

THE BRIDGE

CONNECTING WRITERS
AROUND THE GLOBE

THE BRIDGE MAGAZINE

Volume-I



FEATURED POET

Rizwan Akhtar

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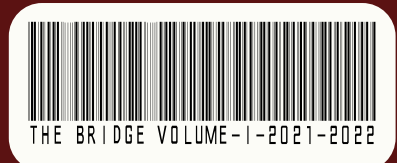
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2021-2022



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EDITOR'S NOTE



Bridging the Distances

With the stream of daily life resuming to its normal steady pace, the world we now find ourselves in has changed to a great degree. The change is quite evident as despite the innumerable distances that the last three years of pandemic have created between us, we have somehow learnt our ways to build connections with the world outside corporeal reach. Surprisingly, the distances and lockdowns have intensified the human urge to explore far-flung, forbidden lands situated beyond our borders. The wish of discovering the undiscovered and connecting with the disconnected has doubled.

The Bridge Magazine has evolved out of a similar impetus. For the community of writers across the world, The Bridge Magazine is one significant step towards creating connections on a global level. With the political, economic and psychological upheaval that the world is experiencing, I think it is now more than ever that we need to establish ties of friendship between cultures through the written word. The Bridge project, on the whole, is doing exactly that and the magazine is a step ahead in the same direction.

The main highlights of this issue include an article on the fascinating poetical views of our Featured Poet from Pakistan, Rizwan Akhtar along with some of his most captivating verses. The musical poems by Dieter Bruhn from the United States will also amuse you to the core. Taha Kehar from Pakistan brings to you “Four Stories” that would leave you spellbound because of the uncanny themes that run parallel in all. “Seventeen and a Half Minutes” is a heartrending story by Jackie Kabir from Bangladesh about a daughter’s love for her father while Othniel Omijie from Nigeria takes us to an imaginary land in the story “The Dream”. We also have a very informative and insightful article by Dr. Faryal Arshad from Pakistan on the measures one can adopt to avoid backache. You will also find a detailed overview of The Bridge project, its origin, publications and future aims. Along with that, the young minds at work in the kids’ section are bound to amaze you. With a diverse variety of deeply moving and intensely inspiring tales, articles, verses and mouthwatering recipes from around the globe, we hope you will enjoy reading every piece of this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

We look forward to bringing you more inspiring writings in 2023.

Happy Reading!

Aaisha Umt Ur Rashid

Editor in Chief

(Founder /CEO of The Bridge)



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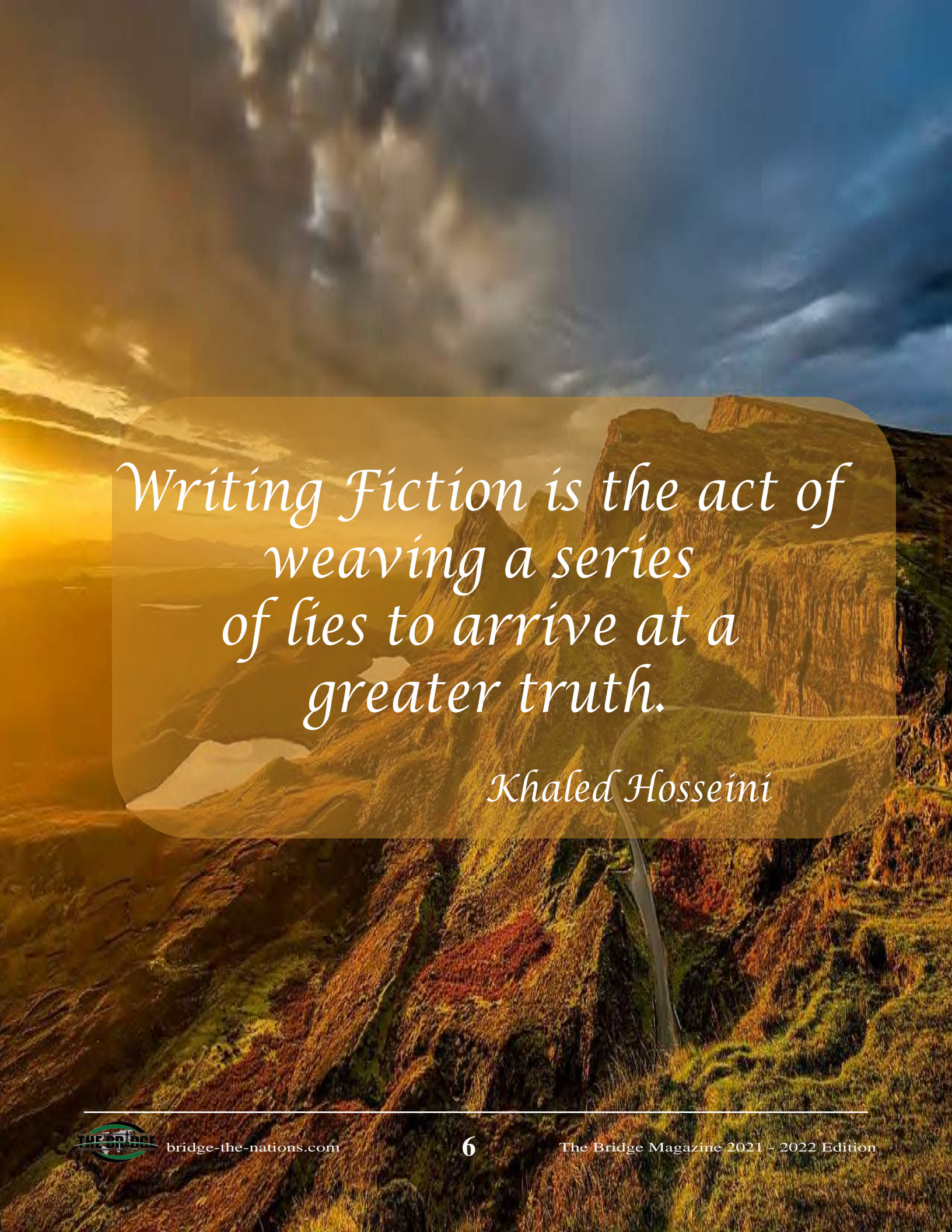
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CONTRIBUTION CATEGORIES

Magazine is published on the website annually and accepts contributions from **1st April till 31st October 2022**. The magazine has the following submission categories:

- Short Story
- Poetry
- Flash-Fiction
- Book Reviews
- Articles
- One Liner Quotes
- One Act Play Scripts
- Memoirs
- Travelogues
- Jokes

The Bridge Magazine is an opportunity for you to explore multifarious genres of writing and experiment with innovative ideas. So join us to enjoy being a part of the second edition of the magazine coming out next year. For details on submission criteria, visit and register on www.bridge-the-nations.com.



*Writing Fiction is the act of
weaving a series
of lies to arrive at a
greater truth.*

Khaled Hosseini



SHORT FICTION

Four Stories



By Taha Kehar
Pakistan

1

Saira saw the parrot for the first time when she was walking past a pet shop in the market. The green bird, with its sharp beak and clawed feet, flapped its wings in a long iron cage. Catching sight of the bird stuck in a cage, she let go of her Amma's hand and ran into the shop to set the parrot free. When she discovered that it was locked, Saira turned towards the owner of the shop who had an ajrak curled around his shoulder.

'Open the bird's cage,' she protested. The little girl's mother finally caught up with her, tightly held her hand and put a finger to her lips to shush her.

'I can't do that, beti,' the owner said. 'If I do that, the bird will fly away.'

'Shouldn't all birds be able to fly?' Saira asked the owner.

'They should,' he nodded. 'But this parrot is special. It can talk.'

'Really?' Saira's eyes widened with surprise. 'What language does it speak?'

'It speaks Sindhi because that's the language I've taught him,' the shopkeeper said. 'But since I left my village in Ghotki and set up my pet shop in Karachi, he has learnt some Urdu words too.'

'Parrots are intelligent birds,' Amma told Saira. 'They can understand things better than any other birds.'

'What can the parrot say?' Saira asked.

The owner walked over to the cage, tapped on its iron bars and whistled at the bird.

'Tell the little girl your name,' the owner said.

'My name is Mithu,' the parrot squeaked in Urdu. Saira smiled. She asked her mother if they could take the bird home with them and Amma agreed.

The iron cage was placed farther away from the window in Saira's room.

'If we keep him close to the window, Mithu will fly,' Amma warned her. 'You mustn't open the door of the cage.'

For the next few weeks, Saira and Mithu became friends. She taught the parrot new words and sentences that she learnt at school. Mithu was an obedient pet and enjoyed repeating the new words that Saira was teaching him. One night, Saira told Mithu that she didn't want to go to school the next day. When Amma rushed into Saira's room the next morning to wake her up, she heard her daughter's cheery voice.

