



Prabha प्रभा

The Prabha Khaitan Foundation Chronicle

June 2021 | Issue 26

Nooks & Knacks

With lockdowns and restrictions becoming the new norm, our homes have become our haven. In this issue of *Prabha*, 11 cultural aesthetes talk about their favourite things at home

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Prabha
खान



MANISHA JAIN
Communications & Branding Chief,
Prabha Khaitan Foundation

A Healing Touch

In this edition of *Prabha* we took a look back at the past year of pandemic and lockdowns through the words of a diverse range of cultural aesthetes from across the country as they talk about their favourite nooks, objects and spaces that made being stuck indoors bearable.

For the past few months, the Foundation, in collaboration with its associates — both organisations and individuals — did its best to mitigate the devastating effects of the COVID-19 crisis by acting as a catalyst between those who needed help and the ones who were ready to donate. We conducted donation drives to help thousands of individuals across the country.

Do keep writing to us and sharing your thoughts and experiences at newsletter@pkfoundation.org. In order to keep abreast of information on events and activities, you can connect with our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. We look forward to hearing from you.

We leave you with the great words of Bertolt Brecht — “Because things are the way they are, things will not stay the way they are.”

Happy Reading!

Manisha Jain

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

[SNAPSHOT OF THE MONTH]



▲ A painting by Ehsaas Woman of Patna, Anubha Arya, on the occasion of Mother's Day.

Happy Birthday

Prabha WISHES EHSAAAS
WOMEN BORN IN JUNE

5th June



Nidhi Garg

6th June



Ketki Bhatia

7th June



Shazia Ilmi

16th June



Preeti Mehta

22nd June



Sushma Niraj
Sethia

26th June



Deepika Goyal

27th June



Karishma Mehta



These Are a Few of My Favorite Things

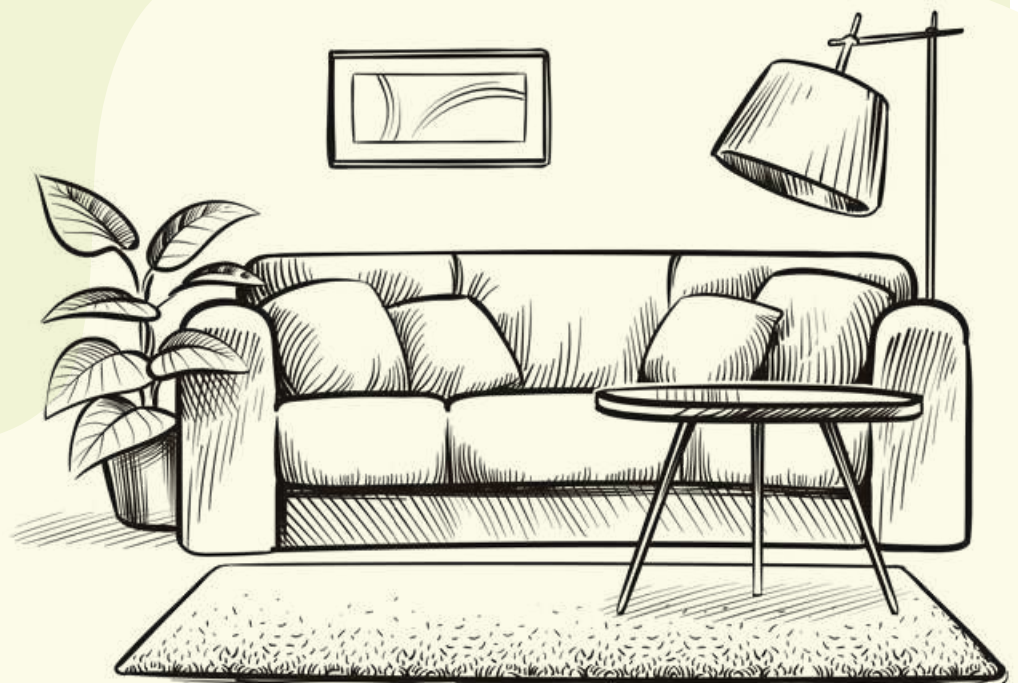


“Home is, I suppose, just a child’s idea. A house at night, and a lamp in the house. A place to feel safe.” — V. S. Naipaul

In the last year, with a raging pandemic and multiple lockdowns, the four walls of our homes have given us a sense of comfort and of safety. But stuck indoors, without anywhere to go or escape, it could have felt like prison if not for that favourite corner in the house, that wonky table, the antique desk next to a sunlit

window, the comfy bed or the room that you made your own.

Prabha asked a diverse range of cultural aesthetes across the country to write about their favourite nooks, objects and spaces that have made their four walls a place to think, write, create and be; about silent companions that have helped them find themselves within the comforts of their homes, away from the chaos of the outside world.





Desk with a View

Photo Essay by
Sunita Kohli

*"What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.
A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare."*

— W.H. Davies

Aishbagh on Damdama Lake is our daughter Kohelika's cottage. It is over an hour from our New Delhi home. We have always cherished it for its seclusion, simplicity and unaffected charm. It is a serene retreat which discreetly blends into the surrounding Aravalli Hills. On two sides, its lawns slope down to the lake's edge. The Aravallis are known to be the oldest surviving geological features on this planet. We love that fact as we all love and collect rocks!

We are still surviving in the Age of Covid. When the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic spread through much of India and, in April a lockdown was announced in Delhi, our four-generational family, for the sake of relative safety came to Aishbagh, a second home. Since then it has become our primary home as the air is fresh and these sylvan surroundings are imbued with an intrinsic calm.



The left corner of my desk has a marble jug from Cuba, filled with whatever is available around the property. Presently, pink oleanders are in season. Reflected in the old English mirror are two pomegranates — the red one is my souvenir from the shop of the oldest extant cathedral in the world, the Etchmiadzin in Armenia. Its pomegranate arils are skillfully crafted from red glass beads. The white pomegranate is by a Danish ceramist. As my husband has planted 2,500 pomegranate trees in his main farm, these are a favourite form.

My favourite nook in this cottage is the deep bay window in our first-floor bedroom as it is a quiet place to read and write. Or just dream! During these past few months this nook still remains my favourite but now the armchair has been replaced with a table — my 'Desk with a View'.

*The author is an interior designer, architectural conservator,
occasional author*



Within this deep rectilinear bay window is now placed an Italian steel table with expandable width. The desk chair is a 1980s acrylic and steel chair, based on the principles of Marcel Breuer's S 64 Cantilever Chair by Thonet, developed in the Bauhaus in the 1920s. I had purchased a pair of these chairs in New York in 1986, when I had gone there to attend the opening of the Festival of India at the Metropolitan Museum. Wonderful memories! The adjustable Victorian reading stand, bought half a century ago from a *kabadiwala* in Mussoorie, displays a book on Kalighat paintings by Jyotindra Jain. Presently, a few reference books on Indian cuisine are on the desk, as I have a manuscript to submit on this subject. The books are a moveable feast. They get replaced by the flavour of the season, by whatever maybe the latest project of research. An antique Chinese basket from Shanghai holds relevant papers. We all collect baskets.



Our first floor bedroom overlooks the lawns, which drop to the waters' edge. The focal bed-wall has a collection of Kalighat paintings by Kalam Patua, purchased many decades ago at the Crafts Museum. I had bought 27 paintings because I like to design or arrange things in multiples of three, which denotes infinity, in both Islamic and Hindu architecture. On the floor is a fine old Kurdish tribal *kilim* purchased in Turkey on which sprawls Begum, one of Kohelika's seven dogs, a Weimaraner with a beautiful grey coat and grey eyes. This white bedroom, with a natural-coloured wooden flooring, has a 180-degree changing view of the landscape outside. In the bay sits a favourite — the iconic mid-century Corona Chair by Poul Volther. Beside it is an antique 19th century cast-iron reading stand.



The tablescape



The right side of my desk has an antique copper tray in the form of a *yon*i, which I use to keep my stationery. A clay bowl, by a studio potter friend, holds my reading glasses and other bric-a-brac. The art students' wooden hand model is from the '80s, from a famous art supplier store on Baker Street in London. Objects are mnemonic! They trigger memories of people and places.



Back from my reveries, I go back to my 'Desk with a View' to settle down to complete and submit a written task... till the next distraction!



Damdama Lake in full times.

A brilliantly blue-plumed kingfisher perches on a branch of the Champa tree, just outside my window.



Ripening phalsa berries



The pastoral scenes visible from my desk are of the constant to-ing and fro-ing of a bovine population of cows and buffaloes.



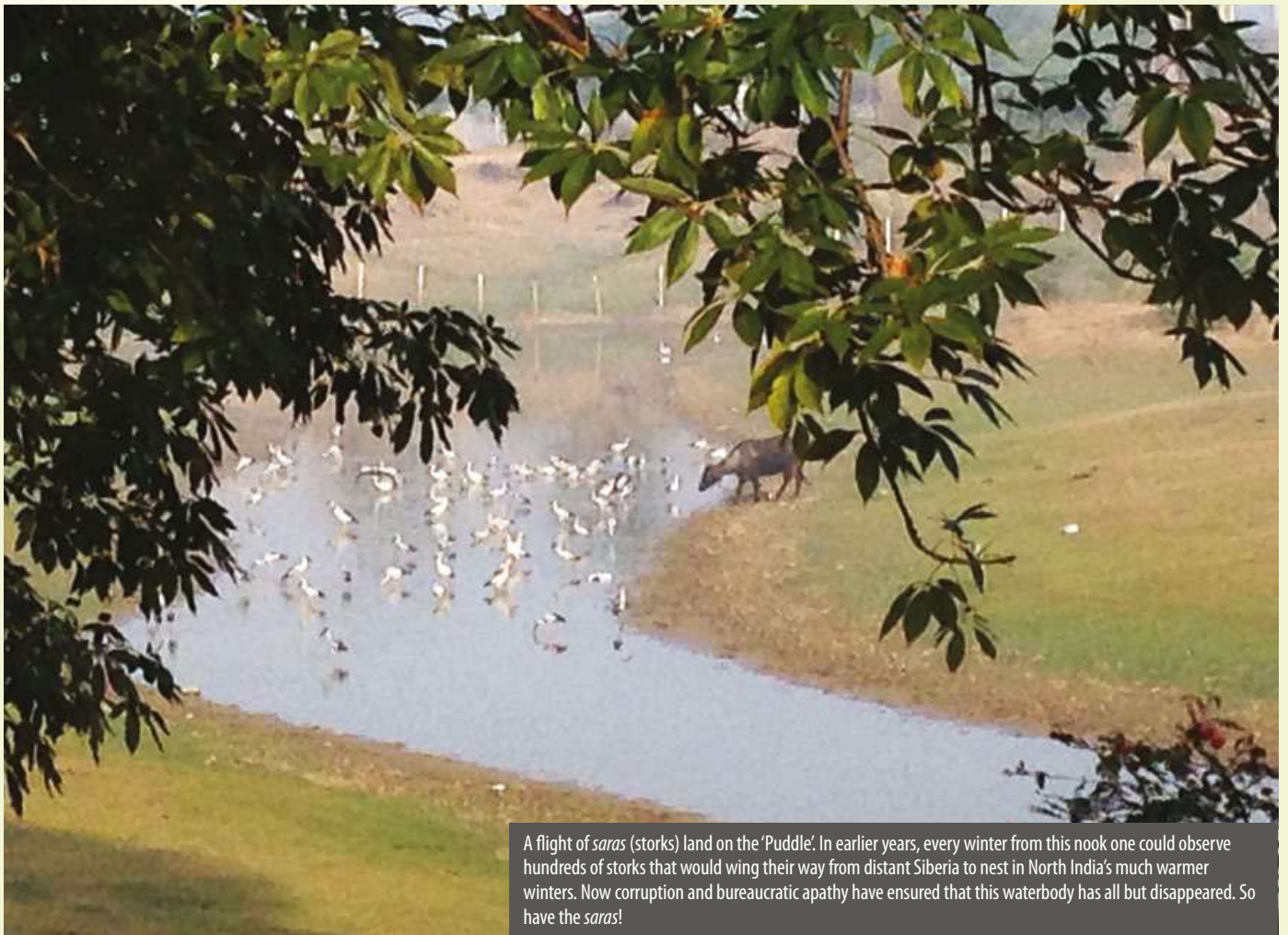
From my desk, almost every evening I observe groups of village women returning home from the *kikar* forests of the Aravalli hills adjoining our land, with bundles of foraged dried branches, to be used as firewood, balanced on their heads.



'The Imperial Phalsa Plantation', as my husband humorously and teasingly calls our few *phalsa* trees as they are my most favourite fruit. The red repeller ribbons are tied to discourage birds from eating the ripening berries.



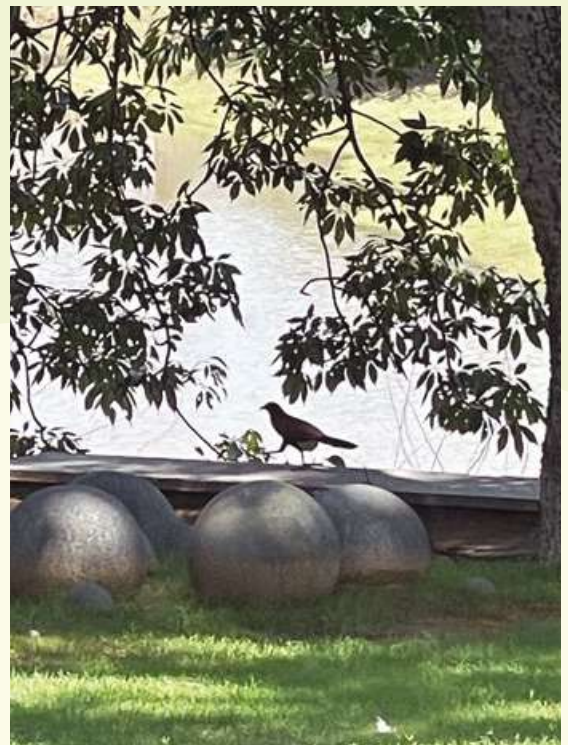
Through the windows one sees a copse of tall bamboos, of a species native to Dehradun and planted a quarter of a century ago.



A flight of *saras* (storks) land on the 'Puddle'. In earlier years, every winter from this nook one could observe hundreds of storks that would wing their way from distant Siberia to nest in North India's much warmer winters. Now corruption and bureaucratic apathy have ensured that this waterbody has all but disappeared. So have the *saras*!



The bay window overlooks the lawn, which abuts the lake which is now merely a thin ribbon of water. There is a constant movement of bovine traffic beyond the rock walls. Within the triad of *Semal* trees is a collection of granite orbs, sculpted by the late Raghunath Mohapatra. I have named this arrangement 'Granite Constellations'.



A coucal, which belongs to the cuckoo family, struts on the parapet, warbling a song in melodious tones.

photo: Anusha Yadava



That What Could Never Leave My Room

Danish Husain

Soon I found I was building a mini library of my own. And with each addition, I was joyous that I was catching up with my parents' collection, and would soon have as big a library as them. Besides, I loved the smell of printed paper. If I were not reading books, I would be sniffing them — the glue, the ink, the whole existence of living books in my hands.

Now I am a middle-aged man but still I have not

much love for other objects than books. The only exception I make is paintings. Or to be fair, miniature sculptures, dolls, anything which is a work of art. Slowly, these things are creeping in, though books still take up the largest share of my living room. But I guess I am not so condescending now of people who have other things besides books in their living rooms. I have also, with age, started attaching myself to objects that remind me of

loved ones. I think I am getting old and more inclusive of different tastes. Everyone should have a room under an aesthetic shed. Albeit, like a healthy planet, one should give the largest share of one's living room's ecosystem to a forest of books.

Danish Husain is an actor, poet, dastango and theatre director. He was instrumental in reviving the lost art form of Urdu storytelling, *dastangoi*, which he later expanded into a multi-lingual storytelling project *Qissebaazi*. He runs a theatre company called The Hoshrubha Repertory, and lives in Mumbai, India. Recently, he has received appreciation for his performances in Netflix projects like *Taj Mahal 1989* and *Bombay Begums*, and an independent film, *Mee Ragsam*, on the Zee5 platform

I woke up to a world of books. My earliest memories are of a house with minimal functional furniture and rows and rows of bookshelves. I never saw fancy artefacts in my house. So much so that when I would see people's living rooms decorated with crystal objet d'art, knick-knacks, bone china dinner sets and other assortments, I would think they do not have taste. In my head, an ideal living room should be a library.

When I was five or something, an uncle of mine who used to work with Penguin Books started gifting me rejected copies of children's literature from his office. These were books with some printing error or defacement and were literally trash for the publishing house. I recall my first book was a pictorial story titled *Dan's Naughty Car*. It was about a duck who had come in possession of a car, but for his penchant to be in water all the time, he would invariably drive the car into a pond instead of on a road, and then be stuck there for long hours before someone rescued him. The story resonated with me. I had the propensity to either lose my toys, or tinker with them into malfunctioning. Also the duck was named Dan.

I loved the smell of printed paper. If I were not reading books, I would be sniffing them — the glue, the ink, the whole existence of living books in my hands



Taking Nepalese Art and Craft to the World

Binod Chaudhary

In 2017, I visited a Nepalese art exhibition in Annapurna curated by the Asia Foundation of India. During this exhibition, I was amazed to see the fine quality of Nepalese art that showcased Nepal's diverse ethnic groups. Music and dance, art and craft, folklore, languages and literature, philosophy and religion, festivals and celebrations, foods and drinks were portrayed as a part of our rich historical and ethnic heritage.

The long history of craftsmanship, with a tradition of carving and crafting, is rooted in Nepali culture. I used to always keep these art and crafts at my office as a souvenir from my various visits. Viewing the culturally rich, timeless masterpieces always encouraged me to envision a platform where artisans could join hands and work together. To give a shape to my vision, I even initiated a few discussions with various multinational organisations but it never reached a well-defined agreement. The next step was to trust my determination for establishing Nepalese products on a global scale and take my own initiative by establishing Unnati Cultural Village (UCV) — Nepal's first center of excellence for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and the artisanal community in Nawalparasi, Nepal.

UCV provides a forum to highlight the best ways of indigenous livelihoods in the Himalayan terrain, as

well as an opportunity to connect with artisans and a place to be inspired amidst the multifaceted diversity. As a transdisciplinary initiative, Unnati proposes to structure and augment Nepal's creative and cultural field. The vision of the project is to create economic growth and improve the financial wellbeing of the artisans by promoting traditional livelihoods.

Art and crafts is at the heart of UCV, Nawalpur, with an art centre, art gallery and museum within the premises, to attract artists from various creative fields. One can find a cultural multipurpose hall and 'Kala Batika' — a garden offering open-air exhibition space for artists — at UCV. Another trademark of the cultural village is the Tharu restaurant that offers typical Tharu cuisine.

For me, UCV is much more than the experience it offers; it is a place to witness the traditional practices of the indigenous people of the Inner Terai, a place to be inspired, and a place to soak up the diversity.

