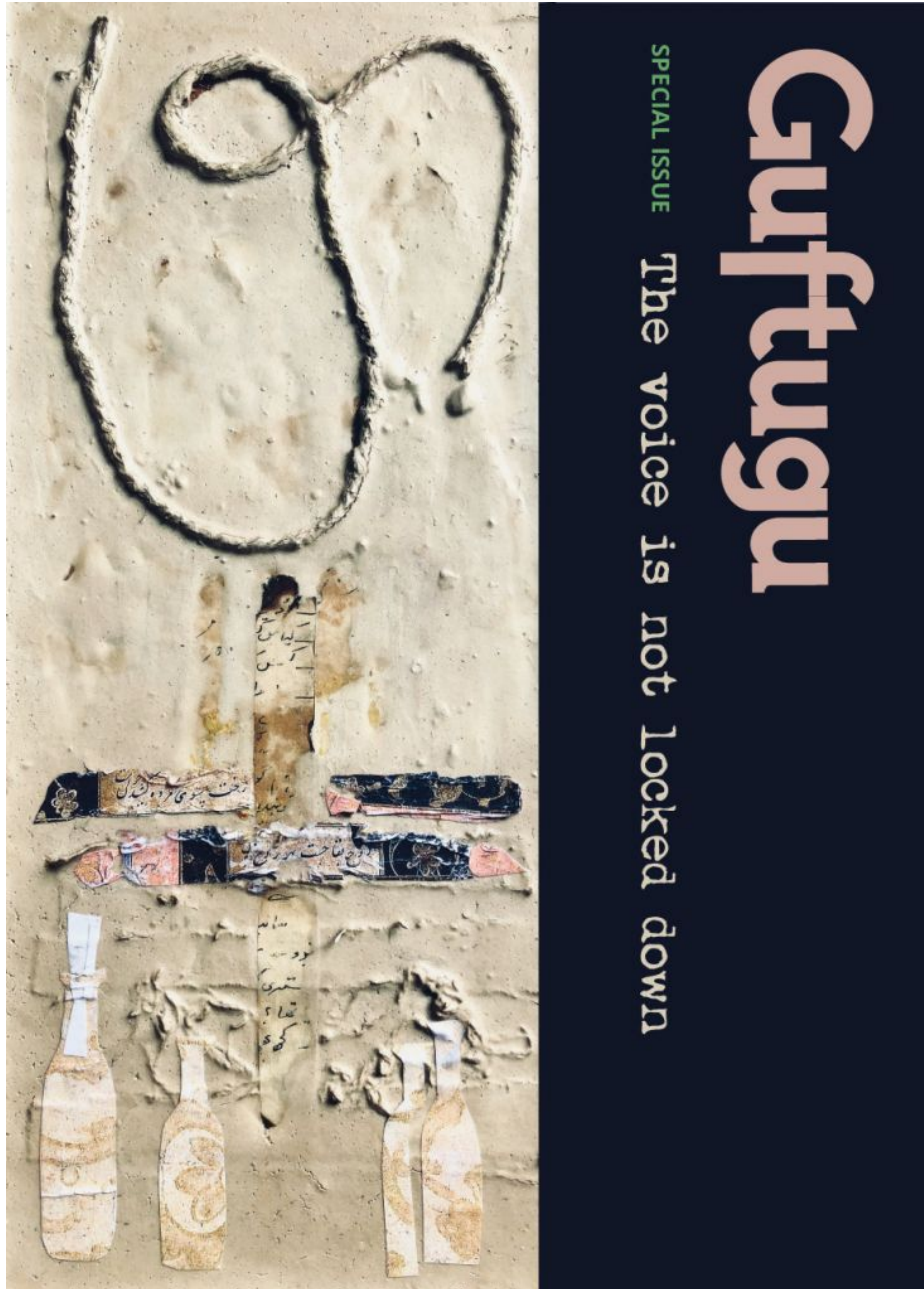


July 2020



Saba Hasan, 'Petrol bombs, library and an eye', miniature, 2020

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*, 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.

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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 voice is not locked down

The year 2020 began with the voices of resistance soaring, blending into one voice, a people's voice, saying No to CAA. No to NRC. No to NPR. No to inequality, injustice, to the brazen distortion of the Constitution. The betrayal of every person's rights.

Women, children, men, old, young – everyone marched, occupied streets, spoke, wrote, sang.

In response to this resistance, the communal virus was unleashed. Delhi burnt.

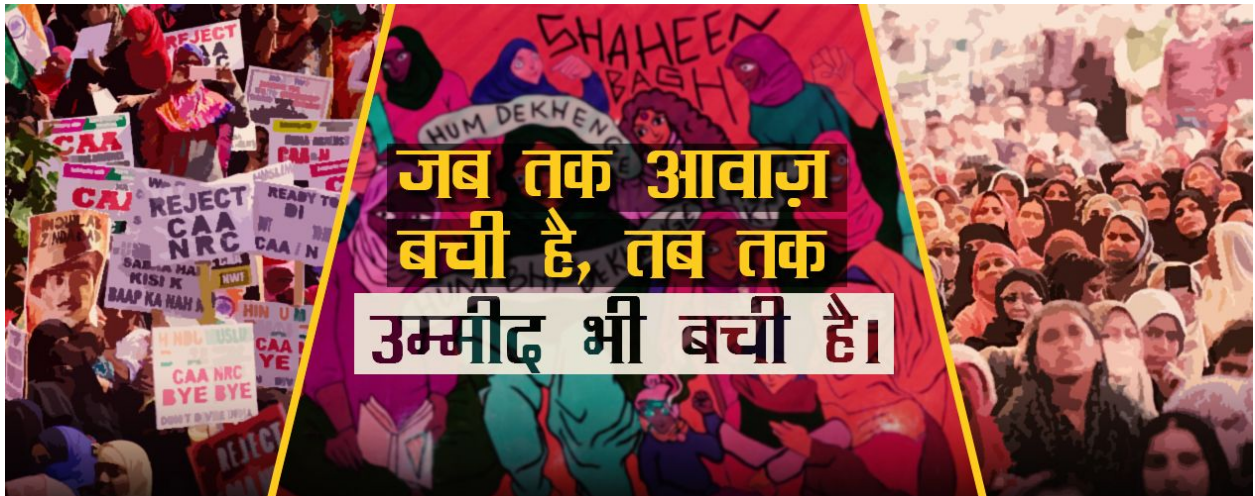


Image courtesy Indian Cultural Forum

Then came a more literal virus that would show up more than one disease among us. Diseases that have been around for long, and that grow – every time a migrant worker dies walking home; every time a dissenting voice is hounded or arrested; or every time there's proof that hunger is the worst virus of all.

In such times, can we fall silent? No. Guftugu presents, in collaboration with many friends, artists and poets, images and words through which our artists, our poets, tell us powerfully, beautifully: The voice is not locked down.

We begin the issue with Saba Hasan's evocative work on the cover: we will never forget the communal violence in Northeast Delhi. Ranbir Kaleka captures soaring against the sky, the image that vaults over all walls during a lockdown. And poet Satchidanandan asks us, with

almost unbearable eloquence, some questions from the dead as he writes his poetic essay on nationalism.