'I don't want to go to school,' she heard Saira say. Amma walked towards Saira's bed and noticed that she was still asleep.

'If she's asleep, who just spoke in her voice?' Amma wondered.

When she heard the words repeated in her daughter's tone for the second time, Amma realised that Mithu was mimicking Saira's voice. She clicked her tongue and walked out of the room.

Saira always found it strange that Mithu struggled to say her name.

'It's sigh-ra,' she repeatedly instructed him. But Mithu became silent whenever she asked him to repeat her name. Even so, Saira continued to teach him new words.

One day, Saira left the room to get a glass of water from the kitchen. Just then, Mano the cat entered the room, jumped onto the table next to Mithu's cage and tried to attack the bird. Mithu squeaked in fear and fluttered his wings.

Saira rushed into the room and pulled the cat away from the cage. After that day, Mithu stopped repeating the words Saira had taught the bird.

'Why aren't you talking, Mithu?' she asked the bird. But the parrot remained quiet, as if he had forgotten how to speak.

When Mithu didn't speak for a week, Amma decided that the bird should be taken to the pet shop so they could ask the owner what was wrong with him.

'Mithu is just scared,' the pet shop owner told them. 'But parrots are intelligent. Give Mithu some time. He will get better and start talking soon.'

But when Mithu didn't get better, Saira realised that the parrot no longer wanted to remain in his cage. One morning, she decided to leave the door

of Mithu's cage open before she left for school. She also threw open the window of her bedroom. When she returned from school, Mithu had flown out of the window. Though she missed Mithu, Saira knew she had done the right thing by setting the bird free.

One afternoon, she heard her name being called out in a parrot's squeaky voice.

Saira peeped out of the window, hoping to find Mithu perched on the palm tree in the garden. Instead, she saw that the tree was empty. When Saira looked into the blue sky, she saw crows circling the tree. Among them was a green bird. Saira took a deep breath and shut the window. She asked Amma to remove the cage from her room because she didn't need it anymore.

2

Every evening, Sara played in the garden while her mother drank tea on a green bench under the shade of a palm tree. Sara would lie on the grass, throw her hands in the air and try to reach for the coconuts on the tree.

One day, Sara asked Amma if she could climb the tree and pluck a coconut for herself. But the tree was too tall and Amma feared that if Sara tried to climb it, she would fall and bump her head.

'Why don't you play by the shrubs?' Amma said.

'Ok, Amma,' Sara nodded.

'But make sure you don't pluck any leaves,' Amma warned her. 'It will be dark soon and plants go to sleep at night. We shouldn't disturb them.'

'Really, Amma. Do plants also go to sleep at night like I do?'

'Plants are living things too,' Amma said.

'In many ways, they are like us.'



For two evenings, Sara ran in circles around the shrubs and their dog Buck chased after her. On the third day, she got tired of running, stood by the shrubs and looked at the veins on the leaves.

‘It looks beautiful,’ she told Buck, who barked loudly and sniffed the shrubs. ‘I want one leaf for myself.’

Forgetting Amma’s warning, Sara tore a leaf from the shrubs and put it in her pocket. She didn’t tell her mother what she had done.

That night, Sara dreamt that she had plucked another leaf from the shrubs. When the leaf snapped from its stem and fell into her hand, she saw a teardrop running down its veiny surface.

‘Why are you crying?’ Sara asked the leaf.

‘I’m in pain,’ the leaf howled. ‘You hurt me when you took me away from my home.’

‘Where is your home?’

‘The shrub is my home,’ the leaf said. ‘I’ll never be able to go back to it now that you’ve torn me away from it.’

‘I didn’t know leaves had homes,’ Sara said, wiping the leaf’s tears with her fingers.

‘We also have names,’ the leaf said.

‘What’s your name?’

‘Hazel,’ the leaf whispered. ‘And the faded leaf that was next to me is my Mama. If you listen closely, you can hear her crying.’

Just then, Sara heard a soft hum in the air – Hazel’s Mama. She knew then that she had made a mistake.

‘I’m sorry,’ Sara said to Hazel. ‘I didn’t know.’

‘I’ll never get to be with my Mama again,’ Hazel cried. ‘How would you feel if someone took you away from your mama?’

‘I’m sorry,’ Sara repeated herself. ‘I didn’t know.’

Just then, Amma woke Sara up for school. Sara looked around and was pleased to find herself in her room instead of the garden.

‘Who were you saying sorry to, Sara?’ Amma asked. ‘Were you having a nightmare?’

Sara took a deep breath and hugged her mother.

Though her encounter with Hazel had been a dream, Sara couldn’t forget it. That evening, she took Amma’s scotch tape and tried to stick the leaf back onto the shrub. But the leaf kept falling on

the grass. Disappointed, Sara lay down on the grass and began thinking of other ways she could put the leaf back on the shrubs.

Amma watched her with interest, put down her cup of tea and walked over to her daughter.

‘What were you trying to do with the tape?’ she asked.

‘Amma,’ Sara said, tears rolling down her cheek. ‘I made a mistake.’

Sara told her mother about the dream. Amma smiled and wiped Sara’s tears with a handkerchief.

‘I know how we can bring Hazel back to her mama,’ Amma said.

The next day, Sara and Amma planted seeds into the ground next to the shrubs.

‘When this plant becomes a tall tree, we can call it Hazel,’ Amma told her. ‘But you must always remember to water it so that it grows.’

Sara promised to water the plant every day.



Whenever Adil played on the swing under the peepal tree, Aunt Sara told him the story of how the tree got its name.

‘Hazel is a strange name for a tree,’ Adil said to her as he got off the swing one evening.

‘That was the name of the leaf I saw in my dream.’

‘How can leaves have names?’ Adil asked his aunt.

‘And how can leaves cry when they don’t have eyes?’

Aunt Sara laughed so hard at her nephew’s questions that the crows hanging on the sides of the tree fell silent.

‘Plants are living beings,’ she told Adil. ‘You’ll be surprised by how similar they are to us.’

‘If they are just like us, why doesn’t Ami let me sit under Hazel after dark?’ Adil put his hands on his hips. ‘Why does she say that witches will take me away if I play under the tree at night?’

Aunt Sara patted Adil’s shoulder and smiled at him.

‘Trees need their rest too,’ she said.



Aunty Sara rose to her feet and pulled her nephew up from the grass.

'Let's go inside now,' she yawned. 'It's getting late and you have to eat dinner in Adil's heart and he couldn't move. A few minutes later, when he was certain that no monster would crawl up from underneath his bed to attack him, he gained some strength. He now felt hot inside the room.

'Maybe I should go outside,' Adil thought.

Adil got up from his bed, found his torch next to his bed and walked past the lounge to the front door. He carefully unlocked it so as to not wake Ami or Aunty Sara, and ran out into the lawn where the air was cooler.

'I'll play on the swing,' he whispered. 'Ami and Aunty Sara are always telling me silly stories that aren't true.'

Adil sat on the swing, waiting for the witch that Ami had told him so much about. But the witch never came. Instead, Adil felt something crawling underneath him. He got up from the grass, saw a lizard moving towards him and screamed. As he

ran away from it, Adil saw leaves fall from the tree and land next to the snake.

Stunned, the lizard made its way into the far end of the garden.

Adil saw Aunty Sara running towards him from the front door. He rushed towards her and gave her a tight hug.

'What happened?' she asked, holding him in her lap. 'What are you doing outside?'

Adil told her that he had seen a lizard and that it had been scared away by the leaves that fell from the tree.

'I'm just glad you're alright,' Aunty Sara said. 'You're shaking. Don't worry. You're safe now. Hazel saved you.'

'Hazel did nothing, Aunty Sara,' Adil said.

'Ami's always complaining that the crows are throwing leaves on the grass. Wait till I tell her that the crows saved my life.'

'The crows disappear into their nests at sunset, Adil,' Aunty Sara said.

Adil's face turned pale with panic.

'I'm scared, Aunty Sara,' he said.

'Don't be,' she said. 'Hazel means no harm. He taught me to care for nature and he's taught you how nature cares for us.'

As Aunty Sara took him back into the house, Adil looked at Hazel – at first with fear and then with wonder. He knew then that he would always find shade under Aunty Sara's peepal tree.

4

A few days before Ali turned six, his mother decided to take him for a trip to Lahore so he could spend his birthday with his grandmother.

'This will be your first plane journey, Ali,' Amma said as they joined the queue that inched slowly towards the metal detectors at the airport. 'Are you excited?'

'Yes, Mama,' Ali replied. 'I've only seen aeroplanes flying in the sky. Now I'll finally get to

ride in one too. I wonder what the clouds will look like from way up high.'

'They'll look like giant balls of cotton,' Amma said as she placed their suitcases on the baggage scanner. Ali smiled when he heard this. He couldn't wait to board the plane.

After they had checked-in their suitcases, Ali stared out of a big glass window as a plane took off from the runway. For a moment, he thought the aircraft was flapping its wings like a giant bird.

