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Womanhood

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FROM THE DESK OF GROUP EDITOR

The word “Woman” has been defined over the ages, since the creation of the universe, in various ways and yet - no single statement has been successful in drawing a complete picture of it satisfactorily. Why?

Is it so difficult to understand this beautiful embodiment of emotions and sentiments OR is the collection of words in the dictionaries of the world insufficient to describe the unfathomable strength and limitless roles that a woman plays during her independent existence as also her individual contribution to the administration of all co-related activities?

No doubt, life itself needs to be celebrated but the important contributors to living need to also be identified, acknowledged and their achievements celebrated.

In celebration of the ‘International Women’s Day’ on 8th of March - this issue of Rhyvers Beat has been dedicated to ‘WOMANHOOD’ and our esteemed contributors have presented their heartfelt images of ‘woman’ in innumerable strokes.

I sign off with warm wishes as I indulge in thinking :
how would the world be without women?

Affan Yesvi
Affan Yesvi



RHYVERS BEAT

Inviting contributions for the next edition of our magazine,
slated to be published in April 2024

Theme

Colours of Life

Send your original contributions in the form of

Short Story (550 words max)

Essay (750 words max)

Poems (20 lines max)

Flash fiction, Artwork, Photo Essays

Book / Movie Reviews

Graffiti etc

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CONTENTS

Sisters In Stride by <i>Aafreen Kotadiya</i>	4
Womenhood An Ode by <i>Sandra Joseph</i>	5
To Be Or Not To Be by <i>Mugdha</i>	6-7
Unveiling Brilliance: Protraits of Women... by <i>Trijit Mukherjee</i>	8
My Mom Speaketh by <i>Kusuma M</i>	9
A Pearl of Wisdom by <i>Shobana Gomes</i>	10
Born Free by <i>Ayushi Soni</i>	11
Unaccomplished Life by <i>Dr. Reshmi S</i>	12
What Makes You A Woman by <i>Apeksha G Tirlapur</i>	13
Women, A Power by <i>Dr. Ramandeep Saini</i>	14
Home Sweet Home by <i>Chitra Khosla</i>	15
The Renewal by <i>Sushmindarjeet Kaur</i>	16
Shakespeare's Sister by <i>Sonia Chauhan</i>	17
Diabolical Burdens by <i>Mutahira Yaseen</i>	18
A Tendril Not So Tender by <i>Parminder Soni</i>	19
Woman Of Substance by <i>Dr Suruchi Aditya</i>	20
Gifted by <i>Gurleen Sandhu</i>	21
Menstruation Festivals by <i>Sayanti Mandal</i>	22
Scent of a Woman by <i>Anu Girdhar</i>	23
A True Wonder by <i>Preeti Lolla</i>	24
Book Review of The Albatross Around	25
My Neck by <i>Narinderjit Kaur</i>	



SISTERS IN STRIDE

In the echoes of struggles, a melody plays,
Notes of perseverance, in myriad ways.
Bearing burdens with grace, like flowers in the rain,
Womanhood is a masterpiece, bound by pain.

From ancient whispers to modern roars,
The spirit of womanhood steadfastly soars.
Triumphs etched in constellations above,
Resilience, the anthem of the mothers we love.

In the chalice of history, tears have been shed,
Yet, from the ashes, strength has been bred.
Through battles and victories, a phoenix rises,
Womanhood thrives, embracing all sizes.

Courage like a river, flowing deep and wide,
Nurturing the roots, where dreams abide.
Gathered are the echoes of suffragettes' cries,
A melody of freedom beneath the endless skies.

So here's to the women, past and present,
A tale so woven, intricate and pleasant.
May our voices resonate, strengthen, harmonize,
In the grand melody of our ever-triumphant rise.



Dr. Aafreen Kotadiya is an M.D. in Immunohematology and Transfusion Medicine from Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai. She is the Editor-in-Chief of The Times of Youth, an international e-magazine.

Womanhood An Ode

In the realm where strength and grace converge,
Breathes the essence of Womanhood's urge.
She's a tempest, gentle as morning dew,
A cosmic force, yet ethereal, she's true.

Her body, a vessel of sacred power,
Nurturing life in every passing hour.
Evoking beauty with every step, every glance,
A celestial dance, she does entrance.

Her spirit, a force that withstands the test,
A universe of secrets, forever blessed.
With fierce compassion, she mends every scar,
Fighting battles, both near and afar.

In her silence, echoes a symphony untold,
Stories of triumph, courage and love unfold.
For she is the poet, the artist, the sage,
The embodiment of wisdom in every age.

Womanhood, a tapestry, vibrant and grand,
Woven with threads of strength and demand.
A masterpiece of beauty, resilience untamed,
Her presence, an ode, forever acclaimed.



Sandra Joseph

is a Post-graduate in English
and hails from Thodupuzha,
Idukki, Kerala.

To Be OR NOT To Be

Just like any other day, Maya was dealing with her law firm's routine affairs. She was delighted the way her conversations were shaping up with Anusar. They had only met recently at one of the book launch events in the city. She was browsing through the poetry books when Anusar nudged her with another famous poetry piece.

Surprisingly annoyed by a strange person's approach yet enchanted by his courage to connect in today's world of social media, Maya dared to be herself.

Anusar recited a piece as if he had been rehearsing it for days. Without hesitation, he asked her out for coffee. She realized that she had gone with the flow without putting much thought to it.

They met the next day, bonded over their love for literature and movies, and felt an eternal connection. They started meeting more frequently and their conversations flowed with hints of care and concern. She felt a constant need to be with him in every passing moment of his absence.

