



Sharing Stories

I M A G I N E

World Harmony

Through Writing

August 2020

World Harmony through Writing

SHARING STORIES



*Empowered
Women
Empower
Women*



**CONTEST
WINNERS**

**60 +
ENTRIES**

**Princess
Rukmini Varma**

**Author
Kiran Manral**

**Padma Shri
Geeta Dharmarajan**



PLUS

**Writing Contests
Book Reviews
Short Stories
Poetry**

Editor's Desk

‘The woman who follows the crowd will usually go no further than the crowd. The woman who walks alone is likely to find herself in places one has ever been before.’

- **Albert Einstein**

I can feel this quote more than ever before as I present this edition of Sharing Stories Online magazine. The women, who have graced this edition chose their own distinct path, leaving aside the crowd and creating a space for their dreams and aspirations in this world.

With Padma Sree Geeta Dharmarajan, Rukmini Varma, the woman who holds the artistic legacy of legendary Raja Ravi Varma and Award-winning author, Tedex Speaker Kiran Manral, this edition is oozing out the energy of women empowerment. We are proud to call ourselves the largest democracy in the world and are at the verge of completing 74 years as an independent nation. Our women have touched the skies in the outer space as well as scaled the highest mountains too. However, sadly, a large part of our women population is still in the shackles of exploitation, poverty, male dominant patriarchal beliefs. Lack of equal opportunities and education are the biggest hurdles which add up to the demon of gender discrimination in our country.

Our current edition focusses on empowered women, who in turn are working dedicatedly towards the upliftment of other women. Because, unless this balance is achieved amongst the female population, the rest of the country cannot move ahead with the same velocity of development.

‘The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it.’

- **Rosseanne Barr**



Women touch human lives in many roles. The beauty of each one of the roles she plays is that it contributes something in others life. From being a life-giving mother to a companion in the evening years of life, her presence adds value to your universe. Let us celebrate each of the precious women we have in our lives. Here is our humble attempt through the magazine.

Along with the regular columns, **#letsmakestoriesdino**, reviews, book blurbs and contest, as always this edition too brings something new for you.

Sharing Stories is not just another writing platform. But we at Sharing Stories continually try to bring out a change in the existing taboos of society through some meaningful writing endeavours.

On the lines of **World Harmony through Writing**, we are associating with **Pachyderm Tales**. This association is dedicated to the actualization of gender equality in the truest sense. Because, when we talk about gender equality, it is not only about men and women, but the third gender needs to be essentially involved in it.

‘Mathuram’ is one such joint attempt by Sharing Stories and Pachyderm Tales to bring out the raw tales of the **third gender community or LGBTQs**. I am sure our community or readers and writer will give their wholehearted support to ‘Mathuram’. To know more, please read the inside pages.

Some concepts dwell in our mind for a long time, however, they appear crystal clear when narrated in the form of stories.

Sharing Stories has a larger vision and mission when it comes to **#HarmonyThroughWriting**. To make our message reach and spread, **‘Satya-The SS Superhero’** is here. With this edition, Satya is going to make his presence felt in your life.

He is here not to save the world, but show us the truth. The truth of our existence, our wrongdoings, our attitude towards life and humanity as a whole. He might be presenting the stark and bitter truth...but then that is what his superpower all about; to provoke rightful thinking through his stories and writings.

Satya is here to stay...because, you can never hide or suppress the ‘truth’. Let our writings be as powerful as the eternal truth.

Happy Writing and blissful reading!

Piya Gajbe

Mother.

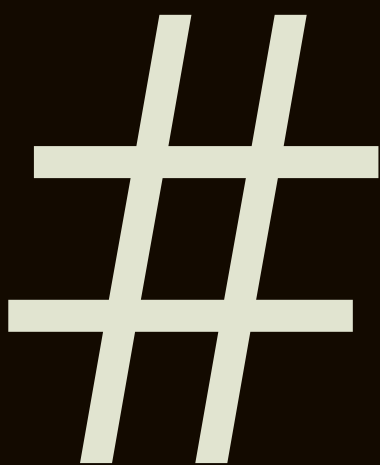


**That eyelock
holds the key
to the child's
future.**



INTERVIEWS

PADMA SHRI GEETA
DHARMARAJAN
PRINCESS RUKMINI
VARMA
AUTHOR KIRAN MANRAL



LOVE FOR LITERATURE

SAY IT WITH IDIOM
WORDSMITH'S CORNER

SHORT STORY -
SHOWER OF KINDNESS
POETRY-
FRIENDS FOR LIFE



PARTNERSHIPS

#LETSMAKESTORIESDIN
(THE INNOCENT DREAMS)
(DARE TO DREAM)
(LIKE A PHOENIX)
(MUSIC OF HOPE)

@PRISTINE.BOOKS
(A HEART SO FIERCE AND
BROKEN)

#KATHA
(THE TALES OFMAKKHILAL)
(CHOOOOOMANTAR)

@PACHIDERYMTALES
(MATHURAM ANTHAOLOGY)

#THEHIVEPROJECT
(BLOOD RUNS COLD)



CONTESTS

#WORDIMPACT
#PICTUREPROMPTPOETR
Y
#1000WORDSTALES
WINNING ENTRIES OF
JULY



GIVEAWAYS

- PANDEMIC2020
- EN ROUTE KASOL
- ADVENTURES OF AN
INDIAN TECHIE
- THE LOST DNA 2050
- THEPETTYGANGSTER



BLOG SERIES

SATYA THE
SUPERHERO

PADMA SHRI GEETA DHARMARAJAN

Founder - Katha Org

How did the whole idea of Katha evolve?

I will have to go back to my childhood to answer your question. The whole idea and practice of storytelling, going to the temple with my **thatha (Grandfather)**, listening to stories there, and discussing the same on the way back. It was a blissful childhood filled with stories. Kamalam Mami used to tell us a lot of ghost stories. I was deliciously frightened by her stories. These have been very much a part of my upbringing; stories, which unfolded a deeper meaning to me. Stories made me think and ask questions. I saw this as a process of growing up. This was the reason that at one point of time I began to question Rama the god and his whole sense of ethics or kindness.

During my working days at the **University of Pennsylvania, USA**, in the early 1980s, I discovered India all over again! I saw their bookstores and the **Van Pelt Library** filled with translations from Spanish, Russian, Italian, even Tamil! A literary agent, **Mrs. Markinko, in NY**, said she loved my writings. She wanted to represent me and asked me to send her some of my stories.

But there was a great nostalgic feeling of “wanting to return” and after two years, my family and I returned to India. I wanted to explore the field of literary translation between the Indian bhashas. Stories and literature have the power to bring people together, people can understand one another better if they are linked through each other’s stories and literature. Translations of quality empathetic writing can be, and is non-divisive. I enjoyed writing children’s stories. I wanted to introduce our children to the rich storehouse of literature from more than 3000 years of Indian literary traditions. Within a short while, I got involved in setting up Katha, and so I never went back to my literary agent, and never got around to sending her my stories. But stories and the power of translations to bring people together kept me hooked.



Back in the **1980s**, India was not doing much in the field of literary translation. I came in contact with **Professor Meenakshi Mukherjee** the **renowned teacher at JNU**. She told me about her small literary translation **magazine called Vagarth**. And she was the first to introduce me to academics and scholars across the country. And thus started my literary translation journey.

By 1987, I had already written more than 400 plus stories and essays for children and adults, while in India and the USA, which were published in various magazines and as books. However, I realized the stories for children were missing something. *I felt that the children’s stories were written in a way where values we were presenting to children were restricted by stereotype thinking – you were ‘Good’ or ‘Bad’ -- there were no grey areas for children.* No choice. No agency. Parental control and school control dominated their lives.

This was also an era when people in India were slave to western ideas, thoughts, products and marketing; a neo-colonization. Breastfeeding, for instance, was not considered good or healthy for the newborn. Hence many women were giving up feeding their child, and giving their child milk formulas instead. This was happening in rural areas too



One fine day I walked in cold into the UNICEF office in Delhi. They liked my ideas and asked me to develop something. It took a year almost to bring out **‘Tamasha!’** UNICEF was keen on supporting it, and the magazine was distributed **to over 30,000 schools in rural areas**. With this the magazine took a flight of its own. Tamasha! was an activity magazine with quirky, magical stories, fantasies, which focused on topics, such as breaking stereotypes, girl power, health, hygiene, sanitation, clean water, and the environment. Our girl protagonists were reader-leaders. Tamasha! was also seen by people in the Delhi Government, the **Delhi Municipal Corporation and Mr. Manjit Singh**, the then Commissioner of Slums in the Delhi Development Authority. Mr. Singh called me and encouraged the magazine, and asked me to work with the children in the slums of Delhi. With the **20,000 rupees** that I received from UNICEF for developing the magazine, **I started Katha**. We are, even now, a very frugal organization with big impact and reach. *In my mind we are still a “small is beautiful” profit for all. The spirit that was there 33 years ago is still the same at Katha.*

Katha Story School has a very unique way of teaching subjects like Math, Chemistry, nanotechnology, etc. to children through storybooks. How did you come up with this creative teaching methodology? How effective has it been?

In the late 1980s, there was a National Sample Survey on education and one sentence in the report stuck in my mind. Children and parents, when asked about schooling, had said that it was not just poverty that was responsible for their children not going to school. Of course, that is one of the reasons in India. The main reason the parents cited was that children found school boring and the textbooks dull. It was around the same point that Mr. Manjit Singh asked me, if given a building, would I be able to run a school. I told him that that I was neither a trained nor an experienced teacher. I am a writer. But he was a patient listener and he said that he liked my ideas. Given his strong belief in me and his insistence, I gave in and started the **Katha Lab School**. I began the **‘deschool’** with five students.



When I started talking to the parents and children, I found that many of the children were working. They were contributing members to the family’s income. I thought that it was so unfair of me to just go and tell mothers, most of them heading their households, “Please send your children to the school.” I didn’t have the moral right to do that. I had to ensure that the money somehow came into the hands of the woman of the house. It was a diabolic picture in the **Govindpuri slums** as the women were the providers of the family, yet oppressed, and with no control over family planning and pregnancies.

So I thought, when women earn, children learn! What if we can make the children’s learning relevant for their families and also their community? I looked at the textbooks and found that they were not remotely relevant to the child’s life. The textbooks were not written for children who are our future citizens – **creative, curious, critical thinkers**. It was definitely not for children who are first-generation school-goers, whose parents cannot read and hence cannot provide support at home for their classroom learning. Textbook information was oftentimes uninteresting. So it was not surprising that children lost interest in the process of learning. **It was in early 1990 that I came up with our KREAD: the Katha Relevant Education for All-Round Development.**



Education has two components – Schooling and Learning. The components of schooling include books, classes, tests, and the child has to learn by rote information to write a test and pass it. But if you look at the learning which happens through stories – it is a learning for life. *When you understand a Kabir or Lal Ded doha, or a vachana from Akka Mahadevi or Avvaiyar, you are learning for life. You are learning because the content grips your imagination and informs your child's inner essence.* A child will be a transformed person in time. There is no one but life to test their knowledge as they mature and inshallah, grow wiser. At the end of the day it is wisdom that we all desire. To be a good human being. So Tamasha! The big fat pucca friend of children stepped in to teach our children, all and every subject, through story. I remember we, adults and children, would sit in a circle in our tiny classrooms, and place a tape recorder in the centre. One of us would start with a story. And then the story would move from child to child, everyone actively participating. At the end of the session, the children would be excited to hear their own voices on the recorder. “Woh mera awaz hai!” It was so exciting to see their excitement. This is what I wanted. To give them an exciting reason to come back to school. The thought **“What am I going to learn at school today?”** should attract children. **This is how Katha Schools have gone from 85% dropouts in the beginning, to 85% college graduates today!**

When you start thinking about the child, and what the child likes and loves, enjoys and wants, the whole idea of the content you want to give children becomes very distinct and clear. My focus was not on the standardized curriculum of schooling. My focus was more on kindness, breaking stereotypes, being a problem solver for earth and nature. For example, in our society boys are valued more than girls. So my question was, is there a way of putting across the idea that both a girl and a boy are equally valuable? To get children to value a questioning way of life, to think, ask questions and discuss Big Ideas before they act which moves them towards lasting achievement. **This is our TADAA!** Children must learn how to Think. **Ask Discuss. Act. Achieve! This is the TADAA! moment of individual discovery that every child should and can experience for lifelong learning to be a Reader-Leader.**

I have developed a whole education system, **‘StoryPedagogy’ (SP).** SP’s **5 C-Pillars** rest on a robust well-defined philosophy that makes the Curriculum and Content the centre of Classroom Practices, and Continuous Assessments. Our Classroom-Community linkages encourage children to see the city as a classroom, to take back their learning as communicators to their families and communities. Katha Schools promote an education that helps children ‘Achieve’ something for the society and not just for themselves. It can be anything as small as helping a grandmother cross a road. Such small achievements are the goal which every Katha child learns to strive for – not just passing exams.

