



Prabha

November 2022 | Issue 41

प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

Gateway
to a
Thousand
Words

It is said that a picture speaks a thousand words – for what is art if not a window into the deepest corners of the natural world and the human heart? In this issue of *Prabha*, we celebrate art in all its glorious manifestations



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Prabha
खैतान



MANISHA JAIN
Communications & Branding Chief,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

For the Love of Literature and Art

Edward Hopper, the American realist painter said, “If I could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint.” Indeed, for centuries, art has been able to communicate emotions in a way that has seldom been replicated. Those who have seen Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* cannot forget that piercing, yet amiable gaze; those who have stared at Vincent van Gogh’s *Starry Night* have rarely been able to get past its allure. Art, true to its nature, has mesmerised people across ages, and has often accompanied literature in giving life to words printed on a page.

Thus, it only seems fitting that illustrations and cover art would adorn books that take us on journeys undefined. With **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**’s unwavering commitment to furthering the cause of art in all its manifestations, this issue of *Prabha* takes a deep dive into the minds and hearts of several individuals who have been instrumental in redefining the relationship among art, literature and India.

As lovers of literature, we are always looking forward to stimulating our minds; thus, Shashi Tharoor’s discussion with other luminaries about his book on B.R. Ambedkar gave us a lot to ponder. So did Navdeep Suri’s translation of several of his grandfather’s works. You can also read about the invigorating conversations on music, climate change and the environment with Ricky Kej in the bustling cities of Gurugram, Patna and Bhubaneswar, as well as the eye-opening discussions with Amish Tripathi and Saksham Garg, both of whom have transformed the way we approach Indian mythology.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of *Prabha*. Write to us at newsletter@pkfoundation.org with your suggestions and feedback!

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]

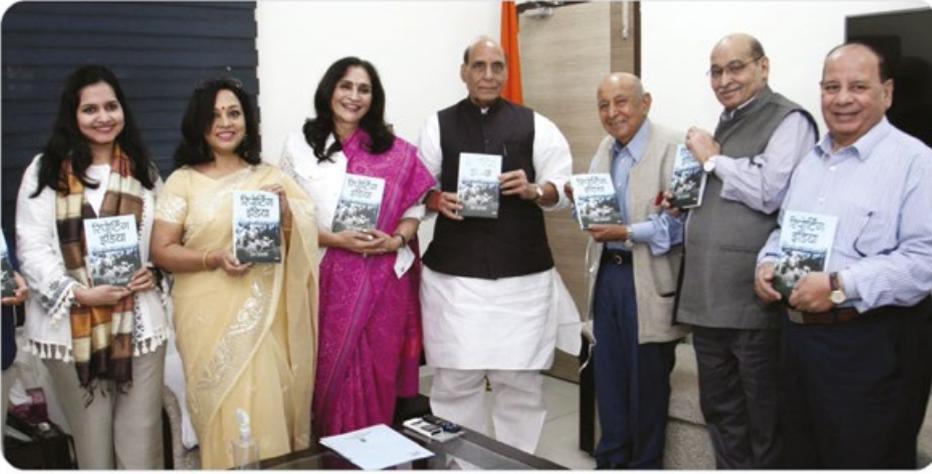


Rajnath Singh ✓
@rajnathsingh

भारतीय पत्रकारिता की विकास यात्रा में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान करने वाले, श्री प्रेम प्रकाश जी की पुस्तक 'रिपोर्टिंग इंडिया' के हाल में प्रकाशित हिंदी संस्करण की एक प्रति आज प्राप्त की।

मैं लेखक प्रेम प्रकाश जी को अपनी हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ देता हूँ और पुस्तक की सफलता की कामना करता हूँ।

Translate Tweet



A tweet by the Honourable Defence Minister of India, Rajnath Singh, on launching the Hindi translation of *Reporting India*, a book by the veteran journalist and Chairman of ANI, Prem Prakash. The translation was initiated by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. Read more about it in the next issue of *Prabha*

Happy Birthday

Prabha WISHES EHSAAAS WOMEN BORN IN NOVEMBER

2nd November



Anubha Arya

5th November



Geeta Malhotra

10th November



Aarti Gupta

11th November



Seema Singh

15th November



Malika Varma

16th November



Esha Dutta

17th November



Priyanshi Patel

23rd November



Smriti Raj
Aggarwal Sonia

24th November

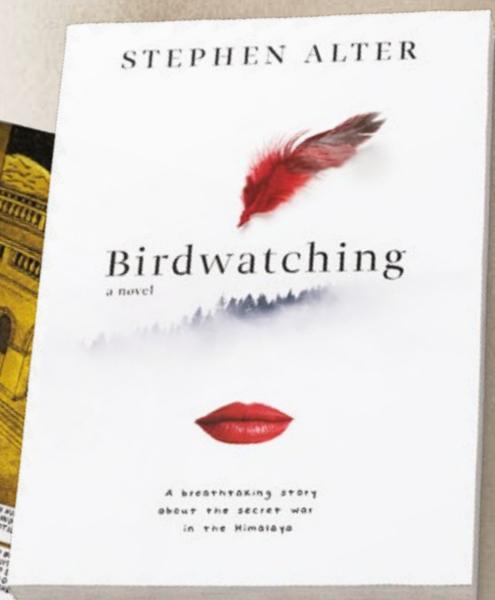
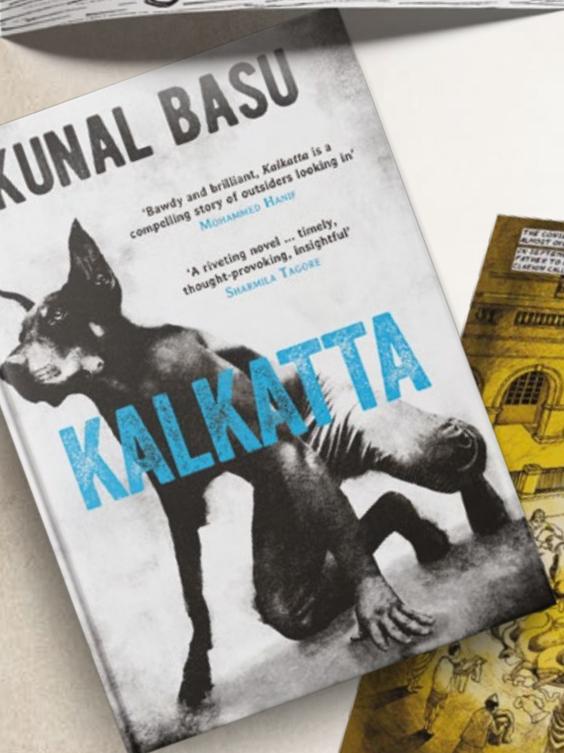


Kulsum Malik

Scenes from a Happy Union



It is often said that one should not judge a book by its cover. But that increasingly sounds like bad advice, given the leaps and bounds with which the realm of literary illustrations and cover art has been progressing. From novels to books of poetry, from nonfiction titles to graphic novels — literature is slowly but surely coming to be defined as a marriage of text and image. And what a happy union it is! **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** brings together 11 stellar voices from the worlds of literature, art, publishing and design to tell us why pictures speak thousands of words





Why are Art/Illustrated Books Important?

Priya Kapoor

Imagine a book on Mughal miniatures, the murals of Alchi, the Chola bronzes

or the finest Indian textiles,

but without any visuals. Imagine a cookbook with no photographs to accompany the recipes. How would you understand the nuances and intricacies of art, architecture, photography, design or textiles without looking at images?

No book on the arts is complete without visuals. Illustrated books (commonly known as coffee table books — a term no publisher appreciates!) are essential to our understanding and appreciation of the visual arts. The format of marrying text and visuals with sensitive, intelligent book design makes art more accessible to readers. You can 'see' the works of the masters of the Uffizi Gallery or the Louvre, read the facsimiles of Vincent van Gogh's original letters to his brother, and acquaint yourself with Nainsukh's painfully beautiful works without visiting a museum or having the good fortune of viewing the originals in private archives around the world. In many ways, illustrated books, despite being regarded as expensive, have democratized art for millions around the world by publishing scholarship, and, therefore, making it more accessible.

Art books offer new perspectives on finding meaning; they provide an understanding of motivations, influences, confluences and styles in art. In a world where information, knowledge and entertainment are becoming increasingly visual, art and illustrated books remain relevant in enriching our understanding of visual mediums, be it fine art, botanical art, tribal art, architecture, design, textile, photography, cinema or paintings.

There is a sense of ceremony in buying, borrowing or being given a book. Art and illustrated books are lasting objects of beauty. There is no ebook version of such books, and that's because there is no demand for them either. Apart from the subject and content of such books, their form — size, shape, paper, design, cover, binding and printing — creates a complete experience for the reader. The next time you pick up an art book, pay attention to the

book designer's work: the interplay between text, visuals, and design elements as minute as running heads, page numbers, choice of font and other such details that come together to create an aesthetically pleasing impact along with a smooth reading experience — one that unfolds page by page, depending on how you look at it.

It is joyful to see good design becoming vital to books of all formats, even mass-market paperback fiction. To prevent the print book from becoming obsolete (it isn't!) publishers went back to the basics and paid more attention to the physical form of the book — they ensured better production quality, creative cover design and suitable fonts. In short, they experimented with whatever it took to make the book an object of desire once again. This resulted in books with clever covers, thought-provoking designs, coloured edging and interesting binding vying for your attention in bookshops.

A rising, aspirational middle class with diverse interests and an incredibly rich cultural legacy coupled with some of the most refined talents in terms of writers and photographers benefit our job as originators and publishers of art and illustrated books. There was a time, not too long ago, when we had to secure an international edition in order to publish large-format books priced above Rs 1,500. There was just not enough buying power in India to sustain a print run of 3,000 copies. Today, we are not only commissioning and publishing books solely for the Indian market, but also buying rights for books with Indian themes from leading international publishers and selling co-editions to them.

There is no better time to be a publisher of such books in India.

Priya Kapoor is Editorial Director, Roli Books, where she oversees the publishing list and the day-to-day functioning of the company. She has commissioned and edited bestselling books such as *Dongri to Dubai: Six Decades of the Mumbai Mafia* by Hussain Zaidi, *Taj Mahal Foxtrot: The Story of Bombay's Jazz Age* by Naresh Fernandes, *Black Warrant: Confessions of a Tihar Jailer* by Sunil Gupta and Sunetra Choudhury and *The RTI Story: Power to the People* by Aruna Roy. She is also the co-founder of CMYK, India's only chain of bookshops dedicated to art and illustrated books, and is on the Board of Woodstock School, India.



Arranged Marriage

Devapriya Roy

It was an arranged marriage. The matchmaker was Karthika VK, editor extraordinaire, and my vague friend.

She called me one afternoon in the spring of 2016, when the neem trees in Delhi were just beginning to shed their leaves, and outlined the prospect: she wanted to commission a graphic novel on the life of Indira Gandhi whose birth centenary was coming up in November 2017. And she wanted me to write it.

“Graphic novel? Me?” I sputtered, my brain instantly pulling up a panorama of graphic novels I’d read (not that many, to be fair), all of which were created by *artists*. Meanwhile, the last time I had sketched something was when my pitiful diagrams of dissected frogs adorned the biology answer script in Class 12 — a memory I have eviscerated from my very soul.

“You’d write it,” Karthika clarified, “and I thought Priya Kuriyan — do you know Priya? She’s lovely! — could illustrate it. My gut feeling is that it should be an all-

woman team.”

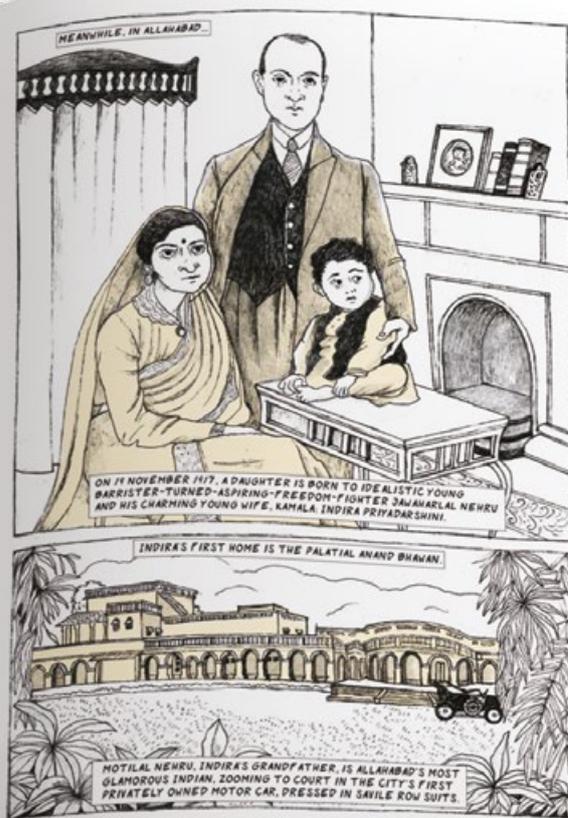
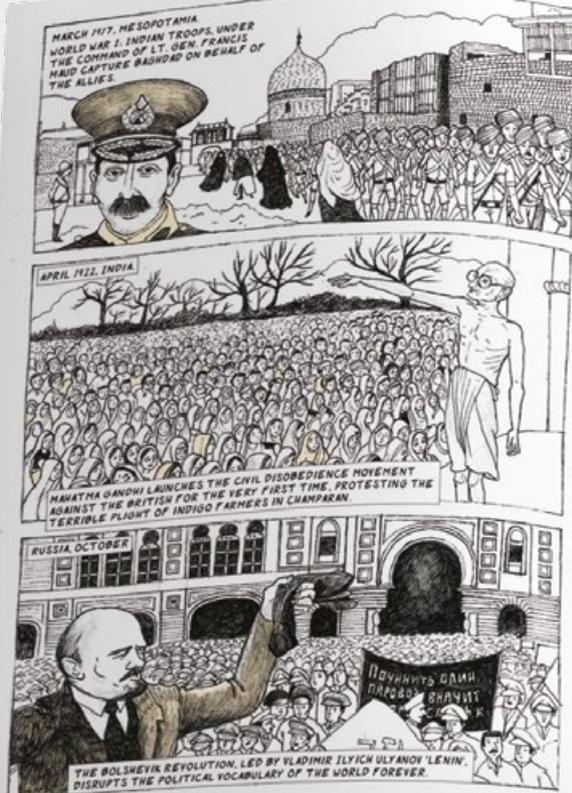
Like the best of matchmakers, K is intuitive and mathematical. She is sanguine about both project and pairing.

Like the worst of authors, I am indecisive and in the middle of several other projects, all going badly. (I am never sanguine about anything ever, except the need for cake.)

However, after I have spent the next two weeks conducting my initial research on Mrs Gandhi, and having had a tentative conversation with Priya on the phone, both of us shy and eager-to-please, I find myself unable to say no.

*

The early days of the venture are heady. In Bangalore, Priya spends her time conducting visual research while I spend my time surrounded by books and old magazines, looking up newspaper articles and ranging far and wide to understand my subject. The rigour of research, is oddly comforting, reminding me of the familiar hum of my PhD days. It is only when I get to the *writing* that I am





A Return of the Image

Priya Kurian

In 2018, in what was seen as a landmark moment in the world of literature, a graphic novel called *Sabrina* by Nick Drnaso, about a girl who goes missing and leaves behind a videotape with clues as to what might have happened before her disappearance, made it to the Man Booker long list for the first time. This novel came out very close to the election of Donald Trump in 2017, and, with its stark yet discomfiting illustrative style, managed to make a strong comment on the environment of fake news and online conspiracy theories that muddle the political discourse and ruin personal lives. The judges had this to say of the novel: “Giving the changing shape of fiction, it was only a matter of time before a graphic novel was included.” The jury had recognised that, in the increasingly visual times we are living in, the way that readers processed information had changed; that the twinning of words with images as a form did something to a reader that had to be given its due.

It was in the early nineteenth century that the novel as a form had become really popular in the West, and publishers sold editions of these novels that were often accompanied by very detailed woodcuts. In India, in the nineteenth century, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s books were serialised in magazines. Similarly, novels like *The Pickwick Papers* were serialised in magazines with illustrations before they were made into books. At the end of the nineteenth century, most books were illustration-heavy. Soon after, things took a different turn, and publishers seemed to want to make the novel appear more cerebral: not something that was merely for entertainment, but something that one would engage with intellectually. Their solution to that was perhaps to make it look very distinct from a children’s book. So, the somewhat misinformed notion was that the interaction with a visual was not a mature activity, as it was something that children did. Soon, what came to be considered as ‘serious’ and more mature literary fiction was unfortunately the book without images!

In recent years, however, the publishing industry has definitely had to sit back and notice a completely new generation of readers that is born into the visual culture of Instagram and other apps of the online world that give them a more visceral experience, thanks to a constant blend of text, sound and imagery. In India, there has, of course, in the past decade or more, been a consistent rise in the popularity of the graphic novel as a literary form — artist/writers like Sumit Kumar, Amruta Patil, Orijit Sen, Appupen, Ita Mehrotra, Sarnath Banerjee and Vishwajyoti Ghosh have brought

out some fine work spanning different genres, but what is exciting as a trend has been the re-emergence of illustrations in other literary forms of the book. In the past two years, I have had the chance to work on at least two books for adults — a book on historical essays (Manu Pillai’s *The Courtesan, the Mahatma and the Italian Brahmin*) and an anthology of Indo-Pakistan stories (*The Other in the Mirror* edited by Sehryr Mirza) — that required me to not only make the book covers, but also illustrate the inside pages for the same. I have also come across at least four poetry books that have uniquely integrated art within them. *Over and Under Ground in Mumbai and Paris* by Sampurna Chattarji and Karthika Nair has beautifully rendered black-and-white drawings by Joëlle Jolivet (illustrator) and Roshni Vyam (illustrator), *Like Blood On The Bitten Tongue: Delhi Poems* by Akhil Katyal has gorgeous art by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and Amitava Ghosh’s *Junglenama* has stunning artwork by the renowned artist, Salman Toor. If I could expand the definition of illustrations to photographs as well, there is also the recent *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, edited by Shilpa Gupta and Salil Tripathi.

Moving to a completely different genre, there is also the really fun illustrated cookbook, *Cooking to Save Your Life*, published by Juggernaut, that is authored by none other than the Nobel laureate, Abhijit Banerjee, with illustrations by Cheyenne Olivier that are not at all instructional, but elevate the cookbook to another level.

I feel the signs are that publishers will be looking more closely at integrating art and text within the novel, and are willing to put more capital into producing these books. The emergence of Harper Design as a separate imprint is also a wonderful indication of things to come. Writers being more open to collaborations with artists and being willing to shed the baggage of their books being perceived in a certain way is also refreshing to see.

As a person who thinks visually, I am, of course, biased towards seeing more books taking this direction and seeing the rise of the illustrated book as a phenomenon in the coming times.

Priya Kuriyan is a children’s book writer-illustrator, comics maker and chronic doodler. She has directed educational films for the *Sesame Street* show (India) and the Children’s Film Society of India, and has illustrated numerous children’s books for various Indian publishers. In 2019, she won the Big Little Book Award instituted by Parag, an initiative of Tata Trusts, to recognize her contribution to children’s literature in India. She lives and works in Bangalore, and, in her spare time, makes funny caricatures of its residents.