Her life of monotonous compromise with flawed companionship was now transforming. Their meetings left her with a mix of hope and distrust owing to her past experiences.





Mugdha

is a lawyer by profession and hails from Chandigarh where she is the managing partner of a multinational Immigration Law Firm.

They often discussed their insecurities and challenges. By opening up to each other, a deeper understanding started to bloom. He seemed like a real person to her, and he constantly insisted on back-walking moments to avoid any complications. Maya, a woman who knew her mind, had no interest in meeting someone like Anusar, an unknown author awaiting recognition. Despite doubts about his intentions and the contemporary trends in relationships, she gave their interactions a chance. His practical nature had a romantic side that Maya found irresistible, and she was falling for him.

Their gentle footsteps, unblemished by the world's menace, took their time when he invited her to spend an evening together. She was scared, but this time, she decided to be fearless and let her heart out.

That night, amidst discussions, he initiated something. However, she abruptly shut down the moment of sweetness as if something from her past had filled her with fear. She was tired of societal norms that dictated her actions and decisions. She confidently made her choices yet was nervous that she would be misunderstood on the scale of virtuous behaviour. This time again, she could not be herself.

She un-attracted him that night, while questioning her actions in light of the traditional values and upbringing. Maya acknowledged the turbulence between her desires and societal norms. Perhaps it would have been helpful if Anusar had attempted to persuade her otherwise. Unfortunately, he didn't.

She bled tears that night, of the deep pain she was experiencing and wrote,

I aspire to a love that transcends those narrow binary norms of the world. I don't intend to fetch anything, but pure companionship of two souls. It's time for society to broaden its perspective and recognize that emotions could go beyond just lust.

If any union ever happens to be, all desires will unfold,
Just companionship's warmth,
which seems like a tale retold,
Beyond the surface of me and you,
we gaze,
The depth of connection is what
I seek and a little space.

Love
Maya

UNVEILING BRILLIANCE: PORTRAITS OF WOMANHOOD

A girl is born, her parents are happy,
They see her as a goddess, while society deems her crappy.
In her laughter, they glimpse a future bright,
Yet whispers of judgment cast shadows in the night.
But she'll rise like the sun, with resilience in her eyes,
Proving her worth beneath vast, endless skies.
In the depth of her soul, resilience blooms,
She's a woman growing, dispelling all glooms.
Empowerment, instead of judging her vanity, finds her powerful,
She nurtures her dreams and becomes successful.
In the sisterhood's embrace, she becomes the people's voice,
In womanhood's essence, she makes her own choice.
While Shakespeare labels Lady Macbeth a toxic creature,
She reads Wollstonecraft and Woolf, shaping her legislature.
She's a woman now, breaking society's circle,
Motherhood is her nature, and caring is her sonority.
Proudly her daughter and son stand, symbols of attribution,
Her husband supports her, once his inspiration.
Her parents now see the light, a glimpse of sovereignty,
This woman is now an icon, bringing social equality.



Trijit Mukherjee
hails from West Bengal
and is the author of a
chapbook *Life in an
Aquarium*.

MY MOM SPEAKETH

Run around wildly
You may never find solace,
Here I am all yours, at the corner
To soothe your eyes as well as
Your Soul... harm no more.

Be my loveable kid
I can take you to heights,
Known marvels of Nature which
Spread everywhere, blindfolded...
Raise to realise... fall no more.

The Eden's garden cherished
Lifelong, meant to train the inner
Treasure, count my tears to learn
Patience, read my wrinkles to unlearn
The Web.. .doom no more !!



Kusuma M is working as an Associate Professor of English at the Government First Grade College for Women, Holenarasipura Karnataka. She has published her three collections of poems in Kannada.



A Pearl of WISDOM

I thought the world was my oyster
Until I learned that oysters lived in a shell,
And formed pearls, priceless, in seclusion.
The sands camouflage the oysters,
Within, the pearl, their clasp,
Wary of the dangers from men,
Who might they be that steal from the bosom
of their crest?
Alas, what does it benefit the sand,
When the pearl is left hidden,
And has no worth if unseen,
By the men who seek priceless treasures?
One day, I saw a shiny white pearl,
Glistening under the bright rays of the sun,
Oh, I thought, even the rays shine
their radiance,
Upon seeing the magnificent
setting of a lost pearl.

The shell lay forgotten and lost its presence,
Even with the sands that once hid them,
The tides would wash them away,
To be hidden again from the eyes of men,
Who now see them as hollow and worthless.
Didn't they once camouflage the beauty of
the white pearl?
I decided to wear it around my neck,
The pearl I thought precious enough,
To radiate my world with beauty and bril-
liance,
And make me a lady refined.
Isn't that the way of a woman?
To radiate the world with beauty,
And bring forth the ways of the
pearl,
To touch and refine the lives
of those around them.



Shobana Gomes
is a poet and writer
from Malaysia. Her
books include- *A
Christmas Duet* and
Where the Rain Falls.

BORN FREE

In a society yearning for freedom, Bondita stood between tradition and rebellion. Her letter to her husband became evidence of infidelity and broken promises.

She took one last look at her home, starting with their bedroom where she lived for four years. She was now a 19-year-old woman. Memories flooded her- she waited all day to talk to him, and outdated ideas of her role as a woman drove her away.