The whole idea of StoryPedagogy is based on the 2000-year-old treatise, the Natya Shastra by Bharata Muni. I see this treatise, which is on performance and dance as a treatise on communication. I tweaked its many practices of creating ‘rasa’ or taste/joy between performer and audience, to build rasa between student and teacher, so each becomes the rasika of the other. And then I brought in the art and craft of the writer and storyteller -- How do you start? How do you sustain the interest in the middle? How do you finish? For instance, if and when a Katha teacher feels that her children are losing interest, she knows how to ask a question to promote thinking. *A Katha teacher learns to be perceptive, attentive, inventive and creative. She also learns to use the vaak and mukha abhinaya to keep child interest alive.*





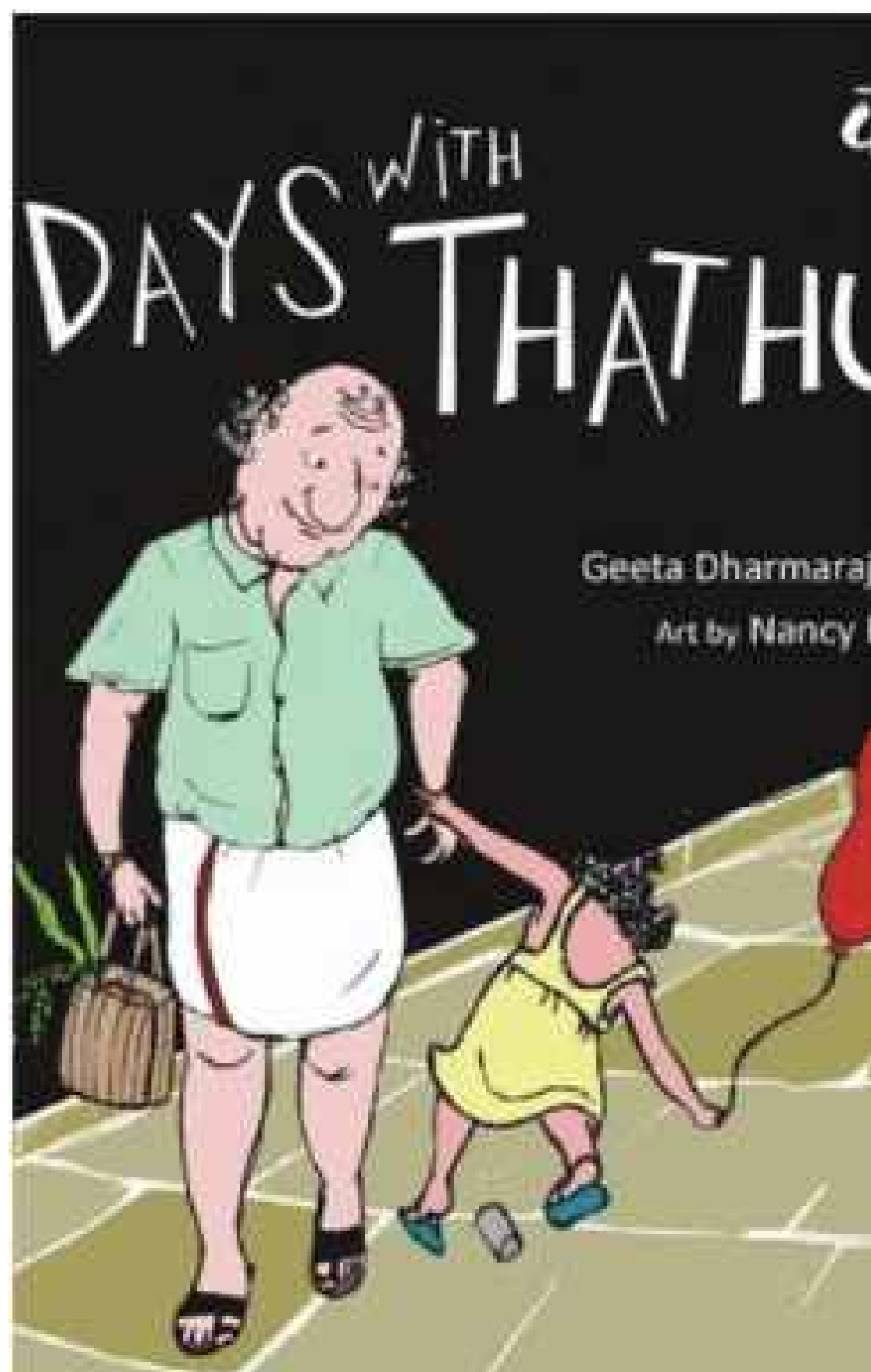
Subjects are artificially separated in conventional classroom settings. It is as if there is no connection between history, geography, language or math or science. Yet these are connected in real life and living. This is what I recognized early on while looking into why children found certain subjects alienating and uninteresting. It was important for me to create – for the children and teachers – a classroom environment, which promoted integrated and holistic learning. Thus, no bells ring to end a class; and our children do not move from one class to another. There is a continuity of the learning and this is just one of the ways that classroom learning becomes connects to the matter of lifelong learning. Another way is to connect what they learn in the classroom with illustrations of real-life application of the same.

You have initiated one of the largest Citizen's Movements with Each Child Teach a Child (ECTC) in your 300M Challenge. How can the youth of the country contribute to this and spread the Movement?

When we were moving towards the thirtieth year, I thought we should leverage the knowledge, experience and expertise we had gained by listening and being fully focused on the child. **30 years of learning to 'pass it forward' to touch 30 crore children who are in schools today in India – 50% of whom cannot read according to UNICEF and most research studies.**

Hence was born the **300 Million Challenge**. The kind of knowledge we have comes from working with their gritty mothers, the innovative kids, and learning from them, and seeing them grow up to be confident and self-reliant adults, who have been able to secure for themselves and their families some much-needed economic self-sufficiency and self-esteem. Our children have gone on to become doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and have and joined the Civil Services. They have become extremely good bakers, art teachers, HoDs of their departments. They earn 30-40 times what their families were once earning. So the whole idea was: how can we share the Katha bag of goodies with the 30 crore children in schools today. *How can we help them **become GEEKs** – working for Gender, Earth, Equality and Kindness? Can our education make our children GEEKs?*

Students are fantastically kind hearted and compassionate. They are creative, curious. Helpful. If each one child who can read can help just one other child to read at grade level, every child will reach her potential. And India would be able to achieve her potential.



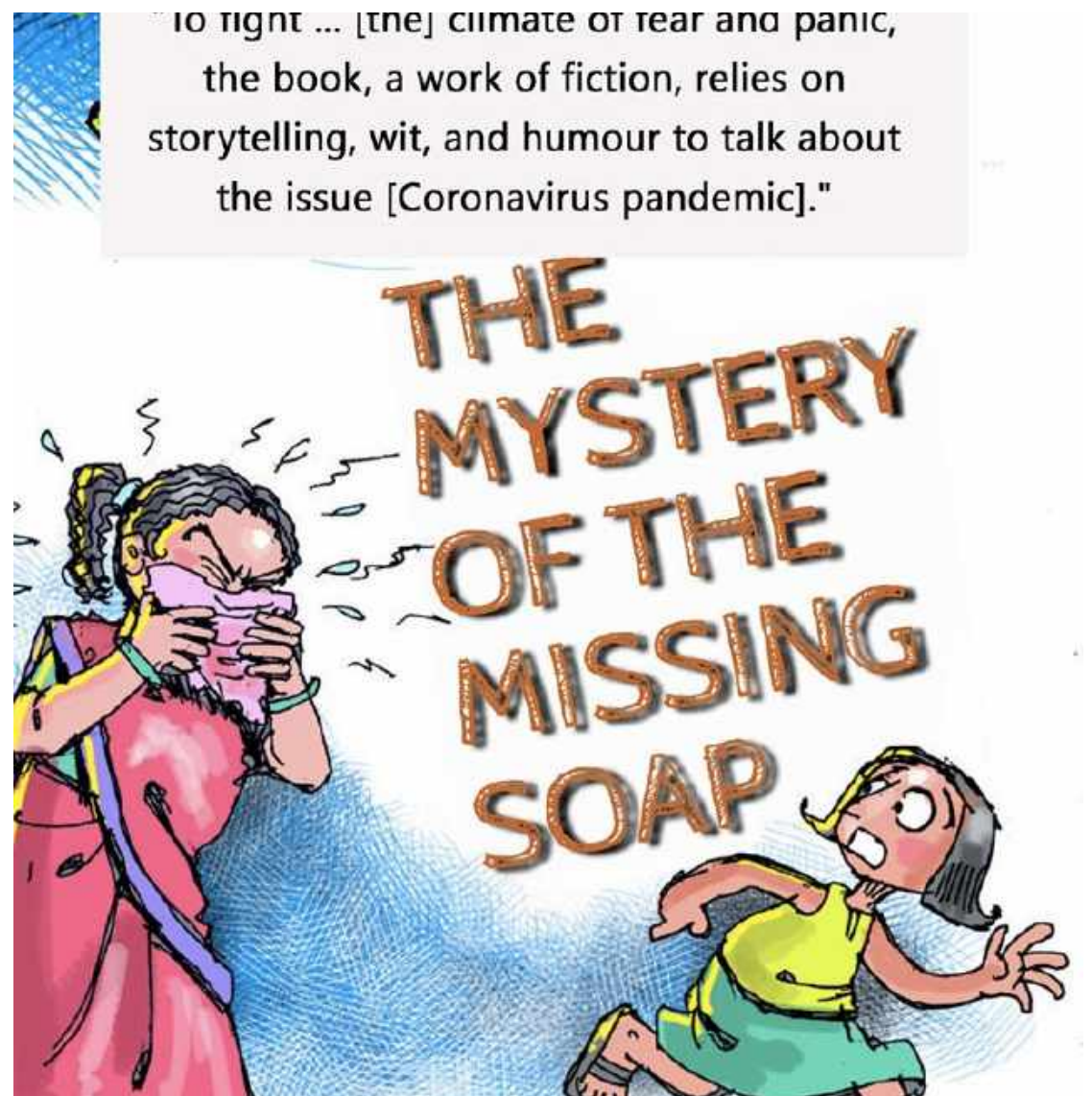
UNICEF says that we missed our target to achieve Universal Primary Education. And now, the next date they have set is 2050. That means ten generations of children will still be going without primary education. And we are not even talking of a quality education. For instance, if I have a maid who comes to work at my house, my child can be a reader-leader with her child and share stories, puzzles, maths, science ... anything! Even that much is enough. A school can do the same in a bigger way by working with a government or low-cost school in the neighborhood. When the will and agency are there the impossible is possible.

That is all we are saying. We are getting an immense response from people from all walks of life, and from institutions and schools, from all over the country. We tell them to use any kind of storybooks, and in any language. We are there to assist. We have got hundreds of Katha books in the GEEK Library with stories focused on girl protagonists, Earth and climate change, Equality and Kindness. Every child a GEEK. The dedicated and awesome team in Katha are working relentlessly for the cause.

To a large extent, children's literature is not yet explored fully by young and contemporary Indian authors. How do you think we can encourage writers to write more for children or children-centric books?

Let me say that the problem lies on both sides. I am seriously thinking of changing my name to **Gita D'Jan**. (Laughs candidly) Nobody reads a Dharmarajan but the moment they see a D'Jan, they may respond with enthusiasm, maybe? This is a major problem, which we face with most of the readers. To be precise, it is a problem we face with the parents. If you go to the book fairs or festivals, most of the books that get picked up are foreign ones. They might be badly edited, not up to the mark, but parents insist on buying them. **Colonialism still lives in our minds.**

Another thing is that we are unaware of the rich stories in Indian languages – the number of translations of Indian stories with Indian themes, learning and knowledge are few and far between. This is a **chicken-and-egg situation between the parents and the publishers**. The publisher is likely to say this is what the reader wants. The reader says this is what I am given, and so this is what I read. It is a demand and supply chain that is set in motion. Writers write for publishers. Publishers publish to meet their financial bottomline. Where does this leave our child readers?



In one of your presentations, you had mentioned an instance where your school got its first computer and how students at Katha helped teachers to learn computers and other skills. Over your thirty years journey could you share a few lessons you have learnt from children.

It is always a two-way process. It is fulfilling to see how our children have imbibed the Katha Culture of respect for all people regardless of age, status or where they work.

I had recently gone to an Apple Store. I saw a boy at the store who was dealing with the customers very courteously. I felt so happy to see this. Then he came towards me, saying in neat English, "I am your student Geetama, don't you remember me?" He was an ex-student from the Katha Lab School. It is like planting a seed, then one day, out of the blue almost, you see a full-grown handsome tree.