'Amma, were birds used to carry passengers from one place to another before aeroplanes were invented?'

Ali's mother laughed at his question. 'Let's go,' she said. 'Boarding has started.'

When they entered the plane, Amma insisted that Ali should sit on the window seat. 'You'll have a great view of the clouds,' she said. 'Just make sure you cover your ears with your fingers when we take off.'

Ali gave her a puzzled stare.

'You'll know what I mean very soon,' she said with a smile.

Minutes later, the pilot asked the passengers to fasten their seatbelts. Ali's mother helped him wear his belt. Just then, Ali heard the rumble of the engine. Frightened by the sound, Ali tucked a finger inside each ear and closed his eyes. Soon, he felt the floor of the plane move and tilt upwards. Ali felt a dull pain in his ears.

'Amma,' he shouted. His mother put a finger on his lips to silence him. She raised the flap of the plane's oval window and pointed outwards.

'Look at the clouds,' his mother said.

Ali opened his eyes and gazed out at the deep blue sky that was dotted

with large, misshapen cotton bolls.

'Are those clouds?'

Amma nodded.

As he stared out the window, he noticed that the plane's wings were cutting through the clouds.

'Amma, our plane is breaking the clouds. What if pieces of clouds fall to the ground?'

His mother grinned. 'Don't worry, Ali. The clouds don't break and fall so easily.'

Amma decided to take him for a walk along the aisle. 'Let's see if we can find the pilot,' Amma said as she opened a blue curtain and walked ahead. Ali saw a woman in a green shalwar kameez sporting a purple hat who was angrily pushing a trolley down the aisle. He grabbed his mother's hand and stared warily at the stern-faced woman. When the woman saw the worried look on Ali's face, she smiled at him, stopped and pulled out a lollipop from her pocket. She knelt down and handed it to him. Forgetting his fears, Ali gave her a smile.

'What's your name?' she said.

'Ali. Are you the pilot?'

Amma laughed. 'No, no, she's a flight attendant.'

'Do you want to meet the pilot?' the flight attendant asked. 'I can take you to meet him.'

Amma nodded. Minutes later, Ali was shaking hands with the pilot. He was a bearded man with a blue cap that bore an inscription of a soaring eagle. 'Do you need the eagle to fly the plane for you?' Ali asked the pilot. When the pilot looked confused, Ali pointed at the image of the bird stitched onto his cap. Amma, the flight attendant and the pilot laughed loudly at the boy's question.

'It's Ali's first time travelling on a plane,' Amma told the pilot.

'Is that so?' The pilot gently ruffled Ali's hair. 'In that case, I'll give you a gift when we land. For now, go back to your seat. We'll be arriving in Lahore soon.'

In the minutes that it took for the plane to land on the runway, Ali beamed with pleasure. He forgot about the clouds, the earache he had when the plane took off or the uneaten lollipop in his pocket. All he craved was the gift.



After the plane came to a stop and the passengers started to leave, Ali urged his mother to help him find the pilot. Amma finally saw him at the exit, saying goodbye to the passengers. She propped Ali onto her lap and told him to wave at the pilot. Ali did as he was told and was thrilled when the pilot waved back at him. As they reached the exit, the pilot took off his cap.

'Here's your gift, my friend,' he said when he placed the cap on Ali's head. 'I don't need an eagle to fly the plane. But you'll always have this cap as a memory of your first time on a plane.'

Ali happily adjusted the cap on his head. When he met his grandmother outside the airport, Ali showed her the cap with pride.

'Did you enjoy your first plane journey?' she asked as they got into the car.

'Yes, Nani. I felt like an eagle flying through the clouds. The only difference is that I was inside the plane. Eagles probably get cotton from the clouds stuck in their ears when they fly in the sky.'

Nani giggled at the remark while Ali told her about his aeroplane adventures.

About The Writer

Taha Kehar is a journalist, a literary critic and a novelist simultaneously. A law graduate from SOAS, London, Taha Kehar is the author of two novels, Typically Tanya and Of Rift and Rivalry. He is the co-editor of The Stained-Glass Window: Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan. Kehar's essays, reviews and commentaries have been published in The News on Sunday, The Hindu and South Asia magazine and his short fiction has appeared in the Delhi-based quarterly The Equator Line, the biannual journal Pakistani Literature and the OUP anthology I'll Find My Way. One of his short stories has been published in The Bridge Volume II which was published by Picture Show Press, California. Based in Karachi, he teaches undergraduate media courses and has just completed a post-modern detective novel.

The Jaws of Death! by Taha Kehar

Dear Ma,

As you sleep in your hospital bed, I wonder if you're still haunted by the daunting events of September 14, 2011 -- the day Emad tried to kill himself. You and I were both stunned that the baby of our hapless family -- the sole catalyst of joy in our lives -- would even entertain such morbid thoughts. God spared him from the jaws of death, but we didn't know that life wouldn't be the same again.

I had the benefit of escape since I went off to university a month after Emad was discharged from the hospital. You're the one who stayed behind to reckon with his fears and erratic demeanour. You stood by him through those turbulent years.

Daddy's fears about his youngest son's well-being verged on a quiet aggression, a denial of responsibility. Fuelled by a maternal instinct, you played the part of a supportive parent, without realising that in the process of rehabilitating Emad, you would lose a part of yourself. Every time I came back to Karachi on holiday, you looked harried and pale, as if you were carrying the world's burdens on your shoulders. Were you punishing yourself? Did you blame yourself for what Emad did? I wish you'd shared your insecurities with us. We could have offered consolation in those distressed hours and helped you achieve your own private nirvana. Ten years have passed since Emad's suicide attempt. The 27-year-old who earnestly waits at your bedside for you to awaken from an endless slumber isn't the same teenage boy who swallowed a strip of Paracetamol.

The times have changed. You're the patient now. The only difference is that the jaws of death seem to be beckoning you. Emad knows that we're embroiled in a losing battle. Yet, he insists that we fight it like soldiers who are resigned to their fate in a burning battleground.

As you sleep before me, I wonder if you still have the will to live. If yes, can Emad be your saviour? I can tell that he wants to repay you for your kindness. I keep telling him that nothing we do can measure up to a mother's love. Why don't you wake up and tell him that I'm not lying?

Best,
Shazeb.

The Jaws of Death won the
First International Writing Competition
(Flash Fiction) on bridge-the-nations.com

THE DREAM

By Othniel Omijie
Nigeria



A gentle breeze awakened my consciousness to the immediate environment. Where was I? I looked around and felt the presence of other passengers on what instantly took the resemblance of a boat. The boat was drifting slowly towards an illuminated quay where a crowd was waiting for the passengers. The darkness around contrasted with the bright light at the quay. I felt a push behind me the moment the boat came to a stop. This was followed by a rough voice 'get down young fella; we have a lot to get out of the boat'.

His voice brought me out of my trance. I hurriedly stepped out of the boat to make way for the strange impatient man and his companions. Stepping into the bright light blinded me momentarily. In this state, I heard a deep guttural voice 'Mr Obec?' I turned around to behold a man tall and stoutly built, with a sun-tanned skin. 'How was your journey?' he asked. 'You must be tired and sure need rest!' He took my hand and pushed his way through the surging crowd of wives hugging husbands and children dancing around fathers to a lonely building nearby, and pointed to an old inn. 'That is where you will put up tonight and tomorrow, I will show you around town' he said. 'Ask for Room 12' he concluded, turning to go. At this point, I found my voice and quickly asked 'Who are you and what am I doing here?' He turned to face me and answered in an urgent

tone, 'You will get all the answers you seek in the morning, for now, have your rest'. With this he moved into the night and his steps died down.

At the door of the inn stood a squat man in a long black raincoat and a slouch hat leaning against the door, his left hand holding a walking stick. He looked at me cold and remote. 'You don't belong here' he shuddered. 'I am staying in Room 12' I managed to reply. The muscles in my legs were twitching; I wanted badly to sit down. He looked at me inquiringly and muttered under his breath, 'I told them you don't belong here, but they won't listen'. He made way reluctantly and ushered me into the inn. I heaved a sigh of relief and walked in.

I went upstairs to the direction of the squat man's forefinger and stopped in front of Room 12. I waited until he was out of sight. As I moved to open the door, I felt a gentle touch on my left shoulder from behind and a voice muttered gently 'Don't go into that room'. I turned sharply to behold a girl of about twenty-five. Her young and beautiful face had probably seen better days. She was dressed in a long overflowing red gown with embroidery flowers, her unkempt hair packed at the back. 'Why' I asked. 'Go back to where you are coming from, you don't belong here' she muttered again. 'What is this place and who are you?' I asked.