She went to the small library, her refuge, and remembered to hide the books to protect her precious shelter. Closing the door, she descended into the kitchen, where each neatly arranged dish blew away the chaos inside. As she cooked what might be her last meal, she recalled how her mother-in-law was ruthless with her culinary skills. Learning too young and forcing her to become the perfect wife of a 30-year-old man whom she was scared to talk to, and whom she couldn't accept as her husband.

One night she went to bed hungry as she was told to eat only after her husband. Yet, the same mother-in-law refused to starve a man whom she almost

did not accept and who enjoyed eating without the chains of her love around.

She did everything to impress him and still didn't know the meaning of what her mother-in-law used to guide her. The day he asked her to not bother him and confessed that he was in love with someone else and this marriage was nothing but a favour, she cried as if the delusion had slapped her and her heart was broken into pieces that couldn't be joined.

Sitting in the courtyard, she wrote a letter, strategically covering his antagonism. Clutching the stolen key to her freedom, she approached the door, her heart pounding. Once outside, she embraced an unfamiliar world, witnessing a journey to freedom, but considering the plight of women and denying them their rights.

As she hit the walk, she felt a new fire ignite inside her. Leaving the past behind, she embarked on a journey to live on her terms, guided by the rallying cry of the crowd passing by..."VandeMataram".

(The backdrop of the story is set in the pre-independence era)



Ayushi Soni

is a dedicated news writer and literary researcher. She holds a Master's degree in English and hails from Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

Unaccomplished Life

My life positioned and circumscribed
Dominated by hegemony and ideology
Redirected are my wishes and desires
Engulfed within dictates of rules and laws
Journey from child to girl,
Girl to woman is beyond prediction.

My life muddled with uncertainties
Conditioned by society, bothered by family
Dreams are crushed; forgotten on a page
Can dreams be revisited or revived?
Gone are the longings crushed within the imprints of memory
Little scope for recalling or cherishing.

My life with passivity and submissiveness
Rarely echoes from the dark corner of mind
“Is this womanhood?”- locating oneself within kitchen
Greasy appearance suits her to the narrow realm
An echo from mind- “I am powerless, voiceless”
Cannot carve an identity.

My life in void and vacuum, abandoned by yearnings
I too become one of the stereotyped women in the archives.



Dr. Reshmi S is working as an Assistant Professor at MES Asmabi College, Kodungallur, Kerala. She is a reviewer of the ATRAS journal of Saida University, Algeria.

WHAT MAKES YOU A WOMAN?

Prompter than my period blood, comes a prescription every month disguised as a women's magazine, a glittery version of things heard even in my sleep from people known and unknown alike, the precious: unsolicited advice!

Womanhood seems like a disease never fully cured, even with its experts all around. From Holy books to Instagram, it's a goddamn list of What Makes You a Woman. Head to toe, inside out—so sick of having my “flaws” pointed out.

Heavy is this humanness. And womanhood . . . heavier still. What really is it that makes me a woman? I wonder as I drift off tonight

until the roar of a thousand whispers shakes me awake, far as my women ancestors spake

'This be for every woman to know: what makes you a

woman is your choice alone.

It matters not the length of your hair or your dress, but that of your battle; not the size of your breasts, but that of your heart . . . forget what they said of how a woman is supposed to sit. You are a woman and however you sit is the way a woman sits. That's all there is to it!

All that jewelry might add to your charms, but you are the ornament this Earth adorns. Someday they will see you so, beyond the marital and maternal chore.

But until then, remember this—you're a woman nevertheless.

Much divinity and resilience you inherit, but what makes you a woman above

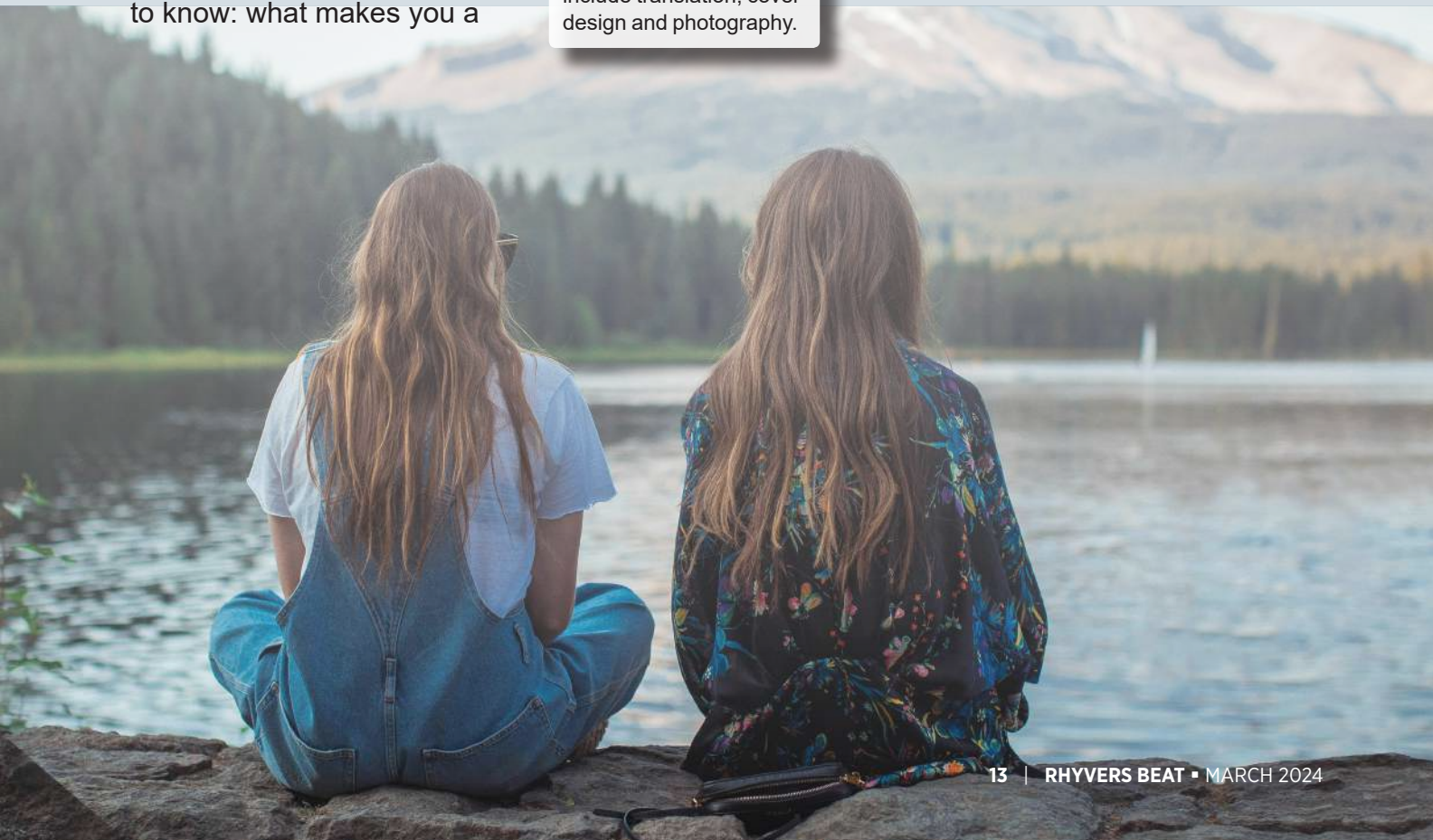
all else is your fated becoming of the eternal fact that none else has half a

