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**GJPP**

**VerbalART**

A Global Journal Devoted to  
**POETS AND POETRY**

A Peer-Reviewed Print Journal

**Vol.- 6, Issue - 1**  
**Apr - June 2022**

**Chief Editor:**

**Dr VIVEKANAND JHA**

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**Prof. SHASHANK NADKARNI**



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## POETRY

AVDHESH JHA

### Why do we do – What we do?

Whereas there are some who spend to earn,  
There are some who earn to spend, in any case,  
They yearn, yearn high to learn and learn to earn  
An analogy, it is as if like,  
They lose to gain or gain to lose or  
More an anomaly of having the feel that  
Democracy is the pulse of a developing country or  
An aberration that we are born to die.  
Life is not only full of flowers, life too has thorns;  
and yearnings are cherished only with hardships,  
We yearn to respect only to be respected;  
We learn to love only to be loved;  
For the fact is, out of hunger, we have food;  
out of thirst, we have drinks  
For, we are not good but try to be good, and  
that we talk of taste only when stomach is full.



## **AVDHESH JHA**

### **Humanity**

With air of rumour wading the days and nights  
And the mind tilted with baseless base as the filtrate;  
Where arrogance freely suppresses democracy  
And autocracy in name of democracy is the ideology;  
Where fear and trauma rule the mind and heart  
And vague idea is created and fetched as identity;  
Where brutal knights, sometimes they address religion  
And sometimes nationality as the identity;  
There I hope for a nation, with the hope  
for humanity as the only religion and nationality.

**BILL YARROW****Closed Lips**

It's not that hard to learn that friends have died.  
We're used to death fucking everything up.  
But to watch them suffer, to listen to them  
Scream and whimper and moan. That's a little  
rough. That's somewhat tough to take. Dying  
silently. Bang! That's the way to go. No crying.  
No pleading. No weeping either. Nothing uttered,  
nothing heard. Sooner or later, we're all clapped  
into soundlessness, that eternity without tongues  
or ears – immobile nobility, or so it seems to me  
from this breathing distance. But go ahead: bitch,  
bewail, beseech. Wriggle, wrestle, writhe. Dance  
with painful abandon. Do what your body says  
you need to do. Later or sooner, I guess I will too.

## **BILL YARROW**

### **Non-Stick Bondage**

#### **I. Fruits of the Poisonous Tree**

I was angry with my wife:  
I told my wrath.  
Her wrath's a knife.

She got pissed and cut me then.  
I made apology.  
That made us friends.

And so it goes, this back and forth  
this passing of a flaming torch

of feeling bad and feeling nice  
inciting will and taming vice.

#### **II. Taming Vice**

Taming vice is taming voice  
which all married couples know.

What once is said hangs in the air  
and cleaves the breathing like a plow.

#### **III. What Once Is Said**

What once is said hangs in the air  
and harasses us

    we who walk around  
    each other tumultuously  
    passive in aggressive silence.

#### **IV. In Tumultuous Silence**

In tumultuous silence  
we keep our thoughts

not daring to risk the social peace  
and venture into voice.

#### **V. The Social Peace**

The social peace won't keep itself  
and so it falls to us  
to safeguard decency  
and learn that amplitude makes all matters worse.

#### **VI. Amplitude Makes Things Worse**

Amplitude makes all matter worse –  
that's what the Victorians thought  
and manufactured a century  
of repression.

We, Postmodernists,  
scream free our souls  
and bask in the melanomic  
sun of unquantifiable liberty.

#### **VII. Unquantifiable Liberty**

Unquantifiable liberty is freedom  
in which the truth is unconstrained  
and the vile sanctify lies.

#### **VIII. Universal Falsification**

With everyone else, I fabricate.  
With you, I never lie.

## **BISHNUPADA RAY**

### **Realism**

seeing is believing  
there is no time lapse  
fast-forward or rewind  
every journey is consciousness  
every return is wilderness  
every right step is a virtue  
every wrong one is a sin.

## **BISHNUPADA RAY**

### **This Path**

this path  
where it touches the horizon  
is my cure and my poison  
it has decided to leave home  
to take to the fields and roam  
grid like, both bound and free  
to grow a black-tape poison tree  
deep inside my head  
oozing out tar and scalding lead

and reflecting on my action  
I can see the awful transgression  
of moving away from me to not-me  
it is when in dire agony  
I seek the fire to bathe in hell  
a place where my true self fell.

**DAVID JAMES**

**To The Disease That Will Kill Me**

I'd rather not meet you.  
Go bother someone else,  
preferably a terrorist or criminal,  
a psychopath, a child murderer.  
Let there be some poetic justice  
in our screwed up world.

If you have to find me,  
and I know you do, make it quick, please,  
that's all I ask.  
Of course, I'd want a little time  
to say my goodbyes, kiss my lovely wife and children,  
kiss my grandkids and family.  
But not too much time –  
I'd start regretting and getting pissed off  
and resentful and I wouldn't be able  
to savor my final days alive on earth.

I've never died before so I'm not sure how much time  
I'll need to say what I must,  
kiss who I want,  
pack my spiritual bags for this next journey.  
Maybe three weeks? A month?

I'm looking forward to it though:  
I've heard it's relaxing and quiet  
with tons of alone-time.

**DAVID JAMES**

**The Art of Persuasion**

You said you would  
only go so far  
and I said that was fine.  
I said I could do this,  
if you wanted, or find a bar  
in the neighborhood  
and get some of that.  
You gave me a funny look  
and said you'd had those before  
and weren't a fan.  
I forgot I'd read that in a book  
about you. I said we could sit here and chat  
and ignore the time we've wasted,  
but you declined and said  
there's always more to learn  
about yourself and about life in general.

That's when you laid back in bed  
and fingered the white lace  
on the bed cover. I said why  
don't we use some of these  
and see where it gets us.  
You took my hand, kissed my knuckles.  
I thought either this is a tease  
designed to leave me high and dry  
or my good old lucky star  
had just sailed into port.