In recent years, Unnati has invested in designing and training artisans and craftspeople. Training local artisans is imperative to meet quality and market demand. Local master trainers and foreign trainers are invited to train local artisans. Art and design workshops also help with enhancing the consistency of the finished goods. Unnati Cultural Village will

“Many traditional and contemporary skills are on the verge of extinction and a platform like Unnati Cultural Village can arouse the interest of the new generation in traditional art forms”

provide space to sell Unnati's product lines. The Craft Village at UCV will showcase the local handicrafts. Chaudhary Foundation will invest the proceeds from handicrafts in the promotion of Nepali art and culture. The project will be taken forward as a social venture so that the locals are encouraged to work as a team in the production of traditional handicrafts, thereby creating jobs.

Someday I hope that this vision becomes an inspiration for the entire country. Many traditional and contemporary skills are on the verge of extinction and a platform like Unnati Cultural Village can arouse the interest of the new generation in traditional art forms. With the UCV initiative, skilled people from various backgrounds can also be brought together to showcase their handicrafts skills and train the next generation of artisans and craftspeople.

All in all, Unnati Cultural Village has opened the door for collaborations with individuals and organisations passionate about art and culture. This is absolutely important to preserve Nepal's cultural identity while creating an international market for our culturally rich products. With this vision, the day is not far when we will replicate the UCV project across all seven provinces in Nepal.



Binod Chaudhary is a Member of Parliament in Nepal and the chairman of CG Corp Global, a multi-dimensional conglomerate with a complementary business portfolio that comprises over 169 companies and 79 brands in 24 countries across the globe. Chaudhary is a global player in FMCGood and the brain behind WaiWai, CG's iconic brand that earned him the epithet "Noodle King". Contrary to popular belief, Chaudhary proved that an entrepreneur can do business in Nepal and still emerge a billionaire — the only one from the Himalayan republic listed by *Forbes*. He established the Chaudhary Foundation in 1995, which focuses on improving the lives and strengthening the communities of Nepal



My Crooked Writing Table

Bulbul Sharma



When I began writing almost 30 years ago, I needed nothing except my old typewriter and a bit of space on our old dining table. The table was made of solid teak and had a beautiful, brown sheen but, for some reason, it sat crookedly on the floor like a weary, overlaid mule. All the table legs were the correct size, so we assumed that the floor was to blame. We changed its position but it still leaned awkwardly, as if about to fall. We had gotten used to this incline but unwary guests were often taken aback when the salt cellar slowly slid down the table on its own. When I changed reluctantly from the typewriter to a laptop, the table sensed this and angrily tilted even further. Somehow I managed to write quite happily at this awkward angle. I felt I was afloat on a ship and had to write faster to save my

life. Sometimes, just to annoy me, the table changed its angle and tilted the other way. “Kindly adjust”, it seemed to be saying.

The constant noise around the dining table never bothered me. My children ran around, dogs barked and our bad-tempered but very efficient cook insisted on setting the table when I was working. He would wait and watch from the kitchen door and as soon as I sat down, he would appear with mats and plates. Making as much noise as possible, he would slap down the plates on the table, making it tilt even more drunkenly. Dishes, glasses, cutlery and bottles of pickle jostled for space but I wrote on regardless. I imagined I was at the Mad Hatter’s tea party in *Alice in Wonderland*.

A few years ago, I was invited to spend a month in a beautiful, sprawling villa by a lake in Italy. It was quiet, green and peaceful. The polished writing table sat elegantly on the carpet. There were tiny drawers for my notebooks. Discreet lights lit up the table. I leaned back on the cushioned chair and looked out at the shimmering blue lake. Faraway, tiny white birds danced across the water like ballerinas. A gentle breeze made the leaves on the green shrubs rustle and a heady scent of flowers floated into the room.

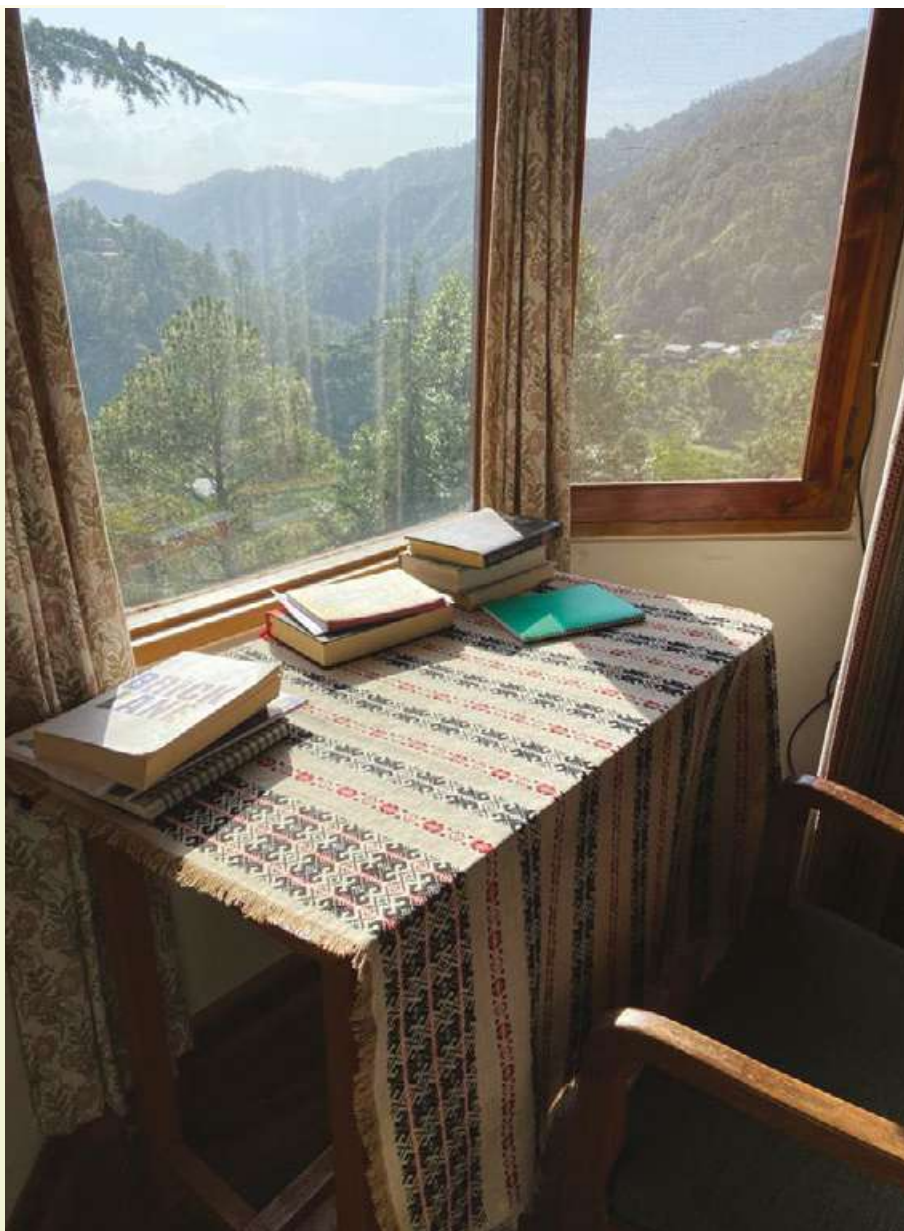
I just sat still and watched the sky change colour.

I could not write a word.

“

Somehow I managed to write quite happily at this awkward angle. I felt I was afloat on a ship and had to write faster to save my life. Sometimes, just to annoy me, the table changed its angle and tilted the other way. 'Kindly adjust', it seemed to be saying

”



I needed my crooked dining table. I needed the noise and the chaos of my home. Italy was beautiful. The villa, with its olive trees and magical garden, is serene and peaceful. It was just perfect for writers but not for me. As soon as I returned, I placed my laptop gently on the dining table. The table seemed to hiss and crackle a not very friendly welcome. Its angle seemed sharper now but I did not care. My crooked dining table and I were together again. Plates crashed, glasses tinkled, forks and spoons danced around me as words began to flow.

I travel a lot and cannot carry my beloved, defective dining table with me. After so many years I have trained myself to write on any table now, but the soothing memory of that old wooden table, leaning awkwardly, is always with me.

Bulbul Sharma is a painter and writer based in New Delhi. Her works are part of collections at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lalit Kala Akademi and Chandigarh Museum.

She has published several books including *My Sainted Aunts*, *Anger of Aubergines*, *Banana Flower Dreams*, *Eating Women*, *Telling Tales*, *Tailor of Giripul*, *Grey Hornbills at Dusk*, *Murder at the Happy Home for Aged and Love and Learning Under the Magnolia*. She has also authored children's books like *Fabled Book of Gods and Demons*, *The Children's Ramayana* and *Walking Through the Hills*.

Sharma is a founder-member of Sannidhi, a NGO that works in village schools in Himachal Pradesh



I live on a 300-acre farm, which sounds large but is a minnow compared with my neighbours, whose properties often run into thousands of acres. It means that the only man-made structure I can see from my cottage is a ruined hayshed on a bare ridge about a kilometre away, a small wooden Acropolis-like structure that might not survive the next storm.

Within this vast space of silence that, for now, I share only with my dog Indie (my partner is working overseas), my favourite place to write is barely four metres long and three metres wide. It's a stone building, maybe 150 years old, just far enough from the main house to be in a wifi-free zone. It was just four walls and an impenetrable tangle of blackberry bushes when I first saw it 20 years ago. Now it is crammed with books, pictures and artefacts from my travels to the subcontinent. A potbelly stove keeps it warm in winter and the thick granite walls push back the summer heat.

Since I mostly write about India, it is only natural that I gravitate to where material objects

A Time to Think and a Time to Write

John Zubrzycki

and memories converge. My desk faces a wall rather than the only window. My gaze falls naturally on old lithographs collected over the years in the markets of Calcutta and Bombay (as they were called at the time), a flaking portrait of Suleman the Great bought in Istanbul, an etching of a scene from the first Afghan war.

At arms-distance behind me are shelves crammed with books. While writing a short history of India to be published next year, I tried but quickly abandoned plans to arrange them alphabetically or chronologically. An organic order gradually emerged, which cut down the time it took to locate a particular volume, but sometimes I'd stare at the jumble of spines for 10 minutes at a time trying to locate the book I needed.

Writing is a process that does not begin or end with typing the first word on a page or the last full stop. As I write this at six in the morning, the first light of day revealing a blanket of thick grey fog that is so common here at the start of winter, Indie is demanding that we stride off into the sub-zero mist.

A friend of mine, Jono Lineen, recently wrote a book called *Perfect Motion* on how walking makes us wiser. Think of Buddha's pilgrimage across northern India until he attained enlightenment under a Bodhi tree or the Prophet Muhammad trekking through the deserts of Arabia 1,400 years ago.

Go back even further, much further, and as Lineen writes, we find *Homo erectus* walking out of East Africa, encountering new environments, taking the

Walking for me is my moment for processing what I've written, read, or am trying to compose. I now know this landscape intimately and since there are no roads to cross, no crowds to negotiate, I can let my creative thinking take over



The 150-year-old stone building where John Zubrzycki writes

first steps that moulded us into the creative beings we are today. Our ability to stand on two feet freed up our hands, enabling us to make tools, put pen to paper. You all know the story.

Dozens of studies have linked exercise with creativity, firing up the neurotransmitters that send messages around the different parts of our brains. As we walk, our minds open up, balancing our temperament and making us more attentive.

As I amble around the farm, my writing space becomes as wide as the horizon, my imagination as limitless as the sky. I don't mind following well-beaten paths because no two days are the same and the light is always changing between morning and midday and especially as the sun lowers in the late afternoon. The landscape varies according to the seasons. A bout of rain after a dry spell can accelerate that seasonal change from months to weeks and sometimes days.

Walking for me is my moment for processing what I've written, read, or am trying to compose. I now know this landscape intimately and since there are no roads to cross, no crowds to negotiate, I can let my creative thinking take over.

That's the ideal, but of course it doesn't always work. I'll notice a fence that needs fixing or start reminding myself that I need to chop more wood

for the fire. But those tasks in themselves can be conducive to creativity.

Returning to the enclosed space that is my writers' room and the page I started on an hour earlier, I begin to see order in the chaos and apply strands of thought that came to me as I crossed a creek or watched a pair of eagles circling in the sky.

A time to think and a time to write. They don't necessarily come together when they need to, they don't always produce the desired results. But for me they are as important as the air I breathe and the space around me.

It's time for another walk.

John Zubrzycki is the author of *The House of Jaipur*, which tells the inside story of India's most glamorous royal family. His other books are *Jadoowallahs*, *Jugglers and Jinns*, which traces the evolution of India's conjuring traditions; *The Last Nizam: The Rise and Fall of India's Greatest Princely State*, and *The Mysterious Mr Jacob: Diamond Merchant, Magician and Spy*. A former deputy foreign editor at *The Australian* newspaper, he has worked in India as a foreign correspondent and diplomat. He has a PhD in Indian history from the University of New South Wales



The Turkish artist Abidin Dino once drew a picture of happiness. In this picture was a big family — huddled together on a broken bed under a leaky roof in a shabby room — a collation of our pandemic life. But each family member was smiling. Because happiness is not the absence of suffering but the presence of its acceptance.

And I have found that acceptance on my bed.

Like Truman Capote, I am a completely horizontal writer. I need to be lying down on the bed, tucked cosily under a blanket, to be able to think *and* write. I'm so finicky about quietude (even in a mad bustling city like Mumbai) that I find the whirring of a fan distracting and can sit through sweltering Indian summers without it on! My family thinks I'm crazy, but that's not necessarily an abhorrent quality for a writer to possess.

I'm a rather unconventional writer in that I'm not afflicted with addictions like cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, demons, dysfunctional relationships and nymphomania. This is not due to moralistic but

My Favourite Place to Write

Meghna Pant

practical compulsions, as I want to live up to a ripe old age so I can keep writing for a long, long time. My only addiction is chocolate and cups of either *adrak* chai or Nespresso, always within reach of my bed.

We all know that writing is a lesson in endurance. It pushes your mind to the brink. It beckons for lengthy and voluntary stays in complete quiet, which can truly only be found under cosy blankets. No?

After all, artists strive for passivity and, perhaps therefore, writing becomes the best way to travel without moving your feet. It is, in essence, an extension of dreams, transforming imagination into something more real than life. My aphrodisiac for writing is angst: the urgency to complete an idea in my head, to finish telling a character's story and to become the best writer I can possibly be. Therefore, I write best in the morning before my mind has completely awakened to the world and, then, late at night when my mind is slowly unawakening to the world. What better spot than my bed for this?

Life is not much different in the pandemic for a writer who has been in lockdown from the world for years now. A lockdown from the world has not made me lock down my imagination. Instead, the absence of social engagement has fired up my passion, fuelled my ambition. It has helped me write two screenplays, two novels, and work on another novel and screenplay. I am often so tired at the end of a long day, even if it mostly involves lying in bed, that I feel my body relax and breathe out.

Lying down is a form of meditation for me. Of inhaling ideas, holding them in, allowing them to percolate, and exhaling them into stories. It is not a state of laziness, as it's demonised to be, but one of levitation.

Productivity. Of allowing thoughts to thrive when your body is most receptive. Of freedom from bras, from performance, from engagement. Of drowning out life's incessant noise

Yup. Lying down is a form of meditation for me. Of inhaling ideas, holding them in, allowing them to percolate, and exhaling them into stories. It is *not* a state of laziness, as it's demonised to be, but one of levitation. Productivity. Of allowing thoughts to thrive when your body is most receptive. Of freedom from bras, from performance, from engagement. Of drowning out life's incessant noise.

No wonder then that my bed is now marked by indents of my life. By two pregnancies, where I had to be lifted from it during my final trimesters. By sleepless nights with newborn babies where I let ideas come to me. By years of babies suckling at my breasts while I forged my plots. By gurgles in response to my spirited conversations with imaginary characters. By first cuts born from a moment of manuscript distraction, by food spills and spit ups and diaper accidents, and by watching little humans, the size of forearms, occupy a tiny tremoring corner of the bed and, in the blink of an eye, taking up the entirety of the same bed, just like my books.

My bed has changed shapes with my writing. I



The bed where life happens

mark my writing with the smiles of my children. Of carving out moments of silence amidst shrieks and giggles. Of their unexpressed love finding its way, as they allow me to be a mother who is completely hands-on but not totally consumed, and therefore, remain a writer. The bed has carved a niche for whatever I want to be — single, married, pregnant, writer, dreamer, drifter, a mother of one, a mother of two, allowing the presence of many shapes and sizes and dreams, sometimes the absence of hope and always the trickle of resuscitated aspirations to rest upon it.

Meghna Pant is a multiple award-winning and bestselling author, journalist and speaker. She's published six books, including *The Terrible, Horrible, Very Bad Good News*, *How to Get Published in India*, *Feminist Rani*, *The Trouble with Women*, *Happy Birthday* and *One and a Half Wife*. She has been felicitated with various honours and shortlists for distinguished contribution to literature, gender issues and journalism, including the Bharat Nirman Award, Frank O'Connor International Award, Commonwealth Short Story Prize, Laadli Media Award, FICCI 'Young Achiever's Award', The Lifestyle Journalist 'Women Achiever's Award', FON South Asia Short Story Award, Muse India Young Writer Award and Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award. She lives in Mumbai with her husband and daughters



Peac-ing It Together

Nayanika Mahtani

‘Oh please — not another Zoom session,’ is my first (and rather ungenerous) thought, when I receive an invite to a literature festival in Lahore that has been compelled to go digital in the pandemic. At the best of times, I am not digitally inclined. In raging pandemics, even less so. Little do I know that this online lit fest will be my gateway to a journey that recalibrates my perspective on life.

While the world as we know it is torn apart by an invisible virus, another invisible entity becomes the glue that holds my world together. Holding out hope when I have most needed it.

This has been a time like no other. Life as we know it is aborted, without our consent. The moving walkway halts abruptly and we stumble off, reaching for our masks and sanitisers. Interactions migrate to an online platform. Some friends pursue newfound passions; I find myself incapable of such productivity — unable to steer my thoughts away from the overcrowded crematoriums that dominate the news. My mind is numb. The words dry up.

