



Prabha

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प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

New Visions of the Written and Spoken Word



As the world changes, so must the way in which we talk about, read, and engage with the arts, especially literature. In this issue of *Prabha*, let us look towards the future, dive into the transformative possibilities of literature festivals, and, of course, everything that elevates human relationships

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Literature is for One and All

Indians have always prided themselves on their rich cultural and linguistic reserve. With 22 official languages, India's literary corpus is varied and voluminous. Thus, it is only natural that all of India's languages would be celebrated and literature festivals would provide a platform to authors and poets from different corners of the country. But this does not happen often enough; thus, it is time for literature festivals to go in different directions and explore newer horizons — horizons that embrace a wider selection of thought, opinion, cultural milieu and overall structure. To this end, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** has dreamed of — and executed — innovative boutique festival formats to understand, discuss and appreciate literature. In this issue's Cover Story, we hope you will read all about what renowned journalists, editors, culturists and authors have to say about reimagining India's literature festivals in a new light. You can also read about *Aakhar Dakshin*, a boutique lit fest organised by the Foundation in celebration of the languages of South India.

The Foundation also works towards the holistic development of children. Several programmes and events under **Muskaan** have brought together children from across the country and helped them develop their creative potential. Be it the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet, workshops on developing reading strategies or Earth Day Celebrations, our readers will get a glimpse into the Foundation's continuous efforts to foreground children's growth.

As always, the Foundation has fostered brilliant conversations with several luminaries. None of this would have been possible without the brilliant effort of our **Ehsaas** Women, who always strive towards helping the Foundation reach newer heights — and who have penned their thoughts about India's new wonder of the arts, the NMACC in Mumbai, beautifully. We hope you will read about our meetings held in Chandigarh, where newer ways of expanding the Foundation's horizons were discussed, and, of course, the culturally luminous Eid Milan, which brought together several renowned personalities.

But no progress is possible if we neglect our health and our environment. This No Tobacco Day and World Environment Day, we took cognizance of our responsibility to ourselves and our planet to reevaluate and realign our actions for our holistic betterment.

We hope that you enjoy reading this edition of *Prabha*. Don't forget to write to us at newsletter@pkfoundation.org!

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.

[SNAPSHOTS]



Ehsaas Women Deepika Goyal, Unnati Singh and Vidya Singh meet in Chennai



Team Prabha Khaitan Foundation and its Honorary Convenor of North-East Affairs, Esha Dutta, met prospective Ehsaas Women from Guwahati and Bengaluru, Simalisha Baruah and Naomi Junaid, in Kolkata

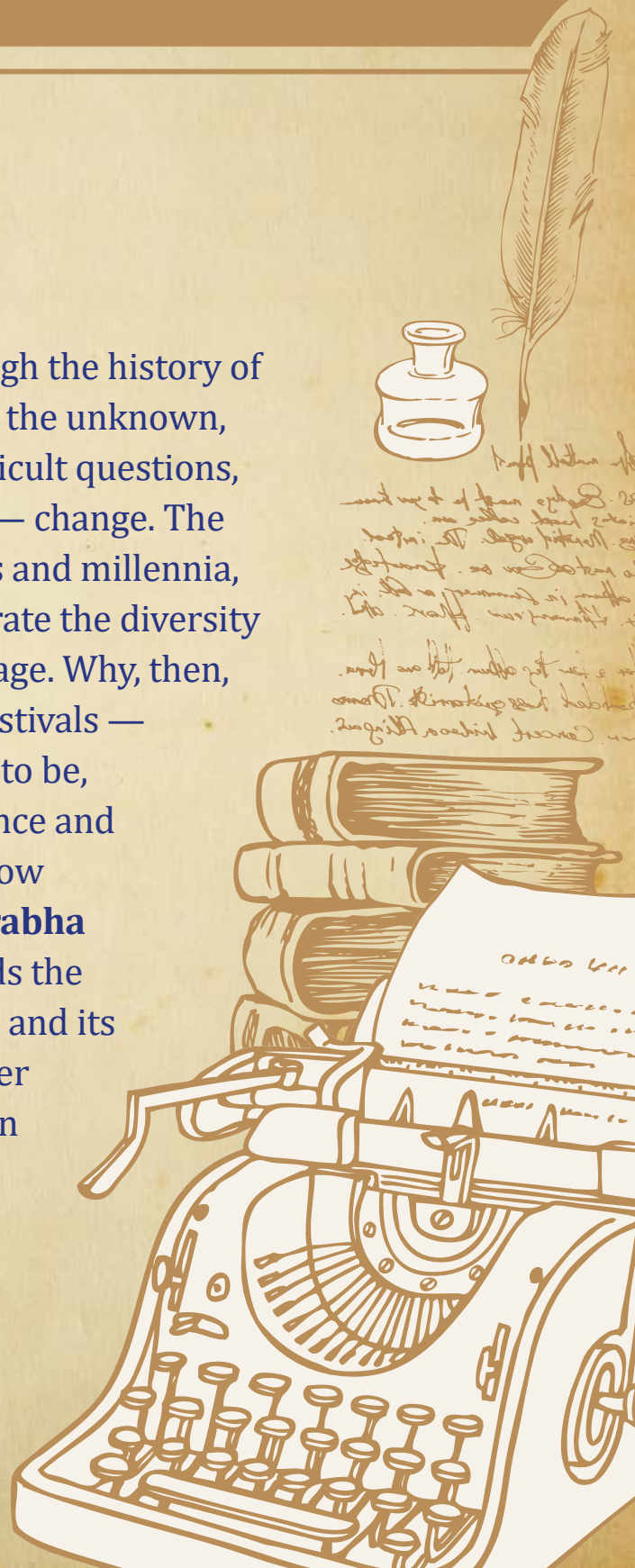
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After a hiatus of two years, Loreto College in Kolkata once again hosted its annual inter-college two-day fest, Samagam. The Literary Society continued with its legacy of hosting the Amal Ghatak Memorial Quiz, a decades-long tradition in the college. The participating colleges included St Xavier's University, Presidency University, Scottish Church College, Shri Shikshayatan College, St Xavier's College, and the home team, Loreto College. It was an invigorating experience for one and all. Scottish Church College was deemed victorious, with Loreto College and Presidency University securing the second and third positions respectively. At the end of the event, the office bearers of the Literary Society expressed their gratitude and acknowledged the monetary assistance provided by Prabha Khaitan Foundation, which made the event possible

Charting a New Way Forward

A cornerstone of literature, through the history of the human race, has been to seek the unknown, imagine different worlds, ask difficult questions, and demand — and bring about — change. The greatest minds, across continents and millennia, have striven to uphold and celebrate the diversity of thought, expression and language. Why, then, in modern times, are literature festivals — which began as, and were touted to be, the vehicles on which the excellence and dynamism of literature rode — now suffering a crisis of sameness? **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, which holds the ever-evolving nature of literature and its meaning very dear, brings together six voices of expertise to reflect on this subject — and to, perhaps, imagine a new way forward.





Literature Festivals 2.0: Small Is Significant, Niche Is Nice

Sundeeep Bhutoria

Literature festivals have been an important part of our cultural landscape, providing a platform for authors, publishers and readers to come together and engage in meaningful discussions about literary work and its impact on society. However, in recent times, the commercialisation of these festivals has led to a dilution of their purpose, with their focus shifting to celebrity appearances and marketing opportunities rather than serious literary discourse.

This is, to some extent, understandable. Book publishing is a business like any other, and publishers need a platform to promote the “it” books of the year. Authors, most of whom are not lucky enough to have their work promoted at all by their publishers, are also eager to ride the wave for as long as it lasts, for literary success is hard to achieve, and when it arrives, is usually fleeting. At the same time, it’s exciting for readers to hear literary stalwarts and rising stars under the big tents at marquee events on the publishing calendar. But it is impossible not to leave those celebrity headliner events feeling that something was lost in the hubbub, for audience and author alike.

I have been fortunate to attend and speak at all manner of literary events and, happily, not all of them are so over-the-top. I always derive the greatest pleasure from attending talks and sessions of a more intimate variety. They provide an insight into the writer’s sensibility and process that is so interesting, instead of the relentless focus on hot-button topics that make for great clickbait but little else.

Mountain Echoes was one such literary festival. Born in 2010 and now known as Drukyl’s Literature Festival, it is a wonderful experience in a magical setting. No surprise that it was at this festival in

Thimphu, at a dinner with Her Majesty the Royal Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, that I got the idea for **Prabha Khaitan Foundation’s** first boutique literature event.

Indeed, I was surprised to see the success of this small country’s literature festival. It has developed an outsized reputation for quality engagement between readers and writers. Bhutan has a passionate love of literature, both local and global. My experience there inspired me to create an intimate niche gathering of select opinion makers to engage in conversations with authors. It would be a small, cozy book event, capped by the pleasure of the audience taking home a copy of the book autographed by the author.

Such an event is simple to imagine but hard to realise. It was important to have all the pieces in place to assure authors of the highest calibre that these sessions would attract a crowd of serious readers and have the scope to amplify their reach beyond the session itself. To that end, my first call was to Mita Kapur of Siyahi to help us book the authors. I approached K. Mohanchandran, the then General Manager of Taj Bengal and a lover of literature, to find an exclusive venue. Finally, I spoke to my friends at *The Telegraph* newspaper to come on board as media partner.

This gave birth to **An Author’s Afternoon**, with the first event taking place at the Souk restaurant in Taj Bengal, Kolkata, on July 12, 2012. The event has since been held over a hundred times, drawing the best names from the literary world in terms of both star appeal and writing credentials. Now this boutique event formula is indeed a success story, having been replicated in 50 cities in India and abroad, with 2,000 events and counting every week!

Besides these single-author sessions, the Foundation also believes there is a need for smaller, niche literature festivals that prioritise meaningful discussions and engagement with serious authors and shine a light on their work in a larger but still intimate format. These festivals can be organised around specific genres, themes or historical and cultural values and topics, allowing a more targeted and meaningful engagement with serious authors and their work with limited, select audiences. In contrast with large-scale literature festivals, which prioritise glamour over writing and find their audiences diminishing year on year, we have tried to create a boutique festival culture, where each session focuses on specific topics or subjects.

After a few small regional literature festivals across India under our initiative **Aakhar**, our first such festival was *Shaharnama* in Jaipur, where we invited 20 authors who have written about various cities. We ensured that hosts were available for them throughout, even having every meal with them. The audience invited was less than a hundred people. All participants were incredibly fortunate to experience the exquisite performance of Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Hariharan in such a unique and private setting. *Ramayana Kala Utsav* followed this in Ayodhya, where we invited scholars from all around India. The veteran attendees told me they were amazed by the depth of knowledge these authors showed. These were not just fest regulars; they were authors from towns across India who, though they are not part of metro social circuits, possess boundless knowledge on their subject.

The commercialisation of literary festivals is at its peak today. In fact, we are often asked how much we charge to organise book events and book launches. When we say we don't work like that, we are still offered the same or more money than charged by some other lit fests. Like-minded NGOs must come forward to not only provide a platform but also give equal attention to the talent writing the books we are presenting to the world.

This year we want to focus more on boutique festivals based on themes or specific subjects, with



Sundeep Bhutoria with Her Majesty Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck

authors from across the country. I remember how we raised eyebrows by putting a small-town regional author's photograph on the same-sized billboard as a best-selling author in English when we started our events!

It's time to give recognition to every author and scholar, and this means only inviting 10-20 authors rather than hundreds of them, so that the interactions are more meaningful. We believe authors should be given their due regardless of whether they are well-known best-selling authors in English or lesser-known regional language writers from rural areas. Unfortunately, I have seen how little-known authors are treated at mega literary festivals managed by event management companies. This is not "*atithi devo bhava*" or "*apni bhasha apne log*". Literature of all languages, written by celebrity authors or lesser-known talent, must be celebrated and spotlighted equally.

Sundeep Bhutoria is a culturist, social activist, wildlife enthusiast and Managing Trustee of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**.



The Rise of the Boutique Lit Fest

Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri



As far as themes for a lit fest go, it is probably the sweetest of them all: Jugal's Literature Festival, a literary festival based on the theme of "mishti", the first of its kind. It is, by all means, a unique idea, and if the attendees to the festival held in the sweet capital of the country, Kolkata, in 2022 is any indication, the food part of it was a great success. About the literature aspect of it — well, the jury is still out. What is undeniable is that it hits the sweet spot as a concept, something that almost all literature festivals worth their name in India struggle with.

When the Jaipur Literature Festival, now billed as the "greatest literary show on earth", held its first edition in 2006, they would scarcely have imagined the epidemic they were unleashing on the country. As one of its co-founders, William Dalrymple, recounted in an interview, "We had 18 speakers and about one hundred attendees. Most of them appeared to be tourists who had simply got lost." *One hundred attendees*. Today, a conservative estimate would probably place the number of lit fests in the country at close to a hundred. In a country with 29 states, that averages around three-and-a-half festivals per state. It is said about Bombay that you cannot throw a stone in the city without hitting a film aspirant. In *Sonar Kella*, the villain, Mandar Bose, mentions Rajasthan as a state where they have a fort tucked away in every nook and cranny. The proliferation of literature festivals in India in the last few years sometimes seems like that.

Is this sustainable in a country where reading habits are notoriously shabby? Where bookstores struggle to survive? Picture this: the opening of India's

first Apple store (whose products will be out of reach for most Indians) has people camping overnight to be the first person in. Can you imagine the same for any bookstore?

I approach literature festivals with a healthy dose of scepticism. Even the leading ones, the ones that get the "big" names in literature to attend. In barely 17 years since the first edition of JLF, literary festivals in the country have become indistinguishable from each other. The same authors, the same moderators, talking about the same issues. More importantly, I am not sure that most of these festivals have anything to do with promoting new young voices. There is an undeniable stink of elitism that pervades most of these. Come December, and everyone is asking everyone else, "Are you at XYZ festival?" It has become as much a status statement as carrying an LV or sporting a Prada, and be prepared to be a literary pariah if you are not invited to any. Authors and litterateurs deal with major depression and anxiety issues in those three months starting December, when the virus of lit fests infects the country. Never mind that for most of these festivals, "literature" is part of only the name. I have personally experienced instances where festivals have asked me whether any film celebrity will agree to be in conversation on the book or at the panel for the book — never mind that the book has nothing to do with the celebrity. In many instances, these festivals have celebs who have not written a book on panels that have little to do with literature.

The smaller ones have fared little better. Most of these have problems finding an audience. The curation is badly organised by people who ape the big ones

with none of their budgets to execute. Since they often have to make do with leftover authors who are not a draw for the big festivals, there are instances where the number of people on a panel at times exceeds the number in the audience. And with “agendas” becoming more and more a part of the Indian social and cultural scene, many of these lit fests are toxically partisan about their leanings. This, however, is not the domain of only the smaller ones. Some of the biggest festivals in the country have pandered to these sentiments only to remain on the right side of the powers that are.

Under such circumstances, is a festival like the Jugal’s festival, with which I opened this feature, a way out? Are boutique festivals the road forward? Do we need to look away, in cinematic parlance, from the pan-India masala potboiler with every ingredient thrown in the mix, to a more niche, indie space? With focused target areas and themes, possibly smaller in scope, but enabling more local and rooted voices to take centre stage?

Prabha Khaitan Foundation has experimented with a number of similar festivals that have niche themes: *Chasing Love*, a festival organised to coincide with Valentine’s Day; *Chalchitra Rangmanch*, a three-day theatre festival with powerful and poignant theatrical productions; *Shaharnama*, a two-day boutique literature festival held in association with Rajasthan Tourism, that brought together writers, artists, journalists and cultural curators who turned their cities into their muses to throw light on the histories and cultures of the places.

The **Muskaan** Children’s Literature Festival, a joint initiative of the Foundation and the Education for All Trust in collaboration with Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Ministry of Culture — Azadi Ka Amrit Mohtsav, India International Center (IIC) as the associate, and Sahitya Akademi as the knowledge partner, celebrated child authors and initiating youngsters into the act of reading.

Over the years, the Foundation has hosted the ‘Yuva Sammellan’ under the **Aakhar** banner, where young authors who write in regional languages engage in conversations and interact with their readers. Recently, the Foundation hosted *Aakhar Dakshin*, a literature festival focusing on south Indian languages — Konkani, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada.

These are encouraging initiatives. One can imagine

so many varied themes — a festival on Dalit writing, for example. Or a festival devoted to LGBTQ writing. Or one focusing on, say, the thriller as a genre. A festival on translations. The question remains: will these also get caught in the tyranny of celebrity names? Will they encourage fresh voices? Do they have an action plan to get audiences for new or unknown authors? Do they have the vision to move beyond state capitals and metropolises to small aspirational towns like Mysuru, Panchkula, Nagpur, Indore, Kishanganj, Kokrajhar, Shillong, Itanagar, Jodhpur, and deeper into the hinterlands? More importantly, will these festivals be able to make any difference to book sales and conversations around books — if that is the primary purpose behind a literary festival? For, it is clear that the “all-in-one” festival has little impact on sales of books, unless the author is already an established literary celebrity, in which case, he does not need a festival to sell his books.

The answer is blowing in the wind.

Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri is a film buff, editor, publisher, film critic and writer





साहित्योत्सवों का स्वरूप बदलने का समय

अनंत विजय

भारत उत्सव प्रिय देश है। यहां हर अवसर को हर विषय को, हर काम को उत्सवी तरीके से करने की परंपरा रही है। साहित्यिक आयोजनों में भी उत्सव का माहौल दिखता रहा है। पिछले कई सालों से देशभर में साहित्य, कला और संस्कृति को लेकर एक प्रकार का अनुराग उत्पन्न होता दिखाई दे रहा है। इसकी वजह क्या हो सकती है ये तो ठीक-ठीक नहीं कहा जा सकता है, लेकिन इस बात का अनुमान लगाया जा सकता है कि देशभर में आयोजित होनेवाले साहित्योत्सवों या लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की इसमें एक भूमिका हो सकती है।

वर्तमान में देशभर में अलग-अलग भाषाओं और शहरों में करीब साढ़े तीन सौ लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं, छोटे, बड़े और मझोले शहरों को मिलाकर। सुदूर तमिलनाडु से लेकर असम तक में लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं। कुछ व्यक्तिगत प्रयासों से तो कुछ सरकारी संस्थानों द्वारा आयोजित। एक के बाद एक इतने लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल हो रहे हैं कि एक ही स्थान पर एक खत्म हो नहीं रहा है कि दूसरा शुरू हो जा रहा है। लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजनों से ऐसा लगने लगा है कि साहित्य में लगातार उत्सव होते हैं। यह भी भाव उपजता है कि शायद साहित्य और संस्कृति को लेकर लोगों में अनुराग उत्पन्न हुआ है। यह अनुराग उत्पन्न होने की बात इस वजह से कि लिटरेचर फेस्टिवलों ने लेखकों और पाठकों के बीच की दूरी को खत्म कर दिया है। इसने पाठकों को अपने पसंदीदा लेखकों से मिलने का मंच भी मुहैया करवाया है।

साहित्य महोत्सवों में पाठकों के पास अपने पसंदीदा लेखकों की हस्ताक्षरयुक्त पुस्तकें खरीदने का अवसर भी मिलता है। लेकिन उनके पास लेखकों से संवाद करने का अवसर नहीं होता है। पाठकों के मन में जो जिज्ञासा होती है वो अनुत्तरित रह जाता है। इसके अलावा जो एक बात होती है वो ये कि जो आयोजक होते हैं वो लेखकों से भी नहीं मिल पाते हैं।

बड़े साहित्य उत्सवों में इतना बड़ा मजमा लगता है कि आयोजक भीड़ को संभालने में और मेले से होने वाली आय के चक्कर में लगे रहते हैं। इससे लेखक उपेक्षित महसूस करते हैं।

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से एक अलग किस्म की प्रवृत्ति दिखाई दे रही है, वो है फिल्मी दुनिया से लेखकों को बुलाने की। फिल्मी दुनिया में अधिकतर अभिनेता और अभिनेत्रियों को जब काम मिलना कम हो जाता है तो वो पुस्तक लिख देते हैं। उनका नाम होता है, उनके नाम से दर्शक जुटते हैं और आयोजक उनको बुलाकर माहौल बनाने का प्रयास करते हैं। इसका एक

दुष्परिणाम ये होता है कि जो जेनुइन लेखक होते हैं वो खुद को उपेक्षित महसूस करते हैं। कई बार तो यह लगता है कि पाठकों और लेखकों के बीच भी बातचीत का खुला सत्र होना चाहिए जिसमें सूत्रधार ना हों। हो सकता है कि ऐसे सत्रों में अराजकता हो जाए लेकिन अगर लेखक पाठक या साहित्य प्रेमी सच में साहित्य की बात करने जुटेंगे तो अराजकता नहीं होगी।

दरअसल साहित्य में हमेशा से अड्डेबाजी होती रही है। पूरी दुनिया में लेखकों की अड्डेबाजी बहुत मशहूर रही है, कॉफी हाउस में लेखक मिलकर बैठकर साहित्यिक मुद्दों से लेकर गॉसिप तक करते रहे हैं। अगर हम भारत की बात करें, तो खास तौर पर हिंदी में साहित्यिक अड्डेबाजी लगभग खत्म हो गई थी।

लेखकों के साथ-साथ समाज की प्राथमिकताएं बदलने लगी और कॉफी हाउस जैसे साहित्यिक अड्डे बंद होने लगे। फेसबुक आदि ने आभासी अड्डे तो बनाए लेकिन वहां के अनुभव भी आभासी ही होते हैं। पहले तो छोटे शहरों में रेलवे स्टेशन की बुक स्टॉल साहित्यकारों की अड्डेबाजी की जगह हुआ करती थी। मुझे याद है कि बिहार के अपने शहर जमालपुर के रेलवे स्टेशन स्थित व्हीलर बुक स्टॉल पर शहर के तमाम साहित्यप्रेमी जुटा करते थे और घंटे दो घंटे की बातचीत के बाद सब अपने-अपने घर चले जाते थे। हमारे

पिछले कुछ वर्षों से एक अलग किस्म की प्रवृत्ति दिखाई दे रही है, वो है फिल्मी दुनिया से लेखकों को बुलाने की। फिल्मी दुनिया में अधिकतर अभिनेता और अभिनेत्रियों को जब काम मिलना कम हो जाता है तो वो पुस्तक लिख देते हैं। उनका नाम होता है, उनके नाम से दर्शक जुटते हैं और आयोजक उनको बुलाकर माहौल बनाने का प्रयास करते हैं। इसका एक दुष्परिणाम ये होता है कि जो जेनुइन लेखक होते हैं वो खुद को उपेक्षित महसूस करते हैं

जैसे नवोदित लोग पीछे खड़े होकर उनकी बातें सुना करते थे, जो कि दिलचस्प हुआ करती थी। वहीं पर बड़े लेखकों से लघु पत्रिकाओं में छपने का प्रोत्साहन भी मिलता था। कमोबेश हर शहर में इस तरह के साहित्यिक अड्डे हुआ करते थे। आज के लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल या साहित्योत्सवों को देखें तो वो इन्हीं साहित्यिक अड्डों का विस्तार तो नजर आते हैं लेकिन इसमें नए लेखकों को किसी प्रकार का प्रोत्साहन मिलता हो ऐसा प्रतीत नहीं होता है।

हिंदी में ये माना जाता है कि साहित्य के पाठक घट रहे हैं। आज से करीब सोलह साल पहले निर्मल वर्मा से एक साक्षात्कार में शंकर शरण ने कथा साहित्य के घटते पाठक को लेकर एक सवाल पूछा था। तब निर्मल जी ने कहा था- 'पहले तो यह स्थिति है या नहीं, इसके बारे में मुझे शंका है। यह हमारे प्रकाशकों की फैलाई बात है, पर पुस्तक मेलों में जिस तरह ले लोग दुकानों पर टूटते हैं, भिन्न-भिन्न किस्म की किताबों को खरीदते हैं। एक पिछड़े हुए देश में पुस्तकों के लिए पिपासा स्वाभाविक रूप से होती है, क्योंकि उसे अन्य साधन कम सुलभ होते हैं। पर अच्छी पुस्तकें नहीं पढ़ पाने का एक बड़ा कारण यह है कि वे आसानी से उपलब्ध नहीं होती। फिर कम दामों पर उपलब्ध नहीं हो पाती हैं। हमारी लाइब्रेरी की हालत भी बहुत खराब है। यूरोपीय देशों में शहर के हर हिस्से में एक अच्छी लाइब्रेरी मिलेगी। हमारे यहां बड़े-बड़े शहरों में दो-तीन पुस्तकालय होंगे, वह भी बड़ी खराब अवस्था में। तो अगर आप पुस्तक संस्कृति के विकास के साधन विकसित नहीं करेंगे, तो पुस्तकों के न बिकने का विलाप करना मेरे ख्याल से उचित नहीं है।'

निर्मल वर्मा ने बिल्कुल सही कहा था कि लाइब्रेरी की हालत खराब है, ज्यादा दूर नहीं जाकर दिल्ली में ही स्थित पुस्तकालयों की हालत पर नजर डालने से बातें साफ हो जाती हैं। अब सवाल उठता है कि क्या साहित्य उत्सवों से हम पुस्तक संस्कृति का निर्माण कर पा रहे हैं। इस बारे में कुछ कहना अभी जल्दबाजी होगी क्योंकि इन लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल में बहुत कम स्थानों पर पुस्तकें उपलब्ध होती हैं। जहां होती भी हैं वहां बहुत कम पुस्तकें होती हैं। पाठकों के सामने विकल्प कम होते हैं। कुछ लोग अवश्य मानते हैं कि इन साहित्य उत्सवों ने पाठकों के बीच पढ़ने की ललक पैदा करने का उपक्रम किया है। पाठकों को नई पुस्तकों के बारे में जानकारी मिल जाती है। लेकिन उसके बाद फिर क्या होता है। इस बारे में साहित्योत्सवों के प्रशंसक भी कुछ कह पाने की स्थिति में नहीं होते हैं।

मेरे जानने में हमारे देश में साहित्योत्सवों की शुरुआत जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजन से हुई थी। जयपुर में पिछले बारह तेरह साल से आयोजित होने वाला यह लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल साल दर साल मजबूती से साहित्योत्सव की दुनिया में अपने को स्थापित करता जा रहा है, और विश्व स्तर पर इसकी पहचान दिनोंदिन बढ़ती जा रही है। जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल को लोकप्रिय और चर्चित करने में सितारों और विवादों की खासी भूमिका रही है। वहां फिल्म से जुड़े जावेद अख्तर, शबाना आजमी, शर्मिला टैगोर, गुलजार आदि लगभग हर साल, किसी ना किसी सेशन में अवश्य मिल जाते हैं। प्रसून जोशी भी अकसर होते हैं। यहां तक कि अमेरिका की मशहूर एंकर ओपरा विनफ्रे भी यहां आ चुकी हैं। इन सेलिब्रिटी की मौजूदगी में बड़े लेखकों की उपस्थिति दब जाती है। इसको विश्व-स्तरीय साहित्यिक जमावड़ा बनाने में इसके आयोजकों ने कोई कसर नहीं छोड़ी और वी एस नायपॉल से लेकर जोनाथन एल फ्रेंजेन तक की भागीदारी इस लिटरेचर

फेस्टिवल में सुनिश्चित की जा चुकी है। कई नोबेल और बुकर पुरस्कार प्राप्त लेखकों की भागीदारी जयपुर में होती रही है। यहां भी सेलिब्रिटी की हैसियत या फिर मशहूर शख्सियतों की किताबों या फिर उनके लेखन को गंभीर साहित्यकारों या कवियों पर तरजीह दी जाती है। संभव है इसके पीछे लोगों को आयोजन स्थल तक लाने की मंशा रहती हो क्योंकि इससे अलग तो कुछ होता दिखता नहीं है।

यह प्रवृत्ति सिर्फ भारत में ही नहीं है बल्कि पूरी दुनिया में ऐसा किया जाता रहा है। लंदन में तो इन साहित्यिक आयोजनों में मशहूर शख्सियतों को लेखकों की बनिस्पत ज्यादा तवज्जो देने पर कई साल पहले खासा विवाद भी हुआ था। यह आवश्यक है कि इस तरह के साहित्यिक आयोजनों की निरंतरता के लिए मशहूर शख्सियतों को उससे जोड़ा जाए, क्योंकि विज्ञापनदाता उनके ही नाम पर राशि खर्च करते हैं। विज्ञापनदाताओं को यह लगता है कि जितना बड़ा नाम कार्यक्रम में शिरकत करेगा उतनी भीड़ वहां जमा होगी और उसके उत्पाद के विज्ञापन को देखेगी, लिहाजा आयोजकों पर इसका भी दबाव होता है। लेकिन जब साहित्य पर बाजारवाद हावी हो जाता है तो साहित्य के नेपथ्य में चले जाने की आशंका उत्पन्न हो जाती है।

जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के आयोजकों ने यह भी स्थापित किया है कि मारे देश में साहित्य का बहुत बड़ा बाजार है। साहित्य और बाजार साथ-साथ कदम से कदम मिलाकर चल सकते हैं। इन आयोजनों से एक बात यह भी निकल कर आ रही है कि बाजार का विरोध कर नए वैश्विक परिदृश्य में पिछड़ जाने का खतरा भी है। हिंदी में लंबे समय तक बाजार का विरोध चलता रहा इसका दुष्परिणाम भी हमने देखा है। बाजार और बाजारवाद को एक करके देखा जाता रहा है। सवाल फिर वही कि हिंदी या अन्य भारतीय भाषाओं को लेकर बड़ी और गंभीर कोशिश क्यों नहीं की जाती है? साहित्य अकादेमी ने पिछले वर्ष शिमला में इस तरह का आयोजन किया था, जिसमें पूरे देश के सभी भाषाओं के लेखकों को आमंत्रित किया था, लेकिन वो एक बार का आयोजन था। पता नहीं इस वर्ष वो आयोजन हो पाया या नहीं।

स्वाधीनता के अमृत महोत्सव के अवसर पर साहित्य अकादेमी ने वो आयोजन किया था। लोग ये भी कहते हैं कि हिंदी में इस तरह का भव्य आयोजन संभव नहीं है। इस निष्कर्ष पर वे कैसे पहुंचते हैं ये पता नहीं। अब इस बात पर गंभीरता से विचार किया जाना चाहिए कि साहित्य का मीना बाजार लगाने से बेहतर है कि छोटे-छोटे आयोजन हों, जिसमें विषय विशेष पर विमर्श हो, लेखकों और पाठकों के बीच गंभीरता से उन विषयों पर संवाद हो। संवाद भी इस तरह का हो कि कुछ नया निकलकर आ सके। लेखकों का आयोजकों के साथ संवाद हो, वे आयोजन की मंशा को समझ सकें। साहित्य प्रेमियों से खुलकर औपचारिक और अनौपचारिक बातें हो। अगर ऐसा हो पाता है तो देश में साहित्यिक और सांस्कृतिक माहौल का एक वातावरण बनेगा। अन्यथा अभी तक साहित्योत्सवों का जो स्वरूप चल रहा है उससे तो यही लगता है कि इनमें से अधिकतर व्यक्ति विशेष को बढ़ाने या फिर लाभ कमाने के उद्देश्य से किया जाता है।

अनंत विजय राष्ट्रीय फिल्म पुरस्कार सहित कई पुरस्कारों से सम्मानित जाने-माने स्तंभकार, पत्रकार, कई चर्चित पुस्तकों के लेखक और दैनिक जागरण के एसोसिएट एडिटर हैं

लेखन का उत्सव: लिटफ़ेस्ट

मीनू मंजरी



1949 में इंग्लैंड के स्पा टाउन चेल्टनहैम में स्पा मैनेजर जॉर्ज विल्किंसन और लेखक-प्रकाशक जॉन मूर ने चेल्टनहैम लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल की नींव रखी तब शायद ही किसी को अंदाजा हुआ हो कि यह वैश्विक पुस्तकीय उत्सवधर्मिता की शुरुआत है। इसका उद्घाटन सेलिब्रिटी अभिनेता राल्फ रिचर्डसन ने किया था और सेसिल डे लुईस ने समकालीन कविताओं का पाठ किया था। हालांकि फिर अस्सी के दशक के पूर्वार्ध तक इनकी संख्या में कोई खास बढ़ोतरी नहीं हुई। लेकिन इसके बाद ब्रिटेन में लिटफ़ेस्ट में गुणोत्तर वृद्धि हुई और धीरे-धीरे यह मॉडल यूरोप, अमेरिका होते हुए दुनिया भर में अपनी पैठ बनाने लगा। जैसा कि प्रख्यात उपन्यासकार डेविड लॉज ने लिखा “यह तेज वृद्धि 80-90 के दशक का एक विशिष्ट सांस्कृतिक उत्पाद था, जब साहित्यिक फिक्शन और नॉन फिक्शन अचानक सेक्सी हो गया, रूपकीय अर्थ में। बुकर पुरस्कार की प्रक्रिया में बदलाव आया और अब इसका फाइनल कुछ-कुछ ऑस्कर अवार्ड नाइट की तरह होने लगा, जिससे मीडिया और जनता की दिलचस्पी (साहित्य में) बहुत बढ़ी।” (डेविड लॉज. ऑक्सफोर्ड लिटररी फेस्टिवल. फ़ाइनैशियल टाइम्स. 06-03-2015.)

