



# Prabha प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan  
Foundation Chronicle

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## Labour of Love

Pg 4-12

They are our future and yet so many of them are in shackles. Is it not our duty to give them back their childhood? A Nobel man shows the way

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Prabha  
खैतान



MANISHA JAIN  
Communications & Branding Chief,  
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

## *Living The New Normal*

This summer has been a roller coaster of regular events as well as a robust collection of live performances on digital platforms named 'Lockdown Live' organised in aid of folk artists and new talents across Bihar, Bengal, Rajasthan and Punjab in an effort to help them tide over these difficult times. It has been an eventful journey, and we will have a separate edition dedicated to just these artists and their sessions.

The high point of the month's activities was the special session of **Ek Mulakat** with Nobel Peace laureate and child rights activist, Kailash Satyarthi. It was truly inspiring to hear about his enlightening and inspiring journey and work on protecting the rights of children and ensuring that they are protected from societal apathy. His life's work is the main cover feature of this issue.

May was also the month that was hit by super cyclone Amphan, which swept across Bengal and Odisha, and left behind a trail of devastation and misery. Amphan not only uprooted thousands of trees in Kolkata, it also went on a ruthless rampage in the Sunderbans playing havoc with the lives and livelihood of the people there. Lakhs were rendered homeless, marooned and hungry. '**Rahat**', a domain of the Foundation, immediately launched extensive operations to extend aid and relief to victims in every way possible.

In keeping with the 'new normal', our Newsletter too has been given a tweak. From this edition we have made the chronicle an interactive one. Readers will not only be able to read about the sessions but also view entire sessions just with a simple click of a button on the pages. This feature is available in the digital version that is available on our website and in the PDFs sent across.

In the meantime, we hope that all of you are being cautious and maintaining health norms. Do keep sharing your views and thoughts. We are available on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram for updates. Write to us at [newsletter@pkfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@pkfoundation.org). Happy reading!

## In Our Next Issue



Read about the **Ehsaas** women's fun evening of Tambola with a Twist with Tisca Chopra. Tisca shared anecdotes about life and lockdown while the participants eyed the prizes on offer! And the twist? It was tambola with a spot of quizzing, so not only did the women have to get lucky with words, they also had to know the answers! Sample this: What is India's national fruit? If you think you have cracked that one, keep an eye out for the story!

## [ SNAPSHOT OF THE MONTH ]



**Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under the aegis of their **Rahat** initiative, supported SHER in running a community kitchen in the Sunderbans, initiated by the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, for people affected by Amphan.



## Happy Birthday

Prabha WISHES EHSAAAS WOMEN BORN IN MAY

2nd June



Sunita Shekhawat

5th June



Nidhi Garg

6th June



Ketki Bhatia

7th June



Shazia Ilmi

16th June



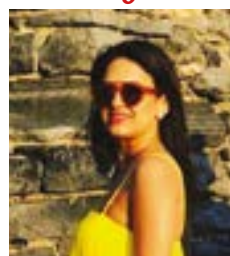
Preeti Mehta

22nd June



Sushma Niraj Sethia

27th June



Karishma Mehta

27th June



Vinita Surana



# Nobel Message of Compassion



Kailash Satyarthi



Yatindra Mishra



Praneet Bubber

Children celebrating the joy of liberation, without the shackles of bondage, is what makes Kalyan Satyarthi the happiest.

The child rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate appealed to people to open their hearts and minds to prioritising the well-being of children at a virtual session of **Ek Mulakat Vishesh**. Satyarthi was in conversation with scholar-author Yatindra Mishra. **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar Praneet Bubber welcomed the guests and audience.

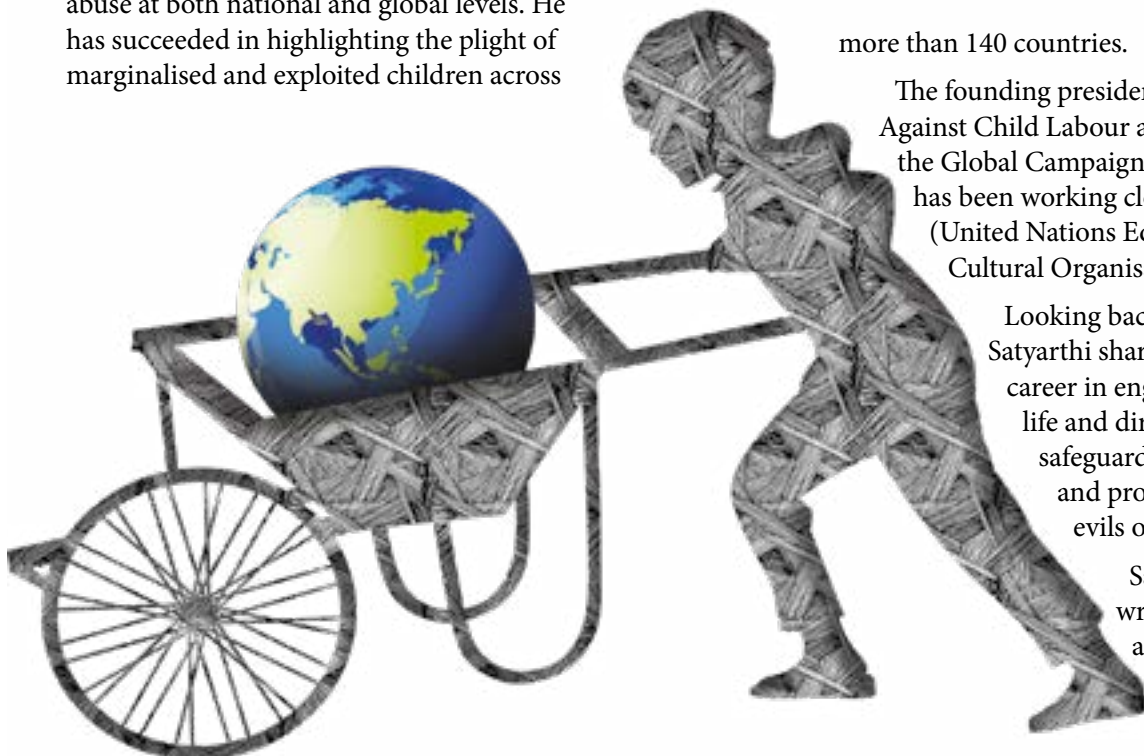
Satyarthi is known to have revolutionised the fight against child abuse, slavery, trafficking and sexual abuse at both national and global levels. He has succeeded in highlighting the plight of marginalised and exploited children across

more than 140 countries.

The founding president of the Global March — Against Child Labour and one of the leaders of the Global Campaign for Education, Satyarthi has been working closely with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation).

Looking back on his journey, Satyarthi shared how he gave up a career in engineering to dedicate his life and direct all his efforts towards safeguarding the rights of children and protecting them from the evils of society.

Satyarthi had started writing on children, women and the ignored and



### Delhi



Nida Fazli's *sher* made complete sense today, 'Ghar se masjid hain bahut dur, chalo yu'n kar lein/ Kisi rotey huye bachhey ko hansaaya jaaye (The mosque is far from our home, instead let's go and make a weeping child smile).'

— Huma Mirza



Neelima Dalmia Adhar



The session was an eye-opener, inspiring and compelling to act for the welfare of suffering children.

— Radhika Relan



One of the strengths of our generation is the ability to identify problems and build anger.

— Mrinali Luthra



Kailash Satyarthi is an inspiration for all activists like me!

— Archana Dalmia



Some people spend a lifetime creating a life of meaning. Others create more meaning in one lifetime than most people possibly could in a hundred lives! It was an honour to witness one such truly legendary personality (even though virtually) — Kailash Satyarthi, an enigmatic yet

simple, incredibly accomplished yet equally grounded Nobel laureate — in a heart-warming session! Thanks to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for organising a memorable *mulakat*.

— Aanchal Garcha

### Raipur



Anisha Dabholkar



Jagdish Jani

### Amritsar



Jasmeet Nayyar

troubled members of society from a very young age. He also launched a magazine, *Sangharsh Jaari Rahega* (The Struggle Will Go On), to document the lives of the vulnerable.

It was a father's plea for help that made Satyarthi realise it was not enough to only write against wrongs. A man called Wasal Khan had knocked on Satyarthi's door one night to save his 15-year-old daughter from being trafficked by mining lords. Khan and his wife had been deceived into bonded labour in mines near Punjab, where they were forced to live and work under deplorable conditions.

Satyarthi mortgaged his wife's jewellery and got a few people together to help him rescue the girl but they were outnumbered. Not one to be deterred, Satyarthi launched a legal battle against the culprits, which resulted in the first documented incident of children being freed from slavery through a private or voluntary initiative. "There

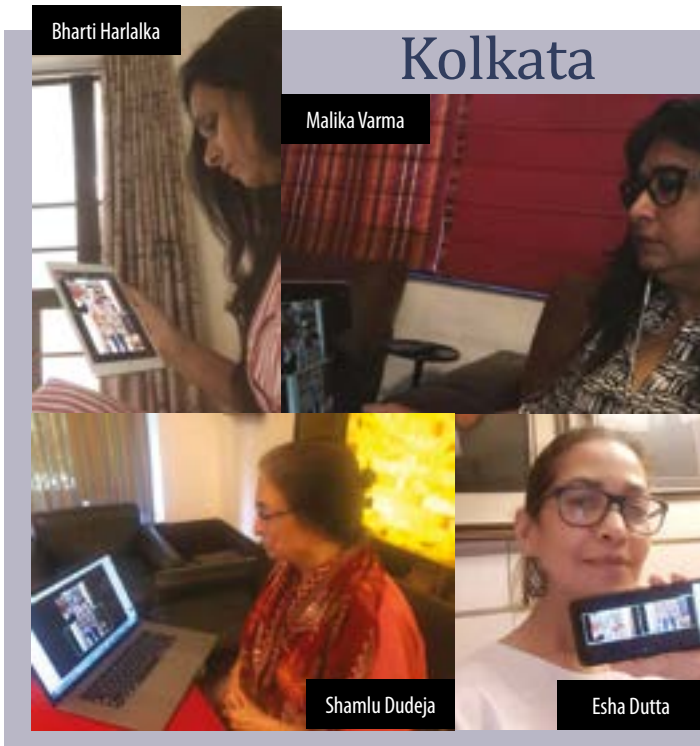
was no looking back after that," the 2014 Nobel laureate said.

Born Kailash Sharma, he took on the title Satyarthi — meaning "seeker of truth" — when he began his crusade to uphold the well-being of lesser privileged children.

Satyarthi's work soon reached the global platform and he became the voice of children all over the world. From his first initiative — *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* — that he launched in 1981 and that grew into India's largest movement for the protection of children, Satyarthi and his team have managed to liberate at least 90,000 children.

A firm believer in the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, Satyarthi has been greatly influenced by the ideologies of Swami Vivekananda as well.

The rights activist called for *karuna ka bhumandalikaran* (globalisation of compassion) in the post-COVID world where the breakdown of the global



## Kolkata

## Udaipur

Learning the lessons of globalisation of compassion is truly what the world needs right now.

— Riddhima Doshi



economy was bound to hit everyone hard. "The current situation can only be called a crisis of civilisation. Hearing all the sad news around us, it seems we have harmed nature and it is taking its revenge," Satyarthi said. "Like I always say, globalisation of compassion is also connected with the supply chain of gratitude. The coronavirus should be seen as an endless sea of *karuna* (compassion) for human beings, where the economy is built on the goodness of the soul. It is essential that we also have *karuna* in us in these trying times. It should not be seen from a communal point of view — *karuna* makes you courageous, builds fortitude to fight inner fears and social evils."

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic may last four to five years, Satyarthi said, and underlined the importance of saving humanity from this global crisis. "The most deprived and marginalised must be kept in mind. Moreover, recent statistics bring into question the safety of children in this country, where four children are raped and eight children go missing every hour. Since the beginning of the lockdown, several studies have shown a significant rise in consumption of child pornography," he said.

## Patna



Thanks to the organisers for arranging this virtual session of **Ek Mulakat Vishesh** with

Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi, which was moderated by Yatindra Mishra. It was engrossing to hear about Satyarthi's journey. He is an inspiration to the coming generations. My regards to him.

— Sangeeta Verma

An opportunity of a virtual *mulakat* (meeting) with the father of the global child rights movement and Nobel Peace laureate Kailash Satyarthi was the



best moment since the lockdown began. This interaction offered me an insight into the humble wisdom of a great man. There's a lot to learn from his vision and unfaltering determination to secure child rights and boost globalisation of compassion. It was an incredible session. Thank you **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

— Vikas Singh



It was a well-conducted webinar. Satyarthi's work apart, it was good to discover such a good poet.

— Tuhin Shanker

Explaining the framework of his endeavours, Satyarthi shared his Anger, Idea, Action formula. It is definitely acceptable to be angered by injustice and atrocities, but one should channelise one's anger in a positive manner to create platforms or conduct activities that would mobilise action.