I was thinking of how bad that was as a mixed metaphor  
when you said sometimes love gets dropped overboard;  
sometimes it gets locked behind the gates of a fort  
and, if inclined, I should use a crowbar  
to break in. Of course, I used one  
and the rest is history.

You did this and I did that,  
and we tried to get one of those  
to work, which it did, eventually.

In the end, it was obvious: we both won.

## **ED WOODS**

### **Achievers**

Have a rough time  
media admires them  
most of society has resentment

Those of complacency  
speak up loudly with ill words  
for they let time go by  
as too a better life

No incentive to speak of  
new skills avoided  
TV is their knowledge source  
inane and sometimes interesting  
No motivation needed

Let an achiever be present  
and they must be dressed down  
to the underachievers level  
to give their life worth

Achievers stick together  
it is safer for the mind  
no humiliation put forth  
only praise and verification

## **ED WOODS**

### **Focus**

Did you ever sense  
your choices destroyed me  
long past a few weeks

Our plans pulled me into the core  
but little did I know of changes  
beyond the speed of lightning

In loving thought in bed  
even on tough nights  
I face your sudden decisions  
towards the next priority

In stupefied stance  
lost abandonment of soul  
bodily feelings hollow

I hold coffee purchase close  
sip by sip I stare at a field  
it is a comprehension canvass

**FALEEHA HASSAN**

**A Goat in a Cup of Tequila**

Like mothers of soldiers being scared of military mail that  
disturbs them in a quiet night  
My heart trembled from the moment you were gone  
I lost my secret satisfaction  
With whom will I talk now about my neighbour's missing cat?  
Who will believe me but you?  
If I say the hungry squirrel eyes they only  
Look like the hungry squirrel eyes?  
Who cares about travail of words that embodied the pangs of  
the fingers that stuck this goat into the bottom of this cup?  
With whom I shall share her pent-up screams  
While she stands in a cold glass void without ears?  
And before all of that  
Who will accept a drink of tequila in cup in which a goat stands  
inside of it  
Other than you?

**FALEEHA HASSAN**

**A Message to My Poem**

Is this fair?

You leave me with the pale whiteness of my paper  
like an orphan stretching out his hand in the void  
waiting for a moment of kindness,

Is this fair?

I open the door of my broken heart to celebrate the pride of your  
words

And you, in vain, give me an indifferent look

Pure silence, around me now

Where did you get your hardness?

I'm like whisper of a silk glove.

I fall asleep on a velvet sheet waiting for you

I'm not a word hunter

to make traps for you.

No dice player

to collect the glow of your body from a lost throw.

I am a poet,

I am born from a wing of a word

and drowning deeply in the emptiness of the paper.

Nothing can be more cruel than your absence now.

**GALE ACUFF****When you die you're dead unless you go to**

church and learn there's an Afterlife, it's  
Heaven or Hell and depending on how  
you've lived you go to one or the other,  
that's at *our* church but at the one across  
the street everybody goes to Heaven,  
when they're dead that is, so nobody goes  
to Hell, everyone's forgiven, after all  
that's why Jesus was crucified so I  
can sin and sin and sin and sin and still  
get forgiven over there but traffic  
is always bad, I might get run over  
and wake up dead in the wrong place, Hell  
I mean--what we need is a traffic light  
or a crosswalk but still I'd look both ways.

**GALE ACUFF****I don't want to die, not ever, *never***

in a word but at both Sunday School and regular school I have to, someday I won't be anything but plain deceased and of course I wonder what that will be like and both my teachers say *Nothingness*, may -be they've been comparing notes but I said *Well, ain't nothing still something* and my teacher at regular school corrected me, my grammar, and at Sunday School my teacher just smiled and said *Well, we'll just see, won't we* so I said *Sometimes I just can't wait* and she said *Well, when you're nothing you'll wish you had*, like she knew what she was talking about so I just answered *Yes ma'am*. God damn it.

## **GARY BECK**

### **Creature Comforts**

The leaves are falling.  
Autumn winds blow cooler.  
We walk the streets a little faster  
urged on by biting winds.  
Yet throughout the land  
there is no normalcy,  
only seasonal change.  
Most of us remain inside  
in urban enclaves,  
with advanced technology  
that lets us stay at home  
in inclement weather,  
in a semblance  
of a well-ordered life,  
immune from climate,  
except when disaster strikes,  
catching us unprepared  
for the struggle for survival.



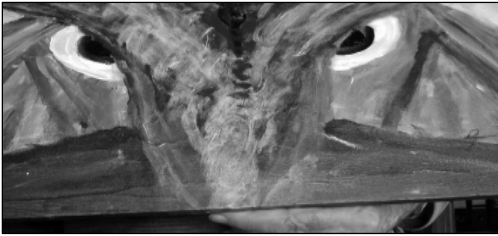
## **GARY BECK**

### **Paean**

I may not live to see  
salvation of the earth  
from ravages of climate change,  
but I never give up hope  
the well-meaning, the resourceful,  
will recognize the dangers  
before it's too late  
and preserve a habitat  
in the vast universe  
for the aspirations  
of a conflicted species  
that still may rise  
above its limitations.

## GARY LANGFORD

### Scarring



You have your own scar picture.  
Anything visual is the password.

Misspell the title. Scaring may still fit.  
A dark gas, masking slips away.

Hope is waking in a new room,  
new clothes, a new character.

Brain matter matters, you chuckle.  
Double meanings are natural letters.

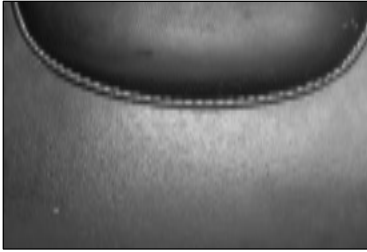
Each one is your home.  
You try not to roam too far.

The share market holds you up.  
Identification cards are needed.

A universe lies outside your address.  
Seeing stars are held up from afar.

