

# READING CORNER

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



Illustration: Shreya Duggal

## Is queering a translation? Is translation queering?

Most of us are used to thinking in two's. Either this or that. This way of thinking serves us fine even when we are thinking of translation: from one language to another. Two languages. When it comes to gender, this notion of twoness still seems to serve us fine: male or female. **Anything that doesn't fit into either of the two boxes that culture has created seems to disturb us.** Of late, many of us have begun to be comfortable with the idea of the transgender. The trans person seem to be **translating themselves from one gender to another**: the emotions remain, the events remain, the thoughts remain, but the mode of expression changes, the appearance changes. English does not look like Bengali; a 'man' does not look like a 'woman'. Since we are used to translations of various kinds: one language to another, image to word (as in ekphrasis), words to gestures (sign language), the idea of a man becoming a woman or a woman becoming a man is something that we are increasingly comfortable with because one is leading to another. There is a sense of transport, a journey (incidentally, the term 'hijra' essentially means 'one who journeys'). But even there, the journey can only be understood if it has two points (a beginning and an end).

But now, since 1991 to be precise, we have a word whose meaning has broadened to include something it did not. The word 'queer' meant, and still means, 'odd, strange, weird' in common parlance. But, since 1991, it has come to mean not only an adjective but also a verb: 'to queer'. If we look at the original

meaning of the word, it simply meant 'athwart/ oblique / at a 45° angle'. It is this original meaning that has now been reinvigorated to practice a certain anti-patriarchal politics. There are only two kinds of relationships that we are trained to understand between two entities or ideas: agreement or disagreement. Which is why first-wave or second-wave feminism is still easy to understand by the common person: 'women against men' is its grossly unfair simplification on the streets. We are quick to box women into either 'patriarchal' or 'feminist'. Clear support or clear opposition. But 'queer' is more sly, more subversive. **'Queer' is guerilla warfare.** 'Queer' will oppose patriarchy but it will not be immediately visible as opposition, as when

**We are quick to box women into either 'patriarchal' or 'feminist'. Clear support or clear opposition. But 'queer' is more sly, more subversive. 'Queer' is guerilla warfare.**

a trans woman claims the identity of a woman, instead of a trans woman. It may look as though she is conforming to the stereotypical idea of a woman, but she is not, because she is a woman without ovaries, a woman without a womb, thereby opposing the patriarchal requirement that a woman must bear children or be capable of bearing children. **So, 'queer' is at a 45° angle to patriarchy:** close and far

at the same time. One part of it seems to be leaning towards patriarchy and the other is at a clear distance. If 'T' is patriarchy 'Q' is the queer.

I think translation is queer. It is leaning towards and leaning away from the original text simultaneously. It's a conflicted engagement. There is an unconsciously patriarchal adjective that is used while evaluating a work of translation: is it loyal to the original text? As if to ask, is he loyal to his wife? No translation is ever entirely 'loyal' to its original. It is in the nature of the activity that such 'loyalty' is never possible, if 'loyalty' means absolute adherence. Just as **queering is a politics, translation is a politics too.** Just as the person doing the queering is in a complicated political relationship with patriarchy, thereby frustrating any attempt to declare the act one of complete support or complete opposition, a translation is in a complicated political relationship with the original text. I guess the poet Ernest Dowson said it best, in a different context: 'I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.' Translation is queerness and queerness is translation in its fashion.



Nilodri R. Chatterjee

Professor,  
Department of  
English, University  
of Kalyani, West Bengal,  
Translator & Author



2 | VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

‘There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.’  
— Arundhati Roy

In a world where dominant narratives often drown out the stories of the marginalized and subaltern, seeking to hear their voices becomes not just a choice but a necessity. This collection of books embodies the struggle, resilience, and triumphs of those whose stories have long been relegated to, and still remain in, the sidelines. From reclaiming indigenous folklore to challenging gender norms and societal prejudices, these narratives illuminate the rich tapestry of human experiences oft-unacknowledged.

Entering the Maze



LGBTQ+

Award Winner

Set in the winding streets, quaint by-lanes, and cacophony of 1960s North Kolkata, Krishnagopal Mallick’s gripping queer tales, painting the author’s life as an ‘out and proud’ homosexual man, are highly unusual for the time. Mallick’s unabashed honesty and celebration of his sexuality starkly oppose the conventional queer narratives rooted in the struggles and sufferings of queer individuals. Prof. Niladri R. Chatterjee, specializing in Masculinity and Queer studies, makes this critical addition to queer literature in India accessible to readers in English with his adroit translation.