Creating awareness is also top on his agenda. Satyarthi had initiated the Bharat Yatra, a nationwide march to generate awareness on child sexual abuse and trafficking, in 2017. The movement had brought about a million people — especially the youth — to the streets.

Satyarthi is at present trying to generate support from the United Nations (UN) and the G20 countries for

## Pune



I enjoyed the session. Kailashji is a very simple man with a lot of clarity in what he wants to do and why.

— Priti Sanghvi



Thanks **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. Kailash Satyarthi's words touched the heart and his poem on the recent death of 16 migrants filled our eyes with tears. His lessons for compassion for everyone, especially in politics, and using aggression and anger for constructive purposes were beautiful.

— Amita Munot



It was a great session. Satyarthiji is such a humble personality with a down-to-earth attitude. He said all politicians should have *karuna* (empathy) but the problem is those who have empathy (people like him) never join politics!

— Shalini Mundada

It was such an honour to listen to Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi. Loved the way he explained things — to treat others' *pareshaani* (worries) as your own and to try and dispel them like you would your own, and not to just show sympathy. The highlight of the session was when he said the need of the hour was globalisation of compassion.

— Seema Handa

children from marginalised communities. "Children are my biggest inspiration, hence, I, along with other global leaders and Nobel laureates, have taken the responsibility to ensure that a certain percentage of the COVID-19 relief fund announced by the G20 forum goes to the lowest strata and marginalised sections of society towards education, health, medicine and other needs of their children. We are already in talks with the G20 leaders and the UN about this," the activist said.

It was extremely enlightening to listen to Satyarthiji. Thanks to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, we have been able to attend many such virtual sessions during the lockdown. It has been something to



look forward to. Satyarthiji's talk was so simple and yet so thought-provoking — globalisation of compassion (*karuna*), supply chain of gratitude, channelising anger into something more creative, crisis for civilisation, digital inequality in future and so much more. But what I liked best was the line, "*Marte toh woh hain jo sapna dekhna band kar dete hain* (*Those who stop dreaming are as good as dead*)." Thank you for the insightful talk.

— Mohini Karkarey

It was a great opportunity to listen to Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi. Thanks for arranging this talk. The two phrases, "globalisation of compassion" and "supply chain of gratitude", will always stay with me. Another point he made about channelising anger for constructive purposes gives us an insight in today's trying times. Thank you once again, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and **Ehsaas** for organising such programmes on a digital platform. All my family members enjoyed listening to such a great personality.



— Gauri Despande

Contemplating on the death of migrant labourers, Satyarthi read out a poem he has written on them. Rather than sympathising with people who are suffering, one should try and feel their anguish, Satyarthi said. "When one feels someone else's pain, they are able to lead the movement of change." Only then can one come up with a solution.

On a lighter note, he added that the very first poem he ever wrote had been to woo his wife Sumedha and dedicated it to her one Diwali.

Satyarthi's favourite book is the *Bhagavad Gita*, he likes to hum the tune of *Hum honge kamyab* and whenever he is out of the country, the song *Aye mere pyare watan* plays in his mind. The Nobel laureate also confessed to being a Meena Kumari fan.

## घर लौटने को बताब भाग रहे भाई-बहिनों के नाम

खून से सनी रोटियों के साथ चिपकी पड़ी हैं जो  
रेल की पटरियों पर, वो मेरी उंगलियां हैं  
बड़ी मेहनत से कमाई थीं ये रोटियां  
लंबे सफ़र के लिए बचाई थीं ये रोटियां

रोते-रोते मुझे छोड़कर मां भूखी सो पाई होगी ?  
उसने तो बांधकर रख दी थी पूरे आटे की रोटियां  
शहर तक के मेरे लंबे सफ़र के लिए  
नहीं मालूम था कुछ रास्ते एकतरफा होते हैं  
मां के आंसुओं से कहीं ज्यादा, बहुत ज्यादा  
तकलीफदेह थी उसकी खांसी और सूखती काया  
बहुत रुलाता था भूखी गायों का रंभाना  
शेरू की असमय मौत और साहूकार का रोज-रोज गरियाना  
पिता के हाथों खोदे गए मगर अब सूखे पड़े कुएं में  
यूं ही बार-बार झांकना बहुत रुलाता था

संकट एक कहीं से आया और मुझे एहसास दे गया  
मेरे और शहर के सपने अलग-अलग हैं  
मेरे और उनके अपने भी अलग-अलग हैं  
बहुत हो चुका, लौट पड़ा था उसे पकड़ने छूट गया था जो अपने घर पर  
मेरी मां को मत बतलाना जो देखा तुमने पटरी पर  
कहना, कैसे मर सकता है  
जिसकी नज़र उतारी थी तूने उधार की राई लेकर ?  
बोल सको तो सच कह देना  
ईंट-ईंट, पत्थर -पत्थर में बसता है अब तेरा बेटा  
बसता है वो हर मकान में, मंदिर-मस्जिद गिरजाघर में

देख रहे हो कुछ भी अपनी आंखों से  
हाथों से जो कुछ भी तुम छू सकते हो  
उन सब में मैं हूँ - मैं अब भी ज़िंदा हूँ  
मेरे सपने मरे नहीं हैं, फिर मैं कैसे मर सकता हूँ  
कायनात जब तक ज़िंदा है, मैं ज़िंदा हूँ  
मरते वो हैं जिनके सपने मर जाते हैं

— कैलाश सत्यार्थी

(Kailash Satyarthi recited this poem during the session)



### Jodhpur



"कैलाश जी, आप मासूम जिंदगियों के सपने बचाने के लिए काम कर रहे हैं। यह तभी कर पाते हैं जब आपके भीतर करुणा भरी है। आप का एक अलग कवि रूप भी देखा। बहुत सुंदर कविताएं। ये कविताएं सच का बयान करती हैं।"

— Padmaja Sharma



"Those with tiny hands and tiny feet,  
Innocent faces and eager eyes;  
Don't deserve the heavy burden of  
manual labour,  
Only the heavy weight of books to  
become wise!

Child rape and porn, slavery and trafficking for labour,  
Against all this we have to take action;  
Also sexual abuse, armed conflicts offending children,  
His mantra is Globalisation of Compassion!

The Nobel laureate who's always raised his voice,  
Against the exploitation of children and youth;  
So inspiring to see Yatindra Mishra speak,  
With Kailash Satyarthi, the seeker of truth!"

— Preeti Mehta

"प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन के तत्वावधान में हुए एक मुलाकात कार्यक्रम में आज श्री कैलाश सत्यार्थी जी को सुनना अपने आप में सुखद अनुभूति थी। एक सरल एवं सहज व्यक्तित्व जिनके हृदय में सम्पूर्ण मानव जाति विशेषकर बच्चों के प्रति करुणा और संवदेना का भाव प्रशंसनीय तो है ही अपितु अनुकरणीय है।

उनका पूरा जीवन हमारे लिए एक दृष्टांत है।

इस प्रकार के उदबोधन एक व्यक्ति को नई दिशा दिखाने के साथ-साथ स्वयं के अस्तित्व का बोध भी कराते हैं कि समाज में हमारी भूमिका क्या है। शोषित, पिछड़े और वंचित वर्ग के प्रति सरकार ही नहीं हमारे भी कुछ कर्तव्य हैं। माननीय कैलाश सत्यार्थी जी का यह उदबोधन युवाओं के लिए और समाज के हर वर्ग के लिए प्रेरणादायी और चिंतन का विषय था। प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन का हृदय से आभार इस कार्यक्रम से जोड़ने के लिए।"

— Akash Middha



I want to thank **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for organising such a precious session with a great personality. I'm looking

forward to many more inspiring and positive sessions during the lockdown.

— Renu Verma



It was a pleasure listening to a rising-from-the-grassroots activist fighting child labour. Kailash Satyarthi ji is simple to the core and an analytical thinker who puts words into action. I am touched and continue to be in awe of this great personality. Thank you for having me in the session.

— Manoj Bali, GM, Radisson Blu Hotel



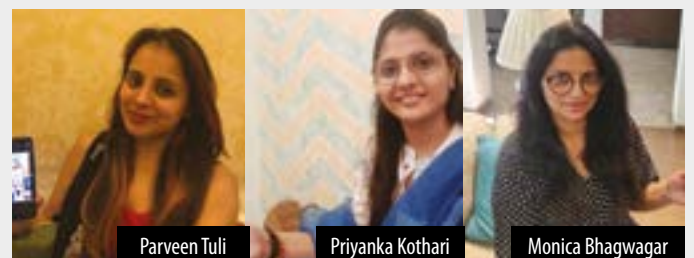
It was an amazing session with such an accomplished human being. He inspires with his simplicity and humility. He is limitless in his range, as he approaches everything with utmost simplicity. I must congratulate **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for giving us the opportunity to listen to such a personality, who in his humility is much larger than the largest. The interviewer, Yatindra Mishra, was fabulous. He is himself a master.

— Rajeev Agarwal

### Nagpur

I am very lucky to have had this opportunity to hear such a great person live. His saying 'globalisation of compassion' and his poetry left me deeply moved. I salute the person for his noble work. Thank you for inviting me to this wonderful session.

— Poornima Patil



Parveen Tuli

Priyanka Kothari

Monica Bhagwagar

# Gift a Smile to Every Child

*I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign on my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.*

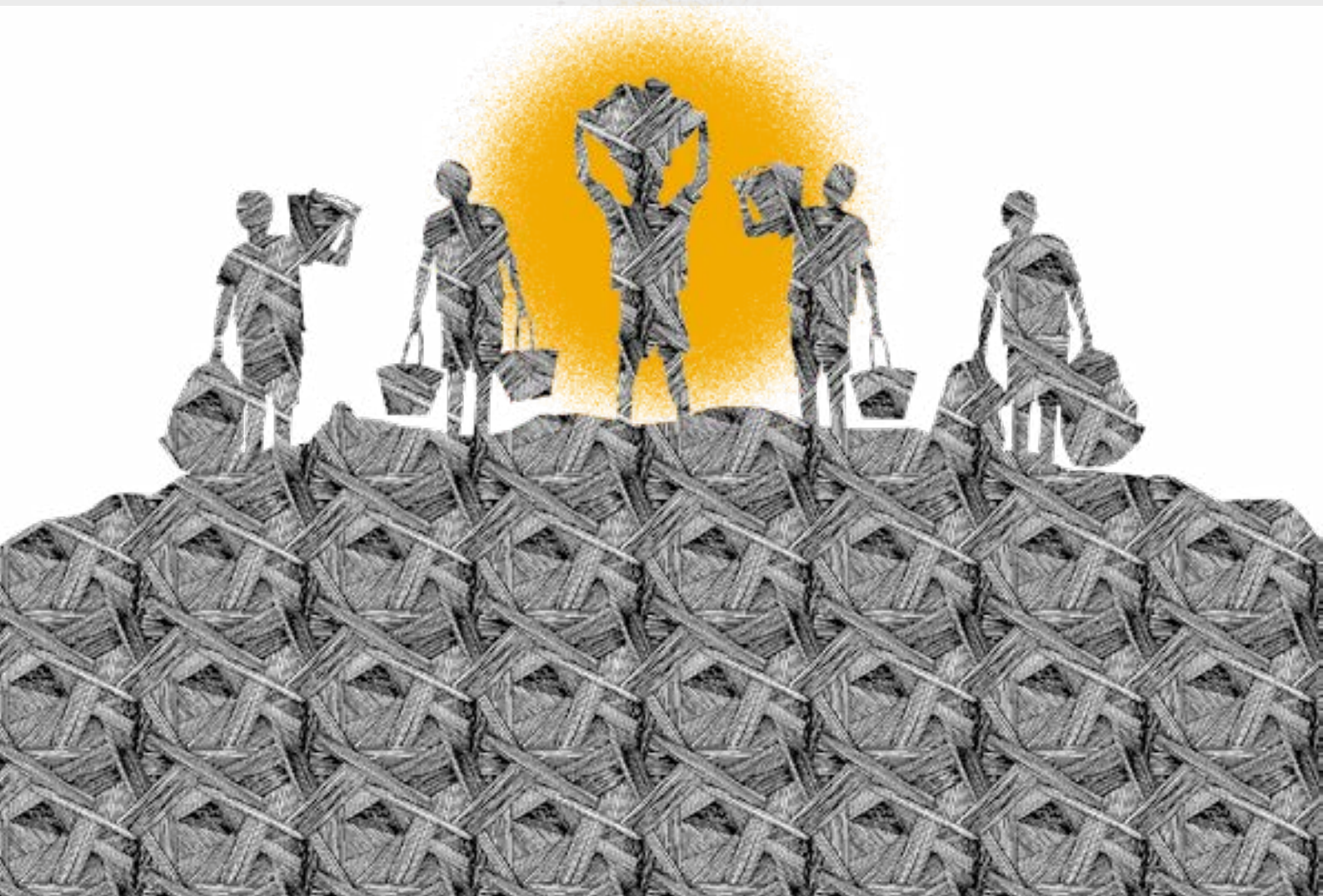
— A young David Copperfield when he is sent to work in a warehouse after his mother's death

A century and a half later, the words still ring true whenever we see a child serving tea at a roadside stall or selling knick-knacks at traffic signals. The debate on what actually encompasses child labour has raged on for

decades, while millions of dreams are shattered every day as young impressionable minds succumb to exploitation and abuse.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) declared marked June 12 as World Day against Child Labour in 2002 to raise awareness about children being engaged in work that is "mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous". People in almost 100 countries across the world have since observed the day to pledge to end child labour and protect children.

