



*Poetry from India curated and edited by Rochelle Potkar*

**Three poems by Akila G.**

*Our Hopes*

like the Tanjore doll  
her body, head and hands  
in mudra, swaying with a gentle push  
to her dome skirt

You taught me to wrap it  
in a cone shaped paper  
stuff the hollow spaces  
with crumpled bits, what if  
we lose the rhythm  
to a broken hook

I never learnt the way  
you wanted me to;  
tracing your nubile veins  
tugging your skin in amoebic shapes

Now  
you do not glow—  
er at my (packing) abilities  
nor do you rub the fall of light  
in your eyes

as if you have learnt  
to drift into my world  
when you see the little doll  
rhyming with its shadow.

### *Coping*

Toss veggies, slice fruits  
pour out recipes for pouring out

clack the red plastic bangles  
roll *roti*, round them with conjunctions  
(a loop)

sip details  
like coffee with newspaper  
(including silences)

gather syllables  
without faces, bodies

let the skin  
stretch like a fisherman's net

toss it over the blue expanse  
with other things.

### *Daily Targets*

From an incessant chatter  
dribbling from the bamboo grove  
you borrow a frail hum

threads of a memory  
run staccato – an abstract  
trebles, trembles

dispersing cacophonous notes  
there is no harmony in fear  
you turn inside a soundproof box hoping

tomorrow will find a way  
back to where you belong, until then  
you tie them to your feet  
listen to them upside down.



G. Akila has presented her poetry at *Sabitya Akademi, Hyderabad Litfest, Goa Litfest, TedX – VNRVJIET, Hyderabad*. Her poems have also found a home in reputed online and print anthologies and few of them are forthcoming. Her poems 'Stains' was shortlisted for the *Womeninc Sakhi Award 2018* and 'Graphite from a Traveller's Notepad' for the *Glasshouse Poetry Festival Contest 2020*. She also engages in the Japanese forms of *haiku, tanka and haibun*.

## Poems by Sanket Mhatre

### *Sign of Liberation*

Imagine yourself in a prison. Dark and wet walls.  
The works of Shawshank redemption.  
Now imagine staying in it for two decades.  
Knowing every crevice and understanding the texture of every brick.  
(Only you understand this because how else will you survive.  
You have to desperately know things).  
Now imagine one fine day, your prison wall gets a window.  
Out of sheer mercy.  
A high window, so to say.  
Nevertheless, you can now own a piece of sky and a tiny cloud. That's it.  
No more. But these are yours to see.  
You keep looking at the sky and the cloud for days.

They put you to sleep and they are there when you wake up. You get used to them. They are your friends now. You have a real bond with them. You talk to them. You fight with them. You make up again. You stop talking to them altogether. They never talk back. Then you know, they never did. You belonged and un-belonged to them. And in all of these, as if to distort the entire dynamic and overturn the interplay, a butterfly flies past. Carefree and Fearless. Spreading its wings and owning every inch of the outside world. As if it knows the world by heart. As if, it will never get trapped. And it flies and flies instilling your hope in the innate nature of flying. At such times, you only look at the butterfly in awe. You take in its freedom without questioning the science under its wings.

You feel it. And only you feel it because you always wanted to feel being outside your own prison walls. You don't google that butterfly. You don't look for its species. You don't understand its life span and migratory pattern. You just stay in its little hopeful flight. Dreaming to make it yours.

*An Open Letter of Appreciation for Peace Keepers*

Dear Peace Keepers,  
I must congratulate you on your recent achievement.  
Your efforts have set a new benchmark for gun violence across the globe -  
We now have the world's youngest gun pellet victim!  
Aren't you surprised that it's a 19-month old baby girl whose vision  
has been reduced to a single eye socket?  
A door that has been shut forever?  
An endless pit where you could dump all your remorse if you had to?  
Did you aspire for a younger target than this to remain unsurpassed in this category?  
You can still set other records though.  
Like for example, the youngest rape victim was a 6 - month old  
The youngest acid attack survivor was all of fifteen years  
Only 21,065 kids have been killed in Syria  
And only 39,900 - gun deaths have taken place in American schools  
Although, you might still face stiff competition  
from your Talibani counterparts who shot  
indiscriminately at 134 school students  
But you have chances of winning that too.  
In the meanwhile,  
Cotton gauze is stuck to her cheeks like a fresh snow flake  
That, if uncovered would reveal the darkness you inserted  
in what was a right-side cornea  
Do you ever realize that hollow tunnel could have been  
a place where her valley of dreams could have blossomed like red apples?  
(Would anyone of you ever visit her in your civil uniforms and look her in the eye  
or whatever's left of it?)

