



Prabha

प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

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Sharmila Tagore

A very special guest contributor and our **Ehsaas** Women open up about love in all its forms on the occasion of Valentine's Day, through some letters that have touched their hearts

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Prabha
खैतान



MANISHA JAIN
Communications & Branding Chief,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

Red Letter Day

Presenting to you our next edition of *Prabha*! In this edition, our **Ehsaas** Women and veteran actress Sharmila Tagore open up about love in all its forms on the occasion of Valentine's Day, through some letters that have touched their hearts.

Spreading awareness and empowerment through the path of literature has been one of the driving forces behind the activities of our Foundation. In keeping with the idea of reaching out to book lovers, the Foundation set up yet another Book Rack, in Bhubaneswar, last month. As the world carefully opens up, we were thrilled to host our events physically in multiple cities across the country. From polo matches to book launches, the Foundation had an eventful month. Last month, we also added another feather to our cap by starting **Aakhari** for Bengali literature in Kolkata and Santiniketan.

We have always appreciated your suggestions and participation. We look forward to more of your enthralling articles and mindful suggestions at newsletter@pkfoundation.org. Keep following us on social media to stay abreast of all our activities. Don't forget, you can always click on the red play button on our digital versions to view the sessions.

In the meantime, stay safe and stay healthy. Happy Reading!

Manisha Jain

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors. They do not reflect the opinions or views of the Foundation or its members.

[SNAPSHOT OF THE MONTH]



▲ The humble house sparrow, captured by **Ehsaas** Woman of Lucknow Deepa Mishra as part of her urban wildlife photo series. Read all about it on Page 70

Unlocking Diaries



▲ **Ehsaas** Woman of Ranchi Seema Singh and **Ehsaas** Woman of Chennai Deepika Goyal were spotted at a dinner hosted by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** on the sidelines of the Arth Festival in Kolkata

Happy Birthday

Prabha WISHES **EHSAAS** WOMEN BORN IN MARCH

2nd March



Sonakshi Kundra

12th March



Kaveri Lalchand

13th March



Praneet Bubber

13th March



Parveen Tuli

28th March



Pooja Agarwal

29th March



Mumal Bhandari

A Letter to Remember



“How wonderful it is to be able to write someone a letter! To feel like conveying your thoughts to a person, to sit at your desk and pick up a pen, to put your thoughts into words like this is truly marvelous.”

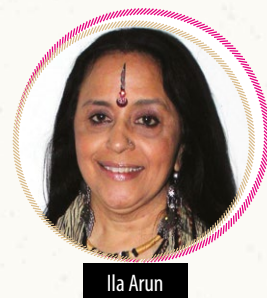
— Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*

In the day and age where connection and communication are a click of a button away, whether it is an Instagram story, a Facebook post, a WhatsApp text or even a short email, the handwritten letter has become even more precious. And what is more quintessential to love than a love letter?

But love is not just about romance, it is also about family, friends and even yourself. At a time when enforced distance has made us value family and friends, warm words and hugs, cherishing that love seems even more important.

So, on Valentine’s Day, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted an event where they asked some **Ehsaas** Women to share a letter that they have written, received or read that has touched their hearts.

And they responded with letters they have written to their loved ones, a friend they have lost, childhood love letters that have remained anonymous and letters that they have written to themselves. , Actress Sharmila Tagore and singer Ila Arun also read a letter each. While the former chose a letter by Zelda Fitzgerald, Ila Arun read one by Dharamvir Bharati.



Ila Arun



Sharmila Tagore

Between June 1930 and August 1931, after a series of mental health episodes had whittled away at her career, her marriage, and her overall well-being, Zelda Fitzgerald was a patient at Les Rives de Prangins, a clinic in Nyon, Switzerland, where she wasn't allowed visitors until her treatment had been established. The experience, as one could imagine, was tremendously isolating: once at the centre of a lively and glamorous scene, she now found herself utterly alone with her thoughts. Her husband, F. Scott Fitzgerald, sent short notes and flowers every other day. She wrote long letters in reply, tracing the contours of her mind, expressing both love for and frustration with Scott, and detailing, in luscious, iridescent prose, the nonevents of her days. Dear Scott, Dearest Zelda collects more than three hundred of the couple's letters to each other. Three of Zelda's letters from Les Rives de Prangins—carefully transcribed with an eye for accuracy, misspellings and all—appear below.

[Fall, 1930]

Goofy, my darling, hasn't it been a lovely day? I woke up this morning and the sun was lying like a birth-day parcel on my table so I opened it up and so many happy things went fluttering into the air: love to Doo-do and the remembered feel of our skins cool against each other in other mornings like a school-mistress.

And you 'phoned and said I had written something that pleased you and so I don't believe I've ever been so heavy with happiness. The moon slips into the mountains like a lost penny and the fields are black and pungent and I want you near so that I could touch you in the autumn stillness even a little bit like the last echo of summer.

The horizon lies over the road to Lausanne and the succulent fields like a guillotine and the moon bleeds over the water and you are not so far away that I can't smell your hair in the drying breeze. Darling—I love these velvet nights.

I've never been able to decide whether the night was a bitter enemy or a "grand patron"—or whether I love you most in the eternal classic half-lights where it blends with day or in the full religious fan-fare of mid-night or perhaps in the lux of noon. Anyway, I love you most and you 'phoned me just because you 'phoned me tonight—I walked on those telephone wires for two hours after holding your love like a parasol to balance me. My dear—

I'm so glad you finished your story—Please let me read it Friday. And I will be very sad if we have to have two rooms. Please.

Dear. Are you sort of feeling aimless, surprised, and looking rather reproachful that no melo-drama comes to pass when your work is over—as if you [had] ridden very hard with a message to save your army and found the enemy had decided not to attack—the way you sometimes feel—or are you just a darling little boy with a holiday on his hands in the middle of the week—the way you sometimes are—or are you organizing and dynamic and mending things—the way you sometimes are—

I love you—the way you always are.





Apra Kuchhal - Jaipur

जीती,

तुम्हारे और मेरे नसीबों में बहुत फर्क है।

तुम वह खुशनसीब इंसान हो, जिससे तुमने मोहब्बत की, उसने तुम्हारे एक इशारे पर सारी दुनिया वार दी।

पर मैं वह बदनसीब इंसान हूँ, जिसे मैंने मोहब्बत की, उसने मेरे लिए अपने घर का दरवाज़ा बंद कर दिया।

दुःखों ने अब मेरे दिल की उम्र बहुत बढ़ी कर दी।

अब मेरा दिल उम्मीद के किसी खिलौने के साथ नहीं खेल सकता।

हर तीसरे दिन पंजाब के किसी-न-किसी अखबार में मेरे मुम्बई में बिताए हुए दिनों का जिक्र होता है, बुरे से बुरे शब्दों में, पर मुझे उनसे कोई शिकवा नहीं है, क्योंकि उनकी समझ, मुझे समझ लेने के काबिल नहीं।

केवल दर्द इस बात का है कि मुझे उसने नहीं समझा, जिसने मुझे कभी कहा था, 'मुझे अपने सारे सवाल का जवाब बना लो।'

मुझे अगर किसी ने समझा है तो वो तुम्हारी मेज़ की दरज़ में पड़ी हुई रंगों की बेज़बान शीशियाँ हैं, जिनके बदन में रोज़ पोंछती हूँ, उन्हें दुलारती हूँ।

वो रंग मेरी आँखों में देखकर मुस्कुराते हैं, क्योंकि उन्होंने मेरी आँखों की नज़र का भेद पा लिया है।

उन्होंने समझ लिया है कि मुझे तुम्हारी क्रिएटिव पाँवर से ऐसी ही मोहब्बत है।

वो रंग तुम्हारे हाथों के स्पर्श के लिए तरसते थे और मेरी आँखें उन रंगों से उभरने वाली तस्वीरों के लिए।

वो रंग तुम्हारे हाथों का स्पर्श इसलिए मांगते थे, क्योंकि दे वांटेड टु जस्टिफ़ाई देयर एग्जिस्टेंस।

मैंने तुम्हारा साथ इसलिए चाहा था कि मुझे तुम्हारी कृतियों में अपने अस्तित्व के अर्थ मिलते थे। ये अर्थ मुझे अपनी कृतियों में भी मिलते थे, पर तुम्हारे साथ मिलकर अर्थ बड़े शक्तिशाली हो जाते थे।

तुम एक दिन अपनी मेज़ पर काम करने लगे थे कि तुमने हाथ में ब्रश पकड़ा और पास रखी हुई रंग की शीशी को खोला। मेरे माथे ने जाने तुमसे क्या कहा, तुमने हाथ में लिए हुए ब्रश पर थोड़ा सा रंग लगाकर मेरे माथे से छुआ दिया। न जाने वह मेरे माथे की कैसी खुदगर्ज मांग थी, आज मुझे उसकी सज़ा मिल रही है।

आदम ने जैसे गेहूँ का दाना या सेब खा लिया था, तो उसे बहिश्त से निकाल दिया गया था...

अमृता प्रीतम और इमरोज़ के खतों का सफरनामा



Garima Tiwari - Bilaspur

Dear Abhijeet,

Happy Valentine's Day.

आपके साथ विवाह बंधन में बंधना, मेरे जीवन के सबसे खूबसूरत पलों में से एक है। आपका हर पल मुझे अपने प्यार का एहसास कराना मेरे लिए आपसे दुबारा इश्क होने जैसा है। आप नहीं करते मेरी खूबसूरती की तारीफ़, आप नहीं बखान करते मेरी साड़ी के रंग की, उसकी सुंदरता की, पर बिना कुछ बोले भी आपकी नज़रें काफी कुछ कह जाती हैं और मैं कुछ इतराने सी लगती हूँ। आप जब मेरे तैयार होने के बाद यूँ नज़र भर जो देखते हैं, उस वक़्त अपनी सुंदरता पर मुझे कुछ अभिमान सा हो जाता है। जब आप मेरी बड़ी बिंदी का जिक्र करते हुए मुझे काजल लगाने की नसीहत देते हो तो यकीन मानो, मेरे लिए आपका कुछ नहीं बोलना भी बहुत कुछ कह जाता है।

आपका प्यार मेरे लिए पूस की ऐसी गुनगुनी धूप की तरह है, जो हर वक़्त मुझे गर्माहट का एहसास कराता है। आपको और आपकी बातों को याद करते हुए मैंने अपने अहसासों को इन शब्दों में पिरोया है।

अक्सर जब भी कभी खुद से आईने में नज़र मिलाती हूँ मैं, लेकिन आपसे नज़र मिलाकर खुशी से कमल सी खिल जाती हूँ मैं।

आप ही आप झलक जाते हैं हर जगह और हर पल ही, साथ रहते सालों गुजर गए पर लगता है कि जैसे यह बात हो कल की ही,

अपनी नज़रों से मुस्कुराते हुए कह जाते हैं सभी बातें,

जानती हूँ मैं आपके दिल में छिपी हुई वो सभी बातें,

मैं बेहद खुशकिस्मत हूँ जो मुझको जिंदगी में आप मिले हैं।

मेरे मन मंदिर के तालाब में जैसे कई कमल खिले हैं।

इस तरह होती हैं मेरी आपकी यादों से मेरी बातें।

निकालने आती हैं मुझे आपकी हर बात से बातें।

आपकी गरिमा





Deepa Mishra - Lucknow

Dearest Sunil,

Hope you are well!

It's been ages since I wrote to you, therefore really don't know how to begin and where to begin because there are so many memories that we have made, so many special moments that we have shared, in the last four decades. As Valentine's Day is approaching, I hope you find yourself surrounded by love and loved ones. To be honest, I hope that happens to you every day but maybe extra special on Valentine's Day!

You know that I am not very demonstrative about my feelings, but today let me tell you this, that the moment you came into my life, you were the love of my life, and still are, you are not only my baby brother but also my bestest friend, my confidant and my go-to person. You are someone who is never judgemental, you have the kindest and the biggest heart, you love unconditionally.

I had no idea that Valentine's Day would become such an event in my life, when I got my first ever Valentine's Day card. It was from you! I think if I remember correctly it was in my first year of graduation. At first I was surprised as it was so unexpected, but then it made me very happy. You see, the way Valentine's Day was marketed to me was that it was a couple's thing; and what with studying in a convent school throughout my life (if you remember I was so inspired by the sisters of my school that I wanted to become a nun and serve the community, and after reading the book *City Of Joy*, I wanted to go to Calcutta and join Nirmal Hriday. Mom nearly had a heart attack, those were the days) I didn't have any boyfriends unlike some of my friends. So, this day was never on my radar. I would go with them to Archie's Gallery (remember those?) and browse cards and laugh at the funny ones, but it never occurred to me to send them to people in my life who I love. You changed that for me.

That day I realised that I do have a person in my life I can send a Valentine's Day card to. It also showed me that love can have more than one meaning and it doesn't need a label. Love in any form is always love. Just like gold can take many forms — a ring, a necklace, but underneath it's still gold. Love in some strange way also grows when you express it to other beings. It doesn't matter how much, or how often. So having a day fully dedicated to loving more those whom you love is exactly the thing we need right now.

You remember Valentino? I will be celebrating his ninth birthday on Valentine's Day. He's getting old in dog years but he's still that little loving pup. I never tire of telling people that he was named Valentino because he was born on Valentine's Day and not because of the famous designer. Well that, and if you met him, you'll know the name fits him perfectly.

As we get ready to spend Valentine's Day under a lockdown, in many cases away from our loved ones, it's easy to get sad, but I will be counting my blessings. And on top of that list is having an awesome brother like you, who's been that one person in my life I can always count on. I'm sorry we don't get to spend a lot of time together, but that has only strengthened our bond. Thanks for being a part of my life and being on this roller-coaster journey with me. Having you on my side has definitely made the harder bends a little easier to navigate.

There are still so many things I would like to share with you. The memories are endless. Maybe I'll write another letter soon. So here's wishing an end to this lockdown soon and for us to spend some time together in person!

Love,

Didi





Shinjini Kulkarni - Noida

A love story...

He makes an eye contact,
Only to hesitate
Slides the tip over her buttery
smoothness,
Only to leave a deep blue mark
He draws over her curves encircling her
whole being,
Only to change her forever
He moves quickly driven by a hunger to
have her all,
Only to see her surrender herself
He loves her with all his might,
Only to leave the next morning
The Pen and Paper unite....
Only to forever blot the paper
Only to forever drain the pen.



Huma Khalil Mirza - Delhi

On the eve of a daughter's wedding

It's that day once again dear,
My thoughts drifting in the air
As I sit on the threshold of the door
Of your life's myriad contours.

I want to tell you, how I adore
Our walks on mountains and the shore
Enfolding you in my arms shrugging off this scene
I wonder at the miracles, few and far between.

You illuminate the interiors of my heart
Giggles and laughter that you impart
Throwing tantrums at the slightest excuse
Somehow you were easy, always ready to diffuse.

Weaving intricate patterns of memories now
I cling to each strand of thread your affection endows
Strange premonitions cloud my mind
Of your life's journey that you designed.

I am happy accompanying you down right here
For prayers in my soul, your concern endear
In the twist of wrinkles, with the passing of time
Accustomed we will be to this life's paradigm.

You embark upon this journey, as life does indicate
Labyrinths of perseverance, various arts of love and hate
To many corners of this vast world
My guidance, you inherit will be unfurled.

Let me tell you, as such I am quite secure
The choice you haven made is surely mature
My only concern for the hand you behold
Should be able to warm you up against the cold.

I feel like hugging you, this evening
Whisper in your ear, when no one's listening
My expressions today are beyond these easy smiles
My dreams for you will take you miles.

Twenty seven summers and winters have gone
Never has my affable self felt so forlorn
The mind glances through many recognitions, dim and faint
Thoughts of seclusion and connect... tears of restraint.

The picture of your childhood revives again
With hands up, my prayer ends in Amen
Farewell, for you are too dear for my possessing
As my heart fills up with unlimited blessing.

The thought of you not being around all the time
Can only be consoled, wherein your beatitude is prime
From now on, in waiting and anticipation will I roam
For the clamour of my bird returning home!



A few lines are in order on this coming Valentine's Day
Yes it's in February not in May
This year too be my Valentine,
Be in my embrace and me in thine.

For each other we have many battles fought
Never in an awkward moment we've been caught
What all stuff each other we've taught
Sublime love is priceless and can't be bought.

Mehra Anshu tis me who is blessed,
Without any *mahurat* you and me wed.
Do you remember the waterbed?
The colour of love, sex, passion and blood is red.

Have given your dad's watch for repair
Remember we have to get an Omega pair
Walk hand in hand and times we can compare
What you and I have is rarest of rare.

I love this feeling inside
This moving ocean of emotion and its tides
Hope you've enjoyed the ride
In you my dear I can confide.

My port of call, my safety net,
Every time I fall you hold me without me breaking my neck
Thank you Love for choosing me as thine
Let's walk together and everything will be fine.

Letter to Anshu Mehra from her husband



"O my Luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.
So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!

And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
Though it were ten thousand mile."



*I got this anonymous note when I was in Class X
and I'm still looking for the person who wrote it!*



Anshu Mehra - Meerut



Anvita Pradhan - Patna

More than a catbird hates a cat,
Or a criminal hates a clue,
Or the Axis hates the United States,
That's how much I love you.

I love you more than a duck can swim,
And more than a grapefruit squirts,
I love you more than a gin rummy is a bore,
And more than a toothache hurts.

As a shipwrecked sailor hates the sea,
Or a juggler hates a shove,
As a hostess detests unexpected guests,
That's how much you I love.

I love you more than a wasp can sting,
And more than the subway jerks,
I love you as much as a beggar needs a crutch,
And more than a hangnail irks.

I swear to you by the stars above,
And below, if such there be,
As the High Court loathes perjurious oaths,
That's how you're loved by me

To My Valentine by Ogden Nash (1941)



Archana Dalmia - Delhi





Jasmeet Nayyar - Amritsar

Hello,

How did this happen?

How come we know we are bonded for eternity? I thought such lines were rubbish, fantasies and only written to please readers.

It's timeless now. This journey has changed my being. I am an educated, intelligent, grounded person with a square head screwed well into my shoulders and living a 'so called' good life, good home, career and family and all the other blah blah....

In my memory, there is that vision, when I first met you. Then came the useless word exchanges and then, our eyes met.

When we encountered each other, I started suffering disturbances in my system. My energies went turbulent. I was confused, irritated and lost, as my totally satisfactory life was now on a seesaw. It took me months trying to tell myself, advise myself to be sane.

Suddenly the meaning of sane was different. It's strange that being an avid reader, all the literature that came my way at that point in time was Dan Brown and Paulo Coelho!! Why?!

What does it mean to be soulmates? I was suddenly deciphering 'GOLDEN BODY RATIOS' and 'FIBONACCI NUMBERS' !!

Our long talks over coffee, where I was the listener mostly, do you recall? How we discovered our falls in childhood, bones breaking in limbs were at the same places in the body at similar ages as kids. We topped exams and sports and accolades, though in very different streams drew parallels!

We had the same Golden Body Proportions and our Fibonacci Numbers matched! We had parallels to draw in every aspect, even problem solving and thought chains..... OMG !

Love doesn't need to be discussed, it has its own voice and speaks for itself.

When two such people meet and encounter each other, the past and the future becomes unimportant. There is only the moment that evokes love and seeks out its twin soul.

"We both know now, souls recognise each other beyond the five senses through intuition and a balance of Energies."

Our Energies on Yin and Yang, it's one in US. This needed no further affirmations.

With that shift in my being, I became silent, peaceful and effective at work. I was meeting a new "ME" every day and you talked of the same symptoms in your own expression which I found was so much 'Martian'.

I have written a few lines. They are for your bookmark and the lines are for ME.

Rainbows and Moonlight

Who doesn't need them?

Not for a moment did I ask for a promise

But in rain and moonless night I waited for your call.

Millions of times, I've come face to face with you — on another planet.

The core of your being radiating a divine light

Which only my inner sense could perceive

I'm covered in Rosysweat of anticipation and excitement —

Year after year my confidence in you secretly grew

Today,

Without conditions

Without hesitations

My entire past, present and future, my complete incompleteness

My inner conflict

Yes and No.

I stand by your side

To dedicate to you.





Nidhi Garg - Bhubaneswar

Dearest Nidhi,

As an adolescent kid when I had first learnt of Lord Krishna and Radha being mere best friends I found myself loitering around a certain disbelief. And that feeling of disbelief stayed with me up until the freshest of my memories. It hung around with me until you came into my life and in the most elegant manner forced it out of me.

To sit back and type-in a book for you is probably the most satisfying feeling of my life. 'The Incredible Gem' is the tiniest of tributes to how much you mean to me in my life. As I typed in the last chapter of your book I realised that even sixty thousand words aren't enough to express the space that you hold in my heart.

It's blissful to think back at how our friendship remains unbelievably fresh even after more than four years of it. That's nothing less than a boon. We have seen days that should best remain unexpressed, as there aren't words that are made to aptly describe how special you are to me.

If 'I trust you' was as mainstream as 'I love you' then I would have tirelessly recited it to you, over and over again. I can bet my life on it.

Your presence in my life in itself makes my life worthwhile. Just one 'hello' over a call from you holds the capacity to make one entire day of mine. No no no, I am not exaggerating. That's exactly how much your presence matters to me.

You are what a 'perfect friend' defines itself to be. You are what a 'best friend' truly aspires to be. To have you in my life means to be in the arms of a 'dream turned true'. The more I think of you the more I feel determined to never let you go. Nope, I don't as well want to hold on to you. I simply intend to 'walk with you'. At least until I last breathe, if not as a forever thing.

From the little things that you do for me to the most life-changing impact that you have on me, makes me feel indebted to you. Your most silent favour to the loudest of cheer, each bit of it is precious to me. The way you pluck time out for me especially when I feel the lowest at heart, affirms to me that my life if not more is 'incomplete' without you. You, unquestionably 'Complete' me.

To demean the bond that we share by stitching it with a few words is probably a bundled criminal offence. Our friendship is without an iota of doubt beyond 'world's most beautiful bouquet of words'.

I take pride in even thinking about you. It's not just "sometime" thing, it's infact a face of perpetuity for me. I still am trying to sink in the fact that you have accepted to befriend me at some point in time of your life. I pity your stars sometimes for making you do so and thank mine for being the kindest to me.

Some things in life are inexpressible and that's exactly how our friendship is. You to me, I to you don't just mean a lot to each other. We in fact mean just about a world to each other. Miss Nidhi Garg, you hold the most special 'space of friend' in my heart. You, Miss Garg, are the rarest gem of my life.

Before I sign off and let the most special friend of mine read HER book, I have a little something for You,

"Mehek dosti ki kam nahin hoti,

Dosti zindegi se kam nahin hoti,

Agar mil jaye aap jaisa dost,

Toh zindegi jannat se kam nahin hoti".

I was, I am and I will always be in Awe of you. I Trust You

I Adore You

I most certainly do Love You.

Please never let go of me, ever. I will be broken for life. You, Dr Nidhi Garg, are indeed my Most Incredible Gem.





Parveen Tuli - Nagpur

To my Valentine, Parveen

I, my love, have been there all along the time. Before and ever since everyone came. When people decided, debated, defined for your name, your traits, what you are good at, what you are bad at, how you should be in the world? What makes you more loved and what makes you less loved and a million more.

Our love affair started from day one, the giggles, innocence, the wonderment, the joy, the sun, the moon and the star, we experienced everything together.

Then gradually the game of hide-and-seek began. The hiding came as you started being like everyone else and the seeking came from finding that what you suppressed to have all that.

I kept showing you, calling you, sometimes subtly sometimes intensely. You were too busy to pay attention as if we were in a race of life.

The more the world sold you concepts, forms, structures, utopian idols, the lesser I became important. You ran through everything, sometimes after an image, after the tags, after a concept, after a relationship to have the happiness that you thought it will give you and yet it did, but was it momentary, I wonder!!

Was it always dependent upon someone else's validation and choice?

Then came the turning point when you slowed down cause the pain and the gain of having it all disillusioned you. The pain, hurt and the cancerous spaces became a blessing in disguise to have the time and the presence of our long-distance love affair.

I was always there and am always here, yet you started sensing me more now.

We became more intimate, with the bruises, the good, the bad and the ugly, the senses, laughter, the lightness and the simplicity and wonderment of life.

Ahhhh!!!! What a relief to have you back as if I have been waiting for this all this time.

The unlearning, un-conditioning, decluttering, undoing started.

This time the seeking was nothing outside of us, this time the play is like an adventure where the risks and the rewards are more celebrated, nothing is rejected, not even judgements. The grace of embracing all of life as it is and playing it to make it better became a game of conscious choice.

Now I see our family growing as we include more sunsets, more trees, more animals, more music, more poems, more reading, more planting, more kids, more people, more laughter, more joy and its adding more, more and more.....

Thank you for choosing me. With you Hedonism is a way of living .

Love you,

Yours truly

Yourself





Priyanka Kothari - Nagpur

Dear Didi,

After thinking a lot about what gift I should give on your 36th b'day, I couldn't get a better idea than writing a letter on your b'day. Writing a letter will retrieve all our memories. I used to write letters when you were in college, and used to write back with so much love, correcting my grammar. It has been about 10 years, we have stopped writing letters, but it is the best way to express my gratitude for you.

From the day I came into this world, you took care of me from the hospital till I reached home, you dressed me, you combed my hair, you liked making fountain-wali "pony", you made me learn spellings, poems etc, and guided me all through life. After you got married, you never made me feel that you went away, rather you would call me on winter holidays, during Christmas, and take me to the mall to meet Santa Claus. Then time passed, you told me about all the biological changes I am or I will go through. You were there at every step, every part of my life.

After all the scolding to draw lines and write on white paper, I am still lazy doing it. You also tried to improve my handwriting, make me write cursive, told me to hold a pencil from the end, I tried, but I was unable to write, and still continue to hold a pen near the nib. Now, I think, I should have followed your instructions.

Even though I spread out and slept, you allowed me to sleep when Hridyansh was in your tummy. Then also you taught me during half yearly and said "*samajh ke padho, ratta mat maro*", "*naak se mat bolo*". I remember very few. You played treasure hunt with me, on my 10th b'day.

Whatever be the circumstances, you always made me feel happy and had many memorable moments with me.

When Tiara was born, I stayed with you in the hospital during morning shift. You had faith that I will take care of Tiara very well, when you sleep. Thank You. And because of you, Tiara and Hridyansh are very close to me, I miss them a lot.

During my important phase, when I had to choose my career, you were there and guided me a lot, you told me about IIM Indore and different fields. Again, a big thank you.

You are very busy with household chores, teaching kids, yet you make time to talk to me and help me whenever I need you.

Now, what to write, I am emotional, lost in memories and thinking will I ever match up to your love, care-giving nature. You also made me part of the HK trip, which was your family trip. As I cannot find a perfect gift for you, because you deserve everything and I promise, I would give a real Gucci bag to you.

From sending b'day cards to each other on every b'day, talking every day over cordless to cellphones, a lot of things have changed but what has not changed is our 'love', sister-sister bond.

You bought me all the best dresses, and gave me your dresses and footwear happily. No one does today. As I see the world now, I feel blessed I am younger and you became my elder sister, because everyone is busy in their own lives but you care about me also, like you care about Hridyansh and Tiara, like your daughter.

I think you will receive this letter late! But I wish you "Happy Birthday" and whatever you touch might come to your closet.

I have doodled something for you

From
Sonu, Mona





Shweta Aggarwal - Faridabad

A Warm Hello to the most vivacious one, so worth knowing,
Dear Shweta,

It's the first ever love letter I am writing to someone. The words come to you straight from my heart to yours.
Who knows you better than me?

Over the years, I saw a toddler, a child, an adolescent, a woman, a wife, a mother and, most importantly, a woman.

I have seen you growing and evolving. You are whatever you are largely by the dint of your own effort, long educational process and your obsession with the eternal learning curve. Your psychological training and experience has given you a very holistic view of human behaviour.... You can see deeper into the psyche of people, but for me you are always a simple girl struggling with the dos and don'ts of life. Your simplicity is what I admire and it seems to be part of your DNA.

I am experiencing a cascading torrential tsunami of thoughts and words while writing this letter to you. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote and I quote: "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways...."

You are always a beautiful, elusive mystery, charming everyone with your natural self, yet leaving them mystified and yearning for more. Revealing you in this letter will only result in the extraordinary consummation of an amazing relationship that is just going to take off! Shweta, the world knows you as a true friend, a keen businesswoman, a caring and nurturing mother and a doting wife. Together, these facets of you create a unique essence much like a rare, exotic perfume suffused with strong magical properties.

Believe me when I tell you, you are one of a kind... inimitable, invigorating and irreplaceable.