Photograph by Ranbir Kaleka | Published in collaboration with Vadehra Art Gallery

Questions from the Dead:

An Essay on Nationalism

K. Satchidanandan

Which country's border was Hiuen Tsang crossing when, on a donkey, he crossed the Himalayan pass with a sack full of Buddhist texts?

Whence came the races that spoke Dravidian and Aryan tongues? Was there no one in India when they landed here? Not even a tribal?

Where did the Bharatvarsha of Mahabharat and Meghdoot begin, where did it end? Did Bhasa and Kapilar belong to the same country?

Where were the borders of the India of Fahien and of Al-Biruni? Where was Taxila? Which was the India Alexander set out to conquer? Which country did Ashoka and Akbar rule?

Who created India: the East India Company Or Mountbatten? Or was it Gandhi? When Did 'Hindu' become the name of a religion?

When did Earth come to be in the history of the universe? When did nations come to be in the history of Earth? How many nations make a human body? What is the kinship between human soul and nations' maps? Did all the births of Bodhisattva take place in India? How many oceans are there in each language? How many skies in winds? How many seasons for love?

I had been guarding the borders till yesterday. All my life I had arguments about borders. My living flesh bled, caught in their barbed wire fencing. I went to court in their name, killed many times, died many times. They said I would become a martyr if I died for the cause, that it would secure Heaven for me.

My land, I do not loathe you, nor do I worship you.

Had I been born elsewhere I would have lived another
life; I would have needed a passport to enter you.

Today at last I am going to cross all the borders
and become part of the Earth. Do not cover me with flags.

Today I know, we are a creation of coincidences,
like our body, like the Solar System. We have
no scope for pride, and war does not have even
that scope. Bury me deep without an anthem.

No one ceases to ask questions
just because one is dead.

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Read the Malayalam original [here](#).

The photograph by Ranbir Kaleka is part of a [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) series by Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi, called
"Thoughts from the Studio".

Text © Guftugu; poem © K. Satchidanandan; photograph of bird © Ranbir Kaleka.

Art is a Lonely Business

Thoughts from the Studio

Gulammohammed Sheikh



Art is a lonely business: you often make paintings or drawings in solitude. At times, being left alone leaves you with the quietude you need to sort out problems you've been struggling with. The self-isolation imposed upon us these days is, however, different. You cannot drive away the images of the thousands of your daily wage-earning brethren trudging along a lonely road home.

Contributing to activist groups that help these lonely souls brings in a little comfort but it does not leave you without the guilt of being helpless. These days we are totally indoors. Meanwhile,

I try to make some drawings or small works as the big studio is closed — assistants having left for their homes.

This is part of a series called 'Thoughts from the Studio' initiated by the Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi. Published here in collaboration with the gallery.

Image and text © Gulammohammed Sheikh.

Those Who Live on the Streets

K. Satchidanandan



Kanchan Chander, 'An Aggressive Gossip', Etching, 7 X 5.7 inches , 1979

Yakshis live on palm trees
Human beings live in houses
Those who live on the streets
are not human.

They are outside the Constitution
They have no names or numbers,
religion, caste or class,

neither law courts nor parliaments.
Only, on certain nights some of them
become men or women.

They are a parallel republic

The street hugs them close
Animals do not quarrel with them
Birds alight on their shoulders
Trees do not withdraw their
branches on seeing them.

Neither do they come nor go
Neither are they born or do they die
Their disease is called hunger
And their love, thirst.

As the nation of the men living
in houses develops, the nation of those
who live on the street expands.
They are poems without suggestions
covered by leprous sores, their eyes swollen
They smell of burnt tyres.

Those who live in houses
are scared of those who live on the streets
In their nightmares, these people have
red beards, silver nails and fangs*
Their cats are tigers with caps,
and dogs, leopards with crowns
But these people believe in non-violence.

Parrots live on trees, crows in nests,
Fire inside rocks, water in the sea
Moonlight in the clouds,
stars in the sky, and word in fire

Those who live on the streets
are nobody.

*Red beard is the evil character in Kathakali

തെരുവിൽ പാർക്കുന്നവർ

യക്ഷികൾ പനമേൽ താമസിക്കുന്നു
മനുഷ്യർ വീടുകളിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നു.
തെരുവിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നവർ മനുഷ്യരല്ല

അവർ ഭരണഘടനയ്ക്കു പുറത്താണ്,
അവർക്ക് പേരുകളോ, നമ്പരുകളോ ഇല്ല.
മതവും ജാതിയും വർഗ്ഗവുമില്ല
കോടതികളും പാർലമെന്റുകളും ഇല്ല
ചില രാത്രികളിൽ അവരിൽ ചിലർ മാത്രം
ആണുങ്ങളോ പെണ്ണുങ്ങളോ ആയി മാറുന്നു

അവർ ഒരു സമാന്തരനിപ്പണ്ണിക്കാണ്.

തെരുവ് അവരെ മാറോട് ചേർക്കുന്നു
മൃഗങ്ങൾ അവരോടു വഴക്കിടാറില്ല
പക്ഷികൾ അവരുടെ ചുമലിൽ വന്നിരിക്കുന്നു
വൃക്ഷങ്ങൾ അവരെ കണ്ടാലും
കൊമ്പുകൾ പിൻവലിക്കാറില്ല

അവർ പോവുകയോ വരികയോ ചെയ്യുന്നില്ല
ജനിക്കുകയോ മരിക്കുകയോ ചെയ്യുന്നില്ല
അവരുടെ രോഗത്തെ വിശപ്പ് എന്ന് വിളിക്കുന്നു
അവരുടെ സ്നേഹത്തെ ദാഹം എന്നും.

വീടുകളിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നവരുടെ
ദേശം വികസിക്കും തോറും തെരുവിൽ
താമസിക്കുന്നവരുടെ എണ്ണം കൂടുന്നു

ധ്വനിയില്ലാത്ത കവിതകളാണവർ
പുണ്ണു പിടിച്ചവ, കണ്ണു തുറിച്ചവ,
ടയർ കരിയുന്ന മണമുള്ളവ.

വീടുകളിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നവർ
തെരുവുകളിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നവരെ ഭയപ്പെടുന്നു
അവരുടെ ദു:സ്വപ്നങ്ങളിൽ
ഇവർക്ക് ചുവന്ന താടിയും
വെള്ളിനഖങ്ങളും ദംഷ്ട്രകളുമുണ്ട്

ഇവരുടെ പുഷ്പകൾ തൊപ്പി വെച്ച പുലികളാണ്,
നായ്കൾ കിരീടമണിഞ്ഞ കടുവകളും.
പക്ഷെ ഇവർ അഹിംസയിൽ വിശ്വസിക്കുന്നു

തത്തകൾ മരങ്ങളിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നു
കാക്കകൾ കുടുകളിൽ, തീ പറയിൽ,
ജലം കടലിൽ, നിലാവ് ചന്ദ്രനിൽ,
നക്ഷത്രം ആകാശത്തിൽ, വാക്ക് അഗ്നിയിൽ.
തെരുവിൽ താമസിക്കുന്നവർ ആരുമല്ല.

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

A Bird's Eye View

Thoughts from the Studio

Ranbir Kaleka

My studio is out of bounds. Our house abuts a park, the skies are clear and I sit on a bench in the balcony with a book and a camera.