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



‘...a book like this certainly expands our understanding of how people live, feel, and think outside organized, affluent, English-speaking queer spaces.’  
HINDUSTAN TIMES

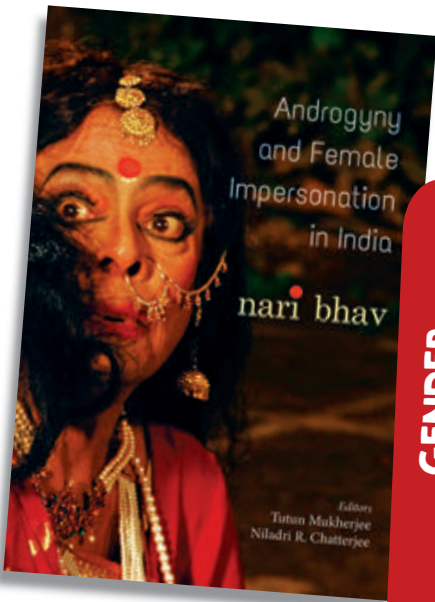


Tutun Mukherjee is Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad.

‘...a conscious attempt at re-invoking the “indigenous categories of gender...”’ AMRITA MIDDEY, INDIAN JOURNAL OF GENDER STUDIES

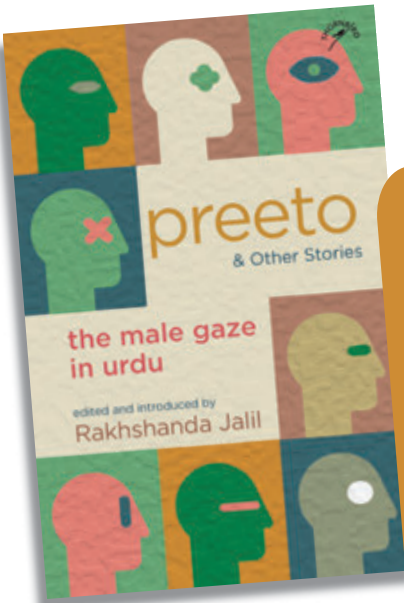
Androgyny, or the fluid interplay of male and female tendencies in one person, is deeply ingrained in Indian cultural beliefs and is said to nurture one’s balance and harmony in all aspects of life. Edited by Prof. Niladri R. Chatterjee and Prof. Tutun Mukherjee, *Androgyny and Female Impersonation in India: Nari Bhav* seeks to understand this notion of ‘nari bhav,’ and studies the cryptic domain of the ‘third gender’ through various essays and one-on-one conversations with performers of the dying art of female impersonation.

Nari Bhav



GENDER

Preeto & Other Stories



GENDER

Literature, whether highbrow or lowbrow, is rife with the depiction of women as ‘objects’ under the male gaze, either as blank canvases waiting to be painted on or as trophies to acquire to fulfil sexual fantasies. *Preeto and Other Stories: The Male Gaze in Urdu*, edited and introduced by the multi-award-winning translator, writer, and literary historian Rakhshanda Jalil, is an anthology of stories by various modern male Urdu writers that seeks to observe how women are presented through male gaze in Urdu literature.



Rakhshanda Jalil, writer, critic & literary historian.

‘...a rather unexpected collection of translated short stories that offers a variety of approaches to modern womanhood and various themes of femininity in modern society.’  
TELEGRAPH INDIA

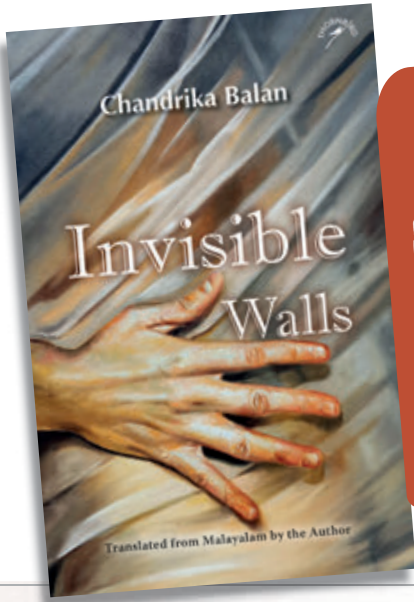


Chandrika Balan, bilingual writer, academic, critic, orator & translator.

‘The dual narrative effectively recounts how the butterfly effect of patriarchy dominates the lives of women and curbs their aspirations...’  
SCROLL

*Invisible Walls*, translated from Malayalam, is about two women, Aparna and Kamala, leading seemingly parallel lives. The book starts with Kamala, seated in a railway compartment, reading a novel about Aparna’s life called ‘Invisible Walls’. While reading, Kamala begins to realize their similarities—they both are independent women who yearn to break free from the invisible boundaries constricting their lives. Bilingual writer and former Associate Professor of English, Chandrika Balan, presents the reader with a nuanced portrayal of timely issues like societal and familial expectations, underlying patriarchy and sexual assault in this book.