It is against this backdrop that I am invited to this online literature festival in Lahore to speak about my novel, *Across the Line*, which is rooted in the Partition of the subcontinent. Both sets of my grandparents are survivors of the Partition. I have long hoped to visit their ancestral homes in and around Lahore — but haven’t had the chance. Since the world is now online, I reckon this digital lit fest in Lahore is the closest I

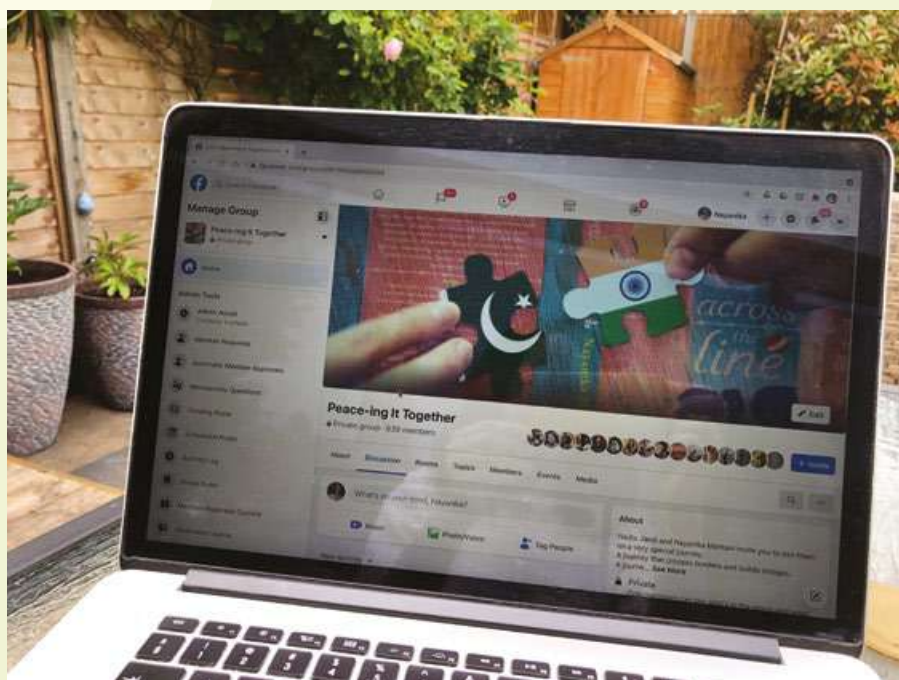
will get to going back to my roots. I gratefully accept the invite.

At the session, I am in conversation with Nadia Jamil, an exceptionally gifted Pakistani actor, who reads extracts from *Across the Line*. This is not the first time I am speaking about the book since the pandemic started. But somehow this time, as we discuss the cataclysmic upheaval of 1947 that left millions dead or homeless in its wake, my reaction is more visceral. Looking at that aftermath through the lens of the pandemic lends perspective to the unimaginable trauma they must have endured and the resilience they must have needed to pick up the pieces and carry on. Something within me shifts, imperceptibly.

In *Across the Line*, Jai, a youngster from New Delhi, starts an online movement called ‘Peace-ing It Together’, with the help of Inaya from Rawalpindi. On reading the book, Nadia says to me, ‘Why don’t you and I attempt to do in real life what Jai and Inaya do in the book?’ And just like that, ‘Peace-ing It Together’ morphs from being an idea in a book to a Facebook group of fellow eternal hopefuls building a bridge of hope in a ‘lockdown world’.

‘Peace-ing It Together’ has since become a virtual neighbourhood where people of South Asian origin from across the world share stories and memories of people and places, from both sides of the border. Stories of who we are, where we came from, what those before us endured — and overcame. Stories of the kindness and humanity that emerged during the Partition when the world was at one of its darkest

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‘Peace-ing It Together’ has since become a virtual neighbourhood where people of South Asian origin from across the world share stories and memories of people and places, from both sides of the border.... Stories of the kindness and humanity that emerged during the Partition when the world was at one of its darkest moments. And stories of heart-warming solidarity and the generosity of strangers as we go through this darkness now
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moments. And stories of heart-warming solidarity and the generosity of strangers as we go through this darkness now.

We have always turned to stories for hope and renewal. There is comfort in knowing that others have been through long, dark nights before.

Spring arrives after the long winter. The cherry blossom tree that I had planted last year bursts into glorious bloom. It has stood for months with its bare branches outstretched to the sky — a reminder of Nature's unwavering belief that spring will follow even the most relentless winter. But the promise of another spring doesn't always hold true for everyone. We humans don't have buds and seeds that will live on, after we are gone. What we do have, however, is stories and collective memory. Which reminds us that darkness and light are both needed to keep the rhythm of life.

My days are now filled with trying to arrange oxygen concentrators or hospital beds back home in India for those battling this rampaging virus. The list includes loved ones as well as many whom I have never met. Some lose the battle, others soldier on, fighting for breath, while I hold mine in silent prayer.

My refuge in these turbulent times has been the little digital oasis of 'Peace-ing It Together', where the stories being shared are the hope that keeps me afloat.

I have always believed that stories choose their tellers and their timing. *Across the Line* is a story that I have carried inside of me for years. Yet, I finally found the words to write it just months before the pandemic started. Perhaps its timing was meant to prepare me for what was to follow.

As always, life remains the master storyteller. Who would have thought that a pandemic would alter the narrative so dramatically — and that a digital neighbourhood on my laptop would provide refuge from the storm?

Nayanika Mahtani started her career as an investment banker and is now an award-winning author and screenwriter, based in London. Mahtani's latest Young Adult book, *Across the Line*, which is rooted in the Partition, has made it to the prestigious South Asia Book Awards' 2020 Honours List. Mahtani has been a speaker at the Jaipur Literature Festival every year since 2015, as well as at various other lit fests in the UK, India, Pakistan, UAE and Bhutan. Mahtani has recently co-written the story and screenplay for the film *Shakuntala Devi* starring Vidya Balan



Technology, the Flawed Friend

Suvir Saran

My iPhone and MacBook have been my most loyal and trusted companions through the Covid journey. Having them gives me the ability to stay connected with the world and also connect my thoughts to a cloud-journal, which gives me cathartic release and therapeutic healing. They are always there for me, do not judge me, and they adapt to my needs and emotions while giving me emoticons to communicate better with. They are perpetually indefatigable and quick to come to my rescue for most of my needs.

Of course, this isn't to say that they are better than the humans who have enriched my life thus far and who shall certainly leave their mark on mine in the future. In fact, I am learning more and more that these trusted technological friends have their own limitations and challenges. Fraught with the design sensibilities of another, I see in them many a flaw; flaws that are as natural in their existence as are all of my own. They are after all the creation and mapping of another as mortal and ordinary as I am. As I find myself frustrated by the illogical ways that some functions on my phone and computer are designed, I think of the frailties and flaws that others see in me and I in them.



I use my phone and my laptop to compose and comment, to share and nudge those in my world and even remotely associated with it into a place of gratitude and civility. I urge them to come alive, to see the other, hear their voiceless calls for empathy, feel for those left to suffer due to our mass apathy towards our own, and to think of the human collective as one and not disparate isms



What I have learned in the silence of my flat in the heart of Delhi is the blessing of good luck and opportunities I have been bestowed in this lifetime. How fortunate I am to be tackling such one percent issues as what nooks and crannies of a home I find comfort in, when millions have been displaced, rendered homeless, and worse, even dead. And so, I find myself thanking my stars and connecting dots, building bridges, and forging links for others less fortunate, trying to provide some opportunity, mindful listening, caring support and thoughtful presence to those forgotten by our mindless collective.

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Chair, couch or bed, the pandemic has gifted many

of us time to reflect and grow, to rise to the challenge as civilised humans. Wherever we choose to find comfort, we ought to run towards that place and begin our journey of reflection and growth, of putting our money, mind, words and actions where our thoughts are.

Suvir Saran is a New Delhi-born-and-based culinary authority and the author of three celebrated cookbooks: *Indian Home Cooking*, *American Masala*, and *Masala Farm*, and the chef-creator of THC, The House of Celeste, a modern Indian restaurant in Gurgaon. His *Slice of Life* column appears fortnightly in the *Sunday Eye* magazine of *The Indian Express*. Saran's approachable style helped demystify Indian cuisine and earned him the first Michelin star awarded to an Indian restaurant in America. In his fourth book, *Instamatic*, Suvir shares the inspiration behind his art and his journeys across multiple civilisations, from the land of his birth to the land of his karma



From the first flat I bought, with my own money, to the home that I live in right now, I've loved doing the interiors of every home I've lived in. I'm proud to say I've done every inch of my home myself. Before we moved into Casa Zen in 2015, I worked tirelessly for a year and a half and stood amongst the brick, cement, sand, carpenters, plumbers and electricians, and decided on every curve, every tile, every last piece of nail that was hammered into the walls. The only room I didn't pay attention to was the guest room. I was exhausted and the guest room had the basics in place. I have had very few guests who have actually stayed over. The guest room only had a huge bed and a cupboard that belonged to my paternal grandma that was now stuffed with beautiful linen. One day, a few years after we had moved in, I was tired of requesting the kids not to disturb me, or not watch the TV really loudly, because my study desk was attached to the master bedroom. I decided to take all my books and my computer and put it into the

The Birdsong Desk

Maria Goretti

"room of no requirement".

I remember clearly, it was early in August, 2019. I had an old table dragged into the guest room, all the plugs and cords, water, snacks to eat when I get hungry, and a crappy Wi-fi connection. Slowly, very slowly, I found my escape from all the din. I started spending a lot of time at that east-facing desk. Every morning sunlight would stream in through the *badam* and the mango tree outside my window, and the chatter of birds filled the room. The room felt *good*.

I spent my time there either writing, talking to friends or reading. It was my little haven. When I looked at the huge bed in this room, put there for visiting guests, it felt so unnecessary. It needed something cosier. Little did I know that as the months went by, we would be in lockdown and there wouldn't be any more guests coming over.

By January, my teenage kids decided that they didn't want to share a room anymore, and so I started remodelling again. Zeke was going to be taking his 10th grade exams that year, his mock exams were around the corner. I started getting his room ready as soon as possible, so he wouldn't be disturbed during his exams. At the same time, I decided to convert the guest room into the cosy, pretty vision I had for it. I designed a simple table with all the storage I'd need, a lovely hanging book stand, and a cupboard that

It's funny how a room that I didn't pay attention to and left bare for years, became the most special place to me. I'm still trying to find the right shade of green for the curtains, but interiors are an ongoing love for me and I don't mind the adventure.... I feel so very fortunate and privileged to have this space during these disturbing times. I know every one of us has our own demons to duel with. I am lucky to battle with them and share a piece of chocolate with them in this beautiful space

would be the bearer of all things beautiful, that were currently lying packed in boxes. Work started in full swing but by March the lockdown was announced. My son's room was ready, my daughter's room was in shambles, and my haven was just drawings on paper.

Somehow, despite its unfinished state, I was spending all my time in the guest room; scouring recipes, reading and writing from that table. That room was work in progress, just like me.

After a few months, when the situation improved and my carpenters started coming back from their villages, I started some work again. By July 2020, Zene had her room ready, a turquoise cupboard sitting cheerfully along with a desk in light wood. She did the rest of the room herself, and I loved watching her creativity flow.

I started work again on my erstwhile guest room. It worked out exactly like what I had drawn up.

The walls have funky wallpaper by my friend Payal Singhal, with peacocks and pomegranates on it. There is purple moulding running around the ceiling. My table is filled with coloured pencils, pens, tiny little

curios that have wonderful memories attached to them, and a bottle of water with a small glass jar of dates. There is also, of course, the all-important ring-light for all my live sessions. I look at a cork map of the world longingly, waiting every day for our world to un-pause.

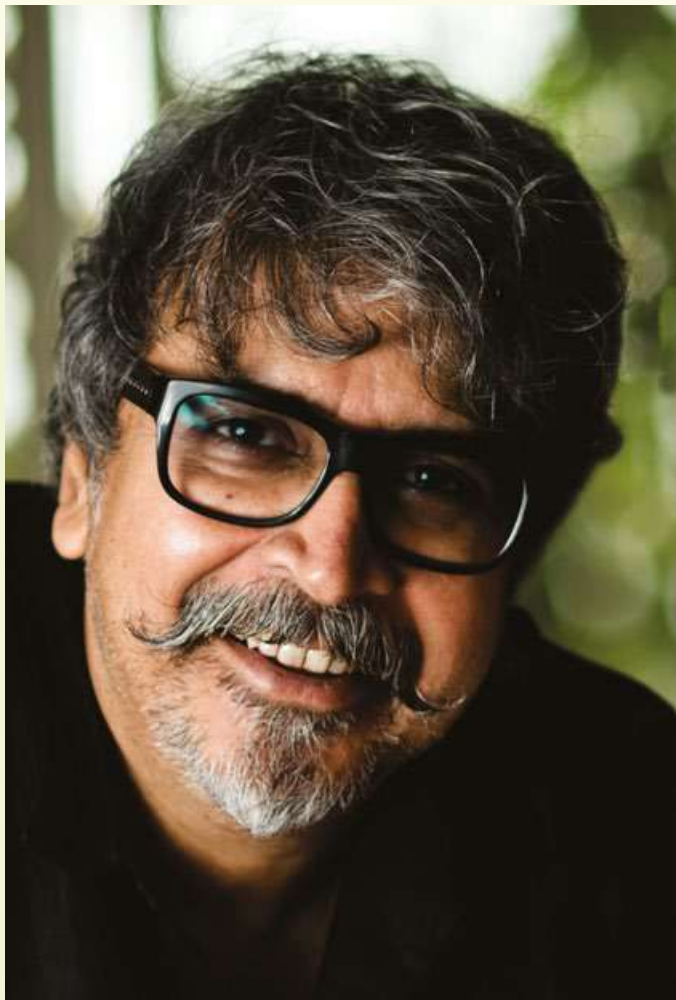
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Every afternoon, I head there post-lunch, followed by Ziggy-Mars, Zuni-Boo and Minx-Zen (my dogs and my cat) for an afternoon siesta. I love my home, but this has become my most favourite room in Casa Zen. It's the space where my thoughts flow and I'm able to write, amidst the snoring of my labs, chirping of birds outside my window, and Minx sitting behind me, asleep in my chair. I feel so very fortunate and privileged to have this space during these disturbing times. I know every one of us has our own demons to duel with. I am lucky to battle with them and share a piece of chocolate with them in this beautiful space.

Sometimes, we get what we need most when the time is right. I thank the one above for this privilege. We've all felt, at some point of time, like we had lost our freedom, because our world closed in on us, and at that time, I hope you were able to find your own little nook, where you felt free. Sometimes that place is in your own heart, and sometimes it can be a physical haven. Most women are wired to think of ourselves after everyone else. Just remember, everything works out in the end, and if it hasn't yet, it's not the end.

Maria Goretti is a gourmet cook, model and actor.

She was a VJ for MTV, interviewing and touring with musicians from around the world, including Bryan Adams, Enrique Iglesias, UB40, Abba, Ricky Martin, Ronan Keating, Peter Andre and Pentagram. Maria hosted the 2000 MTV Video Music Awards for India from the Radio City Music Hall in New York. She did the weekly news and entertainment show for Times Now, and also anchored food shows for NDTV. In 2011, she cleared the Cordon Bleu certificate course in food and baking at the Tante Marie School of Cookery, UK, run by Gordon Ramsay. She writes a food blog that has recipes, slice-of-life stories and poetry



The Mind-Mill

Praseen Pandey

I really wish that there was one particular sofa or corner in the house where I would always, always get an idea. I would have never vacated that space then. I think I am extremely mean when it comes to giving credit to the spaces in my house because if I am not getting an idea, I easily transfer the blame on to the space and shift to a different corner. But if I do get an idea, the poor space never gets due credit for it.

I think just like how there is no formula to get an idea, there is no single space that can help me find one. Ideas are “ideas” only because they are not obvious or predictable. Otherwise, everyone could easily find one. And if there was a fixed space where ideas occur, then we would all stand at the mouth of that rabbit hole and catch one as soon as it came out.

I see ideas as extremely random and surprising

connections drawn between intangible masses floating in a constantly moving, endless space. It is obviously slightly unlikely for anybody to be able to build these complex criss-crossing bridges in one’s mind when in a place one finds distracting. Thus, by sheer process of elimination, the shower becomes one happy place to allow ideas to float in. But a shower is certainly not the only place where one can get ideas, else the French would have had very few ideas.

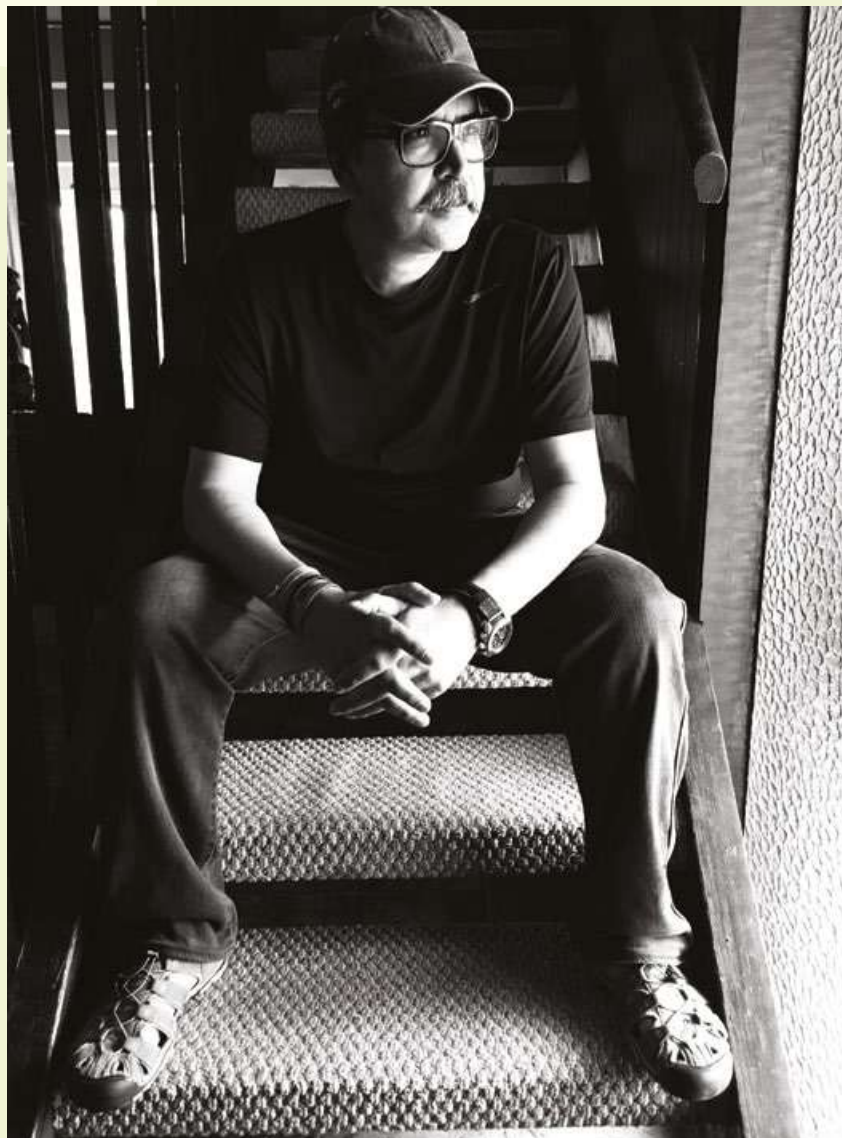
When I designed my office, I never made a cabin or even any specific table or chair for myself because I find all that a bit restricting. Nineteen years later, the office is still this way. I love floating around and trying out new corners while I am thinking. At home, very often I change a room’s set up and reconfigure the furniture in order to create a new space to trigger new areas in my head. Last year, the day the first lockdown was announced, I happened to be on my treadmill when I got an idea for a film. A film where tens of film stars come together to work in a piece of drama without anyone ever stepping out of their respective spaces. A film called *Family*. I decided to work on the project from beginning to end on my treadmill itself. Not something that I had ever done before or even after that one week of filmmaking. Certainly not what my antiquated treadmill was designed for.