The camera: The peepal tree's new buds draw many birds to it and I photograph them. This demands patience and makes for a kind of dreamy meditation. Both the clear skies and bird-photography are new to me and a gift of the Corona-days.

I am sharing some photos with you: Purple sunbird, Female sunbird, and Coppersmith Barbet (Basanta).

The book: *Flights* is a novel about travel in the twenty-first century and human anatomy, broaching life, death, motion and migration... this is the introduction to the book by Olga Tokarczuk. The author brings a hyper-awareness of the physical and the mental lives of the book's denizens which obliquely resonate with the travails of the body and mind in the time of Corona. I am also making some preparatory images for a painting which attempts to reflect on these conditions.













This is part of a series called 'Thoughts from the Studio' initiated by the Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi. Published here in collaboration with the gallery.

Images and text © Ranbir Kaleka.

The Tale of a Chinar Tree

K. Satchidanandan



Rollie Mukherjee, 'Inscribed', mixed media on paper, 28.5 x 21", 2013

*Jis khak ke sammeer mein hai
Aatish-e-chinar
Mumkin naheen ki sard ho
Voh khak-e- arjumand*

(In the conscience of which particle of dust there is the fire of Chinar, that heavenly dust can never feel cold)

-Muhammad Iqbal

I was born in this dust
With fire that can never cool

A holy man's hands planted me here
Six hundred years ago
I blossomed even in droughts
Provided shade to people in summer
And warmth in winter
Herb for hurts,
A place for children's play,
A rendezvous for lovers.

My core has memories
Just as my hollows shelter birds
I learnt my many postures from Patanjali
Panini taught my branches
Wind's grammar.
The semiotics of my stem
Comes from Abhinavagupta.
The murmur of my leaves
Echo Sharangadev's hindol.
My roots are hairs standing on end
Listening to the verses of
Lal Ded, Habba Khatoon and Arnimal
My whirlwinds turned
The freedom-songs of Rahman Rahi
Into flames kissing the sky
Shaivites and Sufis alike
Meditated under my green umbrella.

I talk ceaselessly to
The dead and the living
Talking, I change colour:
Yellow, mauve, red.

There are only Kashmiris here,
Those who hug one another

During Id and Baishakhi
Breaking every stone-wall and thorny hedge
Those who grow lotuses
In their hearts for the birthdays
Of Patmasambhav and Guru Nanak
And paint the lake with shikaras
Those who eat from the same plate,
Drink the same water and
Speak the same language of kindness.
Their religion was liberty
And their flag, love.

They studied their alphabets like this:
Anantnag Arnia
Badgam Baramulla Bishna
Chenani Devsar Gunderbar Hiranagar
Kishtwar Kulgam Kupwara
Kathvua Kargil
Lakhanpur Leh Manda
Pahalgam Pulwama Poonch
Shopian Sopore Srinagar
Talpara Uri Udhampur
Yarippora Vijaypur...

But now only blood spots remain
The blood of a land being
Mutilated and partitioned
The red blood of fleeing youth
Entangled in thorns
The brown blood of the nail-marks
Of the disgraced bodies of women
The purple blood flowing
From tender hearts torn by bullets:
That is what reddens my leaves now.

The spreading endless variations of red
From the eyes of children, once bluish,
Now pierced by pellets:
Blood,
In every season.

(Note: Chinar is a symbol of Kashmir, a tree whose leaves grow yellow, mauve and red in autumn. A tree with medicinal value, chinar adorns Persian gardens too. Islam saints like Mir Sayyid Ali had planted chinars centuries ago that are still alive in Kashmir. For Hindus, it is a tree sacred to goddess Bhavani. Chinars often have huge hollows in which children play and lovers secretly meet. It is also called the 'speaking tree' as wind on its leaves seems to be talking. Chinars have also been planted on the graveyards of hundreds of unknown Kashmiri martyrs slain by soldiers. The proper nouns in the poem refer to place names and names of the great poets, singers, saints and scholars from Kashmir).

ഒരു ചിനാർമരത്തിന്റെ ആത്മകഥ

ജിസ് വാക്ക് കേ സമ്മീർ മേം ഹൈ/ ആതിഷ്-ഇ-ചിനാർ
മുംകിൻ നഹീ കി സർദ്ദ് ഹോ/ വോ വാക്ക്-ഇ-അർജുമണ്ട്
(ഏതു പൊടിയുടെ മന:സാക്ഷിയിൽ/ ചിനാറിന്റെ അഗ്നിയുണ്ടോ
ആ സ്വർഗീയ ധൂളിക്ക്/ തണുക്കുക സാധ്യമല്ല)
- മൊഹമ്മദ് ഇക്ബാൽ

ഈ മണ്ണിലാണ് ഞാൻ ജനിച്ചത്,
ഒരിക്കലും തണുക്കാത്ത തീയുമായി,
അറുനൂറ്റിലേറെ വർഷം മുൻപ്
ഒരു പുണ്യവാന്റെ കൈകൾ എന്നെ ഇവിടെ നട്ടു.
വരൾച്ചകളിലും ഞാൻ തളിരണിഞ്ഞു
വേനലിൽ തണലായി
മഞ്ഞുകാലത്ത് ചൂടായി
മുറിവിന്നു മരുന്നായി
കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾക്ക് കളിയിടമായി
കാമുകർക്ക് ഒളിയിടമായി

എന്റെ പൊത്തിൽ കിളികളെന്ന പോലെ
എന്റെ കാതലിലുണ്ട് ഓർമ്മകൾ,
ഞാൻ പല നിലകൾ പഠിച്ചത്
പതഞ്ജലിയിൽ നിന്ന്

എന്റെ ചില്ലുകളെ കാറ്റിന്റെ
വ്യാകരണം പഠിപ്പിച്ചത് പാണിനി.
എന്റെ തടിയുടെ പൊരുൾ
അഭിനവഗുപ്തന്റെത്
എന്റെ ദലമർമ്മരങ്ങളിൽ
ശാരംഗദേവിന്റെ ഹിന്ദോളം
എന്റെ വേരുകൾ ലാൽ ദെട്ടിന്റെയും
ഹബ്ബാ ഖാത്തുണിന്റെയും അർണിമാലിന്റെയും
കവിതകൾ കേട്ട കോരിത്തരിപ്പുകൾ
എന്റെ ചുഴലിക്കൊറ്റുകൾ
റഹ്മാൻ രാഹിയുടെ സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യഗീതങ്ങളെ
മാനം മുട്ടുന്ന ജ്വാലകളാക്കി
ശൈവരും സൂഫികളും എന്റെ
കുടക്കീഴിലിരുന്നു ധ്യാനിച്ചു

ഞാൻ മരിച്ചവരോടും
ജീവിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നവരോടും
നിരന്തരം സംസാരിക്കുന്നു
സംസാരിച്ചു സംസാരിച്ചു നിറം മാറുന്നു:
മഞ്ഞ, ചുവപ്പ്, ഊതനിറം.