Invisible Walls



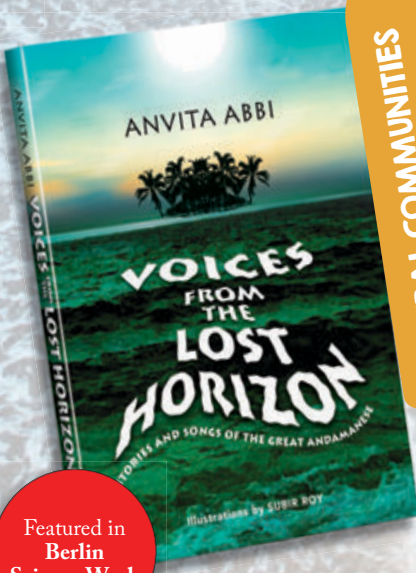
GENDER

Voices from the Lost Horizon

*Voices from the Lost Horizon* is the first-ever compendium of stories and songs of the Great Andamanese, the only surviving pre-Neolithic tribe in the Andaman Islands. The Great Andamanese encompass ten different tribes with distinct languages of their own that are now moribund. Prof. Anvita Abbi, an Indian linguist and recipient of the Padma Shri award, has painstakingly ensured that this endangered language family, along with the culture and heritage of these tribes,

is conserved. Capturing the customs, myths, superstitions, and ethnographic traditions of this community and incorporating vivid illustrations and audio-visual recordings, this book is an invaluable gift to posterity.

‘...a delightfully rich collection of stories and songs from a world gone by and a language lost’  
TELEGRAPH INDIA



TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Featured in Berlin Science Week



Scan for a song

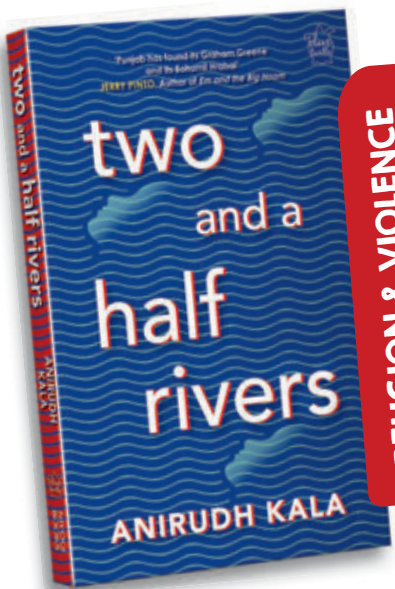


Anvita Abbi, Professor, scholar of minority languages & recipient of the Padma Shri Award.

Song: a dūre kaiyo laṭuka, dūre kaiyo laṭuka, dūre kaiyo laṭuka  
Meaning: This place is not good for living.  
Singer: Boa Sr Tribe: Bo



## Two and a half rivers



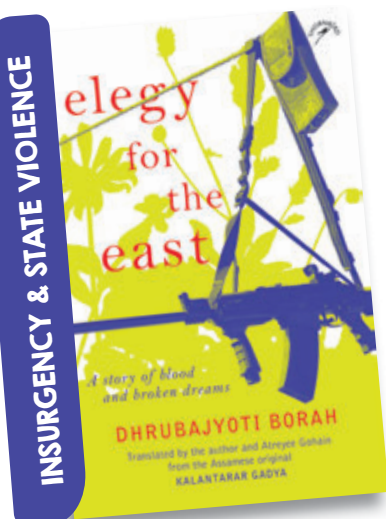
A tale of the caste system, loneliness, and mental health, Anirudh Kala's *Two and a Half Rivers*, cleverly captures the adversity of the 'Punjab Problem' and collocates it with the current scenario. Set in 1980s Punjab amidst the Khalistani movement, this book is narrated by a divorced, depressed doctor who relocates to an isolated house by the riverbank of Satluj to find solace but only encounters corpses and violence. The story then shifts to a young Dalit Punjabi couple whose dreams of making a life for themselves in Mumbai are continually impeded by the forces of casteism, sexism and violence.

Anirudh Kala is a psychiatrist by profession which is reflected in how he sketches out his characters & their personality traits.



'...weaves together the various political and cultural schisms that have affected Punjab and its people.'  
HINDUSTAN TIMES

## Elegy for the East



Assam, when militancy was the norm in most parts of Northeast India. The novel depicts how in a state caught in the throes of such unrest, it is the youngsters, some walking the path of violence to alleviate their plight and some utterly innocent, who bear the brunt of military excesses.

Amid the lush green paddy fields and verdant tea plantations of Assam lie the horrors of bloodshed, rape, and insurgency. *Elegy for the East*, translated from Assamese by the author himself, is set in 1990s



Dhrubajyoti Borah writes in Assamese and English on various aspects of human existence.



