



RHYVERS BEAT

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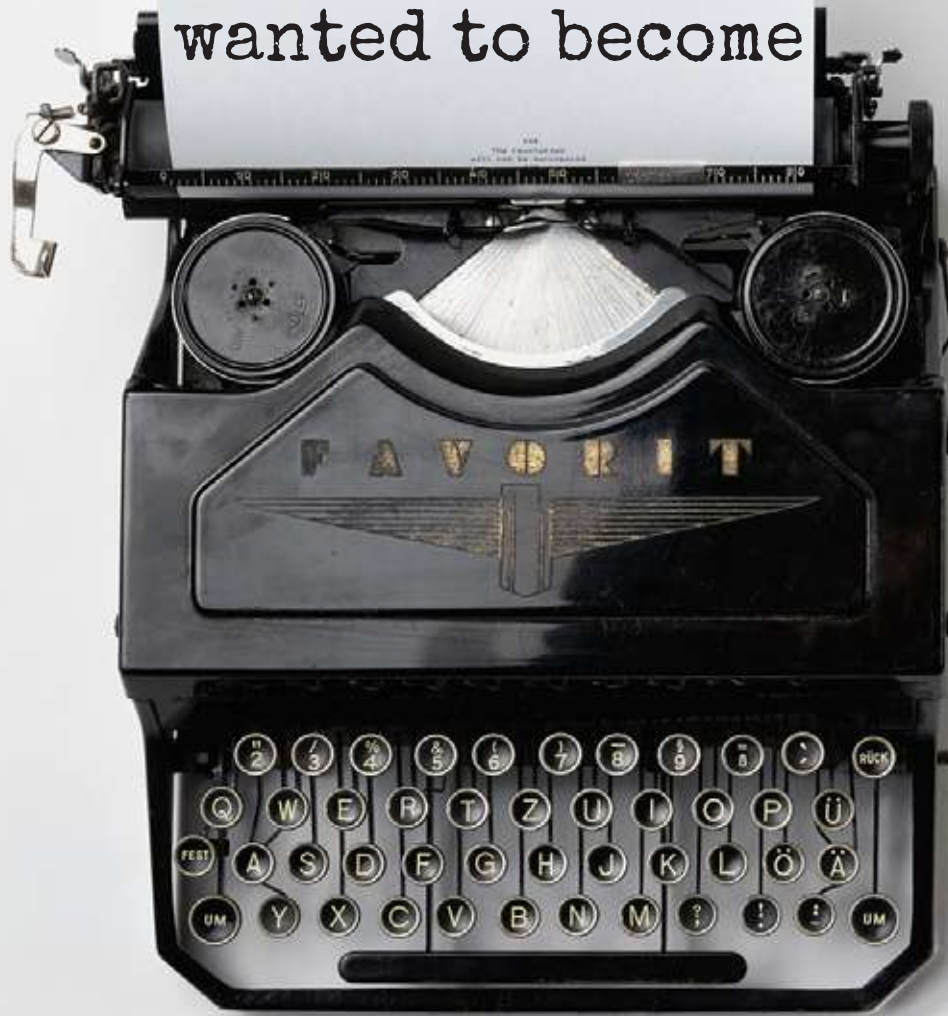


Gratitude



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FROM THE DESK OF EDITOR IN CHIEF

Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle says acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance. Such is the power of gratitude. We have more blessings in our life that we are aware of. Gratitude is the heartfelt acceptance and thankfulness for these blessings.

Our November edition celebrates gratitude. Writers and poets from various parts of the country have sent their compositions on this beautiful, joyous sentiment of the human heart. The myriad expressions of our contributors illuminate Beat every time.

It is a source of immense pleasure to the Beat team that the circle of our readers is continuously expanding. Amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, Beat is the gentle rhythm of moments soft and beautiful, contemplative and ruminative. Rhyvers Beat is the space where one sits back to enjoy the good life, and enjoys the good read.

I was amused by Portuguese philosopher Fernando Pessoa's comment that literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life. Perhaps literature is also among the most agreeable ways of engaging with life. With Rhyvers Beat, we flow in that space – at times invigorating, at times tranquil and serene. In our November edition, we bring to you the many expressions of gratitude. Enjoy the flow.

Happy reading.

Affan Yesvi
Affan Yesvi



FROM THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR'S DESK



DR. SONIKA SETHI

'We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude.'
(Cynthia Ozick)

As children we were always encouraged to be grateful to our elders, teachers and peers. In school we were motivated to express gratitude through prayers, stories and moral science lessons. Saying a prayer before lunch time was mandatory when we thanked not only the Almighty for the 'food we eat' but also the hands that prepared it and at night we offered gratitude for a day well-spent.

Things begin to change as we move ahead in life and enter a paradigm shift from 'days of innocence' to 'days of experience'. Our experience and acquired self-importance instills in us a heightened sense of 'social status awareness' and an altogether indifference towards those who need to be appreciated for their day-to-day, apparent or obscure, contributions in our lives. And that is when a human being loses the divine benediction for it is said that 'a grateful heart is a magnet for miracles.'

If you are healthy, be grateful to your ancestors for handing down those genes to you and work to your best capacity in uplifting those who are less fortunate. If you have plenty, be grateful to those who helped you attain that wealth and be generous to those who are less privileged. If you are strong, be grateful to those who put in efforts to give you resilience, physical or mental, and use your faculties for the betterment of those who are not as advantageous as you are. Most of all if you are breathing and pulsating with life, be grateful to the Almighty for bestowing upon you the greatest gift called 'Life'.

The November issue of *Rhyvers Beat* carries many such heart-warming and touching stories of gratefulness, prayers of thankfulness along with 'an attitude of gratitude' culled out from the deepest recesses of our contributors' hearts, for as Lionel Hampton says,

'Gratitude is when memory is stored in the Heart and not in the Mind.'

Happy Reading! Happy Writing! Happy November!

CONTENTS

Daily Bread - <i>Baisali Chatterjee</i>	4
The Ego Tripped - <i>Aditya Rattan</i>	5
Haiku - <i>Nandini Sahu</i>	6
A Learning Curve in Depravity - <i>Alka Kashyap</i>	7
Blossom - <i>Shubhangi Singh</i>	8
Baking in Nubra - <i>Lippi Parida</i>	9
The Night of Navami - <i>Sanjay Balachandran</i>	10
The Proxy 'Yes' - <i>Mohua Chinappa</i>	11
Mother - <i>Pooja Nangia</i>	12
The Calling - <i>Tia Ray Dhar</i>	13
Thanksgiving - <i>Nupur Parik</i>	14
An Open Letter to All Those I Owe - <i>Nandita Sekhon</i>	15
My Rainbow Light - <i>Abha Joshi</i>	16
The Art of Accepting Appreciation - <i>Ritu Kumar</i>	17
Race Against Time - <i>Ruma Chahraborty</i>	18
Drenched in Gratitude - <i>Alka Kansra</i>	19
My Experiments with Gratitude - <i>Vrunda Chauk</i>	20
And I Say Thanks - <i>Sandeep Kulshreshtha</i>	22
Gratitude in All Seasons Of Life - <i>Dr. Pratibha</i>	23
Merci, Mon Chéri - <i>Nazam Riar</i>	24
In The Shadow of The Olive Green - <i>Navneet Grewal</i>	25
I Longed... - <i>Farooq Kuchay</i>	26
The Burden - <i>Sulekha Sharma</i>	27
With Thanks - <i>Sherin Mary Zacharia</i>	28
The White Knights - <i>Deviyani Singh</i>	29
Toxic Positivity - <i>Randeep Dhillon Mand</i>	30
Covid-Gratitude - <i>Nishant Srivastava</i>	32
The Blessed Sunrise - <i>Rashmi Chaudhary</i>	33
A Little More Gratitude! - <i>Vaneet Kaur</i>	34
Gratitude Attracts Abundance - <i>Rupa Rao</i>	35
In Search of Divine, Interview with Rana Safvi	36
Spark Sessions - Igniting Creativity	39

Daily Bread

*Some flashy mornings
start off
as a monochrome day,
thoughts set ablaze
by the flaming sun,
day long rituals,
set firmly into muscle and bone,
are done, dusted
and neatly stacked with old newspapers*

*The sky is purple now
and the crows are coming home.*

*We give thanks
for this giving night
that blankets us,
drawing a curtain
against the day's
many jibes and humiliations*

*Sometimes,
it's the endings that we are most grateful for...
the end of a movie, a book,
a coupling or a day...*



BAISALI CHATTERJEE DUTT

is currently the Creative Consultant at Sri Sri Academy, Kolkata. Her poetry has been published in various anthologies and magazines, print as well as online. Her latest novella in verse, *Three is a Lonely Number* is available on Amazon Kindle.