ഇവിടെ കാശ്മീരികളേയുള്ളൂ
എല്ലാ മുൾവേലികളും പൊളിച്ചു
ഈദിനും ബൈശാഖിക്കും
അന്വേഷം കെട്ടിപ്പുണരുന്നവർ
പത്മസംഭവന്റെയും ഗുരു നാനാക്കിന്റെയും
പിറന്നാളുകൾക്ക് ഹൃദയത്തിൽ
താമര വിരിയിച്ച് ശിക്കാരകൾ കൊണ്ട്
തടാകത്തെ ചായം പൂശുന്നവർ
ഒരേ പാത്രത്തിൽ നിന്നുണ്ട്
ഒരേ നീർ കുടിച്ച് ഒരേ കരുണയുടെ
ഭാഷ സംസാരിച്ചവർ
അവരുടെ മതം സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യമായിരുന്നു,
അവരുടെ കൊടി സ്നേഹം.

അവർ അക്ഷരമാല പഠിച്ചത് ഇങ്ങിനെ:
അനന്ത് നാഗ് അർണിയാ

ഉരി ഉധംപൂർ കംവാ കാർഗിൽ,
 കിഷ്ട്യാർ കുൽഗാം,
 കുപ്യാരാ ഗുന്ദേർബർ ചേനാനി
 തൽപ്പാന ദേവ്സർ
 പഹൽഗാവ് പൂൽവാമാ പൂഞ്ച്
 ബദ്ഗാം ബാരാമുള്ള ബിഷ്നാ മണ്ഡാ
 യാരിപ്പോരാ ലവൻപൂർ ലേ
 വിജയ്പൂർ ശോപ്പിയാൻ
 സോപ്പോർ ശ്രീനഗർ ഹീരാനഗർ...

ഇന്നിപ്പോൾ എല്ലാം ചോരപ്പാടുകൾ മാത്രമായി
 വെട്ടി മുറിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന ഒരു നാടിന്റെ രക്തം
 ഓടിപ്പോകുന്നവരുടെ തരുണശരീരങ്ങൾ
 മുൾപ്പടർപ്പുകളിൽ കുരുങ്ങിയ അരുണരക്തം
 അവമാനിക്കപ്പെട്ട പെണ്ണുടലുകളിലെ
 നഖപ്പാടുകളിലെ തവിട്ടുനിറമുള്ള രക്തം
 വെടിയുണ്ടയേറ്റ ലോലഹൃദയങ്ങളിൽ
 നിന്നൊഴുകുന്ന ഊതനിറമായ രക്തം ,
 അതാണിപ്പോൾ എന്റെ
 ഇലകളെ ചുകുപ്പിക്കുന്നത്:
 പടർന്നു കയറുന്ന,
 അനന്തദേദങ്ങളുള്ള, ചുകുപ്പ്,
 മുളളാണികൾ തറഞ്ഞു കയറിയ
 കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളുടെ, നീലയായിരുന്ന
 കൊച്ചുകണ്ണുകളിൽ നിന്ന്
 രക്തം
 എല്ലാ ഋതുക്കളിലും.

(കുറിപ്പ്: ചിനാർ - കാശ്മീരിയിൽ ബുന്ദി-ഊർപ്പമില്ലാത്ത മണ്ണിലും വളരുന്ന കാശ്മീരിന്റെ പ്രതീകമായ വൃക്ഷമാണ്. നമ്മുടെ പപ്പായയെപ്പോലുള്ള ഇലകൾ, ശരത്കാലത്ത് മഞ്ഞയും ചുകുപ്പുമാകുന്നു. ഔഷധമൂല്യമുള്ള ഈ വൃക്ഷം പേഴ്സ്യൻ ഉദ്യാനങ്ങളുടെ അലങ്കാരമാണ്. ഹിന്ദുക്കൾക്ക് ഇത് ഭവാനീദേവിയുടെ പുണ്യവൃക്ഷമാണ്, മീർ സയ്യിദ് ആലിയെപ്പോലുള്ള ഇസ്ലാം പുണ്യവാന്മാർ നട്ട അറുനൂറും എഴുനൂറുംകൊല്ലം പഴക്കമുള്ള ചിനാർ മരങ്ങൾ ഇപ്പോഴും കാഷ്മീരിലുണ്ട്. മുതിർന്ന ചിനാറിന്റെ വലിയ പൊത്തുകളിൽ കുട്ടികൾ കളിക്കുകയും ഇണകൾ ഒത്തു കൂടുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.' നമ്മുടെ ആലിലകൾ പോലെ കാറ്റിൽ മർമ്മരങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കുന്നതിനാൽ "സംസാരിക്കുന്നമരം' എന്നും ചിനാറിനെ പറയാറുണ്ട്. കൊല്ലപ്പെട്ട 230 ആളുകളുടെയെങ്കിലും ജഡങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടെന്നു കരുതപ്പെടുന്ന, അടയാളപ്പെടുത്താത്ത

ശ്മാശാനങ്ങൾക്ക് മീതെയും ചിനാർ മരങ്ങൾ വളർത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട് കാശ്മീരിന്റെ കവികൾ,
യോഗികൾ, സംഗീതജ്ഞർ, കാവ്യമീമാംസകർ, സ്ഥലപ്പേരുകൾ ഇവ കവിതയിൽ സൂചിപ്പിക്കുന്നു).

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

Record Karo'na

Bridge Institute

Even in the face of a pandemic, people all over the world have been finding strength in each other to wade through the ongoing uncertain times. It is amazing to see how the human race has always found diverse ways to ensure its survival through hope, faith and resilience.

Record Karo'na campaign aims to fuel this remarkable spirit of the human race to not only defeat the pandemic on a psychological front but also to **record** their lived experiences through art and literature. People contribute poems/sketches/photographs/stories that capture their emotional responses to the pandemic.

The campaign was founded by Tabish Haider Gazi, a Kashmir-based artist and entrepreneur, who with the support of the Bridge Institute, Singapore, established collaborations with several organisations including Guftugu.

The following are some of these works.