I must share a bit about Vijay too. **Vijay** came to join in as a peon. He was in dire need of a job. He was not happy at the place where he was working. I had a conversation with him, and asked him what was wrong and what he would like to do. He told me that he was interested in computers, and was interested in learning about IT and computer technology. This was twelve years ago. And now he is the **Head of the Department of Computers at Katha**. And I am so proud of him today. These days he is the one who mentors me to do my designing and Photoshop

Latika Devi comes from a very regressive background. She joined us with a sociology background in education. Her raw experience of slums, and the way she explains the things about gender equality and ground realities makes me realize how real and grotesque these things are for the poorer sections of our society. No research paper can teach you the way she teaches you. This helps me to break my own stereotypes.

Being a woman, and choosing your path of social entrepreneurship, you must have had gone through your share of difficulties. How does Katha encourage women writers in today's literary scenario?

As a social Entrepreneur and being a woman, I have had my share of different kinds of experiences. Now that I am old, people respect my grey hairs. But when I was younger (laughs) – and you must believe I was younger at some point of time, I used to go to meetings with my COO, a man; there would always be a man on the other side of the table. The person would ask a question to my COO, who would then turn to me. I would answer. And again the officer's question would be directed at the COO! I would wonder whether the man at the other side of the table knew that I was the one answering his questions! The way our society sometimes devalue a woman is awesome. I really don't have any other word for it. It is sometimes very difficult for certain kinds of men to accept that a woman can have a mind and a brain of her own and can talk. But I have also come across many men who have encouraged me, and have treated me with respect. Also, often, some people think that 'Oh, you are a NGO, you should give things for free.' But we too pay salaries and for goods and services. But people seem to have the misperception that as a nonprofit organization, everything we do is for free.

During the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown, the nonprofits were the first ones to come forward to help those in need. As a social entrepreneur, I feel that the Government should increase their trust in good nonprofits. Of course, there are corrupt and bogus nonprofits too. This lack of trust in good NGOs is sadly very prominent in India, and often funds are held back on flimsy reasons after the work has been completed satisfactorily. Although Katha has been fortunate in that we have also found long-term supporters and funders of our work who have stayed with us across the years – but this is more the exception than the rule.

Many nonprofits are now converting themselves into Companies because they are not ready to go through the hassles of being a Non-Profit. But this should not happen in a country like India, where so much work needs to be done for the poor and marginalized, animals and the environment without always thinking about shareholders and company profits.



Tell us about your experiences as a writer.

As far as writing goes, I think, women writers do not write freely. If women write something against stereotypes, then many eyebrows are often raised. Women writers are even scared of using words of abuse in the mouths of their characters. They are scared of being judged. Women need to be free when it comes to writing. They need to be able to imagine and write in different voices. A woman writer needs the courage to let her voice be heard. She should be free, fair and fearless. Women writers, I feel, have to distance themselves, as who they are as individuals, and from their identities as writers. They need to give voice to their writer-selves. Geeta Dharmarajan the writer is different from Geeta Dharmarajan the woman. When I understand this difference, I write freely. I imagine and create freely.

On a personal level, has the line between Geeta Dharmarajan, the woman and Geeta Dharmarajan, the editor, social entrepreneur and educationalist blurred over the years? We would love to know a bit about your family, personal likes and dislikes.

I did say that I have a line. But many times the line does get blurred. For instance, when I am writing, I really don't know about the specific origin of the story. It might be a smell or some other trigger. Then I don't know when the end is going to arrive, and how the end is going to come. But the end is totally different from the thought-process of the person who started on the beginning. I am 'me' when I start writing, but in between, there are all kinds of people whom I met and interacted with. A little bit of this person's laugh, a little bit of that person way of talking comes in the story. It is not the story started by the same person any more.

Me the person who knows the people and the writer who writes the story are different persons. I remember I wrote a story called ‘Sand’. The idea came to me in the middle of the night. I got up and wrote it in my notebook. In the morning, when I showed it to my husband, he asked me from where I get such stories! I, myself, am surprised. I do not know who this protagonist is. I had never been to Coimbatore, and yet this story (published later by The Statesman) is set in Coimbatore.

The Chinese Philosopher, Zhuangzi, once said, ‘Once upon a time, I, Zhuangzi, dreamt I was a butterfly ... I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Zhuangzi. Soon I awakened, and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man.’ When you write you are a composition of all that you learn, you hear and see, consciously or subconsciously.

Even today, my four children – Tulsi and Guha married to Indranil and Shilpi -- when they call about some particular or general issue, I am not sure how to respond. However, at Katha, I am able to listen, weigh options and take decisions. As a person who is running an organisation, I seem to be a more balanced person. I am a little more confident there than I am within the family. In my family, I am a daughter first. I have a different responsibility, which is very different from what I am outside the family. I have my likes and dislikes. For instance when I think about ice cream, I want to eat it. But when I eat an ice cream I do not like it. I feel I am a very mixed up person!

Please share some tips for budding writers.

I think you should read, read and read. If you want to write, you have to read. You cannot be a writer without being a reader. Read poetry. If you can read in an Indian language – read in an Indian language. We have such rich literature in India, and across languages. The feeling is absolutely amazing when you read a poem in Hindi or in Tamil or in Marathi or in some other language. Once, I was reading two books, one was written by a very eminent English author and the second one was **Arumugam, written by Tamil writer, Imayam**. I was weeping and crying over Arumugam. And the beautifully written and polished English book by Vikram Seth, An Equal Music didn't even touch me.

The fact is that a writer has to find the writing that touches her, on her own. And when you read a lot – you inevitably find writing that touches you, and it acts as a springboard for other ideas. There is a Tadaa! moment which comes to each writer, and when it comes – make the most of it. Jot it down and then work on the details, and see where the story takes you!

Also, be a self-editor. Many a times, we write a story, and think that we have written a really good one. But we have to keep on writing a story and editing it. Again and again. The renowned writer, Krishna Sobti, wrote each of her novels three times, from scratch, to catch the right nuances. You have to look at your writing as writer, reader and editor. And then you will know instinctively that the time has come for it to fly away and make a life of its own. I can show you the number of notebooks that I have filled up with stories from the time I began writing, all of them waiting unseen, unheard, unsung.

Thirdly, as writers, practice your art. Like dancers and singers. Writers have to be both contentious and ethical. Being ethical is very important. They have to be passionate to what they are writing, to their story and their characters.

RAPID FIRE

Favourite....

Place: My balcony and my squirrels.

Person: A person called Raju

Food: Idli

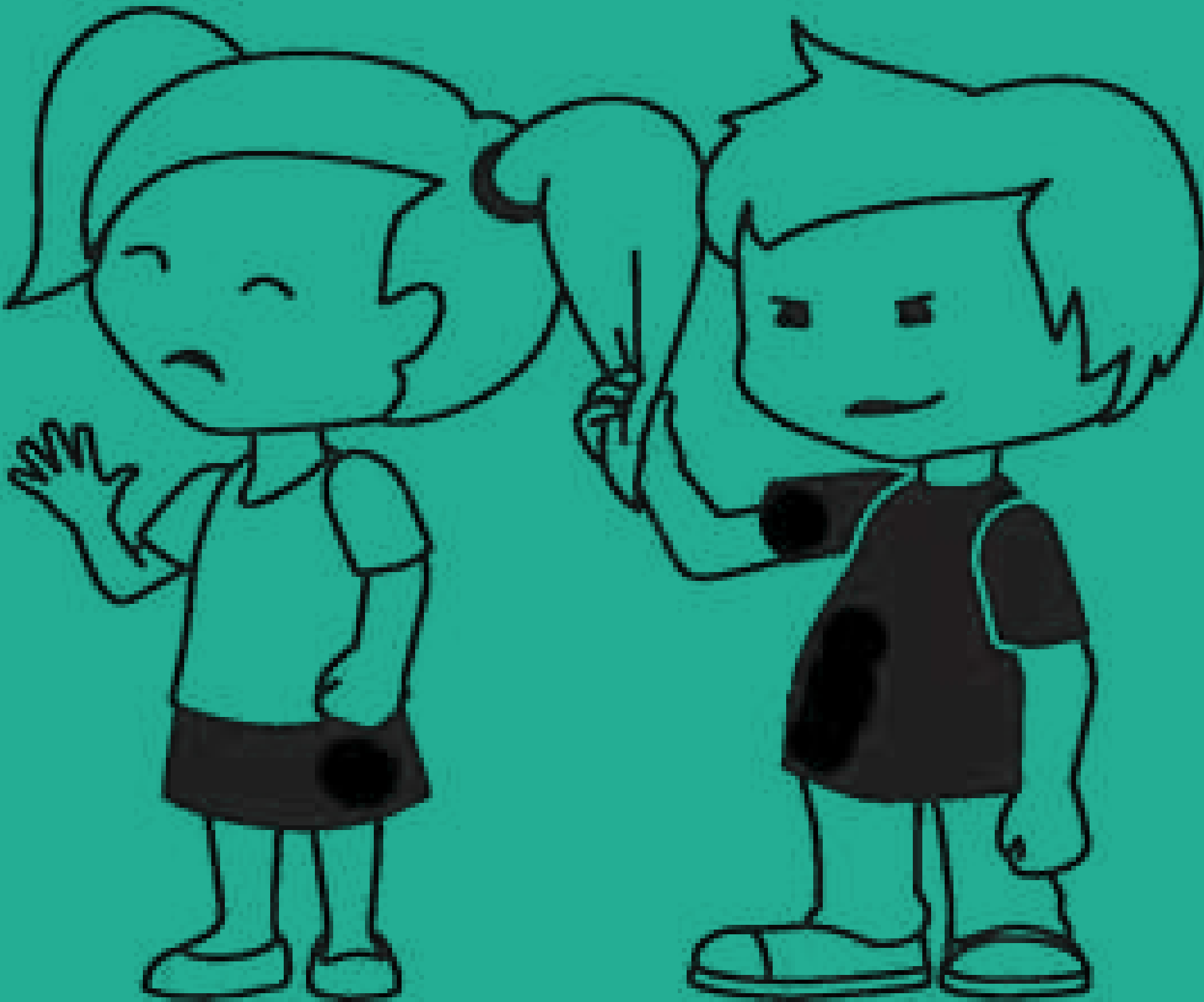
Beverage: Filter Coffee

Your other Talents: I don't know if I have any talents at all. I only know how to write for children and work with them.

First Love: Stories and children

Favourite Quote: “Chinese quote that I have mentioned earlier”

Favorite character from a book- Ranga. Ranga is a Rhino. ‘Ranga the Rhino’ is a book which we have published and he is a baby rhino who is learning how to live. He comes to know all these little things about life. Aan is another favorite. He is a baby elephant living in Mudumalai. A beautiful story about separation and coping.



**She Stood by
you at all
times. No
matter What!**

LETSMAKESTORIESDINO

#100wordsquills



RIDDI KATIRA

Dare to Dream

So far she had been very brave. But at that moment, when the teenager saw her mother getting submerged in water, she broke down. "Was battling a spinal tumor not enough? Why this, mom?" She wanted to ask. But by then her mother was far into the Yamuna. A few hours later, she emerged from water beaming with pride with a record in her name. She swam 1 km against the current with waist-down paralysis. The girl's unbidden tears gathered around her mother's feet like pearls. When everyone was pitying her plight, her mother was nurturing a dream of being a para-swimmer.

PS: THIS STORY IS INSPIRED BY
PARALYMPIAN DEEPA MALIK

The Innocent Dreams

A meagre dot in the vast oblivion.
Enchantment and ecstasy encased in my folds.
Aiming for new heights..
I soar

I feel rapture and glee;
in the warmth of togetherness.
With bonds cherished forever..
I soar

The utopia prevalent in
my innocent wide eyes.
Harbouring blue dreams within..
I soar

The sky's the limit, says my heart.
In anticipation of delightful squeals after
crazy landings..
I soar

The bliss of life is in the smallest of things.
Priceless is the euphoria it brings
Striving to keep the child in me alive;
I ponder to myself
And I soar...

PRIYA WASHIKAR



LETSMAKESTORIESDINO

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Like a Phoenix

After a long hiatus, Malini saw him.
Dropping the kid at the school premises.
With his wife, an elegant lady, with a huge bindi
and a vermilion.

His wife is resplendent with elaborate
vermilion, a happy family of three.

His wife requests her, an emotional mother...
That it is a child's first day at school and she
will leave her son for the first time alone.
Malini assures her that the child will be
comfortable with other kids soon.
She gave a warm smile to the child, introduced
herself, that she is his teacher of the playschool

A great urge, a feeling erupts in her to embrace
the child.

For it is his child after all but she trimmed her
emotions, for she is a teacher impartial.
The child's father looks at her, looks at her as
his son's teacher.

