

# READING CORNER

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



Looking closely at 'The month of Bhadrapada or Bhadon', a folio from a *Barahmasa* Album, Amber/Jaipur, c. 1700–1725 CE, The British Museum, London, (1999,1202,0.1.8):

The deep, all-embracing clouds of the monsoon gather overhead, as lightning flashes across the dark sky, and heavy rains pour onto the lush, green floor. Encapsulated within this intense downpour, a couple sit upon a floral carpet within a garden pavilion, calmly speaking amongst themselves while the female figure grasps the golden edge of her translucent pink *odhani*.

The inscription in Braj Bhasa at the top of the painting describes this sensorially intense encounter, bringing to our visual reading a multitude of other sensory experiences, contrasting the sanctuary of the interior with the torrential rains outside (full translation available on the British Museum collections website, 1999,1202,0.1.8). To venture outdoors is to enter this chaos, while staying within the walls of the pavilion, the couple can enjoy the pleasures of the month of Bhadon, surrounded by the beauty of their elegantly decorated shelter.

This encounter, described here both in image and in word, comes from a verse in the poet Keshavdas' *Barahmasa* (Song of Seasons),



scents, tastes and aesthetics. However, when we visit what remains of such sites today, what we experience is only half of that which was felt centuries ago. Missing are the textile clothes of the structure, whose carefully chosen material characteristics curated the felt experience of those such as the couple pictured here as they inhabited and enjoyed the space.

To return to the image, looking closely at the visual clues left by the painter as keys for unlocking the sensations of the month of Bhadon, we begin to realise that

what the couple actually come into direct contact with is textiles, not stone as we would assume when visiting such sites today. They sit upon a rich hand-knotted carpet, likely made of pashmina fibre, which is warm to the touch, tactile and shifts ever so slightly with the movement of their bodies. On this carpet, two large bolster cushions define the pose of both figures and represent the largest surface area of physical bodily contact. In fact, focusing on the hands of the princely figure, we see that he is clutching the cushion under his arm, supporting his body as he speaks with his beloved. This close attention paid to the sensation of touch extends to the female figure, who holds in both of her hands the heavy golden edge of her finely woven *odhani*.

## SENSES, MOODS AND SPACES: Experiencing Textiles And Architecture During The Monsoon

and hints at the unique feelings of being inside during a monsoon downpour, sitting within architecture specifically designed and suited to this unique climate. As with most garden pavilion architecture of this period (17–18th century CE), it was an extension of other, more extensive palatial architecture. Such structures were the sites of gatherings and less formal activities of court, and represent places of comfort surrounded by carefully maintained gardens, whose plants were chosen for their



Moving upwards, a blind has been drawn to provide access to the interior of the pavilion, whose fabric is likely supported upon a bamboo *chik*. The sound of the pouring rain, the sight of it dripping from sandstone *chhajjās* (eaves) onto textile awnings, likely waxed like *qalandari* awnings for tents, create a visual and material barrier between outside and inside. A wall of water cascading around the couple intensifies the multi-sensory experience of their encounter, encapsulating them within the space in a moving, tactile world.

The taste of the spray as it bounces off the sandstone threshold, the scent of the brass *paandan* and its contents, along with other foods and drinks on the floor beside them—all of these contributed towards a specific emotional mood, captured, preserved, and accessed here at the intersection of text and image.



A major season within the yearly cycle, continuous to the present day and yet ever-changing, the monsoon affects all who feel it throughout India and beyond. This picture gives us a window into understanding how it felt centuries ago.

Jordan Quill

PhD Candidate in Northern  
Indian Textiles, Architecture  
and Art, The Courtauld  
Institute of Art



\*The image has been taken from the chapter 'Clouds, Cuckoos and an Empty Bed: Emotions in Hindi-Urdu Barahmasas' (authored by Francesca Orsini) in the book *Monsoon Feelings: A History of Emotions in the Rain* (Niyogi Books, 2018), which is one of Jordan's favourite books. The original folio lies with The British Museum.



