

Prabha

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

प्रभा



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Click of Care

Pg 4-14

It is the worst of times, it is the best of times. Help and generosity have been in abundance in the times of COVID-19. This edition salutes those who have been reaching out to the distressed

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INSIDE



Prabha
खैतान



MANISHA JAIN
Communications & Branding Chief,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

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The New Normal

The words of Late Dr. Prabha Khaitan, "*Karma hi jeevan hai (Work is life)*" resonates as a mantra within our team in full spirit as we continue to serve and connect with lives without a pause despite the present lockdown scenario. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our team members for their zeal and support in successfully turning our virtual world into reality and being such a strong support system for each of our initiatives. There's never been a dull moment. We have organised more than our usual number of events this month, almost 30 programmes spanning children's activities, book launches, live dance and music recitals and much more, besides our literary sessions.

It's been a busy month with a whirl of activities and sessions almost every day. The deluge of virtual events that connected our patrons with the cultural and literary world spanned not just 30 cities in India and London, Oxford and Birmingham in the UK; we also initiated our events for our patrons in New York. The city of Jalandhar will be a part of our endeavours as well from the coming month. While we adjust to the NEW NORMAL, the Foundation has tried its best to keep everyone's spirits up with a flurry of interesting live events, apart from the usual enriching sessions which the patrons cherish. The Foundation is always striving for diverse literary associations from across the globe and in keeping with this aim, we have conceived The Universe Writes, an exclusive virtual session with international writers, conversing and interacting on their life and work.

On the other hand, Ehsaas Women across India have been very busy trying to do their bit to reach out to people to try and ease their plight. Most of them have shied away from any kind of publicity and have been silently toiling in their effort to touch lives; after a great deal of persuasion a few of them shared some of their work as a part of the 'Click of Care' campaign in the hope of inspiring more people to come forward and lend a helping hand. The Foundation, too, has been involved in various social and community work aimed at not just the lesser privileged, but the elderly as well. Not only human lives, we have also ensured that our four-legged friends are cared for.

As we slip into this "new normal" amidst new experiences and adjustments, with positivity and hope, the world of words binds us together, stronger and richer. Do keep writing to us with your experiences and thoughts. As you know you can keep abreast of our activities on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram as well. Keep writing to us at newsletter@pkfoundation.org.

Meanwhile, do care for your health and follow appropriate health advisories.

In Our Next Issue



We've played the game at picnics, we've played it on road trips, we've played it to while away time and we've turned it into a serious competition. What better way to stay connected in the lockdown and leave all troubles behind for a little while than a rousing game of *antakhshari* online?

In our next issue, we feature the filmy fun that unravelled at the antakhshari session hosted by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for the **Ehsaas Women of India**, which saw over 50 **Ehsaas Women** joining in.

[SNAPSHOT
OF THE MONTH]



Sundeep Bhutoria and his daughter, Aavya, fed stray dogs and helped them during the lockdown as part of our Click of Care initiative.

Happy Birthday

Prabha WISHES **EHSAA**S WOMEN BORN IN MAY

10th May



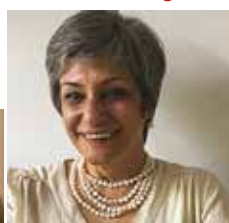
Shraddha Murdia

21st May



Neelima Dalmia
Adhar

27th May



Preeti Gill

29th May



Apra Kuchhal

30th May



Shubh Singhvi

31st May



Vinti Kathuria

Monica Bhagwagar, Nagpur



Migrant labourers are perhaps among the hardest hit by the pandemic. Without food, shelter and employment, many have been forced to traverse miles on foot to reach their homes. Moved by their distress, **Ehsaas** Woman of Nagpur, Monica Bhagwagar, has helped provide

refuge for labourers from Chandrapur and Gondia in Maharashtra, as well as Hyderabad and Rajasthan. Colleges and hostels have been converted into temporary shelters, like the Tuli College of Hotel Management, Nagpur. Sanitisers, food, sheets and clothing have been arranged for the labourers.

I cannot even begin to tell you the state these migrant labourers are in. My heart especially goes out to the women, some pregnant, some very old. The cops are doing their job but they, too, are exhausted. We have converted colleges and hostels into shelters, and have been looking after the migrant labourers. The help that is coming in is overwhelming.



Praneet Bubbar and Sheetal Khanna, Amritsar



Praneet Bubbar

Ehsaas Women of Amritsar, Praneet Bubbar and Sheetal Khanna, have been helping many cope with the coronavirus crisis. Their organisation, Phulkari Women of Amritsar, an associate of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, is distributing dry ration to migrant labourers and daily-wage earners, and providing hygiene kits and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to healthcare professionals. The two have also joined hands with Golden Temple Kar Seva to feed 400 daily-wage labourers in Islamabad Nagar and Verka in Amritsar, and 150 to 200 migrant labourers from Bihar. They have also been looking after street animals during the lockdown.



Sheetal Khanna



Nidhi Garg, Bhubaneswar



Ehsaas Woman of Bhubaneswar, Nidhi Garg, has been distributing masks during the COVID-19 outbreak. She has already handed out 3,000 washable and reusable cotton masks and 2,000 more are in the making. Garg procured

cloth from a friend and hired a few tailors to get the masks stitched. The cloth masks were initially distributed in slums. The choice of material ensured that the masks could be reused and did not add to the city's waste.

When I initially became aware of the coronavirus and realised the importance of masks in combatting its spread, I felt the urge to do something about it. The country was in complete lockdown and I couldn't have procured masks from any other state, so I knew I had to make them in my own city. There was only one thought behind the initiative and it was to help as many people as I could in my own small way. I have always believed in Amelia Earhart's words, 'A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees.'



Seema Singh, Ranchi



Many daily-wage labourers have been struggling to survive because of the pandemic and the lockdown.

Ehsaas Woman of Ranchi, Seema Singh, has been focusing all

her efforts on providing food for labourers. She has been organising meals for more than 700 people for more than 15 days and plans to continue her initiative until the lockdown ends.

मेरे घर के कुछ दूर एक बस्ती है जिससे मैं बहुत पहले से जुड़ी हुई हूँ, लॉक डाउन के समय सब कुछ बंद हो जाने से उन्हें काफ़ी कठिनाइयों का सामना करना पड़ा। मैं कई संस्थाओं से जुड़ी हुई हूँ, मुझे खाना खिलाने का मौका कई जगहों पे मिला। ये सारे अनुभव काफ़ी मार्मिक थे, जो शब्दों में नहीं कह सकती। मुझे ज़मीनी स्तर पर कार्य करने का मौका मिला। मैं बचपन से ही मदर टेरेसा के जीवन से प्रभावित रही हूँ। मैंने अनाथालयों में, एस.जी.वी.स., और रेनबो होम्स में भी काम किया। अपने एन.जी.ओ के द्वारा भी लोगों की मदद की। मानवता धर्म से बड़ा कोई धर्म नहीं, और ना ही कोई सेवा है।



Pooja Agarwal, Ahmedabad



With the number of COVID-infected people on the rise across the nation, and many people suffering loss of employment and livelihood, many people are relying on donations from concerned citizens. Pooja Agarwal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Ahmedabad, is on a mission to provide 3,000 food packets every day to those in need during this difficult time.

I run an NGO where we look after a child's holistic needs. So, we made sure that our children's families had enough food. The parents of the kids were very cooperative in maintaining social distancing and coming to our NGO at odd hours, despite the lockdown. There was a cry for help from people who had no means of earning because of the lockdown and who knew me personally. Distributing food to them gave me a lot of solace. Each family recorded a voice message thanking me and the older ones sent their blessings via messages, which touched my heart.



Aakriti Periwāl, Jaipur



With the pandemic affecting millions of lives across the globe every day, the least we can do is to help those in need. Jayshree Periwāl International School, of which **Ehsaas** Woman Aakriti Periwāl is director, has given out a cheque for Rs 11 lakh as contribution to the Rajasthan CMRF COVID-19 Mitigation Fund.

As citizens, it is our duty to stand by our government in times of crisis. Believing in this philosophy, the Jayshree Periwāl Group of Schools came together to donate a substantial sum to the Rajasthan Chief Minister's Relief Fund to fight COVID-19. By supporting one another, we can help the state battle the pandemic.



Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, Jayshree Periwāl and Rupender Periwāl

Poonam Anand, Ranchi



Poonam Anand, Ehsaas Woman of Ranchi, has been making and distributing masks and has led a drive to feed the needy.

बस समय के इस दौर ने यह समझाया कि जरूरत कब, कहाँ, किसकी पड़ जाये यह कहना मुश्किल है। समाज के लिए कई वर्षों से काम किया, परन्तु इस समय लगता था जैसे यह भी कर दें, और वो भी कर लें। शुरुआती समय में तो सिर्फ़ खाना और मास्क देने की जरूरत महसूस हुई, पर वक्त के साथ आवश्यकताएँ बढ़ती जा रही थी लोगों की। मैंने अपने सामर्थ्य अनुसार जो कर सकती थी किया। बचपन में माँ ने सिलाई सिखाई थी, वो फ़ैशने-वक्त तो काम किया पर जिन्दगी बचाने में सहायक होगा यह सोचा न था। अब तो तपती धूप और बारिश दोनों की मार। नंगे पाँव और तारकोल की गर्म सड़क, कभी पानी। टूटी चप्पल ने भी जवाब दे दिया। कुछ कहने को है नहीं बस ईश्वर इतनी शक्ति दें कि काम करती रहूँ।

'प्रकृति तेरा रूठना भी जरूरी था,
इंसान का घमंड टूटना भी जरूरी था,
हर कोई खुद को भगवान समझ बैठा था,
ये शक दूर होना भी जरूरी था...!'



Malika Varma, Kolkata



Ehsaas Woman of Kolkata
Malika Varma's initiative has taken her to the port area of West Bengal to serve those in need. She has distributed cooked food, milk, soap and masks to many, setting an example of how we can help one another in times of need.



Esha Dutta, Kolkata

Hundreds of animals in cities across India have been suffering no less than the people, in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic. Under the aegis of an NGO, Esha Dutta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, has been caring for 150-odd horses in the Victoria Memorial and the Maidan area that were abandoned by owners. Dutta, along with an NGO, has also been feeding stray dogs around the city.



Being on the committee of an NGO working for stray and abandoned animals, we found the lockdown period particularly trying for street animals who had no source of food or water as all eateries and markets were shut. In particular, the 150-odd horses that would offer tonga rides in the Victoria Memorial and Maidan area suddenly found themselves alone and abandoned by their owners because of a paucity of funds. Some, unable to withstand the scorching afternoon sun, collapsed and died. This is when we stepped in and started feeding them regularly. With help from Kolkata Police (mounted police division), who contributed a few days' feed, we managed to find kind donors and were able to provide a regular supply of bran to the relieved and happy owners! We are also feeding 350-odd stray dogs and 100 cats around the city and more than 100 cows on the NGO premises.

Dona Ganguly, Kolkata

Ehsaas Woman of Kolkata and eminent Odissi dancer, Dona Ganguly, has been feeding the needy during the lockdown. She also performed a dance recital in prayer to the Almighty for the well-being of everyone during the pandemic.

We are all in a very different and difficult situation. None of us has witnessed such a situation before. All we can do is to listen to the advice given to us by the governments. Stay at home, stay safe and this is a small prayer to the Almighty so that we overcome the situation soon.



Preeti Mehta and Sushma Niraj Sethia, Jodhpur



Preeti Mehta

In times of crisis, even a small gesture of kindness can bring about a big change. Preeti Mehta and Sushma Niraj Sethia, **Ehsaas** Women of Jodhpur, worked under the aegis of an NGO to help those in distress during the pandemic. They have managed to collect Rs 3,00,000, of which Rs 1,00,000 was spent on providing food packets to the needy, Rs 1,00,000 was offered as contribution to the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund and the remaining Rs 1,00,000 was used to provide 100 kits of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including disposable overalls, gloves, caps and masks, to doctors of Mathuradas Mathur Hospital in Jodhpur. Demand for these kits is skyrocketing every day, PPE being essential for doctors, nurses and people coming in close contact with patients.



Sushma Niraj Sethia



Sethia also helped her aged dry-cleaner who lives alone. She arranged for him to get a new nebuliser and his regular medicines for two months, while also setting up a daily tiffin service for him.



Priyanka Kothari, Nagpur



Ehsaas Woman of Nagpur, Priyanka Kothari, along with a local organisation, has taken the initiative to distribute one month's ration to daily-wage labourers. She has also sponsored 10 families and donated fabric for masks that are currently being stitched and distributed.

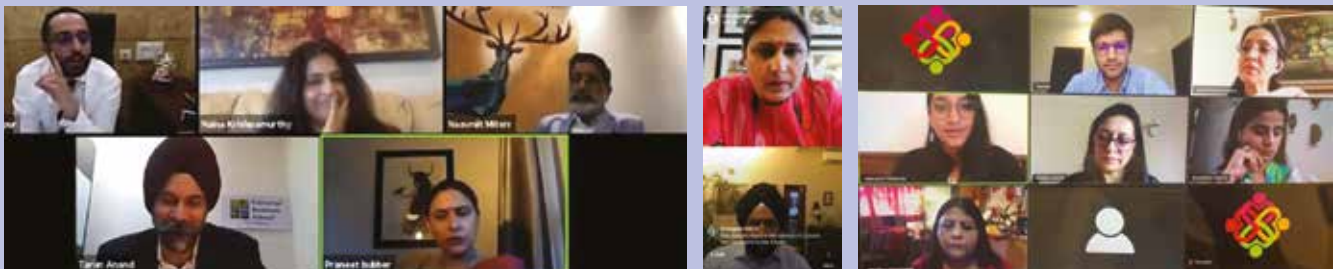
The idea of making even one life easier has always moved me to reach out to people in need. Also, hunger is for real, and needs to be dealt with on priority. The experience of helping people was humbling and made me rethink my lavish menus.



PRABHA KHAITAN FOUNDATION AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

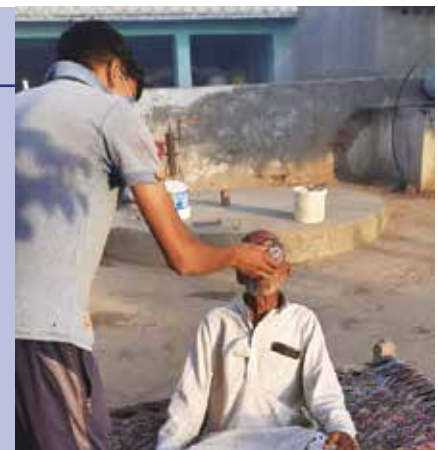
PHULKARI WOMEN OF AMRITSAR

The Phulkari Women of Amritsar have been providing relief materials, information and support wherever and whenever needed, with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** lending a helping hand in this endeavour. They launched the Help The Helpless campaign at the very onset of the lockdown to provide relief materials to the vulnerable and frontline warriors in the form of ration, hygiene kits, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) kits and more. They also conducted 14 live online interactions with officials, doctors, activists and others to disseminate appropriate information and expert knowledge. Quarantine Weekends With Phulkari was started to keep citizens upbeat during the lockdown. Events ranged from interactions with a celebrity chef and a mixologist to A-listers comics and art experts. Phulkari's MSME Thrive Drive provided support to more than 75 MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) by helping them increase their brand visibility and reach a larger audience on social media.



INDIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

The Indian Red Cross Society distributed and administered medicine in several rural districts of Rajasthan, including Nyangal Chhoti, Ramsara Tal, Dadrewa, Noohand, Hameerwas, Rampura, Gugalwa, Bhainsali, Nawa and Dokwa, with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** extending its support for this initiative. Under the leadership of the local authorities, groups went out and distributed immunity-building homeopathic medicines, which are useful in treating a wide range of conditions such as the common cold, cough, asthma and fatigue. In one village, medicines were administered to 752 people in 150 households.



SHER

The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have not only taken a toll on humans but their four-legged friends as well. Dwindling finances and public health norms have led to many strays being deprived of food and care. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** teamed up with SHER to help street animals. For 30 days, around 200 dogs and cats were fed with utmost care by team members. The food was prepared, keeping in mind the dietary requirements of the animals, and distributed in various parts of Kolkata. The initiative aims at feeding as many strays as possible.



MAYURI

As India went into lockdown and many struggled to cope with the social and financial implications of the closures, the worst of the brunt was felt by daily-wage workers. In response to requests from representatives in the areas they have worked in, Mayuri, an initiative by Calcutta Foundation, provided workers with food to help them get through the sudden loss of livelihood brought upon by the pandemic, and **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** joined them in this community work. Mayuri also created the "Breathe Safe, India" campaign, under which they distributed reusable masks in slums and villages around Kolkata. They partnered with local tailors to stitch cloth masks. This initiative helps to support local tailors as well as equips people with basic safety gear against the novel Coronavirus.



INNER WHEEL OF KOLKATA – MIDWEST

Inner Wheel Club of Calcutta Midwest undertook various community service endeavours to ensure the well-being of the less fortunate during the lockdown, and were supported by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** in this work. Responsible Charity is one such NGO that PKF joined forces with to provide groceries to slums across Kolkata.

Ishwar Sankalpa, another very old institution associated with several social service efforts in Kolkata, distributed groceries in and around Chetla Haat as part of the joint venture. Masks were distributed to slum dwellers and the children of Arunima Hospice to keep them safe during the pandemic.



Anindita Chatterjee, executive trustee of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, hands over food items and a cheque

GOONJ

Goonj provided relief kits to those most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, supported by several organisations across the country, including **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. The initiative, called Rahat Covid, is active in 23 states and Union Territories in India and has helped reach essential items and hygiene products to 71,600 families. Goonj sources ingredients for its kits from local farmers and creates opportunities for community-led work, where people can receive relief in exchange for work on projects to solve issues they care about such as road repair, cleaning water bodies, creating kitchen gardens or building bridges. This initiative has been titled Dignity for Work.



PRABHA KHAITAN FOUNDATION TEAM

In a little lane in Central Kolkata lives a mighty beast called Sheru. He is no Shere Khan from *The Jungle Book* or the Royal Bengal Tiger from *Life of Pi*. He is a little mongrel with a tawny coat but he protects that lane and its inhabitants like a king. The lockdown has been very hard on Sheru, who used to thrive on the benevolence of the local snack shops and kind residents, who greeted him with food and a friendly pat on the head. Suddenly the shops closed and the humans vanished. Sheru had no means of sustaining himself.

Thousands of strays across India suffered the effects of the lockdown. Seeing their plight, many animal lovers resolved to do their bit for the hapless creatures, be it birds, dogs, cats, goats or cattle. Here are some glimpses, shared by members of Prabha Khaitan Foundation. The PKF members and their families found great joy in feeding and helping these lovely creatures.