As I sit penning these lines, I am wondering and feeling amazed at how much I can keep writing about you. Who would have ever known that shy, simple girl would transform into a strong young lady and then an empowered woman ready to face the world and its challenges with a smile?

Challenges never fazed you for long. I have seen you crying bitterly on your failures and then getting up even stronger, ready for the next challenge. Like a phoenix you rise from your own ashes, and it was with pride that I watched you, hurting for you, cheering for you, and loving you more and more each day.

Among your myriad qualities, the art of conveying a lot without really saying much is the one that stands out, making you so special. You are always so disarming, so naturally spontaneous and always, so very comfortable in your own world. Yes, I know you failed at times. And yes, I remember your short temper too. Despite all, you deserve your share of happiness, success and fulfillment in life.

Dear Shweta, a piece of advice; do take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Then smile, please. You will realise your power, dear. You are the one who has made this linguistic tsunami happen, opening the floodgates, encouraging and inspiring yourself to give your very best each day.

Remember, I am in you, as you are in me. I love you as no one has and no one ever could. I am and will always be there, in the shine of your eyes, the smile playing on your lips, in the warmth of your handshake and the strength in your will.

I am you, Shweta.

Till we meet again, take care of yourself and love yourself.





Vedula Ramalakshmi - Bhubaneswar

मेरा पहला प्यार,

यादों के धुँधलके से निकल कर वे पल एक एहसास की तरह घेर लेते हैं। वो पल जब पहली बार तुमने मुझे छुआ था। उस स्पर्श के कोमल एहसास से अब भी पुलकित हो जाती हूँ। उस स्पर्श में जैसे अमृत था और मैं पूरी तरह से उस अमृत में सराबोर हो रही थी। तुम्हारी गोद में मेरा सिर था और तुम्हारी स्नेहिल हथेली मेरे सिर पर। तुम्हारी हथेली के पारस परस से मैं सोना सोना हो रही थी। मैं मुस्कुरा उठी। अब तक सब कुछ बस एहसास मात्र था कि अचानक तुमने मेरे माथे को चूम लिया और उस गरमाहट से मैं चौंक उठी। मैंने धीरे से अपनी आंखें खोली और देखा तुम्हारी आंखें भरी हुई थी, जैसे अब छलकना ही चाहती हों। पानी से भरी तुम्हारी उन आंखों में मैंने अपना प्रतिबिंब देखा। आश्चर्य!!! वहां तो बस मैं ही मैं थी। इतना समर्पण कैसे संभव है? मैं खिलखिला कर हंस पड़ी। बस अब क्या था मेरे हंसते ही तुम्हारी आंखों से पानी झर झर कर मुझे भिगो गया, और जैसे मेरी सारी थकान मिट गई। विश्वास करो, तुम्हारी आंखों में अपने आपको देखते ही मुझे तुमसे प्यार हो गया। मेरा पहला प्यार। उस पहले प्यार का अनुभव मेरे लिए नया था और तुम्हारे लिए भी।

मेरा वो पहला प्यार तुम हो मेरी अम्मा। मात्र 17 वर्ष की छोटी सी उम्र में तुमने सृजन का सुख पाया, और मुझे मिली मेरी अम्मा। हम जानते हैं कि पेड़ से कटकर डाल सूख जाती है। पर तुम से कटकर भी मैं जी गई। तुमने अपने अमृत हाथों से मुझे सींचकर मुझमें संजीवनी भर दी। पल-पल जोड़-जोड़कर मेरा व्यक्तित्व तुम गढ़ने लगी। अपने बालपन से अभी तुम निकली भी नहीं और मुझे सम्हालने लगी। मेरी पहली गुरु मेरे साथ बढ़ने लगी। मेरी हर उद्वेगता को अपने आंचल में छुपा लिया तुमने। इतना ही नहीं तीन अबोध, अनगढ़ प्राणियों को सम्हालते सहेजते तुमने जीवन के बड़े-बड़े पाठ खुद भी पढ़े और हमें भी पढ़ाया। मौन, नीरव और कभी-कभी कोलाहल में अदृश्य रहकर तुमने हमें प्यार करना सिखाया। मैं तुम्हारी लाल चूड़ियों की खन-खन में जीवन के नए अर्थ खोजने लगी। घर में किसी ने भी तुम्हारी पदचाप तक नहीं सुनी होगी, पर तुम पूरे घर में छा जाती, चुपचाप शांत नीरव। पानी की तरह सरल, तरल, जीवन दायिनी और अमृतमयी मेरी अम्मा तुम कितने ही रिश्ते में ढलती रही, रूप बदलती रही, पर अपनी ममता को तुमने कभी नहीं छोड़ा और ना ही खोया।

वर्षों बाद फिर मुझे प्रेम हुआ, जब मैं 24 वर्ष की थी। मैं तुम्हारी जगह थी। अब सृजन की बारी मेरी थी। मैं शरत चंद्रिका से नहा कर शीतल हो रही थी। उन सारे अनुभवों का मैं भी अनुभव कर रही थी, और तब समझ में आया कि अम्मा कितनी विशाल, विराट, भव्य और अमृतमयी होती है। अम्मा का कोई रूप नहीं होता, इसीलिये तो वो सबसे सुंदर होती है। तुम मेरा प्यार हो, मेरा आदर्श हो। इस जीवन के लिए बहुत-बहुत धन्यवाद अम्मा।

“माँ”

“जिसके वक्ष पर मानवता पोषित होती है,

तथा, जिसकी गोद में सभ्यतायें झूलती हैं।”

तुम्हारी

रामू





Neelima Dalmia Adhar - Delhi

Hello my beautiful friends

Kaii saal pehle ek khat likha
Jo na kisi ko bheja na kisi nay padha
Aaj ke is ishq ke mahaul main

Sochti hoon

Sar-e-sham thahri hui zameen,
aasman hai jhuka hua
Isi mord par mere waaste
woh charaag le kar khada na ho

Presenting to you my ode to love

Dearest One!

There's fragrance in the air
There's a blue sky above
The birds chirp wildly
Are they heady on love?

The days are crisp
And the nights fly fast
Both hunger and sleep
Are things of the past

The moon shines brighter
Like a blossoming rose

There's no more darkness
No tears no woes

These are the days
For the world to heed
The song of all lovers
Allow them to breathe

It's the season of love
When two souls begin
To merge into one
Their bodies and skin

Their hearts sing aloud
Some even pinned on sleeves
And Cupid plays darts
There's no cause to grieve

But this month of love
Shall pass like a dream
It'll end without warning
You'll wake up downstream

For love is ephemeral
Love is divine
It won't last forever
But we'll survive — give it time.

Yours forever

February 1990



Dimple Trivedi - Lucknow

इस पर एक शेर कि ...

“मुझे तुमसे इश्क, इश्क जैसा है!!

सर्द रातों में गुनगुना सा,

गर्मियों की दोपहर में सावन की घटा सा!!

इश्क जो दिल की तासीर सा,

इश्क जो कसैले दिन में गुड़ सा

इश्क जो रूठी ऋतु में बसंत सा!!

मुझे तुमसे इश्क, इश्क जैसा ही है

इश्क वो चाय जो ठंडी होने पे भी चुस्की में भाए,

इश्क वो कॉफी जो अकेले होने पे भी साथ निभाए!!

मुझे तुमसे इश्क, इश्क जैसा ही है

सच!! हूँ बूँ हूँ इश्क ही है।”



Shraddhaa Murdia - Udaipur

My Dearest Allie,

I couldn't sleep last night because I know that it's over between us. I'm not bitter anymore, because I know that what we had was real. And if in some distant place in the future we see each other in our new lives, I'll smile at you with joy and remember how we spent a summer beneath the trees ; learning from each other and growing in love. The best love is the kind that awakens the soul and makes us reach for more, that plants a fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds. And that's what you've given to me. That's what I'd hoped to give to you forever. I Love You. I'll be seeing you.

Noah





Sangeeta Datta - London

Dear Sraboni,

You are my oldest friend, my childhood buddy, we have known each other since birth. We have learnt to walk together, to fall and steady ourselves, played in the same park, gone to the same school. We have marvelled at the beauty of this earth, watched a caterpillar turn into a butterfly, grown mustard seeds as they sprang into little green sprouts. We went to playschool and learnt nursery rhymes and songs together. Our homes were extended families and together we loved the world as we grew.

Life was hard on you dear friend, just when you had a beautiful family with two little girls, your husband was snatched away. But you were ever the fighter, with dignity and grit you raised your kids singlehanded. You climbed the ladder as a bank officer, expanding your world with concern and care for your employees and for the clients.

When all our school friends got reconnected in a magical way on WhatsApp you were the one who kept in touch with everyone individually.

We knew we were just a phone call away from each other, discussed what we were reading or watching, shared snatches of poetry and songs which moved us. Through the difficult pandemic year when you spent most of your time at home, you thoughtfully enquired about everyone, counselling and inspiring friends. You were so good at sewing and knitting and that eye for detailed perfection went into the deep nurturing of friendships.

Suddenly one day in January you decided to give up the fight and rest forever. And I lost a bit of my life, my link to childhood memories, my sounding board and critic.

We take this word 'friendship' so much for granted but you really gave it the respect it demands. You loved, you cared, you nurtured with no expectations.

They say a true friend is an angel in your life. On this Valentine's, I am writing this unusual letter, extending the traditional and narrow meaning of the term, about my love for a true friend, with whom I shared thoughts and ideas, worries and fears, laughter and tears.

Sending lots of love and hugs and see you sometime on the other side, dear friend.

Letter to my friend who I lost a month ago.





Match in progress

An Afternoon of Equestrian Elegance



With a bright sun shining over the Rajasthan Polo Club on a late February afternoon, the **Ehsaas Women of Prabha Khaitan Foundation** came together to organise the second edition of the Diya Kumari Ladies Polo Exhibition Match.

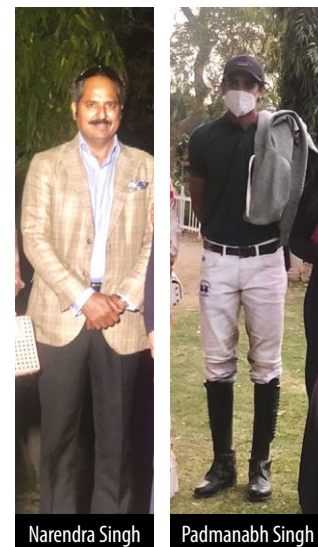
A total of three teams — Team USPA, Team Enrich and Team PDKF — competed at the event presented by the Princess Diya Kumari Foundation (PDKF). The occasion was graced by erstwhile member of royal family Gauravi Kumari as chief guest.

The atmosphere was electrifying, with the sizable crowd cheering on the players at every turn, their applause blending with gallop of horses to create an infectious energy. In a contest that ebbed and flowed with the momentum swinging among the teams, the eventual result produced an outcome that very few would have foreseen. After a remarkable display of feminine power, grit and fighting





Gauravi Kumari with the women of PDKF



Narendra Singh

Padmanabh Singh



Apra Kuchhal



Shazia Ilmi



Rishi Mattu

Vivek Bali

spirit, along with exceptional equestrian elegance, the match ended in a tie!

Two teams — Team USPA and Team PDKF — were declared the joint winners. There were smiles all around as the victors were presented with the awards at the prize distribution ceremony.

The polo match was followed by a convivial sundowner party where the players as well as the who's who of Jaipur mingled and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. The evening became extra special because of the lilting music of Shubhalaxmi, a saxophonist from Mangalore, whose mellifluous performance ensnared all present, including **Ehsaas** Women like Shazia Ilmi, Sunita Shekhawat, Apra Kuchhal and Kulsum Malik, among others. Among the men in attendance were Rishi Mattu, Chirag Parekh and Narendra Singh.

The **Ehsaas** Women have always endeavoured to expand the horizon of possibilities for women. It is no secret that until very recently sporting events like polo would be an entirely masculine domain, with hardly any female participants



Award presented to Abhimanyu and Eva



Preeti Mehta, Sushma Sethia, Sunita Shekhawat, Kulsum Malik

around. Slowly but surely, through events like the Diya Kumari Ladies Polo Exhibition Match, the perception of polo as a male bastion is beginning to change. More and more women are being encouraged to sit atop a horse and blaze through the fields, proving that they are no less when it comes to strength or speed.

While the next edition of this special polo contest promises to be even grander, with a wider pool of participation, the **Ehsaas Women** shall carry on with their exemplary work in the meantime, trying their level best to secure parity of representation between the sexes across sectors.



Award presented to the upcoming players



Vishal Mathur and Narendra Singh

Shubhalaxmi



Spectators





Amy Singh

Poetry for Peace

The fact that poetry can transcend boundaries needs little reiteration. But what is increasingly overlooked in today's hyper-materialistic society is the role of poetry in reconciling boundaries, in soothing hostilities across geographical and cultural borders and in acting as a messenger of peace in times of political turmoil.

Amy Singh, young poet and activist, has used the power of words to lead by example and advocate for peace between India and Pakistan. Singh was the special guest at the latest edition of **Aakhar**, which brings together authors from different languages and states across India in order to promote regional literature. Following its launch in 2019, when its inaugural guest was the poet and Padma Shri recipient Surjit Patar, **Aakhar** has gone from strength to strength in its mission to celebrate the diversity of India's literary landscape.

Joining the session virtually, Singh was in conversation with Gurupratap Khairah, an academician and writer. Singh opened the discussion by talking about coming into the limelight due to her unique and much-acclaimed initiative called *Dak to Lahore*, where she wrote a series of letters addressed to the General Post Office, Lahore. This was done as part of a peace gesture that encouraged more amicable relations between India and Pakistan.

The trigger for *Dak to Lahore* had come about when a popular eatery in Chandigarh had changed its name from Lahori Dhaba to Lucknawi Dhaba amidst tensions between India and Pakistan in December 2016. "This move made me think about the reason and emotions

behind such hostility when most of our generation does not even know people from across the border," explained Singh. After Singh had written the letters addressed to the General Post Office, Lahore, she uploaded the same on social media, where it went viral and became a movement, with people from both countries joining in.

In her subsequent attempt to use poetry as a liberating tool, Singh has been trying to organise poetry reading sessions at several public spaces in Chandigarh, including Sector 17 plaza. The idea here is to take poetry out of books and rooms and make it more accessible to the masses, converting it into an emotional and intellectual vehicle.

Having penned her first poem at the age of six, Singh has written prolifically over the years, often taking suggestions from her mother and grandmother along the way. As someone who believes that poetry can be a force for social change, Singh is not intimidated when it comes to potential inhibitions imposed on her artistic licence. "I never cared much for criticism and will continue to write

fearlessly," she said.

The session drew to a close with Singh reciting four of her original compositions, whose combination of power and poise produced a warm response from the audience.

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Chronicles of Belonging and Loss



Deepa Mehta

For enthusiasts of cerebral cinema, which artistically blends storytelling with social commentary, Deepa Mehta is a known name and face. With over four decades as a writer, director and producer, she has time and again opted to challenge cultural stereotypes with her narratives. Her films have been equally hailed for their daring and harassed for their boldness, but she has been uncompromising in her stance as an honest storyteller.

The *Fire* filmmaker recently joined a virtual chat with **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, Archana Dalmia, zooming the lens in on her own life and experiences. Priyanshi Patel, Ehsaas Woman of Ahmedabad, flagged off the **Ek Mulakat Vishesh** session, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, with an introductory tribute to Mehta

Going back to where it all started, Mehta recalled the birth of her “passion for cinema” at age six. “My father owned a movie hall and film distribution



Archana Dalmia

company in Amritsar, Punjab. After school, when we had to go and pick up dad... we were shoved into the movie theatre to wait for him,” she reminisced. That’s where she saw the film *Mamta*, “about 80 times in little bits and fell in love with it.”

She remembered asking her father how it all happened. “He took me to the projection room. He showed me what the film was like, he taught me how the film was threaded into the projector. Then we

walked down the aisle and he made me feel the screen, which was a piece of cloth, and I thought the whole thing was magical!” she revealed. “I couldn’t believe that something that I couldn’t smell or touch — the characters — could evoke such emotions in me.... I thought to myself that I really want to do this...” she added.

Speaking about her artistic inspirations, Mehta recalled Raj Kapoor being her earliest. “Early on, I thought Raj Kapoor was amazing. I saw *Shree 420* about 20 times.... Later on, I got exposed to Bengali cinema and fell absolutely in love with two filmmakers — Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. Ray became my hero and to this day I think *Charulata* is a film that always inspires me when I make my films about women,” she said.

As for noteworthy contemporary filmmakers, she named Anubhav Sinha, Anurag Kashyap, Vikram Motwane and Anvita Dutt’s works.

Mehta also opened up to Dalmia about her long-time NRI status. “I went (to Canada) because I got married to a Canadian who I met in Delhi. I was young, about 21. I thought I’d go there and hang around, and if it was a bore I’d come back. The arrogance of youth makes you think that you can do something, but before you know it you are married and you have a kid and a divorce and custody battles and then you can’t leave. So, I was a reluctant Canadian and for the longest time, I missed what I called home, which was India,” she shared.

However, her view of home changed with the controversy and debacle surrounding her film, *Water*. “It was a terrible time.... We had to shut down the film.... I was hounded.... I remember being surrounded by bodyguards.... I remember finally sitting on a flight back to Toronto, putting on my seat belt and dramatically bursting into tears because I felt that I was going home. Then, Canada became my home. I realised home is defined by safety.... If I don’t feel safe in India, then it is not home.”

She summed up her citizenship situation with a succinct — “If India gives me her stories... Canada gives me the freedom to express them. So, I am a strange kind of NRI.” She also added, “Sometimes, I wish I hadn’t moved to Canada. Sometimes, I wish I didn’t love India as much as I do. Because I care so much for both countries it becomes difficult.”

On the topic of nations close to her heart, Mehta briefly spoke about Sri Lanka. “I have a special connection with Sri Lanka because *Water* was not allowed to be made in India.... So, my love for Sri Lanka came because India didn’t love what I wanted to do,” she said. Her latest film, *Funny Boy*, based on a coming-of-age novel by Shyam Selvadurai, is set in Colombo.

Mehta also touched upon the changing trends in the world of entertainment. “Streaming has completely changed the way we view films. Will we ever go back into theatres? I hope so. Because for me it is like going into a sacred space to see a cinema when you are not disturbed by anything. Now, we sit at home and see a movie. Then, a phone call comes. I put it on pause, take the call and come back to it, but I have lost something. That’s a tragedy,” she said.

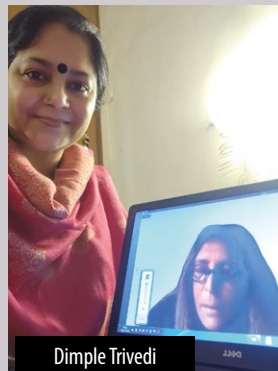
But there is one thing Mehta is sure of even in these changing times. “Ten years from now who knows (what will happen). But I know it (films) will take another form.... A desire to create, as human beings, has lasted since the *Natya Sastras*. The need for drama — for something that pulls us out of ourselves but also makes us think about where we are and what we are — is essential to us human beings,” she explained.

During the hour-long chat, Mehta also spoke about working with Oscar-winning composers A.R. Rahman and Howard Shore, “the powerful and destructive tool” that is social media today and her upcoming supernatural thriller, *Tarot*.

Wrapping up the session with a rapid-fire round, Dalmia asked Mehta both cheeky and thought-provoking questions on first crushes, happiest moments, biggest fears, coveted wardrobes, dinner guests, destiny and more.

The chat ended on a nostalgic note, with Mehta reiterating her love for films, especially Vittorio De Sica’s *Bicycle Thieves*. She spoke about how, even today, she relates to the loss she saw in the film all those years ago at Max Mueller Bhavan in New Delhi. “The philosophy of that film is something that I have imbibed or tried to recreate in all my films. *Bicycle Thieves* for me is about loss and all my films are about loss — be it the loss of womanhood, of humanity, of your country, of what you believe in,” concluded the award-winning filmmaker.

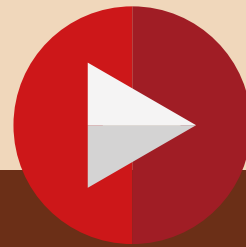
“All my films are about loss — be it the loss of womanhood, of humanity, of your country, of what you believe in”





Abhay Kumar

Poesy and Diplomacy — A Balancing Act



Vidya Gajapathi Raju Singh

Being good at writing poetry is not often considered a desired skill set for an emissary to a foreign nation. So, why does Abhay Kumar, who at 41 is currently India's youngest ambassador, think it an asset? The ambassador Madagascar and Comoros spoke about this strange link between poesy and diplomacy at a recent session of **An Author's Afternoon** organised by the **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

Welcomed by **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, Nilisha Agarwal, the conversation was moderated by **Ehsaas** Woman of Chennai, Vidya Gajapathi Raju Singh, who got Kumar talking about the genesis of his intertwined careers — as envoy and writer/editor. "I come from Nalanda... I used to see lots of people from different countries coming to visit Rajgir, Bodhgaya, Nalanda. Then, I found out about a traveller, Huen Tsang..." he said. Learning about the

monk's story and how his translated works became insightful sources to trace our own country's history fascinated him. "So I thought I should join the Foreign Services, where you get to travel the whole world and live this *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ideal that we talk about — that the whole world is a family," said Kumar, who also admitted to enjoying his "nomadic life".

As for his career as a writer, it started during his first diplomatic posting in Moscow. Inspired by the brevity and profundity of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, he found time to first write a memoir. Then, the "grand and magnificent" Moscow charmed him into penning poems about the city and its people. "Those days, I had no ambition to have a career in writing. I just used

to post those poems on my blog... Lots of people liked those poems and commented on them. So I thought to put them together as a collection," he said about his first volume of poetry, *Enigmatic Love*.

Now Kumar is an award-winning poet with several volumes of verses, each inspired by places he has visited. He has even been the recipient of the SAARC Literary Award and the Asia-Pacific Excellence Award, among others.

Conversing about his ability to successfully straddle both career paths, Kumar cited Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's *Rashmirathi* — its "musically fascinating" depiction of Krishna's diplomatic conversation with the Kauravas in its third *sarg* — as his earliest taste of the possibility of poetry and diplomacy coexisting. "I found that poetry and diplomacy are like sisters," he laughed. "Both as a poet and a diplomat you deal with words. One thing poetry teaches you is to very carefully choose your words. It is the same for diplomacy. You cannot be a diplomat if you can't choose your words carefully."

The other points of commonality between the two fields he said were ambiguity and brevity. Just as a good poet uses figures of speech to convey things rather than state things directly, a diplomat is never direct. "You find a way to say things," said Kumar, his hands moving to depict a meandering motion. As for brevity — the art of saying more with fewer words — it's a crucial principle in both fields, he said. Summing it up, he stated: "Poetry connects you to people at a deeper level, so it makes you a better diplomat. And as a diplomat, you get to travel the world, so it makes you a better poet... they complement each other. My poetry informs my diplomacy and vice-versa."

He also spoke about his foray into the world of editing and translating anthologies as well as being the first Indian to be invited to record his poems at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. as part of "The Poet and the Poem" series.

When asked about his celebrated *Earth Anthem* as well as the subsequent Moon, Mars and Venus anthems, Kumar was all smiles. Reciting a few lines

from the former, he said, "*Earth Anthem*, I wrote in 2008 in St. Petersburg. It comes from my deep belief that the planet is our home... an oasis in a cosmic desert... It was to make us realise that we are a very small part of the whole universe... it is important to take care of our paradise."

The song, which has been translated into over 50 languages, is now used across the globe to celebrate Earth Day and World Environment Day. Kumar also went on to recite his *Moon Anthem*, which he penned to celebrate the success of the Chandrayaan 2 mission. "I get my pleasure from reading and writing. The rest are all by-products — publicity and awards are not the primary sources of joy for me," divulged Kumar, who also dabbles in art as a hobby.

Speaking of recreation, Kumar admitted to being a yoga enthusiast and his new love is stargazing. "These days, I love to look at stars. I have been looking at these constellations and I am fascinated. Soon, I am going to write about them," he laughed.

Towards the end of the session, Kumar spoke about his current poetic endeavour — *Monsoon* — a love poem which links Madagascar to the Himalayas. He also listed his upcoming publications — translations of Kalidasa's *Meghdoot* and *Ritusamhara*.

And how does he balance it all? "Diplomacy is a profession for me and poetry is a vocation for me. We all find time for things we love... I always find time for poetry. Diplomacy gives you the freedom to pay attention in short durations... during breaks, there is sufficient time to write a line, a stanza or a poem, but not enough to write a novel. So, I think poetry perfectly suits the profession of diplomacy," he smiled.

Kumar signed off by answering a few audience questions and professing with a smile — "Poetry is my lifeline. Poetry takes away a lot of stress from my work. It helps me to stay sane."

