



# Prabha प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

January 2021 | Issue 21



## The New Normal

In this issue, seventeen voices from varied fields — literature, food, entertainment, dance, design, medical care — endeavour to make sense of their new reality shaped by the global pandemic

INSIDE

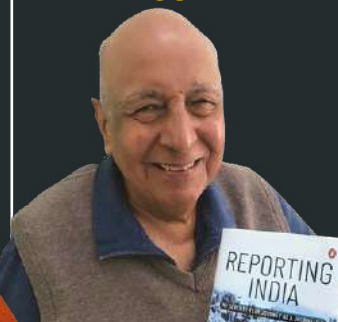
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Prabha  
खैतान



MANISHA JAIN  
Communications & Branding Chief,  
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

## *Navigating New Frontiers*

On behalf of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, I take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a very happy and healthy new year. 2020 started like just another year, with a lot of excitement and vigour. But as the first quarter unravelled, the year became a historic struggle for survival. At **PKF**, we did what we thought was the need of the hour: taking our plethora of activities to the virtual space. In the last year, with the help of our **Ehsaas** Women and associates, we hosted around 350 sessions, with over 450 speakers and 400 artistes, with 6 million views and a reach of 20 million with over 40 million impressions. We also resumed our in-person sessions with all precautions and safety requirements.

The world has seen intense changes in the past year. It's as if we've been given a partially blank canvas to step into the future. Art and creativity give us reason to survive, change, reinvent and question ourselves, and the world around us. In this issue, 17 voices from varied fields of art endeavour to make sense of their new reality shaped by the global pandemic.

We are also pleased to announce that we are coming out with our theme song, composed by Pt Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and performed by some of the most talented artistes from various corners of the country — Ajoy Chakraborty, Hariharan, Malini Awasthi, Pt Channulal Mishra and Vikku Vinayakram. It celebrates the artistic diversity of India blended with musical solidarity.

Meanwhile, we also hope you like the updated look of our website and that you will continue to enjoy the content we provide. Your feedback, constructive criticism, and, above all, your readership of this newsletter, have proven invaluable in our mission to promote literature, art and heritage, and culture. Do keep enriching us with your words and thoughts at [newsletter@pkfoundation.org](mailto:newsletter@pkfoundation.org).

To know more about what's happening at the Foundation or for future updates, do follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Keep reading!



## [ SNAPSHOT OF THE MONTH ]

### Unlocking Diaries



Tigress Ridhi was clicked in Zone 3 of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve by our **Ehsaas** Woman of Chandigarh, Manisha Jain, who visited Ranthambore in the last week of December. ▲

◀ Our **Ehsaas** Woman of Meerut, Garima Mithal, spotted T112 (Caduceus) in Zone 5 in Ranthambore. "He was marking his territory. He exuded pride as he walked between crowded gypsies. He strode and we followed. Truly a king," said Mithal.

## Happy Birthday

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

1st January



Dimple Trivedi

1st January



Madhuri Halwasiya

3rd January



Jyoti Kapoor

23rd January



Shruti Mittal

24th January



Swati Agarwal

25th January



Shinjini Kulkarni

# Making the Most of Change



"Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it."

— Berthold Brecht

Our reality has undergone unanticipated changes in the last year because of the pandemic. Suddenly, realigning, reengineering and restructuring have become the buzzwords. Most of us are struggling to make sense of the "new normal" that has become the global narrative. No more so than those in the creative fields — whether it is a writer or a magician, a chef or an artist. In this issue, we take a peek into the minds and lives of some of these people as they make their way through months of lockdown and wield the hammer with which they shape their new reality and prepare for the changing future.





## Dancing to a New Heart Rhythm

Aditi Mangaldas

I have always believed, as an artiste, to breathe the air of today, and the pandemic has brought that feeling into sharp focus. Whatever we knew from before, our ways of dancing, conceptualising and choreographing were suddenly dammed. There is a different flow to the river that humanity has never encountered before. Initially, our heart, mind and body felt stifled and one struggled to catch one's breath. This greatly impacted the way I felt, and at times still struggle to cope with.

To suddenly be thrust into isolation was creatively stifling. But it was not so because of working in seclusion, I make most of my work in seclusion. Nor was it about not having my dance company physically around me. It was about recognising the conflicting emotions surging through me and then finding that creative spark within the confinement. It was about finding that expansion and path, to ignite one's imagination, when everything one knew as "normal" had come to an abrupt pause. Many

great philosophers in the world have said that one has to die every moment. But that's easier said than done. As humans we do get complacent and mistakenly get content about the fact that life's flow will be uninterrupted and eternal.

The conscious decision to understand one's current reality and take the company members across these tumultuous times became the prime purpose. It was about experiencing one's work with a different heart rhythm. Like dancers and musicians across the world, each one in the dance company started reimagining their dance, re-skilling themselves and inventing new ways of sharing.

I am a narrator — '*katha kahe so Kathak*'. So, my life's work is to share. It became incumbent upon me to find new and ingenious ways of sharing my work. We worked on a series of short dance films. Some to express our feelings from the confines of our home, others to raise funds for the less fortunate artistes, who needed our



support. Some about my own choreography, dance and direction, some to encourage artistes from within my repertory to find their own voice and creative spark. We continue doing this to date.

One had to delve deep within to find inspiration and motivation. The pandemic, in a strange way, has equalled the field. Whether you are powerful or not, rich or not, culturally enlightened or not, the virus does not discriminate. Everyone has had to search for hidden reservoirs of emotion and strength. Acknowledging the anxiety, the confusion, the unknown, my first instinct was to reach out and thus emerged the very first series, *From my home to yours*. And that's exactly the path I chose for my dance company — to reach out. We continue to find comfort in the fact that we have dance embodied in our body ecology. That nobody can take away or no space can restrict the knowledge we have. And of course, imagination has no boundaries! So even though we are in a sense cramped within the confines of our home, that knowledge of dance and more importantly the flight of imagination still remains with us and has become our most prized possession.

My first endeavour was and still is to keep this spirit alive in every member of my dance company — just watching them, working with them, rehearsing with them daily, maintaining a tight schedule with a strict routine helped heal me and helped me to find the centre of my creative existence. The lockdown gave rise to a feeling of

amorphousness of time but we are not letting this affect our practice, our rehearsal and our daily Zoom meetings. Instead, it is helping us keep on track and not let any moroseness creep in.

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Creatively, within the restrictions imposed on us, we expanded on a wide number of possibilities. The outcome was that the dancers and musicians energised me and conversely I energised them. We tried to find new ways of pushing ourselves beyond our limits. Without stepping physically out of the safe haven of our homes we ventured on an adventure to virtually step out of our comfort zone. We made short dance films, revisiting work that we had already made for stage, but letting the current lockdown, the existing unprecedented sense of devastation inform that work. Minor things that one had taken for granted in our life and in our practice began to matter. The visual of a bird in flight, or a tree swaying to the wind, or the blue sky or the rising sun — came into sharp focus when seen from a little window in our rooms.

Helping the artistes pay attention to the small positive things in life, facilitated them to shift their focus away from the pandemic, helping them rediscover their creative spark and redefine what they had known before.

The future demands that we reconceive our relationship with our audiences. In a live situation, performers draw from the audience as much as they give to them. Having this symbiotic relationship in the online realm is not possible. Indian dance by its very nature has the viewers and the "viewed on", a simultaneous discovery



and, therefore, that concurrent journey embarked upon creates emotions in the now. That is a very important aspect of dance that currently is inaccessible.

However, I don't like to ponder on things which are not a reality any more. The reality the world over is that live dance, the way we knew it in theatres with packed audiences — with applause, with a living-in-the-moment air — is not going to be possible for a long time. And therefore, we need to accept and transform our art into another realm of reality. It is impossible to recreate sunlight. But it is possible to transform the feeling of warmth that we feel when the sun rises. It is possible to envision the texture and colours in the skies that we see as the sun traverses through the day. We need to find a new vocabulary to express ourselves to virtual audiences. They remain the same. As do we. It's the medium that has changed.

A new medium of communication is demanding. But it gives us scope to expand, to explore and to find new avenues of reaching out. Viewing dance films rather than a live performance should be a completely new experience, something that the audience would not actually get in a theatre. The theatre lets our eyes, heart and mind roam where it wants, at that particular moment, giving us multiple perspectives. But a dance video gives a totally unexplored dimension to the performance. Allowing us to view the dance, from the top, from the bottom, from behind the dancers... from so close, that we can see every eyelash, every drop of sweat of the dancers. Allowing us to view the dance, frenetic at times as well as slowed down till every movement feels as though suspended in timelessness. We need to befriend technology and work it to our favour. I think it means much more, to look at reality in its face and work with what is, than ponder over what was.

Are the horizons of my choreography and imagination shrinking to fit into the confines of our digital frame? On the contrary, I think they are expanding because we are

learning new ways to explore what was known. We are getting lost in the forest again. We are taking a deep dive into the ocean — not the charted one but an uncharted one. This moment has let us find new ways of looking at our work and also given us the opportunity to dig within, to deal with anxieties that are always a corner away from our being. As artists we stand exposed and vulnerable. We've come face to face with the fragility of life. But we are in it together. Let's find ways of finding our humanity, finding our creativity, finding and keeping alive that spark of artistry that makes us what we are. Artistes.

The dance community has definitely come closer and it is incredible how each one reached out across space and time through the online medium. We have realised that we should have had the time earlier to connect with one another; the pandemic shouldn't have made us do that. We should have had the time, as in the words of Nadine Stair "... to, start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall".

*Aditi Mangaldas, with help from Sangeeta Rana, writes from Germany, where she currently is, rehearsing remotely with her dance company members in India, working on new choreographies and dance videos and simultaneously preparing for her upcoming solo, Forbidden.*

**Aditi Mangaldas** is a dancer and choreographer in the classical Indian dance form of Kathak. Besides dancing and choreographing classical productions, she has used her knowledge of Kathak to evolve a contemporary dance vocabulary. Aditi has won critical acclaim across the world. She was awarded both the State and National Sangeet Natak Akademi Award India, in 2007 and 2013 respectively, both of which she declined to accept due to compelling reasons. Aditi heads the Aditi Mangaldas Dance Company — The Drishtikon Dance Foundation.





## The Year of the Virus

Ashok Ferrey

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By now we've seen it all — the impossibly smug, unbelievably glossy lockdown achievements of other people. There were the luscious cupcakes your cousin baked, for a start ("What, *those*? You know I whipped them up just this afternoon? I used gram flour, engine oil and two elderly prunes I happened to find in a cupboard."). Then there was your semi-literate work colleague's word-perfect epic poem – running into many, many pages. ("You know what? I'm a poet, I just never knew it. Bless you oh Gods of the COVID for bringing to light the deep, *deep* talent that is *Me!*") And who can forget the dancing? (Dancing on the bed, dancing with the dog on the bed; even on occasion dancing with the husband and the dog on the bed). All the online COVID porn of this year of living dangerously, of splendid, fulfilled isolation. But if you're expecting Ashok Ferrey's contribution to this lovefest of mutual back-scratching, stop reading right here. In this year of uber-achievement by nearly everyone I know, I did absolutely nothing: I didn't write a single word, I didn't design a single house, I hardly trained any clients. If you see a lot of fat people around Colombo this festive season, it's not just Christmas, it's me.

How come? I hear you wail. (What, you mean you actually said *Thank God*? Sorry, I didn't hear you.) For those of you who actually *are* wailing, let me explain myself.



Why would I write another novel when I've only just finished one? (It's called *The Unmarriageable Man*. The Wife says I shouldn't be writing so much about myself, it's not good manners.) Then again, early this year I had just finished designing a house in Kandy for some hysterical Kandyans. (They generously paid for a year of counselling, only I couldn't get to a doctor because of lockdown.) Finally, how do you expect me to train clients personally when they can't leave home, and are anyway too busy baking cupcakes using engine oil and two elderly prunes? Did I hear you say WhatsApp? Zoom? Hah! Have you seen my Nokia phone circa 2009? The day it does WhatsApp I'll eat my cupcakes. Yours too, if you'll let me.

So then we come to the million-rupee question. What exactly *did* I do, if I didn't do all those dirty deeds you expected me to do? (I know the editor is going to have fun with that last sentence.) The answer to this is rather complex, one I have thought about long and hard for two minutes. I have never owned a credit card or smart phone or laptop. I drive a Tata Nano when I drive, which is not often. (When I do drive, people on the pavement frequently put their hand out assuming I'm a taxi. I'm often tempted to drive them straight to the Attidiya marshes and leave them there.) The house I live in is rickety and

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rambling. (You can see it in *Funny Boy* if you really want to.) It is inhabited by many species of wildlife — rats, bats, cats, kids — all of whom bound away in the other direction when they see me coming; this includes the Wife. It is called social distancing

apparently. So you see my life was in actual fact perfectly "covidised" long before your grandmother got to hear the word. For me it has been nothing special, all this living in isolation doing nothing. Oh yes, I did dig up the back garden in the early days to plant vegetable seeds. (Nothing came up except okra. I am proud to tell you we have an okra-free day every Wednesday.)

So I can give you all that stuff about feeling more centred, more fulfilled, more grounded after this year-long break; sadly, it just won't be true. *Realigned, restructured, re-engineered* may be your new buzz words — they're not mine. Yet believe me when I tell you there's more buzz to me than a Colombo mosquito. Not with the "New Normal". Just lots and lots more of the "Old". Anyway I can't sit here nattering to you about Life and all that. I have things to do. I need to get to the garage to root out the rest of the engine oil.

**Ashok Ferrey** read Pure Mathematics at Oxford before becoming a builder, and finally a writer. He is the author of five books, all of them nominated for either Sri Lanka's Gratiaen Prize or its State Literary Award. His last book, *The Ceaseless Chatter of Demons*, was also longlisted for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. His most recent building, The Cricket Club Café in Colombo, has just been nominated for the Geoffrey Bawa Award. By day he is a personal trainer.



# Adapting to the New Normal

Alicia Souza

**M**y new normal has a little human addition. I'm a new mom with a lockdown baby. We went into lockdown bang in the middle of my pregnancy and I was juxtaposed with feeling that it was kind of the best time to have a kid because my worry about missing events and a ton of work vanished. Yet it was also scary knowing that there was, at the time, not a lot of scientific literature on the subject of COVID and pregnancy and babies. Since then, save for doctor visits and a single handful of masked hellos, my world has been very contained.

I am an illustrator who also runs a merchandising business and an online store. My weekdays are spent mostly at my desk, doing everything from drawing to website edits. I also post a comic/cartoon daily on social media and for this I draw inspiration from life experiences and from the world around me; from things I see, hear, feel. Even before COVID, I rarely did meetings anyway and my outings were mostly reserved for the weekends. But the weekends were my dessert. The sweetness of meeting friends in coffee shops and having long, winding conversations that flow



Drawing is mostly swinging emotions; annoyed with the new normal, grateful with my health, impatient with the end not seeming nearer and helpless with the strangeness of it all

into mealtimes, the joy of making impromptu 'let's visit' jumps to new shops and restaurants, and just driving into town all the while complaining about the lack of parking and traffic woes were the experiential muses I savoured.

And then COVID hit. And then my son was born. Everything's different.

I now have my very unscheduled, is-an-experience-all-on-his-own little human who gives me something to draw about daily. Besides him, I felt like I also gathered a lot of drawing energy from memories, and from, well, myself. What I feel like during these strange times that the entire world is in together. Drawing is mostly swinging emotions; annoyed with the new normal, grateful

with my health, impatient with the end not seeming nearer and helpless with the strangeness of it all. And then there are the endless incidents of poop-splotions, sleep deprivation, baby giggles.

I am optimistic though, or rather a realist; I expect things will get back to normal. I mean at least 'almost' normal. There WILL be a vaccine and I will go back to my weekends of long in-person conversations and coffee shops with their beautiful sights, sounds and human interactions. I will treasure it so much more. At least for a while, until the new normal is normal again. Till then, I will draw about my lack of sleep, that new baby smell and the joy of seeing a familiar face after eight months. Whatever life throws at m, I draw.

**Alicia Souza** is a 'happiness illustrator'. She's been drawing professionally for just under a decade and has hundreds of products manufactured from her drawings. She has also illustrated five published picture books, and earlier this year debuted as a solo author-artist.





## 2020 was a Side of Extra Special

Sharin Bhatti

I will admit that despite my generally everything-agnostic mindset, I am superstitious about some things. I cross my fingers and make a wish every time I see a red mail van. I am also a believer of neat beginnings and endings assigned to dates because they magically wipe the slate clean and let me begin again. You know — anniversaries, birthdays, et al. Even New Year's Day.

2019 was a rough year for me. Despite professional victories, I felt a sense of doom and ruin personally. I faced no untoward incident other than wrestling with the demons in my head. To add insult to injury, I met with two physical injuries in which I dislocated both my knees in just one month. BOTH MY KNEES! So New Year's Day 2020 was burdened with making the new month, year, decade better, bigger, stronger with a side of extra special.

I'd be lying if I now admitted that it wasn't. Because despite the global doom and ruin the world faced, I gained my greatest insights



this year. The biggest one being that misery loves company. 2020 was the year when Books on Toast found a sister in Shiny Happy Book Club.

For long, both Anuya and I have believed in the power of bibliotherapy. We have sunk into our couches comforted with books by favourite authors, given in to guilty bookish indulgences as a cathartic toast to our sorrows. Reading has dug us out of bottomless self-loathing pits. And we found a sister in author Shaheen Bhatt — with whom we started the Shiny Happy Book Club. A mental health Instagram reading (bookstagram) platform that recommends fic and non-fic books each month to befriend during those terrible times. We started this at the beginning of the year, just when WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and nations announced total lockdown measures. Shiny Happy Book Club taught me to stay hopeful in dark times.

2020 also taught me the true meanings of the words — gratitude, humility and privilege. I became grateful for being surrounded by loved ones, humbled by my privilege of being gainfully employed and being allowed the rare luxury of access — afforded to a fraction, I included. Shedding my previously acquired

2020 also taught me the true meanings of the words — gratitude, humility and privilege.... Shedding my previously acquired high ideals of Instagrammable perfection, I exchanged them for secular values of inclusion, communal harmony, safety and health. I had found my Ikigai — and it wasn't in a Venn diagram but in the company of fellow book lovers

high ideals of Instagrammable perfection, I exchanged them for secular values of inclusion, communal harmony, safety and health. I had found my Ikigai — and it wasn't in a Venn diagram but in the company of fellow book lovers.

I realised then that I had already found my tribe — fellow readers who talked books with real passion. We started BOTReadersClub, a unique book club that ran genre-specific book

clubs each month. We signed up members, read our book of the month with them and then interacted with the author in a closed Zoom session. Every month, I'd count down the days to when we'd all gather around a screen and strip a book down to its bare bones and interrogate the author's choices on everything — the cover, the characters, the plot points. EVERYTHING.

As I look back to all that 2020 brought me, I am most thankful for our reader friends who championed me through it. In those isolated times, when all days and nights blended into one — I found my reason for being. 2020 gave me some tough love, brought me closer to my fundamental darkness and showed me how to look for the light. So thank you 2020.

**Sharin Bhatti** is a media professional with over 13 years of experience as a journalist, content and communications consultant and entrepreneur. She's worked with *The Indian Express*, *Hindustan Times*, *Rolling Stone India*, Jabong.com, Adfactors PR, Publicis Groupe, *Open Magazine*, Lakme India, Miami Ad School and more. She is co-founder of Mumbai's culture hub The Hive, black box theater Cuckoo Club and books-led content creator community Books on Toast with Anuya Jakatdar.



## Portrait of the Artist as a Reality Show Contestant

By Anuya Jakatdar

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I don't know if I can call myself an artist..." is my first thought. There it is. My imposter syndrome. It's been with me for so long, I consider it a part of my body, like a mole. Or the bile that uses my throat as a freeway. I start with a mention of this very peculiar affliction that creative people suffer from, because the pandemic has given it a chance to really flourish. For the purpose of this writeup though, let's assume I am an artist, and talk about what it's been like to be one in the time of COVID-19. After all, a con artist is still an artist.

And I'm going to be honest. It's been a wake-up call.

Some days a burst of colour and creativity. Some days a vortex of *Grey's Anatomy* and junk food binges. Our YouTube channel, Books on Toast, saw a promising start to the year — we launched the Shiny Happy Book Club, a





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then spend Tuesday painting  
mandalas in your Adult  
Colouring Book.... It's okay  
to make less money, to have  
more free time. It's okay to  
just be grateful that those  
who you love are okay,  
and around



unique initiative that married books to mental health. We launched the Reader's Club, an exclusive community of readers who get to read the book of the month with us and then discuss with the author herself! I also spent time on developing a few of my original ideas into web series and movies, got them all shiny, and sparkly and pitch-ready. It felt amazing to be doing this at first, and then one day, it didn't. And that ladies and gentlemen is the most important thing 2020 has taught me; emotions are perfidious bitches. Something that will bring you joy one day will make you ache with boredom the next... and that is completely okay.

It's okay to be ultra productive on Monday and then spend Tuesday painting mandalas in your Adult Colouring Book. It's okay to wake up and decide how much time you'll dedicate to your art that day, whether you'll dedicate any time to it at all. It's okay to find satisfaction in chores; in organising

a desk, in cooking a dish, in feeding a cat. It's okay to make less money, to have more free time. It's okay to just be grateful that those who you love are okay, and around.

It was strangely freeing to have this pitstop called 2020 in the race of life. Like an enforced gap year. It doesn't count, we all said to each other, knowing full well that it did. It changed us, afforded us the

kind of clarity we'd have never got had we plunged headfirst into another year full of 'leaping first and looking later' because we've been taught that if we aren't constantly moving, we may as well be dead.

Well, thanks to 2020, I stood still for a while, and lo and behold, I'm still alive. Me and my imposter syndrome, both. We survived to see another year, and at this point that's the most important thing for all of us to do.

We have to survive.

**Anuya Jakatdar** of Books on Toast is a writer, entrepreneur and creative consultant with over 10 years of experience who has managed to turn her love for reading and writing into a profession. In the past, she has written for AIB, Son of Abish and Guy in the Sky Productions, and worked for MTV, UTV, Star India, Google India and more. Her latest stint was as literature consultant and in-house writer for Jio Studios. Books on Toast is the YouTube channel and reader community she co-founded with Sharin Bhatti.



## Free Falling into 2021

Priya Kuriyan

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**W**orking from home in solitude has been the norm for me for almost all my professional life. However, a few unexpected circumstances at the start of the pandemic led me to having to spend a considerable amount of time at my parents' home, living out of a suitcase and working on my illustrations in a makeshift studio under their ever-puzzled gaze; something I haven't experienced in a while.

I think the pandemic has made me embrace and accept the unexpected a little more than I used to, and working from a small town or village; something I've thought about with some trepidation, seems like something I could do in the near future. In all honesty, I feel like I'm still falling through the looking glass and I'm not sure I feel equipped enough to impart any wisdom about how I would realign things





stepping into the future.

I've caught myself looking inwards more often than usual this year and the people-watching that I usually indulge in when I'm outdoors has been replaced by a hunger for green spaces and capturing the natural world in my sketchbooks. I do hope that it helps me retain that sense of joy that I can infuse into the children's books that I will be working on in the coming year.

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**Priya Kuriyan** is a children's book writer-illustrator, comics maker and chronic doodler. She has directed educational films for the *Sesame Street Show* (India) and the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) and has illustrated numerous children's books for various Indian publishers. She collaborated with writer Devapriya Roy on a graphic biography of Indira Gandhi for young adults. She lives and works in Bangalore and in her spare time makes funny caricatures of its residents.



## We Lost Everything... Except Hope

Karan Singh

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Ladies and gentlemen, please put your hands together and welcome on to the stage, Karan Singh Magic." And then there was applause. Beautiful, wonderful, all-consuming applause that filled the room, the most heartwarming sound for an artiste. I walked onto the stage and for the next one hour, did the only thing I know how to do. Entertain, perform and try to leave people with a smile on their faces. This was the afternoon of March 8, 2020, in a stadium of 12,000 people. Nine months, 13 days, 2 hours and 40 minutes ago as I write this was the last time I had applause fill a room. And the world, my world, has never really been the same ever since.

On March 24, India went into lockdown and as a performer the only thing I had in mind was to somehow put a smile on people's faces while the world suffered. And if they couldn't come to watch my magic, the only solution was for the magic to go to them. Through social media I offered to perform private shows for people over Zoom.



When the world locked itself up, we lost a lot. People lost jobs, people lost partners, people lost friendships, relationships, the less fortunate lost their ability to get food and water. But the only thing the world did not lose was their ability to hope, to hope that all of us together somehow, somewhere will get out of this dreadful time that we are facing



A 10-minute act where I would perform for people and their families. Naive little me thought the world would open up in a couple of weeks and those 14 days I would maybe perform for 15-20 families. Little did I know what an experience awaited me.

Gradually as I started performing for people word spread. I was soon performing for people not just in India, where I reside, but people around the globe. I was performing for doctors, for people in hospitals suffering from COVID-19, for boyfriends and girlfriends stuck in different parts of the city unable to meet, partners stuck in different corners of the globe, old age homes where the elderly were unable to meet their children for how long even they didn't know. And each of them had a story. The magic and art no longer was at my end, the magic was at their end and how each of them was coping with the pandemic. I heard tales of a 16-year-old boy who lost both his parents and now lived with his uncle with a smile on his face. A smile of strength I haven't been able to forget. From people who lost loved ones, to people who had friendships or relationships ending, to doctors talking about the pain and suffering of seeing death at close quarters every few hours, crying in the breaks before getting back to tend to the next patient with an unending, unwavering

resolve. The stories unfolded one after the other and they were stories of strength of belief and of hope.

When the world locked itself up, we lost a lot. People lost jobs, people lost partners, people lost friendships, relationships, the less fortunate lost their ability to get food and water. But the only thing the world did not lose was their ability to hope, to hope that all of us together somehow, somewhere will get out of this dreadful time that we are facing.

That hope is what gave me strength to perform for families, for friends, for companies, for the elderly and for the young alike. I may not be able to give them hope and I may not hear the applause from 12,000 people for a long while but a smile at the end of my act from the 71-year-old grandmother who lost her son and grandsons to COVID-19 is all the applause I need for now.

It's been 9 months, 13 days, 3 hours and 26 minutes since I stepped on stage. But what I thought would be 15-20 families that I would perform for have gone on to a number in the thousands from every corner of the globe, and I can truly say the magic and art lie in people's hearts, not in me.

**Karan Singh** is a magician and illusionist known for shows that are personal, interactive and non-gimmicky. His performances have a theatrical element to them, and he likes to use his easy charm and sense of humour to completely disarm his audience. He was awarded "Gigstart Magician of the Year" in 2015, and was recently featured in *The New York Times*. Since the lockdown in March 2020, he has performed over 400 digital shows for families across the world.





## The Art of Doing Nothing

Rahul Ram

I had my last public performance in front of a live audience on March 7, 2020, over nine months ago. I have no idea when the next concert will be. My income from performing will be down by 80 percent this year.

When COVID-19 hit, and a few concerts were cancelled, I had no idea how long this would last! However, a really packed '19-'20 winter schedule made me secretly pleased that there would be no more 3am alarms for a while. And then came lockdown, and I became a full-fledged homemaker for two months. My wife was working all through, as she works with street dogs. Thus I ran the house, with our nine dogs — cooking, cleaning, feeding, doing grocery shopping, etc. and learning three ways to make Ragi Dosa, and Punjabi Chholey and

pizza sauce from scratch — and time passed quite pleasantly. I totally acknowledge my privilege in this, especially when the great migration started and I saw the lines of people standing for food outside schools, and fools banging thalis and lighting lamps. I immersed myself in learning about the pandemic and followed India's and the world's numbers with an intensity that surprised me.