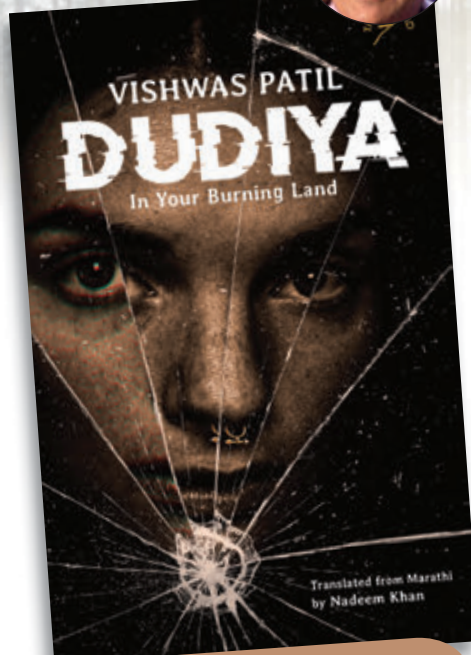
'...a lament for 'broken dreams'  
TRIBUNE INDIA

## Dudiya

*Dudiya: In Your Burning Land*, is the story of a spirited young Adivasi girl, Dudiya, caught in the crossfire between the state administration and the Naxals of Chattisgarh. This gritty novel, translated from the Marathi original by IAS officer Vishwas Patil, unfolds around a civil servant, Dilip Pawar, whose encounter with Dudiya acquaints him with the horrid atrocities and marginalization faced by the tribal population of Chattisgarh since independence.

'...tries to navigate the cracks of nationalism and traces the local narratives of tribal people trying to negotiate the numerous hurdles that are put in front of them'  
SCROLL.IN

Vishwas Patil, prolific & renowned Marathi author.



Nadeem Khan, teacher & translator.



Navamalati Neog Chakraborty, poet, critic, translator, short-story writer & artist.

Harekrishna Deka, renowned Assamese writer & recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, 1987



## Yatra



Prolific Assamese writer and former member of the Indian Police Service, Harekrishna Deka's only novel *Yatra: An Unfinished Novel*, is a deeply psychological tale of binaries, rejecting the notion of simple solutions. An aged writer receives an enigmatic letter from a strange traveller, recounting the tale of stumbling upon an ancient tribe and residing among them for two years, which consumes his thoughts. Curious, the author steps out on a quest to delve into the truth and encounters the tumultuous ways of the 'uncivilised' while traversing through the bounds of the human psyche, exploring the ideas of 'shadowland' and 'heartland'.

*In Wavel Kati: The Quest of the Seven Guardians*, Linthoi Chanu, skilfully weaves a captivating YA fantasy, shedding light on the oft-overlooked cultural richness of Northeast India, by intertwining Manipuri folktales into a thrilling adventure filled with courageous heroes, formidable monsters, and celestial entities.

Chosen by Atingkok, the Father God, Laiba, a perceptive nine-year-old, leads a group of seven youngsters on a quest to retrieve the 'Wavel Kati', the scissors of justice, while battling

myriad adversaries and creatures like the demoness Khutsangbi, dragon-headed serpents and Keioba—a hybrid tiger-man.

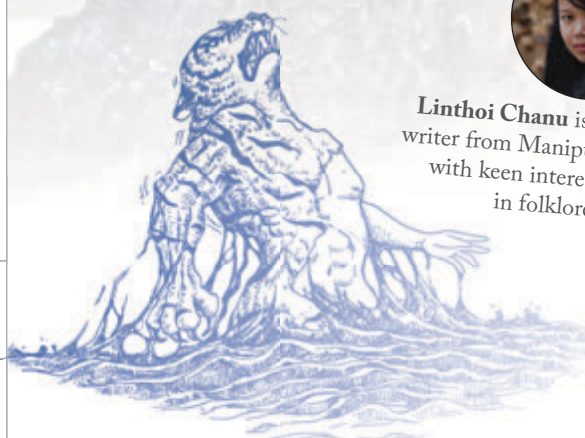
'...[the author] deserves the highest praise for collecting local oral legends, and setting them down in a manner that reaches them to all of India and the world.'  
DECCAN HERALD

Jury Honourable Mention  
AutHer Awards 2024

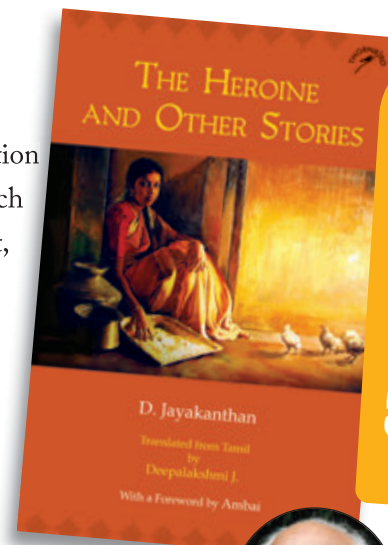
## Wavel Kati



Linthoi Chanu is a writer from Manipur with keen interest in folklore.