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

I found that poetry and diplomacy are like sisters. Both as a poet and a diplomat you deal with words. One thing poetry teaches you is to very carefully choose your words. It is the same for diplomacy. You cannot be a diplomat if you can't choose your words carefully

किरी भी कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष की हार एक ऐतिहासिक घटना थी: अनंत विजय



कोरोना की गति धमने के साथ ही कलम के जमीनी सत्र की शुरुआत हो चुकी है। इसी कड़ी में कलम मेरठ का आयोजन हुआ, जिसमें अतिथि वक्ता के रूप में लेखक, पत्रकार, आलोचक अनंत विजय उपस्थित हुए। प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमेन की ओर से अंशु मेहरा ने विजय का स्वागत किया और संक्षिप्त परिचय के बाद संवाद का दायित्व राजनीतिक विश्लेषक राहुल नील को सौंप दिया। यह संवाद हाल ही में प्रकाशित विजय की बहुचर्चित पुस्तक *अमेठी संग्राम: ऐतिहासिक जीत*, अनकही दास्तां पर केंद्रित था। नील ने सवाल की शुरुआत कुछ इस अंदाज में की। उन्होंने विजय से पूछा, आपने स्मृति पर किताब क्यों लिखी? जवाब मिला, “राजनीतिक पत्रकारिता करते हुए ढाई दशक हो गए थे, पर मुझे याद नहीं पड़ता कि आजाद भारत में कोई भी कांग्रेस अध्यक्ष कभी लोकसभा चुनाव हारा था। लेकिन जब 2019 लोकसभा चुनाव में अमेठी में स्मृति इरानी जीतीं, तो मेरे अंदर का राजनीतिक पत्रकार जगा। दिल्ली से जाने वाले किसी पत्रकार को यह अंदाज नहीं था कि अमेठी में राहुल गांधी हार रहे हैं। मेरी समझ से यह एक बड़ी घटना थी। पर मेरा एक संशय था कि जब राजनीतिक जानकार यह कह रहे थे कि भाजपा किसके साथ सरकार बनाएगी? तब प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी के नेतृत्व में राष्ट्रीय जनतांत्रिक गठबंधन ने ऐतिहासिक जीत हासिल की। इस देश में अभिव्यक्ति की आजादी है। इसीलिए मैंने थोड़ा ठहर कर स्मृति इरानी की जीत को पुस्तक रूप में दर्ज किया।”

अमेठी विपन्नता की स्थिति में थी, इसका कारण क्या था और ऐसी स्थिति को आपसे पहले किसी पत्रकार ने उठाया क्यों नहीं? विजय का जवाब था, “उठाया था। विनोद मेहता ने इस सवाल को उठाया था। पर उससे कुछ हुआ नहीं। 1977 में जो स्थिति थी वही हालात 2019 में थे। उन्हें भी ठहरने, खाने के लिए वही मुश्किल उठानी पड़ी, जो मुझे। उन्हें भी वहां कायदे का होटल नहीं मिला था, और मुझे भी होटल नहीं मिला। इस बीच झूठ का आलम यह था कि जिस आलोक ढाबा में बारह एसी लगा कर स्मृति के अमेठी में रहने की बात कही गई थी, वह झूठी निकली। मुझे न तो बारह एसी मिले न ही वह कमरा दिखा। अमेठी के दर्जनों लोगों से बात की। लोगों ने इंदिरा गांधी और राजीव गांधी को शिद्धत से याद किया, शायद उनका लगाव अमेठी से था, पर गढ़ जैसी बात नहीं दिखी। इसी तरह जब से कांग्रेस में कार्यकर्ताओं की जगह वेतनभोगी कर्मचारियों ने ले ली, तब गढ़ जैसा जो कुछ रहा भी होगा, वह भी नहीं बचा।” इस पुस्तक को लिखने में स्मृति इरानी की कोई मदद? विजय का त्वरित उत्तर था, “उनकी कोई भूमिका नहीं है। उन्होंने सिर्फ दस मिनट का समय दिया था, पर बातचीत में दो मिनट ज्यादा मिले, यानी वही बारह मिनट में सत्रह सवाल का योगदान है।” अमेठी से स्मृति ही क्यों? सवाल पर विजय का उत्तर था, “इसका जवाब नरेंद्र मोदी ने साल 2014 में अमेठी में ही दे दिया था।” राहुल गांधी अमेठी से क्यों हारे? पर विजय ने कहा, “राहुल गांधी का भाव बहुत निस्पृह है। वह किसी से नाराज होते हैं, तो उससे रूठ जाते हैं, बात करना बंद कर देते हैं। जबकि नेता का काम है गलती पर दंड देना और खुश होने पर पुरस्कार देना। वह ऐसा नहीं करते। इसी तरह अमेठी से गांधी परिवार के लगाव को ऐसे समझा जा सकता है कि अभी तक उनका वहां घर नहीं है।”

विजय ने अमेठी की चुनावी व्यूह रचना में संघ की काफी बड़ी भूमिका का भी उल्लेख किया, साथ ही नारी सम्मान के लिए स्मृति इरानी की प्रतिबद्धता की भी चर्चा की। विजय ने इस बात का उल्लेख किया कि साल 2014 में प्रियंका गांधी ने पत्रकारों से पूछा था, हू स्मृति? और उन्होंने स्मृति ने अमेठी के ताकतवर शुक्ला परिवार की मदद लेने से सिर्फ इसलिए मना कर दिया था कि उन्होंने बातचीत में प्रियंका गांधी के लिए अपमान जनक टिप्पणी कर दी थी। स्मृति का कहना था कि जो महिला का सम्मान नहीं कर सकता,



Rahul Neel



Anant Vijay



Garima Mithal



Anshu Mehra

उसके लिए भारतीय जनता पार्टी में जगह नहीं है। आपने अपनी पुस्तक में कुमार विश्वास का जिक्र क्यों नहीं किया? विजय का उत्तर था, “कुमार विश्वास का राजनीतिक स्थान जितना था, उतनी चर्चा की है। मैं 2014 के चुनाव में अमेठी गया नहीं था। विश्वास को यहां 25,000 वोट भर मिले थे। जबकि उन्होंने तब कहा था कि इरानी और पाकिस्तानी यहां से चुनाव लड़ रहे हैं। आखिर जो आदमी चौथे स्थान पर था, उसका कितना जिक्र किया जाना चाहिए?” अमेठी की स्थानीय राजनीति पर विजय की टिप्पणी थी कि भाजपा में भी अंतर्कलह था, 2014 और 2019 में भी। आज भले ही इस बात की कल्पना नहीं की जा सकती, पर साल 2014 में आलम यह था पार्टी के जिले के महासचिव ने ही कह दिया था कि भाजपा कार्यालय पर नरेंद्र मोदी का पोस्टर नहीं लगेगा। तब स्मृति खुद वहां गईं, दीवार पर रात में ही पोस्टर लगाया और उन्होंने से कहा कि इसका ध्यान रखना कि यह उतरे न।

अमेठी के लोगों से स्मृति रागात्मक संबंध की चर्चा करते हुए विजय ने पिपरी गांव की घटना का उल्लेख किया और कहा कि वहां के लोग नदी की कटान से काफी परेशान थे। उन्होंने 2014 में स्मृति को कहा था कि हम वोट का बहिष्कार करेंगे। हम न आपको वोट देंगे, न ही राहुल गांधी को वोट देंगे। स्मृति उस बार चुनाव हार गईं, पर उन्होंने इस बात की कोशिश की कि लोगों की मदद हो। पर 2017 तक राज्य में सपा की सरकार के चलते वह काम नहीं हो सका। जब राज्य में योगीजी की सरकार बनी तब वह काम हुआ। विजय ने कहा, “ये कृषि प्रधान देश की बजाय भावना प्रधान देश है। जो नेता जनता की भावना को छू लेगा, वह जीतेगा।” विजय ने शहीद के परिवार की मदद के नाम पर दिल्ली का किराया और प्रवास खर्च वसूली के बावजूद राहुल गांधी से मुलाकात न होने की घटना का भी जिक्र किया। विजय ने संजय गांधी और स्मृति इरानी को अमेठी में मिली धमकियों का अंतर भी बताया। विजय ने स्मृति इरानी का सबसे बड़ा गुण उनकी सहजता को बताया। उन्होंने स्मृति के अटल जी की कविताओं से प्रेम, प्रेमचंद द्वारा लिखी जॉन ऑफ ऑर्क की जीवनी के अध्ययन और *अमेठी संग्राम* के लेखन के दौरान की गई अमेठी यात्रा में जनता से स्मृति के जुड़ाव का भी जिक्र किया। कलम मेरठ में *अमेठी संग्राम* के लेखक अनंत विजय का अभिनंदन डॉ अनिल कपूर और सूत्रधार राहुल नील का स्वागत मृणालिनी अनंत ने किया। अहसास वूमेन की गरिमा मित्तल ने धन्यवाद ज्ञापित किया।

कलम मेरठ के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण और हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर होटल क्रिस्टल पैलेस हैं।



The Long Route to Mastering Short Stories



Anushka Jasraj



Preeti Mehta

Less is more, at least when it comes to the art of writing short stories. Without brevity and precision, a short story loses its distinctive form, and in turn, its identity. Writing short stories can often require more adjustments than writing a novel, for a good short story writer is someone who can distil the essence of a story without giving into the temptation of including extraneous details.

Anushka Jasraj, a two-time winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize for Asia (in 2012 and 2017), is one such writer who has mastered the genre of short stories over time. Currently based in Austin, Texas, Jasraj holds a bachelor's degree in film production from New York University as well as advanced degrees in creative writing and gender studies from the New Writers Project at the University of Austin, Texas. Besides her Commonwealth accolades, Jasraj is a recipient of the 2017 Stars at Night Emerging Writer award.

Jasraj was in conversation at **The Write Circle** Jodhpur, where she was joined by **Ehsaas Woman** of Jodhpur, Preeti Mehta. Welcoming them to the discussion was fellow **Ehsaas Woman**, Shelja.

The discussion opened with Jasraj describing how winning her first Commonwealth prize made her consider writing short stories seriously. She had won that prize for *The Radio Story*, a piece of historical fiction about the role of ham radio in India's Independence movement. Comprising some 4,000 words, it had taken Jasraj a whole year to finish the story.

As someone who understands that her writing style has evolved over the years, Jasraj does not want to articulate how that evolution has happened or how difficult it has been to mature as an author. She would rather leave it to her readers to judge. However, she did

explain how her experience of writing screenplay as an undergraduate shaped her skills for short stories, especially in terms of exposition and character sketches.

Jasraj admitted that it took her a long time to introduce herself in public as a "writer". Even winning the Commonwealth prize did not guarantee that she would be published in the future, although the recognition gave her the motivation to keep writing.

On the subject of micro-fiction, Jasraj enumerated the challenges that the form poses for its writers. On Instagram, in particular, micro-fiction authors have to grab the reader's attention and provide an emotional payoff within a matter of a few seconds and a handful of sentences. According to Jasraj, such compressed storytelling has its own charm, and even though plot development is barely present in such a medium, the core emotions that readers relate to are just as essential as in longer narrative forms.

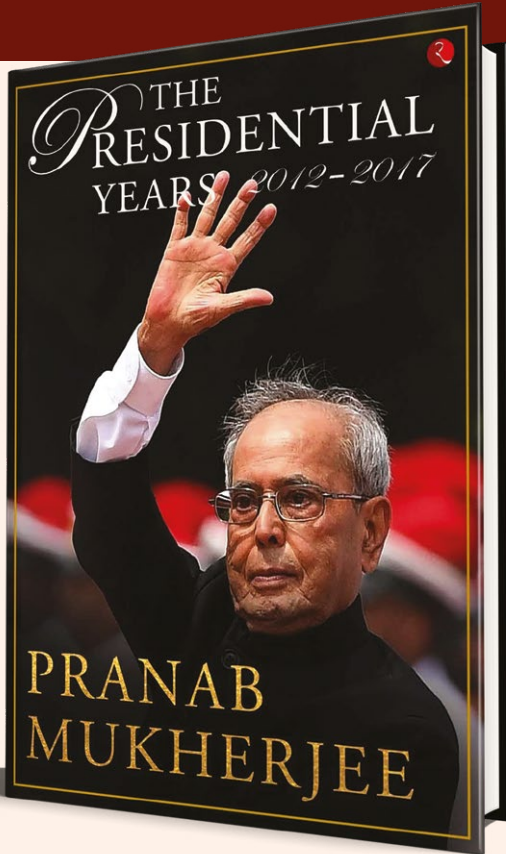
Jasraj also spoke about how, in life, we frequently struggle to express our emotions the way we would like to; but for authors, these struggles can act as catalysts for their next stories.

Finally, Jasraj added that she has been both lucky and foolish in her career, and that one day she would like to adapt her stories for the screen, completing a full circle in her artistic journey in the process.

In life, we frequently struggle to express our emotions the way we would like to; but for authors, these struggles can act as catalysts for their next stories

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

Politically and Personally Yours — Pranab Mukherjee



Speaking about Pranab Mukherjee, she revealed that despite his background in economics, her “father’s love and passion was history and for him, every corner of the Rashtrapati Bhavan was full of history; every stone told a story.” She recalled fondly how one of the first things her father did after becoming President was to document all the artworks and renovate the priceless library. She said that he created the museum for Rashtrapati Bhavan “by collaborating with curators, art historians, librarians — restoring the place to its full glory.”

Another change she witnessed during her father’s tenure was how he “opened up a large section of the Rashtrapati Bhavan to the people of India and made it people-friendly by starting the artist-residency centre, where he would invite scholars, artists, writers, young innovators and scientists...” His intent, she explained, was to encourage them to “become a part of the history — learn, understand and appreciate the edifice.” Apart from his official duties, this was what he was most passionate about.

To celebrate the life and legacy of the 13th President of India, the late Pranab Mukherjee, his daughter Sharmistha Mukherjee, British politician and economist Lord Meghnad Desai and economist and former civil servant Montek Singh Ahluwalia recently gathered for a virtual session of **Kitaab**.

Organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, the session also happened to launch the former President’s final book, *The Residential Years: 2012–2017*, the fourth in a series comprising *The Dramatic Decade: The Indira Gandhi Years*, *The Turbulent Years: 1980–1996* and *The Coalition Years: 1996–2012*. The event was opened by Malika Varma, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, and was moderated by journalist and film critic Ratnottama Sengupta.

When asked about her experience of living in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Sharmistha called it a great honour. She said she was blessed to be Mukherjee’s daughter.

He opened up a large section of the Rashtrapati Bhavan to the people of India and made it people-friendly by starting the artist-residency centre where he would invite scholars, artists, writers, young innovators and scientists

— Sharmistha Mukherjee



Speaking of his official duties and the exemplary way he led the nation, toeing a non-partisan line, Desai commented, “2014 was the biggest earthquake of Indian politics, because of the arrival of BJP with a convincing majority and at the same time the very severe loss that the Congress suffered... that made the task of Pranab Mukherjee very delicate and I think he carried it off beautifully.”

Along with sharing a few anecdotes about Mukherjee,

Desai felt that, “In the annals of Indian presidency you don’t have anyone with that range of contacts and Cabinet positions.... He knew the whole ways the government worked. He was a complete master of detail.” Desai also admitted that he was “impressed” with the way Mukherjee “brought to the job of the President more political experience and knowledge than anybody else.”

Ahluwalia spoke in detail about some of the economic decisions, such as demonetisation, that occurred during Mukherjee’s tenure. He also chose to share a personal story about his interaction with the former President after his Presidential years. “I was flying to Calcutta. I was a

I am very glad that he wrote these books and there’s no one else that I can think of who had such a deep knowledge and appreciation of the details of how things evolved

— Montek Singh Ahluwalia



appreciation of the details of how things evolved.”

Sengupta then steered the conversation to yet another topic dealt with extensively in the book — mercy petitions. Speaking on the subject, Sharmistha admitted that she had once asked her father about this.

“The core of the modern justice system is more towards reform than punishment. So, it is a much bigger debate. From that perspective, the President in our system is the last hope,” she said, revealing, however, that “sitting there, knowing that with his one signature he is going to decide... he felt this trauma and when I asked him he told me that ‘I can’t sleep at night once I reject it (a mercy plea).’” She noted that Mukherjee was very thorough in going through each case and was never one to sit on a decision, no matter how hard the task at hand.

She also revealed that not much had changed in her father’s personal life and preferences after becoming President — certainly not the *beulir dal*, *aloo posto* and *maccher jhol*. What he had to alter and adjust to was leaving behind an active political career teeming with party interactions.

“In the Rashtrapati Bhavan, it was very restrictive and protocol-oriented. Interacting with people is something he really missed,” she said.

The panellists answered a few questions from the audience before bringing the session to a close with Sharmistha summing up her father’s contribution — “His strength has been his constant relevance in Indian politics.”



In the annals of Indian presidency you don’t have anyone with that range of contacts and Cabinet positions.... He knew the whole ways the government worked. He was a complete master of details

— Lord Meghnad Desai

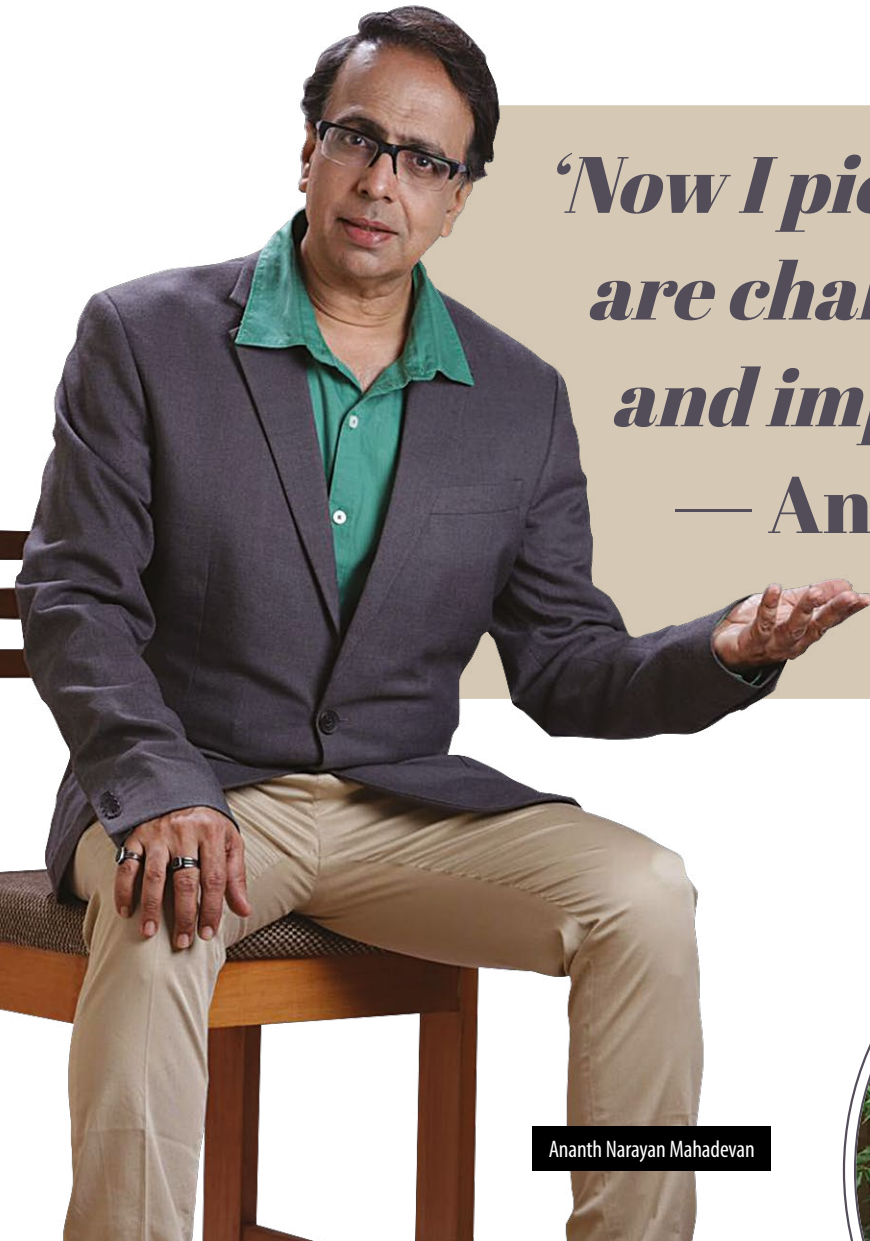
serving civil servant and he (Mukherjee) happened to be sitting next to me. Initially, I said, ‘My goodness! How do I conduct a conversation with a former finance minister?’ I thought the safest thing to do is to not talk about current policy but to look back. For the next hour-and-a-half, I had one of the most fascinating and illuminating discussions with someone who had lived that history.... He used his knowledge of the details to make things come alive precisely in the areas I was talking about.”

The incident had made Ahluwalia think then that Mukherjee should write about his experiences. Speaking about the current book and the series, he added, “He has chapters which talk about foreign policies and Indian federalism. In a way, those are reflections — given his tremendous experience — on what’s happening in India. I am very glad that he wrote these books and there’s no one else that I can think of, who had such a deep knowledge and



Ratnottama Sengupta

This session of Kitaab is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Rupa Publications



Ananth Narayan Mahadevan

‘Now I pick up scripts that are challenging, difficult and impossible to make’
— Ananth Mahadevan



Titiksha Shah

Even with over four decades of acting, directing and writing experience under his belt, Ananth Mahadevan shies away from the tag of “legend.” Belying his extensive portfolio, he still prefers to call himself “a student and learner.”

A veteran of the Indian film, television and theatre world, Mahadevan has acted in over 100 films, 75 television and web series and over 35 plays, never letting language barriers deter him from pursuing his passion. His expertise in filmmaking garnered him critical acclaim with his Marathi biopic, *Mee Sindhutai Saptakal*, winning the National Film Awards for Best Screenplay and Dialogues as well as the Special Jury Award. His latest Marathi directorial venture, *Bittersweet* was selected to be showcased at the Busan International Film Festival 2020.

In conversation with **Ehsaas** Woman of Birmingham, Titiksha Shah, Mahadevan spoke about his early life, the genesis of his entertainment career, his book on the

Indian television industry and more at a recent session of **The Write Circle** Oxford and Birmingham, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

He started the virtual session by talking about his early years, being raised by a disciplinarian father who did not allow him to watch films. “They say if you keep something pent up, that is what eventually bursts open and leads you to what you want to do in life,” he said while elaborating that along with the sciences, he was very keen to tutor himself in the arts. Giving credit to his school, he said, “The arts always fascinated me.... We used to do a lot of reading at Don Bosco. Thanks to my teachers, we were

brought up on these great writers.... We used to do a lot of plays in school. So, theatre is something I imbibed and inculcated while growing up.”

However, he was motivated to pursue a film career when he serendipitously started working as a copywriter at a firm that did adverts for films. “I came in contact with a lot of film and theatre personalities and that gave me the impetus,” explained the actor. Mahadevan candidly admitted that he was met with a lot of doubt about being an actor because his “mug” did not have the “Greek god” kind of looks associated with the film industry in India. “The entire perception of a leading man or actor in India is just good looks... and nothing beyond. It is still tough to convince people that I am a different breed altogether. That I’d like to think and be aware, use my education in furthering the arts.”

But he steadfastly continued on his chosen path and took up theatre seriously, performing at prestigious venues such as Prithvi Theatre, the National Centre for Performing Arts and more. “Nothing can beat the magic of a live performance. I knew that my place was on stage... it’s been over 40 years, and I still continue to do theatre,” he smiled.

Eventually, his theatre took him to television and films. Calling his first film experience — an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* — a “baptism by fire”, he recalled having only three scenes. But they were with the great Sir Peter O’Toole, hence Mahadevan called it “an auspicious start” to his acting career.

However, once sponsored television came to India, he switched to the world of prime time. “It was just one channel, Doordarshan... I was part of the beginning.” His role as Chintamani in *Ados Pados* made him a household name and face. He went on to act in big productions such as *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, *Dekh Bhai Dekh* and *Zabaan Samhalke*, among others.

When asked about the whys and wherefores of television trends, Mahadevan pointed to his latest endeavour, *Once Upon a Prime Time: My Journey on Indian Television* — a documentation of the history of television in the country. “This is what my book is about... a story about the stories being told on the Indian television,” he said. Written in three parts, the book traces the “small screen” curve from its illustrious start, its fate after the advent of satellite TV,

the subsequent emergence of the “bane of Indian television” — the daily soap — to the current trend of web series.

Speaking of the release of his book during the pandemic, he admitted that they “were lucky to have released the book during the pandemic. People sitting at home got the book, read it, watched the shows all over again. It was like the coming back of Indian television. Even the youth got fascinated.” Mahadevan called this a sign — that it is not too late to “resurrect the golden age of Indian television”.

He also spoke about the two chapters of his film career. First, breaking into the industry as a director — approaching mainstream producers and proving himself with commercial hits. And the second — making only “cinema of substance.”

The entire perception of a leading man or actor in India is just good looks... and nothing beyond. It is still tough to convince people that I am a different breed altogether. That I’d like to think and be aware, use my education in furthering the arts

Being a product of the Film Society movement and getting exposed to great world cinema showed him that the bulk of Indian cinema was “lightyears behind.” This realisation, coupled with veteran filmmaker Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s words to him — “In India, to be outstanding you only have to be average” made him change tracks. “It was the most frightening truth and I wanted to get out this trap of making cinema that did not matter,” he confessed. He also admitted that nowadays he only picks up scripts that are “challenging, difficult and impossible to make.”

He then spoke in detail about the unique subject of his latest film — *Bittersweet* — the “wombless” women sugarcane cutters of Maharashtra, the roadblocks to making the film and the reason it should get attention — to bring real-life horrors to the fore.

The hour-long conversation was brought to a close with **Ehsaas** Woman of Birmingham and director of Sampad, Piali Ray, thanking Mahadevan for taking the time out to share his vast knowledge about the stage, the silver screen and the telly.

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

The Perils of Nostalgia



Nisha Susan

Does nostalgia lead to an excessive romanticisation of the past? How can reminiscence be separated from nostalgia? In what way is nostalgia an unreliable anchor for stories?

For debut author Nisha Susan, nostalgia has been conspicuous by its absence. To develop her arguments on nostalgia and its seemingly nebulous effects, Susan was hosted virtually by **The Write Circle**, Jaipur.

Susan's first book is called *The Women Who Forgot to Invent Facebook and Other Stories*. She is the co-founder of two award-winning media companies, Ladies Finger and Grist Media, and writes a column on millennials, time, and obsessions for *Mint Lounge*.

Susan was in conversation with Deepika Arwind, a Bangalore-based writer and theatre practitioner. Welcoming Susan and Arwind to the discussion was Mita Kapur, founder and CEO of Siyahi.

For Susan, her inaugural book will speak to readers who have grown up alongside the emergence of the internet as an indispensable part of life. But the internet is not the only ubiquitous factor influencing the narratives present in the book. An equally important, but arguably more intriguing, factor is the role of memory.

Elaborating on her book, Susan categorically distinguished between memories or looking back at the past with affection and nostalgia. For her, the former is organic, healthy, and a source of sustenance,



whereas the latter is fragile and fleeting, frequently giving way to unnecessary romanticisation, and cannot be a reliable basis for compelling storytelling. While Susan did not rule out the inevitability of nostalgia in life (or in fiction), she argued against celebrating nostalgia as a source of genuine emotional fulfillment.

Addressing the theme of time in her book, Susan spoke about how the main characters are so preoccupied with maximising utility and happiness that they fail to take stock of the passage of time and what it means in the larger context of their lives.

Susan proceeded to explain why she sets most of her stories in Kerala, despite never having lived there for too long at a stretch. She chose to set her story in Kerala because she grew up around Malayalis and because, she feels, the place evokes emotions that can be successfully woven into a nuanced plot.

Identifying herself as a “busybody” and a “people’s person”, Susan said that most of her characters are inspired from people she has met in her life — individuals with certain distinctive features that have been hard for her to overlook.

The discussion wrapped up with a comment on Susan’s writing style, wherein she does not italicise vernacular words or explain them with the help of footnotes. Although Susan admitted that she did not initially make too much of this peculiarity in her style, she later came to realise that a lot of readers accepted this feature positively,

as they were able to read the text just as they would think in their minds, without any apparent distinction between English and vernacular words.

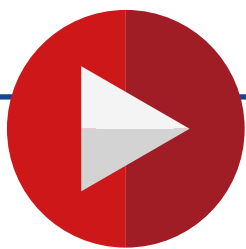
The Write Circle Jaipur is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Siyahi, Spagia Foundation, ITC Rajputana and Ehsaas Women of Jaipur

For Susan, the memories are organic, healthy, and a source of sustenance, whereas nostalgia is fragile and fleeting, frequently gives way to unnecessary romanticisation, and cannot be a reliable basis for compelling storytelling



Nidhi Dugar Kundalia

The Unsung Stories of India



India is a land of fascinating stories, people and professions. Yet, so many of these stories are rarely told with the space and time they deserve. Crushed by the dictates of mass appeal, a plethora of soulful stories falls apart and slowly fades away.

Nidhi Dugar Kundalia, a young writer and journalist, has taken it upon herself to revive these unsung stories of India. At a virtual session of **The Write Circle** Agra, Kundalia addressed a series of subjects that lie on the periphery of the Indian imagination but have found a central place in two of her books, *The Lost Generation* and *White as Milk and Rice*.

Kundalia is a graduate from City University, London, and has written for a variety of national newspapers and magazines. She was joined in the discussion by Vinti Kathuria, **Ehsaas** Woman of Agra. Welcoming them to the interaction was fellow **Ehsaas** Woman of Agra, Shweta Bansal.

Kundalia started the session by talking about *The Lost Generation*, which chronicles 11 dying professions in India. Inspired by her grandmother (who would narrate tales about obscure professions to her), Kundalia wrote an account of a range of occupations that most Indians do not even know exist in their homeland. These include the professional mourners known as the *Rudalis*, who are hired to cry on behalf of widows, as bereaved women in high society are not expected to show their emotions in public.

Kundalia also spoke at length about the street professionals like dentists and barbers that are fast

disappearing from India, except for the streets of Kolkata, where one can find a seamless blend of the old and the new.

Shifting gears, Kundalia discussed her other book, *White as Milk and Rice*, where she documents, largely through oral history, the lives of six tribes from among the Adivasi communities in India. Speaking about these tribes, whose rituals and lifestyle are often stereotyped in common parlance, Kundalia urged for greater acceptance of such communities besides an understanding of nuance.

According to Kundalia, the fact that different tribes may be affected differently by socio-cultural developments must be taken into consideration before evaluating their place in Indian society.

Kundalia described how many of the tribes she studied follow customs that empower women and may seem progressive to an outsider. But, at the same time,

structural inhibitions for both men and women prevail there as well, and one must not make the mistake of painting all Adivasis with the same brush. On the matter of the relationship between the government and the tribal communities, Kundalia said that the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the tribes must be respected at all costs.

The conversation drew to a close with Kundalia pointing out that we need to develop a sensibility where knowing about tribal communities and their daily life does not

automatically lead us to interfere in their lives. As someone who has closely observed people and places that have been marginalised for decades, Kundalia reiterated the need to view everyone through a humanitarian lens without giving up on the appreciation of peculiarities that make communities, professions, and people distinct from one another.