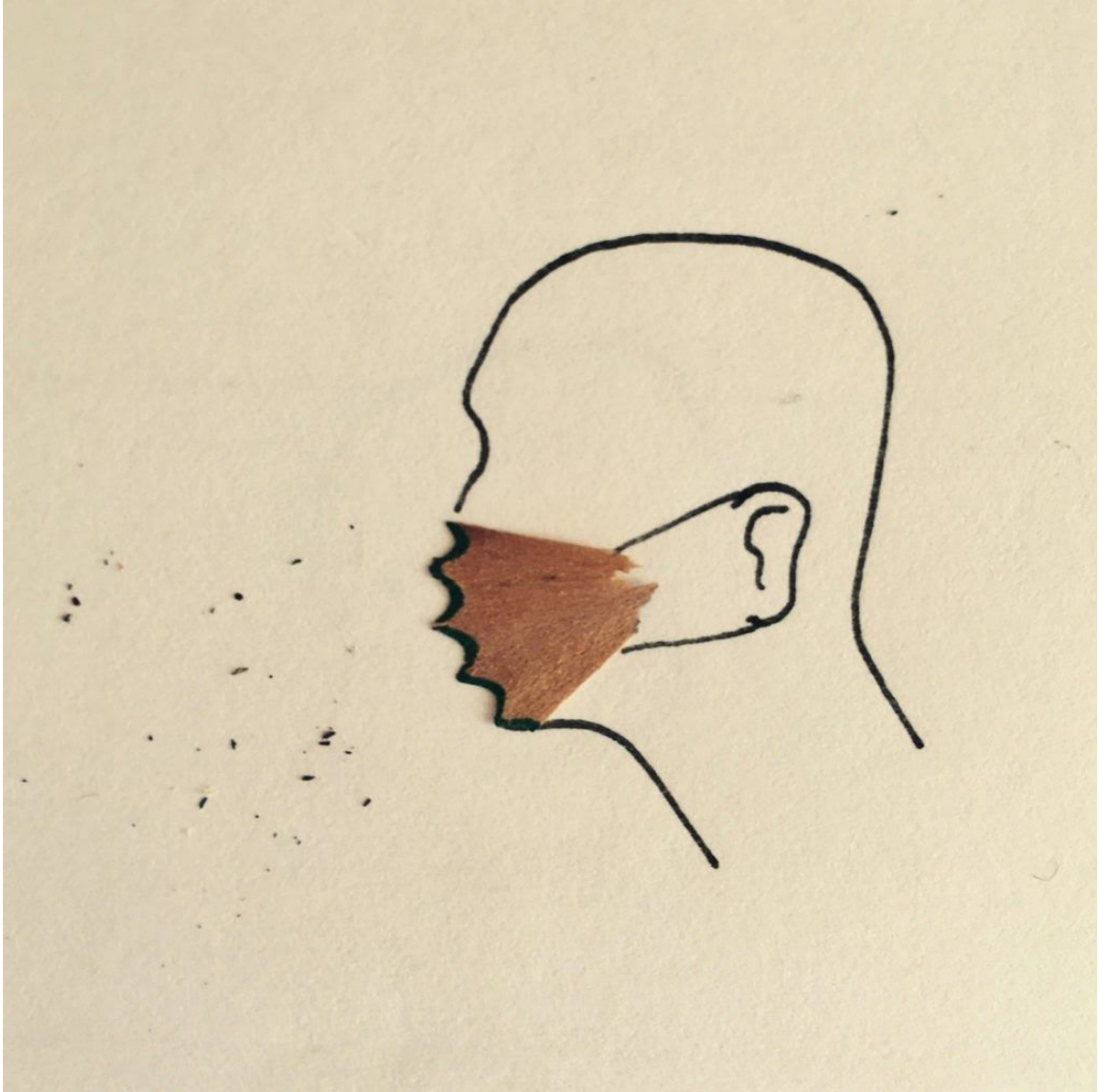
Kafeel Shalla



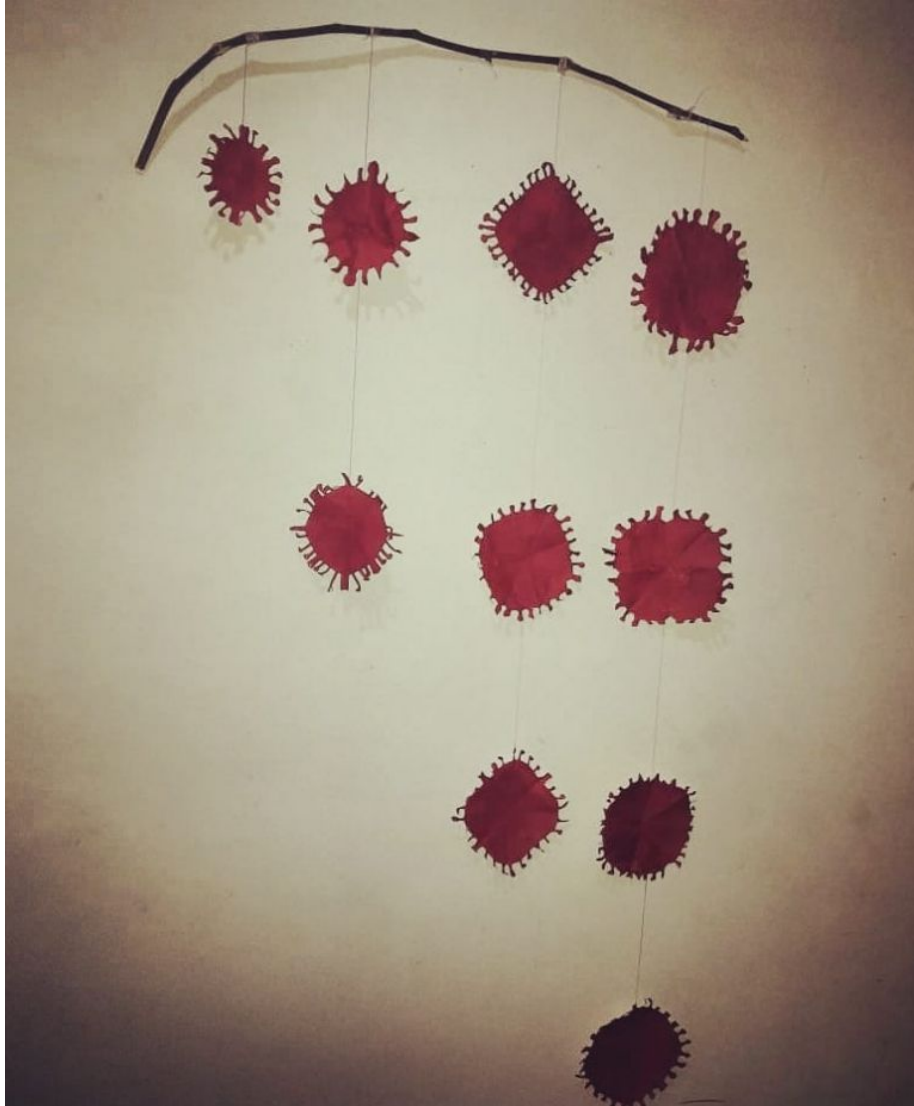
Mohammad Ubaid Shah



Muazima Bhat



Salman Gazi



Muazima Zehra

Organisations like Mission Better Tomorrow and Sahapedia are also part of the campaign.

Entries can be emailed at recordkarona@gmail.com

Images © Bridge Institute.