The Ego Tripped

Life is governed by the choices we make at each step and the choices are influenced by our prevailing attitude. We can either take it for granted or accept it with immense gratitude knowing that we have no role in the grand scheme of the Universe. Often we delve into the zone of self-proclamation. To put us back on our tracks, certain events happen in an inexplicable manner.

Last year, I planned a tough trek of ten days with my friends—Kalpeshwar to Madhmaheshwar in Uttarakhand. We had a support staff of guides, cooks and porters with us. The most challenging part was scaling the *Ghiya Vinayak* pass at a height of 17,500 ft. Each day we trekked for ten kilometers, stepping into the wild far away from civilization.

The moment of triumph arrived on the fourth day as we stood atop the peak, hugging each other and patting our backs. We camped on the downhill slope and planned to cross the Nandi Kund the following day. It started with the invocation of Devi of the hills, as a ritual. Since that was the most sacred part of the trek, we were issued a lot of directives— not to litter, no loud noises and to maintain the valley’s sanctity.

We were enjoying the serene water pool and capturing its beauty when we heard the echo of a conch blowing from the other end of the valley. The music brought wrinkles of worry on the crew’s faces. Some enthusiastic traveller had blown it and they feared it would invite the wrath of the Devi. In no time the sky was overshadowed and the most deafening sound of a thunderstorm replaced the silence of the sky. The furious noise sent shivers down our spines. It started snowing and soon a sheet of white snow covered the entire valley.



The previous night, we had offloaded ourselves into the porter’s luggage and were carrying bare essentials in our backpacks. Ill-equipped for the chilly windstorm, each step was getting difficult in the freezing conditions. Our guide sat on the snow and asked us to carry on.

Our limbs went numb and it was mortifying to watch our fingers turn blue. The guide finally reached us and offered two sugar-coated *rotis* to help us gain energy. They had gone completely wet, yet we shared half a *roti* each to carry on with our journey.

The end was nowhere in sight; when miraculously, the skies went completely silent after about an hour and the weather began to clear. We caught our breaths under a hillock and rubbed our palms and toes. After walking for four hours, we reached our campsite late at night. Later, the guide told us he had cried and halted en route to pray to the Devi and had offered the *rotis* as Prasad. Life doesn’t guarantee our next step or even our next breath. In gratitude lies the dissolving of the ego and acknowledging the Supreme Power.



DR ADITYA RATTAN

is a practicing cardiologist with passion for writing poems and short stories. He is the author of *Install Antivirus in Your HEART ware*.

Haiku

TUESDAY
August
2

Poem

You said, love, anything for you, my truth eternal.
Take me, take heart—take it all. I glinted—
Make love to me like a poem, if at all!

Life

Through your unwavering love
I am granted interminable life.
I will be so, as long as you are the 'last leaf'.

Prayer

Prayer is the sacrament of gratitude.
My only prayer is gratefulness to Him for the existence of 'us'.
My solitary prayer is 'thank you', and nothing else.

WEDNESDAY
August
3



PROF. NANDINI SAHU

Amazon's best-selling author 2022, Professor of English and Former Director, School of Foreign Languages, IGNOU, New Delhi, India, is an established Indian English poet, creative writer and folklorist. She is the author/editor of seventeen books. She is the recipient of the Literary Award/Gold Medal from the Hon'ble Vice President of India for her contribution to English Studies.



A Learning Curve in Depravity

I was invited to deliver a motivational lecture to a group of orphaned and physically challenged children. It was indeed laudable that the management of the institute had thought of providing a holistic experience to the young minds.

They were the blessed children of God, who were born into a harsh childhood and were facing innumerable challenges for no fault of theirs. Destined to live a life of hardship, their little hearts yearned for a silver streak in the dark clouds of their day-to-day existence. The idea of my interaction was to give them a reason to smile, to be happy and to nurture in them a seed of hope for their future.

On the stipulated day, I donned a crisp saree and made some mental notes about what I was going to speak. Knowing that the children would have little or no exposure to the outside world, I decided to give them a few pointers to help them understand the essence of life.

My car broke down at the nth hour and it ruffled me a bit. An alternative arrangement was made and I reached the venue. A warm welcome awaited me. A neatly groomed young girl on crutches greeted me with the most endearing smile. Then, a tender hand escorted me to the hallway and it was only on reaching my chair did I realize that the little girl was blind.

As I sat watching the heart-warming presentation, I felt

overwhelmed. Although they had very few props, they performed with gay abandon. I marvelled at their dexterity in the face of such adversity. For a moment I wanted to be as happy as they were.

It was hard to look myself in the eye, for I had become agitated at a small discomfort of the car and here they were with so many things amiss, yet they remained spirited. These children were delightful pieces of creation who were at peace with whatever they had. They never complained. They simply worked hard. Perhaps that was the mantra of life, to make the best of what one had.

I recalled my time as a kid when I got upset because I did not have colours for my drawing. Here was a child who had lost a hand, yet was drawing pretty well with the other.

My crisp saree, my learnings and leanings held no water in front of their strength, dedication and achievements. My problems seemed so trivial in front of their travails. How ungrateful was I for all the blessings of life!

My voice choked with emotion when I took the stage. There was nothing I could teach them, for they had already conquered the world in their small little hearts. In fact, the whole experience of interacting with them was a learning curve for me. It was me who was delighted to have met them and in turn be grateful for the good things my life had to offer. I would remember those smiling little faces forever.



ALKA KASHYAP
is based in Chandigarh.
She is a Lawyer
by profession and
a freelance writer
by heart.



Blossom

*Drizzly days allure him as though
the clouds whisper her name*

*The old man standing near
the broken wooden bench
Patiently waits for his beloved,
as a promise that they made.*

*To see him where the clouds meet the rain
“Wounded by love or by torment,
my caring shadow,
The voice of my soul, well knows your name”*

*His heart ventured to walk,
into the swamp of promises
Searching for the wildest thing—
that she may call him by his name.*

*Nothing seems to ease, a pain so deep
It never ventures through the skin,
convalescent from his past
For these fatal embroideries of the heart,
nothing shall change*

*And yet some hope blossoms in his head,
Someday the voice of her soul
shall call his name...*



SHUBHANGI SINGH

is head of Social Media and loves to express creativity through writing, painting, and creating different forms of art.

Baking in Nubra

There's a saying— *When we break bread and give it to each other, fear vanishes and God becomes very close.*

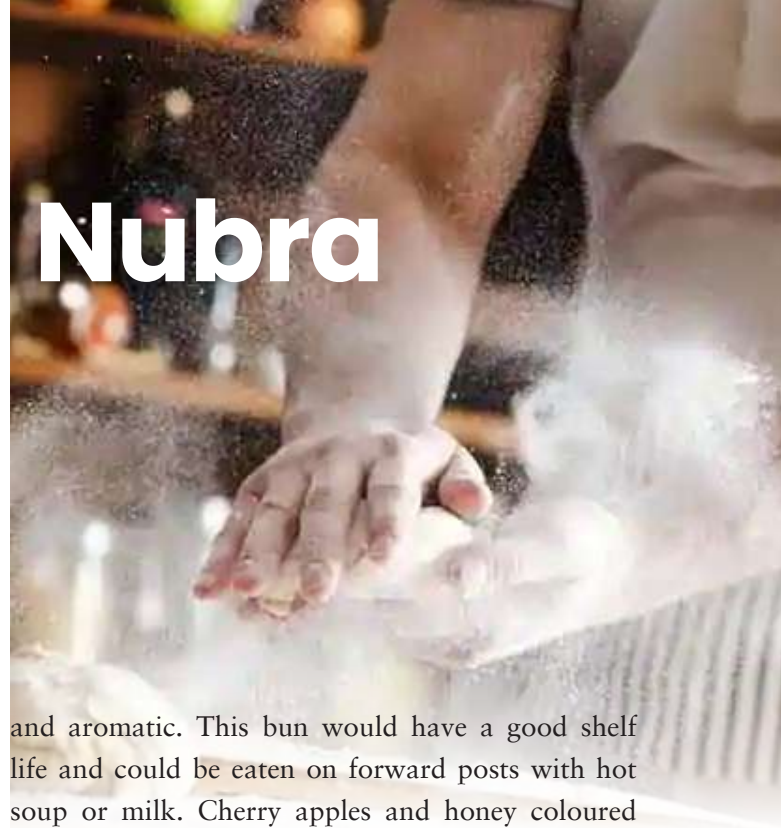
Something similar happened at the 16TH BATTALION ITBP LEH at 11,500 ft. above sea level. Renu Amitabh, Senior Officer in The Indian Revenue Services, trainer for banks and Insurance companies, Motivational speaker, National player of basketball and passionate baker had landed at Leh to take a short break from her gruelling routine.