Magically, the piano came back just two days before lockdown, after being with the repairers for 10 months. My piano playing is rudimentary at best, but all of us at home took great pleasure in playing, and I got to teach the basics of Western music to Vipin, our young friend who lives with us. Indian Ocean also attempted to do some "live" FB sessions, and I learnt how to accompany myself

on the piano while singing our songs (very badly, but who cares, it was FUN!). And then there were requests from people across the board to appear in fundraisers... for migrant workers, for musicians, for libraries, for feeding slum-dwellers.... and I had to learn Zoom and Instalive and some other platforms. There was even paid work! Sing a song for an ad, compose some music and songs with the band. As the months rolled by, some of the tech guys (who were all suffering from similar losses in income) came up with a system where the whole band could perform together, and we actually did four paid concerts. More on this later.

BUT... I have not felt the NEED to reinvent myself, or to find new sources of creativity, or felt the need to keep myself "productive" in order to stay relevant. Neither has this period inspired me to make new music, since I did not feel particularly stifled, or harassed or stir-crazy or depressed. In fact I got a taste of what semi-retired life may be, and quite relished it. I've been a touring musician for over 30 years now, and I know the touring will start again, with possible changes in the parameters of performances, but since I can't either predict or control events, I'm not worrying about it. I did not really "miss" the interaction of a live audience, actually I could interact better with my band members without distractions. Performing live has so many unknowns, every show is different, so maybe I have learnt to take uncertainty in my stride. I spent two months up in the hills, and learnt the art of doing nothing, and doing it well, something that would have been impossible at any point during the last 20 years!

Every day, sunrise and sunset would bring new

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drama, I would watch the griffons soar effortlessly in the blue sky, watch the leaves turn colour, read, cook, hang out with friends and just BE. I had Zoom meetings with my cousins and with my friends, enjoying each others' company and laughing about the old and the new. I went through my father's papers, discovering new things about my parents' lives. In short, I did so many things that I never had the time for, and the joy and pleasure it brought me is wonderful. My dogs absolutely loved having me at home all day for months on end. I did

not watch a single movie or serial

during these months, as my days were already full with life! And, shockingly, I managed to lose five kilograms with no effort!!

Regarding the future, we will have to take it as it comes. The one big positive I perceive is that online concerts will now become a "thing". It potentially gives musicians and other artistes a way larger audience to perform to. How many people have actually seen Indian Ocean live? A small fraction of our total listeners. This way, I can perform for lakhs, if not millions of people. An analogy I like to use is watching cricket in a stadium versus on TV. Both have become equally valid, but different experiences. One actually watches better cricket on TV, but the sheer adrenaline rush of being with thousands of people in a stadium is a very different high. Similarly, the sheer excitement of a live concert is hard to beat, but sitting at home you can get a front-seat view to a concert, with better sound than the front row (worst place for sound in a live concert!!) at a concert. You can watch with friends, with snacks and drinks that YOU choose, from the comfort of your favourite sofa! So, bring on the "New Real".

**Rahul Ram** has been performing with Indian Ocean as a bassist and vocalist for 30 years. He is also part of the political satire/social commentary trio, Aisi Taisi Democracy.



## For the Food Sufi

Ranveer Brar

Phrases like The New Normal, Minimalism, Less is More, are in force thanks to 2020. Yet, truth be told, they have been a way of life for us since ages.

Till now, in my journey as a chef, I have been an explorer, searching for food stories, theories on culinary evolution, connecting the dots between cultures, dishes, cuisines and people.

This year however, as I spent the longest time at home, it has been a boon in disguise. When lockdown started, we all realised that food is going to be the go-to requirement for everyone, either for sustenance or to save oneself from boredom!

As I set about working on recipe after recipe, beginning with minimal ingredients in my home kitchen, actually my 'Mom's fort', it started to cascade into a never-ending plethora of recipe revivals, adaptations and innovations.



I have always believed that Indian cuisine and our food practices have had the answer to almost everything. The exercise of delving into more and more workable recipes, kept bringing up these masterpieces that reinforced my belief that Indian cuisine in general and our home kitchens in particular, are the best examples of resourcefulness.

My induction into this school of thought began with my spending time with Biji (my grandmother) in the kitchen at our ancestral home in Lucknow. Most of the staples in the pantry were fresh farm produce, raw and processed, plus the spices. With the basic ingredients, food for the whole family was whipped up, whether it was for day-to-day meals or festivals and special occasions. And they would be out of the world.

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Likewise, with all of us. If we delve into the "matter of fact", hand-me-down recipes from moms and grandmoms, we can discover many such unappreciated jewels that have been a way of life for us.

And that has been the driving force behind my thought process and cooking these past months.

How can we make an impact with what we have? How can we stop asking for more to create more? What more hidden treasures can we unravel through the simplicity of our culinary repertoire? How can I do more justice to our simple home food and make it attractive enough to re-entice my connections so they reconnect with their home food and its simplicity; to recreate it and relive the memories that I managed to.

Television celebrity, *Masterchef India* judge, author, restaurateur, food film producer and benefactor, **Ranveer Brar** is one of the most celebrated chefs in the country. He has set up restaurants in India (including at a heritage hotel, Alila Fort Bishangarh) and abroad and curated the menu of many more (including cruise kitchens aboard *Royal Caribbean*).

Getting the basics right and revering the kitchen as an artist would his/her studio, are mantras he lives by and propagates to others as well. He also pioneered the first ever Twitter video show called *Ranveer On The Road*, covering new destinations each season and exploring their cuisines and cultures. Brar calls himself a food-sufi on a constant culinary quest.



## Hope Springs Eternal

Viji Venkatesh

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

— *A Tale of Two Cities*

When Charles Dickens wrote this in 1859, I'm sure he never thought that in 2020 an English literature student-turned-cancer care professional would choose these very words to describe the current times .

But to be honest, over and over again these past few months it is these very words my mind keeps going to when I have wanted to define the times we are going through now — the best of times, the worst of times. However, as we enter what seems like a Winter of Despair, let us know the Spring of Hope will follow.

This was brought home to me a couple of weeks ago when one of the cancer patients I work with was visiting Mumbai (from his little town in the South of India) on some work and asked me if I could meet him at least for a very short while over a cup of chai. We chose a "safe" meeting place and did have that chai together and spent a most rewarding hour catching up, no



The pandemic and the ensuing lockdown really made me for one understand the meaning of the word privileged in all its totality. With my job intact and a comfortable home to remain locked in I really had no business complaining. Yes the fear of infection was very real and it continues to be so but when I saw and heard of the challenges the patients were facing any discomfort one experienced paled



matter we could not hug each other like we always do when we meet .

So this was the first patient I was meeting in all these long months. When on an average I see and interact with at least a dozen patients in a day one can imagine the feeling. Seeing this young man was like seeing all my patients. So many empty spaces in the heart were full and filled with hope. Something in me told me this was the beginning of our "back to normal" journey.

The pandemic and the ensuing lockdown really made me, for one, understand the meaning of the word "privileged" in all its totality. With my job intact and a comfortable home to remain locked in I really had no business complaining. Yes, the fear of infection was very real and it continues to be so, but when I saw and heard of the challenges the patients were facing any discomfort one experienced paled.

The patients I work with, and they come from all over the country, from socio-economically challenged backgrounds and number in thousands. They are on lifelong treatment for a rare blood cancer and cannot afford to miss even a day's dose. Our job is to ensure they meet their treating physicians periodically as warranted, get their prescriptions and collect their supply. Given the distances their treatment institutions and dispensation outlets are from their villages and towns they stay in this is a logistical nightmare even in ordinary times. In the times of COVID, it was only magnified with so many

other factors coming into play.

Along with other vulnerable sections of the society patients and not just cancer patients bore the brunt of the pandemic and the new normal that was being thrust on them. These are families that, thanks to a life-altering diagnosis, had already seen their normal lives disrupted and now saw a dearly loved one put at greater and doubled risk.

My team and I had our work cut out and I do not exaggerate when I say we worked day in and day out (and still do) to ensure compliance. And we have received tremendous support from our physicians and their staff in trying and making the whole process as uncomplicated and smooth as possible. Patients have come to each other's support and collected and delivered supply to those who have not been able to travel, physicians have sent us prescriptions electronically, hospitals have lost no time in setting up tele consultation services, police and fire safety officers have chipped in... people have come together as one to serve each other .

When my young patient from Udumalpettai told me as we took leave of each other, we are nothing Amma without The Max Foundation, a myriad emotions swept over me. Gratitude was foremost.

To be in a position to help and to have the resources to support: not just the patients but the team as well. This has not been an easy year for any of us but we have somehow survived.

So, bring on 2021, Universe... we are ready.

**Viji Venkatesh** has 34 years of professional experience in cancer patient care and support in her role as Regional Head, India and South Asia at The Max Foundation. She began with The Max Foundation in 2001 by leading the administration of the Glivec International Patient Assistance Program (GIPAP) in India. Today, in addition to GIPAP, she has a key role in the management of the local Novartis Oncology Access Program (NOA).

She was instrumental in setting up the Preventive Oncology Department at Tata Memorial Hospital and is an active member of its Ethics Committee. She is also an Executive Committee member of the Marrow Donor Registry India and the Terry Fox India Committee, and is a Trustee of Being Human The Salman Khan Foundation, as well as the Friends of Max Charitable Trust.





## New Normal, Old Privilege

Varud Gupta

I've spent a lot of the time, from the lockdown to now co-existing with COVID, thinking about privilege. To be a writer, for the far majority, is to be endowed with plenty of it:

Migrant labourers are forced to march thousands of miles back home in the middle of a pandemic, many even without basic necessities. *Meanwhile, I sit in my room and stare at a blank page thinking how to turn it into a chapter.* Farmers protest on the streets, fearful of a new future and their source of security. *I ponder the title of the aforementioned new chapter and scribble a word or two.* Healthcare workers are on their feet non-stop, cloaked in teal suits, running from emergency rooms to anxious phone calls with loved ones. *I'm having a bad day and get lazy editing the draft.*

I'm not trying to undercut the difficulties of the craft or how personally important writing has come to be for me. When I first started writing, I was going through a personal hell and it saved me. When I wrote my first book, I was so scared of my own future and being given that chance

saved me once more. Every day I sit to write, I still have those personal insecurities gnaw at me — even with this piece right here. But I'm conflicted-ly thankful for this time where I've been forced to ask myself: *Why?* Why do I write? Is writing something important enough to warrant the use of the privilege that has been given to me across circumstance and upbringing?

We can approach privilege in different ways. We can run from it, leaving behind material possessions for minimalist living; we can disregard it, continuing to live a life as if their standards are the norm; or as one of the few, I can decide to leverage it and put it to work.

Because privilege doesn't have to always carry a negative connotation, right? No matter how universally unfair the differences we have — kicking it to the curb or ignoring it would be a far sourer affair.

Privilege can be a personal opportunity, meant to be used ideally for something larger than one's self. Yes, I will always ultimately write for selfish means — for money, for security, for placating the ego. But I decided that if this is the path I'm choosing, then it is time to start doing it right. No more writing on whims or laissez-faire attitudes.

We can approach privilege in different ways. We can run from it, leaving behind material possessions for minimalist living; we can disregard it, continuing to live a life as if their standards are the norm; or as one of the few, I can decide to leverage it and put it to work. Because privilege doesn't have to always carry a negative connotation, right? No matter how universally unfair the differences we have — kicking it to the curb or ignoring it would be a far sourer affair

I have the privilege of time and space and security not many others do. It's only fair that I put it to use — and I have. I've written, read, and studied more in the past months than my previous three years into this new career. And I plan to keep writing, holding this disparity in mind and through word count.

It is hard to admit without being self-gratifying, but I do hope that those words on a page make a difference in their own way, no matter how small an audience or particular in scope. I'm no social media crusader, no non-profit warrior, no political vigilante. I am

but a simple bard, singing even if none listen to me at the crowded tavern, hoping that the power of stories still can enchant, connect, and inspire.

So, in lengthy reconciliation, I've found a strange energy from privilege during these even stranger times. Is it right? I don't know, but I do it, because it is the only thing that makes sense to me in this new world. Am I wrong? Quite possibly so, and this piece only exists to invite your critique in telling me so.

**Varud Gupta** was born and bred for business until a brusque millennial existential crisis sent him travelling through the culinary cultures of the world. He's been a NY cheesemonger, an Argentine asador, a Peruvian bartender and a spy in countless household kitchens. His first book, *Bhagwaan Ke Pakwaan* or Food of The Gods, is an exploration of the intersection of food and faith in India and won a Gourmand award for "Peace" and "First Cookbook." His recently released graphic novel, *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, is a coming of age story set in 1947 Chandni Chowk. When not writing or travelling, he's usually eating, collecting instant noodles, teaching storytelling, or playing *Dungeons and Dragons*.



## The Living

Sumana Roy

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Three weeks before the first lockdown was declared, I was with my family in Agra. We had gone to see the Taj Mahal — rather, we'd gone there to show my nephew and niece the Taj Mahal. My mother was in a wheelchair, we walked beside her — her husband, daughter, son-in-law and daughter-in-law, her two grandchildren, and a tourist guide. My mother reminded me of the things that my brother and I had asked when we'd first visited the monument as children. There were two kinds of histories that I was being given: the guide's, a unique curation of anecdotes about Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal that made us laugh; my mother's, a private history whose rush I felt more than others present there. It was February 28.

The next day, my family was with me in Sonapat. I'd taken them to see my workplace — the campus of Ashoka University where I now teach. After ordering lunch for them at the dhaba, I went to attend a lecture by my colleague, the scientist Gautam Menon. Gautam spoke about the COVID-19 virus. It was the second day of March.



“What changed me was a new awareness — of mortality. Every moment, that literature and song had celebrated as a moment of life and living, was now a moment of death. Carpe diem, seize the moment. What did it exactly mean, particularly in these new circumstances?”

There was no sense of alarm in the lecture hall — just curiosity, even humour. Two days later, when I was eating lunch with my colleagues Rita Kothari and Clancy Martin, I dragged Rita to the wash basin to sanitise her hands. I mention these details just to remember — and register, retrospectively — the speed at which things happened. It was cyclonic — one Saturday, we were standing in a queue, pushing and being pushed, in front of the Taj Mahal, the next Saturday, I was in Siliguri with my family, going from one pharmacy to another. There were no hand sanitisers to be bought in our town.

And then the pace changed. It didn't grow faster or slower. It just thickened, until one couldn't be sure whether the days were going quickly or slowly. Life moved online — but it wasn't abrupt, only a culmination of how we'd been living most of our life online, returning to offline life almost absentmindedly, as if the real life was inside our phones. We knew it wasn't right, and hence the stolen delight of that life. But now that life had suddenly been legitimised, and, with it, the playground had been turned into a workplace.

Having avoided video calls ever since they had come into being, particularly for being forced to look at my face, I now had to look at my students and myself in boxes beside each other. There was little to tell us apart — not our faces, not our hair, not our gender, not our geographical location — except that we were united by one shared ambition: to get to the end of the semester without falling asleep in one of those boxes. I had nightmares about it often — falling asleep in front of the

world, one's most private actions and gestures revealed. Online classes brought their own routine: I combed my hair before I began teaching. For a person who avoids looking at the mirror for days, this was torturous.

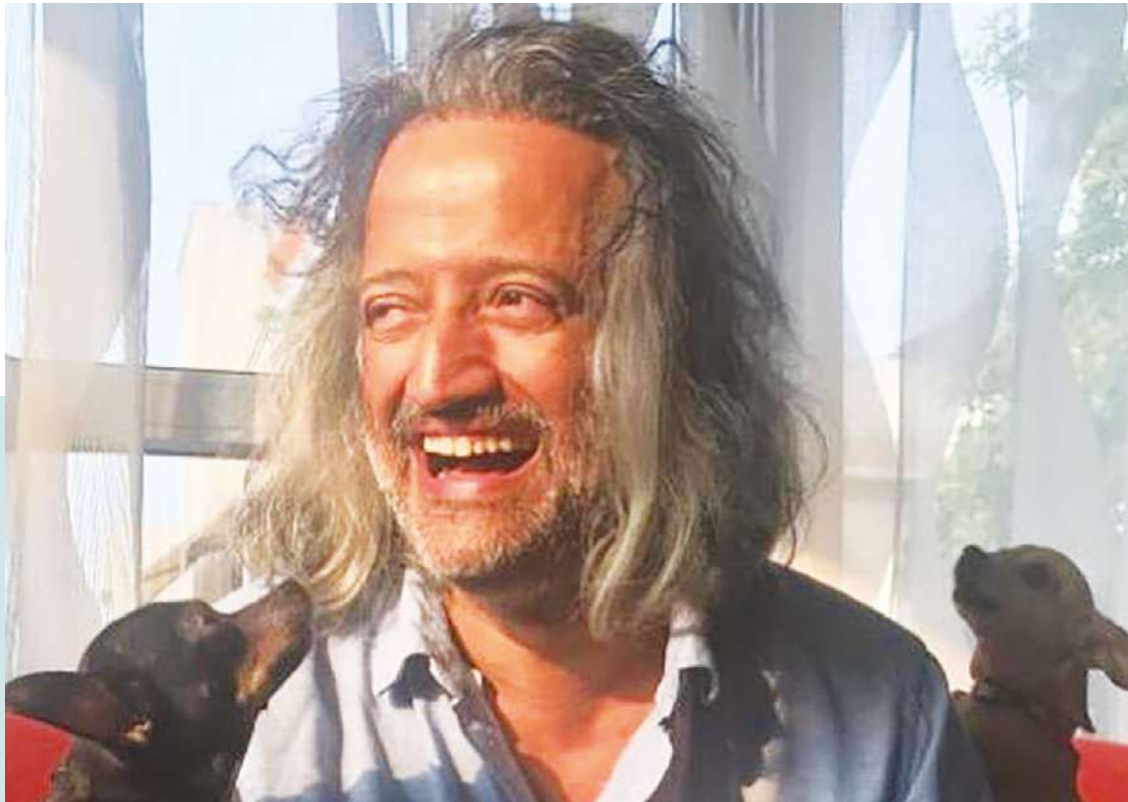
But I mention only the superficial things.

What changed me was a new awareness — of mortality. Every moment, that literature and song had celebrated as a moment of life and living, was now a moment of death. Carpe diem, seize the moment. What did it exactly mean, particularly in these new circumstances?

I became aware of the bodies of my parents in a way I hadn't before. They had aged, and now the virus made me look at them in a way that they might have when they saw me walking as a toddler on a wet floor. Caring for the elderly — I live with my father-in-law — changed the way I wrote. It also affected what I wrote about. Though I had been moving towards a deeper interest about the workings of the human body, I now find that my writing has become a more permanent resident of the body. The relationship between the human body and the different genres in literature and the arts, the elements and their habitat in the body, how our bodies store time.... These are the things that I find myself thinking about more than I have before. I want to be both the tourist guide and my mother, I want to write about both these histories of the body's relationship with various things, seen and unseen.

I think about my parents every few minutes.... I want to discover, through my writing, what constitutes the living.

**Sumana Roy** is the author of *How I became a Tree*, a work of nonfiction, *Missing: A Novel*, *Out of Syllabus: Poems* and *My Mother's Lover and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories.



## Disrupt Your Art Practice

Samar Jodha

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Much is written about the "New Normal" in the worlds of diverse professions, so what about the world of art? Most importantly, what is the context of art, especially in this scenario.

Nine months ago, all of sudden everything came to a grinding halt, and even stepping out became a huge challenge. In my case, it was not only for my personal safety, but my mother's possible exposure to COVID because of my contact with her. Then came the shift in thinking of what I want to do with the time ahead.

The challenges have been plenty. Some of us were privileged enough to survive the cash crunch. Some blessed ones are living in secure relationships, which did not test the limits of the bandwidth of tolerance of loved ones. A few lucky ones had a passion to fall back on and could deal with this mental hotchpotch. Still others just went comfortably numb. However, some of us hit that reset button in life, which brought us back to where we started. It is a time to check what life is meant for, and what we have actually been doing with it — in this daily survival

mode of more material things, the desire for more attention (the DNA of most artists), the hunger for more success on the treadmill of life. There is no one answer, but there are plenty of journeys!

Today, the time in which we live has a much narrower space for dissent; or for a voice which can represent issues of gender equality, marginalisation, sexuality, or even for the ability to speak out against political violence. Historically, creative practitioners were the only privileged few who had individual voices on these issues and could influence the masses. But with money and lobbies in the political space, and the gatekeepers of religion and culture, who have made this the biggest challenge in this century — in this control by neocons and the crony capitalism advocates — we do live in bizarre times.

Meanwhile sausage factory education has turned-out shiny GPA trophies, but the thinking process has somehow got lost along the way. I used to believe that this happened mainly in the left-brain driven professions. Sadly however, today one notices that creative professions like the arts, architecture and design also suffer from this malaise. A large part of art has become more like "manufactured art" — where the focus lies not so much on creativity, and context to the current environment, and addressing issues in the public domain, instead it is mostly skill-driven education, targeting success based on price, churning out numbers, visibility in predictable showings or the sufferings of the mainstream gallery circuit.

As a creative person, the biggest challenge for me is to walk away from the comfort of my figured tool of engagement. It also includes turning away from my skill, style/signature, the money coming in, the name/fame syndrome — basically whatever I have "cracked" on this path of creativity.

My creative journey started as a photographer. Then came a time when I couldn't fit myself by just

Some of us hit that reset button in life, which brought us back to where we started. It is a time to check what life is meant for, and what we have actually been doing with it — in this daily survival mode of more material things, the desire for more attention (the DNA of most artists), the hunger for more success on the treadmill of life. There is no one answer, but there are plenty of journeys!

selling yet another idea. I switched to editorial work and book publishing. After a while that too had its limitations. I felt I was not able to make the impact I wanted, in whatever small way I could. Most of my coffee table books (I had some, with awards thrown in, with cocktail launches and 15 minutes of fame, feeding my vanity) got buried with new arrivals on top, or ended up as

spine in a bookshelf.

So, one got involved in issues with larger bodies like the Gates Foundation, UN, WHO and other smaller grassroots organisations. It was getting into public policy, strategy and going beyond becoming a photo supplier (yes, this is how most see you). But not being armed with any social sector background or development degree, took its own time to understand the larger pieces.

I followed this up with taking my creative process to public art projects. I tried to avoid getting stuck in the white cube gallery syndrome (most of my work like the Bhopal installation, photography workshops with children in conflict areas, and other projects, are not sexy enough to fit into the private spaces of selling and commission). This was also an attempt, in public domain showings, where my message was laid out for not those already converted, but for those willing to see a possibly different perspective, my own artistic expression, to show an alternate vision (unlike a typical gallery showing with the nonstop banter on social and political issues to an audience who don't need much convincing).

But this too kind of lost its charm. Why so? Because, as an individual, how much, and what kind of an impact can I make with just my own voice. My adult world is too busy trying to survive, or too caught up into Go Big or Go Home! How do I bring my thinking into the larger world, make a bigger shift, genuinely influence, and perhaps even change, lives? Because art is too precious and taking it beyond



my echo chamber is the real deal (full disclosure: this is something I too struggle with, at times).

And this is where the young ones come in — before they are converted into whatever lies ahead in the adulthood drama of life.

In today's adult world of political battles, environmental damage, human greed for more material acquisition, corporations controlling our habits, popular culture flooded with influencers, the list goes on.... where does the child or young adult go to get inspired and make a better world for tomorrow? I believe the adults of my generation have given to them a very fragile planet where success is marked with Me, Myself and I. But the silver lining is that children are now fixing their own future. They are not just raising awareness, but also resetting behaviour for the future. There is inclusion, empathy, and far more concern for universal common good.

For over two decades, I have been keenly invested in children and young adults. It is a group that I ardently believe has the power to lead and enable social impact. So, one started Red Balloon, an organisation that emerged from a long-held belief in the use of Art as a tool to set a positive discourse in society — leading to positive outcome. Red Balloon aims to create a collaborative ecosystem, which includes practitioners from the visual and performing arts as mentors. These individuals bring their experience, and voice, which is critical to enable large-scale mobilisation and

“My adult world is too busy trying to survive, or too caught up into Go Big or Go Home! How do I bring my thinking into the larger world, make a bigger shift, genuinely influence, and perhaps even change, lives? Because art is too precious and taking it beyond my echo chamber is the real deal”

impact. With art and design at its core, team Red Balloon builds partnerships with children of all ages and backgrounds, raises awareness on critical issues such as mental health, environment and climate change, human rights, equality and inclusion and gender-based issues, among others. This ignites individuals,

the young, to freely express themselves, meaningfully connect with social issues, assume leadership roles in their communities, leading to developing creative advocacy campaigns, to share positive social messages and raise awareness.

What we hope to impact in the long term is social-emotional learning for the children and young adults, commonly known as SEL, which represents the set of skills the young ones need to flourish during their entire lifetimes. SEL is commonly defined by five central abilities: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. And we, at Red Balloon, guide children to learn these aspects about SEL through the Arts and Design, because these tools of creativity can help these adults of tomorrow to find a voice for themselves and become catalysts for a better world.

As an artist, the question I ask each day to myself: Is art for art's sake, or for larger social change? I think the answer is getting clearer for me.

**Samar Jodha** is a photographer, documentary filmmaker and an installation artist working over two decades on marginalisation and conflict issues across Asia, Africa and West Asia. He is also a judge on *Nat Geo Cover Shot* and is a regular speaker on TED and TEDx. Samar's work has been widely published and has been shown on public art platforms globally.



When COVID-19 first emerged here in New Zealand, we went into a complete nationwide lockdown between 25 March - 13 May 2020.

NZ's "team of 5 million" was "going hard and going early" to contain the spread of the virus.

I was lucky enough to be able to work online from home...

...and could do so VERY comfortably indeed.

It was winter, and being indoors would be quite nice.

I even thought of sketching/ stretching everyday.



That didn't really happen.

## HERMIT CAT

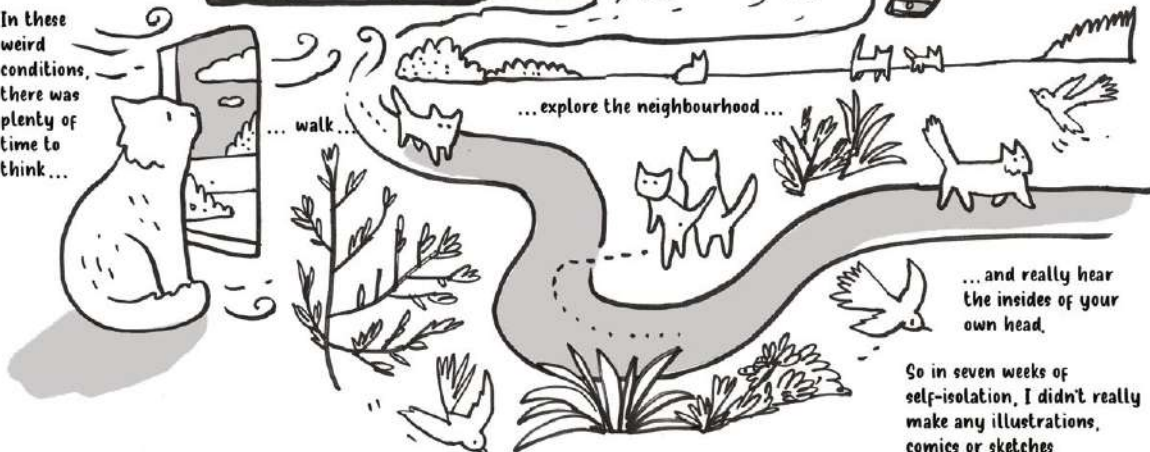
by PRABHA MALLYA

I stared at screens a lot. Days were vaguely the same.



The only variable was the daily 1pm Jacinda and Ashley show.

In these weird conditions, there was plenty of time to think...