साथ ही प्रतिभाशाली युवा लेखकों की आमद से भी जन अभिरुचि इस ओर बढ़ी। प्रकाशक इन लेखकों के लिए इतनी बड़ी धनराशियां अग्रिम दे रहे थे कि यह खबरों में कवर किया जाने लगा। बदले में लेखकों से स्वयं उपस्थित होकर अपनी किताबों का प्रमोशन करने की अपेक्षा रखी जा रही थी। बुक साइनिंग इवेंट, लेखक से मिलिये जैसे कार्यक्रम बड़े पैमाने पर प्रकाशकों और बुक स्टोर शृंखलाओं द्वारा आयोजित किए जाने लगे थे। हैरी पॉटर सीरीज जैसी पुस्तकों की अभूतपूर्व सफलता ने लेखकों को भी सेलिब्रिटी के श्रेणी में ला दिया। लिटफ़ेस्ट इसी तरह के कार्यक्रमों के बड़े और संस्थागत स्वरूप थे।

लिटफ़ेस्ट के सभी महत्वपूर्ण घटक

चेल्टनहैम के पहले फेस्टिवल से ही मौजूद थे- कॉर्पोरेट स्पॉन्सर, व्यावसायिक प्रबन्धक, लेखक-प्रकाशक और सेलिब्रिटी। लेखन के साथ-साथ अन्य सांस्कृतिक पहलू भी कई बार इन फेस्टिवल्स का हिस्सा होते हैं, जैसे संगीत, नाटक, चित्रकला जैसे क्षेत्र।

भारत में लिटफ़ेस्ट की बात करें तो जयपुर लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल का नाम सबसे पहले जेहन में आता है। लेखक-इतिहासकार विलियम डैलरिम्पल और उपन्यासकार नमिता गोखले इसकी निदेशक हैं और इसका प्रबंधन टीमवर्क प्रोडक्शंस करती है। इसके स्पॉन्सर में राजस्थान टूरिज्म से लेकर गूगल, टाटा स्टील जैसे कॉर्पोरेट शामिल हैं। आज जेएलएफ़ दुनिया का सबसे बड़ा लिटफ़ेस्ट कहलाता है। इसके अंतर्राष्ट्रीय संस्करण भी लंदन, न्यूयॉर्क, बेलफास्ट और दोहा जैसे महानगरों में हैं। और शायद यह संयोग नहीं कि टीमवर्क के एमडी संजॉय रॉय डेविड लॉज से मिलते-जुलते शब्दों में ही कहते हैं, जेएलएफ़ ने “भारत में लिटरेचर को सेक्सी” बनाया है। (वीणा वेणुगोपाल. इंडिया'ज बूम ऑफ लिटररी फेस्टिवल्स इज ऑल पॉम्प, नो प्रॉफिट्स. क्वार्ट्ज. 24-01-2013) यहां इतना तो तय हो जाता है कि ग्लैमर और पीआर लिटफ़ेस्ट के महत्वपूर्ण अंग बन चुके हैं।

पाठकों तक रचनाएं पहुंचाने और वर्चुअली उनसे जुड़ने के आसान और सस्ते साधन मौजूद होते हुए भी लिटफ़ेस्ट की लोकप्रियता बढ़ती जा रही है। शायद इसका एक कारण आभासी के बरअक्स वास्तविक का खड़े होना है। भले ही फोन, वेबसाइट, किंडल पर सैकड़ों किताबें उपलब्ध हों, अपने प्रिय लेखक की पुस्तक उनसे बात-चीत कर, हस्ताक्षर सहित हाथ में लेने का अपना सुख है, जिसका कोई सानी नहीं। ठीक इसी तरह लेखक के लिए भी अपने पाठक वर्ग से रूबरू होना एक समृद्ध अनुभव है जिससे एकांतप्रिय लेखक भी आकर्षित होते हैं

लेकिन लिटफ़ेस्ट में लेखकों और पाठकों के लिए क्या है? यह एक महत्वपूर्ण प्रश्न है, क्योंकि अंततः लेखन, कला और व्यवसाय के ये ही आदि-अंत हैं। आज लेखन-पठन के अनेक डिजिटल माध्यम उपलब्ध हैं। पाठकों तक रचनाएं पहुंचाने और वर्चुअली उनसे जुड़ने के आसान और सस्ते साधन मौजूद होते हुए भी लिटफ़ेस्ट की लोकप्रियता बढ़ती जा रही है। शायद इसका एक कारण आभासी के बरअक्स वास्तविक का खड़े होना है। भले ही फोन, वेबसाइट, किंडल पर सैकड़ों किताबें उपलब्ध हों, अपने प्रिय लेखक की पुस्तक उनसे बात-चीत कर, हस्ताक्षर सहित हाथ में लेने का अपना सुख है, जिसका कोई सानी नहीं। ठीक इसी तरह लेखक के लिए भी अपने पाठक

वर्ग से रूबरू होना एक समृद्ध अनुभव है जिससे एकांतप्रिय लेखक भी आकर्षित होते हैं। कई बार यह उन्हें अपने ही लेखन के पहलुओं से, उनकी रीडरशिप से परिचित करवाता है। वैसे यह भी सच है कि लिटफेस्ट लेखक के लिए एक परफॉर्मेंस जैसा बन जाता है, जहां उनके सत्र की खचाखच भीड़ या खाली कुर्सियां उनका मूल्यांकन करती हैं।

कॉर्पोरेट और प्रबन्धकों के लिए यह सांस्कृतिक व्यवसाय है। ऐसे इवेंट के आयोजन में पचास लाख से पांच करोड़ तक का आरंभिक खर्च है। टीमवर्क से संजॉय रॉय कहते हैं कि यह खर्च प्रति वर्ष 15-20% प्रतिशत बढ़ता जाता है। कॉर्पोरेट स्पॉन्सर यूं तो इनमें निवेश के नजरिए से कम और सीएसआर के तौर पर ज्यादा निवेश करते हैं, लेकिन इनमें बढ़ते फुटफॉल को देखते हुए अब ये फेस्ट ब्रांड बिल्लिंग के मंच के रूप में भी देखे जाने लगे हैं। मीडिया कंपनियों, बैंकों, बीमा फर्म आदि के लिए ये फेस्ट एक सुसंस्कृत, उच्च मध्यवर्गीय वर्ग तक ब्रांड इमेज पहुंचाने का जरिया हैं। कई बार लेखन और व्यवसाय के बीच पैराडाक्स सी स्थिति बन जाती है, जहां लिटफेस्ट के स्पॉन्सर उन्हीं मूल्यों का उल्लंघन कर रहे होते हैं जिनकी उद्घोषणा उस मंच से जोर-शोर से की जा रही होती है। जैसे जेएलएफ और जी मीडिया की सहभागिता पर काफी विवाद हुए हैं। इसी तरह टाटा लिटरेचर लाइव में नोम चोम्स्की का चर्चा सत्र रद्द किया जाना भी विवादास्पद रहा था। कहा गया कि इन सत्रों में वक्ता स्पॉन्सर टाटा समूह की कड़ी आलोचना करने वाले थे।

जाहिर है कला और इसे फंड देने वाले, लिटफेस्ट और इनके स्पॉन्सर, विदेशी निधि और स्थानीय चैरिटी- यह एक ट्राइलाइट जोन है। एक ओर निधि देने वालों को यह मानकर चलना होगा कि वे एक साहित्यिक, कलात्मक आयोजन को धन दे रहे हैं और इसमें विभिन्न स्वरों का होना अति आवश्यक है, वहीं लेखकों को भी अपने मानसिक खांचे से बाहर एक विशद दृष्टि अपनानी होगी। अतीत में कई ऐसे किस्से हुए हैं जब किसी "शो स्टॉपर" लेखक ने विपरीत विचारधारा वाले वक्ता के साथ मंच साझा करने से मना कर दिया है। या फिर मंच पर एक अकेले वक्ता के रूप में उपस्थित होने की शर्त लगाई है।

इन सभी विरोधाभासों के होते हुए भी देश में अब 65 के आसपास लिटफेस्ट हो रहे हैं। जेएलएफ की पहुंच वैश्विक हुई है तो साथ-साथ भारत में लिटफेस्ट स्थानीय हुए हैं। आज राजधानियों और महानगरों से परे मैसूर, शिलांग, ईटानगर, जोधपुर और चंडीगढ़, पंचकुला, झांसी, गुडगांव, नागपुर, इंदौर, किशनगंज, नोएडा, मेरठ, शिमला, कोकराझार, पुडुचेरी, पुणे, मदुरै जैसे शहरों में भी स्थानीय स्तर पर ये आयोजन हो रहे हैं। यह लोकप्रियता दशकों से छोटे शहरों और क्षेत्रीय भाषाओं की उपेक्षा और सांस्कृतिक कार्यक्रमों के लिए बढ़ती मांग का

साक्ष्य है।

ऐसे आयोजनों में क्षेत्रीय भाषाओं के लेखक, स्थानीय सेलेब्रिटी और सांस्कृतिक आइकन प्रमुखता पाते हैं। पर्यावरण, एलजीबीटीक्यू जैसे हाशिये के मुद्दे भी इनमें चर्चित होते हैं, जैसे चेन्नई का क्रीयर लिटफेस्ट और दिल्ली में रेनबो लिटफेस्ट। हिमालयन इकोज और ग्रीन लिटफेस्ट जैसे आयोजनों ने पर्यावरण को अपना मुख्य स्वर बनाया है। बच्चों और दलित साहित्य के भिन्न लिटफेस्ट हो रहे हैं।

कला और इसे फंड देने वाले, लिटफेस्ट और इनके स्पॉन्सर, विदेशी निधि और स्थानीय चैरिटी- यह एक ट्राइलाइट जोन है। एक ओर निधि देने वालों को यह मानकर चलना होगा कि वे एक साहित्यिक, कलात्मक आयोजन को धन दे रहे हैं और इसमें विभिन्न स्वरों का होना अति आवश्यक है, वहीं लेखकों को भी अपने मानसिक खांचे से बाहर एक विशद दृष्टि अपनानी होगी। अतीत में कई ऐसे किस्से हुए हैं जब किसी "शो स्टॉपर" लेखक ने विपरीत विचारधारा वाले वक्ता के साथ मंच साझा करने से मना कर दिया है

"बड़े शहरों के विपरीत, जहां लोगों के पास बहुत सारे विकल्प होते हैंटियर-2 और टियर-3 शहरों में लोग सक्रिय रूप से उनकी (साहित्यिक कार्यक्रम की) तलाश करते हैं। जब साहित्य की बात आती है तो वे अधिक गंभीर होते हैं। और इसलिए लेखक भी वास्तव में उनके पास जाना पसंद करते हैं," प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की मानद संयोजक अपरा कुच्छल कहती हैं। यह फाउंडेशन कानपुर, इंदौर, कोलकाता जैसे कई शहरों में लिटफेस्ट आयोजन में सहयोग करता है। (सृज्जॉय डे.मिनी जेएलएफ स्प्राउटिंग अक्रॉस इंडिया. द प्रिंट. 29-08-2022.)

ऊपरी चमक-दमक, व्यवसायिकता, सफलता का बहुत अनुपात आदि कथित खामियों के बावजूद भारत में लिटफेस्ट फलते-फूलते दीख रहे हैं। आखिर भारत वही देश है जहां "कोस-कोस पर पानी बदले, चार कोस पर बानी"। जब ये सभी बानियां मुखरता से अपना प्रतिनिधित्व चाहेंगी तो मंचों की मांग उठेगी ही। इनमें से कुछ आयोजन शायद सफल न रहें और नियमित न हो पाएं, लेकिन इनकी संख्या तो बढ़ेगी ही और धीरे-धीरे ये स्थायित्व भी पाएंगे।

मीनू मंजरी, युवा लेखक और अनुवादक। विश्व के महान लेखकों की रचनाओं का अनुवाद किया है। ओ हेनरी की कहानियां का अनुवाद काफी चर्चित रहा है। साहित्य में मीनू मंजरी की पहचान अनुवादक और समीक्षक के रूप में है; भारतीय संगीत में भी उनकी रुचि है





नहीं बदले तो अप्रासंगिक हो जाएंगे साहित्य उत्सव

विनोद अनुपम

जयपुर की थकान दूर भी नहीं हो पाती कि कोलकाता में स्टॉल सज जाते, और कोलकाता के सिमटने के पूर्व ही इधर कलिंगा की शुरुआत हो जाती, और फिर लखनऊ, गोरखपुर, गोवा, तिरुअनंतपुरम, शिमला आदि-आदि। यदि देश में आयोजित होने वाले साहित्य महोत्सवों और उत्सवों को याद करना चाहें तो, इसकी संख्या 100 से अधिक होगी। इसमें से एक क्रीसंलाइन लिटरेचर फेस्टिवल के बारे में पढ़ रहा था कि उसका आयोजन मुंबई के पास बीच समुद्र में किसी शिप पर होता है। लेखकों श्रोताओं को स्पीड बोट से शिप तक पहुंचाया जाता है, जहां वे गंभीर साहित्यिक विमर्श में शामिल होते हैं। उल्लेखनीय यह कि ये तमाम आयोजन अमूमन दो महीने के अंदर आयोजित होते हैं। उल्लेखनीय यह भी कि इन उत्सवों में शामिल वक्ता भी अमूमन कॉमन होते हैं, जिनकी पहचान लेखक की कम, सेलिब्रिटी की अधिक होती है।

पहले कहां होते थे ऐसे उत्सव, जब लोग किताबें पढ़ा करते थे। हरेक शहर में दर्जनों किताब की दुकानें हुआ करती थी, जहां पाठ्यपुस्तकों से इतर पुस्तकें आसानी से मिल जाया करती थी। किताबें खरीदने में जो सक्षम नहीं होते थे, वे भी किराए पर लेकर किताबें पढ़ा करते थे। घर की महिलाएं भी शिवानी के चौदह फेरे और मन्नू भंडारी के *आपका* बंटी की चर्चा कर लिया करती थी। लेकिन उस समय कहीं लिट फेस्ट की चर्चा नहीं होती थी। हम कितने समृद्ध थे बचपन में कि हमारे लिए खासतौर पर लखनऊ से ज्ञान भारती बाल पॉकेट बुक्स की शुरुआत हुई थी, जिसकी घरेलू लाइब्रेरी योजना से भर-भर कर हमने किताबें मंगवायी थी, घर वालों से छिपाकर। बाद में तो कई और बाल पॉकेट बुक्स भी आए। लब्बोलुआब यह कि हम तो बगैर किसी उत्सव-महोत्सव के पढ़ना सीख लिए। उत्सव के नाम पर बहुत होता था, तो साल में एक बार शहर का पुस्तकालय अपना स्थापना दिवस मना लेता था, जिसमें कोई स्थानीय लेखक या कोई हिंदी के प्रोफेसर आकर साहित्य समझा जाते थे।

ऐसा नहीं कि हमें उत्सवों से कोई दिक्कत थी। उत्सव के तो हम आदी हैं, लेकिन अपने उत्सव हम तय करते थे, अपनी सहूलियतों से तय करते थे। आश्चर्य नहीं कि अधिकांश उत्सव फरवरी- मार्च या फिर अक्टूबर- नवंबर में निबटा लिए जाते हैं। शायद इसलिए कि यह समय कृषि समाज के लिए आराम का होता है। मार्च में रबी की फसलें घर आ चुकी होती हैं, तो अक्टूबर में खरीफ की। आखिर उत्सव है तो उसका कोई कारण भी

तो होना चाहिए। उत्सव हमने तय किए थे तो हमारे पास उसके कारण थे, आज भी होली, दशहरा, छठ से लेकर पोंगल और लोहड़ी मनाए जाते हैं तो उसके कारण हैं। इन साहित्य उत्सवों के कारण समझ से परे हैं। क्या वाकई हम इतने फुर्सत में हो गए हैं कि बस एक के बाद उत्सवों का आनंद उठा सकें। क्या ये साहित्य उत्सव, साहित्य के लिए माकूल वातावरण निर्माण में कोई योगदान दे भी रहे हैं? क्या जयपुर में पढ़ने की संस्कृति में कोई बदलाव आया? बीते दस वर्षों में, जयपुर क्यों, भुवनेश्वर, बंगलुरु, शिमला, गोवा, मुंबई जैसे शहरों में जहां लगातार साहित्य उत्सव आयोजित हो रहे, कहीं-कहीं तो एक से अधिक भी, क्या वहां किताबों की कुछ नई दुकानें खुली, या फिर पुरानी दुकानों की सेल कुछ बढ़ी। इसके विपरीत बिहार, जहां बीते 10 वर्षों में मात्र दो छोटे- छोटे साहित्य उत्सव वह भी सरकार द्वारा आयोजित हो सकें, को राजेन्द्र यादव हिंदी

साहित्य उत्सव अपना आकर्षण कितने दिनों तक कायम रख पाएंगे, कहना कठिन है। बेहतर होता अपने स्वरूप को सार्थक परिणति देने की वे एक नई शुरुआत करते ताकि प्रतिभागियों को खाली हाथ लौटने का बोध नहीं होता। सबसे पहले तो सुनने में यह अटपटा जरूर लगे, लेकिन सच है कि ऐसे कथित साहित्य उत्सवों को अपने मीना बाजार के आवरण से मुक्त करना चाहिए। साहित्य अपने आप में गंभीर और पूर्ण विधा है। साहित्य कहीं न कहीं आपको बदलने की कोशिश करता है। कुछ भी आप पढ़ें, पढ़ने के बाद आप वही नहीं रह जाते, जो आप पहले थे

को रोटी देना प्रदेश मानते रहे, तो अशोक वाजपेयी ने 2013 में कहा था, साहित्य जगत को बिहार के प्रति कृतज्ञ होना चाहिए कि यहां देश के सबसे अधिक साहित्य प्रेमी रहते हैं। यह किसी आश्चर्य से कम नहीं कि

इस तरह के साहित्य उत्सवों की स्थिति भी किसी मीना बाजार या सर्कस से अधिक नहीं दिखती, जब तक तंबू कनात लगा रहता, रौनक बनी रहती, तंबू उखड़ते ही फिर वही सन्नाटा।

किसी आयोजन का महत्त्व उसके टेकअवे से परखना चाहिए। तमाशा अच्छा लगा महत्त्वपूर्ण यह नहीं, महत्त्वपूर्ण यह है कि उसमें ऐसा क्या मिला जो हम घर तक ले जाना चाहें, जो हमारी स्मृतियों में बना रहे। यदि हाल के वर्षों में शुरू हुई साहित्य उत्सवों की परंपरा पर गौर करें तो समाज या सामान्य पाठकों के लिए इनका टेकअवे शून्य ही दिखता है। लेखक, आयोजक तो अपने हिस्से का समेट लेते हैं, पाठक और प्रतिभागियों के जिम्मे कुछ लेखकों की सेल्फी और हस्ताक्षर के अलावा शायद ही कुछ रह पाता। वास्तव में इन उत्सवों का जोर विचार पर नहीं, विवाद पर रहता। अपने प्रतिभागियों से अधिक जवाबदेह ये अपने स्पॉन्सर के प्रति रहते, जो फुटफॉल केलकुलेट करते हैं, दिमाग नहीं गिनते। उन्हें भीड़ चाहिए, विमर्श नहीं। आश्चर्य नहीं कि बीते वर्षों के साहित्य उत्सवों के जाने-पहचाने चेहरों में करण जौहर, शर्मिला टैगोर, सोहा अली खान, अनुराग कश्यप, दीप्ति नवल, नंदिता दास भी शामिल हैं, बाकी राजनीति और उद्योग के व्यक्तित्वों की गिनती तो अलग। ये क्या करते हैं, इन साहित्य उत्सवों में? भीड़ जुटाने के अलावा साहित्यिक विमर्श में कोई सार्थक हस्तक्षेप की न तो उम्मीद रहती, न ये करते हैं। इनसे बस ये उम्मीद रहती कि ये ऐसा कुछ कंट्रोवर्सियल बोल दें जो चैनलों और अखबारों की सुर्खिया बन सके। वास्तव में 45 मिनट के सत्र में 5 वक्ता कर भी क्या सकते हैं? न तो मॉडरेटर को सही से विषय रखने का मौका मिल पाता, न ही वक्ताओं के लिए अपनी बात रखने का। जाहिर है फाइव स्टार की चकाचौंध में गंभीर से गंभीर विषय पर आयोजित सत्र भी मजाक बन कर रह जाता, श्रोता जिसके खत्म होने की प्रतीक्षा करते ताकि सेल्फी ले सकें। विमर्श बस कबड्डी की तरह है जहां पाला छू कर भाग आना होता है।

ऐसे में साहित्य उत्सव अपना आकर्षण कितने दिनों तक कायम रख पाएंगे, कहना कठिन है। बेहतर होता अपने स्वरूप को सार्थक परिणति देने की वे एक नई शुरुआत करते ताकि प्रतिभागियों को खाली हाथ लौटने का बोध नहीं होता। सबसे पहले तो सुनने में यह अटपटा जरूर लगे, लेकिन सच है कि ऐसे कथित साहित्य उत्सवों को अपने मीना बाजार के आवरण से मुक्त करना चाहिए। साहित्य अपने आप में गंभीर और पूर्ण विधा है। साहित्य कहीं न कहीं आपको बदलने की कोशिश करता है। कुछ भी आप पढ़ें, पढ़ने के बाद आप वहीं नहीं रह जाते, जो आप पहले थे। जाहिर है, साहित्य एक खास तवजुह खोजती है। यहां साहित्य उत्सव को एक भरे पूरे मेले में तब्दील कर दिया जाता है, जहां साड़ियां भी बिक रहीं हैं, संगीत भी, खिलौने भी बिक रहे हैं, खेल भी हो रहे हैं। लोगों का एक हुजुम मंच पर, और एक हुजुम मंच के सामने, बस आप देख सकते हैं। सुनना, समझना, अहसास करना वह सब इस मेले में निरर्थक माना जाता। वास्तव में इसकी कोशिश भी नहीं की जाती।

जरूरत है कि ऐसे साहित्य उत्सवों की परिकल्पना की जाय, जहां भीड़ न हो, वे ही हों जिन्हें पता हो कि वे एक गंभीर आयोजन में शामिल होने जा रहे हैं। जैसे जो ध्रुपद सुनने जाते हैं, उन्हें पता होता है कि वे ध्रुपद सुनने ही जा रहे हैं, और वहां उन्हें क्या हासिल होने वाला है। एक छोटा सा संदर्भ यहां पटना के सरकारी दशहरा महोत्सव का गौरतलब है। गांधी मैदान में आयोजित इस महोत्सव में किशोरी अमोनकर भी थी, मनोज तिवारी भी, और शेखर सुमन भी। किशोरी जी ने आलाप भरा ही था कि

लाखों की भीड़ से आवाज आयी, मनोज तिवारी, मनोज तिवारी। किशोरी जी को तो जैसे काठ मार गया। वे आंखों में आंसू भरे बगैर गाए मंच से उतर गईं। किसी भी आयोजन की सफलता उसके श्रोताओं पर निर्भर करती है, साहित्य उत्सवों में भी हमें भीड़ के मोह से मुक्त होना चाहिए।

जाहिर है इस स्थिति में हम छोटे और कांपेक्ट आयोजन परिकल्पित कर सकते हैं, जो प्रतिभागियों और लेखकों को एक-दूसरे के और अधिक करीब होने का अवसर दे सकेंगे। गंभीरता से बातें सुनी जाएंगी, तो गंभीर सवाल आएंगे, और किसी विषय पर एक सार्थक चिंतन के लिए कम से कम आधारभूमि वहां तैयार हो सकेगी। छोटे आयोजनों की एक बड़ी सुविधा यह भी होगी कि डिस्ट्रैक्शन कम होगा। हम जिस उद्देश्य से इकट्ठा होंगे, वह उद्देश्य हमारे सामने होगा। यह नहीं कि आए थे हरिभजन को, ओटन लगे कपास। आयोजन छोटे होंगे तो खर्च भी कम होंगे, जाहिर है आयोजन पर स्पॉन्सर का दबाव भी कम होगा, जिस कारण फुटफॉल की काउंटिंग से मुक्त आयोजक बेहतर दिमाग को इकट्ठा करने पर फोकस कर सकेंगे। उन्हें किसी खास विषय पर सोहा अली खान से अधिक महत्त्वपूर्ण गोपालगंज का कोई लेखक लगेगा तो वे बेहिचक उन्हें बुला सकेंगे।

आमतौर पर हिंदी सिनेमा में देखा जाता है, पहले सलमान खान को साइन कर लिया जाता है, फिर उसके लिए कहानी लिखवाई जाती है, जाहिर है हमारे हाथ किसी का भाई, किसी का जान लगती है। साहित्य उत्सवों में भी लगता है कमोबेश ऐसी ही स्थिति दिखती है, सेलिब्रिटी तय हो गए, फिर उनके लिए कुछ न कुछ विषय भी तय कर लिया जाता है। हालांकि इसके बावजूद बोलते वे वही हैं, जो उन्हें बोलना होता है। इसके विपरीत छोटे आयोजनों को थोड़े व्यवस्थित रूप से किया जा सकता है। आयोजन को किसी खास विषय पर केंद्रित किया जा सकता है, जिससे कि विमर्श को एक व्यापक आकार मिल सके। विषय पर वक्ताओं की संख्या नियंत्रित रख उन्हें अपनी बात रखने के लिए पर्याप्त समय दिया जा सकता है, ताकि वे भी विषय पर तैयार होकर आएँ और प्रतिभागियों को कुछ दे सकें।

सूत्र में कहें तो बस यह कि साहित्य उत्सव आंखों और कानों को खुराक देने के बजाय दिल और दिमाग को खुराक देने के लिए तैयार हो सकें। तभी अपनी सार्थकता बनाए रख पाएंगे, अन्यथा इस बात से भी इन्कार नहीं किया जा सकता कि उत्सवों की अधिकता कहीं हमें साहित्य के प्रति निरपेक्ष न बना दे।

विनोद अनुपम, राष्ट्रीय फिल्म पुरस्कार से सम्मानित वरिष्ठ लेखक हैं। आरंभिक दिनों में विनोद अनुपम ने कहानियां और व्यंग्य भी लिखे लेकिन अब पूरी तरह से फिल्म और उससे संबंधित विषयों पर लिखते हैं



Niche or Grand?

Pooja Poddar Marwah



The sudden surge of literature festivals in India brings two thoughts to mind: are there really so many literature enthusiasts wanting to meet authors old and new? Or are these the breeding grounds for celebrity Instagrammable pictures? At the cost of sounding too direct, I know people who throng festivals for one reason alone: to be seen as intelligent. It may sound absurd but literature festivals today are not about authors and books; they are about how many celebrities you can get on one platform. I visited a festival last year to hear some of my favourite fiction and non-fiction authors talk about their work. In an auditorium that seats 400 people, only about 20 chairs were occupied. Yet, just an hour later, at a panel session of a leading Bollywood director and a playback singer, there was no space to even stand! For a festival that proclaims to be a celebration of literature, it was sad to see the lack of enthusiasm among the curators, as well as their inability to garner audiences for the sessions that were dedicated to literature.

For a writer, a festival is the arena where they can finally step away from the solitary confinement of their laptops and talk about their love for words. They entice us to read and disappear into a world that teaches, entertains or advises. The high of reading an author's work after meeting him puts so much more into perspective. I have wept at their words; I have laughed and giggled and even felt the warm blush of romance flow through my veins. For me, reading a book is like a deep dive into the writer's soul. After all, is that not what the Universe is all about? A melee of souls crossing each other, taking a little something or perhaps leaving a little something behind.

I had the privilege of meeting Mr Sundeep Bhutoria in Delhi recently. Between cups of *masala chai*, we deliberated on a vital transformation that was taking place in the literary scape. Was the emergence of boutique festivals across India surpassing those done on a grander scale? Were people more inclined to attend the smaller shows than partake in festivals held over a weekend or longer? What was working? What wasn't?

India is as diverse a country as there can be; with the abundance of language, culture and ethnicity available

to us, there is more than enough room for everyone. My only concern is that the field of literature should remain sacrosanct to the world of words, irrespective of the language. There is a reason why **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** appeals to me. With its distinct verticals, the Foundation's work ethics are exemplary and exclusive. They offer a wide palette of cultural extravaganzas, depending on what you are looking for. Their small boutique festivals celebrate tradition, exquisite performing arts and of course, literature. But every aspect is distinguished under a unique vertical and there are clear demarcations for the same. A boutique festival carries more of an appeal for me personally, as it can be curated to a niche audience and may offer a personal interaction between the authors and their readers. It can further be divided into various genres so the people interested in them can earmark their dates and attend. Imagine an entire festival dedicated to children's literature — **Muskaan**, for example — or one based on mythology or even the economy. For people interested in these topics, these may prove to be soul-stirring events where they could partake in the discussions at an intimate level. Such specially curated events would leave you with a feeling of "Yeh Dil Maange more and more!"

There are so many genres we can cover. Crime, horror, romance, sci-fi... the list is endless, the possibilities infinite. Besides, boutique festivals offer a unique dimension through their locales. Festivals can be curated in the scenic rural landscapes of India, merging it with the urbanscape, thereby offering a delightful setting to both the audience and the authors or artists.

The idea is to connect India to Indians. Under the aegis of the Foundation, I am certain that this revolution will take place. The question isn't about the scale of a festival but the theme it offers. To promote culture, heritage and tradition, we need an organisation that cares about these values, that is passionate about them from its very soul.

Pooja Poddar Marwah is an Indian author and blogger. She is Ehsaas Woman of Dehradun

Into the Hallowed Halls of Art

For decades, India has nurtured its rich, centuries-old artistic heritage, but has struggled to give it the sort of large-scale, global platform that it deserves. From the nation's plethora of dance forms and modes of theatre to its abundance of musical traditions and storytelling practices, from its stunning history of textiles and weaves to its unparalleled filmmaking traditions, there is nothing this nation produces in the cultural realm that cannot stand shoulder-to-shoulder – or, indeed, greatly surpass – the highest forms of art produced in the West, be it on Broadway or the West End.

This is why the recent opening of the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai will, in the years to come, be known as a watershed moment in India's cultural history. Founded by the Chairperson of the Reliance Foundation, Nita Ambani, the splendid centre of the arts is a first-of-its-kind, multi-disciplinary cultural space that will serve to not only entertain but also to educate. While the opening of the NMACC was star-studded, it is the artistic legacy of the centre, to be built in the years to follow, that will play a definitive role in India's cultural visibility in the world.