His glance towards her is soaked with
gratitude. Nothing more than that. His glances
are indifferent.

Going back to home, she looks at the mirror.
She dislikes the mirror. But today she saw him.
She has to look at the mirror, mirror never lies.
Yes, she looks different now...fatigue, fragile.
Malini looks at the parting of her hair,
Colorless unlike his beautiful wife.

Then she opens her old box, loaded with painful
old memories, a few photos.

And an engagement ring, that tells a story of
broken hearts.

Could not control her tears, she is human and
sometimes vulnerable.

She remembers reading a folk story of
Shakuntala and King Dushyant.

Their ring and tale of love, pain, and forgetfulness.
But Shakuntala is more fortunate than her.
At least her beloved recognized her when they met!
She then looks at that engagement ring once again.
And then at the mirror the parting of her hair.
Where there shall be no vermilion forever.

Her ring finger is loaded with the story of betrayal.
Fingers shall be bare of accessories forever and
forehead shall be colorless.

Some stories buried forever.

The veil will not be unveiled.

Like a Phoenix, she now rises from her ashes.

She looks fragile but it is only an outside
demeanour.

Inside now she is too strong and can withstand
storms.

Life is a seer who enlightens each day with wisdom.
Life is beautiful...And she is picking up her
scattered life and weaves a new story with a silken
thread.

She found love again...And this time true, and
unconditional...

No expectation, and hence no suffering.

Love in the sublime eyes of her pupil...

Their smiles and giggles in the zero periods.

She finds love in the misty morning,
in the chirping birds.

In the loud laughter of her colleagues during breaks
and rest.

Her playschool is a world full of love and
contentment where everyday new buds bloom.

Dreams sails high in the sky.

Like earth, she can now absorb all.

**MOUSUMEE
BARUAH**





The Music of Hope ..

Broken pieces of thoughts , shimmering in the morning sunshine, after the storm that had raged through the night before, look beautiful. Poetry emerges from those shards and melt into music. I have heard those words – each one of them; and they have carved little patterns on my soul. I watch her as she stares out of the window, the nascent sun rays filtering through the mist and bathing her in its beauty. I feel a rush of emotions and move over to hug her. I know she will be fine.

She is fine, as she always has been. She is a bit of me, and if I have grown through forty summers into a strong woman, so will she. So what if there have been nights that are ravaged by demons who descend and circle her menacingly before catching her in their grip? They have been doing it since she was five and they will probably continue to do so. So what?

I was the first to know about the fits. Her father was away on an overseas assignment at that time and I was staying alone with her in our apartment. We had just fallen asleep after our story telling session when I woke up suddenly to some strange sounds. The bedroom door was left ajar and light was streaming in from the passage outside. I rushed out of the room, fearing the worst and stopped in my tracks. She was in the hall, swaying and making the strangest of faces. At times she giggled and then screwed up her face, as if in pain. Her hair was dishevelled and her eyes were wide open. I screamed and rushed towards and shook her. She didn't seem to notice me. Minutes later, she slumped to the ground, unconscious.

That was the first of a lifetime of such nights. Each one of those nights hung within the recesses of my heart like dark cobwebs. Each night brought with it terror and despair. There were questions too, that my husband and I kept asking ourselves. Could she be playing up? Or was she having nightmares? Neither of us was superstitious but we did begin to wonder if some occult, evil force was at work. It was hard to say.

My mother was the one to suggest consulting a psychiatrist. Strangely enough, that was something that I dreaded doing. It was hard to accept that my child might have a mental disorder. I gave in eventually and thus began a new journey.

Our child had a problem. It wasn't easy to pinpoint the problem though. It seemed to be a kind of Parasomnia . The nights grew worse and the days that followed each of those nights were dogged by fatigue and depression. She seemed to be fading away. She looked distracted and lost and hardly spoke. Were we losing her?

It was a cold winter's night soon after her fourteenth birthday. Her father was away on work. It was sometime past midnight when I woke up to the sound of singing. My heart sank. She was probably having another fit. I rushed to the hall to find her sitting on the couch, singing an old favourite song of hers. She looked up at me and beckoned me towards the couch. I went and sat beside her, looking at her anxiously.

"You love this song too, don't you?" she told me.

I nodded, relieved that she was fine. "Then join me," she said. "I wasn't getting sleep. "Perhaps if we sing a little, sleep will come." We began to sing, slowly and softly, holding each other's hands.

Our voices rose and the music floated gently in the quietness of the night. As the song drew to a close, we lapsed into silence. She rested her head on my shoulder. Suddenly she sat up and looked at me. "Ma, we must do this more often – these random things." I nodded.

There was a sparkle in her eyes. "Ma , every night we go to bed fearing the worst and wake up with the same sinking feeling. Let's change things. Let's start doing stuff that uplifts us. Let's just start accepting what we can't change." She looked away for a minute and then continued.

"Ma, I want to live , not just breathe and exist. This illness or whatever it is, is slowly killing my spirits." I blinked away my tears and hugged her. "Of course, we will," I said in a choked voice. Time froze momentarily that night, as the two of us sat on the couch, hugging each other .

The stars slipped away quietly, leaving a rubicund trail , and as we hummed our favourite tunes , the birds rose to join us.

Jayashree Pillai



Teacher.



**She opened
your eyes &
introduced the
world to you.**

Kiran Manral



Author & Journalist

“Sometimes, we do not get a chance to thank each one who has helped us in our Journey.” Let the readers get a chance to know about all the important people who have played a part in this ‘Author Journey of Yours’.

I have a long-long list. Mom and Dad, of course, for putting the love of books in me. My English teacher in Grade 10, Miss Shirley at Duruelo Convent High School for reading out an essay I'd written to the class, it gave me the confidence I never had. Mrs Srilekha Bose of the English Faculty at Mithibai College for firmly believing that I would one day be a writer and encouraging me in every way.

Parul Sharma and Priyanka Chaturvedi, for pushing me to write that first book, Parul for connecting me to **Deepthi Talwar at Westland**, to Deepthi for taking a chance on me, an unknown first time author, Ashwin Sanghi for motivating me to keep on writing when no one wanted my second book, Rupa Gulab for connecting me to Rashmi Menon, my editor at Amaryllis, when I had a very different kind of book written, and Rashmi for taking a chance on me, and publishing that book, and my next two books in that same vein.

Vaishali Mathur at Penguin Random House for asking me to write All Aboard after just knowing me off twitter. Shunali Khullar Shroff for helping me to get a cover quote for my book Karmic Kids from a celebrity. **Tisca Chopra** for so graciously launching my first two books when she barely even knew me. Every single person who has helped me to get the word about my books out, with me having zero budgets for any kind of promotion. I have such a long list of thank yous, and one day I will write it out in full.



You have written a wide range of books, from parenting ones to a gripping novel. Please tell us more about your books. . Are you working on anything at the present about which you would like to share with your readers.

I've written across humour, chicklit, romance, parenting, psychological thriller, horror, and non-fiction. There are also stories in the speculative fiction realm, in various anthologies, I love playing with this genre in short fiction and am writing a full length novel in spec-fic too, but that's still a work in progress. I am also working on a commissioned non-fiction on inspirational women and I hope to have that done soon too. This year, I hope to have two releases out, COVID permitting, one is a humour book, and the other is a dark grim tale.



Tell us a bit about your family, likes and dislikes as a person.

I lost my father very young and was raised by my mom. I live in Mumbai with my husband, my son and my mother in law. It's a pretty regular middle class suburban mom life, likes and dislikes as a person would be a rather long list, let's just leave it at I love to read and I love to write and I am blessed to be able to do both

Could you share a few tips with our Young Authors?

Read a lot. A lot. And then when you think you've read a lot, read some more. Read judiciously. Read good writing. Read what calls to you and not what everyone is reading. And when you write don't be in a hurry to be published. Work on your manuscript till it shines.

WHAT IF ROUND

What if you had to live with only three things all your life, what would the three things be?

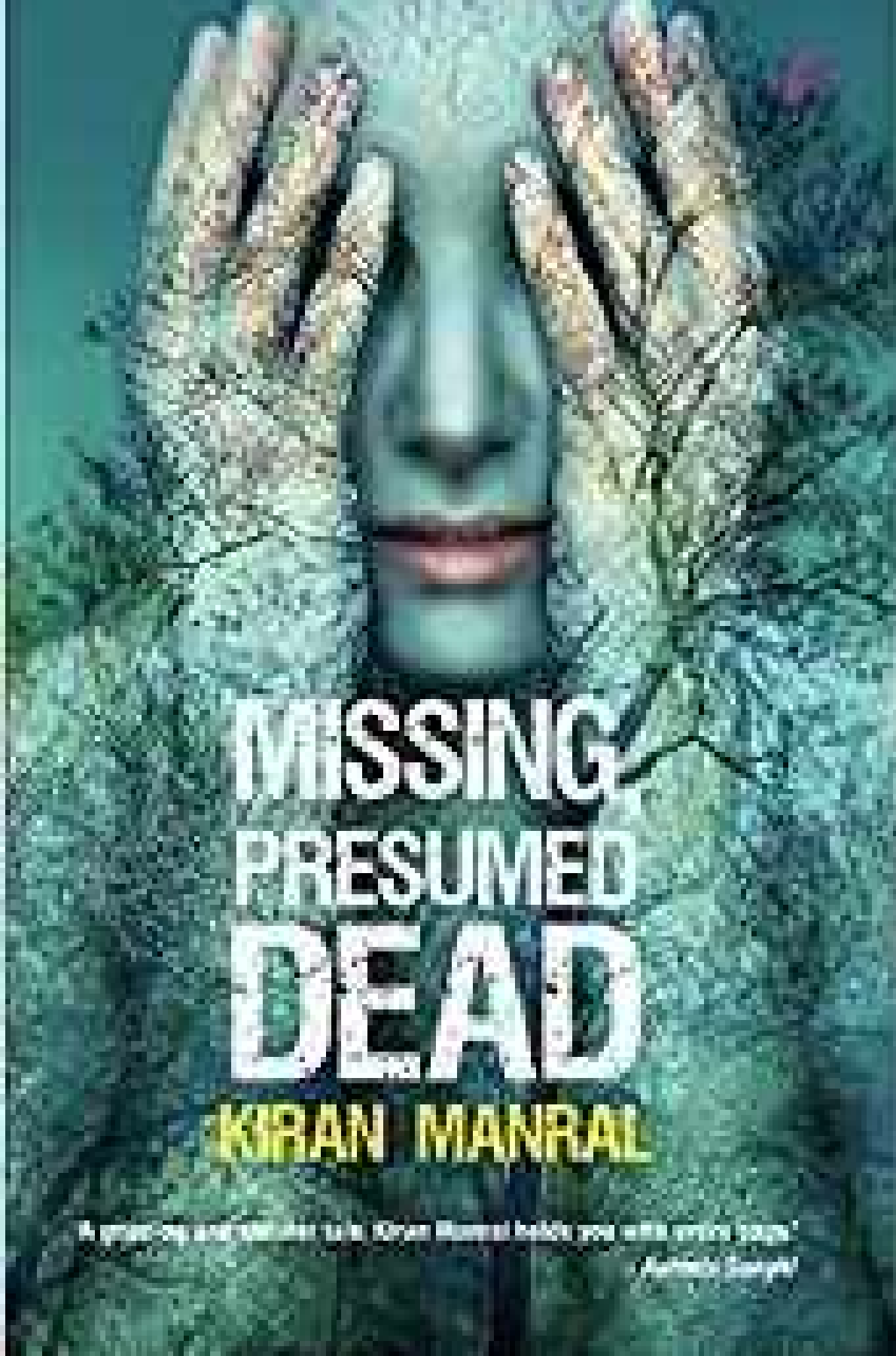
The mobile phone with wifi, 24 hour room service, hot and cold running water

What if you were given the power to change one thing from this world, what would you change?

Poverty

What if you had all the money in this world, what would you do first?

Go on a year- long world cruise



According to you which are the 5 books, everyone should read and also who are your top 3 Authors and what impact they had in your journey as a writer?

Well, I can tell you five books that have been very important to me, whether everyone should read them or not is debatable because not everyone has the same choices and tastes in reading.

Rebecca by Daphne Du Maurier
Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte
Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro
Everything written by P. G. Wodehouse
Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K Jerome

I think the three authors who have been pivotal in my journey as a reader have been, to begin with Enid Blyton, for the wonderful imaginary worlds she transported me into. Roald Dahl, for his wonderfully evil short stories, done so deftly they're each masterpieces by themselves. P. G. Wodehouse for creating a universe where nothing really goes wrong and everything gets resolved in the end, giving us a few laughs while we're at it.

As we celebrate 74th Independence of India this month, how far have the women writers have come in India? What kind of impact Indian female writers are creating in the current literary scenario?