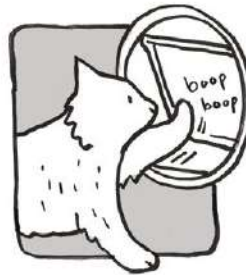
... and really hear the insides of your own head.

So in seven weeks of self-isolation, I didn't really make any illustrations, comics or sketches.

Instead, I learnt to edit videos, taught drawing online, ran a podcast, set up a webinar...



...and decided to head out to someplace new.



It's going to be exciting!



Prabha Mallya is an illustrator and comics creator. She is at her happiest when fussing around with inks and stubby pencils, and frequently has black fingernails.



## Moonlight Ink

Sabika Abbas Naqvi

*Inshallah*

(Inspired by Danesha Lameris)

Every morning when I wake up  
My ribs are heavy  
I carry, within them, two plants  
One is that of hope and the other of hopelessness  
On days I water one, on most days the other  
But that is the thing about hope.  
It isn't a feeling, it isn't a mantra

It isn't just the efforts our face muscles take to  
To round our lips and say O and let it fall at the close of  
P- HOPE

It is labor, hard work, resistance.  
It is a sit-in protest against hopelessness  
Hope does not just smile, it is love, grief and prayers  
It is placards and that song on loop  
Slogans on streets and hoola hoop to the right beats  
It is picking up the rubble from burnt streets  
And scribbling ideas and dreams on used sheets



Sometimes hope seems to be a privilege  
But the hope plant within my ribs wants to fight all odds  
And hope, still

That

On the other side  
We will come out more compassionate  
Kind, dismantling systems of marginalisation  
More Love and safe spaces

More calm and less races  
Inclusive work spaces  
Cleaner air and cleaner hearts  
Original News and greater starts

The plant of hope has climbed my neck and ribs and  
reached out to my ears  
Just to whisper  
Inshallah.

Hopelessness had surrounded my being. It was difficult to find worth in any poem I wrote. Since the beginning of the year, my pen has been struggling to find use. What use are my poems in the middle of a riot, a political movement? They aren't rations or bail money.

The pandemic made it worse. Lockdown days were when my pen yearned to empty its old ink and find newer inspirations. Amidst relief work and petition writing, where would I find the new sparkly ink to write dreams and words of love?

I begged the moon to lend its light so that I could fill my pen up. Write poems of glitter. I am a street poet. I find crossroads and markets to perform. My stage is a Metro station, a railway platform. And here I was, left without an audience or a stage.

I started teaching Urdu and poetry to three of my friends. Gulbadan, Malang, Taalib, Ustaad wrote poems every day in the nights of the pandemic, of love, and entanglements, nostalgia and dreams. While I was inspired, I couldn't write.

I needed to be jolted out of my state. I had thoughts. I had verses in my mind, I just had to write them. But where?

Shilo, a piece of my heart, and the founder of Fearless

When I performed on the streets, my voice left with me. Echoes didn't stay behind to remind the passerbys of what was recited there. But with poetry on huge walls, it is there to be read and re-read.

Collective, inspired me. We spoke about being back on the streets again after Shaheen Bagh. And then we put together a project, "Touch". Something we were craving all those months. Touch, we missed, we desired.

We decided to paint murals and write poems on the streets.

I finally found an outlet. Jaipur and Lucknow were chosen. We were out on the streets, on top of scaffoldings and manlifts to paint. To paint about desire, love and vulnerabilities. All of which were exposed or hidden during the pandemic.

When I performed on the streets, my voice left with me. Echoes didn't stay behind to remind the passerbys of what was recited there. But with poetry on huge walls, it is there to be read and re-read.

They were not always my words. They were words of women we worked with, of LGBTQ+ folks who told their stories, which were put into poems and written on the walls intertwined with the paintings.

What did the lockdown do to me as a person, what other hurdles unleashed themselves, is another story, but as a poet, it made me find a new canvass. I am looking forward to writing poems of love, resistance and assertion across the walls of the world — both physically and metaphorically. To be read and re-read until the rain brings down the ink.

**Sabika Abbas Naqvi** is a performance poet and the founder of Sar-e-Rahguzar: Poetry on the Streets. She is a storyteller, translator, alternative educator and campaigner. Her work revolves around intersectionality, gender, minority rights. Her work is taught in universities across the world. As an educator, she helps create inclusive school curricula based on social and emotional learning. She is an INK Fellow (2019).



## Finding the Joy Again

Richa Gupta

**H**ow have things changed for you? That's the first question people ask these days. Are you working out more? Is working from home a challenge? How do you manage to get things done? With a toddler?

My answer to most of these questions is a sheepish no. A lot of people don't realise this, but I have been working from home for three years now, with a small remote team, so nothing really has changed on the outside. That's an answer for most people. But if I have to be honest, it has changed so much.

As a food blogger, I work with food on the daily. My relationship with food has always been beautiful. Cooking, reading about food, writing about food brings me joy, peace and calm. But it takes a pandemic for all of that to end. Maybe end is a strong word. More like pause for a while. Being stuck at home for days at end, with a toddler who enjoys hanging on my arm for the better part of the day means that I don't have the luxury of focusing, of finding that calm while I work in the kitchen. It's more like a battle some days, where I'm juggling — finding creative, unheard ways of keeping my daughter busy while I find a way to make a recipe in half the time.



The first few weeks of the pandemic seemed normal because I was used to being home most of the time. After a while though, I realised that those visits to meet friends, a walk in the park with my daughter, being able to step out to buy groceries were all breaths of fresh air that I needed for creativity to flow. It's amazing how the smallest moments all contribute to creating. Contribute towards inspiration. Contribute towards feeling and doing



I also love eating out. That used to be my inspiration and gave me a break from eating food I cook. All that came to a rude pause when the pandemic hit. When things started opening up again, I realised that my taste buds had done a roundabout on me. A makeover, but not in a good way. I suddenly realised how greasy restaurant food can be, how it seems to sit in your stomach for hours. Ugh, I'm not painting a pretty picture here. But that's my reality these days.

Some days I don't feel like doing the one thing that I love. Cooking, eating, celebrating food.

But creativity can't take a pause when you are in the business of being creative. That's the rude reality that I never realised I had to face. The first few weeks of the pandemic seemed normal because I was used to being home most of the time. After a while though, I realised that those visits to meet friends, a walk in the park with my daughter, being able to step out to buy groceries were all breaths of fresh air that I needed for creativity to flow. It's amazing how the smallest moments all contribute to creating. Contribute towards inspiration. Contribute towards feeling and doing.

There have been days where I've tumbled into an abyss of comparison, self-doubt and have hit roadblocks that seemed immovable. I had a hard look at my priorities, my style of working, my goals and my lifestyle. And I realised trying to do it all was not the answer. Trying to exceed expectations in these hard times may not be the best way. Being a perfectionist won't work right now.

I've tried to change my ways. Though the old ways do creep in sometimes. But I think these changes are here

to stay for good. I've delegated and brought in more people to join our team. People who are exceedingly good at what they do, and who are an asset, who are helping us grow by taking a few things off my hands. This has given me more time to work (in a way) by not having to juggle work while wanting to be with my daughter, by freeing up time for me to be with her a 100 percent. Which means when I do get to work, I am giving my 100 percent to that as well.

I've also realised that finding inspiration again means relooking at how I was approaching the content that I created. I've always wanted my food and recipes to bring happiness to other people, and I needed to remember that again. I start my day these days by reading comments and testimonials by readers from across the world. This begins my day in the brightest way possible and gives me the joy I need to create. It reminds me why I love what I do so much.

But I think one of the most important things that have worked for me has been reaching out to people. To friends, peers and family, and talking about how tough it's been. It has been the easiest and hardest thing to do. And the most fruitful. Because asking for help and advice takes so little but can do so much.

When I started typing this article, I wasn't sure what I wanted to write. But the words just tumbled out. I realise now how much I needed to say these things, how important it is for other people to know that we are all going through similar challenges, how it's easy to lose sight of the simple things that bring joy and how reengineering our business or personal lives doesn't always mean big, life-changing decisions. It might just mean changing our perspectives and learning to live a little differently.

**Richa Gupta** grew up in the kitchen alongside her mother and grandmother. She decided to turn her love for food and passion for cooking into a full-time career when she started her blog *My Food Story*, a website that's visited by hundreds of thousands of readers from across the world and is known for its tried and tested recipes that are really easy to follow. Her work has been featured on *Huffington Post*, *Deccan Herald*, *Vogue* and many more publications.





## Hindsight is 2020

Samit Basu

I've been a writer for the last 18 years, and while I've seen a lot of social, political and personal change over that period, 2020 has really been something special. Over a simmering base of climate change, automation and tech changing work in every field, a collapsing economy and endless political and social strife in the news every day (and mysteriously disappearing the next day), we added a world-altering pandemic to spice things up. I've never felt so lucky to have a home to live in and basic financial security before: I can't even imagine what things have been like for people who don't. I've also never spent so much time concerned about the health of the people I love on a day-to-day basis, or so grateful that those I care about who remain healthy.

The full-time novelist's creative routine has altered least among all existing professions: we were sitting at home, avoiding people, and worrying about money even before. The biggest change for me has been about actually wanting to meet people, and being more conscious about every privilege I have. But living in the world we now do, and the world that is around the corner, will require us to change in more fundamental ways. To be more conscious about what is happening around us, and what we can do to make things better, easier, for first the people around us, and then in a fast-failing society at large.

The nature of the work we do has to evolve with the times, and there is more responsibility now to be aware of the realities around us, whether we immerse ourselves deeply in them for our work, or create a means of escape. We have to know more about what stories we're telling, who those stories serve, and how we can help other people tell their stories as well. We have to be careful about the larger implications of the work opportunities we choose: what causes we consciously or inadvertently subscribe to, what and whom we enable with our stories, who we're collaborating with and enabling or simply sharing platforms with and thus implicitly supporting, and what messages we're sending out: not just in the direct sense of dealing

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with censors official, corporate or unofficial, but also in a wider ethical and philosophical sense.

In a more pragmatic way, we're also going to have to deal with a popular current buzzword: reskilling. Every creative market is changing faster than before, and every oasis of stability you might find career-wise is likely to be temporary.

This might sound intimidating, but it can also be tremendously exciting: there are so many new media to work in, new places to put our work, new processes to experiment with, and there is much joy to be found in all of these, even though change is always scary. So we're going to have to find ways to both focus on what we know how to do, and to embrace change, find new things we love, and keep learning and growing as artistes and people.

**Samit Basu** is an Indian novelist. He's published several novels in a range of speculative genres, all critically acclaimed and bestselling in India, beginning with *The Simoqin Prophecies* (2003). His latest novel, *Chosen Spirits*, is set in an anti-dystopian near-future Delhi and was shortlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature. He also works as a director-screenwriter (Netflix, 2019), a comics writer, columnist and children's writer. He lives in Delhi, Mumbai and on the internet.

# A Tribute to Timeless Thoughts and Tunes



Nasreen Munni Kabir

"Barbadiyon ka shok  
manana fizul tha...  
Barbadiyon ka jashn  
manata chala gaya"

These and countless other profound lines of poems and songs remain the legacy of Sahir Ludhianvi, the legendary poet-lyricist, a contemporary of S.D. Burman, whose work resonated throughout Bollywood.

To celebrate the life and works of this talent, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised a virtual session of **Tête-à-tea** with Nasreen Munni Kabir, who launched her book *In the Year of Sahir, 2021 Diary* — a biography of Ludhianvi.

Kabir, who is a reputed television producer, director and author based in the UK, was joined in the conversation by Namrata Joshi, a journalist with over 25 years of experience in the field of entertainment, arts and culture. Welcoming them to the conversation was **Ehsaas** Woman of Meerut, Kanak Rekha Chauhan, who started the session by paying homage to the legend.

The memoir, which comprises recollections from



Kanak Rekha Chauhan

Ludhianvi's colleagues, friends and contemporaries, boasts of names such as Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhonsle, Gulzar and Naseeruddin Shah. Speaking on about the contributors, Kabir said that people were kind enough to write on Ludhianvi and help her in compiling the diary. She said that everyone delivered heartfelt contributions. The diary, which also has his quotes and lyrics is, therefore, a meticulous representation of not only Ludhianvi's lifework but also the relationships that he had built.

Reminiscing about her first taste of Ludhianvi's genius, Kabir recalled going to watch *Pyaasa* in London and being struck by the songs. "The Urdu was difficult. So I didn't understand the whole meaning of his words. But I think he is amazingly romantic in one way, but underneath that there's a layer of melancholy and that struck me more," she admitted.

Elaborating on what continued to draw her to Ludhianvi's work, which won him awards for best lyricist for films like *Taj Mahal* and *Kabhi Kabhie* as well as the Padma Shri, Kabir added, "He manages to describe emotions in very simple and effective terms..."





Namrata Joshi



Karthika V. K.



Huma Khalil Mirza

He really connects to people who are discerning and caring about the world but have a tinge of melancholy in the idea of romance."

Therein lies his timeless appeal, explained Kabir. "... many people have remarked that he had such mastery over language, be it Hindi or Urdu, that he knew how to convey very deep philosophical ideas in simple terms," she said to Joshi during the chat. She explained that Ludhianvi is relevant even today because not only did he touch people's hearts but his ideas, poems, songs and even his language was very modern.

In fact, Joshi couldn't help but point out that Ludhianvi's words hold true even during these trying lockdown times, so timeless are his thoughts. "When I opened the diary, the first page I landed upon was Gulzar *saab* talking about *Mann re tu kahe na dheer dhare*. I think that one song encapsulates life as it is for many of us. In the past nine months (COVID-19 era), that has spoken to us so deeply," she said.

Moving on to talk about why she chose to write the memoir in the form of a diary, Kabir said that the format was deliberately chosen as it was creative and unorthodox — a perfect way to pay tribute to a man who lived life on his own terms. Kabir further added that a diary reminds people of the time that has already happened, is happening and will happen — a reminder that people can leave an impression with their work

even after they aren't around anymore.

Speaking about Ludhianvi's reign over Bollywood and why he never had to associate himself with anyone or anything but the best, Kabir said, "Most of the Urdu poets of that era had to work in films to earn money because publishing was not paying so much. He worked with Arnold brothers and Chetan Anand... from the very start, he was not working for C-grade

films but with the top people of the era, like Dev Anand and S.D. Burman, who were very educated and sophisticated. He was moving in an educated milieu. He was not asked to lower the tone of his lyrics ever."

About Ludhianvi's work process, she also added that Ludhianvi saw people and found a way to connect to them through his lyrics. He had a mastery over words and could use them to convey the message that the character and the movie wanted to portray. "...He used to write the poetry, lyrics and the song which would match with the character of a particular film," said Kabir, for whom the journey of writing the diary was a journey of discovery and an

expression of the love that she has for words, poems and Ludhianvi himself.

The conversation ended with **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, Huma Khalil Mirza, thanking Kabir and Joshi for the enlightening conversation on the life of Sahir Ludhianvi and the journey Kabir undertook while writing the memoir.

[Ludhianvi] manages to describe emotions in very simple and effective terms... He really connects to people who are discerning and caring about the world but have a tinge of melancholy in the idea of romance

# Tales of a Total Misfit — a man who refuses to be typecast



Ananth Narayan Mahadevan



Monica Bhagwagar

For anyone with an interest in watching films or with a television in their house, chances are Ananth Mahadevan is a familiar face flashing across the screen. He has donned and doffed roles in films, television, plays and advertisements with ease — language no bar. For others who would care to look at the rolling credits after the entertainment is over, he is a name associated with the roles of screenwriter and director with many of his ventures winning national and international acclaim.

With over four decades of experience in the entertainment industry, Mahadevan has also been the proud recipient of National Film Awards for Best Screenplay and Dialogues as well as the Special Jury Award for his Marathi biopic, *Mee Sindhutai Saptakal*. And at a recent virtual session of **The Write Circle**, members of the Faridabad and Meerut circles had the

opportunity to hear him talk to **Ehsaas** Woman Monica Bhagwagar about the world of acting and television as documented in his bestselling book, *Once Upon A Prime Time: My Journey on Indian Television*. Welcoming them to the conversation was **Ehsaas** Woman, Shweta Agarwal.

The conversation started with Bhagwagar throwing Mahadevan a curveball and asking him to define who he really was. "The biggest fool in the world," he replied. "That's a question I have been wanting to answer for almost 40 years! Who am I? What am I doing here?... We are all trying to find the answer to this conundrum," he added.





Shilpa Aggarwal



Anusha Aggarwal



Nishi Gupta



Manish Jain

He went on to speak about how trying to fit oneself into any fabric of society, be it in the form of creative arts, politics or something else, unfortunately, demands a lot from us and makes us lose our true, inner selves. "Why should we put on a mask and be somebody else?" questioned Mahadevan, who has tried to keep things simple by being someone who is "a simple person with simple living, high thinking, god-fearing, and trying to make the best out of life."

He added that he sees himself as a "total misfit" — as someone who has not understood the ways of the world and not been able to grapple with what the world expects of him. "I still feel very incomplete, as though I haven't really gotten to where I need to... a certain standard of excellence and achievement, which I feel has escaped me."

Talking about his early life, he deemed his schooling a great foundation for his life and outlook. Another fortunate turn of events in his life's journey, he said, was becoming a part of the television industry in its heyday. "Somewhere in the 1980s, I started doing professional theatre, and in 1983 commercial, sponsored television started and I was part of the television brigade right from the beginning... My theatre took me to my television, which in turn took me to my films. My journey has been very logical. I haven't jumped the queue.... It was a huge

learning process and it still continues," he said. "These 40 years have been learning years, and now to apply that to the next 40," he summed up.

Mahadevan, whose writing career started as a journalist and film critic and gradually expanded into writing for television and films, shared his impetus to finally take up the pen and become an author. He wrote *Once Upon a Prime Time* because, "there's no record of what happened, who the people involved were and what the stories behind the stories you enjoyed watching were," he said.

Looking back at the journey of television, he said that many changes have taken place in the past 40 years — from 1983 to 2003 and then from 2003 till the present, especially in the way television is perceived. He feels the television industry is dynamic and will continue to change with the newer generation. Therein, he believes, lies the necessity of documenting its journey from the start and therefore the significance of a book like his.

When asked about his writing process for *Once Upon A Prime Time*, he admitted that "condensing 40 years into 400 pages hasn't been easy," but that he found the final

result "very rewarding". Mahadevan shared with the audience that writing "the first book on Indian television" was an arduous process that required two-and-a-half years of patience and utmost dedication.

The conversation then touched upon the richness of Indian literature and the need for more stories to be translated and exposed to a global audience. He also spoke about not wanting to be typecast, about having a face that can "modulate itself and fit into whatever image", his current projects and what's kept him busy during these pandemic months.

The conversation ended with **Ehsaas** Woman Anshu Mehra thanking Mahadevan and Bhagwagar for allowing the members of the audience to get an insightful glimpse into Mahadevan's life, career and literary prowess.

"I still feel very incomplete, as though I haven't really gotten to where I need to... a certain standard of excellence and achievement, which I feel has escaped me"

*The Write Circle Faridabad and Meerut is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran and Ehsaas Women of Faridabad and Meerut*



# Talking Taboos



Seema Anand

The stories we tell establish our identity.... If we wish to create change, it is these stories that have to be changed."

This observation about gender dynamics in today's India was one of the biggest takeaways from London-based mythologist and storyteller Seema Anand's **The Write Circle** Amritsar session. An authority on the *Kama Sutra* and eastern erotology, tantric philosophy, the Mahavidyas, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, Anand's work on the revival and reproduction of oral literature from India is associated with the UNESCO project for Endangered Oral Traditions.

The session, which was inaugurated by **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar Jasmeet Nayyar, saw **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar, Preeti Gill, converse with Anand about the power of stories, gender stereotyping of women, the *Kama Sutra* and more.

Gill started off the interaction by asking Anand about her book, *The Art of Seduction*, and how she came to be associated with erotology. Calling it an "organic journey", Anand said, "I work with mythologies and with the women's narratives... and as I worked with these stories, I noticed that I never found a story where a woman was responsible for her own body. Where she had the right over her own sexuality. So I thought let me find out what are the stories that have been silenced. That journey led me to the



Preeti Gill

ancient erotic literature of India."

She went on to speak about how the ancient cultures, especially the eastern ones, all believed in the importance of pleasure. "The difference between Indian erotic literature and the others, be it Chinese, Japanese or Persian, is that the Indian one is so beautiful, delicate, elegant and focused on a woman's pleasure," she pointed out. She also expressed her belief that the *Kama Sutra* was written by a woman, to make men think differently about

intimacy and make way for a more civilised society.

Anand next touched upon the tragedy that is society's idea of a "good woman." She elaborated that one who keeps quiet and tolerates is "good" and by extension one who stands up for herself is stamped as "bad". Similarly, a woman is deemed "fast" if she likes pleasure. Anand said that how we speak about the body and how we speak about pleasure needs to change for the power dynamic to change.

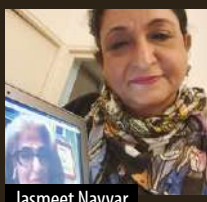
Anand also spoke about the personal — her battle to change people's outlooks, having a supportive family, her role as and motivation behind being a storyteller — and the public, like love jihad and slut-shaming.

The session concluded with **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar Sonakshi Kundra thanking Gill and Anand for an eye-opening discussion on pleasure, power, societal constructs and change.

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



Indu Aurora



Jasmeet Nayyar



Rumita Arora



Sheetal Khanna

# जिंदगी एक स्कूल, यह हमें बहुत कुछ सिखाती है: दीपक रमोला



Deepak Ramola

छोटे शहरों में रहने वालों में एक मासूमियत होती है। बड़े शहरों में आपको एडजस्ट करना होता है। हालांकि छोटे शहरों में बड़े शहरों जैसे अवसर नहीं होते। यहां आपको साबित करना होता है, यहां आप पर एक अनकहा सा दबाव होता है।" यह कहना है कलम मुंबई के वर्चुअल सत्र में शामिल दीपक रमोला का।

कार्यक्रम के आरंभ में प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन व अहसास वूमेन की ओर से रमोला का स्वागत स्वाति अग्रवाल ने किया। उन्होंने कोरोना महामारी और उसकी वैक्सीन की चर्चा की और फाउंडेशन द्वारा साहित्य, कला, संस्कृति के क्षेत्र में चलाए जा रहे अभियानों की विस्तार से चर्चा की। लेखक, अभिनेता, शिक्षक, वक्ता, समाजसेवी, कवि और गीतकार के रूप में रमोला का परिचय देते हुए अग्रवाल ने बताया कि रमोला ने अपनी पहली कविता 12 साल की उम्र में ही लिख दी थी। उनका काव्य संग्रह *इतना तो मैं समझ गया* हूँ काफी चर्चित है। उनकी नई पुस्तक का नाम *50 टफेस्ट क्रेशंस ऑफ लाइफ* है। उन्होंने बताया कि रमोला ने कई फिल्म व धारावाहिक में एक्टिंग भी की है। फिल्मों के गीत भी लिखे हैं व उनके लिखे गीत *अतरंगी यारी* को अमिताभ बच्चन व फरहान अख्तर ने आवाज दी है। रमोला 'प्रोजेक्ट फ्यूल' नाम से एक बड़ी परियोजना भी चलाते हैं। जो संयुक्त राष्ट्र संघ से लेकर उत्तराखंड के गांव, सीरियाई शरणार्थी, देह व्यापार, बाल श्रम, रिफ्यूजी कैंप, मानव तस्करी, प्राकृतिक व मानव निर्मित आपदाओं के बीच काम करती है। अग्रवाल ने आर्किटेक्चर, उद्यमी, समाजसेवी, फुलकारी व अहसास वूमेन अमृतसर से जुड़ी प्रणीत बब्बर को आगे की बातचीत के लिए आमंत्रित किया।

बब्बर ने कहा आपका काम आश्चर्यचकित करता है? आपकी पुस्तक सही मायने में आपका परिचय देती है। हमारे श्रोताओं को 'प्रोजेक्ट फ्यूल' के बारे में बताएं? रमोला का जवाब था, "प्रोजेक्ट फ्यूल के शुरुआत की कहानी मेरे बचपन से जुड़ी हुई है। इसकी प्रेरणा मेरी मां से मुझे मिली, जिन्हें पांचवीं कक्षा में ही मेरी दादी ने स्कूल से निकाल दिया था। मेरी मां स्कूल भले ही नहीं गई थी, पर उनमें विवेक और ज्ञान बहुत है। वह बहुत काबिल हैं। दुनिया को देखने का उनका नजरिया अलग है। वह मानती हैं कि जीवन एक शिक्षा है। जीवन एक स्कूल है। जिंदगी हमें बहुत कुछ सिखाती है और जिंदगी से हम

बहुत कुछ सीखते हैं। यही वजह है कि मैं अपने आसपास से, स्कूल से जीवन की कहानी इकट्ठा करना शुरू किया। तब यह नहीं सोचा था कि इसे दुनियाभर में बताऊंगा। पर यह जरूर सोचा था कि अठारह साल तक मेरे पास इतना ज्ञान होगा कि मैं कोई गलती नहीं करूंगा। पर बाद में मुझे लगा कि गलती न करना ही सबसे बड़ी गलती है।"

अपनी हालिया किताब से जुड़े सवाल पर रमोला ने बताया, "अफगानिस्तान के एक स्कूल में जब पढ़ा रहे थे, तो एक दिन तालिबान ने पूरे स्कूल को उड़ा दिया। उसकी प्रिंसिपल एक लड़की थी ने कहा था, जीवन आसान जवाबों का सफर नहीं, मुश्किल सवालों का सफर है। मैंने इस बारे में सोचा और कई हजार सवाल जुटाए और सबसे कठिन पचास सवाल, जिनका उत्तर देना कठिन था, उनपर अपना दृष्टिकोण रखते हुए यह पुस्तक लिख दी।" सवालों का आपके जीवन में क्या महत्व है? पर रमोला का जवाब था, "हम जिस दुनिया में रहते हैं, उसे आपके सवाल बनाते हैं। जब आप किसी सवाल को पूछते हैं, तो उसका उत्तर आपके पूछने के तरीके पर निर्भर करता है। सवालों का महत्व हमारे जीवन में बहुत है। सवाल पूछने से आप लोगों को कंपर्ट करते हैं।" अपनी पुस्तक में सवालों की प्रकृति व उनके जवाब पर उनका मत था कि पहले आप खुद में झांकिएं फिर सहायता मांगिए। इसी पुस्तक के एक सवाल कि अगर आप सिर्फ देख सकते हों, या सिर्फ सुन सकते हों, तो आप क्या चुनना पसंद करेंगे? के जवाब में रमोला ने यह माना कि मेरे लिए इसका उत्तर चुनना कठिन था। मैंने दृष्टि बाधित बच्चों को पढ़ाया था। फिर उन्होंने चेन्नई के एक दृष्टि बाधित स्कूल से जुड़े अनुभव शेयर किए।

रमोला ने यह माना कि हमारे चाहने वाले हमारे दोस्त हमें गेस करते रहते हैं। जीवन में आप किसी भी रूप में प्रेम को महसूस कर सकते हैं। जब आप प्रेम करते हैं, तब आप अनकंडीशनल होते हैं। आप इतने गमजुदा, संघर्षशील और युद्ध प्रभावित शरणार्थियों के जीवन की दुख भरी कहानियां सुनकर अपने को उनसे कैसे अलग रख पाते हैं? रमोला का जवाब था, "इन लोगों से मिलना आंखें खोल देने वाला है। जिनके घर में मिसाइल गिर रही हैं। उनके संघर्ष व पीड़ा के बीच जीवन के प्रति लगाव प्रेरक है। स्पेन में नब्बे दिन शरणार्थी शिविर में उनके साथ बिताया। इनमें इतनी उम्मीद है। मेरी कोशिश थी कि मैं उनकी कहानियों को उतनी ही सच्चाई से प्रस्तुत करूं। आप और आपकी टीम कैसे उस दर्द से अप्रभावित रहती है। आप इतना दुख सुन कर कैसे पॉजिटिव रहते हैं? रमोला ने जवाब में उस बच्चे की कहानी सुनाई, जिसके पूरे महल्ले को बम से उड़ा दिया गया था। उन्होंने उस एक रिफ्यूजी औरत की भी बात की, जिसके पास इतने पैसे न थे कि वे एक साथ अनजाने देश में शरण मांग सकें। अब वह पैसे कमा रही है कि अपने जीवनसाथी को ला सके। हमारी टीम को दिन में सिर्फ एक बार रोने की इजाजत है। मैं भी रोता हूँ, पर ये आंसू मानवता के लिए है। अगर मैं भावुक हो जाऊंगा, तो हमारा जो उद्देश्य है, वह प्रभावित होगा। रमोला ने यह माना शरणार्थी शिविरों में उन्होंने जो प्रेम देखा वह अद्भुत है। अविश्वसनीय है। उन्होंने फ्रांस के सुडानी रिफ्यूजी कैंप के किस्से भी सुनाए।

रमोला ने कई सवालों के जवाब दिए। कहा कि जो ज्यादा सफर करता है, उसके पास ज्यादा प्यार होता है। उन्होंने पंजाब के जालंधर के एक स्कूल के एक आंख वाले बच्चे से जुड़ी प्रेरक सीख सुनाई और बताया कि ग्यारहवीं कक्षा तक उनका भी उपहास उड़ाया जाता था। रमोला ने दुख के प्रति अहसानमंद होने की बात कही और *अतरंगी यारी* व अमिताभ बच्चन से जुड़ा संस्मरण भी सुनाया। उन्होंने कई श्रोताओं के सवालों के जवाब दिए जिनमें रोशनी, सीमा मुखर्जी, योगेश्वरी आदि शामिल थी। रमोला ने प्रकृति, लोकगीत, भाषा से प्रेम की बात भी कही। उन्होंने भाषाओं को जोड़ने की दिशा में फाउंडेशन की तारीफ भी की और अपनी एक कविता भी सुनाई, जिसकी शुरुआती पंक्तियां थीं,

मैं सालों से घरोंदे बनाता रहा रेत पर

और लहरें आकर मस्ती में

उजाड़ देती उन्हें

सागर ने सिखाया वो फलसफा हसीं

कि लहरों से खफा ना हो

जो तबाह आशियाना तेरा करें बल्कि तारीफ कर उस रेत की

जो देती है हर बार घरोंदा बनाने का हौसला तुझे...