The striking sun, the white sand dunes, the crystal clear shyok (waters), the formidable mountains, the angelic people and history all around overwhelmed her. She and her husband sat on folding chairs as dawn splashed on the tawny mountains. Renu pulled her off white jacket closer as she revelled in her holiday till a shrill tinkle on her mobile phone pierced the tranquil morning.

It was a request for a baking workshop at ITBP LEH to teach simple healthy baking to the mess cooks and officers' wives. As Renu approached the ITBP campus a longitudinal glass edifice painted with blue dragons greeted her. Tall pine trees and sturdy delivery trucks stood alert in the cold morning. On the campus walls was emblazoned the slogan— "FOOD WILL WIN THE WAR!"

Inside, ITBP cooks in khaki cardigans and caps, and ITBP wives stood gathered in front of a banner of the Himveer Wives Welfare Association.

The Tax Commissioner was now determined to do a taxing job so that the jawaans and ITBP personnel would eat right. Minimal with no *maida* (flour) or white sugar and no preservatives or chemicals. She put on her white apron and gloves and whipped up a loaf with eggs, whole wheat, multi- grains, local millet, buckwheat, herbs, milk and nutritious seeds. A veritable "Slice of Life"— hot



and aromatic. This bun would have a good shelf life and could be eaten on forward posts with hot soup or milk. Cherry apples and honey coloured apricots metamorphosed into tea cakes and healthy pizzas and stuffed breads materialized loaded with green capsicums, purple olives and sweet potatoes.

The ITBP wives were filled with gratitude for Renu Amitabh as the first snow descended. Inside her home, Richa baked a "Slice of Life" for her husband, the head of the ITBP battalion in Leh. Her husband had promised her he would eat bread only when she baked it. Richa thanked Renu Amitabh for making her husband's dream come true. It was Priya's third winter in Leh. Outside, everything would soon be fearful with frozen and blocked roads. But inside Priya was busy making muffins and buns. Her kids squealed with joy as the aroma of fresh bread and cherries filled the room and happily Priya thanked Renu Amitabh for making baking so easy for her.

They say travel makes a man richer. Renu Amitabh was at Hotel Stonehenge in the Nubra Valley when she went to pick some breakfast and saw the local *khambir* bread being baked in the live kitchen. She washed her hands and was soon baking the *khambir* with the bakery chefs. The tax commissioner had been seeking to experience the rugged and beautiful terrain but unexpectedly she had found something better.

Gratitude made her heart soar.



LIPPI PARIDA

is an author, painter, photographer, flautist, sand & rock artist, talk show host, motivational speaker & columnist. She's the recipient of 2018 MAKE IN INDIA National award for Excellence in the creative field

The Night of Navami

*It was the night of Navami,
The stage was set, the lights below bright,
The children were happy, the performances tight,
The poet in a corner, stood contemplating,
While in the shadows a greater shadow grew,
Born from the villainous treachery of a few.*

*The poet was summoned, he appeared without fear,
The grudges of the villainous to hear.*

*They broke upon him
With all their villainous might,
But he was not one to give in or to fight.*

*In silence he bore their oppression,
Praying in his heart for cessation.*

*Then it was that another,
A man of courage, a true brother,
Stepped in, the poet to rescue,
His heart was kind, his intentions true.*

*The gang flashed their fangs and gnashed
At the one who had come to the poet's side.
More joined the fray, the evening turned grey.
The wrath of God flashed in the thunderous sky.*

*O listen to the voice of the Heavens,
For the justice of God is swift and strong,
He will smite and strike down the ones who are wrong.*

*In our hearts He dwells and watches and waits,
To deliver the good from the hands of sinners,
And to raise His flock from the lowly dust
And enthrone them in the Hall of Heroes,
The abode of virtuous winners!*



**SANJAY
BALACHANDRAN**

is an author, academician, poet and musician residing in Kolkata. He is a Psychological Counselor and Wellbeing Consultant. He is also a shutterbug who enjoys capturing small details of everyday life on his camera.

The Proxy 'YES'

It was the soft dewy mornings of Shillong that Naina was used to waking up to. Lazing in the warmth of her bed was an addiction. She put the cover tighter over her little body. The church bells rang sharply into her ears. Naina lived with her mother in their warm, little house with lace curtains and photos of Jesus Christ. The house was old with wooden floors and a dining table in the bedroom. The dining table was the centerpiece of the sparse home.

Mother was a devout Christian. The rosary holding, a bleeding Christ on the cross, hung into the depths of her mother's elderly, ample bosom. It hung and caught the sun's rays as she put the little stove on fire with the kettle of water to boil for her tea. This was an everyday affair, in the same speed and motion. Naina thought she did this with better dedication and efficiency than she read the psalms every evening. Naina had little recollection of her father. She was too young when she noticed her mother cry into her palms. Naina used to ask her mother about her father. Mother always said "No point discussing about the deceased soul."

This evening, mother for a change, made an effort to bake some cake. Naina asked, "Today isn't Christmas nor is it father's death anniversary. Why are you baking a cake?" Mother continued to add the eggs into the mixture and turned her back to Naina. Then she said "Your father's best friend is coming to meet us for tea today."

As the sun began to fade, the hills descended into a dark silhouette against the clear skies with bright stars. Naina missed having a father. She blinked into the stars and prayed for abundance for her mother and herself. She, then, rushed inside

and found that mother had also put flowers in a vase. Naina wondered when mother would take out the cake. The aroma of the vanilla and the dough filled the room. At that moment, there was a knock on the door.

Mother opened the door. There stood an overweight, medium heighted and balding gentleman. He had flowers in his hand and a box of chocolates.

Mother said "Hello, Paul!" "Hello Eugene."

I stood between them, watching the boring pleasantries being exchanged. Then he bent down and kissed my cheek. I was furtively looking at the chocolate box that he was holding. He slowly walked inside, towards the table and took a chair. He

sat down and then passed the chocolates to mother. Mother poured him a cup of tea. He sipped the tea with slurping sounds. It broke the silence between the three of us. Mother then took out the cake and cut three generous pieces and placed them on the plates, in front of us. As he took a bite, he didn't look up, but muttered, "Eugene will you marry me?"

Before mother could say anything I said "Yes! I will marry you."

He chuckled at that. Mother had turned a crimson red. She looked towards me. I took another piece of the cake and said "We said yes." In a year, Paul and mother were married. I still wake up reluctantly to the early sunrise of the hills ahead. But I remain grateful every day for the words that came tumbling out of my mouth that maybe my mother couldn't have uttered alone. Paul is now my best friend, a great father and a loving husband to Eugene. I am grateful for the 20 odd years that I found security and a second chance in life of being raised by both a father and a mother.



MOHUA CHINAPPA is the author of *Nautanki Saala* and *Other Stories*. She also runs a popular podcast called 'The Mohua Show'.

MOTHER

*The day I sat in your womb
Your body nurtured me
With your blood and breath
I was just an aggregation of cells,
Piece of flesh*

*Until you gave me nine months
For my body to take shape
In its beauty and form
The form that you nurtured*

Even outside of you, the warmth of you never left.

*My body may have become big but a tiny me
Still resides in you*

O, mother! I am always just you.



POOJA NANGIA

is an educationist, a podcaster and a published author of a poetry book *Aakanksha*. Her podcasts on poetry and parenting can be heard on platforms like Hubhopper, Amazon music, Spotify and Gaana. Pooja can be reached on her Insta handle: @reflections_pooja.



Amanda took a sip of the cappuccino inside the lobby's cafe gazing at the piece of glossy paper. She was about fifteen minutes early.

She let her mind wander. Her thoughts drifted back to about eight years ago.

The Dubai Airport lounge. Her delayed flight from Dubai to Auckland. The lounge was crowded. Luckily, there was space available on one of the sofas near the back wall, where a pretty girl about the same age as her was sitting. She looked upset and was wiping occasional stray tears. Amanda gingerly approached the sofa and asked if someone was about to join her. The girl shook her head.

Over the next two hours, the girls chatted about their hometowns, families and hobbies. Her name was Mia. She was from Norway; her mother was Swedish, and her father was Indian. She was finishing medical school in London and was depressed as she had recently suffered a bad breakup. Amanda's knee-jerk reaction was, "Wow! Medical school?" She must be really smart.

"Are you in medical school by choice? Do you like it? I know how smart you gotta be to get in." Amanda chuckled.

"Yes. I've wanted to be a physician since my school days. I guess I found my purpose quite early in life." There was that word again— *Purpose. Calling.* Amanda was completely devoid of one. She was happy to shop, watch movies, travel, attend parties and take pictures to post on social media. She suddenly felt a mist of guilt engulf her.