This vision fits in seamlessly with the commitment made by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** to the furthering of India's cultural pursuits, both within the country and outside it. Thus, it only stands to reason that the start of the NMACC's journey was cause for celebration for the Foundation as well. The opening and subsequent events were attended by several of the Foundation's associates and team members, including the National Advisor, Vinnie Kakkar, the Honorary Convenor for Rajasthan and Central India Affairs, Apra Kuchhal, and **Ehsaas** Women from all over India, including Mourya Boda, Shraddha Murdia, Pooja Poddar Marwah and Praneet Bubber. They have all written eloquently about their feelings and experiences of having visited the NMACC. Read on to be transported to the NMACC through their heartfelt words!

A Landmark in Indian Cultural History

Vinnie Kakkar
National Advisor,
Prabha Khaitan
Foundation



Nita Ambani and Vinnie Kakkar

When you receive an invitation from *the* leading lady herself — none other than Nita Ambani — to go and witness her work of passion, you can only smile, look up and count your blessings. The Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre is no less than an ode to the country.

Mrs Ambani says, “My heart is full!” Mr Ambani says, “The shows from India will now travel to Broadway!” The community of artists says that the cultural centre is a “state-of-the-art facility.” And the *crème de la crème* of society say, “Staggering! Our minds are blown!”

I had goosebumps when I witnessed the enormity of the stage, the creativity of the digitally handled lights, the

acoustics and the backdrops. What a show it was! The NMACC is truly a home for art, artist and audience.

The Cultural Centre has three dedicated spaces for the performing arts — the 2000-seat-strong Grand Theatre, the 250-seat Studio Theatre, and the 125-seat Cube. They’re all equipped with cutting-edge technology to cater to a wide range of experiences, from intimate screenings and stimulating conversations to multilingual programming and international theatrical productions. The cultural centre also has a dedicated visual arts space — the Art House — overlooking the Fountain of Joy. Complementing the artistically rich spaces is a dining experience

I had goosebumps when I witnessed the enormity of the stage, the creativity of the digitally handled lights, the acoustics and the backdrops. What a show it was! The NMACC is truly a home for art, artist and audience

that includes a concession area, an arts café, a brand new restaurant by the Oberoi group, and one of India's most awarded restaurants, Indian Accent.

The NMACC will showcase the best of Indian and international visual and performing arts. From large-scale global and Indian productions to community-based programming, spoken word events, comedy shows, educational initiatives and workshops for children, the programmes will be as diverse as Indian culture.

What I got to witness was *The Great Indian Musical: Civilization to Nation* at the Grand Theatre. It is a sensory narrative of Indian culture told through the tenets of the classical *Natya Shastra*, brought to us by acclaimed Indian playwright Feroz Abbas Khan. 'India in Fashion', curated by Hamish Bowles, global editor-at-large for *Vogue* and editor-in-chief of *The World of Interiors*, and designed by Patrick Kinmonth with Rooshad

Shroff, journeys through the far-reaching impact of India's sartorial traditions on global fashion from the 18th-21st century. 'Sangam/Confluence', curated by India's leading cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote and American curator Jeffrey Deitch, is a group art show that celebrates diverse cultural impulses and traditions at the Art House.

Seminal moments like these make one's heart swell up with pride to be an Indian. When money is used for the right things, it grows. I felt it!

Someone asked Mrs Ambani, "How did you manifest your dream into reality?" "Well, if a woman cannot do it, then it can't be done!" she replied

be done!" she replied. You have done it once again, Mrs Ambani!

We are also excited for the 140th session of the International Olympic Committee in October 2023, which will be returning to India after 40 years! It will be held at the Jio World Centre in Mumbai. You make us proud in countless ways! Thank you!

Someone asked Mrs Ambani,
"How did you manifest your
dream into reality?"
"Well, if a woman cannot
do it, then it can't be done!"
she replied



Vinnie Kakkar and Mourya Boda at the NMACC



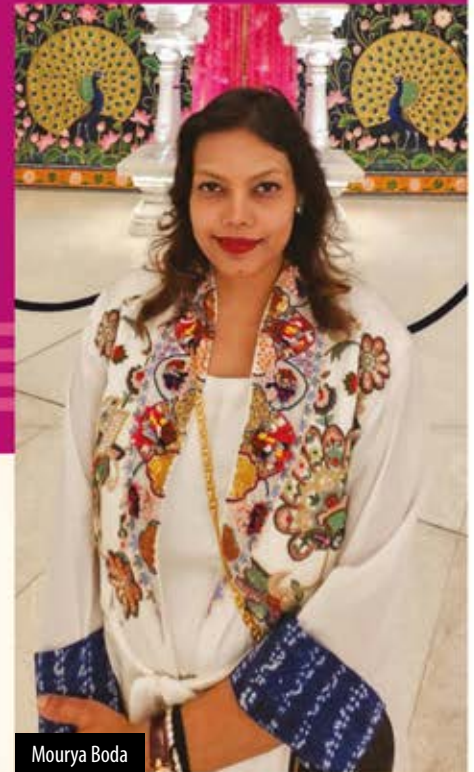
Vinnie Kakkar at the exhibit space of the NMACC

An Unforgettable Experience

Mourya Boda
Ehsaas Woman of Hyderabad



Nita Ambani



Mourya Boda

Visiting the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC) was a memorable and proud moment for me. Nita Ambani has created a place that represents the true essence of Indian art, fashion, and culture – something which every Indian should be proud of. She has put her soul into creating a centre that has been built at par with other such centres of international fame. I was able to witness her talk, and her performance left me spellbound. The NMACC is a must-visit place for everyone.



Mourya Boda at the NMACC



A glimpse of the exhibits

A Space of Our Own

Shraddha Murdia
Ehsaas Woman of Udaipur



Shraddha Murdia

Nita Ambani's *nritya* at a full house was followed by an announcement that delighted art enthusiasts all over. Being a theatre enthusiast, it was always on my list to watch a show at the NMACC. An Indian theatre showing a Broadway production was, personally, a big deal for me. Not only was a Broadway production here, but it was *The Sound Of Music!* The news caused a nostalgic flood of memories.

I had to witness it, and I realised it was also a great opportunity to show my kids the beautiful memories of olden times. During our school and college days, *The Sound Of Music* was regularly enacted in various adaptations, while the songs of this musical were sung in school bands. The play convinced me further that every Indian inclined towards the arts should watch it, and alongside

enjoy the aesthetics and the magnificence of this theatre. The great menu to satiate your taste buds is an added bonus!

The NMACC, I believe, is the most special gift to our country. It was time that we had a state-of-the-art facility in the field of the performing and visual arts. It provides a platform and immense opportunities to so many artists, creates employment and changes the cultural perception of recreation in society at large. It has set the bar for the arts fraternity.

It is my wish that I visit it each time I am in Mumbai, to soak my soul and indulge in the high spirits of classical forms and the avant-garde. As an Indian, it fills me with great pride to have a space like this of our own.



Shraddha Murdia at the NMACC



Shraddha Murdia with her loved ones at the NMACC



Shraddha Murdia takes a picture with her family at the NMACC, including her daughter, Aarohi Murdia (centre) and her son, Veer Murdia (right)

The Great Indian Met Gala

Pooja Poddar Marwah
Ehsaas Woman of Dehradun



Pooja Poddar Marwah

The lotus-inspired Fountain of Joy at the Dhirubhai Ambani Square at the NMACC truly lives up to its analogy. A colourful extravaganza of water that danced, and brought delightful yet socially moderated squeals amongst the glitterati. The Swarovski-studded ceiling not only exuded brilliance but also shimmered alongside the #Bollywood and #Hollywood fraternity.

India's answer to the Met Gala was welcomed with open arms, designer gowns and performances galore. The air hummed with the harmonious energy of artistic brilliance, and I couldn't help but feel an indescribable excitement coursing through my veins.

I was actually here! At the grand entrance to witness the grandeur that is the NMACC. Set in the midst of Jio World Drive, the sprawling, magnificent architecture boasts a kaleidoscope of vibrant colours and intricate details. From private film screenings to multilingual programmes and international theatrical productions, this facility is a celebration of art.

The Grand Theatre was readying itself to welcome the cast and crew of the internationally acclaimed *The Sound of Music*, and I found myself sitting with the young performers who were visiting India for the first time, and chatting about their upcoming performance. 'Spellbound', 'speechless' and 'stunning' are words that came to mind as I strolled around, watching the team put things in place for India's first Broadway show.

The technologically advanced yet intricately designed studio theatre is for niche audiences, and strives to showcase captivating performances by upcoming artists. And the Cube, as the name suggests, is the incubator at the NMACC. It is where new life comes to form, new ideas take shape, and is supposedly a place to showcase raw, untapped talent. This space is dedicated to offering a platform to emerging Indian artists from new and experimental theatre, spoken word and music.

Upon entering the majestic foyer, I found myself surrounded by a kaleidoscope of vibrant colours.

Visualised to be the epicentre of Indian and global art, the Art House is a dedicated four-storeyed art space. It was created to showcase a varying range of installations and exhibits that strive to bring the treasures of Indian and global art to everyone.

As I roamed the corridors, I marvelled at the state-of-the-art facilities that were designed to nurture the artistic spirit in all its forms. From rehearsal studios to art galleries, from recording booths to dance studios, every nook and cranny of this cultural haven was meticulously crafted to inspire and uplift the soul.

It is impossible to miss the stark white, exquisitely carved *mandir*, with Radha Krishna – the epitome of love – dressed in finery. A priest in saffron robes sat nearby,

engrossed in a chant. A culmination of East meeting West, India's tradition merging with the melodies of a breathtaking performance. One could not help but feel an innate sense of calm and happiness, from the soul.

As I stepped out into the world, I carried with me the indomitable spirit of the NMACC. It is a place where art will thrive, where the extraordinary will become ordinary, and where the human spirit will soar, like Icarus, to unimaginable heights.

Move aside Broadway, here comes India's iconic testament to the enduring power of human creativity, a sanctuary where dreams are given wings and the beauty of expression knows no bounds.



Pooja Poddar Marwah with some members of the cast of the Broadway production

The Beauty and Power of the Arts

Praneet Bubber
Ehsaas Woman of Amritsar



Praneet Bubber

Stepping into the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre was a dream come true for me. As an avid lover of the arts and a keen explorer of different cultures, I couldn't wait to immerse myself in the rich artistic heritage of India that awaited me within those elegant walls.

From the moment I crossed the threshold, I was enveloped in a whirlwind of sights and sounds that instantly transported me into a world of beauty and creativity. The grandeur of the centre's architecture and the intricate decorations that adorned every corner were a testament to India's vibrant history and artistic significance.

As I ventured deeper into the heart of the NMACC, my excitement reached new heights when I discovered that *The Sound of Music* was being performed in the magnificent theatre. The anticipation grew with every step I took, and when I finally entered the theatre, I was completely mesmerised. The ceiling, adorned with thousands of Swarovski crystals, shimmered above me, casting a magical glow over the entire space. The production of *The Sound of Music* was nothing short of spectacular, with talented performers bringing the story to life through their powerful voices, enchanting choreography and infectious energy. I found myself swept away by the iconic songs, and I couldn't help but

join in with the audience's applause and sing-alongs.

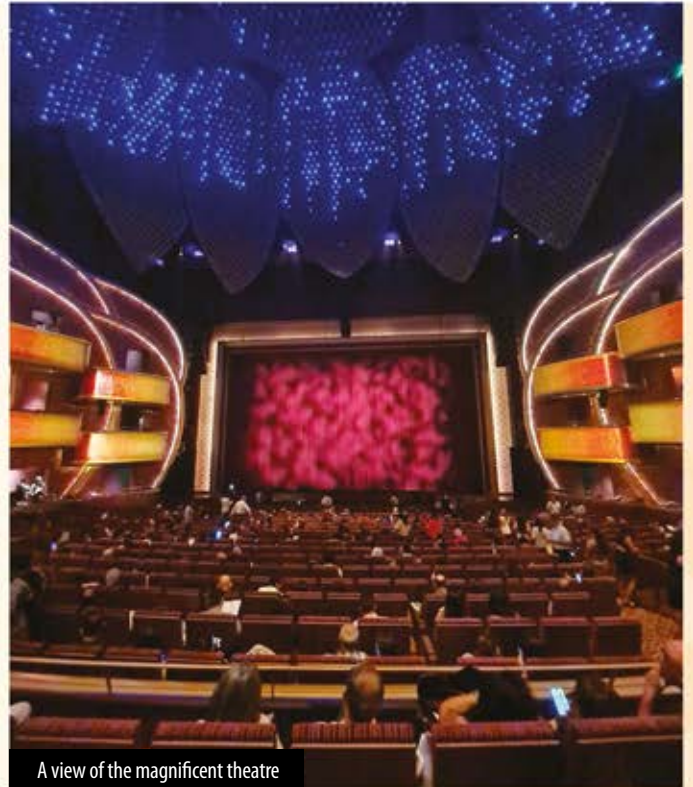
But the NMACC had more in store for me beyond the theatre. The Studio Theatre, with its state-of-the-art technology and intimate atmosphere, offered a different kind of experience. The innovative seating system that could transform to suit any event, coupled with the advanced amenities, made it a truly versatile space for a wide range of performances. I couldn't help but imagine the incredible talent that must have graced that stage and the unforgettable moments that had unfolded within those walls.

The Cube, with its movable stage and cutting-edge technology, was yet another marvel within the NMACC. It was a space dedicated to pushing boundaries and nurturing emerging artists. The thought of witnessing groundbreaking performances and being part of an audience that embraced innovation filled me with anticipation. The Cube's ability to connect artists with their audience through live streaming and digital expression was a testament to the ever-evolving nature of the arts.

As an art enthusiast, I was particularly drawn to the Art House, a sanctuary for visual arts within the NMACC. The thoughtfully-curated exhibits, featuring both Indian and international artists, provided a unique



Art installations at the NMACC



A view of the magnificent theatre

glimpse into different artistic expressions. I marvelled at the talent on display, and the rotating installations ensured that each visit would be a fresh and inspiring experience. The Art House, designed by Richard Gluckman, exuded a sense of creativity and exploration that resonated deeply with me.

While strolling through the concourses of the NMACC, I couldn't help but pause and admire the captivating public art that adorned the space. The presence of Kamal Kunj, with its intricate Pichwai

painting, transported me to another era, and the fountain of joy in the Dhirubhai Ambani Square symbolised the spirit of Mumbai in a truly captivating way.

My visit to the NMACC was not just a visit; it was an unforgettable journey through the realms of art and culture. It was a personal exploration of India's finest offerings, and it left an indelible mark on my soul. The NMACC stood not only as a testament to the Ambanis' vision but also as a place where the world could come together to celebrate the beauty and power of the arts.



The Sound of Music is performed at the NMACC



Musical performances in the open air



Glimpses of the fashion exhibits at the NMACC

A Captivating Space

Apra Kuchhal
Honorary Convenor of Rajasthan
and Central India Affairs,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation



Apra Kuchhal

The Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre in Mumbai is a truly phenomenal place that aims to preserve and promote India's rich artistic, cultural and historical heritage. Through a variety of artistic mediums, this centre provides visitors with an immersive experience that allows them to deeply connect with Indian history and traditions.

Upon entering the centre, I was immediately captivated by the sheer beauty and grandeur of the space. The architecture itself is a work of art, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of India. The centre showcases a diverse range of artistic mediums, including paintings, sculptures, installations, performances and more. Each artwork tells a unique story, representing different aspects of India's cultural identity.

During the few hours I spent at the centre, I was transported to a world of vibrant colours, intricate details and profound symbolism. The artworks all around not only showcased the talent and skill of Indian artists but also served as a window into the country's history and traditions. Every piece carries a deep meaning and significance, allowing the visitors to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for India's rich cultural tapestry.

One of the most striking aspects of the NMACC are the educational and interactive experiences. They are offering workshops, seminars and educational programmes that allow visitors to actively engage with the artworks and learn about various art forms. This hands-on approach is sure to help foster a sense of curiosity, creativity and appreciation for the arts among visitors of all ages.

Moreover, the centre hosts regular cultural events, performances and exhibitions that bring together artists, scholars and enthusiasts from across the country and the world. These events provide a platform for the exchange of ideas, cultural dialogue and artistic collaborations, further enriching the experience for visitors.

I spent a few hours at *India in Fashion* exhibition at the NMACC. Curated by one of fashion's greats, Hamish Bowles, this exhibition narrated the complex nuances of the country's representation in the larger lexicon of fashion. It beautifully showcased the evolution and diversity of Indian fashion over the years. It highlighted the rich heritage, craftsmanship and innovative designs that have shaped the Indian fashion industry. The exhibition featured a curated collection of traditional and contemporary Indian

garments, accessories, textiles and jewellery. It gave me an opportunity to explore the intricate details, fabrics and techniques used in Indian fashion.

India in Fashion also delves into the cultural significance and symbolism behind various traditional outfits and accessories. The installations here depicted how fashion has evolved and adapted to changing trends and societal influences while still retaining its essence.

We also got an opportunity to see the top-notch production, *The Sound of Music*, at the NMACC. The nearly three-hours-long programme was an extraordinary experience. From the stage, the lights and the costumes to the music and the acting, every aspect was astounding and sensational. It was the first time that I witnessed such a world-class show in India.

Overall, my experience at the NMACC was nothing short of transformative. It allowed me to immerse myself in India's rich artistic heritage, inspiring a deep sense of pride and appreciation. The centre's commitment to preserving and promoting India's cultural legacy is truly commendable, and I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to explore and engage with such a remarkable institution.



Apra Kuchhal explores the NMACC



The Sound of Music at the NMACC



A fashion exhibit at the NMACC



Artefacts on display at the NMACC



Apra Kuchhal with her daughter, Apnavi, inside the auditorium at the NMACC

My Heart Beats in Words

Since ancient times, from the days we were born...

Language artistry has been all around.

For their heart palpitations had expressed, uniquely, of their sights,

In ways only they could ever light.

And they grew up worlds that they had thought,

They spoke their words into other ears;

Their living souls had found a way,

To connect them through what'll never disappear.

And this legacy of conscious remedies;

Something sacred belonging to humanity,

Will be carried out by all the generations to be,

The legacy of literary art, by everybody.

And with our words we'll form kingdoms,

And with the same we'll shatter down many.

With them we'll heal our friends,

And with the same we'll break our enemies.

The holy aspects of the human soul;

The holy aspects of what lives and sees

The world's glory,

And the paths, that through their brain it flows,

Will imprint it in the plains of reality.

And the same shall I do to,

For it is what makes us human.

And with the words my heart will beat,

I will paint the pages with my blood.

Krishti Khandelwal is a 13-year-old little girl who started playing with ink, emotions, words and imaginations during the lockdown. She recently released her debut book, The Symphony of My Words, a collection of poems of all flavours



Beginning of a Celebration

*Aakhar Dakshin, held in Bengaluru, was a unique literary festival that brought together prominent voices who speak and write in South Indian languages. **Jayanthi Madhukar** brings you a glimpse of the magical day*

Prabha Khaitan Foundation celebrated the maiden edition of *Aakhar Dakshin: A Literature Festival on South Indian Languages* at the Bangalore International Centre, the city's premium cultural centre. The seminal effort was supported by Shree Cement Limited. What unfolded was a celebration of voices and literature from the rich tapestry of South Indian languages.

On a quiet Sunday, *Aakhar Dakshin* celebrated the richness of South Indian languages with poetry readings by Mamta Sagar, Prathibha Nandakumar, Ramesh Karthik Nayak and Syam Sudhakar. The Urban Folk Project brought in foot-tapping Kannada folk songs, and there was also a mesmerizing dance performance by Shinjini Kulkarni and Yamini Reddy.

The festival was sensitively curated by noted author Shinnie Antony, who brought together Konkani, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada voices. Well-known authors and poets like Damodar Mauzo, Perumal Murugan, K. Satchidanandan, Prathibha Nandakumar, Vivek Shanbhag, K.R. Meera, Vasudhendra, Kannan Sundaram, Deepa Ganesh and Purnima Tammireddy participated in the festival. The moderators included Stanley Carvalho, Karthik Venkatesh, Ajitha G.S., Mahalakshmi Prabhakaran and Subodh Sankar.



Languages with a Special Element

The inauguration by Chandrashekhara Kambara, the noted Kannada poet, playwright, folklorist and the founder-vice-chancellor of the Kannada University in Hampi, struck the right notes. He addressed the audience with a heart-stirring talk on South Indian languages and identity. “All South Indian languages have one special element – a built-in identity of which we are proud,” he said. “It is this quality that unites us all, and we become one. For centuries, our language has been pure and evolved. In recent times, the young generation has had a lot of questions and doubts about their culture, identity, and their future. This was not the case with us. We knew our cultural identity, and we had a strong hold over it. We never questioned anything about our origin and language. Such an integral belief system is not there in other languages.”

Kambara cited the example of a mother named Bhakti (Devotion) who took her two sons Gyana (Knowledge) and Tarakki (Progress) on a pilgrimage to Tamil Nadu. Along the way to a temple, the two sons argued and fought over who was better. As they got completely involved in their fight, the mother went inside the temple, prayed and came back to her sons, who were still bickering. Kambara likened the old-timers, who spoke in their native South Indian languages, to the mother Bhakti. “Our elders knew of us (our work) and appreciated our voice. Unlike us, the youngsters have been open to adopting the English language without realizing that their voice will no longer be unique. Our mother tongue is still alive and we should be happy about that.”



Authors, dignitaries and members of Prabha Khaitan Foundation at the inauguration of the Aakhar Dakshin festival



Chandrashekhara Kambara speaks at the inauguration



Kaveri Lalchand



Anindita Chatterjee



A Haunting Performance

With the significance of the South Indian languages elucidated, the melodious folk singer Shilpa Mudbi of the Urban Folk Project, accompanied by Prajna Beleyur, Poornima Kumar and Seethal Sharma, gave a stirring and haunting performance of 'Songs of My Ancestors'. Mudbi sang the songs after explaining their context: issues faced by womenfolk. The audience leaned forward in their seats, mesmerized by the rendition. There were goosebumps and sighs.



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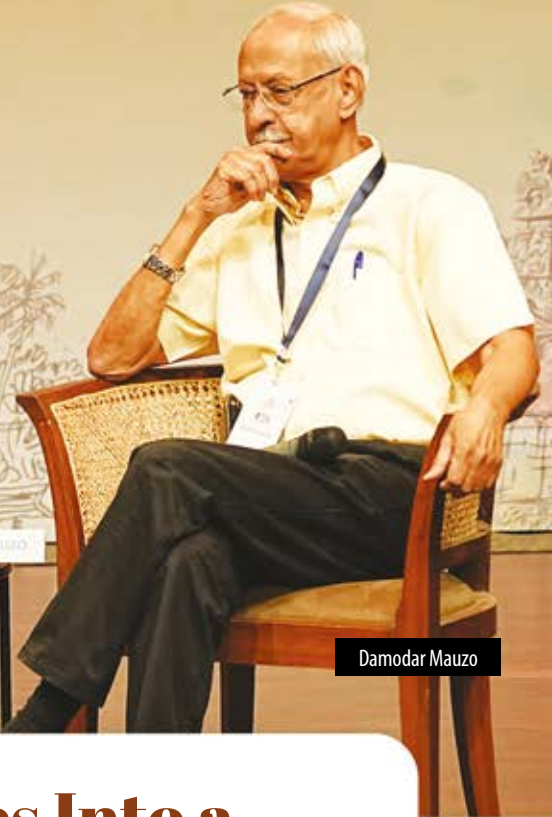
**Shree
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as their CSR initiative

Shilpa Mudbi with Prajna Beleyur, Poornima Kumar and Seethal Sharma



Stanley Carvalho



Damodar Mauzo

Compelling Glimpses Into a Progressive Mind

The third session of the festival was a refreshing conversation between Jnanpith awardee Damodar Mauzo, an acclaimed Konkani writer, and journalist Stanley Carvalho. Titled 'Mogacho Mauzo' (Beloved Mauzo), it provided an insight into the mind of and the progressive writings by Mauzo. Talking about why he writes, Mauzo said, "The genesis [of my writing] always lies in my mind. Whenever something appeals to me or whenever I come across some strange things in real life, they get registered in my mind. Suddenly, if something clicks, I realize I want to write about it." He spoke about writing *Karmelin* after reading about the *ayahs* who go to the

Middle East. "There is some sort of stigma attached to it. That always made me curious about why it was so, and then something happened in my mind which made me write the story."

Mauzo also revealed to the audience that he was a shopkeeper in a Goan village, and it was only 10 years ago that he closed the shop. "I preferred to work in the shop, for I would constantly be in touch with the villagers, my people, the Goan people. But I realized that when I would be busy writing, travelling or getting involved in social issues, it was my wife who had to manage the shop. So, I decided to close the shop and concentrate on writing."

Filled With Hope Again

The stage was set for a fiery and passionate session, 'Born-Again Writer', with author Perumal Murugan, who was in conversation with Subodh Sankar, co-founder of the Bengaluru-based bookstore, Atta Galatta. Murugan is known for his works like *One-Part Woman*, *Estuary*, *The Story of a Goat* and *Pyre*, which was longlisted for the International Booker Prize this year.

Murugan spoke about how he began to write once again after publicly publishing his literary obituary declaring 'Murugan the writer is dead'. "When the Madras High Court upheld my rights as a writer, it gave me the hope that in this country there is still freedom of expression. So, I began to write once more." The author discussed the genesis of his ideas and the reasons why he wrote the stories, and also addressed the controversy surrounding his son's marriage to a Brahmin girl.



Subodh Sankar

Perumal Murugan



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Karthik Venkatesh



K.R. Meera



Ajitha G.S.

All Writing Should Be Feminist



The next was a well-attended session where fans and readers of Malayalam author K.R. Meera listened to a conversation between her, Ajitha G.S. and Karthik Venkatesh. At the session, titled 'Damsel No Longer in Distress', Meera discussed the word 'feminist' with a male member of the audience, who wondered why there should even be such a word pertaining specifically to women. In reply, Meera asked him if he believed in the Indian Constitution, which gave equal rights to every Indian. "If you believe in the Indian Constitution, you are a feminist," she said.

On the subject of her 'feminist' stories making an impact, she reminisced about an aunt who said that her son had changed: 'He has become a feminist after reading your books! He doesn't even allow anyone to wash his plate.' "That's my success story," she said. The author also declared, "If it's a good book, it should be a feminist book. All writing should be feminist."

The Two Important Seeds

The insightful session, 'How a Story Begins', was a dialogue between Kannada author and playwright Vivek Shanbhag and Deepa Ganesh. Shanbhag explained the two parts of how a story begins. "One is where the seed of the story is sown, which is very important because it triggers certain strings of emotions. It [the seed] may be an image, picture, just a character or a phrase. It is a little mysterious, a little abstract and it grows. The seed goes on accumulating over a period of time. Then there is the second part, which is, actually, the art of writing, where I try to capture the abstract in words. I try to find the entry point to it, which, to me, is very important, since it defines the tone and the voice. It is like fixing a camera, and what you see from there, and, more importantly, what you don't see from that position. To find that point, it takes me days, weeks or years."



Deepa Ganesh



Vivek Shanbhag



Subodh Sankar, Vasudhendra, K. Satchidanandan, Kannan Sundaram and Prathibha Nandakumar discuss translation

Publishing and Translation in South India



The debut edition of *Aakhar Dakshin* also had two special panel discussions, 'The Language of Translation' (K. Satchidanandan, Kannan Sundaram, Prathibha Nandakumar, Vasudhendra with Subodh Sankar) and 'Publishing in the South' (Deepa Ganesh, Kannan Sundaram, Syam Sudhakar, Purnima Tammireddy with Vasudhendra), wherein the panellists talked in depth about the translation scene as well as the southern publishing industries.



Kannan Sundaram, Purnima Tammireddy, Vasudhendra, Syam Sudhakar and Deepa Ganesh talk about publishing

The Journey of a Poet

An entertaining session, 'When the Poet Writes', discussed the ideation and writing process of Sahitya Akademi award winner K. Satchidanandan, poet and writer in Malayalam and English. Satchidanandan started writing poetry at around 12 years of age, and some of his poems were published in popular literary magazines as well as school and college magazines. "Now I don't even think those are works of poetry," he said. "I began to take myself seriously during my post-graduation in English, when I found that perhaps this was a major genre in which I could express myself. I stopped taking part in poetry competitions and I continued writing. My first book of poetry, *Anchu Sooryan*, was published in 1970, and that work got accepted in the literary world. That was the beginning. Later, *Matrubhoomi*, a popular literary magazine, started publishing my poetry, and I got taken seriously as well as criticized seriously because that's how it is."



Mahalakshmi Prabhakaran



K. Satchidanandan



Mamta Sagar



Prathibha Nandakumar



Syam Sudhakar



Karuna Sivasailam



Ramesh Karthik Nayak

The Power of Poetry and Song

Throughout the festival, in between literary sessions, there were poetry readings by Mamta Sagar (Kannada), Prathibha Nandakumar (Kannada), Ramesh Karthik Nayak (Telugu) and Syam Sudhakar (Malayalam). These readings were powerful depictions of meaning and nuance, and naturally, every poet took the stage by storm. The rendition of *Tiruppugazh* and *Tiruppavai* by singer Karuna Sivasailam added a spiritual touch.

Dancing Till The End

The grand finale saw the unforgettable sequencing of a dance performance by Shinjini Kulkarni and Yamini Reddy. This scorching coming-together of two dance forms, Kathak and Kuchipudi, was a fitting end to a beautiful and most authentic literary experience. If the words spoken by the eminent writers had the audiences shaken and stirred, the dance left them in a daze. When the Mistress of Ceremonies, Melodee Austin, brought the evening to a close, a day that was filled with feverish conversations and exciting insights came to a reluctant end.

Jayanthi Madhukar is a Bengaluru-based writer, whose works have been published in leading news dailies and magazines



Yamini Reddy and Shinjini Kulkarni perform at the end of *Aakhar Dakshin*



In a Tight Southern Plait

The maiden edition of *Aakhar Dakshin: A Festival of South Indian Languages*, organised by Prabha Khaitan Foundation

and supported by Shree Cement Limited, set the stage at the Bangalore International Centre auditorium on fire in April. While putting the festival together, it was clear in our minds that this was to be a celebration, a multilingual firework in the sky, with sparklers in every language. The authors who were approached understood the significance of such a festival, and lent it their complete trust and unique voice. The atmosphere of inclusivity was overwhelming and moving.

To begin with, when eminent writer Chandrashekhara Kambara, President of the Sahitya Akademi and winner of numerous awards like the Jnanpith and Padma Bushan, was invited to inaugurate the festival, he agreed with a touching quickness. He lit the lamp, surrounded by all the participating authors: the very picture of writers coming together without walls. He then spoke, in Kannada, about the intimate connection between languages and the world at large, kicking off the festivities joyously and on a note of hope.

The inauguration was followed by a performance, *Songs of My Ancestors*, by the Urban Folk Project. Shilpa Mudbi, with Prajna Beleyur, Poornima Kumar and Seethal Sharma as accompanists, sang folk songs in haunting tunes and lyrics. That Shilpa, a new mother, had come from Gulbarga to sing for us added to the specialness of the moment.

Whether it was 'Mogacho Mauzo' (Beloved Mauzo), in which Jnanpith winner and famous Konkani writer Damodar Mauzo speaking to journalist Stanley Carvalho about his writing experiences, or Tamil writer Perumal Murugan, whose book *Pyre* was longlisted for the International Booker, in a free and frank discussion with Subodh Sankar, co-founder of Atta Galatta, in the *Born-Again Writer* session, all the writers spoke from their hearts.

Malayalam writers K. Satchidanandan (in the session 'When the Poet Writes', with journalist

Mahalakshmi Prabhakaran) and K.R. Meera, who spoke with editors Ajitha G.S. and Karthik Venkatesh in her session 'Damsel No Longer in Distress', could elaborate on their craft. While Satchidanandan spoke about his experience translating his own Malayalam poems into English, Meera could clear the mystery around who is and who is not a feminist. Kannada writer Vivek Shanbhag spoke with journalist/writer Deepa Ganesh about how his daily work infuses his writing in the session 'How a Story Begins'.

