

READING CORNER

HISTORY | LITERATURE | ART | CULTURE | HERITAGE | BIOGRAPHY | TRAVEL | WILDLIFE | RELIGION | SELF-HELP | FICTION | TRANSLATION | CINEMA | FOOD

MONSOON MUSINGS

Whenever the monsoon arrives in town, I take two urgent precautions to protect the authenticity of my personal responses to it. First, I strictly avoid listening to any kind of Tagore songs about the monsoon (which is a massive holy ritual among the Bengali cognoscenti during that season), simply because I do not want to be overwhelmed by Tagore's spiritual melancholy about the monsoon, and thereby fail to recognise my original feelings evoked by this great season. Second, I firmly discard the popular notion that the season of the monsoon is the season of sexual union, a la Kalidasa and Vatsyayana, which is a great Indian erotic cliché. I scoff at this notion because, for me, every season of the year is a differently-flavoured season of sex, and the monsoon erotica is in no way superior to the erotica of other seasons.

Thus I project my true self towards the charms of the monsoon and revive my own original impression about it that I hold since childhood. This impression consists of one unforgettable image and one irresistible urge created by the monsoon in my mind. The image is that of the huge advancing dark blue shadows of the first rainclouds coming towards me over a vast riverbank, like the shadows of a mythical bird that would lovingly wipe out the drabness of reality and invest it with the magical powers of life. And the urge is that of a schoolboy who is raring to go to the fields with friends to play football in the rains. Till today, whenever I ponder about which experience I have enjoyed most in my pretty long life, the ineffable thrills of playing football on a wet field in slanting, torrential rain

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surpasses all. Thus the combined effect of this image of cloud-shadows and the urge to play football in the rains reawakens my own creative response to the beauty of the monsoon.

In short, I get around Tagore's mystical monsoon to realise my own sensual monsoon. And this monsoon for me, is a special season of poetry, a very fresh, juicy verdant kind of poetry that won't grow in the mind in other seasons. This poetry originates from the primal Bengali rhyme: 'Jol Pore, Pata Nore' (Rains fall, leaves tremble). And underneath the textbook words of this rhyme, I see, like watermarks, Tagore's smiling face once again! I feel rejuvenated by these monsoon musings and recall two memorable pieces on rain in world literature. The first piece is from Pablo Neruda's *Memoirs*, subtitled 'Childhood and Poetry':

'I will start out by saying this about the days and years of my childhood: the rain was the one unforgettable presence for me then. The great southern rain, coming down like a waterfall from

the Pole, from the skies of Cape Horn to the frontier. On this frontier my countries Wild West, I first opened my eyes to life, the land, poetry, and the rain ... Sometimes it rained for a whole month, for a whole year. Threads of rain fell like long needles of glass snapping off on the roofs or coming up against the windows in transparent waves and each house was a ship struggling to make port in the ocean of winter.'

And the second piece is from Gabriel Garcia Marquez's masterpiece *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:

'It rained for four years, eleven months and two days. There were periods of drizzle during which everyone put on his full dress and a convalescent look to celebrate the clearing, but people soon grew accustomed to interpret the pauses as a sign of redoubled rain. The sky crumbled into a set of destructive storms and out of the north came hurricanes that scattered roofs about and knocked down walls and uprooted every last plant of the banana groves ... The worst part was that the rain was affecting everything and the driest of machines would have flowers popping out among their gears if they were not oiled every three days, and the threads in brocades rusted, and wet clothing would break out in a rash of saffron-coloured moss. The air was so damp that fish could have come in through the doors and swum out of the windows, floating through the atmosphere in the rooms.'

I also recall a memorable line of J.M. Coetzee from his novel *Disgrace*:

'Love will grow. One can trust Mother Nature for that.'

Indeed, love will grow, and monsoon is the season when this miracle will happen on earth, year after year.



Ranajit Das
Reputed poet and critic in Bengali

Niyogi Books is expanding! We now have a bookstore at **KOLKATA**

12/1A, 1st Floor, Bankim Chatterjee Street
(near Coffee House, Opp Sanskrit College), Kolkata 700 003

#seasonspecial

Monsoon Feelings

This lavishly illustrated collection examines the history of monsoon feelings in South Asia from the twelfth century to the present. It contains a series of evocative essays exploring the rain-drenched worlds of poetry, songs, paintings, architecture, films, gardens,



festivals, music and medicine. Each essay is written by a specialist in the field of South Asian arts and culture. The book investigates emotions as reflections of social, cultural and political change across borders of language and religion.

Editor Katherine Butler Schofield was in conversation with Michael Bywater and discussed about this book at Mughal Courtyard, **ZEE Jaipur Literature Festival**, British Library, **London** on 9 July 2018.



Imke Rajamani
A researcher at the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin.