right to tell a woman what makes her a woman.'



Apeksha G Tirlapur

is from Dharwad, Karnataka and is a student of MA (English) from Symbiosis College, Pune. Her interests also include translation, cover-design and photography.



WOMAN, A POWER

She is a unique and special gift
to mankind

Stays strong despite worries in
her mind

Marriage makes her live two
lives, and set priorities.

Who can realise the pain of her
insecurities?

She transforms and tries to
come to expectations

Portrays her role in the drama
of life, a God's creation.

Forgets herself amidst concern
for her loved ones

Entangled between threads of
duty and what she shuns.

Oh, lady! What a strength and
persona you possess

Holding it all inside, you face
the world and caress.

Get up and unleash your

power, talent, charisma

Show them you can absorb
and fight the stigma.

SHE has HE and never asks
for special rights

Rather equal rights to show
and prove her might.

Give her wings and space
without boundaries

See the great impossible
wonders happening

Let her resilience shine and the
grace she portrays

Happy Women's Day today
and every day!



Dr. Ramandeep Saini is the Director-Principal at Chandigarh Business School of Administration (CBSA), Dean of International Affairs at the Chandigarh Group of Colleges (CGC), Mohali (Punjab)



HOME SWEET HOME

“Maa.. Arjun bhaiya has broken my doll’s house” Tanya wailed. Maa consoled her without reprimanding Arjun “You can make a new one...” “Maa.. but it’s not easy ..” she sulked.

While growing up Tanya realised the disparities and privileges between her and Arjun. Arjun announced, “Maa, I am going to a party tonight.” The rumble of the engine roared as he started his bike.

“Maa ...Can I go to Rita’s to finish our project?” Tanya requested.

“No... you finish your work here, it’s not allowed in my house. You get married, go to your house and do whatever you like.” Baba’s heavy voice echoed.

After graduation, Tanya harboured ambition for higher studies but again a familiar voice refrained “I have educated you enough, now you go to your own house...”

Marriage came swiftly a decision driven by Baba’s desire to relieve himself of his responsibilities. Upon entering the new house her heart swelled with excitement.

“Finally this is my own house.”

She meticulously decorated it, cooked with love and lived in her newfound autonomy. “I want to paint our room blue,” she told her husband Ajit.

“No, let it remain yellow as I like” pat came a rude reply crumbling her illusion of freedom.

The birth of her daughter Ananya came as a fleeting respite, her laughter like a melody danced in Tanya’s heart. Yet even this joy was tinged with sorrow as Ajit started coming home late drunk. She tried addressing the issue. “If you want to live in my house, you have to adjust or leave” was his blunt reply. One day she cooked all her favourite dishes and waited for

Ajit. Her mouth was salivated by the aroma of food. Ajit came and sat on the table frowning at the food “Can I have food of my choice in my house.” Throwing the food away he shouted. Tears rolled down her cheeks. So, this was also not her home. With this realisation, her heart shattered like a glass against stone. It was her mistake to seek her dream home from others. Determined to carve her destiny she packed her bags and decided to leave. “You crazy woman, You would repent your decision. Once you leave, the doors of my house are closed for you forever, remember” Ajit warned.

“I...I just want to find my own home.” She sobbed holding Ananya in her lap.

The journey ahead was hard but Tanya was relentless. She took a job in a school and pursued civil services. Three years later, she stood triumphant, as Deputy Commissioner in her hometown. Her arrival at the office was met with a surprising revelation— the keys to her new house. “-Madam these are the keys of your new house. I will make all the necessary arrangements” her secretary spoke oblivious to the impact of his words.