The two panel discussions were on 'The Language of Translation', which had K. Satchidanandan, Kannan Sundaram, Prathibha Nandakumar and Vasudhendra with Subodh Sankar, and on 'Publishing in the South', which had Deepa Ganesh, Kannan Sundaram, Syam Sudhakar and Purnima Tammireddy with Vasudhendra. With translations coming into their own so spectacularly, the panel went into the ramifications of sweet success and the challenges that remained. The publishing industry differs from place to place, and the participating publishers were happy to compare notes and statistics.

Poetry readings by Mamta Sagar, Prathibha Nandakumar (Kannada), Ramesh Karthik Nayak (Telugu) and Syam Sudhakar (Malayalam) were powerful depictions of meaning and nuance. The rendition of *Tiruppugazh* and *Tiruppavai* by Bangalore-based singer Karuna Sivasailam brought Tamil into this segment.

The unforgettable dance performance by Shinjini Kulkarni and Yamini Reddy, bringing together Kathak and Kuchipudi, was a fitting finale to a beautiful and authentic literary experience. A special note of thanks is owed to the former radio jockey, Melodee Austin, who, as the Mistress of Ceremonies, kept the proceedings of the festival going smoothly.

For Anindita Chatterjee, Executive Trustee of the Foundation, and me, this was no ordinary festival. Curating it was a pleasure and a journey of much discovery for me.

Shinie Antony

Curator, Aakhar Dakshin Festival



Ricky Kej

Tunes for the Earth

guests across the country. The initiative, #ReWear4Earth, which aims to promote sustainable fashion, has further strengthened this special relationship between the artist and the Foundation.

As an extension of this bond, Kej has curated 12 unique pieces of music to be used as the **Music of the Month** across all events, social media platforms, and communications by the Foundation. In the pages of *Prabha*, these musical pieces will be showcased henceforth, with this issue heralding the music for April and May. “I am very proud of this latest collaboration with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**,” said Kej. “It is always an honour to associate with such a great organisation which has culture, art, artists and India at its core. All communications and video invites of the Foundation are innovative and I love receiving them. So it is great to have my music associated with it for next year.”

“Ricky Kej’s music is like a breath of fresh air which is sure to add an edge to our social media activities and video invites created for literary and cultural events in India and abroad,” said Manisha Jain, the Branding and Communications Chief of the Foundation. “It will help us weave the spirit of universal environmental consciousness in all our endeavours.”

The 12 songs are varied in their themes and messages, and explore the rivers Ganga and Cauvery, the mighty Himalayas, the Earth, Mahatma Gandhi, and the official Land Anthem of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. They also explore spirituality, and the philosophy of coexistence — *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means ‘The World is One Family’. Each song is a reflection of Kej’s awareness of the natural world. His music calls attention to the urgency for implementing more sustainable practices in our lives and the impact of climate change. For the month of April, the beautiful composition was about the River Ganga; for May, it was an ethereal piece about unity and harmony, called *One Song*.

Winning a Grammy is no mean feat, and Ricky Kej has won the coveted award three times. He is the youngest person of Indian origin to do so. A composer and passionate environmentalist, Kej’s music seeks to inspire people to love nature and work towards protecting our Earth. He serves as the United Nations Refugees ‘Goodwill Ambassador’, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification ‘Land Ambassador’, and Ambassador for the Earth Day Network. He has also been awarded by the Parliament of Canada for his ‘Outstanding Musical and Humanitarian Achievement’.

Kej’s album, *Divine Tides*, which he created with the rock legend, Stewart Copeland, underlines the necessity for humans to coexist harmoniously with all life forms. The album won the 2023 Grammy Award for Best Immersive Audio Album, and brings together artists from across the world. *Divine Tides* also won the 2022 Grammy Award for Best New Age Album. In 2015, Kej’s album, *Winds of Samsara*, won the Grammy under the same category and debuted at No. 1 on the US Billboard New Age Albums Chart in August 2014.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation has always been unwavering in its support for the performing arts, culture and literature, and collaborates with caregivers, committed individuals and like-minded institutions to implement cultural, educational, literary and social welfare projects in India and abroad. It has also always worked towards promoting awareness regarding the challenges faced by our environment. The Foundation, thus, shares with Kej his passion for music and environmental consciousness. Kej’s signature caller tune for the Foundation has mesmerised various artists and

April: River Ganga



April's song by Kej is dedicated to the great river Ganga, which nourishes the lives of over a tenth of the world's population — a symbol of beauty, purity, devotion and of life itself. This song follows Ganga's journey from the Himalayas till the Bay of Bengal, with her bounty nourishing millions along the way.



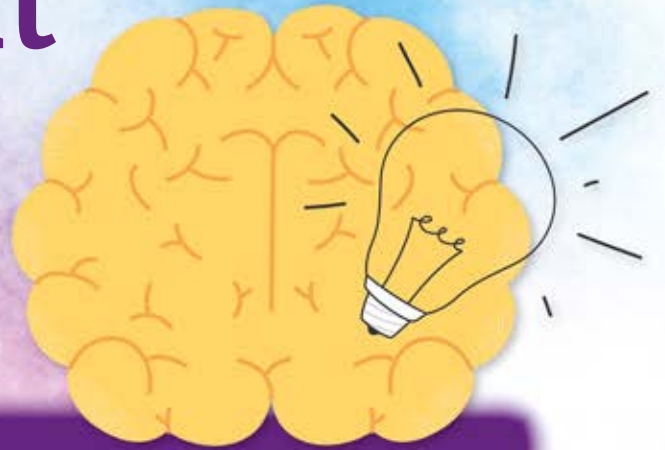
May: One Song



The song for the month of May is about the world coming together as one, so that we can celebrate our uniqueness, diversity and differences. All of us live on one planet, have a common goal, and are in harmony in 'one song'.



A Meeting of Bright Minds



The Youth of India Model United Nations, held at G.D. Goenka Public School, Siliguri, brought to the fore the intellectual prowess of the youth of the country. Held over three days, the event saw the enthusiastic participation of passionate debaters from all over India. Not only did they address critical political issues, such as the Battle of Khartoum raging in Sudan, but also offered innovative solutions to other geo-political and social issues plaguing the world. Guests and speakers such as Dr Gajanan Dange, President of Yojak Centre for Research, Anubhav Dubey, co-founder of Chai Sutta Bar, Kavin Kumar Kandasamy, CEO of ProClima, Rewaj Chettri, founder of NE Origins, and Sailesh Singhal, founder of Youth of India Foundation, motivated and inspired the students to think critically and put their best foot forward while deliberating upon complex issues. The YOIMUN Socials allowed the delegates to let their hair down and have a great time, making the conference a true blend of work and fun. Here are a few glimpses from the three days, in the words of two bright young people, Dharman Sheth and Sia Gupta, who attended the YOIMUN as part of **Prabha Khaitan Foundation's** famed **Muskaan** initiative.

A Larger-Than-Life Event

Dharman Sheth



The inaugural ceremony of the Youth of India Model United Nations 2023 at G.D. Goenka Public School, Siliguri, was one of the most awaited events. The ceremony began with the Best School Delegation trophy being carried onto the premises, preceded by a procession of *dhol* players and dancing secretariat members with yellow flare guns. All those who were participating in the conference were ushered into the auditorium for a mix of mesmerising musical performances and inspiring speeches.

Parinita Tamang, the vice-principal of G.D. Goenka Public School, Siliguri, Dr Gajanan Dange, President of Yojak Centre for Research, and Sulochana Jajodia, the chairperson of the Youth of India Advisory Board, motivated everyone with their encouraging speeches. With Ms Jajodia referring to the young audience as 'candle lights raised by the storm', the mood for Day 1 of the biggest conference of Northeast India was set to an all-time high. The highlight, though, was the speech by Anubhav Dubey, the co-founder of Chai Sutta Bar. His speech was lighthearted as well as bluntly honest. He walked the audience through the highs and lows of his journey, igniting in them a fire that perhaps they did not know they had. When the Founder of Youth of India unveiled the grand trophy for the Best School Delegation, along with the other dignitaries, the participants were motivated to put up their best performances. The ceremony came to an end with cake-cutting and the bang of the gavel, paving the path for the conference to commence.

In collaboration with G20 (Group of 20), and as a member of C20 (Civil 20), Day 1 of the Youth of India came to a spectacular end with a G20 Panel Discussion with four esteemed panellists: Dr Gajanan Dange, Kavin Kumar Kandasamy, CEO of ProClime, Parinita Tamang, and Rewaj Chettri, founder of NE Origins. The conversation was moderated by none other than the founder of the Youth of India Foundation, Sailesh Singhal.



Dharman Sheth at the Youth of India Model United Nations 2023

The discussion was mainly centred around the pressing issue of global warming, with Dr Dange pointing out that along with changes in the way technology is used, lifestyle changes are also a must to help combat the issue.

Kandasamy, on the other hand, urged the audience to treat the deteriorating situation of the planet's climate as an "opportunity" rather than a "crisis". He also stated that the world in general, and India in particular, has been through an identity crisis, and is now just beginning to rise from it.

Ms Tamang highlighted the excellent initiative called GYOF – Grow Your Own Food, carried out by the Student Council of G.D. Goenka Public School, wherein everything from herbs to rice is grown on a plot of land behind the school.



Sailesh Singhal

The second day was power-packed with the committee sessions of all the groups and their debates. The day began with an invite-only, intergovernmental deliberation on the (summarised) agenda of the Battle of Khartoum, among other constant conflicts in present times. A delegate and an Executive Board representative from each committee acted as a team to deliberate upon the issue and come up with innovative solutions. Though no proper solution was drafted, the intergovernmental deliberation left the audience in awe and taught them the politics of debating from the very best in the MUN circuit. High on energy, the delegates left to fight their own battles in their respective committees. The YOIMUN Socials featuring DJ Peri was also hosted at the school. The event was neon-themed, and neon bands and goggles were made available to the delegates to make the event a truly memorable one!

My experience at the Youth of India Model United Nations 2023 at Siliguri

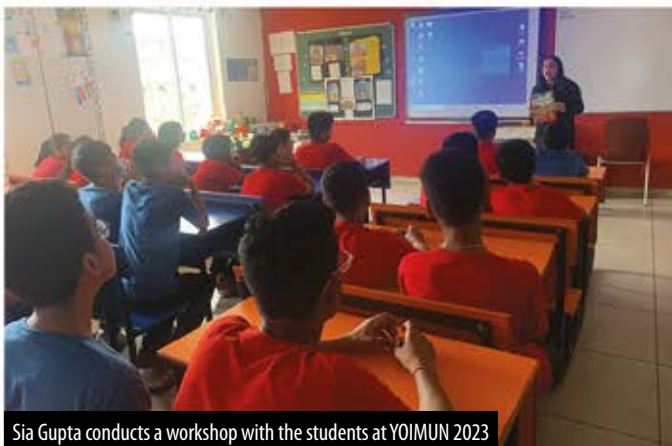
Sia Gupta



Sia Gupta at the Youth of India stand at YOIMUN 2023

It all started with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** reaching out to me with the incredible opportunity of travelling to G.D. Goenka Public School, Siliguri, to participate in the Youth of India MUN in April. I was chosen to be a part of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, where we would be debating abortion rights, with a special emphasis on developing countries.

In a MUN, every delegate is allotted a country whose actions they defend and whose interests they advocate for. I was allotted the United Kingdom. It was interesting to learn about the actions that the UK has taken to preserve the



Sia Gupta conducts a workshop with the students at YOIMUN 2023



A committee in session

integrity of gender equality. I also got a chance to meet talented people from all over the world as we attended Zoom meetings and discussed subtopics for the committee. The days leading up to the actual conference were full of excitement and nerves, as I spent hours researching and writing my speeches!

Day One

The first day of the conference started on an exhilarating note with an enthralling session that included several dignitaries like Anubhav Dubey, founder of Chai Sutta Bar. Subsequently, I met the judges of my committee, Diptesh Banerjee and Srotoswini Ghatak. We were briefed on the rules and provided with a full delegate kit, after which the first session commenced. We were asked to deliver a speech with a summary of our research. I was provided with good feedback, which I was able to implement over the next few days.



Participants of YOIMUN 2023



The closing ceremony with the delegates gathered

We were then divided into blocs based on pre-existing alliances, making me a part of the European Bloc. The day ended with a G20 Civil Panel, with speakers like Rewaj Chhetri, founder of NE Origins; Kavin Kandasamy, CEO of ProClime and Dr Gajanan Dange, C20 India Coordinator, and Anubhav Dubey.

Day Two

The second day commenced with our committee session. I gave my opening statement and was met with an appreciative audience. I was in for a massive surprise. I have six published books, and have conducted several workshops all over the country. The principal asked me to host an event for a group of students, which I conducted during my lunch break. Not only were the students interactive and overjoyed, but many vowed to become authors themselves!

Back at MUN, I delivered my 'formal informal speech' on our first subtopic: the right to life *versus* right to choice. After having immense fun, listening and dancing to music at the socials, we returned to finish our working paper: a document of points and solutions.

Day Three

The third day began with a session by Gaurang Das Prabhu, who imparted many life lessons. It was time to form a consensus document, which was an extremely difficult task because it required the combination of the working papers of all four blocs — European, American, Middle Eastern and Asian — all of whom had extremely different policies. The hour that ensued was full of intense debate and discussion, till a resolution was reached.

This was followed by a round of speeches on the topic, 'unsafe abortions in developing countries', the end of which called for more working papers and a final consensus paper. It was amazing to see how we had all improved, because this was completed in half the time. We were then called to make an extempore speech, mentioning the points that our foreign policy did not agree with and suggesting changes. Although it was my first extempore, I managed a decent speech with the help of our distinguished judges.

To my utter surprise I ended up ranking third! The entire experience was extremely enriching, and I will remain forever grateful to the Foundation for their support and encouragement.

Inspiring Children to Invest in Our Planet

The month of April holds a significant day in the calendar—April 22, the day we come together to celebrate and honour our beloved Mother Earth. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under its **Muskaan** initiative, undertook an endeavour to commemorate this day by involving children in various nature-care activities, aiming to convey a message of love and care for our planet. The theme for the 2023 World Earth Day was ‘Invest in our Planet’, and the children were urged to dedicate an hour towards Earth during the Earth Day week. They were provided with practical measures to adopt as gestures of care towards Mother Nature.

The first essential step that participants were encouraged to take was to reduce their carbon footprint. Following the provided guidelines, many participants chose to plant seeds and small trees, either in their gardens or indoor pots. Some prepared the soil, arranged the seeds in layers and watered them. In a united effort against the use of non-biodegradable products, a group of school students opted for metal water bottles over plastic ones and bid farewell to plastic lunch boxes.

One notable eco-friendly activity carried out by these young nature enthusiasts was the removal of trash from



affected areas within their localities. They not only talked about it but also took practical steps, following the slogan, “Save us, save trees, and save lives”. Some students cleaned their gardens, removed weeds and nurtured existing trees and shrubs. Another participant planted a *tulsi* plant, which is considered holy by followers of the Hindu faith, symbolising their deep reverence for Nature.

The children’s drawings vividly depicted the urgency of addressing climate change and advocated for making the Earth a better place by conserving water and expanding green spaces. As part of an Earth Hour activity, a group of students conducted a survey on water conservation in their school. The children exemplified that there are numerous wonderful ways to celebrate World Earth Day, and their nature-friendly approach likely influenced others as well. **Muskaan** aspires to instil an eco-friendly attitude in children, fostering their commitment to living in a less-polluted and greener world. Through their dedication, **Muskaan** and the children envision a future where the environment is treasured and each individual plays an active role in protecting and preserving the planet.

*A joint initiative with **Education for All**, this session of **Muskaan** was presented by Shree Cement Limited*



Students of Uttam School for Girls clear up trash



Little girls interact with Nature



Ammika Aman Kudesia from Indraprastha World School spends time with some plants



Watering a plant

Literature is for All Seasons

When the Mad Hatter asked, “Why is a raven like a writing desk?” the question befuddled all readers who were enchanted by the world created by Lewis Carroll. As Alice journeyed down the rabbit hole, both children and adults travelled with her through the world of magic, stories, and impossibilities. At the end of the journey, when confronted with reality, the readers didn’t try to understand why the raven is like a writing desk; they accepted that it is.

Such is the lure of books and literature — they can transform the most mundane realities into the most thrilling ones. When allowed to take over a curious mind, literature and books can help to ignite a raging imagination.

The **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, was, thus, an exciting opportunity for children to develop their creative potential. Following in the footsteps of the hugely successful **Muskaan** Literature Festival, this summer literature meet brought together several young ones and child authors who dream of telling stories in myriad ways. They learnt storytelling with Sumita Banerjea, understood art and illustration with Pinaki De, honed their imagination with Lubaina Bandukwala and shook a leg with Amit and Dorothy Shaw of DNA Danceworks. As you move through these pages, you will get a glimpse of the electrifying, deeply informative and fun-filled Lit Meet that both the attendees and the organisational team will never forget!



Priyanka Kothari, Pallavi Pahwa, Cathy Tongper, Anindita Chatterjee, Manisha Jain and Vinti Kathuria at the inaugural dinner

Dinner First!

The inaugural dinner, held in association with the British Council, allowed the participants of the **Muskaan Summer Literary Meet** to become acquainted with each other, with Team **Muskaan** and **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, and with the artists they would be interacting with, including the magician Sourav Burman. The dinner served as the perfect preface to an exciting event full of unbridled joy and learning!



Lubaina Bandukwala



Debanjan Chakravarti



Sumitra Ray



The magician, Sourav Burman, with the young child authors

Learning the Art of Crafting Stories



Sumita Banerjea

After the resounding success of the Muskaan Literature Festival, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised the **Muskaan Summer Literary Meet** for child authors, which allowed them to learn

newer ways of expressing themselves. The participants had to bring forth their creativity for a qualifying essay competition which tested their imaginative skills. Having thus won a place in the meet, the day-long event kept them occupied with various engaging and enjoyable activities as they learnt

newer ways of developing themselves as artists and authors. One such workshop was the inaugural session with author and educator Sumita Banerjea from the British Council, who explored the art of short story writing with the children.

Elaborating upon the features which make good short stories, Banerjea emphasised the importance of imagination, character development, plot, genre, dialogue, and imagery. Imagery transforms pale story-telling into vivid story-telling, and an appropriate plot is essential for the success of the short story. Banerjea highlighted that the plot should have an element of surprise, include a logical flow, and avoid too many subplots. A distinct character helps with the flow of the narrative, as does the use of lucid language. Banerjea noted that in order to sustain the readers' interest till the end, a short story must be a perfect amalgamation of all these essential components. She also spoke about the features of the 'mini-saga'; the children were encouraged to compose

their own 'mini-sagas' and read them out during the workshop.

Thus, the workshop not only helped the children pick up essential qualities as budding writers but also allowed them the opportunity to put their learnings into practice while enjoying the process of creating unique, delectable stories!



Sumita Banerjea conducts her workshop



Anhad Kathuria



Ram Shrivastava

Imagining One's Way Into A New World



Lubaina Bandukwala



Lubaina Bandukwala conducts her workshop on creating immersive imaginary worlds

Our imagination often transports us into fictional spaces we believe to be our newly found realities. The experience of being too deeply drawn into the characters' lives in a book we are reading or a film we are watching is shared by many. This is how artists play with readers' minds. But how do writers skillfully manipulate reality to create new, believable worlds? To get children into this act of thinking and writing, the second workshop at the **Muskaan Summer Literary Meet**, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, opened the windows of children's minds and helped them discover the magic imagination promises. The writer and editor, Lubaina Bandukwala, conducted this mind-opening workshop on *Creating Immersive Imaginary Worlds* which was all about enjoying the process of creating fictional spaces that feel more like reality and unearthing the writers buried in most children.

In the course of this workshop, Bandukwala showed engaging illustrations of some popular books — from

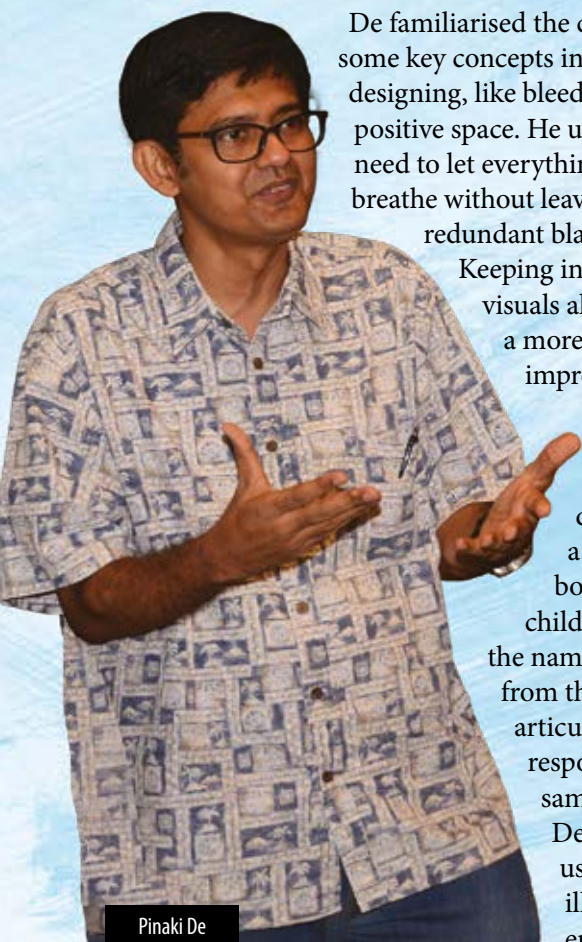
The Chronicles of Narnia to *Winnie the Pooh* — that left the children rummaging through their memory. She gave them cues to think about the books' names by looking at visuals that conjured distinct associations with the worlds of the books. Bandukwala taught them how to treat the mind as a *tabula rasa*. The children in attendance were thrilled as they ceased to be themselves for a while and documented the world around them as a plant or a lion — a concept as nuanced as shifting perspectives was explained very lucidly by Bandukwala.

It was heartening to see how deftly the children manoeuvred metaphors and allegories to write their tales as a part of the exercise in thinking that Bandukwala gave them. Through this workshop, Bandukwala drove home the idea that it is all in the mind, and a book gets its meaning from what an author creates imaginatively, and how a reader perceives that through their own imaginative abilities.

Reading A Book Cover As A Work Of Art

A book cover is one of the first things to catch someone's attention when they browse through the shelves in a bookstore. It is a space of creativity that illustrators play with to convey the emotions and ideas contained in a book. Creating an engrossing cover that is suffused with symbolic meanings and yet not cluttered is not easy. But when it is explained by the award-winning graphic illustrator and book cover designer,

Pinaki De, it seems like a thing many might want to experiment with. To this end, an interesting workshop on illustration techniques for creating book covers and pin-ups was conducted by De at the **Muskaan Summer Literary Meet**. In this workshop, children from all over the country who have already begun their literary journey, were thrilled to discover that they can also design the covers of their books.



Pinaki De

De familiarised the children with some key concepts in book cover designing, like bleed, negative and positive space. He underscored the need to let everything on the cover breathe without leaving too many redundant blank spaces.

Keeping in mind that visuals always create a more profound impression, De walked the children through discussions on a wide range of book covers. The children guessed the names of the books from their covers and articulated their responses to the same. In lucid terms, De explained the usage of fonts, illustrations, embellishments and images to

create an atmosphere on the book cover. The children were delighted to learn how artful and impressive the process of creating an arresting book cover is.

Showing the illustrations of *Pather Panchali*, De discussed how the artist *par excellence*, Satyajit Ray, had also begun his journey as a children's book illustrator. A

workshop of this spirit necessitated that the children's imaginations be unmuzzled, and this is what De did when he asked the children to design covers for their books. Thoroughly enjoying this fun-filled workshop, the children came up with ingenious book covers and tapped into their creative potential.



Pinaki De interacts with Adeeba Riyaz



Pinaki De illustrates a point for Shreyan Garg



Pinaki De with the child authors and students who participated in his workshop



Hitting the Dance Floor



Amit and Dorothy Shaw with the enthusiastic participants

The **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet was far from being a conventional literature festival. It was as much about initiating children into the literary world as it was about exploring other creative forms of art. With fun and experimentation parcelled into this literary meet, Dorothy and Amit Shaw of DNA Danceworks Bodyworks, two consummate dancers, engaged the children in something new — an hour-long K-Pop and Hip-Hop Funk dance practice session that the children were overjoyed to attend. The dancing duo briefly shared their journey and the language of dance with the children before getting them grooving to the beats.

Following a brief warm-up session, Amit familiarised

the children with the nitty-gritty of body movements. He explained how the body is a tool at a dancer's disposal that they can move and experiment with in every possible way. He briefly spoke about the centrality of facial expressions in any dance form. Coincidentally organised a day before International Jazz Day, Amit and Dorothy began this dance session with jazz dancing. The tempo of the music increased as the session progressed, as did the youngsters' excitement as they segued into different dance forms. From dancing to popular Bollywood songs to K-Pop songs, Dorothy and Amit gave the children a unique experience of knowing about and dancing in different styles.



Amit demonstrates a dance style to the child authors



Dorothy Shaw infuses the young participants with a joy for dancing

On Holding Meaningful Conversations



Lubaina Bandukwala with the participating youngsters



Lubaina Bandukwala

Storytelling is often interpreted as a rectilinear flow of thoughts — a storyteller is meant to narrate, and the audience must sit back and listen. A mode of communication as old as time, storytelling is a dynamic process, a time-honoured way of exchanging thoughts. A good storyteller immerses listeners in the tales, alongside provoking new conversations. To teach children how to use a random experience, an idea that crosses one's mind silently as a turning point to weave an arresting tale, Lubaina Bandukwala once again engaged with the youngsters in attendance at the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet in a panel discussion on *Creating Conversations Through Storytelling*. In a world that is sadly forgetting the virtues of real conversations, this panel discussion was a much-needed reminder for us all to hold on to the art of storytelling.

Any creative process is a subjective experience, as this discussion underscored — there is no right or wrong way to do it. To begin the conversation, Bandukwala asked the children to share a couple of lines on anything they have witnessed or felt lately that they might want to give the shape of a story. While one articulated their

experience at this one-of-its-kind literary meet, another discussed how they have so much to share about what happens in their school. It is crucial to initiate dialogues of this nature through workshops and discussions so that youngsters can slowly come out of their shells, battle their often unacknowledged diffidence, and learn about positive communication with their peers. This also plays an important role in a child's socialisation process.

Bandukwala highlighted that stories are not fictional entities. They are about our lives and cultures, about our emotions and needs that are anchored in reality. Children's creative abilities are often, regrettably, dumbed down by the adult world. But the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet created a space for children where they could express their unrivalled enthusiasm about the smallest of things in their lives, and this concluding discussion was reflective of this spirit.



The workshop in progress

Hear It From the Children

The **Muskaan** Literature Festival, held in January in Delhi, gave me the recognition, appreciation and encouragement to write more, and confirmed that I was on the right track. The moment I received the news about being selected for the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet in Kolkata, I was overjoyed and excited that I will be meeting all my friends from the literature fest, and making new ones!

Once we reunited, we talked about how geared up we were for the event. The sessions were extremely insightful and engaging for everyone. I really enjoyed the panel discussion with Lubaina Bandukwala, and the session conducted by Sumita Banerjea from the British Council on short story writing. The other sessions were fun too!

I would like to thank **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** once again for making my first trip to Kolkata so memorable and enjoyable.

– Saina Sarin

I was very happy when my sister, Devyani Bharadwaj, was selected for the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet. But after a few days I got to know that I had also been selected for the same! I was thrilled because I was going to visit Kolkata, meet my friends and new teachers. I was eager to know what I was about to learn from the sessions.

My favourite session was the one conducted by the accomplished illustrator, Pinaki De, who taught us how to illustrate a book cover. I understood it well because I illustrate my own books. I also enjoyed Lubaina Bandukwala's sessions, which taught us how to narrate stories using our imagination, and informed us of the role of artificial Intelligence. We also visited Victoria Memorial, which was a very enjoyable experience. I thank **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and Team **Muskaan** for organising such a fascinating literary meet.

– Shivanjani Bharadwaj

In the first session at the **Muskaan** Literary Meet, we learnt about different styles of poems and how to be more creative when writing a poem. The session was not only interactive and fun, but we were able to write some poems of our own. Lubaina Bandukwala conducted the second session, where we conversed about how AI can one day take over the world. The session was both exciting and informative.

The third session, focusing on illustrating one's books, was conducted by Pinaki De. It was amusing as we illustrated our own book covers! We learnt dancing and discovered fascinating things – like how one can make beats using one's bones! – supervised by Amit and Dorothy Shaw. The addition of Zumba definitely made it the most entertaining session!

Lubaina Bandukwala returned to close the day, and in the final session we learnt how to write a story from another's perspective. This was so engaging; I loved every bit of it! I was really honoured to be a part of the event. The workshops arranged for us by eminent writers and illustrators were thought provoking, and will surely help us in our journey of becoming brilliant authors. The entire day was well-structured, and all the activities were planned in a way that we learnt while having fun. I cannot thank the team enough for providing us with this wonderful platform and for making our stay extremely comfortable.

– Sara Agrawal

When I was selected for the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet, I was very happy because I was going to meet all my friends from the **Muskaan** Literature Festival held in January. The venue of the Literary Meet, the ITC Royal Bengal, was very impressive. I really enjoyed all the sessions. In the session facilitated by Pinaki De, my sister and I were the only ones able to respond when asked if our parents allow us to sketch, because our mother is an artist!

I thank **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** and the **Muskaan** team for inviting me to such a magnificent event. My *muskaan* (smile) never stops when I remember the day. We will remember these moments forever.

– Devyani Bharadwaj

Visiting the City Of Joy for such a wonderful event, attended by budding intellectuals, was a treat for the mind and soul. It was a source of utmost pleasure and joy to meet child authors and some new faces too. We had so much comfort and learning. The sessions were really good. I feel immensely honoured to have been a part of this highly informative meet.

I got to learn a lot. The sessions were full of meaningful interactions, and the mentors were absolutely fabulous. I am

extremely grateful to the panel for selecting my essay, and even more thankful to the team for the consideration, care and gentleness they showed throughout the event. The lit meet was really well organised, and we did not face any problem, all thanks to **Muskaan** and every single person affiliated with **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. I extend warm regards to all who made this event a success.

– Aadeba Riyaz

Parentspeak

I must express my sincere appreciation for Mansi Kamdar Shah and Team **Muskaan** for creating this amazing family for all of us. We are extremely grateful for this reunion of all the young authors, and for the comforting journey and stay we enjoyed. The event, though short-lived, was extremely enlightening and empowering for the children. They might go back to their daily routines, but I am sure **Muskaan** has forever brought a *muskaan* (smile) to their lives, with the added responsibility of taking up writing more seriously!

– Geetanjali Malhotra
Parent of child author Devisha Malhotra

I must extend my heartfelt thanks to Team **Muskaan**, especially Mansi Kamdar Shah and Sumitra Ray, for providing this wonderful opportunity to the children again, and an amazing holiday for the parents. We had a great time, and the kids got to learn a lot. The only feedback I would like to give is a request that we keep being called for such beautifully organised programmes! You have really encouraged the kids to the extent that Saina now wants to write more. I am really happy to see the love and encouragement for our child authors. My husband and I would like to thank **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** once again for the wonderful and memorable days spent in Kolkata.

– Esha Sarin
Parent of child author Saina Sarin

I want to thank Mansi Kamdar Shah, Sumitra Ray and Cathy Tongper for this wonderful meet. We enjoyed every bit of it. Everything was so well-planned and beautifully managed. All of you are doing a fabulous job. The kids really did not want to go back home! We remain highly grateful to have been a part of this special event

– Charu Garg, Parent

We thank you for giving the children another opportunity like this. As usual, the teamwork was amazing, and everything was well-planned. The standards have been set so high that other literature fests may not be able to match up!