Visual Art in the World of Books

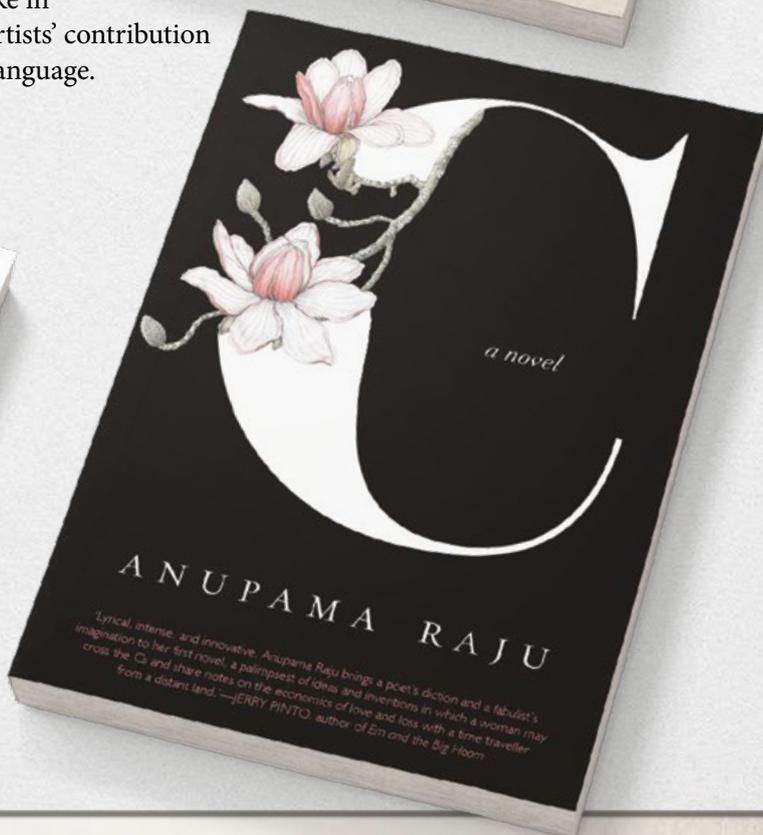
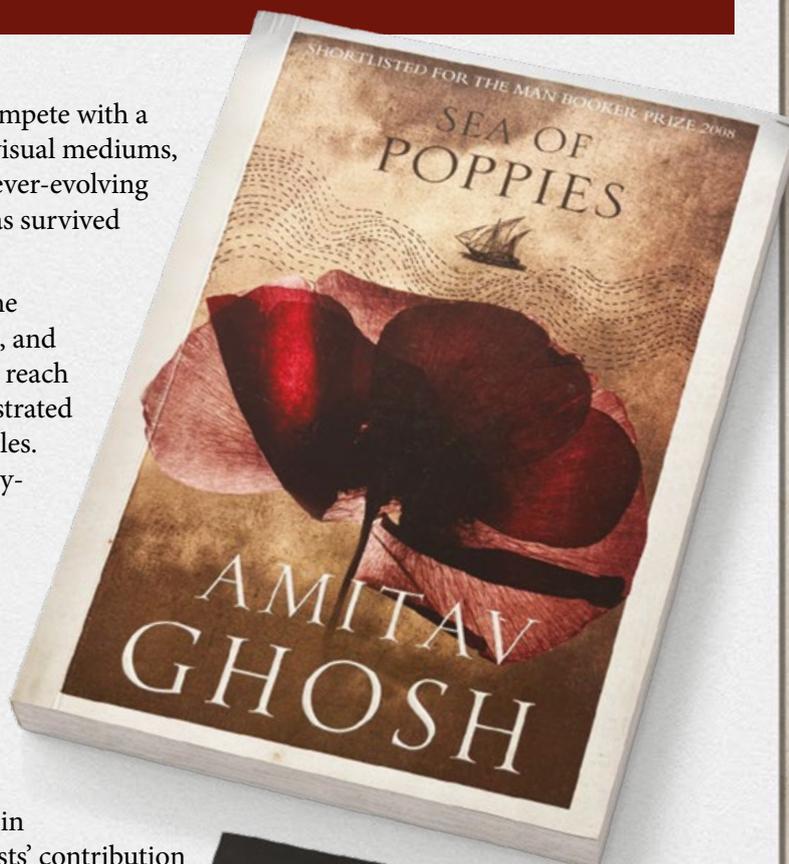
Bena Sareen

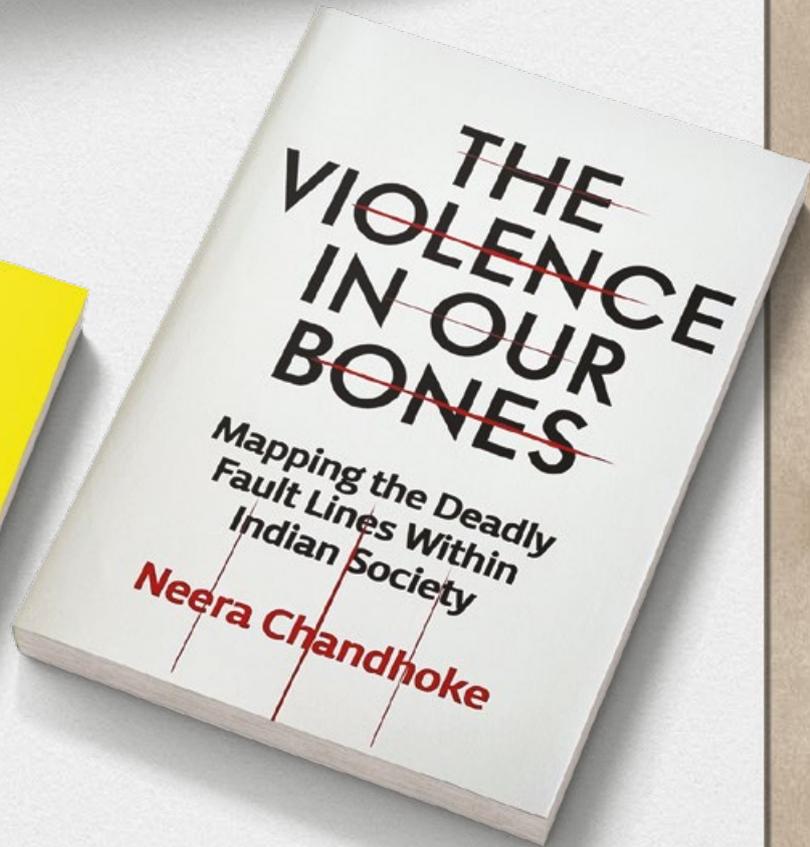
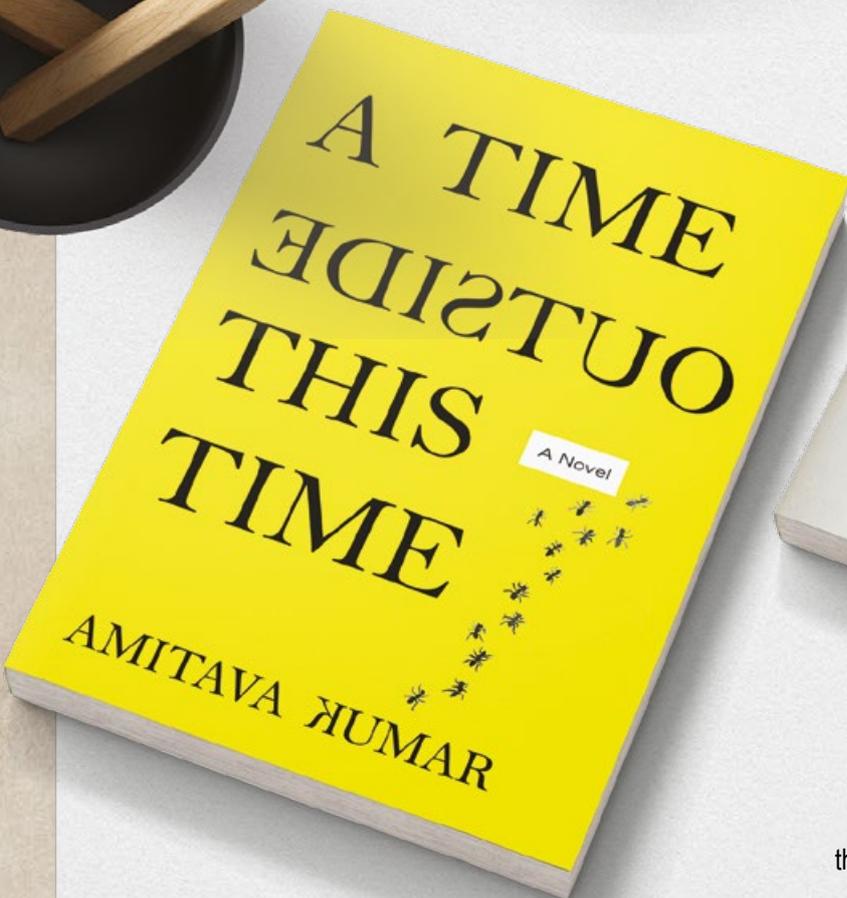
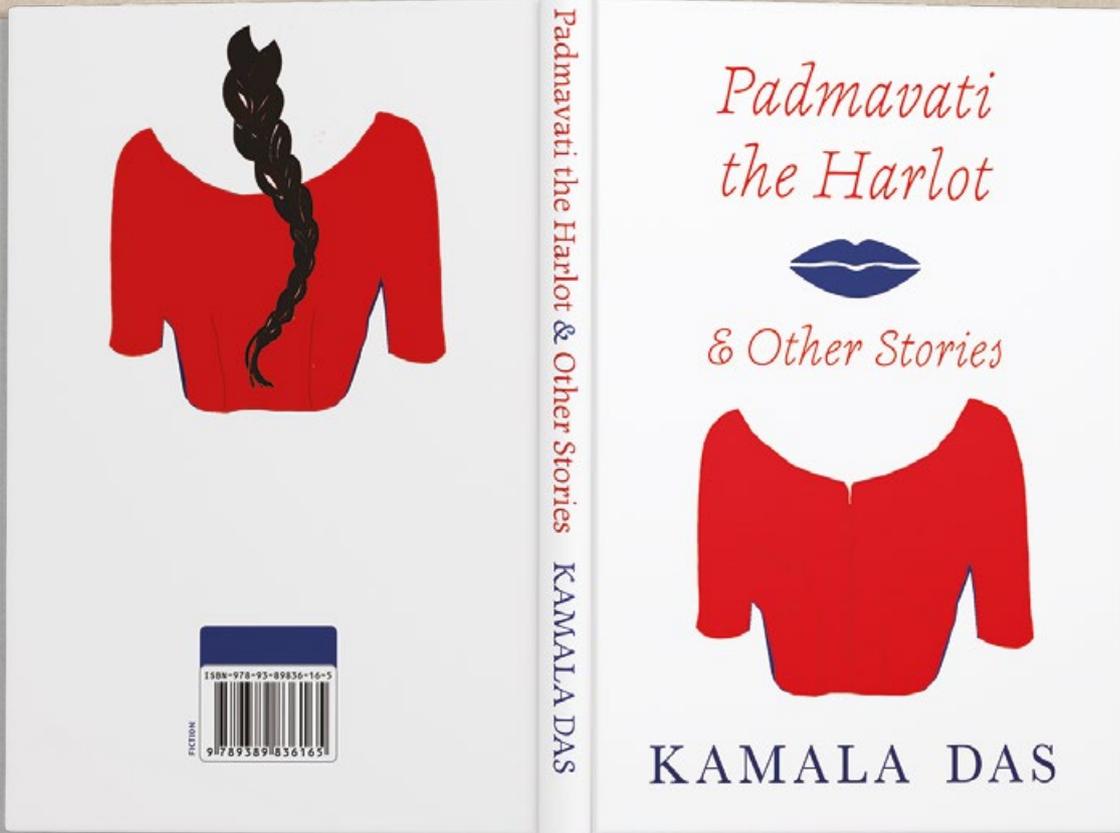
Books today compete with a multitude of visual mediums, short attention spans, and ever-evolving technological advancements. Yet, the physical book has survived and remains a deeply entrenched part of our lives.

Book design is an art form in itself. It has improved the reader experience and made it more immersive, exciting, and illuminating. Additionally, it also helps in making books reach out to a wider audience. This holds true not only for illustrated books, but also for text-driven non-fiction and fiction titles. Photography and art books are a source of powerful storytelling and serve to become an archive of our times.

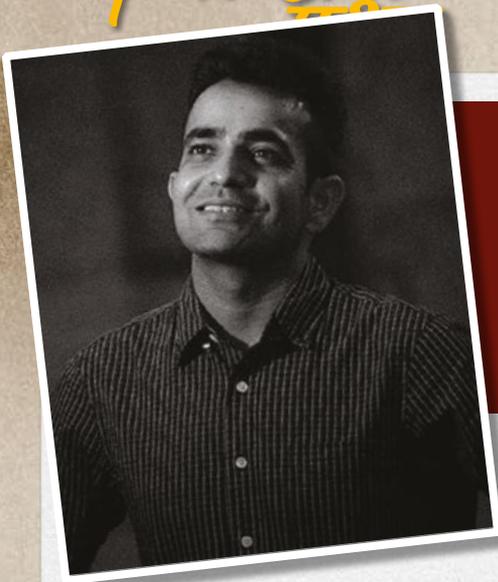
I started my design journey at Penguin Random House India as its first art director in 1999. That was the time when there was no internet, photo libraries or art archives. Today, the world has opened up to resources from across the globe, and that is reflected in the quality of design we see in our books.

I feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction when books are reprinted with a new cover and we see a spike in sales. It's an endorsement of the book designers' and artists' contribution to the book trade and underlines the power of visual language.





Bena Sareen is an independent graphic designer. With a career spanning over two decades, she set up the design department at Penguin India in 1999, and, later, at Aleph Book Company. She is currently a consulting creative director at Aleph Book Company.



Celebrating Bookmaking as a Craft

Gunjan Ahlawat

Kenya Hara suggests that “A human being is a bundle of delicate sensors”. According to him, “Our experience depends on our senses and our senses depend on the material. Even with the rise of electronic media [...] intelligent people still read the newspaper.” Therefore, visual appeal becomes as important as the feel of the cover or the entire book. Some designers approach book design not merely in 2D, but also 3D, and treat it as an object of beauty and function. To illustrate this point, I can’t help but mention the masterpiece created by the Dutch graphic designer, Irma Boom, for the book, *Sheila Hicks: Weaving as Metaphor*, which is based on the woven and wrought works of the artist, Sheila Hicks. It remains one of my personal favourites till date. With the narrative construction through type and imagery, coupled with the politics of viewing, she went on to champion the sensory experience on the cover and the edges of the book.

In my view, originality is not in the straightforward use of images (from photo agencies like Getty, Alamy and so on), but lies at the heart of making. As in the case of making a cover, one gets to employ the head, heart and hand. This is a philosophy that I believe in, and one that has worked successfully for me. In this field of work, one must operate with an open mind and realise that they are on a grand adventure into the literary world — a world of words. I feel, just as the author creates and makes, the cover designer should too. For me, a cover or the book design should not only be original, but should also have an extra edge to make it work and satisfy my creative self. One can achieve this through a dramatic crop, the placement of type, or a simple play of post-production effects. Some experiments in the past yielded successful results that have been both rewarding and gratifying. This also satiates the artist and illustrator in me, who needs to make and create. Moreover, the joy of putting an image together is a therapeutic process for me. Truly, self-designed cover visuals are the most original images that can be used. Some examples of these kinds of covers

of books are *Moong over Microchips: Adventures of a Techie-Turned-Farmer*, *Eleven Ways to Love: Essays*, and *Republic of Rhetoric: Free Speech and the Constitution of India*, among others. Some of the designers who built on the same practice are Sunandini Banerjee, editor and graphic designer at Seagull Books, and Peter Mendulson, designer, author, and currently the Creative Director of *The Atlantic*.

With a rapid surge in technology and a shift in reading trends and buying patterns, today’s readers are far more informed and educated. They have an appetite for something fresh and experimental, which creates newer possibilities for visual books. Designers are attempting cookbooks, non-fiction titles and illustrated fiction titles in courageous ways. The illustrated version of *The Bell Jar*, the anniversary edition of *The Room on the Roof*, and many other reissues of classics are popular purely because of the designers’ unique take on visually interpreting the existing narratives. Not only did the reissues excite the readers with charm and feeling, but offered a new lease of life to the books.

However, all of this is only sustainable when the culture of bookmaking supersedes the need for commercial gains. At the end of the day, the entire process of designing a book is driven by the passion of the designer to make the book stand out and be uniquely different without drawing attention to itself.

Gunjan Ahlawat is a multiple award-winning designer, self-taught painter, TEDx speaker and design educator. His overlapping interests in art and literature inform his keen interest in visual authorial interventions and curatorship. This allows him to shape the visual personality of the book at every step of its creation. He strongly believes in the art and power of making and, therefore, himself constructs most of the images for his book covers. Ahlawat has worked closely with Penguin, Faber and Faber, Hachette, Little Brown, Hodder, Random House, Quercus, Hurst, Scribe AUS, Pantheon and Knopf Doubleday USA. Currently, he is Head of Design at Penguin Random House, India.

A Private Space

Sarnath Banerjee



Kidwai Nagar attic, watching residents of AA block play late evening badminton.

D II Type Government Colony, Delhi, 1988



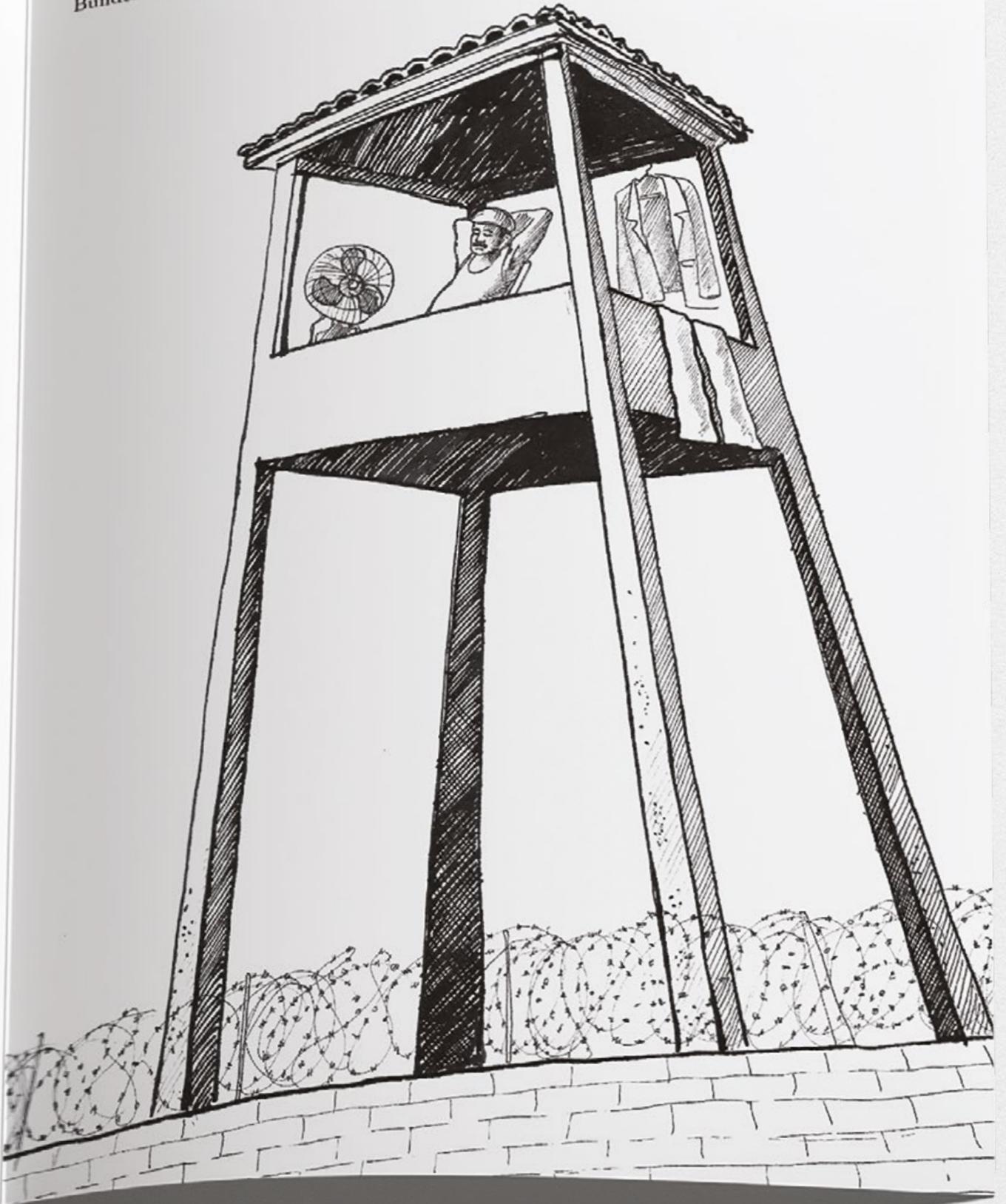
For Sarnath Banerjee, reading is a deeply private preoccupation that is primarily enjoyed in isolation. In the following piece, he has made drawings of four such self-contained spaces that echo the private world of reading.



A single person's bar in Pandunagar.
Bannerghatta Road, Bangalore, 1998



A ladder-less watchtower in Kharadar.
Bunder Road, Karachi, 2003



Waking up in the middle of a journey, finding a square of brick occupying the neighbouring seat.

Hallesches Tor, Berlin, 2010



Sarnath Banerjee is a comic book artist and an erstwhile publisher of graphic novels. He is currently a CAST fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is based in Delhi and Berlin.

Visual Cookbooks

Shweta Mohapatra



Cookbooks have always been absorbing reads. From showcasing beautifully styled and photographed dishes, these books have now moved on to becoming visual or design books that also tell the personal stories of their writers and illustrators.

Illustrated cookbooks have taken centre stage in the world of cookbooks. Illustrators are visual communicators and picture-makers who construct meanings and convey ideas, narratives, messages and emotions to specific audiences and readers. Fundamental to this process is personal creative expression, the pleasure and sheer enjoyment of creative image-making, and the interpretation of words and ideas into images. Illustration has been defined as the amplifying, enhancing and extending of the text, but can be much more than a literal translation of the text; it can function as an oblique counterpoint to the copy.

For example, let's take the cookbook, *Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat: Mastering the Elements of Good Cooking* written by Samin Nosrat and illustrated by Wendy MacNaughton. When we look at the illustrations in the book, we soon realise that it's a cookbook that could not have been photographed. Food photography is largely about precision, and Nosrat's book is all about concepts. MacNaughton's lush watercolours and visualisation of Nosrat's cooking methods are both witty and engaging to the readers in a way photographs could never have been. She amplifies simple cooking techniques through her illustrations.

The illustrator's domain is personal and idiosyncratic. By being sympathetic to the emotions and rhythm of the words, they make effective use of the visual language. Illustrations can be life-affirming, absurd, coherent, intelligent, beguiling, incisive and visceral; they are signs and symbols manipulated to amuse, inform, entertain, or educate.

Let's examine the cookbook, *Cake*, by writer and illustrator Maira Kalman and food writer Barbara Scott-Goodman, dedicated to cakes and beautifully illustrated. In the book, Kalman speaks of her memories of the different kinds of cakes that she had grown up with which

are interspersed with seventeen recipes of cake by Scott-Goodman. In the book, Kalman hand writes the text, making the text a visual element in the book. Thus, in the book, text and images become two forms of representation; two visual signs that integrate and reinforce one another to communicate messages, emotions, ideas or visual commentary.