Divya Mathur

Divya Mathur: An Icon of Indian Diasporic Literature

Prabha Khaitan Foundation is honoured to have been associated with the prolific and talented writer Divya Mathur over many years in her endeavour to promote Hindi and other Indian literature across the borders. Her organisation, 'Vatayan', is the Foundation's associate for its activities in London.

Award-winning British-Indian author of Hindi literature, Divya Mathur, MA, FSRA, and founder of Vatayan: Poetry on South Bank, will soon receive one of India's most coveted literary awards — the Hindi Seva Samman Award, instituted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, in 1989.

Winner of the Padma Bhushan Dr Moturi Satyanarayana Award, Mathur has written a novel, six anthologies, seven collections of poetry, and has edited over half a dozen collections of stories and poems, besides translations of children's literature. Her story collection, *Akrosh*, won her the Katha-UK Award. Besides her literary oeuvre, she is the founder of Vatayan, a charity which encourages poets worldwide and works for building intercultural contact, thus

realising her worldview of engaging the diaspora of women writers.

The Hindi Seva Samman Award will be conferred by the President of India at Rashtrapati Bhavan, along with a prize money of Rs 5 lakh. The author, who is a nominated Fellow of the Royal Society

of Arts in the UK, has expressed her delight at this rare recognition from her motherland. Her zeal to pen her stories in her native language in a foreign country stems from her desire "to promote the culture and literature of that language to the country they hail from, but also enrich the diversity of the host country."

Born and brought up in Delhi, Ms. Mathur moved to the UK in 1985, where she worked at the Indian High Commission for seven years.

In her illustrious career, she was selected by Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi to join the team that established The Nehru Centre in London in 1992. She has also been recognised by the Arts Council of England in 2003 for her "outstanding contribution and innovation in the field of arts".

Divya Mathur's zeal to pen her stories in her native language in a foreign country stems from her desire 'to promote the culture and literature of that language to the country they hail from, but also enrich the diversity of the host country'



Anoop Bhargava and Susham Bedi

In Memoriam: Susham Bedi

Remembering novelist, poet, well-wisher and long-time associate of Prabha Khaitan Foundation who was instrumental in helping the Foundation build a presence in New York

एक ज्योतिपुंज चला गया

कल जब सुषम जी की बेटी पूर्वा (बेदी) की फ़ेसबुक पर यह संक्षिप्त सी पोस्ट देखी :

"Very bleak prognosis for my mom — I'll try to read any messages you post for her to hear before she passes if you post something — doing a very short hospital visit today"

तो दुःख तो हुआ, आश्चर्य नहीं। सुषम जी कई महीनों से अस्वस्थ थी। मन पूरे दिन बहुत उदास रहा। आज उस ख़बर जिस का डर था, वह सच साबित हुई। किसी भी अच्छे व्यक्ति का जाना अच्छा नहीं लगता, सुषम जी एक बहुत ही उदार, जिंदादिल, बहुमुखी प्रतिभा की धनी और हँसमुख मित्र थी।

मैं उन के परिचय में अक्सर मंच से यह कहता था कि अमेरिका में बहुत से अच्छे लेखक और कवि हैं लेकिन यदि उन सब में से किसी एक का नाम चुनना हो तो वह नाम निस्सन्देह 'सुषम बेदी' जी का ही होगा। हमें गर्व है कि हमारे पास 'सुषम बेदी' जी थी। आज वह 'ज्योतिपुंज' और हमारा गौरव चला गया।

मुझे उन्हें 25 बरस से अधिक वर्षों तक जानने का सौभाग्य रहा और उस दौरान के बहुत से मीठे संस्मरण हैं उनके जिन्हें मैं बाद में लिखूँगा। अभी कुछ बातें सिर्फ संक्षेप में

1. सुषम जी की एक कमजोरी थी जो मेरे लिए वरदान साबित हुई। वह लेखिका और कवियत्री तो बहुत अच्छी थी लेकिन तकनीकी मामलों में उन का हाथ ज़रा तंग था। मैं उन की 'टेक्निकल हेल्प डेस्क' सा था, उन का Hotline Support और मैं इसके लिए अपने आप को बहुत सौभाग्यशाली मानता हूँ।

2. मुझे सुषम जी का Dress Sense बहुत अच्छा लगता था, उनकी हर एक साड़ी, उस का टुपट्टा, उस के साथ के शाल उनकी बहुत अनूठी और विशिष्ट पसंद दर्शाते थे। न जाने कहाँ कहाँ से वो उन्हें ढूँढ कर लाती थी। मैं और मेरी पत्नी रजनी दोनो उन के मुरीद थे और उन्हें अक्सर इस विषय में compliments मिला करते थे।

3. अभी पिछले नवम्बर में उनके साथ भोपाल में हुए 'विश्व रंग' साहित्य सम्मेलन में जाने का अवसर मिला। हम एक ही होटल में ठहरे थे। दिन में औपचारिक कार्यक्रमों के अलावा हर शाम को वहाँ अनौपचारिक काव्य / संगीत गोष्ठी भी होती थी। जब सुषम जी का नम्बर आया तो उन्होंने कहा कि वह मधुमती फिल्म का एक गाना सुनाएँगी। मैंने कई अनुमान लगाए कि वह कौन सा गाना हो सकता है लेकिन सब गलत निकले, अंत में उन्होंने वह गाना सुनाया जिस का कोई भी अंदाज़ा नहीं लगा सकता था। गीत था 'चढ़ गयो पापी बिछुआ' और वह गीत उन्होंने न सिर्फ़ खूबसूरती से गाया बल्कि अपने पूरे 'अभिनय' और 'अन्दाज़' के साथ गाया।

सुषम जी! आप के बिना न्यूयॉर्क / न्यू जर्सी में होने वाले किसी भी कार्यक्रम में वह रौनक/ गरिमा नहीं होगी।

आप हमें बहुत याद आएँगे।

Anoop Bhargava
Poet, founder of Jhilmil-USA and friend of Susham Bedi

(This has been taken from Bhargava's Facebook page)



Sundeep Bhutoria and Susham Bedi



Purva Bedi with mother, Susham Bedi

From a daughter, with love

Our amazing mother, writer, singer, grandmother, wife, aunty— Susham Bedi — left us on Friday, March 20 at 5.45pm. We got the news on a sunny warm evening as I met my father outside for a walk (keeping our requisite six feet distance for COVID). I was sitting on the ground with both my 9-month-old son and my daughter while he took a phone call — giving the news that she had just passed away at the hospital despite their efforts to resuscitate her. And now she is free.

How can I thank my mother for all that she gave me? The things she taught me were the most simple and the most important: they have shaped my life.

She said to me on one of the last days I got to talk to her before she lost her ability to speak due to intubation, "Remember my love." And by that I think she meant to remember the passion and ferocity with which she cared for her husband, her kids, their spouses, her grandkids, all of our friends and extended family — and even her students from Barnard, Columbia, NYU, Yale, and CUNY. I mean, one of her student's sisters married my brother! And not only people, but also her love for ideas, which translated into a deep love for the arts, for literature, and for theatre. She came to see every single play I did in NY (and in Williamstown and other drivable distances!) as well as every film. I know no other audience member who saw as much of my work as she did (ok except for her companion, my amazing dad).

— **Purva Bedi**, actress and daughter of Susham Bedi

Susham Bedi: A Literary Stalwart

Novelist Dr Susham Bedi, known for her feminist view of the Indian diaspora, passed away in New York City on March 20. She was 74.

Bedi, an Indian immigrant herself, was celebrated by critics both in India and her adopted homeland. A cross-cultural polymath, she was honoured in 2018 by the then Indian President, Pranab Mukherjee. Her works are studied as part of university programmes.

As a professor, Bedi taught scores of first-generation Americans Hindi at Columbia University, and later taught Hindi literature at the City College of New York, among other colleges and universities. She also acted in films such as *The Big Sick* and *A Walk Among the Tombstones* and TV series *True Crime: New York City*, *Third Watch*, and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*.

Through her novels, short stories and poetry, Bedi explored questions about identity, authenticity and transformation in the context of the immigrant experience. Her most acclaimed novel, *Havan* — translated by David Rubin into English as *The Fire Sacrifice* — traversed the internal dichotomies of women immigrants torn between tradition and the freedoms of their new home.

In *The Portrait of Mira*, Bedi's protagonist straddled the worlds of traditional homemaker and artist, of wife and lover, with a complexity not often granted to the immigrant population. Her poetry highlighted characters who also struggled with the tension of women expected to uphold the traditional roles of her youth.

Bedi attributed the nuances that she gave her characters to her life in the US, saying: "to write tirelessly free of any questions, of freedom, could only be possible in America....The real voice in my writing came after I left India".

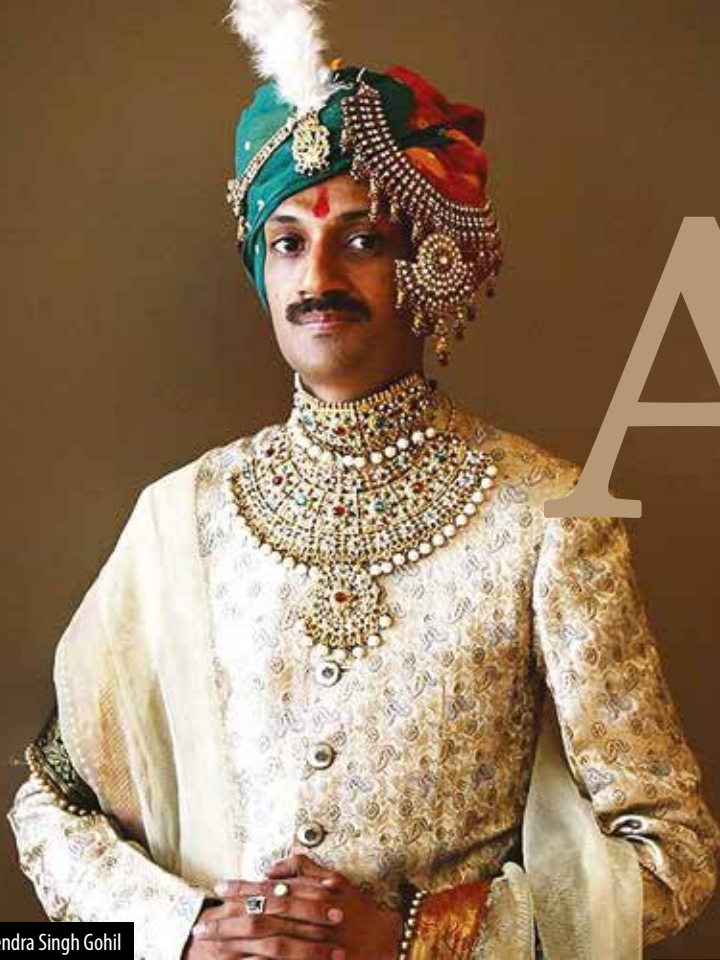
Born in Delhi on July 1, 1945, she studied both art and science at Delhi University and started acting for Indian television in the late 1960s. While completing her PhD in Hindi drama from Punjab University in 1979, she became the Belgian correspondent for *The Times of India*. Bedi moved to New York in 1979 and continued her radio and television work as a contributor to the BBC's weekly programme, *Letters from Abroad*, and as an actor in films and on television.

Bedi went on to publish eight novels, two short story collections, and a poetry collection in Hindi. Her criticism and essays were widely published.

A devoted professor, Bedi wrote extensively about the challenges of teaching language acquisition to non-native speakers. She was on the team of writers and programmers who developed the first computerised Hindi alphabet. She was instrumental in the formation of the Hindi-Urdu programme at New York University.

Bedi was a patient, kind and loving wife, mother, and grandmother. She is survived by her husband, Dr Rahul Bedi, their two children, and four grandchildren.

(With inputs from David Andrew Stoler, son-in-law of Susham Bedi)



Manvendra Singh Gohil

A Prince & Pioneer

Manvendra Singh Gohil, the prince of Rajpipla in Gujarat, shared his moving story of courage and hope in a virtual session, **Ek Mulakat**. The first openly gay prince in the world also told the online audience about the work that he has been doing for the LGBT community.

In conversation with him at Ahmedabad's first **Ek Mulakat** session was **Ehsaas Woman Priyanshi Patel**.

The royal scion's preference for men was initially seen as a problem that could be fixed with medical or spiritual help. His family banked on marriage to "set things right". But his marriage in 1991 ended in divorce, leaving Gohil devastated and guilt-ridden for having wrecked an innocent life.

Gohil, the only son of Maharana Shri Raghbir Singhji Rajendrasinghji Sahib, Maharana of Rajpipla, and his wife Maharani Rukmini Devi, was born in Ajmer. He went to Bombay Scottish School and Amrutben Jivanlal



Priyanshi Patel (file picture from a previous event hosted by the Foundation)

College of Commerce and Economics, Mumbai.

Even as a child, Gohil realised society's hypocritical reaction to homosexuality and the stigma around it. The homophobia he saw around him made Gohil determined to bring about a change. He believed that his coming out would help open a Pandora's box.

The "coming out" finally happened when Gohil was admitted to hospital after a severe



Pooja Agarwal

nervous breakdown. He was socially ostracised and his parents publicly disinherited him. The times were trying but the prince stuck to his guns. He realised that in a society that didn't understand the importance of sex education, acceptance and discussion about homosexuality would always be a struggle.

Gohil was soon invited to speak about his homosexuality and LGBT issues on several prominent platforms, including the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. Over time, his parents came to terms with his sexual preferences and even supported his work.

The prince emphasised the need for the emotional and financial empowerment of people belonging to the LGBT community because even after the Supreme Court ruling decriminalising homoexuality, Indian society is still not entirely comfortable with it.

Lakshya Trust, set up by Gohil, has been working to spread AIDS and HIV awareness in the LGBT community. Gohil's father donated

land in Hanumanteshwar to set up a skill centre that aims at equipping members to be self-sufficient and empowered. Music therapy, counselling and language training are also part of the curriculum at the centre. People from many walks of life have joined Gohil in his work. His own sufferings have, in a way, prompted him to create a haven for fellow members where they can learn to live a life of



Shaneel Parekh

respect and dignity.

He has also been advocating awareness about homosexuality early in life so that young people are able to identify and address their sexual preferences. He appealed to family members not to impose their wishes blindly on their children, especially in the case of arranged marriages.

Gohil acknowledged the role of the media in helping him regain social acceptance and enabling him to spread the word about his work for the LGBT community.

Dwelling on the importance of companionship for LGBT people, Gohil shared how his dream had been turned into reality by his partner. "Self-acceptance is of utmost importance," he stressed. His own journey to happiness is the biggest testament to that.

Ek Mulakat Ahmedabad is presented in association with Karma Foundation and Ehsaas Women of Ahmedabad

The outright approach of Manvendrajii was a real eye-opener. Very few have the guts to do what he did after being born in a royal family. My question to him about the future of his dynasty, as he will not have kids, was answered very nicely. He said life goes on, a dynasty is carried forward by its virtues and not by a person.

— **Amita Munot,**
Ehsaas Woman of Pune

Mantonyat & the Female Gaze in a Man's World



Nandita Das



Aanchal Garcha



Manisha Jain



Shweta Aggarwal

A "true feminist" and his "female gaze" was the subject of a riveting discussion with actor-director-writer Nandita Das at a closed-door virtual session curated exclusively for the **Ehsaas** Women of India.

Das, who received critical and popular appreciation for her performance in films like *Fire* and *1947 Earth*, among others, turned director in 2008 with *Firaaq*. Her second directorial venture was *Manto*, which came out in 2018, with Nawazuddin Siddiqui essaying the title role.

Das began by speaking about her research on the doyen of Urdu literature — who lived and worked in India and Pakistan in the 1930s, '40s and '50s. She described the physical, emotional and spiritual journey she underwent studying Manto for her film, which she later captured in a beautifully published book, *Manto and I*.

Das described Manto as "a man



Praneet Bubber



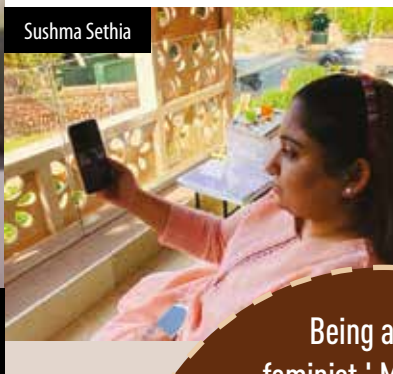
Preeti Mehta



Monica Bhagwagar



Manisha Jain, communications and branding chief, Prabha Khaitan Foundation



Sushma Sethia



Priyanka Kothari



Sangeeta Datta

Being a 'true feminist,' Manto had written extensively on women, especially marginalised women of society, like sex workers.... Manto had a female gaze. He related to a woman's vulnerability, her struggles and desires, upholding her right to exist as an individual with a separate identity

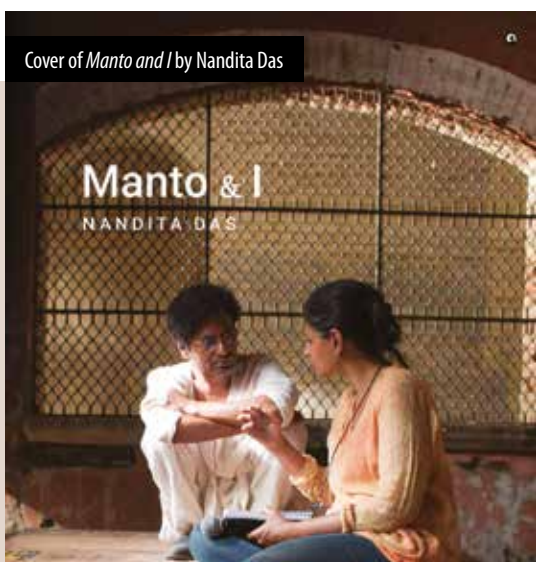
ahead of his time". Manto's courage and resolve to pursue the truth were not bound by any diktat of society. His free spirit, determination to stick to his conviction, empathy towards women and fearlessness contributed to what Das defined as "*Mantonyat*".

Filming *Manto* had been a "long and challenging learning curve" in her life, she said. Manto was a "champion of truth" who believed reality is reflected through art and literature. Das visited locations and gathered archival footage while Manto's family provided her with anecdotes on the writer. Creating the character of Manto's wife, Safiya (played by Rasika Dugal), was an even bigger challenge as she was an integral part of Manto's being with a strong identity of her own.

Manto had not only cherished his wife but also been very empathetic towards her. Safiya's silent strength had helped Manto beat alcoholism, social ostracism, betrayal and his inner turmoil.

Though demure and quiet by nature, Das described Safiya's inner strength as "feisty". Once you scratched the surface of her being, you got to see her pain, torn between her family's well-being and respect for her husband's convictions and craft. Safiya's daughters were extremely happy to see their mother's struggle being given equal weightage as their father's genius in the film.