She held the keys in her hands and repeated “My house.”

“Yes ma’am...” the puzzled secretary nodded.

“Can you get it painted in blue?” she checked reluctantly.

“Of course, whatever you like, it’s your house” he replied with great delight.

Tanya beheld her own home with a heart brimming with contentment. “Ananya, this is our home yours and mine forever,” she whispered in her daughter’s ears, a promise echoing the strength of a woman who forged her own home from the shards of shattered dreams.



Chitra Khosla

is an author based in Hyderabad.



The Renewal

It's whispered and professed
You are free and liberated,
unshackled, unregimented
and untied; but is it true?

Of course, we are propelled
hither to create, recreate
and merge our beings
But that's all that is expected.
And the pleasures,
the happiness have been
robbed, drained and stripped,
With the purport of equipping
and furnishing only.

We are the shelves: the steps,
ridges and layers,
The solid rocks plus pillars upon
which the
pedestal of the home is kept,
And lifting and elevating the
weight of the dwelling
we become insignificant and
feeble,
Hollow and void, replete with an
emptiness;
crack and snap sometimes,
Trying to preserve all and
everything, steady,

stable and exhibiting a balance
Although it hurts yet who knows
the ache?

The wounds within; the vacuum
beneath the jam-packed
shelf, the surface-happiness-
laden visage,
Only the outer cloak is
discernible and we are perfect
at hiding our distresses
Though tormented yet celebrate;
become voiceless as no shrieks
are even taken notice of.

We are thrown and deposed, but
only
to gather ourselves again,
Only to mark us present, only to
be strong yet again;
Rising daily from the dead, after
many deaths, blows, hits and
knocks of lifespan,
After we deny to bow our heads
and bend ourselves down;

Yes, we rise once more and
emerge like a Phoenix.
Reborn and resurrected with a
new faith, desire and renewal.



Sushmindarjeet Kaur

is an Associate Professor
& Head P.G. Dept. of English,
G.G.N. Khalsa College, Ludhiana,
Punjab. Her collection of poems is
titled-*Voices from Within* and *The
Tapestry of Heartstrings*.

SHAKESPEARE'S SISTER

Virginia Woolf says if Shakespeare had a sister,
she'd be mending the hem of his shirt
as he sat down to write another marvel.
Weekly walks along Avon to Stratford's baker
would make up her entire life's travel.

I'm told times have changed and
the walls display some jargon about
equality. But deadlines loom; layovers throttle,
In the middle of it, a woman goes to bed
every month clutching a hot water bottle.

Now, she learns and then she earns.
She rushes up and down in pulleys of glass,
So she can tell you that finally, she succeeds.
But the dishes await and so do the kids.
A woman of today is a man who bleeds.

She's supposed to work-it, go-get-it,
Walk the mile with the widest of smiles
But her toes, they twist in her baby blue stilettos.
You want her to bend and receive
But your will to provide is an innuendo.

Inside every fold of her flesh, a woman has
countless buttons. Many of which are
reserved only to be pushed by the Gods.
she endures in the castle of conflicted encores,
A human to have it all, what are the odds?

But she's got left that one last nerve
And she will use it to dance on your stage.
She will nod her head and shake her skirts
It's not about you and she's not here to subvert.
It's fate; nobody passes through life unhurt.



Sonia Chauhan
is a professional
writer and the
author of an
award-winning
novella,
*The Maze of
Mirrors*.

NAVIGATING WOMANHOOD OVERCOMING DIABOLICAL BURDENS

Throughout history, women have confronted a myriad of challenges, from societal expectations to systemic inequalities. Despite strides towards gender equality, the journey of womanhood remains riddled with obstacles and biases. As a woman born into a seemingly open-minded family, I found myself grappling with the subtle yet profound manifestations of gender discrimination. From childhood to adulthood, the burden of being female pervaded every aspect of my existence.

In my formative years, I encountered the pervasive notion that my gender was a hindrance, a liability that could potentially impede my success. Despite assurances of equal opportunity, the implicit biases embedded within societal norms became increasingly apparent. While my family preached empowerment, the disparity in treatment between my brother and me spoke volumes. The seemingly innocuous act of favoring my brother with an extra sweet at dinner underscored the subtle ways in which gender roles were reinforced within the household.

As I delved into feminist literature, finding solace in Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," I realized that physical space was just one facet of autonomy. True independence extended beyond mere physical boundaries; it encompassed the freedom to pursue one's aspirations unhindered by gender-based constraints. Yet, even as I yearned for autonomy, I found my aspirations curtailed by societal and family expectations.

The disparities became glaringly evident as I reached adolescence. While my brother's boundaries extended beyond the confines of our backyard, mine remained restricted, ostensibly for my own good. The discrepancy in freedoms bestowed upon us based on gender highlighted the deeply

ingrained patriarchal norms that permeated our society.

Mutahira Yaseen
is a student at Christ
University, Bengaluru.