A Conversation with Sketchbooks

Thoughts from the studio

Arpita Singh

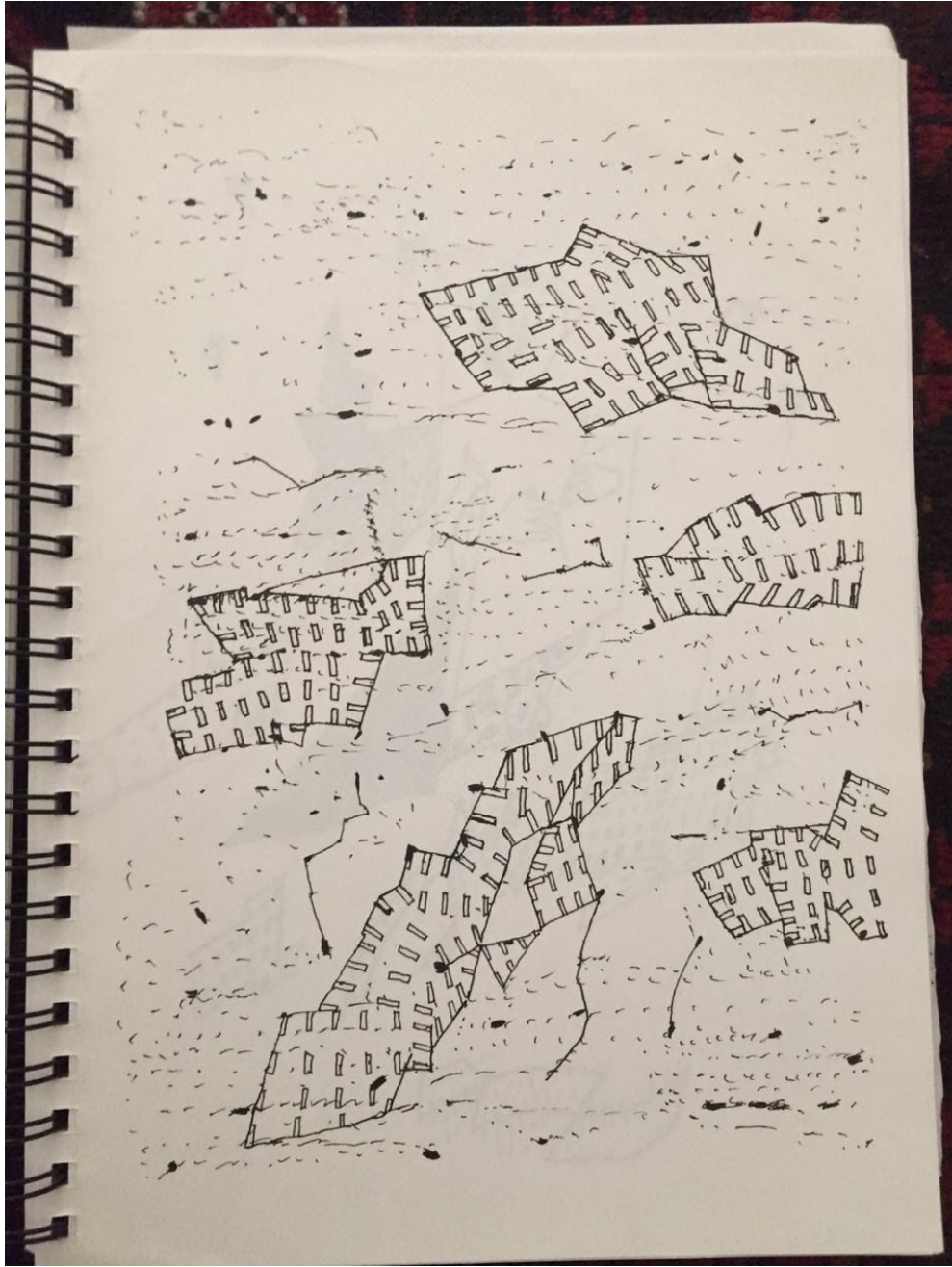
Quarantine or not, the days are the same for me. Working and reading and gossiping. Although there is not much to gossip about. Since human beings are not around much, there are a lot of birds almost all the time. Or maybe because the winter is gone and I find them busy collecting materials for their home to welcome (!) the babies who will be arriving soon. It is fun to watch how they get busy in this baby rearing business. Good that they don't have a collective education centre. Everything is very individual.

By the way, there was a picture of a peacock (sorry peahen actually) roaming on the streets of Nizamuddin in the newspaper. And of course, one has to keep track of what is happening to which tree. The young mango tree in front of our house is laden with mango blossoms. Wonder how long they will last! One dust storm, and half the tree will be empty.

I was also occupied with a book by Montek Singh. Now that it is finished, I'm reading a biography of Dilip Kumar. I have already read it several times, but then I am a big fan. The other hero of mine, Novak Djokovich, is not in the news nowadays. Since all sports activities are cancelled, he too has retired to the rest room.

In the evenings, the sketch books start a conversation. So another activity begins. And , all the time, any time, Ella is there on the other end of the telephone. Art, literature, politics, history, archaeology, garden and grocery, to discuss anything, she is right there.

So my quarantine has turned into a football ground with goalposts set anywhere. ANYWHERE.





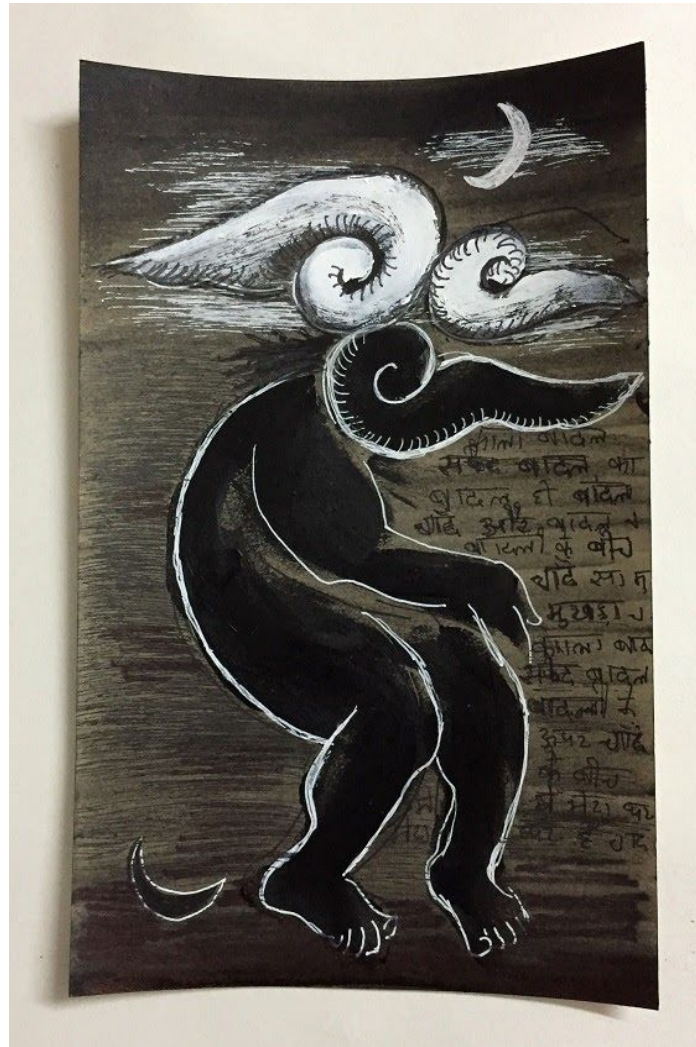


This is part of a series called 'Thoughts from the Studio' initiated by the Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi. Published here in collaboration with the gallery.

Images and text © Arpita Singh.

The Train

K. Satchidanandan



Kanchan Chander, 'Drawing 42', Acrylic and Pen on Paper, 2018, 4 X 6 inches

That train is going to my village;
But I am not in it
Its rails are inside me
Its wheels are on my chest
And its whistle is my scream.

I won't be there
When it comes back to take me
But my breath will travel
Seated on its roof,
guarding my corpse.

As the train stops at my village,
My breath will enter my body
and ride my waiting bicycle
along the old familiar lanes.
My children will come running
As they hear its bell:
“ Abbu is here! Abbu is here!”