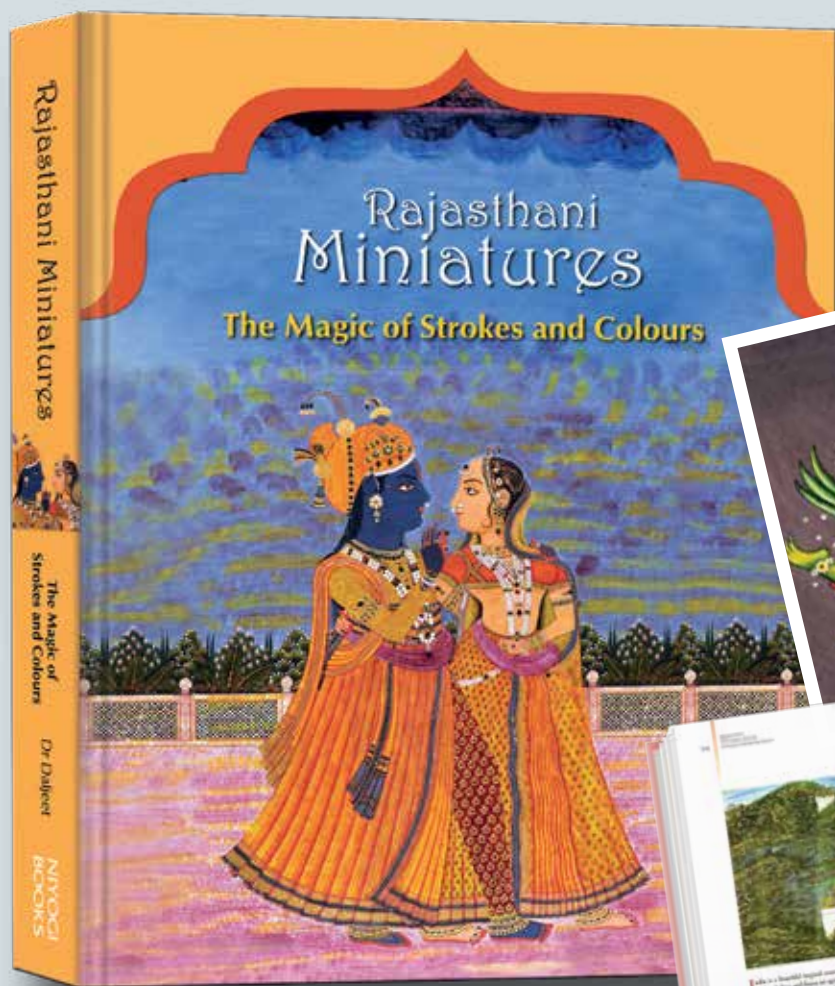


Margrit Pernau
A Senior Researcher at the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin.



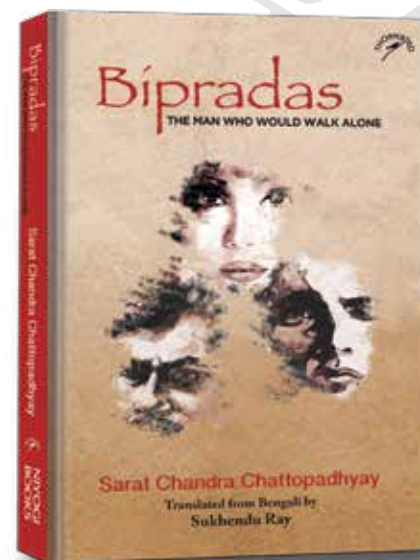
Katherine Butler Schofield
A Senior Lecturer in the Music Department at King's College London, she has written on the intersecting histories of emotions, the senses, aesthetics and ethics.

2 | PRE-MONSOON RELEASES



Dr Daljeet
Art historian and archaeologist, former curator and head of the Department of Painting in the National Museum, New Delhi, she is now Consultant, Sports Authority of India (SAI), New Delhi, engaged in its museum project.

There was humidity and heat, the dust settling in nooks and corners, when this exquisite book got its pre-monsoon launch. Reflected in its pages is the uniqueness of Rajasthani art, where shades and strokes come together in what almost appears as a divine interplay to create magic. The detailed narrative and exquisite photographs offer a glimpse into this art that has spanned several millennia.



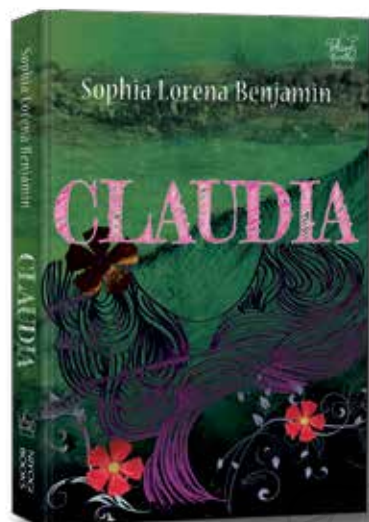
TRANSLATED FROM BENGALI

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay

An illustrious Bengali writer of the early 20th century, his stories narrate the lives of village people and the social practices that prevailed in Bengal.

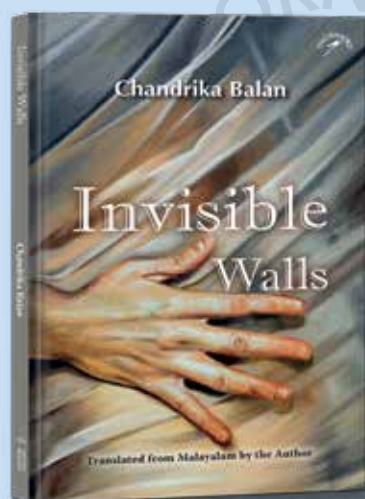


Set against a rural backdrop of 20th century Bengal, the story of Bipradas (1935) revolves around the life and family of the central protagonist, who is also the charismatic hero of the novel. A conflict of cultures is at play in this novel—ancient Hindu versus the modern culture, influenced mainly by Western education and reformatory ideas.



Sophia Lorena Benjamin
A Confidence and Communications Coach, she has written for several local and international newspapers and magazines. This is her first book.

Claudia is a young Goan village girl who is clever, charming and ambitious. With two older sisters, unmarried because their reputation is spoiled by insensible premarital affairs, Claudia is the family's only hope. Her arranged marriage could restore honour within their conservative community.

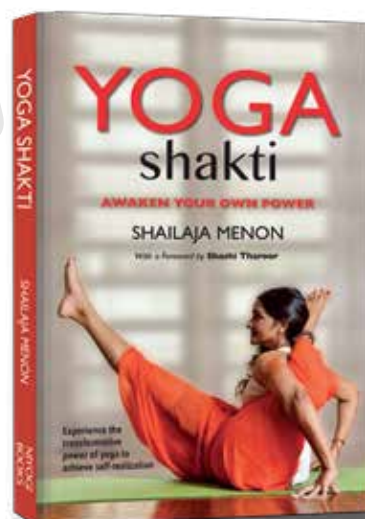


TRANSLATED FROM MALAYALAM



Chandrika Balan
She is a bilingual writer, academic critic, orator and translator and the recipient of 15 awards, including the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award.

This book is about two women, Kamala and Aparna, whose lives run in parallel though they do not know each other. They dream of a world without walls, but invisible barriers surround and crush them.