The Write Circle Agra is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Dainik Jagran, ITC Mughal and Ehsaas Women of Agra

Speaking about the six Adivasi tribes, whose rituals and lifestyle are often stereotyped in common parlance, Kundalia urged for greater acceptance of such communities besides an understanding of nuance

बेहतर काम करने में कभी उम्र आड़े नहीं आती: दीपक रमोला



Deepak Ramola

कलम ओस्लो का वर्चुअल आयोजन हुआ, जिसमें अतिथि वक्ता के रूप में लेखक, कवि, वक्ता, अभिनेता और समाजसेवी दीपक रमोला ने शिरकत की। रमोला का स्वागत चंदर मेहता ने किया। सूत्रधार की भूमिका मनोज मिश्रा ने निभाई। उन्होंने महात्मा बुद्ध के प्रसिद्ध संदेश कि 'अपने व्यक्तित्व का निर्माण कभी भी बगीचा की तरह न बनाओ कि हर कोई उसमें टहलने लगे बल्कि खुद को आसमान की तरह बनाओ कि हर किसी में उसे छूने की ललक जगे' के उद्धरण के साथ किया और रमोला से पहला सवाल पूछा कि विदेशों में बसे भारतीयों के लिए हिंदी का क्या महत्व है, विशेषकर तब जब भारतवासियों को अंग्रेजी लुभा रही है? रमोला का उत्तर था, "मिट्टी की खूशबू आपस में मिलने को भाषा बहुत आसान कर देती है। भाषा यह याद दिलाती है कि आपका वजूद एक बड़े हितैषी समाज का हिस्सा है।"

रमोला ने 2016 में यूरोपीय देशों में सीरियन रिफ्यूजी कैंप में काम करने के अपने अनुभव को सुनाया, जब किशोर कुमार के गाने सुन वे अफगानी रिफ्यूजियों के बीच पहुंच गए थे और आगे के दिनों में उनका काम आसान हो गया था। उन्होंने कहा, "भाषा ने मेरे लिए वह रास्ता खोला है, जो जुड़ने के लिए जरूरी है। किसी भी वस्तु की कद्र तभी होती है, जब आप उसे खो



Manoj Misra

देते हैं। इसीलिए विदेशी भारतीयों के लिए आपकी भाषा आपको नॉस्टेल्जिया और ग्रेटीच्युट से भर देती है। भारत के युवाओं में हिंदी की वर्तमान स्थिति के लिए हमसे पहले की जेनरेशन भी कुछ हद तक जिम्मेदार है। स्कूलों में हिंदी सीखना एक पनिशमेंट की तरह है। हमें समझना चाहिए कि भाषा केवल शब्द नहीं है यह सिंटेक्स है। भाषा फूलों का एक गुलदस्ता है, जिसे आप अलग-अलग शब्दों से सजा सकते हैं।" रमोला ने तन्हां मुसाफिर सारा जहां है, घर से दूर घर कहां है... सुनाते हुए कहा कि एक भाषा को समझने के लिए दो भाषाएं आनी चाहिए। मेरा सौभाग्य है कि मुझे दोनों भाषाएं आती हैं।



Chander Mehta



Kuljas Saggar

प्रोजेक्ट फ्रयूल से जुड़े सवाल पर रमोला ने बताया, “इसकी प्रेरणा मुझे मेरी मां से मिली, जिन्हें पांचवीं कक्षा में ही मेरी दादी ने स्कूल से यह कहकर निकाल दिया कि कोई भी लड़की लड़कों के स्कूल में नहीं पढ़ेगी। मेरी मां स्कूल भले ही नहीं गई थीं, पर हर मसले पर उनका विवेक बहुत कारगर साबित होता है। मैं सोचता था कि मेरी माता इतना विद्वान कैसे हैं। बच्चों को पालना किसी एमबीए से कम नहीं। उनका कहना है कि जिंदगी बहुत कुछ सिखाती है और जिंदगी से हम बहुत कुछ सीखते हैं। यहीं से मैं आम लोगों के जीवन की कहानियां जुटाने लगा। आज इस प्रोजेक्ट के तहत हम चार लाख से अधिक लोगों से जुड़ चुके हैं। मेरा मानना है कि आपकी उम्र विवेक से जुड़ी नहीं है।” उन्होंने बेल्जियम के एक छ साल के बच्चे अब्दुल से पूछे गए सवाल का उल्लेख किया कि जब मैंने उस बच्चे से पूछा कि तुमने जीवन से क्या सीखा? उसका उत्तर था, ‘इससे पहले कि तुम बाइक चलाना सीखो, तुम्हें यह जानना चाहिए कि इसके ब्रेक कहां हैं?’

आपकी कविताएं बदल गई या आपने पटकथा के चलते गाने लिखे? के उत्तर में रमोला ने कहा, “मेरे घर में किसी का भी दूर-दूर तक फिल्म इंडस्ट्री से रिश्ता नहीं है। मैं जब देहरादून में रह रहा था, तो मेरे अंदर की आवाज थी कि मुझे फिल्मों के लिए गीत लिखना चाहिए। वह अंदर की आवाज इतनी सशक्त थी कि मैंने खुद को ट्रेंड करना शुरू कर दिया। मैं जब स्कूल बस में जाता था, तो जो गाना सुनता था और उसमें पुराने गानों के शब्द हटाकर अपने शब्द जोड़कर लिखना सीखता था। ऐसा मैंने तीन हजार से अधिक गानों पर किया। उन्होंने पहला नशा गीत के साथ अपने प्रयोग को भी सुनाया। रमोला ने कहा, “जब मैं 2009 में मुंबई गया तो संदेश शांडिल्य से मिला, तो उन्होंने मेरी कविताएं सुनकर कहा कि इसे आपने ही लिखा है या आपके पिताजी ने? कविता आप चाहे जितनी लिख सकते हैं, पर फिल्मी गीत लिखने की एक सीमा है। आपको चरित्र और क्षेत्र का भी ध्यान रखना होता है।”

रमोला ने सूत्रधार मिश्रा के अनुरोध पर अपने काव्य संग्रह इतना तो मैं समझ गया हूं से दोनों खिड़कियां नामक कविता सुनाई। रमोला ने कार्यक्रम में शामिल छात्रों से मुखातिब होते हुए कहा कि उन्हें कुछ बातों पर ध्यान देना चाहिए। पहली, आपको अपनी

कहानी पर गर्व करना चाहिए। दूसरा, आपका हुनर आपको तोहफे में नहीं सौंपा गया, आपको जिम्मेदारी के रूप में मिला है। तीसरी और आखिरी बात, हमें भाषा का सम्मान करना चाहिए। उन्होंने इस दौरान अपनी पुस्तक *जीवन के पचास महत्वपूर्ण सवाल* की भी चर्चा की, और उसमें से एक सवाल और उत्तर पढ़ कर सुनाया। रमोला ने प्रोजेक्ट फ्रयूल में शामिल ‘वाइज वाल प्रोजेक्ट’ के बारे में भी विस्तार से चर्चा की, जिसके तहत पलायन के चलते खंडहर बन चुके छह सौ साल पुराने सोड़ गांव की बंजर दीवारों की कहानियां उकेर दी गईं। उन्होंने दूसरे गांव खाती और तंजानिया की मसाई जनजाति के साथ चल रहे तीसरे प्रोजेक्ट की भी चर्चा की।

मिश्रा ने रमोला की बहुविध रुचियों में से उन्हें कौन सी सबसे अधिक प्रिय है? पूछा तो रमोला का उत्तर था, “मैं एक कवि हूं। जीवन को कविता के रूप में जीने की कोशिश करता हूं। लोगों से संवाद बेहतर होते हैं। अनुभव को सादगी से पिरोता हूं। उम्मीद करता हूं कि मैं खुद कविता बन जाऊं।” उन्होंने अपने जीवन के उद्धरण से कहा कि बच्चों को बेहतर काम करने के लिए कभी भी अपनी उम्र को आड़े नहीं आने देना चाहिए। आपको बहुत कुछ करना चाहिए। आपको जो कुछ भी आता है वह पूरी तरह खुल के करना चाहिए।

सवाल-जवाब के सत्र में उन्होंने वाणी खन्ना के सवाल पर कहा कि सत्रह साल की उम्र में कोई मुझे गंभीरता से नहीं लेता था। कोई अवसर मुहैया नहीं कराना चाहता था। पर मैं हारा नहीं, निरंतर कोशिश की और आज यहां हूं। रमोला ने टाइम मैनेजमेंट से जुड़े सवाल का भी उत्तर दिया। हमेशा खुश रहने की वजह पूछे जाने पर उनका उत्तर था कि यह विश्वास कि कल बेहतर होगा, मुझे खुश रखता है। हैप्पीनेस सांग भी मदद करता है। कार्यक्रम के आखिर में कुलजस सागर ने कोई भी दुख मनुष्य के साहस से बड़ा नहीं कहते हुए कलम ओस्लो में उपस्थित अतिथियों और श्रोताओं का आभार प्रकट किया।

कलम ओस्लो के आयोजक थे प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन और विश्व हिंदू परिषद नॉर्वे

Combating the Negative, with Anupam Kher



Anupam Kher

To most, 2020 was the year that never was — no get-togethers to enjoy happy moments, no festivals to celebrate, no school and college hours to mark the normal passing of days and no hugs from loved ones. The debilitating fear and uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the world's population unanimously — covering everyone in a pall of depression and hopelessness.

Yet for veteran actor Anupam Kher, from this feeling of hopelessness emerged something positive — the desire to give hope to others and make them feel a little less isolated. This desire eventually took the form of a book, *Your Best Day is Today!* — his third after *Lessons Life Taught Me*, *Unknowingly: An Autobiography* and *The Best Thing About You is You!*.



Ina Puri

freewheeling chat between Puri and Kher about his book and its message.

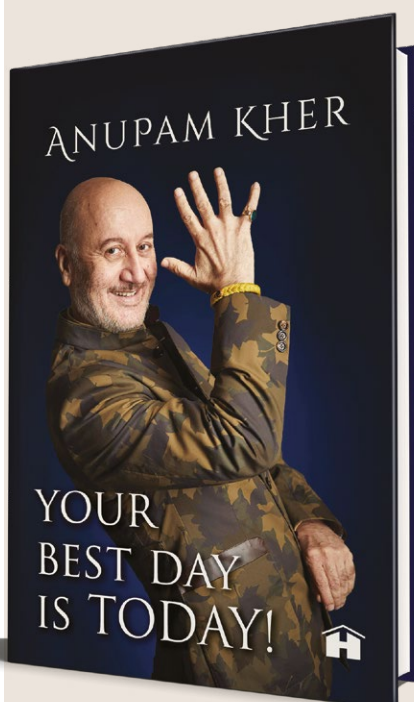
With his quintessential flair for drama — a talent that garnered him the National Award — Kher started the proceedings with a staged walk-off and re-entry to rouse the audience from their civil stupor. “I feel like I have come to a mourning,” he quipped, making the audience titter — “That’s much better.

I feel good now,” he joked, to the sound of thunderous applause and resounding laughter.

After settling in, Kher started with his first tryst with the pandemic. “I was shooting for a medical series in New York, *New Amsterdam*. Suddenly, all of this started. We were told to stop the shoot and go back home. I finally took an Air India flight.”

He noticed things straying from the norm when his usual experience of taking 150 selfies with fans was belied. “I love to be recognised, I am not one of those actors who go ‘arrey mujhe photograph se achha nahin lagta’.... I became an actor to be recognised. But nobody took pictures. I didn’t know if the masked people were happy to see me,” recalled Kher, who initially brushed it off as American paranoia. It was only once he reached the Mumbai airport — and the hullabaloo about quarantine

During a recent session of **Kitaab** organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** in Kolkata, Kher took the stage alongside writer and art curator Ina Puri, who is also an **Ehsaas** Woman of Gurugram, to launch his book. Shefali Rawat Agarwal, the chairperson of FICCI FLO, inaugurated the session. This was followed by a



and temperature checks started — that he realised the seriousness of the situation. “That’s when the fear was born,” confessed Kher. “Even my son opened the door a sliver and gave me an elbow bump and said I will see you in 14 days,” he laughed.

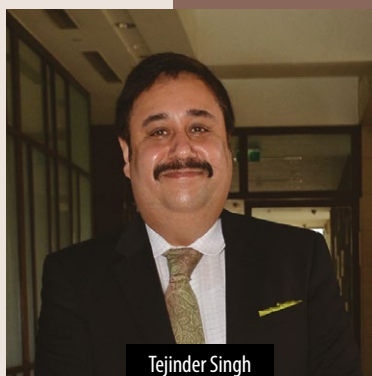
And out of this fear arose his new book. “I started recording what I was feeling on a recorder, basically to drown out my fear... of what’s happening in the world. It is a series of things that happened in my life from March till October and that’s how this book came about,” explained the actor.

Referring to instances mentioned in the book — about discovering blue skies and bird calls for the first time in 39 years of living in Mumbai — Kher called it “the silver lining.” So he started getting up at 4am, walking up and down with his recorder and just speaking out his thoughts. “I would later transcribe it and edit it to get it into shape,” said Kher about his creative process.

When asked about his feelings about the success that has stemmed from this creativity, he replied with an emphatic “Fantastic!” And not just commercial success, the book also received critical appreciation from none other than author Paulo Coelho.

“I started writing so people would introduce me as actor and writer, Anupam Kher. So, I am happy to be an author... The first thing I do [after reaching the airport] is check the bookshop. I was thrilled at the Delhi airport when I saw it as a ‘Number 1 Bestseller,’” he said.

However, it is not his skill at writing but his heartfelt musings that hook the readers, feels Kher. “I don’t think it is because my writing is fantastic. It is because it is a heart-to-heart conversation. I am not trying to be an intellectual... The book is about communication. When my mother contracted COVID, I was scared. I have written about that experience. When Rishi Kapoor, Irrfan Khan and my yoga teacher passed away, I discovered what death is. I discovered in this world, death has become a statistic rather than an



Tejinder Singh



Shefali Rawat Agarwal

emotion.... All that came into this book.”

Continuing about his journey of penning the book, Kher spoke about the series of conversations he had with various people — from Saina Nehwal to a wedding planner, a mother with two young kids and even an elderly lady. “I wanted to see if what I am feeling is just relevant to me.... What I realised from this pandemic [and the conversations] was that before this, we were running fast to nowhere. This pandemic and lockdown made us realise that we just need three things in life — we need to be closer to our dear ones, we need essential commodities and we need WiFi,” he joked, infusing humour in an otherwise sombre conversation.

Kher also spoke about the significance of the book’s title. “When my brother and I were small, our mother would drop us off at school every day and tell us in Kashmiri — your best day is today... and in the time of lockdown one small virus has made us so helpless. [I realised you have to] enjoy right now, you don’t know what’s going to happen after 10 minutes... and that’s how the title came up,” said the actor whose takeaway from all of this is “Life motivates me... and I don’t take life for granted.”

“I am not trying to be an intellectual.... The book is about communication.... I was scared. I have written about that experience.... I discovered in this world, death has become a statistic rather than an emotion.... All that came into this book”

Kher went on to share anecdotes from his life and lessons in Shimla. He also spoke about the importance of mental and physical fitness, his breakthrough as an actor, facing failures and adversities such as facial paralysis and depression head on, and more.

With great simplicity and depth, Kher wrapped up the session by stating that “it is wonderful to be a nice human being” and that’s the role he wants to ultimately keep performing to the best of his ability all his life.

This session of Kitaab is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with FICCI FLO, ITC Sonar, Zee Live and Arth — A Culture Fest



Ram Vanji Sutar

Shinjini Kulkarni

मैंने केवल काम किया, कल की नहीं सोचा: राम वंजी सुतार

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन ने अपनी भाषा अपने लोग कार्यक्रम की कड़ी में राजधानी क्षेत्र में टे-ए-टी का आयोजन किया, जिसमें विश्व प्रसिद्ध मूर्तिकार पद्मभूषण राम वंजी सुतार ने अतिथि वक्ता के रूप में शिरकत की। फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमेन एनसीआर की ओर से आराधना प्रधान ने आमंत्रित अतिथि का स्वागत करते हुए समाज, कला, संस्कृति और भाषा के क्षेत्र में फाउंडेशन द्वारा लगभग चार दशकों से की जा रही गतिविधियों की संक्षेप में



चर्चा की। अतिथि सुतार का संक्षिप्त परिचय दीपाली भसीन ने दिया और उनके मूर्तिशिल्प की चर्चा की। भसीन ने बताया कि सुतार एक ऐसे मूर्तिकार हैं, जिन्हें पूरी दुनिया जानती है। महात्मा गांधी की ऐतिहासिक मूर्ति की लोकप्रियता का आलम यह है कि सुतार द्वारा निर्मित गांधीजी की मूर्तियों की प्रतिकृति भारत सरकार द्वारा रूस, इंग्लैंड, मलेशिया, फ्रांस, इटली, अर्जेंटीना, बाराबडोस जैसे देशों को दी गई है। उन्होंने अहसास वूमेन से जुड़ी कथक

नृत्यांगना शिंजिनी कुलकर्णी को सुतार से संवाद के लिए आमंत्रित किया।

टेटे-ए-टी की चर्चा का विषय था, 'स्मारकीय संरचना द्वारा भारत के राजनीतिक इतिहास का संग्रह'। शिंजिनी ने पेंटिंग और मूर्तिशिल्प के क्षेत्र में राम वंजी सुतार के काम को मील का पत्थर बताते हुए, उनके मूर्तिकार बनने के सफर के बारे में पूछा? सुतार ने कहा, "सुतार मतलब कारपेंटर। मैं कारपेंटर परिवार से हूँ। कारपेंटरी में सबकुछ शामिल है। आर्किटेक्चर, इंजीनियरिंग, म्युजिक सभी शामिल है।" फिर उन्होंने बताया कि बचपन में उन्हें एक बिच्छू ने काटा था। उन्होंने उस बिच्छू को मार दिया। फिर उसे देखकर साबुन से एक बिच्छू बना दिया। वहीं से उनके मूर्ति बनने के सफर की शुरुआत हुई। बचपन से कड़ी मेहनत की। जेजे स्कूल आफ आर्ट्स में जब उन्होंने दाखिला लिया तो प्रोफेसर ने पहले ही साल में देखा कि वे बहुत अच्छा काम कर रहे हैं तो सीधे उन्हें सेकेंड ईयर में भेज दिया गया।

सुतार ने अपने अध्यापक राम कृष्ण जोशी को याद किया और कहा कि उनके आशीर्वाद से सबकुछ है। छोटे गांव से मैं यहां तक पहुंचा। एलोरो की गुफाओं के संरक्षण में अपने चार साल के काम को भी उन्होंने याद किया। बताया कि प्रगति मैदान में उनके काम को देखकर काम मिलता रहा। सरकारी नौकरी छोड़कर मैंने मूर्ति शिल्प को चुना। वर्ष 1950 में उन्हें गोल्ड मेडल भी मिला। सुतार ने बताया कि वे 1948 से मूर्तियां बना रहे हैं। उन्होंने संसद के स्तंभ और भारत भवन के अपने काम को याद किया। चंबल देवी की मूर्ति बनाने का किस्सा साझा करते हुए उन्होंने बताया कि चंबल नदी मध्य प्रदेश और राजस्थान को जोड़ती है। 1960 में उन्हें मध्य प्रदेश में गांधी सागर बांध के लिए चंबल नदी को समर्पित करते हुए मूर्ति बनाने का प्रोजेक्ट मिला। इसलिए उन्होंने चंबल नदी की प्रतीकात्मक मूर्ति को मां के रूप में दर्शाते हुए उसके साथ दो बच्चे बनाए, जो मध्य प्रदेश और राजस्थान के भाईचारे के प्रतीक हैं। यह मूर्ति 45 फीट ऊंची है। इस मूर्ति के लिए उन्हें 10 हजार रुपए मिले थे।

सुतार का कहना था कि उन्होंने कभी जीवन में पीछे मुड़कर नहीं देखा, न ही आगे की सोचा। उनका मानना है कि आज जो काम कर रहे हो उसे अच्छे से करते जाओ। आपको जहां पहुंचना है पहुंच जाओगे। उन्होंने कहा कि उन्होंने जीवन में कभी कुछ नहीं मांगा। सुतार ने अपने बेटे अनिल की बचपन की प्रतिभा को याद किया। अनिल का जन्म 1957 में हुआ। वह जब छोटे थे, तो चंबल नदी की मूर्ति को देखकर कहा था कि यह बहुत छोटी है। उनमें बचपन से ही आर्किटेक्चर की समझ थी। हालांकि स्कूल और कालेज के जमाने से ही अब वे सुतार के साथ मिलकर मूर्तियां बना रहे हैं, और खुद भी एक क्वालिफाइड आर्किटेक्ट हैं। अब वे एक ही सिक्के के दो पहलू हैं। उन्होंने कुरुक्षेत्र की श्री कृष्ण और अर्जुन की विराट रथी प्रतिमा को याद किया। मूर्ति की कल्पना कैसे करते हैं के सवाल पर उन्होंने कहा कि उनके मन में मूर्ति की छवि पहले आ जाती है।

सुतार ने दिल्ली में पं गोविंद वल्लभ पंत से हुई मुलाकात को याद किया, और फिर उन्हें उन्हीं पंत जी की मूर्ति बनाने का काम मिला। सुतार ने बताया कि उन्होंने जितने भी राजनेताओं की मूर्तियां बनाई हैं, उनमें सबसे पसंदीदा मूर्ति महात्मा गांधी की है। उन्होंने मायावती से हुई



(From left) Shweta Aggarwal, Aradhana Pradhan and Dipali Bhasin



Anindita Chatterjee

मुलाकात और डॉ अंबेडकर की मूर्ति निर्माण की घटना को भी याद किया। सुतार ने बताया कि मूर्ति शिल्प के लिए कल्पनाशीलता बहुत जरूरी है। एक इंसान की मूर्ति उसकी पहचान बता दे। उसे कैसे बनाते हैं? के उत्तर में सुतार ने नेताओं के भाव को भांपने को महत्वपूर्ण बताया। सुतार का कहना था कि नेहरू जी चिंतक थे। इंदिरा गांधी एकला चलो रे थी। सुतार ने कहा कि वे सिग्रेचर स्टाइल में मूर्तियां बनाते हैं। स्कूल के दिनों में सुतार ने अपने गुरु के मार्गदर्शन में सीमेंट से गांधी जी की मूर्ति बनाई। यह मूर्ति उनके गांव में लगाई गई। इसके लिए उन्हें 100 रुपए मिले थे। फिर किसी दूसरे गांव के लोगों ने भी मूर्ति बनाने के लिए कहा और उन्होंने 300 रुपए दिए थे।

सुतार ने बताया कि संसद भवन में लगी उनकी 18 फीट ऊंची सरदार वल्लभ भाई पटेल की मूर्ति देखकर ही प्रधानमंत्री मोदी ने गुजरात में वल्लभ भाई पटेल की मूर्ति बनाने की इच्छा रखी। उसके बाद उन्होंने विश्व की सबसे बड़ी मूर्ति 'स्टेच्यू ऑफ यूनिटी' पर काम किया। अरब सागर में शिवाजी की मूर्ति संबंधी परियोजना की चर्चा के दौरान उन्होंने अमृतसर में महाराजा रणजीत सिंह की मूर्ति को याद किया। याद रहे कि सुतार प्रोग्रेस नाम के एक प्रोजेक्ट पर काम करना चाहते हैं, जिसमें उन्होंने 250 फीट ऊंची स्टील की मूर्ति बनाने की कल्पना की है। यमुना नदी पर काम करना चाहते हैं। सुतार ने सवाल जवाब के सत्र में भी भाग लिया। इस दौरान एक श्रोता के प्रश्न के उत्तर में मूर्ति शिल्प की बारीकियां भी बताईं, और कहा कि इस काम में पूरी टीम काम करती है। यह किसी एक व्यक्ति का काम नहीं होता। इस कार्यक्रम में अनंदिता चटर्जी के साथ अहसास वूमेन और आमंत्रित श्रोताओं ने शिरकत की। अहसास वूमेन की ओर से श्वेता अग्रवाल ने धन्यवाद ज्ञापित किया। हजारीका ने बंगाल के हथकरघा निर्मित दोशाला से सुतार का अभिनंदन किया।

टेटे-ए-टी के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण व अहसास वूमेन एनसीआर का भी सहयोग मिला

Racking Up Knowledge



Ramakant Rath

Partha Sarathi Ray

Few sights at home are more stimulating for inquisitive minds than a rack stacked with a variety of books. A book rack serves as an outlet as well as a portal. It provides refuge from the rigmarole of daily life by transporting us into a land of fresh thoughts, compelling characters and relatable emotions. Through the sheer volume and diversity of knowledge it contains, a book rack serves as a candy store for the mind.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation understands these qualities of a book rack, and in an attempt to encourage more readers to immerse themselves in books, recently unveiled a special “Book Rack” at the Mayfair Hotel, Bhubaneswar.

The Book Rack was launched in the presence of the internationally acclaimed sand artist and Padma Shri recipient Sudarsan Pattnaik, poet and Padma Bhushan



Sudarsan Pattnaik

recipient Ramakantha Rath, and Bollywood actors Anu Choudhury and Partha Sarathi Roy. Among the other dignitaries at the event were Pradipta Mahapatra, assistant vice-president, Mayfair Hotels and Resorts, and Chidananda Malliick, deputy general manager, sales, Mayfair.

An endeavour of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** to give back to society in terms of literature and culture, the Book Rack comprises autographed books by authors who have featured in **Kalam** and **The Write Circle** events in Bhubaneswar. The works of writers attending these sessions in the future will also be added to the Book Rack in due course. The Book Rack in Bhubaneswar was unveiled after **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** completed 50 literary events in the city. Similar aggregations of books have been arranged by the Foundation in Kolkata, Patna, Jaipur, Udaipur and Raipur, among other cities.

Speaking at the launch of the Bhubaneswar Book Rack, Rath warned literary communities against division



Pradipta Mahapatra



Vedula Ramalakshmi



Nidhi Garg



(Left to right) Rhea Resham Bari, Partha Sarathi Ray, Anu Choudhury



Sudarshan Pattnaik, Anu Choudhury, Partha Sarathi Ray, Nidhi Garg, Ramakant Rath, Anindita Chatterjee, Samir Ghose, Vedula Ramalakshmi

on the basis of language. "Indian literature is one, even though writers write in different languages. The writings of great Odia poet Bhima Bhoi and legendary Hindi poet Kabir are similar, even though they were written in different languages," observed Rath.

Pattnaik praised the initiative and hailed the Foundation's efforts to promote Indian culture within and outside the frontiers of the country. Sarathi and Choudhury expressed their delight at being part of this unique literary event and said they were excited to join the future

An endeavour of Prabha Khaitan Foundation to give back to society in terms of literature and culture, the Book Rack comprises autographed books by authors who have featured in Kalam and The Write Circle events in Bhubaneswar. The works of writers attending these sessions in the future will also be added to the Book Rack in due course. The Book Rack in Bhubaneswar was unveiled after Prabha Khaitan Foundation completed 50 literary events in the city

endeavours of the Foundation.

Vedula Ramalakshmi, an **Ehsaas** Woman of Bhubaneswar, welcomed the guests and explained the role of the Foundation in spreading literature through its multifarious sessions across the globe.

Finally, Anindita Chatterjee, executive trustee, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, summed up the importance of the occasion with a few words: "A dedicated Book Rack is yet another endeavour of ours to reach out to people who are constantly in search of good literary works. Even during the total lockdown period, we had made our patrons happy by holding some 350 virtual sessions where more than 400 authors and artistes joined from around the world."

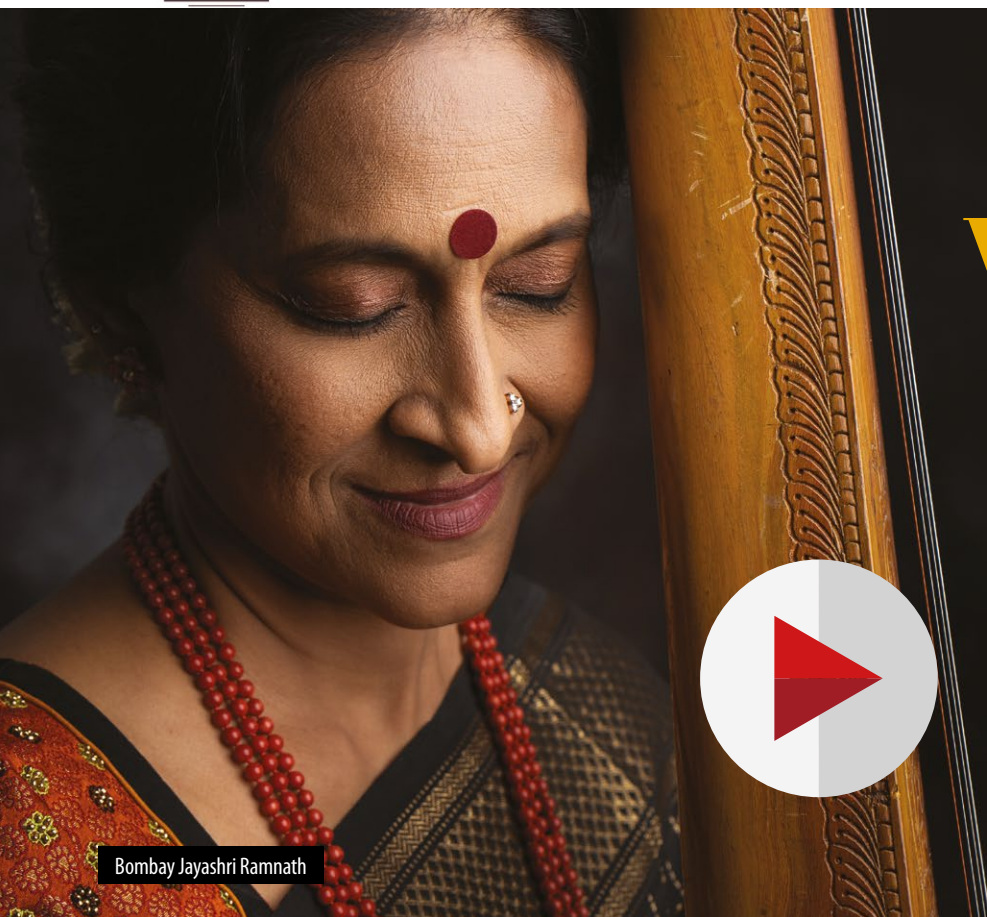
This book rack launch was presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Mayfair Hotels and Ehsaas Women of Bhubaneswar



Samir Ghose, Partha Sarathi Ray, Anu Choudhury, Sudarshan Pattnaik



Sandip Bal



Bombay Jayashri Ramnath

“Music Will Show the Way”: Bombay Jayashri Ramnath

For connoisseurs of music, to watch two experts from different Indian classical *gharanas* engage in a chat about their professional worlds thrumming in harmony to the tune of their inner rhythm is an incredible opportunity. This privilege was afforded to members of the audience at the latest virtual session of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation's Sur Aur Saaz**.