## GARY LANGFORD

### If only



If only chisels hymn-like hope.  
Musicians offered to teach me the guitar.  
I taught theatre lyrics. Time crept by.  
Plucked chords are my twentieth if only.  
They are split seconds in disorder tables.  
Wisdom plants seeds in hindsight boxes.  
Honeyeaters may need translators –  
hollow horns tune into discontent.  
A leading character is cast as satire,  
stating no regrets without being asked.  
Audiences laugh in rainy days of ire.  
We try not to overtly perspire,  
turning the page in a new play,  
floating into space; our space, if only.

## **GEORGE HELD**

### **Did You Receive My Previous Email**

The perfect ploy for a hacker –  
Assume an ongoing Internet  
Connection with nonchalant  
But slightly aggrieved tone

To elicit sympathy for poor  
Old Dion in Nigeria, who just  
Wants to swindle you out of your  
Hard-earned money while

He sweats at his keyboard  
To come up with perfect come –  
ons like “Did you receive....”  
His office door says, “Gone Phishin”;

While you worry about missed emails,  
loss of memory, rudeness inferred  
by friends without replies, Dion’s fishin’  
in his new boat, earned from phishin’.

## **JAMES MULHERN**

### **Hurt Feelings**

You know the meeting  
when a question asked  
“makes someone feel bad,”  
considered a “micro aggression” or “trigger.”

When the discussion dissolves  
and a person’s “fragility” flashes  
on the marquee – “Hurt Feelings.”  
The discourse disregarded  
like a raised hand ignored.

My grandmother lived in a dirt-floor house,  
strut one mile to a well,  
slept in a bed with two siblings  
and a few fire-warmed bricks.  
Never once said, “My feelings are hurt,”  
wouldn’t have understood “fragility” –  
her schooling stopped in sixth grade.

Most mornings, she knelt, said her rosary,  
then walked over a broken-planked porch,  
hugged a wooden pail, stepped onto earth,  
and trekked to the water.

Homeward, she gingerly avoided stones  
that stabbed, bruised, and hurt her feet,  
but still she whispered blessings to the wind.

## **JAMES MULHERN**

### **Session's End**

One day there is no news.  
The anchors stare at empty teleprompters  
Eyes wide and twitching, lips quivering,  
they look into the camera.

We change channels.  
See black screens or people scrambling on sets,  
Passing blank papers and whispering.  
We do not hear what they say and we do not care.

We are too tired to move.  
Through the living room windows: trees and sky.  
The wind blows and birds fly.  
Somewhere snow falls and thunder booms.

But not here. There is no weather.  
No drama, conflict, or story.  
No wars, crimes, or political crises.  
No empty talk. No sound and fury.

In a forest, high on a pine,  
a wood thrush sings.  
Deep in a dark-water cave,  
the Emperor angelfish knocks.  
A judge's ruling: session's end.  
Or someone shuts a door.

**JASON RYBERG**

## **The Illusion of Movement**

Walking late at night, I came to a cemetery  
with the statue of a horse for a headstone,  
like an apparition that had been caught and  
frozen in some moment of regal innocence  
and beauty under the light of a moon that  
had just then come out from behind a bank  
of clouds, bestowing the illusion of movement,  
with its majestic beams of silver-blue upon what  
must have been the Lord of All Horses. Somewhere,  
a peacock shrieked.

**JASON RYBERG**

**What's Happening?**

It's just another  
poem about another  
Kansas sunset, set

in middle-to-late  
August – yellow / gold to red /  
orange, then purple

to Oxford Grey – this  
one featuring the fairly  
standard issue, small

Kansas pond in the  
foreground, slowly going from  
moss green to almost

a tarpit black, its  
glassy surface reflecting  
a newly arrived

moon who has just now  
decided to drop in and  
see what's happening.



## JOHN GREY

### Evensong

I cannot see her  
but someone's rustling the bed sheets,  
opening the dresser drawer.

I'm in one room  
but that doesn't stop  
the other rooms from happening.

Her footsteps creak  
the cold hardwood  
like snapping twigs on trails.

So much her movement  
feels like a product of my stillness  
listening.

A shuffle,  
a crackle,  
a breath between.

**JASON RYBERG****Dead Snake on the Track**

My mother never ventured far from the edge of the swamp.  
Nor did I.  
She was three and a half foot long,  
undulated shiny and black,  
scraping the soil with her red belly.  
That became my own method  
of getting where I needed to be.  
Her mid-body scales formed seventeen rows,  
subcaudals single anteriorly, divided posteriorly.  
No surprise then that mine were exactly the same.  
I never knew my father.  
He could have been the one nestled in the hollow log,  
or gliding through the mangroves,  
or engaged in writhing combat  
with another of his kind.  
My mother dined on frogs and rats.  
Same menu for me then.  
But she devoured a cane toad, died of its poison.  
So I avoided those hideous creatures.  
Man too  
until one crushed my skull  
with a tree-branch,  
left me to die on a brush track  
in the outer suburbs of the city.  
He saw in me  
the embodiment of Original Sin.  
My view of him  
was purely circumstantial.

**JOHN ZEDOLIK**

**Imaginative Response**

A child must play even if alone,  
the air the attentive partner  
as she bobs a shuttlecock

with her badminton racket  
into the inches above the taut  
strings' tap that faithfully returns

the volley and awaits the next  
of the agile elbow that will  
tire only in hours more taxing

in its lone bearing of the time  
than the bend and jump  
of her limbs upon the grass

as green and young so springing  
back, bows whose arrows return  
the sun's rays that will nourish

her into that country where she  
will find mates to reciprocate  
even when these games are gone.

**JOHN ZEDOLIK**

**Soothing Soil**

Percentage is comforting,  
the basic ratio more so

as we crave the lowest  
denominator, in single

solid digits if possible,  
no tower of Babel,

no ziggurat, straining  
to topple and crush our

comprehension with decimals  
and weighty load of zeroes

tumbling upon zeroes,  
less than the stable ground

of gravity at one-third  
or one-half often found.

## **K V DOMINIC**

### **Cause of My Hand Ache**

Why do you radiate, my right hand,  
ache unbearable, stealing my sleep?  
Haven't I injected through your veins  
words which helped hundreds of scholars,  
teachers, students and writers?  
Is it a nemesis of plants innumerable  
for causing their death for my print books?  
Or is it a retribution of animal world  
for pelting stones at snakes, stray dogs  
reptiles, insects and birds in my childhood?