So first, I pulled out my hacksaw and chopped all kinds of materials available at home and built a large working table on top of the aging treadmill. I could

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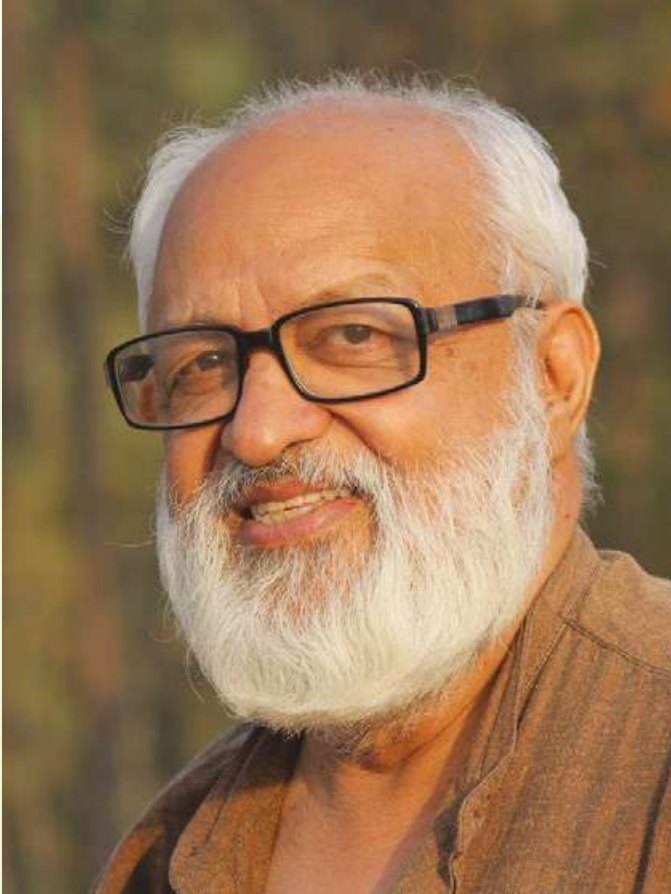
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now draw storyboards, edit clips on my laptop, and video conference with all the people involved while still strolling on the treadmill. Under the weight of the table, the treadmill started squeaking. Now that's a distraction. So, I pulled out a mill stone from our flowerbed and tied that and a 20 kg brass clock as counterweights on the treadmill. For the next seven days, this Mad Max-meets-Alexander Calder of a structure worked silently and wonderfully. On the seventh day, the film was ready and we released it on Sony. Having ensured the film's release, the treadmill found a certain sense of closure and burnt itself out. Which was just as well, because knowing me, I will find it too predictable to try and use a treadmill as a mind-mill again.

Prasoon Pandey is an award-winning ad filmmaker who, over the last 25 years, has introduced a new grammar to ad filmmaking in India: one that is unabashedly Indian and proud of its roots. His work has fed off the creativity that pervades the Indian streets. Pandey has won multiple Cannes Lion Awards, Clios Awards, Asia Pacific Adfest Awards and Abby Awards, including the award for 'The Best Indian Commercial of the Century', to name just a few. The Gunn report ranked him among the Top 25 advertising film directors in the world. In recognition of the unparalleled body of work done, along with his brother Piyush Pandey, The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity honored them both with The Lion of St. Mark, as a lifetime achievement award, in 2018. They are the first Asians and only the seventh in the world to receive it



Freedom in House Arrest

Pushpesh Pant

I feel absolutely no sense of shame in admitting that I have always been a couch potato. Never lured by adventures outdoors, I have been happiest in the bed propped by three pillows and covered by a blanket. In the small hill town where I grew up in the 1950s, there was no television, All India Radio broadcast unexciting fare but there were plenty of books. My parents were liberal and there was no censorship. Mother, who had been to Santiniketan, encouraged 'creative pursuits' like writing and sketching. Things haven't changed much for me with the passage of years.

My favourite place to read and write has always been the bed, preferably placed near a window to have the seldom-exercised option to peep at the world outside. The portable Olivetti has given way to an iPad that allows me to roam the airwaves footloose and fancy-free.

The lockdown held no terrors for me. I revisited

old Hindi movies of the vintage 'When Melody Was Queen'. Listened to my heart's content Dhrupads, Khayals, Thumris and Ghazals with headphones, without disturbing anyone else. My granddaughter recommended web series that she thought would save me from responding like a denizen of Jurassic Park.

God bless Apple for Pages and its idiot-proof Devanagari phonetic QWERTY keyboard that allowed me to punch in 1.5k words a day regularly to finish a novel, long languishing in the proverbial drawer. Never defaulted on my five weekly columns. Managed to translate a good chunk of *Jaipur Journals* in the absence of my amanuensis.

I never felt the need to switch on the Idiot Box, actually no one else in the family did either. As I was convalescing, my son served all my meals in bed. Though he gently reminded me of the benefits of daily exercise and at least a whiff of fresh air, he thankfully didn't insist that I exert to follow the painful routine.

Just before the outbreak of the pandemic I had given myself lots of books — poetry, fiction and non-fiction. These provided great company during what some call 'house arrest'. Before the stricter version of the lockdown was imposed, my beloved bookshop, The Midlands, had sent a number of books on approval with a touching note: You haven't visited us for some time. These are some of the new arrivals that



may interest you. Bless the Begs — grandfather, sons and grandsons, book lovers with seductive skills of drug pushers!

In the beginning, online classes and webinars on everything under the sun provided another reason not to stir out of the perch in the bed. However, soon the novelty of mingling with kindred souls wore off and a video call with close friends via Skype, WhatsApp or FaceTime became addictive.

I have long believed that 'Walls do not a prison make!' and this certainly helped me pass the extended terms of lockdown in 'sessions of sweet silent thought bringing up remembrances of things past' but I must also confess that there were times when the favourite nooks and books weren't enough.

For the first time in my life, I felt a bit like

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the proverbial ostrich with its head buried in the sand. As the stream of migrant labour passed on the road outside the house rekindling pictures of the Partition, it wasn't easy to draw curtains on the window or shut out the sounds with noise-cancelling gadgets. The painful thought continues to nag: have I done anything to deserve the comfort and security of my favourite corner in the room? Isn't this all an accident of birth?

”
Pushpesh Pant writes in Hindi and English and taught International Relations at JNU for over four decades. Born in 1946 in a small Himalayan town, Pant was schooled at home and later studied in Nainital and Delhi. Pant has published a novella in Hindi and books in English, mostly on food and culture. His most recent book, *The Indian Vegetarian*, was published in 2018



Amish Tripathi



The Truth About Losing Control and Finding Success

Talk of artistic creation and control and the role of the writer as a witness and narrator flowed freely at a recent session of **The Write Circle** Birmingham and Oxford organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**. In the hot seat, sharing his views, was none other than one of India's most popular historical and mythological fiction writers, Amish Tripathi.

The virtual meet with the author of the famed *Shiva Trilogy* and the *Ram Chandra* series was opened by **Ehsaas** Woman of Birmingham, Titiksha Shah, and was moderated by Bharatnatyam dancer, storyteller and former Miss India, Chitra Sundaram.

Being a first-time writer with a bestseller on your hands is incredible in itself, but to be the creative force behind the fastest-selling book series (the *Shiva Trilogy*) in Indian publishing history is a feat few can dream of. No wonder then that Sundaram welcomed Amish to the conversation with a question delving into the whys and hows of the beginning of his writing career.

Falling back on the popular adage — “Life is what happens to you when you are planning other things” — *The Immortals of Meluha* author confessed to never having ambitions of being a writer. It was all about reading voraciously in his family. “I began writing the



Chitra Sundaram

story for myself... I never thought that it would get published.... I wasn't thinking about where it would go,” he said. The banker-turned-author-turned-diplomat explained that because he never had to pay bills through his writing, thanks to his day job, he could write for the sake of his own fulfilment.

Much to the delight of the audience, Amish then delved into his hits and misses on the path to authorial success. He acknowledged that he only had the basic story idea and the way to end it. The actual knowledge of how to navigate the plotline was a mystery. Hence, he tried everything from reading self-help books on how to write

to using spreadsheets to keep track of his progress — all “disasters”.

So what finally worked? “The first step was to realise that you are not in control,” said the current director of Nehru Centre in London. He rued that our modern education system drills the importance of exerting control to such an extent that it comes at the price of foregoing intuition, spontaneity and creativity. He added that “As any Shakta worshipper would know, with the Goddess, you have to surrender.... For me surrendering to the flow of the story was a very big mental shift.”

Elaborating on the humility of the creative process, he said, “When I stopped writing with the arrogance of the creator and started writing with the humility of a witness, that is when the story started flowing.” In fact, he admitted that even till this day — over 10 years and nine books later — he has no idea where the stories come from. “It would be a lie for me to say that it was my brilliance and my creativity (that brought success),” said Amish, humbly admitting that he just opens his laptop and a whole universe opens up. It is his job to record whatever he witnesses.

However, in today’s day and age, nothing sells itself, no matter how great, so the conversation next turned to his take on marketing. “A good book doesn’t sell itself — that is a fallacy. You need good marketing.... Kalidasa has been marketed in modern India so we think of him as the greatest Sanskrit playwright. But Kalidasa himself believed Bhasa was the greatest... but he (Bhasa) hasn’t been marketed so we don’t know. So marketing is important.”

However, Amish cautioned budding authors about “letting marketing drive the product”. Calling it corruption, he emphasised that while writing one’s intentions should be pure. They have to let the story flow and take its own course. The marketing should come only after the book is completed.

Speaking of external forces that drive the fate of authors and their works, Amish then chose to shed light on the publishers’ tendency of “looking down on their audience” by deciding what they will and won’t like. “My first book was rejected by multiple publishers because (they thought that) the subject I had chosen wouldn’t be of interest to the youth. It is ironic then that it is the youth who are reading my books the most,” said the author who hasn’t let past criticisms about how his books are too long, too philosophical or not “syrupy” enough for the youth to bring him down or sway him from his artistic path.



Piali Ray



Titikksha Shah

He also revealed that he never writes keeping a target audience in mind.

However, knowing that he has a voice and massive reach, Amish definitely keeps in mind his responsibility as an artiste. “Any artiste should take the responsibility of the content that they put out. They should be true to themselves, their *swadharma* and their inner moral compass,” he said, citing Bollywood’s tendency of normalising stalking and “other extremely troubling behaviour” for decades as a prime example of what shouldn’t be allowed to continue in the name of creative freedom.

Sundaram asked him to elaborate on his notion of dharma, karma and *swadharma* as discussed in his latest book, *Dharma: Decoding the Epics for a Meaningful Life*. Speaking about how to find that fine balance between what’s considered dharma and one’s own *swadharma*, Amish explained, “One of the key things in knowing whether you are in alignment with your *swadharma* is a bit like knowing whether you are in love. There’s no checklist. No one can tell you. You just know.” On the subject’s complexity, he gave the analogy of soldiers whose *swadharma* is to protect their country and therefore cannot simply shun violence as dharma might dictate. So, the trick is to figure out whether there is a dissonance inside or is one at peace with their inner compass. This determines their karma.

The chat ended with a quick Q&A session with the audience after which Piyali Ray, the director of Sampad, thanked Sundaram and Amish for the engaging conversation.

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

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शूटिंग एक हवन कुंड है और एक्टिंग सिद्धि: रवि किशन



Ravi Kishan



Shrinjini Kulkarni



Sharmita Bhinder

कलाकार हमेशा प्रकृति से जुड़ा होता है। वह लोगों से जुड़ा होता है। कलाकार मतलब फकीर। सब कुछ त्यागने की जिसमें शक्ति है वही कलाकार है। जो सड़क पर हो, झोपड़ी में, खेत में या महल में...उसे फर्क नहीं पड़ता।" यह कहना है चर्चित अभिनेता और सांसद रवि किशन का। किशन कोरोना महामारी की दूसरी लहर के बीच **प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन** की ओर से आयोजित **एक मुलाकात विशेष** के वर्चुअल सत्र में मुखातिब थे। कार्यक्रम का आरंभ फाउंडेशन की गतिविधियों पर आधारित एक संगीतमय फिल्म की प्रस्तुति से हुआ। फिर **अहसास** वूमेन चंडीगढ़ से जुड़ी शर्मिता भिंडर ने फाउंडेशन द्वारा संचालित कार्यक्रमों की चर्चा के साथ स्वागत वक्तव्य और अतिथि परिचय दिया। आपने बताया कि किशन जानेमाने कलाकार, अभिनेता और लोकप्रिय राजनेता हैं। दुनिया भर में हिंदी और भोजपुरी भाषियों के उनकी खास जगह है। 650 से अधिक फिल्मों में एक्टिंग कर चुके हैं, जिनमें से हिंदी, तेलुगू, भोजपुरी, कन्नड़, मराठी, तमिल

और गुजराती सिनेमा शामिल है। उत्तर प्रदेश की प्रतिष्ठित गोरखपुर संसदीय सीट से भाजपा सांसद हैं। बिग बॉस में भी शामिल हो चुके हैं और अपने एक डायलॉग 'जिंदगी झंड बा, फिर भी घमंड बा' से हिंदी बोलने वालों के दिलों पर राज करते हैं। आगे की बातचीत के लिए उन्होंने **अहसास** वूमेन नोएडा से जुड़ी प्रख्यात कथक नृत्यांगना शिंजिनी कुलकर्णी को आमंत्रित किया।

कुलकर्णी ने किशन द्वारा बचपन में गांव की रामलीला में सीता का रोल और वर्तमान में श्री राम जन्मभूमि मंदिर निर्माण के फैसले के बाद अयोध्या में आयोजित रामलीला में भरत की भूमिका की चर्चा की और कहा कि आपने इतना अधिक काम

किया है कि आपके बारे में बात करना और सवाल बनाना बहुत कठिन था। आप केवल पांच सौ रुपए लेकर मुंबई आए और इस बड़े मुकाम तक पहुंचे। इस यात्रा के बारे में बताएं? किशन ने कहा, “मेरे जीवन की एक लंबी यात्रा रही। मैं छोटा था तो एक सवाल हमेशा अपने आपसे करता रहा कि मैं यहां क्यों आया? कहीं ऐसा तो नहीं कि मैं बिना पहचान के ही चला जाऊंगा। मां भगवती, मां सरस्वती की कृपा होती है तो आप कलाकार बनते हैं। मेरे पिता की आध्यात्मिकता, मां के आशीर्वाद से मैं यहां पहुंचा। सच यही है कि मैं अपने अंदर एक लड़ाई लड़ रहा था कि लोग हमें जानें। मैंने भोजपुरी इंडस्ट्री बनाई। आज एक लाख लोग इसमें काम करते हैं। खुद को बनाते-बनाते मैंने लोगों के जीवन को भी बदला। मैं स्वार्थी नहीं बना। यह यात्रा बहुत सुंदर रही।”

अमिताभ बच्चन ने आपको यूपी-बिहार का नायक कहा था। हिंदी से जब आप भोजपुरी के लिए काम कर रहे थे, तो यह एक समझौता था, या आप यह चाहते थे? किशन का उत्तर था, “मैं सलमान, शाहरुख, अक्षय के साथ काम कर चुका था। पर मुझमें जो प्रतिभा थी, वह अपनी पहचान खोज रही थी। अंदर से कहीं मुझे लगा कि मैं इस पगडंडी से क्यों न अपना रास्ता बनाऊं। मुझे लगा कि मैं भी जिंदा हूँ, मुझे यह साबित करना है रवि किशन शुक्ला, मैंने सिनेमा की पढ़ाई है। मैंने अपनी पहचान की लड़ाई के लिए यह किया और इससे बहुत सारे लोगों का भला भी हुआ।” भोजपुरी फिल्म इंडस्ट्री में मनोरंजन प्रभावी है, फिर आप कला सिनेमा की तरफ कैसे मुड़ गए? किशन का उत्तर था, “बिग बॉस में लोगों ने मुझे देखकर यह माना कि ये बंदा अपनी अलग छाप छोड़ता है। श्याम बेनेगल, मणिरत्नम, अनुराग कश्यप जैसे लोगों ने इसे महसूस किया। महादेव की कृपा रही। मैंने अपने को दी गई भूमिका में सौ नहीं, हजार प्रतिशत काम किया। शूटिंग एक हवन कुंड है, जब आप किसी किरदार में जाते हो, तब आप किसी को आकर्षित करते हो, तो यह एक महीन काम है। यह एक तपस्या है। यह कोई आसान काम नहीं है। कहीं मैं राम हूँ, कहीं रावण हूँ, कहीं सीता हूँ। यह एक सिद्धि दिलाती है, बिना सिद्धि के इतनी फिल्में नहीं मिलती हैं।”

आगे के सवाल के उत्तर में किशन ने कहा कि काम करने की एक तरह की भूख है मुझमें। ईश्वर की कृपा है मुझ पर, गोरखपुर में साढ़े सात लाख वोट मुझे मिले। ईश्वर ऐसा टास्क मुझे दे रहे हैं। मैं अपने इलाके में लोगों की मदद कर रहा हूँ। कोरोना में गोरखपुर की स्थिति बहुत खराब हो गई थी, अभी ठीक है। ईश्वर चाहते थे कि मैं सेवा भाव में आऊँ। सिनेमा चाहे कैसा भी हो, भाषा कोई भी हो, मुझे कैमरे से प्यार है। मैं सिनेमा नहीं छोड़ सकता हूँ। वही मेरी कमाई है। प्रधानमंत्री और मुख्यमंत्री को भी यह पता है। मैं शूटिंग गोरखपुर में कर रहा हूँ। मैंने सिनेमा को राजनीति में भी रखा है और अपनी संसदीय क्षेत्र में भी कर रहा हूँ। जब मुझे जरूरत थी लोगों ने मेरी मदद नहीं की थी। यह नियति की देन है और महादेव का आशीर्वाद है। गोरखपुर में 2018 में बसपा-सपा के गठबंधन से भाजपा हार गई थी। यह एक कठिन लड़ाई थी। बाहरी और सिनेमावाले का आरोप लगा। हमारे पूर्वज गोरखपुर के एक गांव के थे। कोई गांव, चौराहा, सड़क, नुकड़ मैंने छोड़ा नहीं। शोहरत, दौलत, आराम ईश्वर मुझे पहले ही दे चुके थे। मैं संसद में सबसे अधिक सवाल पूछने वाला यूपी का सांसद बना। मेरी मांगों को बड़ी इज्जत दी जाती है। मैं संसद में चुप नहीं रहता। फिल्म उद्योग के