A humble request though –  
Don't blame her if she has a single perspective for everything  
A myopic vision of looking at this world  
A one-sided argument in political debates  
You have instilled the night in one eye  
Leave the other eye for sunlight to trickle in.

*Half Written/*

This isn't a poem /  
Poems are written with more blood and less guilt /  
So this isn't a poem /  
It's something written in half /  
Half a piece of bread on a hot day /

Half a moon on a moonless night /  
This half has always been kept for you /  
Much like, one half of my body/  
A corner of lips, reserved/  
Even before you knew /  
this half was always given to you /  
Even before we met /  
And then I fought for the same half /  
Giving and ungiving it. And finally knowing it was always yours /  
It is/  
But half-written anatomy of a formless love /  
Formed over crests of a shining cloud. A missing bird. An ocean /  
There are so many things, half written – Like the surf half carrying you /  
to the shore /  
The half dangling posters behind you, the trace of any city/  
a minaret, all half, and yet so full /  
Maybe, everything is half /  
Only for you to enter /  
Make it whole /

### ***When Apocalypse Ends***

The world won't stop and think. The cogs won't be oiled for a week.  
Beaches would be full of naked bodies swinging for another chance at life.  
There will be party. One world will abandon the other.  
While finding balance, we would lose some too.  
Once deserted airports will witness flash-mobs of the quarantined  
Now a gated community with special privileges – they had suffered the most.  
The virus and the fear. They are a new caste who will fight reservation someday.  
Suspicion will flutter from windows and balconies, the last of the dregs, kept to dry and wilt.  
Science will vacay in exotic places. Miami. Seychelles. Recently opened Europe.  
The cure is now served in almost everything – from alcohol to chocolates  
Injected into generations for a virus free species.  
Lovers, once separated, will make furious love in rooms across the globe.  
The chaos of finding joy will skyrocket as much as stock prices.  
The world will stand back on its feet, and count its bruises, before saying, “not much.”  
Nobody will know that this was a silent war waged to divide humanity  
Until the next apocalypse strikes.



*Sanket Mhatre has been curating Crossover Poems – a multilingual poetry recitation session that unifies poets from different languages on a single platform. Apart from this, Sanket Mhatre has been invited to read at Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, Poets Translating Poets, Goa Arts & Literature Festival, Jaipur Literature Festival, Vagdevi Litfest and Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Sammelan. Besides curation & recitation, Sanket Mhatre has also created Kavita Café – a Youtube Channel that combines cinematic vision with visual poetry. He’s also a columnist who contributes regularly to leading news daily in India.*

### Poems by Inam Hussain Begg Mullick

#### ***"I Dies in Palestine I Died in Kashmir"***

I died in Palestine  
I died in Kashmir  
I am history's corpse.

Curfewed souls forget to laugh  
The gardens are quiet  
My corpse is kicked away to somewhere unknown

I died knowing my little brother was also dying.  
The number on my body vanishes soon enough,

I am too far away  
from the festival of butterflies.

#### ***The Unstoppable Destruction of Israel***

Shekina,  
every Zionist will bleed, prostrate and surrender,  
in multiplied torment, their long weakened blood,  
the growl now a yelp, faded, distraught.

Like it or not. White flowers blooming, merciless.

*Haiku*

the ink of moonlight—  
latent assassins amongst  
your hair's dense frolic.