**K. V. DOMINIC**

**Corona Virus, Nature's Defence**

Corona virus  
Nature's defence  
on man's offence  
Crown for man's crimes

Corona virus  
Crown for man's greed  
Reward for man's  
assault on Nature

Corona virus  
Nature's vaccine  
for man's conceit  
An indispensable dose  
to teach him humility

Corona virus  
Crown for man's cruelty  
Alas, crown on man's corpse

## **KEITH INMAN**

### **Bearwalk**

i run toward the man yelling  
at flames licking a beam  
above the paper machine drunk  
with permeate oil and dust

and climb the framework  
to sit on the stalled dryers hoping  
no one will engage the drive  
as a hose is passed up and aimed  
at an in-line motor in the cave  
of the exhaust system

where i pour the sweat of the world  
at the raging bear stirred from hibernation  
its encased fury roaring  
each time i think it's out  
yet some deep heated spark of life  
keeps it alive while outside

this wet womb of adrenalin  
a fire brigade has laddered  
the stack and unleashed a river  
that drives a plug of smoke  
like a grizzled paw smacking me  
in the face before i can say oh shi...

and i am reborn  
gasping for air

## **MADHAB CHANDRA JENA**

### **Let Me Be Your Lover**

If you understand me  
Fold by fold  
I am a mere man of desire  
Man of oil and man of salt  
Man of food and man of fire.  
If you don't understand me  
I am a great lover.  
Don't try to understand me please  
Let me be a lover  
Lover for ever as you desire.



## **MADHAB CHANDRA JENA**

### **Useless Rain**

The sky is empty  
Transparent like glass.  
Scattered like dry soil  
No clouds there,  
Clouds hang like bats  
In our guava tree,  
On the roof of my school,  
Wets my single school uniform  
My torn fifth class books  
And my mud walls.  
But it doesn't rain  
It never rains  
Whenever required  
Wherever required  
With lots of aspiration.

**MICHAEL LEE JOHNSON****My Life**

My life began with a skeleton  
with a smile and bubbling eyes  
in my garden of dandelions.  
Everything else fell off the edge,  
a jigsaw puzzle piece cut in half.  
When young, I pressed  
against my mother's breast,  
but youthful memories fell short.  
I tried at 8 to kiss my father,  
but he was a welder, fox hunter,  
coon hunter, and voyeuristic man.  
My young life was a mixture  
of black, white, dark dreams,  
and mellow yellow sun bright hopes.  
Rewind, sunshine was a stranger  
in dandelion fields,  
shadows in my eyes.  
I grabbed my injured legs  
leap forward into the future.  
I'm now a vitamin C boy  
it keeps me immured  
from catching colds or Covid-19.  
Everything now still leaks, in parts,  
but I press forward.

## NELS HANSON

### The Treasure

Under clouds at four horizons  
sky pale yellow and brighter rose  
meant rain, soft sprinkles first

before autumn vineyards drink  
the downpour. A storm-crossed  
crow blowing back and forth in

jagged flight I have the feeling  
made it home. At winter dusk  
sharp wind went still and next

morning young orchard's thin  
branches wore sleeves of ice.  
Plowed spring loam has a tang

like coffee brewing and grape  
leaves waving recall a world's  
raised hands all shouting hello,

goodbye. Pump water was cold  
and pure from far underground,  
sweet, untouched by human lips

and tracks of animals all led to  
burrows where treasures are, dry  
seeds the golden of doubloons.

## NELS HANSON

### Winter Harvest

Leaves of the ornamental pear  
endured the long summer's green  
to settle ripe gold and crimson

on the frozen grass. A crow calls  
and walks the white roof's peak,  
now icy shingles to pluck dropped

acorn from the runnel, beats for  
colder blue. Berries birds can eat  
are scarlet, brown weeds deliver

seeds for sparrows. It's winter's  
harvest, orchard's pruned brush  
burning yellow as squash, from

a garden of snow clear parsnips  
at the barn's eave, last cornstalk  
the scarecrow dressed in frost.

## **NGO BINH ANH KHOA**

### **Cultivation**

I cultivate my hours in solitude  
To fertilize the soil within my mind  
Wherein ideas are planted, nurtured, grown  
Till, from them, words are formed, weighty and ripe,  
Which I, from every hectare of that field,  
Would pluck, and into which my pen would stab,  
Extracting all of their most potent essences,  
Unleashing all of their most striking flavors—  
The bitter and the sweet, the salty and the sour—  
So I could spill them all upon an empty page  
And watch as they take shape—and bloom.

**NGO BINH ANH KHOA**

**The Way I Say My Prayers**

The way I say my prayers these days  
Is not like how a rooster's crows  
Would soar and rend the quietude of dawn,  
Forcing the words so proudly expounded  
Into any ears within my vicinity  
To take heed.  
No more.

The way I say my prayers these days  
Is more like how a butterfly's wings  
Would flutter on a springtime breeze,  
Serene and soft as they gently guide me  
Toward the little wonders blossoming in  
The world that ever expands  
Far, far beyond myself.

## **NOLO SEGUNDO**

### **My Own Small Slice of Paradise**

I look out my backyard and  
rejoice in its greenness  
(even though green is not  
my favorite color) and I  
think I am so fortunate  
to have a tame jungle  
for a backyard with its  
own little zoo of squirrels  
dancing like dervishes and  
birds fluttering like mad  
and fat crafty groundhogs  
continually trying to dig  
under my shed for their  
own comfy rent-free home  
and the occasional skunk  
(so beautiful at a distance)  
or even a proud wild turkey  
but best of all is when a  
deer or two or three come  
like virgin queens to quietly  
meander o'er my ¼ acre  
domain – it may not be like  
sitting on a beach in Hawaii  
overlooking the Pacific as  
the sun gracefully dies yet  
again but it is my own, my  
very own small slice of  
Paradise....