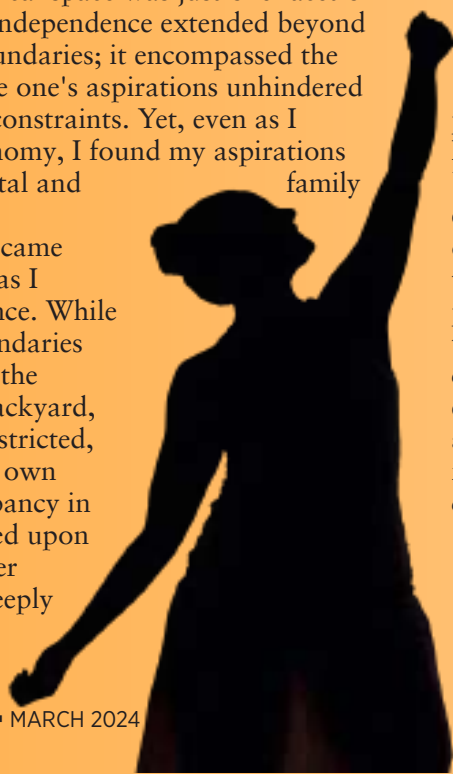
Education, often touted as the great equalizer, proved to be yet another battleground for gender equality. Despite academic pursuits being visibly open to all, the division of labour

within the household perpetuated disparities. While my mother toiled away in the kitchen, my father relished in leisurely conversations with guests. The unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities mirrored broader societal inequities, reinforcing the notion that women's labour was undervalued and taken for granted.

Even as opportunities for higher education beckoned, I found myself confronted with barriers erected under the guise of protection. While my brother was afforded the freedom to pursue his studies in a distant city, I was coerced into selecting a college closer to home. The rationale provided—for my own safety and well-being—underscored the pervasive fear that permeated society regarding women's autonomy and mobility.

Upon finally gaining the opportunity to study in a different city, I was met with yet another manifestation of gender-based discrimination—the stark contrast in curfews between male and female hostels. The arbitrary imposition of early curfews on female students, justified by concerns for our safety, only served to further entrench gendered power dynamics.

In navigating the complexities of womanhood, I've been confronted with the harsh reality that gender equality remains an elusive goal. Despite progress, deeply ingrained societal norms and biases continue to perpetuate disparities and hinder women's full participation in all spheres of life. However, it is through acknowledging and confronting these challenges that we pave the way towards a more equitable future. As we continue to challenge antiquated norms and advocate for change, we inch closer towards a world where womanhood is celebrated, not constrained by diabolical burdens.





A TENDRIL NOT SO TENDER

A tender tendril twirls and curls
Embracing its stem with grace
Yet, when it breaks, it tethers on
With a tight grip in another place
Growth.... goes on!

With strength akin to iron's might
O woman, your spirit soars
In love, you nurture, fiercely protect
A doting Maa, the offspring adores
Verve and nerve you don!

Your love, a beacon, shines so bright
For Ma-Pa, a tender dove
A partner's heart, you tenderly hold
You, multifaceted, diamond in gold!
Luster....Full on!

Not just angelic, but a force to reckon
With grit, you face life's call
A soft core wrapped in armor strong
You turn hell's flames to heaven's thrall
A force to reckon.... fragility gone!!



**Parminder
Soni**

lives in
Chandigarh and
has three books
to her credit.

Woman of Substance

When you
Loved your man unconditionally
Yet conveyed him a 'no' means 'no';
Nursed your in-laws to health
Yet showed them you need 'me time'.

Expressed your tender love for kids
Yet drilled and disciplined them to prepare for life;
Gave up the career ladder to raise your children
Yet created your own 'identity' in a man's world.

Cooked healthy food for the family
Yet ordered 'takeaways' to allow yourself rest;
Oiled the wheels of the joint family
Yet started the trend of solo trips and solo
marriage.

Taught the world that sharing is caring
Yet fought for empowerment and justice;
Struggled to define the 'beaYOUtiful' you
Yet tread the fine line between 'traditional'
and 'modern'.

Smiled through your tears, yet held back
tears through your smile,
You became.... A Woman of Substance.



Dr Suruchi Aditya
works as a senior lecturer
in Dr HSJ Institute of Dental
Sciences, Panjab University,
Chandigarh. She is the
co-author of the book *Install
antivirus in your Heartware*.

Gifted

Women before me
Had gone through a lot,
For me, to have my voice.

Their birth, a mourning ceremony.
Existence, a thing to be caged.
Their throats were strangled,
Bones crushed, hearts made numb
With violence.
With oppression.
They bore the curses.
Bore the brutal remarks.
Bore everything, alone.
Mocked for having dreams,
They had two houses, but no home.
An ornament of family,
A selling object in marriage.
A vessel to cook pleasure in and,
To make something out of it, eventually.
They were tortured.
Silenced.
Women without voice,
Became women without lives.

Women before me
Had gone through a lot,
To give me this voice.
To give me the power to be fearless.
To give me this rage and freedom.
To be kind.



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INDIAN RITUALS CELEBRATING WOMANHOOD

MENSTRUATION FESTIVALS

India is a country which has different religions and races across several parts. All religions have their distinctive places of worship, Gods and traditions. Generally, the rituals are performed by women who are considered to be perfect for these roles. Not only do women perform the rituals but they are themselves connected to the rituals.

Many rituals in India celebrate womanhood. One of the most significant issues related to women is Menstruation. Menstruation is a natural biological process that has been the subject of a wide range of taboos and rites. Many conceptions-positive and negative- have evolved regarding menstruation but the festivals related to menstruation have become a part of our social lives.

The onset of menstruation marks the attainment of womanhood and maturity. The first phase of a girl's life—adolescence to puberty- is important as a girl goes through many psychological and biological changes. The four-day menstruation cycle is honoured as a cultural event in many Hindu rituals.