*Ghazal for Peace*

beyond terrains of murder and rape is the vastness of peace,  
when human atrocities end, begin the months of peace.

the spattered blood of honour killings, hidden burials,  
the ire of saints upon the slayers; futures of peace.

disappeared faces, exiled histories, torn apart yet again,  
what soporific might reconstruct the nights of peace?

we revere Emily Davidson, martyred;  
cry yet for Hector Peterson; ransoms for peace.

Ploetz made a mess of science, God an unwilling witness,  
you think doing away with the poor would bring peace?

the arson of the priest and his children is not forgotten,  
if though forgiven; cry Jesus Christ, cry peace.

as the homeless are chased and Buddhas are desecrated,  
what paths are left for the resolute champions of peace?

we pray for the dead, sing for the living, breathe gently,  
seek the guidance of archangels, make way for peace.

*Inamorato Travels through the Seasons and Thunderstorms*

writing a love poem  
is like building a home  
or a palace brick by  
brick  
stone by stone  
metal by  
metal  
for someone who may not live there

leaves fly,  
the cat is on  
whiskey,

bleeding  
feet of an  
autumnal  
dawn

her body  
is a sulphur  
prism  
she watches  
the war on the television and dreamt  
of a large  
lioness  
with luminous  
periwinkle nerves  
last winter

after the numberless odysseys in silence—  
they who have departed  
now fly  
with angels—  
I uttered a few words

“too late  
for the tavern? never too late  
to drink  
of your mysterious spirit”

love  
is rain  
on leaves,  
hypnotic  
river,  
flowering,  
the cordial curves  
of that familiar  
body  
and an ecstatic turtle, liquiform flutesong

a mystic conflagration and time's hieroglyphic jugglery  
desire's hot dust,

“you weren't scared—  
you even remarked upon the several tints  
of the sun at apocalypse”

“earth of wolves, earth of sheep, astral cattle, may glory be!”





**Inam Hussain Begg Mullick** is an award-winning poet and editor, photographer, composer and performance artiste residing in Kolkata. He is the recipient of a Certificate of Excellence, presented to him at Poetry Paradigm's Kavi Salaam, P4Poetry Awards and The Premio Dardos Award. His poems were short-listed for the TOTO Awards and Srinivas Rayaprol Prize. His photography was awarded by The B/W Minimalists and Fuoco Visuale. Various anthologies in print and on the internet, his publications in print include *Roses for the Madhouse* (Cult of Beauty, 2010), *Winter's Electric Architecture* (Hawakal Prokashona, 2016) and *The Magical Life of Inamorato* (Writers Workshop, forthcoming in 2021). He has coedited *Freedom Raga 2020: 74 Poets pay Tribute to the 74th Edition of India's Independence* (Exceller Books, 2020) with Joie Bose, *Peacocks in a Dream: An Anthology of Contemporary Indian English Verse* (Erothbanatos: The Alternative, 2020) with Subrata Biswas and *The Kolkata Cadence: Contemporary Kolkata Poets* (Hawakal Publishers, 2021) with Jagari Mukherjee and Anindita Bose. He has read and performed at prominent art events, festivals and spaces like Kavi Salaam, Poetry with Prakriti, Poets Reading Poets, Festival of Hope, Sahitya Akademi's Poets' Meet and Synesthesia. A topper in the Drama in Practice and Writing in Practice papers at JUDE, Inam teaches Creative Writing across various levels. He wrote the column Random Harvest in *Evolve*, *The Statesman*. Readers and reviewers have compared his works to the magic realist prose of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the paintings of Jackson Pollock and the verses of T. S. Eliot, Federico Garcia Lorca and Rumi. Inam is a Founder-Editor, *The Quiver Review* [www.thequiverreview.in](http://www.thequiverreview.in), the Poetry Editor, *Erothbanatos* and the Nodal Officer, Poetry Paradigm. He blogs at [www.inamorato.in](http://www.inamorato.in), *The Inamorato Studio*.