A report published by ILO shows that one in every 10 children worldwide are engaged in child labour. "Nearly half of all those in child labour — 73 million children in absolute terms — are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development. Children in forced labour, a worst form of child labour that is estimated using a separate methodology, number



ARTWORK BY  
**SUDIPTA KUNDU**

4.3 million," according to the report.

Can we explain this appalling reality? Is it a lack of stringent laws or a consistent apathy on our part that has forced our children to fend for themselves in a merciless world?

Poverty has most often been identified as the primary driver behind child labour, more so in the light of the onpandemic. Impoverished families encourage children to work long arduous hours in the hope of adding to their scarce income. Lack of choices, meagre supplies and a pressing urge for financial certainty obliterates all else — even concern for the well-being of a child.

Perpetrators of child labour thrive on such helplessness, our indifference and corruption. The victimised child is left on his own, struggling to rein in his restless mind, wondering why he cannot run around and play like others his age. Eventually, despair creeps in.

Carol Bellamy, former executive director of UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), had said "when

the lives and the rights of children are at stake, there must be no silent witnesses". In every minute that we are silent, an innocent child's future in some corner of the world is being jeopardised. Showing compassion, extending a hand of support and standing up for that little boy washing vehicles down the road can help make a tremendous amount of difference.

2021 has been declared the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The resolution underscores member states' commitment "to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms".

We at **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hope in the near future, we'll be able gift all our children the childhood they deserve, where each new day is an exciting adventure, bringing with it a new reason to smile.



# Where is Your Anger?

I have been thinking of my daughter and the image of her body chopped up into 12 pieces by her traffickers has not ceased to haunt me every single day. I am angry. And feel helpless, for not being able to protect her.

I look around, and the silence deafens me. Where are the spokespersons of human rights? Where are the religious leaders, media, politicians, or candle marchers? Where is your anger? Does a 15-year-old child not deserve our outrage until she is a symbol of a community, religion or political group? It is evident that our outrage is contingent upon our personal agendas and vendettas, to which our children are hostage. I am writing today to question this growing state of selective sympathy and reactive response.

Why was my daughter so brutally murdered in the capital of India? The reason – she asked for her wages. We cringed; we shook our head and then turned it away. Educated and civilised, we look for communal or political gains in the death of a child. And when we find none, we discard her. Our education, our development, and our democracy failed in the face of our apathy.

Over 80% of India's workforce is employed in the unorganised and informal sector. This includes agriculture, domestic work, daily wage earners and other home-based and small scale industry. It is in this sector that children are most abused through forced labour, trafficking, slavery and physical and sexual exploitation. This abuse of children thrives in the absence of regulatory policy, accountable institutions and an apathetic society. And it is on the shoulders of this unseen, unpaid, underage and exploited workforce that we hope to achieve real and sustainable economic growth. This is both logically and ethically problematic.

The girl was victim of multiple violations through systemic and structural failures. Primarily, there was a failure to prevent trafficking of the child into forced labour, through ineffective implementation of RTE and social welfare schemes to the child and her family. Her vulnerability was heightened as she fell through the safety net of her home, school and community. She was then faced with structural violence committed against the child through the very institutions that are built to protect her. Judicial orders for investigation of missing children are disregarded. Goons and traffickers function fearlessly

in absence of rule of law, empowered by corruption and political negligence.

Placement agencies operate as hubs of trafficking, in the absence of regulatory policy. Crime is perpetuated through inadequate police and judicial infrastructure, along with slow and corrupt prosecution. We must stop using poverty as an excuse for slavery and bondage of our children. If we do not educate and empower our children today, are we not perpetuating the cycle of poverty? When over 18.6 million adults remain unemployed in India today, what is the reason India still employs over 10 million children?

I recount my child Ashraf who worked as domestic labour in the house of an IAS officer in Delhi in 1994. He was brutally beaten up and thrown to the streets, after being blamed for taking a sip of milk kept for the officer's children. What followed was a long, protracted fight for justice that resulted in criminalising employment of children for domestic work in India.

And here we are, over 25 years later, fighting the same battle. We have criminalised, but we have not transformed. We must regulate agencies that actively traffic children through deceit of a safe and secure life, and we must empower commissions for protection of child rights to fulfil their mandate in word and spirit. The recent amendment to the child labour law does not consider domestic work to be a hazardous occupation for adolescents between 14 and 18. Does the story of our 15-year-old daughter not prove otherwise? I urge the government of India to protect children from being forced to work as domestic slaves.

On this World Day against Child Labour, I once again challenge the conscience of my country. I challenge our selective sympathies and reactive responses, that demonstrate the superficiality of our anger that has failed to translate into real compassion for our children. Dig deeper and find that compassion. Our children cannot wait any longer.

**Kailash Satyarthi**

*(Published in Times of India)*



Shinjini Kulkarni

## DANCE OF DREAMS

Birju Maharaj, Kulkarni started performing when she was eight.

She spoke about the contemporary interpretations of various dance forms and explained how each dance form, including Kathak, has evolved over time. Each era, she said, mirrors itself in art and culture and all art forms need experimentation to stay relevant. But she also stressed that the purity of a dance form should not be tampered with.

Kulkarni invoked the monsoon and depicted *damini* or lightning in a piece choreographed by her and set to music from the album *Mann Bheetar*, composed by Rajiv Mahavir, with lyrics penned by Pandit Birju Maharaj.

The piece, inspired by poet Nirala (Suryakant Tripathi), saw the *nayika* (heroine) engrossed in *shringar* (make-up), surrounded by nature. She brightened her lips with berries, adorned her dupatta with stars and wrapped flowers around her wrists as bangles.

The final piece, choreographed by Kulkarni and set to music by Pandit Birju Maharaj, was a celebration of *vasant ritu* (spring).

Kulkarni's gracefulness, her *abhinaya* (acting) and the vivid imagery that was part of her performance left the virtual audience mesmerised.

Replying to Ehsaas Woman and Odissi dancer Dona Ganguly's question on what dance meant to her, Kulkarni said dance was her best friend and she hoped that it would transform into a life-long lover and companion that would always support her and provide an outlet to her emotions when she was at her lowest, while pushing her to give and do her best at all times.

What does lightning look and feel like? What happens when you adorn yourself with nature's gifts? Dancer Shinjini Kulkarni brought to life seasons and nature through Kathak at **Prabha Khaitan Foundation's** Facebook Live performance.

Kulkarni, who has performed in films like *Jaanisaar* and *Har Har Byomkesh* and is currently part of a pure classical percussion band Laya Curry, was introduced by **Ehsaas Woman** and the Foundation's honorary convener of overseas affairs, Aakriti Mittal Periwal.

**Ehsaas Woman** of Noida and a ninth-generation dancer from Lucknow's Kalka-Bindadin gharana, Kulkarni opened the session by speaking about how the pandemic is nature's way of reclaiming and reviving its former glory from the clutches of human exploitation. She shared her joy at how children can now hear birds chirp at their window and the peacock that has been visiting her terrace during the lockdown.

Having begun dance lessons at the age of five under her grandfather, Kathak legend Pandit



Aakriti Mittal Periwal



Dona Ganguly

# M for Music, M for Masti — An Evening of Funtakshari



*Baithe baithe kya kare, karna hai kuchh kaam  
Shuru kare antakshari leke prabhu ka naam*

**R**oad trips to family gatherings, picnics to power cuts and now the pandemic, *antakshari* is a sure winner to dispel boredom anywhere and everywhere.

**Ehsaas** Women, who have been working silently and relentlessly for the welfare of the less privileged during the lockdown, had their dose of musical *masti* at a virtual *Antakshari* organised by the **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** to spread positivity and cheer in these bleak times.

The musical evening was anchored by Rajat Baid and a panel of eminent personalities from the music and literary worlds joined in. Singer Usha Uthup, poet and author Yatindra Mishra, actor and politician Vani Tripathi and author and editor Anant Vijay pitched in with questions between rounds to take the game forward.

The game was all fun with no rules and hence aptly renamed *Funtakshari*.

The **Ehsaas** Women formed teams named after various dynasties of India – Raisina, Marwar, Tanjore, Saurashtra, Magadh, Nilgiri, Punjab and Awadh. An hour and a half passed by in the blink of an eye amid songs, laughter and cheers from panellists rooting for their favourite cities.

Team Marwar was the winner and Team Magadh the runner-up.



As a guest judge of Antakshari, I loved the fact that the **Ehsaas Women** from all over India got together as one. When we are asking the women to stay strong, the conglomeration of **Ehsaas Women** sends out a message of unity. That's what made an impact on me. It was great to be a part of our "home game", which is Antakshari.

— Usha Uthup



It was an evening of musical fun and cheer. In these troubled times, it is important for us to stay in touch with the child within us and be filled with optimistic energy. Thank you **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for making this evening possible.

— Seema Singh, Ranchi

Really enjoyed myself!  
Thank you.

— Ruhi Syal, Jalandhar



Congratulations to the **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** team for another successful event. It feels good that the Foundation is giving the **Ehsaas connect** so much importance and building bridges across the country even in these tough times. Games are indeed an ideal platform for such get-togethers. The special guests and a professional facilitator like Rajat Baid made a huge difference. Looking forward to more such events.

— Priyanka Kothari, Nagpur

The virtual Antakshari was an amazing and unique experience. Thank you **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for this wonderful opportunity.

— Jyoti Kapoor, Nagpur



कोरोना के संकट के दौर में जब देशभर के लोग अपने अपने घरों में बंद थे, अहसास वूमन और प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन ने अंताक्षरी का आयोजन किया। ये अपनी तरह का अनूठा प्रयास था। इस संकट-काल में अंताक्षरी ने देशभर के लोगों को जोड़ने का काम किया और घर बंदी के दौर में उसी तरह से था जैसे भयंकर गर्मी में शीतल हवा राहत प्रदान करती है।

— Anant Vijay



The online Antakshari was a brilliant concept with a lot of fun, music and warmth shared among the **Ehsaas** women. I feel privileged to be a part of this wonderful event. Kudos to Team **Kalam** and **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

— Yatindra Mishra

Now's the time to relax and chill, time for us all to slow down;  
Hope everyone's holding up, while hunkering down!  
So sheltering in place and Zooming are the new norm;  
Pretty easy stuff, while frontline medics battle the storm!  
Live in the moment; create some cheer and amusement in it;  
If we can give some joy to others, just be happy to give it!  
**Ehsaas** friends got together, to virtually hold each other's hand;  
Antakshari was the time to laugh, sing, unwind and understand!  
An evening full of music, lyrics, melodies and strains;  
Thanks **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, hope we can plan something fun again!

— Preeti Mehta, Jodhpur

Thank you so much team **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for putting in so much effort for the online Antakshari. It was interesting and it definitely filled us with enthusiasm amid the lockdown blues.

— Nidhi Garg, Bhubaneswar

It was really good to interact with other **Ehsaas** women through this fun platform. It gave me a warm feeling to know that we are part of such a dynamic group of ladies. Having stars like Usha Uthup and Yatindra Mishra in the same room was the icing on the cake.

— Shruti Mittal, Bangalore

It was a real fun event! Enjoyed the interesting rounds, the songs and the camaraderie with other participants. The special guests added that extra zing to the event. A delightful evening indeed.

— Sujata Sabnis, Pune



It was a soul-soothing experience to see so many pretty ladies, and some handsome men, enjoying themselves together, singing along, despite the tough circumstances all around. For a couple of hours, all else was forgotten.

— Anshu Mehra, Meerut

I always enjoy all the wonderful initiatives started by the Foundation and it's great being a part of the **Ehsaas** group and **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

— Sushma Sethia, Jodhpur





During this crazy period of lockdown, when we have seldom stepped out and women especially are burdened with tremendous workload, juggling household work and work from home, attending the Antakshari session with some amazing women achievers from across the country was like a breath of fresh air. It also brought back a lot of childhood memories. It was great fun for me and a much-needed relief for a lot of women who are a part of the Ehsaas movement.

Virtual is the new normal, so what better way to entertain yourself than to have friends and associates from across India get together online? The icing on the cake was Usha Uthup who sang many songs and was very appreciative and encouraging of the women. Also, my co-judges and panellists Yatindra Mishra and Anant Vijay are like family to me. I think such initiatives should be given more value because mental health is a big issue right now, especially for women who are overworked.

