Caesurae MANA

Vol 6, Issue 1, July 2024

ISSN 2454-9495



Editorial

Dear Beautiful Souls,

If the moon smiled, she would resemble you.

You leave the same impression

Of something beautiful, but annihilating.

~ *The Rival* by Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath's oeuvre, *The Rival*, redolent of a reflective dichotomy of contrasting beauty and destruction, touches on a deeper, more complex similarity. Plath's moon metaphor embodies a deceptive gentleness that masks an inner beauty, leaving the reader enchanted but annihilated. The captivating smiles hold the potential for devastation. The moon, an epitome of tranquillity with a smiling persona, conceals deeper scars. Annihilation here evokes a force capable of obliterating everything in its path. The poet's deep reflection conveys emotional and psychological desolation, a dichotomy often mirrored in mythologies and literature, portraying both a fostering and lingering presence.

Plath's world is sketched with a language unique to her exploration of emotional being, where the rival on the moon embodies an internal conflict that is alluring yet destructive. The poet explores and encourages readers to ponder the complexities of human relationships and their varied perceptions. The conflict within the self brings about many emotional shifts, which are well-deciphered by the creators in this piece. The coexistence of both sides and the subtle whispering of different shades with such finesse is commendable. Everyone goes through tough battles, and each person is resilient in handling emotions. Moving into a phase of deep disillusionment and recalling wounds is never an easy journey.

The works in the July issue represent the journey of the wounds we bear and their profound impact. Fortitude and perseverance enable us to sprinkle hope as we take the first step to view the phase with anticipation and self-belief. The July issue shall remain etched in our journey as we smile at our scars and use our tears to trust in ourselves and march ahead on an enriching and enchanting journey. To depict the deeper wounds, I have used black and white in the illustrations to convey their essence.

I extend my gratitude to Jayita Sengupta (President of Caesurae Collective Society) for considering me as the guest editor of the July issue. Her unwavering support has been both inspiring and captivating in this beautiful literary journey.

Explore the self within you; the wounds shall heal with smiles, and tears shall flow with the wind...

Love & Light,

Orbindu Ganga

Guest Editor & Illustrator

July Issue, MANA 2024



Orbindu Ganga

Orbindu Ganga is an author, editor, poet, publisher, consultant, researcher, content writer, and spiritual healer. He holds a post-graduate degree in science from India and is the inaugural recipient of the Dr Mitra Augustine Gold Medal for academic excellence. He is the owner of CynFynEnliven, a company that provides publishing, consulting, and content services. He was the co-founder and director of the literary and research editorial boards of two journals, INNSÆI and MatruAkshar Journals. His diverse expertise spans finance, banking, publishing, and soft skills training. Additionally, he is the creator of the Subconscious Observation Belief System (SOBS) and is a certified life coach, spiritual coach, and mindset coach under SOBS. He has been featured three times in "The Year of Poet" (2019–2021) by Inner Child Press International Publication (United States of America). He has published more than two hundred poems, twenty science articles, fifteen articles, six books, three research papers, two short stories, and other creative works.



ADITI PANDA

The Season of Bereavement

i didn't just cry, no.

i grieved.

the ones that flowed weren't tears.

they were the verses of lament.

day by day, they strengthened.

they rose in the pits of my wounded soul

and soared high above.

soaring till they reached my throat,

till they journeyed no further,

till they clutched hard and never let go,

till i was gasping for air,

for help,

for an escape.

when tears finally streamed,

they were hot and endless,

endless and abundant.

none have decency, you know.

not the tears,

not the wounds or pus,

nor the screams or flashbacks.

weary as it is,

my eyes never blink,

the flutters have come to a halt,

and my soul,

to the season of bereavement:

the one that lasts.



Aditi Panda has always allowed words have a stairway to a portion of her soul - a world of poetry, beauty, love, and romance - and let tinted pages transport her to places constructed of emotions and characters that are driven by them.



CHINGALEMBI DEVI

The Closet

Within the closet of her system,

that hidden folder

that she opens more than often randomly

to herself only.

Her precious possession.

Close to all.

Its intensity and size increase,

it exceeds the space.

Unshared memories corrupt her system.

It is harmful to the system –

she knows.

But refrain from re-programming.

Wish to wait –

for the subject of the folder.



Chingalembi Devi is the daughter of Kh. Biswanath Singha and Smt. Brojeswari Singha of Singerband, Cachar, Assam. She graduated from St. Anthony's College, Shillong and received her master's degree from HNBGU, Uttarakhand. She completed her M.Phil. degree from Assam University, Silchar. She is currently pursuing a PhD at Manipur University.