### ***Whither Twitter?***

by Amit Ranjan

'Bringing work home' has always been in currency; thanks to the early nineteenth century adage 'time is money'. With the rise of technology, and proliferation of cheap data, now the dictum is reversed to 'bringing home to work'. The mechanical humdrum of office space is now peppered with another mechanical drumming – peering into, and trolling on social media. People are able to monitor if their kids are being taken care of, whether their dogs are doing well; they are doing their million good mornings; forwarding memes; being politically naïve in forwarding propaganda; or sensitive in being activists for a cause. The virtual world is fast claiming its space in the real world, and is like the real world. There is no need to romanticize it, as there is no need to junk it either. It is a force of history, and its place in history needs to be understood and contextualized.

It's not difficult to understand the parallel between 'bringing home to work' and second wave feminism's famous cry 'personal is political' (popularized by Carol Hanisch's essay by the same name in 1970), in that the 'home' is brought to the 'world', in that the discreet categories of the domestic and the political start blurring to produce interesting changes. While second wave feminism was a serious progressive attempt at politicizing the domestic sphere, we have seen social media swing both ways, like Janus-faced postmodernism – there is an increased awareness to issues of gender discrimination for example; while we have also seen a corporate middle class take to regressive trolling against universities.

In terms of social movements, be it the French revolution of 1968, Naxal movement in India in the 60s, or anti-Vietnam-war protests in America, it was academicians, students and working class in collusion that brought about the upheaval. Tabish Khair and Sebastien Doubinsky, in their book *Reading Literature Today* (2011), raise an interesting point that since 1980, the establishments seem to have understood the dynamics of this dangerous concoction, and injected the societies across the world with heavy doses of consumerism and jingoism. The rise of uber-nationalism is concomitant with the death of revolution. Students burdened with study loans, and their professors burdened with EMIs are no longer the rabble rousers – which is why public-funded humanities and social science universities like JNU and University of Hyderabad are an eyesore for the establishment. JNU has got a new engineering faculty despite IIT Delhi being a stone's throw away, precisely to have a new breed of students who are uninitiated into social sciences, and who are pressured by loans. History has its own mechanisms however, and the flow of ideas may just go through reverse osmosis.

The status quo and stasis in the intellectual world is summed up well by the virulent writer Breyten Breytenbach, "...No wonder that so many writers have withdrawn to the campuses, they're like alienated baboons to deconstruct, to eviscerate and sniff at the innards of our art - the phonemes and the signifiers."<sup>1</sup>

Birds have carried across the words of kings, rebels and lovers alike, throughout history.

Stand up comic and writer Varun Grover summed up the impact a bird can have, in his narration of the plot of Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmavat* (1540) which inspired the controversial film *Padmavati* (2018). A rogue parrot, sentenced to death, manages to escape and becomes a fleering-tell-tale going around telling how beautiful Rani Padmini is. The news reaches several kings; they battle and die; and poor Alaudin Khilji reaches only after everything is reduced to ashes, including the queen. However, the birds of social media declared that the filmic Khilji fantasized about the queen, and so the film must not be seen. Regressive zealots pelted stones, burnt a bus, in hope of progressing in their political careers; a curious crowd went and watched a regressive film that glorifies Jauhar; the film was a hit. The potent combination of virtual propaganda and real violence is making the world a surreal place. Professor HS Gill recently pointed out, in a lecture, that "surreal" is actually more "real." Etymologically, the term coined by Guillaume Appolinaire in 1917, would mean beyond (sur) "realism". We are indeed located in beyond-real, post-truth et cetera where data and perception are fast changing the world as we know it.

### *Twitter Revolutions*

Uprisings in this decade, propelled by social media networks, have an interesting half-burnt-toast feel. The euphoric revolutions of – Tunisia in 2010-11 that dethroned Ben Ali after a reign of 23

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<sup>1</sup> Breytenbach, Breyten. *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution*. Harcourt, 1996.

years; Egypt in 2011 that derailed Hosni Mubarak's thirty year old reign; the continuing domino effect of Arab Spring in Libya in 2011 that saw a mob lynching Muammar Gaddafi on the street; simultaneous protests in many cities against Erdogan in Turkey – gave hope to the world that revolutions can still overthrow despots. Add to this Moldovan unrest of 2009 against 'fraudulent elections', Iranian election protests around the same time, and Ukrainian revolution in 2013 – it seemed that people connected over virtual networks, had really lost patience with the political class's corruption, and that technology had finally given 'power to the people' to realize some kind of Bakunian anarchy.