## The Heroine and Other Stories



*The Heroine and Other Stories* is a collection of eleven brilliant stories from the rich oeuvre of the legendary Tamil writer and activist, D. Jayakanthan. A Padma Bhushan awardee, he was known for his bold and progressive writing, often articulating the hardships of the underclass. Stories like 'The Heroine' exemplifies the strength and assertiveness a woman possesses, while stories such as 'The Pallbearers' illustrate the vulnerability of men.

D. Jayakanthan was considered one of the most progressive writers of his times. A remarkably prolific writer, he also made two films.





Rani Gaidinliu

As a teenager, Rani Gaidinliu bravely stood up to the might of the British Empire, and fought for justice and freedom from colonial repression of her community, the Zeliangrong Nagas. After Independence, the Zeliangrong people pushed for a ‘Homeland Movement’ under her charismatic leadership. She was also a fearless Naga spiritual leader who fought for the preservation of her indigenous tribal way of life by reforming the ancient Zeliangrong religion. Author Som Kamei keenly traces the braveheart’s life, recounting how she came to be known as ‘Rani Gaidinliu’, a name made famous by Jawaharlal Nehru who was touched by her stories of revolt and imprisonment during his travels in the northeast before Indian Independence.

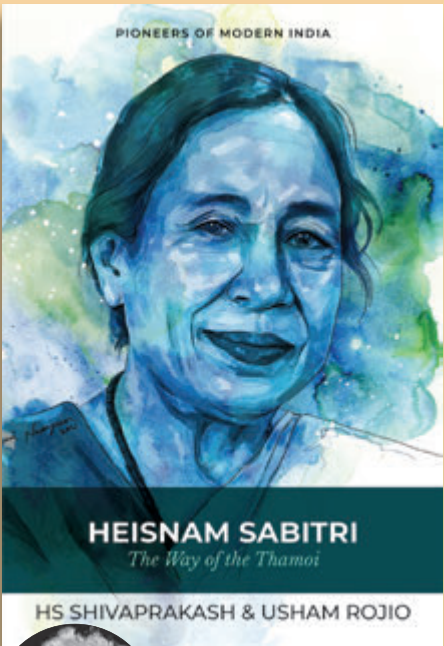


Som Kamei is a member of the Indian Postal Services. His interests include tribal studies & ethnic movements & he writes on cultural & social issues of North East India.



PIONEERS OF MODERN INDIA

Heisnam Sabitri



H.S. Shivaprakash (left) is an award-winning poet, playwright, novelist, and critic, writing in Kannada and English. Usham Rojio is a teacher, playwright and theatre director.

An enigmatic figure in Manipuri theatre, Heisnam Sabitri is a commendable Indian stage performer. Born into a Meitei household in Imphal, Manipur, she was introduced to the theatre at a very young age as a child actor by her aunt. This endeavour, undertaken by HS Shivaprakash and Usham Rojio, makes an effort to dive deep into the life of the critically acclaimed Manipuri performer, Padma Shri holder, and the thamois, or the heart, of Heisnam Kanhailal’s theatrical productions, Heisnam Sabitri. With an impressive body of work, including Nupi Thiba, Tamna Lai, Pebet, etc., all directed by her husband, Heisnam Kanhailal, Sabitri has illustrated that while her husband was the mind, she was the heart of all his productions.

Though one out of every 17 persons in West Bengal belongs to a tribal community, little is known about these tribes, and the areas they dwell in are merely seen as ‘transport corridors’ that connect mainland India with the Northeast. A former officer in the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal, anthropologist, and photographer, Krishnopriyo Bhattacharya, took the initiative to trace the fascinating culture, customs and lifestyle of these tribal communities through his wonderful photographs and stories written in colloquial yet informative manner in this book.

Tribal Bengal



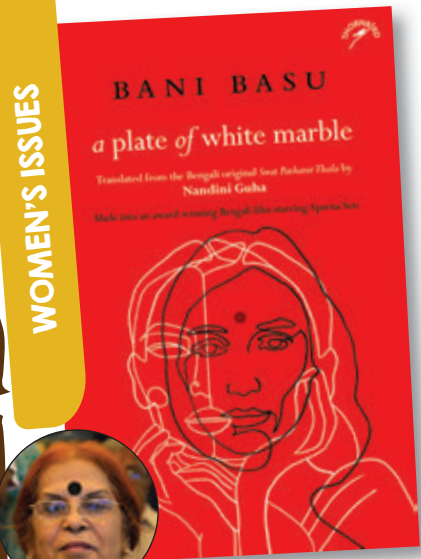
TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Krishnopriyo Bhattacharya is a keen photographer & has been studying the tribal affairs of North Bengal for more than three decades.