Inaugurated by **Ehsaas Woman** Shubh Singhvi, the session saw talented Hindustani classical vocalist Kaushiki Chakraborty converse with veteran Carnatic classical singer and the 2021 Padma Shri winner — Bombay Jayashri Ramnath. In her soft-spoken manner, Chakraborty welcomed Ramnath with, “Personally, it is a treat to be able to chat with you about music.”

With an intriguing name like hers, of course, the conversation started with a curious question from Chakraborty about “Bombay”. Ramnath was all humble smiles as she replied, “I was born in Kolkata but when I was young I moved to Bombay. Then, I moved to Chennai in the late '80s to train under *Guruji*. In the south, traditionally, there is an association with a place

and the musician, more to describe the personality of the music perhaps.... A greatly respected critic, who knew I was from Bombay, wrote a review saying let's call her 'Bombay Jayashri' and then that name just stuck.”

From the general to the specific, Chakraborty steered the conversation to the nuances of music as she got

Ramnath talking about the importance of learning an instrument for a vocalist. “My *Guruji* explained to me how and why it is very important to visualise the notes, which sometimes as a vocalist we take for granted,” recalled Ramnath, who took up the veena as her instrument of choice.

Growing up in a household where both her parents were music teachers, her love of music grew out of its constant presence around her. She would always “wake up to *Amma* singing or *Appa* singing.” With a vibrant smile, she reflected upon those days. “For the longest time, I used to

imagine that everybody's world is like that,” she said but also pointed out the drawback of such a privilege. In such an environment, “you perhaps don't understand the process of creating the beautiful journeys between

The way we sing is a reflection of the personality formed owing to so many sounds we hear — the *riaaz* of the people around you and the different forms of music that impact you. Maybe what I sing is a distillation of all that put together

the notes. So, my Gururji took me to learn the veena and that did change the way I look at music,” she said. Painting a picture with words, she explained, “You play the veena and you hold the notes with your hands.... It is a very graphic journey that transformed my way of thinking about the notes. It helps internalise the notes.”

Chakraborty shared a similar experience with her father, veteran singer Ajoy Chakraborty — his love of playing the harmonium and how it influenced his *sargam*. Ramnath added that playing an instrument also helps her “be a bit more cognizant” of what her accompanying “musicians are doing to create that magic.”

Chakraborty pointed out Ramnath’s signature “softness and amiability” that uniquely melds with Carnatic music’s vigour and strength and asked about its origin. “My *Amma* thought that all the sounds in the world had to be infused into the child, so I learnt a little bit of everything. This has given me a lot of understanding and appreciation.... The way we sing is a reflection of the personality formed owing to so many sounds we hear — the *riaaz* of the people around you and the different forms of music that impact you. Maybe what I sing is a distillation of all that put together,” said the vocalist.

Ramnath also talked about the rewards of being a guru. “Every time I share music with a student, whoever or however that student is, I end up feeling a richer student myself. After every class, I feel I know a composition better. So, the process of sharing and engaging is what I yearn for, because it makes me feel better.”

The singer also spoke about the difficulty of juggling the role of a mother with being the guru to one’s child. “I feel grateful that I have an offspring who understands music... but to be a mother, to share the music and to draw the lines and switch between mother and severe teacher, this conflict will be there.... I feel it’s heavy on my fragile shoulders. But I think with the blessings of gurus and elders... music will show the path. We have to keep doing our duty.” Chakraborty too confessed to feeling divided and torn about when to adopt what role. “With every generation, they [children] need a friend in their parents. The times are very different now, they need that refuge where they can share anything... so you have to find those pockets where you can change



Kaushiki Chakraborty



Vandana Singh

roles,” said Chakraborty.

The duo also spoke about the fine balance of being rooted in tradition yet adapting to the needs of the changing times where music is concerned.

Speaking of her many collaborations with artistes from different musical traditions, Ramnath said, “The possibility that you can sit next to a musician who has trained in a different system for years and share that space... I started getting addicted to this! Every time I have worked on a collaboration, I can see music through their eyes... it allows you to get lost in another person’s art and history and uniqueness.”

The chat also saw Ramnath briefly touching on topics such as working on music with children with special needs for the last 15 years and her receiving the Padma Shri.

A true fan, Chakraborty concluded their conversation admitting that it will be “an honour and a blessing” if she ever got a chance to collaborate with Ramnath in her lifetime. **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, Vandana Singh, brought the session to a close by extending a vote of thanks to both musicians for allowing the audience to be privy to their heartfelt conversation on music and more.

Sur Aur Saaz is in association with Swar, EZCC, Ministry of Culture and Ehsaas Women of Kolkata.



Chandan Tiwari

लोक गीत संस्कृति का हिस्सा, हृदय की आवाज: चंदन तिवारी

हमरो गांव रे...' उन्होंने बचपन में पंद्रह अगस्त को गाए गीत 'गरजता हिमालय है गंगा का पानी, याद करो वीरों भक्तन की कहानी...' के अलावा नानी के निर्गुण व भजन को भी याद किया।

यह पूछे जाने पर कि पॉपुलर गायिकी की जगह आपने लोकसंगीत की कठिन राह क्यों चुनी? तिवारी का उत्तर था, "लोकगीत गाने से पहले मैं बहुत सारे रियलिटी शो का हिस्सा बनी। बहुत लोगों ने कहा कि मुंबई में रह जाओ, यहां बहुत स्कोप है। लेकिन अगर मुझे लोकगीत गाना था, तो लोक के बीच रहना जरूरी लगा। विंध्यवासिनी जी, भारत जी और शारदा जी ने मुंबई की ओर रुख नहीं किया। वे लोग जाना-पहचाना नाम हैं। मैंने यह चुनौती अपनी संस्कृति के लिए स्वीकार की। मैं भी लोकगीत गाने के लिए अपने जमीन की ओर लौटी।" सिंह के अनुरोध पर तिवारी ने बिहार की विविध लोकभाषाओं के गीत भी सुनाए, जिनमें मैथिली का 'बड़ रे जतन से हम सिया-धिया पोसली, सेहो धिया राम लेले जाय...' और भोजपुरी का वह विदाई गीत, जिसे सुन लोगों की आंखें भर आती हैं, 'निमिया के डाढ़ जनि कटवाईह हो बाबा...' शामिल है। तिवारी ने दरभंगा और नीदरलैंड के एक कार्यक्रम में गाए गीतों को याद किया और बताया कि जो लोग भाषा समझ नहीं रहे थे, वे भी झूम रहे थे।



Sanjay Kumar Singh

लोक भाषा में कोई भेद नहीं करता। संगीत का असर सीधे हृदय पर होता है। संगीत भाषा की दीवारों से परे होती है।" ये बातें प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन और मसि इंक की ओर से आयोजित आखर बिहार में लोकगायिका चंदन तिवारी ने कहीं। तिवारी ने भोजपुरी, हिंदी, मगही, मैथिली और अवधी सहित लोक-गायिकी के क्षेत्र में अपनी खास पहचान बनाई है। महेंदर मिसिर और भिखारी ठाकुर जैसे रचनाकारों के गीतों के अलावा गांव की गलियों में गुम और बिसरा दिये गये गीतों को तलाशने और संगीतबद्ध करने के उनके काम को देशभर में सराहा गया है। अमर गीत बटोहिया, लोक के गांधी, लोक में गांधी, पहुनवा राघव, शिवजोगिया, निरगुणिया, गंगा मझ्या, बेटी चिरझ्यां, नदिया धीरे बहो, बिहारनामा, रसूल मियां, स्नेलता, संत मामाजी, प्रताप सिन्हा, विंध्यवासिनी देवी, रामजियावन दास बावला आदि गीतों को आपने लोकप्रियता का नया मुकाम दिया। आप संगीत नाटक अकादमी द्वारा युवा सम्मान, बिहार सरकार के विंध्यवासिनी देवी पुरस्कार, भोजपुरी कोकिला सम्मान आदि से सम्मानित हैं।

आखर के भोजपुरी आधारित इस वेबिनार में स्वागत और धन्यवाद आराधना प्रधान ने किया। प्रधान ने यह कहते हुए कि जब तक साहित्य लोक में समाहित न हो, तब तक वह अधूरा रहता है, आगे के संवाद के लिए लोक साहित्य प्रेमी संजय कुमार सिंह 'पंजवार' को बुलाया। सिंह ने तिवारी से पहला सवाल गायिकी की उनकी शुरुआत को लेकर पूछा। तिवारी ने बताया, "गाने की शुरुआत मेरी नानी से हुई। नानी बहुत सुंदर गाती थीं। मेरी मां भी गाती थीं, इसीलिए संगीत की पहली तालीम घर से मिली। बाद में बोकारो में संगीत की शिक्षा ली।" पारिवारिक लोकगीतों में वह कौन सा गीत है, जिसने आपको गीतों की ओर आकर्षित किया? के उत्तर में तिवारी ने कहा, "मेरी नानी जो लोकगीत गाती थीं, वह था 'कांट कुस से भरल डगरिया, बचके रखियो पांव रे, माटी ऊपर छानी छप्पर ईहै



Aradhana Pradhan

सिंह ने पूर्वोत्तर के एक कार्यक्रम का जिक्र करते हुए पूछा कि आपने वहां क्या सुनाया था, तिवारी ने जवाब दिया, "मैंने पचरा, चैती, कजरी, सोहर, शादी और विदाई गीत सुनाया था।" झारखंड के समृद्ध लोकगीत का जिक्र आने पर तिवारी ने 'हईया रे, हईया रे, हईया..ए रे माझी ले चल नार के पार...' गीत गाकर सुनाया। तिवारी ने फिल्म, डिजिटल मीडिया के चलते भोजपुरी में आई अश्लीलता से जुड़े सवाल पर कहा कि हमें बेहतर प्रयास करना होगा। सोशल मीडिया ही सब कुछ नहीं है। संवाद के दौरान लोकगीतों के चयन, लोक विधाओं के महत्त्व आदि पर विस्तृत चर्चा हुई। तिवारी ने सोहर, कजरी, बारहमासा, शिव भजन, पूरबी, ए बुढ़ऊ करीखा लगाइला, होली गीत, किसान गीत और दर्शकों के अनुरोध पर 'बढ़ई-बढ़ई खूँटा चिरो, खूँटा में मोरे दाल बा का खाउं, का पीउं का ले के परदेस जाउं', 'सुतला में काहे ला जगईला हो रामा, भोरे ही भोरे...' गाकर सुनाया। कार्यक्रम में उषाकिरण खान, निराला बिदेसिया, यशवंत मिश्रा, नारायण आदि प्रबुद्ध श्रोता उपस्थित थे।

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन और मसि इंक की ओर से आयोजित आखर पटना के प्रस्तुतकर्ता हैं श्री सीमेंट।



Chitra Mudgal

Poonam Anand

स्त्री अपनी वैचारिकता को मुकम्मल करे: चित्रा मुद्गल

मेरे बनने में दत्ता सामंत, मजदूरों के संघर्ष, मृणालताई गोरे, प्रेमचंद, हेमिंग्वे आदि की भूमिका थी, पर सबसे अधिक प्रभाव मेरी घूँघट वाली मां का पड़ा, जिन्हें मेरे पिता ने नेवल अधिकारी होते हुए भी बराबरी का मान नहीं दिया। इसी ने मुझे विद्रोही बनाया। मैंने वह सब करने की कोशिश की जो मेरी मां नहीं कर सकी। सच तो यह है कि साहित्य आपका परिचय प्रति-संसार से कराता है।” **प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन** की ओर से आयोजित **कलम** अहमदाबाद में यह बात कही वरिष्ठ लेखिका चित्रा मुद्गल ने। इस कार्यक्रम में उनका स्वागत और धन्यवाद किया निकिता शाह ने। संवाद किया **अहसास** वूमन रांची की पूनम आनंद ने।

आनंद ने अपनी बातचीत की शुरुआत मुद्गल की मृदुता से की और पूछा कि आपकी बहुविध पुस्तकों में दिल के करीब कौन सी पुस्तक है? मुद्गल का उत्तर था, “जब मैं पुस्तक की रूपरेखा बना रही होती हूँ, तो उसकी परिधि व दृष्टिकोण हमारी चेतना के भीतर चल रही होती है। मैं उन लोगों के बारे में ही सोच रही होती हूँ। वह बस्ती जो हमारे चेतन में घूम रही होती है, एकांत पाते ही उसके पात्र मेरे करीब आ जाते हैं, कहते हैं क्या मैं आपके पास बैठ सकती हूँ। इस तरह मैं जब कुछ लिख रही होती हूँ, तो वही किताब, उसके पात्र मेरे सबसे करीब होते हैं। इस तरह जब मैं दूसरी पुस्तक लिखती हूँ, यही महसूस होता है। मेरे लिए मेरी हर रचना मुझे प्रिय है।”

अपने साहित्यिक सफर और अनुभव के आधार पर बताइए कि आज के युवा लेखक क्या करें? पर मुद्गल का जवाब था कि युवा लेखकों को हड़बड़ी नहीं करनी चाहिए। जो विषय आते-जाते, चलते-फिरते दिमाग में आया हो, लगातार उद्गिर कर रहा हो- लेखक को, उसकी दुनिया को, उसके अंतःकरण को, आत्म चेतना से उसे ढूँढना चाहिए। एक डॉक्टर की तरह जो अपने मरीज की बारीक जांच के बाद शल्य क्रिया करता है। पहले विषय को पकने दीजिए। मेहनत करिए, फिर लिखिए। अधीरता का लेखन से कोई नाता नहीं है। ऐसे लिखकर हम अपने पात्र की पीड़ा को पाठक की पीड़ा बना देते हैं।

महिलाओं की स्थिति संबंधी सवाल पर मुद्गल का कहना था, “जब तक इस देश, समाज की आधी आबादी का अधिकार, उसे नहीं दिया जाएगा और यह नहीं समझा जाएगा कि औरत केवल खाना बनाने, कपड़े धोने के लिए नहीं है, आपकी साझीदार है, तब तक बराबरी कैसे आएगी।” ईश्वरचंद्र विद्यासागर के साथ ही उन्होंने महाराष्ट्र, गुजरात, पंजाब में नारीजागरण व शिक्षा के प्रयासों की चर्चा की और कहा कि ज्योतिबा बाई फुले ने कोशिश किया कि शिक्षा केवल अमीर घरों की लड़कियों को न मिले। आज परिवर्तन तो आया है, पर अब भी पितृसत्तात्मक भाव खत्म नहीं हुआ है। अभी भी कई लोग खूबसूरत स्त्री को उसके काम के चलते नहीं बल्कि उसके रूप से आंकते हैं। स्पष्ट है, अब भी हमने स्त्री को वह जगह नहीं दी, जो उसे मिलनी चाहिए।

अपनी बात को और भी स्पष्ट करते हुए मुद्गल ने कहा, “वर्तमान स्त्री बीती सदी की उपज हैं। बाजारवाद में स्त्री को केवल देह के रूप में न देखा जाए। स्त्री के खूबसूरत शरीर में एक दिमाग भी है।” अपनी एक पुस्तक *एक जमीन अपनी* में पूंजी के विस्तार में स्त्री देह की भूमिका के जिक्र के साथ ही उन्होंने बाजार की सोच व एटाइजिंग कंपनियों की सोच पर अपनी बात रखी। उन्होंने कहा, “स्थिति यह है कि

पुरुष के लिए शर्ट, शेविंग ब्लेड, यहां तक चट्टी बेचने के लिए भी स्त्री को सामने रखा जाता है। पुरुषों ने अपने दिमाग से स्त्री को अपने लाभ के लिए इस्तेमाल किया है। आज शादी के रिसेप्शन में गाउन पहने लड़कियां दिखती हैं, जिसे ऐसे बनाया जाता है कि स्त्री की 35x25x35 की देह को कैसे दिखाया जाए। इस बाजारवाद ने स्त्री को चैतन्य तो किया है, पर ‘स्त्री देह’ बाजारवाद के बीच में खड़ा है। यह बाजारवाद स्त्री को उपभोक्तावाद का शिकार बना रहा है। इक्कीसवीं सदी में यह एक चुनौती है कि अपनी देह पर कब और कैसा नियंत्रण रखना है, यह स्त्री को जानना होगा। स्त्री आज स्वतंत्र होना चाहती है कि मेरी देह मैं जैसे दिखाऊं, पर यह एक तरह का ट्रैप है। स्त्री को अपनी वैचारिकता को मुकम्मल करना होगा। अपनी तारीफ सुनकर उसे समझना होगा कि मैं वस्तु न बन जाऊं। मुझे वस्तु समझे जाने से इनकार है।”

उत्तर प्रदेश के उन्नाव कांड का जिक्र करते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि प्रेम में समझ का अभाव इस परिणति पर पहुंचाता है। अब मोबाइल हर घर गांव में है। लड़के सेमीपोर्न देख रहे हैं। संस्कारहीनता और संयम का अभाव भी इसकी वजह है। अगर हम दूसरी की बहनों को ताकते हैं तो अपनी बहन की रक्षा कैसे कर सकते हैं। आज छः माह की बच्ची सुरक्षित नहीं है। ये सभी बाजारवाद, भोगवाद, उपभोक्तावाद, वस्तुवाद की देन है। हम सबकुछ बन रहे हैं, पर अच्छे मनुष्य नहीं बन रहे हैं। विदेश में स्कूल में ही नाम लिखाकर कंडोम खरीदवा दिया जाता है। वहां यह बता दिया जाता है कि यौन सुख भोगना आपका अधिकार है। पर हमारे यहां बिना आत्मनिर्भर हुए इस अधिकार का अर्थ क्या है?

सोशल मीडिया पर ट्रोल से जुड़े सवाल पर मुद्गल ने उत्तर दिया कि साहित्यकारों, कलाकारों को लेकर एक धुवीकरण हो गया है। सरकार का समर्थन करने को लेकर मुझे ट्रोल किया गया था। मैं सोशल एक्टिविस्ट हूँ। तीन तलाक पर हमने प्रधानमंत्री मोदी की प्रशंसा की थी। धारा 370 पर भी हमने प्रधानमंत्री की प्रशंसा की। तो पहले इन्होंने मुझे संघी बताया। फिर ऐसी-ऐसी बात लिखी। मैं कभी संघ समर्थक नहीं थी। मैं ट्रेड यूनियनिस्ट हूँ। मैं शॉक्ड थी। डॉ रश्मि ने मुझे प्रिंट आउट दिया। मैंने कहा इनकी दुनिया बहुत छोटी है। मैंने उन इलाकों को देखा है, जहां असली जीवन है।

यह पूछे जाने पर कि अवाई वापसी के अगुआ उदय प्रकाश ने राम मंदिर को चंदा दिया, आपका क्या कहना है? मुद्गल का उत्तर था कि उस समय उनके अंदर बैठा प्रखर लेखक, उनकी घोर वैचारिक प्रतिबद्धता सरकार के विरोध में थी। अब अगर वह चंदा दे रहे हैं तो उनका स्वागत है। हम खुला समंदर बनें, हम बहती नदी बनें, हम पोखर न बनें, एक सड़ा जल न बनें। उनके मन में अगर मंदिर की बात आई तो हमें इसका स्वागत करना चाहिए। हमें उनपर अपनी वैचारिकता नहीं थोपनी चाहिए। लेखक बौद्धिकता के नाम पर, साहित्यिक प्रतिबद्धता व वैचारिकता के नाम पर जो करते हैं हम उससे असहमत हो सकते हैं, पर हमें हल्ला नहीं मचाना चाहिए। मुद्गल ने सवाल-जवाब सत्र में अपने व्यक्तित्व व विचार से जुड़े उत्तर भी दिए।

कलम अहमदाबाद के आयोजन में अहसास वूमन, कर्मा फाउंडेशन, मंगलबाग और मीडिया पार्टनर दिव्य भास्कर का सहयोग मिला



Priyanka Om

भारत में नारी पहले से ही सशक्त: प्रियंका ओम



है। हिंदी में चित्रा मुद्रल, मंटो, चुगताई, राजकमल चौधरी, मृदुला गर्ग की भी कई रचनाएं बोल्ल हैं।" ओम ने माना कि मैं हिंदी साहित्य के बारे में कम जानती थी। सोशल मीडिया पर आई, तो पाया कि यहां हिंदी लिखने की क्रांति चल रही है। मैं भी लिखने लगी। उस समय मैं बहुत गलतियां करती थीं। मैं कहानियां लिखकर अपने दोस्तों को भेजती थी। उन्हीं के कहने से मैं प्रकाशक से मिली और वह छप गई। ओम ने कहा कि दूसरे संग्रह में मैं पढ़कर उतरी थी। वे कहानियां लंबी हैं। उनमें कई पात्र हैं, संवाद हैं।

प्रकृति ने ही स्त्री-पुरुष को अलग बनाया है। जब समाज बना, तब पुरुष को शारीरिक रूप से शक्तिशाली समझकर उसे बाहर का काम दिया गया और स्त्री को घर का काम। यहीं से पितृसत्तात्मक व्यवस्था कायम हुई। पर आज औरत भी बाहर का काम कर रही है, इसलिए पहले की व्यवस्था अब बदलनी चाहिए। हम औरतों को ही यह प्रयास करना होगा।" यह बात प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन व अहसास वूमेन की ओर से आयोजित कलम दिल्ली में तंजानियावासी हिंदी लेखिका प्रियंका ओम ने कही। कलम में उनका स्वागत अर्चना डालमिया ने किया। ओम के संक्षिप्त परिचय के बाद उन्होंने अहसास वूमेन लखनऊ से जुड़ी माधुरी हलवासिया को संवाद के लिए आमंत्रित किया।



Madhuri Halwasiya

हलवासिया ने ओम से पहला सवाल भारत से तंजानिया तक के उनके सफर व हिंदी लेखन से जुड़ने को लेकर पूछा। ओम का उत्तर था, "मैं जमशेदपुर से हूँ। इंटरमीडिएट तक की पढ़ाई वहीं से किया। संयुक्त परिवार में पली-बढ़ी। अंग्रेजी से स्नातक करने के बाद मैंने तुरंत नौकरी ढूँढ ली। बाद में मुझे लगा कि नौकरी के साथ एकेडमिक भी बहुत जरूरी है, इसलिए मार्केटिंग में एमबीए किया। एक बार फिर कई बड़े संस्थानों में नौकरी की और शादी के बाद तंजानिया चली आई। शादी के बाद मैंने खुद के लिए गृहिणी होना चुना। जब बच्चे हुए और बड़े होकर स्कूल जाने लगे तो मेरी दोपहरें खाली बीतने लगीं। मैंने फिर सोशल मीडिया पर लिखना शुरू किया। इस तरह लेखन का सफर चल निकला।"

साहित्य में आपकी कब और कैसे रुचि हुई? आपके प्रिय लेखक कौन हैं और कहानियां लिखते वक्त क्या आपको इनकी लोकप्रियता का पूर्वानुमान होता है? ओम का उत्तर था, "आपके एक सवाल में कई सवाल हैं। मुझे लगता है, मैं साहित्यिक रुचि के साथ ही पैदा हुई। बचपन में ही तुकबंदियां करती थी। सानेट लिखा। वे कम उम्र की बातें थीं। पढ़ने की आदत मुझे मेरी मां से मिली थी। वह एक दौरेवाला था, जब लगता है आपको कुछ करना है। इस दौरान कुछ समय के लिए साहित्य पीछे छूट गया। पर पढ़ाई जारी रही। लेकिन जो चीज आपके अंदर है, वह बहुत दिन तक दबी नहीं रह सकती। जहां तक पसंदीदा लेखकों की बात है, मुझे लेखकों से अधिक किताबें पसंद हैं।" उन्होंने इस क्रम में जेन ऑस्टिन, झुंफा लाहिडी जैसे लेखकों की रचनाओं नाम लिया। ओम ने यह माना कि उन्होंने लिखने के लिए कोई ट्रेनिंग नहीं ली। क्योंकि लेखन स्वतःस्फूर्त क्रिया है। यह और बात है कि सेल्स और मार्केटिंग के अनुभव काम आए। लेखन के लिए पढ़ना बहुत जरूरी है।

आपका लेखन बोल्ल व बिंदु है, इस पर सामाजिक प्रतिक्रिया को कैसे देखती हैं? के उत्तर में ओम ने कहा, "लेखन पर सेन्सरशिप नहीं होना चाहिये। साहित्य समाज का दर्पण है। साहित्य में वही लिखा जा रहा है जो समाज में घट रहा है। अगर आप बहुत काल्पनिक लिखते हैं तो पाठक उससे अपने को जोड़ नहीं पाता। लेखक आसपास जो देखता है, उसमें किस्सागोई को मिलाता है। यह देखा, भोगा, सुना सच है। दूसरों का सुख व दर्द भी इसमें शामिल है। अंग्रेजी साहित्य में बहुत खुलापन

आपकी कहानियां महिला चरित्रों पर आधारित हैं? क्या आप आगे चलकर नारी सशक्तीकरण की दिशा में कुछ करना चाहती हैं? ओम का उत्तर था, "मैं औरत हूँ तो मेरे लेखन में नारी पात्रों का आना सहज है। पुरुष किसी भी चीज को एक अलग नजरिए से देखता है। मुझे लगता है कि नारी पहले से ही सशक्त है। वह स्वयं शक्ति स्वरूपा है। दुर्गा मां, धरती मां, यहां तक कि भारत को भी भारत मां कहते हैं। हमारा समाज सिया राम, गौरी शंकर, राधे श्याम कहता है। जय श्री राम की जगह जय सियाराम ही हमारी ताकत है।" सोशल मीडिया को आप क्या समझती हैं? के उत्तर में ओम ने कहा, "जब यह आया था, तब अभिशाप नहीं था, पर आज शायद यह अभिशाप बन गया है। आज उसकी अति हो गई है। नियम यही है कि अति सर्वत्र वर्ज्यता किसी भी चीज की अति, न चाहते हुए भी, अभिशाप बन जाती है। मैं लाइक और कमेंट्स को चरस भी कहती हूँ। हम अपने जीवन की छोटी-छोटी चीज को पोस्ट करते हैं।"

अपने पति से जुड़े सवाल के उत्तर में ओम ने कहा कि आज मैं जो कुछ भी हूँ, वह अपने हसबैंड के चलते हूँ। सवाल जवाब के सत्र के दौरान ओम ने कहा कि एक समय था, जब मैं अंग्रेजी बोलने, पढ़ने को ही सबकुछ समझती थी। जब मैं तंजानिया आई, तो सबसे ज्यादा दिक्कत यहां की स्थानीय भाषा सोहली बोलने में हुई। मुझे कुछ भी नहीं आता था। वहां एक प्रॉविजनल स्टोर का लड़का अंग्रेजी में बात करता था। छह महीने बाद उसने कहा मैं तुमसे अब किसी विदेशी भाषा में बात नहीं करूंगा। तुम मेरे देश में हो तो यहां की भाषा बोलो। तंजानिया में फाइव स्टार में सोहली में बातचीत करते हैं। जबकि हमारे देश में घर में हिंदी बोलते हैं, पर बाहर निकलते ही अंग्रेजी बोलना शुरू कर देते हैं। योरोप में, चीन में सभी अपनी भाषा में बात करते हैं। भारत में हम अंग्रेजी बोलकर अपने को अभिजात्य समझते हैं। हमें अंग्रेजी आनी चाहिए, पर हमें हिंदी को महत्व देना चाहिए।

