammu & Kashmir have just witnessed, that Assam and Uttarakhand have endured, and that have brought such havoc to coastal Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu — everywhere destroying the materials, tools, and stocks of artisans? If nature's integrity is a sine qua none of craft inspiration, does this require that craft activists now partner efforts at protecting the earth? Must we help redress the imbalance between development and greed with a culture of replenishment and concern for tomorrow? This is the message of Dastkar's Green Bazaars.

Craft harbingers of justice

Another shift is political and social, recalling the million mutinies of our land. A map of Indian tensions would include the Naxal corridor, Kashmir and north eastern states. These locations are also our richest craft resources. Does this fact tell us something about those attitudes of sunset and neglect, and of the potential of Indian crafts as a huge social and political safety net? Can craft cultures flourish amidst violence and injustice? Consider the reality that the vast majority of India's artisans comprise those marginalised by society: scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, minorities, women, and citizens of some of the most disturbed areas of the land. Can we expect rich craft contributions from those deprived of rights others take for granted and living with neglect and violence? Is our craft culture then a valid argument to be advanced in the cause of peace and justice? If so, what demands does that make on us craft activists? Does this mean that the struggle for human dignity and for human rights is an inescapable aspect of our movement toward sustainable crafts? Does this demand that we forge new partnerships with those who struggle for justice and for peace? Do we have the stamina now to be rights activists as well? Do we, should we, have a choice?

The development agenda: a craft opportunity

Such a range of challenges may seem an impossible agenda for most of us who are still led by passions of the heart, not by strategies of the head. Applications of social sciences, politics and management are still unfamiliar to most of our work territories. Indeed, they often appear as threats to the cultural and spiritual qualities we hold dear. Yet the sector's greatest strength may well be that its impact and influence are cross-cutting, intersecting with so many national and global priorities. Perhaps as no other industry, craft is deeply involved with the most fundamental development agendas of our time: managing threats to the environment, promoting justice and equity and peace by bringing the deprived into the centre of concern, empowering women through recognition of their craft roles and contributions, offering identity and confidence in an era threatened by globalised uniformity, providing sustainable livelihoods to households and communities in their own locations through the use of local resources, protecting them from the miseries of migration, and leaving a light carbon footprint to address the threat of climate change. In other words, an industry that probably reflects as no other, both the issues as well as the opportunities for sustainable development. The opportunity of craft is to bring back what Kapila Vatsyayan has described as "The experience of the whole, the total, in its multi-layered inter-webbing and inter-relatedness". Thus, a cutting-edge industry which represents in itself a development agenda, a movement that is social, cultural, political and environmental, and one that carries within it the seeds of spiritual awakening.

This is an abridged version of the 5th Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Memorial Lecture delivered on October 29, 2014 at the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, New Delhi. Read the full text here on the Indian Cultural Forum.

Sex with Michel Foucault and Other Poems

Koushiki Dasgupta

Shoili Kanungo, 'Stolen Bread', oil on canvas, 2013.

Sex with Michel Foucault

You call it sexuality, I call it bread.
Chewing the bread, smashing the bread…
It's my habit to write poetry from the dough.
You call it habit, I call it discourse.

Hunger is not a discourse, nor a theory, nor a seminar.
It loves to take the whole
Jams, Jelly, Sugar, Salt, and Beef—the censorship too.
You call it discipline, I call it sin.

I love to be a sinner in my bedroom,
I love to smear butter on my body
and moisten my soul before Mephistopheles.
Do you call it narrative? I call it vulgar.

Taking off everything—I write the body again, I write the politics again,
I write the aesthetics inside a professional asylum.
You call it aesthetic, I call it seduction.

Seduction is more expensive than love
Seduction is cheaper than love.
You call it love, I call it sex.

Invisible Peacock

Famous men are same.
Some are famous on left, some on right.
Some are famous for happiness, some for sufferings.

Someone is too innocent to realise what is he famous for .
They love to drink the moonlight,
They love to drink the Amravati.
They don't know camphor is in their sky, sandal is in their air.
Sandal means doubt, camphor means despair;
The anger and sorrow of those who are born to die in dark.

Famous men are fond of the invisible peacock they hide in their house…

Screaming day and night, in the street, in the hell and even in the tea
shop the famous men had never dared to come.
When the city is in sleep, the peacock dances to its tunes.
Without letting the city know, the peacock itself becomes very famous.

Famous men and invisible peacock both look the same at night.

The Ad-Girl

Right now, she has two private things—
One tooth-brush, one comb.
she had some other things of her own but they
got sold out at a high price in dollars.
Flaunting her toothbrush and comb, she is now ad material.
'Come on, like whichever way you like, you can smell her comb and brush.'

In the last decade, her price rose even higher
Her hands ,her legs, her face, her rivulet, her hills, her mystery, got more than fair price
in countries hot and cold.

Now she has only two things left.
If she can sell them, then her life on earth is complete.
In her next life, she will give birth to a new Jesus Christ.
She will be a goddess herself.
Her lap will dazzle with the sunlight of a free economy.

Can anyone auction sunlight?
It may happen one day.
If tooth brush, comb and sunlight are auctioned ever,
then we will recognize the girl under the street fluorescent light,
sadly sitting with a busked of oranges for sale.

Dead-body

They brought the dead body late at night and said,
'Hey Doctor, write down,
The girl has committed suicide.
Or else, we will skin you up,
Write down….. quick.'