अहसास वूमेन मुंबई की ओर से अन्वी ठाकरे, करिश्मा मेहता, केतकी भाटिया का सक्रिय सहयोग था।

कलम मुंबई के आयोजक हैं प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन, हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर आईटीसी ग्रैंड सेंट्रल मुंबई, द लक्जरी कलेक्शन और मीडिया पार्टनर लोकमत थे।



Praneet Bubber



# Making Sense of Loss

The pain of losing a loved one not only constitutes one of life's greatest griefs, but can also lead to a lack of purpose and emotional inertia. Coming out of this state demands grappling with tough questions like destiny, human agency and the meaning of life.

Author Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi has delved into these thorny questions through his recent work, weaving the grim facts of existence into his fiction.

The Write Circle Jaipur hosted Shanghvi for a poignant conversation premised on making sense of loss, the emotion that also forms the title of his latest book.

Shanghvi's debut novel, *The Last Song of Dusk*, captured a whole host of intercontinental awards, and his profundity as an author has also been reflected in his two subsequent works, the internationally bestselling, *The Lost Flamingoes of Bombay*, and *The Rabbit and the Squirrel*, which the *Hindustan Times* called an "instant classic".

Shanghvi was joined in conversation by Mohit Batra, a third generation bookseller from Jaipur. Welcoming them to the chat was Mita Kapur, founder and CEO of *Siyahi*.

Shanghvi's *Loss* is a collection of essays dealing with his process of overcoming loss and learning from it, as precipitated by the death of his father, who succumbed to brain cancer. Sanghvi's objective in writing the book is not to seek solace or sympathy but to provide hope and belief to those who can relate to his loss through their own.

According to Shanghvi, the foremost



Mohit Batra

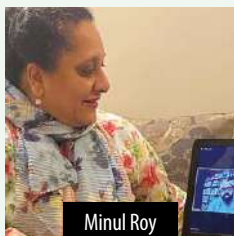
Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

task of an author is to put a mirror to people's pains and make the readers realise that they are not alone in their suffering.

Shanghvi explained how one's whole life is essentially a preparation for death, and that everyone should ponder over the question of how to die, not just the question of how to live. The best kind of death, to him, is a peaceful one, as felt by his father, who "died like a king", in his sleep after consuming a bowl of strawberries and cream.

The conversation drew to a close with Shanghvi narrating how the pandemic has made his awareness of death even more acute, and how he spent the lockdown months writing to people he believed he had wronged, asking them for forgiveness. Closure, and the patience required for that closure, eventually offer what it takes to make sense of loss.

One's whole life is essentially a preparation for death, and everyone should ponder over the question of how to die, not just the question of how to live



Minul Roy



Neeru Saluja



Rimika Singhvi



Vaidehi Singh

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



## लेखन में जीवन दर्शन

## का अपना आनंद:

## दिव्य प्रकाश दुबे



Divya Prakash Dubey

मैं हमेशा यह मानता हूँ कि किताब, दुनिया में किताब, केवल और केवल लेखक की स्टाइल की वजह से पढ़ी जाती है; जिस अंदाज से वह लिखता है, कहानी को कैसे रखता है। इसकी थ्योरी बहुत कम है। कही जाने वाली चीजें बहुत कम हैं। मेरे पास भी नहीं हैं, तो क्या मैं जो लिखना चाहता हूँ, नये तरीके से लिख सकता हूँ। अलग तरीके से कह सकता हूँ। मजेदार तरीके से कह सकता हूँ। केवल लेखक का अंदाज जो होता है वह अच्छा या बुरा होता है, "यह कहना है आज के जमाने के बेस्ट सेलर लेखक दिव्य प्रकाश दुबे का। दुबे कलम जयपुर में इस बार अतिथि लेखक के रूप में शामिल हुए और उन्होंने यह बात अपने व वेबलाइनर से जुड़े एक सवाल के उत्तर में कही।

कोरोना काल में सुरक्षा के मद्देनजर कलम के कार्यक्रम इन दिनों वर्चुअल माध्यम से हो रहे हैं। अहसास वूमन की ओर से अपरा कुच्छल ने कलम जयपुर में दुबे का परिचय देते हुए उनका स्वागत और धन्यवाद किया। अतिथि लेखक के विस्तृत परिचय के दौरान कुच्छल ने उनकी नई पुस्तक *इन्नेबतूती* की विशेष चर्चा। इस दौरान उन्होंने लेखक की चार बेस्ट सेलर पुस्तकों, *शर्तें लागू*, *मसाला चाय*, *मुसाफिर कैफे* और *अक्टूबर जंक्शन* का भी जिक्र किया, जिन्होंने नई वाली हिंदी के स्टार लेखक के रूप में युवाओं के बीच दुबे की पहचान बढ़ा दी। कुच्छल ने दुबे के स्टोरीबाज वाली पहचान का भी जिक्र किया और आगे के संवादकर्ता असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर व साहित्यप्रेमी डॉ भव्य सोनी का परिचय देकर मंच उन्हें सौंप दिया।

सोनी ने दुबे की पहली रचना का जिक्र करते हुए उनसे अगर याद हो तो वह कविता सुनाने की बात कही। दुबे ने इसका उत्तर बेहद दिलचस्प अंदाज में दिया। उनका कहना था, "मुझे आइडेंटिटी क्राइसिस थी। यह सब को होता है। जो भी इस धरती पर आता है वह जानने की कोशिश करता है कि वह है कौन। मैंने अपनी पहली कविता, *पहचान न मिली प्रिय* लिखकर जब अपने पिता जी को दिखाया तो उन्होंने उसे पढ़ा और उसमें वर्तनी की कुछ गलतियाँ बताकर रख दिया। जब मैंने पूछा कि कैसे लगी तो बोले- अभी दस साल और पढ़ो। वह बहुत अच्छी नसीहत थी जिसे मैंने गंभीरता से लिया और खूब पढ़ा।"

दुबे ने बताया कि *शेखर एक जीवनी* मुझे याद थी। ओशो और विवेकानंद के दर्शन का मुझ पर गहरा प्रभाव पड़ा। दुबे का कहना था कि कहानी अपनी दर्शन के चलते याद रहती है। *शेखर एक जीवनी* का उदाहरण देते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि इसमें ऐसी सैंकड़ों पंक्तियाँ हैं, जो पूरी तरह से दर्शन है, जैसे *वेदना में वह शक्ति होती है जो दृष्टि देता है, जो दुःख में होता है वह द्रष्टा होता है*, ऐसे बहुतेरे वाक्यों पर आंखें रुकती थीं। मेरा विचार था कि अज्ञेय ने जो एक्सपेरिमेंट किया था, वही करूंगा। इसलिए जीवन को लेकर जो भी दर्शन मन में आता, उसे मैं अलग से लिख लेता फिर कहानी में उसे जोड़ता, कभी ठीक लगता तो कभी ज्ञान देने सा लगता।

बोलचाल की भाषा में लिखने के लिये क्या कभी आपकी आलोचना हुई? इस सवाल पर दुबे का जवाब था कि पहले नहीं हुई, पर जब स्वीकार लिये गये तब लगा कि अरे यह क्या हुआ, यह तो गलत हुआ; नहीं होना चाहिये था। आत्मा की आलोचना नहीं हुई, कहानी पर आलोचना नहीं हुई; इस बात की आलोचना हुई कि कपड़े किस रंग के पहन लियो तो इस पर ध्यान नहीं दिया। डर जो था कि झगड़ कर दिये जायेंगे, आलोचना से वह दूर हो गया।



Bhavya Soni

हिंदी के लेखक की पांच सौ किताब बिक जाये तो उसे बेस्ट सेलर लेखक मान लिया जाता है फिर भी आपने हिंदी में लिखना चुना, इस सवाल पर दुबे का कहना था, "मेरे पास ज्यादा च्वाइस नहीं थी। मुझे अपने बारे थोड़ा बहुत पता था कि मैं क्या कर सकता हूँ और क्या नहीं। मुझे अपने बारे में जानकारी थी कि हिंदी में ही लिख सकता हूँ। अगर अभिव्यक्त करना है तो ऐसे ही कर सकता हूँ। यहाँ जब आया तो पता नहीं था कि लाख बिक जायेंगे। पता नहीं था कि एक समय ऐसा

आयेगा। फुल टाइम लेखक हो सकता हूँ। यह तो दादी वाला किस्सा था कि घर की खुदाई में छिपा हुआ सोने का मटका मिल जाये। यह विश्वास की दादी मां कुछ न कुछ छोड़कर गई होंगी पर आपको पता नहीं है। आपको ढूँढ़ना है। और नहीं भी मिला तो भी खेत तो जुत गया। किस्मत अच्छी है कि हम सही समय पर आये, जब हिंदी में इतनी जरूरत है। ऑडिओ किताब भी आ जायेंगी। मैं एक चीज और मानता हूँ कि, जिंदगी में तीन या चार मौके आते हैं, जब दीवार के पार नजर आता है, तो मुझे हिंदी में दीवार के पार दिखता था कि अगर यहीं लगे रहेंगे तो कुछ हो जायेगा। और न भी होता तो भी पढ़ तो रहे थे, मजा रहा था।"

आप कई विधा में लिखते हुए किस विधा को अपने सबसे करीब पाते हैं? के जवाब में दुबे का कहना था कि स्टोरीबाजी का अपना आनंद है। छोटी कहानियों को लिखना, सुनाना अच्छा लगता है। दर्शकों में से किसी को चुनकर उनकी कहानी को ही बनाकर कहानी सुनाता हूँ। यह मैंने ढूँढ़ा है तो मजा आता है। आधे घंटे पहले जिससे परिचय न हो वह पांच मिनट के लिये कहानी का होरो बन जाता है। यह उसके लिये एक बेहतरीन क्षण हो जाता है। पर मजा सब में आता है। हां कविता से अब उतना जुड़ नहीं पाता हूँ। उसके लिये जो साधना चाहिये, नहीं कर पाता हूँ।

लेखन के साथ प्रस्तुतिकरण को जोड़ने का मन कब हुआ? प्रश्न पर दुबे ने कहा कि जब हमें स्टेज पर बुलाया जाता था, तो मेरे संघर्ष के बारे में पूछा जाता था, तो मेरा ऐसा कोई संघर्ष नहीं था। फिर मुझे अपने बारे में बोलने में दिक्कत होती थी तो यह रास्ता निकाला कि कहानी सुनाऊँ। यह कोई सोची समझी साजिश नहीं थी। एक स्टैंडर्ड तय करना होता है। ईमानदारी से कहूँ तो दुनिया में जितनी किताबें हैं, एक भी एक्स्ट्रा किताब लिखने की जरूरत नहीं है। आपकी जरूरत नहीं है। वह सब कुछ कहा जा चुका है, जो आप कहना चाहते हैं। लेकिन किताबें क्यों लिखी जानी चाहिये, इसको ऐसे समझिए कि जब कोई बच्चा दुनिया में आता है वह अपने नजरिये से दुनिया को देखता है। वह बहुत ताजा होता है। इसलिये बातें बढ़नी चाहिये। फिर उस अप्रोच से मैंने कहानियाँ सुनाना शुरू किया। सबसे अच्छा एलिमेंट को लाने की कोशिश की। विषय ऐसा रहे कि पूरे परिवार के साथ देख पायें। सवाल-जवाब सत्र में प्रदीप चतुर्वेदी, संजय कौशिक, हेमंत आदि ने हिस्सा लिया।

कलम जयपुर के प्रायोजक थे श्री सीमेंट। होटल जयपुर मेरियट, दैनिक भास्कर, अहसास वूमन जयपुर का सक्रिय सहयोग मिला।



# दुनिया में बुराई से ज्यादा अच्छाई है: अनुराधा बेनीवाल



Anuradha Beniwal

मैं यायावरी को पसंद करती हूँ। मैं यह नहीं कहती कि मैं बहुत साहसी हूँ इसलिये अकेले यात्रा करती हूँ, पर हर कोई अपना लक्ष्य खुद चुन सकता है। आप जो चाहते हैं, जो पसंद करते हैं, कर सकते हैं, तो मेरे लिये यह यायावरी है।" यह कहना है यायावर और लेखक अनुराधा बेनीवाल का। उन्होंने यह बात कलम नागपुर में बतौर अतिथि कही। याद रहे कि कोरोना काल में अतिथियों और श्रोताओं की स्वास्थ्य सुरक्षा के मद्देनजर प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन ने अपनी कई साहित्यिक, सांस्कृतिक गतिविधियों को वर्चुअल कर दिया है। अपनी भाषा अपने लोग के विचार से आयोजित हो रहे कलम के कार्यक्रम भी इन दिनों ऑनलाइन माध्यम से हो रहे हैं।

कलम नागपुर के इस कार्यक्रम का आरंभ अहसास वूमेन की ज्योति कपूर द्वारा हुआ। फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियों व अतिथि वक्ता का परिचय देते हुए उन्होंने बेनीवाल को यायावर और प्रतिभाशाली लेखिका बताया और खेल के क्षेत्र में हासिल उनकी उपलब्धियों का जिक्र किया। उन्होंने बताया कि किस तरह बेनीवाल महज 15 वर्ष की उम्र में राष्ट्रीय शतरंज प्रतियोगिता की विजेता बनीं और केवल 16 वर्ष की उम्र में विश्व शतरंज प्रतियोगिता में भारत का प्रतिनिधित्व किया। पढ़ाई के साथ ही अपने पिता की इच्छा पर वह खेल की ओर प्रेरित हुई। आपकी पहली किताब आजादी मेरा ब्रांड है। स्वागत परिचय के बाद कपूर ने आगे के संवाद के लिए मंच प्रियंका कोठारी को सौंप दिया।

कोठारी ने अपने संवाद की शुरुआत इस अंदाज में की कि शतरंज के खेल में जहां चार चालें आगे की ओर सोचकर चलना पड़ता है, वहां से बिना किसी प्लान के सोलो यात्री बनने के बारे में आपने कैसे सोचा? बेनीवाल का उत्तर था, "वाकई पहले से सब कुछ योजना के साथ करते-करते मैं बोर हो गई थी, तो ऐसा कुछ करना चाहती थी जिसमें पहले से कुछ तय न हो। कल सवेरे कहां जाना है यह पता न हो। इसका एक अपना ही आनंद है।" सोलो यात्रा क्या होती है? के प्रश्न पर अनुराधा का जवाब था, "लगभग ग्यारह-बारह साल पहले मैंने जब अकेले यात्रा करना शुरू किया, तब मेरे दोस्त, परिवार के लोग भी यही सवाल पूछते थे कि अकेली क्यों? मेरे लिये परिवार के साथ या दोस्तों के साथ यात्रा करना फन होता है, मजे के लिये होता है। पर मैं फन से ज्यादा यात्रा, लोगों को जानने के लिये, खुद को दूढ़ने के लिये करना चाहती थी। जब आप अकेले होते हैं तो दूसरों से बात कर सकते हैं, उनसे प्रश्न पूछ सकते हैं, वह आपसे प्रश्न पूछ सकते हैं। पर किसी के साथ होने पर ऐसा नहीं कर सकते। आपको साथी का ध्यान रखना पड़ता है। हो सकता है वह मेरे साथ बोर हो जाये।"

भारत में अकेले यात्रा करना सुरक्षित नहीं माना जाता है? इस सवाल पर बेनीवाल ने यह माना कि हां, यहां सतर्क रहना होता है। कुछ घटनायें हुई जिससे मुझे डर भी लगा। पर सावधानी रखनी चाहिये, समय, जगह का ध्यान रखना चाहिये। और फिर मैं यह भी मानती हूँ कि सभी को एक न एक दिन तो मरना है तो फिर जो करना चाहते हैं उसे करते हुए क्यों न मरें। घर में रहने से ज्यादा, मुझे बीच रेगिस्तान में रहना अच्छा लगता है। घर में मरने से ज्यादा रेगिस्तान में मरना पसंद करूंगी। लेखन में आने के बारे में कैसे सोचा? के सवाल पर बेनीवाल का उत्तर था कि पहले ब्लॉग लिखना शुरू किया। तब लगा मुझे बहुत कुछ कहना है। मैं दोस्तों से, परिवार वालों को अपना अनुभव सुनाती थी तो मेरी एक सहेली ने मुझे किताब लिखने के लिये कहा। मैं नोट्स



Priyanka Kothari

कभी नहीं लिखती थी। क्योंकि फिर इसमें मैं कम देख पाती, कम जान पाती। इसलिये अपनी स्मृति पर भरसा किया और लिखा। पहले तो अंग्रेजी में लिखने की कोशिश की, पर उसमें वह सहजता नहीं लगी। फिर हिंदी में लिखने लगी, इसमें अपने को जुड़ा हुआ महसूस किया, इसमें अपने को जुड़ा हुआ महसूस किया, आपसानी से अपने को अभिव्यक्त कर पाऊंगी ऐसा महसूस किया।

आपनत्व मिला। व्याकरण का कोई दबाव नहीं था। कामा, फुलस्टाप का झड़त नहीं था।

भारत में लड़कियां शतरंज के खेल में कम हैं? के प्रश्न पर बेनीवाल का उत्तर था कि ऐसी बात नहीं है। इस खेल में लड़कियों की संख्या भी बहुत है। अपनी 'जिओ बेटा' अभियान के बारे में बताते हुए वह बोलीं की गांव में वह लड़कियों को शतरंज सिखाती हैं। गांव में शहर से दूर, तकनीकी चीजों से दूर लड़कियों को शतरंज सिखाते हुए मैं आनंद का अनुभव करती हूँ। मैं उनके पास रहना चाहती हूँ। उन्हें मैं खुद अपना निर्णय लेना बताती हूँ, खुद कमाती हूँ, इससे उन्हें प्रेरणा मिलती है और फिर शतरंज घर में बैठकर खेला जाता है, इसके लिये खास तरह के कपड़े नहीं पहनने पड़ते हैं, तो घरों में इसका इतना विरोध नहीं होता है।

संवाद के दौरान अपनी यायावरी को बेहद भावुक अंदाज में याद करते हुए बेनीवाल ने कहा कि जब मैं सूर्यास्त देखती हूँ, कहीं भी रहती हूँ तो, मुझे बहुत खुशी मिलती है। जब आप सड़क पर होते हैं तो लोगों को ज्यादा समझ पाते हैं। जो हम सुनते हैं उसे मैं महसूस कर सकती हूँ। दिमाग में जो पहले से किसी के बारे में कोई बात घर कर ली होती है, लोगों के बारे में, उनकी सोच, उनके रहन-सहन के बारे में, तो यह सब यात्रा करते समय टूटती हैं। सच्चाई आपके सामने होती हैं। अपनी नई किताब के बारे में उन्होंने कहा कि अलग-अलग देश के अलग तरह के लोगों के बारे में लिख रही हूँ। पहले तो ये सारे लोग अलग लगेंगे पर आखिरी में यही पाएंगे कि सब एक जैसे हैं। सभी को जिंदगी में प्यार, सम्मान और शांति चाहिये। यात्रा करते हुए मुझे यही अनुभव हुआ कि दुनिया में बुराई से ज्यादा अच्छाई है। इससे मानवता पर एक विश्वास जगता है। बहुत अच्छाई है और जितनी बुराई है वह आपको कुछ करने से रोक नहीं पायेगी।

लंदन, हमारे देश से बहुत अलग है, वहां आप कैसे सामंजस्य कर पाती हैं? के उत्तर

में बेनीवाल ने कहा कि मैं अपने देश को बहुत प्यार करती हूँ। इसकी सारी कमियों के बावजूद, मैं वापस लौटना चाहती हूँ। यहां का सूरज, खाना, लोग, उनके सपने, जीवन, सभी से एक जुड़ाव महसूस करती हूँ। सवाल-जवाब के सत्र में वंदना सोलंकी, मोनिका आदि ने हिस्सा लिया। कार्यक्रम के अंत में एक बार फिर कपूर ने मंच संभाला व फाउंडेशन व अहसास वूमेन की ओर से अतिथि वक्ता, श्रोताओं, सहयोगियों व प्रायोजक का आभार व्यक्त किया। कार्यक्रम के आयोजन में मोनिका भगवागर, प्रवीण तुली व प्रियंका कोठारी की सक्रिय भूमिका थी।

कलम नागपुर के प्रायोजक थे श्री सीमेंट। रेडिसन ब्लू होटल, अहसास वूमेन नागपुर और लोकमत का सहयोग मिला।



Anjali Purohit

Parveen Tuli

Monica Bhagwagar

Jyoti Kapoor





Shilpi Jha

## पहली महिला के जिक्र के बिना नारी विमर्श अधूरा: शिल्पी झा



Anshu Mehra

परिवार बचा रहना चाहिए, पर किसी एक के टूटने पर नहीं। औरत जहां खड़ी होगी वहीं घर बना लेगी। पर जब औरत ही टूट जाएगी तो उस घर का क्या होगा? मेरा मानना है कि हर किसी के टूटने की एक सीमा होती है। इसका कोई एक नियम नहीं है। पर जिस रिश्ते में स्त्री का सम्मान नहीं बचा है, विश्वास टूट गया है, तो उसे उस रिश्ते को नहीं बचाना चाहिये। प्यार हमेशा आता जाता रहता है। वक्त आपकी परीक्षा लेता है। टूटी हुई स्त्री कभी भी एक पुख्ता घर नहीं बना सकती।" यह कहना है डॉ शिल्पी झा का। वह **प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन** व **अहसास** वूमन की ओर से आयोजित **कलम** गुरुग्राम के वर्चुअल सत्र में संवाद कर रही थीं।

आरंभ में अंशु मेहरा ने सभी का स्वागत किया और कोरोना काल में फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियां जारी रहने की बात बताई और **कलम** के उद्देश्य पर प्रकाश डाला। अतिथि वक्ता झा का परिचय उन्होंने एक खुशमिजाज पत्रकार और शिक्षाविद के रूप में दिया और आगे की बातचीत के लिए एनसीआर **अहसास** वूमन से जुड़ी आराधना प्रधान को आमंत्रित किया। प्रधान ने पूछा आपने अपने आसपास के समाज की स्त्रियों को पुस्तक के लिए क्यों चुना? झा का उत्तर था कि मैंने इसे नहीं चुना। इस विषय ने मुझे चुना। ब्लॉग को मैंने डायरी के रूप में लिखा। मुझे किसी की परवाह नहीं थी। लिखने से पहले मुझे पता नहीं था कि मुझ अकेले के भीतर इतनी सारी औरतें जिनके बीच रहकर मैं पली बढ़ी, या जो मेरे आसपास हैं, वे मेरे अंदर थीं। हर बार कोई पात्र साकार खड़ा हो जाता है। इन पात्रों ने, परिस्थितियों ने, सामाजिक तानाबाना ने मुझसे लिखवाया। मेरा आत्मिक संबंध उन सभी स्त्रियों से था, जो मेरे ईर्ष्यादि थीं।

आपकी पुस्तक के चरित्रों को देखने पर स्त्रियां तीन तरह की दिखती हैं, जिनका अनुपात बदल रहा है? इसका असर आप कैसे देखती हैं? झा का उत्तर था, "औरतों की एक के बाद एक पीढ़ी आई, जिसे हर चीज अहसान जताकर दिया जाता रहा। हम औरतों में एक खींचतान हमेशा चलती रही कि क्या हमें अहसान के रूप में दिया जा रहा है, क्या हमारा अधिकार है। मेरा मानना है कि औरतों की आजादी को आप वर्गीकृत नहीं कर सकते। यह एक ही तरह की होती है, और वह है निर्णय लेने की आजादी। मैंने सीमोन को पढ़कर स्त्रियों की ओर नहीं सोचा। अपने आसपास के लोगों से सुना, जाना और बाद में पढ़ा कि हमसे सौ साल पहले भी स्त्री ने ऐसे ख्वाब देखे थे।

झा ने करियर से जुड़े सवाल पर शादी के बाद के अपने अमेरिकी प्रवास, मातृत्व व वर्किंग वूमन के अनुभव शेयर किए और कहा कि वहां बहुत चीजें ऐसी हैं जो आपके जीवन में क्रांति ला देती हैं। वर्किंग मदर्स की दिक्कतों का जिक्र करते हुए झा ने उच्च न्यायालय की पहली महिला मुख्य न्यायाधीश और लेखक विक्रम सेठ की मां लीला सेठ के लंदन प्रवास का जिक्र किया कि कैसे जब सेठ ने लॉ की पढ़ाई में टॉप किया तो वहां अखबारों ने निराशा जाहिर की कि एक लड़की, वह भी एक बच्चे की मां ने टॉप किया। प्रधान के इस सवाल पर कि हमारे यहां यह धारणा है कि यदि कोई औरत अपने छोटे परिवार, घर में खुश है, तो वह दूसरी नारियों के सुख, दुख से दूर है? क्या किसी औरत को दूसरी औरत

के बारे में समझने के लिए उस यातना से गुजरना जरूरी है? झा का जवाब था, "दुनिया की हर क्रांति भरे पेट वालों की अगुआई में हुई। हर किसी का एक सपना होता है। हमारे समाज व पुरुषों को अपने सवाल बदलने चाहिए। मैंने अपनी 75 साल की सास से पूछा कि आप क्या बनना चाहती थी? तो उन्होंने कहा कि मैं जज बनना चाहती हूं। यह वह स्त्री थी, जिसकी शादी दसवीं क्लास में हो गई थी। जिस स्त्री ने एक भरे पूरे परिवार में हर किसी ने निबाह किया, उससे पूछिए न कि वह क्या चाहती है? पुरुषों के भी सपने मरते हैं। पर एक वृहद सामाजिक परिप्रेक्ष्य में देखें तो स्त्रियों को अधिक समझौते करने पड़े।"

सती प्रथा, बाल विवाह से अब तक स्त्री की यात्रा का जिक्र करते हुए प्रधान ने झा के ही लिखे एक वाक्य कि *डरिए कि उन्होंने डरना छोड़ दिया है* का जिक्र करते हुए पूछा कि आज हम स्त्रियों के प्रति अत्याचार में एक विभत्सता देखते हैं, इसकी क्या वजह है? झा का उत्तर था कि स्त्रियों के प्रति हिंसा इसलिए बढ़ी कि उन्होंने आवाज उठाना शुरू किया। आप उन्हें रोक नहीं सकते। समाज बदला है। पर लड़कियों ने शहरों की कहानियां नहीं लिखीं। उन्होंने बाहर के संसार को अछूता रख दिया। हमारे समय के लड़के तब अपशब्द नहीं बोलते थे। जबकि आज लड़के व लड़कियां दोनों अपशब्द को पॉवर स्टेटमेंट समझते हैं। अब शाब्दिक हिंसा बढ़ गई है। कोई किसी को कुछ भी बोल कर निकल जाता है, क्योंकि सोशल मीडिया ने उसे यह ताकत दी है।

झा ने अपनी पुस्तक *मन पाखी* से कुछ अंश पढ़ कर सुनाया और कहा कि बॉलीवुड में प्रेम व दोस्ती पर गीत हैं, पर जितने भी गाने हैं वह लड़कों की दोस्ती पर हैं, लड़कियों की दोस्ती पर नहीं हैं। उन्होंने *बेटियों की कमाई* और *आधी आबादी का निर्माण* नामक अंश पढ़ कर सुनाया। झा ने एक पंक्ति में हर स्त्री के मन की बात भी कुछ यों सुनाई— "गलत सोचते हैं पुरुष कि औरतें उनकी सहमति लेकर आजाद होना चाहती हैं। वे तो बस इतना चाहती हैं कि बंधे रहने का फैसला भी खुद उनका अपना हो।"

एक सवाल के जवाब में झा ने कहा कि हमारे मांओं, पिताओं ने हमें आगे बढ़ा दिया, तो उस स्त्री विमर्श का कोई अर्थ नहीं, जिसमें पहली स्त्री यानी हमारी मां न हों। हमारी मांओं की जिंदगी हमसे कठिन थी। हमें भी अपनी मां कि जिंदगी बदलने की कोशिश करनी चाहिए। उनकी ख्वाहिश को पूरा करने के लिए काम करना चाहिए। झा ने अपनी छात्राओं से संबंधित अनुभव भी शेयर किए। लड़कियों की सफलता का पैमाना अभी भी क्या यही होना चाहिए कि उसे अपने से अधिक कमाने वाला लड़का चाहिए। झा ने कहा कि हमने लड़कियों को लड़कों की तरह पाल कर गलती की। इसकी बजाय लड़कों को लड़कियों की तरह पाला होता तो परिवार कुछ समय और बचा होता। हमने एक को झुकना नहीं सिखाया और दूसरे को तनना सीखा दिया तो परिवार कैसे बचेगा? भूलना और माफ करना दोनों को सिखाना चाहिए। दो तने हुए लोग क्या सीख पाएंगे। झा ने अपने पारिवारिक अनुभव भी साझा किए।

*कलम गुरुग्राम के प्रायोजक थे श्री सीमेंट। दैनिक जागरण व अहसास वूमन ने सहयोगी की भूमिका निभाई।*



# Vikram Sampath & the Path of Truth



Vikram Sampath



Shefali Vaidya

He is an engineer and MBA by education, a historian by inclination, a musician and artist by passion and a biographer and writer by profession. The versatile Vikram Sampath, most well-known for his biography of Veer Savarkar, and several books on music and musicians like S. Balachander and Gauhar Jaan, regaled the Birmingham and Oxford-based members of **The Write Circle** as he chatted with newspaper columnist and political commentator Shefali Vaidya at a virtual session organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, where they were welcomed by entrepreneur Titiksha Shah.