Well, quite far I would say. We've always had fabulous women writers both in Indian writing in English and language writing. We've had Indian women writers win the top awards at both the national and international level; we've seen women writers top the bestselling charts as well. Women are writing across genres, across what was traditionally thought of as a male domain even in the space of writing, they're writing books that disturb, question, provoke and shake the status quo. I think we should exult that women writers in India have claimed their space under the sky.

You were a journalist for a long time. How did you venture into writing full-fledged books?

I'd actually quit journalism, and was a school gate mom. From this I got into mommy blogging, and the mommy blog, which I've shut down, became the book Karmickids. From mommy blogging, I got the confidence to write my first book, and there was no stopping me from there. It's been nine years and I have ten published books, and two more underway.

RAPID FIRE ROUND

Favourite
Place: Mountains of Uttarakhand.
Person: My Son (Krish).
Food: Butter chicken naan.
Beverage: Coffee.

Your other Talents.... watercolor painting, singing

Your First Love.... Married him.

Favourite Quote..... Get Up, Dress Up, Show Up

Favourite Character from a book...Scarlett O'Hara from Gone With The Wind

Friend



**She kept all
your secrets,
yet never
judged You.**

SAY IT WITH AN IDIOM

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?

Asked to a person who is at loss of words

Example of use:

1)“What’s your name little girl?” (no response)... “What’s the matter? Cat got your tongue?”

2) I wanted to say something at the meeting but the cat got my tongue.

Interesting fact:

Origin: The English Navy used to use a whip called “Cat-o’-nine-tails” for flogging. The pain was so severe that it caused the victim to stay quiet for a long time. Another possible source could be from ancient Egypt, where liars’ and blasphemers’ tongues were cut out and fed to the cats. (What a treat for the cats!)

WORDSMITH'S CORNER

DULCINEA (NOUN)

[DUHL-SIN-EE-UH, DUHL-SUH-NEE-UH]

Meaning

The name given by Don Quixote to a coarse peasant girl whom he imagines to be a beautiful lady and falls in love with.

Word Origin

Sp < dulce, sweet < L dulcis: see dulcet

Example Of usage:

“I would do anything for you, Dulcinea, as you know, but for this work unfortunately I am too modest.-

Portia, Duchess

The Dulcinea, a fishing boat, one of those big ones, four or five stories tall, more than two hundred meters from stem to stern.

Patrick Ness THE CRASH OF HENNINGTON (2003)

Showers Of Kindness

BY ANWEE MAZUMDAR



Mili caressed it as gently as a mother would caress her child. A rainbow-colored umbrella it was. Sturdy yet beautiful, like the one she had seen hanging in a shop that immediately took her fancy. Her eyes glittered in excitement and joy. It was the most precious gift she had ever received. Not used or repaired, it was new, expensive, and bought only for her. When her elation settled a little, Mili ran to her father and hugged his scrawny frame with her tender arms.

Each year during monsoon, Mili would find it hard to save herself and her schoolbag from getting drenched in the rain with the only weather-beaten umbrella with broken ribs and holes the family had. And each year, her parents would promise her to buy her the umbrella she liked. Well, such promises are never easy to keep for mere daily wagers. For them, even earning bread is a struggle. This year, however, the poverty-ridden father somehow arranged some extra pence to buy his beloved daughter’s dream umbrella.

The next morning, for the first time, Mili was waiting for the rain. Wouldn’t it drizzle today? The thought made her anxious. The god of rain heard her, and it was already the season of monsoon. So, after half an hour, Mili put up her umbrella and with hurried steps, headed towards school. She couldn’t wait to show her friends the beautiful gift.

The bell rang loudly to announce the end of school hours for the day. Mili bid her friends adieu and took the regular path to home. The sky became overcast again. But she had nothing to worry about her dress and books getting soaked by the rain. The day was going great. Oh, how her friends were lauding her rainbow umbrella! Lost in such happy thoughts, Mili took a turn, and suddenly felt a few drops of rain on her cheeks. She stopped and quickly opened her umbrella.

After ten minutes or so, the light shower turned into heavy rainfall. Milli increased her speed. As she crossed a grocery shop at the corner, she saw a boy sitting hunched up on the road, wet and shivering. He was wearing only a tattered half pant.

Such heavy rainfall, but why didn’t he find any shade? Why is he sitting on the road and getting soaked up? Mili mused and walked owards him. As she reached near, she saw the boy wasn’t alone. Right beside him, were three little puppies curled up against each other, and he was holding a broken piece of a rusty tin sheet over their head to protect the far balls from the raging rain. Mili was amazed. He could have used it for himself, but he didn’t. Instead, he chose to use the bare minimum protection to save the mere puppies.

“You don’t know the world outside. Many have been living in poorer conditions even than we do. So be satisfied with what you have, girl, and always remember to be kind,” her mother would tell her whenever she would throw tantrums over the quantity of food or her old and torn frocks or such other things. But Mili never realized the depth of her words until now. The boy had nothing, yet he was rich in heart. He taught her what her mother wanted to. Mili knew what she had to do. She gave her umbrella to the boy and walked ahead. They didn’t speak a word to each other, but none was needed. Well, such is the beauty of kindness. Hearts listen, and eyes express.

Within seconds, Mili got wet to the skin, yet she felt warm inside. It was the most precious feeling she had ever perceived.



Love for Poetry



I remember when we last held hands
Sitting on the couch next to each other
Everything was beautiful around our house
We made with romance
Where desires lived awaken
We heard the clock tick tock
And we laid carelessly
In each other's embrace
Feeling the world within us
And then.....

As we drifted apart
Our silences grew louder
Memories faded further
We became total strangers
One day as we moved away
From each other
And then...

After decades as we meet
Again as strangers
There is something Surely left behind
With us which still connects
It's the same feeling as before
Probably we missed each other more
This time let's be friends tonight
Dropping our old identities
To become lovers once again .

© Madhumita Sinha

Madhumita Sinha is an HR professional, a published author of a poetry book 'Heartbeats ' 72, random beats and a prolific poet . She contributes her poetry in numerous international as well national literary journal . She loves to perform on her own creations at various forums and poetry clubs . She is being an avid Toastmaster she loves her stage presence and also enjoys judging various contests at corporates and management colleges. She is known for her strong voice in her poetries which are women centric besides touching other emotions of life.

Friends for Life.



First Love.



**Time when you
had a 1000
butterflies in
your belly.**



PRINCESS

Rukmini Varma

Painter & Author

What inspired you to write a book?

I have always been writing since my very early age. It is just that this was the first one published. When I painted, I realised that my hand holding the brush had a mind of its own. My grandmother, seeing me painting as a girl of six, had told me that my **great, great grandfather Raja Ravi Varma's** blood ran strongest in my veins. I never thought much of it, and wanted to develop my very own style of work, uninfluenced by any ancestor of mine.

Much later on, a member of the **Kilimanoor family**, to which RRV belonged, presented me with two **London Royal Academy books that had belonged to RRV**. They were beautifully illustrated with black and white photographs of the paintings done by the pre and post-Victorian Royal Academicians. *What was most interesting was that at the end of each book, the blank pages were filled with notes written by RRV himself!* That was when I began to feel a deep connection with my great, great grandfather. The more I read those notes the more I began to experience the thoughts that might have prompted him, even though these notes were very brief, often just one or two word, written to assist him in his ideas for compositions.

I started analysing them, and soon began to write it down. When I began writing, everything flowed without a break, as was always the case when I wrote. And as I wrote, I realised what his goal was —to Actualise! It was a thrilling moment for me. Actualise the gods and goddesses! That is how I was able to see deep into his creative psyche.

How will “Hidden Truth” influence today’s generation of painters and connect them with RRV’s style of painting?

The root realisation is that “**intuition**” plays a large role in art, just as in the final piecing together of historical evidence both from ancient texts and from archaeology. When you bring forth an expression of creative imagery, it is a form of intuition that guides your concept. The greater the intuitive capacity of the artist, the greater his or her work is.

What the generation of artists today need to focus on is the integrity of one’s perceptions, in whatever form, whether abstract or realistic, traditional or contemporary. True intuition does not allow for distortion, while accepting divergence from the norm.

How distinct was the experience while expressing through written words as compared to expression through the art of painting.

I have never felt a dichotomy of expressions! *From a very young age I have been writing as well as painting. I have reams of written work stored in trunks!* I have written stories for children as well as novels based on the strange visions I have had of people of ancient civilisations! There are also many short stories, mysterious interpretations based on some strange occurrence or event of the present. There are poems too. Some of these are based on my insight into the Vedas, while some are for children, accompanied by my illustrations.

Most of the youngsters of my family are familiar with my stories for them— and my hand written and illustrated books in the same category. While the written matter flowed without corrections or rewriting in one uninterrupted stream, the painting was often reconstructed or changed according to conceptual requirements.

From initial vision to expression on canvas there was planning, positioning, balancing and construction. The brush followed patterns conceived to suit images, but the pen simply wrote without cessation, with no blocks in between.

In fact, there were times when I had to physically force my hand to stop, because I would have started after dinner and would have gone on till 2a.m. and my wrist and fingers were sore. It was as if my hand was merely recounting something that occurred, it seems to me now without deliberate volition!

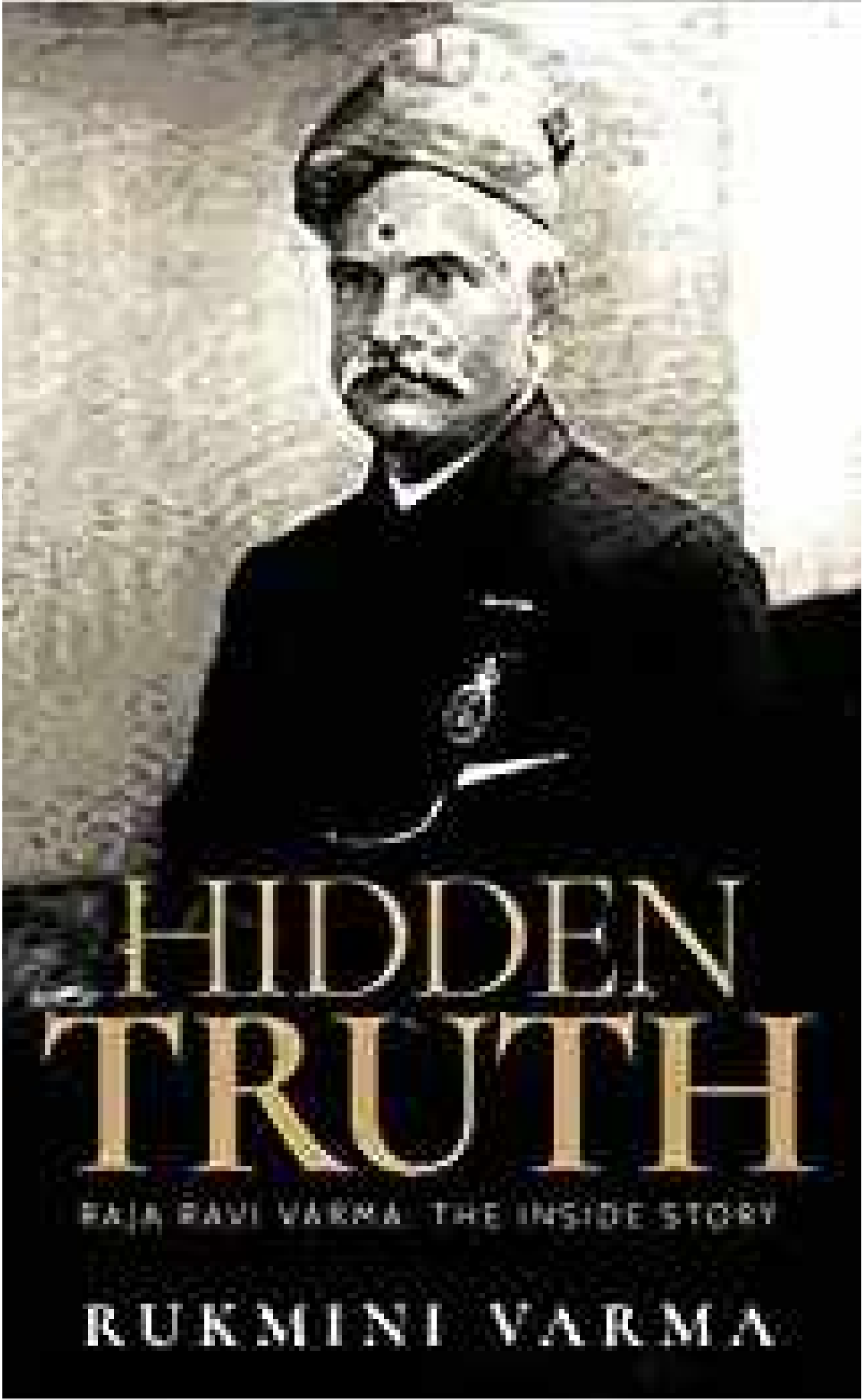
Princess, dancer, artist, author—evolution of level of creativity over the years in each role.