Looking at the body,
My room, my sky, my heart
goes lit with the moon.

I wrote down everything.
I wrote it in a way they write a story of laughter,
they write a story of love.
the way we bead the nail,
make wound on the wall
just to hang Jesus on the wall,
the way we create history.

I wrote down everything in the same way
a poet laments before an unfinished poem.

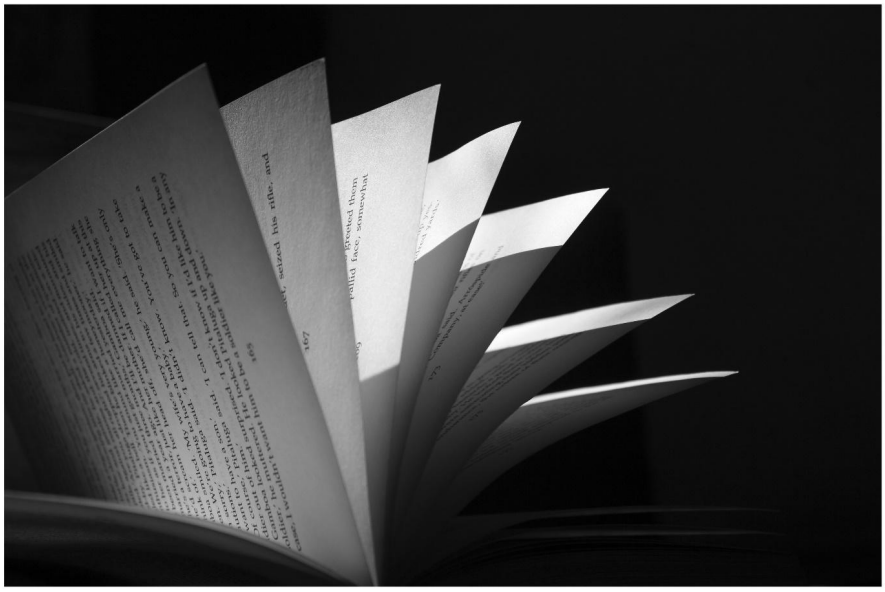
I did it because I know,

each murder is a suicide,
each suicide is a murder.

Read the Bengali originals here.

The Brink / images from an unfinished poem

MP Pratheesh



Poet and critic E.V. Ramakrishnan writes of MP Pratheesh's photographs:

An Amorphous Album of the Elemental

Pratheesh's stark images in black and white stitch the world of the seen and the unseen into a fluid continuum. He frames the minimal at its moment of transition to the infinite and the boundless. The series as a whole is a tribute to the idea of the rim, the edge, the brink as a moment of epiphany when the world takes on a different shape, where possibilities erupt from

nowhere. Light flickers expectant, stubborn, as the grainy world of the fallen and the discarded cling to life and affirm their being. They belong to a larger cycle of ruin and renewal, an amorphous album of the elemental etched on the black soil of beginnings. As I was watching these images one more time before writing these words, a black flying insect came and sat on one of the images, merging into it, and suddenly it figured out something for me which I had only vaguely felt.

Night, Water, Stone

Poems by Debarshi Mitra, Savita Singh, and Johny ML

Theodoros Stamos, ‘Untitled’, Watercolor, ink, pastel, and gouache on paper, 50.8 x 66 cm, 1947 | Image courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art

English

I used to wear it on my head like a crown
when we went to my father’s ancestral home
on some Sundays, the railways leaping in time
several centuries
taking us away from the city and to that other world
where concrete was sparse and the pale yellow of disease
left its unrelenting trace everywhere. Growing up in the city
there was little congruence I could find there.
Inside the house, surrounded by other relatives, sometimes
my (now dead) diabetic aunt would drag her body across
the hall to pick up a fruit kept on the table,

her eyes gleaming while she looked directly
at me and asked, “What do you call this
in English?”

Still

It seems at this time of the night,
I could bring my neighbourhood to a standstill
just by wishing if it were so. Only the street lamps
flicker in nervous anticipation and precisely
at the designated corner, the night watchman
holds up his unfinished cigarette
and sucks time into his lungs. The windows
remain shut, all stray dogs occupy their respective
places in the universe. Not a leaf dares to quiver.
Even the shadow of the thought of you in my bed
refuses to leave.

-Debarshi Mitra

अनिद्रा में

कुछ कम उदास करो मुझे मेरे देश
कुछ कम चाहो मुझसे
कितने बदहाल यहाँ के लोग
कितने कम लोगों की ख़ुशी के लिए
फ़ाक़ाज़दा दिन और वैसी ही रातें
कितने थोड़े भरे पेटों के लिए
जंगल के जंगल कारतूस और बंदूकों से लैस अब
रात भर जगे रहते हैं पेड़
कुछ बच नहीं पा रहा

न मर्द, न औरतें, न बच्चे
न रात, न उसका रहस्य

अंधकार प्लास्टिक के फूल सा मामूली वस्तु भर
स्वप्न बुलेट सी बिंधी एक आँख

अनिद्रा में तैयार हो रहा एक
नया देश

Sleeplessness

Assuage my sorrow, my country.
Ask less of me.
How your residents are rendered feeble
for the joys of the few.
Famished days; and nights, the same,
For the satisfaction of such few stomachs.
Jungle after jungle replete
with cartridges and rifles
The trees are awake all night
Nothing is able to stay
neither men, nor women, nor children
nor the night, or its mystery.