– Smita Bharadwaj, Parent

It was a great experience seeing all the child authors under one roof for the **Muskaan** Summer Literary Meet. Thanks a lot to Team **Muskaan**! The meet started in a very innovative manner with a performance by 'Mr Illusion', Sourav Barman, for the child authors. As parents, we enjoyed every bit of that moment. All the members of the organising team were innovative, informative and encouraging to the child authors. Many thanks yet again to Mansi, Sumitra and Cathy!

– Father of Anushka Dalal

Forging Ahead



Manisha Jain, Anindita Chatterjee, Apra Kuchhal, Sundeep Bhutoria, Sushma Sethia, Shelja Singh and Preeti Mehta at the meeting in Kolkata

Since its inception, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** has been dedicated to the advancement of socio-cultural knowledge, humanitarian causes and eco-friendly practices. Over the years, the Foundation has worked tirelessly for the promotion of culture, education, literature, gender equality and women's empowerment. Along with individuals and organisations with a similar vision as itself, the Foundation has been devoted to the implementation of various social welfare projects in the country. To that end, much of the Foundation's activities are being helmed by the brilliant **Ehsaas Women**, who've come together from various corners of the country to work for the advancement of society. Over the years, it has been their single-minded dedication to making every single event and programme a resounding success that has solidified the Foundation's name as one of the best and most recognised in the country.



Sushma Sethia, Shelja Singh and Preeti Mehta

As the Foundation expands its reach and takes its activities to different cities, the **Ehsaas Women** recently came together in Kolkata to discuss restarting the Foundation's signature initiative **Aakhar** and undertaking different projects in the city of Jodhpur. Here are a few glimpses from the meeting and a dinner.



Shefali Agarwal and Apra Kuchhal



Nilisha Agarwal and Esha Dutta



Sushil Poddar

Nidhi Poddar

'ब्लेज: एक बेटे की अग्निपरीक्षा' की शुरुआत हमारे सपने से हुई: सुशील और निधि पोद्दार

प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन द्वारा आयोजित 'कलम' फरीदाबाद की यह कई मायनों में अनूठी शाम थी। अतिथि के रूप में उपस्थित वक्ताद्वय सुशील पोद्दार और निधि पोद्दार ने आत्मविकास और साहस की ऐसी प्रेरक कथा सुनाई, जो ए हमें यह समझाती है अकसर स्वास्थ्य की महत्ता हमें तभी समझ आती है, जब हम उसे खो देते हैं। परंतु, इस खोए हुए 'मित्र' को वापस पाने की कठिन यात्रा भी हमें आत्मावलोकन, आत्म-परिवेक्षण और प्रतिदान के असंख्य अवसर प्रदान कर सकती है। आरंभ में आयोजकों की ओर से नीरू ने अतिथिद्वय का स्वागत किया और फाउंडेशन की कला, साहित्य, संस्कृति और महिला सशक्तीकरण से जुड़ी गतिविधियों की चर्चा की। उन्होंने 'अपनी भाषा अपने लोग' की सोच से आयोजित 'कलम' कार्यक्रम के बारे में भी से बताया।

वक्ताद्वय का परिचय देते हुए उन्होंने कहा कि सुशील भारत सरकार के वरिष्ठ अधिकारी हैं। आपने आईएसएम धनबाद से बीटेक किया और खनन-उद्योग में पांच साल तक सेवाएं देने के बाद 1994 में भारतीय सिविल सेवा में शामिल हो गए। निधि उनकी धर्मपत्नी और बेहद निडर चरित्र की महिला हैं, जिन्होंने अपने साहसी और प्रेरक बेटे दिव्यांश आत्मन के पालन-पोषण के दौरान की विकट चुनौतियों से जूझते हुए अपनी पुस्तक 'ब्लेज' के नायक के तौर पर उन्हें रखा। नीरू ने 'ब्लेज' की भूमिका रखते हुए पूछा कि क्या कोई कैंसर जैसी बीमारी से जूझ रहा व्यक्ति अपने परिचारकों, विशेषकर अपने माता-पिता के आत्म-विकास को बढ़ा सकता है? सामान्यतौर पर अवांछित हो जाने, त्याग दिए जाने जैसे अनेक नकारात्मक विचार और व्यवहार धीरे-धीरे और उसके अपनों के मन में घर कर जाते हैं। कैंसर का यह सबसे बुरा स्वरूप है, पर दिव्यांश आत्मन के मामले में ऐसा नहीं हुआ। प्रतिकूल परिस्थितियों में दिव्यांश धैर्य, साहस और दृढ़प्रतिज्ञता का प्रतिकरूप था। उसकी जीवन-यात्रा हमें बताती है कि जब आप संकट से चतुर्दिश घिरे हों और सारे रास्ते बंद होते दिख रहे हों, तब भी उम्मीद की लौ थाम कर आगे का रास्ता तलाशा जा सकता है। नीरू ने आगे के संवाद के लिए अहसास वूमन प्रिया वशिष्ठ को आमंत्रित किया।

प्रिया ने पूछा कि 'ब्लेज: एक बेटे की अग्निपरीक्षा' से आपने दिव्यांश आत्मन को अमर बना दिया। वह कौन सा पल था जिसने आपको अपने आत्मिक दुख को पन्ने पर उतारने की प्रेरणा दी। उत्तर में सुशील ने कहा कि हम दोनों लेखक नहीं हैं, न ही मैं अतिथि हूँ। कैंसर से पूरे विश्व में रोज हजारों लोग मर रहे हैं, ढेरों किताबें भी इस पर हैं, लेकिन दिव्यांश में जो था वह औरों से अलग था। कैंसर एक प्रेडिक्टबल बीमारी है। इसके इलाज का एक प्रोटोकॉल भर है। डॉक्टर को भी यह पता नहीं होता कि इस दवा का मरीज पर क्या असर होगा है? इतनी प्रेडिक्टबल बीमारी में जो चीज अनप्रेडिक्टबल होती है, और जिसे डॉक्टर और मेडिकल साइंस भी नहीं समझता, वह है मरीज की आत्मशक्ति, उसकी प्राणशक्ति। जो हमने अपने बेटे में देखा।

वैज्ञानिक ढंग से अपनी बात कहते हुए सुशील ने कहा कि दिव्यांश ने 'पेन' को

ऊर्जा में परिवर्तित कर दिया। उन्होंने दिव्यांश के एक पत्र का हवाला देते हुए कहा कि दिव्यांश की कहानी एक कॉमन मैन की कहानी है। वह हमारे, आपके सबके घरों में हो सकता है। 2015 में योरुसलम में दिव्यांश के ट्रांसप्लांटेशन के फेल हो जाने से जुड़े अनुभवों की चर्चा करते हुए उन्होंने दिव्यांश द्वारा उस दौरान ईश्वर को संबोधित कर लिखी गई संघर्ष, साहस और संवेदना से जुड़ी मार्मिक कविता भी सुनाई। निधि ने कहा मेरे लिए 'ब्लेज' की शुरुआत एक सपने से हुई कि आगे जाकर दिव्यांश अपनी कहानी लोगों को सुनाएगा। उसके जाने के बाद मुझे लगा कि मैं इतनी कमजोर नहीं हूँ कि उस सपने को छोड़ दूँ। बस तरीका बदल गया दिव्यांश की जगह हम लोग आ गए। इस किताब के माध्यम से हम उसे वापस लाना चाहते थे। इस रास्ते पर चलते हुए मैंने भी बहुत कुछ सीखा और जाना। मैंने पाया कि दिव्यांश का एक विराट रूप है। 22 वर्ष की उम्र में उसने पूरा एक जीवन जी लिया। मैंने पाया कि मैं दिव्यांश को फिर से जन्म देना चाहती हूँ, लेकिन उसने ही अपनी मां को जन्म दिया। मैंने यह भी पाया कि सफलता का मतलब सिर्फ चोटी पर पहुंचना नहीं है। उस रास्ते पर कैसे चलते हैं और अपने जैसे लोगों के लिए कैसे रास्ता सुगम बनाते हैं!

निधि ने कहा कि दिव्यांश ऐसी कहानी देकर गया है, जो हर घर में पहुंच रहा है। उन्होंने कहा कि प्रेम को जानना, उसमें डूबना बहुत जरूरी है। मैंने यह जाना कि हममें असीम क्षमताएं हैं, बस हम यह जान नहीं पाते। उसने बारह साल की उम्र में अपनी डेस्टिनी जान ली और डरने के बजाय अपने कर्म पर ध्यान दिया। सुशील और निधि ने किताब बनने की लंबी प्रक्रिया, कर्म का महत्त्व, लेखक बनने की यात्रा, इस क्रम में लेखकों से मुलाकात, उस वक्त की भावनाएं, दिव्यांश की कविताओं के संकलन, उनके मनोबल, उनके विचार, बीमारी पर समाज की सोच, परिवार की जिम्मेदारियों, दिव्यांश की बीमारी के दौरान के दस साल के उनके जीवन बारे में, उनके नाम पर अलग-अलग शिक्षण संस्थानों में शुरू हुई स्कॉलरशिप पर अपनी बातें साझा की और पुस्तक के मार्मिक अंश का पाठ भी किया। पोद्दार दंपति ने श्रोताओं की जिज्ञासा का भी समाधान किया। अतिथिद्वय का अभिनंदन रोहित जैन, जैन और श्वेता अग्रवाल ने किया।

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



Shweta Aggarwal, Priya Vashist, Rohit J. Jain and Neeru with Nidhi and Sushil Poddar



The audience at the event

Diving Into the Life of Sri Aurobindo



Devdip Ganguli and Gautam Chikermane in conversation with Pooja Poddar Marwah

We have all come across the works of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh — his texts, politics, the battle for independence, philosophies and more. But most of us have never encountered an in-depth reading of who he was. This is why it was a special moment when **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** hosted a session of **The Write Circle**, where editors Devdip Ganguli and Gautam Chikermane spoke about their 2022 book, *Reading Sri Aurobindo*. Hosted at the India International Centre, the discussion focused on Ganguli and Chikermane's scholarly work on the great philosopher, Sri Aurobindo. The session was moderated by Pooja Marwah, **Ehsaas** Woman of Dehradun.

Devdip Ganguli, an educator, imparts various aspects of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy to undergraduate students at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre in Pondicherry. He is also associated with national and international institutes that offer courses on Aurobindo's writings. Gautam Chikermane serves as the vice-president of the Observer Research Foundation and specializes in research areas such as economics, foreign policy, the *Mahabharat*, and, of course, Sri Aurobindo's works. After a welcome speech by Archana Dalmia, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, Marwah began by asking the editors who Sri Aurobindo really was. Chikermane said that Aurobindo can be described as someone who has been 'mercilessly cancelled' over the last 75 years. "Our book is a small attempt to revive his personality," he said. "We call him the 'supramental sage.'" "There are infinite ways of approaching and understanding a personality like him, who touches upon the infinite," said Ganguli. "Even then, you just get a

glimpse.... I see Sri Aurobindo as a "revolutionary" not only in the political sense but also in the spiritual sense.

He did not wish to formulate a new religion, but adapt a unique way of living; he valued the past of Indian culture while also being forward-thinking in his vision."

Marwah asked Ganguli for his unbiased views on the sage, since he and three generations of his family have been involved with the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. "I do not have an unbiased view!" said Ganguli. "I grew up in an environment where it was my light and air. Many complain that his writing is too difficult. But he wrote in a way in which his words were a force in action." The speakers also focused on Sri Aurobindo's philosophies, his spiritual collaborator Mirra Alfassa, and *Savitri*, his longest poem in English. Anantmala Potdar, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, delivered the vote of thanks, and Karuna Goenka, **Ehsaas** Woman of Delhi, felicitated the authors.

The Write Circle Delhi was presented by Shree Cement Limited in association with India International Centre and with the support of **Ehsaas** Women of Delhi



Archana Dalmia



Anantmala Potdar



Karuna Goenka felicitates Devdip Ganguli and Gautam Chikermane

साहित्य उदासीनता और भूलने के प्रति एक विद्रोह है: गीतांजलि श्री



“सीमा एक ऐसी चीज है, जो रोजमर्रा में भी, हमारे अवचेतन-चेतन में, हमारे जीवन में, हमारे अतीत में जगह-जगह से अपने को जमाती जाती है, और हर समय हम पर एक चुनौती बनकर आती है कि हम सीमा पहचानें और सोचें कि कैसे उसे लांघना है, पुल बनाना है और बरतना है।” यह कहना है इंटरनेशनल बुकर पुरस्कार से अपनी कृति ‘रेत समाधि’ के लिए सम्मानित लेखिका गीतांजलि श्री का। वे प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित ‘कलम’ जयपुर में बतौर अतिथि वक्ता बोल रही थीं। आयोजकों की ओर से अहसास वूमेन जयपुर, राजस्थान और मध्य भारत की मानद समन्वयक अपरा कुच्छल ने स्वागत और धन्यवाद ज्ञापन दिया। उन्होंने फाउंडेशन के साथ ही ‘कलम’ की गतिविधियों की जानकारी दी। उन्होंने बताया कि फाउंडेशन ने जयपुर और पटना से शुरू कर आज दुनिया भर में ‘कलम’ के 600 से अधिक सत्र आयोजित कर लिए हैं।

अतिथि वक्ता का परिचय देते हुए कुच्छल ने बताया कि अब तक श्री के 5 उपन्यास ‘माई’, ‘हमारा शहर उस बरस’, ‘तिरोहित’, ‘खाली जगह’ और ‘रेत-समाधि’ तथा 5 कहानी संग्रह ‘अनुगूँज’, ‘वैराग्य’, ‘मार्च, माँ और साकूरा’, ‘यहां हाथी रहते थे’ और ‘प्रतिनिधि कहानियाँ’ प्रकाशित हो चुकी हैं। विश्व की कई भाषाओं में आपकी रचनाओं के अनुवाद हो चुके हैं। आप थियेटर के लिए भी लिखती हैं। श्री को मिले सम्मानों की सूची दो पृष्ठों में है। आपके नाम के साथ लगा ‘श्री’ आपकी माता जी का नाम है, जो अपने आपमें महिला सशक्तीकरण का परिचायक है। कुच्छल ने संवादकर्ता जयश्री पेरीवाल का भी विस्तार से परिचय दिया और बताया कि आप दुनिया भर में जानीमानी शिक्षाविद हैं।

पेरीवाल ने प्रश्न की शुरुआत इस वाक्य से की कि आपने अपनी कहानियों से सीमाओं को पार कर रूढ़ियों को तोड़कर एक नई पहचान की खोज के साथ भारतीय लेखन को विश्व मानचित्र पर रखा है। ‘रेत समाधि’ की वृद्धा नायिका का इतना बिंदास चरित्र आपने कैसे गढ़ा? उत्तर में श्री ने प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की विश्वव्यापी साहित्यिक गतिविधियों की सराहना की। उन्होंने कहा कि जहां तक सीमा का सवाल है, वह चारों ओर है। अभी यहां भी है। लेकिन जैसे ही सीमा का एहसास होता है, यह बात दिमाग में आती है कि उसे कैसे तोड़ा जाए। आपने अम्मा के किरदार की बात कही, तो मैं साफ कर दूँ कि सीमा लांघना जिम्मेदारियों से मुक्त होने की बात नहीं है। हम हमेशा ऐसे सवालों से जूझते हैं। औरत को एक उम्र के बाद एकतरह की भीतरी आजादी मिल पाती है, जिस पर शायद पहले वह अपने परिवार की व्यस्तताओं, जरूरतों और जिम्मेदारियों के चलते नहीं सोच पाती। भूमिका भी हमें एक सीमा में बांधती है। हम उसे पहचान पाएं और उस पर पुल बना पाएं, यह भी बेहतर है।



The audience at the event



Geetanjali Shree



Jaysree Periwal



Apra Kuchhal



Deependra Rana

बुढ़ापा जीवन की ऐसी अवस्था है, जिससे हम सबको एक न एक दिन गुजरना है। आपने अपने लेखन और विचारों में उम्र के साथ आने वाले अवसाद, अलगाव और अकेलेपन, शरीर में आने वाली कमजोरी और खुद के अनुपयुक्त होने के भावों का इतना विशद वर्णन किया है। क्या यह कोई चेतावनी है? क्या यह परिवार-मित्रों का चक्र है, क्या यह आर्थिक सुरक्षा है कि कोई अपने आपको कैसे जीवंत रख पाए? श्री का उत्तर था कि मैं कोई वैद्य नहीं हूँ कि इसका कोई नुस्खा, कोई दवा आपको बता दूँ। मैं यह भी स्पष्ट कर दूँ कि कोई लेखक सीख देने के लिए नहीं लिखता। लेखक का अपना भी उद्वेग है। वह उसे भी समझना चाहता है। वह अपने भीतर को, बाहर को, दूसरे के भीतर-बाहर को, अतीत को, न जाने क्या कुछ समझना चाहता है, तो वह उस उथल-पुथल को समझने की कोशिश करता है। हमारे चारों ओर ऐसे बुजुर्ग हैं, जो हमें सिखाते हैं। मेरी मां 96 साल की हैं, जरूर उनका शरीर थिथिल है, पर मन में उनके अभी उर्जा है, जिजीविषा है। वे भी हमें सिखा रहे हैं कि उम्र के बदलाव के साथ भी हम अपने भीतर उमंग को जीवित रख सकते हैं।

एक सवाल के उत्तर में श्री ने कहा कि लेखन हमें याद रखने की महिमा समझाता है। हम लिखते इसलिए हैं कि हम इन लोगों को भूल न जाएं, इन्हें दरकिनार न कर दें, अनदेखा, अनसुना न कर दें। साहित्य उदासीनता और भूलने के प्रति एक विद्रोह है। हम लोग विचारधारा को कई बार बहुत महत्व दे देते हैं। श्री ने अपनी मां के सैर के समय उनसे मिले एक ट्रांसजेंडर के साथ की बातों को भी शेयर किया। श्री ने उत्तर प्रदेश और दिल्ली की पृष्ठभूमि से जुड़े सवाल का उत्तर देते हुए कहा कि आप अगर संवेदनशील हैं तो प्रेरणा आपको हर चीज से मिलती है। अपने को व्यक्त करने की ललक सभी में होती है। उत्तर प्रदेश से मुझे शिक्षा मिली। उसने मुझे खिचड़ी ज़बान और खिचड़ी दिमाग दिया। उसने मुझे अपनी जड़, अपने स्वाद, अपनी ज़बान से मुझे जोड़े रखा। श्री ने हिंदी और एशियाई साहित्य में अनुवाद से जुड़े सवाल का भी उत्तर दिया। उन्होंने कहा कि अंग्रेजी को हम इतना क्यों कोसते हैं। यह सही है कि अंग्रेजी इस समय बहुत शक्तिशाली भाषा है। जबकि फ्रेंच में इस कृति का अनुवाद पहले आया, पर उसकी चर्चा नहीं होती। हमें दूसरी भाषाओं को बढ़ावा देने पर जोर देना चाहिए। उन्होंने भारतीय भाषाओं में अनुवाद को बढ़ावा देने पर बल दिया। श्री ने ‘रेत समाधि’ के अंग्रेजी अनुवाद से जुड़े सवाल का भी बहुत विस्तार से उत्तर दिया और डेजी रॉकवेल के अनुवाद की तारीफ की। उन्होंने श्रोताओं के सवाल-जवाब सत्र में भी हिस्सा लिया। आयोजकों की ओर से महाप्रबंधक दीपेंद्र राणा ने अतिथि का अभिनंदन किया।

अहसास वूमेन के सौजन्य से आयोजित कलम जयपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर आईटीसी राजपूताना और वी केयर का सहयोग मिला

Journeying Through Odissi



Avirup Sengupta



Raina Roy

On a chilly spring evening in Edinburgh, Scotland, the accomplished and internationally acclaimed Odissi performer and choreographer, Avirup Sengupta, graced a packed audience at the Indian Consulate General with his warmth, talent and undeniable charm. His performance left the spectators not only transfixed but also transported to a realm of artistry and cultural brilliance.

The event commenced with an introduction by the Consul General, Bijay Selvaraj, who extended his gratitude to **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, the **Ek Mulakat** initiative and the Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs) for their support and collaboration in bringing Sengupta's

performance to Scotland's capital, also known as the "Athens of the North". Professor Bashabi Fraser, CBE, the director of ScoTs, took the stage next and introduced Sengupta to the audience, highlighting his extensive training in Odissi, neo-classical dance and various other dance forms. She further acknowledged Sengupta's numerous prestigious awards and his notable performances both nationally and internationally. The director also highlighted his work as a social reformer, particularly his efforts in fostering empathetic communities through performing arts, focusing on his work with children with special needs.

Dressed in a resplendent green silk *dhoti*, Sengupta exuded a charismatic aura as he

embarked on a lecture demonstration titled *The Journey of Odissi Dance*. As he explained and illustrated his points through PowerPoint slides, Sengupta guided the audience through the evolution of this ancient dance form, tracing its origins from the sacred temples of Odisha to its transformation into a vibrant and dynamic art form now showcased on modern stages. Through demonstrations, the dancer demystified the language of dance, making it accessible to a diverse audience. His expressive use of *mudras*, *tala*, *raga* and fluid movements provided an understanding and appreciation of the narratives conveyed through Odissi.

Following the lecture demonstration, Sengupta delighted the audience with a mesmerising dance sequence, characterised by eloquence and grace. Joining him on stage was his talented disciple, Raina Roy, a Master's student at Manchester University. Raina's graceful rendition of a *pallavi* enthralled the audience.

As a final gift to the city of Edinburgh, Sengupta choreographed a dance piece to the melodious tune of *Purano Sei Diner Kotha* by Rabindranath Tagore, cleverly adapting it from *Auld Lang Syne*, the iconic song by Scotland's renowned bard, Robert Burns. This artistic expression of the Indo-Scottish connection struck an emotional chord with the audience, evoking a sense of shared heritage and cultural understanding. The performance culminated in resounding applause, a testament to the impact



Bijay Selvaraj, Consul General of India in Edinburgh, addresses the audience

Sengupta's talent and creativity had on the hearts of those present.

After the performance, Sengupta engaged with the audience, answering their questions and responding to their comments. The interaction demonstrated his approachability and affability and cemented the audience's genuine interest. Consul Satya Veer Singh conveyed a vote of thanks to conclude the evening, expressing appreciation for Sengupta's talk. The session wrapped up with a lavish dinner hosted by the Indian Consulate General, where the artists mingled with the audience.

Ek Mulakat Edinburgh was presented in association with Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies and the Indian Consulate in Edinburgh



The audience at the event



Avirup Sengupta with Bashabi Fraser

Turning Spaces Into Stories



Tapan Bandyopadhyay

Shyamal Bhattacharya

is a book to me. I kept unravelling the stories buried in people and giving them the shape of my stories and later, novels.”

The lives of writers often make for tales as fascinating as their art. To learn about the trajectory of the prolific Bengali writer and translator, Tapan Bandyopadhyay, whose novel *Birbal* won him the Sahitya Akademi award in 2022, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised a session of **Aakhar** in association with Purba Paschim. On that memorable evening in Kolkata, Bandyopadhyay conversed with the Sahitya Akademi-winning Bengali author, Shyamal Bhattacharya, to walk the audience into the heart of the Sundarbans and Baduria, places which occupy a significant space in his *oeuvre*.

Soumitra Mitra, the Foundation’s Advisor for Bengali Language, Theatre and Film Programmes, introduced the author.

Bandyopadhyay remembered, “I grew up in a village called Baduria, where even a library was not to be found 10 miles from my house.

My first introduction to literature happened with Tagore’s *Kishalay* in Class III. I wrote a quatrain in my maths copy once and thereafter, wrote a rhyme or two every day. When I read about Premendra Mitra winning the Sahitya Akademi, an award that I knew nothing about and yet sounded important to me, curiously enough, I also wanted to win it.”

When asked what caused Bandyopadhyay to transition from being a poet to a short story writer and then a novelist, he elaborated, “The job of a civil servant took me to the interiors of rural Bengal for over a decade. I heard and experienced diverse stories that I felt I could not do justice to within the limited lines of poetry. Every person

In a jovial mood, Bandyopadhyay shared many anecdotes that went into his stories, like *Rajyopaler Oshukh* or *Mukhyomontrir Upohaar*, where satire is directed at people in power. He highlighted that his short stories till the 90s were saturated with the Sundarbans, after which he turned to novels. A lot of archival research in the National Library and other places helped him craft *Malabkaushik* and *Tatwamoshi* to perfection.

Bandyopadhyay believes history did a disservice to *Birbal* by not recognising him as the chief adviser of Akbar. “Many popular stories about *Birbal* present him as nothing more than a jester. I read *Akbarnama*, Vincent A. Smith’s *Akbar: The Great Mogul*, Ishwari Prasad’s works, and a lot more to unearth the true *Birbal*. There were four Hindu *navratnas* in Akbar’s court, but who do you think influenced Akbar’s pro-Hindu decisions, like the abolition of

Jizya or the translation of many Hindu mythological texts into Persian? It was all for *Birbal*, who made Akbar one of the greatest Mughals. I brought this *Birbal* to light in *Birbal*, which won the Sahitya Akademi.”

A prolific writer and translator, Bandyopadhyay has significantly contributed to the glory of Bengali literature and continues to do so. While praising him, Bhattacharya mentioned that he learnt the “art of living” from the author, who lives close to the soil.

Aakhar Kolkata was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Purba Paschim and Anandabazar Patrika Online



Geetanjali Shree



Aanchal Garha

जो होता है वह आपको भी एक तरह से चकित करता है: गीतांजलि श्री



से बातें आती हैं और तरह-तरह से जुड़ती हैं। अगर मैं किसी की जीवनी नहीं लिख रही हूँ तो फिर कभी-कभी बहुतों को जोड़कर वह एक किरदार बनाता है। इसलिए मैं अलग-अलग करके तो आपको बता नहीं पाऊंगी।

“एक तरफ बहुत खुली है दुनिया, तो दूसरी तरफ बहुत संकीर्ण होती चली गई है। एक तरह का मोनो कल्चर फैलता चला गया है। एक भाषा का जबरदस्त वर्चस्व फैलता चला गया है। इसमें गड़बड़ यह है कि एक पदक्रम बन गया है और दूसरे को कमतर आंका जा रहा है, जो चिंता की बात है।” यह कहना है अपनी कृति ‘रेत समाधि’ के लिए इंटरनेशनल बुकर पुरस्कार से सम्मानित लेखिका गीतांजलि श्री का। वे प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित ‘कलम’ रायपुर में बतौर अतिथि वक्ता बोल रही थीं। आयोजकों की ओर से अहसास वूमन रायपुर सृष्टि त्रिवेदी ने स्वागत करते हुए फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियों की चर्चा की और ‘कलम’ के बारे में जानकारी दी। अल्लामा इकबाल की ‘हजारों साल नगिस अपनी बेनूरी पे रोती है, बड़ी मुश्किल से होता है चमन में दीदावर पैदा,’ के साथ उन्होंने श्री का परिचय दिया।



Kirti Kirdatt and Srishti Trivedi

संवाद अहसास वूमन रायपुर आंचल गरचा ने किया। उन्होंने पूछा कि आप कैसा महसूस करती हैं यह सोचकर कि एक ऐसी कहानी जो आपके दिमाग से निकलकर आपके दिल से गुजरती हुई पन्नों पर उकेर दी जाती है? आप इस कहानी को जैसा रूप देना चाहती थीं, वैसा रूप इसने पाया और ऐसी लोकप्रियता भी इसने पाई? श्री ने फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमन का धन्यवाद दिया और कहा कि पूरी तरह से यह कभी नहीं होता है। एक तो आपको मालूम नहीं होता कि आपने पूरी तरह क्या सोचा था कि क्या आप उसे बना देंगे। यह तो ऐसी बात है जिसकी पहले से पक्के तौर पर कोई कल्पना नहीं कर सकते हैं। जो होता है वह आपको भी एक तरह से चकित करता है। आपके लिए भी वह एक नई चीज होती है। आप भी उसे डिस्कवर करते हैं। उसके संग-संग चलते हैं। और कुछ बनती है। पाठक ही उसकी जूरी हैं। अलग-अलग पाठक उसको नए-नए तरह से, अपनी तरह से देखते हैं, तब आप भी डिस्कस करते हैं। यह एक ऑनगोइंग सिलसिला होता है। यह खत्म नहीं होता है। यह बहुत खूबसूरत है। उन्होंने कहा कि मैंने यह सोचा था, कि मैं ऐसा करूंगी और ऐसा मैंने कर डाला। अगर यह मेरे मन में आ गया तो फिर आगे मुझे लिखने की जरूरत नहीं पड़ेगी। मैं यही कहूंगी, यह एक यात्रा है, मंजिल नहीं।

इम्तियाज अली की फिल्म ‘तमाशा’ में इरशाद कामिल के लिखे गीत ‘तिरकित ताल से लो चली कहानी, पनघट काल से लो चली कहानी, हो सरपट दौड़ती है फकत जुबानी’ के जिक्र के साथ गरचा ने कहा कि आपकी कहानी रेंगती नहीं, सरपट दौड़ती है। कहां से आते हैं शब्दों के जादू? यह कहानी आपके अंदर थी या आपके आसपास की दुनिया से? मतलब, आपने कहानी कहां से चुनी? श्री का उत्तर था, मैं इसकी तो जासूसी नहीं कर पाऊंगी कि कहानी कहां से आई। सब तरफ से, भीतर से भी बाहर से भी। इसको मैं ऐसे बता नहीं पाऊंगी कि कहानी कहां से आई। तरह-तरह

जहां तक आप ओरल ट्रेडिशन की बात कर रही हैं तो हमें उस परंपरा में पली-बढ़ी हूँ। अभी कल ही बिलासपुर में इस पर बात हो रही थी कि बहुत से पश्चिम के देशों में मौखिक परंपरा पुरानी पड़ चुकी है, कभी थी, पर हमारे यहां अभी भी चल रही है। मेरे बचपन से लेकर आज तक बहुत कुछ उसी तरह है तो मुझे जरा भी हैरानी नहीं है। यह चीज मेरे लेखन में भी आई है और आखिरी बात मैं कहूंगी कि मैं आपको

प्रतिक्रिया दे रही हूँ, जवाब नहीं दे रही हूँ। अकसर हम भूल जाते हैं कि हर कला में हर कला का समावेश होता है, तो यह नहीं है कि नृत्य है तो सिर्फ इसमें मुद्रा होगी, साहित्य है तो सिर्फ शब्द वह भी लिटरल मीनिंग में सिर्फ शब्द ही होगा और संगीत है तो सिर्फ सुर ही होगा। सब तत्वों का समावेश हर कला में होता है, अलग-अलग तरह से होता है। कहीं आप लय पर ज्यादा जाएं, कहीं पे आप किसी और चीज पर जाएं, तो यह सब को जोड़कर ही एक पूरी इमारत बनेगी। तो मुझे लगता है कि हर कृति और शायद वही एक कथाकार की अलग-अलग कृतियां, अलग-अलग तरह से खेल करेंगी हर बार और उनके गठजोड़ से

कोई चीज बनेगी।

इंटरनेशनल बुकर पुरस्कार के स्वीकरण व्याख्यान के उल्लेख पर श्री ने कहा कि ‘रेत समाधि’ किताब हर चीज में बहुलवाद को लेकर चलती है। जिसमें हर चीज का, हर चीज से नाता-रिश्ता है। सिर्फ जिंदा चीजों का नहीं, बल्कि निर्जीव चीजों का, सड़क है, दरवाजा है, चरित्र हैं। हर चीज में जब स्मृति आ जाती है, तो स्मृति उसे जिंदा कर देती है। उन्होंने कहा यह अनेकता और विभिन्नता को परस्पर सम्मान देने की बात है, जिस पर न केवल भारत में बल्कि पूरी दुनिया में जोखिम आ चुकी है। श्री ने पर्यावरण, संस्कृति, भाषा, ‘रेत समाधि’ के अनुवाद, डेजी रॉकवेल, लेखक के लिए पुरस्कार या पाठक, का भी उत्तर दिया। उन्होंने सवाल-जवाब सत्र में साहित्य, साहित्यकार, स्त्री, नारीवाद और राजनीति से जुड़े सवाल का भी विस्तार से उत्तर दिया। धन्यवाद वक्तव्य में त्रिवेदी ने अहसास वूमन कृति कृदत्त सहित प्रायोजक का आभार प्रकट किया। आयोजकों की ओर से श्री का अभिनंदन आलोक पुतुल ने किया।