— Vani Tripathi Tikoo

अंताक्षरी के ज़रिए एक बार फिर से पुराने दिन गुलज़ार हो गए। हर लफ़्ज़ का आखिरी हर्फ़ पकड़ते ही ओठ गुनगुनाने लगे। साँसों की माला देर तक चलती रही। साथ में संगत करने वाले भी एक से एक थे। उषा उत्थप जी की दमदार आवाज़ के साथ हमें साथ देने का मौक़ा मिला, छोटे छोटे अंतराओं में सुर गूँज रहे थे और वक़्त कम पड़ रहा था। सभी अहसास वुमन के साथ सुर मिलाने की सबकी कोशिश उमदा रही, जबकि मैं और गाना दो अलग-अलग चीज़ें मानती थी परन्तु उस दिन यह अहसास हुआ कि थोड़े सुर में गा सकती हूँ। रजत जी का सारी टीम के साथ समन्वय बनाना और बेहतरीन तरीके से अतिथियों और अहसास वुमन को जोड़ने की कला बहुत सुंदर। उम्मीद है जल्द ही दोबारा प्रभा खैतान फाउंडेशन द्वारा अंताक्षरी शुरू होगी लेकर हरि का नाम।

— Poonam Anand, Ranchi



The online Antakshari was super fun. A well-planned event in these dull days of quarantine. Music always brings solace to the soul and so did this amazing evening with some foot-tapping rhythm and beats. A big thanks to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for such a fantastic evening.

— Shweta Aggarwal,  
Faridabad

# Where The Reader is

## The Hero



Divya Prakash Dubey

of storytelling. In Dubey's works, the reader becomes a character, rather the protagonist, while the writer weaves his plot around them to build a captivating narrative. He even adds music to his creations to create a sensory experience.

With four books — all bestsellers — to his credit, Dubey has managed to draw the reluctant youth to his blend of Devanagari and Roman scripts. "Bhasha (language) is not desi ghee, it is nostalgia," said the author, a firm believer in the theory that language binds us to our previous generation. It is the responsibility of writers to preserve their languages, each with its own character and identity, he stressed.

Dubey's works include *Masala Chai*, a short story collection, and *Musafir Café* and *October Junction*, both novels.

At a time when the world seems to be crashing down around us, Dubey reminded the audience of the power of literature in these difficult times.

Students are often pulled up for mixing languages and cautioned that they would fail to achieve fluency in either. And yet, languages are more often than not meant to be blended together — borrowing one word from here and another from there offers a colourful experience unlike any other. It is this perspective on language that draws readers to Divya Prakash Dubey's works, written in Hinglish.

In conversation with Anshu Mehra, **Ehsaas** Woman of Meerut, at a virtual session of Kalam, Dubey took the viewers on a journey through his life and his craft.

Bored of his work as AGM of marketing in a telecom major, Dubey took to writing on weekends and sharing it with friends. With time, the pieces were compiled and published as *Terms and Conditions Apply*.

Dubey quit his job to pursue full-time his passion of *storybaazi* — a term he has coined for his own style



Anshu Mehra

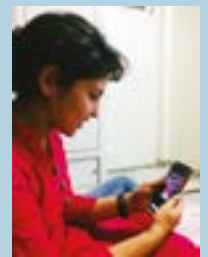
Dubeyji responded brilliantly and the talk was very interesting with relatable life experiences. Looking forward to reading his books.

— Shilpa Aggarwal



Dubeyji made an instant connect with the audience with his charming style and easy flowing "naiwali Hindi". His *storybaazi* was simple and hilarious. I will certainly pick up his books.

— Akshika Singh



Garima Mithal

*Kalam Meerut is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Crystal Palace and Ehsaas women of Meerut*

# Music The Food of His Life and Literature

Mishra shared a deep association with Girija Devi, and the imagery of the silver-haired lady in her white sari lingers in his mind to this day



Yatindra Mishra



Anoop Bhargava

A royal family member and his literary journey held a virtual audience in awe at **Kalam New York**, organised by the **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

Author Yatindra Mishra spoke about *tehzeeb* (culture, etiquette, manners) and *sahitya* (literature) in conversation with Anoop Bhargava, an associate of the Foundation based in New York.

A member of Ayodhya's royal lineage, Mishra reminisced the austere ambience of his childhood, devoid of the pomp and glamour of a royal lifestyle. His grand exposures included visits to classical vocalists Begum Akhtar and Girija Devi, whose presence in his life the author described as that of a grandmother and a guardian.

Mishra shared a deep association with Girija Devi, and the imagery of the silver-haired lady in her white sari lingers in his mind to this day. His many exchanges with her led him to pen a book *Girija: A Journey through Thumri*.

Long conversations with Lata Mangeshkar while penning lyrics for *Garam Coat* inspired Mishra to write *Lata: Sur Gatha*.

Mishra's association with musical maestros like Ustad Bismillah Khan, whose performances at both temples and Islamic gatherings shed light on his syncretic perception of music and culture, afforded the writer a keen understanding of the shehnai player's *rutba* towards life.

A student of microbiology, Mishra had always been drawn to the written word and went on to do a PhD in Hindi. He was greatly encouraged to pursue his passion by his aunt, who recognised his flair for language, and his friends.

A prolific author and scholar, Mishra has written four anthologies of poetry and immortalised the lives of musical virtuosos and Kathak danseuse Sonal Mansingh through his books. He has also compiled many of Gulzar's lyrics and documented hundred years of Indian cinema. His works have been translated into English, German and Urdu.

As founder of Vimla Devi Foundation, named after his grandmother, Mishra aims to conserve Indian art and culture.

*Kalam New York is presented in association with Jhilmil*



Akshara Haasan

# The Many Faces of Akshara



Priyanka Kothari

First she wanted to be a dancer, then an army officer and even a footballer. But Akshara Haasan ended up in films, as assistant director, director, producer and actress. For her retirement, though, she has jamming and farming in mind.

The perfect combination of beauty and brains, Haasan shared her journey to stardom at **Ek Mulakat Nagpur**, in conversation with **Ehsaas** Woman Priyanka Kothari.

Daughter of actor-turned-politician Kamal Haasan and actress Sarika, Haasan made her foray into Bollywood with *Shamitabh*, starring Amitabh Bachchan and Dhanush.

Haasan and her sister Shruti were introduced to arts, culture and sports by their parents and it is this exposure that, Haasan believes, greatly influenced and guided her choices in life.

Although considered the "baby of the family", Haasan said she was treated like an adult and her opinion given the same weightage as that of other family members. The actress spoke about how her parents had prepared her to face the world, while her sister was always there to stand

up for her.

Mumbai turned out to be an eye-opener for Haasan — she was bullied and mocked but stood her ground, turning it into a learning experience for herself.

Haasan has had several aspirations right from childhood. Passionate about dancing and greatly inspired by Michael Jackson, as a young girl she had wanted to be a dancer. The wish was soon taken over by her desire to join the army till her parents gave her a broader picture. Next, Haasan decided to take up football.

But films turned out to be her ultimate calling. Working as an assistant director, she was bitten by the acting bug and it was a "dream come true" for Haasan when she bagged R. Balki's *Shamitabh*. The actress remembered how sharing a scene with the Big B gave her goosebumps. Bachchan was encouraging and made sure the young actress felt comfortable. Describing her emotions during the last scene of *Shamitabh*, which she termed as "iconic", Haasan said she had silently connected with her co-star after the scene was shot as both had gone through the same consuming emotion.



Thank you for the invite, Akshara was such a refreshing person, so humble and open.

— Anjali Purohit

It was a pleasure interacting with such a multi-faceted personality. Thanks to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for this opportunity.

— Mohini Berry



Thank you for a wonderful session, very well-anchored by Priyanka. It was a revelation to know about so many facets of Akshara Hasaan's personality. She's truly talented, a star in her own right.

— Manoj Bali

She is like a breath of fresh air in Bollywood, innocent but intelligent, dignified but bubbly and speaks with so much passion about her work. Priyanka did a fabulous Job.

— Jyoti Goenka

The session was very good and Akshara was so unassuming and sweet. Priyanka was very well-spoken.

— Neeta Kale



I was all ears. Akshara seemed every bit the talented and beautiful person. The session was well-conducted by the pretty Priyanka Kothari.

— Priyanka Jaiswal



Nilufer Rana



Parveen Tuli and Jyoti Kapoor



Vineeta Maheshwari



Monica Bhagwagar

Haasan also spoke about her directorial experience and the need for knowledge of every aspect of cinema, including costume, make-up, camera, light and location, to be able to create good work. She also explained how the southern film industry was very different from Bollywood in its treatment of plot, work ethics, professional environment, music and acting.

Co-producing with mother Sarika has been a joyful experience for Haasan.

Unhappy with her performance in *Laali Ki Shaadi Mein Laaddoo Deewana*, Haasan worked harder on playing the pregnant Aatirah in the Tamil action thriller, *Kadaram Kondan*. She attended workshops, received guidance from her parents and practised with a "spare belly".

The actress pointed out how each movie has its own impact and brings its share of changes. "Some we get over and some we don't."

Haasan made her web debut with *Fingertips*, her choice determined by the intriguing script. She soon discovered

its relevance to reality and her own life. About the growing prominence of OTT (over-the-top) platforms, she said it may be a pocket-friendly option but unwinding before the big screen remained ingrained in the country's social fabric.

Photography is another hobby close to her heart and the lockdown has given her the opportunity to brush up on this skill. There's more to do and Haasan has jamming and owning a country home with apple and other fruit orchards on her post-retirement agenda.

The actress ended the session with an appeal to the virtual audience to stay safe and stay positive.

*Ek Mulakat Nagpur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Lokmat, Radisson Blu Nagpur, Ehsaas women of Nagpur*

# Fact Meets Fiction in Piyush Jha's Writing



Arindam Sil

He writes about crime, his true passion is satire and he hopes to write a romance some day. Meet author and filmmaker Piyush Jha.

Jha discussed crime and women with actor-director Arindam Sil at an online session of **An Author's Afternoon**.

**Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata Esha Dutta welcomed the audience before the talk.

As the conversation began, Jha spoke about his method of writing and how he lends expression to his thoughts by using local dialects of Marathi and Mumbaiya within an English narrative to reach out to a wider readership. He believes his readers can identify with the use of two languages and it also helps the author in his urban narrative.

Jha is known to bring out the essence of the place where his works are set, be it his Mumbai-based novels or the film *Sikandar* set in Kashmir

Jha is known to bring out the essence of the place where his works are set, be it his Mumbai-based novels or the film *Sikandar* set in Kashmir.

Speaking about his fascination for thrillers, Jha said crime writing was a way of focussing on social evils that malign our culture at many levels. His first work was *Mumbaistan*.

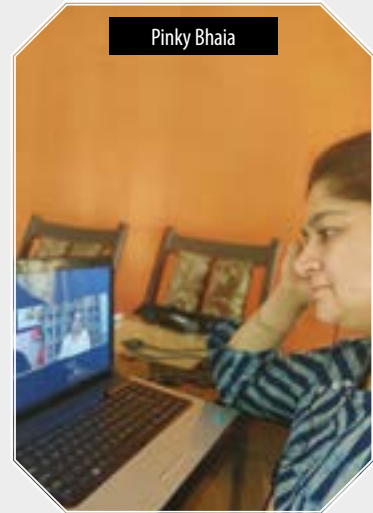
Born and raised in Mumbai, Jha's college days and his subsequent involvement with the students' union exposed him to the ugly face of politics, including a particularly horrible brush with crime that has left an indelible impact on his works.



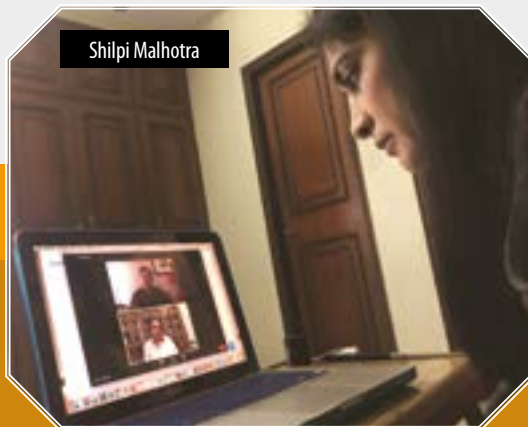
Anamika Ghosh



Navamita Saha



Pinky Bhaia



Shilpi Malhotra



Sujata John



Esha Dutta

Having started his career in advertising with the Grey Global Group, Jha went on to form his own ad film production company and handled prestigious accounts such as Indian Oil, Hindustan Lever, and the UB Group.

Jha believes in his ability to blend reality and fiction seamlessly. Though a wordsmith, Jha disclosed that visuals came to him first.

Female characters play significant roles in Jha's works as they voice the predicament of women. Two transgender characters also find pride of place in his works. One of Jha's protagonists, Inspector Virkar, represents the typical Kohli community ethos,

having been a victim of reverse bias.