The first order of business was for Vaidya to find out the secret behind Sampath's "commendable" yet confusing CV. "What is a nice engineer/MBA like you doing in a fractious field like history and biography?" asked Vaidya, much to the amusement of Sampath. His answer was to dive into an anecdote story about the history of historians in India. "...most were British

engineers and surveyors who got interested in the layout of the land, the people, the culture and ended up writing what were survey books... which later became historical chronicles. So, I think there is some tradition of engineers turning into historians when they realise that engineering is not something that tickles their interest," he quipped.

Moving on to why history caught his fancy in the first place, he revealed that he never liked studying the subject as a child. He said that "the way history is taught in India — very boring, pedantic, rote learning about who succeeded whom and with which war," made it uninteresting. However, at home, he listened to his maternal grandmother narrate stories from history and mythology and was enthralled. He couldn't help wondering why.

Characters  
of the past  
are extremely  
polarising....  
However, it  
is the job of  
a historian to  
take up the  
gauntlet. It is  
an occupational  
hazard

Then, in the 90s, a TV show, *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* was aired, which showed the Mysore Palace, and its ruling king and queen in poor light. He recalled there being protests in Karnataka for such a portrayal. He was intrigued. "As a boy who hated history otherwise, I was absorbing all of this and I really wanted to know the truth" he admitted. Completely driven by "junoon or passion" he began a self-motivated and self-funded exploration of the past. In fact, for the Sampaths it became a "family project". Vacations were spent exploring Mysore, meeting the royal family, going to the royal archives and collecting material with his parents in tow. Even his grandmother came along to translate material available in Kannada.

Thus began his journey of gathering information which led him to eventually write *The Splendours of Mysore*. Calling it a 10-year-long "madness", which continued even while he was studying to become an engineer, he realised that there was hardly anything written about the 600-year-old Wodeyar dynasty. So, he wrote one.

He called the reason behind this lack as the "bane of Indian historiography". The history of India, he found, is Delhi and North-India centric and ignores large tracts of North-east and South India. "The historical narrative of India has to reclaim itself from the narrative of Delhi," he said.

However, the talk soon turned to the topic of truth and the role of historians in bearing testimony to the past. "... characters of the past are extremely polarising... however, it is the job of a historian to take up the gauntlet. It is an occupational hazard," said the author, who received immense flak and death threats for writing truths that went against the popular narrative. "I think I have to increase my international reach and network because if I am hounded out of India, I have to seek asylum elsewhere," he joked.



Titiksha Shah



Piali Ray

On a serious note he said that after Independence, the freedom of expression in historical discourse was stifled. No parallel narratives or dissenting voices were allowed to thrive, leading to a dearth of knowledge in our country. The historians of the country stuck to popular chronicles that the government approved. Everyone was fed sanitised versions of history, which is still being continued via school syllabi.

The talk also saw Sampath speak about his interest in Gauhar Jaan, the first commercially recorded artiste of the Indian subcontinent. His curiosity was piqued when he came across a box of letters and her bio-data in the royal archives of Mysore. He described collecting and compiling information about Gauhar Jaan as solving a jigsaw puzzle.

Next, he spoke on Savarkar — another figure like Shivaji and Tipu Sultan who has an immensely polarising effect. Sampath shared his views on how the intrepid freedom fighter and author has always been used as a political tool, his ideologies alternately promoted or demeaned. His aim was to make *Savarkar: Echoes from the Forgotten Past* "unassailable where facts were concerned." He said that the interpretation of the book was up to the audience but he had created something truthful that people may use for research years later.

The floor was then opened to the audience, who peppered him with questions on varied topics. The chat ended with Piali Ray, director of Sampad, thanking Sampath and Vaidya for the lively conversation and applauding Sampath on making history — the process of research and writing — accessible, encouraging and interesting.

The history of India is Delhi and North-India centric and ignores large tracts of North-east and South India. This is the 'bane of Indian historiography'

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



Ashutosh

जब आप प्रेम  
में होते हैं, तब  
धर्म होता ही  
नहीं: आशुतोष



कहानीपन के बिना कहानी नहीं हो सकती। अगर रिसर्च करके, गूगल से कहानी लिखी जाएगी, तो वह केवल बौद्धिकता होगी। कहानी में कौतूहल होना चाहिए, ताकि उसे सुनाया जा सके। यों कौशल से, कॉमनसेंस से भी कहानी लिखी जा सकती है।" कलम पटना & रांची के इस वर्चुअल सत्र में बतौर अतिथि वक्ता यह बात कही कथाकार आशुतोष ने। **प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन** व **अहसास** वूमेन की ओर से आयोजित इस कार्यक्रम के आरंभ में सीमा सिंह ने सभी का स्वागत किया और फाउंडेशन व अतिथि वक्ता का विस्तार से परिचय दिया। उन्होंने बताया कि आशुतोष साहित्यिक विमर्शों एवं कथा-आलोचना में रुचि रखते हैं और आपके मरें तो उम्र भर के लिए और उम्र पैतालीस बतलाई गयी थी नामक दो कहानी संग्रह आ चुके हैं। उन्होंने आगे की बातचीत के लिए रश्मि शर्मा को आमंत्रित किया।

शर्मा का पहला सवाल था, आपकी कहानियों में लोक की खुशबू मिलती है, आपके व्यक्तित्व व कथाकार में लोक की क्या भूमिका है? आशुतोष का उत्तर था, "मेरी कहानियों में लोक की बड़ी भूमिका है। बचपन में नानी, दादी से जुड़ाव रहा। मेरे जीवन के शुरुआती पंद्रह साल ने मुझे लोक से जोड़ कर रखा, जिससे



Rashmi Sharma

मेरी कथाएं बनीं।" इस सवाल पर कि आपकी कहानियों के स्त्री पात्र बहुत मजबूत हैं, क्या उन्हें आपने देखा है? आशुतोष की प्रतिक्रिया थी, "मैंने आज तक ऐसी कोई कहानी नहीं लिखी जो काल्पनिक हो। मेरे सारे पात्र सच हैं, रियल हैं। मैंने मेरी दादी और मां को जीवन भर लड़ते हुए देखा। उन्हीं के संघर्ष से मैंने स्त्री के लिए आदर का भाव देखा। इसीलिए मैं बार बार ताकतवर स्त्रियों को दस्तक देता रहता हूँ और उन्हें अपनी कथाओं में लेकर आता रहता हूँ। मैं स्त्री की सफलता को नहीं बल्कि उसके संघर्ष को



देखता हूं। मुझे जीतती हुई स्त्री चाहे अच्छी न लगे, पर मुझे लड़ती हुई स्त्री अच्छी लगती है।"

आपके दोनों कहानी संग्रहों के शीर्षक में 'उम्र' आता है, इसकी वजह? आशुतोष का उत्तर था, "इसकी वजह मेरा लोक से जुड़ना है। उम्र एक बड़ा मसला है। उम्र मेरे जेहन का हिस्सा है। यह शुरू होता है, और खत्म होता है। हमारे साथ चल रहा होता है, पर यह खत्म कहां होगा, कब होगा, नहीं पता। मुझे उम्र का खेल बहुत आकर्षक लगाता है।" उपन्यास कब लिख रहे हैं के सवाल पर उन्होंने कहा, "मैं एक उपन्यास लिख रहा हूं, जिसका शीर्षक है चौबीस चौकी, चालीस बांस पर मुझे नहीं पता यह कब तक पूरा होगा। मैं अगंभीर तरीके से काम नहीं कर पाता। मेरे जेहन में एक बहुत बड़ी दुनिया है, जिसे अंधेरे में सरका दिया गया है। मेरे साथ वह दुनिया गायब न हो जाए, जो मेरी स्मृतियों में है।"

रंग भी तू रंगरेज भी तू और दादी का कमरा कहानी के किरदार जमाली हैं, कोई वजह? आशुतोष का उत्तर था, "हां ये असली किरदार हैं। वास्तविक हैं। जमाली एक संपूर्ण कैरेक्टर है। उसकी पहचान मुस्लिम के रूप नहीं है। वह एक संपूर्ण मनुष्य है। वह फकीर हैं, संत हैं। मैंने नाम नहीं बदला।" रंग भी तू रंगरेज भी तू के बारे में विस्तार से बात करते हुए उन्होंने कहा, "मुझे एक प्रेम कहानी लिखनी थी। मैं ऐसा प्रेम लिखना चाहता था, जो प्रेम ही हो। मुझे गढ़ना न हो। इसमें एक हिंदू औरत एक मुस्लिम युवक का प्रेम है। पर इसमें हिंदू मुस्लिम नहीं आते। जब आप प्रेम में होते हैं, तब धर्म होता ही नहीं, तब आप सिर्फ मनुष्य होते हैं। प्रेम जाति, धर्म से ऊपर होता है। प्रेम सिर्फ देना होता है। प्रेम करते हुए हम अपने रंग में रंगते हैं, पर हमें प्रेम करते हुए उसी के रंग में रंग जाना होता है। प्रेम के माध्यम से वर्चस्व कायम करना प्रेम नहीं है।"

कहानी के लिए किस्सागोई और कहानीपन पर विस्तार से अपनी बात करते हुए उन्होंने अपने पसंदीदा और प्रेरक लेखकों का भी जिक्र किया, और प्रेमचंद, निर्मल वर्मा, अज्ञेय, हजारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी, फणीश्वरनाथ रेणु, उदय प्रकाश, अखिलेश, प्रियंवद, हृषीकेश सुलभ, गुरुदयाल सिंह, विमल मित्र, बंकिमचंद चटर्जी आदि के नाम लिए। आप कहानीकार न होते तो क्या होते? का जवाब था, "मैं नाच की कला का घनघोर समर्थक था। लेखन की शुरुआत नाटक से किया। कहानी न लिखता तो मैं खेती बारी करता। पर वहां भी पेड़, पौधों को कहानियां ही सुनाता।" पटकथा, संवाद लेखन व कहानीकार के सवाल पर उन्होंने कहा कि बस तकनीक का अंतर है। कथाकार दृश्यात्मकता को अच्छे ढंग से प्रस्तुत करता है। मैंने अपनी ही कहानियों पर पटकथा लिखी है। मैं यह सोचता हूं कि कोई केवल पटकथा कैसे लिख सकता है।



Poonam Anand

आलोचना संबंधी सवाल पर आशुतोष का उत्तर था, "रचना पहले है, आलोचना बाद में। आलोचना अगर रचना केंद्रित है, सहयोग के रूप में हो तो साहित्य का भला है, पर अगर वह सत्ता संरचना की तरह काम करने लगे, तो न वह साहित्य का भला कर सकती है, न ही आलोचना का। आलोचक पैथालॉजिस्ट की तरह है। दोनों अपनी मर्यादा में रहें तो साहित्य का भला होगा।" सवाल-जवाब सत्र में अनिता, अर्चना त्रिपाठी, पूनम आनंद, प्रभात रंजन, रानी स्मिता आदि के सवालों का उत्तर देते हुए आशुतोष ने कहा कि प्रेम और इश्क में केवल भाषा का अंतर है। लहजे का अंतर है। त्याग मनुष्य जीवन की मूल चेतना है। भारतीय दर्शन में यह सबसे महत्वपूर्ण मूल्य है। अगर आप छोड़ने का माद्दा नहीं रखते तो आप पा भी नहीं सकते। अगर मेरी मां न होती तो मैं यहां नहीं होता। इस पूरी कायनात में अगर ईश्वर के बाद कोई संचालक शक्ति है तो वह केवल स्त्री है। मैं उनकी ताकत को भी जानता हूं और उनकी सीमा को भी। मैंने अपने जीवन में स्त्री को हमेशा आदर दिया। मेरे लिए हमेशा एक मनुष्य के रूप में स्त्री का मान है। कहानी स्त्री ही है। कहानी उसी की है। पुरुष किरदार भर हो सकता है। वह उसका नरेटर भर हो सकता है।

उन्होंने अपनी पसंदीदा कहानियों का उल्लेख किया और कहा कि प्रेम हर तरह की सीमा का अतिक्रमण करता है। वह यथास्थितिवाद का विरोधी है। आशुतोष ने फाउंडेशन की संस्थापक व प्रख्यात लेखिका प्रभा खेतान को याद किया और कहा कि उन्हें पढ़कर मैंने बेहतर मनुष्यता की तरफ कदम बढ़ाया है। उन्होंने कविता को रचनात्मकता का शिखर बताया और माना कि मैं कविता लिख नहीं पाता। लेखन के स्तर पर कहानी प्रिय है और पाठक के रूप में कविता पसंद है।

कलम पटना & रांची के प्रायोजक थे श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण और नवरस स्कूल ऑफ परफार्मिंग आर्ट्स व अहसास वूमन ने सहयोग दिया



Anuradha Beniwal

## यात्रा किसी जगह पहुंचना भर नहीं उसे समझना भी है: अनुराधा बेनीवाल

**क**लम अजमेर & उदयपुर का अतिथि वक्ता अनुराधा बेनीवाल के साथ अपनी तरह का एक अनूठा आयोजन था, जिसमें इस घूमंतू लेखिका ने मुंबई की अपनी कार यात्रा के दौरान वर्चुअल सत्र में संवाद किया। अहसास वूमेन की स्वाति अग्रवाल ने बेनीवाल को प्रेरणा, आत्मनिर्भरता और स्वाभिमान का साक्षात रूप बताया और कहा कि आपकी निडर घूमक्कड़ी और लेखन युवाओं और महिलाओं के लिए प्रेरणा का स्रोत है। आप अंग्रेजी-हिंदी में सहजता के साथ लिखती हैं। आपकी पहली पुस्तक *आजादी मेरा ब्रांड* है और आने वाली पुस्तक है *अजब गजब के लोग*। लंदन में रहते हुए अपनी जड़ों से जुड़ी रहने वाली बेनीवाल को भारत पुत्री बताते हुए अग्रवाल ने आगे के संवाद के लिए मंच प्रवीण तुली को सौंप दिया। तुली ने बेनीवाल से उनकी होम स्कूलिंग के साथ ही खेल की उपलब्धियों से जुड़ा सवाल पूछा। बेनीवाल ने बताया कि उनकी स्कूली शिक्षा घर में हुई और आज वह इतनी सारी चीजें एक साथ कर लेती हैं। उनके परिवार ने उन्हें खेल के लिए हमेशा प्रेरित किया और अंततः वह शतरंज से जुड़ गई। 6 साल की उम्र में उन्होंने शतरंज खेलना शुरू किया और 7 साल की उम्र में प्रतियोगिता में हिस्सा लेने लगीं। देश भर में घूमिं। खूब मेहनत की। दक्षिण भारत में ट्रेन यात्राएं कीं।



Parveen Tuli

इसमें बहुत मजा आया। 15 वर्ष की उम्र में राष्ट्रीय शतरंज प्रतियोगिता की विजेता बनीं। 16 वर्ष की उम्र में विश्व शतरंज प्रतियोगिता में भारत का प्रतिनिधित्व किया। 18 के बाद घूमक्कड़ी को चुन लिया।

यात्रा से जुड़े अनुभवों को लिखने के सवाल पर बेनीवाल का उत्तर था, "घूमना हमेशा मेरे लिए फन रहा। ट्रेवलिंग केवल किसी जगह पर पहुंचना भर नहीं है, बल्कि यह किसी जगह को समझना है। यात्रा में मेरे

पास कहानियां होती हैं। राजस्थान, कश्मीर, सिक्किम और बंगाल जब गई तो मैं प्रोफेशनल तौर पर लिखने की बजाय पर्सनल फीड बैक पर भरोसा करती रही। मैं बाजार की दृष्टि से नहीं सहायता के लिए ब्लॉग लिखती रही। मैंने यात्रा वेबसाइटों या सरकार के लिए नहीं लिखा। *आजादी मेरा ब्रांड* मेरी यात्रा पर है। शुरू में मैंने अंग्रेजी में लिखा। बाद में मुझे लगा मातृभाषा में लिखना ठीक होगा। अंग्रेजी में जजिंग बहुत है। व्याकरण से लिखो, यह गलत है, यह सही है, इसलिए मैंने लिखना बंद कर दिया। फिर हिंदी की तरफ मुड़ी। मैंने देखा फेसबुक पर लोग कितनी सहजता से लिखते हैं। मैंने फिर योरोप के अपने अनुभवों को हिंदी में लिखना शुरू किया।"



Poonam Pandey



Vinita Jain

आपने दुनिया भर में यात्रा की है, भारत में भी यात्रा की है? दोनों जगह यात्रा के अनुभव कैसे थे? के सवाल पर बेनीवाल ने कहा, "हर देश की अपनी चुनौतियां और अनुभव हैं। जैसे भारत में यात्रा के अलग चैलेंज हैं। यहां बहुत पहले से टिकट न कराओ तो आरक्षण नहीं मिलता। योरोप में यह संकट नहीं है, टिकट लो और बैठ जाओ। पर यहां उसका भी तरीका है। भारत सस्ता है। यहां कोई चीज रुकती नहीं है। बतौर भारतीय अगर टिकट नहीं मिला, तो टीटी से बात कर जुगाड़ लगा सकते हैं। सुरक्षा एक मसला है, पर आपको सतर्क रहना होता है। आप जैसे हो वैसे भी यहां रह सकते हो। मैं यहां सेफ हूं। तीन हफ्ते से घूम रही हूं, पर इसे नोट नहीं किया है।" आपके कई वीडियो वायरल हुए? जब इसकी आलोचना होती है, तो आप इससे कैसे जूझती हो? बेनीवाल का उत्तर था, "पहले मैं थोड़ी युवा थी, इसलिए समझ नहीं पाती थी। प्रतिक्रिया को निजी तौर पर लेती थी। पर अब मैं समझ चुकी हूं। पिछले चार महीने से मैं सोशल मीडिया से दूर हूं। ऐसा नहीं है कि मैं सोशल मीडिया से भयभीत हूं। पर अब मैं यह जान चुकी हूं कि कम बोलो। विचार बदलते रहते हैं, इसलिए हर चीज का जवाब देना जरूरी नहीं है।"

'जिओ बेटी' और शतरंज अकादमी से जुड़े सवाल पर उन्होंने बताया, "मैंने कोविड के दौरान चेस ऑन लाइन किया था। मैं अपने गांव में परिवार वालों से बहुत जुड़ी हुई हूं। जिओ बेटी अभियान कुछ साल पहले शुरू किया। मुझे बहुत कुछ मिला, जिसके लिए मैं आभारी हूं। इसीलिए मैंने गांव की लड़कियों को शतरंज सिखाना शुरू किया। गांव में शहर से दूर, तकनीकी चीजों से दूर लड़कियों को शतरंज सिखाते हुए मैं आनंद का अनुभव करती हूं। मुझे अचरज होता है कि ये कितनी जल्दी सीखती हैं। शतरंज मेरे लिए उस टूल की तरह है, जिसके माध्यम से उपेक्षित लोगों के घरों तक पहुंच पाती हूं।" आजादी से जुड़े सवाल पर बेनीवाल का कहना था, "इसे लेकर अलग अलग लोग अलग अलग बातें सोच सकते हैं, जहां तक मेरी बात है, मेरे लिए इसका अर्थ है कि मैं जैसी हूं, वैसी हूं। हो सकता है कि यात्रा दूसरों के लिए आजादी न

हो। जागरूकता और जो संभव है, उसे पाना आजादी है।" बेनीवाल ने कल्पना चावला का उदाहरण भी दिया।

अजब गजब के लोग पुस्तक से जुड़े सवाल पर बेनीवाल ने कहा कि मेरी पहली पुस्तक मेरी खुद की यात्रा है। दूसरी पुस्तक में मैं दूसरों की बात करती हूं, जिनसे मैं अलग-अलग जगह, अलग-अलग देश में यात्राओं के दौरान मिली। वे जो देखने में भले अलग हैं, पर पढ़े-लिखे हैं, ईमानदार हैं, मददगार हैं, दयालु हैं, हमारे जैसे ही खाते-पीते हैं। सभी को जिंदगी में प्यार, सम्मान और शांति चाहिये। इसे वैसे समझिए कि हरियाणा की दादी और नार्वे की दादी में कोई खास अंतर नहीं है। पसंदीदा लेखकों से जुड़े सवाल पर उन्होंने कहा कि मैं रशियन लेखकों को पसंद करती हूं। दोस्तोयेव्स्की व टॉलस्टॉय मुझे प्रिय हैं। उन्हीं के चलते मैं रूस गई। मैंने जोला और मंगोल को पढ़ा, फ्रेंच पढ़ा। हिंदी में मैंने अज्ञेय को पढ़ा शेखर एक जीवनी ने मुझे बहुत प्रभावित किया। प्रेमचंद भी मुझे पसंद हैं। घरेलू शिक्षा से जुड़े सवाल पर बेनीवाल का उत्तर था, बच्चों को पालना सामान्य काम नहीं है। उनके शेड्यूल के हिसाब से आपको खुद शेड्यूल होना पड़ता है। दस साल बाद आप अपने को कहां देखती हैं? के उत्तर में उन्होंने कहा कि मैं और भी बेहतर इंसान, और भी दयालु, समझदार और कम बोलने वाला बनना चाहती हूं। उन्होंने श्रोताओं के सवालों के भी उत्तर दिए। कार्यक्रम के अंत में अहसास वूमेन की शुभ सिंघवी ने आभार व्यक्त किया। कलम के इस आयोजन में कनिका अग्रवाल, मुमल भंडारी, रिद्धिमा दोशी, श्रद्धा मुर्दिया, शुभ सिंघवी और स्वाति अग्रवाल की सक्रिय भागीदारी रही।

कलम अजमेर & उदयपुर के प्रायोजक थे श्री सीमेंट। रैंडिसन ब्लू उदयपुर पैलेस रिसॉर्ट और स्या तथा वी केयर व अहसास वूमेन सहयोगी रहे।



# Unlocking the Secret to Creativity

What is the crucible of creativity? Does it involve blazing a trail or following it? What is the best way to sustain creativity across genres and platforms?

With the aim of discussing such queries and offering an overview of the process of authorship, **The Write Circle** Raipur hosted author, columnist and literary entrepreneur Koral Dasgupta. Dasgupta's books traverse a wide spectrum of subjects, from comedy to analysis of social phenomena to mythology and gender. Her latest is the *Sati* series on Indian mythology, whose inaugural book, *Ahalya*, explores questions of sexuality, spirituality and identity through a riveting narrative.

In conversation with Dasgupta was **Ehsaas** Woman of Nagpur Jyoti Kapoor, a counselor and an entrepreneur by profession, while **Ehsaas** Woman of Raipur Aanchal Garcha delivered the welcome note.

The conversation got underway with a candid admission from Dasgupta that her abilities as an author were nourished by her tendencies to cook up stories as a child, much to her mother's admonishments!

According to Dasgupta, creativity is all about doing things differently and overturning existing norms. At the same time, she emphasised on the need to channelise creativity through a disciplined schedule that caters to a



Koral Dasgupta



Jyoti Kapoor

fixed routine.

On her varied characters, Dasgupta explained how they live in her head, refusing to abandon her mind palace even after she has finished sketching them in the books.

Dasgupta also shed light on the influence of Hindu philosophy on her work, and how the Hindu ethos pays utmost attention to the human soul, over and above the human body.

With her fourth book, *Summer Holidays*, awaiting a movie adaptation, Dasgupta spoke about the process of transferring creativity from the page to the screen. A firm believer in writers not needing to be control freaks, Dasgupta outlined how she has completed her part of the creative process, and it is now up to the filmmakers to do the rest to realise her artistic vision on screen.

**Ehsaas** Woman of Raipur Srishti Trivedi concluded the interaction with a thank you note.

*The Write Circle Raipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Hyatt Raipur and Ehsaas Women of Raipur*



Srishti Trivedi



Harkaran Singh



I absolutely loved listening to the session, and I was really happy to see women looking beyond the obvious and providing, according to me, the correct interpretations of our rich mythology and heritage.