It was time to raise a toast. However, the half-burnt-toast feeling came with the rise of Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring. When I went to Tunisia in 2008 for a conference on 'Secrets' at La Manouba, foreigners spoke of political secrets, and the Tunisians talked about 'secrets in Shakespeare's plays'. There was palpable fear of the dictator. And yet the dictator had declared a policy of 'if you wear the veil, you go to jail.' Tunisia identified itself with France and modernity, rather than with the Arab World. The Spring sprung up religious fear in the stead of the bygone political one. Optimist critics said that this is a Eurocentric view of the matter; that democracy goes through its churning.

Or was the revolution actually not organic? Was it an illusion of choice that was orchestrated? Why did Saudi Arabia not rise in revolution? Gaddafi's career as a "mad dog of the Middle East" as Ronald Reagan had put it, is beyond the scope of this paper. However, his vitriolic hatred toward the West in the later part of his life needs no introduction. Dictators do not die at the hands of mobs; they escape in planes and seek asylum. It might be a conspiracy theory, but even the Daily Mail took cognizance of the alleged rumour that French President Sarkozy had Gaddafi killed to prevent him from getting to trial where he could spill a lot of beans about funding the former in 2007 elections.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the French government was not the only one interested in his elimination. Peter Allen writes in the same Daily Mail article of 30 September 2012, that "the conspiracy theory will be of huge concern to Britain which sent RAF jet to bomb Libya last year with the sole intention of 'saving civilian lives'." Did NATO piggyback on a local revolution and take advantage of it, or was the revolution triggered by it?

In Turkey, fans of football clubs – Besiktas, Galatasaray, and Fenerbahce, dropped their rivalry for people's cause and rose in a "Twitter revolution" against Erdogan. Erdogan, however, gambled and conducted fresh elections, and came back to power in 2015. Where did the belligerent footballers and fans peter out? A similar story played out in Russia – protests in Moscow in 2012, and Putin emerging out of it stronger.

Let's return home. The 2012 Nirbhaya protests were backed by both the social media, and its mainstream counterpart, by the left and right wing organisations. It seemed to be a society on the edge, unwilling to tolerate gender violence any longer, a society determined to punish the political class for gender insensitivity apart from punishing the perpetrators. What came out of it? A 'stalking law' which gives the state more powers but no real power to women; India Gate was shut down to public for all future protests; clamour for death to the rapists which the court would have awarded anyway. No such protests happened when a woman was raped and burnt in West Bengal; neither did protest take such a scale after the Kathua rape and murder case – in fact there were

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, Peter. "Gaddafi was killed by French secret serviceman...sources claim" *The Daily Mail*. 30 Sep 2012

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2210759/Gaddafi-killed-French-secret-serviceman-orders-Nicolas-Sarkozy-sources-claim.html>

lawyers defending the perpetrators. There was talk about reform in policing, and a cosmopolitan recruitment in Delhi police; there was talk of gender sensitization education as compulsory in curriculum – but neither did it happen, nor does one hear any discussion about it any longer. The central government fell under the weight of Nirbhaya case and the Anna movement against corruption. So far, so good. But after the fall, if you get Anti-Romeo squad and cow vigilantes in return, the Twitter revolution and its organic evolution come under scanner.

### *The structures*

Do mainstream media control the discourse of the social media? Do social media merely parrot what the mainstream media would want them to? It's true that social media has very progressive voices; but that is like the real world full of dismal realpolitik, peppered with progressive voice. Or is the scene even more dismal – has the political class bought over most of social media, and the vast multitude of unemployed youth are ungainfully employed for short term as trolls and hate mongers?