Night, like a plastic flower, is
now an ordinary thing.

The dream remains pierced in its eye.

A new country
is augmented
in this sleeplessness.

क़त्ल की रात कल ही गुज़री है

है सुबह की पहली ताज़ी हवा की सुगंध
हृदय में अब भी बची
मुस्कान अपने ही उस प्रेम के अहसास में
जिसे भुलाना ज़रूरी हो गया है

दुख बहुत है इस समय में सबके लिए
उम्मीद फिर भी करनी है सुख की
ख़ून के धब्बे दिखते हैं शहर की इमारतों पर
क़त्ल की रात कल ही गुज़री है

Last Night Passed Yesterday Itself

Crisp breeze, early morning, their redolence
all remain in the heart still,
and the smile that lingers
in the remembrance of that love
which has now become necessary
to forget entirely.

There is far too much sorrow in this time
for everyone. Yet, one has to hope, hope
for contentment. City monuments, still
carry visible stains of blood.

The night of the murder
passed yesterday itself.

-Savita Singh
Translated from Hindi by ***Medha Singh***

Overcoming

In which shape
Should I exist,
As water or stone?
Water they contain
Stone they break
Fire they extinguish
And air pollute.

Don't I know
The lesson of Sky?
Be everywhere
But distant and alone
The hopefuls look up
So do the hopeless

Grieving and loving
Look nowhere else.

Be there
Don't hide
For there is no one place
That they have left out
Forests, rivers, villages
Caves, mountains and vales
They have taken over
Spread their red carpets
For huge carnivals of
Fancy dress to pass.

Be there
Don't run
For the bullets
Know chasing as you go
Better receive one in the chest
Than a few in the back
Tell your mom that
If you come with holes on the back
Drag the corpse on a coconut frond.

But you could be silent
For many would listen
As they too will have
Antennas hidden
One day
The procession of silence
Will submerge the streets
The din of arrogance
Will startle to see it.

Silence in study
Or in the grave
Measures equal
It decays to manure
Righteousness,
Love and overcoming.

Sunstroke

It was like slipping into
Molten silver without noise,
And shiver; skin shone
In sudden strangeness

Holding me hostage
At the fence of a hostel
Sun rays demanded
The last drop of water
Left in my eyes

Tearless I turned to life
How dizzying a feeling it was
Like animals crawl out
From strong thickets
Visions came one by one
From the hot asphalt road

Watches melt
Skeletal men cross
A pope loses his face
A phantom bus starts

Mugging was done
Rays withdrew
Silver plating scalded off
A knife's still hurt my neck

I can't stand these moments
Dripping light on my head
I scream; the city falls down
Tripping on its own shadow.

-Johny ML

Talking Translation with Jerry Pinto

Kanika Katyal in conversation with the writer and translator

"What are we thinking when we think of languages as brackets? They are Venn diagrams; they are anarchic and branching and interconnected."

– Jerry Pinto

How does a translator see languages, and the relationship between them? Why is translation critical to culture, especially in India? Award-winning writer Jerry Pinto talks about his project of translating a rich body of texts by those that were historically oppressed, including Daya Pawar's *Baluta* (2015), the first Dalit autobiography which was published in Marathi in 1978.

Video © Guftugu.

Magnifying Meme

Khandakar Ohida

'The Grey Land', Zine (paper, photo collage, watercolour, news paper cutouts) , 18" x 11", 2018

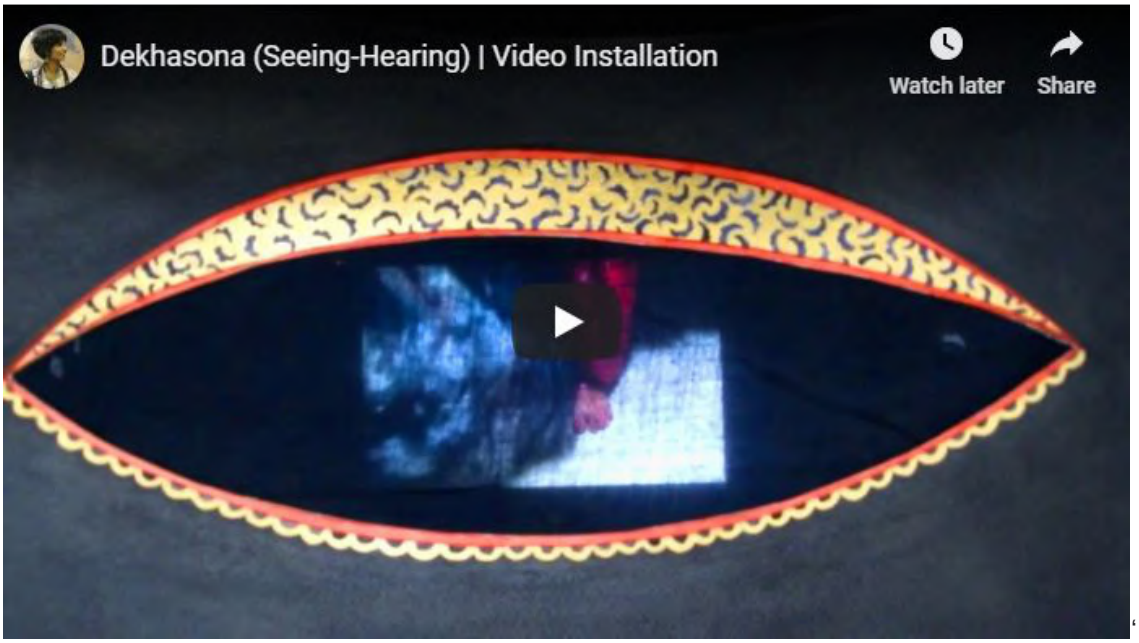
"Practicing art by exploring different mediums is my conquest over the predominant cultural impact [on me] since childhood. My initiatives [have been] to become an art practitioner from a lower middle-class Muslim family of Bengal and demonstrate the dichotomy of cultural hegemony over religious practice."