In which language can I tell them
It is my dead body that has arrived?
Of heaven, or of hell?
I am somewhere in between.

Let the well talk, or the pond.
If water refuses to speak
Let my breath enter a crow
On the drumstick tree on my courtyard
And tell them the truth.

തീവണ്ടി

ആ തീവണ്ടി പോകുന്നത്
എന്റെ ഗ്രാമത്തിലേക്കാണ്
പക്ഷെ അതിൽ ഞാനില്ല
എന്റെ ഉള്ളിലാണ് അതോടുന്ന റെയിൽപാളം
അതിന്റെ ചക്രങ്ങൾ എന്റെ നെഞ്ചിൽ
എന്റെ നിലവിളി അതിന്റെ ചുളം

അത് എന്നെ കൊണ്ടുപോകാൻ

തിരിച്ചു വരുമ്പോൾ ഞാനുണ്ടാവില്ല
എങ്കിലും എന്റെ പ്രാണൻ
ആ വണ്ടിയുടെ മേലെ ഇരുന്നു യാത്ര ചെയ്യും ,
എന്റെ ജഡം അരികിൽ കിടത്തിക്കൊണ്ട്.
അത് ഗ്രാമത്തിലെത്തി എന്റെ ഉള്ളിൽ കയറി
പഴയ ഇടവഴികളിലൂടെ സൈക്കിൾ ഓടിക്കും
അതിന്റെ ബെൽ കേട്ട് എന്റെ കുട്ടികൾ
ഓടി വരും, 'അബ്ബു വന്നു! അബ്ബു വന്നു!'

വന്നത് എന്റെ ജഡമാണെന്ന്
ഞാനേതു ഭാഷയിൽ അവരോടു പറയും?
നരകത്തിന്റെയോ സ്വർഗ്ഗത്തിന്റെയോ?
ഞാൻ അവയ്ക്കിടയിലാണല്ലോ.

കിണർ സംസാരിക്കട്ടെ , അല്ലെങ്കിൽ കുളം.
ജലം മിണ്ടുന്നില്ലെങ്കിൽ
മുറ്റത്തെ മുരിക്കുമരത്തിലെ കാക്കയുടെ
ഉള്ളിലിരുന്നു എന്റെ പ്രാണൻ
അവരോടു സത്യം പറയട്ടെ.

(Translated from Malayalam by the poet)

A Reminder of our Fragility as Humans

Thoughts from the Studio

Faiza Butt

The current pandemic has had a considerable impact upon my practice. I share my studio with other artists and we all come into regular contact as we share utilities and other social spaces within the studio. The fear of infection resulted in rules on how many of us should be in the studio at one time. We were rotating our presence to maintain the recommended 2 meter spacing. It was creating an inconsistency in my work hence I have set up my studio at home. Working from home can be erratic and invasive and that has a degree of impact on one's work, and productivity.

Ironically, self isolation is not new to most artists. Most artists work solo, and the social isolation has not had an emotional or psychological impact on my state of mind. The collective uncertainty and disruption of routine has created moments of reflection. These times are a reminder of our fragility as humans.

As a diasporic artist, I am used to changes and a transient state of existence. My work has addressed our vulnerability in the past. These extraordinary times have had an impact on all of us. It has reminded us of our collective faith and our sense of responsibility towards each other and our planet. I believe I may address concepts that affect us humans collectively, and focus on the universality of issues that the current uncertainty has revealed. Perhaps it's too early to assess if it has had a life changing impact on me, I believe it will reveal itself in time.







This is part of a series called 'Thoughts from the Studio' initiated by the Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi. Published here in collaboration with the gallery.

Images and text © Faiza Butt.

Four poems by Ganga Sati

Translated by Hemang Desai



Kanchan Chander, 'A Woman', Guache on paper, 12 X 16 inches, 1979.

1.

Mounts may rock

Mounts may rock, for once,
Cosmos may come crashing down.
He likes the one who doesn't stray,
Even in most torrid of times.

Hiccups of spirits, low and high,
Can't get her, she's a braveheart.
Guru's vachan is her only beacon,
She sails selfless without a care.

Company of the wise gives her a high,
She swoons like a sot day and night.
For resolves and routes, don't give a damn,
Vicious is maya's hex, snap out of it, bai.

Be such a devotee, if you so desire,
Confide in the legacy of vachan.
Says Sati Ganga, listen O Panbai,
Guru's grace is your supreme haven.

2.

Thread your beads

Thread your beads in bright of the bolt,
You ne'er know when the pitch dark'll pall.
Days will drift away in a blink,
Time will devour breaths, once and for all.

It's an old mystery, woman,
Well beyond the grasp of a half-wit.
Want to know His little game?
Put your ego aside, that's it.

Shed all your chains, come quick,
See for yourself the nature of soul;
I'll unveil the oneness of opposites,
And cast you in a novel mould.

First among Gods, guru is above cosmos,

Follow me in his holy terrain.
Says Sati Ganga, listen O Panbai,
No airs there, nothing to feign.

3.

Get Ready to Live like a Pauper

Get ready to live like a pauper,
If you're serious about bhakti.
Melt away your ego,
Feet of the guru is where lies mukti.

The world of the divine has no place
For caste, gender or race
Shed this phantom chain,
Be cool and take it easy, man.

The mantle of His woman is for those to claim,
Who are blind to flaws of others.
What do they care for hope and hanker,
Simply revel in abiding faith, sweet sister.

Be such a devotee, if you so desire,
And confide in the power of vachan.
Says Sati Ganga, listen O Panbai
Don't settle for anything less, be His woman.

4.

You're One

You're one, He and you,
That says it all.
Sup this secret nectar,
In heady blues, dissolve.

Can't have enough of His dapper looks, true,
What is sin, if one's helpless by heart.
His company is the thrill of your song,
Ecstasy lies beyond letters on your tongue.

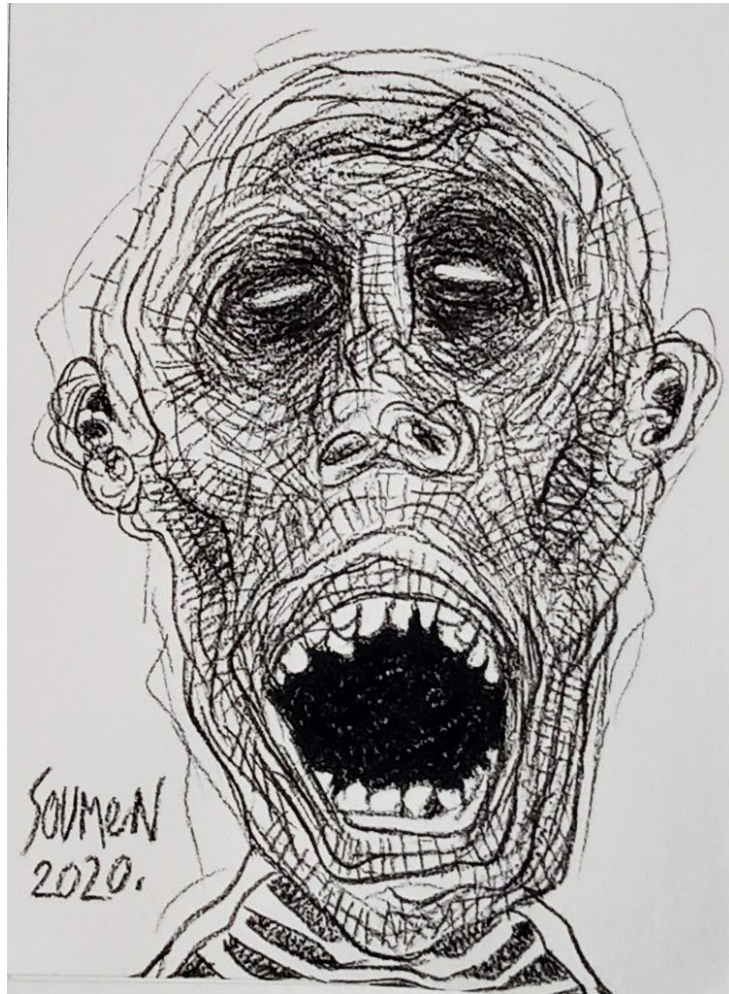
All illusions shatter to smithereens,
Once you shed your cast.
Meet your true self,
As it descends from heaven upwards.