## A Monsoon Vignette

The painting, probably belonging to the early 19th century, embodies the passion that supposedly overtakes lovers in the month of Shravana. With lightning flashing through a sky thick with dark clouds, egrets take flight in neat formation towards some faraway land. A pair of peacocks and a monkey watch the sky as a lone farmer ploughs his field in the far distance. But all these are a setting for the lovers' embrace. They sit on a luxurious bed, their bodies flush against each other, her arms encircling his neck, and the women singers down below, presumably singing the Malhara raga, shyly turn their head away from their passionate embrace.

This is a folio from a series of illustrations, possibly to a Baramasa text by the relatively little-known Hindi poet, Gwal, and comes from the family workshop of Nainsukh of Guler, Pahari region.

**BN Goswamy** is a distinguished Indian art critic & art historian.

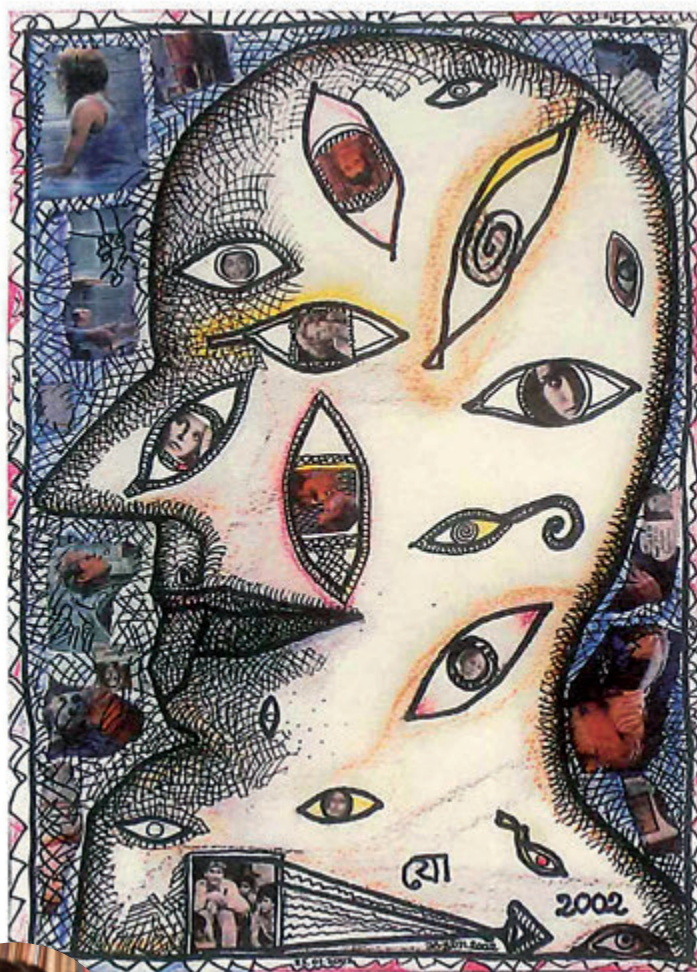


**Eberhard Fischer** is an art historian and cultural anthropologist.

## Their Eyes were Watching...

Titled as *Eyes*, this intriguing still life was painted in 2002 by one of the most celebrated Indian artists of our times—Jogen Chowdhury. The painting uses multiple images of the eye, each different from the other, stuck on a human head—clearly trying to invert the usual privileging of a singular point of view in discourses both social and private, symbolized by a single pair of eyes.

What is most noticeable about the work is the use of memorabilia in the form of scraps of newspaper/magazine photographs superimposed not only at the margins but also within some of the eyeballs. The eyes, therefore, stand not only for consciousness, but are also markers for the actual process that constructs its space. Photographic insertions and their dated stillness are animated as active constituents of consciousness.