Being a "true feminist," Manto had written extensively on women, especially marginalised women, like sex workers. The way a woman would treat issues such as sexuality, relationships, ideas and plots was bound to



Cover of *Manto and I* by Nandita Das



Nawazuddin Siddiqui as Manto and Rasika Dugal as Safiya in *Manto*

be different from that of a man. But Manto had a female gaze, according to Das. He related to a woman's vulnerability, her struggles and desires, upholding her right to exist as an individual with a separate identity.

Asked about challenges faced by women directors, Das said they usually come from the home front. "If a woman stays at home prioritising her family, she is considered useless. If she chooses to pursue a career, she is said to be neglecting her family."

The film industry has its own vices, as exposed by the #MeToo movement, Das said. Night shifts, gender bias, long periods of travel, lack of congenial working conditions and, above all, male predominance, dissuade many women from venturing into the film industry.

But Das didn't start her filmmaking journey as a "woman", she said. "When I work, I am only a director." Initially she despised being referred to as a "female director" but over a period of time she felt if this could help inspire more women to come forward with their skills, ideas and stories, then she might as well embrace the tag.

Das mentioned how male directors like Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal and Mrinal Sen had created some of the most captivating woman-centric films. Aparna Sen's *Paroma* is one movie Das would have loved to create, while films like *Ghare Baire*, *Aandhi* and *Arth* also fascinate her. "Women have come of age and in the process has ruffled a few feathers," she added. She hopes to see "more women behind the camera" in the coming days.

Mainstream cinema has more to do with facts and figures. Films like *Manto*, however, have minimal marketing budgets, according to Das. Certain states like Punjab and Kerala didn't even allow a screening of the movie, and in the states that had, the theatres were unsuitable or show timings inconvenient. But thanks to alternate mediums like Netflix, the film was reaching a larger audience.

She related to *Manto* so strongly probably because he shared traits with her own father, the famous artist Jatin Das. Bold, outspoken, often misunderstood for his forthrightness, Manto resembled her father in more ways than one, she said. *Manto* had to go through the censor

Initially Nandita Das despised being referred to as a 'female director' but over a period of time her perception changed. She felt if this could help inspire more women to come forward with their skills, ideas, stories and perspectives, then she might as well embrace the tag

screen test and was handed 22 cuts.

Not ready to compromise with the authenticity of her film, after a lot of haggling, Das managed to get away with only four audio cuts.

Das concluded on an optimistic note, saying that gender roles have transformed and crossed the threshold. "Men have changed from being supporters to being partners."



In this bleak, dismal and challenging time, when social media is busy with umpteen videos and messages on COVID-19, the online session organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** was a refreshing change. The way Nandita Das spoke was commendable, keeping us hooked for an hour. In fact, that one hour seemed too short a period to discuss *Manto*, *Mantonyat* and her take on feminism.

— Anvita Pradhan, Ehsaas Woman of Patna



The virtual session with the incredibly talented Nandita Das, at this time of social distancing, was an amazing experience! I really want to thank PKF for building a virtual literary world to replace a broken physical one and to strengthen our real-world literary ties. These creative digital experiments are the need of the hour and we are lucky to be experiencing a healthy intellectual version of the digital culture. Kudos **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

— Shelja Singh, Ehsaas Woman of Jodhpur

Tawaifs — the Custodians of Indian Music and Dance

The world of classical music and dance is quite unlike anything. At a time in history when art and culture was flourishing in Awadh, the British were eyeing the territory to expand their control in the Gangetic plains. In 1851, Governor-General Dalhousie described the kingdom as a "cherry that will drop in our mouth one day." And so it happened in 1856.

Awadh was annexed under the pretext of a subsidiary alliance and the very socio-cultural fabric of Awadh, which made it so unique and sought-after, was systematically destroyed. With Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Awadh, being relocated to the outskirts of Calcutta, the rich culture of Awadh went into decline. Without their foremost patron, artistes began to migrate to other cities and kingdoms in search of patronage.

Precisely at such a time, when art and culture were being reduced to ruins by the British, a particular class of women almost singularly held on to the knowledge that had been passed down to them orally for generations. After a colossal fall from their earlier position as *tawaifs* under the patronage of nawabs, nobility and zamindars, they began to be accorded minimal status and respect by the British, who often confused them with sex workers. The Social Purity Movement in Britain, the Anti Nautch Movement in India and the call of nationalism increasingly growing louder branded these highly accomplished women artistes as "prostitutes" indulging in an "immoral" flesh trade.

However, these very *tawaifs* kept the various genres of Indian music and dance — *thumris*, *ghazals*, *baithaki bhav* and more — alive for years. In fact, in some instances, they even financially supported male artistes who were unable to find regular patronage in the changing political milieu. For over half a century, *tawaifs* kept this culture unbroken, gradually becoming one of the first to repackage and present their art before a secular India in a proscenium theatre.

As a young practitioner of Indian classical dance, I wonder what would have remained of our culture that predominantly relied on oral tradition, if not for these women who were ostracised and pushed to the margins. In India, post-Independence, these very *tawaifs* paved

the path for women from all socio-economic classes to enter public life. Women from noble families also began to take up art as a profession — a trend hitherto unknown in colonial India. *Tawaifs* played multiple roles, such as that of a guru, a provider, a chronicler and a reformer. Taking women from the upper classes and a fast-emerging middle class of society under their tutelage, the *tawaifs* disseminated their knowledge, earlier limited only to entertainment halls of nawabs, into households of independent India.

From Gauhar Jaan, the first artiste in India to record her voice, to the most famous first-generation singers and actresses in the Hindi film industry, *tawaifs* have led the way in furthering and promoting art in times when nationalist leaders either saw them as a vice in society that was morally degrading the country or as victims who needed rescuing from a lifestyle that was to be looked down upon.

In my personal view, I believe that as a female artiste, we have a lot to thank the *tawaifs* for, not only keeping art and its oral knowledge alive but also for being one of the first to use their art to claim equality in a public sphere. They paved the way for numerous girls like me, whose family has been immersed in Indian classical dance for over nine generations and yet the first woman from the family took to the stage merely 20 years ago.

As female practitioners of the current times, when once again society is undergoing a shift in its socio-cultural and political outlook, we owe it to this generation of iconic ladies to not just continue guarding our tradition but also to further enrich it artistically. We must keep this momentum going in the face of the ever-globalising and homogenising world by serving the cause of Indian classical music and dance. It is then that in the coming times, history will remember us as not just custodians and torchbearers of art, but as path-breakers in art as well.



Shinjini Kulkarni

Shinjini Kulkarni,
Ehsaas Woman of Noida



A 'Kerfuffle' of the Fun and Fascinating Kind

"If you don't know where you have come from, how will you appreciate where you are going?"

Dr Shashi Tharoor is proud to carry his Indianness with him wherever he goes. Summing up the ethos of his beliefs with the above quote in a special online session curated for the Ehsaas Women of India, Tharoor said history stands to play a significant role in laying the foundations of a sound future. "The India of today could not have existed without the India of yesterday," he said.

Tharoor, an author, Member of Parliament and former Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, was in



conversation with Apra Kuchhal, honorary convenor of Rajasthan & Central India Affairs, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, who extended a warm welcome to the dapper man of words.

Speaking on COVID-19 and the United Nation's role in the midst of a global pandemic, Tharoor expressed his disappointment over the performance of the UN Security Council in this time of grave crisis. Saying the pandemic was a consequence of Chinese irresponsibility, he said the UN had failed to rise to the occasion, along with the United States. The World Health Organization (WHO) had also probably indulged China's misinterpretation



Shalu Goel



Malika Varma



Aanchal Garcha



Sushma Sethia



Anshu Mehra



Priyanka Kothari

of the real impact of the Novel Coronavirus. By the time the truth surfaced, crucial days had been lost, afflicting the entire world. Certain powerful countries exercise such disproportionate influence on these international agencies that their autonomy becomes a myth, as they scramble to appease the major players in the global market, he said.

Tharoor expressed his disappointment over the performance of the UN Security Council in this time of grave crisis. Saying the pandemic was a consequence of Chinese irresponsibility, he said the UN had failed to rise to the occasion

Turning to India, Tharoor said more could have been done to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus, had the Central Government responded earlier than it did. However, he commended the public communication the Government had embarked on related to the nationwide lockdown.

The Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram said he believes people should have been given more time to prepare for the long-term lockdown, especially daily wagers and

migrant workers. He also felt the post-lockdown period would come with another set of critical challenges and questions.

Looking back at his childhood, Tharoor said he had had to stay indoors more often than not because he had been severely asthmatic. He considered books to be his only escape, entertainment and education. Being a voracious reader, he soon ran out of books and that is when he took to writing stories on the lines of Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series with an Indian backdrop, calling his characters the 'Secret Solvers.'

Tharoor, whose literary repertoire includes acclaimed titles like *The Great Indian Novel*, *Riot, India: From Midnight to the Millennium* and *Why I Am A Hindu*, fondly reminisced how his father, the late Chandran Tharoor, used to indulge him, having his secretary type out the young boy's work, sharing it with friends and subsequently mailing it off to the *Free Press Journal's* Sunday edition. At the age of 10, seeing his own name in print had been as addictive as "a first kiss or the first bite of a chocolate" and indeed a huge impetus to his creativity, said Tharoor, who recently received the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book on the British Raj in India, titled *An Era of Darkness*.

Writing had been a process of "self-interrogation" for him. Tharoor wrote right through school and college, penning short stories, campus journals, opinion pieces, satires, humorous pieces and so forth. Writing for a real, live audience had helped sharpen his skills, both criticism and appreciation shaping him as a writer. He admires P.G. Wodehouse, while *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez is the one book he envies, Tharoor confessed.

Tharoor began working for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva

post the pandemic.

As an asthmatic child, Dr Shashi Tharoor considered books his only escape, entertainment and education. Being a voracious reader, he soon ran out of books and that is when he took to writing stories on the lines of Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series with an Indian backdrop, calling his characters the 'Secret Solvers'

The educational curriculum in India, which doesn't incorporate the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*, concerns Tharoor. He said these epics are very much a part of our culture, and must be taught to our children. What should be avoided, though, was a one-sided version of history, moulded to suit the interests of a particular political party, he warned. Education should teach children "how" to think and not "what" to think. "What we need is not a well-filled mind but a well-formed mind," he pointed out.



Seema Singh



Jyoti Kapoor



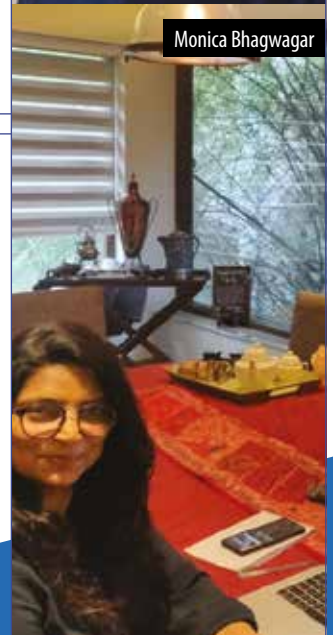
Garima Tiwari

and went on to head the UNHCR office in Singapore. Dealing with nearly 4,500 refugees from the high seas was very challenging. Tharoor had had to resolve issues that were beyond his bureaucratic domain. His own boldness amazed him at times, he said, as he went about acquiring funds, interpreting protocols best suited to the purpose, coordinating with immigration offices, and liaising with the Singapore government and the UN.

When asked about his extensive vocabulary, Tharoor said he simply used words he knew. Even during his debating days at St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, Tharoor said he had accused a news anchor of spreading "an exasperating farrago of misrepresentations and downright lies". But when Tharoor reused the words "exasperating farrago" in 2017 on Twitter, the online Oxford English Dictionary recorded more than a million hits for the two words, and his tweet received more than 8,000 Likes and more than 4,000 retweets. Playing along with the image the public had of him, over a period of time, Tharoor deliberately started using unique words, thinking they would help people expand their own vocabulary. Words like "kerfuffle" and "floccinaucinihilipilification" simply added to his persona. His book of big words, titled *Tharoorosaurus*, is expected to be published



Poonam Anand



Monica Bhagwagar



Preeti Mehta



जब सूरज की किरणे आती हैं
एक नया एहसास कराती हैं
तन मन आच्छादित होता है
क्योंकि... एक नया सवेरा होता है,

तन तो जागृत होता है
लेकिन मन संकुचित होता है
अपने से ही कहता है
क्या ये धूप तले अंधेरा है (कोरोना)

हम अब भी तन से दूर ही हैं
लेकिन... मन से मित्रों हम एक ही हैं
यह सब समय की मार है
ये कवि तो 'अनजान' है

यह रेत में लिखा एक लेख है
बस एक लहर का इंतज़ार है
आज हवा नागवार है
लेकिन कल होगी खुशगवार....



Manoj Misra

A short poem on Corona

Misra is the Foundation's well-wisher in Norway and has supported the expansion of the Foundation's activities among the Scandinavian countries



Amish Tripathi

कहानी के माध्यम से फ़लसफ़े को बताना ही किताब का मूल लक्ष्य है — अमीश त्रिपाठी

देश में साहित्यिक, सामाजिक व सांस्कृतिक चेतना के लिये निरंतर कार्यरत कोलकाता स्थित प्रभा खेतान फ़ाउंडेशन ने कोरोना लॉकडाउन के दौरान ऑनलाइन कलम इवेंट शृंखला का आयोजन किया गया। शृंखला के अंतर्गत हिन्दी साहित्य जगत के जाने माने लेखक, धार्मिक साहित्यकार अमीश त्रिपाठी कला व साहित्य प्रेमियों से रूबरू हुए। यह आयोजन पटना में कलम के 50वें सत्र के पूरे होने के उपलक्ष्य में किया गया था। इस कार्यक्रम को बड़ी संख्या में चयनित दर्शकों ने 30 शहरों में ज़ूम के माध्यम से देखा और ऑनलाइन सवाल पूछकर अपनी जिज्ञासा को भी शांत किया।

कार्यक्रम की शुरुआत पटना कलम की प्रभारी अन्विता प्रधान ने करी। प्रभा खेतान फ़ाउंडेशन की राजस्थान और मध्य भारत



Apra Kuchhal



Anvita Pradhan

Pune



Amita Munot



Mohini Karkarey



Nalini Mehra



Shesh Rao



Meenakshi Moolani



Sharbari



Gauri Deshpande



Shalini Mundada

की मानद संयोजिका अपरा कुच्छल के साथ हुए इस रोचक वार्तालाप में कुच्छल के प्रश्न के जवाब में त्रिपाठी ने कहा किताब का मूल लक्ष्य कहानी के माध्यम से फ़लसफ़े सिखाना होना चाहिए। बिना फ़लसफ़े की कहानी मृत शरीर के समान होती है। हर कहानीकार का यही प्रयत्न होना चाहिए।

मेरे पाठकों में युवा पीढ़ी की संख्या अधिक

त्रिपाठी ने कहा कि मां-बाप बच्चों को अक्सर कोसते हैं कि वो हमारी संस्कृति की रक्षा नहीं कर रहे हैं, लेकिन इसके बावजूद हजारों साल बाद भी हमारी संस्कृति जिंदा है। "मेरे कहने का अर्थ ये है कि हर पीढ़ी के समझने का नज़रिया अलग होता है। मैं धार्मिक विषयों पर ही लिखता हूँ लेकिन मेरे पाठकों में अधिक संख्या युवाओं की है।"

अच्छा लेखक बनना है तो अच्छे पाठक बनें

विभिन्न संदर्भों पर चली बातचीत में उन्होंने कहा कि बिना

पढ़े अच्छा लेखक नहीं बना जा सकता। इसलिए अगर आप एक अच्छा लेखक बनना चाहते हैं तो पहले अच्छे पाठक बनें। तभी पाठकों की नब्ज़ पकड़ सकेंगे।

पहली पुस्तक के लिए प्रकाशक ने किया मना

त्रिपाठी ने बताया कि उनकी पहली पुस्तक 2010 में प्रकाशित हुई। इस पुस्तक को 2008 में जब प्रकाशित करने की योजना बना रहा था उस समय प्रकाशकों ने यह कहकर मना कर दिया कि इस पुस्तक की थीम तो धार्मिक है ये नहीं चलेगी। इसके बाद उन्होंने खुद के स्तर पर ही उसे छापने की योजना बनाई और उसमें वो सफल रहे।

कहानियां वही हैं, समझने का नज़रिया अलग अलग

त्रिपाठी ने कहा कि पिता के साथ अलग अलग शहरों में रहने का मौका मिला यही वजह रही कि मुझे अपनी संस्कृति के प्रति

हर पीढ़ी के समझने का नज़रिया अलग होता है। मैं धार्मिक विषयों पर ही लिखता हूँ लेकिन मेरे पाठकों में अधिक संख्या युवाओं की है।

Nagpur

Amish's words on having faith over being religious and his descriptions of the Indian epics were so insightful. Little did I know what Rahul meant and why Buddha named his son that. It left me intrigued.

— Vineeta Maheshwari of Navbharat



Vineeta Maheshwari



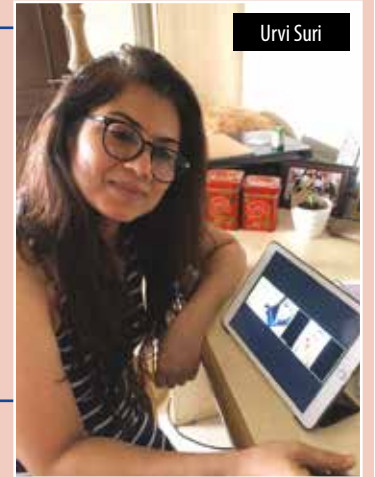
Shruti Sharma

I was in love with his books and now I am in love with him. My thoughts match with his on so many levels. Can't thank you enough for making me a part of it.

— Shruti Sharma of
Baidyanath Life Sciences

Thank you for the lovely session. It provided great insights into the reasons behind a lot of widely misunderstood mythological events.

— Urvi Suri of
Usalads



Urvi Suri



Monica Bhagwagar



Jyoti Kapoor



Parveen Tuli



Priyanka Kothari

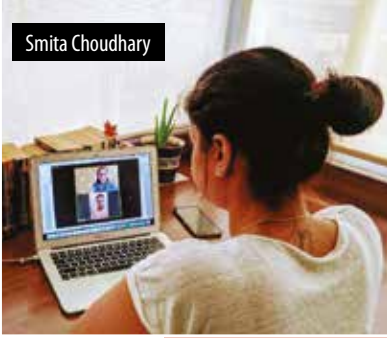
Thanks for wonderful session with such a celebrated author.