पुराने लोगों ने ऐसा किया था। मैं राजनीति भी खुद को खोकर करता हूँ।

आप फिल्मों में अलग-अलग भूमिका करते हैं। इसी तरह दशकों की दोस्ती और विचारधारा के विरोध के बीच संतुलन कैसे करते हैं? किशन का उत्तर था, “ड्रम्स के बारे में बोलना था। हमारे पूर्वजों ने खून बहाकर आजादी ली। मुंबई और फिल्म इंडस्ट्री की बात नहीं, मैं पूरे देश की बात कर रहा कि ड्रम्स का उपयोग करते हुए हमारे हीरो को नहीं दिखना चाहिए। युवा बरबाद हो रहे हैं। संसद में मेरे सवाल के बाद नारको ने बहुत सारे रेड किए। संसद की आवाज बहुत ध्यान से सुनी जाती है। मेरी पार्टी ने इसके लिए मेरी पीठ थपथपाई। बॉलीवुड में लोग पहचान के लिए आते हैं, दोस्ती करने नहीं आते। वे साथ काम करते हैं। आप दोस्ती टूटने जाओगे तो धोखा मिलेगा। लोगों की सोचोगे तो फिर आप बोल ही नहीं सकते। फिर आप धरती पर आए ही क्यों? अगर ईश्वर ने आपको शक्ति

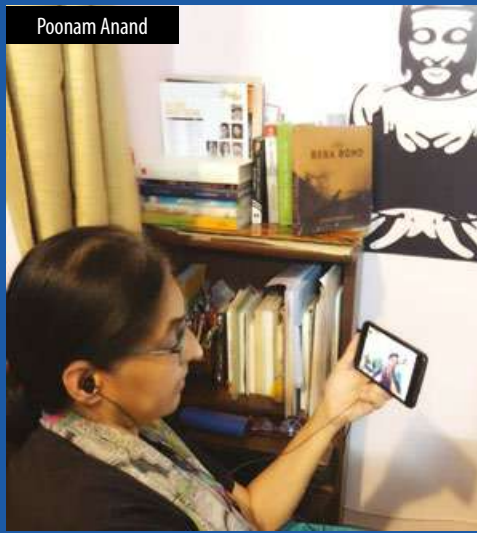
दी है तो डरने की कोई बात नहीं है।” अपनी पर्सनॉलिटी में औघड़पन से जुड़े सवाल पर किशन का उत्तर था, “आपको कैसे जीना है यह आप खुद तय करते हैं। आपके अंदर सारे मौसम हैं। आप जब स्वयंभू बन जाते हैं तो आप किसी चीज को मिस नहीं करते। मुझे ईश्वर ने वह शक्ति दे दी है। यह उनकी लीला है। जब आप मानते हैं तब आप कुंठित नहीं होते। अगर आप मिस करते हैं, तो आप मर गए। अभी मदद का जो भाव है वह अलग है। कोरोना ने मुझे झिंझोड़ दिया है। मैं अपनी हर सांस के साथ ईश्वर को धन्यवाद देता हूँ। पूरा देश एक साथ बीमार हो गया। आज सांसों का मूल्य पता चल रहा है। आंखें खुल रही हैं। यह दौर हमें सिखा रहा है।”

किशन ने दीपा मिश्रा, अर्चना त्रिपाठी और कनक रेखा चौहान के अलावा रैपिड

राउंड सवाल के भी उत्तर दिए और यह माना कि भोजपुरी सिनेमा बहुत पीछे है। उनके जूनियर हीरो ने केवल पैसा कमाने पर जोर दिया, जबकि मलयालम, तेलुगू, कन्नड़ सिनेमा इंडस्ट्री ने अपने को मजबूत किया। किशन ने सलाह दी कि भोजपुरी सिनेमा को केवल गानों पर नहीं, बल्कि अपने कंटेंट और स्क्रिप्ट भी पर काम करना होगा। इसके लिए सबको एक साथ जागना होगा। उन्होंने यह भरोसा जताया कि एक दिन ऐसा अवश्य होगा। इस दौरान उन्होंने नोएडा में बन रही फिल्म सिटी की भी चर्चा की और प्रधानमंत्री नरेंद्र मोदी और उत्तर प्रदेश के मुख्यमंत्री योगी आदित्यनाथ द्वारा मिल रहे सहयोग, समर्थन और विश्वास के साथ अपनी भूमिका की भी चर्चा की। अलग-अलग भाषाओं में फिल्में करने के बीच उन्हें किस भाषा में काम करना अधिक भाता है? पर किशन का उत्तर था कि भोजपुरी ने मुझे स्टारडम दिया, पर हिंदी पिता के समान है। रही पसंद की बात तो मुझे लाइट, साउंड, कैमरा, एक्शन, कट और मेकअप की खुशबू इतनी भाती है कि मैं हर भूमिका में सहज हूँ। गुजरे जमाने के कलाकारों में बलराज साहनी, संजीव कुमार को पसंदीदा बताते हुए उन्होंने समकालीनों में अक्षय कुमार, अभिषेक बच्चन, तेलुगू फिल्म शूटिंग के दौरान हुए जीप एक्सीडेंट की चर्चा की। ऑटोबायोग्राफी के लिए उन्होंने *जिंदगी झंड बा फिर भी घमंड बा* को उपयुक्त नाम व पसंदीदा गीत के रूप में *कोई होता जिसको अपना और मैं जिंदगी का साथ निभाता चला गया* का जिक्र किया। आभार भिंडर ने व्यक्त किया।

एक मुलाकात विशेष के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट

Poonam Anand



Driven by Passion



Himanshu Gulati is not just your average Indian-Origin high achiever making India proud. The young Norwegian of Indian descent joined youth politics at the age of 15, served as the youngest State Secretary in Norway at 25 as well as the Deputy Minister of Justice and the Deputy Minister State Secretary in the Prime Minister's office after that.

But it is not just his political exploits that have been exemplary, his proficiency in other spheres, as an actor, director and television presenter has been noteworthy as well. To speak about all of this, Gulati joined **Ehsaas** Woman of Chandigarh, Rishma Gill, for a rousing **Ek Mulakat Vishesh** session. Also present were **Ehsaas** Woman of Varanasi, Ankita Khattri Naadan, who delivered the opening speech, and Harsha Parekh of Spectrum, who delivered the endnote.

Gulati joined the virtual chat from his office inside the Norwegian Parliament. The session started with

Gulati disclosing what it feels to be one of the youngest members of parliament.

Gulati first pointed out that it wasn't as uncommon in Norway for people under 30 to hold office as it is in India. He gave credit to well-developed youth parties that function as recruiting organisations for the main parties for this trend. Grateful for his career highs, he stated the importance of having the youth in politics. "I think it is important in every society that people of all ages, whether the elders... or the youngsters have their voice inside politics and play a part in how their society is shaped. It helps to create better policies if all age groups are represented."

However, his path to success was far from smooth. "The challenges you face as an outsider, being so young in politics, is that people underestimate you. I think that is a challenge people face everywhere," he admitted, adding with conviction, "But we live in a world where what you do and your input is more



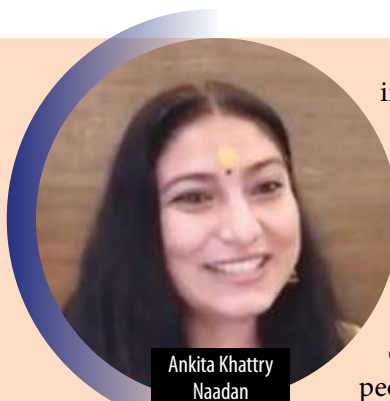
important than who you are. That is one of the reasons I could also be where I am."

When asked how politics happened to him, Gulati said that he always had very strong opinions whenever he looked at debates on television, that his "blood used to boil." "I had the feeling that unless you participate in democracy, unless you throw yourself out there, you don't have a legitimate reason to complain. So, I felt that if I am unhappy with something, I should try to be part of the change myself," he explained.

He also credited to his Indian heritage — an integral part of him — and his parents for shaping his thinking and his worldview. "My parents, like a lot of people who left India in the '70s-'80s for Norway, started with two empty hands... I am very grateful to them. I and a lot of people who were born to Indian parents abroad got opportunities served on a silver platter, while people who did the hard work were our parents' generation."

As for how he has managed to stay connected to his roots, Gulati revealed it was thanks to his parents as well. "Indians, wherever they travel, are very good at preserving their culture. Although living away from India, my parents, like millions of other Indians abroad, watched Bollywood films, listened to Indian music. They made Indian food not just for themselves but for all the neighbours," he disclosed, calling them "ambassadors of Indian culture".

Gulati next revealed that while politics is his calling, travel is his passion. Having visited over 160 countries, Gulati urged "everybody to travel as much as possible". "I travelled a lot within India also and was fortunate to see almost all parts of the country. Travelling truly expands one's horizon and also teaches one that the world is not black and white. It is full of nuances," he shared, going on to list some of his more challenging destinations, including North Korea, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. "I also have participated in several personal

Ankita Khattry
Naadan

Harsha Parekh

initiatives to help Norwegians stranded abroad to come home," he said.

Gulati, who has been part of efforts to purchase and supply oxygen concentrators to India from Norway, added, "I do travel for my soul and as a hobby, but I haven't let borders, distances or war stand in the way of trying to help people as part of my political work as well."

The MP also spoke about his "personal mission" — to strengthen ties between India and Norway. "Norway is a small country but you could say it is a superpower in certain fields such as energy, gas, oil, fisheries and so on. Both India and Norway can increase trade. I think there's great potential for Norwegian and Indian technologies to go both ways. I think India also offers Europe and Norway something more than just commodities.

It offers the heritage of yoga, meditation and sort of the inner aspects I know Norwegians are very inspired by," said Gulati, who is the creator of the Norway-India Friendship Association within the Norwegian parliament.

The challenges you face as an outsider, being so young in politics, is that people underestimate you. I think that is a challenge people face everywhere. But we live in a world where what you do and your input is more important than who you are. That is one of the reasons I could also be where I am

Gulati received the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award in 2019. Conveying his gratitude, he said, "It was an out-of-the-world experience.... Personally, to receive the award from the Prime Minister (of India) and the President was one of the greatest honours of my life and something I will never forget."

The session came to a close with Gill and Gulati discussing the latter's interest in filmmaking. "In this world, there is no such thing as a politician, an activist or a documentary maker. What you see is people who have a passion for something they believe in. The format you use to channel your energy and activism can sometimes be politics, sometimes be films or books. My passion for what I stand for is

what drives me, and I have used all formats I could to get this across," he said.

Ek Mulakat Vishesh is presented by Shree Cement Ltd

Kabir Bedi: Living Life as an Enigma



Kabir Bedi



Neelima Dalmia Adhar

For close to five decades, Kabir Bedi has been one of India's most enigmatic film personalities. His iconic baritone and his eclectic acting skills have fascinated generations of fans. At the same time, his disdain for societal conventions has made his personal life seem like a soap opera.

As part of a virtual session of **The Write Circle** Bangalore, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, Bedi addressed the unconventional life he has led and how he has documented his most important stories as part of his recently released autobiography, *Stories I Must Tell: The Emotional Life of an Actor*.

Known for numerous memorable roles such as his portrayal of emperor Shah Jahan in *Taj Mahal: An Eternal Love Story* or his turn as antagonist in *Khoon Bhari Maang*, Bedi, who has performed across continents in an illustrious career, was in conversation with Neelima Dalmia, **Ehsaas Woman** of Delhi, psychologist and author of three books.

The discussion got underway with Bedi revealing that he has "felt a compelling need to tell my story for 10 years." Although he initially struggled with how he was going to keep his readers hooked, the onset of the pandemic allowed him time to write in isolation, figure out a neat structure for his book, and do justice to the multiple narratives of his life by allocating

them into separate sections, like a collection of short stories.

Bedi worked non-stop for seven months with the feeling "that a volcano was exploding" inside his head and produced a book that is loaded with candour and held together by Bedi's characteristic charm and confidence.

"The world was changing and we wanted to be part of the new world by pushing the envelope on what was socially acceptable in India," said Bedi about his relationship with Promita Bedi. Even though their choice of an open marriage ended in separation, Bedi does not regret the decision, for he feels his choices are a part of him, they make him who he is.

Talking about his marriages and the idea of what fidelity and marital company mean to him, Bedi said, "It's not just the idea of being in love all the time but I also believe in the idea of marriage with a person with whom I can share my excitement and journey. No one gets married with the idea of getting divorced."



Shruti Mittal

In the book, Bedi writes poignantly on the mental health issues that plagued his son Siddharth and how he responded to them as a father. During the discussion, Bedi noted that "for people with mental health problems, something fundamentally changes inside them. The person that you see is not the person that you know."

Even though Bedi has been stereotyped as someone who loves to go against the grain and set himself apart with his choices, the actor recognised that he is actually someone who likes traditions and structures, as his firm faith in religion proves.

"Spirituality has been a running theme in my life. I got the Sikh tradition through my father and the Buddhist tradition from my mother.... Organised religions are very important in people's lives and I have enormous respect for that," said Bedi, wrapping up an intriguing interaction.

For people with mental health problems, something fundamentally changes inside them. The person that you see is not the person that you know

The Write Circle Bengaluru is presented in association with Taj West End and Ehsaas Women of Bengaluru

Digging Deep into

BOLLYWOOD



Jugal Mody

It is no secret that Bollywood is an obsession for Indians. But how well do Indians really know their Hindi cinema? Can they identify which piece of trivia concerns which film or what are the connections between seemingly disparate Bollywood songs?

To shed light on this and how one can build a repository of fascinating Bollywood facts, **The Write Circle** Jaipur, organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, hosted Diptakirti Chaudhuri for a virtual session about his book, *BollyGeek: The Crazy Trivia Guide to Bollywood*.

A marketer by day and author by night, Chaudhuri is a Bollywood fanatic who has made it his mission to dig deep into films and arm himself with an ever growing collection of trivia. In conversation with Chaudhuri was Jugal Mody, an author, web designer and narrative consultant. Mita Kapur of Siyahi welcomed the panelists to the conversation.

Mody started the discussion by suggesting that Chaudhuri should be awarded a PhD for the effort he has put into *BollyGeek*. Mody highlighted how Chaudhuri, in the manner of a true scholar, has made use of venn diagrams to project patterns of Bollywood films and made intriguing observations about how India's biggest movie industry is impacted by festivals and crime in the book.

"I have always been fond of Hindi cinema and movies have been a way of unwinding for me. I am a trivia buff and I love trying to piece things together," said Chaudhuri, citing the influence of his mother, who was also a movie buff, in sparking his interest in Bollywood.

The fact that kids and young viewers nowadays are not interested in Bollywood trivia as much as Hollywood franchises like the Marvel series leaves Chaudhuri disappointed. His own knowledge of Hollywood pales in comparison to the inventory of information he has accumulated on Bollywood, as he is more comfortable exploring Hindi cinema and looking for parallels between films.

Speaking about the evolution of Hindi cinema, Chaudhuri argued that certain trends that had become dominant a few decades ago — such as the predominance



Diptakirti Chaudhuri

A PEAK INTO DIPTAKIRTI CHAUDHURI'S COLLECTION OF TERRIFIC BOLLYWOOD TRIVIA

- For the song *Mera kuchh saaman* (from the film *Ijaazat*), Gulzar had composed the lyrics in blank verse, which led an infuriated R.D. Burman to lash out by saying, "Lyrics kaha hai? Yeh to dialogue hai. Kal tum Times of India le aaoge aur bologe iss hi pe lyrics bana do?"
- *Mr India*'s iconic title character was initially created for Amitabh Bachchan, but by the time the film hit the sets, Bachchan was perceived to be too big a star to not be visible for most of the film's duration!
- Before Shah Rukh Khan had purchased *Mannat* and converted it into a palatial mansion, it used to be a small bungalow called Villa Vienna. A popular shooting location, SRK himself had shot a song on the street in front of the bungalow for the film *Yes Boss* — *Bas itna sa khwab hai!*

of double or triple roles in Bollywood classics such as Hema Malini's *Seeta Aur Geeta* and Amitabh Bachchan's *Mahaan* — would no longer work now, as contemporary audiences quickly grow tired of watching the same actor on screen.

Following the discussion, Chaudhuri interacted with the audience, where he showcased his Bollywood knowledge by coming up with a piece of trivia for every film that the audience could supply him with.

The session came to an end with Mita Kapur delivering a vote of thanks.

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



बुद्ध, गांधी कभी अप्रासंगिक नहीं हो सकते: गीत चतुर्वेदी



Geet Chaturvedi



Deepa Mishra

तुम मुझसे कहना, मैं कहूंगा तुमसे
मुझे यकीन है, कहने सुनने से दूर हो जाते हैं दुख
जैसे बचपन में फूंक मारने से दूर हो जाते थे बादल...