— Amita Bijnoor Nagakatti



It was really interesting to know the female characters in Dasgupta's work from a different standpoint. Loved this talk, and looking forward to more sessions by Dasgupta.

— Simran Verma



Kirti Kirdatt



Kalpana Chaudhury



Aanchal Garcha

# भावनाओं के बीच कोई दीवार नहीं होती: प्रदीप्त कुमार मिश्रा



Pradipta Kumar Mishra

**आ**खर भुवनेश्वर के आभासीय सत्र में ओड़िआ कहानीकार प्रदीप्त कुमार मिश्रा के साथ युवा साहित्यकार सुजीत पण्डा की बातचीत।

प्रदीप्त कुमार मिश्रा ओड़िआ साहित्य जगत के एक जाने-माने कथाकार हैं। आप का कथा साहित्य भले ही परिमाण में कम है, पर बहुत ही प्रभावशाली और चर्चित है। आपने अपने आसपास के परिवेश से उन पात्रों को अपनी कहानियों में स्थान दिया है, जो प्रत्यक्ष या परोक्ष रूप से आपके जीवन का हिस्सा रहे हैं, इसी वजह से आपके पाठक भी आपकी कहानियों के पात्रों के साथ बड़ी ही आसानी से अपनी संगति बैठा लेते हैं। आपकी कहानियों की भाषा तो ठेठ देहाती शब्दों से युक्त है, लेकिन कहानी लिखने की तकनीक आधुनिक है, जिसमें प्रयोगधर्मिता भी नजर आती है। इसकी वजह यह है कि आपका बचपन गांव में बीता। बाद में भले ही आप शहर में रहने लगे, पर गांव की भाषा और संस्कार आपसे कभी नहीं छूटे। आपकी कहानियों की भाषा वह है जो आपकी माँ घर में बोलती हैं, गांव की पंचायत में बैठे लोग आपस में बोलते हैं। लेकिन कहानी की तकनीक में आधुनिकता एवं प्रयोगधर्मिता आपके विचारों की ताजगी को दर्शाता है।

आपने बहुत कम कहानियां लिखी हैं? के जवाब में मिश्रा कहते हैं, "मैंने कम कहानियां इसीलिए लिखी हैं क्योंकि साहित्य को मैंने हमेशा से अंतःप्रेरणा का फल माना है।" लेखन आपके लिए रोजमर्रा की जिंदगी का एक हिस्सा नहीं है। आपने लेखन को अपनी दिनचर्या का हिस्सा नहीं बनाया है। आपने कहानियां तभी लिखी हैं जब कोई विचार या भाव आप



के मन में कौंध जाता है, और ऐसे में आप कलम लेकर बैठ जाते हैं और कहानी एक-दो घंटे में पूरी हो जाती है।

आपने अपने आसपास के जीवन को बहुत ही बारीकी से देखा है। इसी वजह से आपकी कहानियों की कथावस्तु सामान्य मनुष्य या उसके सामान्य जीवन का ही कोई हिस्सा हुआ करता है। आपके कहानी संग्रह को कोई लेकर बैठे तो उसे वह बीच में छोड़ नहीं सकता। आपकी कहानियां बहुत ही रोचक हैं और हिंदी, अंग्रेजी और अन्य भाषाओं में अनूदित हैं।

आप बड़े साहित्यिक समारोहों एवं साहित्यिक आलोचनाओं का हिस्सा नहीं बनते, पर आपकी कहानियों की चर्चा साहित्यिक समारोहों का हिस्सा जरूर होती है। आप के दो कहानी संकलन हैं छद्म घट एवं कुहुड़ि खेला। तीसरा संकलन जल्दी प्रकाशित होगा ऐसा आश्वासन ओड़िआ साहित्य के पाठकों को लेखक देते हैं।



Sujit Kumar Panda

आपकी कुछ कहानियां ऐसी भी हैं जो चर्चा एवं विवाद का विषय रही हैं। जैसे दूर पहाड़ कहानी में स्त्री और पुरुष के यौन संबंधों का मुद्दा उठाया गया है जो काफी विवाद एवं चर्चा का विषय रहा है। कांथ कहानी एक मास्टरपीस है। कांथ अर्थात दीवार, लेखक ने इसमें अपने बचपन की एक सच्ची घटना को केंद्र में रखा है, जो दो परिवारों की कहानी है।

एक परिवार जो बहुत ही आम है और दूसरा परिवार धीरे-धीरे आम से खास होता चला जाता है। दोनों घरों के बीच की दीवार पक्की होती चली जाती है। जहां इन घरों के सामने का हिस्सा पुरुषों के अधिकार में हैं, जहां अहंकार, शत्रुता और एक दूसरे को नीचा दिखाने का प्रयास है, वहीं इन घरों का पिछला हिस्सा घर की औरतों के अधिकार में है, जिसमें सहकारिता, अपनापन और स्नेह है। घरों के बीच की दीवार भले ही पक्की हो जाती है, लेकिन उसके किसी कोने में उस में एक छेद बनाकर दोनों घरों की स्त्रियाँ लगातार अपने स्नेह को साझा करती रहती है। दीवार भले ही विचारों की हो लेकिन भावनाओं के बीच कोई दीवार नहीं आ सकती।

मिश्रा की कहानियां भाषा और कथ्य के स्तर पर ग्रामीण जीवन से जुड़ी हुई हैं और अभिव्यक्ति के स्तर पर नई तकनीक की ताजगी लिये हुए हैं। आखर भुवनेश्वर का यह आभासीय सत्र दर्शकों के लिये अत्यंत रोचक और सराहनीय रहा।

आखर भुवनेश्वर के प्रस्तुतकर्ता थे श्री सीमेंट, मेफेयर होटल्स & रिसॉर्ट्स और अहसास वूमेन भुवनेश्वर का सहयोग मिला





## An Online Window to Prabha Khaitan Foundation

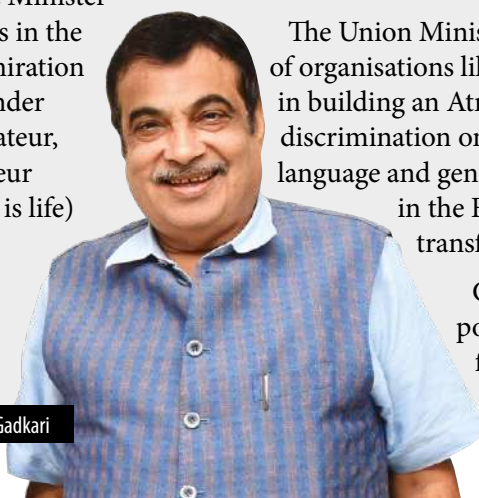
In a virtual function attended by guests in India and abroad, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari formally e-launched the brand new website of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** ([pkfoundation.org](http://pkfoundation.org))

Gadkari, a veteran politician who is currently Minister for Road Transport & Highways and the Minister of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in the Government of India, expressed his admiration for the Late Dr Prabha Khaitan, the founder of the Foundation and an eminent litterateur, philanthropist, social worker, entrepreneur and feminist. "*Karm hi jeevan hai* (work is life) was the mission of the Late Dr Prabha Khaitan, who showed social sensibility and responsibility towards the poor and disadvantaged and espoused the cause

of women's empowerment in the spheres of art, literature, culture, education and social work by helping them hone their hidden talents. She instilled in them confidence and self-reliance. I am glad that **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** is carrying forward the good work and legacy of Late Dr Prabha Khaitan," observed Gadkari.

The Union Minister further emphasised the role of organisations like **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat devoid of discrimination on the basis of caste, ideology, religion, language and gender, expressing his confidence in the Foundation as an agent of social transformation.

Gadkari also spoke candidly and poignantly about a crucial incident from his life that underlined the



Nitin Gadkari



importance of social service: "Those who do good work for the poor get their gratitude and blessings. I had an accident in 2004 near Nagpur and the vehicle with a red beacon was crushed. All who saw it felt no one could survive the accident. However, I, my wife, daughter, son, personal assistant, and the driver survived. I tell people that I have helped thousands of heart patients in getting medical support and others get artificial limbs. I feel it was because of the force of their collective blessings that we survived."

As one of India's leading social welfare organisations engaged in various social welfare causes for women, children, and the elderly, the Foundation has been actively involved in creating a more conscientious and responsible society, one where every person learns to empathise with each other and collaborate meaningfully to fulfil mutual needs.

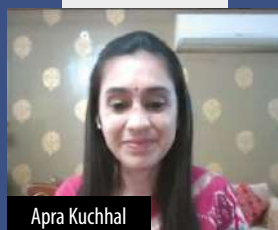
Over the last few decades, the Foundation has also accumulated substantial cultural capital by working in tandem with a broad network of talented individuals and organisations across the world. This has brought about enrichment and advancement of Indian art, culture, literature, and folk heritage both within and outside India through a plethora of literary and social events like **An Author's Afternoon**, **Kitaab**, **The Write Circle**, **Ek Mulakat**, **Lafz**, **Sur aur Saaz**, **Tete-a-Tea**, **Kalam**, **Aakh**, etc., spread across venues in London, Oxford, Birmingham, Oslo and New York, among others, providing a prominent platform to established as well as aspiring writers, artists and performers.

"**Prabha Khaitan Foundation** is an innovator of various boutique literary events to promote literature, writings, art, wildlife conservation and culture. We undertake collaborative literature and cultural activity and projects with many universities and like-minded people across the globe. The Foundation's women's initiative,



*Karm hi jeevan hai* (work is life) was the mission of the Late Dr Prabha Khaitan, who showed social sensibility and responsibility towards the poor and disadvantaged and espoused the cause of women's empowerment in the spheres of art, literature, culture, education and social work by helping them hone their hidden talents. She instilled in them confidence and self reliance. I am glad that Prabha Khaitan Foundation is carrying forward the good work and legacy of Late Dr Prabha Khaitan

— Nitin Gadkari



Apra Kuchhal



Monica Bhagwagar

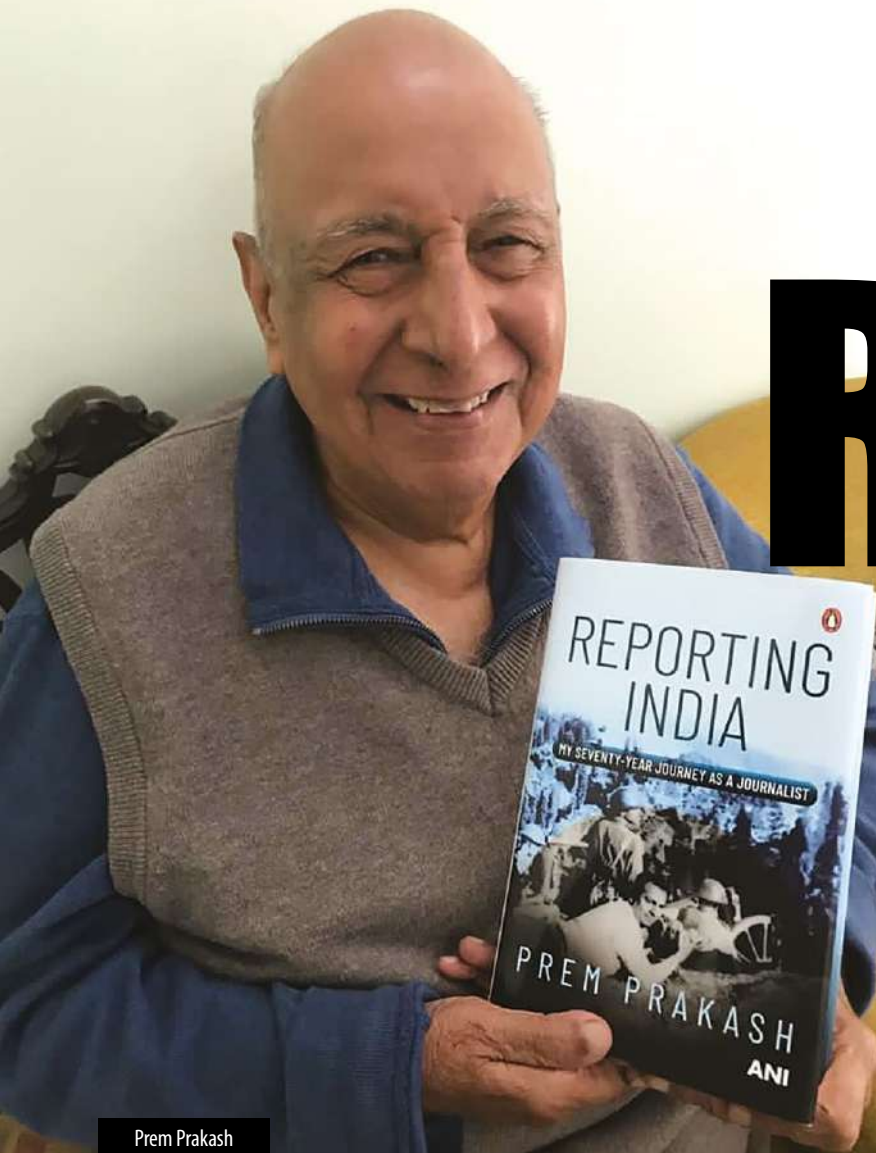
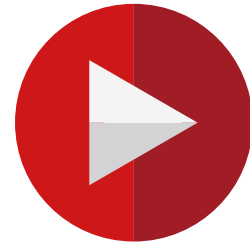


Manisha Jain

**Ehsaas Women**, is a conglomeration of women from all walks of life who act as galvanising agents. We feel that culture is at the heart of development policy and it constitutes an essential investment in the world's future. Late Dr Prabha Khaitan's vision for a better tomorrow guides us," noted Apra Kuchhal, **Ehsaas Woman** and Honorary Convener, Rajasthan and Central India Affairs of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

Citing the role of the new website in furthering the cause of the Foundation, Manisha Jain, Communication and Branding Chief, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, commented: "The **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** website highlights our effort to uphold the cultural capital of the country and promote Indian culture and literature in India and overseas. Literature, culture and heritage, basic education, women's empowerment and social welfare are the five pillars of inspiration for the Foundation. Nearly 1,000 initiatives spanning 35 cities in the world are listed on the website. It also hosts the monthly newsletters, which are interactive and give the visitor access to our events and articles by noteworthy names."

In fact, the website has been tailored to serve as the one-stop destination for everything connected to the organisation. Designed in a sleek and user-friendly format using understated yet elegant aesthetics, the website allows **PKF** members and followers to stay up to date with the latest activities of the Foundation, dig into the vast archives of the organisation's work, discover the network of associates that the Foundation collaborates with, reach out directly to the **PKF** team, keep abreast of the latest accomplishments and accolades, and most crucially, familiarise themselves with the ethos of the Foundation, which is premised on striving towards a better world where knowledge, understanding, and empathy produce more compassionate and creative citizens.



Prem Prakash

# R e p o r t i n g f r o m G r o u n d Z e r o

From border skirmishes to full-blown wars, from natural calamities to the liberation of states, from assassinations and emergencies to insurgencies, he has seen and reported it all first-hand — often from ground zero. He is Prem Prakash, a well-known name and face in the world of journalism for the last seven decades and he has penned a book capturing a lifetime of work done with journalistic integrity and intrepidity.

To celebrate his success and mark his achievements, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the minister of External Affairs of India, launched Prakash's memoir, *Reporting India: My Seventy-Year Journey as a Journalist*, at a recent **Kitaab** online event organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

The hour-long chat also saw veteran journalists Sheela Bhatt and Sushant Sareen and former executive editor of *India Today*, Venkat Narayan,

join Jaishankar for a discussion on Prakash's talent and triumph. The event was flagged off by Aakriti Periwal, honorary convener of overseas affairs, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

Starting off the session, Jaishankar showered accolades on Prakash's life spent in search and service of the truth, deeming him "a great recorder of events and history." He said, "We may be discussing a book but in reality, it is a celebration of his life.... He has been there and done that and shaped our recollection of events and the image of India. He has always been at the right place and at the right time."

Commenting on the nature and merit of *Reporting India*, Jaishankar added that Prakash's book "has a very engrossing flow that I feel the young generation of today, less conversant with that era, would value very much." Indeed for those

not well-versed with India's past, the book reads like a factual intrigue piece, taking the readers through the memorable highs and lows of the country's journey. It is a knowledgeable glimpse into historical events by someone who witnessed it all first-hand.

Jaishankar, for whom the chapter on the Emergency struck a particularly personal chord, also acknowledged that while reading the book, he got "a sense of how hard one has to work" and "the initiative and gumption that is needed" to achieve the feat Prakash has managed.

Speaking about what struck him as most remarkable while reading *Reporting India*, Jaishankar listed three elements — how Prakash "defined his own ambition early in his life to shape the image of India abroad", the "singular absence of post-Partition nostalgia that one would have expected from someone of his generation", and the ultimate "deep underlying optimism that continues to permeate his outlook even now."

Jaishankar concluded by saying that the country has gained enormously from Prakash's efforts. That "he has built a solid legacy... he has every right to be proud of his life's work... a 75-year journey — one of memorable moments, unique experiences and great accomplishments."

Sushant Sareen, for his part, inaugurated the panel by cheekily tweaking Jaishankar's turn of phrase "at the right place at the right time" to claim that, in fact, after reading the book, he thought Prakash's success was because he had had a knack for being "at the wrong place at the right time" — be it in Bhopal during the gas tragedy or somewhere equally more dangerous.

But what Sareen found astounding about Prakash was that not only was he an exceptional journalist, but he was also a successful entrepreneur and a pioneer. He listed how Prakash, who started as a photojournalist during Jawaharlal Nehru's time, went on to become an established journalist covering the Bangladesh Liberation War from within the country at great personal risk, reporting on the 1971 Indo-Pak war, capturing the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in Colombo through his lens and more. He also went on to talk about how Prakash went on to set up Asian News International (ANI), India's largest news agency, which provides syndicated multimedia news feed. It was, in fact, the first agency in India that syndicated video news. The secret to successfully balancing the two separate roles — that of a working professional with an extremely tough job and of an entrepreneur — was what Sareen wanted to know more about from Prakash. The humble man, who holds the record of being one of the few journalists to have



We may be discussing a book but in reality, it is a celebration of his life.... He has been there and done that and shaped our recollection of events and the image of India. He has always been at the right place and at the right time

— Subrahmanyam  
Jaishankar

interviewed all of independent India's prime ministers, simply said, "I did what had to be done."

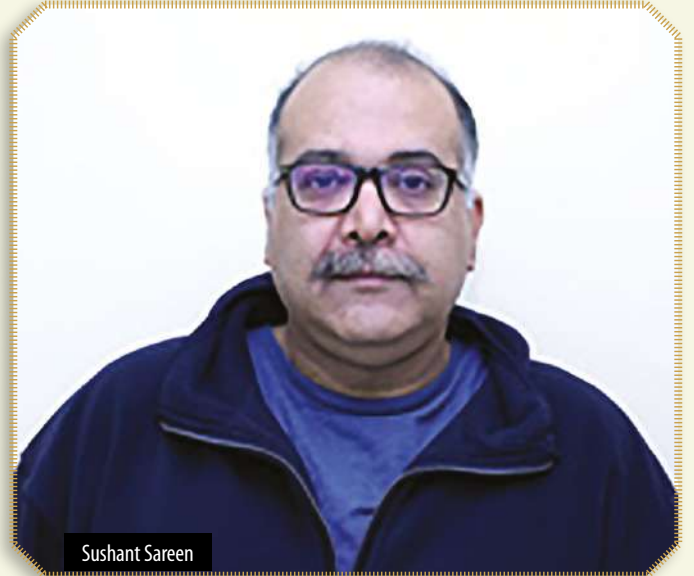
In conversation with Sheela Bhatt, Prakash reflected on the country's defeat during the 1962 India-China war, which he covered from the ground, and elaborated on Nehru's role in it for not modernising the Indian Army in time. He even debunked the "Hindi-Chini *bhai bhai*" myth saying, "The Hindi-Chini *bhai bhai* slogan was nonsense. India's views towards the Chinese in the past can be described as romanticised. We gave up everything on Tibet and acknowledged its sovereignty while the Chinese asserted its powers and went on to capture Tibet."

However, acknowledging Nehru's contributions to the country, Prakash said, "...during the British rule, the citizens of the country had no right to vote and had





Aakriti Periwal



Sushant Sareen

no idea what democracy was. Jawaharlal Nehru's biggest legacy is democracy. He saw us as a nation through three general elections, which left India's people with the habit of going to polls and electing a government."

Continuing to reminisce about India's first Prime Minister, he added, "He was always present in Parliament and used to interact so much with the press." Prakash lauded Nehru for his support of the freedom of the press, recalling how Nehru once said, "I am happy with an irresponsible but free press rather than a controlled press."

During the conversation, he also mentioned the struggles of reporting during his youth and how the field of journalism had changed since then. He recalled that there was no satellite connection. One had to pack the film, take it to customs and make sure it reached the airlines in three hours so that it could reach its international destination in time for it to be broadcasted. Today, in comparison, it is so much easier to travel abroad without having to plough through heaps of

paperwork and convey news as well. How access to borders is much easier and the army is more friendly and compliant, he added.

Moving on to the lack of Indian correspondents who report global stories first-hand and the tragedy that we consume all international news from a

western perspective,

Prakash rued,

"There are so many organisations, flush with cash, but don't send correspondents abroad to capture news from the ground. I don't know why. They are not loss-making companies, they should base their reporters abroad. The audience has a right to want news from first-hand sources rather than via second or third-hand mediums."

**I was once told by the editor of Whisnews that 'a dead Prem Prakash is no good to us'. Agreed. But how could a live Prem Prakash report on East Pakistan sitting in Calcutta? So I had to cross the border**

**— Prem Prakash**

During the course of the conversation, Prakash also touched upon topics like covering the liberation of Goa from the Portuguese; the media savviness of Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi; the conundrum of why we keep winning on the battleground but losing out during talks; our "naivete" when dealing with China and Pakistan; the sad plight of Afghanistan



Venkat Narayan



Sheela Bhatt

and why we should help them. He also recounted a first-hand account of the Tashkent talks between India and Pakistan after the 1965 war and Soviet Union's plans to pressure the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, who died mysteriously soon after, to sign the declaration.

Prakash also took questions from an eager audience who asked him about varied topics such as his experience of writing *Reporting India*, what causes chaos in India, the quality of today's journalists, the nature of reporting done and more.

About his experience of writing this book and reflecting on his life, he confessed that he had never had any concrete plans to pen a book, though his friends had always pushed for it. It was only after a surgery in 2019, when he was resting and had "all the time in the world", that he started speaking about his experiences to his son, Sanjiv (the present CEO of ANI), who wrote it down. Prakash admitted he really "enjoyed it".

The topic of today's journalists and the nature of news coverage brought forth a sigh and a chuckle from the doyen. Speaking on the matter, he said, "For

heaven's sake, tell your reporters to go to the field and report. Hardly any of them go to the field." Sharing an anecdote, he elaborated, "I was once told by the editor of Whisnews that 'a dead Prem Prakash is no good to us'. Agreed. But how could a live Prem Prakash report on East Pakistan sitting in Calcutta? So I had to cross the border. I took a grave risk. Same with Goa during

its liberation... You have to go to locations!" Another "dangerous" trend today, he pointed out, is that "they (reporters) have their own opinions. Instead of reporting facts, ... they push their opinions, which is not right."

He ended by advising young journalists to "read a lot, go to the locations and report facts. Identify your sources properly even if you don't disclose them. At least let your editor know them. That's it."

The engaging session concluded with Narayan reminiscing old times with Prakash and thanking the veteran, who has covered many turning points in the history of the nation, for sharing his stories with everyone.

*This session of Kitaab was held in association with Penguin Books and The Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia*

Jawaharlal Nehru's biggest legacy is democracy. He saw us as a nation through three general elections, which left India's people with the habit of going to polls and electing a government

— Prem Prakash



# Ruminations of a Rebellious Lord



Lord Meghnad Desai

He can speak to you about Marx, Keynes and global economic policies as well as the significance of Dilip Kumar's era in Bollywood and Shah Rukh Khan running around Europe in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*. A member of the House of Lords in the British Parliament and the current Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF), Lord Meghnad Desai — the British economist, scholar and a writer with over 30 books on economics, history, politics, cinema as well as fiction — recently launched his book, *Rebellious Lord: An Autobiography*, at a virtual **Kitaab** session.

Lord Desai also enjoyed a free-wheeling chat about his book, the Indian economy and politics with Montek Singh Ahluwalia, economist and the erstwhile Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of India. Welcoming them to the conversation was **Ehsaas** Woman Priyanshi Patel.

Launching the book of his "old friend," Ahluwalia spoke warmly of the author and his work. "Meghnad is a man of many parts... and some of it comes out in the book. But the nicest thing... is that it takes you through such a broad-based, varied set of experiences in a very light way.... It is easy reading," he said.

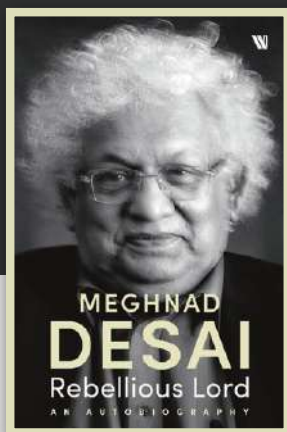
Ahluwalia started with a chat about Desai, the economist. He questioned Desai on his take on the BJP's economic policy back in the 1990s vis-à-vis now before moving on to India's love for pigeon-holing people. "In India, people are expected to tread the same path — no deviations. Early on, they label you — that's it. No further freedom of action is allowed.... You have to play that role. As I have described in my book, I have had a number of evolutions in my thinking," said Desai, referring to his own Marxist label by virtue of his knowledge on the subject and his association with the Labour Party in Britain.

Reading out an excerpt from the book about the "easy task" of learning non-linear differential equations from a library book, Ahluwalia then asked Desai to reflect on his love for libraries. Reminiscing, Desai said, "One of the things that



Montek Singh Ahluwalia





would be reflected if people read my book is how much time I spent in a library once I hit college...." He said he spent endless afternoons at various libraries teaching himself all he could. "I hope my book also tells everybody that it is possible to overcome obstacles," he added.

Hailing Desai as a "movie buff," Ahluwalia steered the conversation to cinema next. He asked if movies reflect Indian society accurately. "I don't see today's movies as much as I used to in the old days, but I find it fascinating that Bollywood always tells India's story to it." He gave examples of how the stories change with the times — *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hain* was inspired by initiatives of Vinoba Bhave to rehabilitate bandits, in the 1990s when India was globalising and diaspora became important, Shah Rukh Khan ran around Europe, and so on. "So, it has an uncanny ability to tell the nation's story in an entertaining way. I remember seeing Salman Khan's *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*... it is amazing... you wouldn't see this much of Bajrangbali during the Congress days but in the BJP days there he is — a buffed Bajrang Bhakt...." He also commented about the virulent reactions Bollywood can incite in people, as with *Padmavat*. "The passion that people show regarding a film is astonishing! I am a great fan of Bollywood.... It is always really good at storytelling — with both content and entertainment."

While conversing about his love for celluloid, he also rued the new small-screen movie-watching culture. "I like watching films in the cinema, I am not a Netflix person. The charm of the big screen is something else, maybe I am old-fashioned," he laughed.

India is a nation-state. It is not going anywhere else. But let's understand the different dynamics... India is a united civilisation, which is rich in nationhood. I think this (approach) is much more friendly than everybody marching to the same tune

The next topic of discussion treaded contentious territory — the idea of India as "a collection of nations." Desai said his views began to form while living through the linguistic movement in

Mumbai. He said, "(I'm) thinking of a nation as anything that has a common language and a territory. It might have a religion as well, but the interesting thing about Bangladesh... religion was not enough. Language made all the difference because language is culture." So, he came to think of "India as a sort of Europe".