'Exuberant Anonymity', Watercolour and wasli, 2018

"I try to explore the subtle layer between cultural and religious identity and… investigate the position of the declared 'second sex'. And incidents of religious violence… interweave with the cultural divergence through my works."

‘Magnifying Meme’, Installation: two drawings on paper with a background tungsten bulb, 24” x 18”, 2018

“I am always trying to make sense of the pressures of identity, not just as a Muslim woman, but also by exploring my roots as a rural Bengali woman… [So there is] continuous confrontation with social hierarchy and gender stereotypes.”



Dekhasona’, Single channel video installation , 7” tablet, black veil, black box (20” x 10” x 10”),1min 40sec, 2018

A Landscape in Cobweb and other poems

Nandini Dhar

Afro, ‘Untitled’, Oil on Canvas, 102.9 x 127 cm, 1952-53 | Image courtesy The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Requiem From the Pothole, Within Which I Stand, Precariously Balanced

An old woman drags behind her
a dilapidated mailbox, its half-broken door

rattling on the brick of the pavement.
For five decades, she has

refused to shut her door,
has set aside a plate of food for a son

who is dead. Dead and gone. The plan
to build a monument for him was discussed

meticulously, then aborted – like many
other things we planned to chisel. Besides,

everyone knew him by his alias. Which
only happens to be an incomplete nomenclature

when contriving a memorial. I remember
her as a line in a song, an epigraph

in a poem whose end-rhymes
you kept forgetting. Although, I

remember you joining the chorus.
A line in a song where her eyes

are always hibiscus-red: with tears.
An antique mother who keeps carving

pearl-coffins from her own tears. Outside
of the barbed wires of the poems,

her eyes were hollow: you could have
poured buckets and buckets of water,

but nothing would have overflowed. No
ripples, nothing. Her hair shot up

towards the sky, a dry oleander tree
whose branches were bereft of blossoms. A

colony of vultures made their homes
in those shriveled boughs – dry, dessicated,

drought-heavy. In order to touch her bones,
rattling like an abandoned chimney, I

had to unstring your olivewood fiddle. Alone,
with empty hands, bruise-rivered

like an overflowing estuary. You stood
apart, head inside your hands, staring

down. Dejected, because you failed to find
the hammer inside the toolbox.

The Last Surviving Diorama From Twentieth Century

A tongue thus born – the prick
of a rusted needle, the serration
offered by a mountain-path, the chipped
edges of a dismembered constellation,
the bruised bones of a north star
that has lost its way. A star-chrome voice,
the ash that is left after the last fortification
has been gunned down : a tongue lit
by a flameable constellation. A city of girls
looking for poems on their skins;
you think, in their metaphors, your blood
will find a river to flow. This effort
to illustrate your voice with the broken
edges of the brick is like a leaf
looking for a tree. A quest pre-ordained
to fail: I am rowing a canoe down
the roads of a flooded city. I cannot save
anyone from drowning, but I am putting
you together bit by bit: an alphabet
at a time. You will set my assemblage on fire.

A Landscape in Cobweb

Amongst the many terrors of return,
is the vision of a precipice
turned inside out –
the imagined frottage: an
evening of smashing open
the flower-pots
of this city's highrise balconies.
Yet, this promenade
remains
a hesitant foray
into the unwritten ballad –
of how entire wheatfields
rush into wallflower orchids,
remain lost, and reincarnate –
as memento magnets.

A row of seven balsam-saplings
on the balcony, the pots color-coded
to resemble a rainbow: a vague
effort to brush into existence
a coffee-table reality: an as-yet
untouched picturesque.

Iron-gates, walls veiled
with glass-shards; high as a forest-ranger's
elephant. Barbed-wire driveways:
this is where philanthropists
are sculpted out of pill-popping mansion-mistresses.

A smack, a deluge, a snuff-out– the desert
a crow carries into the porch on its beak.
A scratch, a squeal: a plateau swimming
underneath her unslept ivory-bed. A rasp,
a scrape, a squeak: the chirr of a porcelain
vase perforating. This is the sound
of her carving poets out of makeshift mountains.

A massacre has just been made beautiful
in brush-strokes, and I am watching. Watching
and counting. Counting: how many seconds

does it take to hold someone
jumping from the rooftop. Or not.

In this return, I bring home nothing
but memories of evasion. The kind of barrenness
that inevitably follows an apology — I admit
I misread the wavering undulations of your chest
as pretension.

The Music of the Brahmaputra Valley

MitraPhukan

Image courtesy Pangsau

Geographical location is undoubtedly a very important factor in shaping the culture of a place. It is geography that determines how accessible a place is; and this, in turn, determines the migrants from different lands who come to the place, bringing with them the influences of their own cultures. Geography also determines how attractive a place is for potential migrants. Is the place well-watered? Is the climate suitable for agriculture and for living?