कोरोना महामारी के दूसरे चरण में जब उम्मीद और हौसले पस्त होने लगे थे, तब कलम रायपुर & बिलासपुर के वर्चुअल सत्र में अतिथि वक्ता गीत चतुर्वेदी ने अपनी कविता की इन पंक्तियों से हिम्मत बंधाई। प्रभा खेतान फाउंडेशन, अहसास वूमेन व अभिकल्प फाउंडेशन की आयोजन समिति की ओर से उनका स्वागत गौरव गिरिजा शुक्ला ने किया। उन्होंने बताया कि चतुर्वेदी 27 नवंबर, 1977 को मुंबई में पैदा हुए और लेखन जगत में तेजी से अपना मुकाम बनाया। उनके चाहने वाले पूरी दुनिया में मौजूद हैं। चतुर्वेदी की चर्चित पुस्तकों के जिक्र के साथ शुक्ला ने बताया कि इनकी रचनाओं के अनुवाद अब तक तकरीबन 22 देशी-विदेशी भाषाओं में हो चुके हैं। नॉवेल सिमसिम के अंग्रेजी अनुवाद को चर्चित 'पेन-हैम ट्रांसलेशन ग्रांट' मिल चुका है। अमेरिका के छह विश्वविद्यालयों के प्रकाशनों में चतुर्वेदी की रचनाओं को जगह मिली है। आगे की बातचीत के लिए अहसास वूमेन लखनऊ से जुड़ी दीपा मिश्रा को आमंत्रित करते हुए शुक्ला ने बताया कि मिश्रा वन्य जीवन, साहित्य और पर्यावरण में रुचि रखती हैं।

मिश्रा ने चतुर्वेदी से उनके काव्यात्मक नाम की कहानी के साथ ही जानना चाहा कि कविता से उनका नाता कब जुड़ा और कब यह उनकी जरूरत बन गया? चतुर्वेदी ने बताया, "मेरे जन्म लेने से पहले मेरा नाम रखा जा चुका था। नाम, जीवन, कविता और कलाओं के प्रति रुचि भी पिता से मुझ तक आई। उनकी संगीत में रुचि थी।

वह फिल्मों के लिए भी बांसुरी बजा चुके थे। तेरह साल की उम्र में मैंने पहली कहानी लिखी। रामायण, दिनकर को पढ़ा। सत्रह की उम्र में जनसत्ता मुंबई में पहली बार छपा, फिर तो छपना शुरू हो गया।" पहले और अब की रचनाओं में अंतर से जुड़े सवाल पर चतुर्वेदी ने कहा, "उस उम्र से अब तक मैं मेच्योर ज्यादा हो गया। घर में संगीत का माहौल था, पर मैं पश्चिमी संगीत के साथ जुड़ा था। चौदह से सत्रह और कॉलेज की पढ़ाई तक पॉप म्यूजिक, रॉक संगीत की तरफ तुलनात्मक रूप से ज्यादा झुकाव था। तब एक मस्ती थी, अलहड़पन था। कॉफिडेंस भी ज्यादा था। पर अब ऐसा नहीं होता। अब जेहन में जो आता है, लिखने के बाद उसे पढ़ना होता है, विचार करना होता है। अब संदेह बढ़ गया है।"

मिश्रा के अनुरोध पर चतुर्वेदी ने अपने संकलन *खुशियों के गुमचर* में शामिल यकीन कविता को सुनाया। अपनी पुस्तकों पर, उनकी प्रकृति पर विस्तार से चर्चा करते हुए उन्होंने बताया कि करीब सात सालों तक जब मैंने दुनिया भर के श्रेष्ठ साहित्य को पढ़ रहा था, तब लिखा नहीं। जापान से अमेरिका तक, नॉर्वे से दक्षिण अफ्रीका तक के साहित्य अध्ययन के बाद यह समझ में आया कि आप अच्छे कवि तब होते हो जब आप दूसरों से अलग होते हो। अब मैं अपनी कविताओं को संदेह की नजर से देखता हूँ। संकलन *आलाप में गिरह* में मेरे ब्रेक लेने से पहले और ब्रेक के बाद की कविताएं भी हैं। *न्यूनतम* मैं मेरी सबसे अलग किताब है। इसमें अपनी सीमाओं के भीतर मैंने कविता का एक नया मुहावरा पकड़ने की कोशिश की है। इसमें 2010 से 2014 की कविताएं हैं। ये रियलिटी से अलग मेटा रियलिटी की कविताएं हैं। *खुशियों के गुमचर* की प्रकृति अलग है। इसमें सरल कविताएं हैं। चतुर्वेदी का तर्क था कि हालात जितने कठिन होंगे, जिंदगी जितनी मुश्किल होगी, कविता उतनी सरल होगी।



Garima Tiwari



Gaurav Giri Shukla

आप यह सोचिए कि पिछले पच्चीस साल में तीनों संकलनों में मैंने कुल 72, 63, और 81 कविताएं लिखीं। कितना कम लिखा।

उन्होंने अपने तीनों संकलनों से कुछ कविताएं सुनाई। आलाप में गिरह से नीम का पौधा कविता सुनाई, जिनकी कुछ पंक्तियां हैं —

यह नीम का पौधा है
जिसे झुक कर
और झुक कर देखो
तो नीम का पेड़ लगेगा
और झुको, थोड़ा और
मिट्टी की देह बन जाओ
तुम इसकी छांह महसूस कर सकोगे...

न्यूनतम मैं से पंचतत्व कविता —

मेरी देह से मिट्टी निकाल लो और बंजरों में छिड़क दो
मेरी देह से जल निकाल लो और रेगिस्तान में नहरें बहाओ
मेरी देह से निकाल लो आसमान और बेघरों की छत बनाओ
मेरी देह से निकाल लो हवा और कारखानों की वायु शुद्ध कराओ
मेरी देह से आग निकाल लो, तुम्हारा दिल बहुत ठंडा है

खुशियों के गुमचर से चार वचन कविता —

खिलाई गई रोटी व दिए गए चुंबन, कभी गिने नहीं जाते।
पोंछे गए आंसू व चुराई गई नसीहतें, बताई नहीं जातीं।
भीगी हुई आत्मा को धूप में टांगकर, सुखाया नहीं जाता।
जिया हुआ प्रेम व सुना गया संगीत, लौटकर जरूर आते हैं

आप अपनी किताबों को कैसे प्लान करते हैं? के उत्तर में चतुर्वेदी ने कहा, “एक थीम दिमाग में रहता है। मैं व्यवस्थित व्यक्ति नहीं हूँ।” पुस्तक अधूरी चीजों का देवता के बारे में चतुर्वेदी ने कहा कि इसमें डायरी, निबंध, संस्मरणात्मक लेख सब हैं। गद्य के भीतर कविता का अनुभव हो ऐसी कोशिश है। जो विश्लेषण है उससे अलग, जो स्मृति है उससे अलग। प्रेम, प्रकृति और आत्मा को छूने वाला संगीत, ये तीनों चीजें अंतर्धारा की तरह मेरी रचनाओं में हैं। कोरोना से जुड़े असर पर चतुर्वेदी का उत्तर था, “केवल कवि नहीं मनुष्य के रूप में यह असर डाल रहा है। जो बचे हैं, पीड़ित हैं, उनकी तरह मैं भी विक्षिप्त हूँ। कवि के रूप में संवेदनाएं आहत करती हैं, अपनी रचनात्मकता को कैसे जिंदा रखा जाए। खुशियों के गुमचर के प्रकाशन के बाद जो तांडव मचा उसके चलते अंदर से मेरे मन में क्षोभ और पीड़ा है। मेरे भीतर की मनुष्यता आहत है। वर्तमान

स्थिति को दर्शाने वाली कोई कविता नहीं है। मैं लिखता तो रोज हूँ, पर उन्हें फाइनल नहीं कर सका, वर्तमान स्थिति का चित्रण करते हुए। कविता मुश्किल समय से उन्होंने ये पंक्तियां सुनाई —

जब मुश्किल समय आए
सब कुछ बेकाबू हो जाए
उससे थोड़ा और प्रेम करना
जिससे तुम अब तक करते आए

उन्होंने दुख बताया कि जिसे लोगों की नौकरी बचानी थी वह नौकरी ले रहा, जिन्हें जान बचानी थी, वे मौन हैं। नौजवानों को संदेश देते हुए उन्होंने कहा, “जो लेखन से जुड़े हैं, कोशिश कीजिए कि किताबों की संगत में रहें। डॉक्यूमेंटरी बनाइए। जिंदगी को पढ़िए, इनसानों को पढ़िए। किताबों, लिखे शब्दों के साथ जुड़िए।” साहित्य से इतर जिन्होंने आप पर असर डाला? के उत्तर में चतुर्वेदी ने बुद्ध और गांधी का नाम लिया। कहा कि बुद्ध से मैं बहुत प्रभावित हूँ, यह कहना अजीब होगा। मैं उन पर अनुरक्त हूँ, आसक्त हूँ, उनका अनुरागी हूँ। आखिर उनसे कौन प्रभावित नहीं। वह कहते हैं जो तुम हो वह मैं हूँ। जो तुम्हारे अंदर है, वह बाहर है। वह हमें अतियों में जाने से रोकते हैं। वह संतुलन की बात सिखाते हैं। वे प्रेरित करते हैं। दूसरे महात्मा गांधी। इस देश, महाद्वीप क्या पूरी दुनिया में उनके जैसा व्यक्ति नहीं मिलेगा। गांधी प्रेम, करुणा, अहिंसा के मार्ग पर रहे। अंततः हर चीज प्रेम में तिरोहित होगी ऐसा नहीं कहा बल्कि यहां से वे हमें मैत्री और उसकी मार्फत शांति की तरफ ले जाते हैं। चतुर्वेदी ने इस साल अपना पहला उपन्यास आने की बात कही।

गरिमा तिवारी ने दर्शकों की ओर से सवाल पूछा और धन्यवाद दिया। शुक्रा और कल्पना चौधरी आदि ने भी सवाल पूछे। चतुर्वेदी ने सबका विस्तार से उत्तर दिया। कहा कि इस पूरे ब्रह्मांड में हमारी स्थिति धूल के एक कण के बराबर है। इस ज्ञान के बावजूद हम एक विशाल घमंड से, अपने होने के, अपने मय से भरे हुए हैं। एक सवाल के उत्तर में उन्होंने कहा कि कला, साहित्य और जिंदगी में मौलिक कुछ भी नहीं है। मेरा शरीर भी मौलिक नहीं है। मैं अपने माता पिता की अनुकृति हूँ। इसी तरह हमारा लेखकीय शरीर भी अपना नहीं होता। उनका तर्क था कि कुदरत एक कंबीनेशन से चलती है। हर चीज एक कंबीनेशन है। प्यार भी एक कंबीनेशन है। करुणा, कामना, आनंद, दयालुता, वासना के साथ आप अपना कंबीनेशन कैसा बनाते हैं इस पर तय होता है। एक सवाल के उत्तर में उन्होंने कहा कि बुद्ध, गांधी कभी अप्रासंगिक नहीं हो सकते। इसलिए कि आप कितने भी युद्ध प्रेमी हों आप उसमें जी नहीं सकते। हिंसा जानवर भी कर सकता है। अहिंसा ही इनसान बनाती है। चतुर्वेदी ने दावा किया कि कोरोना के बाद दुनिया अब पहले जैसी नहीं रहेगी। हो सकता है आर्थिक मार से आप बच जाएं, पर सामाजिक और भावनात्मक रूप से व्यर्थता का जो भाव है, वह कभी खत्म नहीं होगा। उन्होंने अल्वेयर कामू के ग्रेग नामक उपन्यास का भी जिक्र किया।

कलम रायपुर & बिलासपुर के प्रायोजक हैं श्री सीमेंट। हॉस्पिटैलिटी पार्टनर हयात रायपुर और दैनिक जागरण की ओर से मीडिया पार्टनर नई दुनिया के साथ अभिकल्प फाउंडेशन और अहसास वूमन का सहयोग मिला।



Dave Goulson

Conservation: The Buzzword



Presentation

University of Sussex
@DaveGoulson

Most of us know that climate change is real. If not curbed, it will lead to humanity's eventual demise. But what most of us don't know is that modern profit-driven advancements go hand-in-hand with the mass extinction of several kinds of insects, including bees. How is that worrisome? It is so because their extinction might cause an ecological disaster as catastrophic for mankind as the melting of the polar ice caps!

No wonder then that scientist Dave Goulson had the audience all abuzz with curiosity about his intriguing insights on insects and why they are important at the recent session of **The Universe Writes**.

Organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, the virtual session commenced with Mita Kapur, CEO of Siyahi, welcoming Goulson to the conversation. A professor at the University of Sussex, Goulson is the founder of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. He is also the author of more than 300 scientific articles as well as books such as *Bumblebees: Behaviour, Ecology, and Conservation*, *A Sting in the Tale: My Adventures with Bumblebees* and the *Bee Quest*.

Introducing his latest book, *Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse*, Goulson elaborated that he aims to spread awareness about what can be done to avoid a decline in insect numbers. Then he started his talk right at the beginning — with the history of insects. "Insects are really an ancient group of creatures. They evolved

nearly 300 million years ago, before the dinosaurs," said Goulson before focusing on his favourite — the bees, which evolved from wasps around the time of the dinosaurs.



Mita Kapur

After listing some of the 25,000 species of bees in existence as well as the clever ways devised by the different species to collect pollen and nectar from flowers efficiently, Goulson revealed something that has haunted him through his career as a scientist. "They are in trouble now..." he said, adding, "It has become very clear that they are disappearing." The bee ecology expert also showed data charts down the

decades to prove his findings, including one of the Franklin's bumblebee which has gone globally extinct.

However, it is not just bees that are disappearing but insects of all kinds. "This really came to the forefront of public knowledge in 2017 when a study was published from Germany... in a 26-year period (between 1989 and 2016) the weight of flying insects in Germany fell by 76 percent." And soon, this decline turned out to be a global phenomenon.

Speaking about the tragedy of this situation, Goulson, lamented, "There's a real danger that our next generation



of children will grow up in a world where they don't know the sound of buzzing bees and chirping crickets; where they don't see the beautiful colours of the butterfly's wings or hear birdsong." As a father himself, he admitted that he is sad and "terrified that they (his children) will grow up in a world missing most of its wonderful biodiversity."

However, the tragedy seems to have a far-reaching impact than just children missing out on the beauty of Nature. To explain the true impact, Goulson quoted American biologist, E.O. Wilson, who said that if mankind disappeared, the world would simply regenerate to what it was 10,000 years ago but "if insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos."

The award-winning scientist went on to explain why insects matter so much. He said that other than being

a large part of our biodiversity, they are food for other creatures. They are also vital as pest control agents, recyclers of dung, dead bodies and other organic material. They keep the soil healthy and distribute seeds. So it is obvious that their loss will have a lasting impact.

Goulson reminded the audience that "Insects pollinate. Eighty-seven percent of plant species in the world need pollinating.... Without that pollination, all these plants will disappear." He gave an example of apple and pear orchards in southwest China which are forced to hand pollinate because their bees have disappeared. Goulson cautioned, "Life would be pretty dire without these creatures" because they will affect our food source and most of our fruit and vegetables would disappear.

He then touched upon the causes for this disappearance. From the loss of habitat (forests, flower-rich patches, meadows) and climate change to the heavy use of pesticides, which kill everything in its path, the biologist said that we are waging war on Nature. The disappearance of the insects is a direct result.

So, is there a solution? There is, but replacing the dwindling number of real bees with robotic bees is not a viable one. The sheer number of them means, "In practice, I would think it is ridiculous to try and replace them." The resources and materials required, the maintenance needed, and even possibilities of hackers reprogramming them for their own gain make them unsustainable, said Goulson.

Instead, he said that increasing flower-rich habitats, planting flowering trees, avoiding profit-driven intensive farming and trying sustainable farming methods were the right actions to take. "In essence it is (all about) working with Nature rather than against it," said Goulson, because it is not too late. "Most insects haven't gone extinct and their numbers can recover quite quickly if we look after them," he pointed out.

The session came to an end with Goulson answering a few audience questions and elaborating on why he chose to shift focus from writing scientific journals to books for the masses. "For a long time I was a traditional scientist, publishing scientific papers and journals that hardly anybody reads but scientists.... It is very frustrating; publish any number of scientific papers as you like and it won't save one single bee.... It is also why I write books — to try and make a difference, inspire people to change their ways and habits to reduce their impact on the planet. And I think scientists should do this more," he said.

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

‘Dharma Treats You Like an Adult’ — Amish



Amish Tripathi

“Don’t wake me up, I love this dream!” That’s what Amish Tripathi of the *Shiva Trilogy* and the *Ram Chandra* series fame had to say about his charmed life as a bestselling author at the inaugural session of **The Write Circle Chennai**.

The meet was flagged off by **Ehsaas** woman Apra Kuchhal. Ehsaas woman of Chennai, Kaveri Lalchand, welcomed Amish to the session before handing over the reins of the discussion to **Ehsaas** woman of Chennai, Vidya Gajapathi Raju Singh.

Singh started by asking Amish to take a walk down memory lane to the time when he was a banker by day and writer at night. “*The Immortals of Meluha* was the first piece of fiction I had ever written. I started writing the book around 2004-2005. It took me some four or five years to write it. I wrote the first two books along with my job. I come from a middle-class family, I couldn’t be irresponsible. So, I was writing for myself. I never thought of resigning from my job.... I was just surprised that



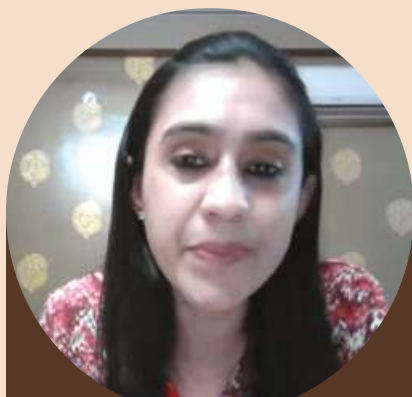
Vidya Gajapathi Raju Singh

a story was coming to me,” said Amish.

He shared how he was forced to self-publish his first book after rounds of rejections. However, when his book took off, publishers came back to bid for it. “By the time the second book came out, the royalty check had become more than my salary. So, it was a practical decision to resign from my job. It wasn’t a planned move,” revealed Amish, adding that every year seems better than the previous one professionally. “It’s been a journey that’s almost difficult to believe.

If someone had told me 15 years ago that this is the life you would be living, I would have laughed at the guy,” he disclosed.

Discussing the thought behind *The Immortals of Meluha*, Amish said that the book started as “purely a philosophy thesis” conveyed through an adventurous plotline. “The philosophy at the heart of it is ‘what is evil?’. If we discuss in Sanskrit, we don’t even need to debate this because there is no translation for the word.... It



Apra Kuchhal



Kaveri Lalchand



Deepika Goyal

was a thought that had occurred to me — some based on my readings of the *Upanishads* and some on my own thoughts. So, it is a story [written] to convey a philosophy,” he explained.

And why did he choose Shiva as his protagonist? “One thing that is attractive is that Lord Shiva is just so cool! If you write a story about him, that story itself is also so cool. So, it’s not just about me being a devotee,” smiled Amish. Moreover, a story about evil at its crux is most suited to having a hero who is known to be the “destroyer of evil”, so no one else would do, he feels.

Next, he spoke about his ongoing series on Lord Ram. With the fourth book, tentatively titled *War of Lanka*, coming out by the end of this year, Amish spoke passionately about the genesis of his version of the tale. “Once the *Shiva Trilogy* was over, I couldn’t decide which story idea to pick (for his next project)... I was at a Lit Fest and someone asked me a question on Lord Ram. They have every right to question their gods and goddesses, but the way the question was framed! There are some norms one must have in the words they use; basic politeness in how you speak with and about other humans and here you are talking about a god,” said Amish animatedly.

The youth’s question not only left the author disturbed but got him thinking about what might “have been done over the last few decades that so many of the youth see Lord Ram in this manner”. It was that incident that drove him to write the *Ram Chandra* series.

When asked about the research that goes into writing his books, Amish said, “My books are fiction. I never claim them to be true. There are some things based on my perception and some things based on facts.” “I have some of my own research but some of the dates get decided by how the

story comes because many stories are interconnected,” he added.

Amish then briefly touched upon his vision of Raavan, which is based on the “far more nuanced take of the ancient texts” as opposed to the televised symbol of “evil.” He also spoke about his latest protagonist, Suheldev as documented in his *Indic Chronicles*. Amish emphasised the great loss Indians have faced in never knowing the story of this great king who got Hindus of all castes, Muslims and Buddhists together to fend off the Turks in battle.