She looked searchingly at me. In her clear blue eyes, I saw secrets deeply locked away. She dropped her head as if in deep thought, seconds went by before she raised her head slowly, and looked down the stairs to make sure the man in

black raincoat and a slouch hat was not in sight. She looked at me pleadingly and said in a low tone; 'They bring young intelligent men from your world to write untold stories from their own view. We are the oppressed but nobody ever cared to hear us. They are our oppressors but they tell the story; they ship in writers to write our story. You are Obec. We have heard about you. They whisper your name and say you are an emerging young writer, the next big name in the literary world. They want you to write what they want the world to hear'.

I shrugged. 'What makes you think so?' I asked in a husky voice. 'Who are you and what are you doing here?' I asked for the umpteenth time. She drew in a deep breath and answered slowly 'I am Rima, we were brought and kept here against our will. There are many others in this place'. She stopped for a moment as if unsure of what to say next. 'We want you to write our story this time from our own view' she resumed after a long pause. 'You look different from other writers who have visited this place. I heard you coming up the stairs and decided to take my chance'.

She pushed a neatly folded piece of paper into my breast pocket with a shaky hand. 'Go back and tell the world we are dying, tell them we need help'. She looked at my face with wet eyes and said 'They will believe because they know you are an objective writer. Leave before it is morning. All the information and evidence you need is in that folded piece of paper'. Her voice was hysterical. 'I am not working for them' I said faintly, facing the direction of the squat man. 'I have had enough, please go! No one can force me to do what I don't want to do'. I said. 'Please listen to me and don't get so upset' she said genuinely. 'You have accepted their money. If you don't want, they will drop you, but you can never drop them. If you try,

they will come after you. The only chance you have of dropping them is to disappear completely'. She took the pen in my breast pocket, opened my right palm and wrote a code. 'With this, the ferry man will take you back. Room 12 is enchanting; it stalks the honest writers and stops them from objective writing. We need you to tell the world the truth'. She nudged me 'They are coming' and pointed down the stairs.

I saw a flicker of light and the shadows of two men moving stealthily towards the reception. They were wearing slouch hats. It was now half-past one

in the morning by my time piece and I was feeling dead-tired. I considered my position. I could hear their deep breath faintly. Rima pushed me into the opposite room and silently closed the door after me.

'What makes you think they were here, Mark?' the shorter of the two men asked when they came up. 'I heard voices' replied the second man referred to as James. The first man was silent for a long time and finally said 'He can't get away, unless he is helped'. 'Don't doubt the intuitive power of a good writer' Mark said. 'Could he have

found a boat or even think in that direction?' the first man asked. Mark gave no answer; he probably had none. Rima shoved me towards the only window in the dark room. She seemed to know the room like the back of her hand with the way she moved in the darkness. I could hear the door of Room 12 open and the faint sound of the light switch. I stopped for a moment to face Rima 'How did I get here?' I asked. 'The piece of paper will tell you all that' She muttered impatiently. I strapped my bag behind my back and let myself down the window with a twisted rope made for the purpose. I gently lowered myself and landed at the base of the building where it was dark and concealing. I could hear voices speaking in hushed tones and the faint sound of footsteps in the distance. It was a





The Dream - Othniel Omijie

needed to take me to my destination; a code I don't even understand. At this point, the ferryman made a sign for me to close my eyes. I obeyed; I had no choice. A gentle breeze enveloped me, causing me to go into a trance.

As I awoke to consciousness, I heard the crow of a cockerel, signalling the dawn of a new day. My room took full shape and I could see my writing materials scattered around me on the bed. My laptop was still on (I was actually typing before I fell asleep). I looked at my palm, no code. I reached for my breast pocket and felt a folded piece of paper. 'Rima!' I jerked and scrambled out of bed. I shoved the blinds aside and peeped outside. The city was gradually coming to life. What was the message of last night? I looked at the scribbled content of the paper, and the memory of the previous night rushed in like a tap turned on. The day will no doubt be a long one. Rima stood out in my mind's eye as I reached for my pen and paper, the world must hear this!

cold morning and conflicting thoughts ran riot in my head. I looked at the code on my palm, but could not make anything out of it; I was not supposed to, 'Just show it to the ferry man' She had said. How did I accept their money, where and when?

By now, I had unknowingly walked a distance, and was close to the ferryman. He was a hooded shadow. I stretched out my opened palm, towards him. He looked long at the code, then at me and signalled me to step in. It was a dark silent night and fear gripped my heart. The only sound came from the paddle as the ferryman propelled the canoe. Rima said the code was all that was



Q: How would Ferdinand de Saussure introduce himself and conclude his "Theory of signs" at the same time?

A: "I'm Saussure of this theory of signs".

By Syeda Faiza Babar
Pakistan

Signifier + Signified = Sign





Seventeen and a Half Minutes

By Jackie Kabir
Bangladesh

My father, an indomitable spirit, most powerful and influential parliamentarian of this time was lying on the ICU bed. He was sixty seven. It was not possible to understand if he was conscious or unconscious but he looked frail. He had many different wires coming out of his body which were connected to the different devices. A six parameter patient monitor showed he was hemodynamically stable. He had the oxygen mask on. They called me on my phone while I was on duty in the ward informing me that he had a heart attack. I flew from Dhaka on the first available flight.

His daughter from another mother was there. Sitting right next to his bed, holding his hands. A sharp pain originating in my heart spread through my whole being. He was my father, why was his second wife's daughter sitting so close to him? It's just been a year since my mother passed away. That was when I saw him last. That day he

came with his entourage, he is the district president of the ruling party, naturally he would move about with his people. Such a powerful man, no one ever dared to say anything bad about him. It was hard to accept the fact that he was lying like this. Tears welled up my eyes and fell in drops without me knowing.

My mother always loved him despite the fact he got married to another woman. He had to get her permission to marry a second time. She gave the permission in writing. Both My brother and I were upset and didn't speak to him for the longest time. She scolded us for not wishing him well. My mother told us that my father met the other lady at a rally where my father was invited. She was a social worker, a divorcee with three girls. At once they fell in love and in a couple of months my father married her and moved out. I just finished school then. He would come by once in a while at the beginning gradually that turned into twice a year on two Eid days. We had a big house, big sitting room, all the time house would be swarming with people. When one took leave from father three more would arrive. Fresh cups of tea were brought in, replacing the used ones. My mother didn't have any time for herself. She was busy giving instructions to the maid, guards, cleaners and gardeners. Our kitchen stove seemed to be

on throughout the whole day.

All that changed after he moved out. Our house lost its luster like a defeated city after war they show on movies, abandoned, empty. My mother also became quiet, suddenly she had a lot free time, then also she learned to live with herself. I guess 'self' is one's best friend. But my mother's body betrayed her, she was diagnosed with cancer and many years later she succumbed to the disease.

I came to Dhaka for my education, my brother joined the army. My mother was living alone in that big one storied building my father inherited from my grandfather. She never complained, never showed any bitterness towards the other woman. Once I was so angry hearing that he had bought a house for his new wife and children while my mother struggled to pay for my tuition. I called the other woman names. My mother was furious. She asked me in a calm voice

"Did I bring you up with these kinds of values? This is what they are teaching you? What is the difference between you and a slum dweller? They fight all the time, call each-other names at the slightest things? Is there any difference?"

Since then I had never uttered any bad words about her. I had a slight hope that my father might return when my mother got ill; but three girls took care of him so very well after their mother passed away, it didn't make him feel uncomfortable at all. The youngest daughter also took care of all his finances and my father's wealth. Besides,

I froze, then I tried to regain my composure and tell myself that it was indeed the head of the state wanting to talk to me.

my father was a very composed man, in fact everybody in his political career admired him. He was very close to the head of the political party. He would always seek my father's advice before taking any decision regarding any important matter. When my mother died, every single politician in the city came to her funeral. My father let them pay their respects as his wife.

I went to the doctor's room and spoke to him about my father's condition. As a doctor I knew his days were numbered. When I went back to his room, the girl got up and offered me to sit down. I sat, looked at him for a long time. I whispered to him that I loved him

even though he abandoned us. I told him that all I wanted now was for him to get well. That I didn't care if lived with second wife's children. The doctor and nurses were instructed to look after my father with care. But after three days he had another heart attack and he passed away. I was dumfounded but sat crying. While my step sister managed all the formalities, talking to the doctors,



In Memoriam

By Mahnoor Tahir
Pakistan



TThere is magic in places we love. As a child, the idea seemed fascinating, downright ludicrous as an adolescent, but as I grew older, I started to find wisdom in those age old words.

I remember it like it was yesterday. My grandmother, old and wrinkled, sitting under a banyan tree, mixing henna. In a world where these things could be bought cheaply, she relied on her own two hands to produce the best things. She was old-fashioned like that.

When she had finished working the mixture into a fine paste, she had beckoned me over from where I had been sitting with a book in my lap and my mind miles away. As I neared, the strong odour of henna assailed me and then it was being lathered onto my hair in large gobfulls, my grandmother deaf to my weak protests. "It's good for your hair," was her calm response.