Geographical location is undoubtedly a very important factor in shaping the culture of a place. It is geography that determines how accessible a place is; and this, in turn, determines the migrants from different lands who come to the place, bringing with them the influences of their own cultures. Geography also determines how attractive a place is for potential migrants. Is the place well-watered? Is the climate suitable for agriculture and for living?

The location of Assam is unique — it is situated at the cusp of two great civilizations, the Indian and East and South East Asian. It is, therefore, inevitable that it should reflect these influences in various spheres. Till the other day, Assam, bound by heavily forested hills, and one of the biggest river systems of the world, was largely inaccessible to the rest of India, as well as to the lands to the east. But these fertile valleys that bask in the mellow sunshine of a moderate climate could not fail to attract migrants from great distances. The difficulty of the terrain leading into this golden land however ensured that these migrations have taken place,

historically, slowly. These migrants brought with them the culture of the lands of their origin. Because of the slow pace of migration, the assimilation process of each of these influences threw up newer creations, while retaining the flavour of the original. Over time, these mixed and melded with the local culture, to produce something that remains unique to this day. So whether it is cuisine, or dress, or textiles, or literature, or indeed the many other facets of traditions that manifest themselves in our everyday life, there is always something different, something distinctive about the cultural markers of this land.

The musical ancestry of migrants is often a kind of race memory of the land from which they have come, even centuries after the actual migration has taken place. Music is the nostalgia, the recollection that migrants carry with them, as remembrances of the land they have left behind forever. In Assam, the various strands of its rich repertoire of music, both the vocal and the instrumental heritage, glisten with those memories. The melodies of this land are a seamless intermingling of the airs of the rest of India, particularly Northern and Eastern India, and also, on the other hand, of the many cultures of different ethnicities that surround the valley, in the hills of the region. There is also of course the memory of music that has come from further East. These two latter influences are seen in the more staccato nature of the melodies of this part of the world, compared to the music of the rest of India, which is based on 'meends', or glides. Also, the melodies of the ethnic music of Assam are usually based on a descending scale, unlike the folk and Raag based melodies of much of the rest of the country. However, the mingling of the influences over the centuries has ensured a composite melodic end product that is as attractive as it is unique.

The music of the valleys of the Brahmaputra in Assam is rich in both the traditional as well as the folk kinds. (The music of the Barak Valley is appreciably different, with its own influences, and therefore merits a separate discourse.) Both these categories are often an accompaniment to dance, though they are also performed without this pairing. Among the most luminous of traditional music forms are those that spring from the *Sattriya* culture. These *Sattras*, or monasteries, were established by the great Vaishnavite saint, SrimantaSankardeva (1449-1568) and his primary disciple, Madhabdev (1489-1596). Sankardeva himself wrote many works of devotion, among them the KirtanGhosa, Bhaonas and Naats (dramatic works) and so on. The Borgeets, or Great Songs that he wrote are performed with great piety even today. These are effulgent with devotion, and are based on Raags whose nomenclature is different from both the Carnatic and Hindusthani systems, and also a complex system of Taals or rhythmic patterns. The lyrics are in the sweet language known as Brajawali, a mixture of the Assamese of the time, and the language of Braj. This gives an aura of nobility to the texts, a kind of distance, which is however totally comprehensible to the lay audience for which they were written. The accompanying instruments of the time were the khol and the taal, or cymbals, but today, recitals of Sattra music are accompanied by the taanpura, violin and flute as well. Madhabdev also wrote some beautiful *Borgeets*.

It is not the Vaishnavite faith alone that has beautiful devotional songs. Several other deities are worshipped through music. The Mother Goddess, in various forms, has always been very important here. *Ai* Naams extol her virtues and glories, and are usually sung by women.

Another category of traditional songs are the *Oja Pali* , where a group of men, divided into the main singer/narrator and the accompanying chorus, play out a dramatic musical narration, complete with basic dance steps and hand gestures. Small cymbals accompany the songs. A notable change in recent times is that women too are part of the groups performing *Oja Pali*… a welcome development.

Muslims have their own songs of piety and devotion in Assam, known as *Jikirs.* These often sing of moral values and are accompanied by simple instruments and hand claps.

Assam is very rich in folk music, of which there is a large variety to be found here. In the Westernmost areas of the State, in Goalpara and Dhubri, for instance, one finds the luminous Goalpariya folk songs. These are related to the river songs of nearby Bangladesh and North Bengal, though their melodic development and vocabulary is different. These are the regions of the great elephant herds that wander from place to place. It is no wonder that 'elephant songs' have such a distinctive position in the folk music of this area. Boatmen's songs from these musically rich districts are also very evocative in both their melodic and rhythmic schemes.

The adjacent districts also have a rich repertoire of folk music, Kamrupiya *Loka Geet* being highly melodious. There are also some intriguing categories, such as the *'Moh Kheda Geet'* of Barpeta which is sung by groups that fan out with burning torches, to chase away mosquitoes. The boat songs of Barpeta, '*Nao Khelor Geet'* Barpeta sung during boat races, are vigorous and energetic. There are several other categories of folk music, heard up and down the valley. These include the *Tokari Geet, the Bongeet,* the lullabies or *Nisukoni geet*. Some of these lullabies are indeed soothing. Besides, there are the group songs such as *Biya* Naams (wedding songs) which are often extempore. These can be sad, as well as merry.