LUCILLA TRAPAZZO

My Mother Didn't Go Slowly

I see her lips and her eyes again

again, her breath - my mother again

returns on my retina

asking for air

and again, you are a daughter

my mother a handful of time

and her eyes, her lungs, her body

- primordial forces clinging to life -

her eyes and her lungs were begging

for death

and I helplessly was hunting a word

my hand, my arm that lifted her up at night

turning her body, fixing the oxygen tubes

– we conjugate with gestures the language

of love

and then you no longer are a daughter,

suspended without bread without

land

a prelude of black birds in the sky

is drawing the quavers – faint

intermittent signals once again calling

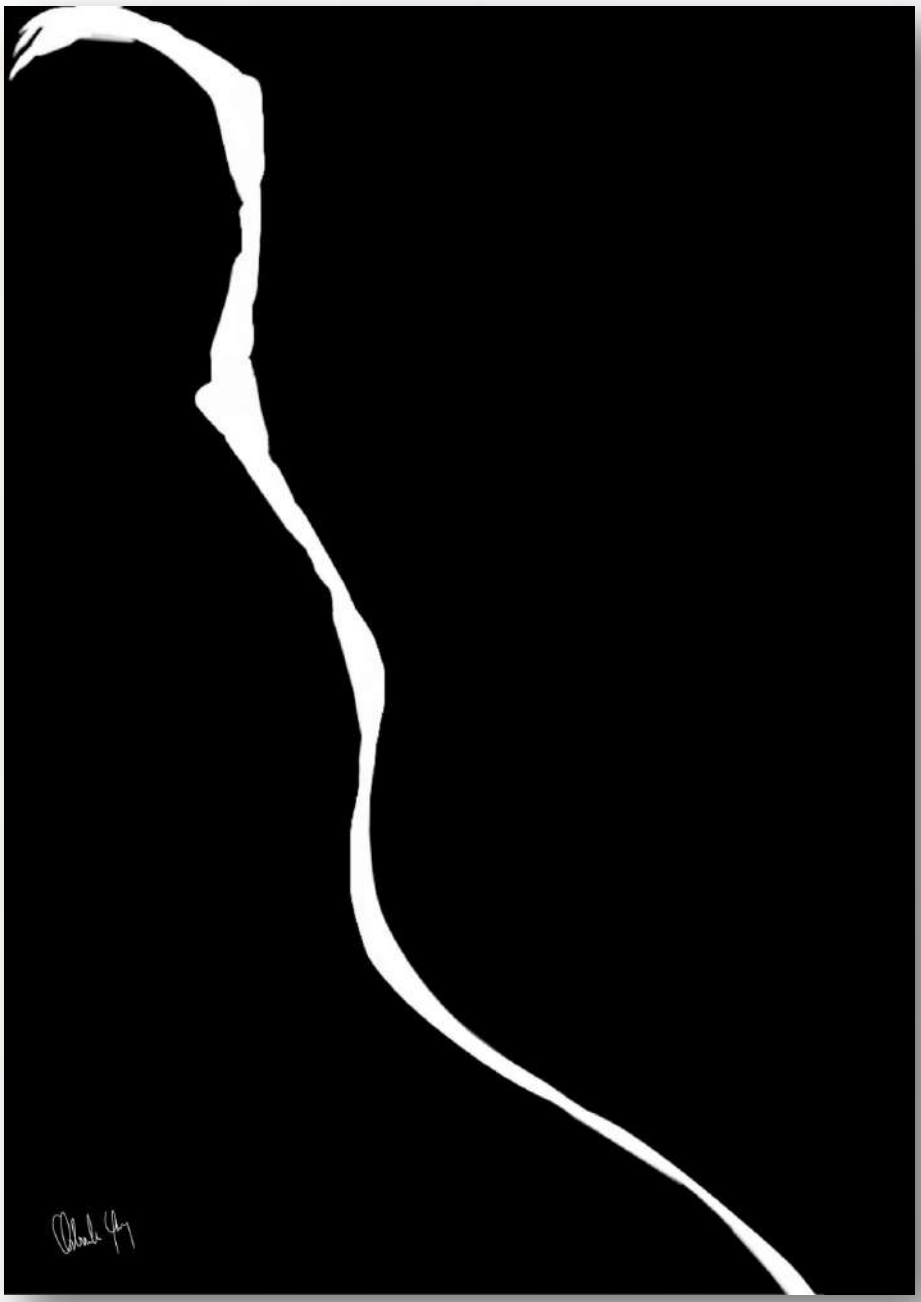
for life at dawn in the red

of the day



Lucilla Trapazzo is a poet, translator, artist, and performer. After years spent abroad for study and work (DDR, Belgium, USA), she now lives between Switzerland, Italy, and NYC.

To her credit, she has six books of poetry, a series of translations of international poets, numerous literary collaborations with associations, magazines, and poetry anthologies (as poet, editor and translator), and a CD with compositions by Marco di Stefano, inspired by her poems. She co-organizes and moderates poetry events, festivals and art exhibitions for international associations. Her poems, translated into 18 languages, have won major international awards (including poet laureate *Kurora e Poezisë* at Korca International Festival *Netët të Poezisë*, Albania 2023) and she regularly participates in poetry and art festivals in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia (some: Struga Poetry Evenings, N.Macedonia 2021; Princeton Festival, USA 2021,2024; Babylon International Festival of the Arts, Iraq 2022, 2024; Kistrech International Festival, Kenya 2023). A staunch advocate for human rights and the planet, her social and feminine views are reflected in many of her writings.



M. RUDRAA

Metamorphose

I sit on the veranda today,

Surrounded by my compeers but a heart-aching sensation keeps me away.

Agreed that life cannot always be at a standstill, the setting of the situation drops you in itself even without your will.

This soul of an old lady, once a glorious spirit cheerfully dutiful towards her moppet, through the phases of sunrise and sets has metamorphosed into a wrinkled-skin grandma today.