Yet another cookbook that is beautifully designed by designer Josh Williams is *Ottolenghi Simple: A Cookbook* by celebrity cook Yotam Ottolenghi. The concept of simplicity, as is emphasised by the title, becomes an integral concept of the book. It forms the basis for the colour and visual codes that help categorise every recipe included in the book. So in the book, 'Simple' stands for:

- S — Short on time
- I — Ingredients: 10 or less
- M — Make ahead
- P — Pantry
- L — Lazy
- E — Easier than you think

The book's pages are filled with vibrant, delicious photography and playful graphics, while the image of a large, yellow lemon on the white cover makes it instantly recognizable.

Cookbooks have come a long way as illustrators, designers and artists continue to push the visual boundaries of what a cookbook can be. It will be exciting to see what comes next in this space.

Shweta Mohapatra is an educator, author, illustrator and designer based in India. In her career spanning over 20 years, she has made animated films for the Children's Film Society of India and has worked on the show, *Sesame Street* (India). She is a published children's book illustrator. She works at the intersection of technology, education and craft. A published author, Mohapatra has written for various publications and is a visual archivist of food practices.

Kolkata Cliché

Pinaki De

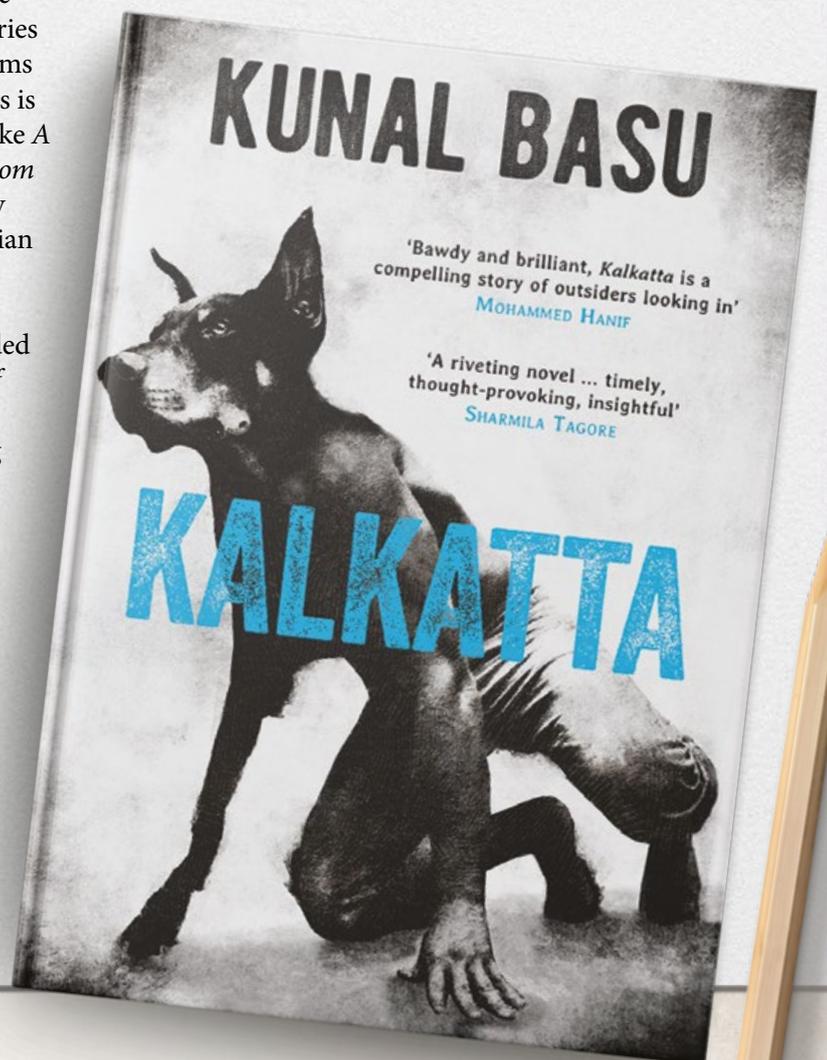


Kolkata and its visual quiddities have almost degenerated into an over-used template. So, whenever a cover brief arrives

about a fiction or non-fiction book based on or set in Kolkata, there is a temptation on the part of the designer, goaded with equal enthusiasm by the editors, to fall back on similar kinds of images while designing its book cover. For example, although Geoffrey Moorhouse's *Calcutta: The City Revealed* (2000, Penguin India) and *Strangely Beloved: Writings on Kolkata* edited by Nilanjana Gupta (2014, Rupa) are born as books almost 14 years apart, both have similar freeze frames on their respective book covers — a bird's eye view of the cityscape teeming with yellow taxis and hand-pulled rickshaws. Already, the hand-drawn rickshaw on the cover of Dominique Lapierre's book, *City of Joy*, carries the legacy of iconic image-making that started in films like *Do Bigha Zameen* and continued thereafter. This is not an isolated example. Amit Chaudhuri's novels like *A Strange and Sublime Address*, *Afternoon Raag*, *Freedom Song*, or *A New World* (all published in India first by Picador and then by Penguin), mostly about quotidian Kolkata, have changed covers with the publication of new editions. Most of them use photographs that depict dour interiors or crumbling exteriors of a faded city. The newly published *The Bengalis: A Portrait of a Community* by Sudip Chakravarti (2017, Aleph) just added another Bengali passion — a boy playing football against the usual backdrop of a North Kolkata façade. Even an experimental book cover like Ruchir Joshi's *The Jet Engine Laugh* (2004, HarperCollins), designed by the inimitable Itu Chaudhuri, cannot avoid the mandatory Howrah Bridge or the Durga *pratima*. When Amitav Ghosh's books were acquired by Penguin India, it went for a comprehensive rejacketing under the watchful eyes of Bena Sareen, probably one of the best cover designers in India. The covers, otherwise brilliant in execution, inevitably use repetitive imagery when they try to depict the city. Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* has a unique narrative, and is not a usual novel about

the city at all. However, there is nothing unusual about the image of the dead fish on its cover evoking the idea of *maach*-obsessed Bengalis. Even when photography is avoided, the hand-drawn painting warps back to the same imagery. Indrajit Hazra's *Grand Delusions* (2013, Aleph) is a case in point.

In my short career as a designer, I fell into the same trap. Whenever I got an assignment to design a Kolkata-centric book cover, I would inevitably search for the same iconic images that apparently (re)presented the soul of the place. So, when I designed books like Bunny Suraiya's *Calcutta Exile* (2012, HarperCollins India) or Krishna Dutta's *Calcutta: A Cultural And Literary History* (2012, Supernova), the covers emerged like postcards — postcards that are dispatched only too often. When retro-themed Kolkata-based books came up, like Sharbari Zohra Ahmed's *Dust Under Her Feet* (2019, Tranquebar) or Hemendra Kumar Roy's *Calcutta Nights*, translated by

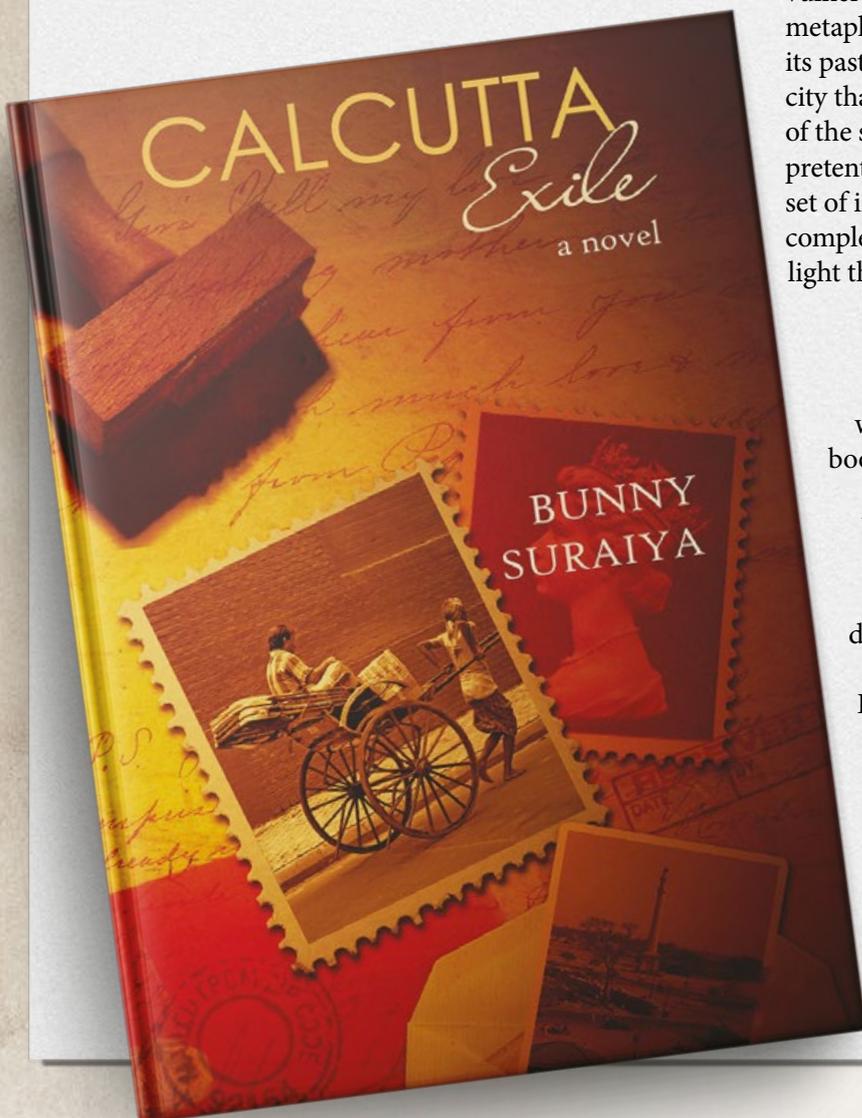


Rajat Chaudhuri (2020, Niyogi Books), I went mad with sepia/yellow tones, as if those colours will help to locate the book to the past where it belongs.

I forgot that Calcutta has turned into Kolkata. Things have changed. There are new visual idioms and vocabularies in the making. However, the book covers around the city remain trapped within a certain visual paradigm — an archaic, nostalgia-driven world of timelessness which inevitably harks back to its glorious past and faded present. North Kolkata bylanes, old houses, political graffiti, fish, trams, yellow taxis, hand-drawn rickshaws, Durga idols, Howrah Bridge, Shahid Minar, Victoria Memorial Hall, *pat* paintings — the repetitive use of motifs about these places, objects or events have reduced Kolkata to a visual cliché. Many may argue that this dictum is applicable to any book cover that tries to project the essence of any iconic city, as some images have the maximum recall value for anyone who wishes to buy a book set in a particular city. Still, I think it is time to break out and forge together a new visual language that will speak to the present as well as the past in a different way. Some attempts have been made, like the brilliant covers of Amit Chaudhuri's book, *Calcutta:*

Two Years in the City (2013, Penguin India). The book has been re-jacketed quite a few times, each different from the other in nuance and appeal. When it made its debut, it used a stunning photograph by Saibal Das which depicted an almira full of curiosities. In another edition, it uses a photograph of two empty red chairs to make a subtle political and social comment, while a later reissue just plays around with art deco fonts of the title. The covers don't force the reader/onlooker to immediately think of Kolkata, but once it gets the attention, it tries to draw him/her within the labyrinthine subtexts of the city. I am also fortunate to work closely with the author, Kunal Basu, whose cover brief for his book, *Kalkatta* (2015, Pan Macmillan), was precise and simple — to create an image on the cover that will not reduce Kolkata to its banal repetitive self. In fact, Kunal *da's* vision for the city was so psychedelic and unique that it also changed my perspective of how I look at those spaces. Initially we dabbled with surreal night photographs of the cityscape shot by Kunal *da*, and it was only after many brainstorming sessions that I came up with the idea of the dog-man — a creature that encapsulates the pain and tragedy of the main protagonist in the novel. The vulnerable eyes of the street dog-man also became the metaphor for a city that is slowly becoming a memory of its past. It was an attempt to portray the underbelly of the city that remains unique despite the cloying proliferation of the stereotypes that frequently project it with the same pretentious monotony. The city repertoire needs a new set of imageries that will let others view Kolkata in a completely new light, and it is up to us, the designers, to light the dying embers and start a fire.

Pinaki De is a graphic illustrator-designer who regularly works for renowned publishers across the world. He won the PublishingNext prize for the best book cover design in India twice in 2017 and 2019. He won the prestigious Oxford Bookstore prize for the best cover design in India at the Jaipur Literary Fest 2017, and finished as runner-up in 2021. His layout design on Satyajit Ray's archival manuscripts has drawn accolades from all across the globe. A Charles Wallace Trust Fellow, his PhD is on comics theory. Pinaki is one of the editors of the prestigious annual magazine *Longform* (Volumes 1 and 2, published by HarperCollins and Penguin respectively) and also the comics advisor of Mangasia, the biggest ever exhibition on Asian comics curated by Paul Gravett for the Barbican, London. De juggles his creative work with academics, as he has a day job as an Associate Professor at Raja Peary Mohan College, Uttarpara.



Rethinking on the Drawing Board

Vishwajyoti Ghosh



Remember that recent afternoon when WhatsApp was down? It seemed that, for an afternoon, the world had lost its platform to speak, if not its language. We all stood somewhere between losing the ability to connect and a state of disbelief that such a thing could happen. Taking a leaf out of that afternoon, would that mean that the world would be visually paralysed if Instagram was down? One prays not, but that's how pervasive these tools in our palms are. They connect us, cohabit in our heads, and even create content out of us. And these are not GenZ things anymore; they involve us all. Images pop up on our phones, both moving and still, and demand our engagement in a 48x7 cycle. Thus, in this process, we are all visuals and content in ourselves.

In a world that is engaging with visual content more than ever, one deliberates the role of a visual director — if at all there's a term like that — or a designer now, especially in the world of publishing. When Instagram is the new visual library, the visual influencer, the pinboard of our zeitgeist, when UX/UI are the more dynamic tools of visual expression, how does a designer look at his/her position in this ever-influenced world? This is something I often wonder.

Talking about one's early years in practice, work and the process, celebrated graphic designer M. Bierut

said, "What I found exciting was the fact that graphic design particularly, design in general, but graphic design specifically, is a very social activity. You're mediating between different groups of people." (Before we go any further, he said this in a podcast interview, and I also found this in an Insta post.) True, design is a social process, or it was, or it should be. It is the same in the world of publishing, or it should be. But it takes effort to move from the conservative monolith of a 'cover designer'

to that of a designer as visual mediator or director, an independent department of consequence, at par with sales, marketing or production, and not a service provider to the editorial side. While some parts of the publishing world acknowledge that, most prefer the *status quo*. In a world where the printed word is competing with the digital text, where CMYK is standing up to RGB, where the visual is becoming a language and the text also metamorphoses into an image, it is the designer's drawing board that often becomes the conference room for sales, marketing and, of course, the editorial. Designing thus becomes a social process, but most often with that slant of

'Dept. of Cover Design and all that has to be done'. It may help that way, but increasingly not.

In a world where the visual is a language, rather a creole of influences and learnings, disciplines and preferences, it is also the role of a visual artist or a designer to define his/her space as a part of a social

The book cover, as we know it, should be more than a cover. It is often expected to be a visual synopsis, a teaser, and in order of one's preference as it should be — a visual statement. The contribution of a book cover is no longer a visual topping with a statutory photo and the title as a text. The engagement is far more complex, with typography, visuals, illustrations and photographs all being equal opportunity players in this venture. And this, too, is not a recent phenomenon, but a larger process of evolution. Art directors, designers and even authors have worked on forming their visual language over the years, and beyond the world of publishing. From Rabindranath Tagore, Milton Glaser and Kiyoshi Awazu to Satyajit Ray, Chipp Kidd, Paula Scher and Oliviero Toscani, the list is long and inspiring. It is this engagement a designer looks for and wants to explore the endless visual possibilities of, however stunted by the peer pressure of trends and emulation

process — to engage with the text, react and play, and, to quote the poet, Dom Moraes, ‘form a language from a language’. However, trends and the ‘can-we-do-something-like-that’ are often the bigger influencers that run into the danger of ‘the pretty’ rather than that which must be visually articulated. And often, lately, 20 book covers of the season, by different publishing houses, created by different designers reacting to all different ranges of texts, end up looking like they are from the same school, if not the same design. This happens for a reason. Because our collective visual library is bigger than ever, our references change by the minute and our visual exposure is now diversely influenced — by films, posters, public art, memes, gaming, animation, you name it. Yet the trends and the number of likes are often the momentary influencers of our times.

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It is this search from the drawing board, the visual social engagement that has also led to the acceptance of every publishing house producing graphic narratives rather than a niche few. The demand for visual engagement is far stronger and the genres diverse, an engagement that is now being addressed by thinking art directors and design heads, steering strong design departments, creating independent design imprints within the framework of a larger publishing house. And this is the beginning of a visual conversation that may be starting from the drawing board but, before it reaches

the reader, is a conversation that convinces the publisher, the management, sales, marketing, and production teams as much — more than a collective plea to broaden their respective perspectives but also to be a partner in this visual world. And this is a welcome move, with the hope of realizing engaging visual content, through photo and design books, where the visual is the content and not an illustrated appendix. This is happening in poetry, fashion, cookbooks and photography with a thematic diversity that ranges from navel gazing, romance, self-help and business to the complexities of caste, dissent, economics and serious non-fiction. A complex work like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, thus, is a literary masterpiece turned film turned graphic novel as much as a work of nonfiction like *Sapiens*. This, of course, is not in isolation, not ignoring the efforts before, however old or recent.

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Whether inside a publishing house, or in the book store, it is just that the space for visual engagement is far more enlarged than before. Graphic novels and photo books are independent shelves in a bookstore, no longer slotted in a children’s section. It’s cool to read comics in the classroom and pen a PhD thesis as a graphic narrative on a graphic novel, in a world where a particular selfie can also be considered serious photography.

And one hopes this is only the beginning. We no longer live in the future where AI will be our skilled better halves, but in a present where a painting generated by AI has won an award in a Fine Arts competition. The engagement, from the reader, the viewer and the creator has and will get only more intense, discovering new possibilities of visual articulation, creation and interdisciplinary collaboration. Hence, for those in the world of publishing, including the designers, the visual artists and art directors on the drawing board who still dabble in the realm of ‘Dept. of Cover Design’, it is this moment one needs to rethink, and on the drawing board.

Vishwajyoti Ghosh is a graphic novelist, designer and now a podcaster at *Kissa Stories*. His graphic novel, *Delhi Calm* (Harper Collins India), was published in 2010, and, in 2013, he curated *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (Yoda Press). His most recent publication is *WE Mean Business – 20 Women Entrepreneurs, 20 Stories* (Yoda Press), a non-fiction graphic anthology on 20 grassroot women entrepreneurs from India. Ghosh has also served as the design head at Westland Books from 2018-19.

Visuals In Our Imagination

Rachita Rakyan

How many times have you walked into a party, met someone, forgotten their name but remembered their

face? We're wired for pictures. Most of the information our brain processes is visual, and we're good at processing it really fast because we've been doing it for millions of years. Stories also usually originate as visuals in our imagination. The process of writing is nothing but translating those visuals into descriptive words that will help the reader to see the same things.

While designing book covers, I realise that it's not the haiku of the story to be told, but the whole heart and soul of the author. A book cover is a visual personality of someone's years of work. More often than not, a book is judged by its cover. Hence, the cover art becomes a very important part of publishing.

Writers are traditionally 'word' people — my challenge as a designer is to plug into the power of visualisation to create books and book covers that translate them visually without sacrificing the beauty, creativity and depth of stories and ideas. The aim, in fact, is to enhance them in the process.

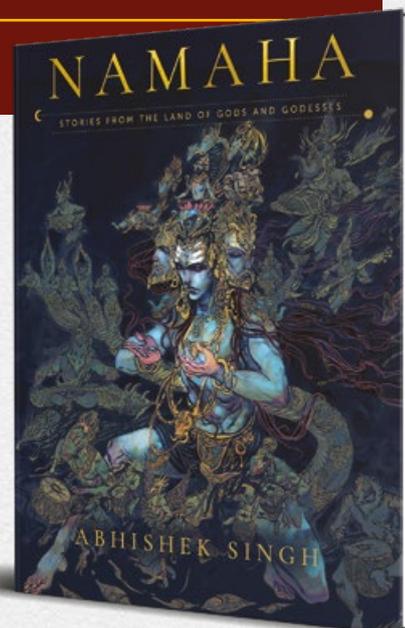
With so much visual stimulation across mediums, it's even more challenging to create designs that compel the reader to pick up a book just on the basis of its cover. I believe the concept has to be strong, in a way that is suggestive and thought provoking. When I design book covers, even the type becomes an image for me because people see before they read.

It's exciting to see so many comics and graphic novels being revived in recent years. Graphic novels bring stories to life with expressive illustrations that take readers on epic adventures. From cartoon-like reads to historical novels, graphic novels cover a diverse range of stories and can be for readers of all ages.

A lot of publishers are doing graphic adaptations of some bestsellers. One great example is Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Graphic History*. Adapting an existing work into a graphic novel involves more than just

providing pictures to words. Other than editing, it's about choosing an aesthetic that is true to the story, and deciding where and how to let the art do the talking.

I recently worked on possibly one of the most visually captivating books — Abhishek Singh's *Namaha: Stories From The Land Of Gods And Goddesses*. With its rich and captivating illustrations, the book transports you to another time and space. It is the first book of paintings and stories handpicked from the body of work of author-artist Abhishek Singh, created over a span of 12 years and exploring India's literature of ancient wisdom.