## NOLO SEGUNDO

### Fragments

A bit here, a piece there,  
that's all we really have--  
be it the tail end of a dream  
as you awaken to a more  
mundane world and feel it  
slip away from you, and  
knowing you will never see  
that wondrous universe  
again – or the books you've  
read over a lifetime, the  
millions of words that  
went through your brain  
like cars speeding away into  
the encroaching night....

You know you can keep  
nothing really, nothing  
whole, but still you want  
to – you want life and yes,  
love too, to be solid, sure,  
unfading – but sentience is  
a melange and your mind  
a bubble on a wave that  
rolls in and out, in and out,  
as time's undercurrent pulls  
you relentlessly into that  
unfathomable ocean –  
Eternity...



**PAWEŁ MARKIEWICZ**

**Poem of not-Hindu for Goddess Krishna**



full chalice and I become an existence  
when your memory shines  
the dreamy chalice –  
I miss  
and I want it  
a cup without blood comes true  
magic of the dew – fulfilled  
I am a blissful butterfly  
for your sake  
you turn dew into essence  
into fog over the volcano  
as well as into numinous sacred cow  
and I am the magic of the night  
a spring and a miracle  
the heart with many songs  
I adore this rainbow  
you paint a revelry in it  
the heart of the poet  
my soul – dreaming  
in your dreams – memories  
to this cornflower

You are your glorified soul  
a rainbow of being and perfect  
fleeting wings of poetry  
in your soul-cave – dwarf  
in this pond – mirror  
your mirror loves  
a melancholy  
the cave darkness  
the light from the moon  
rest in me  
in you a thousand lights  
of winged being  
I have found myself  
in your  
butterfly like heart  
I will you  
in the breeze  
and in a seagull  
of the mornings

**RITA ANDERSON**

## **The Long Way, Home**

In the dark on an unlit road, you  
take the corners sharply, tempting  
fate to take us off the course we

precariously wend. I have done my  
best not to make the evening *adventure*,  
but it is almost too much: the beauty

of outdated architecture, a long drive  
to a dinner neither of us can afford,  
and the demands of your gaze, food

turning cold on the plate, fed by  
the *want* in your eyes, a forbidden  
feast. Brushing past you in the doorway,

I know I let you stand too close too often,  
and when you seize me in your arms  
to inhale my exhalation, the pounding

in my temple answers your silent plea.  
– Returning home, we talk about the river  
that runs parallel to the narrow lane,

a black strip except where trace light  
glistens, reflected off the water's surface.  
Nerves on fire, I half-listen to your stories,

refusing to let my eyes or mind settle on  
anything, afraid an image will stay,  
singled into memory, made precious.

Unclasping my hands, I wiggle my fingers  
as if releasing something too sacred to hold,  
checking, again, the catch of my seat belt.

## **ROGER G. SINGER**

### **Empty Streets**

I hear hounds  
howling  
and windmills  
slowly grinding  
bitter rust

a porch light flickers,  
as moths circle  
above dusty chairs

there's an  
upstairs light,  
someone passes by,  
casting a shadow

nearby  
steel wheels of  
boxcars  
promise safety  
and a soft  
wooden floor  
to the next place

## **ROGER G. SINGER**

### **Sun Passage**

chasing over latitudes,  
beyond time zones,  
over roads  
and mountains  
of the lesser gods,  
it never pauses  
as it races  
to the western  
shoreline  
where it  
silently  
passes overhead  
with miles gained  
to horizons

## **SANDIP SAHA**

### **It is frosting**

It is frosting from the last night  
thick white sheet  
is covering the land  
snow on branches of the tree  
forming surreal scenery  
roads are becoming slippery  
one house terrace is fully submerged  
seeking sun light to remove huge load  
totally free of noisy life  
imagination runs freely  
no body disturbs  
God is enjoying from above.

## **SANDIP SAHA**

### **At the Bank of Brahmaputra**

At the bank of river Brahmaputra  
sitting on my white thick cushion bed  
in the cottage hotel floor, glass wall  
far above the river on a hill full of  
flora swaying branches in wild wind  
sound of which is like playing tunes  
no artist can match it, so pristine  
is this land I immerse myself in it.

Flowing calm river some rare boats  
are sailing looking at them time passes  
I am swallowing every bit of the nature  
just to steal permanent pleasure out of it.

The caretaker calls us for the breakfast  
takes us to the open terrace dining hall  
every part of its construction is by bamboo  
concrete jungle is replaced by greeneries.

We visited tea garden no people are seen  
once in a while somebody appears  
at distance some meadows with nearby huts  
by the side of the mighty river, life is so simple.



## SRINIVAS S

### Rejection

Rejection collects in a tub  
Like dripping water from air-conditioners...  
A flood forms and drowns resolve,  
Or the bubbles break;  
And normal service resumes, breathing  
The labouring love of exhaust fans.

Rejection collects under trees  
Like flowers not fated to bear fruit...  
A (smell-) cloud 'pears to smother hope,  
Or the sun (flower) breaks through;  
As the everyday returns, keeping  
Leaves green and winds greener.

Rejection collects on the road  
Like mirages of broken mirrors past...  
The shards prick and thoughts bleed,  
Or form is broken;  
As unseen futures begin, ascending  
From still or stone-rippled lakes.

## **SRINIVAS S**

### **The Prize**

A hard-pressed pen in failure seeks approval,  
And in success searches for a freedom,  
Beyond the twilit waves of fortune,  
Licking at the long shores of everyday.

The brighter light – it blinds sight,  
With the boundless beauty of beatitude;  
The darker one – it flogs visions,  
For failing to look deep into shadows.

Form is a game of shadows, temporary;  
Fame is a genial light, theoretical;  
And there's no love at last sight, no love lost,  
Between a firefly and a fine mirage.

Here then is the question, now the response:  
The pen's laboured bridge is its own prize,  
As yesterday's light through today conveyed  
Tomorrow, a moon, a shadow becomes...

**SUMAN SINGH**

**Thunderstruck**

Out of the bolts of lightening  
    springs forth terror;  
swift as a leopard downing prey,  
    sudden as night  
invading day, burying light  
    below the hills:  
so thunderous clouds burst forth  
    to pounce upon the tree  
to split and crack and tear it down  
    the racing heartbeat stilled.