अहसास वूमन के सौजन्य से आयोजित कलम रायपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट।

The audience at the event



सच्चे लेखक के ऊपर दबाव बाहर से नहीं, उसके भीतर से आते हैं: गीतांजलि श्री

Garima Tiwari

Geetanjali Shree

“जब मैं लिखती हूँ, तो दर्शक-पाठक किसी के बारे में नहीं सोचती। मुझे किसी पाठक की रस्ती भर भी चिंता नहीं है। अगर यह हुई तो वह आपको तरह-तरह की हिदायत देगी।” यह कहना है लेखिका गीतांजलि श्री का। अपनी कृति ‘रेत समाधि’ के लिए इंटरनेशनल बुकर पुरस्कार से सम्मानित श्री प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित ‘कलम’ बिलासपुर में बतौर अतिथि वक्ता बोल रही थीं। आयोजकों की ओर से अभिकल्प फाउंडेशन की अन्वेषा जौलकर ने श्री का स्वागत किया और फाउंडेशन के साथ ही ‘कलम’ के बारे में जानकारी दी। अतिथि वक्ता का परिचय देते हुए उन्होंने ‘माई’, ‘हमारा शहर उस बरस’, ‘तिरोहित’, ‘खाली जगह’ आदि कृतियों की चर्चा के साथ ही श्री को मिले सम्मान और फेलोशिप का जिक्र किया और 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। उन्होंने वार्ताकार साहित्य अनुरागी अहसास वूमेन बिलासपुर डॉ गरिमा तिवारी का भी परिचय दिया।

तिवारी ने श्री से पूछा कि आपकी पहली कहानी ‘बेलपत्र’ 1987 में हंस में प्रकाशित हुई थी, और अभी मई 2022 में आपको बुकर अवार्ड मिला है, तो आप अपनी इस करीब 35 वर्षों की लेखकीय यात्रा के बारे में बताएं? श्री ने बताया कि ये जो दो पड़ाव हैं, ये दो राह के पड़ाव हैं। पुरस्कार और लेखन की राह अलग-अलग है। इस राह पर ज्यादातर साहित्यकार नहीं चलते। हंस में मेरी तीन कहानियां प्रकाशित हुई थी। यह मेरी दूसरी कहानी थी। मैंने बहुत देर से लिखना शुरू किया। पहली कहानी मैंने तब लिखी, जब मैं तीस की हो चुकी थी। इतना विलंब से लिखने से मेरे भीतर बहुत कुछ कुलबुला रहा था, तो मैंने कई कहानियां लिखीं। मेरे भाई और पति ने कहा कि इन्हें कहीं छपने के लिए भेजो। मैंने हंस और राजकमल को भेजा। दोनों ने ही इसे स्वीकार कर लिया। राजेन्द्र यादव हंस के संपादक थे, उन्होंने विशेष परिचय के साथ एक तरह से मुझे लांच किया।

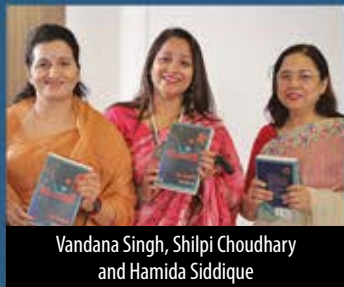
अपनी किताबों में थी उतनी ही उनकी शख्सियत भी असल में थी। उन्होंने इतना कुछ देखा था। वे खुद में एक किताब थीं। उनसे मिलने से ही कुछ मिलता था। मैं अपनी किताब घर में सबसे पहले अपनी मां को दिया और बाहर कृष्णा जी को दिया था। ‘रेत समाधि’ को उन्होंने पढ़ा और बहुत बढ़ावा दिया। उन्होंने जाने से कुछ दिन पहले कहा था कि यह बहुत बड़ी किताब है।

श्री ने ‘रेत समाधि’ के रचनाकर्म से जुड़े अनुभव साझा किया। उन्होंने कहा कि लेखन एक प्रक्रिया है। आप उसके अंजाम के बारे में नहीं जान सकते। आप कोई क्लोन नहीं बना रहे होते। आपके पास एक मिट्टी है। आपको पूरी तरह से असफल होने के लिए तैयार होना पड़ता है। उन्होंने कहा कि आप हमेशा अपनी अभिव्यक्ति को तराशते रहते हैं। श्री ने ‘रेत समाधि’ में परिवार से जुड़े एक अंश का पाठ भी किया। श्री ने कहा कि सच्चे लेखक के ऊपर दबाव बाहर से नहीं, उसके भीतर से आते हैं। श्री ने बताया कि उनका एक नया उपन्यास लगभग तैयार है। पर उसका फाइनल ड्राफ्ट देखना बाकी है। श्री ने कार्यक्रम में उपस्थित दर्शकों के सवाल-जवाब का भी उत्तर दिया। उन्होंने कहा कि कुछ पुरस्कारों ने अपनी विश्वसनीयता बरकरार रखी है। न जाने कितनी किताबें ऐसी हैं जो किसी पुरस्कार से बेहतर हैं।

एक सवाल के उत्तर में श्री ने कहा कि सबको शिक्षा मिले, अवसर मिले, अभिव्यक्ति की आजादी मिले, इसके लिए मिलकर प्रयास करना होगा। श्री ने कहा कि लेखक को उसके लेखन का प्लॉट उसके आसपास से ही मिलता है। उन्होंने कहा कि भले ही आज भौगोलिक दूरियां हैं, लेकिन अभी भी न्यूक्लियर फैमिली वाला कंसप्ट हमारे यहां नहीं आया है। आज की बड़ी दिक्कत यह है कि लोगों के पास वक्त नहीं है। पर अभी भी कुछ लोग हैं जो रुक कर, ठहर कर चीजों को देखते हैं। सूर्योदय देखने के लिए आपको ठहरना ही होगा। श्री ने ‘रेत समाधि’ की कथा, उसके पाठ, भाषा, उसकी रचना प्रक्रिया से जुड़े सवाल का विस्तार से उत्तर दिया। उन्होंने कहा कि मैं उस तरह से अपना विश्लेषण नहीं करती पर हमारी वाचिक परंपरा इतनी मजबूत है



Anvesha Jaulkar



Vandana Singh, Shilpi Choudhary
and Hamida Siddique



Anupama Saxena, Purna Hiradhar, Kavita Pujara,
Garima Tiwari and Sunita Mishra



Abhijeet Tiwari

कृष्णा सोबती को आपने अपनी पुस्तक ‘रेत समाधि’ समर्पित की है। आप उन्हें अपना गुरु मानती हैं, उनसे जुड़ा आपका अनुभव कैसा था? के उत्तर में श्री ने कहा कि कृष्णा जी को मैं गुरु मानती हूँ, पर मैं उनके पहले और उनके समकालीन बहुत से लेखकों से मैंने सीखा और उन्हें मानती हूँ। कृष्णा जी से मेरा कोई वैसा संबंध नहीं था। वे बहुत बड़ी थीं और मैं बहुत छोटी। निर्मल वर्मा से भी मेरा बहुत करीबी रिश्ता था। वे उमर का कोई ख्याल नहीं रखते थे। कृष्णा जी से यह दूरी कभी मिटी नहीं। वे बहुत स्नेह देती थीं। ऐसा बहुत बार होता है कि आप किसी के लेखन से बहुत प्रभावित होती हैं, पर उनकी शख्सियत बहुत बार अलग होती है। पर कृष्णा जी जितनी प्रभावशाली

कि वह हमारे पास अपने आप चेतन-अवचेतन में आई ही होगी। फिर मेरा थिएटर से भी जुड़ाव रहा है। वहां मैंने जो चीज सीखी कि सब चीज शब्द में ही सीमित नहीं है। चुप्पी की भी अपनी एक अनुगूंज होती है। आयोजकों की ओर से डॉ अनुपमा सक्सेना ने अतिथियों का अभिनंदन किया। धन्यवाद ज्ञापन अभिजीत तिवारी ने किया।

अहसास वूमेन के सौजन्य से आयोजित कलम बिलासपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। अभिकल्प फाउंडेशन और नई दुनिया ने सहयोगी की भूमिका निभाई।



Richa Jha conducts the workshop with students

Helping Children Hone a Love for Reading

The American author, Fran Lebowitz, had said, “Think before you speak, read before you think”. Indeed, nothing quite helps young minds grow and flourish as much as a healthy love for reading. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under its **Muskaan** initiative, collaborated with the Sadhu Vaswani International School for Girls, New Delhi, to open up a whole new world of imagination to young learners, a feat that can only be accomplished through reading.

To celebrate this joy of reading, the renowned author, Richa Jha, came on board to share her wisdom at an interactive session at the school. Jha writes fiction for children and social observations for adults. She is the founder and publisher of Pickle Yolk Books, an independent children’s publishing house nominated for the prestigious Bologna Prize for Children’s Publisher of

the Year 2022 in Italy, and a three-time finalist as the Best Publisher at the Publishing Next Industry Awards, India.

The young litterateurs could be seen eagerly absorbing the ‘strategies of reading’ as outlined by the guest author-speaker. The mood of the session seemed promising, as the young readers listened intently to what they were told – read intelligently, find new words everywhere and don’t miss any word in a text, especially when it is a difficult one. The session was the outcome of the determined efforts of the English department to nourish the readers’ imagination and intellect, and engage minds in empowering discussions. This is the way to build a constructive framework around global challenges with the help of literature.

*A joint initiative with **Education for All**, this session of **Muskaan** was presented by Shree Cement Limited*



Sumitra Ray addressing the students



The enthusiastic participants had a lot of questions

A Puff Of Death



good capital and offers significant employment opportunities to millions of people. But a look beyond the face of things paints a starkly different picture.

Tobacco is a major threat to humankind; it single-handedly contributes to many serious illnesses, ranging from cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cardiovascular obstructions and heart strokes to diabetes, dental problems and so on. The list is endless. Tobacco contains many hazardous compounds, including several carcinogens, such as nicotine, nitrosamines and polonium 210. Tobacco smoke contains carbon monoxide, herbicides, tars and many other toxic substances that impair the body's defence mechanism and healthy cells. Tobacco consumption costs many millions of lives every year across the globe. To put things in perspective, the World Health Organization states, "[Tobacco] is one of the major causes of death and disease in India and accounts for nearly 1.35 million deaths every year... Nearly 267 million adults (15 years and above) in India (29% of all adults) are users of tobacco, according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey India, 2016-2017. The most prevalent form of tobacco use in India is smokeless tobacco and commonly used products are *khaini*, *gutkha*, betel quid with tobacco and *zarda*. Smoking forms of tobacco used are *bidi*, cigarette and

hookah."

The origins of tobacco consumption take us to the first century CE when people of the Maya Civilisation in South America used to smoke tobacco in sacred ceremonies. Tobacco usage reached up north as the Maya people migrated, and it slowly became a part of many tribes, and, then, bigger communities. The European colonial mission spread tobacco to different parts of the world. The times have evolved, and so have the patterns of tobacco consumption.

But it seems people have thrown all caution to the wind when it comes to smoking or chewing tobacco. The disturbing visuals of the repercussions of consuming tobacco are restricted to statutory warning – mostly ignored – before watching a film in the theatre.

Despite the caveats, why do people continue to smoke?

Smoking a pipe is a colonial legacy Indians have inherited and cherished for a long time now. From the Bengali *babus* of the colonial era smoking a *hookah* to Feluda smoking a pipe, a lot like Sherlock Holmes — the pipe was a marker of the cultural supremacy of a particular class of Indians. But smoking tobacco was never restricted to only the upper echelons of society. It was smoked and consumed in different forms by a huge part of the population, and the scenario has not changed for the better. These practices are often conflated with an individual's sociability. India marked itself on the global map of tobacco cultivation with the establishment of the Imperial Agricultural Research Institute — currently the Indian Council of Agricultural Research — in 1903. The demand for tobacco surged, and to monitor its production and export, different councils and boards were set up post-independence. Tobacco continues to be an important cash crop in the country today that brings

To a certain extent, this nicotine addiction is culturally inherited. Smoking has become a signifier of modernity and masculinity in the worst possible way. It is also seen as a gendered activity, and many cultures do not sanction women smokers when it is more than acceptable for men to smoke. Digital media also plays a crucial role in initiating youngsters into smoking, and the tobacco industry spends huge capital to attract the youth. The popularity of *hookah* bars, mostly among the youth, is a sorry manifestation of this industry's attempt to delude the masses into believing that tobacco consumption can be a source of entertainment.

E-cigarettes, masquerading as a safer way to smoke, also contain a good amount of nicotine, enough to increase the risk of asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions. The need of the hour is to understand that tobacco consumption, in any form, is no better than taking a puff of death. It jeopardises any individual's health, let alone the economic costs that come along with it, regardless of age, gender, race, and other categories of division.

To inform the masses about the dangers of consuming tobacco, its large-scale ramifications in society, and how people must learn to live beyond the clutches of the tobacco epidemic, the Member States of the World Health Organisation created World No Tobacco Day in 1987. It intends to acquaint individuals with the debilitating impact of using tobacco on the health front. Following the passing of Resolution WHA42.19 in 1988, the WHO started celebrating World No Tobacco Day on May 31

every year. The 2023 theme for World No Tobacco Day is 'Grow food, not tobacco'. This shift in focus from the health front to the agricultural sector also has significant reasons. The production of tobacco drastically interferes with the growth of sustainable crops, in that the huge amounts of pesticides and fertilisers used to cultivate tobacco cause lands to lose fertility. Mostly unknown to the public, the tobacco industry converts around 3.5 million hectares of land across the globe for tobacco growing — accelerating deforestation and the global food crisis. The tobacco industry also prides itself in creating

employment opportunities for farmers, but this is far from the reality, because unfair contractual arrangements further reduce the tobacco farmers to abject poverty. It is high time that these issues were addressed. To this end, the 2023 WTND campaign calls on policymakers and governments to look for ways to provide alternative employment opportunities to

tobacco farmers so that they can grow other food crops to sustain themselves. The repercussions of producing and consuming tobacco are too glaring to be overlooked any longer.

Once addicted, the journey towards healthy living by getting rid of tobacco is not a simple one. It requires individual will and determination to undo the wrongs done to one's body and society at large. The nicotine withdrawal symptoms might interfere with a person's life initially, but with professional and personal support, one can take small steps towards the end of the tunnel. All one needs to remember in this overwhelming journey is this: when there is a will, there is a way.

The European colonial mission spread tobacco to different parts of the world. The times have evolved, and so have the patterns of tobacco consumption



ARTWORK BY SUDIPTA KUNDU

Back from the Dead To Speak of Truth



Perumal Murugan



Shobhana Kumar

Aakhar - the joining of letters to form words - holds significant meaning in the creation of literature, regardless of the language or region within India. Our nation is a treasure trove of regional languages and literature, which is a cause for celebration and fills us with pride for the rich diversity it represents.

Keeping this in mind **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** has curated the **Aakhar** initiative to foster the growth of regional literature. Since its inception, the foundation has organised **Aakhar** sessions in various parts of India, with the most recent being the launch in in Coimbatore. This inaugural session featured the Indian author, scholar and literary chronicler,

Perumal Murugan, whose works are critically acclaimed and widely read.

Hosted at Welcomhotel by ITC, Poonam Bafna,

Ehsaas Woman of Coimbatore, delivered the introductory speech, while Roopa Mohandas, **Ehsaas** Woman of Coimbatore, welcomed the audience. Perumal Murugan is highly revered as a writer whose works have enriched the world of Tamil literature. The conversation between the writer and Shobhana Kumar, a memoirist, chronicler and industrial biographer, was one to be remembered.

Murugan is known as the 'Born Again Writer' because he broke his self-imposed silence and returned as a writer after having announced his 'death' on Facebook in January 2015, in response to

“
Murugan is known as the 'Born Again Writer' because he broke his self-imposed silence and returned as a writer after having announced his 'death' online in 2015, in response to the harassment, attacks and threats he faced from certain groups
”



Poonam Bafna



Roopa Mohandas

Erine Louis, General Manager,
Welcomhotel, Coimbatore

harassment, attacks and threats from groups opposed to freedom of speech. He has authored twelve novels, six collections of short stories and four anthologies of poetry, and five of his novels have been translated into English, including *Seasons of the Palm* (which was shortlisted for the Kiriyaama Prize in 2005), *Current Show*, *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat*, *One Part Woman* and *Pookuzhi (Pyre)*. He also served as a Tamil professor at the Government Arts College in Salem Attur.

Murugan began his writing career by publishing numerous short stories in the Tamil journal *Manavosai* between 1988 and 1991. His novels draw inspiration from personal experiences and observations of the world around him. His themes often revolve around the oppression of the weak, freedom, autonomy, childhood and more. *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat* marked his comeback after the self-imposed literary silence. Critics consider this book an allegory about social oppression and authoritarian surveillance of the

marginalised and the vulnerable. In the novel, a black goat silently witnesses the inequities and tragic violence of the human world.

The inaugural Coimbatore session of **Aakhar**

left a lasting impact on listeners, who were filled with awe and inspiration. Murugan's humility and his ability to weave engaging narratives with a touch of humour instantly connected with the audience, which comprised academics, students and avid readers familiar with Murugan's work in both the original Tamil and

the English translations.

Expressing gratitude on behalf of the Foundation, Mohandas delivered the vote of thanks. Bafna then felicitated the author, acknowledging his contributions to literature.

Aakhar Coimbatore was presented by Shree Cement Limited in association with Welcomhotel By ITC and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Coimbatore

“
Murugan's novels draw inspiration from personal experiences and observations of the world around him. His themes often revolve around the oppression of the weak, freedom, autonomy and childhood
”



The audience at the event



The author signs copies of his book

Let Our Environment Breathe



The word 'environment' has made its way into common parlance these days, so much so that we scarcely have any conversations that do not mention the changing environment. None of these conversations points towards something healthy and optimistic. Everything underscores our failing relationship with the environment — we pay no heed to the damage we are causing to it. The two-legged creatures that pride themselves in their ability to exercise logic and rationality are, unfortunately, the most imprudent species when it comes to preserving one's environment. It is a given that the world will forever be at the mercy of humans as they continue to exploit, if not ravage, all it has. Ridiculously, millions obsess over healthy living without ever having any regard for the environment they live in.

To get to the heart of the word 'environment', it refers to all the things that surround us — from biotic and abiotic

entities and ecological units to natural resources and phenomena, physical and chemical forces, and everything that constitutes the world in its totality. On account of their superior mental abilities, humans put themselves at the apex of this environment, determining the interactions among different species. The human mind has been creating new changes for the development of their lives and this world since immemorial. From fire in the Stone Age to electricity, DNA, or artificial intelligence in the last couple of centuries — the onward march of civilisation has only made us more negligent of our environment in most cases.

Anthropogenic impact on the environment has become unprecedented in recent decades. Overpopulation, rampant pollution, overconsumption of resources, environmental degradation, loss of forest cover and agricultural lands, mass extinction and shrinking of

biodiversity, ozone depletion — the list knows no end. Most of the things without which modern existence is unimaginable — be it the internet or vehicles — cause a severe strain on the environment. This is because most forms of energy are derived from the depletion of non-renewable natural resources. The *World Scientists' Warning to Humanity*, a document written three decades back in 1992, began, "Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course." The situation has only severely deteriorated over the years, and the environment has to bear the cost of our urban, modernised existence. Till a couple of decades back, global warming and climate change sounded like abstract ideas

that remained restricted to Environmental Science books. But, thanks to humans, these have been translated into reality. Global temperature is rising without bounds, and every year feels like the hottest we have ever experienced. Carbon dioxide emissions caused by human activities have risen steeply. NASA states, "Since the beginning of industrial times (in the 18th century), human activities have raised atmospheric CO₂ by 50% — meaning the amount of CO₂ is now 150% of its value in 1750." The changes we have done and are doing to this world are irreversible. Still, policymakers across the globe are in denial. We have jeopardised not just our lives, but that of other species, and the planet at large.

It is unfortunate that we need timely reminders to preserve the environment that sustains us. To this end, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been celebrating World Environment Day on June 5 every year since its inception in 1973. It aims to initiate dialogue and raise awareness about different pressing concerns that plague our environment on a global scale and create solutions to alleviate their drastic effects on the planet. World Environment Day is about learning how to establish a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature. As millions from over 150 countries participate in this United Nations international day, it stimulates positive change to create greater consciousness about our wrongdoings toward the environment and look for ways to create a more sustainable world. Our actions must begin at the local level to effect changes on a global scale. There is only one Earth for us to live on, and we must protect it at all costs.

World Environment Day focuses on a particular

theme every year, and the 50th anniversary's theme was *#BeatPlasticPollution*. If we look into the history of this international day, we can learn that 2018's theme was the same. What was the reason behind focusing on the same issue again? This is because plastic is one of the many substances that has come upon humankind as a curse. To put things in perspective, the UN states, "More than 400 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year worldwide, half of which is designed to be used only once. Of that, less than 10 per cent is recycled. An estimated 19-23 million tonnes end up in lakes, rivers and seas annually. That is approximately the weight of 2,200 Eiffel Towers

altogether." The rate at which plastics continue to harm human health and threaten biodiversity is alarming. The world is choking on plastics, so to speak. The need of the hour is "a shift to a circular economy [which] can reduce the volume of plastics entering oceans by over 80 per cent by 2040; reduce virgin plastic production by 55 per cent; save governments US\$70 billion by 2040; reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25 per cent; and create 700,000 additional jobs — mainly in the global south," added the UN.

The ramifications of our conscious yet destructive actions against the environment are too real to go unnoticed any longer. The Doomsday Clock is ticking. Now more than ever we need to let the Earth breathe before it explodes.

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ARTWORK BY SUDIPTA KUNDU



Geet Chaturvedi

Shraddha Murdia

शब्द ऐसे बोलो कि लगे शब्दों को चूम कर बोला है: गीत चतुर्वेदी

“भाषा को मैं त्वचा की तरह महसूस करता हूँ, जब कोई भाषा में सुई चुभाए या गलत बोले तो उतना ही दर्द होता है जितना मुझे अपनी त्वचा में सुई चुभोने से होता है तो मुझे अपनी भाषा को भी सहज, सरल, सुंदर और शुद्ध रखने का प्रयास करना चाहिए।” यह कहना है लेखक गीत चतुर्वेदी का। वे **प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन** की ओर से आयोजित **कलम** उदयपुर में बतौर अतिथि उपस्थित थे। आरंभ में उनका स्वागत **अहसास** वूमेन उदयपुर रिद्धिमा भसीन ने किया। उन्होंने फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियों, कलम और अतिथि वक्ता का परिचय दिया। उन्होंने बताया कि चतुर्वेदी ने अब तक ग्यारह पुस्तकें लिखी हैं, जिनमें दो ‘novellas’ और तीन कविता संग्रह शामिल हैं। उन्होंने चतुर्वेदी की विशिष्ट शैली, उन्हें मिले सम्मान, उनकी कृतियों की लोकप्रियता तथा विभिन्न भाषाओं में कृतियों के अनुवाद की चर्चा की और संवाद के लिए **अहसास** वूमेन श्रद्धा मुर्दिया को आमंत्रित किया।

मुर्दिया ने पूछा आपने मुंबई को छोड़कर भोपाल को क्यों चुना? चतुर्वेदी का उत्तर था, “मुंबई अवसरों का शहर है, साथ ही साथ पानी का भी शहर है। भोपाल भी पानी का शहर है। कई बार मुझे ऐसा लगता है कि भोपाल के पानी ने मेरे भीतर बहते मुंबई के पानी को पहचान लिया होगा। क्योंकि पानी पानी से प्रेम करता होगा। उदयपुर के भी पानी ने ही मुझे बुलाया है।” आप मुंबई में पले-बढ़े हैं लेकिन आपकी भाषा मुंबई में रहकर भी इतनी सरल, इतनी शुद्ध कैसे है? वहां के आम लोगों की बोली में एक अलग तरह का उच्चारण है। उत्तर में चतुर्वेदी ने कहा कि भाषा के साथ मेरा बड़ा रचनात्मक किस्म का संबंध रहा है। जहां पैदा हुआ उस घर में सिंधी बोली जाती थी। जो लोग घर में आते थे, वे हिंदी बोलते थे। घर से बाहर निकले थोड़ा बड़े होकर तो देखा कि लोग मराठी बोलते हैं, तो थोड़ी सी मराठी भी सीख ली। फिर स्कूल-कॉलेज जाना हुआ तो वहां थोड़ी सी अंग्रेजी सीख ली। तो बिल्कुल एक मुंबईया लड़के की तरह मैं ऐसी भाषा बोलता था, जिसमें सब तरह के शब्द थे। जैसे मुंबई में देश के हर हिस्से के लोग रहते हैं, वैसे ही मेरी भाषा में तमाम दूसरी भाषाओं के शब्द थे। मैं पत्रकारिता से जुड़ा हुआ था लंबे समय तक, और पत्रकारिता का स्कोप उत्तर भारत में है, तो जब मैं उत्तर भारत आया नौकरी के लिए, और दफ्तर में

मुंबईया भाषा में जोर से चिल्लाता था, तो सभी लोग हंसने लगते थे। तब धीरे-धीरे यह अहसास हुआ कि भाषा से मुझे प्रेम है। मेरे पिता कई भाषाओं के ज्ञाता थे। वे हिंदी, अंग्रेजी, मराठी, गुजराती, उर्दू, फारसी जानते थे। कई भाषाओं को उन्होंने पढ़ाया भी था। तो उनसे भी कुछ न कुछ सीखने का जो सिलसिला था, उसके चलते भाषा से प्रेम हुआ। कहते हैं न कि शब्दों को ऐसे बोलो कि लगे कि तुमने शब्दों को ऐसे बोला है कि चूम के बोला है।

लेखक बनने के बारे में कब सोचा? इस सवाल के उत्तर में चतुर्वेदी ने कहा कि मेरा बचपन साहित्य और संगीत के बीच बीता। मेरे पिता बहुत अच्छा तबला और बांसुरी बजाते थे। मेरी पहली रचना 13 वर्ष की उम्र में ट्रिंकल पत्रिका में छपी थी। मेरी बड़ी बहन मुझे लिखने के लिए बहुत प्रेरित करती थीं। मैंने एक कहानी बिना किसी को बताये छपने के लिए भेज दी। छः महीने बाद जब मैं अपनी क्लास में बैठा था तो एक लड़के ने मुझे पत्रिका दिखाकर पूछा कि यह तुम्हारा ही नाम है क्या? वहां से एक आत्मविश्वास मन में आया कि भाषा के साथ, शब्दों के साथ और अभिव्यक्ति के साथ मेरा रिश्ता हो सकता है। जो टर्निंग प्वाइंट मेरे जीवन में था वह इसी से जुड़ा है। मेरी बड़ी बहन हमेशा बीमार रहती थी। 1993 में मुंबई दंगों के बीच जब वह



Riddhima Doshi

बहुत बीमार हुई तो हम उनके लिए वाहन, एंबुलेंस की व्यवस्था नहीं कर पाए और हम उन्हें सही समय पर अस्पताल नहीं ले जा पाए और उनकी मृत्यु हो गई। उस समय उनकी उम्र 22 साल थी। पर मरने से 3 दिन पहले उन्होंने मुझे एक पेंसिल दी थी कि तुम्हें लिखने में दिलचस्पी है, तो इससे लिखना। मेरी उम्र उस समय पंद्रह साल थी। जब मैं दुख से उबरा तो मैंने डायरी लिख-लिख कर वह पेंसिल खत्म कर दी। आज मैं सोचता हूँ कि मुझे ऐसा नहीं करना था, उसे संभाल कर रखना चाहिए था, वह मेरा सबसे कीमती तोहफा था। पर खयाल आता है कि चाहे मैं जिस कलम से लिखूँ, जिस की-वर्ड पर टाइप करूँ, उस कलम के भीतर, उस की-वर्ड के भीतर मेरी दीदी की पेंसिल जिंदा है। उन्होंने रॉक बैंड बनाने के अपने सपनों को भी साझा किया।

चतुर्वेदी ने कवि के लिए दुख-आक्रोश की जरूरत, लेखन के अपने अनुभव, पढ़ने के प्रति अपनी ललक, अपने लेखन पर किसी लेखक विशेष का प्रभाव, अपने लेखकीय दर्शन के बारे में विस्तार से बताया और कहा कि दुनिया की सबसे सुंदर किताब वेद व्यास की लिखी **महाभारत** है। उसमें सब कुछ है। वेद व्यास **महाभारत** की शुरुआत में ही कहते हैं कि जो कुछ भी इस संसार में है, वह इस किताब में है, और इस किताब में अगर कुछ नहीं है, तो इसका मतलब वह इस संसार में नहीं है। वह कहते हैं इस संसार में मनुष्य से श्रेष्ठ कुछ भी नहीं। पालन करना है तो मनुष्यता का पालन करो। चतुर्वेदी ने अपनी किताबों के चुनिंदा अंश भी पढ़े, लेखन के लिए समाज की जरूरत और श्रोताओं के सवाल के भी उत्तर दिए।

अहसास वूमेन के सौजन्य से आयोजित **कलम** उदयपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर हैं होटल रैडिसन ब्लू उदयपुर पैलेस रिसॉर्ट और स्पा

The audience at the event





Aalok Shrivastav

Monica Bhagwagar

जब आप बोलते हैं, लिखते हैं, तो पूरी एक तहजीब आपके पीछे होती है: आलोक श्रीवास्तव

“जो मेरा पैशन है वह मेरा पेशा बना और जो मेरा पेशा है वह मेरा पैशन बना।” यह कहना है कवि, गीतकार और टीवी पत्रकार आलोक श्रीवास्तव का। वे प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित कलम नागपुर में बोल रहे थे। अहसास वूमेन प्रवीण तुली ने ‘कलम’, अतिथि वक्ता श्रीवास्तव का परिचय, स्वागत और धन्यवाद किया। उन्होंने बताया कि कविता संग्रह ‘आमीन’ और कहानी संग्रह ‘आफरीन’ से लोकप्रिय श्रीवास्तव को मप्र साहित्य अकादमी का दुष्यंत कुमार पुरस्कार और अंतर्राष्ट्रीय पुश्किन पुरस्कार प्राप्त हो चुका है। उन्होंने आगे के संवाद के लिए अहसास वूमेन मोनिका भगवागर को आमंत्रित किया।

भगवागर ने हरिहरन के साथ आए गीत ‘समझा तो कर...’ के जिक्र के साथ जगजीत सिंह, पंकज उधास, उस्ताद राशिद खान और महानायक अमिताभ बच्चन के साथ श्रीवास्तव के संजीदा कामों की चर्चा की और इनके पीछे की ताकत को जानना चाहा। श्रीवास्तव ने अपनी इस शायरी के साथ उत्तर की शुरुआत की—

तुम्हारे पास आते हैं तो सांसें भीग जाती हैं
मोहब्बत इतनी मिलती है कि आंखें भीग जाती हैं
तिरे एहसास की खुशबू हमेशा ताजा रहती है
तिरी रहमत की बारिश से मुरादे भीग जाती हैं।