As I waited, I grew restless. I was almost nine by then, but the childish urge compelled me to plead, "Tell me a story, Dado."

She launched into an old account, of brave men and women marching across their homeland for foreign parts. I could picture it all — the tall stalks, my grandmother and her people crouching

down among them, the sounds of thundering boots and rumbling vehicles, the scorching sun threatening to expose them to the enemy's gaze. All her stories circled back to the Independence. I now know that all her stories also enjoyed a little embellishment for the sake of me. She knew I wanted heroism and she delivered, reliving her past in new and exciting ways.

That day, as she spun her stories, a burning question forced me to interrupt. "Why would you live there if people were bad to you?" It was such a childlike question, coming from someone who had never had to think about it themselves.

Her words had come instantly. "There is magic in places we love." I remember there was no hesitation, no doubt as she spoke and when she smiled, her eyes shone with happiness. She truly believed in this conviction.

As I got older and my requests for stories became less and less, my grandmother's stories started losing more and more of the half lies. She started giving me the truths. The naked, ugly truths — she had been a child herself, everyone looked like an enemy, and she was devastated to be leaving her home.

Those rare days when I did ask for her stories, she gave me lush visions of a large courtyard full of family, large trees in the back where chickens clucked all day long, rooms that remained cool throughout summers, and a sense of home that was rooted deep inside. A skeptical teenager though I was, I started to glimpse the magic she wove with her words. The invisible tether that had kept her home alive in her memory long after she had left it.

She'd spend hours sitting underneath the banyan tree that had been planted especially for her — a special place in our vast garden where she could sit and pretend that she was back home. She insisted she didn't need that. She was happy where she was. It was only when she talked to the ones who had stayed that her eyes filled, her voice got heavier, and she said things like, "At the end of the day, your home is your home. You're all better off being back there."

To someone who had not been there or walked hand in hand with her through that land and experienced the endless freedom she remembered, that was not home. My home was here in a nice suburban town where we had a large garden with a community park and nice shops close by. Her home was wild, free, and dare I say, exotic? My home was tame, comfortable, and completely ordinary. I dreamed of her home while living in mine and that was how I came to the realization that generational memory is sowed deep inside us through stories.

To our horror, it was that memory that eventually failed her. As I sat under her favourite banyan tree one day and mixed henna for her, something I could never get exactly right, she was off in dreamland. She was mumbling incoherently about intruders in the night and waking up to distant screams. I had grown used to these horrific

visions and could never figure out if she was back to embellishing truths or the truth was just that horrible.

When I reached for her with my henna covered hands, she turned a ferocious glare upon me. "It's not right. You never do it right. It's all wrong and it smells wrong. Don't you dare put it on me, Salma." Then she turned her back to me, her eyes fixed on the tree shading us from the afternoon sun.

I slowly picked up the spare towel I had brought with me and wiped my hands clean. I put the bowl and the towel aside and reached for her again with gentle hands. "Dado, I'm Varra. Who is Salma?"

My grandmother didn't respond. We later learned that she had become unresponsive to everything. Everything except the mention of her home. Her dull eyes, coated with the grey film of age and experience, would light up at the mention of her home and she would tell the most remarkable stories. Her ageing brain slowly erased the present to make room for the past.

It initially struck me as sad. How tragic to lose all sense of the present and live constantly in the past? But as I came home one day, after months of staying in a hostel far from home, I felt a deep love bubble up inside me. The familiarity blanketed me and gratitude choked me for several long moments. How good it was to be back home!

Her words, said in full consciousness and joy, came to me then. There is magic in the places we love. The way they are tied to moments in your life and bring out all these powerful feelings in you. Who knows what magic is at work? But she had been right about its existence all along.

About The Writer

Mahnoor Tahir is a regular contributor of The Bridge anthologies. She is a passionate writer based in Pakistan who likes to experiment with genres as means of expressing her feelings and emotions.



SLEEPING WITH DEMONS

By Sabrina Fatma Ahmad

Bangladesh

The pain comes as regular as the high tide at noon. It crashes over my head and spills down my shoulders. I fight to keep my breathing steady, counting down to what I hope is its inevitable ebb.

The first time this happened, I had screamed and screamed into the pre-dawn darkness, convinced I was dying. I had never felt such agony before – the bolts of electricity inside my skull, the taste of metal in my mouth. You had clung to me, terrified and helpless, while I made my tearful, and slightly melodramatic goodbye speech. When morning came, and I had cried myself to sleep, clearly still alive, you got up and got dressed for work.

It is at once frightening and fascinating, how routine can make the mundane out of the monstrous. We were told that these mysterious episodes were here to stay. At first, we were heartbroken and horrified. The pain pushed us to opposite sides of the bed. It could be heard in my gasps and whimpers, and your sighs of frustration. My perfumes

were replaced by mentholated balms, which often gave you a headache. My palate shrank to foods that wouldn't trigger an attack. Nothing actually worked.

Gradually, I learned to identify the tell-tale signs of the onset of a seizure, how to position myself for minimum discomfort, how to brace for the worst of it. You mastered the art of looking away when the sight of my suffering got too much to bear. We got on with our lives.

I exhale slowly as the last wave recedes. I've made it through another morning. Your sleepy fingers find the back of my neck and squeeze lightly, to congratulate me. I slowly open my eyes to the sunlight streaming through the gaps in the curtains. It's going to be a beautiful day.

About The Writer

Sabrina is the author of *Sehri Tales*, an anthology of poetry and flash fiction, based on the annual creativity boot camp she created in 2016, by the same name. A journalist and academic by profession, she lives in Dhaka with her husband Abak Hussain.



Super Soldier

By Dirha Qazi
Pakistan

“Hank, Hank, get out of the way!”, shouted the soldier. For a second Hank’s vision was dominated by a white flash and all he could hear was a high pitched ringing in his ear. He momentarily passed out, owing to a recruit’s stupidity having used a real stun grenade for a training session. While knocked out, Hank saw his family back home. He was on the porch of his house in Texas, playing catch with his son, Jason. “Go long son! Here comes a big one”. Laura, his high school sweetheart and his wife, called for both of them while the ball was in mid-air. Jason fumbled and dropped the ball, in the excitement and anticipation of drinking lemonade after working up a sweat. He ran inside, racing his golden retriever to the door. “The last one to the door’s a stinking loser”, chuckled Jason. Hank had everything a guy could wish for, the picture perfect family, the white painted picket fence, and authority. However, just like most good things, it came at a steep price. The price of distance.

“Hey! Look who’s finally up. You worried us for a second there, big guy, collapsing like that”, remarked General Smith. Hank opened his eyes, half disappointed that what he had seen was merely a dream. “What happened?”. “Somebody accidentally switched the dummy stun with a live zitchy”, answered Smith. “I see; they should be

more careful. If you excuse me, I would like to go to my study”. Hank left abruptly leaving the soldiers confused. Back at his quarters, Hank took a blank page and pen and started writing a letter to his son. Ever since he had been dispatched to Iraq 4 years ago, Hank had started writing a peculiar letter series of sorts. He wanted his son to look up to his father and also feed the comic book fan in him simultaneously. Therefore, Hank had decided to paint himself as this superhero, slightly modifying his heroic selfless stunts to fit a fictional mould. After a couple of drafts, he was finally done with writing his most recent letter in the fables of “Hank the Super Soldier”.

The letter read, “Hello dear son, I hope you’re well. Know that wherever I am, I’m thinking about you and your mother. Speaking of your mother, I expect you to be taking care of her and not being in much trouble, as a true sidekick to Super Soldier would behave. I hope you’re getting good grades and helping out Mrs. Patricia next door with her groceries. Most of all, I hope you’re happy. Okay, I’ve kept you waiting long enough. Now to the good part. Oh boy, do I have a story to tell you. One fine morning, me and my troops were doing our routine enemy camp inspection patrol when my Super Soldier sense started tingling. The evil mastermind Voltra had covered the perimeter

with hidden landmines. Just before an unsuspecting soldier was about to step on one, I called for him to stop. I promptly came up with an ingenious plan and decided to use telekinesis from my arsenal. The landmines all flew out of the ground, bits of soil flying about, as one unit, a ball of destructive beeping machinery which I launched into the sky with a single swipe of my hand. I closed my fist when the mass was high enough to crush and compress it. The pressure and contact activated the mines. It was awesome! The mass erupted in a fiery red ball like fireworks in broad daylight. After disabling the defences, my team was able to infiltrate the enemy camp and save our captured fellow veterans. We also detained some of Voltra's men. I proceeded to, as you might expect, employ my mind-reading powers, succeeding to extract where Voltra is hiding. Super Soldier has yet to confront Voltra, you'll have to wait until my next letter for that, but Voltra will get the beating of his life, you can be sure of that. Stay safe kiddo, and give hugs and kisses to your mom for me. Love you. Super soldier out." After attaching the postage stamp, and writing the address on the envelope, Hank left the letter on his desk, planning to deliver it with the next scheduled shipment out of the base.