Whose angers have turned into granny's bag of stories and her slaps of strictness have turned into pattings of 'chandamama lullabies' an angelic grandma is at display.

But why do I sit in the old-folk home here and now? Left alone with my feebles and weaknesses, when my chores and responsibilities were never undone somehow.

Mother to a son is left behind, the perception of pain takes me through an expedition to trauma, all around me as well as worldly confined.

When an antique piece bought with money is so carefully handled, do parents with oldness need to be thrown out and abandoned, these living gods who toil for you, are dismantled.

Sitting on the veranda tears took me to the days when mother to a son was the primary role I played.



M. Rudraa, continuing with a master's in Economics at Ramadevi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha is upcoming as a student-poet of Odisha. She has won Ekphrasis excellence awards along with due recognition by the ILA council, for poems like *Silence the divine missile* and *why not peace?* She has her poems published in anthologies like *Daughter: An Adorable Princess*. Her poems have been published in various poetry clubs as well. Emerging from Kendrapara town she aspires for an administrative job in future as well as pursue her writing.



MANISHA GAWADE

Trauma Beyond All Think!!

Usually, the slightest of irregular things are capable of giving a trauma,

Well, that is so true of how most men see women's reactions!

Kids during adolescence are forever traumatised or wonder if they traumatise the whole tribe. The word is used so loosely that it's even begun to lose its meaning.

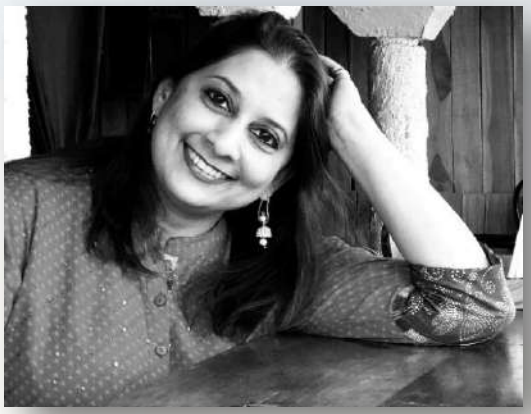
Crossing the hospital and seeing it through my car window, I often used to see the board of a hospital which said "trauma centre." For years, I used to wonder as a child if they give the trauma there or heal it. And if it is a psychological issue how would they be putting the bandage?

Scars of real traumas can take years to heal and sometimes don't even go away at all, working as an aviator, made me realise. It's most often about death, wars and genocide.

I know this poem doesn't rhyme, but who is bothered about it in peacetime?

When the bombs are raining and the tanks spewing fire, the battles are raging, the scents of women are far gone, the birds stop to chattering, and the kids are buried in graves.

People hungry and thirsty for days, rows of coffins on the tarmac made me understand the meaning of the word so small yet so big. "Trauma", is beyond all think!!



Manisha Gawade spent 18 years in the aviation industry and wears many creative hats as a journalist, internationally acclaimed artist and curator. She has contributed widely to television, radio print media and has been a part of 142 painting exhibitions the world over and many of her paintings form a part of serious museum collections and palace collections in Oman and Dubai and parts of Europe.



NANDINI MITRA

Disentangling from Darkness

The ceiling fan above rotates in a circle

Talking to my inner self,

The heat within burns me.

Sitting at the edge of my bed

I wonder,

Where I've gone wrong.

Each day is a battle,

A battle that can't be fought,

Breaking my silence in many layers.

Are there monsters in my room?

Or blood-sucking vampires?

They pull me back to the beginning.

Lost and sore from the scars of the past,

My heart is torn apart,

I'm stuck in a cage with a lost key.

Memories of pain linger on,

Outside a storm rages,

My trauma steals my voice.

I'm no longer dumb, not lost,

I'll hold on till the pain ends,

I pat my back for how far I've come.

I come out of my hiding space,

I return with a realisation,

Disentangling from darkness.



Nandini Mitra is a poet based in Kolkata. She recently published her first book of poetry, *The Road to Tranquility*. Her poems have been featured in various national and international anthologies. Her poems have also been translated into a few other languages.



NEERA KASHYAP

A Change of Instruments

A raised arm bent at the elbow.

An open hand flanked by the sun and moon - orbs of eternity.

A shield of five orbs – symmetrical mounds of protection.

A ribbed conch shell - the eternal sounds of the cosmos.

On a sati memorial stone – a tall arched slab in red sandstone.

Hidden under wild overgrowth

in bushes bristling with thorns,

as forgotten as the woman who walked to her pyre

to burn with the lemon and mirror she carried,

one in each hand.

For the sake of future chastity;

for the eternal honour of a dead husband;

family honour, caste honour, clan honour;

the honour of uniting eternally with her husband in heaven,

for earning eternally her parents' blessings for her Devotion.

A death without choice, dragged sometimes, tied to bamboo stakes.

To burn.

With time, the instruments of control changed.

The fires moved to engulf women for dowry,

for demands that varied in competitive times:

money and material goods,

material goods and money.

The prevailing winds of law brought change

but not enough.

Despite new sanctions, new punishments, the instrument simply changed

from the fires of death to rape.

Rampaging, uncontrolled fires that sweep on in a society

inured to their sorrow and shame,

that listens more to the voice of Sita

in the name of family honour.