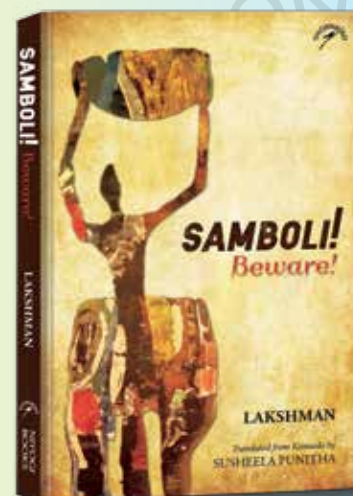


Shailaja Menon

A certified Manasa yoga teacher, speaker and freelance writer/editor based in Malaysia, she has over 18 years of experience in yoga, both as a teacher and as a practitioner.



The author not only explores the physical benefits of practising yoga, but also the spiritual and mental fulfilment that one gains from this practice. Using personal experience as a driving force, she explains the origins of Manasa yoga and recommends daily exercises to help introduce beginners to yoga.



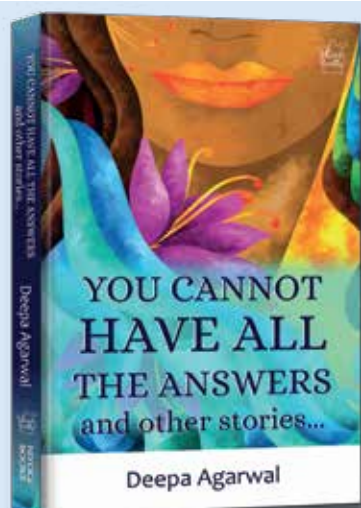
TRANSLATED FROM KANNADA

Lakshman
Social activist and an eminent Kannada writer.



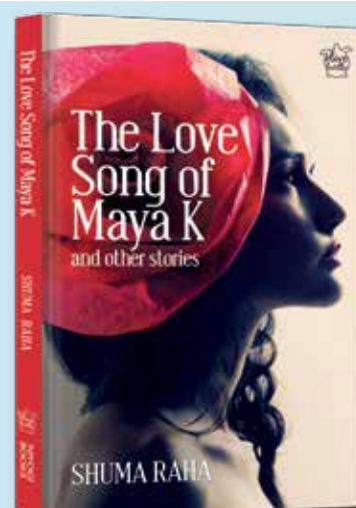
Susheela Punitha
She has translated from Kannada to English, including excerpts on theatre in Karnataka for the University of Delhi.

Manu, the ancient lawgiver, decreed that people belonging to the untouchable castes had to hold a pole with bells tied to one end and pound it on the ground at every step. They had to call out, 'Samboli! Samboli!'



A collection of 15 short stories that offers a glimpse into the conflicting emotions which define the human condition, and portrays characters who attempt to seek answers to a variety of existential questions. The narratives deal with issues such as trauma, sexuality, prejudice, family relations and the recklessness of youth.

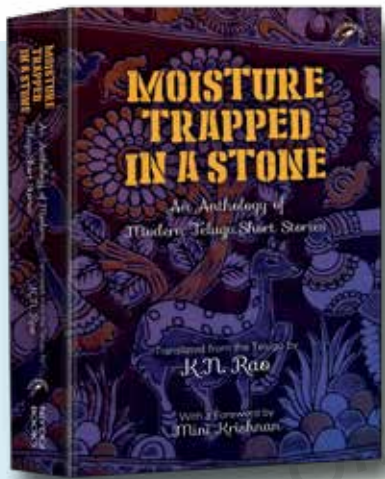
Deepa Agarwal
A poet and translator who writes for both, children and adults, she has over 50 books published. Among other recognitions, she has received the NCERT National Award for Children's Literature.



Set in Kolkata and Delhi, the stories in this collection deal with love and betrayal, dogma and superstition, sexuality and thwarted desires. The characters belong to the world of urban, aspirational India where snobbery goes hand-in-hand with class and religious conflicts. These stories are a snapshot of modern India as well as an intense crystallisation of the chaos of life.

Shuma Raha
A former journalist, this book is her debut collection of short stories. She has won the Juggernaut Short Story Prize, 2017.



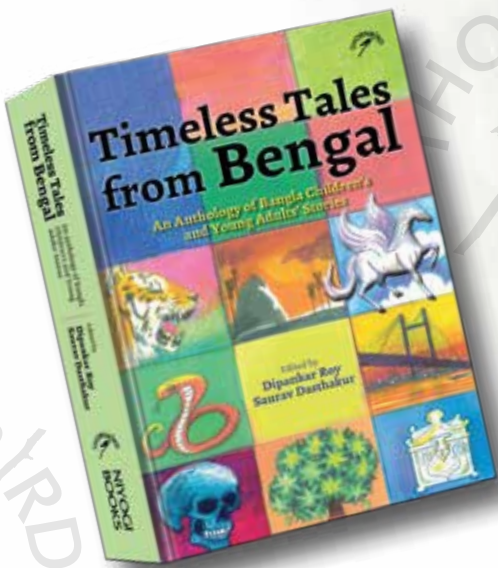


TRANSLATED FROM TELUGU



K.N. Rao
Along with academics, he has pursued his hobby of creative writing and regularly contributes stories and articles to Telugu magazines and journals.

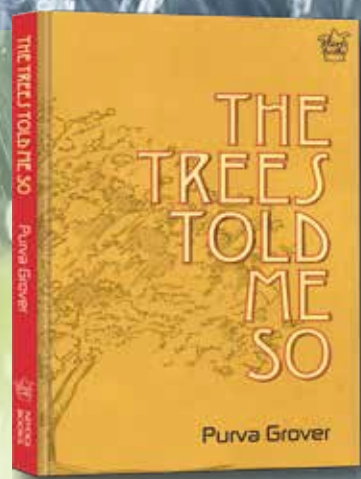
An anthology of **modern Telugu short stories** by writers of Telugu fiction who have carved out a niche for themselves in the annals of Indian literature.



Dipankar Roy
Teaches at the Department of English, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and has translated Bengali poetry into English and vice versa.



Saurav Dasthakur
Assistant Professor of English at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. His areas of research include modernist literature, children's literature, culture studies and translation.



Purva Grover
A journalist, poet, playwright and stage director, she is the founder-editor of *The Indian Trumpet*, a quarterly digital magazine for Indian expats.

A collection of short stories that draws a **poignant picture of love, life and loss**, with an honest voice. The common thread is that nature (read: a tree) stands witness like an old soul—full of wisdom and compassion.