आराधना प्रधान के एक सवाल के उत्तर में ओम ने कहा, "लिखने से पहले पढ़ना चाहिए। भाषा, शिल्प साहित्य पढ़ने से ही आता है। आप अच्छा लिखेंगे तो प्रकाशक खुद ही मिल जाएगा।" एक सवाल के उत्तर में ओम ने कहा, "उन्मुक्तता नकारे जाने की वजह नहीं होता, साहित्य में शुरू से यह है।" मनीषा गोयल के अच्छे पाठक से कैसे जुड़े वाले सवाल पर ओम ने कहा कि आपको यह तलाश खुद करनी होगी। वैसे भी लोकप्रियता का कोई विशेष मापदंड नहीं होता। आप पसंदीदा रचना ढूँढ़िए। मेरी पसंदीदा किताब है 'मुझे चांद चाहिए'। खूशबू तिवारी ने भी सवाल पूछा। आभार नीलिमा डालमिया आधार ने दिया।

कलम दिल्ली के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण, दिनेशनदिनी रामकृष्ण डालमिया फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमेन का भी सहयोग मिला



Anuradha Beniwal

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन ओर से आयोजित कलम जालंधर में इस बार अतिथि वक्ता थीं यायावर, सोलोयात्री, प्रशिक्षक और लेखिका अनुराधा बेनीवाल। फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमन की ओर से रुही वालिया स्याल ने बेनीवाल का परिचय देते हुए स्वागत किया। स्याल ने फाउंडेशन और कलम के उद्देश्य से श्रोताओं को अवगत कराते हुए आगे के संवाद के लिए अहसास वूमन नागपुर से जुड़ी प्रियंका कोठारी को आमंत्रित किया। बेनीवाल ने अंग्रेजी, हिंदी में अपनी बात रखते हुए कहा कि मुझे पंजाबी में बात करने में मजा आता है। मैंने शतरंज खेलना तब शुरू किया था, जब मैं छह साल की थी। मेरे पिता खुद बहुत पढ़े लिखे थे। मेरी मां भी बहुत पढ़ी लिखी थी। फिर भी वह हरियाणा की शिक्षा व्यवस्था में लड़कियों की स्कूली शिक्षा के खिलाफ थे। वे रट्टामार लर्निंग के बहुत खिलाफ थे। उनका मानना था कि अगर बच्चे को याद करने के लिए बाध्य किया जाए, तो उसकी सृजनात्मकता खत्म हो जाती है।

बेनीवाल ने कहा कि स्कूली शिक्षा को समझने की जरूरत है। अगर स्कूल बंद है और आप बच्चे पर किताब पढ़ने के लिए दबाव डालिए कि वह याद करे, तो गलत है। आज मशीन मिनटों, सेकंडों में जोड़ घटा लेती हैं, तो उसे बच्चों को याद करने के लिए बाध्य नहीं करना चाहिए। इससे ज्ञान नहीं बढ़ता, न ही आगे इनका उपयोग है। यह ठीक है कि मैंने स्कूल के माहौल को मिस किया। पर आज लंदन में भी लोग होम स्कूलिंग को बढ़ावा दे रहे हैं। सच तो यही है कि ज्ञान और शिक्षा के कई माध्यम हैं। इसीलिए उस दौर में मुझे स्कूल छोड़ना पड़ा। फिर मैंने शतरंज छोड़ा अठारह की उम्र में। हालांकि मैं हमेशा पढ़ती रही। मुझे पुस्तकों से प्यार है। मुझे पढ़ना पसंद है। मैं प्रेमचंद को आठवीं क्लास में पढ़ चुकी हूँ। मैंने गुनाहों का देवता भी उसी उम्र में पढ़ लिया था।

इंस्टाग्राम पर अपने चर्चित वीडियो तोतो-चान की कहानी का जिक्र करते हुए बेनीवाल ने कहा कि यह एक जापानी क्लासिक है। अब तो स्कूलों में शिक्षकों को यह किताब दी जाती है कि कैसे पढ़ाएं। तोतो-चान एक लड़की का नाम है, जो बाल सुलभ कौतुहल व जिज्ञासाओं से लबरेज व खुशमिजाज है। वह पारंपरिक, रटे-रटाए तरीके से पढ़ाई-लिखाई में बिल्कुल दिलचस्पी नहीं रखती और हमेशा खिड़की पर खड़ी होकर बुलबुल को देखती है। आखिर उसने एक ट्रेन वाला स्कूल खोज लिया। जिसमें बच्चों को एडल्ट की तरह मानकर, बराबरी से समझाया जाता है। यहां शिक्षक कम दोस्त ज्यादा लगते हैं। और इस तरह वह मस्ती की पाठशाला में खेल खेल में सबकुछ सीख जाती है।

सोलो ट्रेवलिंग से जुड़े सवाल पर बेनीवाल ने कहा, “इंडिया में मैंने जब अकेले घूमना शुरू किया तो लोग पूछते थे कि घर में लड़ाई हुई है क्या? दोस्त नहीं हैं क्या? कुछ हुआ है क्या? मैं क्या कहती कि जब मैं यह करती हूँ तो मुझे अच्छा लगता है। मैं सड़क पर होती हूँ, निरुद्देश्य प्रकृति के पास होती हूँ, अकेले होती हूँ। उगते सूरज को, ढलते सूरज को देखती हूँ। मैं जहां चाहूँ रुक सकती हूँ। तो मुझे अच्छा लगता है।” एक

घूमने का मतलब केवल यात्रा भर नहीं होता: अनुराधा बेनीवाल

सवाल के जवाब में बेनीवाल ने कहा कि कन्फ्यूजन्स हमेशा बुरा नहीं होता। अगर आप कन्फ्यूज हैं तब भी ठीक है। अगर आप पांच साल बाद देखेंगे तो आपको अच्छा लगेगा। अगर आप कन्फ्यूजन्स में हैं, तो इसका मतलब है कि आपके पास च्वाइसेज हैं। यह एक अच्छी बात है। मैंने पारंपरिक राह नहीं चुनी। मैंने अंग्रेजी पढ़ी पर मैंने अंग्रेजी में लिखा नहीं। लोग यह क्यों नहीं समझते कि घूमने का मतलब ट्रेवल भर नहीं, न वैष्णो देवी की यात्रा भर है।

सोलो यात्रा के खतरे पर बेनीवाल का मत था, “अगर आप यह डरते हो कि यात्रा में आपके साथ बलात्कार हो सकता है, तो यह तो आपके साथ अपने घर में भी हो सकता है। अपने परिचितों के बीच भी हो सकता है। मेरा अनुभव है कि बाहर की दुनिया बहुत अच्छी है। दुनिया में अच्छाई ज्यादा है और बुराई बहुत कम है। यह दुनिया सुरक्षित भी है। यह ठीक है कि अकेले घूमने में सावधानी और जागरूक रहने की जरूरत है। हरियाणा में एक लड़की के रूप में पैदा होना अपने आपमें कठिन है। हिंदी से मुझे प्यार है, हरियाणवी मेरी नाभि से जुड़ी हुई है, पंजाबी भी मैं समझती हूँ। अंग्रेजी मुझे आती है।

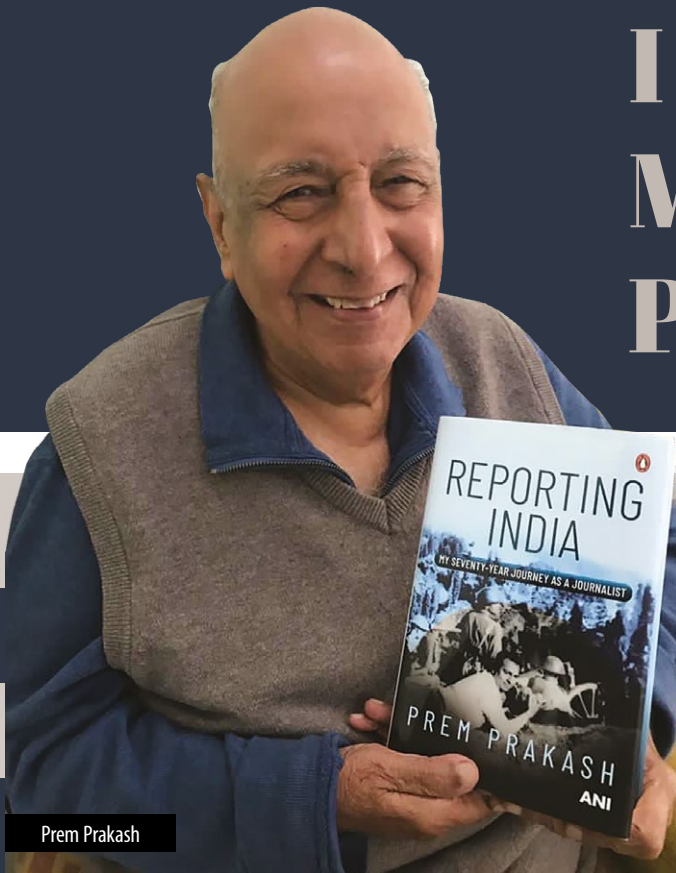
“महामारी ने मेरी यात्रा को एक ठहराव दिया। पिछले साल जब लॉकडाउन खुला तो मैं फ्रांस के एक गांव में चली गई। लॉकडाउन के दौरान मैं वहां ठहर गई। वहां के गांव में ऐसा खिंचाव था कि मैं दो महीने वहां रुक गई। मुझे फ्रेंच नहीं आती थी, उन्हें अंग्रेजी नहीं आती। लोग कहते हैं फ्रेंच कोल्ड होते हैं, स्पेनिश वार्म होते हैं। पर ऐसा नहीं है। एक समाज की कई परत होती हैं... मैं लेखक से पहले एक यात्री हूँ। यह मुझे खुद को समझने की ताकत देता है। अब उसमें दूसरों को समझकर लिखने की गहराई मिल गई है। पहले मुझे जो दिखाई देता था मैं लिख देती थी। पर अब मैं देखते ही लिखती नहीं। अब देखना ही बहुत है। जरूरी नहीं है कि लिखो ही। कुछ कहानियां जीने के लिए भी जरूरी हैं। इसने मुझे अब गहराई दी है। ये कहानियां मुझे आंतरिक तौर पर मजबूत करती हैं।”

लिखने के पीछे का उद्देश्य बताते हुए बेनीवाल ने कहा, “पहले मैं ब्लॉग्स लिखती थी। निजी आदमी का ब्लॉग किसी भी कामर्शियल लेखन से अधिक विश्वसनीय होता है। आप उनपर भरोसा कर सकते हैं। अगर मुझे नागपुर जाना हो तो मैं पूछ सकती हूँ कि वहां संतरे का मुरब्बा कहां मिल सकता है। मैंने इसी उद्देश्य से लिखना शुरू किया था। पुस्तक लेखन की शुरुआत मैंने अपनी दोस्त, नो नेशन फॉर वूमन की लेखिका प्रियंका दुबे के कहने पर किया। मैं उन्हें कहानियां सुनाती थी, तो उनके दबाव व निर्देशन पर मेरा लिखने से जुड़ाव हुआ।

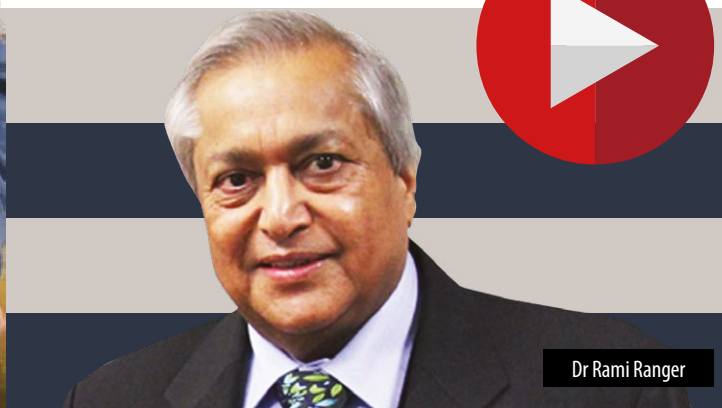
“ट्रेवलिंग केवल किसी जगह पर पहुंचना भर नहीं है, बल्कि यह किसी जगह को समझना भी है। जरूरी नहीं है कि आप कहीं जाएं तो आप उसे लिखें हीं। यात्रा में मेरे पास कहानियां होती थीं, तो मैं अंग्रेजी की बजाय हिंदी में लिखना शुरू की, ताकि लोग समझें कि हिंदी लिखने वाले भी लिखते हैं।” एक सवाल पर उन्होंने आजादी मेरा ब्रांड पुस्तक के बारे में बताया, साथ ही हरियाणा से दक्षिण भारत की यात्रा के दौरान राजस्थान के एक गांव में रुकने के दौरान लिखी कहानी भी सुनाई। बेनीवाल ने जिओ बेटी अभियान के बारे में भी बताया, जिसके तहत वह गांव की लड़कियों को शतरंज सिखा रही हैं।

कलम जालंधर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण और अहसास वूमन जालंधर का भी सहयोग मिला।

I Have Survived Many a Death — Prem Prakash



Prem Prakash



Dr Rami Ranger

He is a media doyen who needs very little by way of introduction. He's had, with over seven decades in journalism, a front-row seat to the birth of a nation and its subsequent odyssey — strewn with eventful ups and downs — to become the world's largest democracy. He started as a young photojournalist on the frontlines and went on to become a name synonymous with news reportage in India — Prem Prakash — the man behind Asian News International (ANI), India's largest syndicated news network.

Documenting the history of India through the lens of his long and illustrious career, Prakash recently penned a memoir — *Reporting India: My Seventy-Year Journey as a Journalist*. It was launched by Lord Rami Ranger, a British businessman, at a virtual session of **Kitaab** organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. The event, moderated by reputed international journalist Manish Gupta, hosted a panel comprising Tim Witcher, the New Delhi bureau chief of Agence France-Presse (AFP) and C.V. Patel, the UK publisher of several news weeklies.

Commenting on Prakash's life, Ranger deemed it

“a remarkable journey.” He felt that reading *Reporting India* was like watching a movie on the evolution of journalism and the development of India albeit without the dangers that Prakash had to face while covering those news stories. Ranger also applauded Prakash's tenacity, commitment, dedication and skills.

“The British were leaving. Lots of jobs were opening up. I chose journalism.... At that stage, we didn't think politics was our cup of tea. I was very young in any case... how could I get into politics? I would have been the stupid, unpaid worker of some illiterate politician”

Gupta, for his part, commended Prakash for the way he has beautifully captured India and the region around. He called *Reporting India* a “soft, simple, easy read”, which gives the reader “a quick walkthrough of the entire 73 years.” He requested Prakash to speak a little about India — then and now.

Prakash, true to his status as a chronicler of India's tryst with destiny, started by reminiscing about Delhi under British rule — how the head of police of Old Delhi would trot up and down to Red Fort on a horse as a show of authority. He also spoke about the tragedy of Partition and more. Using the recent Chinese withdrawal from Ladakh as an example, Prakash commented on the progress India has made. “It was known as the land of snake charmers and elephants in Britain but today it's not just an emerging power. It has

power of its own,” he said.

He then went on to talk about his tryst with technology — a crucial part of news broadcasting. “One thing I keep telling my colleagues at the ANI even today is ‘stay ahead of technology.’ I started with 35mm cameras, then came the 16mm black and white... and the 16mm with colour. Then, I saw the first video cameras appear in television studios. It was huge!” he recalled. Illustrating the need to keep adapting to technology, he added, “I was in London speaking to a colleague and I said, ‘wait a minute, it won’t be long before this damn thing will be on our shoulders’. And it happened. That same video camera today can be carried by hand whereas I have a back problem from carrying those heavy cameras around on my shoulders,” he laughed.

When asked by Witcher about the Emergency, Prakash discussed Nehru’s vision of the Press and explained why in contrast the Emergency was a dark period of Indian history. He disclosed his staunch support for Nehru’s views saying, “Our founding father, the first Prime Minister, who gave us three elections and a legacy of democracy, would always say that ‘I am comfortable with irresponsible and independent newspapers than with controlled newspapers.’”

Delving deep into the ins and outs of the Emergency, he recalled his experience. “I, myself had to go into exile.... I was definitely using the tweaks and the weaknesses of the censorship guidelines and getting my stories abroad.... I had to leave within 24 hours and was out for three months before I came back,” he disclosed.

Speaking about current-day journalistic trends, he spoke with sadness. “One of the complaints I hear — not many journalists go to locations.... Too many seek information from government officers and go by that, rather than doing their own research,” he said. As a contrast, he cited his own experiences of reporting from ground zero and revealed, “I have survived many a death.”

With Patel, Prakash discussed why he went

into journalism instead of politics. “My father had a photography studio, my cousin was into photojournalism,” he reminisced, stating that his first experience of writing a report was on the founding of the National Students’ Union of India. He also attributed his career to the ample opportunities everyone had once India became free. “The British were leaving. Lots of jobs were opening up. I chose journalism.... At that stage, we didn’t think politics was our cup of tea. I was very young, in any case... how could I get into politics? I would have been the stupid, unpaid worker of some illiterate politician,” he laughed.

Speaking of today’s breed of trained journalists, he said, “There were no schools in my days. Nowadays, when they come out of schools they think ‘I am already on top of the world. I have a degree.’” Given that “it takes a long time to realise that you are a journalist” Prakash felt that there is an imminent need for them to be moulded correctly by the editors in charge.

Being one of the only journalists to have interviewed all 14 Prime Ministers of India, Prakash also went on to answer a “tough question” — PM who disappointed the most (Chandra Shekhar), who impressed the most (Rajiv Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee) and why.

He also spoke about the Bangladesh Liberation War, the “shameful” 1984 riots and his strong feelings about the dangers of social media as the origin of fake news. He said that now everybody is becoming a journalist as a result of access to social media. In this context, Prakash also corroborated Witcher’s statement that “the key to every story is the source and it is up to the reader to have trust in the source.”

Summing up, Prakash said that the only way forward for India and its journalists in upholding the truth was “to get back to the basics of journalism” — be honest, be on location, report the facts and leave the opinion-making to the editors.”



Munish Gupta



Tim Witcher



C.B. Patel



Pooja Maru

Putting India First



Ram Madhav

What is the role of idealism in nation-building and development? What has been the impact of the abrogation of Article 370 on the political leadership of Jammu and Kashmir? What are the misconceptions with which the Northeast is viewed by most commentators in India?

Kitaab, an initiative by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, hosted politician and thinker Ram Madhav at ITC Sonar, Kolkata to help answer the aforementioned questions and much more in the course of a riveting session. Madhav, who has served as the National General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and been a member of the National Executive of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), was speaking ahead of the launch of his book, *Because India Comes First: Reflections on Nationalism, Identity and Culture*. A frequent columnist for various publications like *The Indian Express* and *Open* magazine, Madhav has also been the editor of *Bharatiya Pragna*, a monthly magazine in English published by Pragna Bharati, and associate editor of *Jagriti*, a Telugu weekly.

In conversation with Madhav was **Ehsaas** Woman of London, Sangeeta Datta, a writer, filmmaker, musician, and curator working in India and the United Kingdom.



Sangeeta Datta

Madhav opened the conversation by revealing how he was inspired to join the RSS after witnessing the idealism with which the organisation functioned as a collective, striving to do what is best for India. Emphasising on the importance of idealism over ideology in nation-building, Madhav said that the driving force for individuals like him is to put the country ahead of one's own self. This is also the reason Madhav has penned his latest book, which addresses the concept of prioritising the nation above the interests of the self.

Reflecting on his early days in the BJP, Madhav said that his was a lateral entry into the party, which meant that he did not rise through the ranks as quickly as he did during his time with the RSS. Initially, he was given charge of areas like the Northeast and Kashmir, not traditional strongholds of the BJP. But Madhav remains



Rishi Bagree

grateful for the opportunity as it allowed him to contend with complex socio-political challenges and do his best in an attempt to unite the country.

Specifically on Northeast India, Madhav repudiated the notion of viewing the region through the prism of violence, terrorism, insurgency, and anti-India sentiments. According to him, the ground reality is far more complex. Madhav analysed how there used to be groups in the Northeast, sponsored by neighbouring countries like China, that would try to undermine the interests of the Indian government. Crediting the nationalists of the Congress for trying to integrate the Northeast with the rest of India, Madhav said that they had been victims of conspiracies. Madhav acknowledged the existence of a potent Pro-India movement in the Northeast and highlighted how it was crucial for the BJP to reactivate this movement and incorporate some of their leaders within their own party. Uniting the country without the use of terms like “Mainland India” to separate the Northeast from the rest of the country is what Madhav desires in the long run.

Moving on to the state of democracies across the world, Madhav elaborated on why democracy as a form of governance is undergoing an acute crisis. Madhav located this crisis in the rise of non-political power players, chiefly the rise of social media giants. “Social media is so powerful it can even topple governments. Regulating them is difficult as they are borderless. These forces can promote anarchy, which will weaken democracy, but solutions should be within the constitutional framework,” observed Madhav.

He accepted that social media was originally used to empower individuals, but believes its primary purpose has now been distorted in order to create a ruckus in the digital sphere. Extending his argument on the power of social media, Madhav predicted that if platforms like Facebook and Twitter go unchecked and unregulated, they could subvert the idea of a multi-polar world and replace it with a hetero-polar world, where corporations are as powerful, if not more, than nation-states.

Answering a question on Mahatma Gandhi, Madhav said that the RSS does not undermine the contributions of any freedom fighter: “There may be differences of opinion, which we even find between (Jawaharlal)

Madhav accepted that social media was originally used to empower individuals, but believes its primary purpose has now been distorted in order to create a ruckus in the digital sphere. Extending his argument on the power of social media, Madhav predicted that if platforms like Facebook and Twitter go unchecked and unregulated, they could subvert the idea of a multi-polar world and replace it with a hetero-polar world, where corporations are as powerful, if not more, than nation-states

Nehru and Gandhi from the letters exchanged between them, but that does not mean we disrespect a national leader. In the RSS morning prayer, we invoke Gandhi’s name along with other leaders.”

Finally, on the subject of the abrogation of Article 370, which converted Jammu and Kashmir from a state into separate Union Territories in August 2019, Madhav explained how locals had told him that the abrogation favoured the people of Jammu and Kashmir by breaking the hegemony of select political parties in the region. Madhav stressed on how the abrogation has paved the way for the emergence of a fresh crop of grassroot leaders as opposed to entrenching the power of a few privileged families. Urging for greater decorum in politics between parties as well as in general everyday discourse, Madhav called upon his fellow compatriots to make Kashmiris feel an integral part of India’s 1.3 billion-strong family.

Summarising his comments, Madhav said, “Kashmiris have been victims of propaganda for very long. Things are changing, but it (progress and development) will take time.”

This session of Kitaab is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with ITC Sonar



Esha Dutta



Shrinini Kulkarni



Dipali Bhasin

G.P. Hinduja's Guide to a Good Life



G.P. Hinduja

Sitting in an elegantly furnished room of his home, 80-year-old Gopichand Parmanand Hinduja was the picture of humility and grace as he engaged in a session of **Tête-à-tea**. Organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, the conversation revolving around the UK-based businessman's life and beliefs was opened by Shefali Rawat Agarwal, the chairperson of YFLO, Kolkata.

Watching him laughingly acknowledge to author and social worker Lady Mohini Kent Noon that no one in the UK knows him as anything other than plain old "GP," you would not guess that he is the multi-billionaire industrialist and co-chairman of the Hinduja Group. You would also not realise that his stately "family home" stands on the ground that used to be the boyhood residence of King George IV.

GP started the conversation by attributing his success to his parents. "Everything I am, or my family and brothers are, is because of our parents." "What I learnt from my mother from childhood was how to be generous, how to be spiritual.... Life is not easy, it is complicated and difficult but if your karma and deeds are good it makes living easier," he smiled.



Mohini Kent Noon



"Some people, when they make money they think they are successful. I have never believed in that. I don't think money plays an important role in life," he added.

According to him, happiness is what's truly important. "When you give happiness to others, you feel permanently happy. With wealth, you are temporarily happy. In our family, I don't think anyone

Thanks for the great interview. There is much to learn from Mr Hinduja's life experiences. Look forward to more such talks.

— Yog Sikand, New Delhi

Wonderful programme. GP has many qualities and attributes that we should emulate.

— Deepu Mirpuri, London

Excellent talk and a very good presentation! So warm and relaxed. There was a lot to learn from it.

— Gita Moorjani, New York

Lovely session. Very rarely does one hear accomplished people speaking of human impulses (like revenge) and the necessity of overcoming that to realise one's potential. It's usually just fluff. This was real.

— Seetanshu Junnukar, Singapore

It was very enjoyable, very natural and spontaneous. He was very positive and gave good advice to the younger generation.

— Vasanti, Pondicherry

believes in wealth. We have always tried to see where humbleness can be adopted. So, what I have learnt in my life is... that the more humility you have, you will get peace, happiness and enjoy your life much better," he said.

Going back to the teachings of his parents, he explained, "Our parents taught us one thing — everything belongs to everyone and nothing belongs to anyone. We came into this world with nothing... when we go, what do we take with us? Nothing. So, what an individual needs is to find true friends — relationships that can help you distribute the right money," referring to Noon's charity, LILY, which helps rescue and rehabilitate trafficked children.

GP even shared an anecdote about how, forced by need, his father had to beg for money from his friends. "There was no lift then, I remember. Some of his friends used to be on the fourth or sixth floor and when my father used to climb the stairs and reach there... they would hide in the bathrooms. Their wives would say they

are not at home," he revealed to point out how petty and deceitful wealth can make people if they are not careful.

Speaking about his father's principles, which have become guidelines for him and his brothers, GP listed — First, work to give to others — through charity, by creating jobs or by simply helping others, whether you are rich or not. Second, your word is a bond — lawyers and documents are not the guardians of a good transaction; finding the right, trusted people who hold up their end of the bargain is the key. Third, growth with partnership — look for the quality of a person and not the project. Find the right person, so you can help each other grow.

Elaborating on the third aspect, GP explained, "When I say the quality of the person, I try to see if the person's intentions, his philosophy and nature are straightforward. Look! Profit and loss can always happen, it is like life and death... we have no control over it. My father always used to believe that we should deal with right-natured people, the right quality of people. Even if he had good projects where he knew he was making good money and he found out that the character of the person was not good, he never used to deal with them. So that is why he said growth with partnership."

As for his advice to the youth, it was simple: Wake up, thank God that you are alive, meditate and then start the day — keep an optimistic mindset throughout the day. He also reminded the youth that challenges are not setbacks. They are stepping stones to go higher as long as one's intentions are good. Also, he reminded everyone that to be "something" you have to work hard.

He summed up with, "In my life, I have never cheated anyone. I have never harmed anyone. I have tried to see if I can help and if I couldn't, I just said sorry. So youngsters, keep these principles in mind. Don't have any ego..."

He then concluded the session by reading out an excerpt, which he felt would be useful to the youth, from a letter he wrote to his mother that was published in Noon's book, *Dear Mama*.

Agarwal wrapped up the chat by thanking both Noon and GP for taking time out of their busy schedules for an enlightening chat on the secret to a fulfilling and well-lived life.

This session of Tête-à-tea is presented by Shree Cement Ltd, in association with Ficci Flo Kolkata

“In my life, I have never cheated anyone. I have never harmed anyone. I have tried to see if I can help and if I couldn't, I just said sorry”



Marcus du Sautoy

Collaboration Not Competition is the AI Way



Devangshu Datta



Do androids really dream of electric sheep? Are robots really bound by the Three Laws of Robotics? Can Skynet actually turn our future dystopic? These and many more such questions flood our sci-fi-fueled brains, made fertile by great authors and filmmakers who've painted intriguing visuals of time-travelling, crime-fighting war machines and sentient synthezoids with such life-like dexterity that they have fascinated us and terrified us in equal measure.

Add to it confounding terms like machine learning and deep learning and you have the perfect recipe for a layman's nightmare vision of blood-thirsty robots taking over the world and enslaving the human race. Yes, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is real. Yes, it is going to be a part of our future. But sifting fact from fiction is essential to find out what the future of AI is really about.

Marcus du Sautoy, professor of mathematics at the University of Oxford and author of *The Creativity Code: How AI is Learning to Write, Paint and Think*, sat for a virtual chat with Devangshu Datta, a journalist specialising in science and technology.

Organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, this session of **The Universe Writes** was opened by Mita Kapur, the CEO of Siyahi. Datta jumped straight away to the topic of creativity and AI. Calling it one of the most thought-provoking books he has read, Datta asked Du Sautoy to elaborate on his vision of creativity. "Creativity is one of those slippery words, a bit like consciousness. You sort of know it when you have it or see it... but

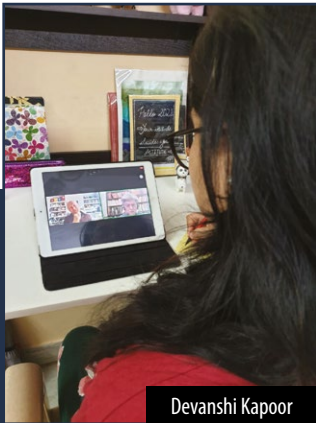
we have been clinging to this word 'creativity' as something uniquely human. That it's an expression of what it means to be human... we are hoping that AI won't be able to achieve creativity," Du Sautoy mused.