## SUMAN SINGH

### Colours

Colour of the trees is green  
Of skies 'tis blue they say  
Why then this hazy blue and faded green –  
Pollution they say:  
and the colour dull will go away  
when we discover a way  
to paint the sky an azure blue  
the trees a glistening green  
artificially,  
in factories –

**WILLIAM DORESKI****Homer Street**

The rebuilt house, freshly beige,  
stands its ground more firmly  
than anyone expected a year  
ago, when demolition looked  
likely enough. A child  
in a red jacket speeding past  
on his bicycle looks worried  
about the storm clouds infusing  
the otherwise indifferent sky.  
Those clouds are drifting east, though,  
blooming toward Boston Harbor  
where islands crouch like creatures  
about to leap. The highly strung  
power pole, burdened with cables,  
strained by competing forces,  
will hold its ground as firmly  
as the house does, eager to scrawl  
a musical composition  
only the bravest can hear.

## **WILLIAM DORESKI**

### **Blackbird Doughnuts**

A slash of mirror-glass façade  
captures the aging brickwork  
and pointed Gothic dormers  
of a building I once admired.

Two saplings braced against storm  
frame the Blackbird Doughnut shop,  
where I pause for a healthy dose  
of organic deep-fat and sugar.

To select my favorite doughnuts,  
I enter the reflection where  
a glow soaked with winter sun  
warms me back to younger years

when anyone could afford to live  
within a short walk of Harvard.  
The person bagging my doughnuts  
looks like a graduate student.

When I step outside, already munching  
a chocolate-dipped fistful of lard,  
the street looks smooth as a runway  
about to launch me into the blue.

The bright new face of this building  
mocks the former low-rent city  
the way childbirth mocks old age,  
by confusing form and spirit.

## ARTICLE

### 1

# The Tribal Tradition of Nature Worship as Portrayed in Gita Mehta's "A River Sutra"

TULIKA SWATI AND PROF. A. K. BACHCHAN

### Abstract

The man and Nature relationship has been the essential binding force for human existence on planet Earth. The interconnectedness of man to the environment in the Indian panorama is not only for existential needs but also for the rituals and beliefs pertaining throughout the society for ages. As humans depend on nature for survival, Indian society reveres the five elements of nature as well as the components as their religious deities. Human development has always been going on through industrialization and urbanization, but the indigenous society depends extensively on nature for their basic needs as well as their age-old beliefs embedded in nature worship. Indian English Literature has been welcoming of the portrayal of tribals in various aspects. The portrayal of tribals would be incomplete without a detailed discussion about the importance of nature in tribal society. The present paper analyses the novel *A River Sutra* written by Gita Mehta in the context of man and nature relationship through tribals.

*Keywords:* Nature worship, River, Tribals, Culture, Beliefs, Tradition, Rituals, Environment.

### Introduction

"Listen O brother.  
Man is the greatest truth.  
Nothing beyond."

*Love Songs Of Chandidas*

India has been a land of binding relations between nature and human existence. Nature is considered a “Mother” in Indian culture. The Sun, the Moon, air, soil, trees, mountains, and rivers are the holy and quintessential parts of life in India. Nature worship has been a prominent connecting “*sutra*” amidst such an enormous collection of varying myths, customs, and rituals across the country. *“Most of the religious communities have got nature worship as their primary ritual in their spiritual journey through life. Nobody on Earth worshiped nature with such reverence and intensity as ancient Indians. Nature was not merely part of his life but, on the contrary, he himself considered himself as an integral part of nature. He sought divine presence in each and every aspect of nature. For him nature was essence of life.”* (Varadpande 19) Nature worship is one of the collective consciousness of Indian cultural traditions. Most of the religious customs in Indian society and culture contain a ritual specially related to nature gods.

Nature has also been a connecting link between modern civilization and primitives. Nature and natural resources are the sole means of the existence and survival of tribals. In fact, tribes are the only community on earth that depend solely on nature and thus have kept themselves earthly rooted to the natural resources as well as customs and beliefs related to nature. Tribal cultures worship mountains and rivers as their gods and goddesses. Unlike the urban population which crushes nature to fulfill their needs, the tribes sustain nature as their means of existence. Their valor, hard work, and nature-worshipping rituals are way ahead of urban industrialization, exploitation, and deforestation – all-destroying ecological balance on Earth. They believe nature to be the primordial power, ruling this universe. The existence of temporary human life on this eternal mother Earth, for them, depends on the worship of nature to get resources for survival here. The tribes believe in living with tranquility and purity deep inside a forest, away from the so-



called prosperous urban life full of hazards and hectic schedules. Gita Mehta, a renowned journalist, documentary filmmaker, and well-known diaspora writer, opted to portray Indian culture and myths related to nature in her third novel "*A River Sutra*".

The novel *A River Sutra* deals with themes related to Indian sensibility, cultural ethos, myths and rituals, music and art forms, and the indigenous ethnicity of India. "*The novel does not have the structure of a novel in the modern sense*", as R. S. Pathak says, "*It is in line with the ancient Indian tradition of story-telling. The pattern enables the author to present a multiplicity of viewpoints, which goes long way in helping her unfold the intricate realities of life.*" (Pathak107)

The novel consists of six stories with different narratives and narrators. The main story begins with an unnamed narrator, a Bureaucrat who opts to stay away from the hustle and bustle of urban life and becomes a manager at a government rest house located near the bank of river Narmada, near Vano village. The six stories, namely – The Monk's story, the Teacher's story, the Executive's story, the Courtesan's story, the Minstrel's story, and the Naga Baba's story – all occur or end up at the bank of river Narmada which acts as the "*sutra*", the binding thread, of the novel. The narrator as well as the river Narmada has been assigned the responsibility of linking the stories. The narrative style opted in the novel is much similar to the ancient style of storytelling as used in the *Panchatantra* by Vishnu Sharma.