In the final leg of the conversation, Amish spoke about what lies beneath his stories. “In the Indian way, the stories are always wrappers for philosophies, and the philosophy that our ancestors have always been obsessed about is ‘What is dharma?’,” he said before explaining that dharma is more complex than a list of simple commandments. It requires intelligent thought to decode. “Dharma treats you like an adult — that these are the concepts, philosophies and choices. You make up your own mind and live with the consequences. So, to explore dharma is at the very heart of the Indian way of life (and his books).”

It’s been a journey that’s almost difficult to believe. If someone had told me 15 years ago that this is the life you would be living, I would have laughed at the guy

The session concluded with **Ehsaas** Woman of Chennai, Deepika Goyal delivering the endnote and Amish joking that the next step in his journey to the land of true success is a tough one — to become his 12-year-old son’s favourite. “I don’t care if no one else likes my books, I have to be my son’s number 1,” he laughed.

The Write Circle Chennai is presented in association with Ehsaas Women of Chennai

A Bicycle Ride with Uncle Bond



Ruskin Bond

His carefully woven words have transported generations of children and adults to misty mountains and quaint towns. He has made us laugh with joy, sigh with warmth and shiver in horror. Through his stories, he has opened up his hilly home and hearth to us even as he has made us feel a kinship with his friends and family.

The smiling face of Ruskin Bond is no stranger to us. Neither is his life story and the long list of his achievements and accolades — from the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan to the Sahitya Akademi Award and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. That didn't seem to deter the audience at **The Write Circle Special** session from wanting to hear more about the author's life and his career spanning 70 years from the legend himself.

Introduced by Apra Kuchhal, Honorary Convenor of Rajasthan & Central India Affairs, Prabha Khaitan Foundation, and **Ehsaas** woman of Indore, Unnati Singh, the session was moderated by children's author Rupa Pai.

She started by sharing her first experience of a Bond book, *The Room on the Roof*, read at the age of 15. "It blew my mind. The sense of love and loss contained in it is still a part of me. And I have always thought of Mr Bond since then as Rusty (the book's semi-autobiographical protagonist)," said Pai, before adding, "I cannot believe



Rupa Pai

that you were only 17 when you wrote that book.... Will you tell us a little bit about that?"

Sitting in a cosy room with shelves and cupboards spilling over with books, Bond was his ever humble and humorous self as he replied, "It has far more readers today than when it was first published. I can't count the years that have gone, but I am so glad that there are so many young readers and older readers too who get some pleasure from reading *The Room on the Roof*."

As he narrated the story of his first tryst with writing, you could see the storyteller in him take over. "I was 17 when I wrote it. It took me about two years to find a publisher. It wasn't that easy," he laughed, adding, "In the process, I had to really work hard on it. I did at least three drafts. I have never worked so hard in my life as I did with that first novel."

Admitting that though the book set him off as a writer, it didn't make much of an impact and wasn't a sensation when it was first published. "People think I started off with a bestseller. It wasn't. It was a book that just about made its way and it took me a few years after that to establish myself as a writer. Some young writers think you can have success overnight, but that isn't the case," he clarified.

Bond reminisced how, still a teenager, he managed to buy a one-way passage back to India from UK with the advance he got for selling his manuscript. "It was about a year after that the book actually came out. There I was sitting in my small room in Dehradun, banging away at my typewriter — writing for almost every newspaper and magazine in the country. Then in the post came along my six copies that the publishers usually give you.... I had no one to share that triumph with at that time. I had a few young friends who didn't read books at all," he recalled with a laugh. His actual popularity, he revealed, came by way of *The Room on the Roof* getting serially published in the then-popular magazine, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. "That made the book fairly well-known in India," he added.

The conversation then time-jumped seven decades from his first book to his latest, *All-Time Favourites for Children*, an illustrated collection of 25 short stories. "I think it is a well-produced book.... It's got my old favourites and a few new stories that I have written," he said before speaking about the cover — an illustration

Maybe, I am a bicycle. I have always done things at a slow and leisurely pace. I hate rushing around. But even with bicycles, I was always falling off. I have always been best on my own two feet



"Thank you, once again, for the amazing session. It was one of the liveliest sessions that I have attended. Ruskin Bond was phenomenal, and Roopa Pai's pleasant countenance made it more interesting. I only wish the session was a bit longer."

— Deepa Mishra, Lucknow

of Bond typing away on his typewriter. "They got me to slim down a bit for the cover picture," he joked. "I think it is very important for children's books to have attractive covers," he added.

However, he clarified that he stopped using a typewriter five years ago and has started writing by hand. "I have moved backwards instead of forwards and I have lovely handwriting, so my publishers don't mind," he quipped, adding that he edits, erases and redrafts very little because he is "a lazy writer". "I write with passion sometimes, but then I don't want to change it....

I might scratch out the odd word or put in a comma but otherwise (don't make changes)," he revealed about his creative process.

He went on to speak about his love for India. "I had hardly left when I was wanting to come back. I couldn't turn the ship around," he said. "I went for the first year to Jersey, which was one of the Channel Islands. I didn't know anybody there. There was no one from India there.... So, I missed my friends and everything that I had known as a boy. I was miserable for some months."

The move to London helped to a certain degree but not much, he recalled. "I knew I couldn't write about England with the same kind of feeling. When I finished *The Room on the Roof* I said, 'Now what do I write about next? There's nothing here that I can write about!'" So, despite knowing that it would be very difficult, he came back to India to start a new life on his own terms.

"It was an excellent event that was flawlessly executed. Rupa Pai was a well prepared interviewer. Mr Bond was his usual, delightfully unassuming self."

— Nasreen Rustomfram, Mumbai

As for how his career veered towards being a children's writer, "It happened accidentally," said the 78-year-old author. "I wrote a lot about childhood — my own childhood and other children in many of my stories. But it was only when I was about 40 that I wrote my first book specifically for children."

He had submitted his novella *Angry River* to a UK publisher who thought if tweaked a bit it would be a perfect children's book. "So I did work on it. I adapted it a bit and that became my first children's book," he said.

Bond then on to share a few tips and tricks to writing for children. "You have to have a good story to tell, you must begin that story in a lively way. Unlike adults who might put up with you for a chapter or two, a boy or a girl is going to toss the book aside if you don't catch their interest. You also need interesting characters

I am a good goalkeeper and I think I have been a goalkeeper all my life, defending my life, my territory or my family or people I love. I am not an attacking person, I am a defensive person

revealed that being a child living in a boarding school helped shelter him from the realities back then. "It was only when I came home over the holidays that maybe

I saw something of the world itself and what was happening... but being only 12 or 13, all the implications didn't sort of hit," he shared. He explained that only adults think about consequences. "(As a child) you just take these things a day at a time or an incident at a time. Perhaps that's why children get through these moments of crisis better than adults do very often," he added.

But the pandemic is "totally different" from anything else he has lived through because "it is invisible", said Bond.

"It's a ghost!" Bond exclaimed, adding that the bafflement and incomprehension surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak adds to its impact on people. "We've seen wars take place, there's even been tsunamis

"Thanks for the lovely programme. It was a delight listening to Ruskin Bond, especially with such an enthusiastic moderator as Rupa Pai. The comfort level with which it was conducted kept the chat flowing seamlessly. Thanks to Prabha Khaitan Foundation. Hope to be a part of more such programmes."

— Nalini Mehra, Pune

"The webinar was beautiful and mesmerising. It gave me a completely new perspective on Ruskin Bond and his works. Thank you so much for such an endearing session. I am filled with the feeling of plenitude after such an enlightening evening."

— Rijay Dey, Kolkata

and maybe the reader should be able to identify with the narrator or the main character... and I write fairly simply," he said.

Referring to a story, *Hockey with Azhar*, in his latest book, Pai then asked Bond to talk about his history as a sportsman and goalkeeper — something very few people know. "A goalkeeper is good because you don't have to run around too much. You wait for somebody to come and try to hit you with a hockey stick," replied Bond in his signature humorous style. "I am a good goalkeeper and I think I have been a goalkeeper all my life, defending my life, my territory or my family or people I love. I am not an attacking person, I am a defensive person," he added.

As for his experience of surviving life-changing and catastrophic events such as World War II, the Partition as a child vis-à-vis going through the pandemic now, he

You have to have a good story to tell, you must begin that story in a lively way. Unlike adults who might put up with you for a chapter or two, a boy or a girl is going to toss the book aside if you don't catch their interest

and all that but we can understand them, so this is very different," he said, confessing that he is lucky and privileged that he can continue staying home and doing what he loves — writing — without his livelihood and quality of life getting affected by the pandemic like countless others.

The engrossing session covering Bond's works and his world came to a close with Pai reading aloud a few excerpts about leisurely bicycle rides from his story, *A Bicycle Ride with Uncle Ken*, and Bond delivering a humorous commentary about himself — "Maybe, I am a bicycle. I have always done things at a slow and leisurely pace. I hate rushing around. But even with bicycles, I was always falling off. I have always been best on my own two feet," he chuckled, bidding adieu.

The Write Circle Special is presented by Shree Cement Ltd

An Enclave of Elegance



Pool at twilight

The essence of Jodhpur, India's exotic "Blue City" and the second largest in the state of Rajasthan, lies in its unique blend of landscape and mindscape, in its combination of architectural magnificence and its ability to capture and captivate the senses. This exquisite essence has been captured wonderfully by Taj Hari Mahal, a luxurious resort located a couple of kilometres from Jodhpur Junction railway station and four kilometres from Ghanta Ghar, the iconic clock tower of Rajasthan.

Packed with all the requisite amenities of a five-star hotel, Taj Hari Mahal is spread over six acres of landscaped lawns and manicured gardens, and has been recognised by travellers as well as critics as the ideal stopping place for a blissful getaway. Built to exhibit the grandeur of Rajput and Mughal architecture, from its arch-shaped swimming pool to its latticed windows, from its mesmerising frescoes to its flower-strewn water fountains, Taj Hari Mahal showcases a compelling confluence of two glorious cultures that are deeply embedded in the identity of India.

The hotel's plush, state-of-the-art suites, which are embellished with jewel-toned furnishing, crown moulding, and modish windows, come equipped with stunning flat-screen television sets, free Wi-Fi, minibars, as well as tea and coffee facilities. Each of the 93 suites — whether in the deluxe, luxury or premium categories — offers a charming garden or pool view and

Devendra Ratnawat, GM of
Taj Hari Mahal Jodhpur

comprises graceful living rooms and dining areas.

Serving the most scrumptious Chinese meals in the city, the restaurants at Taj Hari Mahal are also home to haute global cuisines and timeless local delicacies like *dal baati* and *Jodhpuri maas*. The sumptuous food is paired with superlative wines that can transport the palate to paradise. Complementing such gastronomic indulgences is a world-class fitness centre that provides for stimulating and therapeutic fitness sessions alongside wellness treatments at the spa.

The concierge desk at Taj Hari Mahal puts together unforgettable sightseeing tours that encapsulate the best of Jodhpur, from shopping trips to Sarafa and Kapraa bazaars to riveting drives in the undulating sand dunes of the Thar Desert to *baajot*-style bonfire dinners (accompanied by live folk music) and one-of-a-kind village safaris.

Completing this enclave of elegance are dexterously designed meeting venues that are tailor-made for business conferences and seminars as well as the cultural soirees and authorial interactions organised by

Prabha Khaitan Foundation.

With its marriage of traditional and contemporaneous qualities, Taj Hari Mahal is the perfect destination for anyone intending to immerse themselves in the endless wonders that are contained in the enigmatic city of Jodhpur.



PKF Book Rack at Taj Hari Mahal Jodhpur

Trailblazers of Nagpur

JYOTI KAPOOR



Jyoti Kapoor is the co-founder of Infinite Space India, a gaming start-up that revolves around the idea that empowerment is the key to freedom. She has been felicitated by the Vidarbha Industry Association for her innovative start-up besides being recognised as a Super 30 Woman by a renowned Maharashtra daily.

Kapoor founded Infinite Space India in July 2016 and has been director of the organisation ever since. She completed her undergraduate degree in psychology from Punjab University before obtaining a postgraduate diploma in counseling and psychotherapy from the Institute of Psycho Management Studies in Nagpur. She is a trained therapist and a relationship and parent coach.

A firm believer in the importance of creation as a source of sustenance for life, Kapoor is a part of popular Facebook group Parent to Parent, an online community where she engages with thousands of parents from all across the globe, helping improve bonds between parents and their children.

Over the years, Kapoor has counselled countless parents and couples, conducted workshops, and facilitated interactive sessions in an attempt to explain the intricacies of relationships to people. A co-partner in the She Fest, an entrepreneurship event, Kapoor has also been extremely supportive when it comes to integrating and empowering young entrepreneurs with fresh ideas.

MONICA BHAGWAGAR



An optimist by nature with a passion to live life to its fullest, Monica Bhagwagar is the owner of Paperage, a start-up that sells exquisitely designed hand-made paper and stationery. Having spent her formative years shuffling between schools and then colleges (she has been part of 14 different educational institutions, largely due to her father's transferable job), Bhagwagar believes that her evolution into a multi-faceted personality is a direct product of being exposed to a variety of cultures from an early age.

Producing a range of artistic and affordable products as part of Paperage, Bhagwagar's goal is to do her bit to realise a futuristic vision for the city of Nagpur, to become a tastemaker for the Orange City.

A voracious reader who also enjoys travelling, Bhagwagar loves meeting all kinds of people from different walks of life. Part of an NGO that forms an important part of her life, Bhagwagar has been associated with the likes of ITC, Apple Industries and Welcome Group of Hotels. She has also served as a part-time lecturer in sociology and English literature and is a frequent public speaker at various schools and colleges.

Bhagwagar has been a recipient of the *Femina* Power Woman of the Year award as well as the title of Power Woman from *Navbharat Times*. A prominent member of Business Networking International (BNI) and Rotary Club, Nagpur, Bhagwagar lives with husband Rukshad, who is involved in the export business, and their two children.

PARVEEN TULI

Parveen Tuli is the co-founder of Infinite Space India, a gaming start-up, besides being an internationally certified access consciousness facilitator and business transformation and empowerment coach. She lives by the motto “all of life comes to me with ease, joy, and glory.”

For the last seven years, Tuli has dedicated herself to facilitating shifts, changing mindsets, and empowering people in order to make them aware of their true potential. Armed with a set of processes and therapies, she has been successful in transforming people's lives by cultivating self-learning and allowing her clients to explore their identities unencumbered by the limitations of preconceived notions.

An expert facilitator of one-on-one sessions, customised as well as structured programmes, and large-scale workshops, Tuli's journey has also made her engage with community groups and healing circles where her behavioural therapies have brought satisfactory results.

Always on a quest to discover interesting people and grow through the challenges that life hurls at her, Tuli believes that being a mother of two kids has significantly enhanced her relationship and management skills.

A self-proclaimed “hedonistic reader”, Tuli is an explorer and adventurer by heart who is able to locate a great amount of convergence between her entrepreneurial activities as part of Infinite Space India and her responsibilities as a wellness coach and business facilitator.



PRIYANKA KOTHARI

A budding mompreneur, Priyanka Kothari is a trained cosmetic scientist who is obsessed with seeking out 100 percent natural cosmetics. Having grown up across four different states of India, Kothari has developed an appreciation for a wide range of artistic sensibilities and sensitivities. She nurtures a great reverence for Indian art, handloom and culture, irrespective of the part of the country it hails from.

Kothari is a regular blogger and uses her social media platforms to advocate for scientific skincare for all. She sees science as a natural panacea for skincare issues and believes that cost-effective scientific solutions for skin problems must be amplified so that access for the same can be democratised.

Usually found in her kitchen formulating cosmetics or working on new recipes, Kothari pursues several talents. An artist with a keen sense of how to blend tradition and modernity, she is well-versed in a number of contemporary dance forms, apart from being a singer as well.

A cosmetologist and naturopath by training and an eclectic designer and performer by passion, Kothari's ultimate objective is to be a creator with a difference, someone who can combine aesthetic appeal with constructive change to impact the lives around her.



Rahat to the Rescue

The severity of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic might be on the decline but it was deadlier than the first, inflicting considerable damage across Indian states, West Bengal being no exception. **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** collaborated with The Bengal, a Kolkata-based NGO, under the Foundation's **Rahat** banner, and stepped up to the medical and societal challenge posed by the pandemic. The



Honourable Minister Bratya Basu and Soumitra Mitra providing necessities to theatre artists



Anindita Chatterjee providing food to Little Sisters of the Poor



Manisha Rampuria providing aid to Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. She has been a crucial part of this entire project under Rahat and has mobilised a lot of support

Jisshu Sengupta with MLA Debashish Kumar at the Covid Care Centre set up by the Tollywood actor



Anirban Bhattacharya with oxygen concentrators for the safe home set up by him



Foundation, with the aid of its associates and individuals, did its best to mitigate the effects of the crisis by acting as a catalyst between the needy and the ones who were eager to reach out and donate.

Rahat has reached out to the remotest parts of West Bengal to aid the most vulnerable. As part of its relief programmes, **Rahat** has donated and mobilised the supply of masks, sanitisers, thermometers, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders and oximeters. **Rahat** has also arranged for hospital beds and hospital equipment in areas where resources remain scarce. Distribution of rations and everyday food items has been carried out with the objective of ensuring that the basic means of sustenance are made available to as many people as possible. Aid was also provided to street animals.

Rahat has been fortunate to provide support to a number of organisations and projects such as the IHA, Prayas, O2ku Shawbar, Omkarnath Mission, West Bengal Motion Picture Artists' Forum, Pronam, 87 Ward Safe Home, Calcutta Foundation, Prameya Foundation, OFFER, Greymind Communication and Lotus Rescue. We are also thankful to Anirban Bhattacharya, Jisshu Sengupta, Ananya Banerjee, Srijit Mukherji, Rana Sarkar, Anupam Roy and others who came forward to help those in need.

Determined to persevere in the face of adversity and reach out to victims of disasters, **Rahat** continues to contribute as widely and as effectively as possible. **Rahat** pledges to keep on striving to be the support system of those whose needs are the most urgent.



Avirup Sengupta providing basic grocery and sanitisation items to underprivileged kids





Rahat has reached out to the remotest parts of West Bengal to aid the most vulnerable. As part of its relief programmes, **Rahat** has donated and mobilised the supply of masks, sanitisers, thermometers, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits, oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders and oximeters. **Rahat** has also arranged for hospital beds and hospital equipment in areas where resources remain scarce. Distribution of rations and everyday food items has been carried out with the objective of ensuring that the basic means of sustenance are made available to as many people as possible





For the Greater Good



Prabha Khaitan Foundation, through its many social initiatives, have been striving to make a difference in the lives of those less privileged, be it in the field of education, relief work, economic empowerment or health. The Foundation has been fortunate to have many well wishers to support this cause. We would like to extend our special thanks to **Alka Bagri, Anupam Kher, Bina Rani, Cherie Blair, G. P. Hinduja, Guru Prakash Paswan, Himanshu Gulati, Kapil Dev, Manoj Tiwari, Meghnad Desai, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Nakul Anand, Nirmala Sitharaman, Prem Prakash, R. Jagannathan, Riva Razdan, S. Jai Shankar, Sanjaya Baru, Sharmistha Mukherjee, Smita Prakash and Venkat Narayan** for supporting us in our various philanthropic activities.