**Anuradha Ghosh** is Associate Professor in English at Dinabandhu Andrews College, Kolkata.

An avid collector of Indian textiles and art objects, **Anita Bharat Shah** is a renowned museologist.

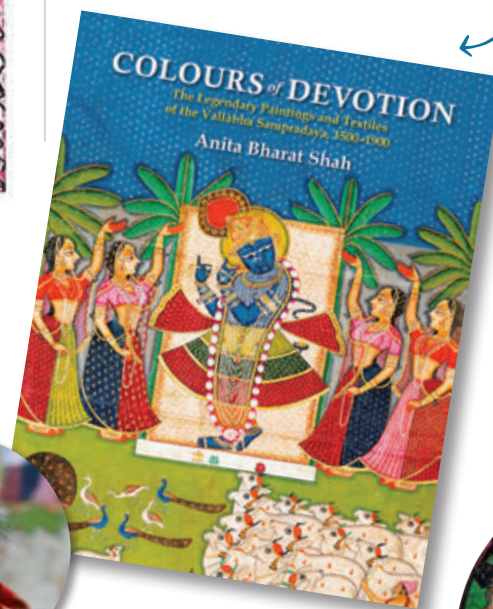


## The Colours of Devotion

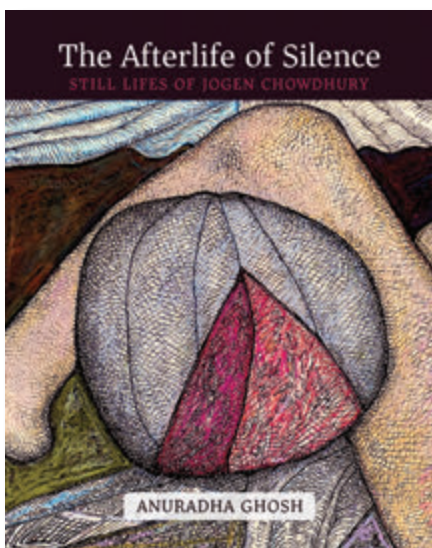


This miniature painting represents the devotion and patronage of Jagjeevandas and his descendants, who followed the Pushtimarg tradition of loving Lord Krishna selflessly. The painting shows the deities of their family shrine before they divided their assets, which included precious idols, pichwais and other sacred objects.

The painting was commissioned by Bhagwandas, the great-grandson of Jagjeevandas, from a Nathdwara artist in the late 19th century. It is now part of the Padmavati and Tarmakdas collection.



This painting is a remarkable example of how art and religion have been intertwined in human history since prehistoric times.

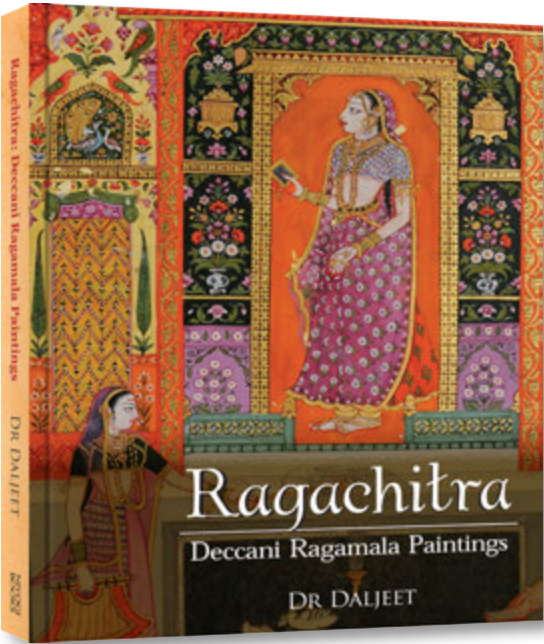




### 3 | A PAINTING IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

#### A Melody Come Alive

The *ragachitras* or *ragmala* paintings are stunning examples of synesthesia, the phenomenon of blending different senses together. In these paintings, the artists translate the musical essence of ragas into visual forms and colours. One such painting depicts Ragaputra Chandrabimb, the second son of Raga Hindola. He is associated with the moon's reflection and its soothing effect. He wears a purple turban and jama, and a garland of fresh flowers. Holding a white lotus in his hand, he sits in a pillared enclosure, playing a drum that resembles a *nagara*, while a lady sings along with her *tambura*.