But one look at Mia's sad face and

she was jolted out of her musing.

"You want to talk about the breakup? It might take away some of the strain. You might feel somewhat lighter."

Mia spoke about the loss of the relationship, but most of it was about denial, agony, grief and an ever-pervading sense of loss. Amanda listened patiently and empathetically. Despite having no experience of losing friendships or budding relationships, she told Mia that time would heal the wound and that she should face the pain instead of trying to escape it. Amanda was pleasantly surprised at how naturally she had been there for someone, even if it was someone she had just met.

"Amanda, have you ever thought about pursuing higher studies in psychology? Just talking to you and having you listen made me feel light."

There it was! Mia had given Amanda a potential source of inspiration. A direction to pursue. Something which could become *her purpose. Her calling.*

Amanda finished her coffee and started moving towards the hotel conference room. The paper she was holding was the itinerary for that year's Forensic Psychology Symposium. She was one of the invitees for a panel discussion. She was grateful she had met Mia that night in the airport lounge. Despite living on different continents, they kept their friendship alive through online chats and video calls.

A purpose, a good friend and good health— Amanda was indeed grateful!



TIA RAY DHAR

has 15 years of experience in content creation for biomedical and healthcare communications across India, the US and New Zealand. She has published two books: A murder mystery novel *Unfurling: A Tale of Friendship, Love, Mystery & Mayhem* and a self-help book *Don't Let Your Break-Up be Your Break-Down*

Thanksgiving

*Sounds hang differently in the air
On winter days.*

*They travel through the corridors
Of homes like a cloud of cozy decibels
Bunched together under a big, warm blanket.*

*Even sunlight sits differently
In balconies and window sills which
Feel hostile and uncomfortable in summer.*

*Suddenly, I find myself gravitating
Towards them as the mornings get chilly;
The sweetest heat hides in
The golden rays that dance through them
Silently into my room.*

*Between this toasty feeling and
The pregnant stillness of lethargic
Summer afternoons,*

*We still have a few months of
Cheer, merriment, cakes and wine,
And if nothing else, at least...
That is something to be grateful for.*



DR. NUPUR PARIK-PANDEY

is a dentist, poet and podcaster from Calcutta. Her poetry podcast 'Straight from my Heart' features poems written and performed by her. Her poetry has been featured in The Alipore Post multiple times, and she also recently conducted a show for A Story Club as their writer of the week.



An Open Letter to All Those I Owe

The Latin word *Gratus* itself spells such positive energy, so loaded with meaning. Be it to show my Gratitude to the Universe, my parents, my revered teachers, my dear spouse, my children or siblings without who I am nothing. The elixir of Life comes from them.

Besides all these I find my pets such a store house of positive aura around me. I am deeply indebted to them for keeping me sane and so happy all the time. Their unconditional love is what I live for. My staff without whom I may never have achieved the spic and span look of the house and a manicured lawn.

As I age I realize the sheer joy of being with them who give me pure happiness and contentment.

My huge fraternity of loving friends and now extended family on social media need special mention, who are not only inspiring but also lovely. Many of them shake me off the reverie to remind me who I am and what possibly I can do. I am blessed that they saw potential in me.

I am in awe of the song, 'To sir with love' from the movie that goes by the same name. The lyrics touch a chord of your heart and you wonder who wrote that well thought of number. Sydney Poiter portrays the most compassionate black teacher who etches love and respect in the hearts of his pupils who detested him.

'How do you thank someone who

has taken you from crayon to perfume? It isn't easy but I'll try.

If you wanted the sky I would write across the sky in letter that I would soar a thousand feet high...

To Sir with Love.'

I have not forgotten my teacher who taught me my first alphabet, ABC to someone who taught me to spell 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.' It seems a long time since I crammed hard to remember it. Thanks to the teacher who taught me this.

I bow my head in utter humility to all my teachers in school and then in the later part of my life to all the professors who shaped my personality as I face the world today. Each person was remarkable in my journey only the gratitude quotient varied from teacher to teacher and person to person. That's natural I guess.

An 'Attitude for Gratitude' sails us through every sphere of Life. When I close my eyes and remain in total shutdown mode I know I am not only thanking the universe but all those who have crossed paths with me and some who have even taught me through negativity.

My humble Gratitude to each one for being my best teacher!



NANDITA SEKHON
is a homemaker and
lives in Panchkula

My Rainbow Light

*When the Chaos of the Mind shrouds My Self
Clouds of desires burst out crying
Crying not for what I have not got
Crying for what I thought I craved for
Crying for what I thought I needed
Crying to make my Mind meet the Soul
The struggle, the fight worthwhile
I settle in the lap of My Being
Thoughts rustling by
The Layers peeling off
From Darkness I emerge
Rise yet once again
As The Phoenix rises
From the dead Ashes of my mind
At the Glistening end of the Rainbow
Bathed in its Scintillating Halo
Shimmering Merger
In GRATITUDE to My Rainbow Light.*



ABHA JOSHI SHARMA

is a Senior Architect with the Government of Punjab. She lives in Chandigarh and dabbles in poetry and prose.

My family and friends often appreciate my write ups and poems. Humbly, I smile and say thank you, recalling words of William Shakespeare from his play 'Twelfth Night', "I can no other answer make but thanks and thanks and ever thanks." But many a time I think whether they actually mean appreciation or are they pampering me?

This makes me ponder that to appreciate others for their good work is a great virtue but how others respond to the praise means a lot to the one who appreciates. Recently one of my colleagues retired and during his farewell function, the speakers eulogized him for his genial demeanor and for being a diligent and devoted teacher. When he spoke in the end, he said "I have done my duty with everyone's support. I did nothing extraordinary to be showered with such superlatives." I had a sudden realization as to why he did not acknowledge his colleagues' appreciation which they truly meant and he deserved. It was well-earned after a long tenure. Is it a question of being humble or false notion of humility?

With this came an epiphany that when someone praises my poetry or writings I should take pride in it without being vain. There is a lot of meaning in accepting appreciation gratefully and gracefully. However, sometimes we are apprehensive while praising others unsure of the other person's response. In a get together a friend danced beautifully and we praised her talent but she said nonchalantly that she just did a few steps she remembered doing in school when her teacher forced her to participate in a group dance. She further asked "Are you pulling my leg?"

Such situations raise the question whether the person receiving praise is doubtful that he/she does not deserve it and if the other person is either overdoing it or being sarcastic? In both the cases we should try to accept the praise and come up to the good opinion expressed by the well-wishers. It is courteous to thank a person who has put us on a high pedestal. We should take it as an honour and accept it. From these episodes I learnt that art of accepting appreciation involves personality



The Art of Accepting Appreciation

development. Suppose a person gives me an eight out of ten while I believe I deserve a six, then I should accept eight with a promise to myself that I would work constantly and consistently to reach an eight. This can be a novel way to inspire myself, weighing my strengths and weaknesses side by side. I am trying this experiment in my dance classes, being run by my ex-students who keep on giving me a six where as I know I deserve only four.

Acceptance requires humility from us. Apt are the words of the French Novelist, Marcel Proust "Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming garden who make our soul blossom"



DR RITU KAMRA KUMAR

is HoD and Associate Professor of English in MLN College, Yamunanagar, Haryana. She has authored four books: *Configurational Coordinates of Woman and Space in Select Novels of Shashi Deshpande*, *The Priceless Petals*, *The Strokes of Solitude* and *The Peerless Pearls*.



Race Against Time

*A race against time
Rising with the clock's chime
Chores to be done
No time for fun
Or even a smile
Ticking mental checklist while
The household rises with languor
Then demands pour out,
Whines and shouts,
Stretched and hassled
Each day more frazzled.
One day merging seamless into another
So used to it that it ceases to bother
Once there were dreams and desires
Replaced by duties and work that tire
Her eyes inscrutable and locked
Resentment pushed back and blocked
Till a tug on the sari from the reverie, jolts

"Happy Mother's Day" the voices trill
Her face lights up with thrill
With gratitude, her entire being fills.*



RUMA CHAKRABORTY

is a senior English faculty in a premium institution in Kolkata. A painter, a budding poet and compulsive storyteller, currently she is in the process of writing a compendium of short stories and poems

Drenched in Gratitude

*A beautiful sunrise
fills my heart with pleasure
The joy of cool morning breeze
is kissing me*

*I descry
the moon talking to
my jasmine flowers
Raindrops after a sultry day
Petrichor soothing my soul
Inviting food on my table
An old melody playing
On TV on the console
Paintings on the wall
set poetry dancing in my thoughts
Books on the shelf beckon
Pillow fights with my grandchildren
My Childhood, I recall
The phone rings
The little ones are on line
'Nani come to our house', they sing
Magic scattered all around
Filling my life with happiness
How time flies!
Happiness is in the moment at hand
Happiness is in the memories
stored in the heart
Living life is an art
The rain is falling again
Drizzling His benevolence
I am drenched in gratitude.*



ALKA KANSRA

is retired Professor and HoD, Chemistry from MCMDAV College, Chandigarh. She has two poetry collections to her credit- *Peedhiyon ke Kshitij* and *Zindagi Kavita ho Gayi*.