Rainy Days and a Good Book

'What is the second best thing to do during the monsoons?' she asked.

'Dancing in the rain, perhaps,' I ventured a guess.

'That would be my first choice,' she replied, going on to ask, 'What is yours, then?'

'Sitting by the window, in the background of the *jham-jham* or *tupur-tapur* of the rain, curled up with a book that I wanted to read for a long time.'

My conversation with the baby leaves faded out as I went into a reverie. I recount from my childhood days, my mother harping on Tagore's lines,

*Sullen clouds are gathering fast over the black fringe of the forest.
O child, do not go out!*

As the falling rain curtained the exit, I would sulk and ask, 'Why doesn't the peacock's mother tell him so?' I would stare at the rain coming down on earth and gradually find myself asking a barrage of curious questions. I would remind myself that Rabindranath Tagore, aged 7, wrote his first poem while looking out of the window on a rainy day—*Jol Pore, Pata Nore* (It is raining, leaves are shaking). I would feel inspired and would indulge in a creative art, be it dance or music, or reading. From Arundhati Roy to Beethoven's musical notes, I acquainted myself with them as the rains curtained me from the outside world temporarily. It was, perhaps, the forced me-time in a world of workaholism that I found myself. While summer and spring give us an abundance of fruits and energy, the monsoons and winters are, I believe, the seasons for the replenishment of the soul.

Looking back, I feel the rains intensified my senses as well. The green looked verdant, the sky took on a deeper shade of blue, the rainbow shone brighter and my questions became

more difficult and demanding. But, even as my questions and the world around me changed as the years went by, the clouds seemed to be untouched. Hence, taking a cue from Rabindranath Tagore's writings on monsoon, I conclude that one of the basic tenets of this season is the spirit of self-renewal for not only does it renew whatever it touches, it regains its cherubic countenance soon. This reminds me of Mirabai's poem, a part of which I quote:

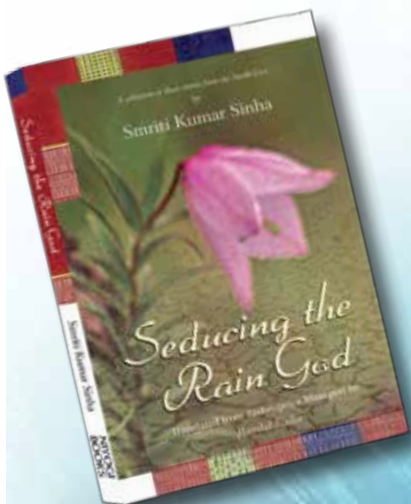
*Clouds—
I watched as they ruptured,
ash black and pallid I saw mountainous clouds
split and spew
rain for two hours.
Everywhere water, plants and rainwater,
a riot of green on the earth.*

And, as the rain-curtains are lifted, I feel rejuvenated, with some questions explored and some new ones raised. Monsoon reading, since then, has become an annual ritual, which I intend to uphold and infect everyone around me with. As a matter of fact, even my email signature quotes Rumi ... words that are also inspired by rain:

*Raise your words, not your voice.
It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.*



Trisha De Niyogi



TRANSLATED FROM BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI

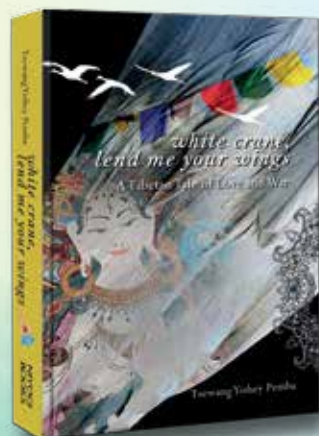
The 14 stories in this compilation are **rich in structure and texture, novel in theme**, innovative in terms of technique and expression, weaving a tapestry of sacred rituals, ancient customs and simple lives. This translation presents the unique regional culture of North-East India.



Ramlal Sinha
A veteran journalist from the North-East, he has a two-decade-long experience and is committed to presenting the best creative works in Bishnupriya Manipuri.



Smriti Kumar Sinha
A leading short story writer in Bishnupriya Manipuri, a little-known indigenous language of the North-East, he has published three collections and has received the Geetiswami Memorial Award.



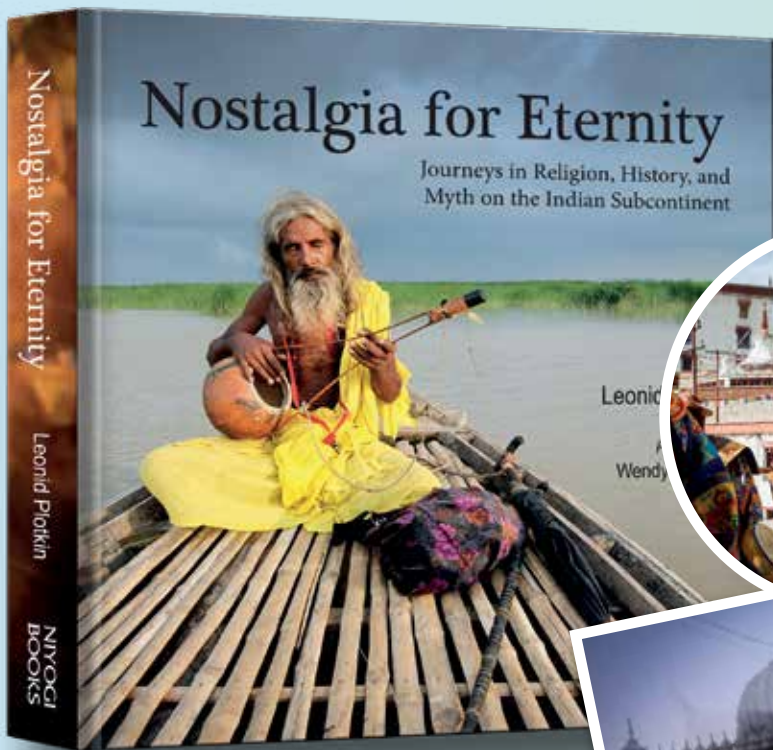
Tsewang Yishey Pemba
He is the founding father of Tibetan literature in English and the first Tibetan to become a doctor in Western medical science.