Menstruation marks the transition from girlhood to womanhood and the attainment of the stage of fertility. The festival "Ambubachi" is celebrated with great arrangement in Assam. The word "Ambubachi" is derived from the Sanskrit word "Ambuvaci" which means 'Goddess'. This festival is widely popularized in India celebrating the menstruation of Goddess 'Kamakhya', believed to be the Genital Goddess. It is assumed that the genital organ of 'Sati' had fallen. However, it also signifies the menstruation of the entire Mother Earth. Usually, "Ambubachi" is celebrated on the 7th day of the month of Ashara every year. During this time, the temple remains closed for three days and an enormous mela is organised.

Mother Earth is considered unclean during the menstrual cycle and it is believed that Mother Earth is a fertile woman capable of germinating seeds and cultivating crops. It is for this reason that a woman's womb is compared to 'Kshetra' for cultivation. The festival is known by its different names

such as 'Amthi-sua', 'Amoti' and 'Ambabati'.

Another significant tradition of Assam related to puberty is "TuloniBiya". The festival celebrates a girl's journey to womanhood. The ceremony is performed seven days after a girl reaches puberty.

"Raja Festival" of Orissa is also popular since the Middle Ages. The festival marks an agricultural break and worship ceremony for Bhudevi, wife of Lord Jagannath. The word 'Raja' originates from 'Rajaswala' meaning a menstruating woman. It is celebrated in mid-June for four days considering the menstruating span of the fertile Mother Earth. All agricultural work remains suspended for four days. The villagers organize a joyous celebration to welcome the monsoon season, the season of cultivation.

"Ritu Kala Samskara" is a festival celebrated in South India when a girl passes through her first menstruation. When a girl begins to bleed, a separate room is arranged for her and relatives and friends gift her a saree as a part of this festival. On the last day, a bath ceremony is performed by the girl's mother and other female relatives.

Another notable festival of Kerala and Karnataka related to menstruation is 'Keddassa' or 'Tulu Festival'. This festival is also associated with the annual fertility season of Mother Earth.

It is believed that Mother Earth goes through an annual menstrual period and after that, the world will bear crops and fruits.

The idea of menstruation is ideally celebrated in Kerala. The festival is known as "Thriputharattu Festival". Every month, the idol of Goddess Parvati is believed to be menstruating. So, the idol is shifted to a hidden room for three days until the menstruating cycle is over, and an elephant is brought to the river for a ceremonial bath.

It is reflected via festivals that menstruation is a symbol of creation and women are an essential part of society. After all, the period as a symbol of production reflected through festivals forms an essential aspect of Indian Culture.



Sayanti Mandal
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S C E N E OF A WOMAN

Quiet, poised,
Unafraid or unapologetically herself,
Being strong when things go wrong
Or inherently born with strength,
Strong enough to stand alone
Yet smart enough to know when she needs help.
She doesn't play the victim,
She gets up and deals with the facts.
She is not defined by the opinions of others,
What she should be as a woman is defined by herself.
She knows how to celebrate her womanhood.
By wearing colourful clothes, bold makeup,
Interest in beauty and fashion doesn't
minimize her intellect.



Anu Girdhar is Professor and HOD In National Dental College in Punjab. She is the author of the books-*As the life unfolds*, *Heartstrings* and *Benevolence*.

A TRUE WONDER!

This pulchritude,
With that ray of hope,
Leading us to our very own existence,
The epitome of love and purity,
Symbolic of innumerable sacrifices,
The guiding light,
The torchbearer,
The no-nonsense persona,
Always on duty, while,
Never letting her guards down,
She might be fragile,
She might be lost,
She might be tearing up,
Yet, she is never deterred,
Truly, a clean-cut wonder!



Preeti Lolla
is a Software
Professional writes
on platforms like
StoryMirror, Quora,
Mirakee and Terribly
Tiny Tales.



BOOK REVIEW

'THE ALBATROSS AROUND MY NECK' BY SONIKA SETHI

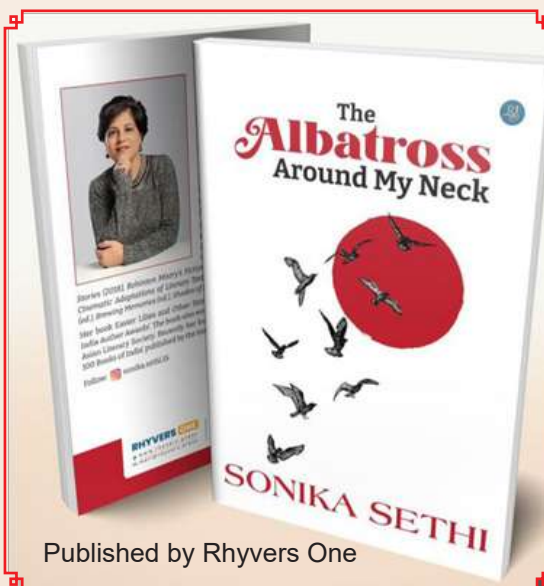
SONIKA SETHI'S poetry collection, *The Albatross Around My Neck*, includes 75 eloquent pieces of poetry that portray the poet's all-encompassing worldview. This is a mosaic of succinct poems that leads the readers to venture into the depth of their own emotional journey. Her expansive canvas is filled with a kaleidoscope of emotions, from love, passion, and compassion to separations and loneliness. The outer world of mountains, oceans, nature's beauty, and changing seasons harmonizes with the

ever-shifting landscape of her deep feelings. Through these pages, one meets the poet in her myriad roles and avatars as a woman, a mother, a daughter, a passionate lover, and a humane heart, seeking redemption for her fellow human beings.