Jha hoped that his characters and works would help throw light on the rampant injustices in the modern metropolitan.

Speaking of his love for Calcutta, as he still chooses to call the city, Jha shared how he had been taken aback by the simplicity of the former chief minister of West Bengal (Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee) when he met him at the Kolkata International Film Festival. The former chief minister had come to watch *Chalo America*, Jha's first feature film.

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

# Of Cities, Cinema and Childhood



Nikhil Sachan



Huma Khalil Mirza

Nikhil Sachan is making the most of the lockdown to catch up on pending work from formatting his book and finishing a film script to writing for a web series. But what he has been enjoying the most is the time he has been spending with his daughter.

The author shared his lockdown routine in conversation with **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, Huma Mirza, at a virtual session of **Kalam**.

The innate simplicity and the informal narrative of Sachan's works are what draw readers. He uses the dialect of the common man in his narration and the local lingo in his characters' voices. Even slangs are gracefully stitched into the narrative to evoke empathy.

Sachan's Kanpur connect is evident in his works. His short stories, the author revealed,

Sachan feels that if a story is told from the perspective of a child, the depth of the message is greater because what might be unimportant to an adult might seem very significant to a child

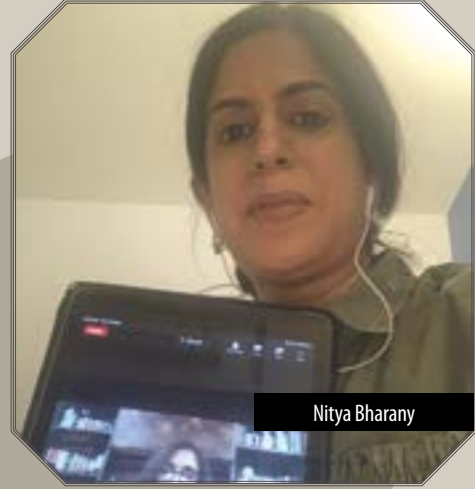
reflect his life story and experiences. Carefully picked anecdotes have found their way into the stories. Sachan has published two short story collections — *Namak Swaadanusar* and *Zindagi Aais Paais*.

Speaking of his novel *UP 65*, Sachan said the book revolves around his student days in Varanasi. Prior to Banaras Hindu University (BHU), his only aim in life had been to clear IIT, but BHU turned out to be his 'Eureka moment' and made him realise that he could create magic. Sachan describes the campus environment as being





Shweta Aggarwal



Nitya Bharany

"happy-go-lucky". "Everything in UP reflects the extremes," he said.

The author said his writing has always been influenced by cinema. He watches a lot of Iranian movies and one of his favourite directors is Majid Majidi. Many of Majidi's films are about children though the films are not meant specifically for children. This influence can be seen in *Namak Swadanusar*.

Sachan feels that if a story is told from the perspective of a child, the depth of the message is greater because what might be unimportant to an adult might seem very significant to a child.

*Namak Swadanusar* draws from Sachan's childhood and reflects the thoughts of a child. His characterisation of Papa Man shows how all children see their father as a superhero. It is the story of a man who wants to embark on a new journey in life and is ridiculed and discouraged by many. It is his little daughter who holds his hand and leads him on to follow his dreams. "There is no retirement age for parents," said Sachan. Though most people retire at 55 or 60 now, that could be the time to start following one's dreams and hobbies; it is the perfect time to change oneself from being ordinary to extraordinary, he added.

Talking about the waning popularity of Hindi books in India, Sachan said literature needs to be reinvented and nobody put in the effort to reinvent Hindi literature. Also, Indians associate English with class and when people stopped reading Hindi in schools, it became tough to read it even though they enjoyed listening to



Neelima Dalmia Adhar

stories in the language.

But Hindi is gaining in popularity and more writers have returned to the fold. The need to revive and rediscover the language persists, but a lot more books are being published in Hindi and the gap is closing, Sachan said. He concluded the session with his poem *Woh bas musalmaano se darta tha*, influenced by the amended citizenship act and also read out an excerpt from *Namak Swadanusar*.

*Kalam Faridabad* is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Books En Beyond and Ehsaas woman of Faridabad

*Kalam Delhi* is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Dineshbandini Ramkrishna Dalmia Foundation and Ehsaas woman of Delhi

# A Peek Into the *Bawra Mann* of Swanand Kirkire



Swanand Kirkire

Lyricist, playwright, screenwriter, actor, director, singer, poet and author — Swanand Kirkire wears many a hat.

The man who won the hearts of millions with compositions like *Bande mein tha dum Vande Mataram* from *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, *Bawra mann* from *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* and *Raat hamari toh* from *Parineeta* mesmerised the virtual audience at a multi-city **Kalam** session with his rich baritone and cool charisma.

The two-time National Award-winning lyricist was in conversation with actress and folk-pop singer Ila Arun. The two shared their experience of working together in the recent *Ghoomketu*.

**Ehsaas** woman and honorary convener, Rajasthan and central India affairs of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, Apra Kuchhal, delivered the welcome address.

A student of the National School of Drama (NSD), Kirkire



Ila Arun

Poems have  
their own pace  
(*Kavita ki apni marzi  
hoti hai*)

confessed that he was the happiest when doing theatre. Talking about the future of theatre post COVID-19, he expressed his readiness to perform on the streets to keep the art alive.

The drama school, where Kirkire studied theatre direction, allowed him a lot of exposure besides helping him make the most of his spontaneity and skill. It was in one dark corner of the NSD campus, Kirkire's favourite spot, that many of his popular and award-winning songs, including *Raat hamari toh*, were penned.

Kirkire told the audience the behind-the-scenes stories of many of his songs — how the soulful *Bawra mann* was written from personal experience while he was new to Mumbai and shared with a few friends before actor Kay Kay Menon wanted to include it in the film. Kirkire



Apra Kuchhal



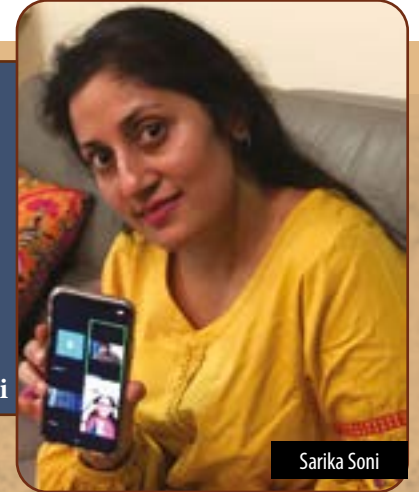
Neeta Kale

I enjoyed listening to Swanand Kirkire's poems and songs.

— Neeta Kale

Listening to Swanand Kirkire's poems and songs and his conversation with Ila ji was a very nice and positive experience. Thanks to Team Kalam.

— Dr Sarika Soni



Sarika Soni



Jyoti Kapoor



Priyanka Kothari

confessed that he had been apprehensive when filmmaker Rajkumar Hirani wanted the song *Bande mein tha dum* to reflect the character of Munnabhai but it eventually led to the "magic moment" as the song not only topped charts but also fetched him a National Award.

Discussing his poetry collection *Aapkamai*, Kirkire said "poems have their own pace (*kavita ki apni marzi hoti hai*". The lyricist who draws inspiration from Gulzar and Sahir Ludhianvi felt that poetry had evolved over time and so had grammar so that the new generation uses a more contemporary language. For Kirkire, though, poetry is more about following the heart than sticking to perfect grammar.

Speaking about Marathi cinema, Kirkire said its literary richness had not been diluted by commercialisation and so the *lekhak* (writer) remained more significant than the actor and content was still the hero, unlike in Bollywood where movies were made keeping the actor in mind.

"*Log entertainment ke bhukhe hai* (people are hungry for entertainment)," said Kirkire, explaining the rise of OTT (over-the-top) platforms.

The singer acknowledged that OTT technology was indeed a boon, but rued that it also diluted real talent, especially in the music industry where voice texture, *sur* (tune) and singing errors can be easily covered up by editing.

The session drew to a close with Kirkire belting out a few favourite songs. "Interacting with Swanand was an enriching experience. *Lag raha tha dil se baatein ho rahi hain* (it felt like our hearts were conversing). I appreciate the initiative taken by the Foundation to organise such events, adding positivity during this time," Arun said.

*This Kalam was presented by Shree Cement in association with Ehsaas Women*



# An Ode to Fathers

The debut session of **Kalam Jalandhar** took off on a poetic note with Manoj Muntashir talking about life and poetry.

Muntashir, credited with bringing poetry back to Indian cinema, was in conversation with Inderjit Singh Paintal at the virtual session.

In *Meri Fitrat Hai Mastana*, Muntashir's first collection of poetry, the poet had thanked his father. Being an only child, the family had many expectations from him but it was his father's support that helped Muntashir follow his passion and become a poet.

When Muntashir confided in his father that he did not want to become a doctor because he felt that he would be a very mediocre doctor and wanted to be a writer instead, his father asked him to complete his graduation. On completing his graduation, Muntashir asked his father for money to travel to Mumbai to pursue his writing dream. His father relented and was extremely encouraging.

Muntashir's first book became No. 1 on Amazon's bestseller list in just 24 hours.

Talking about his poem *Babu Ji*, Muntashir said that all poems are autobiographical in nature and those



Manoj Muntashir



Ruhi Syal



Inderjit Singh Paintal

that are not are not poems but newsletters. He believes that an emotion or experience that has not truly been felt by a person cannot be expressed in a poem. He pointed out that in our society, while we often glorify mothers and the joys and pains of motherhood, we tend to neglect the importance of fathers. There are few poems and songs about fathers, he said, emphasising that fathers often made the biggest sacrifices for the happiness and well-being of their children, but aren't given enough credit. Regardless of how old and fragile one's father is, if he is with his child, no power in the world can affect the child.

On his journey into the world of poetry, Muntashir said he fell in love with a girl in Class XI and when she decided to part ways with him, he wrote his first poem. That was

a time when most Bollywood hits had meaningless lyrics, Muntashir said, referring to the early 2000s.

Muntashir was determined to change the trend and bring poetry back to Indian cinema. When his song *Galliyan* from *Ek Villain* topped the charts in 2014, he felt a great sense of satisfaction.

Muntashir's advice for new and aspiring writers was that they should read a lot. New writers should not be scared, they should not doubt themselves, and instead do their best, he said. Mumbai always has space for new talent but nothing can be achieved without struggle and hard work.

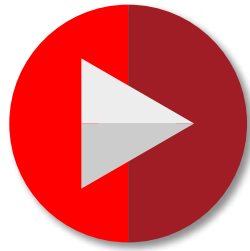
All poems are autobiographical in nature and those that are not are not poems but newsletters

*Kalam Jalandhar is presented in association with Dainik Jagran and Ehsaas women of Jalandhar*

# Surviving the Battle Against Coronavirus



Dr Swapneil Parikh



Maherra Desai

When and where did the coronavirus originate? How does it affect the respiratory tract? How best to tackle the global pandemic? These and many other such questions that have been foremost on every mind were discussed at the virtual launch of an e-book on COVID-19.

*The Coronavirus: What You Need to Know About the Global Pandemic* by Dr Swapneil Parikh, his father Dr Rajesh Parikh and Maherra Desai, was released by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, on the platform of **Kitaab**, in

association with Penguin India.

The launch was followed by a discussion between Dr Swapneil Parikh, a Mumbai-based physician and co-founder of the healthcare start-up DIY Health, and Desai, a clinical psychologist and medical researcher. Shama Deo, past president of Spectrum Pune, welcomed the audience to the session.

Dr Swapneil Parikh's practice primarily focuses on reversing lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and obesity. He is passionate about infectious diseases, medical literature and

the future of technology in medicine. Desai has excelled in psychometrics and is the site manager of clinical research at Jaslok Hospital. She is passionate about fitness, travel and voluntary social work.

During the hour-long session, the doctors explained how the coronavirus works inside the human body, multiplying silently until its detection by the immune system, and why the aged, diabetics, people with cardiovascular disease and smokers are at greater risk.

Charting the modern history of viral contagions, the doctors demonstrated how healthcare professionals are becoming overwhelmed. In their quest to keep themselves and others safe, many are experiencing deep-set psychological problems such as sleep deprivation, anxiety and depression. The growing number of cases has left the country's ill-equipped healthcare system overburdened, the doctors said.