Contemplating his form is sheer bliss,
Warps or wefts of mind, nothing is amiss.
Says Sati Ganga, listen O Panbai,
Nirvana is your soul's supreme seat.

Read the Gujarati originals [here](#).

Art Bodies

Soumen Bhowmick



'Screamer', charcoal on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020



'Demonic Urge', charcoal on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020



'Isolated Being', charcoal on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020



'Migrant's dream, Charcoal, graphite, coffee on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020



'Ek Roti Mayli Sii', Graphite, coffee on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020



'The Trophy', Charcoal and inkwash on paper, 15 x 21 cms, 2020

Till it's time to meet again

Thoughts from the Studio

Anju Dodiya

I am not isolated enough. I am with my family. I am grateful, but complete solitude is what feeds my art. This is different.

In the beautiful mornings, hearing the birds and the squirrels, (and nowadays, monkeys too in Ghatkopar), I forget about the crisis.

At 11ish the screens light up, statistics loom and there is news of storms (geographic and political), that vegetables are scarce. The gray abandoned building sites next door remind me of the absences. Where are they and what must they be doing? The istrywala, the night watchman, the cement clad labourers and the rickshaw walas...

I cook and clean, pretending that it is a meditative practice. Lying is legitimate when it heals.

Later, in my studio downstairs, I generously drench the garden. It reciprocates with happier thoughts and many flowers. I sit down, trying to work and find myself drawing masked faces, safe enclosures for the self. To protect my breath from yours, and yours from mine. Till it's time to meet again.

Nights are spent revisiting Bergman, Tarkovsky and Kurosawa; escaping dystopia and embracing a black and white lucidity.

The great Venetian painter Tintoretto died in a plague pandemic and Munch survived the Spanish flu. I can only laugh at my audacity in February, when I had told a friend that I was planning to do some joyous paintings. What the hell are joyous paintings? Munch gives me joy, most Italian pietas make me sing and the bleak wartime still-lives of Picasso are sumptuous.

So will we sustain our joy? What lies ahead?"





This is part of a series called 'Thoughts from the Studio' initiated by the Vadehra Art Gallery, Delhi. Published here in collaboration with the gallery.

Images and text © Anju Dodiya.

Dance Unlocked — A Coming Together

Darpana and Natarani

That was a world of greed, of want, of winning, of more, more, more. This must be the world of caring, of giving, of sharing, of cooperation and generosity. Towards this new world, Darpana and Natarani bring you the dance of togetherness and reaching out. May the spirit of dance liberate you.



Concept: Mallika Sarabhai

Direction, editing and graphics: Yadavan Chandran

Music: Tanmoy Bose – Rivulets of Innocence

Featuring (in order of appearance):

Tanmoy Bose

Kumudini Lakhia

VP Dhananjayan
Madhavi Mudgal
Astad Deboo
Anita Sharma
Rukmini Vijayakumar
Mandeep Raikhy
Anita Ratnam
Rima Kallingal
Sandeep Soparrkar
Geeta Chandran
Revanta Sarabhai
Jayachandran Palazhy
Mallika Sarabhai
Vaibhav Arekar
Shovana Narayan
Rama Vaidyanathan
Aditi Mangaldas
Priti Patel
Ileana Citaristi
Hemabharathy Palani
Shanta Dhananjayan

Video © Darpana and Natarani.

Presented by Darpana Academy and its amphitheatre Natarani, this video is shared here with permission from Mallika Sarabhai.

Contributors

Born in 1964 in Mumbai, India, **Anju Dodiya** trained and received her fine arts degree from the Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai. Her recent solo exhibitions include those at Vadehra Art Gallery at Bikaner House, New Delhi, 2018; the Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris, 2016; Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, 2012; Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore & Bodhi Art, Singapore, Mumbai, New York, 2008, to name a few. She is also represented in several private and public collections in India and abroad, including the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Mumbai; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Described as a figurative artist and a modernist, Delhi-based **Arpita Singh** still makes it a point to stay tuned in to traditional Indian art forms and aesthetics, like miniaturist painting and different forms of folk art, employing them in her work regularly. Since her first solo exhibition in 1972 at Kunika Chemould Gallery, New Delhi, Singh's work has been featured regularly in shows of Indian art held in the country and internationally. She has also won several awards including at the 1981–82 All-India Drawing Exhibition in Chandigarh, the 1987 Algeria Biennale, and the 1991 Parishad Samman from the Sahitya Kala Parishad, New Delhi.

Born in 1973, **Faiza Butt** trained at the NCA in Lahore and the Slade School of Art in London. Her work has been shown in various museums and included in several publications. Her recent show titled 'Pehlwan' at the Grosvenor Vadehra, London, was very well received and served as a step towards improving the Indo-Pak relationship through cultural connections. The artist lives and works in London, UK.

Ganga Sati (ca. 18th-19th century) is a celebrated medieval bhakti poet of the *loka dharma* tradition that mainly developed in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat. She sang fifty-two bhajans to her daughter-in-law, Panbai, which constitute the discourse of the Mahapanth cult and remain a powerful presence of cultural memory in Gujarati households even today.

Gulammohammed Sheikh (born 1937) is a painter, poet and art critic from Gujarat. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1983 and the Padmabhushan in 2014 for his contribution to the field of art.

Hemang Desai, a bi-lingual poet working in Gujarati and English. He has translated contemporary Marathi poetry into Gujarati and contemporary Gujarati poetry and short fiction into English. His Gujarati translation of Arun Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems* was published recently. He can be reached at hemangde@gmail.com

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

Kanchan Chander was born in New Delhi in 1957. She was trained in Painting and Printmaking from the College of Art, New Delhi. She has participated in prestigious exhibitions in India and abroad.

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.

Rollie Mukherjee is an artist and critic based in Baroda. She studied at Visva Bharathi, Shantiniketan, and the Maharaja Sayyaji Rao University in Baroda. Her work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group shows in India and abroad.

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

Soumen Bhowmick is a visual artist, independent lecturer, art blogger, cultural activist and writer.

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