Not to the voice of Draupadi

who blanched her uncoiled hair with blood

and demanded

Justice.



Neera Kashyap has worked as a health and social communications specialist. As a writer, her short fiction, poetry, book reviews, and essays have been published in several literary journals and anthologies, both national and international. She has published a book of short fiction for young adults, *Daring to Dream* (Rupa & Co., 2004), and has a collection of short fiction scheduled to be published by Niyogi Books. She is also working on her first poetry manuscript. She lives in Delhi.



NEHA S CHAKRAVARTHI

That's Where I Draw the Line

Subtle nuances that you thought

Would skip my eyes,

No, they never did.

Tell me not you were misconstrued,

Or that life would be better with you.

Diced with death and toyed

At the hands of a vicious brute,

Now I know better.

Blinded by whatever I thought was

'Love' you had for me,

I shuttled to and fro

Bearing the brunt of your unjust morale.

Maybe now you can't stand

Me living my pacific best.

I'm glad you can't; for you were

That pretentiously attractive flower

That knew not to love but sting venom,

And stab my soul into slices.

Callous exploits that knackered me once,

Are what made me rise alive.



Neha S Chakravarthi is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in computer science and engineering from the Coimbatore Institute of Technology, Coimbatore. Taking inspiration from everyday events, she developed an interest in writing during her early teens. From penning poems during her leisure time to becoming a recognized author on Amazon India, she walked up the ladder of exploring words in a way of her own!



PARAMITA DASGUPTA

Dot

The faster the beat goes

A little of me collapses

I am half now

Quarter or a dot?

She asked with a mountain brow.

I said the broken half had fled away

To find out the broken pieces.

A knot in the throat

A daring dried-mouth

Talking passively with half-desires

Quarter or a dot?

She again asked with a half-smile.

I said the desires are broken but bold

The shrill trumpets are terribly noisy.

Heaviness in the limb

I am running with a heavy leg

Numb numb numb

I can fall down and break my crown

But no one will come running after.

You are blind

Unable to find my bleeding tears.

Yes, I am half, a quarter, and a dot.

I am crescent too.

I still exist with a brave position because

Without me, you are not full.



Paramita Dasgupta is working as an assistant professor at Vidyasagar College of Education, Rupandighi, Phansidewa, District Darjeeling. She has published poems and research articles in national and international publications. She is passionate about writing poems. One can easily connect her feelings while reading her poems. Her poems reflect a sense of attachment, love for mother and motherland, and the trauma of the younger generation struggling to manage a living.



RIYA HAITH

The Frozen Body

I saw my mother's frozen body

Lying on the floor

How calmly she closed her eyes

And slept forever

Forgetting all of her pains of the past

My eyes were restless and dim

Seas of pain waved through each limb

All of a sudden, I saw a golden chariot

A woman sat in it

She came in her white shroud

And kissed my mom's forehead

The woman said, "I am eternity my dear"

My innocent eyes were full of tears

My mother's soul started her journey towards an unknown, mysterious land

I could not hold her by my trembling hand.



Riya Haith is a government employee from West Bengal. She completed her master's degree in English literature. She loves to paint her imagination with words. Her poems and short stories have been published in various Bengali magazines.



SHALINI NANDKEOLYAR

The Luminosity of Pain

Endless nights limped with searing pain

Days trickled into suffocating weeks.

Time drowned in a wave of mist,

rivulets of tears.

Cancer Ward - doom death despair

Mother's incessant anguished cries

Her frail emaciated form

dismal echoes reverberating

through the long antiseptic corridors

Festering wounds, muffled sobs

wailing walls, raging storms.

The smell of death hanging in the air.

Children with gaunt faces, hollow eyes

Their lustrous curls were robbed by chemo…

Silent screams that pierce the heart

into shattered smithereens.

Deep within a part of you dying slowly.

Moments that would change

every fragment of your being

Images tattooed in your soul

never to be erased, never to be forgotten…

the dichotomy of pain and death.

Every breath turned into Prayers, entreaties,

A straw of hope

a plea for mercy for all.

Eyes ever riveted heavenwards

Searching for a million unanswered

questions …

Where was God of infinite mercy?

The ever-compassionate One

Who would alleviate the pain and sufferings

of His beloved children?

But the ache only intensified

galloping beyond a screeching crescendo!

Prayers became pleas of deliverance

Mother breathed her last

silently at dusk

When the day was transitioning

Into night

She rose to the astral world…

Life plunged into an abysmal void,

into depths of darkness

Months crawled by

Without any consolation,

Without hope, bereft, no solace.

In the pinnacle of pain

The night mirrored

my own blinding darkens mind-

Faceless, cocooned, veiled

In obsidian shrouds of agony.

A shower of unceasing grace…

Tears of fire and penance

watered the jewelled seed

buried in the soul's sacred altar.

Pain metamorphosed

Into a journey towards light.

A shower of love cleansed

the utensils of the heart

A light shone through

The Crystal transparency -

A light of unseen brilliance.

The wounds slowly healed

With the salve of acceptance.

A river of surging love flooded.

Veils peeled away bit by bit

To reveal the true immortal Self –

For nothing ever ceases to exist.

Death is a myth to be transcended!