Referring to the work of Margaret Boden, an AI expert, Du Sautoy elaborated that for something to be considered creative, it should be new, it should be surprising and it should have value. According to Du Sautoy, while the first is an easy and objective point to determine, the other two are extremely subjective. However, he conjectured that it's possible to apply these tenets to AI because machine learning and deep learning are based on feeding relevant data to AI.

"So there is the chance to give this code the things that we find surprising, the things that we value — art, music, literature and mathematics — and it might be able to sniff out the qualities that distinguish the valuable... and perhaps be able to be creative in its own right," he explained.

This is the journey of the book, said Du Sautoy — whether AI can learn as a human does. Therefore, "the book is as much an exploration of how humans create, where do our groundbreaking ideas come from — generally by learning from the creativity of past masters," he argued, pointing out that Picasso first mastered reproducing art styles before breaking and reinventing them.

Sautoy also expounded the merit of not biasing code



Devanshi Kapoor



Lokendra Singh Rathore



Shivranjani Singh



Raj Subramaniam

with our ways of thinking. Referring to AlphaZero, a code programmed to play the Chinese game, Go, he said “It was better that it didn’t learn the ways we play Go because it seemed to limit it.” He called it the “tabula rasa learning”. Extending this teaching methodology to the world of mathematics, he explained, “Mathematics is a little bit like a game. It is quite a clean environment that doesn’t necessarily have the influence of external ways of thinking and data to develop it. So mathematics is a place that might be susceptible to a tabula rasa style of learning.” However, he also explained that “code isn’t that good at doing mathematics” at this moment. It is a topic Du Sautoy has dealt with extensively in the book because he feels mathematics is a scientific art form and has an element of storytelling in it — not an AI forte yet.

The next topic discussed was how and why people are upset when they discover that a piece of art or music they liked is AI-generated. Eyes gleaming in excitement, Du Sautoy debated animatedly how “this helps us get to the heart of why we create art.”

He believes that humans do so to try to have a conversation with another consciousness and is also at the heart of why we feel cheated by reacting to AI-generated art — because we can’t reconcile to connecting with something without a heart or soul. However, Du Sautoy sees no reason to feel tricked. “AI is learning from our art, which is an expression of our emotional world. So, I think people shouldn’t feel distressed if they have an emotional reaction because actually what they are responding to is the human emotional world taken through this new filter,” he said.

Giving the example of an AI Jazz Continuator, which not only produced intricate jazz pieces and wrought an emotional reaction from listeners but also helped musicians rethink certain progressions anew, Du Sautoy conjectured that our perception of AI as the competitor

is incorrect. It is more complementary than competitive. “Hollywood tends to cast AI as the competitor. I think that’s wrong. We should regard the emerging AI as a collaborator, as a powerful new tool which can push us into new ways of thinking!” he exclaimed.

Du Sautoy further connected the AI-human creative process by suggesting that nowadays, trying to decode the process by which AI generates strings of code is as complex and unfathomable as trying to make sense of the human brain and its neural network. However, despite the leaps in progress, to have sentient AI — capable of independent thought and awareness — is still a long way off, disclosed Du Sautoy. “It’s going to be many years before **The Universe Writes** invites a piece of AI to share its novel with the audience,” he quipped.

No topic during the conversation was left untouched by the AI brushstroke — from art, music and math to the algorithmic accuracy of sports and hook-up predictions, from self-driving cars and their associated ethical conundrums to cognitive biases, religion and common sense.

In conclusion, Du Sautoy said, “We sometimes tend to give algorithms and code too much respect, which can be dangerous.... Throughout all of this it’s about collaboration. The best team is the one that combines the skills we humans still possess and the things that the AI has.”

Putting things in perspective, he added, “We talk about singularity — when AI will be cleverer than us — this is a completely wrong picture. Intelligence is highly multi-dimensional. There will be areas where AI is better and areas where humans are better. But the two together will always be better than one on its own.”

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

“Hollywood tends to cast AI as the competitor. I think that’s wrong. We should regard the emerging AI as a collaborator, as a powerful new tool which can push us into new ways of thinking”



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@theuniversewrites



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An Insider's View of Indian Media



Smita Prakash

Does the role of the media change when public discourse becomes exceedingly polarised? How can one understand the function of neutrality in journalism? What is the state of the Indian media when it comes to facilitating greater representation of women?

In an attempt to grapple with these critical questions and provide an overview of the Indian media landscape, **Ek Mulakat Vishesh** welcomed Smita Prakash, one of the most recognisable figures in Indian journalism.

Prakash, who was in conversation with Ketki Bhatia, a corporate lawyer and **Ehsaas Woman** of Mumbai, is the editor of Asian News International (ANI), which is South Asia's leading multimedia news agency, providing content for every information platform, including television, mobile-first platforms and newspapers. Prakash has more than two decades



Ketki Bhatia

of journalistic experience, having started anchoring television shows in the 1990s, when the media industry in India had just started opening its doors to the private sector. She has anchored several television news shows, including one of India's first TV news magazines, *Ghoomta Aaina*, besides working as a reporter for NHK Japan and Channel News Asia of Singapore. Her show *This Week in India* was the longest running news show on any channel in South Africa, even before it opened diplomatic relations with India. She has reported extensively from the United States on the last three presidential elections and specialises in politics and international affairs pertaining to South Asia. The discussion was moderated by **Ehsaas Woman**, Nidhi Garg.

The conversation started with Prakash talking about how she developed an interest in journalism. Her father, a

Prakash spoke about how the media has become the favourite punching bag of the people. She acceded to the fact that everyone has biases, but also explained how the audience can use the media to reinforce their own prejudices. The importance of distinguishing facts from opinion in a media ecosystem flooded by polarising views was emphasised repeatedly by Prakash

civil servant, used to frequently meet journalists at home, and over time, through listening to journalists talk about their work, the challenges it entailed and the purpose it gave them in life, she decided that journalism was her calling. Moreover, she had always been curious about world affairs and news in general, which only served to bolster her enthusiasm for a career in media.

In her early days as a journalist, Prakash had gone to Punjab for a story, which was only beginning to recover at the time from a sustained period of instability and violence. Prakash's seniors were hesitant to send her for the assignment because of potential safety issues for women. But Prakash put her foot down and insisted on going, shooting a documentary in Punjab for Doordarshan. The opening shot of the documentary was supposed to show a Punjabi farmer tilling his land, but Prakash and her team could only find Biharis on the farms! This incident made it clear to Prakash that preconceived notions have no place in journalism's quest for the truth.

Shifting to the representation of women in the Indian media, Prakash raised some vital points about the infrastructural deficiencies that continue to imperil female journalists, especially those covering stories on the move. One such deficiency is the lack of adequate washroom facilities across the country. This often means that women do not get to eat or drink because they cannot get access to proper sanitation later. However, Prakash added that the Swachh Bharat campaign initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has helped in assuaging this concern in recent years with many more toilets coming up across the length and breadth of India.

Prakash went on to talk about the #MeToo movement

and its ripple effect on Indian media. According to her, there is now greater sensitivity concerning what questions can be asked to women and what kind of behaviour is out of bounds in a professional space. Prakash also analysed how growing up in a culture that normalises the humiliation of women at multiple levels can often convince women subconsciously that they are overreacting when, in effect, they are simply speaking out and voicing their grievances. The insidious impact of Bollywood in cultivating such a mindset was cited as one of the examples by Prakash.

Finally, on the subject of the media's roles and responsibilities in contemporary India, Prakash spoke about how the media has become the favourite punching bag of the people. She acceded to the fact that everyone has biases, but also explained how the audience can use the media to reinforce their own prejudices. The importance of distinguishing facts from opinion in a media ecosystem flooded by polarising views was

The opening shot of the documentary (for Doordarshan) was supposed to show a Punjabi farmer tilling his land, but Prakash and her team could only find Biharis on the farms! This incident made it clear to Prakash that preconceived notions have no place in journalism's quest for the truth

emphasised repeatedly by Prakash.

Before wrapping up the discussion, Prakash made a couple of valuable observations on the notion of neutrality in journalism. While she acknowledged the need for a journalist to present both sides of an argument in upholding neutrality, she also underlined how no reportage can be entirely unbiased, for there are frames of reference that condition every story that is covered in the media. Cautioning journalists against becoming activists looking to amplify their own agendas through the media, Prakash called for journalism that is rooted in integrity, based on facts, and designed to inform — not indoctrinate — the audience.

Ek Mulakat Vishesh is presented by Shree Cement Ltd

A Triple Treat at Arth Festival 2021



Governor of West Bengal Jagdeep Dhankhar and wife Sudesh inaugurated the Arth Festival in Kolkata, where **Prabha Khaithan Foundation** was the knowledge partner

It is not possible to enhance culture without conversing about it. Each year, the Arth Festival is organised with the aim of discussing culture in a way that challenges conventional wisdom, furthers path-breaking ideas, and provides intriguing insights about those at the centre of cultural production. In 2021, Kolkata played host to the Arth Festival on February 27 and 28.

Besides its multitude of discussions, the Festival hosted two special interactions as well as a live session, in association with **Prabha Khaithan Foundation**, from earlier in the month that launched the latest book written by Bollywood actor Anupam Kher.

These sessions provided some fascinating ideas, delving deep into the lives of the celebrated personalities that were a part of them. **Ehsaas Women** Shweta Aggarwal and Seema Anand also attended the specially designed sessions that stimulated hearts and minds alike.

How Folk Music Shapes Creativity

For generations, folk music was considered to be a niche art form that had little to no mass appeal at a pan-India level. But with her trailblazing work, Ila Arun became one of the pioneers in marrying the nuances of folk art with the reach and popularity of mainstream cinema.

As part of Arth, Arun — one of India's greatest folk singers — was in conversation with Shinjini Kulkarni, a Kathak dancer and



Shinjini Kulkarni

Ila Arun

student of history at Delhi's St. Stephen's College.

"I did not undertake any professional training, but subconsciously imbibed the artistry of folk from my surroundings," said Arun while explaining how her upbringing in Rajasthan, where "music lurks in every corner", made her realise the transcendent appeal of folk.

Arun spoke about how her interactions with different communities in Rajasthan gave her the chance to master their dialects and vocabulary while her participation in college events, where she would get to witness numerous tableaux, meant she developed an understanding of folk culture in different parts of India.

In terms of how she made folk music identifiable for urban audiences, Arun highlighted the role of playing around with language: "My focus was on making the lyrics of folk songs comprehensible for all, without diluting the authenticity or the symbolism of the context the song came from."

Arun discussed the grand success of her albums like *Chhappan Chhuri* and *Banjaran*, besides providing the backstory for the composition of unforgettable Bollywood hits like *Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai*. "Folk gives you the space to create what you want... it has all the creative components one needs, from drama to conflict to a wide

Folk gives you the space
to create what you want...
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components one needs,
from drama to conflict to a
wide emotional palette
— Ila Arun

emotional palette," said Arun.

When Kulkarni asked Arun about the her adaptations of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, Arun demonstrated how she incorporated Ibsen's memorable character Nora (from the play *A Doll's House*) in Rajasthani folk music by invoking images that an ordinary Rajasthani could relate to.

In the final part of the discussion, Arun spoke about the infinite creative possibilities of folk music, citing a recent Coke Studio performance she was part of, where folk was blended with a saxophone as well as rap music to give it a truly global outlook.

With particular reference to modern Bollywood songs, Arun argued that using folk music as a hook without celebrating it properly in a song does not do justice to its rich history. While she acknowledged the dexterity with which some Bollywood directors like Sanjay Leela Bhansali have deployed folk in cinema, she warned against the appropriation of folk music for purposes of representative tokenism.

The conversation wrapped up with Arun singing for a few minutes, reminding everyone of the sheer force and intricacy with which she has been able to mesmerise audiences for decades.

Disruption through Music

Few people enter Bollywood with the aim of causing a disruption. Most aim to fit in, continue set patterns, and experience success in the way it has been experienced before. Irshad Kamil is not one of them.

A poet and lyricist whose words have graced some of the most popular Bollywood tracks, ranging from songs in *Jab We Met* to *Rockstar*, from *Tamasha* to *Aashiqui 2*, Kamil's magic lies in his ability to disrupt, to break rules of rhyme and rhythm that Bollywood has grown to take for granted.

To discuss the secret of Kamil's disruption in this gripping session of Arth was Satya Vyas, a prominent writer of modern Hindi and best-selling novelist.

"I do things my way. I have never succumbed to pressure before and never will," said Kamil, when asked about his approach to music composition.

Kamil began the conversation by contextualising his journey to Mumbai and Bollywood, dealing mainly



with how he wanted to create a new kind of music for popular cinema. This desire to disrupt stemmed from his observation that most Bollywood songs would resort to flowery language and a form of sophisticated diction that often contradicted the film's setting as well as the background of the characters.

In a bid to change that, Kamil introduced a more conversational style of lyric composition, which paid off instantly. Armed with a wide knowledge of poetry, its trends and innovations, Kamil spoke about how he likes to play around with traditions to create something unprecedented. Case in point being Kamil's use of Sufiyana music for romantic songs, hitherto unheard of in Bollywood.

Interspersing his theories on lyrics and music, Kamil provided some wonderful anecdotes about how some of his songs came to be. Speaking of his soulful creation, *Agar Tum Saath Ho* (from the film *Tamasha*), Kamil recollected how the song that was eventually used was the fourth one he

Within me, I have a poet as well as a lyricist, and sometimes it becomes difficult to reconcile the two.... Most Bollywood songs are written to a tune, whereas a poet would always prefer to write first and attribute a tune later. This can make things really tricky for me, but I enjoy the process as well

— Irshad Kamil

had created along with A.R. Rahman, with the first three deemed unfit to complement the poignancy of the shots captured by director Imtiaz Ali.

More such captivating stories about his songs are ensconced in Kamil's book, *Kali Aurat Ka Khwab*, which also formed a part of the discussion.

Kamil described how he wrestles with the twin composers inside him: "Within me, I have a poet as well as a lyricist, and sometimes it becomes difficult to reconcile the two.... Most Bollywood songs are written to a tune, whereas a poet would always prefer to write first and attribute a tune later. This can make things really tricky for me, but I enjoy the process as well."

Failure as a Stepping Stone to Success

"When I had failed my tenth standard examination, my father took me to my favourite cafe and ordered all the items I loved — mutton samosa, pineapple pastry and an espresso. I asked him what's wrong with him, to which he replied that he was celebrating my failure. He told me that whenever I failed in life I should keep in mind that failure is not to be feared, but to be celebrated," said Anupam Kher.

Launching his latest book, *Your Best Day is Today*, at the Arth Festival, Kher was at his inspirational best as he encapsulated his journey from a struggling student to one of the most accomplished actors in Bollywood. Kher was joined in conversation with his friend Ina Puri, writer, curator, and documentarian.

Kher spoke about how the onset of the pandemic had impelled him to write a book as he had no other way of channelling his emotions during the several months of lockdown. "Death became a statistic, it was no longer an emotion due to COVID-19," said Kher, explaining how he used the months spent isolating at home to internalise the meaning of loss and suffering.

Kher proceeded to list the three things he felt had become indispensable to life during the pandemic: family, basic sustenance, and a strong WiFi connection! He recollected how he



Anupam Kher

Ina Puri

Failure is an event, not a person. I have built my life on failures, but I have not let failure convince me that I am not special. All of us are special in our own ways. Each of us could have a film made on our lives.... But the problem is we forget what makes us special

— Anupam Kher

managed to connect with old school friends over calls, and how, as a man obsessed with routine but without nothing to do for months, he would allocate half an hour every day just to stare at the ceiling.

Wrapping up the discussion, Kher returned to the theme of failure, recalling another of his father's statements: "Failure is an event, not a person." Kher substantiated this by saying, "I have built my life on failures, but I have not let failure convince me that I am not special. All of us are special in our own ways. Each of us could have a film made on our lives.... But the problem is we forget what makes us special."

Aakhar: A New Frontier



Srijato, Bratati Bandopadhyay, Debshankar Halder, Hiron Mitra, Paran Bandopadhyay, Soumitra Mitra, Deepa Chatterjee, Subhankar De, Sougato Chattopadhyay, Pabitra Sarkar, Santanu Roy Choudhury, Poulami Bose, Surojit Bandopadhyay, Shankarlal Bhattacharya and Suman Mukhopadhyay

Literature has been an inseparable part of Indian culture and civilisation since time immemorial. In recent years, too, the paramount position of literature as one of the leading sources of artistic nourishment in India has endured. But such a gilded status for literature at the national level has been unable to arrest the gradual sidelining of regional literature in different pockets of the country.

In order for a literary ecosystem to thrive, literature in regional languages must get their due recognition and encouragement. This is what **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** aspires to do with **Aakhar**, an initiative that promises to promote regional authors and regional literature. **Aakhar** has been created with the aim of recognising the richness of regional literary roots as well as appreciating the sheer diversity and dexterity with which local literature is written in India.

The launch of **Aakhar** in West Bengal took place in Kolkata with the release of *Dekhi Biswaye*, a book on the life and career of legendary actor Soumitra Chatterjee. Across a career that spanned the best part of six decades, Chatterjee featured in numerous films, television series, and plays, receiving the Padma Bhushan (2004) and the Dadasaheb Phalke Award (2012) for his contributions to art and cinema. Best known for his collaborations with director Satyajit Ray, who gave Chatterjee his on-screen debut in *Apur Sansar* (1959), Chatterjee went on to portray unforgettable characters like Feluda, the sleuth who is a household name in Bengal. In 1999, Chatterjee became the first Indian film personality to be conferred with France's highest award for artistes, *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.



Deepa Chatterjee

Dekhi Biswaye was released by the late actor's wife, Deepa Chatterjee, who also passed away recently. It provides a panoramic view of Chatterjee's stellar artistic achievements and contains rare photographs, paintings by Suvaprasanna and Jogen Chowdhury, sketches by Hiron Mitra, articles, and lists of movies and theatres in which Chatterjee had acted. It is meant to be a homage to Chatterjee besides offering exclusive insights about the actor to his legions of followers. The book has been edited by Soumitra Mitra.


Present on the occasion of the book's release were a plethora of accomplished artistes including Debshankar Halder, Paran Bandopadhyay, Pabitra Sarkar, Hiron Mitra, Suman Mukhopadhyay, Bratati Bandopadhyay, Srijato and Anindya Chatterjee along with the legendary actor's daughter Poulomi Bose and son Sougata Chattopadhyay.

"The Foundation promotes and recognises talents from different walks of life. It is our honour to launch in Bengal the new initiative, **Aakhar**, through the release of a book on a renowned personality like Soumitra Chatterjee. It sure promises to be a compelling read," said Manisha Jain, communications and branding chief, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.

As part of **Aakhar**, there has already been a series of initiatives to celebrate regional literature through interactions with authors writing in Odia, Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Tamil, Kannada, Gujarati, Magahi, Rajasthani, etc. Now, with the launch of **Aakhar** in Bengal, the Foundation is intent on exploring the depths of Bengali literature through one-on-one conversations with Bengali authors as well as other formats of discussion designed to stimulate the literary imagination.



Anuja Chauhan



Of Memorable Taglines and Pacy Page-turners



Praneet Bubber

Over a decade ago, a go-getter quit her thriving career in advertising to pursue her passion for penning novels. And boy, did she thrive in her newly chosen field! With each new book, she ensured that her coined catchphrase “Yeh Dil Maange More” — for the Pepsico brand — became a mantra for her readers awaiting her next book. Her latest, *Club You to Death*, a whodunit, is her sixth.

The Write Circle Oslo recently chatted with *Those Pricey Thakur Girls* author Anuja Chauhan about her career change, latest book and more. The virtual session, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, was initiated by Indian Norwegian Community representative Kirandeep Dhillon Midha and moderated by **Ehsaas** Woman of Amritsar, Praneet Bubber.

The conversation started on a candid note. Chauhan recalled how her love of writing became the make and break of her advertising career. “I joined advertising because I wanted to write and I quit advertising because I wanted to write!” She also gave the audience a sneak-peek into the ad world. “Advertising writing is great fun. You have bright, shiny crayons, superstars and big budgets... but what you can draw with those crayons is limited. So, there was a small amount of frustration with always being

told what to write,” said Chauhan.

However, the major reason behind her decision to quit advertising was that with seniority there was very little writing and “much more admin (work).” So, there came a point where she “desperately wanted back creative control.” She confessed to feeling so “inconsequential” during a massive shoot with Shah Rukh Khan and Saif Ali Khan that she had a “public meltdown.” She went back to her hotel, opened her laptop and started writing her first

book, *The Zoya Factor*. “That’s how it started. I was just seeking a wider canvas.”

Talking about her signature use of “every-day language” — a sort of Hinglish — in her ad campaigns and books Chauhan said, “You see, the search is always for authenticity. You are trying to write how people actually talk. If you don’t... it will sound very stilted and fake. Naturally, we Indians are bilingual, trilingual or more.... So, if you are trying to capture that in a novel then you have to use that language.”

However, she admitted that she had been worried that in her quest for authenticity she might alienate a wider audience. “With my first book, I worried about this... oh *mera* international audience *kya sochega*. And then I thought 1.3 billion Indians! *Usi mein* I will manage. Plus, I also try to give a hint... a gist of what he (the character) is trying to say. So those who don’t know the language will not be completely lost.”

Jokingly identifying herself as a “professional eavesdropper,” Chauhan confided that her characters are most often based on people she knows or comes across. “I eavesdrop a lot and also strike up conversations with people... because I am always interested to know (about them) and listen to the cadence of the way they talk and the little phrases they use.” But she makes sure that nobody will recognise themselves in the pages of her books.

Chauhan also spoke about her strong female leads being a product of her upbringing. “I am the youngest of four sisters. I have two daughters. I went to an all-girls college... I am a huge believer in female friendships...” She added that she bases her female characters on traits she believes in — strength, lack of bullshit, calling out hypocrisy, firm yes and no, leading by example, etc.

She admitted that she gets critiqued for having rose-tinted glasses on all the time. She said that she is trying to rectify that in her current books. “I am trying to remove them.... I hope I am writing a lot more realistic fiction now because I get grief from young girls who say, ‘Why do you spoil me with these high expectations (of love and men)?’”

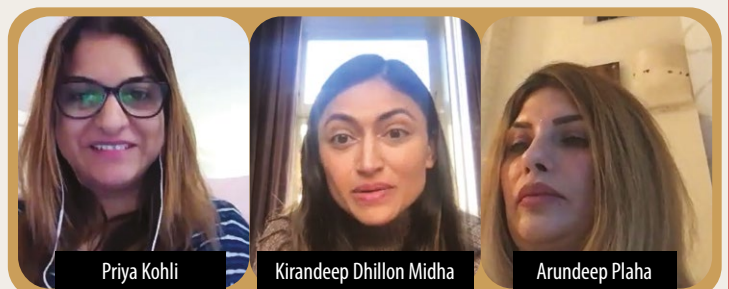
Next, Chauhan talked about her shift from writing full-blown romances to a whodunit. “I started to feel boxed in after writing five romance novels.” She felt that she needed to explore all that happens “beyond the happily ever after.” She also disclosed that she is a huge

fan of the crime genre. “I love cosy crime books. I have so many and I have read them all. I was excited about the challenge of pulling a killer out of the hat and seeing if I could do it well.”

I have written about
superstition, toxic
patriotism... forgiveness
and family, propaganda...
but I like writing a
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However, she is still a firm believer in the “propulsive thrust” that a romance gives a book. “I have written about superstition, toxic patriotism... forgiveness and family, propaganda... but I like writing a romance because it keeps you hooked...” She felt that a whodunit has a similar propulsive thrust. “The reader will stay with it because they want to find out whodunit,” she said.

On her writing style, she said, “My style is always to try and make a heavy point but make it lightly.” She also partially credited her visual style of writing — thanks to 17 years in advertising — for getting her books movie deals. However, she also added, “In Bombay, if one person buys (the rights to a book) then everybody suddenly



wants it... I don’t know if it is a good thing, but I am happy for the exposure, the audience and the decent money. So it’s good.”

Chauhan also touched upon her author inspirations, writing process, upcoming projects on Netflix and Disney+ and more.

Towards the end of the session, Chauhan addressed the budding authors in the audience. She advised them not to judge themselves harshly. “Don’t critique as you write. Write for the love of writing. Just stick to it. It’s a lonely business, writing. But when you go into your cave and you write... it’s so lovely... when you can share what you wrote with people. It is very rewarding.”

*The Write Circle Oslo is presented in association with
Indian Norwegian Community and
Ehsaas Women of Norway*

Our Dehradun House



Breakfast and lunch are moveable meals, depending on the weather, the sun and the mood!



Sunita Kohli

In 2008, Kohelika and I were together in New York, one of our favourite cities in the world. We went to the inaugural exhibition, titled 'Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary', at the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), in their

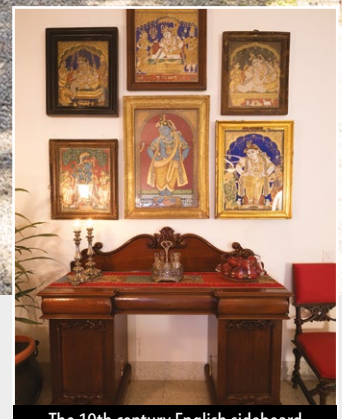
beautiful purpose-built new building on Columbus Circle in Central Park West. This was an amazingly creative exhibition where objects, originally made for another functional purpose, were given a "second life", in a new avatar. I think, such is the case with many elements in our Dehradun House where "the artists" in Ramesh Kohli's multi-generational family have transformed the House, whilst responding to new design and cultural paradigms. This house is a commentary on familial memories of gentler times.

This House, located in the centre of an old residential area, was bought in 1944/45. My husband has lived there most of his life. This British period house, previously called 'Brentwood Estate', was then already about 50 years old. The plot still has about a hundred or so old fruiting trees of litchi, jackfruit and pomelos.

In 1966/67, my husband, Rome, had done a major reconstruction and renovation job. The façade was entirely changed and the re-building was done entirely by



Over the fireplace hang award-winning photographs by a 12-year-old Suryaveer, from a mid-term trip to Gangotri.



The 19th century English sideboard displays Georgian candlesticks and an early English cruet set with a modern designer glass bowl from New York. Above it hangs a collection of old Tanjore paintings, all on the Krishna theme.

him. But, as Dehradun is in a seismic IV zone, structural damages to the house have included many fissures during frequent earthquakes and tremors. Being in the valley, cloudbursts are also frequent. The House has always required regular repairs. Our ties to Dehradun are very old as Rome studied at The Doon School, as did our son Suryaveer. And now, our 14 year old grandson, Zohravar, is fortunate to be studying there. It is these old ties that prompted Ramesh Kohli's children to decide to go in for a major revamp some years ago, as part of the family lives there permanently and the rest visit very frequently.

Lowenthal had famously said, "The past is a foreign country". This house is palpable with nostalgia and it selectively recaptures events, objects and places from the past. Spending time in the House is therapeutic. Although the House is only about a hundred years old, we treated the renovation of the house as partly a conservation project of a mid-century house. For our



The front verandah is the hub of most activities and a congregation place for family and friends. The refurbished armchairs are the only items that have, over the many years, survived the termite attacks.



A large glass-topped coffee table is always laden with home-made snacks. An old Kurdish kilim (rug) from Turkey is laid below.



The focal wall of the master bedroom suite is painted a deep red and on it hangs a layered red abstract canvas by Nupur Kundu.



The dining room is contiguous with the living room and continues with the mixed range of furniture of many periods and many styles. On the window sill is an old wooden Naga pot, filled with 'jharoos' from Bhopal.



Suryaveer's bedroom, in a deep green pistachio that is taken from the pichwai and from his college-day collection of old Kutch textiles.



In the Rear Verandah, which leads out from the Dining Room is a large Victorian armoire for hanging coats, which for years was used as a sample by Sunita Kohli. It has now been converted into a functional bar by Kohelika, for her father.

three grandchildren, the associations are already of four generations. "Architectural heritage is history written in stone" and as collective memories and family values represent intangible heritage, we wanted to conserve the sense of continuity, of belonging and of being rooted.

Houses engender social and family harmony. They anchor us in a larger hold, connecting us to the past, grounding us in the present and giving us a sense of identity and roots, a sense of belonging and of purpose. As it is hard to define heritage, personal histories and personal heritage, therefore, we must define it for ourselves. We have chosen to remember and observe our family rituals of birth, death and marriage and our ways of celebrating certain festivals such as the chanting of specific songs at *Karva Chauth*.