In the foreground, a lady is swimming in a pond to collect lotuses. Since this *ragaputra* is associated with the moon, the bright blue sky has a setting sun, partly hidden by the palatial building. The hour of singing this *ragaputra* is at sunset, when the glow of the rising moon softly lights up the darkening sky.

Rendered in the Basohli or Pahari style, this *ragachitra* comes probably from late 17th or early 18th century.

Late Dr **Daljeet** was an art historian and archaeologist, former curator and head of the Department of Painting at the National Museum, New Delhi.



#### Gurudeva: Through His Own Eyes

At the age of seventy, when most Indians retire from active life, Tagore's creative abundance gathered in a new gusto in the realm of visual arts.

In May 1934, on the occasion of Tagore's birthday, a special issue of *Visva-Bharati News* was published with an official photograph of the poet adorning the cover. Tagore took twelve copies of this issue and used a pen to playfully deface his photograph in such a way that his face looked masqueraded and different in each cover. These annotated portraits recalled Marcel Duchamp's 'L.H.O.O.Q, 1918', a reworked reproduction of Leonardo Da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'.

His European audience was still nurturing the image that Tagore portrayed in *Gitanjali* – that of a sage rather than a poet. Even at home, he was revered as Gurudeva – the preceptor. These heavily scratched, bantered and transformed photographs reveal an unresolved conflict between this iconic image or the outer man and the other self—the inner man.



**Sovon Som** was a painter, poet, essayist, curator, musicologist, scriptwriter and the first critic to study Tagore's paintings.





## Wild Treasures & Adventures

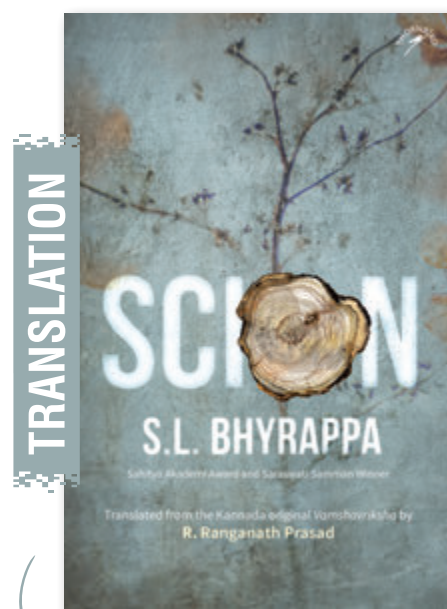
From close encounters with tigers, elephants and other ferocious beasts to daredevilry with timber smugglers and poachers of Rajasthan, Sunayan Sharma recounts tales from his life



**Sunayan Sharma**, formerly a member of the Indian Forest Service, was Wildlife Warden at Jodhpur, Rajasthan, and later, Director at the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur.

in the service of the nation's wildlife reserves. The book also depicts the relocation of endangered keystone species like the tiger and wildlife conservation efforts made by the Indian government, primarily the Project Tiger.