Shalini Nandkeolyar has a diploma in acting from the New York Academy of Theatrical Arts and has acted in several plays. She studied English literature and philosophy and has a degree in business management. She is a gifted singer and has a music album of bhajan called ARPANAM. Painting is another passion. She writes poetry, both in English and Hindi and her poems have been widely published in literary journals, various magazines and several anthologies in both languages. Her poems are exquisite, full of beautiful imagery, deeply philosophical, profound and evocative.



SHARMILA MEHTA

Brain Dead

A young man full of fun and humour,

Destined to burn within by liquor.

Born with prayers and blessings,

His parents raised him royally, spending all their savings.

Days, months, and years passed by,

Grew up buying everything he got nearby.

The time came when he was married and blessed with a kid,

His Lavish lifestyle allowed him to follow habits that could never get rid of.

He lost everything, health ruined him; depression hugged him,

His wife left him and sadness always forgot to grin.

Sitting idle, he got an attack,

Multiple organs failed, disease gained a setback.

He was battling life and death,

Struggling hard, even for a single breath.

The daily trauma was difficult to see,

Fighting death, only on heart beats he lay there free.

Mercy Lord, bless him and heal him soon,

Brain dead he was, waiting for a boon.

Prayers were answered, miracles were shown,

He opened his eyes, recognized, and faith was grown...



Sharmila Mehta is a 49-year-old housewife who has had a flair for writing since childhood. Recently, with encouragement from her family and friends, she began posting her poems. It is an honor for her to be among great poets.



SHRABANA ADHIKARI

Melancholic Song

An unfathomable darkness devours me

An unheard cry is everywhere

Looking for green happiness

Under this mysterious galaxy

I, the lonely soul, persist.

Is there any door to lead me?

Is there any hand to care?

A long pause ...

The touch of death on my back.

The life is perhaps lost now

Was there life at all?

Under this mysterious galaxy

I, the lonely soul, sing.

Is there any way to redemption?

Is there any way to recreate life?

A room full of silence ...

The divine spirit percolates

And I, the lonely soul, wake again.



Shrabana Adhikari is a PhD research scholar in English literature at Gujarat University with a research interest in South Asian Diaspora and Migration Studies. She has published Bengali poems in an online magazine and is a music lover and nature enthusiast.



SONAL JHAJJ

In the Realm of Inner Silence

Perched on the window sill with my warm brew

The serene ambience of nature

Searched for the solemn peace from me inside out.

For dwelling in the present moment

My heart lost in the silence of words

Is this peace of the present moment

All about the calmness inside me.

My life being designed by the power

Of my own actions and deeds

I thought for a minute sipping my aromatic brew

The whispering miracles are hidden inside.

Traversing back at the journeys navigated through,

The memories of the past were still alive

My testimonials of the person that I am today.

Expressing my gratitude to the silent warriors inside me

The harsh tongues of the world did transform me

Now I open my eyes to the glorious future

To embrace the victory and hit a century

My teenage scrapbook hides unheard stories

The moments of a carefree life

My heart and soul are the relentless warriors

If you only you had seen

My life behind the glass



Sonal Jhajj is the founder/ C.D and CEO of Metamorphosis. She is a human development expert, an ecce Impactor, an eyfs researcher, a multi-awardee, an award-winning poet, a child counsellor, a global speaker, and an award-winning editor. She has edited three books available on Amazon. She is a skilled artist and an educationist. She has won around 100 awards and 400 certificates for her contribution to Education and Literary fields.



SULEKHA SAMANTARAY

Another Philomela

I revered you as my God,

never suspected your real intention

hidden behind the soothing sweet words

and your play acting as a trickster.

Enticed by the charm of

your endearing words of encomium,

I innocently allowed myself

to be carried away with the

current of your vengeful designs.

You took pleasure in ravishing me publicly

with naked descriptions of my physique.

From my toes to my hair, inch by inch,

you portrayed me in your poems

with voluptuous words aimed at

arousing longing and erotic feelings.

It was worse than a physical rape.

I felt like an object for auction.

My sacred body laid bare in the market place

for everybody to see, examine

and enjoy a vicarious pleasure.

What was my crime?

Why did you make me a scapegoat

of your bitterness for the rejection

you suffered as a jilted lover??

Fearing the revelation of truth

you silenced me permanently.

I couldn't explain to the world

the heartbreaking truth lying

under an apparent mystery.

And the veracity of my personality

was buried in the dark hollow of history.



Sulekha Samantaray is a bilingual writer from Bhubaneswar and has served as an associate professor of English in the Department of Higher Education, Odisha. She has published two books of poems in English and ten in her mother tongue Odia. Hundreds of her poems, stories and translations are published in various national and international journals and anthologies. For her contribution to literature, she has also received twelve awards.



SUTANUKA MONDAL

Ache in the Silence

In the solitary dwelling, where all is known to me,

I was but a transient, a visitor for the night.

I peered through the door's silent crack, Time murmuring to a departed soul,

unshackled from mortal coils of life's bitter pain.

Restless, I lay upon the whispers' symphony, sensing the choppy waters

etching lines upon the agitated surface of the pail.

The spirit then gestured with its glinting, ashen hand,

stained dark-red, towards a wilted rose.