— Hemant Lodha ,
chartered accountant
and founder of
Vidharbha Lit Fest

लोगों की मान्यताओं और नजरिए को समझने का खूब मौका मिला। उन्होंने गणेश जी का उदाहरण देते हुए कहा कि गणेश जी और कार्तिक जी में बड़े कौन है? उत्तर भारत में लोग कहते हैं कार्तिक। लेकिन, दक्षिण भारत में जाकर पूछेंगे तो लोग बोलेंगे कि गणेश जी बड़े हैं। वैसे ही कार्तिक जी कुंवारे हैं कि शादी-शुदा हैं? तो उत्तर भारत में लोग बोलेंगे कुंवारे। वह भी इतना कि कई कार्तिक जी के मंदिरों में औरतें जाती तक नहीं हैं। लेकिन, दक्षिण में उनकी दो-दो बीवियाँ हैं। उत्तर भारत में हनुमानजी की मंगलवार को पूजा की जाती है जबकि महाराष्ट्र में शनिवार को।

"कहने का अर्थ ये है कि हमारी परंपरा यही रही है

Patna



Smita Choudhary



Anubha Arya



Ratneswar Singh



Usha Kiran Khan



Geetika Chhabra



Shubh Singhvi



Namrata Choksi

Udaipur

A good, informative and interactive session. I had a great experience.

— Namrata Choksi

Amish surely knows how to keep the audience engaged! His remarks were thought-provoking and inspirational.

— Geetika Chhabra

कि भगवान तक पहुंचने का और अपना रास्ता चुनने का हम सबका अपना हक है। बस हमें ये हक नहीं बनता कि किसी दूसरे के रास्ते का तिरस्कार करें। यदि हम दोनों शिव की प्रार्थना करें तो इसमें क्या फर्क पड़ता है। मैं शिवभक्त हूँ और अपने तर्कों से चीजों को इंटरपिरेट करता हूँ। एक बात हमेशा याद रहे कि हमारी परंपरा हमेशा से रही है कि हर सत्य के

हमारी
परंपरा यही रही है
कि भगवान तक पहुंचने का
और अपना रास्ता चुनने का हम
सबका अपना हक है। बस हमें
ये हक नहीं बनता कि किसी
दूसरे के रास्ते का
तिरस्कार करें।

अलग-अलग पहलू हैं।”

वह कहते हैं, "मैं रोज सुबह लिखता हूँ। जल्दी उठ जाता हूँ। 5-6 बजे तक। फिर पूजा और एक्सरसाइज। आमतौर पर सुबह 9-9:30 बजे लिखना शुरू करता हूँ और पूरे मन से लिखता हूँ। कई बार ऐसा होता है जब शब्द ही नहीं मिलते। तब लैपटॉप बंद कर देता हूँ।”



Devdutt Pattanaik

Rebirth & Revenge: Philosophies of Paigambar and Digambar

What is common between the current COVID-19 crisis and the Biblical story of Noah's Ark? In the Paigambar tradition of mythology, both are incidents that illustrate the consequences of not following the message, or the *paigam*, of the Almighty, explained Devdutt Pattanaik. The mythologist, author and management guru was speaking on the two main *paramparas* of mythology: Paigambar and Digambar.

The occasion was a special **Kalam Vishesh** online session. In conversation with Pattanaik, who has authored more than 40 works of mythology and management, was Gaurav Girija Shukla of Abhikalp Foundation, which is associated with the PKF.

The mythologist started the session by going into the etymology of the word '*kalam*', which is of Turkish origin. And it is the Turkish who, about eight centuries ago, brought pens to India along with paper, which the Chinese had started using much earlier. Before the arrival of pen and paper, Indians used to write on stones, leaves, *bhojpatra* and *tambra patra*. The same syncretism can be seen in the origin and evolution of the Paigambar and Digambar traditions.

Pattanaik explained how the Paigambar *parampara* originated in West Asia and has been imbibed by Judaism, Islam and Christianity. One would come across narratives from this tradition in



Gaurav Girija Shukla

Europe, America and the West Asian countries. The Digambar *parampara*, on the other hand, originated in India and its ethos can be found in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

The greatest difference between the two branches is that while the Digambar tradition is rooted in *punar janam* or rebirth, which is very much a part of the Hinduism-Jainism-Buddhism triad of faiths, the Paigambar tradition is centred around the belief that humans live only once.

To make the most of this one life and be judged favourably in the afterlife, believers in the Paigambar tradition need to follow a set of rules conveyed to them by the Supreme Power — called the Allah or the Lord, depending on the faith — through

Patna



Harshita Shrinagar



Alok Shahi

बहुत रोचक सत्र रहा। पैगम्बर एवं दिगंबर वाद के भेद आज आसान शब्दों में समझ आये। आप का बहुत आभार।

— Alok Shahi, Patna

Jodhpur



Meghna Rajpurohit



Shelja Singh

Intriguing as always! Pattanaik effortlessly simplifies concepts. He is immensely gifted with a unique perception that is beyond words.

Meerut

It was a dream-come-true experience to be able to hear my favourite author Devdutt Pattanaik live, all thanks to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation's Kalam** session. For the first time, I came to understand why we follow particular belief systems. The man truly is a living encyclopaedia of culture. What an insightful session indeed!

— Shallu Mutneja



Shallu Mutneja



Anshu Mehra



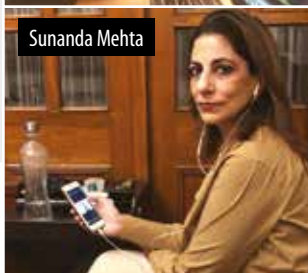
Mrinalini Anant



Mrinali Luthra



Neelima Dalmia
Adhar



Sunanda Mehta



Archana Dalmia



Huma Khalil Mirza

Delhi

messengers called the Paigambar. Mohammad, Jesus Christ, Moses and David are some of the Paigambar known across the globe.

The Paigambar faiths emphasise cause and effect, virtue and blessing, sin and retribution or punishment. Referring to the pandemic, Pattanaik said many in the West Asia see the pandemic as a consequence of not following the message of the Almighty. It has the same moral as the story of Noah's Ark. In modern times, the Paigambar ideology finds reflection in legislators formulating laws in Parliament for citizens to abide by.

The Digambar tradition is steeped in dharma and karma, with special focus on *moksha* and nirvana. Pattanaik cited Shiva and Buddha to explain how renunciation and *tyaag* (sacrifice) are significant in the Digambar faiths. Everyone has their respective karma or deed and no two people are the same. Each has a unique journey to undertake to attain absolution, which is liberation of one's soul from the endless cycle of birth and death.

"It means that no child is born on earth with a clean slate. He comes to the world with debt. This debt could be of various kinds," Pattanaik elaborated, explaining how, in the Digambar tradition, we are indebted to our ancestors for our legacy and lineage and how we inherit the

Nagpur

The session was very interesting, in terms of knowledge and new information.

— Akanksha Singhania



Anjali Purohit



Anula Goenka



Parveen Tuli



Priyanka Singhania



Monica Bhagwagar



Jyoti Kapoor

I am a fan of his works, and it was an extremely interesting session to attend. Thank you all for this opportunity.

— Anjali Purohit of
Hitvada

This was my first Hindi programme and Devdutt Pattanaik is a very engaging speaker. I quite liked the right and left brain analogy. Thank you so much!

— Anula Goenka of
Paperage



Priyanka Kothari

Thank you so much for such a great session!

— Priyanka Singhania

obligations that come with them. We owe debts to the gods and so we must perform rituals in temples and make offerings to them. We are indebted to the plants and animals that sustain us. We also owe a debt to the sages and therefore, we should reflect on what they discovered — focusing not only on our external journey and success but also on our internal journey.

Essentially, Pattanaik noted, the Digambar approach is to let go and observe the world for what it is, with emphasis on forgiveness. The Paigambar approach is to follow rules and be aware of actions and consequences. He explained the two approaches by citing two ways of serving food. The Indian way is serving all the dishes together in a thali and the Western way is to serve courses, one after the other.

If the Paigambar tradition follows standardisation, the Digambar tradition works around customisation, said the mythologist. This can be seen in the different ways Diwali is celebrated in different parts of India, whereas the Ramzan rules are the same across the world. Pattanaik pointed out that the Digambar philosophy is more prevalent in polytheistic and pagan religions, while the Paigambar philosophy is more oriented to the newer monotheistic religions.

Pattanaik took questions from the audience, explaining how popular mythological figures can be placed in the

Bilaspur



Garima Tiwari



Preetipal Bali



Abhijeet Tiwari



Chanda Bansal



Shubha Singh

Jaipur



Dr Durga Prasad
Agarwal



Minul Roy



Dr Meeta Singh



Vishal Gupta



Harish Chopra



Rajendra Nigam



Ranoo Srivastava



Suresh Bajoria

Pune



Preeti Sanghvi



Prema Rathi



Sharvari Parsanis



Mahima Mehra



Nalini Mehra



Mohini Karkarey



Amita Munot



Meenakshi Moolani



Gauri Despande



Shalini Mundada

Ranchi



Poonam Anand



Seema Singh



Meena Sinha



Rajshree Jayanti



Ravikant

context of the Digambar and Paigambar traditions. At the core, the author stressed, the Digambar *parampara* is based on repaying debts over multiple lives while the Paigambar *parampara* is centred around making individuals accountable for their actions, virtuous or sinful, in one lifetime.

The session was attended by 300 guests in India along with an overseas audience. The session ended with the vote of thanks by Shukla.

Kalam Vishesh was presented by Shree Cement, in association with Ehsaas Women of Nagpur, and media partner Lokmat

A Global Narrative



Alan Friedman

After COVID-19, the new normal will not be the old normal. We will have to reinvent ourselves.

Unsettling but true words by author, filmmaker, activist and award-winning journalist Alan Friedman.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation launched its new literary initiative, **The Universe Writes**, to offer a platform for international writers to interact with an Indian audience. The first of the series, in association with Siyahi and Shree Cement Limited, had Alan Friedman Zooming in from Lugano, Italy.

He was in conversation with Anil Dharker, writer, columnist and founder of the Mumbai International Literature Festival. Mita Kapur of Siyahi inaugurated the event by stressing the importance of having new voices instil faith during a global crisis — and also wished Friedman a happy birthday!

The riveting discussion began with Dharker commending Friedman's forthright statements on the state of democracy, surprised that he is still welcome in many countries like the US or Italy! "As an investigative journalist and author, I have always been strong in my expression," asserted Friedman. "I believe it is the duty of a journalist, of a humanist, of a concerned citizen to speak truth to power." Although this doesn't always win one friends and can be a punishing experience, the author felt if one is fortunate enough to have global platforms that he himself has had, then one should "just do it and damn



Vinnie Kakkar

Looking at the current situation, it's a great opportunity for literature lovers to connect with such international writers in the comfort of their homes. The session was an enriching experience to learn more about international politics and writing.

— Vinnie Kakkar



Anil Dharker

the consequences!"

In the first chapter of his new book *Democracy in Peril: Donald Trump's America*, Friedman has compared Donald Trump and Narendra Modi because he considers both to be strong figures, who've been classified as 'populists'. According to the author, a populist in a democracy is a relatively new experience, somebody who uses demagogic rhetoric, who is able to inflame nationalist sentiments. "Populists tend to rise to power in history — and this has happened for centuries — when there is a national or international trauma, a war or an economic or financial crisis," said Friedman.

Why do Americans have so many guns? Answering his own question, Friedman said that it was part of the frontier mentality, "America is not a sophisticated country. But no country in the world is really sophisticated. Just the elites are. Let's be honest about that." Only the elite have a voice and are able to express themselves. But even if they're only talking inside the elite,

That was a very interesting and informative session. Many thanks! I am in the US. It's great to be able to participate like this!

— Uday Mirdha

A very informative and eye-opening session.

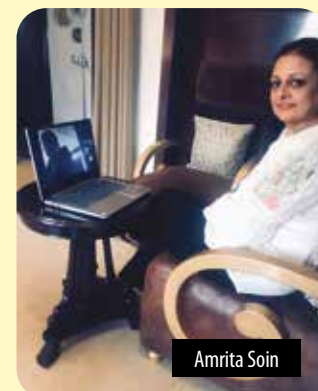
— Anant Mahant



Manjul Mandawa

Wonderful talk. The best webinar we have attended so far! A real treat to hear Alan Friedman!

— Samta Baid



Amrita Soin

The way we tell our stories form will change with the pandemic, and with the world coming together to recreate the local narrative. **The Universe Writes** is an initiative to bring international voices to our audience here.

— Mita Kapur



Mita Kapur

It was really nice. Was a solace to know about the positive side of the Indian economy and world in the future.

— Ranoo Nathani



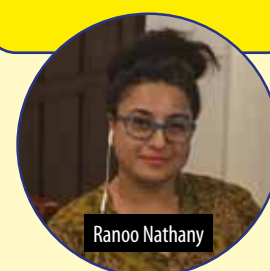
Vivek Ladha



Dr Ashok Singh



Suvrat Jain



Ranoo Nathani

intellectual, political and economic establishments of their country, it is their job to offer a conscience, sad Friedman, "What is humanism? Humanism is the ability to care about the human race and to put the sanctity of human life above economic or political gain."

On being asked if Hillary Clinton would have done a better job at handling COVID-19, Friedman said he believed anybody would have done a better job than Trump. Citing George W. Bush, Friedman said only a few years ago the former US president was considered to be a vulgar cowboy who threw his American weight around the world. "But Bush, compared to Trump, looks like an intellectual statesman because he did not try to destroy the World Trade Organization (WTO), did not stop funding to the World Health Organization (WHO), did not put America out of the Paris Climate Change Accord, did not attack and deny science, did not pull the United States out of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, which Trump did," Friedman said.

The author believes that Trump thinks of India as a way to go against China and wants to position India as an American ally. India might consider Trump to be a great friend to protect its national interests, but, "Beware! Those who get into bed with people like Trump tend to fall out of bed on the other side and hurt themselves,"

cautioned Friedman.

Talking about the global pandemic, Friedman said when most of the world's industrial and economic activity was shut down for months to save lives, an economic and financial disaster was incontrovertible. Friedman believes even if COVID-19 were to end tomorrow, the economy would not recover completely for at least a couple of years. He believes we're facing a global recession, worse than the 2008-09 recession. "If the pandemic goes on much longer, we would be at serious risk of facing a great depression, more painful than the one in 1929." He referred to the American stock market as an example, saying, between 1929 and 1933, the stock market had collapsed by more than 30 per cent over four years. With COVID-19, that had happened in four weeks.

Ending on a note of optimism, Friedman urged everyone to believe in social equity and to protect the planet. We must stay strong, speak truth to power and protect our freedom, because after the pandemic, "We are all related. We are all one big family."

The Universe Writes is presented by Shree Cement, in association with Siyahi

दीपक रमोला के साथ एक काव्य यात्रा



Deepak Ramola

देश-विदेश में कोरोना वायरस संक्रमण के चलते लॉकडाउन की स्थिति में जनता एकाकी और मंद महसूस कर रही है। परन्तु ऐसे समय में फेसबुक लाइव के माध्यम से अनेक दर्शकों ने युवा लेखक और गीतकार दीपक रमोला के साथ गुप्तगू की एवं साहित्यिक चर्चा का आनंद उठाया। कलम शृंखला का यह वार्तालाप बिलासपुर और रायपुर दो शहरों में हुआ।

दोनों शहरों से साहित्य प्रेमियों ने विभिन्न प्रकार के प्रश्न पूछे और दीपक रमोला ने उनके उत्तर विस्तार में दिए। रमोला ने अपने जीवन के साहित्यिक सफर के कई पहलुओं से दर्शकों को रूबरू करवाया। यद्यपि उन्होंने स्कूल में वाणिज्य की पढ़ाई की किन्तु कॉलेज में अपना ध्यान मास मीडिया पर केंद्रित किया। उन्होंने यह भी बताया कि वह एक ऐसे परिवार से है जो देश के मध्यम वर्ग का हिस्सा है। अक्सर माता-पिता अपने बच्चों की आर्थिक स्थिरता के लिए उन्हें कुछ विशिष्ट व्यवसाय में जाने का बढ़ावा देते हैं, किन्तु उनके माता-पिता ने उन्हें अपने दिल की सुनने के लिए उत्साहित किया और इसी कारण वह आज इतनी कामयाबी हासिल कर पाए हैं।

जब एक दर्शक ने कविता की कला की बात छोड़ी तो रमोला ने बताया कि उनके अनुभव ने यह सिखाया है कि कविता लिखते वक़्त हर कवि को यह पता होना चाहिए कि उनका किरदार किस भाषा में, क्या कह रहा है एवं किस अंदाज़ से कह रहा है। इस विषय में उन्होंने स्पोकन वर्ड पोएट्री के मूल्य भी समझाए। उनके विचार में कविता सुनाने की यह शैली युवाओं में इतनी लोकप्रिय इस वजह से है कि वह उन शब्दों के माध्यम से कवि की आंतरिक भावनाओं का अनुभव कर पाते हैं। जब कविताओं की बात हो ही रही थी, तो रमोला ने दर्शकों के अनुरोध पर अपनी कृति प्रस्तुत की:

उम्र के सारे खेल खेल कर
बुरे भले सब दर्द झेलकर
डूब-डूब कर, उभर-उभर कर
जीत-जीत कर, हार-हार कर
फुर्सत की दो घड़ियों में
जब इस दिल ने साँस ली,
जीवन की सच्चाई सारी जान ली
मान लिया कि कभी खुशियाँ बनकर
लम्हों को गुदगुदाती है
कभी गमों की बाँह पकड़ लचकाती है
जिंदगी कितना कुछ सिखाती है
सूनी सहमी रातों में
चाहा के दिन आबाद रहे
कोई अपना कोई पराया
दो कदम तो साथ चले
कभी भीड़ में गुम हो जाता
कभी तन्हाई का जश्न मनाता
मन ही ये मन को समझाता
कभी पल भर में मंजिलों तक पहुँचाती है
कभी एक ही मोड़ सौ दफ़ा दोहराती है
ये जिंदगी है



Aradhna Sharma



Ananya Sharma



Dinesh Chaturvedi



Garima Tiwari

और ज़िंदगी कितना कुछ सिखाती है

इस के बाद उन्होंने एक ऐसी मार्मिक कविता भी सुनाई जिसे सुनकर सभी के दिल भर आए:

काँच की तरह

काँच की तरह रिश्ता टूटा नहीं था हमारा
बस उसके सिरे खुल गए थे,
ढूँढ़ते रहे दरारें,
मैं चटकने की आवाज़
करती रही याद,
तुमने फेरे हाथ कई बार खतों पर
जो हमने एक दूसरे को लिखे थे
ये सोचकर की चूर-चूर रिश्ते के नुक़ीले
किसी टुकड़े से हाथ लगेगा तो खून बहेगा
और सब साबित हो जाएगा
पर तुम्हें तो खरोच तक नहीं आई
काँच की तरह रिश्ता टूटा नहीं था हमारा
मैं न कहती थी
काँच की तरह रिश्ता टूटा नहीं था हमारा
बस उसके सिरे खुल गए थे,
जैसे खुल जाते हैं रोशनी के रात से
और सिरे तो फिर जुड़ जाते हैं
हाँ मगर मंजूरी तो लाज़मी होती है
इसमें दोनों सिरों की
मेरी थी
तुम्हारी नहीं
काँच की तरह रिश्ता टूटा नहीं था हमारा
बस उसके सिरे खुल गए थे,
और सिरे तो फिर जुड़ जाते हैं...