The best known folk form of Assam is the *Bihu*, an expression of joy and merriment, which is today a dance that is synonymous with the people of Assam. It is a dance celebrating fecundity and fertility, and is part of the *Bihu* festivals of April and January. The *Bihu* of Spring, especially, is a joyous one, with dancing and singing galore. The songs that accompany these dances are an integral part of the whole performance. The rhythm encompasses a vibrant double beat that is guaranteed to set feet tapping and bodies swaying. The lyrics are often quite risqué, and depict the boy wooing the girl, and the girl's teasing reply. Indeed, the whole tone of the songs is light-hearted, with lots of teasing and double entendre, guaranteed to bring a smile to the faces of the audiences. These songs are full of stunning descriptions of nature, evoking the lush beauty of the fields, the rivers, the trees and foliage all around. An intriguing aspect of these lyrics is the fact that they lend themselves to extempore creations quite readily. Many events of a contemporaneous nature are often incorporated into these short stanzas, as are teasing references to the audiences, especially if they are too inhibited to join in the dancing and singing!

Indeed, every tribe of Assam's multi-ethnic community has its own music. The Bodos celebrate 'Baishagu' with song and dance. The *Bagurumba* dance, accompanied by song, describes the beauties of Nature. Every tribe celebrates Spring in its own way, with its own songs and dances, which enrich the composite culture of Assam. The Adivasis of the tea garden regions have their lively and graceful Jhumur dances and songs.

Among the traditional instruments of Assam are of course the flute made of bamboo, which is ubiquitous in the rural areas. There are, besides, the stringed folk instruments such as the Ektara and Dotara, which yield tunes that are resonant with feeling. There are also instruments such as the pepa or pipe, sometimes made from the horn of a buffalo, and the gogona or jew's harp. Among the percussion instruments are the khol, mainly used for music of a religious nature, and the more secular dhol, the nagara, and the bamboo clappers. It is to be noted that these are all made of material found in abundance in nature. The CiphungBahi of the Bodos is a long bamboo flute, played during festivals.

Contemporary music in Assam draws on this solid musical foundation. The amalgamation of various categories, and also more contemporary influences from outside the region, has resulted in some beautiful outpourings of music. Artistes such as Bhupen Hazarika, Papon and Zubeen Garg, who have been nourished by the musical streams of this land, owe much to this rich legacy, which has nurtured their genius to produce their remarkable musical outpourings.

This overview of the music of Assam is only a brief outline that seeks to give an idea of the beauty, richness and diversity of the musical heritage of this land.

This essay was first published on Pangsau.

Mirror Images in Mixed Media

Kelly Reedy

Medusa Under the Aegis

‘Transform’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

‘Tie’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

‘Strike’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

‘Snare’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

‘Moon on the Water’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

‘Blossom in the Sky’, 2010, etching and mixed media on paper, 50cm x 50cm

Mirror Image

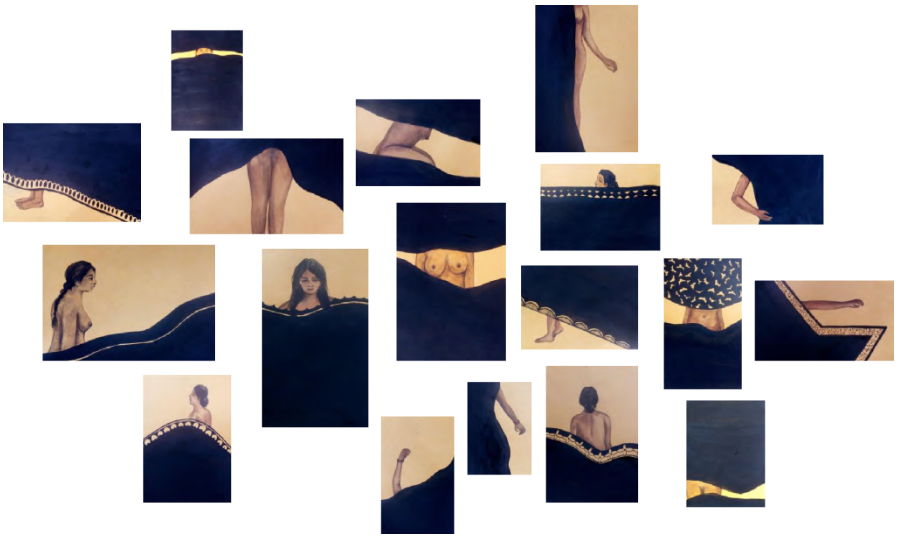
A golden thread runs through each life and beyond, connecting parent to child – generation to generation. Its unique pattern reflects the journey of an evolving Self in search of self-protection, self-knowledge and self-fruition. The video installation, *Mirror Image*, probes the complexities of this binding thread in the relationship between a mother and daughter. Through their encounter with the enigmatic gaze of Medusa, archetypal symbol of the Great and Terrible Mother, they merge, individuate and transfigure. By collaging fragments of her drawings, etchings, photographs, and films into a dream world, Kelly represents her personal voyage into her subconscious, mirroring the healing transformation she has experienced as a woman, daughter and mother through this venture.