## Scion



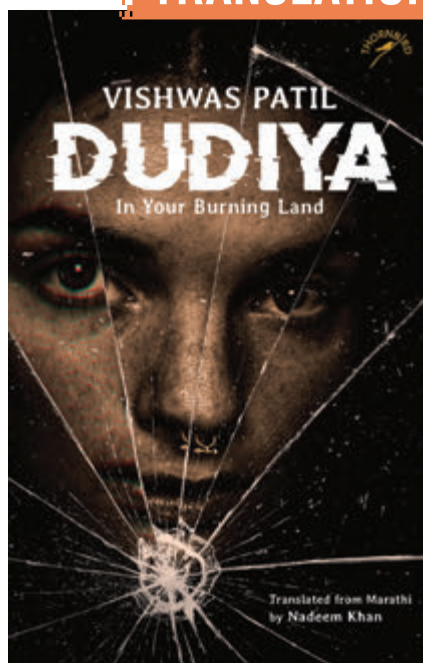
Set in early 20th-century rural Karnataka, *Scion* is a work of great sociocultural importance, chronicling the intersecting lives of a handful of highly intelligent, sensitive, and emotive characters—all torn apart, brought together, and then torn apart again under extraordinary circumstances.

The novel also explores the concept of polygamy, re-marriage (in a time when it was a social taboo), death, grief, devotion, celibacy, reverse narratives of motherhood, Oedipus complex, self-sacrifice or lack thereof, betrayal, forgiveness, and transcendence and resurrection.

**S.L. Bhyrappa** is an Indian novelist, philosopher & screenwriter who writes in Kannada.

Translator **R. Ranganath Prasad** participated in literary circles, studying classical Sanskrit and Kannada literature.

## TRANSLATION



## Dudiya

Vishwas Patil's *Dudiya* is a necessary and thrilling novel of the Naxalism in Chhattisgarh.

It spins a fascinating tale of a civil servant, Dilip Pawar, posted as an Election Observer in Chhattisgarh. The novel charts how he meets a young Adivasi girl, Dudiya, whose life is torn between running from the guillotines of both the state government and Naxals; who, forced by gruelling circumstances, had to be indoctrinated with them but ended up surrendering to the police in the end.

The novel paints the gruesome reality of states and tribal communities trodden by poverty, and Naxals burning through them—an illustrious view of violence, blood and grittiness.



**Vishwas Patil** (top) is one of the most prolific and best-known authors in Marathi.

**Nadeem Khan** has been a teacher of English for fifty years.



## Entering the Maze

Krishnagopal Mallick's unselfconscious prose pulls the reader into a city of trams, quiet by-lanes, and a life lived with honesty and simple joys. And yet, rarely has Bengali literature witnessed such clear-eyed narratives of public and private violence, of sexuality and humour. Unusual in their frank depiction of sexual encounters and behaviour, the stories in this collection are a significant addition to queer literature in India, now made accessible to readers in English. *Entering the Maze* introduces us to a craftsman of deadpan storytelling who infuses North Kolkata with a queer radiance unmatched in Indian writing.



**Niladri R. Chatterjee** is Professor, Department of English, University of Kalyani, West Bengal.

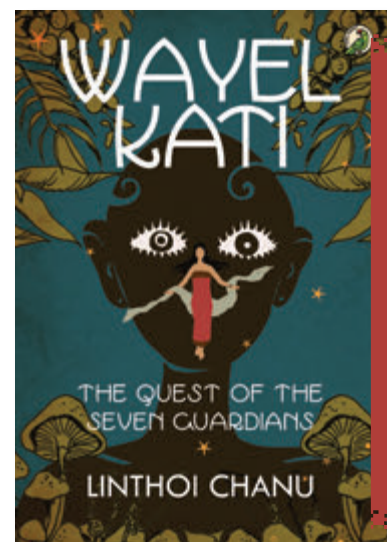


**Linthoi Chanu** is a writer from Manipur. Her central area of interest is Manipuri folklore, and her works have been recognized for their impact on re-popularizing folk stories and legends of Manipur among the youth.



*Wayel Kati* by Linthoi Chanu is a fantasy spun from the fascinating folklores of Manipur, India. It revolves around a magical quest that seven guardians undertake, led by a nine-year-old boy, Laiba, in order to retrieve the Wayel Kati – the scissor of justice, and how they struggle to fulfil the quest amid monsters and dark creatures threatening to breach the human world. Threaded with charm and beauty of the hills of Manipur, this book taps into the themes of nature worship and environment preservation.