He also went to talk about the diversity of Indian history beyond Delhi, the Sultanate and the Mughals. Desai confessed that he wants to make people aware and tell them to "relax". "India is a nation-state. It is not going anywhere else. But let's understand the different dynamics... India is a united civilisation, which is rich

in nationhood. I think this (approach) is much more friendly than everybody marching to the same tune," he concluded.

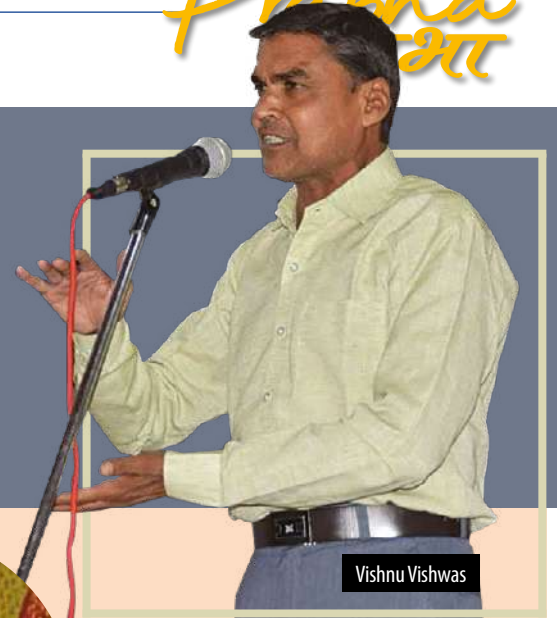
The chat also touched upon global political trends, Desai's exit from the Labour Party, the India-China skirmishes and the impetus to do good and bring in positive change — via NGOs, research institutes, or politics.

This chapter of **Kitaab** ended with Patel thanking Ahluwalia and Desai for sharing their expert opinions and views with the audience who would walk away more informed and enriched.



*This session of Kitaab is presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Westland Books*

# लिखें तो माटी की लाज के लिए, सृष्टि कल्याण के लिए: विष्णु विश्वास



Vishnu Vishwas

राजस्थानी भाषा में मिठास है। इस भाषा में अपने संस्कार हैं। अपनी लोक परंपराएं हैं जिनका रक्षण और संरक्षण जरूरी है। इसीलिए विष्णु विश्वास राजस्थानी भाषा में कविताएं एवं लेखन करते हैं। प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन ने ग्रासरूट मीडिया फाउंडेशन के सहयोग से आखर कार्यक्रम का फेसबुक पेज पर लाइव आयोजन किया। इसके तहत कवि विष्णु विश्वास से साहित्यकार नहुष व्यास ने बातचीत की। कार्यक्रम के आरंभ में विजय जोशी ने अतिथि वक्ता व संवादकर्ता का परिचय दिया।

व्यास ने पहला सवाल पूछा, आपकी साहित्यिक लेखन की यात्रा शुरू कैसे हुई? विश्वास का उत्तर था, "कॉलेज में पढ़ते समय भी गिरधारीलाल मालव, दुर्गादानजी, प्रेमजी प्रेम, मुकुट मणिराज जी को सुनने में आनंद आता था और धीरे-धीरे कविता करने लग गया। मां से मुझे हाड़ौती अंचल की लोक संस्कृति का ज्ञान हुआ और मां से ही सांस्कृतिक परम्परा के कई गीत मिले, जिनको गुनगुनाते हुए आनन्द आता था।" आपकी कविता में श्रृंगार के प्रति झुकाव अधिक देखने को मिलता है। गोरी थारो डील.. गीत काफी प्रसिद्ध हुआ? पर विश्वास की प्रतिक्रिया थी, "इस गीत का मूल भाव नारी अस्मिता को लेकर है। पत्नी को आदर्श मानता हुआ उसकी अस्मिता की पृष्ठभूमि पहचानने की कोशिश करता हूँ —

थारो डील ईतर की सीसी, सोरम की लपट उड़ै छै  
थारो मन गंगा को पाणी, पाप्यां का पाप झड़ै छै।  
हाथां में लछमी को बासो, पावां में रिद-सिध छै  
थारै कण्ठ सुरसति मनव्हरां मं बालक की सी जिद छै  
थारी सीख सलाहं मं दुर्गा संकट दूर करै छै।  
थारो मन गंगा को पाणी, पाप्यां का पाप झड़ै छै।

व्यास ने अगला सवाल यह कहते हुए किया कि वात्सल्य तो प्रेम और अध्यात्म का दो पग है। आपने एक बाल गीत लिख्यो छो — मामा कहे थारो मान बढ लो...? विश्वास का उत्तर था, "हमारे आध्यात्मिक पूर्वज शुरू में हमे यहां तक लेकर आए कि घुटनू चलत रेणू तनु मंडित मुख धरि रेता मैं आप लोगों को इससे आगे और लेकर चलने का प्रयास करता हूँ। जब बालक चलने का प्रयास करता है और वो रेंग-रेंग कर चलता है। धूल में धूसरित होकर चलता है, तब उसकी मां का उस पर मन आता है। मां उसको लाड़ लड़ाती है और गोद में उठा लेती है। उसको कैसे लाड़ लड़ा रही है। परिवार के हर सदस्य के साथ साथ बच्चा जब तोतली भाषा में प्रथम शब्द उच्चारित करता है तो अपने यहां की परम्परा रही है कि यो ऐसा कहता है ऐसा होगा या बनेगा —

मामा कहवे थारो मान बढेलो, बाबा कहवे थारो भाग  
काका हवै तो काळ कटे, तू चाहवै जे ही मांग ॥  
थारी तोतली बोल्या पै मर-मर जीऊं हजारं बार  
थारा दो दांता पै वारुं सौं-सौ बीघा का सौ बाढ़ ॥

आपने ग्रामीण परिवेश का जीवन जिया है। ग्रामीण परिवेश का ही आपका एक देवल शीर्षक से गीत लोकप्रिय और बहुत प्यारा गीत है? पर विश्वास ने कहा, "यह गीत दबे-कुचले लोगों का गीत है। जो समर्थ नहीं हैं और समाज रौंदता है। उसको मिट्टी के माध्यम से आवाज दी है। मिट्टी के माध्यम से ही हम हीरा मोती पाते हैं। मिट्टी को अपन रौंदते हैं, और पृथ्वी का गुण है कि वो क्षमा करती है।

मैं ढेकळ की वंदना करू छूँ  
बना रूप अर बना कदर को न कोयां सू राळ्यो-ढाळ्यो  
सबने छोड़ दियो तो कोई, धूप, बाळ, पाणी को पाळ्यो।  
ज्यां के लेखें बना बात ई कण-कण होर वखर जाऊं  
ऊंडा ऊंडा फाळ्या सह-सह अन्न-धन्न मूँ नपजाऊं।  
ते भी जस कोई नह ई लेखें ई मूँ बेकळ छूँ  
काई ताना मारो म्हार मूँ ढोयो ढेकळ छूँ।



Nahush Vyas

कोई एक दो रचनाकार जिनसे आप प्रभावित हुए और जिनका परिवेश ऐसा ही हो? के जवाब में विश्वास ने कहा, "मेरे ही अंचल का राजस्थानी साहित्य मर्मज्ञ जिन्होंने राजस्थानी भाषा को ऊंचाई दी। कुछ लोग जो अभी नहीं हैं, जिनमें मेरे शिक्षक गिरधारीलाल मालव सहित गुरु दान सिंह गौड़ मेरे आदर्श रहे हैं। मुकुट जी, जगदीश जी। मैंने मेहतारानी पर एक गीत लिख्यो — एक मेहतारानी और दूसरी रानी — यह गीत चरित्र का गीत है। कर्म कैसा भी हो, मैं कर्म की खातिर प्रणाम करता हूँ। राजा के घर रानी ज्यूं इंद्र की पटरानी... इस प्रश्न पर कि आप गद्य और पद्य दोनों विधाओं में रचना करते हैं, पर हर रचनाकार को अपनी कोई रचना बहुत प्यारी लगती है। आपको कोई रचना प्यारी लागे वो बताओ? विश्वास का उत्तर था, "नी म्हा तो चरणा मरणा तन छै... बढ़ती उम्र की कन्या पर लांघ रही खेतों की मेर प्यारो गीत बहुत बढ़िया गीत है। इस गीत को आप श्रोताओं से रुबरू करवाओ? पर विश्वास ने सुनाया, "एक सरसों खेत में बड़ी होती है और एक बेटी है उसका नाम सरसों है। धीरे-धीरे घर के आंगन में बढ़ी होती है। बढ़ती बेटी को देखकर मां लाड़ भरी शिकायत पति से करती है।

अजी लांघ रही खेतों की मेर,  
बढ़ती डाळा च्यारु मेर।  
सरस्यूं घालैं डील जवानी जड़ रही छै।  
मार उमर की पड़ रही छै।  
यां सूता खूटी ताण।  
अजी थां बाप होर अणजाण।।  
आगै-पाछे की सूझे न्ह मन सम्भळ्या न्ह सम्भले,  
काम करै छै अणहोता जे बरजै ज्यां पे उखलै,  
बाळपणों कटगयो कदीं को, अब अल्हड़पण उदळै  
सरस्यूं फूलां आ रही छै।  
उमर माथो नहा रही छै।।  
अब अखरै बंध-बंधाण।  
अजी थां बाप होर अणजाण।

आपने हिंदी से एमए किया और लेखन की भाषा राजस्थानी क्यों चुनी? के उत्तर में विश्वास ने कहा, "जब मुझे बोध होने लगा। हिंदी में भी लिखा, अंग्रेजी भी पढ़ा पर जो मिठास मुझे लोक संस्कृति में मिली, अपनी लोक संस्कृति में, तो उसी में मन रम गया। हर क्षेत्र की परम्परा अलग-अलग रहती है। राजस्थान में हाड़ौती क्षेत्र की जो परम्पराएं हैं। जो संझ्यां पूजना, यह बात मुझे बहुत आकर्षित करती है।

इ भाषा ने घणै-घणै लोग पढे छै  
मैं इ पर ही काम करना चाहो छो...

आप नई पीढ़ी को कोई संदेश देना चाहते हैं? के जवाब में विश्वास ने कहा, "मैं सबसे कड़ी बात यह कहना चाहता हूँ कि स्वाध्याय, धैर्य धारण कर, रम कर लिखोगे, तो वो चीज उभर आएगी। गीत के बीज हृदय के गर्भ में होते हैं। उसको पलने दो, धैर्य धारण करो, ध्यान रखो और कम से कम 100-50 बार देखो। जब लगे कि यह फलफूल रहा है, तब जनता के सामने रखो। निवेदन करुं कि इ माटी की लाज राखणे की खातिर काम करो। अच्छा सोचें और सृष्टि के कल्याण के लिए लिखें।

आखर जयपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। ग्रास रूट मीडिया फाउंडेशन व आईटीसी राजपूताना का सहयोग मिला



# लेखन हमेशा विचारधारा से प्रभावित होता है: अंकिता जैन



Ankita Jain

**आ** दिवासियों के बीच रहकर खेती-किसानी से जुड़ी लेखिका अंकिता जैन कलम लंदन में अतिथि वक्ता थीं, जहां उन्होंने अपने लेखकीय जीवन, कहानियों और पुस्तकों के बारे में विस्तार से चर्चा की। बनस्थली विद्यापीठ से कंप्यूटर साइंस इंजीनियरिंग में एमटेक करने वाली जैन जैविक खेती से जुड़े वैदिक वाटिका की निदेशक हैं। कलम के इस वर्चुअल सत्र में जैन का स्वागत पद्मेश गुप्ता ने किया। लेखिका का संक्षिप्त परिचय देने के पश्चात उन्होंने संवाद का दायित्व लंदन निवासी साहित्यप्रेमी तिथि को सौंप दिया। तिथि ने जैन से पहला सवाल उनकी तकनीकी पृष्ठभूमि के बावजूद लेखन से जुड़ाव को लेकर पूछा। जैन का उत्तर था, "2010 में जब सीडैक में काम कर रही थी तभी लेखन की शुरुआत हो गई थी। सोशल मीडिया उस समय हाईप ले रहा था। मैंने फेसबुक पोस्ट करना शुरू किया, तो मेरे लिखे को लोग पसंद करने लगे। बचपन में मेरी मां वाद-विवाद में भाग लेना बताती थी। पिता भजन लिखते थे। मेरी रुचि विज्ञान में थी। भोपाल में शिक्षा से जुड़ी। कॉलेज में पढ़ाया भी, पर मैं नोट्सवाली पढ़ाई नहीं करा सकती थी, बंधन में रहकर काम नहीं कर सकती थी। फेसबुक के एक ग्रुप से ही मुझे एक काम मिला। मेरे लेखन की शुरुआत यहीं से, कविता और गीतों से हुई। मेरी पहली कविता प्रलेश मोब गीत मुंबई 143 था। यह मुंबई हमलों के बाद लोगों को प्रेरित करने वाला एक गीत था। मैंने इसके बोल लिखे थे।"

तिथि ने जैन की एक कहानी की चंद पंक्तियां पढ़ीं और पूछा कि इतने विरोधाभासी भाव के लिए सूक्ष्म दृष्टि कैसे लाती हैं आप? जैन का उत्तर था, "मेरे ददिहाल के माहौल में लड़कियों को शिक्षा नहीं मिलती थी। मेरी मां की वजह से हम पढ़ पाए। मातृकुल की एक बुआ चौदह साल की उम्र में विधवा हुई और सत्तासी साल की उम्र केवल सफेद साड़ी में ही गुजार दिए। आखिर कोई तो इनकी बात करेगा। मेरी कहानियों में पहले किरदार तैयार होता है। असल जीवन के किरदार को मैं बहुत सूक्ष्मता से देखती हूं।" मैं से मां तक पुस्तक की चर्चा पर जैन ने कहा, "इसके लिखने की शुरुआत 2016 नवंबर में हुई। लेखन से मुझे कमाई होने लगी थी। पर अपने पहले मिसकैरेज के बाद मैं डिप्रेशन में चली गई थी। जशपुर में अपने घर में मैं रहती थी। तब लल्लनटॉप में एक पोस्ट आई थी, कि लिखना चाहते हैं तो लिखिए। मैंने उसके संपादक से बात की तो उन्होंने मुझे अपने अनुभव लिखने के लिए कहा। हमारे समाज में गर्भावस्था के बदलाव पर बात नहीं होती। इससे मैं डिस्टर्ब थी कि अगर मेरा परिवार मुझे इतना सपोर्ट करने वाला होकर भी ऐसा है, तो बाकी लोगों का क्या होता है। मैंने उस दौरान के मानसिक, शारीरिक बदलाव के अनुभवों को लिखना शुरू कर दिया। मेरे लिखने की काफी सराहना हुई। प्रभात खबर में भी यह सीरीज के रूप में छपा। मैंने भावनात्मक रूप से लिखा कि गर्भावस्था के दौरान मूड स्विंग्स, झुंझलाहट और चिड़चिड़ाहट भी कोई चीज होती है, इस पर बात होनी चाहिए। खुशी की बात है कि जब किताब आई तो उस पर पुरुषों की टिप्पणियां अधिक आई।"

जैन की पुस्तक ऐसी वैसी औरत के जिक्र के साथ अगला सवाल था, आपने इतने अलहदा विषयों पर कैसे लिखा? उनका उत्तर था, "ऐसी वैसी औरत में ग्यारह कहानियां हैं। इसके किरदार ऐसे हैं, जिन्हें हमारा समाज स्वीकार नहीं करता। मेरी सहेलियों ने मुझे अपनी कहानियां सुनाई। चाहे जशपुर की हो, दिल्ली, मुंबई या लंदन न्यूयॉर्क की, सबने एक जैसा महसूस किया।" बहेलिए पुस्तक की चर्चा करते हुए जैन ने कहा, यह उन औरतों की कहानी है, जो खुली रह सकती थीं, पर बांध दी गई। चौथी पुस्तक ओह रे! किसान कथेतर श्रेणी की है। इसमें किसानों की, उनके जीवन और संघर्ष की कहानी भी

है, जिसमें मैंने अपने स्वयं के अनुभव भी डाले हैं। पर इस किताब के लेखन का पूरा श्रेय मेरे पति को जाता है। मेरे पिता ग्रामीण बैंक के प्रबंधक थे। पर जब मेरी शादी किसान से हुई, खुद देखा, फावड़ा उठाया, मेरी कलम है, पति के अनुभव हैं।

वह बहुत सारे किसानों से जुड़े हैं। मैंने उन्हें ट्रेनिंग भी दी। किसानों की समस्या वह नहीं, जो टीवी पर दिखाया जा रहा है। किसान का बेटा किसान नहीं करना चाहता। सिर्फ खेती ही नहीं अगर प्रकृति को बचाना है, तब भी किसान की बात अवश्य होनी चाहिए। आज घरों की दीवारों से दीवारें सटी हैं। हमारे देखते-देखते खेत दीवार बन गए। अगर आप इस किताब को पढ़ते हैं, तो जानेंगे कि हमारा काम केवल अन्न खाना नहीं है, बल्कि अन्न उगाने वाले की मदद करना भी है।"

सार्थक लेखन के लिए कैसा माहौल है? के सवाल पर जैन का उत्तर था, "हर लेखक अपने समय को जीता है। प्रेमचंद हों या प्रसाद, सबके लेखन में उनका समय है। उस समय सोलह साल की लड़की साड़ी पहनती थी। पर अब चार साल में जेनेरेशन बदल जा रही है। तो 2016 में लिखी किताब अब पुरानी हो गई। मेरे पति मुझे कहते हैं कि मेरा लेखन बाजार के लिए नहीं है। मैं सुकून के लिए लिखती हूं। मेरे वर्तमान को मेरे पति की सलाह से मदद मिलती है। आपके सुकून के पीछे आपके ऐसे साथी का हाथ होता है, जो एक दूसरे को संभाल सके। सफलता की परिभाषा बहुत बेमानी है।" उन्होंने माना कि रचनात्मकता हमेशा विचारधारा से प्रभावित होती है। प्रभाव ही हमें लिखने पर मजबूर करता है। अपनी सबसे प्रिय रचना पर जैन ने कहा, "एक मां से यह पूछना गलत है कि आपका कौन सा बच्चा प्रिय है। इस लिहाज से सभी प्रिय हैं, पर मैं से मां तक मुझे सबसे प्रिय है। आपने किसानों की बात सुनी होगी। पर महिलाओं की आत्महत्या, डिप्रेशन की बात पर कोई सामूहिक आंदोलन नहीं होता। मैंने लोगों को यह कहते लोगों को सुना कि बच्चा पैदा होने के दसवें दिन बहू को मायके भेज दिया ताकि वह दो माह आराम कर सके। ससुराल वाले ऐसी बातें फख्र से कहते हैं। जो औरत आपका परिवार, दुनिया और समाज चला रही, हम उनके लिए आंदोलन नहीं करते, हम उन्हें फ्रंट पेज की खबर नहीं बनाते।"

जैन ने यशपाल, जयशंकर प्रसाद, हजारी प्रसाद द्विवेदी को प्रिय लेखक बताया। कहा मंटो ने मुझे लिखने के लिए प्रेरित किया। शिवानी भी मुझे काफी पसंद हैं। नए लेखक भी पसंद हैं। उन्होंने कुशल, वीरेंद्र शर्मा, निखिल कौशिक, अंजू खरबंदा, गीता शर्मा आदि के सवालों के उत्तर भी दिए।

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित कलम लंदन के सहयोगी थे ब्रिटिश कौंसिल, वातायन और वाणी फाउंडेशन।



Tithi



Padmesh Gupta



Nikhil Kaushik



Virendra Sharma



# सिनेमा को समाज चाहिए और समाज को सिनेमा: अंशु हर्ष



Anshu Harsh



Anoop Bhargava



Manish Bhargava

माध्यम से हमने उन्हें बताने की कोशिश की कि सितारों के आगे जहां और भी है।" भार्गव ने इस दौर को हिंदी फिल्मों का रेनसां बताकर हर्ष की प्रतिक्रिया जाननी चाही तो हर्ष का उत्तर था, "फिल्म फेस्टिवल ने कम बजट की फिल्मों को बढ़ावा दिया है। ऑफ बीट सिनेमा, शार्ट फिल्म, समानांतर सिनेमा, समाज व साहित्य से जुड़ा सिनेमा इससे आगे बढ़ा है।"

खामोशी में है शब्दों का समंदर

जब कभी खामोश रहती हूँ.

उस समंदर में डूब कर

मन के जाल में कई शब्दों को पकड़ लाती हूँ...

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित कलम न्यूयॉर्क में अपनी यह कविता पढ़ी अतिथि वक्ता अंशु हर्ष ने। कोरोना काल के चलते वर्चुअल आयोजित इस सत्र में हर्ष का स्वागत, धन्यवाद और संवाद किया अनूप भार्गव ने। अतिथि वक्ता का परिचय देते हुए भार्गव ने बताया कि हर्ष एक कवयित्री और फिल्म निर्देशक हैं। आप मासिक पत्रिका सिम्पली जयपुर और साप्ताहिक समाचार पत्र वॉइस ऑफ़ जयपुर की संपादक और प्रकाशक हैं। इनकी कविताएं एक अधूरी पेंटिंग का अहसास दिलाते हुए कवयित्री द्वारा उसे जल्द पूरा करने की हड़बड़ी का अहसास भी दिलाती हैं। शब्दों का समंदर आपका चर्चित काव्य संग्रह है। आप राजस्थान इंटरनेशनल फिल्म फेस्टिवल की निदेशक भी हैं।

भार्गव ने कार्यक्रम की शुरुआत में कहा कि जब हम अपनी मिट्टी से जुड़े लोगों से जुड़ते हैं तो एक अलग खुशी होती है। आप अपने बचपन से अब तक सफर के बारे में कुछ बताइए? हर्ष का उत्तर था, "बचपन की बात पर एक चुलबुलापन याद आ जाता है। जन्म जयपुर में हुआ। पिता पुलिस अफसर थे तो ट्रांसफर के साथ जगह बदल जाती थी, लोग बदल जाते थे, माहौल बदल जाता था, दोस्त बदल जाते थे। तब बहुत दुख होता था, पर आज जीवन के उतार चढ़ाव में उस दौर से बहुत मदद मिलती है। तनाव के माहौल में सहजता मैंने अपनी मां से सीखा।" आपका व्यक्तित्व विविध आयामी है, आपकी कविताओं में सहज अनुभूति है। आपकी जो सोच व रुचि है, उनमें किन बातों का योगदान रहा? हर्ष का उत्तर था, "बचपन में चंपक, नंदन, चंदामामा, बाल हंस, सुमन सौरभ आदि पत्रिकाएं पढ़ीं, तो इन पत्रिकाओं का बहुत असर हुआ। वर्ष 2000 में शादी हो गई थी। 2008 में मैंने एक अखबार के लिए लेख लिखा, जिसे अवाई मिल गया, तब लिखना शुरू कर दिया। फ्रीलांस लिखती रही। बाद में मैंने कविताएं लिखीं।" हर्ष ने बताया कि उनके कविता संग्रह का अंग्रेजी अनुवाद आखिरी चरण में है। एक अन्य सवाल पर उन्होंने बताया, "2012 में हमने द्विभाषी पत्रिका निकाली। इसमें हमारी संस्कृति के साथ ही लोगों की प्रेरक कहानियां इसलिए ली जाती हैं ताकि दूसरों को प्रेरणा दे सकें।"

लघु फिल्मों के निर्माण से जुड़े सवाल पर हर्ष का उत्तर था, "फिल्म फेस्टिवल के लिए काम करने के दौरान क्रिएटिव सोचती रहती हूँ। एक फिल्म देखकर सोचा कि कोई महिला जब ऑटोबायोग्राफी लिखती है तो उसमें कितना सच होता है? इसी पर शार्टफिल्म बना दी। मेरा कहना है कि जब भी मैं ऑटोबायोग्राफी लिखूंगी तो उसमें सच लिखूंगी, इसीलिए इसका नाम मैंने टू बी कंटीन्युड रखा।" फिल्म फेस्टिवल और शार्ट फिल्म से जुड़े अनुभव व चुनौतियों पर हर्ष ने कहा, "मेरे जीवन में कुछ फिल्मों का बहुत योगदान था। श्री इंडियट्स फिल्म देखी तो इसका काफी असर हुआ। फिर राजस्थान की फर्स्ट द्विभाषी पत्रिका निकाली। फिल्म फेस्टिवल भी इसी सोच का नतीजा है। समाज और फिल्म एक दूसरे के पूरक हैं। पुराना सिनेमा सामाजिक सरोकारों का सिनेमा था। सिनेमा को समाज चाहिए, समाज को सिनेमा चाहिए। राजस्थान के स्टूडेंट्स केवल डॉक्टर, इंजीनियर और सरकारी नौकरी की तरफ सोचते हैं या हीरो बनना चाहते हैं, तो इसके

आगे की योजनाओं पर हर्ष का उत्तर था, "पत्रिका और फेस्टिवल एक कॉमर्शियल पहलू है। पर मैं खुद के लिए लेखन में मुकाम चाहती हूँ। मैं उस जगह की हूँ जहां की मीराबाई हैं।" अमृता प्रीतम का जिक्र होने पर उन्होंने कहा कि मीरा पुराने समय की हैं, अमृता आज के दौर की लेखिका हैं, दोनों से प्रेरणा लेती हूँ। उनके विचार स्वतंत्र हैं, पर स्वच्छंद नहीं। श्रोताओं में से मनीष भार्गव ने पूछा कि इंजीनियरिंग के छात्रों में भी दूसरी क्रिएटिव प्रतिभाएं हैं, लेकिन वे आगे नहीं जा पा रहे। उन्हें क्या रोकता है? हर्ष का उत्तर था, "आपको खुद के अलावा कोई दूसरा नहीं रोक सकता। जब मैं दुख तकलीफ लिखती हूँ तो वही नहीं लिखती जो मैं जीती हूँ। मैं जगबीती लिखती हूँ। बच्चों के पैरेंट्स को यह समझने की जरूरत है कि वे उन्हें बांधे नहीं।" संवादकर्ता भार्गव ने जोड़ा कि इंटरनेट ने प्रकाशन के लिए एक सशक्त माध्यम दे दिया है। आज एक स्मार्ट फोन से शॉर्ट फिल्म बनाई जा सकती है। न्यू जर्सी में रह रहे पुष्प विक्रम ने बताया कि वे भी पिलानी में पढ़े थे। श्री इंडियट्स उनकी भी पसंदीदा फिल्म है, जिसमें हंसी मजाक के साथ बहुत शिक्षा मिलती है।

श्रोताओं में से नीरजा ने पूछा, बतौर लेखक आप विषय कैसे चुनती हैं? हर्ष का उत्तर था कि जो मन में आता है उस पर लिखती हूँ। विचार चाय की तरह होता है। कभी दो उबाल और कभी कड़क चाय। पसंदीदा विधा से जुड़े सवाल पर हर्ष का उत्तर था, "समय की दिक्रत है। कविता लिखती हूँ। कम शब्दों में कहानी भी लिखा है। उपन्यास लिखने का मन है, पर विषय अभी दिमाग में नहीं है। अभी तो लोगों की प्रेरणा, जीवन, प्रेम व दुख की बात करती हूँ।" दर्शकों के अनुरोध पर हर्ष ने कुछ कविताएं सुनाई, जिनमें एक कविता थी, मेरे जीवन में तुम आए, तो एक कविता के बोल थे —

बहुत बरसों से एक नियम मैं हर रोज निभाती हूँ

हर दिन नीयत समय पर रोज तुमसे मिलने आती हूँ...

इस दौरान संवादकर्ता भार्गव ने भी अपनी कविता सुनाई—

सुनो तुम जानती हो

मेरा अस्तित्व तुमसे शुरू होकर

तुम पर खत्म होता है

फिर बता सकती हो तुम्हें मेरा विस्तार

अनंत सा क्यों लगता है...