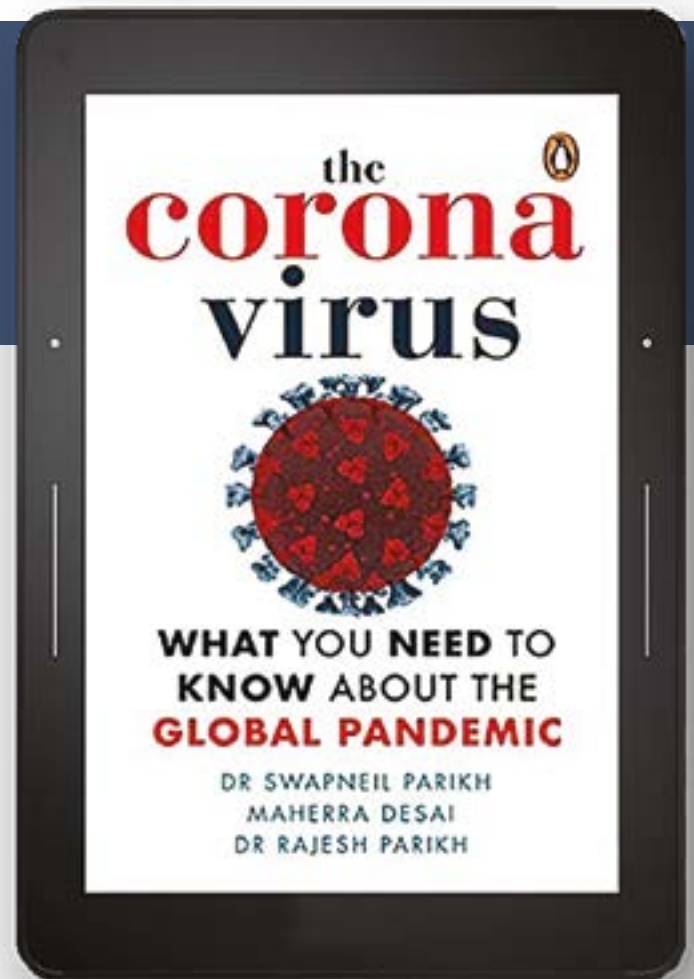
The talk also highlighted a research conducted in 2019 by John Hopkins Center for Health Security, as the doctors pointed out the mistake of ignoring the propensity of the virus to cause a pandemic.

Despite the challenges, the doctor stressed that hope is never lost and humanity will forge its way forward and survive the battle against COVID-19. But the first step in that direction would be to increase awareness.

The book, conceived aboard a boat while Dr Rajesh Parikh — India's first neuropsychiatrist and director of medical research and neuropsychiatry at Jaslok Hospital, where the research for the book was conducted — was travelling with colleague



Shama Deo



Ram Ranganathan in the Sunderbans, is the first of its kind in India. It reads like a thriller, documenting the origins of the virus, its spread across several locations, the increasing numbers and how it has forced the world to come to an indefinite standstill. It also documents the experiences of frontline warriors who courageously venture into the battleground (read hospitals and other medical facilities). The

history of pandemics and the challenges ahead are other areas that the book focuses on.

*This Kitaab session is presented in association with Penguin India*



Piyush Jha



# Crime, Cop and Confessions of a Writer



Preeti Gill

**A** voracious reader of crime fiction, one-time advertising professional, filmmaker and now a bestselling crime writer, life for Piyush Jha has come a full circle.

Jha, in conversation with **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar, Preeti Gill, at a session of **The Write Circle** Amritsar, gave his virtual audience a glimpse into his life, works and city.

Growing up, Jha devoured crime fiction and thrillers and so when he decided to switch professions and take up writing as a career, he allowed his instincts to lead him.

An out-and-out Mumbai boy, Jha confessed that the city was fundamental to his being and so it is no surprise that all his novels are set in Mumbai's seedy underbelly, contrasting it with beautiful landscapes to bring out the city's multifaceted character. Not only the city but its food and people, too, play a significant role in Jha's novels.

Jha's protagonist, Inspector Virkar, grew up in Mumbai, just like him. He speaks fluently in English, a trait many Indians aspire to, and yet while training at the police academy in Nasik, his familiarity with the language

became a cause for bias against him. Virkar's first posting was at Gadchiroli, where he remained for 15 years, before returning to Mumbai and realising that he no longer recognises the city he grew up in and yet it remains the same at its core.

Talking of his motivations as a writer, Jha expressed his aversion to stereotypes, because, in his view, they are always more myth than truth. Jha not only chooses to illustrate women who have fought and won more





Sonakshi Kundra



Ramanjit Grover



Sheetal Khanna



Jasmit Nayyar



Praneet Bubber



Arvinder Chamak

opportunities and liberties for themselves in his novels, but skilfully avoids putting women in positive moulds, casting them instead as perpetrators with distinct histories of their own.

Jha's most significant choice as a writer is reflected in *Girls of Mumbaiistan*, based on Mumbai's first transgender cop Rani Kumar.

Before Jha became a writer, he directed several ad-films and also a feature film, *Chalo America*, a satirical take on settling abroad. The film, under NFDC's banner, was screened at several film festivals in India and beyond and established him as an acclaimed film director.

Concluding the session with a few words on language, Jha confided that he preferred using both English and Marathi because it made his characters more real.

**Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar, Praneet Bubber, proposed a vote of thanks.

*The Write Circle Amritsar is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Taj Swarna and Ehsaas women of Amritsar*

# Musings on Governance



Vikas Balia



Jairam Ramesh

Listening is key to a democracy, politician and writer Jairam Ramesh said while underlining the value of liberal ideas at two online sessions of **Write Circle**.

The Jodhpur session was conducted by Vikas Balia, a commercial lawyer, and the Pune session by real estate magnet Kumar Gera.

Ramesh stressed the need for complete transparency in the way governments function.

A veteran parliamentarian, Ramesh considers the Parliament to be a great learning podium. In all the years he has spent there, his mantra has been to "mean what you say and say what you mean".

"Democracy is also about listening... it means listening to the last man," Ramesh said. He rued that the value of liberal

Life is a gift and it offers us the privilege, opportunity and responsibility in these trying times to give back by becoming more. Today, when we cannot be in the same physical space, we need to find a connection. These virtual sessions have come at a time when we needed them the most. Hosting the session with Jairam Ramesh has been a matter of pride for me and my associates. We are proud to be associated with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and are grateful for this opportunity to learn, elevate and continue to grow...changing the world within us and around us.



— Shelja Singh

What an amazing session with Jairam Ramesh, the man who dons several hats! The conversation with Vikas Balia gave us an interesting insight into his persona and ideologies. I am grateful to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for organising such an interesting session in these difficult times and look forward to arranging many more such sessions in future.



— Sushma Niraj Sethia

Today's session saw the economist, environmentalist, politician and robust voice of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Jairam Ramesh, in conversation with the articulate lawyer, Vikas Balia. It was a very engaging and interesting session. My biggest takeaway from this talk was the deeply inspiring quote 'प्रकृतिः रक्षत रक्षति'..! To be protected from nature, it is necessary to protect it! I am extremely grateful for being a part of the **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** family and for being able to bring this magic to people around us too!"



— Preeti Mehta

Thank you, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** for giving me the opportunity to attend an interesting talk by Jairam Ramesh. Enjoyed it very much and will look forward to such opportunities. Thanks again.

— **Shalini Mundada**



It was an interesting session with Jairam Ramesh. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this webinar.

— **Priti Sanghvi**

Jairam Ramesh and Kumar Gera had a very interesting lookout on political strategy. Ramesh kept his cool in the rapid-fire round. The loss of election and now the lockdown have given Rameshji time to pen seven books. Thanks **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

— **Amita Munot**



It was a great session with Jairam Ramesh moderated by Gera. His take on business houses versus political parties sounded like a belief. He was very honest about how he writes.

— **Seema Handa**

The conversation was a fascinating cocktail of politics, history and environment. Thoroughly enjoyed it!"

— **Sujata Sabnis**



ideas and the ability to listen had dwindled, especially in Parliament. Nowadays, nobody wants to listen and everyone wants to speak and be heard, he added.

Ramesh, who has seven books in his literary repertoire, including *Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature, Making Sense of Chindia: Reflections on China and India and A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V. K. Krishna Menon*, said he took up writing to leave behind an "intellectual legacy" for future generations. He said he had never written for money or fame, choosing instead subjects and people that interested him.

Discussing his latest book, Ramesh said Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon had been soulmates who influenced each other. Nehru, being a more proficient orator, was able to leave a greater impact and mobilise more minds. Menon, on the other hand, "stood up for India when the world was white".

While many of his colleagues had criticised his inclination towards Indira Gandhi and Krishna Menon, Ramesh said he had never allowed politics to influence his choices. "If you feel you have managed to dissatisfy someone, it means you are doing something right," he said. "I am not obsessed with Indira [Gandhi] but fascinated by her."

*Prakriti rakshiti rakshita* had been her (Indira Gandhi's) work philosophy and it was at her initiative that major environmental issues were addressed and policies brought forth, said the former environment minister.

Asked about his views on his party, Ramesh said the Congress needs to decentralise and restructure itself, focusing on a strong regional leadership. He believes party positions should be awarded on merit and deliverance and not lineage or patronage.

Ramesh blamed the growing intolerance in the country on misuse of social media. He said it was important to verify the authenticity of news.

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

*The Write Circle Pune is in association with Lokmat, The O Hotel and Ehsaas Women of Pune*



# नारी विमर्श की जगह 'मानव विमर्श' की बात हो: चित्रा देसाई

कोरोना काल में यह एक शानदार साहित्यिक पहल थी। प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित कलम पटना और रांची कार्यक्रम में अतिथि वक्ता के रूप में सुप्रीम कोर्ट की वकील व जानीमानी कवयित्री चित्रा देसाई आमंत्रित थीं। कार्यक्रम की शुरुआत अन्विता प्रधान द्वारा चित्रा देसाई के परिचय से हुई। चित्रा देसाई से बातचीत की पटना की जानीमानी लेखिका डॉ भावना शेखर ने। इस संवाद के दौरान चित्रा देसाई ने हिंदी साहित्य में चलने वाली बहस पर एक बेहद महत्वपूर्ण टिप्पणी की। उन्होंने कहा कि साहित्य में नारी विमर्श की जगह 'मानव विमर्श' की बात होनी चाहिए, क्योंकि पुरुष लेखक भी स्त्री की संवेदना को बेहद उम्दा ढंग से लिख सकते हैं। उन्होंने गुरुदेव रबींद्र नाथ टैगोर का उदाहरण दिया और कहा कि मेरा लेखन भी मानवीय संवेदना का विंब है।

कार्यक्रम के आरंभ में संवादकर्ता भावना शेखर ने चित्रा देसाई के दोनों काव्य-संकलनों 'सरसों से अमलतास' और 'दरारों में उगी धूप' का जिक्र करते हुए पूछा कि देसाई के जीवन में लेखन व वकालत में पहले कौन आया? जवाब में चित्रा देसाई ने भी साफगोई दिखाई और कहा, "कविताएं पहले थीं। मैं जब सोलह साल की थी, तब से मैंने लिखना शुरू किया। मुझे तो तब यह भी नहीं पता था कि ये कविताएं हैं। मेरी हॉस्टल की एक दोस्त ने एक दिन मेरी डायरी देखी और जाकर मेरी प्रिंसिपल डॉ नांबियार से कहा कि चित्रा कविताएं लिखती हैं, तो मुझे हिंदी कविता-प्रतियोगिताओं में हिस्सा लेने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया जाए। मेरी यात्रा कविता कॉलेज में ही शुरू हुई। वकील बनना भी मैंने नौवीं कक्षा में ही सोच लिया था। गांव में मैंने अन्याय व शोषण देखा था, इसलिए मैंने इस पेशे को चुना।"

देसाई ने अपने काव्य संग्रह सरसों से अमलतास में जिंदगी के अलग-अलग रंगों को मौसम के साथ जोड़ा है, इस अनूठे प्रयोग के बारे में कवयित्री का कहना था, "मैंने कभी अपनी कविताओं को प्रकाशित कराने के बारे में नहीं सोचा था।



Bhavana Shekhar



Mukti Shahdeo



Poonam Anand



Rashmi Sharma



Sangita Kujara



It was an interesting evening of poetry and conversation with spirited poetess Chitra Desai. The one-hour session was mesmerising and we just lost track of time. In fact, it seemed too short for such enriching experiences.

— Anvita Pradhan



"True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

The most important element of Chitra Desai's personality that came through in the talk was her humility. She explained that most of her writings are memoirs and are experiential in nature and that may be the reason it touches people. She valiantly works for the preservation of words which are getting lost because of the onslaught of the modern Hinglish world. Her simplicity and honesty added charm and Bhavna Shekhar skillfully brought out interesting reflections and anecdotes from the writer.

— Nishi Singh

गांव के धरती की सोंधी महक आती है, चित्रा जी की कविता में। इन्होंने धरती के संन्यासी जैसा होने की कल्पना कर सब को डरा दिया। पर सच यही है धरती तो बस देने के लिए है। आग की सृजन शक्ति को भी उन्होंने बखूबी बताया।

— Alok Shahi



चित्रा जी, आपकी सरलता लोगों को आपके निकट लाती है। साधुवाद! भाषा के प्रति आपका प्रेम ही शब्दों का संभार है। आपके व्यक्तित्व में जीवन संघर्ष ने कोई चिह्न नहीं छोड़ा है। कहाँ से लाती हैं इतनी ऊर्जा?