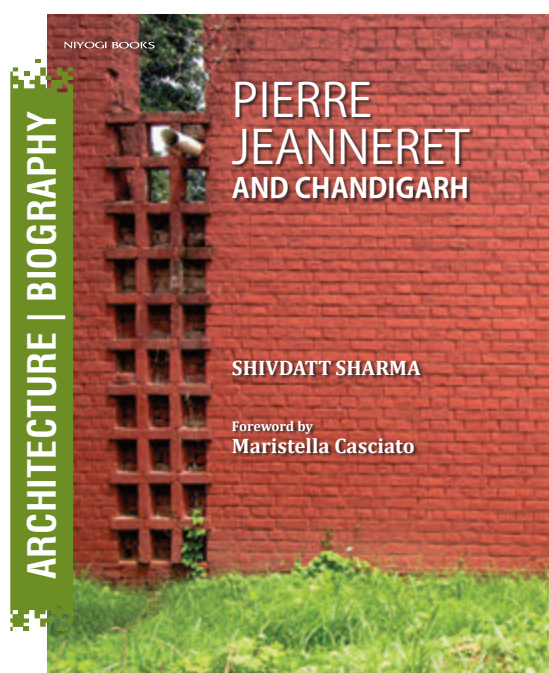
## Wayel Kati



YOUNG ADULT | FANTASY



## Pierre Jeanneret and Chandigarh



**Shivdatt Sharma** assisted Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret on various projects in Chandigarh and was described as an 'architect of rare qualities' by the latter.



This book is a beautiful and succinct tribute to Pierre Jeanneret, the Swiss-French architect and his immensely emphatic yet little-known contribution to the development of the city of Chandigarh. The humble artist's artistry has been consistently overshadowed by his cousin architect, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier. Shivdatt Sharma, who worked closely with Pierre, has attempted to reshuffle memories or bring alive new ones through Pierre's tacitly gorgeous work in modeling Chandigarh into the 'City Beautiful' it is today. The corpus of photographs, letters, and diagrams inside help more to paint a fascinating picture for the readers of the architect and the dream city.



Le Corbusier (left) with Pierre Jeanneret (right). Photograph signed by Le Corbusier for the author Photograph source: Suresh Sharma (Studio Indiano, Chandigarh)

## Begum Hazrat Mahal

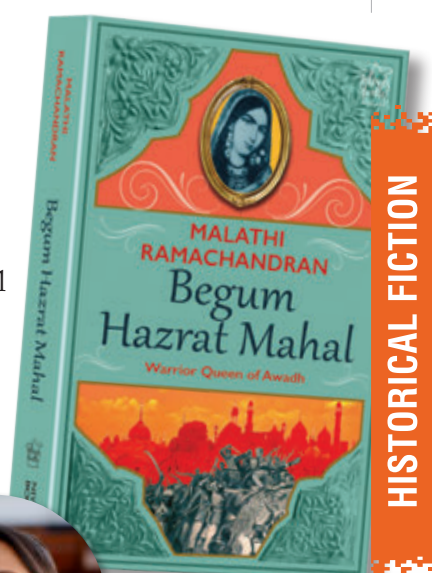


Malathi Ramachandran's historical fiction is a dramatic retelling of the story of Muhammadi Khanum, later known as Begum Hazrat Mahal, the second wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh, who stayed back in Lucknow with her young son Birjis

Ali when the Nawab was exiled by the British. It poignantly narrates the events that led up to the tumultuous uprising of 1857 in Lucknow, how one fearless queen, vowing to protect her son's future throne from the clutches of the British, builds a rebel army to take a stand.

Ramachandran's research, with a sensational blend of fiction, gives you a sweeping view into how the ensuing battle lent flames to kindling love and passion, along with an epic floundering of loss and grief and betrayal.