### **River Narmada as the "*Sutra*"**

The first connection of humans with nature, in the novel *A River Sutra*, begins with the mythological story of the river Narmada, the holiest river as mentioned in ancient scriptures. It is the final destination of pilgrims, priests, archaeologists, and people searching for salvation, being the connecting thread of the six stories, as Mehta says in the novel: "*Beggars and holy men, priests*

*instructing the devout on how to make their obeisance to the river. Horoscope readers and palmists...women after their ritual baths.”* (193) In the novel the main theme is the myth of river Narmada connected with every story as the sutra and presenting the cultural aspects through the rituals related to it. The tribals and the locales around consider river Narmada “*greater than all the gods combined*” (92) The main narrator of the novel, the Bureaucrat, after fulfilling his worldly duties, decides to become a *vanaprastha* and opts for life after retirement where he could reflect upon the true meanings of life. He comes to reside near Vano village as the manager of the Narmada rest house. The author personifies the river Narmada through the narrator’s thoughts when he says: “*In the silence of the ebbing night I sometimes think I can hear river’s heartbeats pulsing under the ground before she reveals herself at last to the anchorites of Shiva deep in meditation around the holy tank of Amarkantak.*” (3)

The narrator remains astonished at the divinity of the river Narmada worshipped by the devoted pilgrims and the tribals around. River Narmada, considered to be the daughter of Lord Shiva, represents the mythological symbol of the Indian belief in attaining salvation through penance. Gita Mehta explains River Narmada’s story as mentioned in the Skanda Purana. “*It is said that Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of Worlds, was in an ascetic trance so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration began flowing from his body down the hills. The stream took on the form of a woman-the most dangerous of her kind: a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetics to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, at yet another as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire. Her inventive variations so amused Shiva that he named her Narmada, the Delightful one, blessing her with the words “You shall be forever holy, forever inexhaustible.” Then he gave her in marriage to the ocean, Lord of rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors.*” (5-6)

Worship of water and water bodies like rivers and wells is a revered ritual across the country. As K. R. S. Iyenger says, “The river in India is a feminine power and personality and the land must woo her if their hopes of fruitfulness and security are to be realized.” (322-23) river Narmada is considered to be a life rejuvenating source. About the holy river Narmada, it is believed that every stone in the river is so holy that it should be considered to be Shivalinga, the representation of Lord Shiva Himself. In the novel, the holy river Narmada is shown to unify different religious beliefs including those of the tribals. Also, it was on the bank of river Narmada where sage Vyasa had dictated the Mahabharata. The river is shown as the center of pilgrimage and is worshipped by all religions equally, be it Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, or Tribals. It is an ancient Indian belief that “Bathing in the waters of the Jamuna purifies a man in seven days, in the waters of the Saraswati in three, in the waters of the Ganges in one, but the Narmada purifies with a single sight of her waters.” (105)

### **Nature as the Primordial Deity for Tribals**

Tribals are among one the major constituents of India. In the novel *A River Sutra*, Gita Mehta has attempted to portray the intricate tribal culture and rituals through the stories and incidents. The novel highlights the mythical beliefs for nature worship practiced by the tribals in the very opening chapter. According to the story, the tribes of the Vano village believed that they were once defeated by the gods of Aryans and were saved from annihilation by the divine personification of the river Narmada. The pilgrims who visit the river banks usually recite invocations made by the tribals for the holiest river Narmada:

“Salutations in the morning and at the night to thee, O  
Narmada!  
Defend me from the serpent’s poison.” (4)

The tribals are portrayed with their inherent trait of considering nature as the most powerful deity for them. They are shown performing mythical rituals and sacraments, supernatural elements, magic, and witchcraft, all with their cultural hues. In the novel, the tribals are most prominently portrayed in the story of the Executive. In the Executive's story, the protagonist Nitin Bose, a young executive at Calcutta's oldest tea company, finds solace in the lap of nature, doing his work at the tea estate. He finds himself enthralled by the local tribes *"imagining that the gentle tribals (I) had seen bending over the tea bushes were in fact descendants of this civilization, still able to do the great Indian rope trick."* (78) A tribal woman named Rima with her indigenous charm and mystic beauty seduces him and captures Nitin's soul between split halves of coconut during a lunar eclipse, asserting that he cannot leave her ever, even if he tries. He cannot escape his desire for her. Possessed with the tribal girl Rima's vengeful enchantments, Nitin loses control over his mind. *"Thus a tribal lady of bewitching beauty fascinates Nitin, a man of the civilized world, and keeps his soul under her control. Despite being well educated Nitin falls a victim to the magical power of an uneducated woman. Wielding this invincible power on a man's life is not an unusual thing for Rima, but to avoid its effect is beyond the capacity of Nitin, an executive with the treasure of knowledge acquired from the study of a large number of books on varied subjects. This reflects the defeat of a man's intellect by the magical power of an uneducated woman."* (Chaturvedi 34)

To recover Nitin Bose, a priest at Vano village suggests he *"worship the goddess at any shrine that overlooks the Narmada. Only that river has been given the power to cure him."* (89) It shows the belief of people there that if you don't respect nature, she is bound to punish you. Further, in the novel, the author explains the rituals performed by the tribals for Nitin's redemption. The only shrine of the tribals is believed to be an old banyan tree which they worship as their God. The tribal nature worship

ceremonies and mythical beliefs are portrayed through the process of making a garlanded idol and Nitin Bose taking it to their shrine and then to the river Narmada in a procession. In the procession to the river, only the tribals are allowed, no outsiders. Since Nitin Bose is under the possession of a tribal woman, he goes to cure himself. Nitin Bose is told to dissolve the idol in water chanting the same salutation to river Narmada: *“Salutation in the morning and at night to thee, O Narmada! Defend me from the serpent’s poison.”*

For the tribals of the Vano village, the myth of the river Narmada is depicted as the personification of the river into a deity having the stone image of a half-woman with the upper body of a snake. Her full breasts denote the fertility myth. It was believed by the tribals that they once governed a snake empire until losing it to the Aryan gods. Further, they were saved from annihilation by goddess Narmada. They still believe that the river Narmada *“annuls the effects of snakebite and thus the chanting It was believed that the tribals will beg the goddess to forgive Mr. Bose for denying the power of desire.”* (92) The power of desire denied by Nitin Bose is the truth of human life. A human body can never deny its desire as it is the driving force of life. The serpent mentioned in the salutation to river Narmada is the same desire that when denied turns into venom. As R. S. Pathak says, *“The élan vital (life force) is the governing principle of life, and anyone who negates it is bound to be punished.”* (Pathak 172) Nitin Bose’s denial of his desires for the tribal women Rima leads him to the situation he is in. And it is the river Narmada where one can accept his sin and find repentance for the same.