— Dr Mangalarani

हालांकि कॉलेज के एक साझा संकलन में मेरी कविताएं छपी थी। हालांकि मैं लगातार लिख रही थी। वकालत के दौरान भी यह क्रम जारी था। एक दिन जब मैं अपनी हरी डायरी के पीले पड़ गए पन्नों को जब देख रही थी, तब मुझे लगा कि इन्हें छपवाना चाहिए। आखिर मैं अपने बच्चों को विरासत के रूप में क्या दे रही हूँ। फिर मैं इसका शीर्षक सोचने लगी। मुझे अपने सरसों के खेत और हॉस्टल के अमलतास के पेड़ याद आ गए। यह मेरे गांव से शहर की यात्रा थी। मैंने इसी को जिया। मैं आज भी उन्हीं से जुड़ी हूँ।"

उनकी कविताओं में मौसम से संबंधों का नाता इतना गहरा कैसे है, वह रिश्तों को इतनी तरजीह क्यों देती हैं? भावना शेखर के इस सवाल पर चित्रा देसाई का कहना था, "जीवन की जो पूंजी हैं, वह रिश्ते ही होते हैं। बाकी सब माया है रिश्तों को ही जीया है अब तक।" 'घड़ा कौन बनाता है, न मिट्टी, न कुम्हार, उसे आग बनाती है,' जैसी पंक्तियों पर चित्रा का कहना है, "मेरी कविताएं मेरा संस्मरण हैं। मैंने इनका एक-एक शब्द जिया है। यह नॉस्टेल्जिया हो सकता है। अगर यह आपको ताकत देता है, तो इस तरफ लौटना कोई बुराई है या नहीं है। लेखन अपने समय और भाव का दस्तावेज है। देशज व गंवई शब्द भी गुम होते जा रहे हैं। मेरा लेखन संस्कृति से भी जुड़ना है।"

गांव से मुंबई पहुंचने का श्रेय उन्होंने शादी को दिया। लेखन में अंतराल पारिवारिक जिम्मेदारियों से आया, पर इसे लेकर कोई पछतावा नहीं है। "मैंने जो भी पाया है उसे बहुत मेहनत से पाया है। वकालत की प्रैक्टिस को छोड़कर परिवार के लिए समय देने का मेरा अपना निर्णय था। रिश्ते और परिवार का पलड़ा बहुत भारी होता है। पैसे तो कभी भी कमाए जा सकते हैं। मेरा मानना है कि अदालत में हजारों वकील होते हैं। वहां एक चित्रा के बिना कुछ नहीं बिगड़ता, पर मेरे परिवार के लिए मेरे होने, न होने का अर्थ है। यह मेरी स्वेच्छा थी।"

देसाई ने कहा, "मैं आज जो भी हूँ, वह अपनी मां के चलते हूँ। जब मैं चालीस दिन की थी तो मुझे मेरी दादी के घर भेज दिया गया। बाद में मेरी मां वापस अपने मायके लौट आईं। यहां उन्होंने आया की नौकरी की। नर्स की ट्रेनिंग ली और एक समय ऐसा आया कि उन्होंने अपना नर्सिंग होम खोला।" देसाई का कहना है कि कविता के लिए भाव बहुत जरूरी हैं। उन्होंने इस दौरान अपने सेलिब्रिटी पति अनंग देसाई की चर्चा भी की, तथा यह भी माना कि मेरी कविताओं में संस्मरण के साथ सपने भी हैं।

कार्यक्रम के दौरान देसाई ने अपनी कुछ कविताएं सुनाईं। जिनमें मेरे गांव की चौपाल, कुम्हार के घर से, धरती वंदना, तुम कैसे समझोगे और मैं मुंबई हूँ कविता शामिल है। इस कार्यक्रम में प्रश्न सत्र भी संचालित हुआ, जिसका संचालन पूनम आनंद ने किया। इस दौरान अतिथि कवयित्री चित्रा देसाई ने सत्यम सोलंकी, प्रो रिजवान, आलोक कुमार शाही, डॉ के के कृष्णा, महिमा श्री, विजित विवेक, दिलीप कुमार ठाकुर, मंगला रानी, अजीत प्रधान भी शामिल हुए। इस कार्यक्रम के आयोजन में प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन का सहयोग नवरस स्कूल ऑफ परफार्मिंग आर्ट्स और अहसास वुमेन ने किया था। इसके अलावा दैनिक जागरण का मीडिया सहयोग था। इन सभी का सहयोग के लिए आभार व्यक्त किया गया।

Kalam Patna is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Hotel Chanakya and Navras School of Performing Arts

Kalam Ranchi is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Navras School of Performing Arts and Ehsaas women of Ranchi

# Dastan of a storyteller

Himanshu Bajpai

Author-poet Himanshu Bajpai delved into the history of storytelling at two virtual sessionsok **Kalam**.

**Ehsaas** Woman Vedula Ramalakshmi conducted the Bhubaneswar session, and Shruti Kushwah the Ahmedabad one.

Bajpai began his career as a journalist but was soon disillusioned and went on to pursue a PhD on *Awadh Akhbaar* that was later published by Naval Kishore Press in his hometown of Lucknow. It was during his research that his late friend Ankit Chadda, a *dastango* (a storyteller in the Urdu oral heritage) himself, introduced him to the art and Bajpai fell in love with it.

The author spoke about *quissagoi*, a century-old art of storytelling in India that is a tradition in itself. Bajpai explained that *quissagoi* are shorter and unrefined tales, while *dastangoi* are longer and more refined stories, and the two must be presented differently.

*Dastangoi* — the art of Urdu storytelling — is an integral part of Lucknow heritage. Each chapter of Bajpai's book, *Qissa Qissa Lucknowa*, begins with poetry. Bajpai's book mirrors the feudal system through the eyes of *aam log* (common people), their lives and the cultural narratives they live in, which form the crux of the *tehzeeb* (courtesy, manners) of Lucknow.

An active supporter of the movement, Bajpai lamented that the practice is fading in the absence of talented



Shruti Kushwah



Pooja Agarwal



Shaneel Parekh



Shilpa Patel



Fatema Maniya

Himanshuji draws his confidence from his inner being. I share his views on standardised and original languages. Telling a story is an art. He has rightly described that love for language, accent, culture and local myths is a natural attribute of pleasantness and engaging presentation.



— Sujit Panda

A heartfelt session with a storyteller who touches hearts; thank you Kalam Bhubaneswar for organising such a memorable conversation.



— Pallab Das

Thank you Prabha Khaitan Foundation for your continuous efforts to entertain and enlighten even during the lockdown. The session with Himanshu Bajpai was a dream come true. We enjoyed it thoroughly. *Dastangoi* is not a very common term for everyone but Himanshuji did justice to it by explaining well in his simple yet dignified language. His short stories on the elegant and classic culture of Lucknow stole the audience's heart. Looking forward to more such sessions.



— Shagufta Zabeen

Dear Kalam, thank you for the amazing session with Himanshu Bajpai. It was interesting to learn about the life of the writer and Lucknow. I liked it most when Himanshuji said he wanted to tell the stories of people who never went to big rich schools but were simple commoners who very much contributed to the making of Lucknow! I felt his works are a novel attempt towards uplift of the marginalised, including women. Thank you very much yet again for the session!



— Dharitri Priyadarshini



Vedula Ramalakshmi



Nidhi Garg



storytellers. He said it was important to recreate the aura around storytelling to revive the urge to listen to good prose.

The history of storytelling dates back to *Ek Hazar Raaton Ki Kahaniyan*, which again is said to be a take-off on *Kathasaritsagara*.

Bajpai, who has been mentored by Mahmood Farooqui, writer, performer and director, and is a walking encyclopaedia of the oral culture of Lucknow and a storehouse of Urdu-Hindi poetry and Awadhi folk stories.

As storyteller, Bajpai has regaled audiences in Istanbul, Dubai, Singapore and Pakistan. The poet passionately believes that people are bound by the sensuality of the tales he tells, because "*bhasha* (language) has no religion".

"This is not a weak or feeble medium of communication," he added.

Bajpai also elaborated on the difference in performing styles of folk and urban settings.

The writer also shared his experience of working in the Netflix series *Sacred Games 2*, where his cameo appearance was much appreciated.

*Kalam Ahmedabad is in association with Karma Foundation, The House of MG-Mangalbag, Divya Bhaskar and Ehsaas women of Ahmedabad*

*Kalam Bhubaneswar is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Mayfair Hotels & Resorts and Ehsaas women of Bhubaneswar*



# Love, Life and the Bigger Picture

Preeti Shenoy

The lives that her books touch, and not the numbers they sell, matter to bestselling author Preeti Shenoy.

The author shared her thoughts with poet, writer and fashion designer Titiksha Shah at a session of the UK chapter of **The Write Circle**. Padmesh Gupta, the director of Oxford Business College, welcomed the virtual audience.

Shenoy said she often received messages from readers saying how her books had changed their lives. That, for her, was a truly humbling experience.

The author of more than 10 books has been consistently nominated to the Forbes list of 100 most influential celebrities in India.

Her first book, *34 Bubblegums and Candies* was recently relaunched with the title *Love a Little Stronger*. Explaining this transformation, Shenoy shared that after her father's death, she realised it was important to concentrate on positivity and found solace in her writing. She wrote some short stories based on her life experiences. Some incidents, she explained, are like bubblegum that you keep chewing or thoughts that you keep going back to. Some experiences bring you joy and add colour to your life like the colourful candies in a jar. But in the end, once we have had our fill of the bubblegum, we spit it out, or the candy melts away. Life also changes and we have control over what we focus on, though we may not have control over life. The book was republished and new sections and stories added



Titiksha Shah



Padmesh Gupta





Zarina



Iona



Munir Lone



Piali Ray

to lend it a more mature flavour.

Shenoy described how human relations have been redefined in the modern day, a topic she explores in her book *Why We Love The Way We Do*. Human relationships have disintegrated and the advent of various digital media has led to the lack of dedication and compatibility woes. Life seems to function on fast forward and relations also keep pace with societal demands and exposure. Contemporary women, she pointed out, are much more aware and forthright about their likes and dislikes and rights. Social connection and communication now have a wider range. Her column in *The Financial Chronicle* was the inspiration for this book as it brought to light the fact that there were voices wanting to be heard. Shenoy did her own research, along with the stories that she had collected.

Shenoy's ability to "see a bigger picture" has made her approachable and more relatable. She shared that she keeps getting messages from her readers where they share their dilemmas and expect her to have a solution for them. It is the younger people who reach out to her the most and she tries to help them as much as possible because they are often confused and desperate for answers.

On how she has been dealing with the

pandemic and the lockdown, Shenoy said she has been indulging her artistic urges. The author is currently creating 30 faces in 30 days for her journal. She draws a portrait every day and each portrait is accompanied by a quote.

Before the pandemic, Shenoy had been working on *When Love Came Calling*, a novel for young adults. The story revolves around a young boy living in the UK who wins an opportunity to study in India for 12 weeks and how his life changes when he meets a girl in India.

Shenoy read out an excerpt from *A Hundred Little Flames*, whose cover was launched in Birmingham. There is talk of her book being transformed into a screenplay.

Her advice to aspiring writers was that they should read a lot and keep writing. It is important not to be bothered by criticism and to stick to one's individual convictions, she added.

Shenoy said she often received messages from readers saying how her books had changed their lives. That, for her, was a truly humbling experience

*The Write Circle Oxford & Birmingham is presented in association with Oxford Business College, Kriti UK, Sampad Arts and British Council*

# Part-time Writer, Full-time Joy

Some writers choose to follow their passion full-time, others attempt to strike a balance between the conventional and the unconventional in the professional sphere. Pratyaksha Sinha belongs to the second group as she continues to work in the finance sector while winning hearts with her writing.



Kanak Rekha Chauhan



Pratyaksha Sinha

Sinha was in conversation with Kanak Rekha Chauhan, **Ehsaas** Woman of Lucknow, for a virtual session of **Kalam**.

Raised in a home where the *mahol* (ambience) was enthusiastic about the arts, be it music or theatre, Sinha learnt to appreciate them even more as she grew older. Years later, when she settled into a stable job, it was no surprise that she returned to the arts for her *man ki khushi* (joy of the heart).

Writing allows her an escape from everyday life and that is what keeps her anchored. But she believes the modest sales of Hindi books makes it impossible for writing to be her primary source of income. So, she has chosen to straddle both worlds.

Sinha has published several books, including *Globe ke Bahar Ladki*, which she describes as an experimental venture that needs to be read with one's heart, and *Barishghar* whose plot was driven by the journey of two siblings after they lose their father. Her books have received widespread acclaim,



Namrata Chauhan

and have also won her the *Sonbhadra Katha Samman* and the Indo-Norwegian Award.