My Experiments with Gratitude

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity...it makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

- Melody Beattie

Gratitude is not just about saying ‘Thank you’. It is about noticing the goodness and appreciating it wholeheartedly. To experience the benefits of gratitude, I conducted two experiments.

The first experiment was expressing gratitude towards a stranger who helped me with something. I spent an entire day thanking people who served me in some way. Starting off it was difficult for me to come up with anything more than just “thank you” but towards the end of the day, I was able to express genuine gratitude.

I was struggling to find a cab on my way home from work. Due to heavy rain most of the cab rides were cancelled. Finally, one cab driver agreed to drop me off at my location. I boarded

shift in focus. From what goes wrong to what works. It can change your mood and your perspective. I felt good to see some people smile when I looked them in the eye and said “thank you.” Seeing this, a person sitting next to me also said “thank you” to the waiter who served him. Gratitude surely is contagious!

My second experiment was about expressing gratitude to someone who helped me during difficult times.

I thought of being creative with this experiment. I wrote a gratitude letter to my mom. While writing the letter I realised that there were millions of things that she had helped me



the cab and told the driver how grateful I was that he had agreed for this ride. It was more than a mere “thank you”. I told him how this will help me reach home in time and how frustrated I was with not finding any ride. He smiled at me and told me that he loves his job because he gets to help people commute when they urgently need to reach somewhere. We had a good conversation till the time I got off. I thanked him again and he said he had a nice time chatting with me. ‘Likewise’ I replied.

On my way home, I reflected on how expressing something authentic and positive had made a huge difference. I could have sulked about how late I would be in reaching home and complained about the heavy rain, instead I made a choice to express gratitude for his kindness and had a good conversation.

Expressing gratitude creates a

with for which I never expressed my gratitude. I was filled with joy while writing the letter and felt immensely blessed to have her in my life. I decided to sit down with her and read out this letter to her.

I had tears in my eyes while I read the letter. My mother was overwhelmed and she hugged me tightly. That hug stayed with me. We both were emotional towards the end. She expressed how much this meant to her and kissed me on my forehead.

Remember, feeling grateful isn’t enough. You need to tell others how much they mean to you and how their actions had a lasting positive impact on you. You strengthen your relationship with the person as you cherish the happy moments together. The experiments made me realize that the more I count my blessings, the more I have to be grateful for!



VRUNDA CHAUK
is a certified Positive Psychology Practitioner. Her hobbies include reading, writing and watching series and she loves travelling!

And I Say Thanks

*The blue skies and the rays of the sun
As they transcend on the green foliage
Make me say thanks.*

*That this life, in all its shades
Is worth a while.*

*When I see the people I love around me
Spinning up challenges
Sometimes being nasty
Or extra caring when they see my conflicts.*

I feel alive and

The moment of truth arrives

When all I can see is this moment,

Only this moment is real

When I hear the chirping of the birds.

When the rain stops,

It's then I see a rainbow...

And the blue skies act balmy.



SANDEEP KULSHRESTHA

is a poet and an author based at Hyderabad, India. Sandeep is also a published business author and his books on Positive Psychology and Resilience are published by BookBoon, Denmark.

Gratitude in All Seasons Of Life

It is said,

*Dukh vele simran,
Sukh vele shukrana,
Har vele simran,
Har vele shukrana.*

(During good or bad times just keep praying and show gratitude to God)

Prayer is not about prodding the supreme power repeatedly to fulfill our wishes and desires. The best form of prayer is just a heartfelt THANK YOU.

Gratitude brings a feeling of abundance whereas complaining and demanding shows lacking in our lives.

Like all muscles of our body, Gratitude is also a muscle of abundance. The more you pay gratitude, the more abundance will be filled in your life. Though God has his own timings to bestow his blessings upon us, we must learn to trust his timings.

Gratitude and abundance are twin sisters who are inseparable.

It is a scientifically proven fact by scientists that consistent gratitude changes the neurochemistry of brain leading to complete change in epigenetics. This has been a great breakthrough for medical fraternity in helping out people with psychosomatic diseases and mental health issues.

A grateful heart is a healthy heart. Scientists have proven these facts time

and again. These facts are enough to convince us to be in the emotion of thankfulness 24*7.

The best time to pay gratitude is the very first moment when we wake up in morning and just before sleeping at night. At both these times our conscious mind is sluggish and it is easier for our subconscious mind to get this nurturing diet of gratitude.

Another way to strengthen this habit of gratitude is to practice a daily gratitude journal.

There are always hardships and challenges we all are going through at every stage of life. Still, learn to say 'thank you' by practicing 'Opposition Thinking'. Opposition thinking says that even when you are not happy with your current situations in life, replace those negative feelings with the hopeful positive feelings.

For instance– if you are unwell, just say 'I know I am not well but I am taking a great diet or the best treatment, I know that You (GOD) are working on it... Big thank you for all this.'

Even if you are trapped in a cascade of negativity and don't notice any positivity to say 'thank you God', just think that the present chaos is the result of your own past karmas and God is helping you to end it faster. So, pay your gratitude anyhow.

Wishing everyone a grateful life with the message to remain "Uski razza main raazi"



DR. PRATIBHA

is a Dental Surgeon,
author of book *Dear Zindagi*, Blogger,
Motivational Speaker,
Yoga and Naturopathy
enthusiast.

Thank you!

Merci, Mon Chéri

*To you I owe this room in my heart
That is the deepest and the quietest
The only sound is echo of your laughter
The sole light in this darkness,
Is the shine of your pupils
The softness it knows is your unspoken words
And of the ways that caress my burning soul
I owe this amber smoke of effusiveness to you
I owe this gregariousness and gratefulness to you!
Merci, Mon Chéri, for I owe my grateful being to you!*



NAZAM RIAR

is an Immigration consultant, a Happiness Coach and a Personality Development Trainer. She writes articles in newspapers of national repute and her poems have been published in international journals. She has written three books on poetry and prose- *Confessions of a Happy Woman*, *The Quirky Wallflower* and *the Silent Bumblebee* and *The Solitary Sunflower in my Bageecha*.



In The Shadow of The Olive Green

In the corridors of the olive green where respect and integrity are the pillars steely, each moment is a fable a journey in itself.

Umpteen postings and transfers usually within two to three years and sometimes as short as even six months keep us ready and packed to move on. Our partners the black trunks which hold reels of memories, albums of tears, and carnivals of joys bolster our movements when duty calls.

At each posting be it at the valley in freezing environs or the heat of the deserts that mirage our hope and optimism the only value that holds us through is thankfulness. We live and die with it. When the blizzards cut supplies and we eat ice to fill our stomachs or when the water runs dry and we share small sips with our brethren to stay alive each breath each inhale sings a melody of gratitude.

Secularism runs in our blood and the *Sarv Dharm Sthals* are a beautiful example of this where each soldier irrespective of rank, religion or caste

sits in a congregation of faith asking for strength thanking for life and missing family and loved ones back home. The very essence of the forces rests on these virtues which stand various tests of time, grit, integrity, weather, topography, and habitation.

As a common man too,
What do we have?

This is a question we ask ourselves daily. In roles substantiated by fate and faith, we all have a charter that is either given or we carve for ourselves. This charter of our meaning of life needs to be clad and embellished with the prism of perennial gratefulness towards the saviour for a life worth living. Sans this we are just like fiends of materialism hell-bent to feed a never-ending lust for everything.

And like Eckhart Tolle, German spiritual teacher says,

“Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance”

Sums up the basis and the principle for this saga of living.



NAVNEET GILL GREWAL

is a psychology graduate and a qualified language teacher. She lives in Chandigarh. Her forte is writing in the free verse. She is the co-author of a poetry collection, *Our Hearts We Pen*.

I Longed...