The practice drill, which led to Hank passing out, was to prepare the soldiers for a recon mission. One of the locals had tipped them off about enemy movements near friendly camps and Hank's squad was tasked with scouting the area to confirm the sightings and report back. The directives were precise, no one was to engage the enemy, it was strictly a recon mission. The mission started as well as one can expect. It was a small group of four soldiers led by Hank, all geared up, wearing ghillie suits to help camouflage them. They traversed the neighbouring vicinity, plotting their course based on the limited intel available to them. The mission seemed to be without any

fruitful conclusion, for even after 4 hours of trekking through the mud, they had not yet seen any signs of enemy presence. The sun had set, so Lieutenant Hank made the decision to turn back, with a slight modification to the path they took, cutting through the forest to reach camp in a shorter time. However, this decision proved to bear ill for the group. Halfway along the route, Hank triggered a hidden tripwire, but instead of falling over, he recovered and was mindful to lean against it, knowing when he moved away it would blow up. He motioned for his men to slowly move back and form a 400-meter perimeter check. The soldiers, suspecting it to be a surveillance tactic, followed his orders. Hank waited for them to disappear from sight, and promptly moved away from the wire, ducking and running to somehow get away from the impact in time. The shrapnel flew everywhere and three pieces penetrated his leg. The soldiers upon hearing the explosion rushed back to their Lieutenant, finding him lying on the ground, groaning and holding his leg. They hoisted him up over their shoulders and hurried back to the barracks.

Back at home, Jason was eagerly waiting for his next letter. The collection of letters was his most prized possession, which he kept in his nightstand drawer. Despite being careless and forgetful, Jason had never misplaced a single letter from his father. He woke up early every Saturday, without exception, and sat outside on the footsteps, looking for the mailman to turn the corner. "Mom, why isn't the mailman here yet? What's taking him so long?", asked Jason impatiently. "He'll be here honey, come inside and have some breakfast", urged Laura, but Jason sat glued to the footsteps. He thought back to when he had last seen his father. He was only 7 then, but he remembered it like it was yesterday. He had not known then that he would not see his father for such a long time, otherwise he would've never let go, he would've



kept on hugging him. Dressed up in his army attire, if he had ever seen a real life manifestation to his realm of heroes, it was undoubtedly his father. Hank's exact last words to him were, "I'll be back before you know it, kid. You're in charge while I'm gone. I need you to step up. Promise me that you'll keep your mom happy with the goofy stuff you do so she doesn't miss me as much. Keep her hands full". He chuckle-cried to himself at the end. "I promise dad", Jason had replied, and he had kept that promise to the best of his abilities.

After sitting outside for an hour, Jason accepted defeat and came back inside with a gloomy look on his face. "What's the matter Jason?", asked his mother. "It's the letter, it's always here by now". "The mailman probably had a flat tire or was feeling unwell. The letter will turn up. Why don't you call Ford over? Go on", she answered, trying to sound reassuring, concealing the worry on her face. Jason slept in the next day, as he mostly did on Sundays, but Laura was awake, riddled by unrest. When she still hadn't received the letter, took out the encrypted sim and old calling phone from her drawer. It was issued by the army for emergency contact purposes. She held down one on the keypad as her husband had instructed. The number was on the speed dial. The line was ringing, but nobody picked up the phone. She kept on trying, without break, for two hours. Jason woke up and came running downstairs. "Where's the letter mom?! Where's the letter? Where's the letter? Where's the let-", Jason started to ask excitedly, but cut himself off in the middle when he saw his mother crying. "Why are you crying, mom?". "It's nothing sweetheart, Mommy just hurt herself walking barefoot". The sound of the phone ringing jerked Laura awake from her crestfallen state and she ran to pick up the receiver. "Hello! Is my husband okay? Is Lieutenant Hank of the USF-I

okay?". "Calm down Ma'am, your husband is alive. He suffered a severe injury, in an accident of explosive nature, to his right leg. It led to an infection and the leg had to be amputated below the knee cap. He is no longer fit for service and will be returned home to you within a week. We've fitted him with a state-of-the-art bionic leg and he should be walking by the time he reaches you". Laura did not know how to respond. She fell down to the floor, in disbelief. All that could be heard on the caller's end was brief pauses followed by high pitched periodical short shrieks and sharp sobs. "Good day to you Ma'am, I offer my condolences", and with that, the military

personnel ended the phone call. Laura had to pull herself together for the sake of her son. Her husband was returning home. She decided to greet him with a smile on her face and a well-kept house.

Laura told Jason that his father was going to come later this week, which is why they had not received any letter. This obviously led to effects far worse than a sugar rush, with Jason jumping around the house, hardly able to contain his excitement. Four days after the phone call, Laura opened the door to a moving truck with

Hank's personal belongings. "Mr. Hank should be arriving any minute now. Please sign here", said the delivery guy. Jason was waiting outside. Running up and down the street, jumping at the sight of any car. After what seemed like an eternity to the kid, a black Rolls Royce pulled up to the driveway. "Father!", exclaimed Jason excitedly and ran into the Lieutenant's arms. After Jason finally let him go, Hank got out of the car limp-walked up to his wife. "I'm fine dear, everything's alright", said Hank and pulled his wife into a tight embrace. Hank later explained to Jason when the limp came up that he had finally taken down Voltra, and sustained a minor injury that he was recovering from. He also had brought with him the

The sound of the
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jerked Laura
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"Hello! Is my hus-
band okay?"

undelivered letter on his desk, to Jason's delight.

For a while, at least until Jason grew up, Hank kept up the superhero pretence, sometimes going to extreme lengths to keep the dream alive for his kid. He used his contacts in the innovative technology sector and his scientist friends to put on a show for his kid, which included but was not limited to flying Hank, laser-shooting Hank, and bulletproof Hank. A silver lining, if one could consider as such, was Lieutenant Hank finally having the time to be the father that his kid deserved and the husband his wife deserved, happily living out his days, at his estate in Texas. In more ways than one, Lieutenant Hank proved to be a real life superhero and the true Super Soldier.



Compost Species

There is no 'the' in the fantasies of nature
Putting an 'ies' in fantasies doesn't cut it either
For Nature in its multifariousness dwarfs human
imagination
For human is part of nature, so
Nature's fantasies are compost
Refused, recycled

Inorganic matter suffused with organic, dying and
living
Harmonious living without aging is an anti-Nature
fantasy
As is an accelerated, break-neck evolutionary
speed
For islands drown, continents crash into another
But, only after millennia
Hear how we all grow into these wondrous trees,
100s of years
Gunned down in minutes
Immolated
Ashen
Scattered in the wind
Making the wind burn ice, burn mountains
Carcinogens - this is not a metaphor
The blue rivers of Africa are not a metaphor for
wondrous beauty
It is blood dyed blue, bleaching the earth, my skin
And it's the fantasy of Nature with Death as its
muse
The fantasy of Nature with Life as its muse, is also
inevitably there
So do not cling so desperately to your death, it can
wait
Fantasize a little
Of what kind of roots you have
What kind of bark you can grow
How best to fully bloom into yourself?

By Muhammad Khurram - Pakistan

*Above poem was selected as Poem of the Month
on bridge-the-nations.com*

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

By Hamna Ishtiaq
Pakistan

She is startled awake. Her palms are sweating and her face is completely white. She had a dream. It was a dream that felt almost real. Or was she still in the dream. She has no idea because everything seems unreal. She opens her eyes. There is no light, only darkness everywhere. She closes her eyes. After 30 seconds of darkness, there is a flash. She opens her eyes again. This time there is no darkness.

She is in a room. Everything is pink. She looks up. The ceiling is also pink. She realizes it is her room. She smiles because pink is her favorite color. Somewhere in the house, a clock strikes. Footsteps are heard. Doors are opened and closed. Everything seems to be rushed. Everything is audible to her. She tries to get out of bed but is unable to do so. She cannot move herself at all. All of a sudden her mother calls her from downstairs. She wants to respond but is impotent to do so. She feels paralyzed. Her name is called out once more. This time it's a man's voice. She recognizes the person. It's her father. Incapable of responding in any way she just stares at the wall. They call out several times but in vain. And then there is a long silence.

She moves her eyes around the room. The room is full of toys and books. Dolls are lying here and there. Her eyes are fixed on a certain doll. The face is dirty and the clothes are all torn. Her eyes are fixed on the doll. Suddenly her vision is blurred. She realizes she is crying.

What is happening? The doll's state evokes a long-forgotten memory. But she cannot comprehend what memory that is. It makes her sad. Tears are rolling down her face. She simply wants to get out of bed and pick up the doll. She, on the other hand, remains unmoving.