A **historical fiction** set in the Nyarong Valley of the Kham province of Eastern Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century. The author skillfully weaves a dazzling tapestry of individual lives and sweeping events.



Malathi Ramachandran
An avid reader, amateur artist and an ardent itinerant, she has travelled widely and loves observing people of different cultures. Two of her short stories have won prizes in British Council short fiction contests.

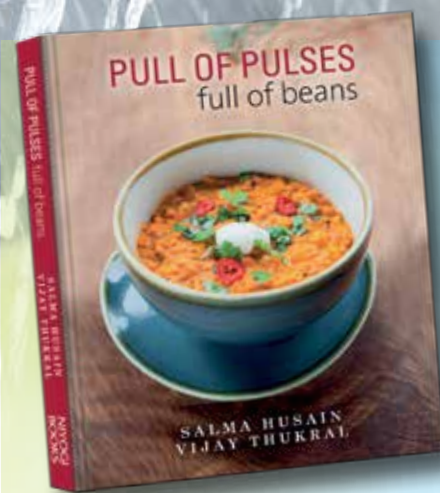
Kuldhara, a village in the Rajasthan desert, is perched at the edge of time. It dreams of its vibrant past when the streets echoed with laughter and the fields swayed with green and gold. Then **something happened one night that drove its inhabitants from their homes**, never to return. Did they flee to preserve their honour, when the covetous gaze of a local lord fell on Pari? Where did they go? How did they survive?



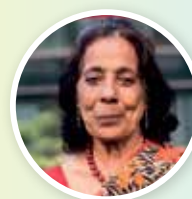
The culmination of five years' travel with Indian pilgrims, this book is a **stunning visual poem** about the timeless human search for transcendence and ultimate truth.



Leonid Plotkin
A freelance documentary photographer since 2007, his work has appeared in various international publications including *National Geographic*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *The Guardian* and *The Economist*.



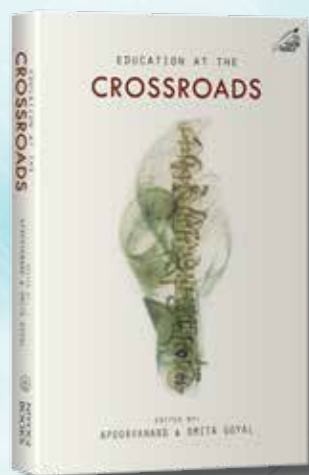
This book is a **tribute to the rich and awesome diversity of Indian gastronomic traditions**. The recipes include not only dal curries but also dal-based snacks, savouries and sweets from various regions and communities of India. There are also several international lentil recipes.



Salma Husain
A passionate cook, food historian and a Persian scholar who has worked with the Celebrity Chef, Gary Rhodes, for a British television serial.



Vijay Thukral
Executive Chef, India International Centre, Delhi, he has been serving the global hospitality industry for more than 35 years and the IIC since 1988.

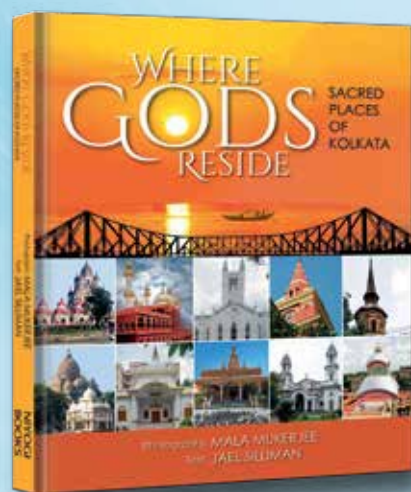


The contributors provide a clear understanding of the current state of education in India, which stands at a crossroads. **A common theme running through the book is the recognition that education will teach us to think and question.**



Apoorvanand
He is Professor of Hindi, University of Delhi, and was part of the core group that designed the National Curriculum Framework for School Education in 2005.

Omita Goyal
She is Chief Editor of the *IIC Quarterly*, the journal of the India International Centre. Prior to this she worked at Sage Publications India.

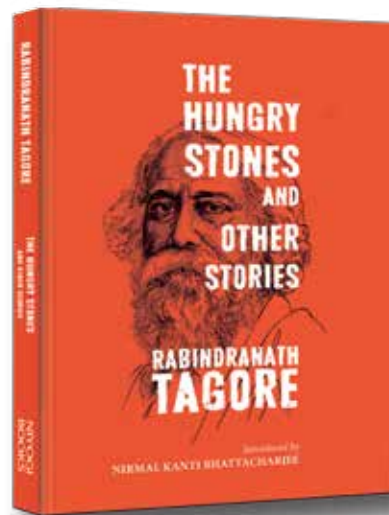


In this book, **Kolkata's unique spiritual heritage is presented through splendid photographs** of its diverse places of worship, which are symbols of the city's composite culture.

Mala Mukerjee
Her work has been exhibited in all major cities in India and abroad and she has received several awards for excellence.

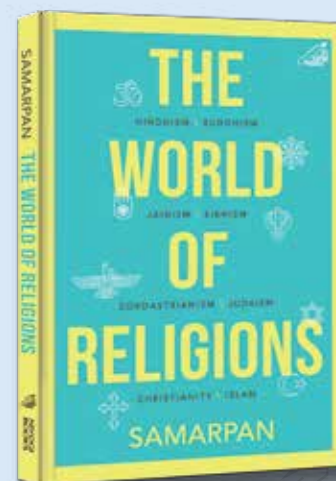


Jael Silliman
An independent scholar, consultant and writer, she has written extensively about the Baghdadi Jewish community.



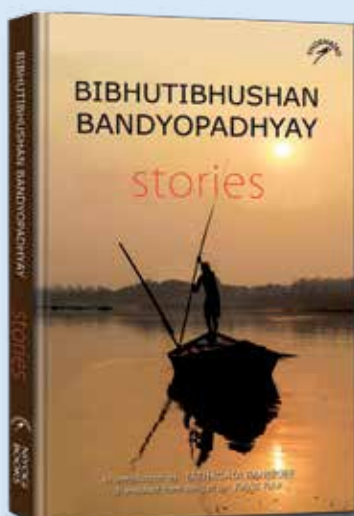
The 13 stories in this compilation are the truest representation of life by the Bard of Bengal, Rabindranath Tagore. These heart-warming short stories are both dramatic and poetic in effect. They are aesthetically orchestrated and constructed and bring to light the trials and tribulations of human life, the simplicities and complexities of relationships, overlaid with supernatural issues, morality and the sufferings of the soul.