The mythical and mythological beliefs of the tribals, thus, do not hold just the literal meanings of the rituals. The customs of the tribals depicted in the novel demonstrate how they find solutions to each of their problems in nature. Their dedication toward Nature-God symbolizes nature’s power to overcome the

problems in life. The ritual performed by the tribals in the novel shows their nature-worshipping custom as the prominent one. Although tribals have always been viewed as uncivilized communities, their innocence does not mean that they are unaware of worldly things. As A. K. Chaturvedi says: “*Being the descendants of old civilization they are by no means undisciplined, uncivilized and barbarous... Their way of life is characterized by simplicity and naturalness, songs and dances and humour... In a nutshell, their life is governed by spontaneity, love, desire, selfless service, struggles and their belief in primordial power.*” (Chaturvedi 72) Tribals might be away from mainstream society but they are way more enriched and fulfilled in the lap of nature. Their search for need, both material and spiritual, ends in the worship of natural resources as their religious deities. Not only about their own needs, but they also prove to be equally helpful towards the mainstream civilized world if approached for help. “*On being approached the tribals selflessly help in finding out the way to redemption from the maladies that have no remedies except through the tribal rituals and sacraments that are part of the tribal culture.*” (69) In the novel, Gita Mehta has shown many of their rituals concerned with the river Narmada and also their compassion towards the civilized world. The tribal myths as well as the modern civilized society as portrayed in the six stories stands for the unitary pluralism of Indian society held in the collective unconscious of the tradition of nature worship.

### **Conclusion**

In the novel *A River Sutra*. Gita Mehta indirectly presents Nature as the “*Sutradhār*” i.e. the storyteller and the “*sutra*” i.e. the binding thread. The river Narmada, like a storyteller, binds all the six stories and their connecting link, the Bureaucrat’s story around it. All the six narratives either begin or end near the bank of the holy river. Besides that, all the stories, with different protagonists and their personal conflicts, end up finding

renunciation near the bank of Narmada, the holy river. This interconnectedness among the characters, despite being poles apart, displays the unity in the multiple consciousnesses of the Indian psyche. The diverse Indian society celebrates both the civilized and the indigenous existence through the Indian way of worship rituals. The novel carries the aura of Indianness throughout the story through cultural values and traditional Nature worship themes. Throughout the novel, there are interactions between the river and the characters. The Narmada pilgrimage and the rituals being performed at its bank have been amply deployed in the novel.

Each of the Indian rituals begins and ends with a folk or traditional song praising the worshipped deity. In the novel, there can be seen innumerable of such folk and religious songs related to the river Narmada, tribal rituals, Jain religion, Indian classical music, and witchcraft. The last chapter of the novel has been dedicated fully to these songs being sung by the Minstrel. Mehta portrays tribals, the ardent nature admirers, and their mythical rituals very clearly as nature worship. Their rituals make readers realize that despite all the material privileges available to humans, they find redemption in nature. Nature, the supreme ruler on Earth, can keep us alive with its resources but when treated ill it can devastate our lives in a second. Usha Bande very aptly summarises the novel saying: *“Thematically, the novel has many focal points & renunciation, love, lust, ego and involvement and a number of others. It contains an eloquent commentary on Hindu myths, rituals and beliefs; it is an exposition of contemporary Indian psyche; it provides a useful dialogue on spiritualism vs. materialism, detachment vs. attachment, love vs. its various shades, and modernity vs. tradition, but finally and significantly, it eulogizes Narmada.”* (126)

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9. **Gary Langford** is a painter writer in Melbourne, Australia. His paintings have been used by the publishers of more than half of his 44 books, wherever they are in the world (16 works of fiction, 19 works of poetry, 4 textbooks, 3 plays and 2 non-fiction works).
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12. **Jason Ryberg** is the author of eighteen books of poetry, six screenplays, a few short stories, a box full of folders, notebooks and scraps of paper that could one day be (loosely) construed as a novel, and, a couple of angry letters to various magazine and newspaper editors. He is currently an artist-in-residence at both The Prospero Institute of Disquieted P/o/e/t/i/c/s and the Osage Arts Community, and is an editor and designer at Spartan Books. His latest collection of poems is *The Great American Pyramid Scheme* (co-authored with W.E. Leathem, Tim Tarkelly and Mack Thorn, OAC Books, 2022). He lives part-time in Kansas City, MO with a rooster named Little Red and a billygoat named Giuseppe

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14. **John Zedolik** is an adjunct English professor at Chatham University and Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has published poems in such journals as *Abbey* (USA), *The Bangalore Review* (IND), *Commonweal* (USA), *FreeXpresSion* (AUS), *Orbis* (UK), *Paperplates* (CAN), *Poem* (USA), *Poetry Salzburg Review* (AUT), *Third Wednesday* (USA), *Transom* (USA), and in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. In 2019, he published a full-length collection, entitled *Salient Points and Sharp Angles* (CW Books), which is available through Amazon, and last September published another collection, *When the Spirit Moves Me* (Wipf& Stock), which consists of spiritually-themed poems and is also available through Amazon.
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USA, UK, Canada, Romania, Australia, Sweden, Turkey and India. In 2020, a trade publisher released a collection of his work titled *The Enormity of Existence*, and in 2021 another collection titled *Of Earth and Earth*. He went on to teach ESL in Taiwan [where his wife is from] and Japan. His 3rd book, “Soul Songs”, was just released.

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# GJPP



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