All of a sudden the doorknob turns and the lock clicks. The door opens with a screech sound. Unable to move, she shifts her eyes to the door. Two people enter in the room. Their faces are obscured, but she recognizes them as her parents. They're holding a cake. A small but beautiful pink colored cake. Her eyes shift from the cake to the people holding it. They are still not visible as if their faces are blurred out. What is happening? She again focuses on the cake. Her gaze has now turned to the ceiling. The pink color of the ceiling resembles that of the cake. She smiles again. Her eyes are once more clouded. She is crying. Tears are falling down. Instantly she hears a happy birthday song. The room is filled with the sound of a lovely voice. The tone is changing with every lyric. She is enjoying and yet crying. Her shirt is all wet but she pays no heed and listens carefully to the voice.

Her eyes then move towards the face of the one singing. The vision starts to clear up. She eyes them both and they really are her parents. She can see them smile. Oh! What lovely smiles they have. Her eyes water up again. Everything starts to make sense now. This is her house and these are her parents. She wants to yell.



But her state is not helping in any way. Motionless, she just cries. Now their faces become visible and their smiles are ever so pure. She tries to say something for the last time. Not a single muscle moves. What is happening? Her eyes are pouring out tears. She squints her eyes shut.

She opens them immediately. All of a sudden everything is again black. What is happening? All was starting to make sense and now this darkness again. She tries to move. Her muscles are working. A bell starts to ring instantly and there emerges light from nowhere. She is blinded for a second there. Trying to regain her sight, she looks up. She is in a room. Without thinking she looks up towards the ceiling. There is no pink color. Everything is white as death. What is happening? She lowers her gaze. She realizes the room is filled with other beings. Hundreds of children are moving here and there. Girls with torn dresses move past by. A sudden realization hits her. The doll looked exactly the same. What is happening?

Everybody is running and shouting. She has taken up a position in the centre of the room. Her face is as white as the ceiling once more. She tries to recall the events in the pink room. She was aware that she was content. But what is happening? She is suddenly handed a piece of paper. She examines it. A 9-letter word is written in bold and takes up half of the page. She looks up. A fat old lady is standing in front of her, speaking. She returns her gaze to the paper. Her attention is drawn to the huge word. Her hold on the paper is stolen. She raises her head once again. It's the lady, and her looks indicate she's not pleased, so she walks away. She stares down at her now-empty hands. Somehow she can still make out the huge word. What is happening?

Her vision has impaired once more. The meaning of the word is now clear. The nine letters are more than simply letters; they encapsulate a sense of betrayal.

O R P H A N A G E. Now she knows what is happening.



ORPHANAGE

MIRAGE

By Tarab Zahid
Pakistan

There she stood, in front of the mirror, holding a piece of glass over her wrist while blood was dripping from her fingers because of her tight hold over the glass. Tears rolled down her cheeks like a cascade. She cursed the whole world and had decided to bid farewell to this excruciating pain that she had kept bottled up beneath her soul from her family, friends, and even her soul.

"Don't do it", someone whispered.

She got petrified and looked at the door with terror as if somebody had caught her committing an unforgivable sin.

"Wha... What? Who is it?" She rambled with confusion however there was no one at the door and it was still locked on the inside. It felt like a hallucination for her as she looked around and there wasn't even a soul.

"Dear! I'm right in front of you" someone whispered again.

The fear shivered through her spine as she found herself standing in front of a mirror and looked with astonishment at her reflection that wasn't her. The reflection was quite opposite of her. It was the one without the teary eyes and not so fallen apart. She was about to pass out when immediately her mirroring character spoke "get yourself together, I have so many questions for you, in fact for myself" "Who are you and how? Why?" She rambled "What? You can't recognize yourself?" She replied with a peal of laughter"

"Am I dead already? Is this my afterlife?"

"Not yet, you have quite a long life to live"

"I don't want to"

"Well! You have to. And I'm going to tell you how and why".

"No," she screamed, "I'll tell you why I need to take this step."

"Okay, go ahead" she echoed gently.

"I... I ... need to end this life because I'm nothing but a disappointment for my friends, family, and everyone out there who is expecting great endeavors from me. Their expectations are hurting; they are hurting me. They want me to do something that I'm not capable of. They make fun of me and my dreams."

"So you are saying that their expectations and your dreams are causing you pain...Right?" she interrupted with contemplation.

"No... not that".

"Then what is it?"

"I told you already... It's everyone" she cried, "Everyone's hurting me. They use me for their benefits and when I'm in need, they all vanish. They fake their friendships, they talk behind my back and mock my weirdness. I have no one to confide in and I don't have a shoulder to cry on. No one's ready to hear me out. I try so hard in relations. I assist everyone with their problems and I always make an effort to please them. However, I'm still not enough. They push me away on my teeny tiny error, it appears that they were waiting for me to commit a mistake just to get rid of me. I don't even desire anymore talking to anyone about my fears or traumas. They'll make fun of me or will take it

for granted. I feel completely destructed. I don't know what to do."

"You need to stop complaining.

"I'm not complaining."

"Yes, you are... You're just complaining about yourself and your shortcomings."

"How come?"

"Aren't you the one hurting yourself, holding grudges against everyone. Aren't you the one who is taking all the burden to please everyone? My dear! You cannot please everyone. You cannot be perfect all the time. You're a human, not a robot. Why are you taking responsibility for every other person? Stop making so many efforts for the ones who are not worth it. You tell me... Isn't it you who force yourself to do the chores and run errands for others while your tasks remain undone? You're the reason for your suffering."

"If that's so, then I should end my agony by putting an end to my life"

"Sweetheart! that's not the solution. Don't portray yourself as a coward. You have been strong for so long. Don't let it be wasted. Forbid holding grudges. It's just like the piece of glass you're holding, the longer you hold it, the deeper the bruise is with a never healing scar."

She glances at her bloody fingers and drops the glass splinter with a gasp. A realization overcomes her anxious face.

"What should I do then? How am I going to terminate this pain?" she started weeping and dropped herself on the floor.

"Don't be so hard on yourself. Just lean out of your comfort zone and reach for a shoulder to cry on, take hold of a warm hand, pour out all your soreness in mellow arms. Confide in someone who will never stab in your back. Don't be a lone wolf. You cannot fight this world on your own."

"I don't have anyone; I don't trust anyone at all. But I can trust you. Will you be my homely person?"

"Na ah! I can't stay here in the mirror forever.

You'll start feeling haunted. I'm just an illusion.

You need actuality... You need your mom."

She picked her head up and with an impression of disbelief

"No... No... No ... I can't talk to her"

"Why can't you?"

"Because I've never talked to her about my complications. I don't have a comfortable relationship with her."

"For what reason, you haven't confided in her?"



"I refrain myself from hurting or disappointing her... She doesn't need to know that how broken or fragile I am. She'll be upset and I don't want to do that. She is not willing to hear me or help. No one cares about me neither does she. She'll never get me. I'm all alone"

"Is it her or you who's not willing to speak? My dear! For yourself, shatter the boundaries that you have created. Your mother is just respecting your fictional limits. She needs a cue to intervene and that might be a just teary call of yours... Strive at least for once."

A silence halted the conversation. No utterance could be heard except the squeaky sound of steps approaching her room.

"It's mom," she said and looked in the mirror. There was no one but her reflection—the same broken girl.

"Bev" her mother shouted while knocking at the door.

"Bev darling! Are you in there? Open the door. It's dinner time. We all are waiting for you."

She stood there frozen and clueless. Her mom knocked for the third time...

"Honey open up" she sounded worried.

Beverly opened the door and immediately turned her back towards her mom so that she could not see her shattered soul through her eyes.

"What took you so long?" mother investigated.

"Nothing. I was in the washroom" Bev responded.

"Look at me and..." Her sight caught the bloody splinter of glass

"Oh, God... Where did this come from?... And why's blood on it? Are you hurt?... Bev...?" She grabbed her shoulder and turned her around."

"Oh my God. Your fingers are bleeding... What in God's name happened?... Where's the first aid box? Don't cry, my dear... Your mother will fix this."

Bev hugged her mother and cried like a kid.

"Oh honey, what is it?... Are your fingers hurting bad or is it something else that's bothering you?"

"It's something else" she claimed with a breaking voice."

Bev ranted all her feelings out about how lonely and left out she had been over the years.

"I didn't know how much you had going on with you" her mother rejoined apologetically. "I was unaware of your deteriorating mental health... But I was assured of how strong my girl was. I never doubted your strength. Bev, everyone has their shortcomings. No one is born a superhero. A life without any hurdle or hardships is like a school without any exam or assessment. It will be futile. These unwanted scenarios are just to test whether you end up on the wrong or the right side and I'm so proud of you that you have kept your kindness and generosity preserved. You have never misused anyone. I'm so proud of my little girl and you should also be proud of yourself. And remember only a phoenix is capable of rising from the ashes... Not every bird can do that. You're that phoenix."