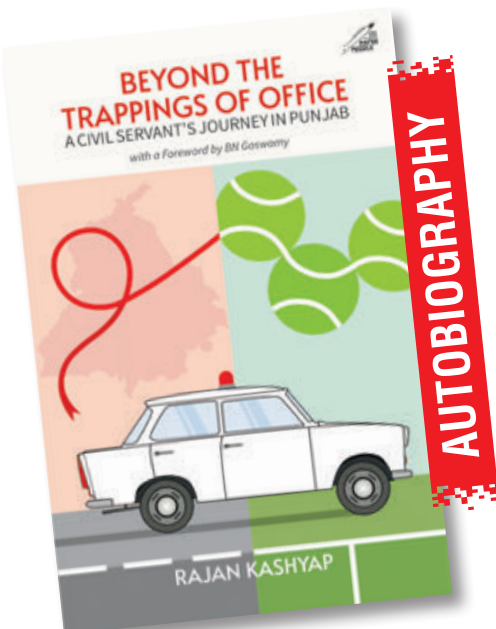
**Malathi Ramachandran** has been published in renowned magazines and anthologies, two of which have won prizes in British Council short fiction contests.



In *Beyond the Trappings of Office*, the author offers colourful vignettes of events behind the drab doors of officialdom. He depicts the successes and failures of governments and individual protagonists in attaining power and sustaining it. As the author concludes his introduction to the book, he writes, 'these are the recollections of a person who found colour and excitement in the humdrum of life, beyond his vocational calling of scratching files on dusty tables'. Rajan Kashyap's interests ranging from tennis to classical music, yoga to civil society organizations, this memoir makes for delightful reading.



**Rajan Kashyap**, a member of the Indian Administrative Service, served the government, mainly in the state of Punjab, for 38 years, retiring as Chief Secretary.



## Living in Dreamtime

Usha's *Living in Dreamtime* is a beautiful love story between a dolphin, Parina, and a walrus, Borick. When Parina is abandoned in the sea after her dear master's death, she meets Borick and a seal named Arij, and soon they grow close together to form a powerful bond. Parina's tales about land life slowly inspire Borick to go on his own quest and climb a mountain, live in peace and meditation, while Parina herself becomes miserable with her own longing for land life and desire to be human. This is a moving story of love and hope and what the power of imaginations compels us to do.



**Usha** became acquainted with Tolkien's works, and they intensified her faith in fantasy and magic beyond the realities of life.



Illustrator **Salil Sojwal** is ex advertising, ex-design, exhausted—mostly.



# Winner of Art Book PRIZE OXFORD BOOKSTORE

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## SCENO GRAPHY

An Indian  
Perspective*"Written in a very informative style, this is an invaluable  
book on scenographic treatment of Indian theatre."*  
—Ratan Thiyam

SATYABRATA ROUT



Satyabrata Rout is a noted scenographer and director of contemporary Indian theatre. He has been associated with various institutions and organisations like Rangmandal, Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, Theatre-in-Education Company, NSD Extension Programme, etc.

Professor Rout is one of the pioneers in conceptualising 'Visual Theatre' in India.

He has been conferred with numerous prestigious national and international awards, and that includes the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and B.V. Karanath award by NSD.

At the Oxford Bookstore  
Art Book Prize Ceremony.

L-R:  
Dr Alka Pande,  
Trisha De Niyogi,  
Martine Aamdal Bottheim  
(Deputy Head of Mission  
at Norwegian Embassy  
in New Delhi)  
and Author Satyabrata Rout

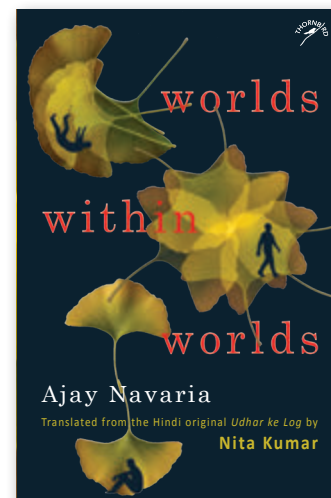
Dr Arshiya Sethi (Left) in conversation  
with KK Gopalakrishnan at Oxford  
Bookstore, Connaught Place, New Delhi