TOUCHING THE SUN



How "Can one touch the sun without burning one's fingers?"

Even "The sun consumes the sunlight to become a fruit. When we eat the fruit, we also consume the same sunlight."

Often we become indulgent and take in more than how much we require. This greed starts to burn us back, creating stress, tension, unhappiness and suffering.

When you be kind and start giving this energy to others, you can feel the sun from where the sunlight is coming.

That's when you know you have touched the sun within you, without burning your fingers.

Then the swan which was the liveries, took a flight with the lotus flower with the truth held in it's beak, across the pond of life.

Rachita Rakyan is the founder of YME design and the Drawing Room. She has 20 years of rich experience in the graphic design world, specialising in the creation of Corporate Identity, Packaging, Books and Book Covers. She also provides coaching, consultancy and training to children and adults in the field of graphic design and design thinking.



The Power of Art Beyond Book Covers

Priti Paul

Long before man mastered the art of communicating through language, visual illustrations served the purpose. The complexities of language meant that it took a long time to document life and its intricate flavours — an achievement that, today, makes us proud as a race.

Books, the vessels of knowledge, transcended time and geographical barriers. And yet, the recipe for their success didn't change: great written content along with a few illustrations and images, bound between well-designed covers. In a world where we were taught not to judge a book by its cover, content remained the king.

That concept is almost extinct today. In the age of social media, a book cover must receive a significant number of 'likes' on Instagram and Facebook so that readers feel inclined to hold it, flip through the pages and appreciate the content. Although book designers and graphic artists have done exceptional work for centuries, the unstoppable social media and its love of images have forced us to take book covers more seriously.

The effect of social media, quite interestingly, has a limited lifespan. So, for designers and artists, the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel remains elusive. Realistically speaking, their abilities are seldom

recognised.

Since the prehistoric era, art has served as a medium of communication and education. Around three million years ago, people from the Lower Palaeolithic period engaged in activities that could be interpreted as art. From cave wall paintings or parietal art to rock carvings or petroglyphs, examples have been discovered from sites across the globe. Images drawn by cavemen were supposed to communicate with and teach young men how to hunt, or propagate a belief, ages before the alphabet was born.



The value of art in books is timeless. From cave paintings and scrolls to modern e-books, art can drive a message home. The success of a book depends on art, pictures, graphics and illustrations. The industry needs more and more individuals to recognise this... To help everyone understand how important art is to book production, we should respond to the following question: If art is an integral aspect of human civilization, is it not necessary for books? The definition and value of art have evolved over the centuries. However, when it came to books, art remained a representation of what the author thought and was presented in a tangible way for others to see and interpret



The first use of the word 'art' from the 15th century onwards implies that even the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans had no defined term to describe their magnificent monuments, colosseums and statues.

'Art' is a post-Norman conquest Middle English word derived from the Latin 'ars', which means skill or technique. Plato first defined art as 'mimesis', which, in Greek, means copying or imitation. For centuries, the primary meaning of art was the representation or replication of something significant.

Throughout history, illustrations in books have demanded something more than trained skill. An artist has to see beyond the physical limitations of his eyes to create images of what his brain conceptualises.

It is the mind's eye that provides humans with an advantage over other species. It helps us formulate survival strategies and understand complex phenomena.

An illustration can be found in a Chinese copy of *The Diamond Sutra*, the world's oldest printed book that appeared over 1,100 years ago! Preserved at the

British Library, the book is one of the most intriguing documents in the world because of its content. Its *sutras* are a conversation between the Buddha and Subhuti, one of his disciples. Kneeling on a prayer mat in front of the Buddha, Subhuti is the elderly man illustrated on the frontispiece of the scroll. The artist undoubtedly made the book invaluable and helped readers comprehend the *sutras*.

Most books we read today have appealing visual content. The creative canvas has widened. Artists enjoy the flexibility of expressing themselves beyond the covers. New recipes that make books of all genres appealing to an internet-savvy world include intricate artwork, pleasing graphics and story-telling images in addition to doodles and line drawings. From coffee table books on art and fashion to comics and graphic novels — images and illustrations have reached new heights.

From our experience in running the century-old Oxford Bookstore, we have observed how scores of designers and illustrators working around the globe and especially in India's publishing industry have gone almost unnoticed.

Nobody can refute the fact that a book's cover design is an essential factor behind its success; designers and illustrators can make a book iconic and usher in its recall. So, in March 2015, we instituted the Oxford Bookstore Book Cover Prize to honour the creative minds behind enigmatic covers. Through this prize, the iconic bookstore attempts to encourage the extraordinary work of illustrators, designers and publishers from across India. The award honours designers with much-needed recognition for their role in interpreting and irradiating the content, which ultimately contributes to the success of a book. Given out seven times till now, the Oxford Bookstore Book Cover Prize has become the most prestigious award for book cover designing. Amid increasing demand for visual content, such appreciation is now more important than ever.

The Oxford Bookstore Art Book Prize, another endeavour of ours, begins its journey this year. It is the only award in India that recognizes the worth of all forms of art coming under the category of art publication. The Art Book Prize acknowledges a book's contribution to the extensive realm of art and culture.

The Oxford Bookstore has been pulling down obstacles in the path of boosting the publishing sector and celebrating every creative achievement in the business. A memorable art design, just like a seamless flow of written words, is an essential contributor to a book's success. Designers and illustrators, just like the author, can play an important role in helping a book achieve immortality.

The value of art in books is timeless. From cave paintings and scrolls to modern e-books, art can drive a message home. The success of a book depends on art, pictures, graphics and illustrations. The industry needs more and more individuals to recognise this.

To help everyone understand how important art is to book production, we should respond to the following question:

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If art is an integral aspect of human civilization, is it not necessary for books? The definition and value of art have evolved over the centuries. However, when it came to books, art remained a representation of what the author thought and was presented in a tangible way for others to see and interpret.

The use of art in books has persisted as a way to represent something concrete as well as a notion or an emotion. It has conveyed the full range of human experience in the pages of books. The beauty of this art form somehow whipsaws our sense of time. You are suddenly sucked into

a landscape the book's author wants us to explore. It is for that reason that art in books has endured all external influences and will continue to do so as we move forward.

Priti Paul is Director, Apeejay Surrendra Group, an author and a philanthropist. She is also the creative force behind the iconic Oxford Bookstore, and the creator of *ABC Desi*, an alphabet book with a distinct Indian flavour, handcrafted using various techniques giving a charming new life to the typical ABC book through the revival of the almost lost Indian craft of billboard painting. Paul is also the Founder Festival Director, Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, which celebrates books, music, art, film and more with the finest creative minds in the nation and world.





हमें अपनी भाषा की समृद्धि को भूलना नहीं चाहिए: क्षमा शर्मा



Kshama Sharma

“अतीत में गोते लगाना हमेशा अच्छा नहीं होता है। वह कई बार बहुत दुखद होता है। हम अकसर यह कहते हैं कि हम अपनी शर्तों पर जीना चाहते हैं, पर ऐसा होता नहीं है।” प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित ‘कलम फरीदाबाद’ में यह बात कही लेखिका क्षमा शर्मा ने। आयोजकों की ओर से अतिथियों का स्वागत ह्युमैने फाउंडेशन की श्वेता अग्रवाल ने किया। उन्होंने भारत और दुनियाभर के पैंतीस से भी अधिक शहरों में कला, साहित्य और संस्कृति के साथ ही महिला सशक्तीकरण के क्षेत्र में चल रही फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियों की विस्तार से चर्चा की और बताया कि ‘कलम’ का यह आयोजन ‘अपनी भाषा अपने लोग’ की सोच को बढ़ावा देने वाली पहल का हिस्सा है।

अतिथि लेखिका शर्मा का परिचय देते हुए अग्रवाल ने बताया कि हिंदी साहित्य से स्नातकोत्तर, पत्रकारिता में डिप्लोमा, साहित्य और पत्रकारिता में पीएचडी. की उपाधि रखने वाली शर्मा ने साहित्य, पत्रकारिता, बाल साहित्य को अपना कार्यक्षेत्र बनाया। आपने कई दर्जन पुस्तकें लिखी हैं, जिनमें कहानी-संग्रह, उपन्यास, स्त्री-विमर्श, पत्रकारिता, बाल साहित्य के अलावा आपने संपादन और पटकथा लेखन भी शामिल है। आप महिला संगठनों और पत्रकार यूनियन से भी संबद्ध रही हैं और आपको भारतेन्दु हरिश्चन्द्र पुरस्कार और हिन्दी अकादमी, दिल्ली सहित कई अन्य पुरस्कारों से सम्मानित किया जा चुका है। 37 वर्षों तक हिन्दुस्तान टाइम्स की बाल पत्रिका ‘नन्दन’ से सम्बद्ध और कार्यकारी संपादक के पद से सेवानिवृत्ति होने के आप स्वतंत्र लेखन कर रही हैं।

अग्रवाल ने आगे के संवाद के लिए बहुमुखी प्रतिभा के धनी सुयश गुप्ता को बुलाया। गुप्ता ने आम बोलचाल की भाषा वाले शब्दों में संवाद की इच्छा जताई, जिस पर शर्मा का कहना था कि अगर हम शब्दों का उपयोग नहीं करेंगे, तो वे गायब हो जाएंगे। जैसे कि इनसान के कान पहले हाथी जैसे थे, या उनकी पूंछ भी थी, पर उनका उपयोग नहीं हुआ तो वे गायब हो गए। मैं संस्कृत निष्ठ शब्द या



Suyash Gupta

भाषा की शुद्धता के सख्त खिलाफ हूँ, क्योंकि मुहावरे में कहे तो भाषा बहता नीर या नदी, जहाँ से गुजरेंगे वहाँ की मिट्टी, वहाँ के पेड़-पौधे, वहाँ की काई, वहाँ की और भी कई चीजें अपने साथ ले आती है। हिंदी के साथ भी यही है। हमें अपनी भाषा की समृद्धि को भी भूलना नहीं चाहिए। गुप्ता ने शर्मा से उनके जन्म से जुड़ी उस घटना पर सवाल किया, जो काफी चर्चित है।

शर्मा ने बताया कि मेरा जन्म उस दौर में हुआ जब अस्पतालों में जन्म नहीं होता था। हालांकि आजकल ब्रिटेन में भी घरों में ही प्रसव को वरीयता दी जाती है। पर मैं उस पीढ़ी में पैदा हुई, जब अस्पताल इतने पास नहीं होते थे। हालांकि मैं अस्पताल में पैदा हुई। उस समय बच्चों को इकट्ठा ट्राली में ले जाकर नहलाते थे। तो एक महिला जिन्हें मिर्गी के दौर पड़ते थे, मुझे नहलाकर गलती से उनके पास सुला दिया गया। मेरी मां को जो बच्चा दिया गया, उसे देखते ही उन्होंने कहा कि यह तो मेरी बच्ची नहीं है। मुझे मेरी बच्ची लाकर दो। इस पर अस्पताल के जो सीनियर डॉक्टर थे, वे मेरे मामा के दोस्त थे। उन्होंने आकर कहा अरे दीदी तुम्हारी तो मरी हुई सी लड़की पैदा हुई, पता नहीं मरेगी या जीयेगी। मैं प्री-मेच्योर बेबी थी। कहो तो कोई मोटा सा लड़का लाकर दे देता हूँ। मेरी माताजी ने इस पर कहा कि चाहे मरी हुई सी सही, है तो मेरी बच्ची, वह मरे या जीये, मुझे उसे ही लाकर दो, नहीं तो कोर्ट से लड़कर लूंगी। मैं सोचती हूँ, तब फेमनिज्म का इतना चलन नहीं था, मेरी मां को केवल आठवीं पास थीं, उनके दिमाग में यह बात कैसे आई। शर्मा ने इसके बाद विस्तार से अपनी वापसी की पूरी कहानी सुनाई।

शर्मा ने अपने परिवार के बारे में बताया कि हम तीन भाई, तीन बहन थे। मैं सबसे छोटी थी। मेरे बड़े भाई, जो मुझसे बीस साल बड़े थे, ने मुझे पढ़ाया। उनका कहना था कि लड़कियां पढ़ेंगी नहीं, तो बढेंगी नहीं। हमारा संयुक्त परिवार था। मेरी बड़ी बहन जब मैं छः साल की थी तो लेक्चरर बन गई थी। शर्मा ने अपने पहले लेख से जुड़े सवाल पर 1975 के अंतर्राष्ट्रीय महिला दिवस से जुड़े उस लेखन को याद किया कि कैसे वह गांव में जमीन पर लेटी हुई थी और उन्होंने रेडियो पर 26 जून, 1975 को इमरजेंसी के साथ ही अंतर्राष्ट्रीय महिला वर्ष घोषित होने की बात सुनी। मैं सोचने लगी कि यह अंतर्राष्ट्रीय महिला वर्ष क्या है? मैं महादेवी, जयशंकर प्रसाद, शरतचंद्र को पढ़ चुकी थी। मैंने सोचा कि कुछ करना चाहिए। मैंने डायरी से एक पन्ना फाड़ा और एक लेख लिखकर भेज दिया। किसी तरह से ढूँढ कर अमर उजाला अखबार का पता निकालकर उन्हें भेज दिया। मेरे जीजाजी ने बताया कि तुम्हारा लेख छपा था। उस समय मुझे दस रुपए मिले थे। वहाँ से लिखने की शुरुआत हुई। शर्मा ने रेडियो के युववाणी कार्यक्रम में मिले 15 रुपए की घटना से मिलने वाली खुशी का भी जिक्र किया।

शर्मा ने परिवार की महत्ता, लेखन, जयशंकर प्रसाद, नारीवाद, कानूनों के दुरुपयोग, भ्रूण हत्या, लिंग भेद, प्रकृति, पर्यावरण, बॉलीवुड, सौंदर्य प्रतियोगिता, विज्ञापन की दुनिया, सोशल मीडिया के प्रभाव, सोशल मीडिया इन्फ्लूएंसर, ओटीटी आदि पर अपने विचार रखे और श्रोताओं के सवाल के भी उत्तर दिए।

कलम फरीदाबाद के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण और ह्युमैने फाउंडेशन का भी सहयोग मिला।



Shweta Aggarwal



Anand Mehta



Sharad Tyagi

The Euphony of Emotions

Since 2018, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and its associate organisation in New York, **Jhilmil**, have collaborated to curate regular sessions of the **Kalam** initiative. After conducting several virtual sessions through the pandemic, the first post-Covid live sessions in the United States kicked off in style recently. The series, which featured the celebrated Indian woman-centric writer and manager with the Power Grid Corporation, **Pratyaksha Sinha**, witnessed two events — one hosted by the Consulate General of India, New York, and the

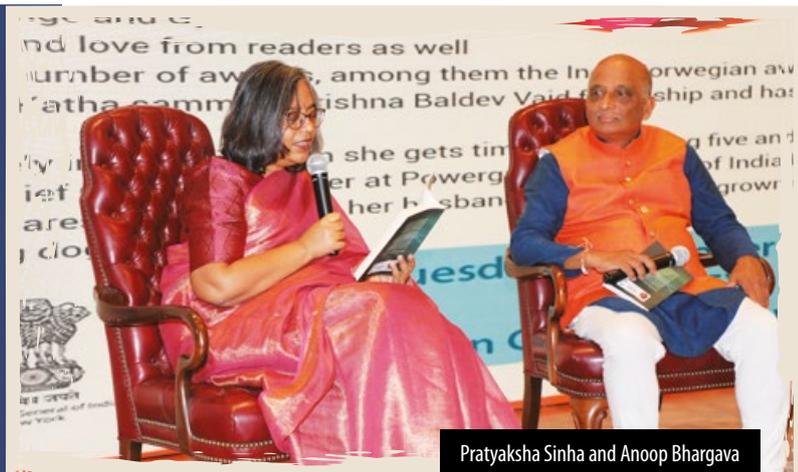


Pratyaksha Sinha interacting with audience members at New York University

other at New York University. At the former, several renowned dignitaries were in attendance, including A.K. Vijayakrishnan, Consul, Community Affairs, and Suman Singh, Consul, Head of Chancery, who were representing the Consulate.

Sinha is known for portraying women's intense and complex emotions through her stories and poems. The author, who writes to escape professional monotony, has 11 published books to her name, including notable works like *Barishghar* and *Globe Ke Bahar Ladki*. Sinha was in conversation with the accomplished poet and founder of Jhilmil, **Anoop Bhargava**, who also delivered the welcome note and highlighted the Foundation's many initiatives and the author's literary achievements.

What is Sinha's new novel, *Para Para*, about? "It's a



Pratyaksha Sinha and Anoop Bhargava



Pratyaksha Sinha with members of the audience

I am not interested in the obvious, straightforward narratives. I inevitably tread the intricate paths of layered emotions. As a reader, I like to imagine and connect with a world full of mysterious allusions and intricate possibilities, a world where nothing is right or wrong, but things exist just as they are. That is what I try to give to my readers

saga of three generations of women searching for love and trying to be wise with their feelings as they go through the journey of life," replied the author, who admitted that juggling two intense careers has greatly influenced her writing. "I am not interested in the obvious, straightforward narratives. I inevitably tread the intricate paths of layered emotions. As a reader, I like to imagine and connect with a world full of mysterious allusions and intricate possibilities, a world where nothing is right or wrong, but things exist just as they are. That is what I try to give to my readers."

The event concluded with a vote of thanks by **Suman Singh**, who was instrumental in making the **Kalam** series a success in the US.

Kalam New York is in association with Jhilmil, Consulate General of India, New York and New York University

Creating India's Own Fantasy Fiction



Not having their own mythological tales serialised into memorable works of fiction had always been a sore point for fantasy lovers in India. Saksham Garg, the author of *Samsara: Enter the Valley of the Gods*, came up with the perfect solution. An editor at Penguin Random House India, Garg conceptualised a mythological fantasy novel at the tender age of 18, and, over the course of 10 years, perfected his craft to produce one of the finest works of fantasy fiction that the country has seen in recent years. Released in 2022, *Samsara* offers a thrilling read with a plot that is intricately crafted and perfectly executed. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted a special session of **The Write Circle** in Jaipur with the debut author, who was in conversation with Urvi Bhuwania, COO of Siyahi, the Jaipur-based leading literary consultancy. The welcome note for the event was delivered by Mita Kapur, the founder and CEO of Siyahi.

“Even today, there’s talk of a mythical hidden valley in India called Gyanganj,” said Garg. “This is supposedly the land of Hindu gods, mythical creatures and immortal people. The story is about 10 modern-day individuals from India who not only find it, but also reveal to the world that it secretly controls India.” Elaborating upon his 10-year-long journey, Garg spoke about how the



Urvi Bhuwania

process of writing the book involved in-depth research. “I had to read several translations of the *Rig Veda* to ensure that the verses were as true to the original text as possible,” explained the author. “The process of writing was research-intensive.”

What about the comparisons that have been made between *Samsara* and the *Harry Potter* novels? “I had expected such comparisons to eventually arise,” replied Garg. “Having read the *Harry Potter* and the *Percy Jackson* series as a teen, I have felt that Hindu mythology has remained untouched and neglected.” However, the author did not shy away from admitting that his editorial experience did contribute positively to the creation of the book. “For each book proposal that I had to go through as an editor, I made a note of the factors that worked and didn’t,” he revealed. “I went back to that when I was submitting my proposal.”

While marketing has been an important contributor to the success of the book, Garg wants *Samsara* to speak for itself, and thinks that word-of-mouth marketing is the best kind. Having co-created an audio track to accompany the reading experience, Garg hopes for the trilogy to be adapted for OTT platforms.

The session came to a close with a riveting Q&A round with the audience. Mita Kapur delivered the closing speech and Subodh Sharma felicitated the author.

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



Mita Kapur



Subodh Sharma



Meeta Singh



Sarojini Hoon



Nandini Atal and Ajay Atal



Rita Nayar



Teena Kothari

Songs For Mother Nature



Ricky Kej

Two pillars have influenced the course of Ricky Kej's life: music and the environment. In fact, the Grammy Award-winning music composer of global eminence has been a strong advocate of environmental preservation, and was tasked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to compose an album that connects the environment and music. Thus, Kej recorded the album, *Shanti Samsara*, which was launched by Modi at the United Nations climate conference in Paris in 2015. Kej also composed music for *Wild Karnataka*, a natural history documentary narrated by Sir David Attenborough, which was also the first Indian documentary film to be released in theatres. Kej spoke about all this and more at a special session of **Ek Mulakat** in Bhubaneswar, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. Kej spoke to Parveen Tuli, **Ehsaas** Woman of Nagpur, about his evolution as a musician and an environmentalist. Nidhi Garg — who, along with her fellow **Ehsaas** Woman of Bhubaneswar, Vedula Ramalakshmi, was instrumental in organising the event — delivered the welcome speech.

Kej believes that living in the North Carolina countryside during his formative years sowed the seeds of environmental consciousness in him. "Living in a house surrounded by forests led to frequent encounters with reptiles and insects," he said. "My parents advised me to either run away or kill these creatures. But I was always curious to know why these creatures existed if they were a danger to others." This went a long way in fostering his compassion and respect for the animal world.

What about music? "My life is centred around music," was Kej's reply. "My knowledge of music from



Parveen Tuli

all over the world is owed largely to my father's music collection. Exposure to music was also an integral part of my education, as it shaped my cultural and political ideologies. Music has the power to communicate with people and bring positive changes in society. I want to harness the power of music to raise awareness and improve environmental and social conditions."