Ensnared in this trance, I discerned the dying plea of the tormented spirit,

which lingers by the vase of the withered bloom.

It wandered, shrieking its unfulfilled desires, echoing through the barren halls,

and gesturing towards the thorns of the withered rose.

The choppy waters tracing lines upon the pail's ripples,

and its spectral form contorted with unseen wounds.

A haunting reminder of life's cruel grip.

Until dawn, clarity descended upon all.



Sutanuka Mondal, hailing from a Bengali background in India, is a widely respected English poet with a global following. Alongside her work as an English facilitator, she also excels as a versatile content writer and ghostwriter. Her poetry has been featured in prestigious international and national journals, literary anthologies, and online platforms. With a deep love for literature and a sharp eye for societal issues, Sutanuka uses her poetry to explore the complexities of human psychology and behaviour.



TAMIKIO L. DOOLEY

The Origin of Affliction

My eyes remain blind to the origin of affliction.

My eyes resemble those of a plastic doll, glossy and rigid.

Oblivious to the source of my afflicted blood's agony,

Occasionally, I find myself gazing out the window.

Adorned with red flowers and cactus plants,

I desire to gaze at them, concentrate on them.

Yet, what awaits, me is only agony, remorse, and anxiety.

There's a creepy, unwanted feeling that grips my spine.

I yearn to stifle my torment, hidden from believing others.

I experience the same emotions of pain as my fellow humans,

Unless someone tells me, I would never know.

With age, my paranoia has grown, along with fading wisdom and diminishing trust.

Just like the doll's eyes, I cannot shift my gaze.

My trauma and depression have consumed me for years, preventing me from seeing beyond the terror and confessions.

Still, I have a fear of solitude.

Drowning in the sorrows I've faced, alone, for so many years.

Nobody knew…

Unless I told them, just like my fellow humans-we share the same things we can't face beyond.

The origin of affliction.



Tamikio L. Dooley is a multi-award-winning author. She is the author of 150 titles and 90 published books. The author writes fiction and nonfiction of crime, thriller, mystery, fantasy, historical, western, romance, zombie apocalypse, and paranormal. In her spare time, she writes short stories, poetry, articles, essays, health books, children's books, diaries, journals, inspiring books, culture, African American, and history books.

She is the founder and publisher of CreatiVIngenuitiy Magazine, the President and Founder of The Pinnacle News Review-Digital Newspaper, the Editor of Friendship of People Magazine, the Editor of Orfeu Magazine, and the Ambassador of The Daily Global Nation Newspaper.

Tamikio is the President and Founder of Humanist of the World Organization, and the president and founder of Empowering Education Skills and Programs Organization.

Tamikio is featured in Humanity Magazine, CreatiVIngenuitiy Magazine, Kidliomag, Friendship of People Magazine, The Daily Global Nation Newspaper, Connections E-Magazine, The World of Myth Magazine, Orfeu Magazine, along with other magazines and newspapers.

She has received awards and certificates for her works published in Bard's Day Key Anthology, People's Poetry Parliament, Antologia (an anthology published in Italian), and Multinational Pen Soldiers Poetry Anthology.



ORBINDU GANGA

Battle of Silence

The cavernous crevices still strop deep

With yestreen barnacles of bolides,

The nimble fingers yearned

To smile, smelling the fragrance,

Adoring the peripatetic journey on the bus

Departing from school for the candies.

Sports Day brushed deep

To embrace the twilight, a marathon

Inundated the road with the firmament

In delight unfurled the crepuscular

To cleanse the ambience,

The petrichor was the sole

Solace in the impenetrable forest,

Chockablock traffic with

Potholes gaping,

Buses brimmed with no

Tickets to climb the ladder,

With the dark clouds burgeoning

Somehow infiltrated a teeming bus,

A crescendo grew in the commotion

With the weary legs struggling to endure

After the football match, many

Brushed past, initially ignored,

A hand brushed my back

And a few minutes later grazed

My flesh, the very touch rendered

Me sore, my voice paused and stalled,

I was excruciating anguished, screaming

Within, immobilized amidst

the crowded bus, tears steaming

With lips shut, scavengers

Hovered, poised to prey on blood,

The bus halted at the next destination

The movement propelled me forward,

The long silence lingered the journey

To be longer than ever before,

Upon reaching home, tears never stopped

Closing my room, never to reveal.

The Odyssey in a crowded bus

Left me stifling, perpetually waiting for

The less congestion, my sleepless nights

Evoked tacit tears, the thought never

Shared, the remnants etched within my crevices

Wrapped, never to open the seal, they often

Haunt me, I endure in silence within

Betrothed in the silent battle.



SHORT STORY

DR MOLLY JOSEPH

The Mad Woman in the Attic

Yes, she cowers and shudders under her blanket. She cannot bear voices.

Silent. Staring at things, people...

Yes,

The world had been too much for her.

Now she has shrunk into herself.

Her life was frittered away by her soulful career, dutiful home management, bringing up children with a husband who was far off at work, and catering to the needs of in-laws.

The burning of her life's candle gathered momentum when her grandchildren came. She was ready to go to any extent to look after them: feeding them, putting them to sleep, telling stories, and even infusing confidence in them, making them the heroes and heroines of her storybooks.

All are exposed to the derision, humiliation, and obsessed appropriation of children by the ununderstanding daughter-in-law.