उनकी हृदय को छू जाने वाली कविताएं सुनकर एक दर्शक ने इस युग के फिल्मी गीतों की तरफ़ अपना असंतोष जाहिर किया। रमोला ने अपनी सहमति जताई कि कुछ आपत्तिजनक, निचले स्तर के गीत लिखे जा रहे हैं। किन्तु उन्होंने अपने प्रशंसकों को आश्वासन भी दिया कि जब तक इरशाद कामिल, वरुण ग़ोवर, मनोज मुंतशिर जैसे लेखक हैं, दुनिया में मौलिक और कर्णप्रिय गीतों की कमी नहीं होगी। प्रश्नोत्तर के सत्र के पश्चात रमोला ने प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन को धन्यवाद दिया और अभिकल्प फाउंडेशन के संस्थापक गौरव गिरिजा शुक्ला के प्रति आभार व्यक्त किया। साथ ही साथ उन्होंने दोनों शहरों के दर्शकों को भी शुक्रिया अदा किया और उनके शहर आकर उनसे मुखातिब होने की तमन्ना व्यक्त की। आखिरकार – 'आमने-सामने बैठकर चर्चा करने का मज़ा कुछ और ही होता है।'

Kalam Raipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Hyatt Raipur and Abhikalp Foundation

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Ragini Toshniwal

दीपक रमोला से कलम रायपुर के ऑनलाइन सेशन में बहुत सार्थक बातचीत हुई। उनकी कविताओं का सफ़र जानना अच्छा लगा। मैं कलम रायपुर को धन्यवाद देती हूँ कि उन्होंने कलम का ऑनलाइन सेशन आयोजित करके नया प्रयास किया।

— रागिनी तोषनिवाल

कलम रायपुर को मैं आभार व्यक्त करना चाहता हूँ कि लॉक डाउन के विषम परिस्थिति में भी उन्होंने रचनात्मक कार्य जारी रखा है। दीपक रमोला को सुनना ज्ञानवर्धक था। वो बहुत ही अच्छी कविताएं लिखते हैं।

— प्रहलाद पटेल



Prahlad Patel



Shalini Mishra

मुझे कलम रायपुर के सभी प्रयास अच्छे लगते हैं। वो हमारे शहर में साहित्यिक आयोजनों को नया आयाम देते आए हैं। लॉक डाउन में जब हम अपने घरों में कैद हैं, ऐसे वक्त में साहित्यप्रेमियों के लिए ऑनलाइन सेशन शुरू करना बहुत ही सराहनीय है। दीपक रमोला जैसे युवा कवि

को सुनने में बहुत मज़ा आया।

— शालिनी मिश्रा

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन सदैव रचनात्मक और इन्वेटिव रही है। साहित्य को आगे बढ़ाने के लिए संस्था द्वारा सदैव नए नए प्रयास किए जाती है, जिसे देखकर हम भी बहुत कुछ सीख रहे हैं। दीपक रमोला का कलम ऑनलाइन सत्र बहुत ही सार्थक और सफल रहा। उन्होंने अपनी कविताएं पढ़ी, लोगों के सवालों के जवाब दिए। शीघ्र ही ऐसे और अन्य सत्र आयोजित हों, ऐसी इच्छा है। मेरी शुभकामनाएं।

— गौरव गिरिजा शुक्ला



Gaurav Girija Shukla

A Way with Words: The Tharoor Story



Shashi Tharoor

Shashi Tharoor does not want to land in jail, even though it would mean a lot of time to write. The author and Congress MP was quick to clarify this after describing how his party predecessor and India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote his books in jail. Tharoor was speaking of the heavy toll his varied and extensive duties have taken on his writing and reading.

The occasion was an exclusive multi-city online **Kalam** session, attended by 200 guests across 30 Indian cities. Tharoor, serving his third term as MP and the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, was in conversation with eminent author and columnist, Anant Vijay.

Tharoor, who recently won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his book, *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India*, said on most days he writes only after 11pm. He tries to do more when Parliament is not in session but his other commitments often take priority. Most of his reading is done on flights, especially the four-and-a-half-hour flight between Thiruvananthapuram, his Parliamentary constituency, and Delhi.

Asked whether he preferred the pen or the keyboard, Tharoor disclosed



Anant Vijay

Ehsaas Woman of Meerut



Anshu Mehra

Ehsaas Women of Lucknow



Dimple Trivedi



Kanak Rekha Chauhan

that he has been using the latter since 1980, when he was writing the second of his 20 published books. He attributed this to his "highly indecipherable handwriting" which his secretary would find difficult to make out, resulting in him having to revise what the secretary had typed. "Writing is a solitary process, so regardless of the medium one uses, what truly matters is the connection between the writer and the words. Nothing else should come in between," Tharoor said.

In recent times, the author-politician has leaned towards Hindi to reach a wider audience. He counts an hour-long speech in Hindi that went viral on the Internet as his biggest achievement in the language. Tharoor explained how, English being the language he was educated in and Malayalam being his mother tongue, Hindi was just an optional language for him in school. He used to refrain from speaking in Hindi for fear of being laughed at or misunderstood.

He gradually realised that making an effort to speak the language was worth it. He still finds the *ling* in Hindi incomprehensible, especially what gender to assign to inanimate objects. He expressed satisfaction at the fact that his speeches in

Tharoor feels his book, *Main Hindu Kyun Hoon*, reflects his individual ethos and ideologies related to being a Hindu. Translating the book from its original version, *Why I am a Hindu*, was a challenge, given the range of his English vocabulary. Tharoor tried to ensure that the language was simplified during the Hindi translation so that more readers could enjoy the book

Ehsaas Woman of Faridabad



Shweta Aggarwal

Ehsaas Women of Amritsar



Praneet Bubber



Preeti Gill

When asked which of his books he considers his masterpiece, Tharoor said it was like asking a parent to pick a favourite child. He insisted that the effort, struggle and care he had put into each of his works was equal

Hindi and Bengali addressed to the migrant workers stuck in Kerala during the lockdown had been effective and widely appreciated.

Tharoor, a former Under-Secretary-General at the UN, was among the first politicians to use social media to connect with people and now has millions of online followers.

Though many had initially tried to discourage him, he has been steadfast in the belief that social media is the best way to reach out to people. For him, social media is also a form of feedback. He enjoys interacting with live audiences whose appreciation and criticism help him refine his approach.

He spoke about how he had unveiled his book, *The Paradoxical Prime Minister*, on Twitter. At that time, many were talking about his vast English vocabulary. Taking inspiration from that, he introduced the book with the words: "My new book, THE PARADOXICAL PRIME MINISTER, is more than just a 400-page exercise in floccinaucinihilipilification." This one line took social media by storm and had thousands looking up dictionaries to understand the meaning of the word (the act of considering something to be not at all important or useful). This attention benefitted the marketing of the book.

Tharoor feels his book, *Main Hindu Kyun Hoon*, reflects his individual ethos and ideologies related to being a Hindu. Translating the book from its original version, *Why I am a Hindu*, was a challenge, given the range of his English vocabulary. Tharoor tried to ensure that the language was simplified during the Hindi translation so that more readers could enjoy the book.

Main Hindu Kyun Hoon is also a testament to Tharoor's pride in and deep-rooted allegiance to his motherland. The MP said the BJP's Hindutva ideology does not match

Ehsaas Woman of Patna



Anvita Pradhan



Shweta Bansal



Vinti Kathuria

Ehsaas Women of Agra

his own understanding of the Hindu religion. He has always been greatly inspired by Swami Vivekananda's vision that the peaceful coexistence of various religions is the true essence of Hinduism.

Asked whether readers can expect an autobiography from him soon, Tharoor said the time had not yet come for him to write his life's story as he still has a lot of work left to do and a lot more ground to cover before he reflects on his experiences. He believes that now is the time to look to the future and not the past.

For him, a writer's block is a luxury that cannot be entertained by busy wordsmiths. His suggestion to budding writers is that they should keep writing whatever they can and the right ideas would definitely bring their writing process back on track.

When asked which of his books he considers his masterpiece, Tharoor said it was like asking a parent to pick a favourite child. He insisted that the effort, struggle and care he had put into each of his works was equal.

Hindi readers seem to be diminishing in the country and Tharoor believes that the onus is on the writers to lure the readers back into the fold. Simplifying the language is one aspect that should be explored, he said, so that a larger number of people are able to relate to the words. However, the richness of the language should not be lost in the bargain, he stressed. Tharoor expressed his delight at the fact that a lot of new regional writers were gaining international acclaim.

The session ended with a rapid-fire Hindi vocabulary test for Tharoor which he very happily failed while eagerly absorbing the new words and their meanings.

Though many had initially tried to discourage him, he has been steadfast in the belief that social media is the best way to reach out to people. For him, social media is also a feedback form. He enjoys interacting with live audiences whose appreciation and criticism help him refine his approach



Manoj Muntashir

A Lyrical Journey

A poet first, a Bollywood wordsmith later. Manoj Muntashir is clear about his primary identity. "Poetry is the foundation for my other skills," says the man whose words add magic to many a screen moment.

Manoj was speaking at the first session of **Kalam** in New York, Kalam ka Bahubali. The session, held as an online video conference, is one of the many featuring literary stalwarts that the Foundation is holding to help people cope with the pandemic. Lovers of literature from across the world can join these enriching sessions online. The conversation with Manoj was steered by Anoop Bhargava, the co-founder of JhilMil, with other guests joining in.

The poet, lyricist and screenwriter got his big break when Amitabh Bachchan chose him to write his script for *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. This was the turning point in Manoj's life. His words made an immediate impact on the music makers and several other high-profile projects followed.

He considers *Teri Mitti* to be his best work so far. He disclosed that writing the song had consumed and overwhelmed him. The strong emotions that the song had to carry challenged his sensibilities.

Writing the Hindi dialogues for the *Bahubali* films is another feather in his cap. The project allowed him to work with the best in the industry and opened up for him a new way of expressing his talent. S.S. Rajamouli, the director of the *Bahubali* films, had chosen Manoj after hearing his lines for the 2016 hit, *M.S. Dhoni: The Untold Story*.

The poet also took the audience along on his journey from



Anoop Bhargava

He had an affinity for words and language from a young age. When he was only around six, he learnt Urdu from a manual in just two months

Manoj Shukla to Manoj Muntashir. He was born in a small village called Gauriganj at Amethi in Uttar Pradesh. He had an affinity for words and language from a young age. When he was only around six, he learnt Urdu from a manual in just two months.

Having read just about every Urdu writer and poet whose books he could lay his hands on, Manoj began writing, restricting himself to poetry till he was 17 or 18. His adopted surname, Muntashir, is another expression of his love for Urdu.

Do the constraints of the film industry stifle his creativity? Manoj feels that the challenges of film writing are best taken as opportunities to hone and showcase one's skill and craft. "If one can prove their skill in the commercial domain without compromising or strangling their 'shayari', it indicates success," he says.

He spoke about his culture shock with the kind of lyrics that were being written as he was taking baby steps in the industry.

His faith in his craft and his conviction allowed him to stand his ground and not "sell his soul". According to him, despite the constraints, Bollywood provides a platform to writers to reach a wider audience and gain recognition.

If one can prove their skill in the commercial domain without compromising or strangling their 'shayari', it indicates success

Manoj draws a lot of inspiration from his life experiences. He owes his first burst of inspiration to a broken romance, when his first lyrics, *Ankhon ki chamak*, was born out of heartbreak. A science student, he found a similarity between heartbreak and the energy being produced after an explosion.

Explaining his creative process, Manoj says that he thinks in poetry and then fits that into a tune. Music directors now cooperate with him and give him leeway. He feels that lyrics have become more fluid than before. For him, each song generates a blueprint for the next.

His advice on overcoming a writer's block: "When you feel you are hitting a wall, pause for some time and soak in the world around you; the solution will surely emerge."

The ever-smiling poet finds positivity even in the lockdown. "This period is giving us time to cherish what we have — our life, family, friends, achievements and even our homes — and we should appreciate that," he said.



Sandeep Chakravorty

The session spread happiness and amplified courage during these COVID times.

— Sandeep Chakravorty,
Consul General of India,
New York, USA

Kalam New York is held in association with Jhilmil, New York University and the Consulate General of India-NY

'India's Unity in Diversity is Getting Replaced By Uniformity' — Salman Khurshid



As the world grapples with COVID-19 and the human race stands united to fend off the coronavirus, a series of virtual sessions aims to nurture the mind with words of wisdom from eminent personalities. One such closed-door event was organised by **The Write Circle** Mumbai and Bengaluru with Salman Khurshid, senior member of the Congress Party, advocate and author. He was in conversation with Dr Mujibur Rehman, an academic and teacher at Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. **Ehsaas** Woman of Mumbai Swati Agarwal welcomed the speakers and the audience who tuned in from their homes.

Talking about his 2019 book, *Visible Muslim, Invisible Citizen: Understanding Islam in Indian Democracy*, Khurshid said it was triggered by a series of essays in *The Indian Express* that dealt with the identity of a community. While India as a nation has always represented unity in diversity, the focus has suddenly shifted to uniformity, the senior politician asserted.

Khurshid's book intends to give a voice to those who feel they should withdraw themselves from the national discourse and not demand or try to retrieve their entitlements. "Shaheen Bagh represents the camouflaged unity, diversity and homogeneity of the nation," Khurshid said.

The ideologies and strategies of secularism sometimes diverge but are necessary in terms of pragmatic or practical politics, pointed out the author of titles like *At*



Dr Mujibur Rehman

Home in India and *Delhi: Red Fort to Raisina*, among others. If you remain rooted in the ideologies of secularism, strategies do not hurt you. Uniformity, he said, should not camouflage anything unethical and all deliberations should come with a sense of responsibility and accountability. He said he would like to address all communities as a whole and not just a particular community because of his name and background. A wholesome democracy was an affirmative action in every sphere.

Asked if Pakistan had distorted the idea of Muslim identity in India, the former minister for external affairs under the UPA government said he is hopeful that one day their angst against us and our grievances for the pain they have caused us will be buried and a reunification will ensue. Khurshid explained that Pakistan lacked the ability to integrate its own people, as was evident when the erstwhile East Pakistan broke away



Swati Agarwal

and led to the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. "We have no choice," he said, "but to prepare ourselves for their declared and undeclared wars, pawning a huge amount of precious resources to keep Pakistan in check." But after this alarming and painful experience of COVID-19, how does one go back to being enemies or hurting each other again, he wondered.

Khurshid described Pakistan as a "strangely constricted and restricted society." The intellectuals, artists, retired civil servants and generals who visit India give a different impression of our neighbour, which in no way matches the Pakistan we deal with.

"...the Pakistan that we deal with or see and suffer every day is completely different. Are they schizophrenic in some way? That they are unable to deal with their own schizophrenia? I don't know," Khurshid said.

He also strongly opposed those who question the loyalty of a section of Indians. "The fact remains that people here who question the loyalty of an Indian are very sad, pathetic, really, really pathetic, it shows their intellectual bankruptcy, nothing else."

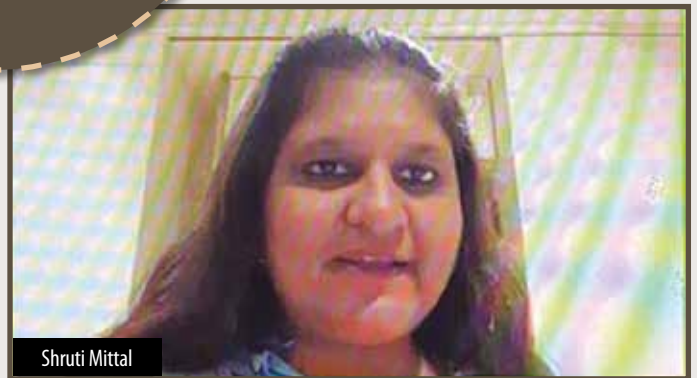
Addressing the Citizenship Amendment Act, Khurshid said anyone who cherishes the freedom of expression would agree that Shaheen Bagh was a landmark in the history of the Indian Constitution. He hoped that India's constitutional institutions, including the Supreme Court, would treat it with more consideration in the future. He was saddened by the fact that honest people associated with the protest were being wrongly hounded. Dubbing the movement regressive or questioning someone's "patriotic commitment" was totally baseless, he added. The protesters had joined the fight against COVID-19, shelving their protest against the CAA and hoping

Uniformity, said Khurshid, should not camouflage anything unethical and all deliberations should come with a sense of responsibility and accountability. He said he would like to address all communities, and not just a particular community because of his name and background.

that a solution would be reached once the pandemic was over.

India is a country that believes in moral duties, emphasised Khurshid. However, when politics seeps into the interpretation of morality, the translation gets distorted. He appealed that people open their hearts and homes to anybody seeking refuge, irrespective of their backgrounds.

There were innumerable positive and negative deliverables of CAA that were yet to be addressed. Khurshid said that there was no place to send the people who we identified as "foreigners", and even if there was, who would accept our



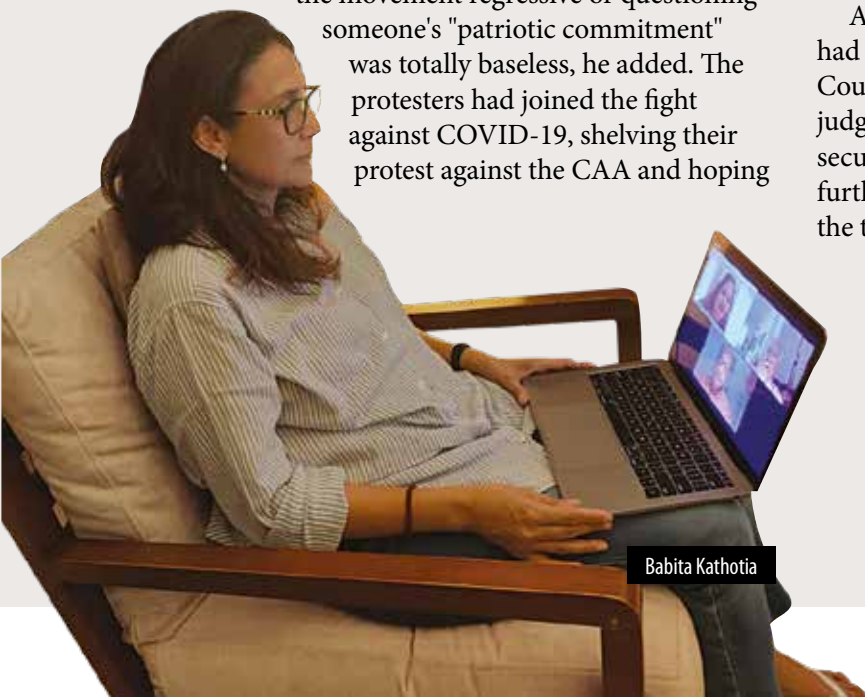
Shruti Mittal

version of their existence? A large number of countries practised peaceful coexistence, irrespective of their religious bearings, said Khurshid. He proudly spoke about how Indian immigrants in the UK, the US, France and Germany had helped change a monocultural domain to a multicultural space.