I

*Longed to hark some soulful chants
But I was befooled with cacophony
Of whales and sharks.*

I

*Longed to sweep with the pious souls
But I was put in the nasty company
Of wolves and vultures.*

I

*Longed to follow the purified world
But I explored cynicism around
Of timely saints and priests.*

I

*Longed to nurture my quiescent being
But I failed to overcome mediocre fellows
Of venomous and malicious nature.*

I

*Longed to dwindle in a delicious slumber
But I was woken up with the cries
Of upright and helpless victims.*

I

*Longed to peer everyone in bliss
But woes never let them glorify joys
Of triumph and victory.*



FAROOQ KUCHAY
hails from Kashmir
and has a Masters'
Degree in Linguistics
& English Literature



The Burden

Gautam and Sidharth were best friends and had been since their school days. They were both living their rich dreams. Gautam, a landlord with huge holdings acquired through ancestry, lived in a big house with a Mogul style garden so beautiful that it was almost a tourist attraction. Sidharth dealt in precious stones. He travelled across oceans to buy and sell rare stones. His clients ranged from kings to art collectors. They trusted his expertise and his word. Sidharth acquired a rare ruby that was not for sale but for his beloved daughter as part of her wedding trousseau.

A few months later, he was ready for another trip across the seas. He left the precious ruby in Gautam's care. Gautam was fond of gambling. He was not a hard core gambler but once in a while he sat down with friends for a game to relax and was often lucky to win.

A stranger from far away heard of his wealth, his hobby, his luck and the rare ruby. He introduced himself as a courtier in the court of a King that they had never heard of. He laughed and said that there was so much else that they had not heard of. The stranger quickly established himself in the high society through his extravagant hospitality and a rich storehouse of entertaining fables that he told with tongue in cheek and ended by saying, "believe it or not."

One day he invited Gautam to a gambling match. Gautam played against him and won. This became a

routine affair. Then, one day his luck changed. Gautam began to lose from the outset. As the worried citizens watched with dismay, Gautam lost all. The smooth sarcasm of the opponent riled up his ego. He could not stop. Before the Sun rose, Gautam had lost everything he owned.

The winner gave him a choice. He could buy it all back with the ruby or leave home and hearth before sunset. Gautam felt being roasted on a pit of fire. Unbearable poverty stared him in the face if he

refused. The choice he made killed his sense of himself and the prospect of losing a dear friend.

Sidharth heard of the incident upon his return. He pondered over his loss and reconciled to it. Losing a lifelong friend was even harder. Gautam realized that Sidharth was sincere when he came to call upon him and even refused his apologies.

Sidharth, then showed him his latest acquisition—a flawless blue diamond that weighed a hundred carat. This was, he declared, an even better gift for his daughter. He talked happily of his daughter and the preparations being made. Gautam could not look him in the eye. He felt hatred swelling in his heart. He hated Sidharth's carefree and happy face while his soul was burning in hell. He picked up his stick and hit him on the head. Sidharth died on the spot.

Forgiveness bestows grandeur but carrying the burden of gratitude is harsh and alien to human nature.

SULEKHA SHARMA
is a retired educationist
and lives in Chandigarh.



With Thanks

*Neither the men nor the women
Ever said a "Thank you"
To some important things in life.
They run helter-skelter to meet their targets
But forget to thank their shoes
Weary; bearing their feet smelly.
Neither men nor women pause
To smile, once they finish their lunch
At the water jug that had quenched their thirst.
Few ever had waited to check
If the chairs they were seated on
Are left arranged neatly, waved them good bye.
Yet, how can anyone ignore the trash bin
Which always kept their secrets as secrets?
They hardly thank the city lights
That made the night shine bright.
There is way more to go, but often stopped
At the traffic light turned red.
Move again with expectations
Remember them as you reach home safe.*



**SHERIN MARY
ZACHARIA**

is a young poet from Kochi, Kerala. She is a regular blogger and often contributes to English anthologies.

The White Knights

(An Ode of Gratitude to Doctors)

*Angels hovering in hospital wings in coats white,
Seeing the miserable, milling millions' sad plight.
Dealing with the overwhelming influx day and night,
Oh wasn't it a dismal, depressing, daunting sight?*

*Bravely, they neither cowered nor retreated,
Swiftly everyone they comforted and treated.
Flag bearers of the universal Red Cross.
Which religion, caste or creed can't accost.*

*True to their ancient sacred oath of Hippocrates,
With modern medicines and wisdom of Socrates.
Dealt efficiently with Covid and co-morbidity,
Put their own safety at risk to give us priority.*

*We need to thank these masked Superheroes,
Who proved their mettle more than mere medicos,
In Hospital rows, let drums roll and trumpets blow,
As these shining Knights in white armour take a bow.*



DR. DEVIYANI SINGH

has a PhD in International Terrorism. She taught in Delhi University and worked with the Lok Sabha Secretariat as Executive Officer in the Committee on External Affairs. She is presently the Editor of an Education magazine.

Toxic Positivity



Tia woke up in the morning feeling anxious. She seemed to have no energy to get out of bed to exercise or pray. She was always known for her sunny disposition in life, though by now, she had experienced her fair share of struggles and challenges. Every now and then, she liked to read motivational pieces or watch videos on the internet to stay 'positive'.

Once while visiting her friend, she saw a 'Gratitude Jar' and thereafter started making a Gratitude List of her own.

Yet, there were days like today when she didn't feel too bright. However, she felt a pressure to always feel grateful for what she had and to look 'okay'. She had been conditioned to believe that she shouldn't dwell on sadness, anxiety, loneliness or fear. She often chided herself for feeling such emotions because after all many people had it worse than her. If she ever opened up with her friends they would also advise her to 'count her blessings' and choose 'happiness'.

Today, however, she felt cornered.

She sat in the balcony looking at the plants and asked herself, "When was the last time I faced my uncomfortable emotions?"

Tia didn't realize that her carefully cultivated 'Gratitude routine' had resulted into her falling into a trap called 'toxic positivity'— a flawed emotional management. Toxic positivity can be defined as trying to maintain a positive mindset or attitude regardless of what circumstances and emotions are being experienced. It dismisses emotions instead of affirming them.

Little do we realize that forcing ourselves to feel grateful in times of stress is not only ineffective but also emotionally damaging as we end up invalidating emotions that are authentic and need to be dealt with. To manage our emotions, we need to process them the right way and for that we need to allow ourselves to feel them, instead of burying them.

The problem with trying to rush past feelings that make us uncomfortable is that, they will resurface, stronger than before. So we must devote some mental space to them. Unpleasant thoughts, sometimes, can bring greater insights into life.

Though it might sound funny but some people have confessed going to the extent of making an 'Ingratitude List'. Why not! After all, naming negative feelings can make one more present in the moment and appreciable of the good things in life.

So should we give up Gratitude all together? Certainly not! However, we have to revamp the gratitude practice.

For one, we must practice validation along with gratitude. That is, we have to accept that our feelings are real and we are worthy of being dissatisfied. Grief, anger, envy or shame might seem wrong but are valid human emotions, so must be accepted or else the person will not have the tools to cope

with them and build resilience. Who knows, they might be an opportunity for growth if we figure out how to use them for personal growth. Bad feelings can be vital clues that a health issue, relationship or other important matter needs attention,

One looks for the silver lining (the good in life) only after acknowledging that the cloud is dark. Gratitude can exist along with other emotions. Negative emotions don't cancel out gratitude. Next time they come knocking, sit with them. Express how you feel in a journal or talk to someone. This exercise might shift your perspective and bring a closure.



RANDEEP DHILLON MAND

is a Jalandhar based writer of short stories and articles. Her venture 'The Fable Garden' involves story-telling and literary activities for children. Her edited book *Barefoot Souls* is available on Amazon.

Covid-Gratitude

Gratitude is a positive emotion that involves being thankful and appreciative. One has differing experiences about feeling grateful for something or someone in life and to respond with feelings of kindness, warmth and other forms of generosity. On a larger scale, gratitude covers sympathies and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others who extend help to us even in their dire state.

I remember, during Covid-extreme days, on the specific demand of my better half, I rushed outside fully geared, wearing mask and gloves to buy some vegetables from the cart passing by the colony.

I spotted two frail looking girls, pushing a cart full of onions, tomatoes, garlic, lemon and assorted veggies. As I made a dash towards them, I found them struggling in the steep passage. I removed a stone causing hurdles to the smooth passage of the cart and thereby made them feel comfortable and relaxed.

When they were settled, I broke into a conversation with them. “New to the colony?”

“Yes. From the neighbouring slum and belong to Haryana” they said.

I deciphered so from their accent.

After selecting choicest vegetables at negotiated prices, I tried to save further on the overall cost of bought items, with a stingy look at Hari Mirch which I thought should be my designated gift.

The elderly frail girl in tatters with some twinkle in her large eyes, smiled with a magnanimous gesture and offered a handful of Hari Mirch to me without any remorse.

The moment the handful of Hari Mirch was poured into my zealously guarded plastic basket, I was wonderstruck. A bolt from the blue jolted my whole being. I was stunned at the grand offering. The unexpected freebies from the have-nots made me jitter. I felt as if my grandeur of being amongst the echelon of the “Haves” had been struck with lightening. It had started to drizzle but I was wet to the core with a sense of shame and guilt.