‘...a critically important document...’  
GET BENGAL

A Plate of White Marble



WOMEN'S ISSUES

Bani Basu (top) is a renowned Bengali writers & recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award, 2010. Nandini Guha is an academican & translator.

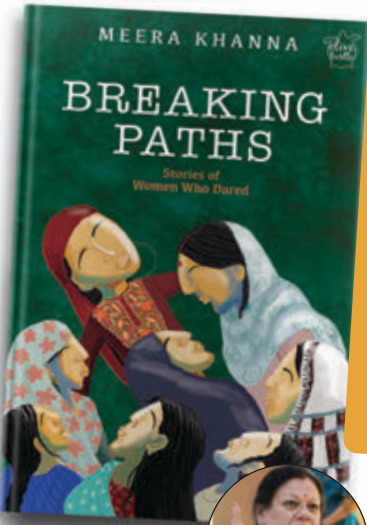


Set in 1950s Kolkata, *A Plate of White Marble* illustrates the discrimination faced by widows in a highly patriarchal society like ours where a woman is always seen as someone’s wife, daughter or mother. After losing her amiable, modern husband to a heart attack, a 27-year-old widow is forced by her in-laws to follow a desolate lifestyle devoid of colour and flavour. Seeing how her family has cast her aside due to her widowhood, Bandana decides that she won’t conform to these social rituals and, with the aid of her uncle, dares to begin her life afresh.

‘...the tale of the coming of age of a widow.’  
THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Meera Khanna’s *Breaking Paths: The Stories of Women Who Dared* is an anthology of 18 stories of brave women who resist the suffocation and conformity of their daily lives. Striving to break stereotypes, these women, belonging to spaces where ‘compromise’ and ‘sacrifice’ define every woman’s story, refuse to shy away from challenges that encroach on their homes, hearts, souls, and bodies and find subtle ways to exercise their agency.

Breaking Paths



WOMEN'S ISSUES

Writer, poet & social activist Meera Khanna is the Trustee and Executive Vice President of the Guild of Service NGO.



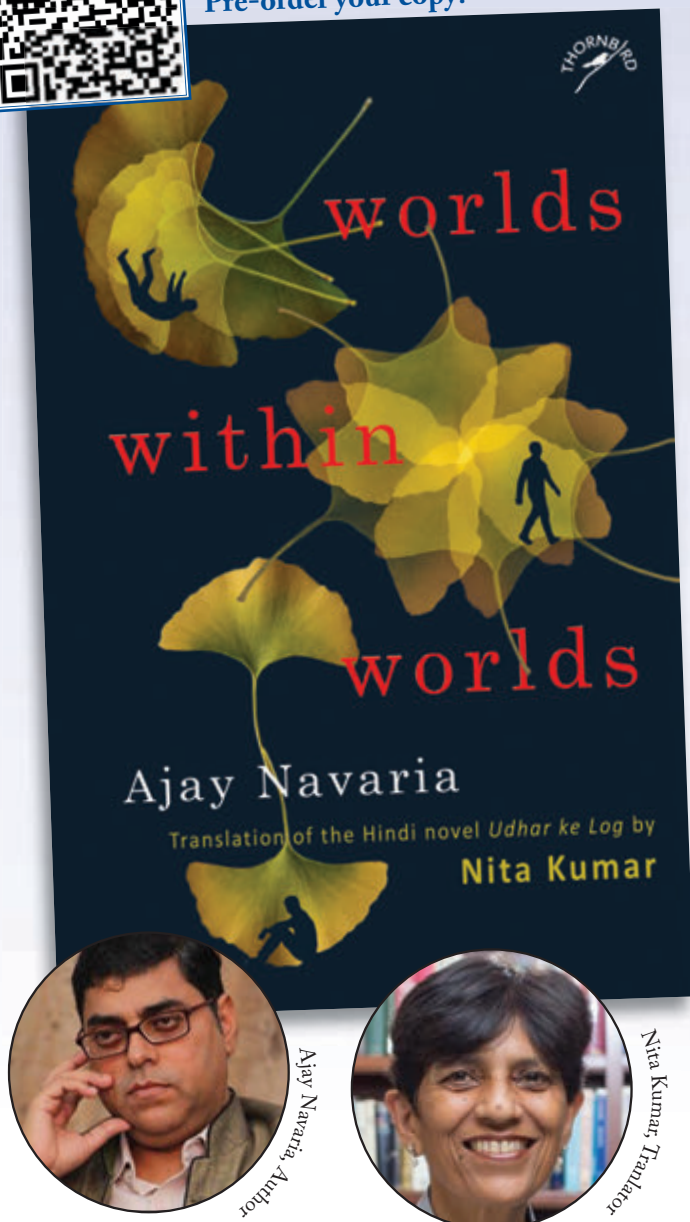
‘Ordinary women’s bravery and boldness in the face of enormous hardship...’ FRONTLIST