Rabindranath Tagore, sobriquet Gurudev, was a Bengali polymath who reshaped Bengali literature and music, as well as Indian art with Contextual Modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.



A book that presents eight major religions of the world and discusses their origin, growth and impact on society. The chapters **reveal the greatness of every religion**, all of which aspire to integrate purity, compassion and peace in everyday life.

Samarpan
A monk and a teacher whose talks on the Indian scriptures have a stirring presence in electronic media, he has written extensively in Hindi and English.

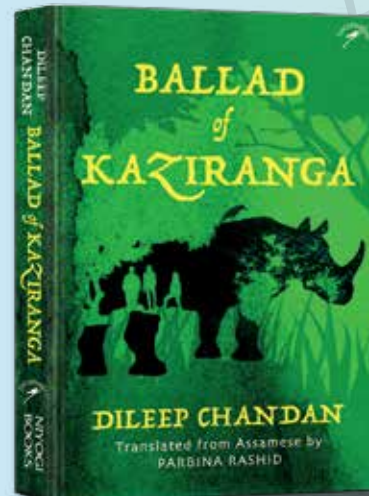


The brilliance of Bibhutibhushan's stories lies in his preoccupation with a whole universe of human beings discovering their destinies amid their complicated circumstances; as well as **for the feeling of intimacy he invokes among his readers, making even ordinary lives seem extraordinary**. The stories in this collection, introduced by the author's grandson, Tathagata Banerjee, are some of the finest examples of his storytelling.

Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay
A prominent fiction writer in Bengali literature, he is best known for his novel *Pather Panchali* and its sequel, *Aparajito*.



Rani Ray
She has taught English at the University of Delhi, University of California at Santa Barbara, USA and the Institute of English Studies in Poland.



This is not a love story, but rather, the story of the love that three friends share for the beautiful and majestic Kaziranga. It is through the lives of these three men and their dreams, aspirations and sometimes, even their frustration and anguish that Kaziranga unfolds itself. A riveting story, **it also throws light on the current state of affairs in the national park** and the problems plaguing it.



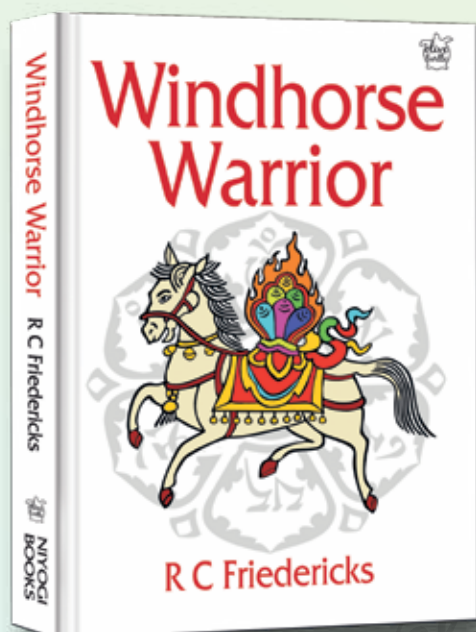
Dileep Chandan
A senior journalist working in Assam, he has written 18 books on various facets of society and the North-East.



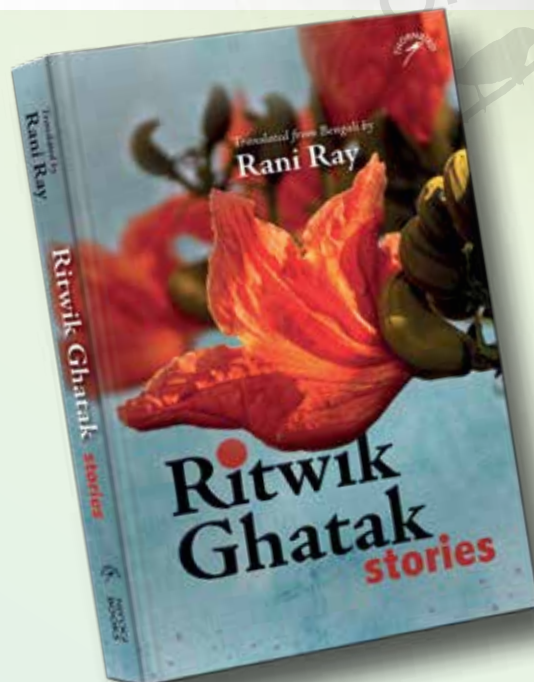
Parbina Rashid
She writes a column, opinion pieces as well as reviews books for *The Tribune*.