As for the Ayodhya verdict, Khurshid explained it had been an extremely difficult decision for the Supreme Court to make. He described it as a "deep thoughtful judgment" which had laid the foundation for a stronger secularism in the country but refrained from commenting further, saying his next book would reveal more on the topic.

The Write Circle Mumbai is presented in association with Lokmat, ITC Grand Central and Ehsaas Women of Mumbai

The Write Circle Bengaluru is presented in association with Taj West End Bengaluru and Ehsaas Women of Bengaluru



Babita Kathotia



Bijoylaxmi Hota

Open Up & Say 'Om'

What better time to acquaint oneself with the healing process of yoga than lockdown? Reduced movement, lack of Vitamin D and uncomfortable #WFH (work from home) positions are only some of the issues we may be facing.

Reputed yoga therapist Bijoylaxmi Hota tapped into virtual energy over a digital session of **An Author's Afternoon**, moderated by yoga enthusiast Bharti Harlalka. The session drew the #fitfam of the **Ehsaas** Women of India and Malika Varma from Kolkata welcomed them all.

What drew Hota to yoga at the age of 20? "I was forced into yoga because of my illness. When my first child was born, I was suffering from a bad headache. Then I developed anaemia and became very weak. My mother literally forced me to go to a yoga ashram for 15 days... I was not very keen," said Hota, who has been practising for almost four decades.

Those 15 days changed her life. "All my ailments disappeared," she said, except backache, which took a few years. The gurus at the ashram assisted her with the yogic processes, selecting and helping

Every muscle and nerve is part of the wholesome healing process of yoga. 'Use it or lose it,' said the yoga guru



Bharti Harlalka

her practise the asanas, as she read books on yoga. Consequently, Hota developed a steadfast faith in yoga, which led her to the Bihar School of Yoga, where she trained under Guru Satyananda Saraswati, a sannyasi, yoga teacher and an author of multiple books on yoga, educating herself on holistic healing. Today, Hota conducts workshops within and outside India, writes books and articles, produces TV programmes and scripts dance recitals on yoga.

Her approach is dynamic and integrates yoga, psychology and meditation. "Somebody came to me with arthritis. I taught her normal asanas and pranayamas... she improved but she was not cured. Her health would deteriorate suddenly. I couldn't understand it. Then my domestic help told me she had joint problems and got cured with Ayurveda. She told me the pain would return if she didn't stick to her diet. Then I realised it had something to do with food. When I had applied the same diet restrictions to my patient, she was cured," said Hota. Being a student of nutrition was an added advantage.

Because yoga revolves around the spiritual synthesis of the mind and body, Hota began addressing mental health through yoga. "If one does not have exposure to the sun, he or she won't get Vitamin D, then calcium won't get absorbed and the calcium deficiency can lead to depression. Similarly, if some glands are not functioning or feel-good hormones are not being produced properly, one can get depressed," she explained. Treatments varied depending on the type of depression.

Addressing the current scenario of commercialised yoga, Hota said it comes with a lot of irrelevant frills. Ancient yogis who had conceived and practised this art were extremely disciplined and followed a great deal of restrictions, exercising abstinence. But "what [yoga] has become [now] is fashionable and short-lived and will fail to achieve the desired results," she said.

The attendees were engrossed in Hota's take on how thyroid and obesity should be dealt with and how cleansing of the body was of utmost importance to repair and revive body cells. Yoga is both curative and preventive and should be put in a time frame, feels Hota. Every muscle and nerve is part of the wholesome healing process of yoga. "Use it or lose it" said the yoga guru. She elaborated on the BMI theory in yoga, BMI standing for Body, Mind and Intellect, and went on to explain how asanas clear pranic blockages, pranayamas help cleanse the channels, mudras assist in transportation, *bandhs* lock energy in the body and *satkarmas* perform necessary remedial processes.

Sleep is essential to deal with the wear and tear of the tissues in the body and lack of sleep

can be traced to a deficit of Vitamin A, said Hota. During this troubling period of COVID-19, the therapist asserted that chanting 'om' and practising the Savasana and the Sivasana would help to a certain extent. It is very important to build up one's immunity at this time, she added. Talking about fasting and water washing methods, Hota mentioned that the practices help cleanse and repair the body, as the body tends to spend less time on digestion.



Malika Varma

The session was like a balm for troubled souls during this global pandemic. 'Healthy and happy – this is how our world should be,' Hota signed off

According to Hota, anybody can practise yoga regardless of age. However, proper supervision or knowledge of particular asanas is required. Not all asanas are good for everybody.

Hota has just finished writing her 11th book and wishes to set up a Wholistic Living Farm soon. She urged everyone to engage their minds spiritually to deal with these trying times and encouraged them to consistently practise yoga. The session was like a balm for troubled souls during this global pandemic. "Healthy and happy – this is how our world should be," she signed off.

An Author's Afternoon is presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Taj Bengal, Kolkata

Anand Neelakantan was a typical government official before "a project born out of boredom" changed his life. The project was *Asura: The Tale of the Vanquished*, his debut novel, written over six years and rejected 18 times before being published. The book has so far sold 6.5 lakh copies in 14 languages.

In the eight years since the publication of *Asura*, Neelakantan has not only churned out more bestsellers but also made a name for himself as a screenwriter, columnist and motivational speaker. He recounted his journey at an online session of **The Write Circle** titled A Conversation with Anand Neelakantan. Priyanshi Patel was in conversation with the eminent author, who was welcomed by Shaneel Parekh.

Neelakantan believes that unless one feels strongly about what they are writing, the words will lack life. A writer is a "creator who gives soul to his words", he said. His own works reflect his fascination for the epics and the *Puranas*, whose immortal characters have always captivated him. *Asura* was an attempt to see these characters from a fresh perspective, he said.

Art, dance and temples were very much a part of Neelakantan's growing up years in south India. He had been exposed to intellectual and religious exchanges and debates from a young age. Has history influenced our perception of epics? Neelakantan feels that our interpretation of literature and history underwent a change after Islamic invasions. He cited the example of Sita, who, in the early Vedic period, was portrayed as a strong personality who did not cover her head but later was shown as more submissive.

"Stories in India are told" and not read, according to Neelakantan. Our culture and heritage have been passed down for generations through tales told to us by our mothers and grandmothers. Children imbibed their values from these tales narrated with love and passion. The interpretation of mythology, however, has evolved in each generation and writers in English have only expanded the appeal of mythology, said the author.

Neelakantan sees the lockdown as a "time for innovation" and has seized the opportunity to reread many books. The session ended with a vote of thanks by Pooja Agrawal, **Ehsaas** Woman, Ahmedabad.

The Write Circle Ahmedabad is presented in association with Karma Foundation, Divya Bhaskar, The House of MG and Ehsaas Women of Ahmedabad

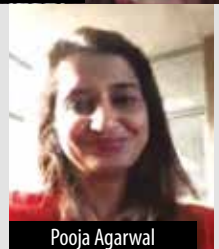


Anand Neelakantan

Of Heroes, Villains and Other Myths



Priyanshi Patel



Pooja Agarwal



Shaneel Parekh



Kosha Shah



Nikita Shah



Nirav Kriplani

Many a Reason to Smile



Arpit Vageria



Padmesh Gupta

A young writer provided the audience with many a "reason to smile" at a virtual session of **Kalam London** in the midst of the global pandemic. Arpit Vageria, the bestselling novelist of titles like *You Are My Reason to Smile*, *Be My Perfect Ending* and *I Still Think About You*, and scriptwriter in popular live audience shows like *India's Best Dramebaaz*, *Sabse Bada Kalakar* and *Indian Idol*, was in conversation with author Padmesh Gupta.

Looking back, Vageria said after pursuing Chartered Accountancy and an MBA, he had wanted to pen down a book on his life, hoping to impress his lady love. Once his book began garnering appreciation, he realised this was his true calling and embarked upon a journey into the world of words. He proudly professed his love for his mother tongue, saying that all his thoughts and ideas were conceived in Hindi.

Romance or comedy — what works for him? Both, said Vageria. The writer feels romance and comedy are both very much a part of his own personality. He likes blending casual comedy with romance while writing books but for television scripts, he concentrates on "punch comedy", he added.

Vageria feels controversy in the Indian television industry is rare because most of the content is filtered to a great extent before being broadcast. "While most

shows are pre-recorded, I enjoy the challenge of working on live scripts," he said.

Having had the opportunity of writing for the IIFA Awards, Vageria said two kinds of scriptwriters are involved in an award show — one who writes dialogues for the hosts and another who scripts the flow of events. He tends to avoid writing for daily soaps because of the emotional turmoil it entails, admitted the writer.

'While actors gain experience with each film, writers keep emptying themselves through each word and thought they pour into their work'

Vageria believes while actors gain experience and hone their skills over the years with each film, writers keep emptying themselves through each word and thought they pour into their work. He aspires to create a channel dedicated to the Indian community abroad, run only by Indians, so that people thousands of miles away from home can feel the true essence of India.

Talking about COVID-19, Vageria said, "The pandemic has helped me come to terms with the unpredictability of life and realise how precious the people in my life are." The author is living one day at a time and hopes to spend more time with his family and friends in the days to come, he said.

Kalam London is presented in association with Vatayan, Vani Foundation and British Council



A Majestic Mushaira with

Nomaan Shauq

Sspoken-word Urdu is undeniably a pursuit of passion — lyrical and lofty, it lends depth to every emotion by adding a certain complexity and nuance. Since its magic lies in its sound, it must reverberate in one's ears rather than be read on paper.

A session of **Lafz** — an initiative of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** to promote Urdu, Arabic & Farsi languages — celebrated the beauty and purity of Urdu with poet Nomaan Shauq reciting his poetry with panache during an hour-long *mushaira*. Audiences from Jaipur, Udaipur and Ajmer tuned in for this closed-door session, and participated with enthusiasm.

Shauq, who has published Urdu poetry collections like *Ajnabi Sa'aton Ke Darmiyan*, *Jalta Shikara Dhoondhne Mein* and *Apne Kahe Kinaare*, and Hindi poetry collections like *Raat aur Vishkanya* and *Indian Jnanpith*, as well as a collection of ghazals titled *Aakhiri Ishq Sabse Pahle Kiya*, began by divulging that he had chosen pieces that he usually does not recite at poetry gatherings, and although most people would dismiss the themes of such poems, in his opinion, they were as worthy of being discussed as any other topic brought up on



Kulsum Malik

Vinnie Kakkar, National Advisor of
Prabha Khaitan Foundation



S. Shakir Ali

Punam Pande

Sudhir Mathur
(file picture)

Vishal Gupta,
GM, Hilton Hotel

Mumal Bhandari

such occasions. He told his viewers that the first half of the event would be about ghazals, one of which went like this:

"Thha ishq ya main vakai beemaar padha thha
Ab yaad nahin kaun sa aazaar padha thha

Sadiyan mujhe iss ghar ki safai mein lagi hain
Bekaar khudaon ka ek ambaar padha thha

Mushkil thha bahut humse khareedaar ka milna
Yoon raah mein baazaar ka baazaar padha thha

Par humne kasam khai thhi ibrat nahin leni
Akhbaar ke andar bhi ek akhbaar padha thha

Thha ishq ya main vakai beemaar padha thha
Ab yaad nahin kaun sa aazaar padha thha."

Elucidating his process of writing, Shaq said that he focuses almost entirely on words and themes that are linked to and in sync with our everyday lives. The poet admitted he is partial to expressions that are not necessarily in common usage, but whose weight and meaning one is nonetheless aware of.

Shauq, an employee of All India Radio's Foreign Broadcasting Service, contributes as writer and editor to several Urdu and Hindi papers and websites. He acknowledged the trying circumstances created by the pandemic and cautioned people against dependency on technology. On a positive note, he said that even as people are preoccupied with collecting pieces of their lives, they have come to realise the importance of elements they had taken for granted until the present state of affairs turned their world upside down.

He said that people are allured by the form of the ghazal because one can easily colour it with their own personality. So, you may wield the words of a ghazal to say something that the ghazal wasn't saying at all! If you persevere to apply your skill and sentiment, the language deposits such a collection of words before you that you are capable of expressing yourself through the *shayari* of ghazals!

Poetry lovers sent in their heartfelt reactions and responses all through the session, and Shaq expressed his gratitude for their enthusiastic support of his work.

The poet next moved on to *nazms*. He began with a piece titled *Freezer Mein Rakhi Shaam*, which is also the name of one of his poetry collections. He explained that there is a range to his choice of form. While his *nazms* are a manifestation of his search for new worlds, his ghazals are photographs of his pursuit of joy. From a piece titled *Fashion Shows*, about his son's control over the TV remote that stops him from watching the daily news, to another composition called *Lakshman Rekha* that inspires its listeners to break the boundaries set by modern-day tyrants, Shaq touched upon many subjects.

The event drew to a close with Sudhir Mathur of Sudhir Mathur Sansthan delivering the vote of thanks.

Lafz Jaipur is presented in association with Hilton Hotel, Rekhta, Sudhir Mathur Sansthan and Ehsaas Women of Jaipur

Rambha ho to Darling, a Voice for Every Occasion



Usha Uthup

Rustling kanjeevaram and signature bindi in place, the evergreen multilingual songstress Usha Uthup made sure the first virtual session of **Ek Mulakat** was a chartbuster.

Uthup was in conversation with Shailja Khaitan. She was introduced by **Ehsaas** Woman Akriti Periwal.

A powerhouse of talent, Uthup has been dominating the music industry for over five decades as the queen of Indian pop and jazz. She has to her credit several iconic hits, from *Ramba ho* to *Darling*, the latter winning her a Filmfare Award for Best Female Playback Singer in 2012. She started her career as a nightclub singer in the 1960s and has not looked back since.

The versatile singer can sing in several languages, including English, Russian, French, German, Italian, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Punjabi, Kannada and Swahili. She was invited by the Pope to represent India during the canonisation of Mother Teresa. Her biography in Hindi, titled *Ullas Ki Naav*, was written by journalist Vikas Kumar Jha and published in 2019. She believes "music has no barriers and musicians are global citizens"



Shailja Khaitan

— a philosophy evident in Jha's writing.

During the session, Uthup spoke about her homebound days because of the lockdown. An early riser, she recites the *Mahamrityunjay jap* and chants *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* after her morning cup of coffee. The



Aakriti Perwal



Vinnie Kakkar



Manisha Jain



Apra Kuchhal



Jayshree Perwal

singer makes sure she is as dressed up as she would be on any other day because it gives her a sense of normalcy and routine in these troubled times. For **Ek Mulakat**, too, she didn't forget to sport the customary *maang tika*.

Uthup has also been knitting, and is now busy making a snazzy bag for granddaughter Ayesha. Revisiting books has been another favourite lockdown pastime and Uthup is now reading her biography all over again.

Reminiscing her golden decades, Uthup said she was blessed that people had always been more interested in her singing than her attire. The queen of Kolkata's twinkling Park Street in the 1960s, Uthup's first contract with Trincas broke into the stereotypical domain, a sari being very much a part of her identity. Soon people expected to see her only in a sari and as she broke free from the shackles of a male-dominated society, women came to listen to her as well. She had never been forced to let go of the sari in all her years in the profession.

Talking about her philosophy towards relationships, the legend said she believes a man and a woman should

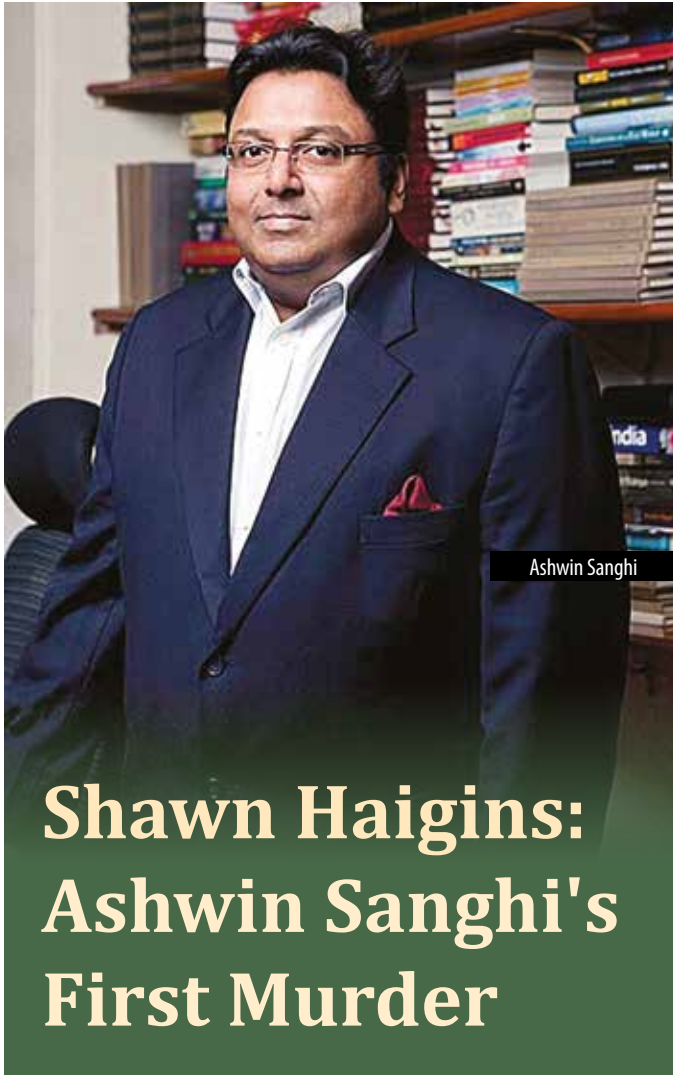
walk hand in hand and, at times, silence in a relationship makes a more powerful statement. Home should be democratic, she said, quick to add with a chuckle that men should be allowed to believe they are the ones calling the shots.