"India is still finding it difficult to reduce the burden of poverty, hunger, gender inequality, malnutrition, water deficit and sanitation," said Kej, when quizzed on the nation's environmental concerns. "People can't care about the environment if they have no food to eat. That's why it's difficult to find support for environmental causes from the masses. So, we must rely on alternative ventures like the Zero Budget Natural Farming which is a collective effort of the UN, the World Bank and the Andhra Pradesh government to eradicate old and harmful farming techniques by stopping pesticide and fertiliser use and farming multiple crops on a single piece of land depending on region, soil and climatic conditions."

Kej participated in a Q&A session before Ramalakshmi delivered the closing remarks. Ajay Kumar Padhi, Commandant SOG, Chandaka, felicitated Kej, and Namrata Chahal, President of FICCI FLO Bhubaneswar, felicitated Tuli.



Nidhi Garg



Vedula Ramalakshmi



Ajay Kumar Padhi



Namrata Chahal

Ek Mulakat Bhubaneswar was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Mayfair Hotels & Resorts and with the support of **Ehsaas** Women of Bhubaneswar

मेरी अपनी कोई धुन है, मैं उसमें लगी रहती हूँ: गीतांजलि श्री



Geetanjali Shree



Bishambhar Newar

श्री ने कोलकाता से अपने पुराने नाते को याद किया और कहा कि मैं अपनी गुफा में बैठकर लिखती-पढ़ती रहती हूँ। उन्होंने यह स्पष्ट किया कि यह पुरस्कार 'रेत समाधि' को मिला है, जो अंग्रेजी अनुवाद की मार्फत बाकी दुनिया के सामने आई है। बुकर ने डेजी रॉकवेल के काम को भी मान्यता दिया है, और अनुवादक के काम के महत्त्व को आंका है। श्री ने कहा कि मुझे नकारात्मक बातों में कोई रुचि नहीं है। मैं लंबे समय से लिख रही हूँ। 'रेत समाधि' का पहला अनुवाद फ्रांसीसी में हुआ है। कृष्णा सोबती ने इसे सबसे पहले पढ़ा। उन्होंने हमेशा मुझे बढ़ावा दिया।

उन्होंने इस किताब की समीक्षा में कहा कि यह बड़ी किताब है, लोग इसको धीरे-धीरे पढ़ेंगे। न जाने कितनी औरतें मेरे पास आती हैं और कहती हैं कि यह तो मेरी नानी, दादी के बारे में है। यह तो हमारी जिजीविषा के बारे में है।

नेवर ने पूछा कि अपने पांच उपन्यासों में 'रेत समाधि' को ही अंग्रेजी में अनुवाद के लिए क्यों चुना? श्री का उत्तर था कि मैंने किसी भी किताब का अनुवाद खुद से नहीं कराया है। इस उपन्यास से पहले मेरे तीन उपन्यास 'माई', 'तिरोहित' और 'खाली जगह' का अनुवाद अंग्रेजी में हो चुका है। अंग्रेजी में कोई ज्यादा पाठक गण नहीं मिले। 'रेत समाधि' का कौन सा पल था, कौन से सितारे उससे जुड़ गए कि बुकर देवता इस पर मेहरबान हो गए, इसे कौन जानता है। कृतियां तो और भी बहुत अच्छी हैं। श्री ने अपनी प्रिय कृति से जुड़े सवाल पर अपने पहले कहानी संग्रह 'गूँज' और उपन्यास 'माई' के बारे में विस्तार से बात की और अपनी रचना प्रक्रिया के बारे में बताया। उन्होंने 'रेत समाधि' में पेड़ और कौओं की बातचीत का जिक्र करते हुए मल्लिकार्जुन मंसूर के खोकर राग का जिक्र किया। श्री ने बताया कि मैं कहानी लिख रही थी, लेकिन मुझे लगा कि मुझे अपनी पूर्वज स्त्रियों के बारे में लिखना है, जिनकी जमीन पर हम खड़े हैं। तब मुझे यह नहीं पता था कि यह निबंध है, या क्या है? मैं लिखती चली गई और उपन्यास बन गया।

'रेत समाधि' के अंग्रेजी अनुवाद से जुड़े सवाल के स्तर पर श्री का कहना है कि अगर अनुवाद अच्छा नहीं होगा तो आपकी किताब कहीं नहीं पहुंच सकती। श्री ने यह माना कि अच्छे अनुवाद की बहुत बड़ी भूमिका होती है। अगर 'टूब आफ सैंड' नहीं होता तो अंग्रेजी जगत उसे जान ही नहीं पाता। मुझसे एक प्रकाशक ने संपर्क किया और उसी ने डेजी से संपर्क किया। डेजी ने कुछ पन्ने अनुवाद करके दिए थे। मुझे बाद में पता चला कि डेजी लंदन की नहीं अमेरिका की हैं। डेजी से मेरी ई-मेल पर लंबी खतो-किताबत हुई। बुकर में से ठीक पांच दिन पहले ही डेजी से मेरी मुलाकात हुई। आपको अनुवादक को कुछ छूट देनी पड़ती है। आखिर हमने भी टॉलस्टॉय और दोस्तोयेव्स्की को रूसी में नहीं अंग्रेजी में ही पढ़ रखा है। लेखक को यह पता ही नहीं होता है कि उसकी कृति कहां जाएगी। श्री ने अपने लेखन, उससे जुड़ी चुनौतियों, आलोचकों से जुड़े सवाल पर भी अपने विचार रखे और श्रोताओं के सवाल का जवाब भी दिया। अहसास वूमन की ओर से ईशा दत्ता ने अतिथि वक्ता का स्मृति चिह्न देकर अभिनंदन किया।

अहसास वूमन के सहयोग से आयोजित 'कलम कोलकाता' के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। मीडिया पार्टनर हैं ताजा टीवी हैं।

'मैंने आज तक किसी पुरस्कार के लिए कुछ नहीं लिखा। जो लेखक पुरस्कार के लिए लिखते हैं वे कोई और लेखक हैं। मेरे भीतर एक कोई चुनौती है, मुझे कुछ चीजें उद्देलित करती हैं, परेशान करती हैं, कभी आनंदित करती हैं। मुझे जरूरत होती है अपने से संवाद करने की, दुनिया से संवाद करने की, अपने चारों ओर समझने की, मिट्टी को लेकर आकार गढ़ने की। मेरी अपनी कोई धुन है, मैं उसमें लगी रहती हूँ।' यह कहना है इंटरनेशनल बुकर पुरस्कार से सम्मानित लेखिका गीतांजलि श्री का। वह प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित 'कलम कोलकाता' में बतौर अतिथि वक्ता बोल रही थीं। आयोजकों की ओर से मनीषा जैन ने श्री का स्वागत किया और प्रख्यात नारीवादी लेखिका, उद्यमी और परोपकारी डॉ प्रभा खेतान द्वारा अस्सी के दशक में स्थापित फाउंडेशन के उद्देश्यों और गतिविधियों की चर्चा की। उन्होंने अतिथि वक्ता गीतांजलि श्री का भी विस्तार से परिचय दिया। श्री की कृतियों, उन्हें मिले सम्मान, फेलोशिप की चर्चा करते हुए उन्होंने बताया कि अंग्रेजी सहित विश्व की कई भाषाओं में आपकी रचनाओं के अनुवाद हो चुके हैं। आप थियेटर के लिए भी लिखती हैं और विवादी नामक ग्रुप से जुड़ी हैं।

आगे के संवाद के लिए लेखक, संपादक विश्वम्भर नेवर को आमंत्रित करते हुए जैन ने उनका भी परिचय दिया। जैन ने बताया कि नेवर छपते-छपते के प्रधान संपादक और ताजा खबर के निदेशक हैं। वे अपनी गंभीर साहित्यिक रुझान और गतिविधियों के लिए जाने जाते हैं। बातचीत की शुरुआत में ही नेवर ने कोलकाता की साहित्यिक-सांस्कृतिक विरासत को याद किया। उन्होंने कहा कि यह रवींद्रनाथ टैगोर की और काजी नजरूल इस्लाम की नगरी है। हिंदी का शायद ही ऐसा कोई साहित्यकार हो, जिसका कोलकाता से संबंध न रहा हो। चाहे वह जयशंकर प्रसाद हों, मुंशी प्रेमचंद हों, निराला हों, सबका नाता रहा है। आप उत्सव के समय यहां आई हैं। उन्होंने कोलकाता की वैचारिक स्वतंत्रता की बात की और गीतांजलि श्री द्वारा इंटरनेशनल बुकर प्राइज की स्वीकृति के दौरान दिए गए व्याख्यान की कुछ पंक्तियां पढ़ीं। नेवर ने 'रेत समाधि' के बारे में भी कई बातें कहीं और श्री से प्रारंभिक वक्तव्य देने का अनुरोध किया।



Mohua Chatterjee and Esha Dutta



Manisha Jain



Anindita Chatterjee



Raj Mithaulia

The Heart Of Everything Is Kindness

He has a degree in dentistry, but Ricky Kej followed his instincts and pursued his passion to become an internationally-acclaimed Grammy Award-winning music composer and an advocate for environmental preservation. He is UNESCO's Global Kindness Ambassador and amplifies the 'Kindness Matters' campaign globally. Kej also works with other organisations like UNCCD, UNHCR and UNICEF. He collaborated with the legendary Senegalese singer and guitarist, Baaba Maal, to compose the UNCCD land anthem, *Born from the Land*.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation hosted Kej at a special session of **Ek Mulakat** in Jodhpur, where he shared insights into his musical journey, in the course of which he has delivered extraordinary albums like *Winds of Samsara*, *Shanti Samsara: World Music for Environmental Consciousness* and *Divine Tides*. He also spoke about his approach to Nature and addressing environmental concerns through his musical compositions. He was in conversation with Preeti Mehta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Jodhpur.

Kej spoke to Mehta about some of his musical works and his drive to urge everyone to save the environment. Among his best works, Kej considers *Divine Tides* to be special, as he got the opportunity to collaborate with his idol and legendary drummer, Stewart Copeland. "I reached out to Copeland and was surprised to see that he liked my music," said Kej. "We collaborated to record the album without ever meeting in person. The album went



Ricky Kej is felicitated by Nitish Sethia



Preeti Mehta



Ricky Kej

on to top the Billboard charts! Meeting Copeland was a surreal experience for me. After receiving our Grammy Award, he insisted that I deliver the acceptance speech. I could only think of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* at that moment, which means co-existing in harmony with all entities of Nature. We have disturbed the balance of the ecosystem. Harmonious coexistence is the only way to restore and maintain that balance."

Why do Nature, compassion and the environment always find a place in Kej's creations? "Music and the environment are the two pillars of my life," revealed Kej. "All my decisions are influenced by them. Music is a powerful medium to communicate a message and instil it in the consciousness of the listener. Take the national anthem, for example. Hearing the anthem evokes a sense of patriotism every time. It has a profound effect. When I realised that, I decided to dedicate my craft to conveying my beliefs, personality and ideas, instead of chasing money-making projects. I want my music to make this world a better place."

The session concluded with a round of Q&A and an interaction with the audience. Mehta delivered the vote of thanks and Niraj Sethia felicitated Kej, drawing the evening to a close.

Ek Mulakat Jodhpur was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Taj Hari Mahal Jodhpur and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Jodhpur



Ricky Kej

History Is Chronicled Through Music



Nidhi Garg

I am just a musician. Everything for me happens through music." That's how the Grammy Award-winning music composer, Ricky Kej, defined himself while speaking to Nidhi Garg, **Ehsaas** Woman of Bhubaneswar, at a special **Ek Mulakat** session in Patna, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. Kej excels in connecting people with Nature through his music. He has worked on award-winning projects with stalwarts like Sir David Attenborough and legendary drummer Stewart Copeland. At the request of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kej even collaborated with musicians from different countries to record *Shanti Samsara: World Music for Environmental Consciousness*. The album was launched in 2015 at the climate conference in Paris. At the session, Kej spoke to Garg about Indian music and his journey. Anvita Pradhan, **Ehsaas** Woman of Patna, delivered the welcome speech to begin the session.

Kej spent the first eight years of his life in North Carolina, where he was exposed to a lot of music from a young age. "I was always surrounded by good music," he said. "My father had a varied collection of works by popular artists and world musicians. I enjoyed listening to different artists and their unique styles. It was an education for me. I focused on the lyrics, and this played a vital role in shaping my understanding of different places, people, cultures and politics. The identity of a nation and its history can be found in music." Perhaps this is the reason

why Kej chose to follow his passion for music even though he holds a degree in dentistry.

After working on commercial productions for 13 years, Kej decided to switch tracks when he realised what his music could achieve. "The impact of communicating a message through music is unparalleled,"

he revealed. "That's why I decided to follow my heart and write music that's true to my beliefs and thoughts." Elaborating on Indian music, Kej remarked, "No matter how popular Bollywood is in India, it's not as successful as Indian classical music is on the global stage. Musicians must explore, but they must also remain connected to their roots. Copying the West is not the right path. Pandit Ravi Shankar achieved global stardom by staying connected to his roots and culture, which was reflected in his music. It's sad that most Indians may know who he is, but cannot recognise or hum his tunes."

Before concluding, Kej spoke about his collaboration with the Foundation called *ReWear4Earth*, which promotes sustainable fashion. Anvita Pradhan closed the session with a vote of thanks as Ajit Pradhan felicitated Kej.

Ek Mulakat Patna was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Dainik Jagran, the Navras School of Performing Arts, Hotel Chanakya and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Patna



Anvita Pradhan



Ajit Pradhan felicitates Ricky Kej

Melodies That Express The Beauty Of Nature



Ricky Kej

Ricky Kej is not only an internationally acclaimed music composer and a Grammy Award winner, but also an environmental activist. Music is his tool for raising awareness for environmental protection and to help people form a bond with Nature. Kej's music often revolves around Sanskrit hymns and the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which talks about living in complete harmony with everyone and everything around us. To hear more about his motivations, influences and progress both as a musician and an environmentalist, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted Kej at a special **Ek Mulakat** session in Gurugram. Neelima Dalmia Adhar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, welcomed Kej, who was in conversation with Shinjini Kulkarni, **Ehsaas** Woman of Noida.

"I cannot take the Indianness out of my music," Kej said. "So, my compositions are a fusion of my influences, which include Indian music. Ultimately, the intention is to connect emotionally with the audience." Kej also believes that Indian classical musicians are breaking cultural boundaries and have already built a solid reputation on the global stage. Classical music, however, fails to reach the masses in India owing to Bollywood's strong influence on the industry. "I was heavily inspired by Pandit Ravi Shankar," said Kej. "His music was powerful, and he stayed true to his roots. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan is another personality who had a major influence on me. The younger generations are being deprived of many classical masterpieces owing to undue interference from record labels that still believe the Indian audience isn't intelligent enough to appreciate this genre of music. This notion has to change."

What about his motivation to raise environmental awareness through his music? "Living around a forest



Shinjini Kulkarni

I cannot take the Indianness out of my music. So, my compositions are a fusion of my influences, which include Indian music. Ultimately, the intention is to connect emotionally with the audience

during my childhood led to many encounters with different creatures, most of which are considered dangerous," Kej replied. "And although killing them was a common practice in the area, I refused to accept the norm, as I believed that these creatures are a part of Nature like us, and an essential part of our environment."

"Music has the power to change the world, and I was delighted when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met me after my Grammy win and insisted that I work on a musical project for environmental consciousness," reminisced Kej. "That's when I recorded *Shanti Samsara: World Music for Environmental Consciousness*, which was a

collaboration of 500 musicians from 40 countries. The PM launched the album at the United Nations climate conference in Paris in 2015. It changed the course of my musical career."

The evening came to a close with a Q&A session with the audience, before Anantmala Potdar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, felicitated Kej. Adhar concluded the ceremony with a formal vote of thanks.

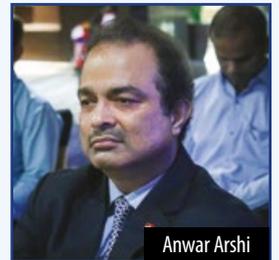
Ek Mulakat Gurugram was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport and Dainik Jagran, and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Gurugram



Neelima Dalmia Adhar



Dipali Bhasin



Anwar Arshi



Archana Dalmia and Anantmala Potdar

Ambedkar's Vision Is His Legacy



Anindita Chatterjee, Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Sonia Aggarwal, Anantmala Potdar, Archana Dalmia, Shinjini Kulkarni and Manisha Jain with Shashi Tharoor, Justice Madan B. Lokur, Karuna Nundy, Bhalchandra Mungekar, David Davidar and Kapish Mehra

Who hasn't heard of Shashi Tharoor? The serving member of Parliament is a former Indian diplomat, a public intellectual and a politician, but his showmanship comes from his mastery of the English language, his wit and his wisdom. His perspectives, knowledge and experience are reflected in his writing, which is why he is a distinguished and internationally acclaimed author with over 20 published books. His latest work, *Ambedkar: A Life*, is a lucid and insightful telling of the life of B.R. Ambedkar, the driving force behind India's Constitution. In the book, Tharoor traces every strand of Ambedkar's life and expresses his own admiration for the father of the Indian Constitution. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** celebrated the launch of *Ambedkar: A Life*, published by the Aleph Book Company, at Delhi's Nehru Memorial Museum & Library. The evening was graced by eminent personalities from different walks of life, including Indian dignitaries like Justice Madan B. Lokur, former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, Dr Bhalchandra Mungekar, economist, educationist, social worker and member of the Rajya Sabha, and Karuna Nundy, a renowned lawyer at the Supreme Court of India. Neelima Dalmia Adhar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, delivered the welcome note at the book launch.

David Davidar, publisher and co-founder of Aleph Book Company, and Kapish Mehra, managing director of Rupa Publications, were joined by Archana Dalmia

and Anantmala Potdar, **Ehsaas** Women of Delhi, Shinjini Kulkarni, **Ehsaas** Woman of Noida, Shruti Agarwal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Allahabad, Anindita Chatterjee, Executive Trustee of the Foundation and Manisha Jain, Branding and Communications Chief of the Foundation, on stage for the book's unveiling. This was followed by a discussion on Ambedkar by Justice Lokur, Mungekar, Nundy and Tharoor.

“How do I scale Ambedkar's greatness in words? He was poor and a Dalit, but he overcame these barriers to become the first Dalit individual to enter an Indian college. He became a professor at prestigious colleges and earned multiple doctorates in economics, politics and law in the United States of America. His writing and books are a testament to his eclectic mind and sharp, provocative intellect

— Shashi Tharoor

“How do I scale Ambedkar's greatness in words?” pondered Tharoor. “He was poor and a Dalit, but he overcame these barriers to become the first Dalit individual to enter an Indian college. He became a professor at prestigious colleges and earned multiple doctorates in economics, politics and law in the United States of America. His writing and books are a testament to his eclectic mind and sharp, provocative intellect.”

How does Mungekar assess the contribution of Ambedkar to Indian society of the past and future? “After independence, Ambedkar and Nehru's intellect and modern political approach were pivotal in making India what it is today,” said Mungekar. “Despite facing discrimination for

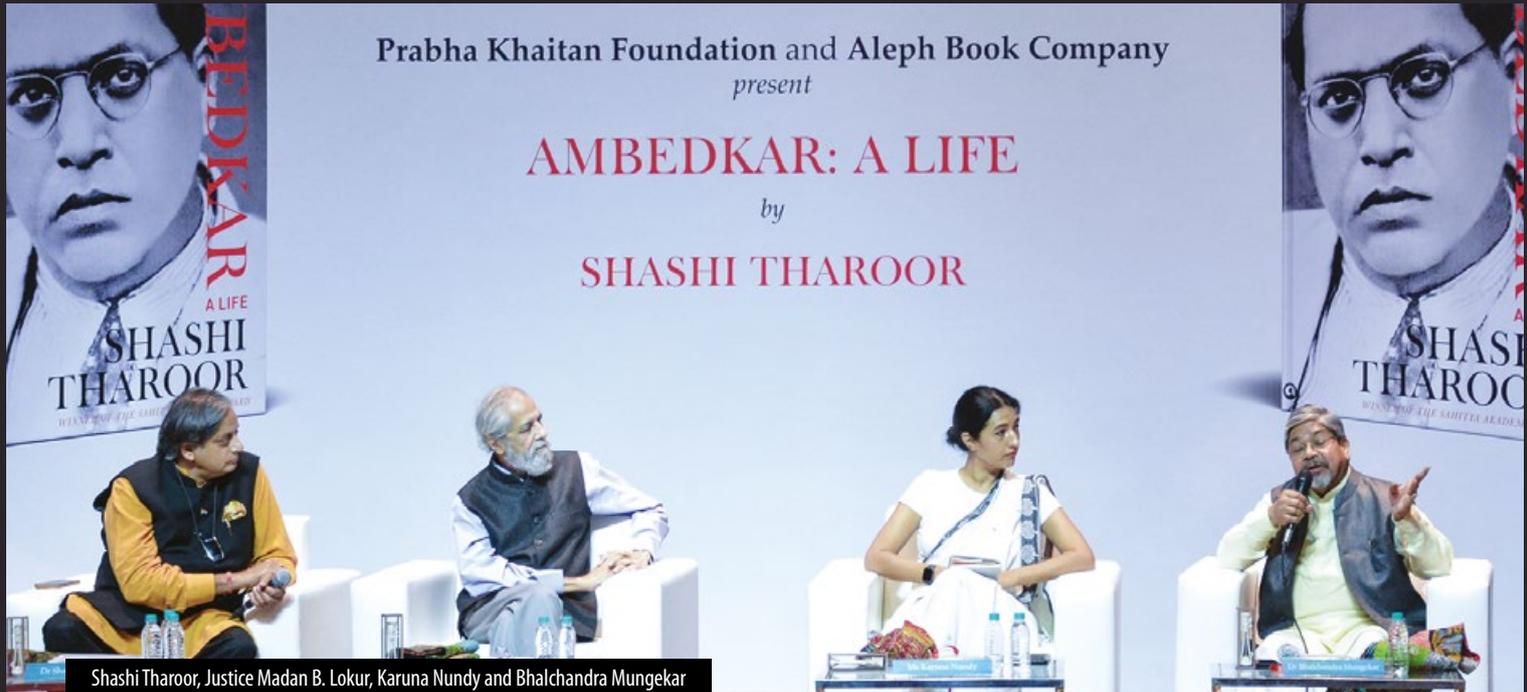
being a Dalit, Ambedkar's contribution to building this nation is unparalleled. He never compromised on liberal democracy, and wanted to transform political democracy into a social democracy. That never happened, and, unfortunately, he got labelled as a hero of the minority. Ambedkar even championed women's empowerment, but,

Prabha Khaitan Foundation and Aleph Book Company
present

AMBEDKAR: A LIFE

by

SHASHI THAROOR



Shashi Tharoor, Justice Madan B. Lokur, Karuna Nundy and Bhalchandra Mungekar

sadly, no one remembers that today.”