'*Mirror Image*', single channel video projection, dimensions variable, 2017

Concept and creation: Kelly Reedy; Video artist: Vijayaraghavan Srinivasan; Composer: Ankit Suri

A Woman of Letters: Three Poems

K Srilata



Khandakar Ohida, 'Fuliginous', Watercolor on Paper, Variable Size, 2O17

Breasts/*Mulaigal*

(For Kutti Revathi)

He smuggles it out the theatre
and into pathology,
the small man,
heedless of that which is in his hands,
still warm with blood,
and pleading, for a last minute reprieve.
I think: what if he is a cannibal, what if.
I picture him licking his lips after lunch,
his hands on his swollen belly.
Mulaigal, I think,
the Tamil coming to me unbidden.

Orange slosh of Adriamycin,
teeth on stand-by carrying traces
of daily gritting and forbidden sugar-love,
that slow switch to crumpledness,

and nurses with breasts
who come and go,
and she talking of Kannagi, of Otta Mulachi,
and me thinking of that which is in his hands,
still warm with blood,
pleading, pleading,
and the night's dark ceiling
sprouting a million missing breasts.

A Woman of Letters

Some days what I want to be is a woman of letters,
to retire to my study and be
solitary.
I can see it all:
that desk – neat, rectangular, coffee brown,
its drawers seductive and deep,
holding secrets from another age,
on it some paper, a pen and an ink well,
and a bookcase filled with every kind of book –
Austen definitely and Dickinson and Chugthtai…

No adolescent daughters abandoning dresses in contemptuous heaps.
No grubby sons, their dirty socks like bombs under my books.
No spouses, no mothers, nor mothers-in-law
with their urgent thoughts.
Sometimes all I want to be is a woman of letters.
Between chores, the very idea makes me weep.

Sita

"I am not gone yet," she whispers to the boys as they sleep,
"and even though it looks as though I walked out on it all,
and even though it's what I wanted most at the time –
to return to the earth,
to leave it all behind in a grand gesture,
I find I have been outwitted after all,
for the going away is easy but the leaving behind isn't.
This keeping vigil has become a habit impossible to kick,
and you, my boys, are my very heart.
Tell your father
I am neither golden image nor ghost,

I am that mother's face which looks
back at him from all the palace mirrors,
flame-scarred and bright.

My Sweet Home

Samina Mishra

Okhla is a neighbourhood on the banks of the river Yamuna in Delhi. It was once a small village on the south-eastern edge of the city but the city grew to claim it. As the area developed, it began to attract more and more people — often, family members and friends of those already living here. They came from small towns and villages to study, find jobs and make a better life. In the last few decades, even more Muslim families have moved to this area because it is hard for them to find houses in other parts of the city or because of the fear of communal riots. So even though, large parts of Okhla have bad roads, erratic electricity supply and even contaminated water, people throng to this "Muslim area."

I have been in and out of Okhla since I started studying in Jamia in 1989. My grandparents lived there, and my family and I continue to live there. When the Batla House encounter happened and Okhla took centre-stage on TV channels, I began to think about what was missing from the picture of Okhla that was being created by the news and television, what was missing that could connect Okhla's story to the story of other neighbourhoods in other cities. The answer I felt was — everyday life.

In *My Sweet Home,* children shared these stories from their lives with great enthusiasm. They wrote and created art about their homes – terraces, mosques and train tracks that lead to the villages that their families came from. The book invites you to explore this busy, congested area that is teeming with stories that the newspapers and television don't bother with, stories that belong to Haris and Amna, Tabish and Nooma, Simeen and Shahana and Anam. And all their friends. Come, walk through their streets and share their stories because stories, as I once read in a book, have to be told otherwise they die.

Here’s a short film on the book:

My Sweet Home: Childhood Stories from a Corner of the City (Mapin 2017) is a book by Samina Mishra, Sherna Dastur and the children of Okhla with photographs by Kunal Batra.

Contributors

Ashoke Chatterjee has a background in the engineering industry, international civil service, India Tourism Development Corporation, and 25 years in the service of the National Institute of Design (Ahmedabad) where he was Executive Director, Senior Faculty, Distinguished Fellow and Professor of communication and management. He has served a range of development institutions in India and overseas, particularly in the sectors of drinking water, sanitation, disability, livelihoods and education as well as working with artisans in many parts of the country. He was Honorary President of the Crafts Council of India for over twenty years and continues to serve CCI.

Chaman Lal was professor of Hindi Translation at the Centre of Indian Languages in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He edited and translated Punjabi poet Pash's collection in Hindi; the collection won the Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize. He returned the award in 2015 to protest against growing intolerance in the country.

Debarshi Mitra is a Delhi based poet. His debut book of poems *Eternal Migrant* was published in May 2016 by the Writers Workshop. He received The Wingword Poetry Prize 2017, the Srinivas Rayaprol Poetry Prize and was long listed for the TFA Prize 2019.

Dushyant Kumar was a poet of modern Hindi literature.

EV Ramakrishnan is a poet and critic who writes in Malayalam and English. He is currently Professor Emeritus at the Central University of Gujarat.

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.

Known among people and friends as JaVi, **J.V. Pawar** (74) was one of the founding members of *Dalit Panthers* in Maharashtra. Pawar has been the part of Ambedkarite Movement for 52 years now. His first poetry anthology *Nakebandi* was immediately translated into English as *Blockade*. He works as the general secretary of the Bhartiya Republican Party and currently resides in Mumbai.