Elaborating on her work ethos, Uthup said she had always acknowledged the technicians working tirelessly behind the scenes to keep a show rolling. In keeping with her effort to pay respect to these talented people, the real heroes of the industry, she launched Stagecraft Foundation in 2014 with like-minded peers to offer patronage to these craftsmen.

Uthup has been loved and respected all through her illustrious career spanning nightclubs, live performances and playback singing. She believes the way she has conducted herself over the years kept gender bias away. On a lighter note, the singer shared how people had often mistaken her voice as a man's.

Wearing with elan her spunky spirit, cheerful optimism and bright-coloured sneakers, Uthup ended the session with some timeless melodies in her rich baritone.

Ek Mulakat Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with ITC Rajputana Jaipur and Jayshree Perwal Foundation



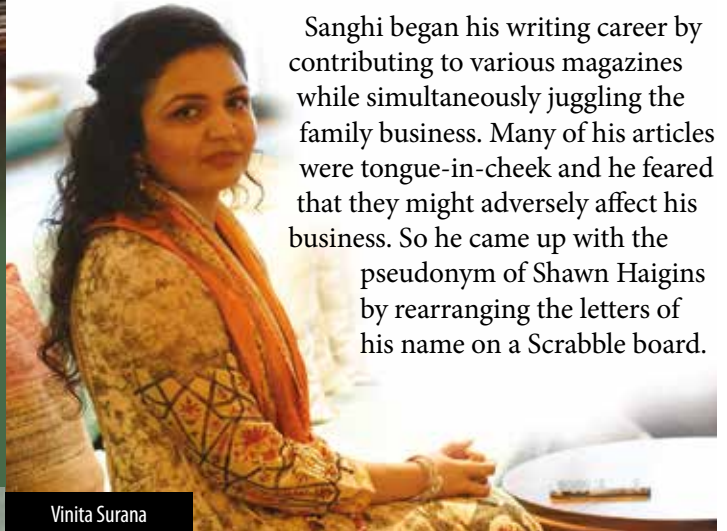
Ashwin Sanghi

Shawn Haigins: Ashwin Sanghi's First Murder

His website describes him as a 'thinker, speaker, writer and storyteller'. And all these qualities came to the fore as Ashwin Sanghi, one of India's highest-selling writers, enthralled audiences at **The Write Circle** online sessions for Jodhpur and Hyderabad.

The writer of bestsellers like *The Rozabal Line*, *13 Steps to Bloody Good Luck* and *Keepers of the Kaalchakra* was welcomed to the Jodhpur session by Apra Kuchchal. In Hyderabad, Vinita Surana delivered the welcome speech.

Sanghi feels he "landed up where [he] did by accident". His maternal grandfather introduced him to the world of words by gifting him a book every week. Young Sanghi would, in turn, write to his grandfather, telling him about all that he had read. The grandfather had explained to the grandson that pursuing Saraswati was a sure way of acquiring Lakshmi because they were inseparable.



Vinita Surana

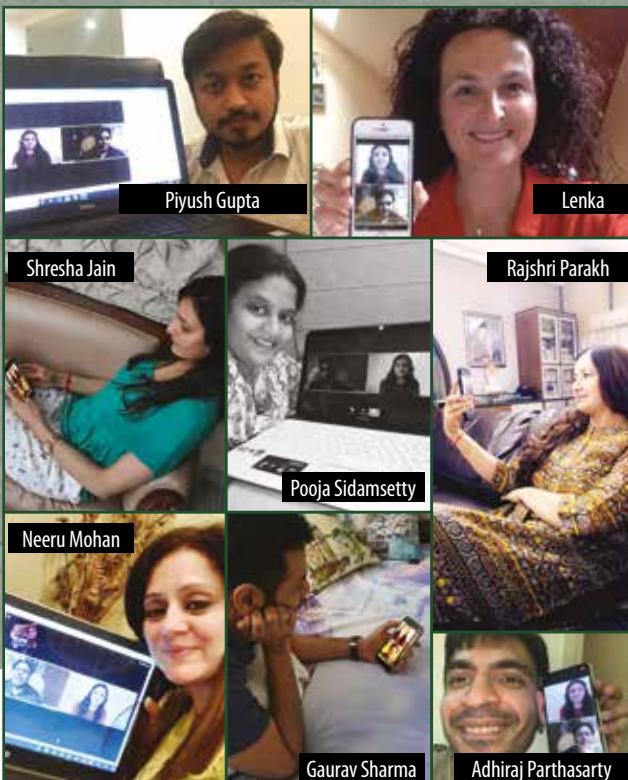
Sanghi began his writing career by contributing to various magazines while simultaneously juggling the family business. Many of his articles were tongue-in-cheek and he feared that they might adversely affect his business. So he came up with the pseudonym of Shawn Haigins by rearranging the letters of his name on a Scrabble board.

When the manuscript of his first book, *The Rozabal Line*, was rejected by many publishers, he thought his name was the problem. Hence, he self-published the book under his pseudonym. The book was well-accepted and soon Westland wanted to publish it on the condition that the writer would use his real name.

According to Sanghi, the publisher felt readers would get a 'cultural shock' linking the name to a "potbellied *baniya Marwari*". The writer chuckled and described this as "the murder of Shawn Haigins", the first murder in his writing journey.

A "five-woman Shakti" had played a very significant role in his life, said Sanghi. His mother, who had inculcated the love of reading in him; his wife, who had encouraged him to make a transition; his sister, who had inspired him to keep going; his Rakhi sister, who had brought spirit and joy to his life; and finally, "Maa Shakti", the power behind all the words he puts on paper.

The writer also spoke about his famous international collaborator for the *Private India* series. "If there is





I'm really happy that today Ehsaas Women of Jodhpur have hosted our first virtual **The Write Circle** event. I support this initiative of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**; it is adapting to the gradual evolution of learning, and represents an excellent way to reach out to the members of society, thereby promoting their active involvement. I look forward to conducting many such virtual sessions to bring the people of Jodhpur face to face with different authors.

— Sushma Sethia

The beauty of Ashwin Sanghi's writing lies in his intricately designed plots, mystical concepts, historical incidents and multidimensional characters; and this was all brought out during the conversation.

— Preeti Mehta



My admiration for **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and Ehsaas Women of Jodhpur has been further augmented on seeing their efforts and commitment in organising the first virtual session of **The Write Circle**, with Ashwin Sanghi.

With the uncertainty and gloom brought upon by the pandemic, organising this event is not only a literary treat for Jodhpur but also helped in breaking the boredom and brightening our day.

— Devendra Ratnawat, GM, Taj Hari Mahal



a book factory, it's probably James [Patterson]," said Sanghi. He referred to his association with Patterson as an "arranged marriage", architected by his friends, Meru Gokhale and Suzzane Sandon. The collaboration with Patterson has been a "jugalbandi", each perfectly in sync with the other.

Questioning the truth behind historical narratives, Sanghi reminisced about a visit to a small temple in Kolkata dedicated to Amitabh Bachchan, where people were praying to shoes worn by the actor in *Coolie* and selling *Amitabh Chalisa*. The writer felt that several thousand years from now, people might also question the degree of truth behind what exists today.

Each of his books has a different flavour, said Sanghi. *Chanakya's Chant* was an easy read, *Keepers of the Kalchakra* had a scientific essence while *Sialkot Saga* was more Bollywood. In his book, *The Krishna Key*, he wrote, "God is what you have left from infinity after you have subtracted human knowledge", which he represented to his idol Dan Brown as $G = \text{Infinity} - K$.

Sanghi hoped that COVID-19 would make people more caring towards nature and the Earth. The lockdown was like a reboot button pressed by Mother Nature, making us reconsider the way we live, consume and prioritise, he said.

The Write Circle Hyderabad is presented in association with Ehsaas Women of Hyderabad

The Write Circle Jodhpur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Taj Hari Mahal and Ehsaas Women of Jodhpur



Sevantika Bhandari

Life is a gift and it offers us the privilege, opportunity and responsibility in these trying times to give back by becoming more. When we are today on the brink of social recession and an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, we need to find a connection. These virtual literary sessions have come at a time when we needed them most. Hosting the first virtual session of Jodhpur has been a matter of pride for my associates and me.

— Shelja Singh



Newsroom Novel



Sanjeev Paliwal

The series of literary conversations held under the aegis of **Kalam** Bhubaneswar made its virtual debut with journalist Sanjeev Paliwal, who recently ventured into the literary world with his book, *Naina*, a murder thriller. Paliwal, a senior executive editor with Aaj Tak, was in conversation with Dr Nidhi Garg, who posed questions on his life, career in journalism and his first work of fiction, *Naina*. The event began with a welcome note by Vedula Ramalakshmi, **Ehsaas** Woman of Bhubaneswar.

Paliwal's novel revolves around a contemporary woman in a metro city and maps her evolution as a person. Paliwal described his protagonist Naina as a news anchor at the peak of her career. He pointed out that women face many challenges at the workplace because men usually don't like to see women succeed.

Naina has been hugely appreciated by women readers, who have found both her negative and positive attributes identifiable, the author said. Paliwal himself relates to Naina, too, and confessed that he had been so engrossed in creating her that she would even appear in his dreams at times.

Not just Naina, the author said, "I am all the characters of the novel, in different forms." While writing, Paliwal said, he immerses himself in every character he creates, be it Naina, Naveen or Gaurav. Each of them reflects a part of his own self.

The author emphasised that he tried to make his characters as true to life as possible so that readers could relate to them. He has sketched his characters in black and white, leaving the readers to interpret the shades of grey. He said he had incorporated his own newsroom experiences into his book.

Paliwal said he chose to be a writer of thrillers because there were only a few authors left in the genre. The conversation was followed by an interactive session with the audience, where Paliwal fielded a wide range of questions.

At the end of the session, Vedula Ramalakshmi proposed a vote of thanks. The session with Paliwal turned out to be a novel experience for many in the audience amid the lockdown.

Kalam Bhubaneswar was held in association with Mayfair Hotels and Resorts and Ehsaas Women of Bhubaneswar



Nidhi Garg



Vedula Ramalakshmi



Pallab Das



Vipul Rikhi



Shabnam Virmani

Spirituality & Song in Uncertain Times



Mita Kapur



Anu Kler



Pushpendra and Reetika Bhargava



Dr Ashok and Dr Anu Puri

There are two primary themes, I would say — one is love and one is death, and they are connected, they are not separate from each other," said Vipul Rikhi, on Bhakti, Sufi and Baul poetry, in a special online session of **The Write Circle** Jaipur.

The session, featuring Vipul Rikhi and Shabnam Virmani, revolved around their two jointly written books — *I Saw Myself: Journeys with Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai* and *One Palace, a Thousand Doorways: Songlines Through Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions*. Virmani is a filmmaker and singer, while Rikhi is a poet, fiction writer, translator and singer.

Mita Kapur, the CEO of the literary agency Siyahi, opened the discussion and pointed out that in these bleak and troubled times, we needed to find inner peace and thus, it was very apt to have a session on spirituality. She welcomed Virmani and Rikhi and invited the audience to "Let them weave their magic for you."

Both Virmani and Rikhi began on a positive note, asking the audience to look at these unfamiliar circumstances caused by the lockdown as an opportunity. The first theme discussed was the idea of death.

Rikhi posed a series of questions. "Do we think about death? Is it present in our lives? Now, more than ever, it is present. But otherwise, in normal times, how much do we confront the fact of death? How much do we face its emotional repercussions on us? How does fear interact with this whole reality? The fact of life is death. So, the Sufis, the Bhakti poets... Shah Latif, Kabir... all of them speak all the time about death."

Virmani said, "I am experiencing this time as an opportunity to enter deeply into One. Because this is a strange time... There's no scope for dissipation, there's no scope for distraction. If we are restless, there's nowhere to go. So, this is the time to seek the One."

She called to mind poems by Kabir and Bulleh Shah, which express this theme.

Both authors related the narratives of these traditions beautifully to the current situation we are facing. Their interaction with the audience turned out to be extremely engaging. They even sang some melodious and heart-touching songs. The session ended with Mita Kapur thanking both Virmani and Rikhi for such a soulful evening.

The Write Circle Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Ehsaas Women of Jaipur, Siyahi and Spagia Foundation



Sujoy Ghosh



Arindam Sil

Kahaani Revisited

"Nobody is above the film, including me."

Ghosh revealed that he connects strongly with his crew, and rarely replaces them. "They have been instrumental in both my own success and *Kahaani*'s," he said.

He said he is currently working on his new film, *Bob Biswas*, named after a memorable character in *Kahaani*. Produced by Shah Rukh Khan, it has Abhishek Bachchan in the title role. The pandemic, however, has halted shooting.

Ghosh said Vidya Balan was a source of inspiration while making *Kahaani*. Both Ghosh and Sil were all praise for the actress, commending her humble demeanour and dedication towards her craft. Sharing an incident

from the shoot, they said a particular scene had required her to roll on a muddy road and she did it without batting an eyelid.

Speaking about Abhishek Bachchan, Ghosh said he was a "phenomenal actor". Working with Tapsee Pannu in his 2019 film *Badla* was also a great experience for Ghosh. Her zest and hunger to keep doing good work made her very dedicated, he added.

Born and brought up in Kolkata, Ghosh's. His love for the city has made him return time and again, Kolkata having an aura that added to the sensibility of his films. Talking about the city's legends, Ghosh



Esha Dutta

referred to actor Soumitra Chatterjee as "Gurudev", saying he wasn't equipped to touch Satyajit Ray's work on *Feluda* yet. "Let them remain an aspiration," Ghosh said.

On the subject of "*Kahaani 3*", Ghosh said he would consider a third film only if there was a good story. And yes, Vidya Balan will definitely be in the lead!

Ek Mulakat Kolkata is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Ehsaas Women of Kolkata

Vidya Balan was a source of inspiration while making *Kahaani*. Sujoy Ghosh and Arindam Sil were all praise, commending her humble demeanour and dedication towards her craft

Cinema will always be more of a social outing, a big screen spectacle, where either the 'film is big or the thought is big,' said director Sujoy Ghosh, addressing one of the pressing concerns of the post-lockdown phase: What will happen to our movie halls?

Ghosh, who has made films like *Jhankaar Beats*, *Kahaani*, *Kahaani 2* and *Badla*, was speaking at a virtual session of **Ek Mulakat**, in conversation with actor-filmmaker Arindam Sil, who was the executive producer for his 2012 smash hit, *Kahaani*.

Ehsaas Woman of Kolkata, Esha Dutta, welcomed the speakers and the attendees, after which the duo got into "*Kahaani Revisited mode*", sharing with the audience their experiences of working together, their work ethics and much more.

Sil — all in the spirit of friendly banter — complained how Ghosh is very finicky about everything, be it the cast, the location or his crew. Ghosh said he believes in writing his own scripts because it helps him visualise the scenes better. But "a film is not a one-man job," he conceded.

Poetically Yours



Yakoob Gill



Arvinder Chamak



Bakhtawar Singh



Hardarshan Singh

*Main boond hoon, sagar hoon ya pani pe
lakeer hoon*

*Mujhe rokna tere bas mein nahin
Mera koi aur intezaar kar raha hai*

"Wah, wah!"

Former IAS officer and Sufi poet Bakhtawar Singh held the audience captive with his *shayris* and poetry at a special digital session of **Aakhar**, a series of literary interactions dedicated to regional literature, curated by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** in collaboration with Majha House. The conversation was conducted by Dr Arvinder Chamak, artist, poet and honorary secretary of the Indian Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar.

"While fulfilling the duties (of an IAS officer), I came across several ground realities. My experiences and observations inspired me to pen stories that people find relatable," said Singh, popularly known as Bakhtawar Miyan in literary circles, about his "balancing act".

When asked about his poetic influences, Singh said he has always been an ardent admirer of Sufi poets. "One can see the influence of Baba Bulleh Shah, Sheikh Farid and Baba Nanak in my poems," he said. He also recited poems from his collection *Paar Chhena Toh Osda Dera* and *Jogi Raavi Kinare Rehnda*.

Describing some of the beliefs of Sufism, Singh addressed the prevalence of heteronormative love in Sufi poetry. He delineated the difference between *Ishq-Majazi* and *Ishq-Haqiqi* (two types of love in Urdu poetry), where the former centres around love for a human being, place or institution, while the latter focuses on the love for the Divine who is seen as the absolute reality.

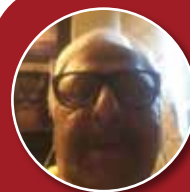
Talking about his early life, and the art of creativity, Singh said that he had never felt the need for solitude in order to compose poetry. He narrated a humorous

'While fulfilling the duties (of an IAS officer), I came across several ground realities. My experiences and observations inspired me to pen stories that people find relatable,' said Singh, popularly known as Bakhtawar Miyan in literary circles

incident about once how a poem came to him during a case hearing! He also shared that three more books of poetry are in the process of being published.

The conversation meandered to the current times of the collective calamity of coronavirus. "This too will pass," said Singh. He spoke about how he had seen and overcome many difficulties in life, including going to jail, and emphasised that truth finds its own path to make itself known. "Nothing lasts forever," agreed Dr Chamak.

Also part of the **Aakhar** session was the young and talented professional Sufi singer, Yakoob Gill, who came forward to sing a couple of the poet's verses. The audience



First of all, I would like to congratulate Dr Chamak and everyone for conducting and organising this meeting so well. It has been wonderful listening to Bakhtawar ji. I am watching your programme from Gurgaon. *Bahut badiyan!*

— Mahesh Sagar, Gurgaon

comprised listeners from London, USA, Dubai, Australia, and Pakistan. Dr Chamak thanked PKF, Majha House, Bakhtawar Singh and the audience for joining in to make it a memorable session.

*Aakhar Amritsar is presented in association with
Majha House*

Storytelling with a smile



Vandana Rag

In spite of the many vagaries of the lockdown, one cannot deny that it has made more people turn to books, discover new authors and rediscover old ones.

One such virtual session helped us discover and rediscover the magic of Hindi writer Vandana Rag, who was in conversation with Sarita Malik, director of Shanti Media Zone and a poet and pranik healer, for **Kalam** Chandigarh. Both speakers were welcomed to the event by Shalu Goel.

A recipient of the Krishna Pratap Smriti Award, Rag has translated Eric Hobsbawm's book, *The Age of Capital*. Her published works include *Utopia*, *Main Aur Meri Kahaniyan*, *Khayalnama*, *Hijrat Se Pehle* and most recently, *Bisaat Par Jugnu*.

"I write because I am angry," the author disclosed, starting her firebrand session by talking about the social injustices that raise her ire. It is this anger and restlessness that she converts into words, which cascades onto the pages of her book. Marriage and then motherhood took priority over her creativity for quite some time, in spite of her literary bent of mind, and it was in 1999 that she took up writing seriously.