## What are these worlds within worlds?



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I want to begin a discussion of the novel strategically with the wedding, spread over Chapters 7 (Towards the Wedding), 8 (The Ritual Lunch), 9 (Ayesha's Style), 10 (Weber Arrives) and 11 (We Friends). Rinku, the younger brother of the protagonist-narrator, Masterji, is getting married. In the course of the five days or so of the wedding, we read about the devious yet innocent plot of Masterji to get his estranged wife Sangita back. We read about prolonged wedding rituals—including different family members' roles, the abusive ritual songs sung by women, and the lunch at which the man and woman's families are (ritually) at the opposite sides and come together. We go into deep discussions about caste and untouchability. We learn of the prostitute Ayesha's quest to be a normal member of a family and society. We have intense scenes of male bonding with heart-to-heart conversations about sex, manhood and power. Finally, we share the author-narrator's musing on modernisation in India and the growing popularity of 'Punjabi' culture; on the meaning of family and community; and on the importance of education.

This platter of topics covered gives an idea that **what *Udhar ke Log* partly is, is an education. The discussions about caste and hierarchy are informed by inside knowledge—and thus, deliberately informative.** The wedding songs are

almost ethnographic in style, the author taking an obvious pleasure in celebrating songs that many would consider trivial but we are invited not to. Because the narrator-protagonist is a soul-searching intellectual, we accompany him on his journey on the quest for the truth about hierarchy, patriarchy, oppression, community, the individual, love and friendship.

So intense are these different loci of education, as I am calling them, that we almost cannot digest the information all at once. You can fight back the oppressor in many different ways. Of all the different ways, Navaria chooses the following: quietly be yourself. But show that you are as complex and differentiated, as clever and unfathomable, as deep-rooted and interesting, as problematic and political—as anyone out there that you are being, or may be, compared with. There is not a trace of victimhood or pitifulness here.

**From the Foreword by the translator Nita Kumar**

When we think of caste-based discrimination, why does our mind only go to the rural backward areas? From the remotest village to the bustling cities, such discrimination is pervasive throughout all social classes in India. And it is books like this that familiarize us with that reality...

## In conversation with

**Manjari Chaturvedi, the creator of Sufi Kathak & restorer of the dance of the courtesans**

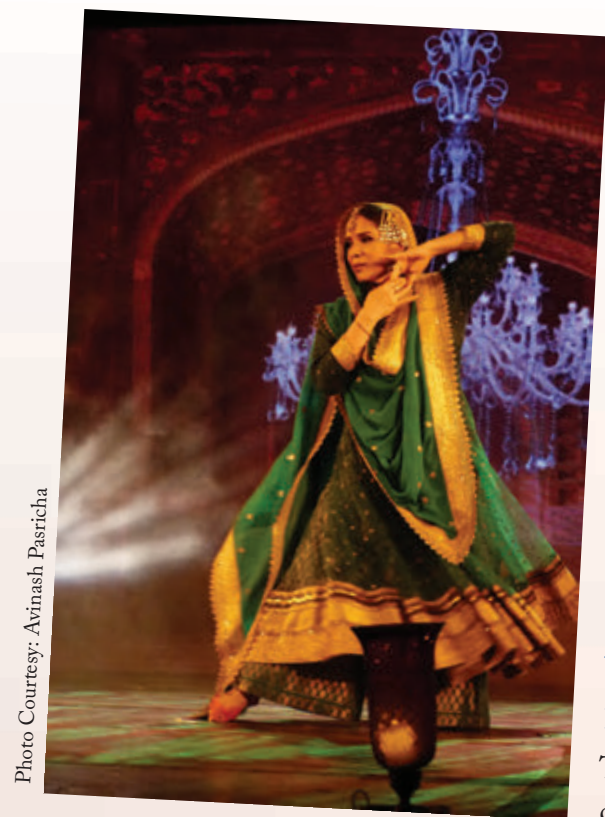


Photo Courtesy: Avinash Pasricha

Manjari Chaturvedi is the visionary behind 'The Courtesan Project,' a groundbreaking movement celebrating the forgotten legends of music and dance. Through meticulous research and storytelling, Chaturvedi sheds light on the historical significance of the 'tawaif' in artistic realms.