The active grandparents, their social involvement, and their social acceptance infuriated her all the more, and it became her favourite pastime to destroy the peace of their only son, her husband bullying, and humiliating his aged parents.

They are graceful enough to forget and forgive, not to add fuel to the fire. After all, their son's peace and happiness mattered as well as the welfare of their grandkids. They should not grow up in a broken family.

She was all alone at the household to face it, cut off from opening out…

Her husband, though aged he was, sought solace in socialisation. At least social issues, functions, friends, chats, and parties gave an opening to his communication with the world.

There she was, confining all into herself, with nobody to speak to…

She is the average Indian woman in her fading sixties…

It was quite easy to brand her as a case of mental stasis and depression. She refused to speak…

After, all those years she toiled for others, everyone was happy with her service, but who was there for her to talk to her now?

The psychiatrist said,

"Engage her with something, it may work."

Hmm.. Engaged she was with a hundred and one things, stressed out with life.

What can engage her now?

Again, who has time to engage her? The busy life around, endlessly on the rat race…

Left to her little space in the attic, she shudders and stares.

Even her grandchildren are forbidden to visit her.

The Mad Woman in the Attic



Professor, Dr Molly Joseph, a Bilingual Poet from Kerala, has published 23 books which include Poems, Critical works, Short stories and Novels, Travelogues and Children's Books. She serves at present as Chief Coordinator International Academy of Ethics and holds International Seminars, discussions and Poetry Recitals on World Peace, to bring the world together in the pathways of right ethical mooring. As a writer critic and reviewer, she engages with the contemporary, believes in the power of the word to transform the world and has been widely applauded with accolades.



FICTION

SUMI DAA-DHORA, PhD

Jivan Mama

The combat boots sounded outside the gate, drowning the village into a ghostly shadow of silence on that midnight, hunting for *Mama*… my Jivan Mama. In the small village of Silli on the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, sharing its territory with neighbouring Assam and a huge stretch of paddy fields, my father was posted as a teacher in a government school. Apart from the six staff quarters, only 12 houses inhabit the village. The remembrance of childhood memories from this small village of scenic beauty cuddled by nature makes me nostalgic and fills my heart with an ardent desire to go back and run through the huge stretch of green fields and play in the crystal-clear waters of the *Tahum* river flowing down from the blue hills. This story remains incomplete without reference to the natural richness and spell-binding beauty of the village. The school was just two small bamboo huts in an L-shape with desks and benches made from trees cut down by the villagers to serve the purpose- a school far away from the modern amenities of teaching and learning. There were two hostels, one for boys and the other for girls, who cooked their meals together in firewood that they collected from the hills. The food supplies were provided by villagers, and the hostelers were carried from their homes and villages. I used to spend a lot of time with the hostelers and even enjoyed their food. The staff quarters and the hostels were made of woven bamboo and roofed with large palm leaves. At a corner of the village beside the river stood the church, the only wooden structure in the village, marking the gradual sweeping of Christianity into the tribal land and making people forget their ancient animistic faith of *Donyi-Polo* (Sun and Moon). My mom often remembers and describes the condition when we landed there for the first time: 'There were pigs inside ploughing the mud floor and I had to clean the shit taking shelter in the IB for two days.' However, as a child, the best part for me was the huge jackfruit tree adjunct to the back verandah of the quarter from where my father hung a swing for me, and I would glide into the air with glee and feel like a bird. I played with my classmate, Himadri, the daughter of my father's colleague, Mr Hatibaruah.

We took turns on the swing, completing rounds of 25 or 30 as we wished. If I talk about Himadri, that would be another long story!

Yes, the soldiers, the armed men, had come into the village hounding for the armed boys who dreamed of *Xunor Axom,* a utopia. Jivan Mama, a frequent visitor to our residence had not visited us for quite some time. He usually came in the evening and sat down to talk about the French Revolution, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, the poetry of Tagore and Shelley, of Bishnu Rabha and Bhupen Hazarika. I could only remember the names, the rest passed over my head. We sat round and Mama along with my parents sang melodious songs of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika, and Mohammad Rafi's *Axomire sutalote… rodaliye senehote...* Jivan Mama played the harmonium, and his friend Monikanto showed his expertise in the tabla. This made our evenings none less than a *mehfil* of a royal palace. Mama had not come after the news of the advent of the armed soldiers spread like wildfire and every elder in the village became protective of their sons and grandsons and the young girls and women too. Girls stopped going to the *Tahum* alone to collect water and wash, and to the hills to collect firewood and food.