By writing about strong, independent female leads, Rag shared that she hopes to inspire women across her readership. "My dream is to be the voice of marginalised women," she said. Speaking on the length of her stories, she agreed with Malik that the *yuva* or youth of today has a short attention span and demands instant gratification. It is disheartening to see them lose interest in reading.



Sarita Malik

Yet she and her writer friends "keep the faith and keep writing".

Talking about the constructive changes in the sphere of Hindi literature, the author pointed out that publishing houses have opened their doors for established as well as aspiring Hindi writers. She believes that new marketing strategies and planned publicity, especially through social media, have made a lot of difference, in turn offering a democratic platform for aspiring artistes to share their craft.

Rag gives a lot of prominence to democratic values and believes that a writer is the voice of various human lives, society, relations, diverse ideologies and thoughts directly or indirectly experienced. She likes to leave it to her



Manisha Jain



Shalu Goel



Akansha Arora



Anju Jain



Diksha Arora

readers to interpret her stories. The ideas or characters of her books are conceived from experiences or images from real-life incidents.

She discussed her book, *Bisaat Par Jugnu*, which has two woman protagonists — Pargosa, an Indian girl, and Eu Yan, a Chinese girl — and revolves around Indo-China trade relations between 1840 and 1910. The story evolves as Eu Yan's descendant decides to trace the relation between the two girls and the nations. The author's message through the book was that nothing is greater than humanity, *kala* or art and love, which can bind and win over everything.

Kalam Chandigarh is presented in association with Hyatt Regency Chandigarh and Ehsaas Women of Punjab

गजादान चारण के साथ राजस्थानीडिंगल पर चर्चा

कोरोना संक्रमण से उत्पन्न परिस्थितियाँ साहित्यक प्रेमियों के उत्साह को कम नहीं कर सकती। इस बार साहित्यक प्रेमियों ने पश्चिम की ओर यात्रा की। जयपुर के आखर शृंखला में राजस्थानी भाषा के साहित्यकार डॉ गजादान चारण ने डिंगल शैली के विषय पर बात की। यह प्रसंग आखर राजस्थान फेसबुक पेज से लाइव शुरू किया गया। डॉ चारण 'शक्तिसुत' राजस्थानी के प्रमुख रचनाकारों में से एक हैं एवं राजस्थान कॉलेज शिक्षा में व्याख्याता के पद पर कार्यरत हैं। इससे पूर्व आखर में आईदान सिंह भाटी, अरविंद सिंह आशिया, रामस्वरूप किसान तथा अंबिका दत्त जैसे लेखकों ने हिस्सा लिया है।

डॉ चारण ने अपने प्रशंसकों को बताया कि उनका जन्म बीकानेर जिले के नाथुसर नामक गांव में हुआ। उनके घर में बचपन से ही डिंगल के छंद और कविताएं गूँजती थीं। इस तरह उनके पहले गुरु उनके स्वर्गीय पिताजी अमरदान थे जो स्वयं डिंगल परंपरा के एक प्रसिद्ध कवि थे।

उनके अनुभव में डिंगल एक शैली ही नहीं पर एक ऐसी भाषा है जिसका जीवन के मूल्यों से एक गहरा सम्बन्ध है। डिंगल भाषा के अंदर ओज की धारा पैदा करती है, अर्थात् एक व्यक्ति के जोश को एक नयी जान देती है जो उसे बिखरने नहीं देता। इस प्रकार डिंगल राजस्थानी साहित्य ही नहीं, साधारण जीवन का भी एक अहम हिस्सा है।

डॉ चारण के मानने में इस युग में डिंगल में कई बदलाव आये हैं। निश्चित रूप से डिंगल ने हमारे सुनहरे व गौरवपूर्ण इतिहास को बाँध कर रखा है। किन्तु डिंगल परंपरा के वारिस स्त्री विमर्श, राजनीति, धर्म-दर्शन, आदि जैसे नए परिवेशों और विषयों के बारे में लिख रहे हैं। इन विचारों के मूल तत्व जटिल तो हैं किन्तु लेखक इन्हे एक खूबसूरत



Akshita Charan

Gajadan Charan



Pramod Sharma

और सरल स्वरूप में व्यक्त करते हैं। आखिरकार नवीनता के सहारे प्रकृति को परिवर्तनशील बनाया जा सकता है।

एक बड़ी समस्या यह है कि यद्यपि राजस्थानी भाषा में वह समस्त मानदंड हैं जो एक स्वतंत्र भाषा की मान्यता के लिए अनिवार्य होते हैं, तथापि राजनीतिक उदासीनता और जनजागृति की अनुपस्थिति के कारण यह आकार नहीं ले पा रहा है। ऐसा नहीं है कि राजस्थानी साहित्यकार प्रयास नहीं कर रहे हैं। हर एक विधा के कई लेखक चेष्टा कर रहे हैं और उनकी यह चेष्टा जरूर फल देगी।

Aakhar Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with ITC Rajputana and Grassroot Media Foundation



Rhythms Of Rajasthan

The music of the sand dunes, brought alive by Rajasthani folk musician Pempa Khan left listeners enchanted at the first virtual event of **Sur aur Saaz** Kolkata. The event was shown on Facebook Live.

Born into a family of Manganiyar musicians, Khan, who has his roots in Barmer district of Rajasthan, is an acclaimed singer as well as a *surnai* (a wooden pipe) and *shehnai* player in the folk traditions of the region. He is credited with popularising Rajasthani folk music not only across the country, but around the world as well. Members of the community have carried on the musical tradition generation after generation, their art once supported by aristocrats and wealthy landlords.

With time, the musicians have contemporised their approach and choice of subjects. Khan himself leads a band called Albela that fuses elements of both Rajasthani and Sufi music to create a unique sound. The band has performed at multiple popular shows such as *Entertainment Ke Liye Kuch Bhi Karega* and the Lakme Fashion Week. Both the woodwind instruments that Khan plays are associated with folk music in the Indian and Anatolian regions. They are often played at weddings and other ceremonies.

Khan himself leads a band called Albela that fuses elements of both Rajasthani and Sufi music to create a unique sound

Khan's soulful notes enthralled the Facebook audience. The highlight of the evening was an original tune created by Albela to spread awareness about the novel coronavirus that had earlier gone viral on social media. Khan's endeavour to educate and inspire people through music in these trying times was deeply appreciated by the online audience.

Ehsaas Woman of Kolkata, Gouri Basu, lauded the performance. "Khan's repertoire is wide and he has played a major role in popularising Rajasthani folk music. He is known for his skilful singing. His music, which borders on the classical, was enjoyed by all," she said.

Sur Aur Saaz is presented by Shree Cement, in association with EZCC, Ministry of Culture, Hyatt Regency Kolkata and Ehsaas Women of Kolkata



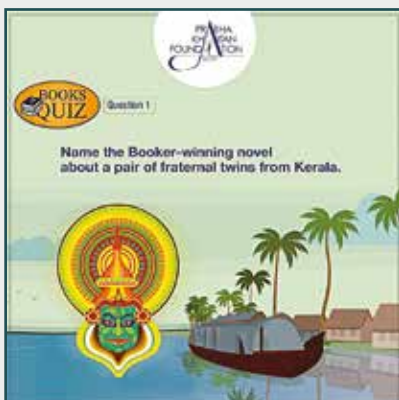
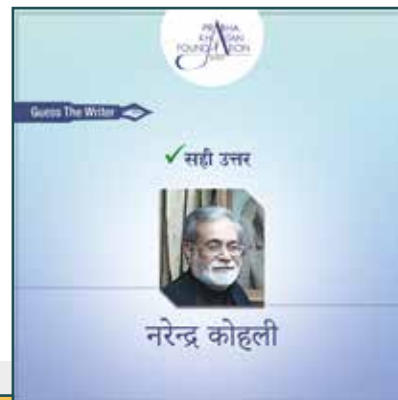
Gouri Basu

Pempa Khan

Online CONTESTS to Beat Lockdown Blues

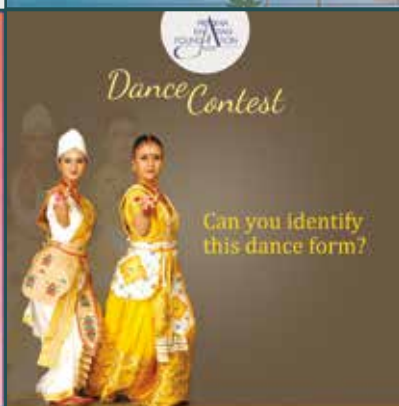
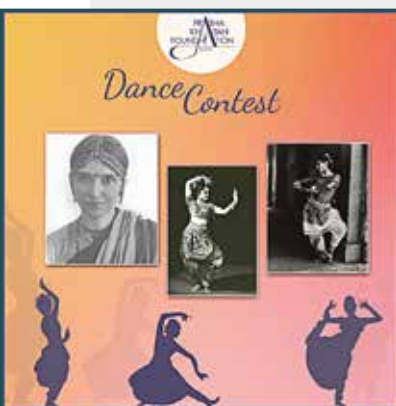
In March, as a new word entered our collective lexicon — social distancing — and #StayHome #StaySafe replaced #YOLO and #TravelGoals, Prabha Khaitan Foundation, too, postponed all on-ground sessions, and embarked upon a new journey to digitally engage with the extended PKF family and readers across India and beyond.

While the Foundation's curated literary and cultural sessions went virtual almost overnight, the team added a new fun element to the Foundation's Social Media presence — PKF Contests. Books, Music, Dance, Food — everything that makes us happy became a part of the PKF Contests. For the English Books Contests, the Foundation partnered with Westland Books



the folk instrument Ravan Hatha to Mohd. Rafi singing in Creole, while dance enthusiasts were asked about the national dance form, Sattriya, to Madhuri Dixit's association with Pt. Birju Maharaj.

The response of the Foundation's online followers was overwhelming, with hundreds of people eagerly participating in each contest. The PK team would like to thank each and every participant for making this online venture a huge success. Many winners have already



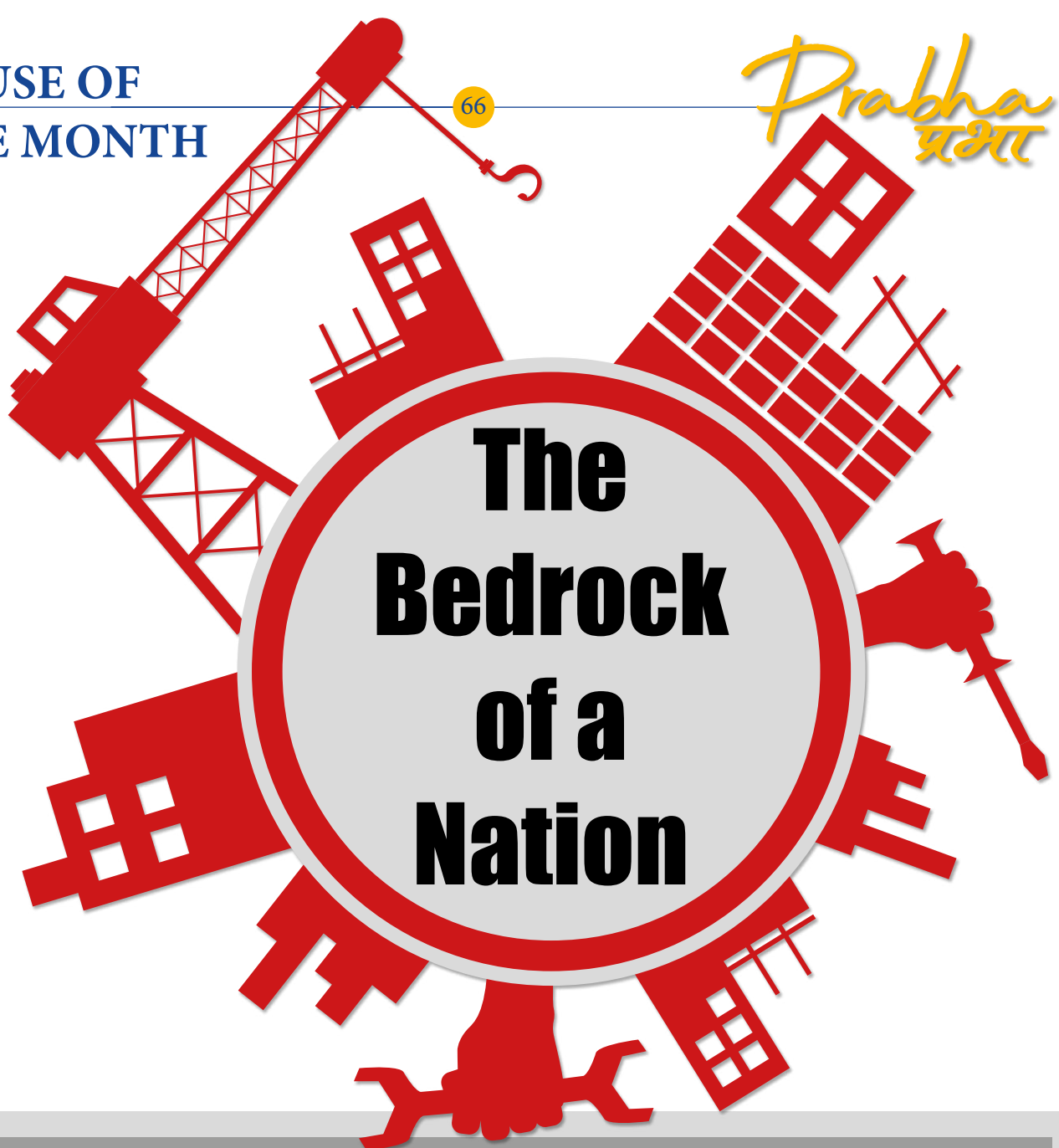
to run a 'Guess the Writer' series, featuring authors like Ashwin Sanghi, Anand Neelakantan, Preeti Shenoy and Pavan K. Varma, while the PKF Hindi Sahitya Pratiyogita featured well-known writers like Narendra Kohli and Yatindra Mishra.

For food lovers, there were pictorial quizzes, quirky crosswords and tongue-twister anagrams, for music aficionados, the audio clues ranged from a rendition on

received their gift vouchers, others who have won signed books from their favourite writers will receive them soon.

PKF Contests will continue, with more new and exciting topics!

To participate, follow PKF on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Celebrating Dignity of Labour on International Workers' Day

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all hosts of heaven and earth pause to say, 'Here lives a great sweeper who did his job well.'"

— Martin Luther King Jr.

On May 1, as the world grappled with the Coronavirus pandemic, a homebound migrant worker walked down a deserted road, battling hunger and fatigue, not knowing, not caring that this was a day marked in red in calendars across the globe, a day honouring him and thousands like him — workers 'who did [their] job well' and without whom the world would come to a standstill.

In India, Labour Day 2020 bore witness to thousands of

labourers struggling to make ends meet, alienated, away from home, without money, food and sometimes even a roof over their heads, as a result of a prolonged lockdown brought upon by the threat of COVID-19. Among the many lives lost over the past couple of months, many were of such labourers trying to return home to their families and meeting with accidents or giving in to exhaustion on the way.

While Labour Day, also known as International Workers' Day, is a much-awaited holiday to sit back and relax for many, the events that led to its institution tell a different story. On May 1, 1886, thousands of industrial workers in the United States took part in a nationwide strike, demanding humane working conditions and an eight-hour instead of the usual 10 to 16-hour workday. When police came to disband protesters in Haymarket

Square, Chicago, on May 4, a bomb thrown by an unidentified person went off, killing seven policemen and at least four civilians. Police responded by opening fire on the crowd, which in turn killed several men and wounded more than 200.

To commemorate this tragic incident, now known as the Haymarket Affair or the Haymarket Massacre, the International Socialist Conference declared May 1 as an international holiday for labour. In India, the first Labour Day, organised by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan, was celebrated on May 1, 1923, in Chennai.

But, despite there being a day celebrating sweat and toil, do we believe in 'dignity of labour'? Not entirely, perhaps. A deeply ingrained prejudice against blue-collar labour and labourers is still rampant. Workers are denied proper wages, social status, respect, and of course, dignity, with many people considering their work to be 'menial' or 'inferior'.

In *Young India*, September 1, 1921, Mahatma Gandhi wrote, "It is a sad thing that our school boys look upon manual labour with disfavour, if not contempt."

'Dignity of labour' emphasises the equality of all jobs, with no occupation being considered superior or inferior to others. Dignity lends a purpose to one's life, creating a citizenry that is able to participate and contribute to growth of a nation as a whole. Such a perception is critical to eradicating the belittlement of labour and instilling a sense of respect towards the otherwise marginalised



ARTWORK BY **SUDIPTA KUNDU**

workers of society.

If we are to rebuild our nation post COVID-19, stronger and more vibrant than ever before, we must first and foremost look to our labourers. Physical labour is indispensable to the growth of a wholesome economy. We at **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hope the current crisis helps us create a more inclusive society where, to complete Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision... "No work is insignificant. All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Guests	Events
Akshara Haasan	Ek Mulakat Nagpur
Piyush Jha	An Author's Afternoon Kolkata, The Write Circle Amritsar
Divya Prakash Dubey	Kalam Meerut
Swanand Kirkire	Kalam Multi-city
Kailash Satyarthi	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Yatindra Mishra	Kalam New York
Manoj Muntashir	Kalam Jalandhar
Dr Swapneil Parikh & Maherra Desai	Kitaab Book Launch Kolkata
Himanshu Bajpai	Kalam Bhubaneswar & Ahmedabad
Nikhil Sachan	Kalam Delhi & Faridabad
Jairam Ramesh	The Write Circle Jodhpur & Pune
Chitra Desai	Kalam Patna & Ranchi
Preeti Shenoy	The Write Circle Birmingham & Oxford
Pratyaksha	Kalam Lucknow
Lisa Ray	The Write Circle Jaipur
Vandana Rag	Kalam Udaipur
Salman Khurshid	Vidyapath Discussion
Storytelling and Puppetry session with Shreedevi Sunil	Education For All Kolkata
Painting Workshop	Education for All Kolkata
Antakshari for Ehsaas women	All India & Overseas

Multiple Lockdown Live events were held in various states.

The views expressed by the speakers during the sessions are personal.



Akshara Haasan

Chitra Desai

Divya Prakash
Dubey



Dr Swapneil Parikh

Himanshu Bajpai

Jairam Ramesh

Lisa Ray



Maherra Desai

Manoj Muntashir

Kailash Satyarthi

Nikhil Sachan



Piyush Jha

Pratyaksha

Preeti Shenoy

Salman Khurshid



Shreedevi Sunil

Swanand Kirkire

Vandana Rag

Yatindra Mishra

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