The wisdom-keeper in my husband's family was my mother-in-law. Traditional food, pickles, *murabbas* and sherbets were made by her. Ayurvedic medicines were brewed and pounded in her kitchen. The preparation of food is learnt by observation, it is a process of osmosis. In this House, all three generations are reasonably good cooks and much traditional cooking takes place in the renovated kitchen.

K2India is a multidisciplinary firm of architecture, design, furniture-making and construction. So Kohelika took over the renovation of the House. She says, "The

idea was to do as little change to the exterior look of the space but to systematically go through the interior spaces and add or change what we really needed to do, now with three generations living there."

A long, pebbled driveway leads up to the front façade, with its cantilevered porch, and buttressed by river rocks. These features were conceptualised by Rome and were retained. "We noted how the original house connected from room to room and how perhaps now we did not want those connections. So once I finished dealing with the infrastructural issues, the waterproofing of the roof and all the drainage, plumbing and electricity issues, then we started looking at the flow of how we now wanted to use the House. Windows were enlarged to really experience the outdoors much more. One got all the fireplaces up and working again, by re-bricking chimneys. I added a fourth bathroom, for the fourth bedroom. My grandmother was a strict vegetarian so there were two segregated kitchens. I converted one into a utility-cum-staff room. I made the rear verandah into an extension of the living and dining rooms and fitted a bar in there into an old armoire, giving that item of furniture also a second life", she concludes.

Sunita Kohli

Aakhar: A Celebration of Poetry



Inauguration of Kabita Utsav

In times of crises, poetry provides an outlet to help process our emotions. Our fears, our vulnerabilities, our dreams, when expressed in verse, appeal to the mind and the heart alike. Poetry becomes our internal refuge when the external world takes a turn for the worse.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into a crisis of meaning, upending most of our perceptions of normality. In such a situation, the presence of poetry has been one of the few redeeming factors, with talented poets across languages trying to make sense of a generational tragedy in a way that is both sensible and sensitive.

The Kolkata chapter of Abrittilok provided a platform for this sensibility and sensitivity to shine through during an evening of poetry recitation at Srijoni, Santiniketan. Organised in association with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation's Aakhar** initiative, Sahitya Akademi, and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre (EZCC), the poetry festival allowed emotions to enunciate themselves through verse in what became a first-of-its-kind physical congregation in more than a year.

Based on the theme of survival, Abrittilok featured a bevy of special guests, including Gouri Bose, director, EZCC; Debendra Kumar Debesh, regional secretary, Sahitya Akademi; and Malabika Mitra, president, Abrittilok, who also delivered the opening address.

In what marked Abrittilok's first foray into Santiniketan, in association with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, there was a series of moving performances by Ranajit Das, Bithi Chattopadhyay, Prabal Kumar Basu, Aditi Basu Roy and Mrityunjay Prabhakar. A group presentation also took place, involving Bratati Parampara, Santiniketan, and Bolpur Sambad.

Two special pieces graced the occasion, inspired by the rebellious zeal of Kazi Nazrul Islam and the poetic

perspicacity of Jibananda Das. More individual recitations wrapped up the performative aspect of the event with the likes of Soumitra Ghosh, Siddhartha Mukhopadhyay, Suvobrata Roy Chowdhury, Shovansundar Basu, and perhaps most spectacularly, Goutam Halder, taking turns to mesmerise the sizable audience that had gathered mostly from the town and the surrounding villages.

A felicitation ceremony was organised to recognise the remarkable contributions of senior recitationist Rabin Majumder, which brought a fitting end to proceedings.



Group programme

The background music for the event was designed by Santanu Bandopadhyay, while those in charge of conducting the tunes were Saiful Islam, Moumi Dutta, and Sayanti Roy. The chief coordinator for the whole programme was Soumitra Mitra, adviser, Abrittilok.

Besides the poetry performances on stage, there was an exhibition and sale of books on the sidelines of the event, organised by Sahitya Akademi, in association with the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

In the time to come, Abrittilok hopes to put together more evenings like this that serve to showcase the versatility of poetry and its ability to make people from different walks of life feel at one with one another.



ज्ञानयज्ञ समारोह में छात्रों को निः शुल्क पाठ्य पुस्तकें प्रदान की गईं



Bishambhar Newar



प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन के सहयोग से कोलकाता की मानवसेवी संस्था भारत रिलीफ सोसाइटी ने कोलकाता के टांटिया हाईस्कूल सभागार में ज्ञानयज्ञ समारोह का आयोजन किया, जिसके तहत गरीब, पर पढ़ने में निपुण छात्रों को निःशुल्क उपयोगी पाठ्य-पुस्तकें मुहैया कराई गईं। याद रहे कि भारत रिलीफ सोसाइटी पिछले 36 वर्षों से इस तरह के कार्यक्रम आयोजित करती आ रही है, जिसमें बिना किसी जातिगत, क्षेत्रीय, लिंग व धार्मिक भेदभाव के गरीब जरूरतमंद छात्र-छात्राओं को उनकी उपयोगी पाठ्य पुस्तकें निःशुल्क उपलब्ध कराई जाती हैं। अपने शुरुआती सालों में ही लोकप्रिय हो जाने वाले इस आयोजन के तहत अब प्रति वर्ष हजारों विद्यार्थी पाठ्य-पुस्तकें हासिल कर शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में आगे बढ़ रहे हैं।

इसी तरह प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन कला, संस्कृति, शिक्षा, वन्यजीव संरक्षण और साहित्य उन्नयन के क्षेत्र में अपने महत्वपूर्ण और लोकप्रिय कार्यक्रमों के चलते विश्व भर में एक जाना माना नाम है। लैंगिक समानता और महिला सशक्तीकरण की दिशा में फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियां कोरोनाकाल में भी रुकी नहीं। फाउंडेशन की संस्थापक डॉक्टर प्रभा खेतान एक लब्ध प्रतिष्ठित उद्यमी,

स्वप्नदर्शी, परोपकारी, समाजसेवी, नारीवादी चिंतक और लेखिका थीं। आप नारी सशक्तीकरण की दिशा में सक्रिय रूप से प्रयासरत थीं और आपका लक्ष्य एक सुनहरे भविष्य का निर्माण करना था। आप 'कर्म ही जीवन है' के मूलमंत्र को मानती थीं। इसीलिए फाउंडेशन संस्कृति, भाषा, संगीत, साहित्य, दृश्य कला, नृत्य, नाटक, शिक्षा, मौखिक परंपरा और पारंपरिक प्रथाओं को बढ़ावा देता है। फाउंडेशन 'अपनी भाषा अपने लोग' के मौलिक विचार को बढ़ावा देने के लिए अपनी साहित्यिक, सांस्कृतिक, समाजसेवी, कल्याणकारी और महिला सशक्तीकरण की गतिविधियों के लिए दुनिया भर में चर्चित हैं। फाउंडेशन के बहुविध कार्यक्रम न्यूयॉर्क, लंदन, दिल्ली, पुणे, जयपुर, बेंगलूरु, भुवनेश्वर, कोलकाता, लखनऊ, भोपाल, चंडीगढ़, पटना, रायपुर आदि शहरों में निरंतर आयोजित होते रहते हैं।

इस ज्ञानयज्ञ समारोह में भी फाउंडेशन ने सहयोगी की भूमिका निभाई। इस दौरान कोरोना प्रोटोकॉल के चलते आरंभ में कुछ छात्रों को पाठ्य पुस्तकें दी गईं, और शेष छात्रों को सोसाइटी भवन से पाठ्य पुस्तकें लेने का आग्रह किया गया। कार्यक्रम में विभिन्न स्कूलों के छात्र उपस्थित थे।



Leopard — The Prince of the Jungle



In India, there are around 15 species of wildcats, of which leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is one of the big cats. In the habitat of the tiger and lion, the leopard is a co-predator. So, one can say that if the tiger or the lion is the King of the Jungle then definitely the leopard is the prince, who is crowned as one of the most beautiful and agile members of the big cat family.

The leopard is renowned for its unique skill and adaptive nature, making it one of the most successful wildcats in the world. India remains the largest home for this animal outside Africa at a time when it is endangered in other parts of the world. The leopard has a wide distribution throughout India, except the alpine Himalaya, the main desert in extreme west Rajasthan, the Rann of Kutch and the deltaic Sundarbans of West Bengal. Its habitat varies from dense forests to open jungles to scrub savannahs, but it is also found in densely populated cities like Mumbai, Gurgaon, Bangalore and Mysore, where it primarily survives on stray dogs and

pigs. Leopards are mainly active at dawn and dusk and its prey is relatively smaller than that of the tiger and the lion and its skill in climbing gives it protection from predators and helps it protect its prey. In wildlife reserves, which are dominated by the tiger or the lion, the leopard too shares the territory but it prefers to live in the periphery to avoid competition with the supreme predators. It often ventures into forest-side villages in quest for food like goats, sheep, fowls and dogs. However this results in an increase in human-animal conflict.

Leopards are opportunistic hunters built on strength rather than speed as they are more likely to drag their hunt up a tree. Their primary prey are deer, wild pig, and monkey. In the last few years, there have been many records of Black Panther or melanistic leopard sightings in India, which is basically a colour variant. They have been frequently sighted in Nagarhole, Dandeli and Tadoba reserves.

Leopards usually mate throughout the year, producing two or three cubs generally. The cubs remain hidden for up to six to eight weeks till they are ready to follow their mother.

The leopard population in India started falling in the late 1960s and it continued over a long period. However, it grew significantly from the widespread conservation action that created a momentum. It is because of the rigorous efforts made by the government in improved habitat, afforestation work and strong protection measures and creating corridors through different schemes and policies in concerned states. This continuous effort resulted in significant growth in forest cover and wildlife population. As per the ISFR 2019 report, there is an increase of 5,188sq km of forest and tree cover combined at the national level, and the latest report of the National Estimation of Leopards found 12,852 leopards, which is 60 percent higher than the 2014 estimation of 7,910.

and engagement of different institutions and NGOs such as WWF — who are working for forest and wildlife conservation through different programmes — also helped in the increase of wildlife population and forest growth.

Though the population of leopards is increasing, they still face a lot of threat and if proper measures are not being taken, this number can decrease swiftly. The main



During the All India Tiger estimation 2018, the leopard population was also estimated within the forested habitat in tiger occupied areas. But other leopard-occupied areas such as territorial forest, non-forested habitats (coffee and tea plantation and other land use where leopards are known to be found) were not considered while counting the overall leopard population. Hence we can say that the estimated number of leopards should be more than what is being recorded.

Along with the government, the awareness in society

reason for the reduction in the numbers of the big cats, including leopards, is humans. They are responsible for the loss of habitat, area fragmentation, poaching and illegal trade. So we should take a pledge to protect this beautiful animal before it becomes extinct and give our future generations a gift of wildlife to cherish.

— Daulat Singh Shaktawat

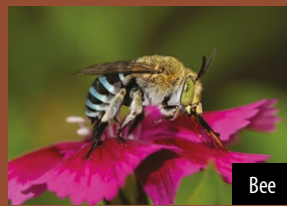
The author is an award-winning forest official who has served four decades in conserving wildlife in Rajasthan



Urban wildlife is a misnomer and gives a false sense of achievement of how humans have let wildlife coexist with them in an urban setup. In reality, wildlife in urban areas are the remnants of the wildlife that existed in those areas before urbanisation and are those animals that have adapted and managed to survive in a concrete-filled environment.

Among us humans, the most important misunderstanding to be corrected is the concept of wildlife. For most, wildlife as perceived by television and other mediums, are big animals like the tiger, lion, elephants or may be a crocodile in a swamp. The reality is that wildlife consists of creatures way different than these giants. Very strictly speaking, in an urban context, it includes a number of species of birds, frogs, lizards, snakes, ants, butterflies, moths and mammals like mongoose, civets, squirrels and foxes. Some urban landscapes that have remnants of a reasonably large patch of forest even have resident leopards.

The reason why these animals and birds have survived is due to their adaptation that helps them stay away from human sight and to breed in the urban architecture. Let us take the story of sparrow, the population of which has visibly decreased in cities. Without getting into the science of it, here is a logical explanation for the same. Till the late '80s, the architecture of our houses supported the nesting of sparrows in the form of "roshandans", crevices to keep things, small gardens and roosting sites may be in the form of bougainvillea bushes. But with modernisation, the architecture became non-supportive and gardens became a luxury. The ritual of cleaning wheat and spreading it in the sun also vanished and, lastly, the new idea of cleanliness made the hanging twigs of a



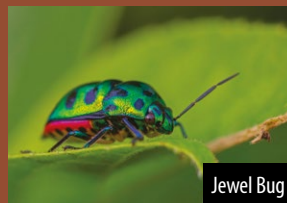
Bee



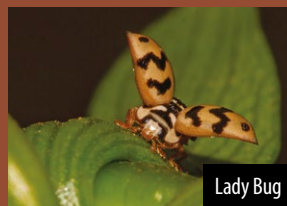
Caterpillar



Common Emigrant



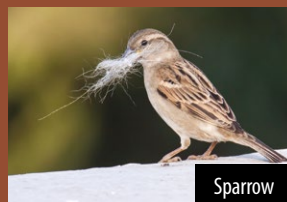
Jewel Bug



Lady Bug



Rock Pigeon



Sparrow

nest more of a problem than a pleasure. With no environmental support, the population of sparrows declined in the cities, but rural India still has a healthy population.

The story of rock pigeons, the greyish pigeons that we see around us, is again that of adaptation. These pigeons have adapted to nesting and roosting anywhere and hence, have thrived and become an integral part of urban wildlife. The small patches of greens that survive in the cities are still host to a number of small reptiles and insects, even the plants in our pots host a number of insects. Old inhabited buildings and factories find owls, mongoose and foxes as their guests and there are often reports of leopards walking in residential areas near a wooded patch.

Insects especially are an important indicator of the health of our environment. Cities today are missing fireflies due to pollution and a drastic fall in butterflies and bees due to degradation of our environment, which, on the other hand, has encouraged disease-producing insects like mosquitoes and flies.

We must understand that we live in a time of serious environmental catastrophes. Every year we lose thousands of species, even as others slide deeper into danger. Animals and birds have silently been bearing the burden of our development. They have lost their habitats for our habitation, therefore it is our duty to help these original inhabitants by giving them some space to survive.

Deepa Mishra

The author is an **Ehsaas** Woman of Lucknow



Pedal to Jungle: A Cycling Adventure

The fourth edition of Pedal to Jungle, an exclusive cycling competition, was successfully hosted in Rajasthan and Gujarat by the Rajasthan Forest Department's Wildlife Wing of Udaipur, the Green Peepal Society, and Doiwala Ventures, in collaboration with Le Tour De India.

Aimed at promoting responsible wildlife-eco tourism, the latest edition witnessed 37 participants — 16 women and 21 men — with the majority of them being senior riders from different states of India.

Before the competition kicked off, the orientation ceremony and felicitation of sportspersons of Udaipur was graced by R.K. Singh, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests, Udaipur and R.K. Khairwa, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, Udaipur.

Rush Hour Ride, the first leg of the expedition, was flagged off at the Field Club, Udaipur, by Rajeev Pachar, IPS, SP, Udaipur.

The entire expedition lasted four days and overnight stays for participants were arranged at a campsite near Gorana Dam, which offered a breathtaking view. Starting at the Field Club in Udaipur, the riders were expected to reach Panwara via the Phulwari ki Naal wildlife sanctuary, before culminating their journey in the Polo Forest in Gujarat.

The flag off ceremonies of the second and third legs of the competition were performed by Arun Mishra, CEO and director, HZL, and Mamata Kanwar, the youngest district head of Udaipur. The guest of honour at the closing ceremony in Gujarat was Dr A.P. Singh, IFS, Additional Principal, Chief Conservator of Forests, Gujarat.

Following the completion of the race, the participants distributed slippers to underprivileged schoolchildren.

The fourth edition of Pedal to Jungle turned out to be a resounding success, with the forthcoming instalments set to be even bigger, with more riders joining in for a one-of-a-kind cycling adventure.

DAY 1



DAY 2



DAY 3



DAY 4





At One With the Wild

“Humankind must learn to understand that the life of an animal is in no way less precious than our own.”

— Paul Oxtan

To view civilisation as being limited to human beings is not only a naive but also a dangerous proposition. Without the presence of wildlife, the ecosystem that makes our planet viable for life would not be able to sustain humans either. Therefore, caring for the health and preservation of wildlife is not just a moral compulsion but also a civilisational imperative.

On December 20, 2013, the United Nations General Assembly decided to proclaim March 3 as World Wildlife Day, as proposed by Thailand. In 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was adopted on March 3 to raise awareness about the benefits of fauna and flora. The symbolism of March 3 made it an appropriate occasion to raise awareness about wildlife and its importance for the environment we inhabit.

As part of its resolution, the General Assembly reiterated the intrinsic value of wildlife through its contributions across various sectors — ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational, and aesthetic — towards

the greater goal of sustainable development on Earth. Moreover, the Assembly requested the CITES Secretariat to facilitate, in collaboration with relevant organisations of the United Nations, the implementation of World Wildlife Day.

Between 200 and 350 million people live within or adjacent to forested areas around the world, depending on the various ecosystems provided by forest and forest species for their livelihoods as well as to meet their most basic needs, including food, shelter and energy.

Indigenous peoples and local communities are at the forefront of the symbiotic relationship between humans and forests. Approximately 28% of the world’s land is currently managed by indigenous peoples, including some of the most ecologically intact forests on the planet. These spaces are not only central to their economic and personal well-being but are also indispensable hubs for cultural growth and consolidation.

Forests, their flora and fauna, and the livelihoods that depend on them are currently confronted by the multiple crises, from climate change to biodiversity loss to health, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the protection of wildlife

and flora and fauna in general, it is vital to understand how to navigate each of these crises in a way that takes into account all the stakeholders involved, without restricting the analysis to homo sapiens.

Over the years, World Wildlife Day has been used to shed light on a variety of themes and messages pertaining to wildlife. These have ranged from focusing on wildlife crime, predators, life under water, among other topics.

In 2021, World Wildlife Day was celebrated under the theme: “Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet”, with a virtual celebration that brought together representatives of UN member states, UN system organisations and multilateral environmental actors, civil society and the private sector for a series of discussions on the chosen theme.

This is designed to generate conversations that highlight the central role of forests, forest species and ecosystems in sustaining the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people globally, and particularly of indigenous and local communities with historic ties to forested and forest-adjacent areas. This also aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 1, 12, 13 and 15, and their wide-ranging commitments to mitigating poverty, ensuring sustainable use of resources, and conservation of land.

World Wildlife Day is an opportunity to remind one and all of the multitude of benefits that conservation of flora and fauna can usher in. It is also an occasion to reiterate the urgent need to step up the fight against wildlife crime, irresponsible treatment of natural ecosystems, and human-induced reduction of species, which have economic, environmental, and social consequences. As António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has observed, “Let us remind ourselves of our duty to preserve and sustainably use the vast variety of life on the planet. Let us push for a more caring, thoughtful, and sustainable relationship with Nature.”

At **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, we strongly endorse the vision of World Wildlife Day that aims to promote inter-species harmony and planetary welfare. Celebration of wildlife and forest-based livelihoods serves to encourage healthy wildlife management practices that accommodate both human well-being and the long-term conservation of forests. As a result, it is possible to synchronise the best of traditional practices with modern learning and technology to contribute to a more sustainable relationship between humans, wildlife, and nature.

ARTWORK BY
SUDIPTA KUNDU

खयाल घरानों की यात्रा



Praveen Kumar Jha



हिंदुस्तानी संगीत है तो घराने हैं। घराने हैं, तो कथाएँ हैं। कथाएँ हैं, तो उनमें रस है। उतना ही, जितना कि संगीत में। क्योंकि कथाएँ बनी ही संगीत से हैं। मुश्किल ये है कि यह कोई बताता नहीं। अब किसी ने बैठक में सुना दी, किसी ने यूँ ही बातों-बातों में बता दी, और कभी किसी ने लिख दी। पर कोई एक व्यक्ति हो, जो हिंदुस्तानी संगीत से जुड़ी तमाम कथाएँ सुना दे, शायद न मिले। आप कहेंगे कि इसकी जरूरत ही क्या है? किस्से-कहानियों से भी भला क्या संगीत बना है? अब यही तो खासियत है। यह संगीत जितना शांत, सौम्य और एकांतशील नजर आता है, उतना ही यह दरबारी माहौल, पान-सुपारी की बैठक, वाह-वाही और इरशाद के बीच बढ़ा है।

घरानों की शुरुआत ग्वालियर से ही हुई, तो यह सफर भी वहीं से शुरू हो।

उस्ताद निसार हुसैन खान का एक अलग रूतबा था। तस्वीरों में जितना देखा, और बैठकों में जैसा उनके बारे में सुना, क्या खूब लंबे-चौड़े बुलंद उस्ताद रहे होंगे! अब एक दफे कहीं ट्रेन से बिना टिकट जा रहे थे, तो उतार दिए गए। उस्ताद वहीं प्लेटफॉर्म पर बैठ कुछ 'चीज' गाने लगे। उनकी यह तान सुन ट्रेन रोकनी पड़ी। गाड़ी से उतर कर सभी यात्री नीचे आ गए और वहीं प्लेटफॉर्म पर महफिल जम गई। कैसी होगी आखिर संगीत की शक्ति कि ट्रेन रुक जाए?

अब वह कलकत्ता गए तो गवर्नर साहब को रेलगाड़ी तराना गाकर सुनाया। ट्रेन की आवाज की तर्ज पर विलंबित और द्रुत का साम्य बना कर रचा गया तराना। गवर्नर साहब खुश हुए तो ईनाम पूछा। उस्ताद ने आखिर इस बेटिकट की झंझट से निजात पाने के लिए 'रेल पास' ही मांग लिया।

ग्वालियर घराने से ही अन्य घराने उपजे। ग्वालियर के बालकृष्ण इचलकरंजीकर जी ने विष्णु दिगंबर पुलुस्कर को सिखाया। वही पुलुस्कर जिनका गाया 'रघुपति राघव राजा राम' महात्मा गांधी को इतना भाया कि दिग्विजय कर गया। सीनियर पुलुस्कर की रिकॉर्डिंग अब भले न मिले पर लोग कहते हैं कि उनके शिष्य ऑकरनाथ ठाकुर में उनकी आवाज कुछ हद तक आयी। आपने उनका गाया 'वंदे मातरम' सुना होगा जो उस आजादी की रात संसद में गाया गया।

आजादी से पहले जब उनकी चर्चा मुसोलिनी ने सुनी, तो बुलावा भिजवाया। मुसोलिनी के समक्ष उन्होंने वीर रस का 'राग हिंडोल' गाया, तो मुसोलिनी को पसीना आ गया, हाथ-पैर कांपने लगे और आखिर उन्होंने कहा, "स्टॉप!" इसके बाद उन्होंने

राग छायाण्ट गाया, जिससे करुणा के भाव में डूब कर मुसोलिनी अपनी वायलिन लेकर आ गए और बजाने लगे।

यह रागों से भावनाएँ जगने या रोग ठीक होने में विज्ञान की चर्चा कई बार भटक जाती है। लोग कहते हैं कि अब्दुल करीम खान साहब का कुत्ता भी राग में भूंकता था। यह अतिशयोक्ति भी संगीत की बैठकों का हिस्सा ही है। उस्तादों में एक खुदा या ईश्वर का नजर आना। पर कुछ चमत्कार तो सबके समक्ष हैं ही।

टी.बी. से कुमार गंधर्व का फेफड़ा खत्म हो जाना, और फिर गायन में कीर्तिमान स्थापित करना। अलादिया खान साहब की अपनी आवाज अचानक गुम हो जाना, और एक दिन नयी आवाज में लौटना। बेगम अख्तर का गाना छोड़ते ही बीमार होना, और वापस स्टेज पर आते ही ठीक हो जाना, और फिर से सुर टूटते ही मर जाना। संगीत और शरीर के तार तो जुड़े ही हैं।

आज भी संगीत के तमाम घरानों की उपस्थिति कमोबेश नजर आती है। अब भी कई अवशेष हैं। अगर घराने से सभी खान साहब चल बसे, पर कहीं न कहीं कोई वसीम अहमद खान साहब आज भी गा रहे हैं। ग्वालियर है, जयपुर है, पटियाला है, कैराना है, इमदादखानी है, मेवाती है, बनारस है, रामपुर है, इंदौर है, और धुपद की बानी हैं। गर खो गया तो भिंडीबाजार खो गया। मुंबई की भीड़-भाड़ में वो मशहूर घराना, जो कभी लता जी, आशा जी और मन्ना डे को गुर दे गया, अब खत्म हो गया।

मेरी भी यह छोटी सैर अब समाप्त होती है। कई किस्से रह गए। वह गंडा बंधाने की कहानियाँ। वह बंटवारे में अलग हुआ संगीत। वह फैयाज़ खान के मजार को, और रसूलन बाई के घर को दंगों में नेस्तनाबूद करना। वह सरकारी पेंशनों का बंद हो जाना। घरानों का देश से पलायन होना, और अमरीका-यूरोप में बस जाना। यहाँ से संगीत का जाना, और वहाँ से आना। और फिर प्यूजन हो जाना। मुझे शिकायत नहीं, संगीत का सफर तब भी अनवरत चलता था, अब भी चल रहा है। हाँ! जड़ों को खाद-पानी मिले तो यह फलता-फूलता रहेगा।

प्रवीण कुमार झा

(झा संगीत प्रेमी और वाह उस्ताद नामक पुस्तक के लेखक हैं। वह सम्प्रति नॉर्वे में चिकित्सक हैं)

How to Integrate Soft Skills



Vinnie Kakkar



We live in an era of multitasking and constant diversification of the workforce. To survive in such a work environment, it is crucial to be able to harness and develop a wide range of skills, including the soft skills that are essential for employability as well as personality growth.

Spagia, an initiative by Vinnie Kakkar, has been attempting to empower the youth with a variety of soft skills, which include, but are not restricted to, tailoring, first aid, dealing with road accidents, understanding the concept of good touch and bad touch, yoga sessions, mental wellness, counselling, beauty course, health and hygiene awareness, self-defence, and folk dancing.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spagia could not carry out its in-person sessions. But that did not derail the initiative in any way, as the Spagia personnel adapted with the times to organise virtual sessions.

In association with **Education For All**, Spagia hosted a number of sessions that focused on empowering the youth in different ways. For instance,

some sessions were devoted to studying the *Bhagavad Gita* and the lessons it contains for young minds. Positive counselling sessions were held that served to boost the self-esteem of the participants. Fun events such as painting competitions, reading days, *antakshari*, and live concerts were also arranged virtually in order to lighten the mood and help youngsters cope with the negativity unleashed by the pandemic.

The students who were a part of these sessions proved to be keen learners, aware of the message imparted through the various activities and eager to spread the word among their friends and peer groups.

Once the pandemic situation improved slightly making socially distanced physical gatherings feasible, Spagia, in collaboration with **Education For All**, took more than 150 children out for Jaipur Darshan. This provided a wonderful opportunity for the students to appreciate the rich history of the Pink City and to further explore their own culture in an interactive fashion.

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Guests	Events
Sanjeev Paliwal	Kalam Jaipur
Geet Chaturvedi	Kalam Ranchi
Anushka Jasraj	The Write Circle Raipur
Nidhi Dugar Kundalia	The Write Circle Ajmer & Udaipur
Naveen Choudhary	Kalam Nagpur
Sonal Mansingh	Ehsaas India's website launch
Santosh Choudhary	Aakhar Pothi Kitaab Jaipur
Sujit Panda	Aakhar Bhubaneswar
Anant Vijay	Kalam Noida
Rakshanda Jalil	Kalam Pune
Payal Kothari	An Author's Afternoon Kolkata
Anu Singh Choudhary	Kalam Jodhpur
Dilip Kumar Jha	Aakhar Patna
Shakuntala Satyapriya	Aakhar Jaipur
Yashaswini Chandra	The Write Circle Jaipur
Screening of 'Who is Baul'	Chalchitra Kolkata
Theatre event	Sur Aur Saaz Kolkata
Communication workshop	Ehsaas India
Laglo Je Dol	Holi event



Anant Vijay



Anu Singh
Choudhary



Anushka Jasraj



Dilip Kumar Jha



Geet Chaturvedi



Naveen Choudhary



Nidhi Dugar
Kundalia



Payal Kothari



Rakshanda Jalil



Sanjeev Paliwal



Santosh Choudhary



Shakuntala
Satyapriya



Sonal Mansingh



Sujit Panda



Yashaswini Chandra

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