**Q Can you tell us a bit about the role of these women performers and why you believe it is important for their stories to be studied as part of the history of performing arts?**

The *tawaifs* of the 16th and 20th-century were the trendsetters

of their time; they merged Persian and Indian influences; they were repositories of Kathak dance and soulful *dadra*, *ghazal* and *thumri* music; they wrote and sang immaculate poetry; they were trained in classical music and dance—they set the standards for elegance and refinement. They were not just artists par excellence, but also esteemed mentors of etiquette and conversation. These were the women who moved from the Kotha and formed the part of the Parsi theatre and then subsequently were the first women performers for the big Hindi Film Industry.

Hence, it becomes imminent that we tell their brilliant stories and show their art, their music, their dance to the world. Those **forgotten dancers called *tawaif* and *nachnewali* who do not find space in the documentation of performing arts**, whereas their counterpart male performers are referred to as 'Ustads' and these incredible women merely as 'nautch girls'.

**Q How do you attempt to remove the social stigma associated with courtesans and what are the major challenges you face?**

To remove the social stigma I have taken a multipronged approach. In the last 14 years I have done hundreds of concerts to recreate the dance and music and the stories of *tawaifs*. I have held three seminars and multiple talks at universities and museums, including three TedX talks. At the same time, I have introduced to the youth an alternative narrative about these brilliant women performers about whom they had only heard derogatory words, which are largely Bollywood-driven, till now.

'The Courtesan Project' also questions the role of the people, the society and in the way history sees women performers and why till very recently and even now, most musical *gharanas* do not allow the 'girls and women' from their families to perform on stage.

This project is a bold statement that is needed to finally accord respect for the performance art of the *Tarwaif*, to go beyond the drawing room sniggers and laughter associated with the word '*tawaif*', and to finally acknowledge their role in history. It personally took me **ten long years to finally use the term in first person for a concert without being ridiculed for it.**



Photo Courtesy: Monica Dawar





NIYOGI BOOKS AT THE NEW DELHI WORLD BOOK FAIR 2024



NIYOGI BOOKS AT THE INTERNATIONAL KOLKATA BOOK FAIR 2024



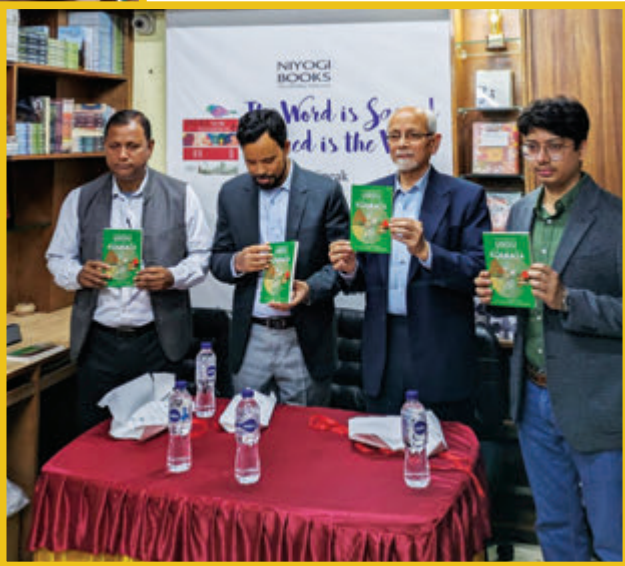
L-R: Achala Moulik, former civil servant & author of *Phantom Lovers & Rogues Among The Ruins*, in conversation with Dr. Anna Mirza, academician, author, social entrepreneur & advisor to DBL & Delhi Literature Festival, at the New Delhi World Book Fair 2024.

L-R: Journalist Manik Gupta in conversation with author Bappaditya Ckaravarty at the launch of *The Huntsmen* at Kunzum Books & Coffee, GK2, New Delhi



L-R: Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya, Editorial Director, Niyogi Books; Rajesh Chaudhary, academician & author of the book; Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO, WWF; Rajesh Bedi, Wildlife photographer & conservationist; and Vinesh Kumar, co-author of the book, at the launch of *Wildlife In and Around Corbett Tiger Reserve* at WWF, New Delhi.

L-R: Dr Mohd. Imteyaz Alam, Asst. Professor, University of Calcutta; Dr. Rafat Ali, Asst. Professor, Jadavpur University; Shams Afif Siddiqi, academic, translator & co-editor of the book; with Fuzail Asar Siddiqi, academic & co-editor of the book, at the launch of *Contemporary Urdu Short Stories From Kolkata* at Niyogi Books Store, Kolkata.



FORM IV

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I, Bikash D Niyogi, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

  
Bikash D Niyogi  
Signature of publisher

Dt: 30.06.2024

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