I never thought much of titles. Painting and writing have always been part of my life. Dancing was a physical way of expressing sentiments, and therefore had certain limitations; physical energy is subject to fatigue, whereas mental energy is not. I found myself concentrating more and more on writing and painting— they were more self-oriented, and did not need others, playing accompaniments. You depended solely on yourself for expression when painting or writing. So this became more satisfying. Painting is evolving with more visions and writing has turned into non-fiction— based on observations on philosophical and metaphysical notes.

You have seen the evolution of Indian society since the early days of independent India and the digitally empowered one in current era.

How have art forms transformed through all these phases. It’s importance in common man’s life.

The basic concept of Art has never changed through the ages. What have changed are forms of Expressions. Expressions vary according to personal capacity, emotions and concepts. Expressions also reflect one’s surroundings, values and the period of time in which one lives. All these reflect and have a bearing upon the artist’s works. Today there is digital art, and soon we may see AI art. Varied forms of expressive output exist today such as may not have been conceived of say a hundred years ago.



At the same time there are institutions abroad that have taken Realism to the next level and achieved great heights of perfection with the aid of a larger range of colours than what existed earlier. In the field of Realism, there are studios that have evolved to such high degree of credibility that now even photography tries to imitate paintings!

True, Art must tell a story, in whatever form, that appeals or strikes a chord with the viewer. The core purpose of Art is Communication. If it succeeds in intent, it can truly transform the common man’s life, be a source of inspiration, or inner satisfaction. It can soothe nerves, give a mental boost and in point of fact, bestow upon one the full benefits of yoga or meditation in self-healing.

While you were in the comfort zone of being a painter, you decided to take the plunge and authored a book. What kind of challenges did you face and overcome during the whole process of writing “HT” —the inside story of RRV.

As I mentioned before I had never separated writing and painting. Throughout my life I had been doing both. In fact there were days when I would be working on a canvas from 10 am until 3 pm. and start writing from 9 pm until the early hours of the morning. Both painting and writing were equally my comfort zones.

I began to pen the inner psyche of RRV which influenced his work. There were no blocks or challenges to overcome, it all flowed continuously as if I was being guided by the spirit of RRV himself. The older generation members of my family, particularly my grandmother, knew certain events of RRV’s life which others did not. I drew upon that. I also spoke to some of RRV’s close relatives in Kilimanoor, his birth place. When I heard of his last moments on earth, it was as if I was experiencing it through him. I was so emotionally involved that I could not eat or sleep for two days. The sorrow was overwhelming.

Tell us more about the Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation. What is the vision behind it?

The core vision of the Foundation is to support and elevate the principles of creativity in the field of art and culture in general while upholding the legacy and heritage of RRV in particular, and the immense contribution he has made to the nation in numerous ways.

In the past five years, since its inception it has grown at a phenomenal rate with the help of its dynamic **Managing Trustee Gitanjali Maini**, whose brainchild it is, and the team of dedicated and talented members foremost of them being Archana Shenoy and Ravi Chakravarthy who have most efficiently worked to elevate the status of the Foundation to what it is today.

The Foundation has its own archives, its research department, its creative cell, its communication section, and its working body.



It is a non-profit Foundation and aims at preserving and promoting the legacy of RRV and bring to the world what the great artist always wanted – art must be accessible to all. This is one of the reasons RRV established a printing press to recreate his paintings so that the common man could admire and enjoy them as much as the royals and the illustrious, during his time.

Please share some tips and pieces of advice to the budding artists and writers.

The one thing that motivated me was a lesson I had learned from the life of my great, great grandfather, who had experienced great tragedies and travails and obstacles in his life, the loss of dear ones, opposition from dissenters, political upheavals, envy and obstructions, all of which would have crumbled a lesser spirit. RRV rose above all impediments to leave an undying rich legacy and heritage unparalleled in the history of our nation. This is the most inspiring and motivating thought that aspiring young artists and writers could draw from the undaunted and indomitable spirit of RRV himself, just as it **has always inspired me, the one belief above all else, “Never give up.”**



Coming from a royal family, were women as painters accepted in those times? How do you see these hurdles now, after crossing each of them gracefully?

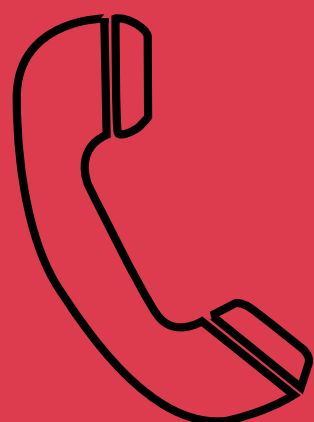
In our specific royal family which follows a matrilineal form of succession, no women painters have been known. Ours is the Attingal Royal family and is considered the Ruling Family. All female members are from this family and the Ruler takes the family name of his mother and not his father, even though the latter may be from an old aristocratic family. Even though I am RRV's direct descendant, being the eldest grand-daughter of his eldest granddaughter, he himself hails from the Kilimanoor family, since his mother belongs to that family. My own father is RRV's nephew. I am therefore connected to him through both my mother and my father. My father himself paints extremely well, though he does it for the fulfilment of his own creative energies and not to pursue it as a profession.

While in my family there are no known female painters, in RRV's family there are many artistically inclined women, even though they have not pursued it seriously enough. RRV's own sister Mangala Bai however was an acclaimed artist in her own right.

Women of the past were never encouraged to pursue their passions or talents and often had to satisfy their creative abilities privately. In my case however, such hurdles were not present. But it was difficult in another sense since I also had to manage a family. At a point in my life I simply ignored obstacles and somehow managed to express my ideas, since they were irrepressible.

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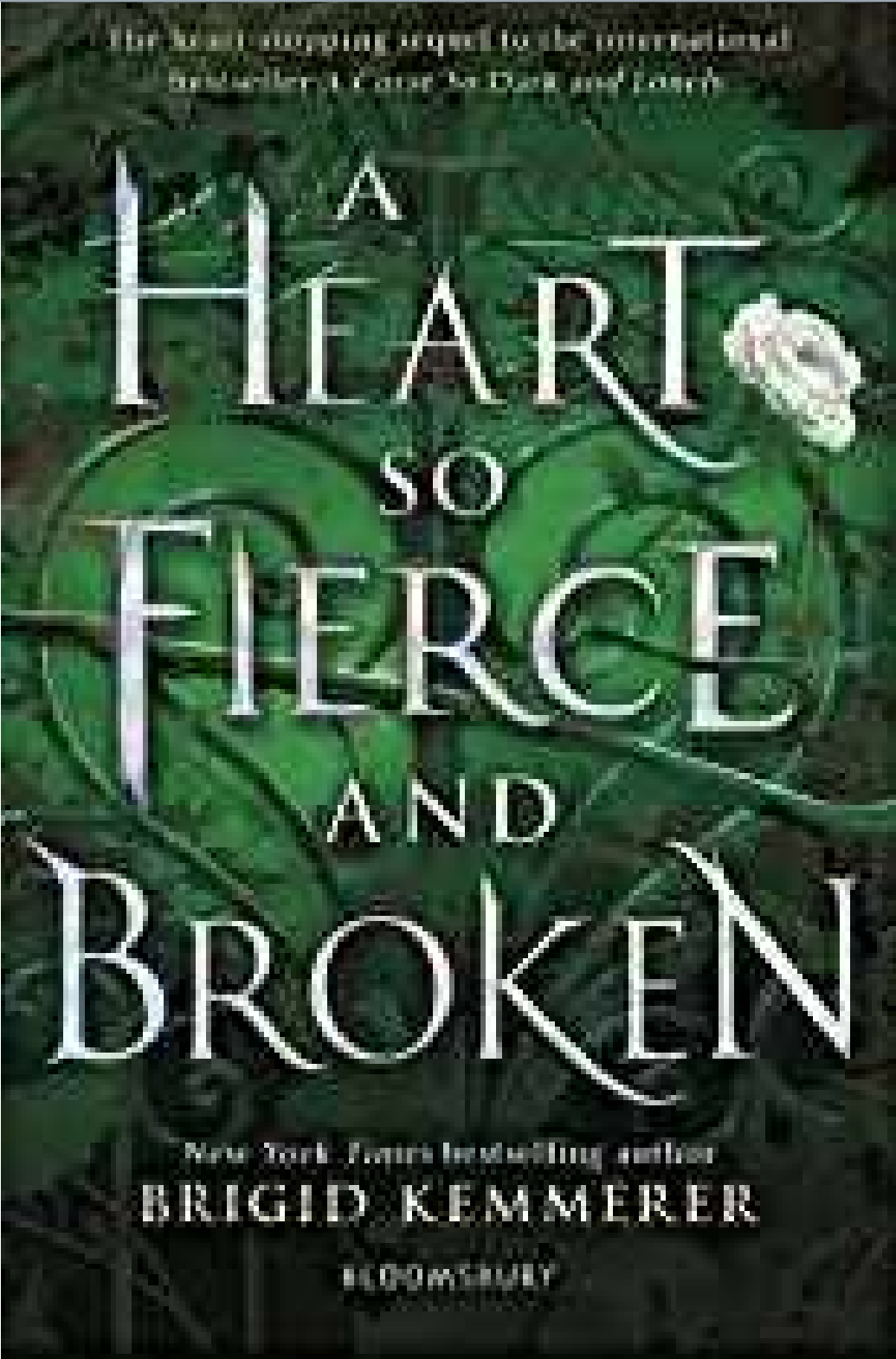
Wife.



**On your knees,
yet she made
you feel, you
were on top of
the world.**

A HEART SO FIERCE AND BROKEN

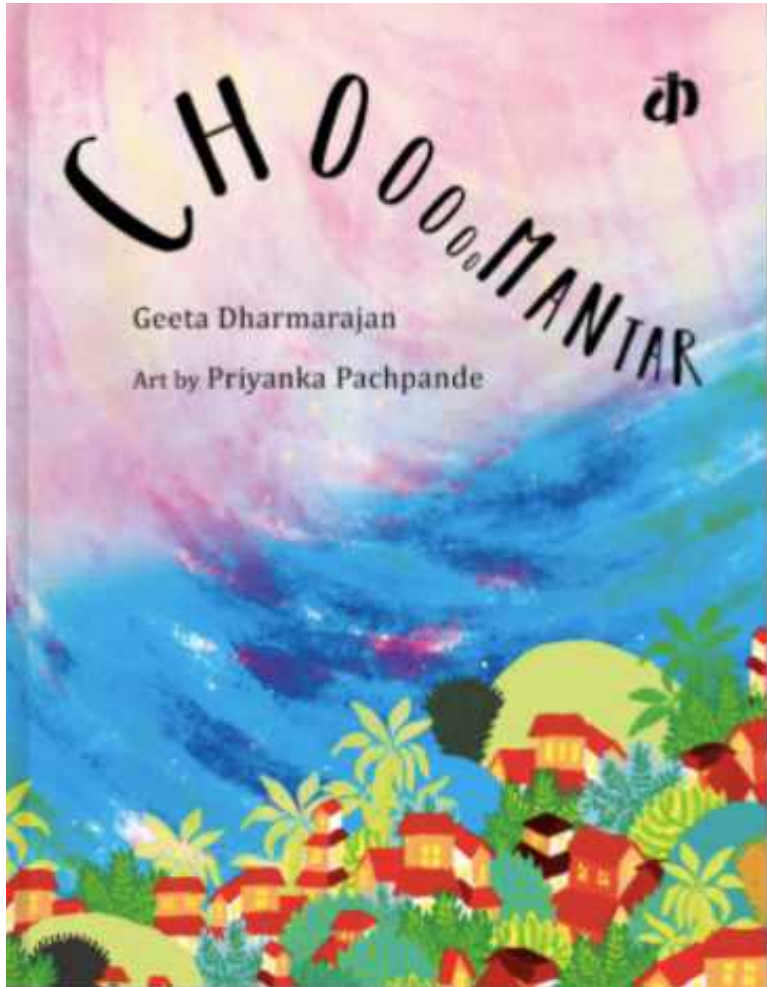
The second book has entirely different characters. There's one POV of Harper at the beginning and Rhen at the end. The two main POVs in the book are of Grey and Lia Mara. Harper and Rhen could have had some story time too, because the whole time the readers are concentrated on Grey and Lia Mara, we only assume and know in bits and pieces what is happening back at Emberfall. A thorough inclusion would have shed more light on Rhen and Harper's life post the curse and their state of mind. Grey doesn't have much of a character development, more like his true nature has come forward now that he's not a guard commander anymore. The USP of the book is seeing Grey in love. The expressive description rather than vocal narrative in case of Grey was much more heart-touching than Rhen. There's something about suppressed feelings of romance that appeals to me. Grey managed to do just that, pull at the strings of the heart. Lia Mara is better than Harper as a protagonist. She has the conviction of practicality that Harper doesn't, even though Lia Mara is clearly an idealist. She's friendly, soft spoken, naïve but smart, brave and an acute observer. She's not strong though. She would rather give up than fight. An endearing quality the way it has been portrayed. It's a different concept. A risky area because such characters usually end up being termed pathetic. At some point, I thought the same. But it all comes together in the end. There are other characters. Jake- Harper's brother and his boyfriend Noah, Tycho, a young groomsman, and Isiak, the Scarver, and Nolla Verin, Lia Mara's youngest sister. Grey travels with them (except Nolla Verin) to Shyl Shallow. Jake and Grey's sarcastic banter provides a much needed light hearted laughter, if not for that, this book would be heart-breaking and soppy. Isiak's character is deeply impressive. He is intelligent, assertive, loyal and mature. There's an insight into his story. The reader will surely want to know more. The relationship between Lia Mara and Nolla Verin reminds me of Elsa and Anna from Frozen. Nolla Verin is shown as brutal, hard hearted and desperate to please her mother but under all those layers, she is a soft-hearted person, who embroiders and giggles while talking about men and loves her sister more than anything. The plot of second story is a coup that doesn't exactly come to fruition but has surely set the wheels in motion for the third book. There's a sub plot here written in a manner to make the reader aware of the politics of the region as well as an insight into the characters that will play a major role in the upcoming book. There's a lesson on history of the region too. There's a hint of a love triangle in between. It felt like an unwanted cliché at first but it was smoothed out properly in the end. Yet the speculative nature of that part was kept intact for a long time. Truly, well played by the author. In my opinion, the second book is better than the first. While A Curse So Dark and Lonely had a predictable ending owing to the base script of Beauty and the Beast, the true prowess of Kemmerer's storytelling is seen in the second book where an entirely new sequel story is woven that is just as good as the first one, even better actually. Also, this book has a major cliffhanger. So beware because there is a 6 month wait before the third book releases.