The woman in her poems is the epitome of love, burning passions, and maternal tenderness. Her love journey keeps shifting between lingering passion and the excruciating pangs of separation and loneliness, between *The Kaleidoscope of Desire*, 'the bliss of our union ... aglow', and 'twirling and curling in love's ubiquitous thread' to *Fading Footsteps* and *Memory of Our Meeting Last*, yearning all the time for better times - *I Long for Spring*.

Though the woman's surrender to the man is complete and unconditional in *My Dirges are for You*, and *Playing Fool in the Hands of God*, yet while facing misogyny in *Unanswered Questions*, she has the strength and courage to stand on her own in *It's Your Smile I Dread*.

Memories are the mainstay of her journey as these can see her through the painful journey, as in *The Plethora of Your Memories*, *The Weight of the*



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Memories, and *Memorabilia of Times Gone By*.

The poet's concerns for the vulnerable, suffering humanity are expressed succinctly in *The Triumph of the Soul*. The humble human soul strives for divine wisdom and nirvana, in *Man's Spirit Soars*, and *The Seeker Knows the Way*.

The outstanding feature of this collection is the poet's proclivity for the English classical poets. The very title of the book '*The Albatross Around My Neck*' immediately takes you to the epic poem of S.T. Coleridge's '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*'.

In the first poem, *The Largest Albatross*, Sonika Sethi has successfully created the same scenario and atmosphere, with,

Frosty soulless eyes, festering wounds;
blood oozing sore-ridden hands.

A dead albatross around each neck
Measuring the weight of guilt.

However, she extends the myth a little further with even God having an albatross around His neck, as an atonement for the sins of His creation - the man. If *The Plaint Danseuse* reminds one of William Wordsworth's *Daffodils*, *The Broken Promise* alludes to John Milton's *The Paradise Lost*. William Shakespeare keeps hovering around in '*Love is not love that alters...*' in

Meet Me When Ships Sails, and *A Red Rose...signifying nothing*.

But *Just Friends* remains my personal favourite- a small poem with short sentences- for its crisp, fast-paced, rhythmic flow that leaves so much unsaid, for the readers to read between the lines. This is what poetry is, and this is what separates poetry from other literary genres.

Overall, a highly commendable effort.



Narinderjit Kaur is a retired Associate Professor of English, based in Patiala (Punjab). She is a trilingual writer and translator. Her latest book is a collection of short stories *The Icicle*.



आभास

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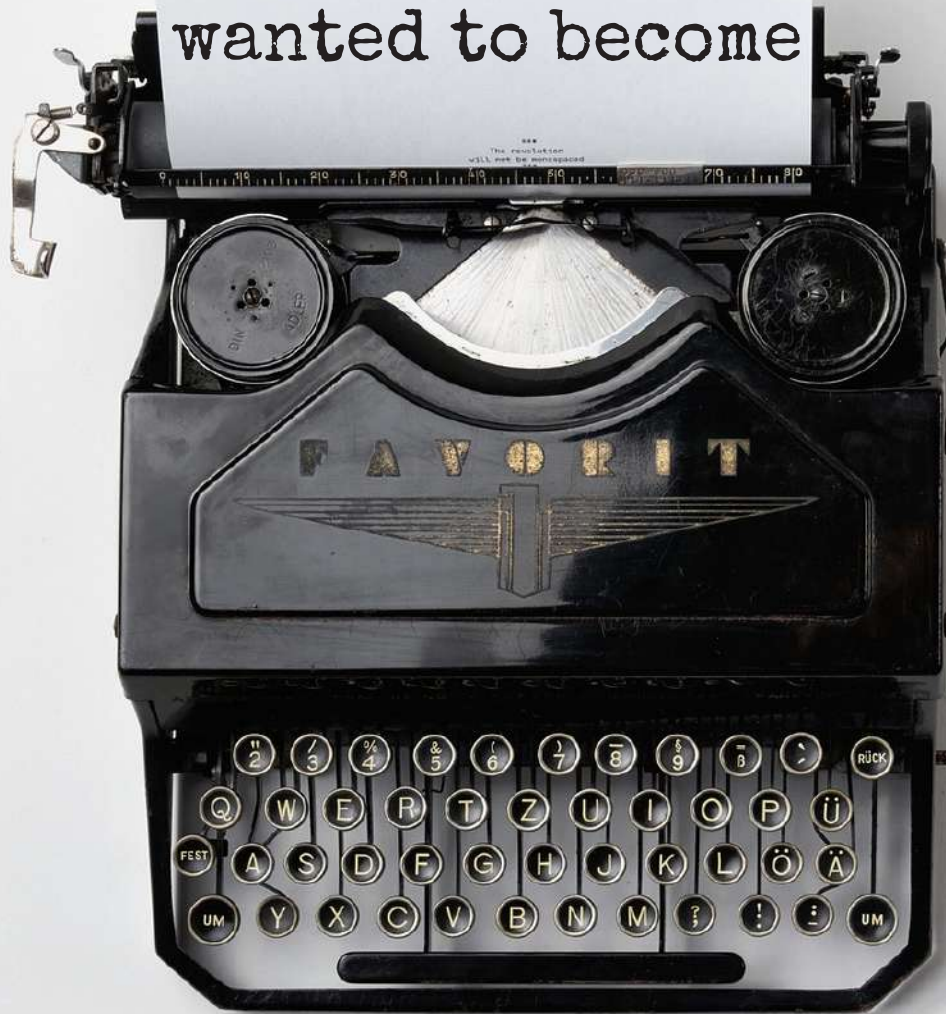


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