NISHANT SHRIVASTAVA

is a retired Engineer residing in the city beautiful, Chandigarh. Loves to write and sketch.

My later gratitude and a few alums offered to compensate the gesture couldn't debug my sense of repentance. Their hard work to toll the cart laden with 50-60 kg of stuff for over four km. from subzi mandi, after couple of hours spent in the purchase became picturesque to me. The Godly smile that offered me the freebies left me frozen into a timeless frame. I considered myself a beggar, seeking rewards at having done some acrobatics with the money power in my hand from someone who's omnipotent.

Alas! When money has lost its sheen and glitter and life has become more precious in these telling times, my bargaining capacity and shrewdness didn't get the jolt it deserved.

I would hardly forget this incident for the rest of my life. The large-hearted slum girl with a divinely smile must have put in at least four hours of hard work before reaching my place and this realization left me feeling like a pauper on the street .

I don't know if this incident will be a lesson to me or to any of us, to have a different perspective towards these unsung warriors, who toil to offer daily essentials for our needs at the risk of their lives.



The Blessed Sunrise

*In a world such as this
Looking at His canvas & wonder;
Bright blue skies, tangerine delights
Iridescent springs, whistling winds
Vermillion Red on her forehead
Hues of happiness, Sunny splendor
At a stroke, it turns dark
Sunset embers, hazy winter dawns
Snowy White veil, withered season
May seem without any rhyme or reason.
Graveyard of stars, moonless night
Sadness solitude and silent tread
Don't lose faith, believe in His might
Will answer even prayers unsaid
Kaleidoscope of life turns around
From all twilights to a new dawn
With divine grace, love reborn
Carnelian amber golden skies
Gratitude; for another Sunrise*



DR. RASHMI CHOWDHARY
is a Dentist by profession and writes short stories and poems.

A Little More Gratitude!

Satnam decided that he will finish his work a bit early today and celebrate Sidak's birthday by spending time with him. He has already informed his Zomato team manager that he will not be available for delivery after 6 pm. It has been raining heavily since morning. He puts on his raincoat and bids goodbye to his son with a promise to return in time. In the torrential rain, he begins to deliver his orders, and in anticipation to receive a handsome tip from his customers, he endeavours to be punctual. It is five pm and the rain has also ceased. His phone pings— "Papa, I am waiting for you. When will you be back?" The WhatsApp of Sidak rejuvenates him— "I will reach in half an hour and there is a surprise for you, so be ready!"

Feeling ebullient, he buys Sidak's favourite Doremon cake, gifts and some snacks. After delivering the last order at 5.40 pm, he is all set to leave for home. At the eleventh hour, his manager calls him, "Satnam, there is an order. No other delivery boy is available. So you have to do the job." Reluctantly, he obliges. As he picks the order, the

heavens open unexpectedly and his face turns pale as his destination is 8 km away. Pondering over the issue of how to protect the stuff of his customer and his own, unwillingly, he takes out Sidak's cake, places it between the handles of his bike and keeps his order safely in the bag to protect it from getting wet.

On the way, he does his best to save the cake from the heavy downpour but remains unsuccessful. Finally, he finishes the toughest task of his life and rings the doorbell to hand over the order. The owner of the house receives the order, lashing at Satnam "You Zomato people are worthless. Never on time. My guests have been waiting for half an hour. I will definitely lodge a complaint against you. I am not going to give you rating at any cost." Then, he casts a glance at the paraphernalia that Satnam has handed to him and pays gratitude to God, "Thank God, everything is safe."

Satnam stands there crestfallen. He first looks at the owner, then the inveterate weather, and lastly at the dripping cardboard box containing Sidak's cake. He strives to comprehend the meaning of 'gratitude'.



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Gratitude Attracts Abundance

*Sweltering humidity makes to perspire
rains mess up coiffed hair, attire
wintery cold chaps cracks silky skin
autumn fades nature to dull brown akin*

*hospitality not at par with someone's metric
neighbors' traditions perceived apart eccentric
their accents, foods, festivals viewed archaic
fanatics' quest- uniformization in cult, horrific*

*Power hungry prey on vulnerable
control is motive behind powerful
Plenty petty to harp, gripe, doubt
overwhelming issues to war about*

*Wake up, staring humans is horror
of war, hunger, poverty, terror
homelessness, orphans, maimed, poor
up empathy toward vulnerable, O' brother*

*Bystander, passerby, ignore not injustice
comes full circle to one's door, prejudice
Endowed land, leader, free will for worshipping
mandates grateful to share the abundant blessing.*



RUPA RAO

inks poetry and stories and has contributed to local papers, e-zines, anthologies and blogsites.

In Search of Divine

Sufism is a vast ocean of mystical thought, doctrines, literature, and poetry, and a legacy of its saints



Photo credit: Syed Mohammad Qasim

Ms Rana Safvi is among India's most popular contemporary chroniclers and raconteurs. She is an award-winning writer, blogger and translator. Ms Safvi documents her passion for India's *Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb* via its food, customs, festivals, monuments and clothes. Ms Safvi is a passionate believer in India's unique civilizational legacy and pluralistic culture, which she documents through her writings, podcasts and videos. She has published nine books on the culture, history and monuments of India. These are *Tales from the Quran and Hadith* and the Delhi trilogy which includes *Where Stones Speak*, *The Forgotten Cities of Delhi* and *Shahjahanabad: The Living City of Old Delhi*. Ms Safvi has translated both the editions of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan's seminal work on Delhi, *Asar-us-Sanadid* and *Dastan-e-Ghadar*, and four accounts of 19th and 20th century Delhi from Urdu to English as *City of My Heart* and *A Saint, A Folk Tale and Other Stories: Lesser-Known Monuments of India*. She runs the popular blog ranasafvi.com.

Rhyvers Beat presents Rana Safvi in conversation with Editor-in-Chief Mr Affan Yesvi

Please tell us about the idea of Sufism, its roots and how it affects people across communities.

Sufism is a vast ocean of mystical thought, doctrines, literature, and poetry, and a legacy of its saints. The Arabic word *tasawwuf* means devoting oneself to the contemplation (of Allah) but it is generally used today, in the sense of 'a verbal noun meaning the act or process of becoming a Sufi'.¹ It is from this term that the word Sufism is derived.²

You have stated that it took you six years of research and visits to about 100 shrines and dargahs across

the country to complete the book, *In Search of the Divine: Living Histories of Sufism in India*. What were your learnings through your quest for this book?

The academic and field research for this book did take six years, as I wanted to understand and immerse myself in the subject before writing about it. I have scratched only the surface but hope it awakens a curiosity in the hearts and minds of readers to know more. My research was into finding ways in which devotees interacted with the saints in earlier centuries and with their shrines now. There were many surprises

¹ Carl W. Ernst. *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam*. Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, 2016.

² The word *tasawwuf* along with the word Sufi are taken from the root word *suf*, which means a coarse woollen cloak.

along the way. Each region and indeed at times each shrine has different meanings for its devotees. For example if in the north we go to dargahs on *nauchandi jumeraat* (first Thursday of the new moon in any Islamic month), in the Deccan devotees flock on *amavasya* (no moon). These are all described in the book.

On a personal level, this journey apart from enriching my knowledge did change me in many ways, and I hope it is for the better. I realized that unless I personally follow the principles to the best of ability, what I am writing is superficial. The lives of the saints and their sayings have helped me to hopefully learn more *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in Allah).

Your works have highlighted the undeniable yet often forgotten contributions of women in Sufism. Please tell us of their contributions in the context of south-east Asia.

Let me begin by quoting Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya: When a wild lion comes into an inhabited area from the forest, no one asks: 'Is it male or female?' Similarly, the sons of Adam, whether they be men or women, must devote themselves to obedience and piety.¹

—*Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*

Whenever there is a discussion on Sufism, it's about the men. The women are cast in the role of mothers, sisters, and daughters. Yet, we know that women made great contributions starting from Khadija bint Khuwalid, the Prophet (pbuh)'s first wife to members of his family.