Blurb

Grey is in hiding, with a terrible secret. Rhen is looking for him. If Rhen finds Grey, he will kill him. Grey is going against Rhen for the first time in his life. He is forced to fight for something he doesn't want in the first place. Not to mention the feelings developing in him for an enemy princess that destiny has put in his path. When Grey and his band of traitors make their journey to Shyl Shallow, little do they know that the game is afoot even with the players missing. Lia Mara, princess of Shyl Shallow wants peace. Her mother doesn't. When she barter for peace with Rhen without her mother's knowledge, she is taken prisoner. She escapes with Grey, and his friends to make the journey to Shyl Shallow with a promise to provide sanctuary for Grey. But there is another trap in waiting. One that Lia Mara doesn't know is being laid out for them. There will be a choice- a choice to choose between love and duty. To choose between Grey and herself.





Chooooomantar

The book 'Chooooomantar' is written by Geeta Dharmarajan. The main characters are Jivuba, her mother, Dammu, Sultana, Mary, Sarpanch and Jivuba's uncle.

In the village Bhopali, there lived a girl named Jivuba. She loved to sing.

"When you will be married, you will have no trouble putting them to sleep, said her mother. The girls were married off early in the village. But Jivuba wanted to be the best singer in the world.

She went to Dammu, the wise Apsara of the Forest. Dammu cast a spell on the villagers to make them forget to get their daughter married. However, there was a way to break the magic.

The daughters grew up to become doctors, singer and carpenter etc.

Did the spell get broken? Does the education of the girls help the Village Bhopali?

To know more about this, read the wonderful book, 'Chooooomantar'.

The pictures are colourful and make the story interesting. The story teaches us that girls should also be given proper education. With education, they can help their parents and do lots of things.

BY YASHAN GAJBE
(8 YEARS OLD)



The Tale of Makkhilal

The story is about a fly called Makkhilal, who acted as a God for people of Makkhipuri. The villagers prayed to Makkhilal and offered him, Prasad. Villagers let the fly taste their food and sit on their babies eyes and face till one day, villagers started falling ill. Then comes a Doctor Saab.

Will Doctor Saab help the villagers?

It's an enjoyable short story written with rhyming words. There are lots of colours and pictures and teaches us about hygiene. Moral of the story is – we should think before we choose our God.

BY MYSHA
(6 YEARS OLD)

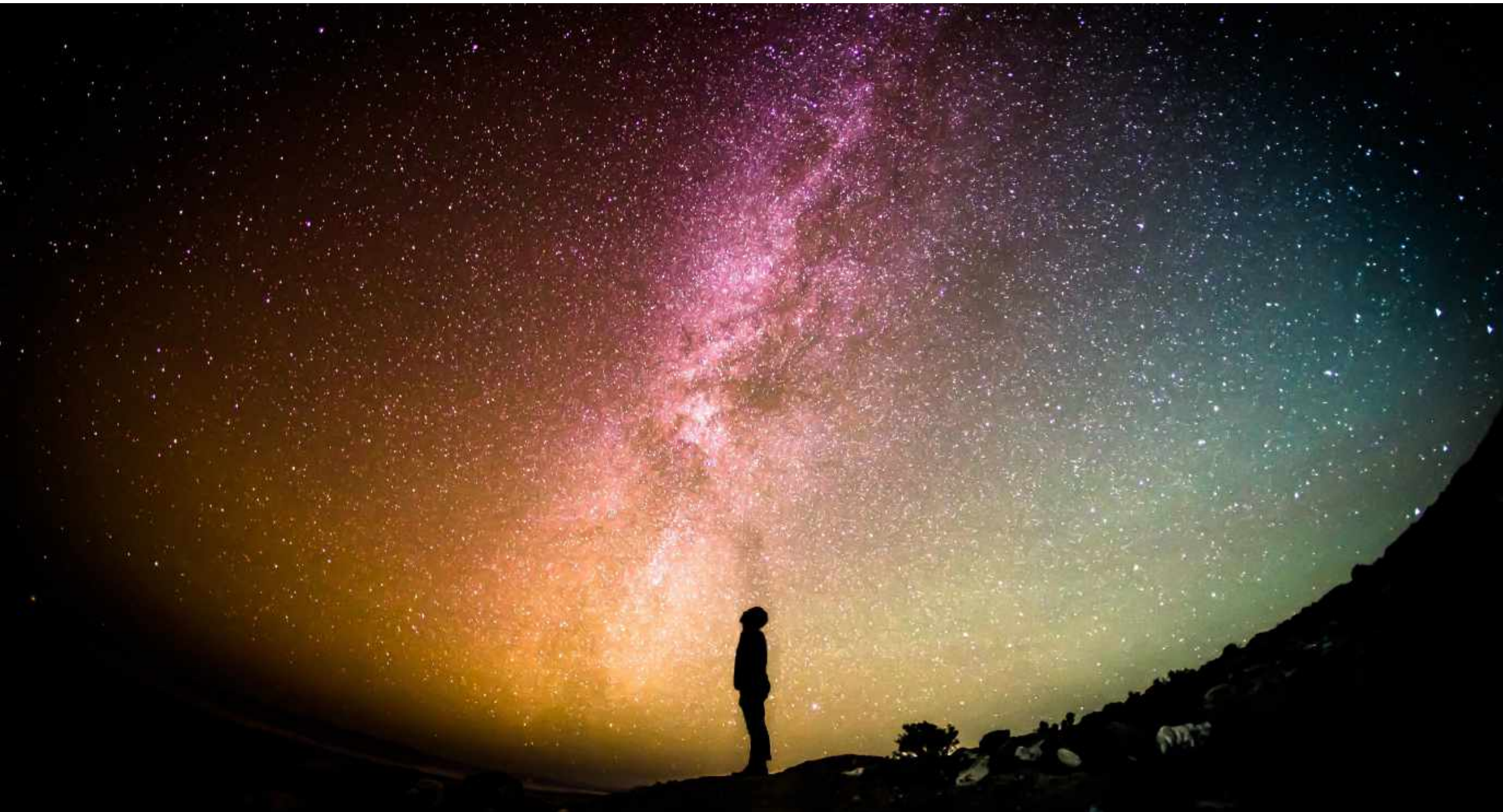




by Abilash Geetha Balan

Satya.

Chapter 1.



Hi, I am Satya. I am a superhero and my superpower is that I only do the right thing. I am from your future, I mean; I am from the future of Humanity. I represent each one of you. I am made of the good and the bad, the pure and the evil, the right and the wrong, I am a human and an animal, rich and the poor, black and the white, god and the demon, left and the right, man and a woman. I am not the extremes, rather, the collective voice of both sides. I am the true rightful voice of your inner soul

I am here to tell you the things you guys screwed up, things you should have acted upon, keeping your differences aside. Things which have made the world the way it is today, **'Chaos in Harmony'**. Till now, I have tried to keep quiet and let you make your decisions, however, I feel it is time for me to breach your perceptions and take charge of your true inner soul. And, I want you to do the right thing..

Let us begin from the Origin of the Earth. The opinion here is largely divided and has been debated for over many centuries. Some of the most popular such divisions are based on various religious and scientific beliefs.

In the scientific world, some strongly believe it is the big bang theory, while others claim alternative theories like eternal inflation and the oscillating universe.

Amongst the religious divide, the world was made in 7 days, Lord Brahma created life on earth through the river Ganga and Earth being built over 6 yawm (over a long period of time) are amongst the most widespread.

Since, it is fairly impossible for humans or rather any form of life on earth to have witnessed the origin, and even if someone had witnessed such a marvellous event and was able to record the whole phenomenon in a written text or a lengthy poem, it is almost certain that the actual story would have changed its course over time. This is a high possibility due to the following two reasons, first, **history is written by the most powerful king** and not the rightful and second, have you heard of something called a Chinese whisper? In the first reason, mankind has lost many knowledge and literature due to invasions and other natural disasters. And secondly, it is impossible for a story to remain in the exact form and fir for over 2,00,000 years. The amount of time the human race is said to have existed, or even 6000 years since we started claiming ourselves as civilized.



In today's time, even with such advanced communication modes and technology, it is impossible to trust media and news floating around. The actual news is controlled even today by the most powerful men and loses its course due to a lot of false news on social media. Now imagine how could anyone be certain what had happened so many years ago. Even knowing what has happened 500 years back could also be highly arguable. So, it is quite normal that this "Divided Opinion" on how all this came into existence is expected to overcome the test of time and here to remain.

Now let us do a small perception test. Be honest and introspect what IMAGES come to your mind when you read the following words. Take a few seconds and do not hurry.

1. Universe
2. Sun
3. Stars
4. Planets
5. Earth
6. Sky
7. Ocean
8. Animals
9. People

Each one of you would have either visualized an image from your memory; either you have witnessed it through your own eyes or maybe through a photo/video which you might have seen on TV, computer, newspaper, etc.

Now listen carefully, **"The Truth is never an absolute voice, it is always hidden in between the various versions of it."** Of all the possibilities, in both the scientific and human belief system, there was one underlying commonality. Each of the above items is the creation of the creator, the person whom you call God.

The first eight things listed above are not divided in the name of religion or science, it is common to all forms of life, and it is only you, the humans who are divided in the name of the creator. A creator, who has left behind all his creation. And now if you really look closely, you could hear the collective voice of each of these elements together, we call this Nature. The ultimate creator and preserver, the living God, whom we can see, smell, touch, hear and taste. ***Known, is a river, the unknown is an ocean.*** So let us start respecting **nature** and preserve it as God. Without nature, you and I are not possible. By nature I mean, all its elements, air, water, land, fire, ether and all the life forms in it..

Image Source : [Earth.com](https://www.earth.com)



Parent.



**She gave a new
meaning to
your life.**



IMAGE SOURCE: THE LOGICAL INDIA

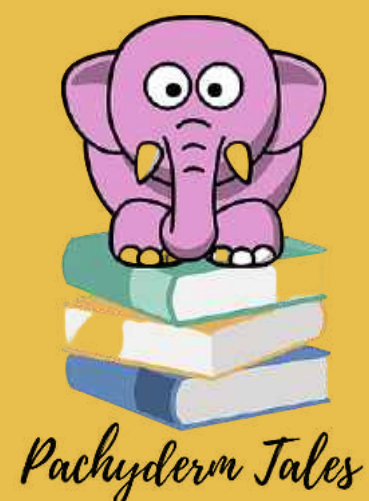
Mathuram the sweetness of love is an attempt to spread love and understanding. It is an endeavour to hear the muffled voices of Trans people, who are forced to remain silent, as they do not agree to the normative of society. Mathuram is a venture towards an inclusive society where no one is perceived differently because of their gender. Mathuram is the voice that will speak with, for and on behalf of every person who aims in creating a genderless society. If something can rule the world it can only be love. Mathuram is that attempt to love every human alike. Mathuram will be a world where people of all the colours, races, sexes and gender live together in peace and harmony.