TRANSLATED FROM ASSAMESE

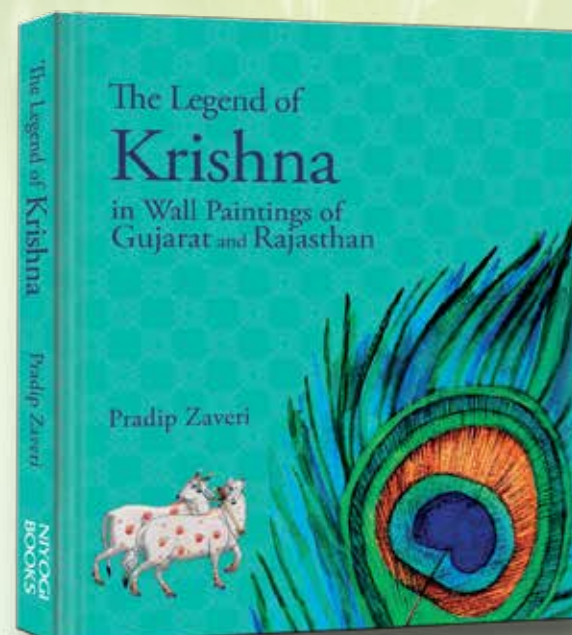
TRANSLATED FROM BENGALI



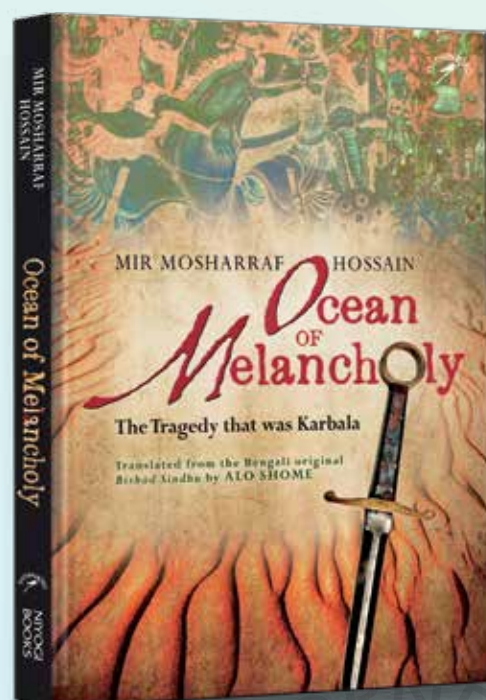
A look at the aspirations of the Tibetan people during the 1950s, it is a tale that weaves together the politics of occupation and resistance, a romance between a Chinese communist and an educated Tibetan woman.



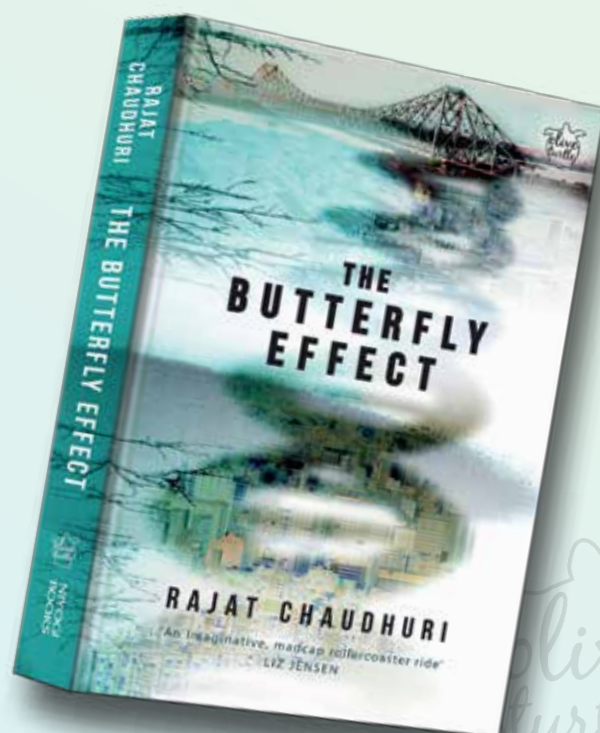
These stories are not only a living part of Ritwik Ghatak's development as a creative artist—a writer and a filmmaker—they are also essential for an understanding of the totality of being that went into the making of his films.



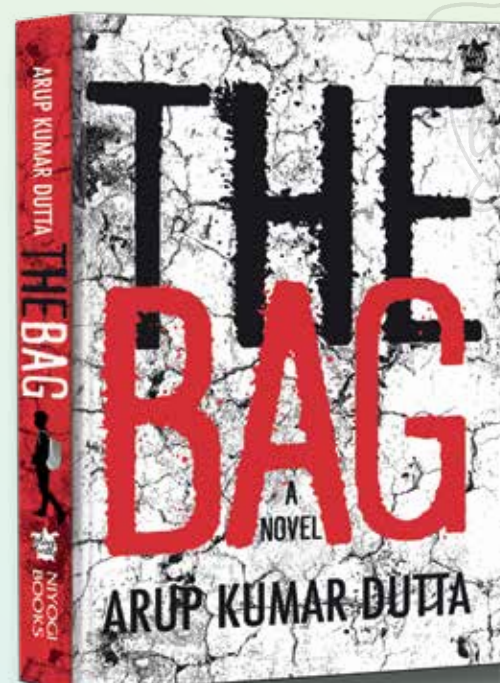
A comprehensive documentation of the Krishna theme in an art form that is now on the verge of extinction, this book explores the Krishna myth in its historical and cultural context. It includes paintings that illustrate the deeds of Vishnu and his other avatars.



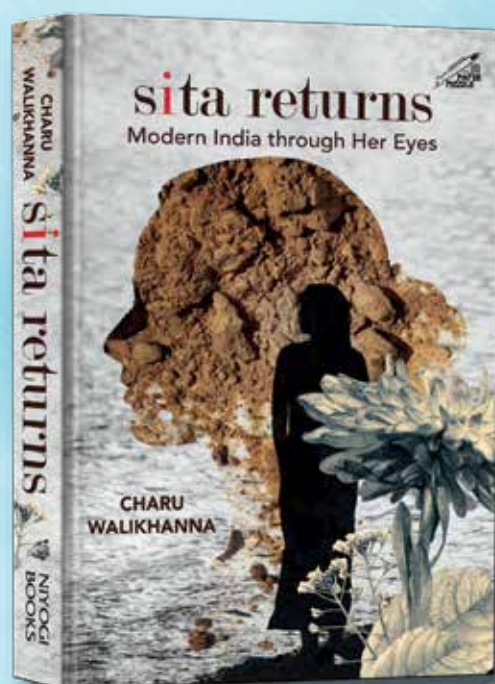
A historical novel centred around events that led to the battle of Karbala in Iraq and its aftermath. The plot is dramatic and deeds of heroism and supernatural occurrences render an epic flavour to its narrative.



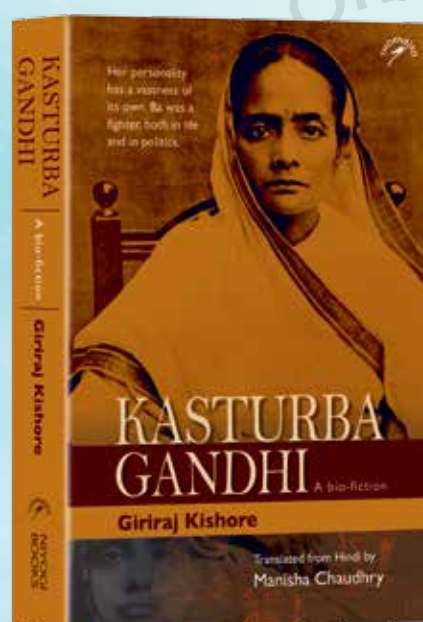
From utopian communities of Asia to the prison camps of Pyongyang and from the gene labs of Europe to the violent streets of Darkland, this time-travelling novel crosses continents, weaving mystery, adventure and romance.