उन्होंने विवेकानंद के शिकागो में चर्चित ब्रदर्स एंड सिस्टर्स व्याख्यान के बाद की एक स्पीच का जिक्र किया और कहा कि जब विवेकानंद बोल रहे थे, तो सारे लोग बड़ी तन्मयता से सुन रहे थे, पर वहीं अगली पंक्ति में बैठे एक व्यक्ति विवेकानंद को सुन नहीं रहे थे बल्कि ड्राइंग बना रहे थे। विवेकानंद उससे बहुत डिस्ट्रैक्ट हो रहे थे। जब उनकी स्पीच खत्म हुई, तो वह व्यक्ति उनके करीब आया। विवेकानंद ने कहा कि आप मेरी स्पीच नहीं सुन रहे थे, क्या कर रहे थे? तो उसने वह तस्वीर दिखाई, जिसमें स्पीच देते हुए विवेकानंद थे और उनके पीछे उनसे दसगुनी बड़ी तस्वीर स्वामी रामकृष्ण परमहंस की थी। विवेकानंद चौंके कि वे तो बैकड्राप में यहाँ नहीं थे, आपने क्या उनको देखा है? तो उसने कहा नहीं, जब आप बोल रहे थे तो ये मुझे आपके पीछे दिख रहे थे। तो यही आपके सवाल का उत्तर है कि जब आप बोलते हैं, लिखते हैं, तो पूरी एक तहजीब आपके पीछे लिखती है, बोलती है। मेरा शहर और परिवार हिंदी-उर्दू की तहजीब का नुमाइंदा है। विदिशा की तहजीब ऐसी है। मां, पिता, बड़े भाई उर्दू के जानकार थे। मुझमें भोपाल और विदिशा की संस्कृति समाहित है। मेरा फिल्मों में जो काम है वह पहले मेरी किताबों में आ चुका है। फिल्म अटकन चटकन और वोदका डायरीज के गीतकार श्रीवास्तव ने कहा कि मैं फिल्म सिचुएशन पर गीत लिख रहा। हालांकि यह कोई नया काम नहीं है, सारे बड़े गीतकार यही करते रहे हैं।

जावेद अख्तर द्वारा अपनी तारीफ से जुड़े सवाल पर, श्रीवास्तव ने कहा कि मेरी खुशिकस्मती है कि जावेद साहब, गुलजार साहब और नामवर सिंह ने मेरी तारीफ की है। मैं पूरी तरह हिंदी, पूरी तरह उर्दू की जगह हिंदुस्तानी ज़बान में लिखता हूँ। उन्होंने शमशेर बहादुर सिंह का यह शेर— ‘वो अपनों की बातें वो अपनों की खुशबू, हमारी ही हिंदी हमारी ही उर्दू’ भी सुनाया। ‘आमीन’ पर नामवर सिंह की इस टिप्पणी कि आप दुष्यंत की परंपरा के आलोक हैं का जिक्र करते हुए भगवागर ने पूछा कि

इस परंपरा का आरंभ, कहां, कैसे और कब हुआ? श्रीवास्तव ने विदिशा की तहजीबी आबोहवा के बारे में विस्तार से सुनाया। उन्होंने बाबा नागार्जुन, श्रीराम सिंह शलभ, कैफ भोपाली का नाम लिया और जगजीत सिंह, मेहदी हसन और फरीदा खानम को लेकर अपनी दीवानगी के बारे में बताया। श्रीवास्तव ने कहा कि तभी ये लगता था कि कभी ऐसा हो कि मेरा लिखा ये लोग भी गाएं। उसके बाद उन्होंने एक बड़ा मुशायरा सुनने के बाद पिताजी से हुई पिटाई का जिक्र किया और कहा कि मैंने जब अपनी मां से कहा कि चाहे जो हो मैं बड़ा होकर लेखक ही बनूंगा और एक दिन मेरी गज़लें जगजीत सिंह गाएंगे। मां ने कहा आमीन, और वही मेरी इस किताब का नाम है।

श्रीवास्तव ने फिल्मों में गीत लेखन, तहजीब, अदबी माहौल आदि पर भी खुलकर बात की। उन्होंने यह भी बताया कि वे अपने से बड़ों से अब भी सलाह लेते हैं, जैसे कि शिव तांडव स्तोत्र के आशुतोष राना द्वारा गाए जाने के बाद भी उन्होंने जावेद अख्तर से इसके भावानुवाद को लेकर पूछा था। श्रीवास्तव ने ‘मंजिलें क्या हैं, रास्ता क्या है, हौसला हो तो फासला क्या है’ के अलावा ‘आमीन’ पर कमलेश्वर की प्रतिक्रिया से जुड़ा संस्मरण भी सुनाया। उन्होंने पत्रकारिता और लेखन जगत के अपने अनुभवों और उसमें अपनी सहजता को भी साझा किया। उन्होंने कहा कि मैंने खुसरो, कबीर, गालिब, मीरा और मीर को बहुत शुरुआती दौर में ही पढ़ा। उन्होंने इन लोगों की जमीन पर लिखी अपनी कई गज़लें भी सुनाईं। जिसमें ‘सखी पिया को जो मैं न देखूँ’ के कुछ शेर यों हैं—

दिलों की बातें दिलों के अंदर जरा सी ज़िद से दबी हुई हैं
वो सुनना चाहें, जुबां से सब कुछ मैं करना चाहूँ नजर से बतियां
ये इश्क क्या है, ये इश्क क्या है, ये इश्क क्या है, ये इश्क क्या है
सुलगाती सांसें, तरसती आंखें, मचलती रूहें, धड़कती छतियां...

श्रीवास्तव ने शिव तांडव स्तोत्र सुनाया, उसके हिंदी भावानुवाद से जुड़े अनुभव को साझा किया और श्रोताओं के सवाल-जवाब के भी उत्तर दिए। आयोजकों की ओर से अतिथियों का अभिनंदन रेडिसन ब्लू की पायल ने किया।

अहसास वूमेन के सौजन्य से आयोजित कलम नागपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर होटल रेडिसन ब्लू नागपुर और मीडिया पार्टनर लोकमत का सहयोग मिला



Parveen Tuli



Jyoti Kapoor



Priyanka Kothari

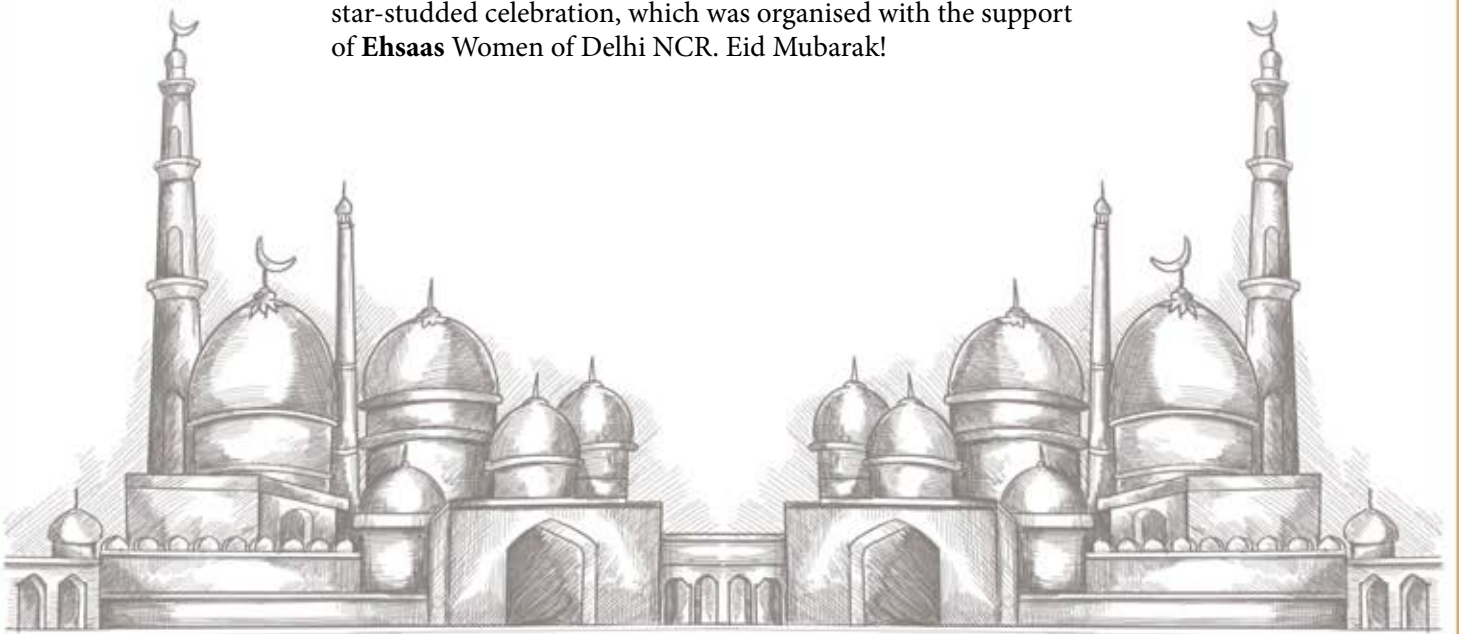


Guests enjoying the conversation

Coming Together for Eid

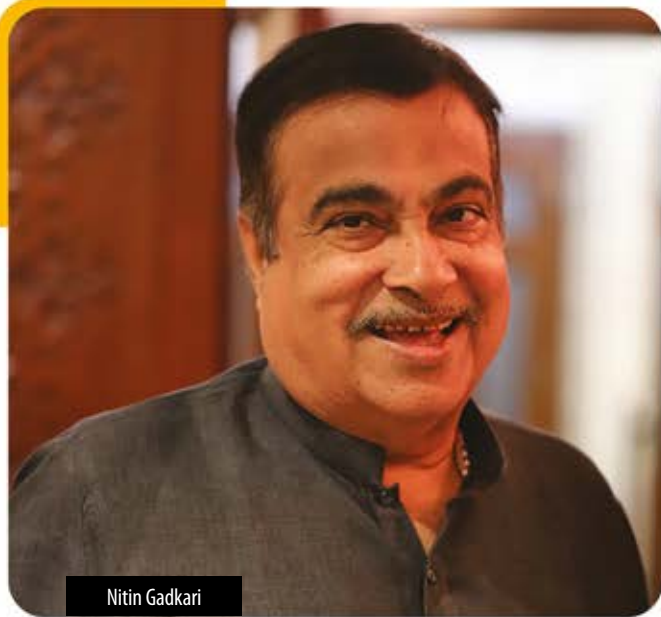
Prabha Khaitan Foundation is known for its unwavering support of India's rich heritage and culture. Through initiatives such as **Choupal**, **Chalchitra Rangmanch**, **Sur Aur Saaz**, **An Author's Afternoon** and others, it has been fulfilling its vision of instilling intercultural values in our society. It focuses on fostering a participatory society, where cultural and intellectual discussions are held freely. Thus, it brings together stalwarts from diverse walks of people to engage in conversations and cultural activities.

Eid Milan, held at the ITC Maurya in New Delhi ahead of the iconic festival of Eid, was no different. It saw the presence of luminaries such as the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, political leader Mumtaz Patel, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Korean Embassy in India, Lim Sang-Woo, the economist, Bibek Debroy, the filmmaker, Muzaffar Ali, and veteran journalists like Prem Prakash, Salma Sultan and Anant Vinay, among others. Here are a few glimpses from the star-studded celebration, which was organised with the support of **Ehsaas Women of Delhi NCR**. Eid Mubarak!





Unnati Singh, Dipali Bhasin, Anantmala Potdar and Garima Mithal



Nitin Gadkari



Yasmin Kidwai and Mumtaz Patel



Prem Prakash



Jay Panda, Lim Sang-Woo and Shazia Ilmi



Gautam Chikermame and Monica Halan



Preeti Gill



Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Nazia Yusuf Izuddin and Karuna Goenka



Shinjini Kulkarni



Subha Chopra



Yaseen Rampur, Sabaah Sheikh and Devika Sahani



Vandana Singh and Anant Vijay



Archana Dalmia, Naina Balsavar Ahmed, Ratan Kaul and Nikita Arya



Sheela Bhatt



Uday Muharkar



Meera and Muzzafar Ali



Kammi Bakshi and Minu Bakshi



Smita Barooah



Leena Singh



Ashmina, Asmaniya, Mrinali Luthra and Rachna Seth (Chief of Protocol, Ehsaas Women)



Suket Dhir and Percival Billimoria



Salma Sultan



Rocky Singh



Bibek Debroy and Suparna Banerjee



Chetan Seth and Abhimanyu Bhandari



Neelam Rudy



The ITC Maurya, New Delhi
(Photo credit: www.itshotels.com)

Chasing Rainbows of the Imagination

Acting on its intentions to popularise heritage, literature and culture among children nationwide, **Muskaan** showcased a unique film, *When the Colours Ran Away*, produced by Kolkata-based not-for-profit organisation ThinkArts. Analina Sanyal and Tamali Bhattacharya of ThinkArts joined this **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** event to present the animated film that led its young audience on some colourful flights of fancy.

The digital film by ThinkArts – an arts organisation that facilitates high-quality transformative arts events for children and young adults in Kolkata – emerged out of the digital stories that they began producing during the pandemic. *When the Colours Ran Away* was originally commissioned by the online edition of the Vancouver International Children’s Festival in 2021.

Before the screening, Sanyal asked the children in attendance to pay close attention to the film; she promised that exciting activities would follow. Just about twenty minutes long, the film traced the story of two young boys and their encounter with colours that have run away from a painting! The story took inspiration from Canadian artist Emily Carr’s painting *Autumn in France*.

With its engaging narrative and extraordinary storyline, the screening was well-received and the children thoroughly enjoyed the film. *When the Colours Ran Away* allowed the young ones to don their detective hats to figure out the mystery of the missing colours along with the protagonists. While the children may have been too young to comprehend all the different layers of the story, the film delivered nuanced lessons that will no doubt shape their worldview. Some of these were lessons in equality, dismantling the class divide and how imperfections create art.

The promised activities were assisted ones that called for memory engagement and critical thinking. The sets of questions provided a welcome break from the usual run-of-the-mill activities. The children were also encouraged to use colours to bring their imagination to life, and each of the young artists delivered! When asked what they would do together if their favourite colour came to life, the children’s answers were diverse, and there was a



uniqueness and originality to each one. While one child wanted to play in the rain with their favourite colour, another hoped to dance with it to cure global warming.

Sanyal said, “The best part about an art piece is that everyone has their own opinion and view of what they have seen.” Her words captured perfectly the spirit of independent thinking that the event was all about. The children were asked to send in their completed artworks, ensuring that the lessons learnt would be carried on far beyond the end of the film. The event drew to a close with a vote of thanks.

A joint initiative with Education for All, this session of Muskaan was presented by Shree Cement Limited



Analina Sanyal



Sumitra Ray



Tamali Bhattacharya



HOW SHAH RUKH KHAN AFFECTS INDIAN WOMEN



Shrayana Bhattacharya

Prabha Khaitan Foundation, under its The Write Circle initiative, organised a lively session with the economist and author, Shrayana Bhattacharya. Taking the audience down memory lane, Bhattacharya recounted her life's journey, making a special stop to discuss her celebrated work, *Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh: India's Lonely Young Women and the Search for Intimacy and Independence*. Having been a senior economist at the World Bank, Bhattacharya's book is a unique blend of movies and economics, which she traced in a free-flowing conversation with Pooja Poddar Marwah, *Ehsaas* Woman of Dehradun. Pooja Khanna, *Ehsaas* Woman of Dehradun, introduced the speakers to the audience.

Bhattacharya revealed that her introduction to Shah Rukh Khan was through the film *Baazigar*. "Although that movie did not turn me into an ardent fan, I kept watching Khan's movies until I became one, having realised that he epitomises romance and redefines masculinity. I think there's a lot of woman

in him. I see him as a female icon."

Although *Baazigar* did not turn me into an ardent fan, I kept watching Khan's movies until I became one, having realised that he epitomises romance and redefines masculinity. I think there's a lot of woman in him. I see him as a female icon

What led Bhattacharya to use Khan as a research tool when speaking with women from the slums of Ahmedabad, the forests of Jharkhand, and the villages of Uttar Pradesh? The author revealed that conversations about Khan, who unanimously turned out to be a favourite among these women, helped them break through their prejudices and fears and open up



Pooja Poddar Marwah

about the basic question of their freedom. The book was a 15-year journey – one filled with changing perspectives on love, life and career, and myriad emotions that challenged her. Although difficult at times, the research brought to the fore the immediate need for massive changes to ensure financial independence for deprived women in India. Bhattacharya believes the book is a testament to the women's belief in her.

Bhattacharya addressed the inequality between men and women in India as well. Recalling a personal anecdote, Bhattacharya recounted how a male friend of hers refused to look at her while speaking. While this annoyed her initially, it led her to realise that this behaviour stemmed from how he, and Indian men in general, are brought up. This, Bhattacharya insisted, needs to change.

She also spoke about the deep passion she harbours for her job as an economist. "During the pandemic, I spent my time trying to understand the struggling economy with colleagues and leaders, aiming to make a change," she said. "The Indian economy did fairly well in comparison to other nations. We had our challenges and struggles, but we made it."

As the session came to a close, Bhattacharya spoke once again of the challenges faced by many women in India. "Women don't have time or purchasing power," she said. "They are stuck between the four 'M's – men, money, marriage, and market." As women jumped through the social hoops, Khan brought them deep psychological relief. "Because, as real life disappoints, Shah Rukh Khan comes in and gives them a few hours of love, laugh and longing," said Bhattacharya. Such is the power of the Bollywood superstar.

The Write Circle Dehradun was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Hyatt Regency Dehradun and Dainik Jagran and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Dehradun

“My diplomatic journey complements my literary journey”



Divya Gautam



Abhay K

It was a special day when **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under its **The Write Circle** initiative, organised a memorable session with the Indian poet-diplomat, Abhay K, at the Hotel Chanakya in Patna, to talk about everything from his writing process to his new book, *The Book of Bihari Literature*. Abhay was in conversation with Divya Gautam, a researcher in the field of media and cultural studies, while Anubha Arya, **Ehsaas** Woman of Patna gave the welcome speech.

Gautam, who engaged with the author about his life, his literary journey and his books, asked Abhay about the start of his journey towards becoming a writer. “In the year 2003, I joined the Indian Foreign Service,” replied Abhay. “I wrote my first book, *River Valley to Silicon Valley*, during my stint in Moscow. That was the beginning of my poetry writing as well. Till date, I have had 12 books of poetry published, including *The Book of Bihari Literature*. My diplomatic journey complements my literary journey.”

What is the driving force behind *The Book of Bihari Literature*? “The absence of literature in Magahi – my mother tongue, and a local dialect of Bihar – forced me to write a poem about it,” said the writer. “That’s how the journey of this particular book started.” Abhay went on to recite a few of his poems as well as the works of other poets included in the book.

When Gautam asked about the selection procedure of poets for his book, Abhay said that he talked to many contemporary writers who helped him to structure this book. “I would like to mention that this book has more pieces written by women than by men.” How is women’s writing different from writing about women and marginalised communities? In response, Abhay quoted a story written by the Hindi writer, Kavita, and said that such insightful stories can only be written by a woman. “Only women writers can bring out the truth of human relationships,” he said.

Abhay also spoke about the writing of Heera Dom, who is considered by many to be the first Dalit writer. The word ‘dom’ is often used to indicate a person who undertakes the cremation process. Dom’s poem, ‘The Untouchable’s Complaint’, recorded the suffering faced by a minority community, and is powerfully autobiographical. The anthology also contains the writing of Patna-born Sake Dean Mahomed, who wrote in English, as well as pieces that deal with deeply-ingrained casteism and the plight of sex workers. The conversation also included many interesting questions related to translation, writing processes, and the challenges that one might face in the foreign services. Abhay answered all of them eloquently. The audience’s questions and Abhay’s interesting replies made the event successful. The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Anvita Pradhan, **Ehsaas** Woman of Patna, while the renowned author, Ratneshwar Kumar Singh, felicitated Abhay.



Anubha Arya



Anvita Pradhan

The Write Circle Patna was presented by Shree Cement Limited in association with Navras School of Performing Arts, Dainik Jagran, Hotel Chanakya and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Patna



Abhay K is felicitated by Ratneshwar Kumar Singh



Kunal Sen

Ina Puri

Remembering a Legend



Mrinal Sen was very particular about the people he employed on his sets. After the passing of art director and production designer Bansi Chandragupta, the filmmaker employed one of his son's friends, Nitish Roy, as the set designer for *Kharij*. Roy eventually went on to work for Shyam Benegal and won several National Film Awards.

However, the director's relationships with musicians were always fraught – in part because he didn't understand music very well himself. "He didn't have a very well-developed sense of music and he didn't want to soak the audience's minds with too much of it," added Sen.

The only marked failing on the part of the filmmaker was his disinterest in parenting his son. During his younger years, the younger Sen considered the actor Anup Kumar, whom he called 'Anu', the father figure in his life. Despite this, he decided to go ahead with writing the upcoming book *Bondhu: My Father, My Friend* on his visionary father. "I'm not a writer, and when the publisher asked me to, I hesitated. The first thing I decided was that I wasn't going to write about the aesthetics of his films and that I won't turn it into a chronological biography because a lot has been written about him already. So, I decided to create thematic chapters and connect different parts of his life," he explained.

The session concluded with an engaging Q&A round with the audience and the actor, Sudipta Chakraborty, felicitating Sen.

Tête-à-Tea Kolkata was presented by Shree Cement Limited and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Kolkata

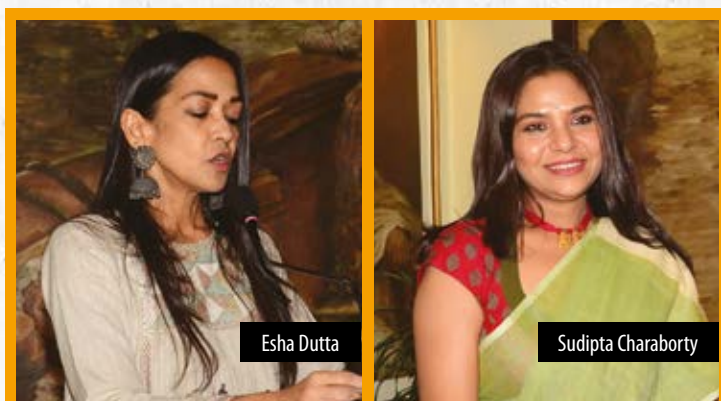
Portraying the plight of the common man through art is no mean feat, but Mrinal Sen used cinema to expose the fallacies that marginalised sections of the population. Films like *Padatik*, *Mrigayaa*, *Kharij* and others have endured the ravages of time and are considered to be among the best films ever made. They have rightfully earned their place in the hearts of cinephiles around the world.

To celebrate the birth centenary year of the legendary director, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised a **Tête-à-Tea** session with his son, Kunal Sen, who was in conversation with the writer, art curator and documentarian, Ina Puri, who is also **Ehsaas** Woman of Gurugram. The speakers were introduced to the audience by Esha Dutta, the Foundation's Honorary Convenor of North-East India Affairs.

Kolkata has been a living presence in the works of the acclaimed filmmaker. Elaborating on this, Sen pointed out that despite having migrated to the city at the age of 17 to attend university, his father never experienced a sense of displacement. "He considered Kolkata to be the place that helped him grow and become who he was. His earlier films were very Kolkata-centric. Later, he focused on stories that had Kolkata as the background," said Sen.

Rather than dwell on the nostalgia typical of Kolkata, the filmmaker looked for ways to adapt his craft to the changing times. "With TV, the illusion of the film breaks immediately because of advertisements. When he made the 12 short films for Doordarshan, they were all in a very different format from what he was used to. He tried to adapt to a new medium," said the younger Sen.

Beyond the veneer of the artist, the filmmaker was also someone who cared deeply about others. "Despite having small budgets for his films, he made it a point to pay the technicians working on his set significantly higher wages than the industry rates and always shared a close bond with them," remarked Sen.



Esha Dutta

Sudipta Charaborty

औरतों के जज़्बात दुनिया भर में एक जैसे: अज़रा नक़वी

Chandni Chopra

Azra Naqvi



Vinti Kathuria



Shweta Bansal

“औरत की मोहब्बत है, सब जगह एक जैसी है। अब भी पूरी दुनिया में औरतों को अपने अस्तित्व को, अपनी शख्सियत को मनवाने में बहुत बड़ा, बहुत कठिन इम्तिहान देने पड़ते हैं।” यह कहना था प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन की ओर से आयोजित ‘लफ़ज़’ आगरा की पहली शृंखला की अतिथि अज़रा नक़वी का। आरंभ में श्वेता बंसल ने आयोजकों और अतिथि वक्ता नक़वी का परिचय दिया। उन्होंने ‘लफ़ज़’ और शायरा नक़वी का परिचय देते हुए यह शेर पढ़ा—
आने वाले कल की खातिर हर हर पल कुर्बान किया
हाल को दफ़ना देते हैं हम जीने की तय्यारी में।
आगे का संवाद अहसास वूमन चांदनी चोपड़ा ने किया।

चोपड़ा ने विविध विधाओं में नक़वी की पैठ का जिक्र करते हुए पूछा कि आपकी शुरुआत कैसे हुई? नक़वी ने बताया कि मैं ऐसे खानदान में पैदा हुई जहां सब बड़े-बड़े लेखक थे। मेरी मां शायरा थीं। मैं उन्हें ग़ज़ल पढ़ते-लिखते देखती थी। तो खुदा ने मुझे भी कुछ दे दिया और तुकबंदियां करते-करते लिखने लगी। इसमें कुछ खास बात नहीं है। चोपड़ा ने नक़वी से उनकी औरतों से जुड़ी कहानियों की किताब का जिक्र किया, तो नक़वी ने उसकी लेखन प्रक्रिया से जुड़े अनुभव साझा किए। उन्होंने कहा कि मुझे इतनी हैरत हुई कि औरतों पर जो गुजरती है, उनके हालात पर, उनकी मुसीबतों और समस्याओं पर यहां तक कि दो-दो बीवियों पर उस जमाने में ऐसी कहानियां लिखी गई थीं। चोपड़ा के अनुरोध पर नक़वी ने अपनी एक कहानी का सार भी सुनाया, जिसकी नायिका अपने वजूद की तलाश करती रहती है और अंततः अपनी पहचान ढूंढने के लिए आईने के सामने जाती है, और पाती है कि उसकी शक़-ओ-सूरत अपनी मां जैसी है।

चोपड़ा के एक सवाल पर नक़वी का उत्तर था, “हां, भले ही बहुत चीजें बदल गई हैं, पर औरत की जो असुरक्षा है, उसकी जो सुकून की तलाश है वह वैसी की वैसी है।” औरत की अपनी तलाश और सपने तो हैं ही। नक़वी ने चोपड़ा के अनुरोध पर अपनी यह ग़ज़ल पढ़ी—

एक शांत नदी सी लगती हो, किस खामोशी से बहती हो
हर बार उम्मीदें बांधती हो, हर बार नए दुख सहती हो...

नक़वी ने बताया कि मैं नज़्में ज्यादा लिखती हूँ। टिपिकल ग़ज़लें मैं नहीं लिखती। इश्क, प्यार, मोहब्बत जैसी चीजें मुझसे नहीं लिखी जातीं, मैं उससे

बाहर निकल चुकी हूँ। एक औरत होने के नाते जो मैंने महसूस किया अपने लिए, जो मैंने महसूस किया बहुतों को देखकर, उसमें हाउस वाइफ भी थीं। ये सब कहीं धीरे-धीरे जलती गई हैं, मुझमें भड़कती गई हैं।

आपका पसंदीदा शायर कौन है? उत्तर में नक़वी ने साहिर लुधियानवी का नाम लिया। कहा कि उन्होंने एक से बढ़ कर एक गाने लिखे—

औरत ने जन्म दिया मर्दों को, मर्दों ने उसे बाज़ार दिया...इसी तरह उनकी ‘चकले’ नज़्म फिल्म में थोड़ा बदल कर आई—

ये कूचे ये नीलाम घर दिलकशी के
ये लुटते हुए कारवां ज़िंदगी के...

ऐसी शायरी कौन कर सकता है। साहिर अपनी मां से बहुत प्यार करते थे। उन्होंने औरत के दुःख-दर्द को बहुत शिद्धत से महसूस किया था। मर्द की हबस को भी देखा था। साहिर में औरतों से जितनी हमदर्दी है, उतनी किसी में नहीं है। उन्होंने साहिर की ‘ओ मेरी जोहरा जबी...’ को याद करते हुए बहुत विस्तार से बात की और ‘परछाइयाँ’ के कई शेर सुनाए—

जवान रात के सीने पे दूधिया आंचल
मचल रहा है किसी ख़ाब-ए-मर्मरी की तरह...

नक़वी ने साहिर, उनकी शायरी, उर्दू अदब, शायरी के असर, सोशल मीडिया, सऊदी अरब, मुशायरा, साहित्य, किताब, लाइब्रेरी, ऑडियो नॉवेल, अनुवाद भाषा, बोलियां, उर्दू, अरबी, फारसी से जुड़े लफ़ज़, रेख़्ता, हिंदवी आदि पर भी अपनी बात रखी और कहा कि जो बदलाव आ रहे हैं दुनिया में उन्हें हमें स्वीकार करना चाहिए। उन्होंने श्रोताओं के सवाल के जवाब भी दिए। धन्यवाद ज्ञापन विनती कथूरिया ने दिया।

अहसास वूमन के सौजन्य से आयोजित लफ़ज़ आगरा के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। रेख़्ता, हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर आईटीसी मुगल आगरा, द लक़्ज़री कलेक्शन और मीडिया पार्टनर दैनिक जागरण का सहयोग मिला।

Moving Further Ahead



Since its formation, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**'s vision has been to work for a better tomorrow. As a result, it has devoted itself to the development of culture and the arts, educational opportunities, literature, gender equality and women's empowerment.

To that end, it has carried out a number of artistic, instructive, literary and philanthropic endeavours in collaboration with various organisations and associations. However, indispensable to its success has been the contribution of the **Ehsaas Women** — a collective of women from different walks of life who work together for the uplift of society. Sharing a common passion for cultural and philanthropic development, the **Ehsaas Women** have gone over and above to ensure that the vision of the late Dr Prabha Khaitan is adhered to. Inspiring many more women to stand up for their beliefs, these women have exceeded the boundaries of their professional capacities and excelled in carrying out the unique initiatives of the Foundation with dedication, compassion and proactiveness.

Recently, the Foundation met the **Ehsaas Women** from different states in a series of meetings over two days in Chandigarh, to initiate several new plans. Chief among the objectives of the meetings was touching base with these dynamic women, brainstorming, exchanging ideas and forging the way forward for new initiatives in their respective cities. One of these plans involved discussing the organising of a North-East regional boutique festival, which would bring a new dimension to the visibility of India's cultural richness. Apart from this, it was also important for the Foundation to meet some **Ehsaas Women** whom we had not hitherto met in person.

Awareness was raised about the Foundation's ongoing activities, and of course, new bonds were strengthened! During the meetings, presentations were made to **Ehsaas Women** from all the states present, and in one of them, Sumitra Ray, Student Programmes Advisor of the Foundation, shared with the guests details about the organisation's one-of-a-kind initiative for children, **Muskaan**, and the meaningful work that is being conducted under its banner. Apart from the fruitful meetings — during which many plans were made and much was achieved — two sumptuous, enjoyable dinners were organised on both days, one of which was hosted by Sundeep Bhutoria, Managing Trustee of the Foundation. These dinners provided the opportunity for everyone to enjoy themselves, have a laugh, bond and celebrate all the fruitful discussions had over the course of the two days.

Here are some glimpses from the meetings!