When Tharoor asked for Justice Lokur’s insight on the impact of Ambedkar on constitutional life, Lokur was quick to admit that there’s no person in law who does not look up to Ambedkar as a great constitutionalist. “It’s not uncommon to have constitutional drafts for reference, but Ambedkar drafted the Constitution almost single-handedly,” he said. “He was an optimist, so he devised a Constitution to achieve greater good for the country and each of its citizens, even though he faced massive deprivation for being Dalit. That’s why Article 21 of the Constitution gives everybody the right to live a life of dignity. We must strive for social, political, and economic justice to honour Ambedkar.”

“The purpose of the citizen is the focus of the Constitution,” continued Justice Lokur. “There is a fundamental right to life and personal liberty. Ambedkar wanted the Constitutional morality of the society, not just an individual. In that respect, we have faltered in our

“

Baba Saheb’s real project was social transformation. Sadly, that transformation is absent today. Look at how vile and abusive people are towards minorities. What goes viral are instigation and hate. This problem needs to be tackled because it leaves an impression on the world as to who we are as Indians. So, I try not to be a social activist but a Constitutional soldier who takes constitutional rights and values and structures them forward

— Karuna Nundy

”



Neelima Dalmia Adhar



David Davidar

understanding and implementation of the Constitution.”

Nundy took the opportunity to talk about the continuing resonance of Ambedkar’s life and teachings even today. “I urge everyone to read *Annihilation of Caste* to understand Ambedkar’s intellect and his values better, and how deeply it resonates even today,” Nundy remarked. “Baba Saheb’s real project was social transformation. Sadly, that transformation is absent today. Look at how vile and abusive people are towards minorities. What goes viral are instigation and hate. This problem needs to be tackled because it leaves an impression on the world as to who we are as Indians. So, I try not to be a social activist but a Constitutional soldier who takes constitutional rights and values and structures them forward.”

Before moving on to an interactive session with the audience, Mungekar had a few concluding thoughts. “Ambedkar laid down the roadmap to a successful democracy. But caste is still an entrenched element in our social structure. That’s why the condition of minorities is worsening.”

Geetu Martolia of Aleph Book Company delivered the formal note of thanks to conclude the session.

*This session was in association with
Aleph Book Company*

Putting Women's Needs in the Spotlight



Mamta Mehrotra

been largely missed during the virtual sessions. Bijay Selvaraj, the Consul General of India in Edinburgh, delivered the welcome note, while Bashabi Fraser, CBE, a poet, children's writer, editor, academic and the director of ScoTs, chaired the session. The audience, which was a mix of Indian and Scottish book lovers, were enthralled by Mehrotra's discussion on women's issues, which also form an important part of her writing and social work.

Talking about the women in her family, Mehrotra recounted how her grandmother and mother were all "strong, loving, liberal women" who inspired and encouraged her to express herself and realise her dreams. Elaborating on the story of Madhavi in the *Mahabharata*, she explained why she felt this was a story that needed to be shared. In the *Mahabharata*, Madhavi's plight involved staying youthful after giving birth, and being passed around by powerful men to be exploited. This was a story of patriarchal exploitation which holds relevance even today. Mehrotra's talk generated a lively discussion with the audience, as she responded to questions about the struggles of women in present-day India.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation organised a special session of **Kalam** in the city of Edinburgh in association with the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs) to listen to the author, filmmaker, social activist and educationist, Mamta Mehrotra, speak on a host of topics, the most important of which were issues that plague women. Accompanied by her daughter, son and son-in-law, Mehrotra also discussed her latest book in Hindi, *Mahabharat Ki Madhavi*.

Established by Edinburgh Napier University, ScoTs is a centre for Scottish-Indian collaboration and global engagement which honours the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore. It was represented at the event by its Chair, Lady Joyce Caplan, and the Vice-Chair, Lord Charles Bruce. The in-person event was a welcome change after three years of virtual meetings during the pandemic, and reinforced the sense of friendship and togetherness that had



Neil Fraser, Bashabi Fraser, Abhijeet Chatterjee, Bijay Selvaraj and Rani with Mamta Mehrotra

In the *Mahabharata*, Madhavi's plight involved staying youthful after giving birth, and being passed around by powerful men to be exploited. This was a story of patriarchal exploitation which holds relevance even today

When did Mehrotra know she was a writer? "I am not a writer," replied the author of 50 books, with a smile. "I feel as if someone else writes for me!" Lady Caplan delivered the vote of thanks, and the audience at the event certainly had a memorable experience that they will cherish for a long time.

Kalam Edinburgh was in collaboration with the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies and the Consulate General of India in Edinburgh

Bitter Struggles, Sweeter Victory



India's landmark detective television series, *Karamchand*, gave us a memorable character in Kitty, and also introduced the country to a consummate artist. Susmita Mukherjee was destined to be successful because of her talent, hard work and dedication. Today, she is a revered personality that young artists look up to. With her book, *Baanjh: Incomplete Lives of Complete Women*, Mukherjee stepped into a new role with a piece of artistic brilliance. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised a session of **The Write Circle** where Mukherjee candidly revealed how she made it through times of uncertainty. She also shed light on her book, which tells the stories of different women. Neelam Seolekar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Pune, welcomed Mukherjee, the moderator Ketki Bhatia, **Ehsaas** Woman of Mumbai, and the audience.

Writing was not a new hobby for Mukherjee; she had always been passionate about it, but feared that pursuing it could jeopardise her career in acting. "I used to ghost-write for my husband's production company," revealed Mukherjee. "I even wrote the screenplay for Surendra Verma's novel *Mujhe Chand Chahiye*. I didn't crave the credit; it was the pleasure of writing that mattered."

I was convinced that acting was my calling, but convincing middle-class parents isn't easy. I refused to compromise, and my rebellion finally paid off when I joined the National School of Drama. But that's just the beginning. Living in Mumbai without friends and money was overwhelming. My determination and love for acting helped me withstand the difficulties, and they eventually passed. And that's why I have no regrets



Ketki Bhatia

Mukherjee's journey towards becoming a professional actor was replete with challenges. "I worked with street theatre pioneer Badal Sarkar when I was 16," she said. "I was convinced that acting was my calling, but convincing middle-class parents isn't easy. I refused to compromise, and my rebellion finally paid off when I joined the National School of Drama. But that's just the beginning. Living in Mumbai without friends and money was overwhelming. My determination and love for acting helped me withstand the difficulties, and they eventually passed. And that's why I have no regrets."

Baanjh is a collection of accounts from Mukherjee's experiences that she recorded over a period of 40 years. It tells 11 hard-hitting but relatable stories that will resonate with every Indian woman. "The patriarchal imprints in society leave women with a sense of incompleteness," said Mukherjee. "They are seen as nothing but child-bearers, who need validation from men to feel complete. This has to change. Women must realise that they create life and shape generations and cultures. They have to find their best selves and shine bright. This process must begin from childhood through encouragement and by nurturing their imagination."

When the engrossing session came to a close, Sujata Sabnis, **Ehsaas** Woman of Pune, delivered the vote of thanks, and Amita Munot, **Ehsaas** Woman of Pune, felicitated Mukherjee.



Neelam Seolekar



Sujata Sabnis



Amita Munot

The Write Circle Pune was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with The O Hotel, Lokmat and with the support of **Ehsaas** Women of Pune

Envisioning and Empathy

Can reading fiction evoke empathy in its readers?

“We want to be more than ourselves... We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own... In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself.”

— C.S. Lewis, on reading (*An Experiment in Criticism*)

Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.”

— G.K. Chesterton

“[T]he most important stuff I’ve learned I think I learned from novels. It has to do with empathy...”

— Barack Obama

“Fiction is empathy technology.”

— Steven Pinker

“Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It’s a way of understanding it.”

— Lloyd Alexander

These are a few of the great minds who attribute some of the greatest lessons in their lives to their habit of reading fiction. I could now just type, “Here I rest my case” and end the article here. But I have so much research and its conclusions to cite! Much of fiction is concerned with protagonists’ understanding and misunderstanding of the beliefs and motives of other characters, and is only comprehensible if the reader is exercising cognitive empathy (*Lodge, 2002; Zunshine, 2007*). Affective empathy has also been proposed as an essential component of the understanding and enjoyment of fiction (*Hogan, 2010*). Or take the prominent 2006/2011 Oatley and team report, which found that the more names of fiction authors that participants knew — and the more fiction they probably read — the higher they scored on empathy tests.

Dan Johnson’s research showed that readers of a book called *Saffron Dreams* — a fictional story of a Muslim woman in New York — had greater empathy for people of a different race/ethnicity, compared with those who read a synopsis of the excerpt, devoid of descriptive prose and dialogue. The study participants viewed 12 images of ambiguous-race faces expressing varying levels of anger. Participants who read the synopsis or the history piece tended to categorize the most intensely angry faces as Arab. But those who read the narrative showed no such bias: thus, showing more racial tolerance and empathy

A meta-analysis of many such pieces of research has also concluded the same.



So, both psychologists and thinkers have asserted and inferred that fiction reading awakens or fine-tunes the reader’s empathetic sensibilities. And why not? Fiction exposes us to paragons of complex protagonists stuck in multifarious situations that we otherwise would not or could not humanly encounter in a single lifetime. While reading, we stand by our protagonists, irrespective of their age, gender, faith or geographical position. We weep and laugh with them; we either embody them or become their cheerleaders. This love, fear and anger in our virtual world seamlessly extrapolate to our real world. I can say for myself, as an avid fiction reader: after completing each book, something, maybe a little, does change in me.

This is where the type of fiction one reads has a role to play. Fiction that is more immersive, embellished with rich imagery, where one can get lost only to find oneself, and, in the process, others — that kind of fiction, in which we deep-dive, *sans* inhibition, into an unsuspecting setting — does the magic that pulp fiction can barely do.

This is not to undermine genre-specific fiction, though. Watching fiction has a similar effect, but reading is more personal. The characters look and dress our way, and have our sensibilities — something which seldom happens in movies. Books are long forms of fiction that worm their way to the very insides of the moral and wicked capacity of any living soul (fictional or otherwise). How can we lose out on this spiritual, emotional, socially cognitive, hedonistic journey of the lives of so many, right from the comfort of our rooms?

Reading fiction is an emotional workout that fortifies more empathy than sympathy, because now we know the hows and whys of the situation. We are better equipped to help people, instead of just barely commiserating with them. We can speak up for people, because now we know what to say. We can react more humanely, instead of just humanly, because we can probably rationalise people’s actions and convince others, too.

So, get up and read — not because it is good for us, but because reading is good.

I hope you are convinced that fiction is more than elaborate stories or fancy vocabulary. At least now you won’t tag fiction readers as socially awkward loners, because it looks like they are more capable of ‘reading the room’.

— Priyanka Kothari, **Ehsaas** Woman of Nagpur



Ramin Jahanbegloo

Nicolas Tenzer



On the Subject of Freedom

Prabha Khaitan Foundation organised its first Delhi session of **The Universe Writes** as a part of the Freedom Project of the EUNIC cluster of Delhi at Alliance Francaise de Delhi. 'EUNIC' stands for EU National Institutes for Culture — a network that consists of 136 clusters drawn from EU member states and their associations engaged in cultural relations. Their work involves promoting interaction in the arts, creative industries, youth affairs, digitalisation and education.

The Universe Writes, as a literary initiative, facilitates interaction between overseas writers and their Indian readers. The panel at this unique event was graced by eminent scholars such as Professor Ramin Jahanbegloo, Executive Director at the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, and the Vice-Dean of the School of Law at Jindal Global University; Professor Nicolas Tenzer, the Editor of *Le Banquet*, founding President of the Centre d'étude et de réflexion pour l'action politique (CERAP) and the Director of the Aspen Institute from 2010 to 2015; and Professor R. Krishnaswamy, Associate Professor and Co-Director for the Centre for Social and Political Research, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, who works on issues concerning philosophies of the mind, particularly in relation to the Israelian phenomenology.

Are Democracy and Freedom Incompatible? This was the title and the theme of the discussion, which was moderated by Krishnaswamy. The panellists put forth their expert views drawn from their illustrious careers in the diverse fields of culture and philosophy. The welcome note for the session was given by Stephane Amalir, Director of Alliance Francaise de Delhi, followed by a formal introduction to the EUNIC by Her Excellency Ljubica Pevec, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of Slovenia, President of the EUNIC Cluster of Delhi.



R. Krishnaswamy

The panellists were felicitated by Neelima Dalmia Adhar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi.

The session started with the students of the Alliance Francaise expressing their views on what they understand freedom to be; this was followed by their discussion of the various political and historical implications of freedom. "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their freedom are ready to fight for it," opined Jahanbegloo. "We may have freedom movements without democracy, but to realise or to achieve



Stephane Amalir



Ljubica Pevec

freedom, we must have democracy," said Tenzer. "For freedom, we have to consider three entities: the State, the society and the individual. There is no freedom without the individual."

Threats to the ideal concept of democracy in the current geopolitical scenario were discussed and analysed, and the audience actively participated in the conversation. There were also concerns regarding the misalignment between the theoretical principles discussed and their practical implications. The fascinating session concluded with a formal vote of thanks delivered by Stephane Amalir.

The Universe Writes was presented with Alliance Francaise de Delhi and with the support of **Ehsaas** Women of Delhi

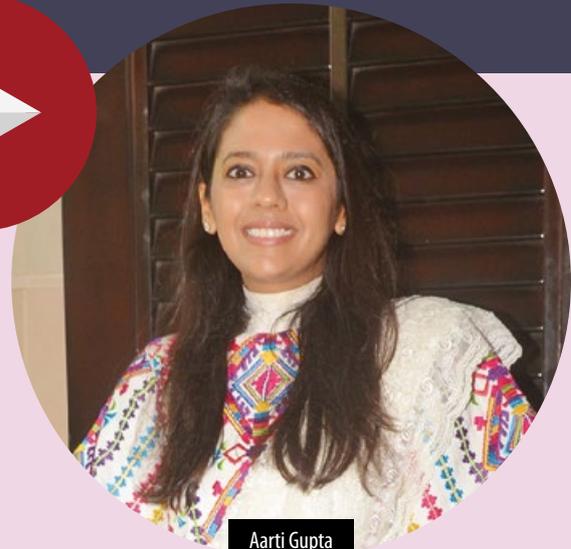
The Different Stories Of Gods And Goddesses



Amish Tripathi

After facing rejection from publication houses, Amish Tripathi self-published his debut novel, *The Immortals of Meluha*, and made the first chapter free for all to read on digital platforms. The book, which is the first instalment of *The Shiva Trilogy*, was a resounding success. His bestsellers have been translated into 20 languages and are critically acclaimed. Tripathi has been bestowed with several awards, and finds his name among the top modern Indian writers owing to the research he puts into his work, his profound thought process, his deep-rooted pride in Indian mythology and his liberal, progressive outlook. Tripathi also hosts television documentaries, produces films and works as a diplomat for the Indian government. His new book, *War of Lanka*, is a well-researched and riveting story that weaves together the narratives of the first three books of the *Ram Chandra* series to depict the victory of *Dharma* over *Adharma*. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted a special session of **Kitaab** in Kolkata to launch the much-awaited *War of Lanka*. Esha Dutta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, moderated the event.

The book launch witnessed the presence of Shilpa Sethia, the Chairperson of FICCI YFLO, Anindita Chatterjee, Executive Trustee of the Foundation, Manisha Jain, Branding and Communications Chief of the Foundation, Dona Ganguly, danseuse and **Ehsaas**



Aarti Gupta

Woman of Kolkata, and Malika Varma, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata. Tripathi was in conversation with Aarti Gupta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kanpur and former chairperson of FLO Kanpur. Sethia delivered the formal welcome note to mark the beginning of an engaging discussion between Tripathi and Gupta.

“I was never looking to be an author,” began Tripathi, as he spoke about his decision to quit finance and pursue his career as a writer. “I was a voracious reader. I never displayed any creative abilities in my youth. That’s why my friends still doubt whether I have truly written the books! *The Shiva Trilogy* started as a pure philosophical thesis, but turned into an adventure. The thesis answered the question as to what evil is, and the books were a medium to present the idea wrapped in adventure.”

Did the author feel any pressure in writing the *Ram*



Shilpa Sethi, Esha Dutta, Malika Varma, Dona Ganguly, Aarti Gupta, Manisha Jain and Anindita Chatterjee with Amish Tripathi

Chandra series, as it's inspired from the revered Indian epic, *Ramayana*, and because he is known for taking creative liberties in his interpretations of mythological tales? "You feel pressured if you think you're a genius adapting a foundational scripture," Tripathi replied. "When I sit down to write, a parallel universe opens up in front of me. I can see the characters, hear them and feel their emotions. It just flows, and I am not trying to adapt to anything. That is why I love to write. It is the only part of my life where I am completely instinctive and completely emotion-driven. In fact, all of us must do something creative to balance our rational side."

Tripathi's stories have always had interesting backstories and characters, and the same can be said about the *Ram Chandra* series. "To match up to the original narrative, you must first know what the original version is," said Tripathi to Gupta. "The original version of the *Ramayana* by Valmiki does not mention the 'Lakshman Rekha', but it's mentioned in later devotional versions. Even Ramanand Sagar interpreted the idea of the 'Lakshman Rekha' in his own way while filming the series for television. Writing

your interpretation of the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* or the *Puranas* is not an act of rebellion, but an act of honouring our gods and goddesses."

Tripathi also had a few thoughts on his multilinear approach for the *Ram Chandra* series and its characters. "The first three books are based on the perspectives of the three main characters in the *Ramayana*: Ram, Sita and Ravan," he explained. "They help you understand the philosophies much better. Sita *Ma* as a warrior is not my creation, but an interpretation. There is a version by Valmiki where Sita is a warrior and kills Ravan. Similarly, Ravan is not just a thug. He had several noble qualities, but his lack of control over his ego, desire and anger led to his downfall."

Tripathi gave the audience a peek into his future endeavours before engaging with them in a Q&A session. The evening came to a close with Dona Ganguly felicitating Tripathi with a *kantha uttoriyo*.

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This session of *Kitaab* Kolkata was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Hyatt Regency Kolkata, FICCI FLO Kolkata and with the support of *Ehsaas* Women of Kolkata

A Journey into the World of Cinema



Anil Kapoor

In the world of film journalism, it is impossible not to think of Bhawana Somaaya. Her contribution to writings on cinema has been invaluable. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted another session of its **Kitaab** initiative with the renowned film journalist and author at The Club, Mumbai. At the event, Somaaya's *Letters to Self*, the translation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's book *Aankh Aa Dhanya Che*, was launched by the veteran Bollywood actor, Anil Kapoor.

Swati Agarwal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Mumbai, delivered the welcome note on behalf of the Foundation after introducing the author to the audience. Somaaya was in conversation with Ruhi Walia Syal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Jalandhar. Following the launch of the book, Ojas Rawal, the noted Gujarati actor and poet, recited a few verses from the original work written in Gujarati, before Somaaya read out lines from *Letters to Self*. "It is my pride and privilege to recite the words that have come from the mind of Narendra Modi," said Rawal. He recited lines from poems such as *Achanak*, *Patang*, *Kriyapad* and *Chhodo*.