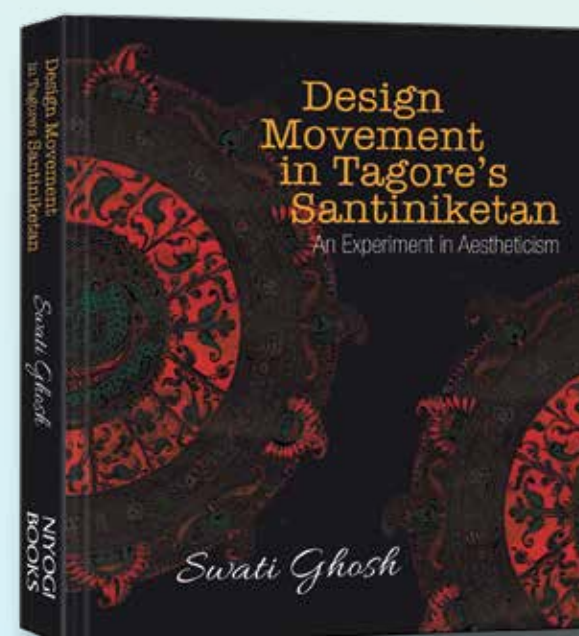
This book zooms in on one-of-the-all too many poignant mini-dramas that are played out in the conflict zones of North-East India, where no one 'wins'. It is undoubtedly the most powerful insurgency-related novel to have come out in recent times.



This book embarks on Sita's journey to discover the condition of women in 21st century India. She relates her own experiences to those of women today, creating a contrast between the past and the present.



A fictionalised biography of Kasturba Gandhi, a lady as strong and great as Mahatma Gandhi, who earned a place in history because of her personal sacrifices and strength of conviction in what was right as much as on account of being the wife of Mahatma Gandhi.



Set in a rich cultural landscape, this book chronicles the evolution of hand-drawn designs across nations, cultures and time. It narrates, through sketches and photographs, the transformative journey of Bengal's traditional motifs from folk art to a symbol of cultural identity.

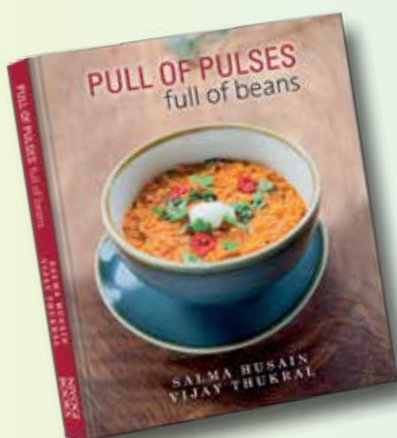
EVENTS

Rabindranath Special



L-R: Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee, Somdatta Mandal, Sourin Bhattacharya, Sankha Ghosh and Amiya Dev at the book launch held at **Oxford Bookstore, Park Street, Kolkata.**

Pull of Pulses: Full of Beans



Trisha De Niyogi in conversation with the author, Salma Husain, at an interactive event held at **Om Book Shop, DLF Place Mall, Saket, New Delhi.**

The Love Song of Maya K and Other Stories



L-R: Shuma Raha (author), Mrinal Pande, Poonam Saxena and Anita Agnihotri at the book launch, **IIC Annexe, New Delhi.**

PC Sorcar: The Maharaja of Magic



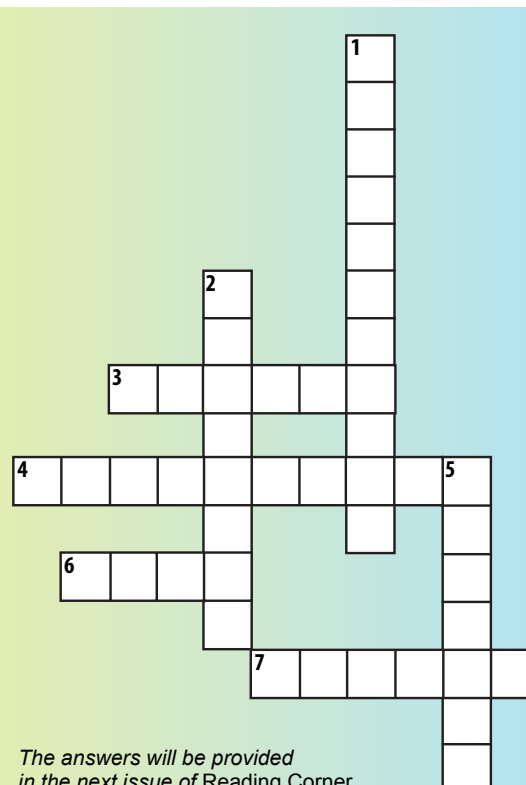
L-R: Mumtaz Sorcar, Jayashree Sorcar, PC Sorcar Jr (author), Pankaj Shaha, Maneka Sorcar and Moubani Sorcar at the book launch held at **Starmark Book Store, South City Mall, Kolkata.**

Timeless Tales from Bengal: An Anthology of Bangla Children's and Young Adults' Stories



L-R: Sucharita Ghosh, Trisha De Niyogi, Saurav Dasthakur (co-editor), Prasad Ranjan Ray, Bani Basu, Surangana Banerjee, Dipankar Roy (co-editor) and Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee at the book launch held at **Starmark Book Store, South City Mall, Kolkata.**

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- A heavy flood (6)
- A sudden violent rainstorm (10)
- The sky and thunder god in ancient Greek religion (4)
- A raga so powerful when sung that it induces rainfall (6)

DOWN

- Writer of a song on rains sung by a clown in a comedy (11)
- The poet who has written a classic love poem on 'Cloud Messenger' (8)
- A strong, dangerous wind that forms itself into an upside-down spinning cone and is able to destroy buildings as it moves across the ground (7)

The answers will be provided in the next issue of Reading Corner

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