PLANNING NEW BEGINNINGS



AMRITSAR

A meeting with Ehsaas Women of Amritsar



CHANDIGARH

A meeting with Ehsaas Women of Chandigarh



JALANDHAR & PATIALA

A meeting with Ehsaas Women of Jalandhar and Patiala



LUDHIANA

A meeting with Ehsaas Women of Ludhiana

PLANNING NEW BEGINNINGS



A meeting with Ehsaas Women from Uttarakhand



Sumitra Ray talks to Ehsaas Women about Muskaan



Ehsaas Women of Punjab and Uttarakhand attend the presentation on Muskaan

Sundeep Bhutoria speaks to Ehsaas Women at the presentation

FOOD & FRIENDSHIPS: NIGHT ONE



Ehsaas Women and members of the Prabha Khaitan Foundation team take a photo together



Pooja Khanna and Praneet Bubber



Manisha Jain, Anindita Chatterjee, Cathy Tongper and Rachna Seth



Preeti Gill and Sharmita Bhinder



Neha Desai



Pooja Poddar Marwah and Isha Gupta Vaish

FOOD & FRIENDSHIPS: NIGHT ONE



Pallavi Pahwa, Ritika Talwar, Sumitra Ray and Divya Kapoor Sardana



Sonia Aggarwal



Ruhi Walia Syal



Sheetal Khanna



Simran Paintal and Esha Dutta



Zarqa Jain and Deepika Bhalla

PLANNING NEW BEGINNINGS



A meeting with prospective Ehsaas Women



Sundeep Bhutoria, Esha Dutta, Rachna Seth, Cathy Tongper, Preeti Gill, Anindita Chatterjee and Manisha Jain meet to discuss organising a boutique regional festival with a focus on the Northeast of India

FOOD & FRIENDSHIPS: NIGHT TWO



Mehek Bhan, Akshay Bhan, Karanbir Singh Sibia, Hardip Chandpuri and Sunaiyani Guleria



Saguna Jain



Mitul Dikshit with Sundeep Bhutoria



Savita Bhatti



Sohaib Kidwai and Racchit Roshyn



Shayda Bano



Renee Singh



Subhash Ghosh



Vijya, Parul and Sukant Deepak

The Army Man Who Loved His Uniform

Aakriti Perival

Rachna Bisht Rawat

A four-star general of the Indian Army, General Bipin Rawat served as the first Chief of Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces from January 2020 until his untimely death in December 2021. The late general's commitment to his uniform is what drew his daughter, Rachna Bisht Rawat, to dedicate her latest book, *Bipin: The Man Behind the Uniform*, to him as a tribute. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** invited journalist and writer Rawat to a session of **The Write Circle**. Held at The House of MG in Ahmedabad, the session commenced after a welcome speech by Shaneel Parekh, Ehsaas Woman of Ahmedabad. Speaking with Aakriti Perival, the Foundation's Honorary Convener of Overseas Affairs, Rawat said of her father, "He was a sentimental man, but his commitment to the olive green always came before anything else, including his family."

Rawat juggles multiple roles as a journalist, author, mother and the wife of an army officer. Her writing sheds light on both well-known and little-known stories of real-life heroes and their unparalleled bravery. Among her notable works are accounts of the Kargil War and the 1965 conflict, as well as untold narratives in *Kuch Ansuni*.

The conversation began with Rawat reflecting on her journey to understand the man behind the uniform by delving into his relationships and contemplating the reasons behind his unconventional choices in the military. Rawat also shared her personal experience of being in the cantonment during the Kargil War in 1999 while her brother, Sameer Bisht, served in the war. She recalled her mother's words even in the absence of news about him: "*Humare parivar mein sabhi wapis aaye hai, woh bhi zinda*". While her brother got home safe, Rawat acknowledged the tragic reality of many others who lost their lives at a young age. Inspired by their bravery, she interviewed the fathers of soldiers such as Vijayant Thapar, Saurabh Kalia, Vikram Batra and others, which led to her book *Kargil*. When asked about General Rawat's chopper crash in Dimapur in 2015, which he survived, the author said, "The helicopter was lifted into the air and

it crashed. No one was hurt except my father. His clothes were torn and he was bruised because the helicopter crashed on the side where he was seated. He assured the pilot that it wasn't his fault, and in two hours' time was on another helicopter to attend a meeting in Itanagar."

In the course of the session, Perival requested the author to speak about General Rawat's relegation while in the National Defence Academy. Rawat explained that during his early days as an NDA cadet, her father struggled with nerves and could not complete the mandatory 10-foot jump into the pool. Eventually, however, he surpassed his peers and became a general, which was a testament to his resilience. Yet, despite being loved by many, General Rawat faced some controversies during his leadership, particularly for his statement on the conflict in Kashmir. Rawat shared that interviewing the families of 21 Param Vir Chakra recipients was a profound learning experience for her. She emphasised the emotional connection in her interviews, which also applied to her interactions with General Rawat's acquaintances. The enthralling session finally wrapped up with a Q&A round, followed by a vote of thanks by Priyanshi Patel, Ehsaas Woman of Ahmedabad, and with former Wing Commander Shri Arun Kaul felicitating the author.

The Write Circle Ahmedabad was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Karma Foundation, The House of MG, Divya Bhaskar and with the support of Ehsaas Women of Ahmedabad



Shaneel Parekh



Priyanshi Patel



Former Wing Commander Arun Kaul felicitates author



Purnendu Bikash Sarkar

An Ophthalmologist Brings Tagore Online



Debashis Basu



Soumitra Mitra

The birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore is a highlight during the month of Baisakh. To commemorate the occasion, **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, under its **Aakhar** initiative, paid tribute to the Nobel laureate through an invigorating session with Tagore researcher and ophthalmologist Dr Purnendu Bikash Sarkar. Moderated by elocutionist and orator Debashis Basu, the session captured the spirit of “*Robimash*”. Soumitra Mitra, the Foundation’s Advisor for Bengali Language, Theatre and Film Programmes, welcomed the audience.

Fuelled by an interest in rational scientific thought that began in his school days, Sarkar went on to secure a high rank in the Joint Entrance Examination and then studied ophthalmologic surgery and medicine. His deep fascination and unshakeable passion for Tagore’s lyrical work took shape later, following the completion of his medical studies.

Once the interest took root, however, Sarkar immersed himself in research on Tagore’s compositions. This was a time when Tagore’s music could only be accessed through cassettes, CDs and DVDs, and the internet was hardly the accessible resource it is today. As a result, the means available to Sarkar were not very user-friendly. Nevertheless, Sarkar took upon himself the ambitious task of digitising Rabindra Sangeet playlists. Although he began the project for his personal use, it later expanded into a broad exploration of the available methods for playing music. “The idea behind this was to deliver Rabindranath (Tagore) and his works to the younger generation in an easy manner,” said Sarkar.

In the year 2006, his digital compilation of Rabindra Sangeet was

released at the Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi. From 2008 onwards, the ophthalmologist dedicated himself to creating a digital library of Tagore’s work. His tireless efforts to this end would ultimately result in a website named *Gitabitan Archive*, an online library that contains the background, melody, notation and phase of every composition by the Bengali bard. The poetry of Tagore is similarly assembled on another website named *Rabindra Kobita Archive*. Widespread appreciation for the digital archive convinced Sarkar to create a print version as well.

His latest book, *Rabindra Gaan Er Antorale*, provides a unique opportunity for Tagore enthusiasts to read about his songs in a book and simultaneously listen to them on their digital devices. Sarkar’s book compiles 250 songs with significant contextual stories, and each song is followed by a QR code. Readers can scan the code *via* their smartphones to listen to an audio recording of the song.

The session imparted some valuable life lessons as Sarkar recounted how he managed to balance a successful career as an ophthalmologist with being a passionate researcher. The session drew to a close with a vote of thanks, but not before Sarkar promised the audience that a groundbreaking work was in progress that would be revealed in the coming months.

Aakhar Kolkata was presented by Shree Cement Ltd in association with Purba Paschim and Anandabazar Patrika Online

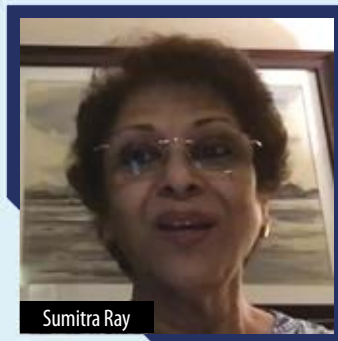
I took on the task of digitising Rabindra Sangeet playlists. Although I began the project for my personal use, it later expanded into a broad exploration of the available methods for playing music. The idea was to deliver Rabindranath Tagore to the younger generation in an easy manner

Bringing Comics to Life



Savio Mascarenhas

Comics are always fun to read, and a few lucky kids from classes VI, VII and VII got a first-hand taste of how they are created when **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** organised a virtual **Muskaan** session with cartoonist Savio Mascarenhas. Hosted in collaboration with **Education For All Trust**, the session featured a fun interaction between Mascarenhas and the kids as they talked about cartoons and comics as well as how to create them.



Sumitra Ray

Mascarenhas has been in the world of comics for over 30 years. He began his journey as a freelance cartoonist for *Tinkle* comics back in 1992. He later joined *Tinkle* full-time and played a vital role in co-creating and shaping popular comic characters such as Mopes and Purr, Janoo and Wooly Woo, Suppandi and Little Shambu. For the past 25 years, he has been the artist behind Shikari Shambu. Currently serving as Group Art Director at Amar Chitra Katha Pvt Ltd, Mascarenhas divides his time between the light-hearted characters of *Tinkle* and the heroes of *Amar Chitra Katha*.

During the session, Mascarenhas showed the students how to shape comic figures and create character stories. He started with Suppandi, a funny character with a box-shaped head, a big smile and three strands of hair. Suppandi finds a new job in almost every story, only to lose it shortly after. The character has worked as a postman, watchman, computer mechanic and bicycle mechanic, and taken on many other roles.

With Mascarenhas guiding them, the participants also worked on another popular character — Shikari Shambu, the forest ranger who was the brainchild of illustrator Vasant Halbe. In the comics, Shambu's eyes are always covered by a giant vhat, and he has a signature moustache that goes up when he is happy and down when he feels sad.

Mascarenhas demonstrated how a few simple lines, strokes and circles can shape characters that dance and jump. Within seconds, he had

illustrated captivating scenes. He also showed how to create character stories using separate panels, incorporating special effects like speech bubbles and splashes. As an example, the cartoonist presented a short story of Shambu wandering in the woods, searching for ripe mangoes and the events that followed. "Illustrated stories include twists and climaxes within a short period," he explained.

The cartoonist also emphasised the power of the imagination by showing how a butterfly can be developed from an exclamation mark, a girl's hair band or even a fan. He encouraged the students to express their creativity through their own comics, emphasising that everyone can build a story using just a line or circle as their starting point. An essential tip that he offered was to observe the world carefully. "Good observation and a vivid imagination are the keys to developing engaging cartoon stories," he said.

The virtual meeting with Mascarenhas took the students on a delightful and creative journey, allowing each of them to explore their inner artist and unleash their imagination through cartoons.

A joint initiative with Education For All, this session of Muskaan was presented by Shree Cement Limited

Illustrated stories include twists and climaxes within a short period



The young virtual audience

महत्त्वपूर्ण बात है स्वयं की आवाज़ सुनना और उसे शब्द देना: मीठा खान

राजस्थानी भाषा के साहित्यकार मीठा खान से 'आखर' राजस्थान में साहित्य के शोधार्थी प्रवीण मकवाणा ने संवाद किया। मकवाणा ने पूछा कि आप राजस्थान के सांचौर जिले के गांव डभाल निवासी हैं। पारंपरिक मिरासी परिवार से होने के कारण गायन से जुड़े हैं। आपके समुदाय में क्या लिखने की भी परम्परा है? खान का उत्तर था, "गायन की परम्परा हमारे यहां सदियों से है, साथ ही कुछ दोहा, गीत छंद लिखकर भी गाए जाते रहे। हालांकि इन्हें लिखकर किताब का रूप कभी नहीं दिया गया, बल्कि याददाश्त से ही एक पीढ़ी से दूसरी पीढ़ी तक पहुंचाया गया। इन गीतों को गाकर लोगों से दान दक्षिणा प्राप्त करने की परंपरा का पालन हमारे यहां होता आया है। मेरी रुचि गायन से अधिक लेखन में होने के कारण मैंने कई छंद और गीत लिखे हैं।

सामान्य शिक्षित होने के बावजूद आप राजस्थानी में शास्त्र आधारित छंद लिखते हैं, जो काफी लोकप्रिय हैं। ऐसा आप किस प्रकार कर पाते हैं? उत्तर में खान ने बताया कि मैं तो उच्च प्राथमिक तक ही पढ़ पाया लेकिन ईश्वर की कृपा से समझ अपने आप विकसित होती चली गई। एक बार जब गांव में मिरासी परिवारों में लेखन परंपरा के लगभग समाप्त हो जाने के विषय पर चिंता जताई गयी तो यह बात मुझे भीतर तक कचोट गयी और मैंने तय किया कि अब मैं कुछ लिखूंगा। मैंने धीरे-धीरे दोहे लिखने शुरू किए और मां शारदे की कृपा से अभ्यास करते-करते बेहतर होता गया। पारिवारिक परंपरा के कारण गीत गाने और लिखने की रुचि सदा बनी रही, चाहे जीवन कितना भी संघर्षमय क्यों न रहा हो।

मकवाणा ने जानना चाहा कि लोक में लिखी हुई बातों और साहित्य का अधिकाधिक प्रचार कैसे हो और ऐसा क्या हो कि आपके साहित्य को पूरा राजस्थान पढ़े? खान ने कहा कि मैं तो यही सोचता हूँ कि मुझसे जितना बन पड़े साहित्य सृजन के लिए उतने प्रयास करता रहूँ। हालांकि इस सवाल का सटीक जवाब दे सकूँ इतनी बौद्धिक ऊंचाई तक मैं नहीं पहुंच पाया हूँ, पर मेरी समझ के हिसाब से काम करते



Pramod Sharma



Pradakshina Pareek

हुए मैं लेखन में निरंतरता रखता हूँ और अधिकतम समय देता हूँ। मेरे मन में जो भी भाव आते हैं उन भावों को ही ईमानदारी से कागज पर उतारने की कोशिश करता हूँ। बस यही पूजा है। मकवाणा ने कविता सृजन और आलोचकों के बारे में खान की राय जाननी चाही, तो उनका उत्तर था कि कविता लिखने के लिए जरूरी है कि हम सबसे पहले अपने मन की सुनें और उसे ही लिखने का प्रयास करें। आप चाहे किसी भी शहर या किसी जिले में रहते हों वह मायने नहीं रखता, महत्त्वपूर्ण बात है स्वयं की आवाज़ सुनना और उसे शब्द देना। रही बात आलोचकों की, तो उन्हें मैं अपना गुरु मानता हूँ। आलोचक ही तो हैं जो रास्ता दिखाते हैं, मार्गदर्शन करते हैं, कमियां बताकर उन्हें सुधारने की प्रेरणा देते हैं।

खान ने कई स्वरचित गीत सुनाए, जिनमें कृष्ण गीत के कुछ पद यों हैं—
कर नित शुभ कामा, आठों यामा, सिमरे नामा घनसांमा।
तज दोष तमामा, रत मन रामा, अलख अकामा अभिरामा।
सौ बार सलामा, सालिगरामा, कर परणामा किरतारी।
भगवन भयहारी, रह रखवारी, आय उबारी इण वारी जी आय उबारी इण वारी॥1॥
माता ग्रभ मांई, हैं दुखदाई, सिर ऊंधाई लटकाई।



Meetha Khan

Praveen Makwana

परगळ दुख पाई, रट रघुराई, बंध छुड़ाई बचवाई।
प्राणी तन पाई, जग में आई, भूल्यो भाई हदभारी।
भगवन भयहारी, रह रखवारी, आय उबारी इण वारी जी आय उबारी इण वारी॥2॥

निरखे परनारी, काम विकारी, सुधी बिसारी जद सारी।
बणियो बदकारी, इ व्याभिचारी, भई खुआरी हद भारी।
निलज्ज नर नारी, अधम अपारी, कज दुखियारी करनारी।
भगवन भयहारी, रह रखवारी, आय उबारी इण वारी जी आय उबारी इण वारी॥3॥

ऐही अवरोधा, कायम क्रोधा, बणे विरोधा जग बाधा।
भलपण नह भावे, नह शरमावे, ऐम करावे अपराधा।
नर समझत नाही, मन के मांही, मान गुनाही मतिहारी।
भगवन भयहारी, रह रखवारी, आय उबारी इण वारी जी आय उबारी इण वारी॥4॥

जग में रह जेवा, मिसरी मेवा, हरदम ऐवा रख हेवा।
भगवान भजेवा, ध्यान धरेवा, सिमर सदेवा कर सेवा।
देसी हर देवा, लाभ लखेवा, मौज मिळेवा मनधारी।
भगवन भयहारी, रह रखवारी, आय उबारी इण वारी जी आय उबारी इण वारी॥5॥

उनकी कुछ और छंद प्रस्तुतियां थीं—

आप वचन कर आवियो, ईशर सूं नर ऐम।
भजन करैला भाव सह, नित म्हें राखे नेम॥1॥

दौडत हैं धन देखके, सुख लेहण विध सात।
ईशर सूं कह आवियो, बिसर गयो नर बात॥2॥

कळश छप्पया

मिनख जमारे मांय, राम को सदा रिझावै।
मिनख जमारे मांय, कमाई नेक कमावै।
मिनख जमारे मांय, दोष सोहि राखे दुरा।
मिनख जमारे मांय, सत मग नित्य चाले सूरा...

खान ने छंदों में बांध जीवन का सार यों सुनाया—

छळ बळ कर इम छेतेरे, माया जोड़ी मन्न!!
कांय न अन्ते काम री, (ओ) धूड सरीखो धन्न !!1!!

केती भल भेळी करी, जद माया निज जाण!!
संग न रति भर चालसी, पिण्ड निकसताँ प्राण!!2!!

दुसमण घणा इ देह रा, क्रोध मोह मद कांम!!
मन इतराँ सिर मोवडी, हरदम आठों याम!!3!!

आयोजकों की ओर से ग्रासरूट मीडिया फाउंडेशन के प्रमोद शर्मा ने आभार व्यक्त किया। संचालन प्रदक्षिणा पारीक ने किया।

ग्रासरूट मीडिया फाउंडेशन के सहयोग से प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन द्वारा आयोजित आखर राजस्थान के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर आईटीसी राजपूताना का सहयोग मिला



Anita Krishan

Nazia Yusuf Izuddin

Telling Tales of the Supernatural

Anita Krishan has carved a niche for herself in the world of storytelling. The author of the bestselling short story collection, *Ghosts of the Silent Hills*, has crafted widely popular books such as *Despite Stolen Dreams*, *Tears of Jhelum*, and *Fluffy and Me*. At a session of **An Author's Afternoon**, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, Krishnan discussed her most recent book, *Ghosts in the Dark Silence*, while enthralling the audience with stories of the supernatural. She was in conversation with Nazia Yusuf Izuddin, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kochi; Esha Dutta, **Ehsaas** Woman of Kolkata and the Foundation's Honorary Convenor of North-East Affairs, delivered the formal welcome note and introduced the author and the moderator to the audience.

What led Krishan to take up writing as a profession after 25 years as a teacher? It was, Krishan pointed out, her profound love for the mountains. Elaborating on this, Krishan noted that she used to live in a "quaint little cottage in Shimla surrounded by pine and oak trees in the hills," which was where she first got acquainted with the romance and magic of horror stories. "In my childhood, Shimla had a lot of snowfall, and that would cause the overhead electricity wires to snap and the pipes bringing water to freeze. We used to live without water and electricity for days together. During those evenings, we used to sit around the fireplace and exchange ghost stories. I remembered the excitement that I felt during those evenings for a long time," she added.

But choosing to be a writer was a decision that she made after her children grew up and her longing for the mountains overpowered any other considerations. *Fluffy and Me* was the result of this love that she had for the mountains. "I grew up in the mountains of Shimla. But after I got married, I had to settle down in the plains. In my excitement, I never realised that I was never to return to the mountains again. I came to visit from time to time, but I never stayed. The nostalgia for the mountains lingered with me, but I was too busy as a wife and mother to pay any attention to it," remarked Krishan.

This was also the point at which she realised that writing was her calling. Witnessing the 2005 Delhi explosion, though, strengthened her notion that being a writer was definitely her destiny. "On 29 October 2005 (two days before Diwali), my husband and I were in Delhi's Sarojini Nagar, shopping for Diwali, when a bomb exploded just 10 metres away from us. We were fortunate to have been saved, but afterwards learnt that 37 people had been killed in that one bomb strike. I had escaped that day since there were so many people in front of us. I've seen that nothing is in our hands, and destiny keeps leading us through the twists and turns of life," explained the author.

For Krishan, the purpose of writing ghost stories was not just to bring alive the memories of her childhood, but also to convey the idea that spirits are immortal. "The spirit is indestructible and continues living through the cycles of birth and rebirth," shared Krishan. "As long

as we are in this life, we have to do our best so that we are rewarded in the next life. My books are based on true experiences that people have had, and though the existence of the spirit is unknown, I believe that it's a possibility."

To that effect, she shared stories of real-life encounters that her aunt, uncle and nieces had with the paranormal which kept the audience on the edge of their seats. She also added how her nieces' experience with the supernatural led them to take up past life regression therapy professionally.

"There are three kinds of 'believers' when it comes to ghosts: first are the sceptics, who do not believe at all; second are the ones like me, who are confused, who haven't had any direct experience with ghosts but have heard real-life stories; and third are people who have direct encounters and know for sure," she concluded.

The session was followed by an interactive Q&A round with the audience. The vote of thanks was delivered by Dutta, and Anindita Chatterjee, Executive Trustee of the Foundation, felicitated the author with a *dokra* memento.

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



Esha Dutta



Anindita Chatterjee felicitates Anita Krishan

जो दिख रहा है सामने वो दृश्य मात्र है, लिखी रखी है पटकथा मनुष्य पात्र है...

आलोक श्रीवास्तव



Unnati Singh

“बहती नदी के नाम पर कुछ भी नहीं रहा,
मुझमें नमी के नाम पर कुछ भी नहीं रहा।

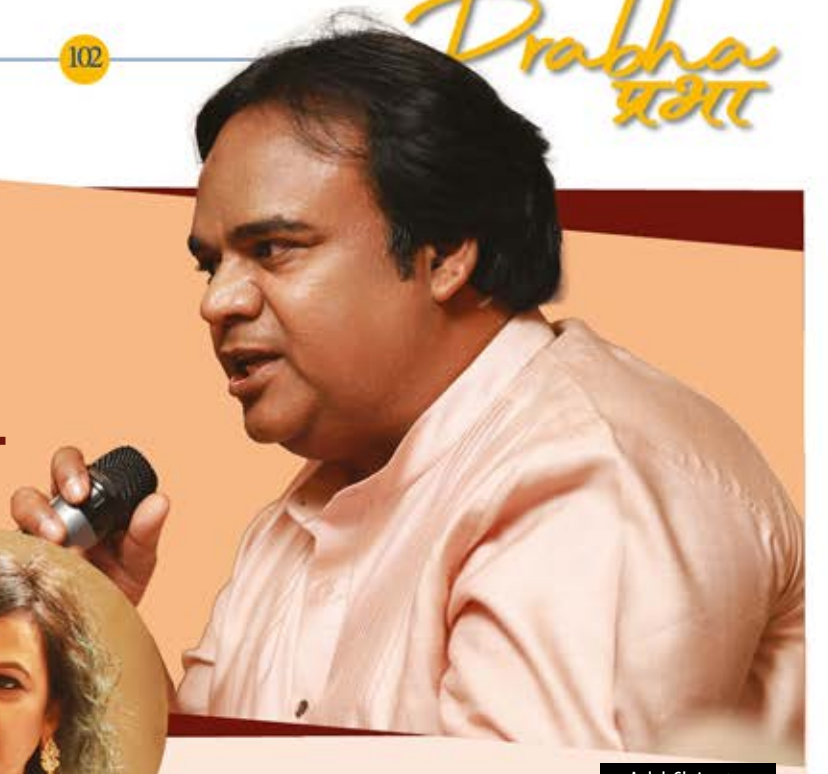
हम लोग जी रहे हैं मशीनों के दौर में,
अब आदमी के नाम पर कुछ नहीं रहा।

आई थी बाढ़ गांव में क्या-क्या न ले गई,
अब तो किसी के नाम पर कुछ भी नहीं रहा...” कवि, गीतकार और टीवी पत्रकार आलोक श्रीवास्तव ने प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन द्वारा आयोजित कलम इंदौर की शाम को अपनी गजलों और बातचीत से आलोकित कर दिया। आरंभ में अहसास वूमन सुरभि धूपर ने अतिथि वक्ता श्रीवास्तव का परिचय दिया और स्वागत किया। उन्होंने बताया कि कविता संग्रह ‘आमीन’ और कहानी संग्रह ‘आफरीन’ से लोकप्रिय श्रीवास्तव की रचनाओं के अनुवाद गुजराती, मराठी, पंजाबी सहित रूसी भाषाओं में हो चुके हैं। आपकी रचनाओं को जगजीत सिंह, पंकज उधास, उस्ताद राशिद खान, शुभा मुद्गल आदि बड़े गायकों और अमिताभ बच्चन जैसे महानायक की आवाज़ मिल चुकी है। शिव तांडव स्तोत्र के आप द्वारा किए सरल हिंदी भावानुवाद को आशुतोष राना ने अपना स्वर दिया है, जो काफी लोकप्रिय हुआ। श्रीवास्तव को न्यूयॉर्क और लंदन में मिले पुरस्कारों का जिक्र करते हुए धूपर ने आगे की बातचीत के लिए अहसास वूमन उन्नति सिंह को आमंत्रित किया।

सिंह ने श्रीवास्तव से ‘अ’ अक्षर से उनके लगाव को लेकर पहला सवाल पूछा। श्रीवास्तव ने फाउंडेशन का आभार जताया और इंदौर से अपनी मुहब्बत का इजहार करते हुए कहा कि मां का घर भोपाल था और मौसी का इंदौर। आपने मेरा यहां इस्तकबाल किया, यहां मेरे कई सारे अजीज बैठे हैं, तो मैं अपना यही शेर सुनाऊंगा-

तुम्हारे पास आता हूँ तो सांसे भीग जाती हैं,
मुहब्बत इतनी मिलती है के’ आंखें भीग जाती हैं।

उन्होंने कहा कि अ से मुहब्बत की शुरुआत मेरे नाम से ही हुई। फिर अ- अलिफ से उर्दू शुरू होती है, अ से वर्णमाला शुरू होती है, अ- ए से अंग्रेजी शुरू होती है। मैं भी यही तो कर रहा हूँ। आरंभ कर रहा हूँ। इसीलिए मेरी किताबों के नाम भी उसी से हैं।



Aalok Shrivastav

श्रीवास्तव ने शिव तांडव स्तोत्र के भावानुवाद पढ़ने के अनुरोध पर हॉल में उपस्थित उसके संगीतकार सौरभ और आशुतोष राना की आवाज का भी योगदान बताया और इसको लिखने के पीछे की कहानी सुनाई। उन्होंने कहा कि कोविड के दौरान जब सभी लोग घरों में बंद थे तो उन्होंने जो लिखा था, उसे बड़े भाई राना ने हास्य करते हुए कि तुम तो महानायक से नीचे बात नहीं करते, पढ़ने की इजाजत मांगी। वह रचना थी-

जो दिख रहा है सामने वो दृश्य मात्र है,
लिखी रखी है पटकथा, मनुष्य पात्र है।

नये नियम समय के हैं- असत्य; सत्य है,
भरा पड़ा है छल से जो वही सुपात्र है।

दिलों में भेदभाव हों, घृणा समाज में,
यही तो वर्तमान राजनीति शास्त्र है।

इसको पढ़ने के बाद एक दिन उन्हीं के निर्देश पर मैंने शिव तांडव स्तोत्र का हिंदी भावानुवाद किया। श्रीवास्तव ने इस रचना की जो पंक्तियां सुनाई, वे ये हैं-

जटाओं से है जिनके जल प्रवाह मात गंग का,
गले में जिन के सज रहा है हार विष भुजंग का।

डमड्डु मड्डु मड्डु डमरु कह रहा शिवः शिवम्,
तरल, अनल, गगन, पवन, धरा धरा शिवः शिवम्॥

जो नन्दनी के वंदनीय, नन्दनी स्वरूप है,
वे तीन लोक के पिता, स्वरूप एक रूप हैं।

कृपालु ऐसे हैं के चित्त जप रहा शिवः शिवम्,
तरल, अनल, गगन, पवन, धरा धरा शिवः शिवम्॥

श्रीवास्तव ने अपनी इस रचना में वह हिस्सा भी सुनाया, जो शिव तांडव का अंश नहीं है। उन्होंने भगवान शिव का, उनके नाम, भाव, विविधता का अर्थ भी बताया।

वे शेष हैं, अशेष हैं, प्रशेष हैं, विशेष हैं,



Suchitra Sajid Dhanani



Surbhi Dhupar

जो उनको जैसा धार ले वे उसके जैसा वेष हैं।
वे नेत्र सूर्य देवता का चंद्रमा का भाल हैं,
विलय भी वे प्रलय भी वे, अकाल, महाकाल हैं॥

उसी के नाथ हो लिए, जो उनके साथ हो लिया,
वहीं के हो गये हैं वे जहां सुना शिवः शिवम्

डमड्डु मड्डु मड्डु डमरु कह रहा शिवः शिवम्,
तरल, अनल, गगन, पवन, धरा धरा शिवः शिवम्॥

श्रीवास्तव ने इसके लेखन से जुड़ी आस्था और उससे जुड़ा अनुभव भी साझा किया कि कैसे वे जब इसके भावानुवाद के समय रुक गए थे, तो ठीक वही शब्द उनके दिमाग में आया, जिसका अर्थ भी उन्हें नहीं पता था, पर वह बहुत उपयुक्त था।

श्रीवास्तव ने एक सवाल के उत्तर में अपने लेखन पर अमीर खुसरौ, कबीर, संत कवियों, गालिब, मीर को पढ़ने और शोहबतों का असर बताया। उन्होंने जगजीत सिंह, कैफी, साहिर, शैलेंद्र, गुलज़ार

साहब आदि का भी उल्लेख किया। श्रीवास्तव ने अपने लेखन पर उर्दू और हिंदी के प्रभाव और उसके पीछे के वातावरण को भी विस्तार से बताया। नए दौर के लेखकों को उनकी सीख थी कि 95 प्रतिशत पढ़ना चाहिए और 5 प्रतिशत गढ़ना चाहिए। उन्होंने हरेक को पुस्तकों से गहरा रिश्ता रखने का आग्रह किया और भारतीय भाषाओं के साहित्य को पढ़ने पर बल दिया। कामयाबी और संघर्ष से जुड़े सवाल पर उन्होंने दुख जताया कि दुनिया किसी नाकामयाब व्यक्ति के संघर्ष की कहानी नहीं सुनती और कामयाब व्यक्ति की कहानी सुनने के लिए आतुर रहती है, जबकि सबको लोगों के संघर्षों की कहानी ध्यान से सुननी चाहिए। यह आपको प्रेरित करती है कि इतने संघर्ष में भी कैसे कोई व्यक्ति कामयाब हो सकता है। उन्होंने श्रोताओं के सवाल-जवाब के भी उत्तर दिए। आयोजकों की ओर से धन्यवाद ज्ञापन सुचित्रा साजिद धनानी ने किया।

अहसास वूमेन के सौजन्य से आयोजित कलम इंदौर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर होटल शेराटन ग्रैंड पैलेस इंदौर और मीडिया पार्टनर नई दुनिया का सहयोग मिला

The audience at the event



IN OUR NEXT ISSUE



Aalok Shrivastav



Abhigyan Prakash



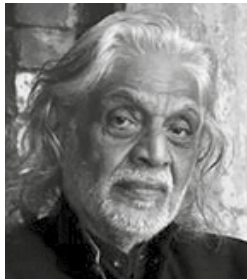
Ajay Brahmataj



Anirudh Kanisetti



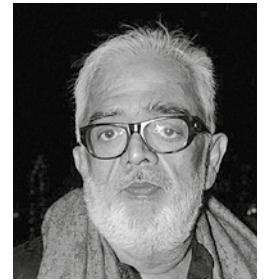
Mrityunjay
Kumar Singh



Muzaffar Ali



Prabal Kumar Basu



Rahul Rawail



Satyarth Nayak



Seema Puri



Shubha Vilas



Sushil Doshi



Vinod Bhardwaj

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