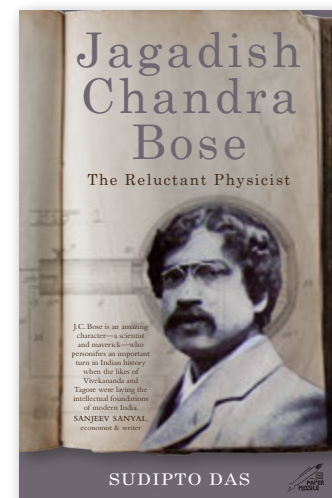
Book Launch at  
Oxford Bookstore,  
Kolkata. L-R:  
Sushama Mallick  
(daughter-in-law  
of Krishnagopal  
Mallick), Chapal  
Bhaduri, Niladri  
R. Chatterjee,  
Rimi B. Chatterjee,  
Sujoy Prasad  
Chatterjee,  
Trisha De Niyogi



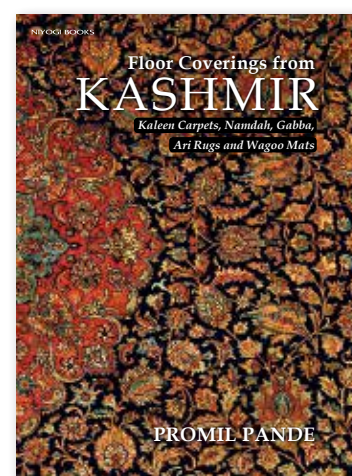
## FORTHCOMING



A novel about the  
meaning of 'caste' and  
'untouchability' and  
whether education can  
bring about change.



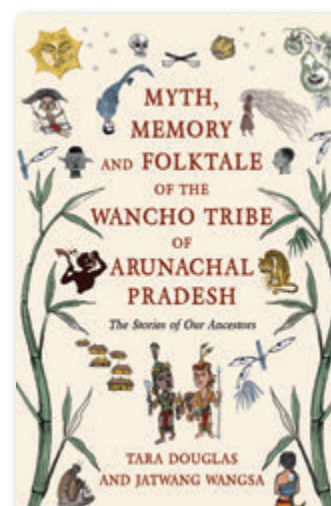
Holder of many firsts in  
multiple scientific fields,  
Jagadish Chandra Bose  
was both mythified and  
forgotten. This book is an  
attempt at demystifying  
the "Boseian" myth.



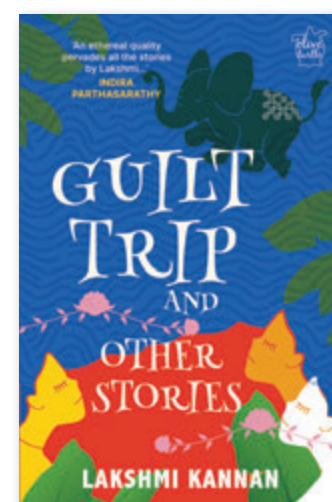
This book is an elaborate  
glimpse into the floor  
covering traditions of  
Kashmir, a comprehensive  
study on Kaleen carpets,  
Namdas, Gabbas, Wagoo  
mats and Ari rugs made in  
this region.



This guidebook  
comprehensively  
portrays Corbett Tiger  
Reserve as a wildlife  
repository, visual treat  
of the natural ecosystem  
and memorable  
ecotourism destination.



For the Wancho tribe  
of Arunachal Pradesh  
stories are part of the  
texture of their life, passed  
down from generation to  
generation. And this is a  
collection of those  
very stories.



Deals with the challenges  
that women of all ages  
face in their daily life,  
young people's escapades  
and strategies of  
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