श्रोताओं में मौजूद लेखक दुर्गा प्रसाद अग्रवाल के इस सवाल पर कि इतनी सारी व्यस्तताओं के बीच तालमेल कैसे निभाती हैं? हर्ष का उत्तर था, "नैया तेरी राम हवाले, लहर लहर हरि आप संभाले... इस दौर ने एक चीज समझाई कि भौतिक संसार में होते हुए आध्यात्मिक होने की जरूरत है।" उन्होंने कोरोना समय के विश्लेषण पर आधारित पुस्तक की चर्चा की और सुनाया, जो जल में रहूं तो ऐसे रहूं जैसे जल में कमल का फूल रहे... उन्होंने उम्र से जुड़ी कुछ कविताएं भी सुनाई और प्रभा खेतान जी को याद करते हुए कहा कि वह मारवाड़ी लड़कियों की मार्गदर्शक हैं।

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित कलम न्यूयॉर्क के सहयोगी थे झिलमिल अमेरिका



Khalid Jawed

## ईश्वर, व्यक्ति और मैं के त्रिकोण के बीच ही साहित्य और दर्शन: खालिद जावेद



M I Zaahir

यह उर्दू फलसफा, अफसाना और अदब पर गंभीर चर्चा से रोशन एक शाम थी। मौका था लफ्ज जोधपुर का, जिसमें अतिथि वक्ता के रूप में मौजूद थे उर्दू के बेहतरीन रचनाकार खालिद जावेद। स्वागत वक्तव्य में अहसास वूमेन की शैलजा सिंह ने आयोजक प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन, सहयोगी रेख्ता फाउंडेशन, अहसास और लफ्ज के बारे में बताया। उन्होंने अतिथि वक्ता का संक्षिप्त परिचय भी दिया। जावेद ने उर्दू जगत में अपनी एक खास पहचान बनाई है। उनकी चर्चित पुस्तकों में *बुरे मौसम में*, *मौत की किताब*, *आखिरी दावत*, *तफरीह की एक दोपहर*, *मौत और आखिरी विदेशी जवान*, *फन और शिकायत*, *नेमत खाना* आदि शामिल हैं। मैग्नियल गार्सिया मार्क्वेज और मिलान कुंदेरा पर उन्होंने गंभीर काम किया है। परिचय के बाद आगे का संवाद जोधपुर के शायर और पत्रकार एम आई जाहिर ने किया। जाहिर ने जोधपुर के अदबी माहौल का जिक्र किया और इस्मत चुगताई, हसन जमाल, बेखुद बदायुनी, शीन काफ़ निजाम आदि का जिक्र करते हुए जावेद से उनके लेखन की शुरुआत पर सवाल पूछा।

जावेद ने बताया, "घर का माहौल अदबी था। पिता, मां, ननिहाल आदि का माहौल साहित्यिक था। खिलौने से ज्यादा किताबों, रिसालों से वास्ता रहा। सात-आठ साल की उम्र में ही कहानी लिखना और खुद का एक काल्पनिक प्रकाशन भी शुरू कर दिया था। ग्यारह साल की उम्र में पहली रचना छप भी गई। बाद में यह सिलसिला साये की तरह उम्र के साथ चलता रहा।" जावेद का मत था, "अदब, शायरी, साहित्य के बगैर भी जीना, क्या कोई जीना है?" जाहिर का अगला सवाल था कि आज के दौर में जब हर शख्स तन्हा है, तो कोरोना के दौर और किरदारों को बतौर कथाकार आप कैसे लेगें? जावेद का उत्तर था, "कथाकार अपने समय के बाहर नहीं होता। हम अपने ही समय में ही लिखते हैं और उसी से टकराते हैं। लेकिन रचनाकार में केवल यही नहीं होता बल्कि एक आंतरिक छटपटाहट भी होती है। प्रेमचंद का कथा पूरे एक युग का दस्तावेज है। यह जंगे आजादी के समाज को उजागर करता है। *वार एंड पीस* पढ़कर हम जंग के बारे में पूरी तरह से समझ सकते हैं।" उनका दावा था, "इतिहास केवल तारीख बताता है, साहित्य उस पूरे युग के बारे में बताता है।" उन्होंने बताया कि कोरोना काल की बात होगी, तो लोगों की तकलीफ को, मन को, द्वंद्व को उजागर साहित्य ही करेगा। उन्होंने अपने एक नए उपन्यास *एक खंजर पानी में* का जिक्र किया और उसे किसी महामारी पर लिखा उर्दू का पहला उपन्यास बताया।

दर्शन और साहित्य से जुड़े एक सवाल पर जावेद ने कहा कि फलसफा हो या अदब, दोनों का तात्त्विक इंसान, उसे बनाने वाले और उसमें रहने वाले, यानी ईश्वर, व्यक्ति और मैं के इस त्रिकोण के बीच है। सारे का सारा दर्शन, उपनिषद इन्हीं पर निर्भर है। गीता, अद्वैत, मीमांसा इसी फलसफा को विचार के रूप में लेते हैं। साहित्य इसी में संवेदना को अपने अनुभव से जोड़कर दिखाता है। हर व्यक्ति एक अदीब होता

है, वह जिंदगी भर दर्शन और शब्दों के बीच झूलता है। उन्होंने वीएच लारेंस का भी उद्धरण दिया और कहा कि दर्शन अमूर्तता को भी व्याख्यायित करता है। किसी अनजाने ग्रह, अल्बेयर काम्यू, ज्यां पॉल सार्त्र के उद्धरण से उन्होंने दार्शनिक और कथाकार का अंतर समझाया। उनका कहना था कि अच्छा कथानक वही है, जिसे पढ़कर आम आदमी कहे कि यह कहानी हमारे जैसी है। हो सकता है कि उसके जीवन में ऐसी घटना घटी हो। अच्छे फनकार का काम यह है कि पाठक उसके लिखे के साथ आगे बढ़े। 'आगे हुआ क्या' की जगह पाठक और लेखक एक हो जाएं। पाठक उस कृति के सुख और दुख के साथ एकाकार हो जाए। ज्ञान की जगह अच्छा साहित्य अहसास पैदा करा दे। अच्छा वह है जिसे पढ़कर हम पहले जैसे न रहें जैसे थे।

डिजिटल मीडिया, टीवी और साहित्य से जुड़े सवाल पर जावेद की राय थी कि वर्चुअल मंच पर वक्ती पाठक होता है, यह परमानेंट नहीं है। एक तरह का इंफार्मेशन एक्सप्लोजन है। गालिब, फैज के जमाने में भी सारे शायर उन्हीं के जैसे नहीं थे। उन्होंने कहा असल बात परदा हटाने में नहीं परदा होने में है। सुंदरता से परदा हटाइए तो वह अश्लील हो जाती है। किसी बच्चे को अगर रैपर सहित चॉकलेट दिया जाए तो उसकी खुशी का ठिकाना नहीं होता। आज तो पाठक को प्लेट में उघाड़ा हुआ चॉकलेट दिया जा रहा। उन्होंने रसगुल्ला खाने की तीव्र चाहत व उसे खाकर मिली तृप्ति और कविता-कथा लिखने से मिले जीवन भर के सुख को भी उदाहरण के साथ समझाया। गूगल और लाइब्रेरी की खोज में अंतर बताते हुए उन्होंने यह भी कहा कि हमारी क्या मजाल जो कि हम किसी अच्छी किताब को रद्द करें। वह तो किताब होती है, जो हमें रद्द करती है। हम भी पढ़-पढ़ कर इस जगह तक पहुंचे हैं। किताबों के भविष्य पर उन्होंने मार्क्वेज का उद्धरण दिया कि मशीन इंसानी जिस्म का विस्तार है, पर दिमाग का विस्तार किताब के रूप में सामने आता है। अच्छा और बुरा लेखन तो हर काल में था और रहेगा।

जावेद ने अपनी पुस्तक और उनके शीर्षक से जुड़े सवाल के भी जवाब दिए। श्रोताओं में डॉ सरोज कौशल ने जावेद के उपन्यास मौत की किताब के संस्कृत को समर्पण की चर्चा की तो जावेद का जवाब था, संस्कृत में एक लय है, आवाज है। यहां तक कि आग से जलने की आवाज, बुझने की, राख की जो आवाज है, उसके लिए भी शब्द हैं। उन्होंने महाभारत युद्ध की समाप्ति पर अर्जुन द्वारा कहानी लिखने की इच्छा पर श्री कृष्ण के संवाद का जिक्र किया, जिसमें अलंकार राख हो जाएं और ऐसा लिखा जाए कि लिखने वाले और लिखे गए के बीच कोई अंतर न रहे का भी जिक्र किया। फ़ानी जोधपुरी के इस सवाल पर कि क्या अफ़सानानिगार अपनी कहानियों के किरदार को जीता है? जावेद का उत्तर था, "किरदार हमेशा दूर के नहीं होते पर जब हम गढ़ते हैं तो हमारा किरदार कई किरदारों का कोलाज होता है। कहानीकार हमेशा बेशकू चीजों को शक़ देने की कोशिश करता है। हमारे जीवन की शुरुआत ही कहानी से होती है। कला, संगीत, धर्मग्रंथ सबमें कहानी है। अगर फिक्शन को आप झूठ कहते हैं तो यह झूठ भी अपने अंदर बहुत बड़ा सच छिपाए हुए है। उन्होंने नई तकनीक, पॉडकास्ट, चौपाल, उर्दू कहानी, अफ़साना आदि पर भी अपने विचार रखे। जावेद ने रेणु वर्मा के दर्शन और फिक्शन से जुड़े सवाल का भी जवाब दिया और विज्ञान, भौतिकता, अध्यात्म, अमूर्त, संवेदना, मनुष्य और उसके हृदय की चर्चा की।

लफ्ज जोधपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। रेख्ता, ताज हरि महल जोधपुर और अहसास वूमेन जोधपुर ने सहयोगी की भूमिका अदा की



# Beyond the Pitch: Life, Love and Moments that Made Kapil Dev

Nobody remotely associated with Indian cricket can ever forget the image of Kapil Dev — gracefully and gleefully — holding aloft the World Cup trophy on the balcony of Lord's — the proverbial home of cricket — in 1983.

Almost three decades since his retirement, the name Kapil Dev still resonates resoundingly in the annals of India's most feverishly followed sport.

Recognised by Wisden as the Indian Cricketer of the Century in 2002, Dev retired as the highest wicket-taker for his country in both Tests and One Day Internationals.

As the only cricketer to have scored more than 5000 Test runs and claimed more than 400 Test scalps, Dev is widely recognised as one of the greatest all-rounders to ever grace the game — a status cemented after his induction into the ICC Hall of Fame in 2010.

As part of **Ek Mulakat Vishesh**, an initiative by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, Kapil Dev spoke to Archana Dalmia, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi.

Welcoming them to the interaction was **Ehsaas**

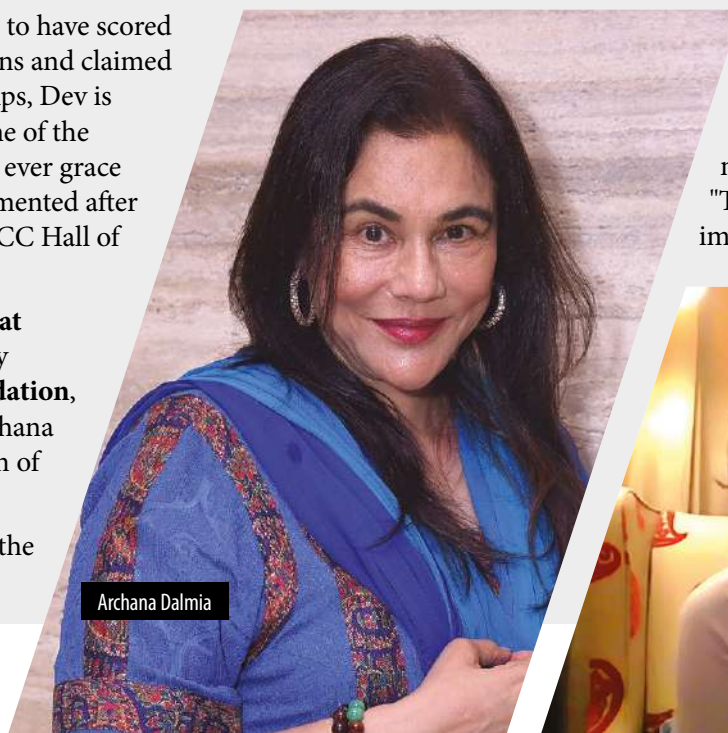


Kapil Dev

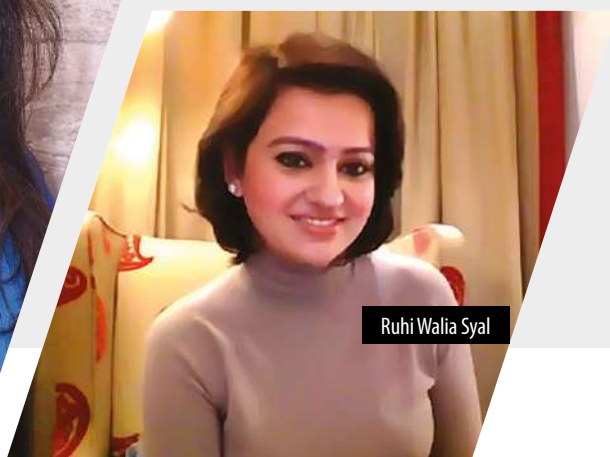
Woman of Jalandhar, Ruhi Walia Syal.

The discussion kicked off with Dev making a surprise admission — leading India to a historic World Cup triumph in 1983 was *not* the defining moment of his life. While he agreed that beating the much-fancied

West Indies in the final was a matter of great pride for him and his teammates, Dev picked the day of his birth and the day of his debut for India as moments of greater significance. "To me, as a kid, the most important thing was to represent



Archana Dalmia



Ruhi Walia Syal



the country," said Dev, for whom wearing the Indian jersey was an incomparable privilege.

Dalmia, naturally, steered the conversation to Kabir Khan's upcoming release *1983*, leading Dev to clarify that he is not the focus of the film. Instead, *1983* is about celebrating the entire squad of players that prevailed against all odds in England to win India's first major cricketing honour. Dev added that since an actor of the calibre of Ranveer Singh is essaying the character of Dev (with Deepika Padukone playing Romi Bhatia, entrepreneur and Dev's wife), people may be under the mistaken impression that the film is Dev's biopic. In reality, *1983* is all about the journey of the Indian team en route to winning the World Cup.

The soft-spoken Dev acknowledged that he has no intentions of entering films, for he remembers his mother forbidding him to do so in his childhood — as "I did not have a good appearance!" — a warning that has still stuck with him. The few cameos Dev has featured in (for Bollywood films like *Dillagi... Yeh Dillagi*, *Iqbal*, *Mujhse Shaadi Karogi*) have all seen him play his own self, and not a fictitious character, in order to make a movie "look more authentic".

Dev's reluctance to take up acting raised the issue of his reluctance to join politics, but Dev believes "I can't change my personality for politics."

Dalmia soon shifted gears to urge Dev to speak about his relationship with wife Romi Bhatia, with the couple having tied the knot at a time when love marriages were a rarity in Indian society.

Dev revealed that Bhatia had no knowledge about cricket when the two first met through mutual friends in Mumbai. When Bhatia had come to see a cricket match for the first time, she was baffled at how a bowler's

Dev and Bhatia — yet to be engaged — were once travelling by car when Dev spotted an Amul advertisement hoarding that was based on him and promptly asked for a camera. When Bhatia asked him why he wanted the hoarding to be clicked, Dev cheekily replied that he wanted to show the picture to their children. The rest, as they say, is history!

delivery was called a "no ball" in spite of his having released the ball after a lengthy run up!

Dev and Bhatia — yet to be engaged — were once travelling by car when Dev spotted an Amul advertisement hoarding that was based on him and promptly asked for a camera. When Bhatia asked him why he wanted the hoarding to be clicked, Dev cheekily replied that he wanted to show the picture to their children. The rest, as they say, is history!

Dev and Bhatia have a daughter together, Amiya, and when asked by Dalmia to talk about the father-daughter equation, Dev described their relationship as something that he cherishes, citing today's generation of children as being far more comfortable in sharing their opinions.

Dev then went on to speak about the satisfaction he feels when he sees cricketers from small towns playing for India — fast bowler T. Natarajan being the latest example — something Dev, hailing from Haryana, pioneered during his era when the Indian team would be dominated by players from the big metropolises.

With hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, Dev is aware of how platforms like Twitter can make or break the lure of celebrity for young talents. On the whole, however, Dev told Dalmia that "technology, if it's taken in the right spirit, can be wonderful... otherwise it can be devastating."

The conversation wrapped up with Dalmia asking Dev to explain his life's mantra, which Dev centred on focus, attention, and passion. Highlighting the need

to enjoy one's work, Dev concluded by emphasising the need to live in the present instead of dwelling on the past or always contemplating the future.

## Rapid fire

**First crush:** Cricket

**First thing you notice about a person:** Hands and feet

**First quality that appeals to you in a woman:** Absence of pretentious behaviour

**What makes you happiest:** Good food, good friends, and golf

**Favourite song:** *Jeena yahan marna yahan* and *Koi lauta de mere beete huye din*

**Foremost passion:** Happiness within oneself

**Three people to have dinner with:** My family

**Does luck play an overpowering role:** It doesn't. One should not sit just back on the basis of luck

**Secret to your energy:** Passion for life

# Education as a Tool for Expanding Possibilities

Education is not simply a human right; it is also a social responsibility and an indispensable factor behind civilisational progress.

On December 3, 2018, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring January 24 as the International Day of Education, in celebration of the role of education in generating global peace and sustainable development.

According to UN estimates, some 258 million children and youth are yet to be schooled; 617 million children cannot read or do basic math; less than 40 percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete lower secondary school and some four million children and youth refugees lack access to basic educational facilities.

"We must do far more to advance Sustainable Development Goal 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," observed UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

The right to education is enshrined in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and as part of the Sustainable Development Agenda adopted in September 2015, the international community has resolved to make education possible for one and all by 2030.

To mark the third International Day of Education in 2021, the United Nations intends to echo the message of collaboration and international solidarity for the purpose of learning under the theme "Recover and Revitalise Education for the COVID-19 Generation".



This year's virtual celebrations include three main segments: learning heroes, innovations and financing, and will be organised in partnership with UNESCO New York Office, UNHQ, the Global Partnership for Education and the Centre of Interdisciplinary Studies (CRI).

Capturing the spirit of the International Day of Education, CRI and UNESCO have spearheaded a Learning Planet Festival to celebrate learning in all contexts and share innovations that fulfill the potential of every learner, irrespective of their circumstances.



In light of the global pandemic, education has undergone a paradigm shift, with the educational infrastructure in most countries moving entirely online. While the wonders of technology have ensured that students continue to receive training from their teachers while isolating at home, there is not, and cannot be, any substitute to the holistic learning experience provided by the physical environment of schools, colleges and universities.

The world has arrived at a crossroads today in terms of the future of education and learning. On the one hand, the challenge to provide basic educational resources to underprivileged children and youth has once again become steeper due to the systemic issues posed by the pandemic. On the other hand, the underlying problems with the traditional educational structure that relies on decades-old syllabi and rote-learning, and prioritises examinations over genuine enquiry, have also come to surface, demanding thinkers and policy makers to make a bold transition to newer ways of imparting and imbibing knowledge.

When Martin Luther King Jr remarked that the goal of true education involves "intelligence plus character", he understood the need for education to

According to UN estimates, some 258 million children and youth are yet to be schooled; 617 million children cannot read or do basic math; less than 40 percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa complete lower secondary school and some four million children and youth refugees lack access to basic educational facilities.

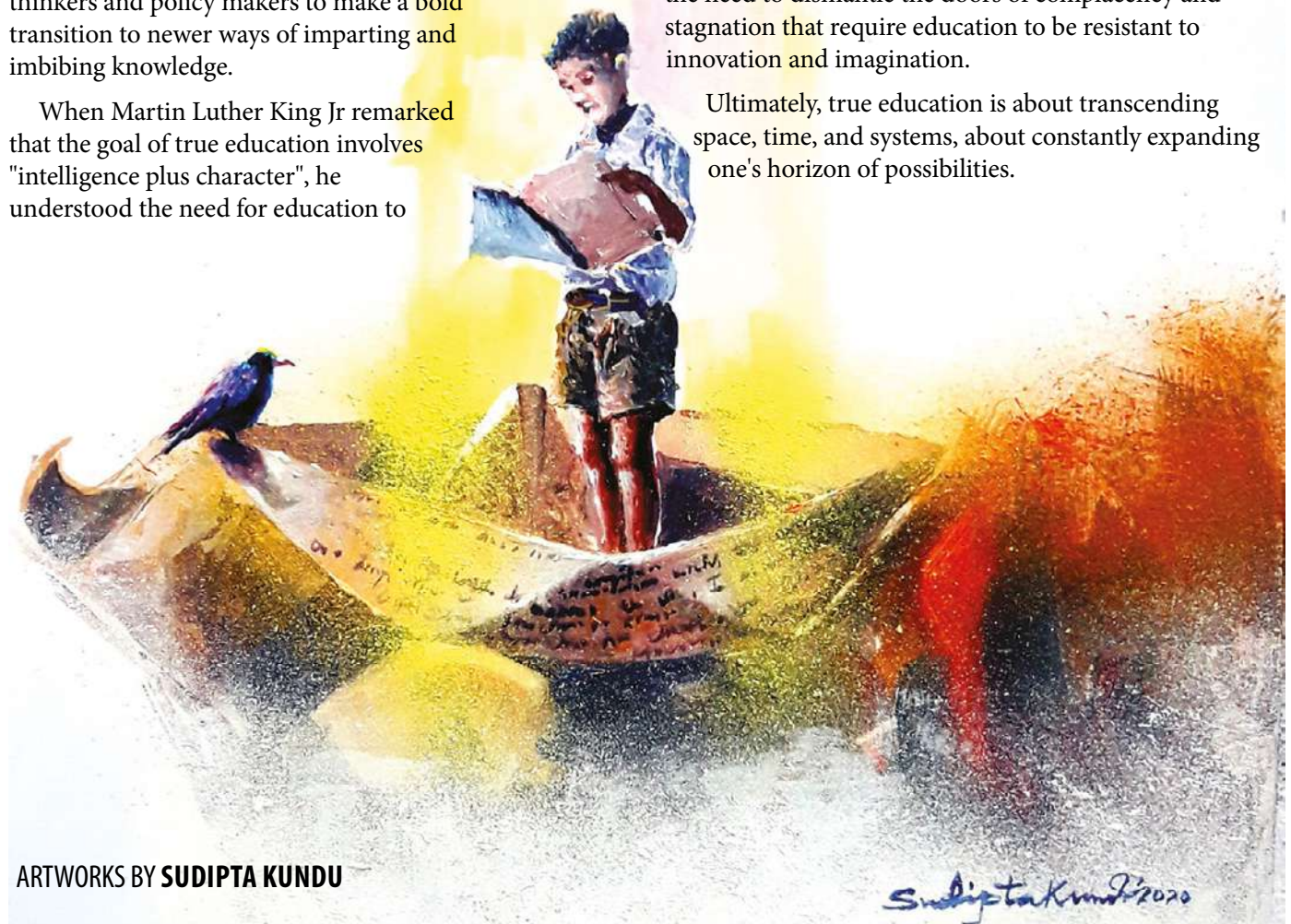
become a catalyst in social change, by not remaining complicit in the maintenance of the status quo.

As important as it is to spread educational networks to every nook and corner of the planet, it is equally imperative to ensure that the nature of education is such that it offers employability, encourages dialogue and discussion, and builds empathy among human beings for one another.

In India, an approximate 77.7 percent of the population can read and write today. But that does not necessarily mean that 77.7 percent of our population is educated, for the meaning of education is not restricted to articulation; it also involves the ability to assert oneself politically, culturally, and emotionally, something that educational institutions must offer greater emphasis on going forward.

Since the whole point of education, as expressed by legendary American journalist Sydney J. Harris, is to "turn mirrors into windows", it is important to encourage the need to dismantle the doors of complacency and stagnation that require education to be resistant to innovation and imagination.

Ultimately, true education is about transcending space, time, and systems, about constantly expanding one's horizon of possibilities.





# An e-Carnival for Christmas

Who says if you can't go to a Christmas carnival because of the pandemic that the carnival can't come to you?

**Education For All**, in association with Spagia, Oxford Bookstore and Red Panda, brought Christmas cheer to kids between the ages of 8 and 14 years all over India with a virtual Christmas Carnival that had storytelling sessions from three children's authors and a fun Christmas workshop.

The storytelling session was moderated by Red Panda publisher, Vidhi Bhargava, who introduced the authors Khyrunnisa A., Aparna Karthikeyan and Lakshmi Iyer.

Khyrunnisa kicked off the carnival with a story from her book, *The Crocodile Who Ate Butter Chicken for Breakfast and Other Stories*.

Aparna Karthikeyan, who is a dog mother, was up next and she talked about the dogs from her book, *Woof*, while sharing some fun facts about the dogs she loves. The kids aced the fun, impromptu quiz about dogs that Karthikeyan came up with.

US-based author Lakshmi Iyer then talked about her book on adoption *Why Is My Hair Curly* and put up an engaging presentation on Christmas traditions around the world. All the authors also shared their childhood Christmas memories.

The carnival came to a close with a Christmas workshop conducted by Bhargava, where she showed the children how to make Christmas ornaments with ice cream sticks to hang on their Christmas trees.



Aparna Karthikeyan



Khyrunnisa A.



Lakshmi Iyer



Vidhi Bhargava







# Warmth, Love and Care



**Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under its **Rahat** initiative, spread warmth this winter to thousands of people across the state through blanket distribution drives. One of them was at Sagar Island, organised in association with **Ananta Seva Foundation** for people living with disabilities. While making sure people were protected from the cold, the Foundation also ensured their safety by maintaining proper social distancing norms.





## IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Guests	Events
Dr Gajesingh Rajpurohit	Aakhar Pothi & Kitaab Rajasthan
Raja & Radha Reddy	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Shivshankar Shukla	Aakhar Chhattisgarh
Anant Vijay	Kalam Faridabad
Ashutosh Bhardwaj	Kalam Bilaspur & Raipur
Nakul Anand	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Rakhshanda Jalil	Kalam Nagpur
Manoj Tiwari	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Satya Vyas	Kalam Ranchi
Shubhendu Shekhar	Aakhar Bihar
Arjun Sengupta & Partha Mukherjee	Kitaab book launch
Sanjaya Baru	Kitaab book launch
Gayatri Rath and Paarul Chand	The Write Circle Jaipur
Meha Dixit	An Author's Afternoon Kolkata
Naveen Choudhary	Kalam Patna
Nishant Jain	Kalam Udaipur
Thakur Nahar Singh Jasol	Aakhar Jodhpur
Lucy Hawking	The Universe Writes
Anupam Kher	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Blanket distribution	Rahat
Tribute to Satyajit Ray	Aakhar special session



Anant Vijay



Anupam Kher



Arjun Sengupta



Ashutosh Bhardwaj



Dr Gajesingh  
Rajpurohit



Gayatri Rath



Lucy Hawking



Manoj Tiwari



Meha Dixit



Nahar Singh Jasol



Nakul Anand



Naveen Choudhary



Nishant Jain



Paarul Chand



Partha Mukherjee



Raja Radha  
Reddy



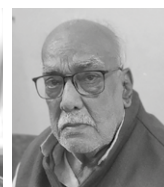
Rakhshanda Jalil



Sanjaya Baru



Satya Vyas



Shivshankar  
Shukla



Shubhendu  
Shekhar

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