Let us refer to Marshall McLuhan, media theorist of 1960s, to unravel this matter. In 1964, he introduced the phrase “the medium is the message” in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. It's a structuralist argument that suggests that the content of a said medium does not matter, its structure does. For example, by its very structure, television is more susceptible to corruption than newspaper (which television channel or which newspaper does not matter) – television with its wider reach amongst the literate and the illiterate, with much more money through sponsorships, is likely to be more corrupt. New media is interesting in this case. With cheap data, it is accessible by a large population, unlike a few years ago. Now, there is constituency in it for all classes, and sponsorship is not an issue, it's a crowdfunded medium. What are the possibilities then? Visibility matters, as does content generation. More the money, more the content, more the visibility. McLuhan's argument seems to then suggest, that oligarchy will have larger control over social media while it would seem to have democratic origins in the people. It is also interesting to note that mainstream media quotes from, and relies a lot on Twitter (therefore the term Twitter revolution) which is accessed (or at least controlled) largely by the elite. The larger population is fed videos manufactured by organisations, and mainstream media in turn augments similar prejudice without anyone knowing where this prejudice is being manufactured. In the following year, in 1965, McLuhan came up with another book, *The Medium is the Massage*. From “message” to “massage” is a huge leap. We know well that mainstream media has been massaging our senses through the idea of ‘retail therapy’. One can only be optimistic about social media because it's new – however, structurally, big data is here, and it is amenable to be exploited and distorted by the oligarchy.

Ivan Krastev writes in the New York Times, “What is now apparent is that the global protest wave may have polarized societies, but it is ‘the party of stability’ and not ‘the networks of hope’ that profited from the polarization. Wherever one looks, the political and social disruption brought on by protesters resulted not in more democracy and pluralism, but in a consolidation around the state and the national leader. We are witnessing a new anti-cosmopolitan moment.” (“Why Did Twitter Revolutions Fail?” Nov 11, 2015)

Now let's amalgamate McLuhan and Krastev – ‘the party of stability’ will win over ‘networks of hope’ on the turf of social media, for the former is the oligarch with the power to generate and proliferate propaganda.

Krastev raises another important point. He asks why is that we were convinced that Twitter Revolutions would succeed in the first place. This conviction, he argues, comes from the narcissism of the West, wherein “imitation of Western practices and principles is a foolproof road to democratic success.” He argues that a “liberal teleology” has replaced a Marxist one wherein the assumption is that democracies make countries richer and less corrupt. The new face of this self-congratulatory model is the “silicon valley effect” wherein the utopia of technological dream would overpower historical experience.

Despite Krastev, the possibilities of using social media in the developing world as powerful political and social tools are tremendous. #BringBackOurGirls was tweeted millions of times to pressurize the Nigerian government to bring back around 200 girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, a far-right militia which is against women’s education. There have been several movements in Africa over various issues like reducing fee; forcing court to review a judgement where rapists had been merely asked to cut grass a punishment in Kenya; finding Kony who was using children as soldiers, and so on. In terms of gender struggle too, the world has gained a lot through social media struggles in the past few years. And yet, back home, we still have hashtags that the mainstream media or political bosses decide. We did not have any movement to reduce fees in an increasingly privatizing education sector, we did not force our government to find Najeeb, we did not create a nationwide campaign and sensitization over the Kathua case. Our twitterati and subscribers of Whatsapp university, as some say, need serious soul searching.

What we are, is what our leaders are. And similarly, our social media also is what we are. The mirror merely reflects. To end with Krastev, “You can tweet a revolution, but you cannot tweet a government.” The first step is to own an organic revolution, and then sustain its evolution to governance.



**Amit Ranjan** undertook his undergraduate studies at St. Stephen’s College and has MA, MPhil and PhD from JNU, Delhi. He was a Visiting Fellow at UNSW, Sydney; and a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence at Miami—with eye to the sky, and ear to the ocean. His poetry collection, *Find Me Leonard Cohen, I’m Almost Thirty*, came out two years ago, and the biography of Dara Shikoh is due out soon. Amit is a lecturer of English at NCERT, Delhi. His most recent book is *John Lang - Wanderer of Hindoostan, Slanderer in Hindoostanee, Lawyer for the Ranees*.