It was a moonlit night and the sound of boots outside the gate terrified the locality ghostly hounding for Mama… my Jivan Mama or any youth under suspicion. With the roaming around of the soldiers, the foxes have stopped coming and howling in the village at night. They had visited Jivan mama's place a couple of times before and warned his family when they couldn't find him. That night the moon rose high ending its orbit in a cursed dawn with gunshots! My parents were awake that whole night worrying about Jivan Mama… whispering quietly and praying in silence for his wellbeing. Four gunshots marked the breaking of that cursed dawn in that winter of the dreadful 1991 when the Government launched the counter-insurgency programme Operation Rhino in September of that year. Mama had come late in the evening that day frantically knocking at our wooden door. He was shabby and disorganised covered with mud all over his body and clothes, ruffled hair and smelt like the green grass and half-ripe paddy in the fields. He was breathless and demanded water. I as a child was stormed with questions at Jivan Mama's condition- Why has he come so untidy and afraid? How will he sing today? Why is he whispering and what? I saw my father give him a shirt, a pair of trousers and a warm

sweater knitted by my mother and some money. I saw my mom crying, I saw Mama's eyes shining with tears and walking out into the cold night. I knew it was something grave beyond my understanding. The gunshots that filled the air at dawn brought the news we were afraid of. The *Gaonbura* (village chief) had come early in the morning to visit the teachers in the quarters. I was always amazed to see the *gaonbura* for the headgear he wore decorated with the beak of the hornbill. He gave the news that Jivan, the brave young man, a student of Dibrugarh University had been captured by the army last night under suspicions of being a part of the militant group ULFA. He was running through the field towards the hills when he was shot in the legs. My parents never revealed that he was there last night at our place for some time, never mentioned that he was helped with some clothes and money. The gunshots engulfed the village under a cloud of fear and uncertainty. Jivan Mama never came to fill our evenings with songs and poetry. Evenings became quiet and unsafe. No one could tell us where Jivan Mama was, whether alive or dead. I would pray for his return every Sunday in the church to some unnamed God whom the people there called *Ishor*. I would fold my hands and plead to Jishu to bring back our Jivan Mama. The very next moment I thought- this God who is himself tied to the cross, how would he save my Mama! I would still have faith and join the people singing 'Hallelujah'. Every morning and evening the radio news revealed the number of boys captured, some killed in encounters and some secret killings by unidentified masked men in motorbikes in almost all parts of Assam and bordering areas. This was becoming a daily affair. We woke up to such news; we listened to such conversations at tea time and the dinner table and retired to bed hearing discussions on such incidents of violence and death. Gradually, Jivan Mama was fading away from our daily life and conversations though somewhere deep inside his memories disturbed our minds.

It was time for us to move to a new place, my father was transferred to another school and promoted as a Senior Teacher and from there to another promoted as Vice-Principal. I was in my eighth standard- already becoming a rebel in my heart reading Kabiranjan, reading Tolstoy and Dostoevsky from my school library, reading them- the names I heard then as a child. One fine morning to our surprise, Jivan Mama arrived. We were filled with joy, curiosity and disbelief that he was alive, standing in front of us, his eyes shining with tears and ours too. Mama comes forward, we embrace him as my father patted his back. He sits down and looks at us and says

pointing at me- 'Everyone looks the same except this little one grown up.' As we sit on the table sipping tea and *pitha* (rice cakes) together Mama describes that terrible night of his trial of escape and capture. He ran into the fields towards the river and the hill with the least knowledge that the armed forces had surrounded the entire area. They fired at him. He was shot in the left leg and he couldn't run anymore. He was banged on the head and didn't remember anything thereafter until he discovered himself tied to a chair inside a camouflaged tent and subjected to numerous atrocities every day, anytime. He wept as he explained every detail of the torturous moments spent there. He raised his shirt and showed us the marks on his body of burn injuries caused by cigarettes by the army men, the spot on his left leg where he was shot which had maimed him for the rest of his life. He told us about his escape from the camp after seven months of captivity and sustaining inhuman atrocities He took shelter in a remote village of Arunachal Pradesh, where he remained hiding at the *Gaonbura*'s residence. It took some time for him to heal his wounds. He couldn't sleep for nights, he couldn't eat, his hands trembled and his frail body shivered. For days he was quiet, he only wept and sometimes screamed his heart out. It was Nyori the *Gaonbura*'s daughter who took care of him like a child- washed him, fed him and nursed him back to health. Gradually, Jivan mama revived and became friends with the rest of the villagers. They liked him for his simplicity and wisdom and respected him as a learned man. He taught little children to read and write, told them stories and discussed things with the village youths. He started having a special feeling for Nyori. He would watch her doing her daily chores, he would recite poetry to her while she was busy weaving. She would not understand the depth of the poems and smiled at him which showed her dimpled rosy cheeks. He would follow her to the hills during the time of Zoom cultivation and help her carry firewood on their way back home. He married her.

Times changed and so did lives. Jivan Mama never came to sing songs again, but the sufferings had turned him into a poet. He became a silent rebel. He could never complete his higher studies at the university. He couldn't strive anymore to become a professor, a dream he carried in his heart. He turned his home into a cultural centre spreading the ideals and philosophy of freedom, of loving one's land and identity. He turned into an activist nurturing young minds and telling them about Bishnu Rabha, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Subhas Bose, Guevera and Tagore.

Jivan Mama still writes. He pours down his angst and pain in his words in poetry and sings his heart out playing the harmonium spreading the most beautiful sense of the word 'hope' to the world.

Notes:

Mama: Maternal Uncle

Gaonbura: Village Chief

Donyi-Polo: means Sun-Moon; It is the indigeneous animistic religion of the Tani and Tibeto-Burman peoples of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in the Northeast of India.

Ishor: God

Xunor Axom: (Golden Assam) A slogan defining Assam as golden Assam raised by the nationalists during socio-political movements.

Pitha: cakes and local snacks prepared from rice flour



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