Through Mathuram, Sharing Stories and Pachyderm Tales will strive to seek the tales of Third gendered people from their experience, and from others' encounter with them. Mathuram reclaims the space for the Transgender, by incorporating stories from Mythology, History, Anthropology and Science. Mathuram will navigate the uncharted territories and bring out the hidden truths into light! Mathuram is going to be a road not taken, because we have simply forgotten what it is to be 'Human'... Join us in this attempt by narrating the stories of your transgender friends, their lows and highs, their love, their pain and suffering, their achievements and success. Also get ready to listen to the raw emotions of transgendered people and their lives in their own voices.

The idea to make world a better space has been time and again conceived by numerous philosophers, but we firmly believe that a society which marginalises even one person does not qualify as good. Mathuram will act as a bridge in understanding a community and their fear in contrast with your experience and your agitation! Only in truly knowing, can we forget bifurcations and unify as a family! For the World is definitely a space to live together! Write along with all the Mathuram in your heart!

ANNOUNCING **MATHURAM** ANTHOLOGY ON THE THIRD GENDER

PARTNERING



We are Looking for your
Entries.....



The Hive

Anthology | Blood Runs Cold

The Hive is a platform dedicated to publishing anthologies of short stories, a category typically underestimated by traditional publishers. They continue to bring out anthologies of short stories, every year. Being ardent readers of short stories, they realized the dearth of good anthologies out there. So, for the love of storytelling they decided to co-create The Hive, a non – traditional publishing collective, focused at this point only on anthologies. What started as a collective of passionate writers is now a thriving platform. As a publishing house, The Hive is determined to make the publishing world a better place for aspiring writers. After the stupendous success of the first anthology **Route 13 – Highway to hell**, The Hive recently launched their second anthology, **Blood Runs Cold**. 17 Writers, 17 Stories. One book, One roller coaster ride, with edge-of-the-seat thriller stories. From stoic detectives to spirited vigilantes, from serial killers to terrorists, from noir to psychological thriller, 'Blood Runs Cold' has it all to keep you awake till the turn of the last page. Known for not sitting on their laurels, they are soon launching Best of Minitalles.

17 Authors | 17 Amazing Stories



Priya
Bajpai



Anshu
Bhojnagarwala



Varadharajan
Ramesh



Srivalli Rekha



Sreeparna
Sen



Eli P



Kanika G



Sarves



Tina
Sequeira



Yatindra Tawde



Aradhna Shukla



Ratnakar Baggi



Rashmi
Agrawal



Pavan Kumar



Sheerin Shahab



Christopher DSouza



Pranav
Kodial



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Old Age



**She made your
old age a lot
more fun...**

Winners

Writing Contests | July Edition



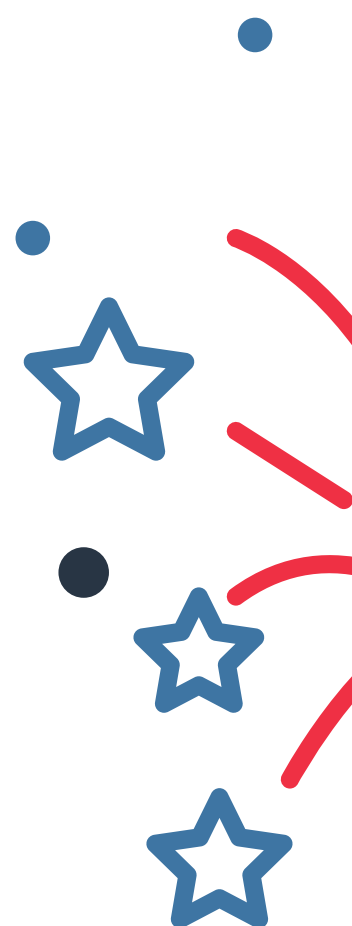
WORD IMPACT

Winning Entry

Ratna Prabha

Special Mentions

Santosh Bakaya
Anwee Mazumdar
Sonia Dogra
Vasudha Pansare



PICTURE PROMPT POETRY

Winning Entry

Vibhavari Bhushan

Special Mentions

Chandra Sundeep
Chandrika Radhakrishnan
Prasanth
Snigdha Agrawal

@1000WORDSTALES

Winning Entry

Preethi Warriar

Special Mentions

Anamika Bhattacharya
Tejaswini Ravi

A few Select Entries will be featured in our website shortly....

Justice.

A blindfolded lady was walking down a dark alleyway,
On her way to meet someone important.
Suddenly, the agonized screams reached her sharp ears.

"Help! Help!"

The lady turned her head towards the sound.

She heard the incessant bark of a dog in the same direction.

"Aah! The poor woman bitten by a dog, it seems!"

"She'll manage! I need to be elsewhere!"

If only she had removed the blindfold!

She would've seen the dog trying to ward off,

Four ravaging men working silently and viciously,

On the now almost-dead woman.



RATNA PRABHA

Ratna is an ex-banker who is now dabbling in writing. She has been at it for over four years now. She is a freelance writer on Upwork and has her own set of clients who provide her with a regular stream of writing work. She has written in multiple formats including blog content, fiction and non-fiction eBooks mostly as a ghost-writer.

PicturePromptPoetry

WINNING ENTRIES



*It was a pitch-dark night
Lying supine with open eyes
Almighty decided to paint
With colours beyond benign.
He summoned his folks
To bring the colours
Of virtues, vivacity, desire and dignity.
Day and night
He mixed and matched
And colours danced in shapes and shades.
The work was almost done
Suddenly he felt enormous pain
In his right hand.
"Oh those few left strokes", he moaned
And thus the healers were born.*



VIBHAVARI BHUSHAN

Vibhavari Bhushan is a science graduate. She has a penchant for English classics and loves to cocoon herself in a world, where she can romance with words. She loves the world cinema but Indian cuisine.

#1000wordstales

Color is
NOT a
Crime.



Situation :

The mayhem we saw in the past few weeks over a particular skin color and the discrimination makes us wonder how mere white, black, brown, yellow colors can classify humanity? Third Saturday of July is celebrated as 'Nelson Mandela International Day'. His fight against 'apartheid' needs no introduction. Even after these many years, we are still fighting the same demons.

Of Love & Hypocrisy.

She gazed at the computer screen in disbelief, unable to fathom what she had just stumbled upon. "It's high time this racial discrimination stops, my heart bleeds for the victim. Black, brown, how does it matter, I pray for the victim's soul." ABC, the famous Bollywood actor had tweeted his solidarity to a racial abuse casualty, an incident that had caused a huge furore worldwide.

She scoffed. With a sarcastic smile playing on her lips, she browsed ahead, least concerned about ABC's elaboration.

"What's so funny?" her husband handed her tea. "ABC has expressed his emotions about that racist incident in the US. Remember I told you he was my classmate at high school? He once refused to share the bench with me. I would infect him with my dark colour, he had jested." she was still smiling, albeit sadly.

"Hey, cheer up." Her husband tried to turn the situation jovial, "He was young, and obviously an idiot. Forget it. I can't bear to see the beautiful mother to be upset."

WINNING ENTRIES

But how could she forget? ABC had been a teenager back then, old enough to realize that such comments hurt. And it hadn't been an isolated incident, ABC and his group of fair complexioned good looking elite, made sure she was the butt of their many racist jokes. She had an umbrella for the afternoon sun, to which ABC had once cited, she didn't need one as her skin couldn't tan any further. 'Kaali' was what he and his comrades often preferred calling her.

And here he was now, condemning racial discrimination on social media. Popular amongst many, with average acting skills but light skin and good looks, he had made his way to the top. Much as she tried pushing those thoughts away, somehow she found herself disturbed the whole day. Those jibes, those demonic laughs at the cost of her skin colour, those memories, were too deep-rooted to get rid of. She had to do something, she had to unmask ABC off the benign garb he donned over his snobbish self. And of course, who else, but social media to help. So she diplomatically replied to his tweet.

"Dear ABC, wonder if you recall me from high school. For years, you fondly addressed me 'Kaali', remember? Glad that you now sympathize with racial discrimination, never expected it from someone who thought my dark skin colour was contagious." The impact her little response created, was shocking. Many of her ex classmates had resonated with her, many other strangers had expressed their disdain. His act of mock compassion had turned into a field day for twitter users. There was hardly much against her, it was his tweet that had turned into a meme fest. Turned out he endorsed a fairness cream as well, the public roasted him for being fake, his tweet was being openly called a sham.

WINNING ENTRIES

So much happened over two days, Mr. ABC finally sent out another message on social media, tagging her. He mentioned he did remember her, and deeply regretted what had happened back then. He in fact apologised for his childish behaviour and called the whole episode unfortunate. She was genuinely surprised, but content. At least he had been honest and taken on her accusations head on. She was hardly interested in the adulations and praises she was garnering, his acknowledgement and apology had been enough. Some had admired his decency to accept his wrongdoing and she on her part had forgiven him. It was a huge load off her mind and somehow, she was ready to put the whole childhood incident behind, forever.

When she thought about it now, it somehow turned out, he hadn't been the only one. She had been a brilliant student and her teachers' pet. But when it came to dance or fashion shows, she often found herself side-lined, the other beautiful girls were placed above her. In school skits, there were certain roles she was deemed fit for, many others were out of her scope. The relatives didn't make it easy either. Almost every product, from curd, to tomatoes, to synthetic creams were smeared on her face, but to no avail. But they all made sure they constantly let her realize, she had a problem, a big one at that. The marriage arena had been worse, qualities like good education, individuality or moral values often took a back seat when it came to skin colour. The matrimony websites had a colour filter, she was often rejected as early as the profile viewing stage.

But then, none of it mattered now. She had studied well, she was independent and she had made her parents proud. As for marriage, her husband had been her colleague, they had worked together in a team, grown to love and respect each other, and now graduated to beginning a family together. She was about to retire to bed one night, when her mother-in-law offered her a glass of saffron milk. "It's the fourth month now, so I thought I could toss in some saffron for you and the baby." The good lady smiled. "I don't like the taste Ma." She was confused. "Just gulp it down, it'll do you good, your baby will be fair complexioned." The mother-in-law reasoned.

Offended she was, but she let it go. Her day at work had been hectic and she was in no mood to argue with the old matriarch. But no more lightening therapies and no more saffron from tomorrow, she swore. Once in the confines of her bedroom, she talked about the incident to her husband, about how uneasy she felt when it came to someone so close, discussing her unborn child's skin colour. "Let it go dear, Ma is old. And then, no harm in trying, right? Who's to tell, what if we turn lucky and get blessed with a fair baby?" his expression gave away his actual point of view. She sighed and switched off the lights.

Preethi Warriar

has completed her Masters in Electronics Engineering and is an Assistant Professor at Shah and Anchor Kutchhi Engineering College, Mumbai. Apart from the technical stuff, she likes weaving stories out of some heart touching incidents she comes across. She has published three stories and one poem in the Induswomanwriting online magazine. Her work can be found in various Anthologies like Born Too Soon, She- The Warrior, Travel Diaries and Secret Diary. She is one among the winners of the TOI Write India Campaign Season-1, for the famous author Anita Nair. She is a regular blogger with Momspresso, Womens' Web and Let's Make Stories. She also won Third Prize at Asian Literary Society's Gitesh-Biva Memorial Awards for her story 'Orphaned For Good.' Preethi resides in Mumbai with her husband and son.



Creative Contest

Win Exciting Prizes

1.

Worth
60,000Rs*
this season



Painting Courtesy : Anjana Kamal

Picture Prompt Poetry

2.

SS
Sharing Stories

Word Impact Series

"Your Happy Place"

More than six months have passed and we are stuck with this Pandemic and homebound. Some of us might be away from home.

Every person has that one place close to the heart which is his or her 'Own Happy Place'. The place can be a cozy nook in the attic or may be it can be under the stars beneath the open sky. It is not mere place, but an emotion... at times nostalgia and sometimes sheer joy.

3.

#1000

WordsTales

"Human Emotion'...

Your emotions are the slaves to your thoughts, and you are the slave to your emotions."

— Elizabeth Gilbert

A writer writes a story with all his emotions, delivered in words to evoke the readers emotions. This time #1000wordstales contest intends to let you experiment with human emotions.

Situation-

Write a story where the chief protagonist undergoes a crucial event/happening in his/her life. The character is tackling or trying to overcome one of the major human emotions. It can be love, hate, anger, solitude, lust, envy, **etc**...any ONE emotion.

Let your pen bleed through the words and touch the chords of reader's heart and shake them to the core!!

[Click Here to Participate](#)



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I M A G I N E

World Harmony

Through Writing