Somaaya underlined the importance of reading a book in its original language. "When a translated book is launched, we tend to forget the original," she said. "It is very important to feel the presence of the original and then the translation." While she read the first three poems, the last was recited by Anil Kapoor in English. "The beauty of the Prime Minister's poems lies in the language, which is adorned



Bhawana Somaaya

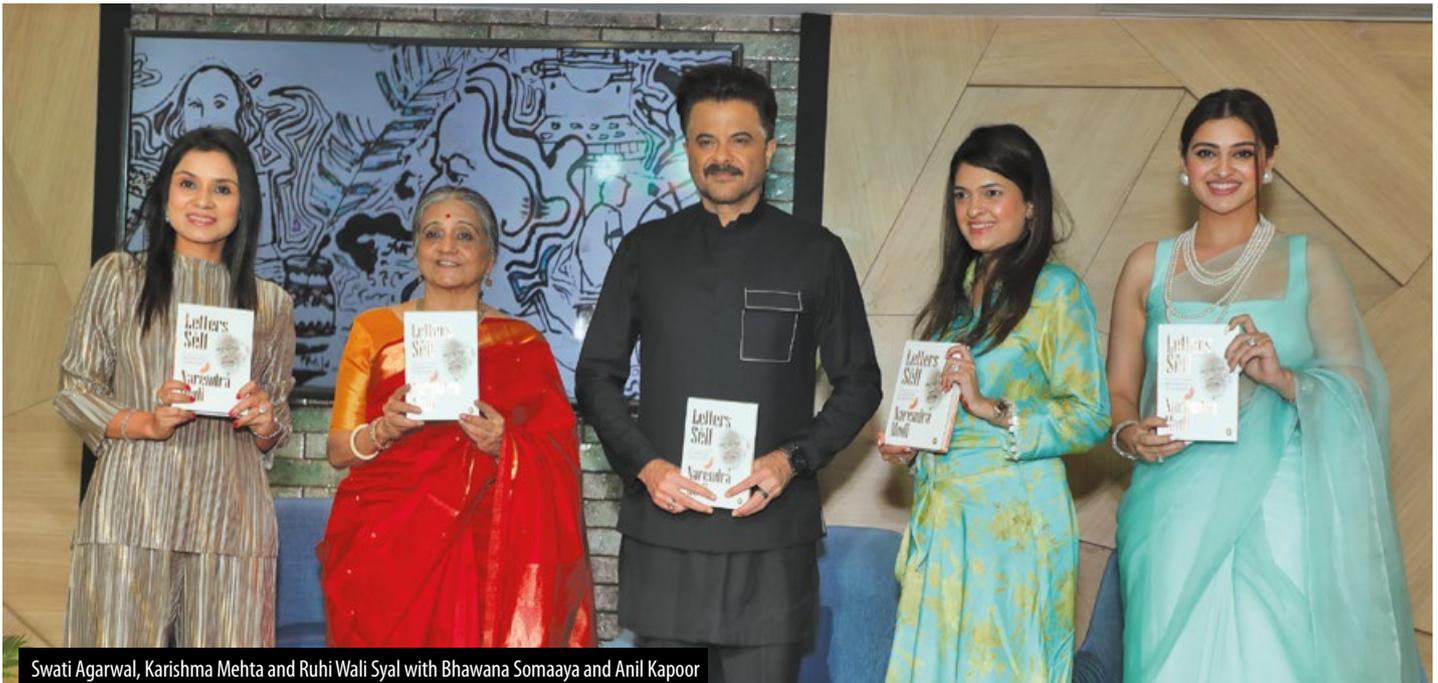
with wonderful vocabulary and a philosophic note underlining each poem," pointed out Somaaya.

So what led to Somaaya's brilliant career in film journalism? "I did not have a journalist as a role model," said the author. "What started off as writing for college magazines eventually led to me writing for magazines related to the world of cinema." Once she began a career in film journalism, she worked hard to make a mark in her field. What inspired her to translate Modi's book? "The Covid-19 pandemic and the fear of falling into malaise," she replied.

"I was already writing a film book when I also started translating Modi's first book, titled *Saakshi Bhaav*. After translating this book, I thought that I had gotten the hang of his writing. That is why I took up translating the second book."

However, for Somaaya, translating is not always an easy task — but she did it with panache. "There are two kinds of writers — those who do translations and those who write original works," she explained. "I combine both. When I do original writing,

When I started translating Narendra Modi's works, I had a lot of challenges. The biggest challenge was that his works presented a male thought process, while I am used to offering a female gaze. Nonetheless, I decided to keep the essence of his voice intact



Swati Agarwal, Karishma Mehta and Ruhi Wali Syal with Bhawana Somaaya and Anil Kapoor

I am a free bird, but when I translate, I have to abide by the thoughts of my subject. So, when I started translating Modi's works, I had a lot of challenges. The biggest challenge was that his works presented a male thought process, while I am used to offering a female gaze. Nonetheless, I decided to keep the essence of his voice intact."

Discussing her bond with the celebrated actor, Anil Kapoor, Somaaya stated that before she became a film reviewer, she was one of his closest confidantes. She supported him when his films were criticised. But after she started reviewing films, she made it clear that she would be more of a critic than a friend when it came to his work. "The same goes for

his children, Sonam and Harshvardhan Kapoor," declared Somaaya. "Anil knows this, and he takes everything in

his stride. He has never confronted me. This work is not about false praises, it is about sharing creativity, a space, and a mindset."

Do the mood swings or the emotional turbulence of actors during interviews affect Somaaya? "Cinema is the most sensitive medium, because it involves sound, image, emotion, music and words," she explained. "Film artists are the most sensitive people. As a person who is meeting them, I am sensitive to their moods. Sometimes you carry back their anxieties and fears related to a film or a relationship. But you cannot park everything in your heart. You park it in your subconscious, and it helps you somewhere in your art. Everything is about art eventually

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Ojas Rawal



Priyanka Khanna

The session came to a close with a Q&A round with the audience. The formal vote of thanks was delivered by Karishma Mehta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Mumbai, while Priyanka Khanna presented gifts as tokens of appreciation to Somaaya and Kapoor.

*This session of **Kitaab** Mumbai was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Lokmat, Fingerprint and with the support of **Ehsaas** Women of Mumbai*



अजमेर में 'प्रभा खेतान का कथा संसार' विषयक संगोष्ठी और अन्य कार्यक्रम संपन्न

मरु भूमि को जब भी अवसर मिलता है वह अपनी माटी की चर्चित साहित्यिक बेटि प्रभा खेतान को जरूर याद करता है। अभी कुछ समय पहले ही राजस्थान साहित्य अकादमी उदयपुर ने अजमेर लेखिका मंच एवं सामाजिक सेवा संस्थान के साथ मिलकर 'प्रभा खेतान का कथा संसार' विषय पर एक दिवसीय भव्य राष्ट्रीय संगोष्ठी का आयोजन किया। अजमेर के जयपुर रोड स्थित होटल रॉयल मिलोज के सभाकक्ष में यह संगोष्ठी 2 सत्रों में संपन्न हुई। प्रथम सत्र में संगोष्ठी की अध्यक्षता डॉ कृष्णा कांत पाठक आईएएस, दर्शन शास्त्री एवं साहित्यकार ने की। मुख्य अतिथि अजमेर की उप अधीक्षक छवि शर्मा थीं। अकादमी के अध्यक्ष डॉक्टर दुलाराम सारण, सचिव डॉ बसंत सिंह सोलंकी भी मौजूद थे।

कार्यक्रम का आरंभ दीप प्रज्वलन और डॉक्टर शारदा देवड़ा व डॉक्टर छाया शर्मा की सरस्वती वंदना से हुआ। अजमेर लेखिका मंच की संयोजक डॉ मधु खंडेलवाल ने कार्यक्रम की रूपरेखा और अतिथियों का परिचय दिया। अंबिका हेड़ा और काजल खत्री ने लेखिका मंच के गीत को स्वर लहरी दी। कार्यक्रम में अजमेर लेखिका मंच का प्रतिवेदन और डॉ खंडेलवाल की राजस्थान साहित्य अकादमी के सहयोग से प्रकाशित पुस्तक संवेदनाओं के सागर का विमोचन भी हुआ। पुस्तक की समीक्षा डॉ रासबिहारी गौड़ ने, तो प्रतिवेदन का संक्षिप्त परिचय भारती प्रकाश ने दिया। लेखिका मंच का विशेष एक्सीलेंट अवार्ड पायल गुप्ता को मिला। मेयो कॉलेज अजमेर के हिंदी विभागाध्यक्ष कुंदन सिंह ने प्रभा खेतान का कथा संसार पर चर्चा की।

मुख्य अतिथि शर्मा और अध्यक्षता कर रहे डॉक्टर पाठक ने भी अपना मत रखा।

द्वितीय सत्र की अध्यक्षता डॉ गौड़ ने की। डॉ मोनिका मिश्रा एवं डॉ मोनिका शर्मा ने 'प्रभा खेतान का कथा संसार' विषय पर पत्र वाचन कर उनकी ख्याति, जिंदगी, साहित्य और रचनाओं की जानकारी साझा की। कार्यक्रम में डॉक्टर अरुणा माथुर कलम अवॉर्ड के विजेताओं को भी पुरस्कृत किया गया। इसके बाद 'एक नया सवेरा' विषय पर रचनाएं प्रस्तुत करने वाले प्रतिभागियों को प्रमाण पत्र एवं विजेताओं को पुरस्कार दिया गया। अंत में डॉ सोलंकी और सत्र के अध्यक्ष डॉ गौड़ ने विचार व्यक्त किए। उमेश कुमार चौरसिया एवं कमला गोकलानी ने निर्णायक की भूमिका निभाई। मंजु माथुर ने आभार प्रकट किया।





Changing How Women Are Portrayed On Screen

Astha Arora

“Most of the women characters portrayed on television are looking to find a good husband and win the family over. This limits the scope of a woman’s potential and needs.”

These were the hard-hitting words of Astha Arora during a special session of **Tête-à-Tea** organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** on the YouTube page of Kahalli. Arora, the head of film and digital content at Purple Pebble Pictures in India, is a well-known personality in the world of films, web series and entertainment. She had some sharp insights on the female gaze in mainstream cinema as she spoke to Advaita Kala, screenwriter and creator of Kahalli. Nidhi Garg, **Ehsaas** Woman of Bhubaneswar, delivered the welcome speech and introduced the speakers.

“I jumped from television to OTT platforms to create the kind of content I would be able to relate to or believe in,” said Arora. “Television has its benefits, but on Indian television, women are stereotypically portrayed as doing chores, and such depictions are popular even now. Sadly, even creative teams consisting of women have been propagating traditional roles for women. We are so accustomed to seeing women through the traditional male gaze that even other women have been conditioned to share that perspective.”

Arora then spoke about the OTT arena. “The problem arises when business becomes more important than creativity,” she said. “Women who played regressive roles



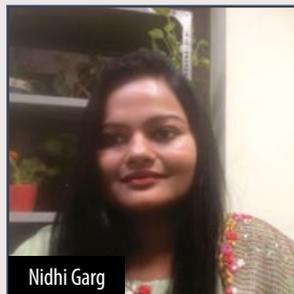
Advaita Kala

on television have usually been paid better than others. OTT, on the other hand, targets a new India — the urban, younger India that has evolved viewing global content. Today, across all platforms, we are lucky to have an audience that accepts a scenario where the ‘*bahu*’ walks out of the house if she is wronged — something that was considered blasphemous a few years ago.”

Arora also hopes that the next trend in global entertainment will be Indian content. “There is no dearth of stories in India, but there is so much diversity that we cannot appease everyone with one source of content,” she said. “The diversity in India calls for diverse content. The viewers get variety, and the world gets to see different parts of India. Instead of emulating the West, we need to find local, original stories that can also connect with the global audience. Producers are looking for good stories. Female-centric content is being appreciated, as women are voicing their opinions to change the patriarchal culture.”

The speaker expressed her concerns over the psychological struggles of young women in the age group of 15 to 24, many of whom are facing mental health issues but don’t know how to deal with them. “That’s why mainstream films like *Dear Zindagi*, that feature big names like Shah Rukh Khan and Alia Bhatt, can help raise awareness about the need for psychological counselling,” she concluded. Garg ended the enlightening session with a formal vote of thanks.

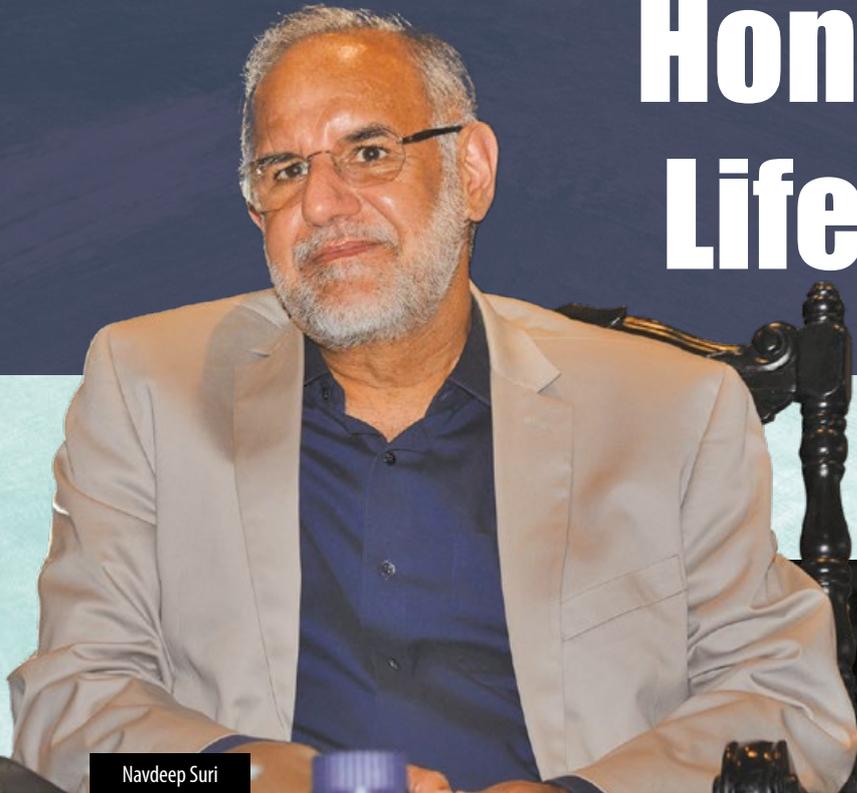
“The problem [in TV content creation] arises when business becomes more important than creativity. Women who played regressive roles on television have usually been paid better than others. OTT, on the other hand, targets a new India — the urban, younger India that has evolved viewing global content. Today, across all platforms, we are lucky to have an audience that accepts a scenario where the ‘*bahu*’ walks out of the house if she is wronged — something that was considered blasphemous a few years ago”



Nidhi Garg

This session of Tête-à-Tea was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Kahalli

Honouring the Life of an Icon



Navdeep Suri



Manoj Mohanka

Having served for 36 years in the Indian Foreign Service, Navdeep Suri is a noted diplomat who has been on India's diplomatic missions to Cairo, Damascus, Washington, Dar es Salaam and London, and has served as India's Consul General in Johannesburg.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation organised a session of **An Author's Afternoon** in Kolkata with Suri, where he discussed global politics, diplomatic issues, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the turmoil in India after Partition, drawing from the legacy of his grandfather, Nanak Singh, the venerated Punjabi songwriter, novelist and poet. Suri was in conversation with the renowned businessman and entrepreneur, Manoj Mohanka. Shefali Rawat Agarwal, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata, delivered the formal welcome speech and introduced the author and the moderator to the audience.

An ardent scholar and writer, Suri took it upon himself to translate several of his grandfather's most renowned novels such as *Pavitra Papi* and *Adh Khiria Phul*, and also translated Singh's lost poem, *Khooni Vaishakhi*. One of his latest works is the translation of Nanak Singh's novel, *Khoon De Sohile*, into English, titled *Hymns in Blood*. Praising his expertise in translation, Mohanka observed that the author has

managed to capture the soul of the original work, which provides important insights into the violence that took place during Partition.

"My grandfather struggled to support his family after the death of his own father," remarked Suri. "My grandfather was born Hans Raj (a Hindu). He converted to Sikhism and, under the influence of a pious Sikh *guru*, took the name Nanak Singh. He had a talent for music and a penchant for verse. With the zeal of a new convert, he wrote a book of verses in praise of the Sikh *gurus*. The book, published in 1918, is called *Satguru Mehma*. This book of verses, set to the tune of popular songs back then, gained popularity and became his source of financial sustenance. He became

When Nanak Singh wrote *Khooni Vaisakhi*, on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he knew that he was writing for posterity. The poem is a chronological account of the first 14 days after the massacre in April 1919. It beautifully captures the mood of the city, from the time that the Rowlatt Act is brought into force to Gandhi's call for *satyagraha* to protest against the Act, and the aftermath of the massacre. The poem also speaks of the stories of brotherhood between the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities, which now seem to be on the wane

famous, as his book sold lakhs of copies at that time.”

However, central to Nanak Singh's experience was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. In 1919, he was in Amritsar, and went to Jallianwala Bagh with two friends to protest against the Rowlatt Act. He was knocked unconscious in the stampede when the firing at the crowd started. Nanak Singh lost his two friends to the tragedy, and was left among the dead. He walked away from there, and, after recovery, wrote a long, heart-wrenching poem called *Khooni Vaisakhi*. It was first published in May 1920, and was

immediately banned. After its absence from the public eye for 60 years, Suri translated the book in 2020, on the centenary year of the massacre.

Suri followed up this recounting of history with excerpts from *Khooni Vaisakhi: A Poem from the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, 1919*, which starts with an invocation to Guru Gobind Singh. “When Nanak Singh wrote this poem on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he knew that he was writing for posterity,” said Suri. “The poem is a chronological account of the first 14 days after the massacre in April 1919. It beautifully captures the mood of the city, from the time that the Rowlatt Act is brought into force to Gandhi's call for *satyagraha* to protest against the Act, and the aftermath of the massacre. The poem also speaks of the stories of brotherhood between the

My grandfather was born Hans Raj (a Hindu). He converted to Sikhism and, under the influence of a pious Sikh *guru*, took the name Nanak Singh. He had a talent for music and a penchant for verse. With the zeal of a new convert, he wrote a book of verses in praise of the Sikh gurus. The book, published in 1918, is called *Satguru Mehma*. This book of verses, set to the tune of popular songs back then, gained popularity and became his source of financial sustenance. He became famous, as his book sold lakhs of copies at that time

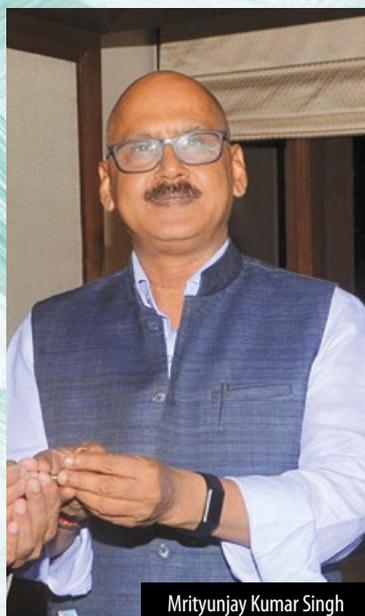
Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities, which now seem to be on the wane.”

The session came to a close with the author participating in a Q&A round with the audience. Agarwal delivered the formal vote of thanks on behalf of the Foundation, while Suri and Mohanka were felicitated by the author and poet Mrityunjay Kumar Singh.

An Author's Afternoon was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Taj Bengal Kolkata and The Telegraph Online—My Kolkata



Shefali Rawat Agarwal



Mrityunjay Kumar Singh



Standing Up For Women

It was only in 1979, after years of oppression, violence and discrimination against women, that the world began to wake up to its blunders, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations. The CEDAW was an international bill of rights for women, consisting of a Preamble and 30 Articles which defined what constituted discrimination against women, and set up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. This was the beginning of a series of actions that have been taken since to alleviate the plight of women across the world, and is one of the many steps taken that aim at providing reparations to women for the centuries of crimes committed against them. Nonetheless, violence against women continues to plague our world, and women in all countries continue to be the victims of various violent offences.

Violence against women is defined by the UN as “any act of gender-based violence that results or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion, or arbitrary

deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life”. While the definition of the act is a mouthful, the idea of it is quite simple; violence against women is any act that seeks to harm and restrict women both in their public and private lives.

Through resolution 48/104, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women on December 20, 1993. However, it was only on February 7, 2000, that the General Assembly adopted resolution 54/134, officially designating November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This day had been selected as an occasion to honour the Mirabal sisters — the three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were murdered in 1960 by the country’s ruler, Rafael Trujillo. Since those murders, and since the adoption of various measures to eliminate violence against women, not much has changed for women across the world, who are subjected to unimaginable crimes. The UN reports that across the world, 736 million women have suffered intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence or both. A significant part of the violence against women is perpetrated by current or former husbands or intimate partners, and 640 million women aged 15 and older have been abused by intimate partners. In fact, almost one in four adolescent girls in the age group of 15-19

have experienced physical and sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband. Moreover, it has been found that, globally, violence against women disproportionately affects low and lower-middle-income countries and regions. About 47,000 (58%) of the 81,000 women and girls killed worldwide in 2020 were murdered by intimate partners or family members. Covid-19 has only intensified this kind of violence. The pandemic has been linked to a significant increase in reports of domestic violence to helplines, women's refuges or shelters, and the police in different countries. These numbers do not simply remain numbers; they are lived experiences of violence suffered by women everywhere.

Most recent in public memory is the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Iranian woman. She was beaten into a coma by Iran's 'morality police' for wearing the *hijab* 'inappropriately', and died in custody on September 13, 2022. Her death sparked protests across the country; according to Iran Human Rights, a minimum of 402 protesters have been killed, out of which, at least 43 were children. While the actual numbers remain unknown, Human Rights Activists News Agency points out that approximately 16,800 people have been arrested. Along with daily news reports emerge the stories of all the women, girls and children who had been killed because of police brutality.