Ashish Kumar

The characters in Sinha's books speak both Hindi and English to keep them close to reality. There are several words, she said, that are unique to a language with no equivalent in other languages.

As a writer, Sinha's greatest pleasure has been in discovering that both urban and rural readers relate to her work. During her travels to attend literature fests held in villages, she has had the opportunity of listening to nuanced interpretations of her novels by rural women, giving her new perspectives.

Sinha recited one of her poems to conclude the session, and Dimple Trivedi, **Ehsaas** Woman of Lucknow, proposed the vote of thanks.

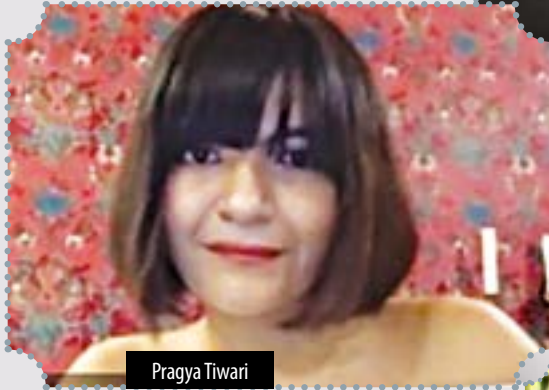
*Kalam Lucknow is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, Hyatt Regency Lucknow, Lucknow Expressions and Ehsaas women of Lucknow*

# A Life of Inspiration

Modelling career to her battle against cancer, Lisa Ray gave the audience at a virtual session of **The Write Circle Jaipur** a peek into her life.

The actor, author, columnist, model, performer, philanthropist, social activist, television and theatre personality was in conversation with Pragya Tiwari. Mita Kapur of Siyahi opened the session.

Ray was barely out of her teens when she became a sensation as the Bombay Dyeing girl opposite Karan Kapoor. There was no looking back as a model and Ray even went on to wow audiences in the music video of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's *Afreen afreen*. She also acted in several films, including *Kasoor* and *Water*.



Pragya Tiwari

The model-turned-actress spoke about how she wanted to break preconceived notions about her profession.

Born to a Bengali father and a Polish mother, Ray shared how she took pride in the cultural amalga. Her maternal grandfather was of French origin, while her strong-willed Polish grandmother kept her rooted and tried hard to "imbibe some Polishness" in her. She reminisced about her childhood days spent at her paternal grandparents' Shyambazar home and how "Kolkata gets in your blood".

Ray was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood cells, in 2009. Her inspirational journey from diagnosis to treatment and recovery has been documented in her book, *Close to the Bone*.

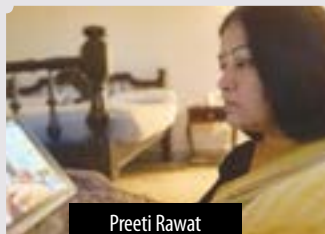
Cancer didn't happen to her in isolation, Ray explained, and every relationship and event in her life underwent changes as well. Meditation, Buddhism and the Osho ideology gave her the courage to deal with her cancer and Ray believes that her illness made her a better human.



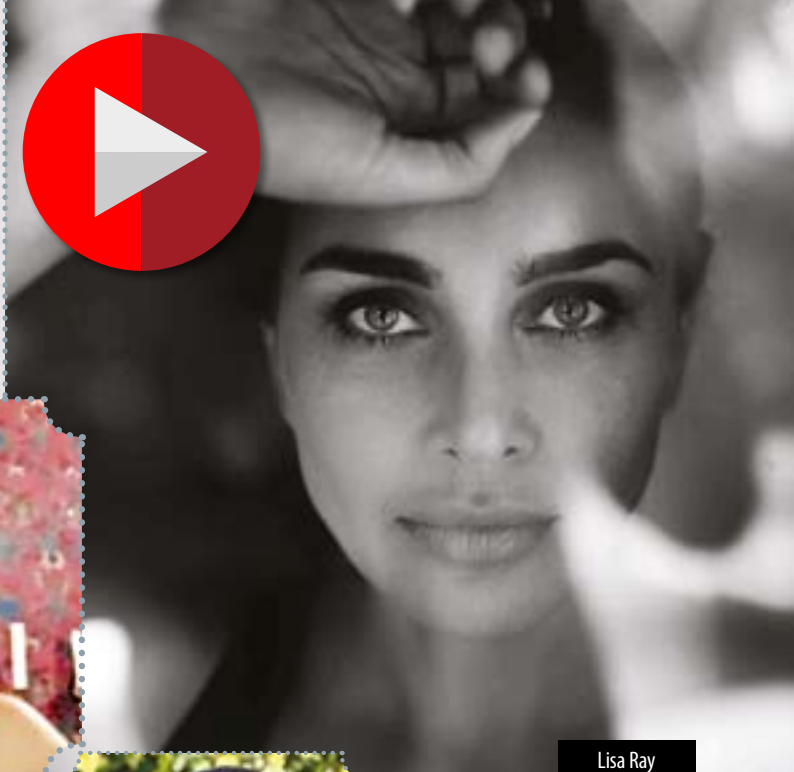
Mugdha Sinha



Ranoo Nathany



Preeti Rawat



Lisa Ray



Mita Kapur

Trauma is one of the central themes in her book, said Ray, who believes that unprocessed trauma doesn't go away. She confessed that a major part of her life has been about running away and

then about processing. She only started acknowledging her emotional turmoil when she attended drama school in London, where she needed to throw out her voice loud and let out every emotion within her. This triggered her healing process. She spent a lot of time in Dharamshala, letting the trauma erode.

"Grief is going to be a fact of my life," she acknowledged, but also added that now she doesn't brush it aside. She left the audience awed and inspired with her strength of character and spirit.

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



Vandana Rag

# The Voice of the Woman

Social prejudices, gender bias and the changing dynamics of women writers were the highlights of a **Kalam** Udaipur session featuring author and poet Vandana Rag.

Rag was in conversation with **Ehsaas** Woman of Udaipur Riddhima Doshi. **Ehsaas** Woman Swati Agarwal welcomed the writer.

Talking about her literary journey, Rag recalled how she had started writing in English but found comfort in Hindi instead.

Years of travelling — both her father and husband had transferable jobs — had exposed the author to the intricacies of varied cultures and inspired her to write.

Rag started maintaining a journal, jotting down her thoughts. It was the encouragement of her friends that prompted Rag to get her writings published in the magazine *Hans*.

Rag's keen understanding of social injustices against women in a socio-political and patriarchal narrative is reflected in her stories.

She, however, remains hopeful, especially with the



Riddhima Doshi

rising presence of women in Hindi literature and how the digital media has created a more flexible platform for publishing.

Rag's keen understanding of social injustices against women in a socio-political and patriarchal narrative is reflected in her stories

The author of *Bisat Par Jugnu*, a novel set in the times of India-China trade between 1840 and 1910, and the translator of historian Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Capital*, Rag is the recipient of the Krishna Pratap Smriti

Award. Her other published

works include *Yutopia*, *Main aur Meri Kahaniyan*, *Khayaalnama* and *Hijarat Se Pahale*.

The author ended the session with the hope of writing a novel that highlights systemic injustices on women and the belief that post-pandemic, writers will emerge as a more spiritual force.



Swati Agarwal

*Kalam Udaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Radisson Blu Udaipur and Ehsaas women of Udaipur*



Salman Khurshid

# Politics and the Minority

Empowerment, institutional development and attempts to make Muslims irrelevant to the country's political decisions were on the talks table at a virtual **Lit Live Afternoon** organised by Vidyapath in London, where Salman Khurshid was the guest speaker.

The politician and author spoke about his book, *Visible Muslim, Invisible Citizen*, explained the aim and the argument of the book and how the idea for it came about when the BJP won the second-term election. He also pointed out how the shrinking space for minorities continues to diminish.

He was in conversation with historian and director of Asian Studies at The University of Oxford, Faisal Devji. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** was the knowledge partner for the session.

"One very dramatic shift that has taken place in minority politics in this country is that they have found the metaphor that links them with the majority, or at least a large section of the society, and they have found confidence, pressing themselves not to be self-conscious of their identity but keeping their identity intact," Khurshid said.

The former minister said Muslim politicians face the

problem of legitimacy in India and Muslim support to parties like the Samajwadi Party and BSP shows that it is wrong to assume that Muslims prefer Muslim leaders.

Khurshid and Devji discussed several momentous events in recent Indian history such as the Partition, the Kashmir problem, the Babri Masjid issue, triple *talaq* and the Citizenship Amendment Act. Khurshid also recalled the controversies that he has been involved in, as a commentator and political actor.

We (the Congress) just have to get back to finding some good storytellers, and tell India a new story, a fresh story and a creative story

The event ended with an interactive session. The author signed off by saying that his party had lost the art of storytelling, and that their audience who had been listening to them very intently and carefully had fallen asleep halfway. "We just have to get back to finding some good storytellers, and tell India a new story, a fresh story and a creative story," Khurshid said.

The organiser — Vidyapath — is a UK-based charitable non-profit organisation promoting South Asian literature, art and culture to raise funds and support philanthropic work in education for underprivileged children in India. It supports schoolchildren in slums and those with physical and mental disabilities.



Pooja Maru



Shivani Sethia

# Puppets, Stories and a Fantastic Journey



Shreedevi Sunil



Stories and puppets had children engrossed at a virtual session with artist Shreedevi Sunil.

Sunil, the founder of Talking Turtle Storytellers, is known for using stories to teach and create awareness among her young audience. The session organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** under **Education For All (EFA)**, was streamed live on Oxford Bookstore's Facebook page.

Also a ventriloquist, Sunil began by introducing the Talking Turtle to the audience. The duo went ahead to tell a Jewish folktale about an old man who was disturbed by "too much noise" around him and couldn't sleep. He decided to see an old wise

Sunil, the founder of Talking Turtle Storytellers, is known for using stories to teach and create awareness among her young audience

lady in his village about the problem. Other animated characters in the story include a big mango tree, a dog, a donkey, a cow and a pig. After several visits to the old wise lady for advice, the old man realised that there could have been many things worse than the "noise" that would keep him awake, and with the peace of mind, the old man could finally sleep well. The story instilled in kids acceptance, temperance, patience and wisdom.

Sunil's simple storytelling kept the children engrossed as she transported them to a fantastical land.

Her journey with children began as an educator but her love for reading prompted her to start Talking Turtles Storytellers. Sunil has also held workshops for parents and teachers.

**Education for All** by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** started in 2000 and has since helped over 20,000 under-privileged children to stay in schools across West Bengal and Rajasthan.



*The session was a combined initiative of Prabha Khaitan Foundation's Education For All, Oxford Bookstore and Spagia of Shyam Group.*



Sudipta Kundu

# Strokes of Colour



A virtual workshop added colour to the dull lockdown days that children have been forced to spend.

The creative virtual art workshop conducted by artist Sudipta Kundu was presented by **Education For All**, in association with Oxford Bookstore and Spagia — an initiative of Shyam Group — to keep children productively engaged.

The workshop was streamed live on Oxford Bookstore's Facebook page and attended by children and parents across India.

The participants were taught to sketch with vibrant colours and to draw landscape with just three elements — trees, huts and a fence. They were also taught how to use colours to lend mood and ambience to landscapes.

The participants were taught to sketch with vibrant colours and or to draw landscape with just three elements — trees, huts and a fence

Kundu, known to work with acrylic, watercolour and charcoal, used only a pencil to sketch and crayons to colour as he engaged with the youngsters.

He showed them how to twist, turn and swing crayons in arcs and move them in various ways to achieve different effects. He demonstrated how to use separate strokes, letting the colours blend in and adding hills and rivers to the three elements, to make the picture come alive.

"It was a beautiful experience and I am glad that I could share my experience with children and their parents. I am overwhelmed by the response and thankful to Education For All, Oxford BookStore and Spagia for organising this, helping children explore their creative side as well as relaxing at home," Kundu said.

# IN OUR NEXT ISSUE



Amita Sahaya



Artinder Sandhu

Guest	Event
Praveen Kumar Jha	Kalam Gurugram
Amita Nigam Sahaya	An Author's Afternoon Kolkata
Sanjeev Paliwal	Kalam Raipur, Bilaspur
Artinder Sandhu	Aakhar Amritsar
Jerry Pinto	The Write Circle Raipur
Nidhi Dugar Kundalia	The Write Circle Jaipur
Pavan Varma	Kalam Mumbai
Megha Majumdar	Kitaab Book Launch
Dipti Misra	Kalam London
Diana R Chambers	The Universe Writes
Tisca Chopra	Tambola for Ehsaas Women



Diana R Chambers



Dipti Mishra



Jerry Pinto



Megha Majumdar



Nidhi Dugar



Pavan K. Varma



Praveen Kumar Jha



Sanjeev Paliwal



Tisca Chopra

*Be For Bengal – Facebook Concert for Amphan Relief*

*The views expressed by the guests are their own*

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