Jerry Pinto is a writer of prose, poetry and children's fiction, as well as a translator, journalist and teacher. His works include the highly acclaimed novel *Em and the Big Hoom*, several edited anthologies, and translations such as *Baluta*, *Cobalt Blue* and *I Want to Destroy Myself.* He also teaches journalism at the Sophia Institute of Social Communications Media in Mumbai.

Johny ML is a Delhi based art critic, writer, curator and translator.

A poet and fiction writer**, K. Srilata** is a Professor of English at IIT Madras. Her poetry collections include *The Unmistakable Presence of Absent Humans, Bookmarking the Oasis, Writing Octopus, Arriving Shortly* and *Seablue Child*. Her novel *Table for Four* was long listed in 2009 for the Man Asian literary prize. Srilata has edited several anthologies including *The Rapids of a Great River: The Penguin Book of Tamil Poetry, Short Fiction from South India* (OUP) and *Lifescapes: Interviews with Contemporary Women Writers from Tamil Nadu* (Women Unlimited).

Kanika Katyal is a Delhi-based culture writer. She was a part of the editorial collective of the Indian Writers Forum.

Keki N. Daruwalla writes poetry and fiction. He lives in Delhi. His novel *Ancestral Affairs* was recently published by Harper Collins. He won the Commonwealth Poetry Award (Asia) for his poetry volume *Landscapes*.

Kelly Reedy has over 20 years experience working in Singapore as an artist, art educator and more recently as an art therapist. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Wisconsin, USA, a Master of Education from Hunter College, USA and a Master of Art Therapy from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore & Goldsmiths, University of London. She is a qualified art psychotherapist, MA, AThR, registered with ANZATA, The Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association.

Khandakar Ohida is a Delhi-based art practitioner. Her art explores the different cultural spheres of rural Bengal, Kolkata and New Delhi. Ohida uses different mediums and techniques that include drawing, video installations and performance. She has a BFA from the Government College of Art and Craft, Calcutta, and a MFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

Koushiki Dasgupta teaches History at the West Bengal Women's University, Kolkata. She has published two books of poetry in Bengali, one in English translation and a novella in Bengali (forthcoming). She has also published poetry in Bengali and English language magazines. She received the Utpal Kumar Basu Sammanana in 2018, the Mallika Sengupta Puraskar in 2014, and the Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad Puraskar in 2019.

Lal Singh Dil was born into a dalit family in Ludhiana district. Published in 1971, his first book of poetry is *Bahut Sare Suraj* (Many Suns). He then wrote his autobiography *Dastan*. His poems have been translated into Hindi, Urdu and English.

MP Pratheesh is a Kerala based poet and photographer. He has published four collections of poetry in Malayalam. His poems have appeared in several places including *Kavya Bharati*, *The Bombay Review*, *Kerala Kavitha*, and *Indian Literature*.

Medha Singh is a Delhi-based poet. She is currently the India Editor at *The Charles River Journal*, and Editorial Board member of the *Freigeist Verlag*.

Mitra Phukan is a Guwahati-based novelist, columnist and a vocalist of the Hindusthani Shastriya Sangeet tradition.

Nandini Dhar writes poems, essays and fiction in English and Bangla and is the author of *Historians of Redundant Moments: A Novel in Verse* (Agape Editions, 2016), *Ma-Rupak Khelchhi Na* (Aainanagar Prakashani, 2019) and *Jitakshara* (Aainanagar Prakshani, 2016). She is an independent media activist, and co-edits the micro-press Aainanagar with Madhushree Basu and Pramod Gupta.

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

Ranbir Kaleka, a major multi-media artist, studied painting at the College of Art, Punjab University, and the Royal College of Art in London. His work encompasses a wide range—from paintings on paper and canvas to photography, video art, and installations. His work has been widely exhibited in India and elsewhere.

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. He currently lives and works in India.

Samina Mishra is a documentary filmmaker, writer and teacher, currently with Pathways School Noida. She also conducts workshops with children and has authored several children's books including, *Hina in the Old City*. Sherna Dastur is a graduate of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. Some of her documentary work includes Safdar Hashmi (2000), Rah Bahari (1997), and Jungle Bolta Hai (1994). Kunal Batra is an artist and photographer based in New Delhi.

Savindra "Savi" Sawarkar was born into a Mahar family that converted to Buddhism under the influence of Ambedkar. He has had numerous solo shows in India and elsewhere; and all his works challenge brahmanical hegemony; struggle with the creation of a Dalit aesthetic; and work toward the annihilation of caste.

Savita Singh (b. 1962) did her Master's and M.Phil from the University of Delhi and went to McGill University, Montreal, for higher studies. Her first collection of poems in Hindi, *Apne Jaisa Jeevan (A Life Like its Own),* was published in 2001 and received Delhi's Hindi Academy Award in 2002. Her poems are published in several magazines and journals of Hindi and English and have been translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Maithili, Urdu, French, German, Spanish and Dutch. She is also the author of *Nind Thi aur Raat Thi* (2005) and *Swapna Samay* (2013).

Shoili Kanungo is a graphic artist and designer based in New Delhi.

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

V. D. Chandanshive is the translator of *Vinaya Pitaka* (Vol.-V): *The Basket of Discipline (Vol. 5).* He lives in Nanded, Maharashtra.

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