In Delhi itself we have the shrine of Bibi Fatima Sam or Samina, she was the *pir-bahen* (spiritual sister) of Baba Farid and his brother Sheikh Najibuddin Mutawakkil. When there was nothing in the house for him to eat, she would send him some bread. She would say, 'The saints will cast away both worldly and religious

blessings to give a piece of bread or a drink of water to someone in need. This state is something one cannot obtain by one hundred thousand fasts and prayers.'³

Her shrine is visited by many women who go to pray there for their children. Similarly Bibi Zuleikha popularly known as Mai Sahiba, the mother of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Her influence on her son is deep and profound. Whenever there was no food in the house, Mai Sahib would tell her son, 'Nizamuddin! Today, we are guests of God.'⁴

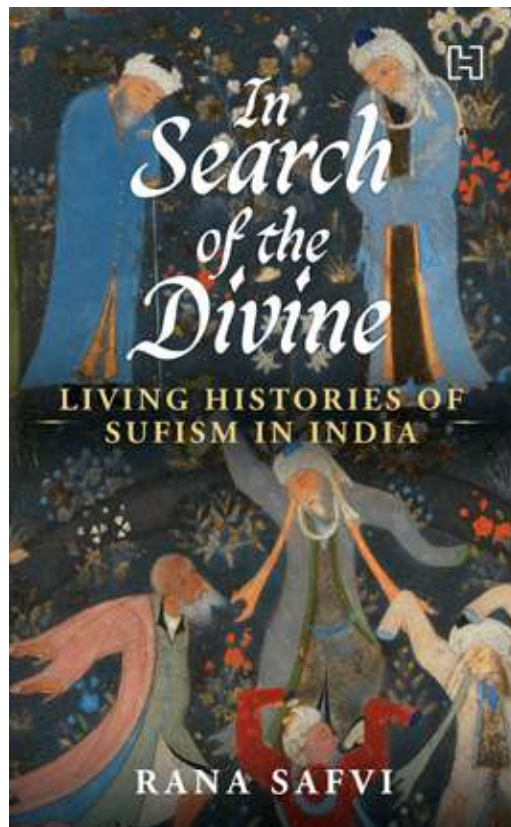
She had total faith in God's will, and she taught her children that what mattered was that He would send them spiritual nourishment, which differed from worldly food but was more fulfilling.

Then of course we have Jahanara Begum (1614–1681), daughter of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. She was also a devotee of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti and wrote his highly acclaimed Persian biography titled *Mu'nis al-Arwāh*. Whenever she visited the dargah of Khwaja Muinuddin Chisti, she would offer prayers of gratitude at every step – all the way from the gateway to the shrine. She got a beautiful Begumi *dalan* (Begum's courtyard) added to the shrine.

There is Babajan, an Afghan lady who relocated to Pune when she was very old. Born in Afghanistan in an aristocratic family and named Gulrukh in the early part of nineteenth century, she died in Pune in 1931. Her shrine is very popular.

Annemarie Schimmel mentions a Bubu Rasti (d. 1620), living in Burhanpur, India, who was an expert in interpreting medieval Persian mystical texts, especially the works of Fakhruddin Iraqi whose *Lamaat* (flashes) – a small book of poetry mixed with prose, it charmingly elucidates several Ibn al-Arabi stories and ranks amongst the finest works we have a mystical love.'⁵

Prof Azizuddin Hussain mentions three women Sufis of the seventeenth century who were made



³ Helminski, Women of Sufism.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Annemarie Schimmel. My Soul is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam. Translated by Susan H. Hay. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1997.

khalifas by their spiritual masters. Shaikh Ilahbadi Sambhali Naqshbandi (d. 1650) appointed his *murid* Bibi Dola his *khalifa*. Saiyed Shah Abdul Hasan Qadri Kankali gave *khilafat* to Bibi Asmatun Nisa, while Bibi Khaki Shan became the *sajjada nasheen* of her brother Shair Ali Shah Darwaish, who gave her all his responsibilities.⁶

However, we find mention of very few women Sufi saints of South Asia as compared to their male counterparts or their records have been lost to us.

About your book, 'In Search of the Divine...', it has been stated that this unique treatise examines core Sufi beliefs and uncovers why they might offer hope for the future. Please tell us about these core Sufi beliefs.

The core belief to the best of my understanding, apart from the emphasis on the 5 pillars of Islam and shariah are 'ihsan', 'iman' and 'akhlaq' emulating the practices of the Holy Prophet and the futuwah of Ali ibn Abi Talib.

On being asked what *ihsan* is, the Prophet Muhammad said, '*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not achieve this state of devotion, then (take it for granted that) Allah sees you.'⁷ For Sufis, *ihsan* is a high goal reached when they are so absorbed in their prayers that they feel the presence of the divine with every breath they take. It also translates in service to God's creation by doing beautiful deeds. In fact, after submission to Allah, *ihsan* and *iman* (attainment of complete faith) are the two most important aspects of devotion.

Akhlaq or exemplary character traits. As the personification of virtue, Prophet Muhammad states in a hadith, 'I was sent to perfect good character,'⁸ and to guide humans as they make decisions about right or wrong so that they may reach their full potential.

All the Sufi saints practiced these in the tradition of the Holy Prophet, pbuh.

The blurb on your book says this work delves into the fascinating roots of Sufism, with its emphasis on ihsan, iman and akhlaq, and the impact it continues to have on people from all communities. What are these fascinating terms? What is their impact?

The terms are explained above. The impact of this was that the saints showed the way by their personal examples thus setting standards for their disciples. It is this service to humans which is the most beautiful aspect of Sufism.

One of your works, 'Tears of the Begums', is stated to be the English translation of Khwaja Hasan Nizami's Urdu book 'Begumat ke Aansoo'. It is stated that the book chronicles the turning of the wheel of fortune in the aftermath of India's first war of independence. Please tell us more about this intriguing work.

This book documents 29 stories of the survivors of the Uprising of 1857, collected by Khwaja Hasan Nizami from the survivors themselves. It is a path breaking book and gained much popularity in the Khwaja's lifetime itself because while we know about the Mughal ruler and some of the important nobles, attention was never paid to the thousands of Mughal men and women who were uprooted from the Red Fort in the aftermath of 1857. While some were killed many had to flee and lead ignominious lives, unsung, unwept.

Some of your works are said to be an exploration of Sufism as a rigorous discipline. At a common level, Sufism is regarded to be a gentle, lyrical pursuit of the Divine marked by surrender of the ego and the self. What makes it a rigorous discipline?

I have used the word 'rigorous' in the sense of arduous and demanding.

Today, a layperson connects Sufism either to a shrine or music. However, becoming a Sufi is not easy. It may seem easy and lyrical but is a very difficult path with four stages of shariah, tariqa, haqeeqat and marifat. Very few of those who take oaths of allegiance to a Sufi master make it to the last two stages. It is a rigorous meditative discipline casting aside ego and immersing oneself in complete contemplation of the Divine, requires great self-discipline. We all know of the chillahs of Baba Farid who prayed in difficult circumstances for 40 days at a stretch, oblivious to his physical needs.

⁶ S. M. Azizuddin Hussain. Sufis of Punjab: A Biographical Study. Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 2021.

⁷ Hadith of the Prophet, Sahih al-Bukhari, 4777.

⁸ 'Sahih (Al-Albani), Book 14, Hadith 273; Sunnah.com. <https://sunnah.com/urn/2302710>.

SPARK SESSIONS



IGNITING CREATIVITY

An innovative and curated lecture series was organized by Rhyvers Group to ignite creativity among youth. Mr Affan Yesvi, Director, Rhyvers Media Group and Dr. Sonika Sethi, Executive Editor, Rhyvers Beat addressed students of various colleges in Haryana including Govt. P.G. College, Ambala Cantt., Govt. Girls College, Ambala City, D.A.V. College, Ambala City and Govt. P.G. College for Girls, Sector 14, Panchkula.

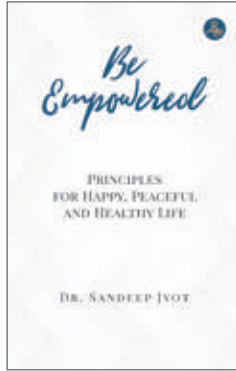
Mr. Yesvi urged the students to develop their creative and storytelling skills, and build a new identity as writers and poets. Dr. Sethi discussed the art and nuances of 'storytelling'. More than 1,000 students participated in the lecture series. The students and the faculty members highly appreciated these sessions.



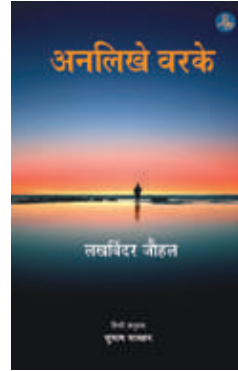
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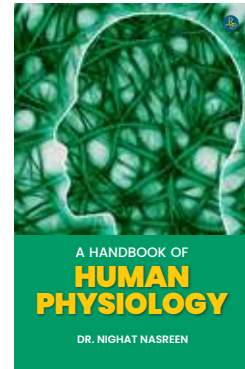
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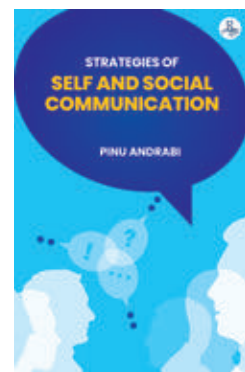
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