भैरवी: सदा सुहागन रागिनी

भैरवी की बंदिशों में जितना ठहराव है, उतनी ही गति भी। अनुराधा फिल्म में एक गीत है, पंडित रविशंकर का सितार और लता मंगेशकर की आवाज है,

“साँवरेsss साँवरेsss

काहे मोसे करो जोरा जोरी, बैयों न मरोड़ो मोरी, दूँगी दूँगी गारी हटो जाओ जी!”

और मन्ना डे का वह गीत...

‘कोरी चुनरिया आत्मा मोरी

मैल है माया जाल

वो दुनिया मोरे बाबुल का घर

ये दुनिया ससुराल

हाँ जाके बाबुल से नजरें मिलाऊँ कैसे, घर जाऊँ कैसे?

लागा चुनरी में दाग छुपाऊँ कैसे?’

एच.जी.वेल्स ने कहा था कि मैं किसी भी मंजिल पर पहुँचने के लिए सीधा चलना पसंद करता हूँ, क्योंकि यही सबसे छोटा रास्ता होता है। राग भैरवी तक पहुँचने का सबसे सीधा रास्ता अखितयार किया कुंदनलाल सहगल ने। उन्हें एक दफ़ा फैयाज खान साहब ने सुना तो कहा कि तुम्हें सीखने की जरूरत नहीं, तुम बस गाओ! वाजिद अली शाह के बाबुल मोरा नैहर छूटो जाए हो या उनका क्लासिक जब दिल ही टूट गया, एक सुगम गायक के रूप में उनसे बेहतर भैरवी कोई न गा सका।

एक दूसरे गायक जिन्होंने उनकी तरह गाना शुरू किया था, वह थे मुकेश। उनको खास कर संगीतकार दान सिंह ने जितने गीत दिए, अधिकतर भैरवी में दिए। एक बार मदन मोहन ने पूछा कि आप इतनी सहजता से भैरवी कैसे गवा लेते हैं? वाकई यह मिलियन डॉलर प्रश्न है।

भैरवी में एक से एक ठुमरियाँ भी गाई गयी। एक ठुमरी जमुना के तीर ठुमरी की महानता इसमें है कि इससे अब्दुल करीम खान जुड़े हैं। जो भी, जहाँ भी, इसे गाता है, उस्ताद को याद करता है। नवाब वाजिद अली शाह की अधिकतर मशहूर ठुमरियाँ भैरवी में बिठायी गयी। जैसे एक कालजयी ठुमरी है बाजूबंद खुल खुल जाए, साँवरिया ने जादू डारा

भैरवी गाथा का अंत करता हूँ बाबा अलाउद्दीन खान से। 8 अक्तूबर, 1972 को फिलहार्मोनिक हॉल, न्यूयॉर्क में पंडित रविशंकर, अली अकबर खान और अल्ला रक्खा खान मंच पर बैठे थे। पंडित रविशंकर ने कहा, “मित्रों! आज की शाम हमारे गुरु बाबा अलाउद्दीन खान के नाम है, जो एक मास पूर्व चल बसे। संगीत की यह क्षति कभी पूरी नहीं हो सकती। हमारे लिए वे महानतम संगीतकार, एक महानतम वादक थे।”

उसके बाद वह ऐतिहासिक कन्सर्ट हुआ जिसमें बाबा के दोनों शिष्य ऐप्पल रिकॉर्ड्स के अपने आखिरी एल्बम के लिए साथ बैठे। हेम बिहाग, मंज खमाज गाने के बाद एल्बम का अंत होता है ‘सिंधु भैरवी’ से। यह मैहर की पेटेन्ट भैरवी थी, जिससे कभी अली अकबर खान ने अमरीका में हिंदुस्तानी संगीत का आगाज किया था। इस भैरवी में वह चपलता नहीं, जो पंडित जी के सितार में कई बार नजर आती है। इसमें एक असीम शांति है, करुणा है। आखिरी अंश में यूँ लगता है जैसे अली अकबर खान के सरोद और पंडित जी के सितार से ऑसू झड़ रहे हो। दोनों सवाल-जवाब करते एक-दूसरे को ढाढ़स दे रहे हों कि बाबा चले गए, लेकिन यह मैहर का संगीत नहीं रुकेगा। चलता रहेगा।

प्रवीण कुमार झा

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



Praveen Kumar Jha

शायद ही कोई संगीत कार्यक्रम हो, जिसका अंत भैरवी से न होता हो। शायद ही कोई सुबह हो, जब दुनिया के किसी एक कोने में भैरवी न गाया या सुना जा रहा हो।

पंडित भीमसेन जोशी के पास प्रधानमंत्री राजीव गांधी के कुछ सलाहकार पहुँचे कि एक गीत बनाना है। पंडित जी के लिए यह कोई मुश्किल बात नहीं थी, लेकिन राग कौन सा चुनते? तो उनके मन में जो एक परिकल्पना बनी कि एक खूबसूरत सुबह हो रही है, और पूरा देश मिल कर एक गीत गा रहा है; तो वहाँ भैरवी ही उनके जेहन में आयी। यह

पंद्रह अगस्त 1988 का दिन था, जब लाल किले पर राजीव गांधी ने अपना भाषण दिया, और उसके ठीक बाद दूरदर्शन पर पंडित भीमसेन जोशी एक जलप्रपात के किनारे बैठे हुए गाते हैं — मिले सुर मेरा तुम्हारा।

पंडित जी ने 45 मिनट की अपनी प्रस्तुति रिकॉर्ड करायी, जिसमें से तीस सेकंड छाँट कर गीत में डाल दिए गए। गीत लिखने के लिए कोई गीतकार नहीं मिल रहे थे, तो उस ऐड कंपनी के जूनियर एकाउंटेंट पीयूष पाण्डे ने गीत लिख दिए। बाद में वह इस गीत के दम पर ही काफी ऊँचाई तक गए।

भीमसेन जोशी जी की एक और समस्या थी कि वह अमूमन किसी और गायक के साथ मंच साझा नहीं करते। उनका स्वरमान अलग था, तो जमता नहीं। उनका कहना था कि वह मात्र दक्खिन के गायक बाल मुरलीकृष्णन के साथ गा सकते हैं। इस गीत में भी उनको लाया गया। इस गीत को सुन कर जब आप पंडित भीमसेन जोशी जी का भजन जो भजे हरि को सदा सुनेंगे, तो राग का एक खाका दिमाग में बैठ सकता है।

सितार के सरताज विलायत खान की जीवनी में नमिता देवीदयाल लिखती हैं, “...उनके जीवन से जुड़ी वह स्त्री जो सदैव उनके साथ रही, वह कोई मनुष्य नहीं थी, वह एक राग थी — भैरवी।”

भैरवी में डूब कर वह भवानी दयानी सकल बुध ज्ञानी गुनगुनाते, तार छेड़ते देवी पार्वती की एक सशक्त छवि रचते हैं। उन्हीं की बनायी एक बंदिश है —

“तुम हो जगत के दाता, रखियो मोरी लाज नाथ

जोबन लुटाए बैठी, कौन मुख लाज्यो

तुम्हरे पास आवन को मनवा लजाता”

15 अप्रैल 2015



कुछ लिखना चाहती हूँ तुम्हारे लिए। रात के 3:45 बजे हैं और तारीख है 15 अप्रैल।

आज, 15 अप्रैल है। ...2021 की 15 अप्रैल
आज तुम्हें गए हुए 6 साल हो रहे हैं
बावजूद इसके,
तुम्हारी अनुपस्थिति पत्थर पर उकेरी गई निष्प्राण तारीख भर नहीं बन पाई है
बन भी नहीं सकती
यकीन है तुमने स्वयं ऐसा नहीं चाहा होगा
तुम्हारी आंखें तब भी मुझ पर टिकी हुई थीं
तब भी तुम मेरी डबडबाई आंखों को
अपनी न उठ पाने वाली उंगलियों से कांछ लेना चाहते थे
जबकि मुझे समझाया जा रहा था
मैं भ्रम में हूँ, तुम्हारी देखती हुई आंखें देख नहीं रही हैं मुझे
जानती थी,
सच वह नहीं है जो मुझे समझाया जा रहा
सच वही है
जो मैं महसूस कर रही हूँ।
महसूस कर रही थी मैं अपने गालों पर हमेशा की तरह तुम्हारी उंगलियों का स्पर्श
जानती थी,
बर्दाश्त नहीं कर पाते तुम मेरे चेहरे पर घिर आई सलवटों को,
पुछी स्लैट सी घिर आई सियाह उदासी को

तुमने हमेशा चाहा
मेरे साथ ऐसा कुछ ना हो
जिसे नहीं होना चाहिए था
वह हो गया
तो कैसे हो गया हमारे न चाहते हुए भी!

दिनों ढूँढ़ते रहे हम
उस कुंजी को जो खोल दे उस सांकल को
जिस पर अनचाहे आ लटका है वह ताला
तुम दरके, रिसे, गहरी पीड़ा और पश्चाताप में उभ चूभ होते और मैं,
भीगती रही रातभर अपनी ही आंखों की अनावृष्टि के थपेड़ों में
स्वयं को किसी मजबूत तने में बदलने की कोशिश करते हुए
ताकि तुम्हारा हाथ जब सहारे को मेरे कंधों पर टिके
मैं साध सकूँ तुम्हें, साध सकूँ स्वयं को
कंधे पर टिके तुम्हारे भरोसे से भरे हाथ को छू कर!

कितना कठिन होता है परस्परता की आंच की जमा पूंजी को सहेजना,
किरचों में तब्दील होते स्वयं को बटोरना,
आंचल के कोर में गठियाना,
संजो कर विश्वास और आस्था की संदूकचियों के हवाले महफूज कर
उन पर विवेक के ताले जड़ देना।

सुनो अवध!
किसी को भी जानकर शायद अजीब लगेगा या पागलपन
लेकिन यह सच है
उम्र की सफेदी से भीगी
ज़िंदगी के इस मोड़ पर भी
टहलते हुए किसी जोड़े की अंतरंगता को देखकर
अनायास तलाशने लगती हैं तुम्हारी बाहों को धरने को व्याकुल मेरी रुआँसी हथेलियाँ!

दूरदेशी थे तुम बहुत
शायद दूर बहुत दूर चले जाने से पहले जानबूझकर छोड़ गए हो मेरे लिए जरूरी वसीयत
गुजरे सालों और साथों में गूँथे हुए प्रतिपल हमें विकसित करते उन गुनगुने एहसासों को,
ताकि ना होने दें वह उचाट उस सीमा तक अपनी खरोचों से,
लहलुहान करने वाले उन बघनखों से
जो अक्सर,
बढ़ आते हैं किन्हीं कमजोर क्षणों में जीवतता को सोख लेने को।

होता है,
होता है अवध और ऐसा बार-बार होता है,
संभ्रमित होने के भ्रम को बार-बार बुहारता,
किसी भी कार्यक्रम के लिए निकलते हुए आदतन जा खड़ी होती हूँ,
अंतिम बार आईने के सामने देखने के लिए अपनी छवि,
आश्वस्त होने के लिए, कि सब ठीक तो है न!
तभी पाती हूँ कि तुम अचानक आकर मेरे पीछे खड़े हो गए हो,
“बिंदी तनिक दाई और खिसकाओ तो चित्चुल, हाँSS हाँ अब ठीक है”
चौंक कर मैं आईने को घूरती हूँ
आईना बदल चुका है तुम्हारी आंखों की पुतलियों में
पुतलियाँ मुझे कर लेती हैं कंधों से सम्मुख,
रख देती हैं हमेशा की तरह अपने होठों को आहिस्ता से मुंद गई मेरी पलकों पर
और पाती हूँ
घर के गेट से बाहर निकलते हुए उठते कदमों में लौट आया है
निकलने से पहले
अनायास मुझसे छूट भागने को अपनी कलाइयाँ छुड़ाने को कसमसता हुआ, आत्मविश्वास!

When Education For All Went Digital



Sharmila Tagore at website Launch

"The government is doing its bit but we cannot afford to be complacent. Sometimes small focus groups can reach out and such partnerships can really work. We must be more proactive because it [education] can make a difference to people's lives"

— Sharmila Tagore

Providing equitable access to education is one of the fundamental challenges confronting Indian society. For several years, the **Education For All (EFA)** Trust has been doing exemplary work in order to democratise education in the country and reduce the inequities that plague the education sector, both in India's urban and rural spaces.

June 2021 marks a decade since the **Education For All** website was officially launched at a function organised by **Prabha Khaitan Foundation** at ITC Sonar. The chief guest for the occasion, back in June 2011, was Sharmila

Tagore, one of India's most iconic actresses and then goodwill ambassador of UNICEF.

Launching the website, Tagore had commented that when it comes to improving access to education, "the government is doing its bit but we cannot afford to be complacent. Sometimes small focus groups can reach out and such partnerships can really work. We must be more proactive because it [education] can make a difference to people's lives."

The launch of the **Education For All** website was



Alkesh Agarwal and
Sharmila Tagore



Manoj Mohanka, Sharmila Tagore and Sundeep Bhutoria



School Teachers, Imran Zaki and Sharmila Tagore



Suuchandra



Ashok Jaiswal, Rajesh Bihani, Bhaniram Sureka with Sharmila Tagore



Sharmila Tagore and Madhumanti Moitra

attended by a select gathering of school principals, key donors and well wishers of EFA.

In the decade since its launch, EFA's website (www.educationforalltrust.org) has become a repository of vital information regarding numerous projects undertaken by the Trust, besides documenting crucial data pertaining to educational access in India.

EFA, ably assisted by several philanthropic organisations and individuals, believes that creating more avenues for learning is the only way to minimise, if not entirely eradicate, the problem of unequal access to education in India. In doing so, EFA remains strongly opposed to any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, religion or gender. EFA's solitary objective is to widen the accessibility of education in India as far and as soon as possible, so that education can be recognised and enjoyed as the basic human right that it is today.



Nurture, Nourish, Embrace Mother Earth

“The environment is where we all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share.”

— Lady Bird Johnson

The environment is a collective civilisational asset over which no single species has a monopoly. And yet, with the growth of industrialisation and modern technology, human beings have increasingly asserted their dominance over the environment, exploiting resources to imperil nature as well as future generations of humans. The emergence of the anthropocene, or the age where humans determine the destiny of the earth, has put the environment at the mercy of human agency.

A quantitative analysis of the environment today provides plenty of cause for alarm. Nearly five million hectares of forests — an area larger than Denmark — are lost every year. Due to the persistent draining of wetlands

for agricultural and harvesting purposes, some 87 percent of global wetlands have been lost in the space of the last 300 years. Approximately 80 percent of the world’s wastewater is discharged directly into oceans and rivers without treatment. As much as 50 percent of our coral reefs are already lost, a number that could go up to 90 percent by 2050 even if global warming is reined in by limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees celsius.

The occasion of World Environment Day (WED), which is celebrated every year on June 5, serves as an annual reminder that the environment is rapidly deteriorating and human apathy is only accelerating that degeneration.

Established in 1972 by the United Nations’ Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the first ever World Environment Day was held two years later with the theme “Only One Earth”. WED was envisaged by the UN as a platform that raises awareness and action for the protection and preservation of the environment, and over the years, June 5 has been used to sensitise the international community on a range of environment-related issues, from marine pollution and global warming to overpopulation and sustainable consumption.

In 1987, a decision was taken to rotate the host cities for WED in order to amplify the international reach of the event.

Premised on the slogan “Reimagine. Recreate.

Restore”, the 2021 edition of the World Environment Day was hosted by Pakistan and was concerned with the restoration of the ecosystem. The period between 2021 and 2030 also marks the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, which is a rallying call urging countries across the planet to pay attention to the revival of indigenous and international ecosystems so as to further the symbiotic relationship between human beings and nature.

Ecosystem restoration basically means organising a global undertaking through which plants and animals can be brought back from extinction, irrespective of their habitats. It also means rehabilitating large swathes of land so that people across the world get access to cleaner water, more nutritious food and more promising employment opportunities.

Seemingly minor endeavours like growing trees, making cities greener, rewilding gardens or cleaning garbage alongside rivers and coasts are also an essential part of ecosystem restoration.

For every dollar invested in restoration, we can expect at least seven to thirty dollars in returns for society.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has proved that the fault lines of our society invariably get exacerbated during a crisis. If we do not pay attention to problems like global warming and climate change, which are at the heart of environmental disruption today, the societal fault lines will create even greater and more enduring cracks upon the edifice of humanity.

At **Prabha Khaitan Foundation**, we strongly believe that actions pertaining to the environment cannot be delegated any further to a suitable time in the future. Meaningful steps towards environmental action need to be realised urgently, for the costs of dithering and delaying are too high.

In the absence of an environment that can sustain us, we cannot hope to sustain ourselves. Human avarice and the blind quest for development must be checked, and greater accountability mechanisms must be in place so that the ceaseless assault upon the environment can have an end in sight.

Since time immemorial, the environment has been our greatest friend. It has nurtured and nourished us and supplied us with the resources to dominate the planet. Standing at a critical juncture in the history of the earth, the onus is now firmly upon us to nurture and nourish the environment and supply it with whatever it requires to rediscover its harmony and balance. In doing so, we must remember that what is at stake is not just the survival of the human species, but the survival of life as a whole.

ARTWORK BY
SUDIPTA KUNDU

Sudipta Kundu 2021

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Guests	Events
Riva Razdan	The Write Circle Jaipur
Kabir Bedi	The Write Circle Guwahati
Rakhshanda Jalil	Kalam London
Jeffrey Archer	Kitaab Book Launch
Gurmeet Karyalvi	Aakhar Amritsar
Laxmi Narayan Tripathi	Kalam Vishesh
Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay	Aakhar Kolkata
Kailash Kher	Sur Aur Saaz
Ambrish Mithal	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Yatindra Mishra	Kalam Chennai
Jairam Ramesh	Kitaab Book Launch
Geet Chaturvedi	Kalam Bengaluru
Manish Tewari	Ek Mulakat Vishesh
Shivcharan Sen 'Shiva'	Aakhar Pothi Kitaab Rajasthan
Aalok Shrivastav	Kalam Rajasthan
Shreedevi Sunil	Muskaan Puppets & Stories
Summer Camp	Muskan
Yaas Relief Work	Raahat



Aalok Shrivastav



Ambrish Mithal



Geet Chaturvedi



Gurmeet Karyalvi



Jairam Ramesh



Jeffrey Archer



Kabir Bedi



Kailash Kher



Laxmi Narayan
Tripathi



Manish Tewari



Rakhshanda Jalil



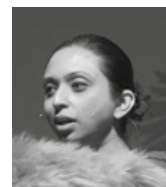
Riva Razdan



Shirshendu
Mukhopadhyay



Shivcharan Sen
Shiva



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