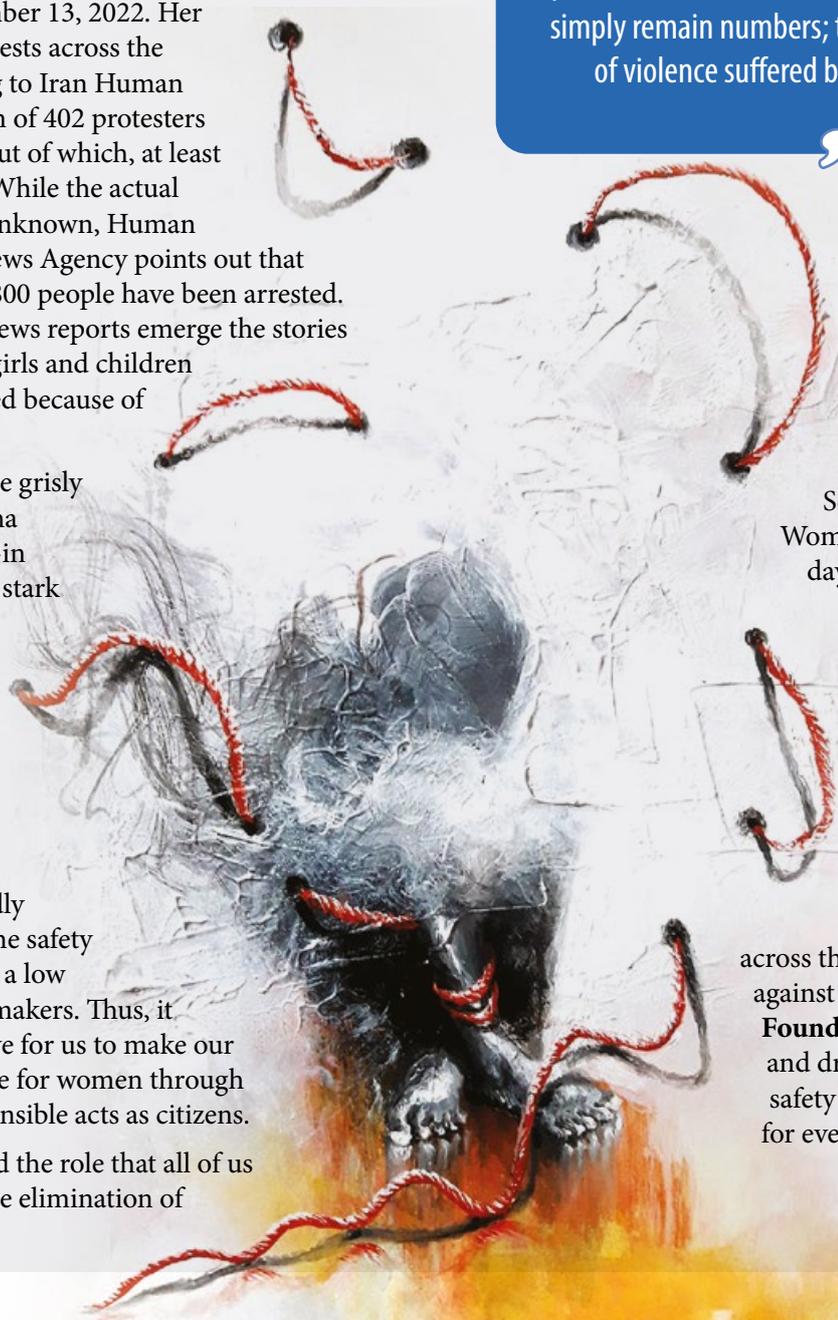
Closer home, the grisly murder of Shraddha Walkar by her live-in partner serves as a stark reminder of the UN's report on violent crimes against women by intimate partners. It reminds us that, even though our society is supposedly moving forward, the safety of women remains a low priority for policymakers. Thus, it becomes imperative for us to make our society a safer place for women through activism and responsible acts as citizens.

Keeping in mind the role that all of us play in ensuring the elimination of

The UN reports that across the world, 736 million women have suffered intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence or both. A significant part of violence against women is perpetrated by current or former husbands or intimate partners, and 640 million women aged 15 and older have been abused by intimate partners. Almost one in four adolescent girls in the age group of 15-19 have experienced physical and sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband. The pandemic has been linked to a significant increase in reports of domestic violence to helplines, women's refuges or shelters, and the police in different countries. These numbers do not simply remain numbers; they are lived experiences of violence suffered by women everywhere

violence against women, the 2022 theme for International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is 'UNITE! Activism to End Violence against Women & Girls'. Led by the UN Secretary General and UN Women, the campaign is a 16-day initiative of activism which concludes on December 10, the International Human Rights Day. The aim of this campaign is to not only call global attention to challenges to women's safety, but to bring together all of society to stand in solidarity with women's rights struggles across the world, and to fight crimes against women. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** believes in this vision, and dreams of a world where safety is a non-negotiable right for every woman.

ARTWORK BY SUDIPTA KUNDU





बाघ – चतुर, चालाक शिकारी

दौलत सिंह शक्तावत

लगातार बढ़ती हुई मानव आबादी, घटते हुए जंगल, जलाशय तथा लगातार प्रकृति के साथ मानव की दखलंदाजी ने जहां एक ओर मनुष्य की संख्या में बेतहाशा वृद्धि की है, वहीं प्रकृति में पाये जाने वाले अन्य जीवों का जीवन संकट में आया है। कई प्रजातियां विलुप्त हो गईं, कई विलुप्तता की कगार पर खड़ी हैं, इनमें से एक वन्य प्राणी है, जंगल का राजा बाघ (TIGER)। बाघों की लगातार घटती आबादी को मद्देनजर रखते हुए भारत सरकार ने बाघ संरक्षण के लिए 1973 में राष्ट्रीय स्तर पर बाघ परियोजना का प्रारंभ किया, जिसे हम वन्यजीव संरक्षण में एक सफलतम परियोजना कह सकते हैं।

काफी लंबे समय से बाघों के आवास का लगातार खात्मा, उनका अवैध शिकार होने के बावजूद अगर इस वन्यजीव 'बाघ' ने प्रकृति में अपने आपको बचाए रखा है, तो इसमें मनुष्य द्वारा किये गये इसके संरक्षण प्रयासों के साथ-साथ इसकी चतुराई, चालाकी एवं प्रकृति द्वारा प्रदत्त जीवनशैली का भी बहुत बड़ा हाथ है।

घटना 1985 की है। रणथम्भौर बाघ परियोजना में वन अधिकारी के रूप में

कार्य करने के दौरान एक दिन जंगल में गश्त के समय जीप रोड की साइड से बाघ के गुराने के साथ अन्य वन्य जीव की भी तेज-तेज आवाज सुनाई दी। इसके कुछ ही क्षणों के बाद हमारी गाड़ी के सामने एक युवा बाघ गुराता हुआ आया। इसके बाद एक भालू अपने पिछले दो पैरों पर खड़ा होकर बाघ की ओर काफी तेज-तेज आवाज निकाल रहा था। एक निश्चित दूरी के अंतराल पर दोनों के मध्य गुराहट की परस्पर प्रक्रिया लगातार चल रही थी। बाघ बीच-बीच में रुक-रुक कर भालू की ओर गुराता जा रहा था, परंतु उसके प्रति ज्यादा आक्रामक दिखाई नहीं दे रहा था। बाद में बाघ नीचे नाले की ओर चला गया तथा भालू विपरीत दिशा में पहाड़ी की ओर चला गया। आज से लगभग 38 वर्ष पूर्व जंगल में यह घटना देखकर मेरे जेहन में अब तक जंगल के राजा बाघ की जो छवि बनी हुई थी, सोच-सोचकर अजीब-अजीब तरह के प्रश्न मन में आ रहे थे कि बाघ एक खूंखार हिंसक एवं बहुत ही आक्रामक वन्यजीव है, जिसकी एक दहाड़ से जंगल के सब वन्यजीव डर कर भाग जाते हैं। फिर यह कैसी घटना थी, जो मेरे सामने घटी थी। आखिर जंगल का राजा बाघ है या भालू?

इस घटना के बाद मुझे 1987 में वन्य जीव संरक्षण और प्रबंधन का विशेष पाठ्यक्रम करने देहरादून जाने का मौका मिला। वहां मैंने अपने प्रशिक्षक से इस घटना का जिक्र किया। उन्होंने कहा जंगल का राजा तो बाघ ही है, जिसको अपने साम्राज्य में कैसे अलग-अलग जानवरों से निपटना है, वह बखूबी जानता है।



युवा बाघ का वयस्क बाघ के समक्ष हार मान लेना, सरेंडर कर देना

युवा बाघ द्वारा टेरिटोरी
स्थापित वयस्क बाघ
को चुनौती देना



फिर उन्होंने हंसते हुए एक उदाहरण दिया कि किसी गांव में एक समझदार, ताकतवर व्यक्ति गुजरे एवं उसके सामने यदि कोई शराबी उदंडी व्यक्ति गाली-गलौज कर हल्ला मचाये तो वह क्या करेगा, मैंने कहा वह उसकी ओर ज्यादा ध्यान न देकर अपने गंतव्य पर निकल जायेगा। उन्होंने कहा बिल्कुल वैसा ही उस बाघ ने किया। परंतु यही प्रक्रिया तुम्हें एक-दो बार दिखाई दे तो ध्यान रखना उसके बाद भालू उस एरिया में दिखाई नहीं देगा।

उसके बाद मैंने एक दूसरे क्षेत्र में भालू एवं बाघ की यह प्रक्रिया देखी, और वाकई कुछ दिनों बाद उस एरिया में भालू का दिखाई देना बंद हो गया। तब उनके बताये अनुसार मैंने उस क्षेत्र में तथा उसके आसपास के क्षेत्र में स्टाफ को सघन ट्रेकिंग करने एवं ट्रेकिंग के दौरान जहां भी उन्हें बाघ की ताजा मल मिले, उसका सैम्पल लेकर आने का निर्देश दिया। सैम्पल मिलने के बाद वही पता चला, जिसकी आशंका थी। बाघ के ताजा मल में भालू के बालों के गुच्छे थे अर्थात सही मौका देखकर बाघ ने भालू का शिकार कर लिया था। बाघ सदा घात लगाकर ही अपने शिकार को मारता है। बाघ के साथ बिताये आगे के 35 वर्षों में हर घटना में मुझे यह देखने को मिला कि कैसे बाघ अपनी शक्ति का सही जगह एवं सही समय पर प्रयोग कर छोटे से लेकर उन बड़े जीवों तक का भी शिकार करता है, जिनसे अगर वह सीधे तौर पर भिड़ता तो शायद उसके घायल होने का खतरा बना रहता है। उसकी यह चालाकी, चतुराई एवं होशियारी ही है, जिससे वह जंगल पर राज करता है। बिना बात वह कभी आक्रमक नहीं होता।



काफी लंबे समय से बाघों के आवास का लगातार खात्मा, उनका अवैध शिकार होने के बावजूद अगर इस वन्यजीव 'बाघ' ने प्रकृति में अपने आपको बचाए रखा है, तो इसमें मनुष्य द्वारा किये गये इसके संरक्षण प्रयासों के साथ-साथ इसकी चतुराई, चालाकी एवं प्रकृति द्वारा प्रदत्त जीवनशैली का भी बहुत बड़ा हाथ है



भालू के आक्रमक होने
पर भी बाघ द्वारा नजर
अंदाज करना



बाघ द्वारा भालू के गुराने को नज़र अंदाज़ कर अपने ट्रैक पर विचरण

बाघ यही बात अपना आवास क्षेत्र (territory) स्थापित करने के लिए भी करता है। लगभग 2-3 वर्ष का नर/ मादा वयस्क बाघ मां से पृथक होने के बाद अपना अलग आवास क्षेत्र बनाता है। इसके लिए वह पूर्व स्थापित बाघ से सीधा भिड़ने के बजाय, उसकी शारीरिक भाषा, उसके हाव-भाव एवं उसकी शारीरिक क्षमता को भांपकर पहले उसे धमकाने-आजमाने की कोशिश करता है। यदि उसको लगता है कि वह स्थापित बाघ को परास्त कर सकता है, तब ही वह आगे भिड़ने की कोशिश करता है, अन्यथा वह स्थान छोड़ देता है। स्थापित बाघ भी यह प्रक्रिया अपनाता है और इस दौरान उसे यदि ऐसा लगता है कि कब्जा करने

बाघ के साथ बिताये आगे के 35 वर्षों में हर घटना में मुझे यह देखने को मिला कि कैसे बाघ अपनी शक्ति का सही जगह एवं सही समय पर प्रयोग कर छोटे से लेकर उन बड़े जीवों तक का भी शिकार करता है, जिनसे अगर वह सीधे तौर पर भिड़ता तो शायद उसके घायल होने का खतरा बना रहता है। उसकी यह चालाकी, चतुराई एवं होशियारी ही है, जिससे वह जंगल पर राज करता है

वाला बाघ उससे भारी पड़ रहा है, तो वह सीधी भिड़ंत को टालने की कोशिश करता है। जैसे कभी-कभी बाघ से सीधी और गंभीर लड़ाई भी हो जाती है, जिसमें दोनों बाघों में से कोई या तो गंभीर रूप से घायल हो जाता है या उसकी मृत्यु हो जाने जैसी स्थिति भी हो जाती है, परंतु ऐसी घटनाएं यदा-कदा ही घटित होती हैं।

इस प्रकार बाघ अधिकांशतः सीधी मुठभेड़ को टालता है और उसकी यह आदत उसके जीवित रहने का सही तरीका है, क्योंकि एक बार गंभीर रूप से घायल हो जाने के बाद जंगल के राजा का जीवन पूर्णतः खतरे में पड़ जाता है। इसकी पूरी समझ उसको है।



वयस्क बाघ द्वारा युवा बाघ पर आक्रामक रुख अपनाना

सुरीले अल्फ़ाज़ का सफ़र



Praveen Kumar Jha

जै से डाक्टरी या किसी विधा का अपना एक शब्दकोश है, संगीत का भी है। इनसे परिचय हर श्रोता के लिए ज़रूरी नहीं, मगर संगीतकार जो रागों की सूत्र दिखाना चाहते हैं, उनके कुछ नाम हैं। जैसे हम किसी चेहरे को देख कर कहते हैं कि आँखें खूबसूरत हैं, खेल देख कर कहते हैं स्क़ायर ड्राइव कमाल का था; उसी तरह संगीत-सुधी जब कार्यक्रम से लौटते हैं तो आपस में बतियाते हैं- “उनका वह बहलावा, उनकी वह

मुरकी! क्या कहने!”

आज ऐसे ही कुछ शब्दों की बात करता हूँ, जिनसे आगे भी संगीत पर बातचीत सुलभ होगी। जैसे पहले के लेखों में चर्चा की है कि हर राग का अपना एक चलन होता है। उनका एक कैच-फ़्रेज होता है, जिससे हम पकड़ लेते हैं कि वही राग गाया जा रहा है। इसे ‘पकड़’ ही कहते हैं। जैसे अगर उन्होंने ‘नि रे ग, रे ग मे प रे, नि रे सा’ गाया, तो वह संभवतः राग यमन गा रहे हैं। मशहूर फ़िल्मी कव्वाली ‘निगाहें मिलाने को जी चाहता है’ को गुनगुना कर देखें तो इससे मिलती-जुलती तस्वीर दिखेगी।

कभी-कभार यह भी हो सकता है कि राग के चलन से जान-बूझ कर भटक जाएँ। आप कहेंगे कि यह तो कोई और राग लग रहा है। यह मूल स्वरूप से भटकाव ‘तिरोभाव’ कहलाता है, और संगीतकार जब वहाँ से वापस घर लौटते हैं तो यह ‘आविर्भाव’ कहलाता है। ऐसा अक्सर मिलते-जुलते रागों के साथ किया जाता है। वह दिखाते हैं कि अगर मैं इस रास्ते चला जाता तो राग बदल जाता, लेकिन मैं वापस उसी राग पर लौट आया हूँ। यह वही फ़नकार कर सकते हैं, जिनकी दोनों रागों पर मज़बूत पकड़ हो। जिन्हें चक्रव्यूह से बाहर निकलने और वापस आने, दोनों का रास्ता पता हो।

स्वरों को रखने का तरीका या जिसे ‘बरतना’ भी कहते हैं, वह एक संगीतकार की पहचान है। स्वर-समूह और चलन तो वही हैं, लेकिन उन्हें हर संगीतकार अपने रियाज़, अपने गुरु-ज्ञान, और अपने अनुभव से हमारे समक्ष रखते हैं। दो स्वरों के मध्य कई सूक्ष्म-श्रुतियाँ (माइक्रोटोन) होती हैं, जिन्हें लिखा नहीं जा सकता, मगर गाया जा सकता है। कई बार एक स्वर दूसरे स्वर का एक ‘कण’ लिए होती हैं।

अगर दो स्वरों के मध्य एक ऐसा पुल बनाया जाए, कि हमें नजर ही न आए कि वे कब पुल पार कर गए, तो यह ‘मीड’ कहलाता है। यानी वे सूक्ष्म श्रुतियाँ

इतनी सूक्ष्म थी कि दिखी ही नहीं। अगर वे थोड़ी-बहुत दिखने लग जाएँ, तो वह ‘घसीट’ कहलाती है। ध्रुपद गायक स्वरों के मध्य एक ‘सूत’ बनाते हैं, एक मोहक धागे की तरह एक स्वर से दूसरे को जोड़ती हुई। जैसे अगर मंद्र धैवत (ध) से षडज (सा) तक आए तो एक वृत्ताकार लूप बना कर कई सूक्ष्म श्रुतियाँ से गुजरते हुए। संभव है श्रोताओं को यह बारीकी न समझ आए, लेकिन हमारे कान इतना तो अंदाज़ा लगा लेते हैं कि फ़्रिक्वेंसी बदल गयी है। वह कितनी सफ़ाई से बदली, और हमने उसे बदलते हुए कैसा महसूस किया, वहीं से मन में ‘वाह’ निकलती है।

कुछ रागों के खास कोमल स्वरों को आंदोलित करना उनकी पहचान है। आंदोलन झूला झूलने या ऑसिलेशन की तरह है। जैसे एक स्वर से नीचे या ऊपर जाकर वापस उसी स्वर पर लौटना। यह झटके या हड़बड़ी में न होकर कोमलता से हो। जैसे राग दरबारी में गंधार (ग) अतिकोमल है, और उसका आंदोलित होना ही उसकी खूबसूरती भी है और उसकी पहचान भी। राग भैरव में कोमल धैवत का आंदोलन उसकी पहचान है। हम यह महसूस कर सकते हैं कि संगीत उस स्वर तक ले गए, और वहाँ उसी स्वर को धीरे-धीरे झूला झुलाने लगे।

इसी कड़ी में अगर यह झूला स्वरों के कंपन (वाइब्रेशन) जैसा अनुभव दे, लेकिन साथ ही साथ संतुलित और कर्णप्रिय भी हो, तो यह गमक कहलाता है। खास कर ध्रुपद गायकी में इसका प्रयोग इसके मूल स्वरूप में होता है। यह गले या जबड़े की थरथराहट न होकर एक नाद की तरह निकलती है।



खयाल गायकी में मुरकी और खटका का प्रयोग किया जाता है। मुरकी और खटका सभी श्रोताओं ने फ़िल्मी सुगम संगीत और ग़ज़ल में भी सुना होगा, जिन्हें सुन कर कई बार कहते हैं- ‘वाह! क्या हरकत ली है!’ तकनीकी लिहाज़ से वहाँ मुरकी और खटके का प्रयोग हो रहा होता है।

एक शब्द जो श्रोता अक्सर प्रयोग करते हैं, वह है - उपज। जैसा नाम से ही स्पष्ट है कि यह संगीतकार ने बीज रोप कर स्वयं उपजाया है। यह उनके अपने अनुभव और अपनी सोच से जन्मा है। इसलिए इसे ‘सोच’ भी कहते हैं। संगीतकार किस तरह विस्तार करते हैं, किस तरह तान बनाते हैं, और किस तरह स्वरों को बरतते हैं, इन सबसे मिल कर एक उपज या सोच बनती है।

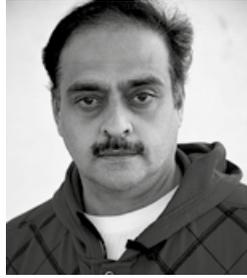
बहरहाल तकनीकी शब्दों की फ़ेहरिस्त तो लंबी है, और उनकी बारीकी कठिन। लेकिन, इन चंद अल्फ़ाज़ के सहारे संगीत पर बातचीत का सिलसिला तो आगे बढ़ ही सकता है।

(प्रवीण कुमार झा एक संगीत प्रेमी और ‘वाह उस्ताद’ नामक पुस्तक के लेखक हैं। वह सम्प्रति नाँवें में चिकित्सक हैं)

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE



Aparna
Piramal Rajee



Ashutosh Dube



Gagan Gill



Iryna Vikyrchak



Mihir Vatsa



Minu Bakshi



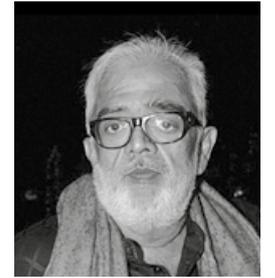
Natasha Sharma



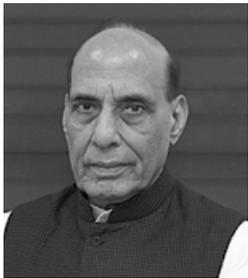
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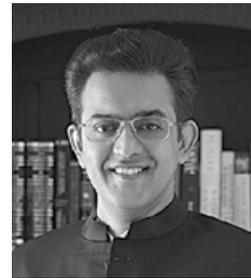
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Sudha Murty



Vikram Sampath



Yaduveer Krishnadatta
Chamaraja Wadiyar

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