Bev smiled with teary eyes while her mother caressed her forehead.

"I'm sorry... I should have never pushed you away", said Bev

"You never did. Now wash your face and come down for dinner. I've prepared you your favorite dish. You'll love it"

"Sure mom."

Her mother left the room and Bev realized that it was her who kept herself in pain. She suffocated herself with trying to prove her worth to everyone. It is only you who knows your worth. Stop expecting from people. Start expecting from yourself. You're the one who'll do great things for yourself and will be there for you. No one else is going to do that for you.

About the Writer

Tarab Zahid is a creative writing student from Pakistan who has always been fascinated by the idea of becoming a writer. She is interested in writing about real life happenings in the world around her.

Only the Dead have Seen the End of War

By Hafsa Mubarik
Pakistan



I woke up with sweaty face. Sirens were piercing through my ears. An unsettling feeling was starting to set in my gut. Mama came running, took my hand and hid us in our silent and damp basement. She was whimpering and terror could be felt from her eyes. The muffled cries were making it worse. Our bodies were shaking. There was no refuge from this feeling. Even our own house felt unsafe. Just two days ago I went to school with a glistening smile. I did great in my test and my teacher gifted me a honey caramel toffee. I came home running to brag about this to Mama. She kissed on my cheek and asked me to take some rest.

Two days later, I keep hearing sirens on the street. Soldiers cladded with weapons barged into the houses forcefully. Took me time to realize what was happening.

My homeland was falling apart. My dreams were falling apart. My future was falling apart. My people were in agony and suffering.

And here I am hiding in the basement fearful for my life, wondering why people couldn't choose love over hate? Why gaining power comes

with inflicting pain on people? Why we can't make this world a better place for everyone? Kashmir is known as Paradise on Earth and yet my paradise was drenched in blood.

Wallowing sounds and shrieks of people in pain were coming constantly. Every moment was dreadful. A loud thud came from outside. Mama hugged me more tightly and put her hand on my mouth. We forced our screams to die inside. Something banged hardly on the door. Two officers carrying their weapons entered and separated me from mama. They dragged us all the way from the stairs to outside. With tears rolling down on her face my mother begged them to spare us. I looked at the soldiers and wondered if there would ever be an end to this bestiality. Suddenly I noticed the dead bodies lying naked on the street. Maybe only the dead have seen the end of war. Maybe death is the only way out.

About the Writer

An enthusiastic university student, Hafsa Mubarik is seeking a degree in English Literature. She loves to read, write and cook in her free time. Pancakes are her specialty.



TRUST

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

By Sana Fatima

Pakistan

She was really cheerful today. Not just because she had recovered from a long-term illness but also because her little son had won an art competition held in his school.

He was so adorably enjoying his success that it made her heart full of gratefulness and delight. She had also baked a cake which was a rare occasion for she was never good at cooking or baking but she had tried her best to celebrate the first success of her little boy.

She began to set the dishes on the table as it was past 8 in the night and that was when Eric usually returned home from work. Eli was again drawing a picture. She sat beside him and asked him what he was drawing.

“Mom! See, this time I drew us; You, dad, me and Andy. We are a happy Family.”, her son exclaimed with utter joy.

She saw the drawing and it was indeed beautiful. Both her and Eric were looking at Eli happily who was holding their adorable puppy in his lap.

She felt tearful after looking at the drawing. She had always wanted a happy and loving family and now that her dream had come true, she could not be more grateful.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang while she was lost in her thoughts. Eli ran to the door shouting “Dad”. She came along too but when she opened the door, the sight was nothing less than a nightmare for her. There was another lady standing beside her

husband. “Eli, my baby! I’m home.” Said Eric, pushing her and bringing the other lady in.

“W-who is this lady? W-what is she doing here?” She asked.

“Oh, I forgot to introduce you to her. She’s Emma, my new wife. She’ll be living here from now on.” Saying this, he took the lady to their room. He had no regret in his voice. It was so inconsiderate and cold that it stunned her.

She stood there blankly staring at the front door.

“Mom! Mom! Who is that woman with my Daddy?? Asked Eli shaking her.

The same question had been repeated after 8 long years.

“Mommy! Who is she?? Why is she here?? Daddy why is Mommy crying?” Asked that little girl whose mom was sobbing loudly after realizing that her husband had been stolen by another woman.

This time, the question was asked by her own son and not by the daughter of her husband’s ex-wife.

Her happy family was only a mirage. Tears threatened to fall from her eyes at this realization and her body began to shake while there was only a single voice ringing in her mind repeatedly.

“Mom! Mom! Who is that woman with my Daddy.....”?

About the Writer

Sana Fatima is a short story writer who writes to escape the societal pressures and harsh realities of life and to build a colorful picture of what she wants the society to be like.



The Murder

By Dirha Qazi - Pakistan

As I pen this down, I still feel those chills that I experienced the first time my A levels teacher recounted this event to us on 8 October, 2018, in bitter memory of the 2005 earthquake that hit Azad Kashmir and surrounding areas, forever tormenting many of us, if not all. So what I am beginning to narrate to you is an original incident that you would be reading solely on your own choice as you can still terminate to do at this point. However, you won't be doing it. Because either you know too much of that horrendous day, or you do not anything at all. I'll begin right from the day everything happened, momentarily assuming role of one of the protagonists; not disregarding the authenticity of story, but loosely availing the liberty of prose fiction.

All the names used are fictitious.

It was probably half past 9 when I suddenly woke from a sound sleep after a 9 hour long surgery that night. The strident noise of my phone was ringing in the backdrop of my dreams for quite a time until it finally tattered them, launching me back to reality. I had probably ignored nearly 6 back to back calls in those dreams when I swiped down the notification bar of unanswered calls to confirm. I dialed back.

“Assalam o Alaikum... Sab khairiyat hai...?” *

“Sir, hospital staff has been summoned at Chief Minister's by 10 a.m. Sir, Dr. Tufail Umar and you would be leading the team, sir...should we also make call to nurses present in surgery room last night?”

“Arham? Is it you? What happened...What Chief Minister?” I couldn't properly figure out if Arham was disoriented in his talk or I was still somewhere unconscious. However, I was sure of hearing him name Chief Minister in between his stream of uncoordinated phrases and I knew it wasn't for any

good. *Allah khair kare.* **

“Yes sir, the earthquake, sir...all finished. *Sab tabaah!!*”***

My watch showed 11a.m and the chief minister was still awaited at the lounge while some of the doctors were dozing off in between slurping their chai and others making calls back home to inform the families about the sudden departure to north and more importantly the hell that broke loose last night. I was one of them; so I called my wife Huma who was gearing for her lecture that morning and briefed the whole scenario. She, like every time I had to leave for emergency, left me under the care of God and *Ayat ul Kursi*****. I knew I was safe now, but it wasn't about me this time, it was about...

It was about those words I saw his mouth register blankly with my own eyes, the dread I recorded with my own ears, it was about the guy in green shirt, it was about all similar tragedies. It was about the earthquake 2005.



The Murder - Dirha Qazi

emergency case but this scenario had left me most helpless. Then again, I remembered my wife reciting “fa inna ma al usri yusra” (verily, after every difficulty, there is ease”) and just there I stopped myself becoming a disbeliever and resolved not to break down again until I made sure to be

As soon as the copter landed near 2 pm, the surreal imagery in front of my eyes for once seemed like some flashback from a Hollywood movie featuring some war crisis of Afghanistan or Syria. I only realized the verity of moment when I noticed Pakistan’s armed forces personnel spread all over the uneven circumference, producing from under the boulders and tents; carrying and guiding the ‘mere survivors’ of the hour. It was not then surprising that I momentarily forgot who I was and what was my reason to be there. If it was to treat the wounded, it seemed too late; too late to gather the spirit and start randomly and unthinkably, and if it was to extend a hand of help to the army doctors and medical camps installed probably two to three hours ago, I never felt more indecisive in my entire career. The other doctors from the team then shook me from behind, wrapping their arms around my shoulders and I resumed from where everything seemed to halt in front of me despite the ongoing tumultuous motion all around.

“Dr. Ahmad ... Buckle up! Would you like to sit down a bit? The whole crew’s morale depends on you sir. Don’t do this”

By the time my fellow doctor Nadeem finished saying the last words under his concealed cracking voice, I broke into massive amount of ungovernable tears breaking free from my eyes. I couldn’t hold on further and bent down, hanging my head in air, and complained to Almighty while sobbing. I had never complained before in any

somehow relieved while leaving this place.

“Nadeem, start over then” I stood on my feet once again and began to locate some place suitable to fix our camp.

“Ahmad, that guy over there, in green shirt, I been watching him ever since we got here. He seems injured, but more... panicked. Why no one’s treating him when he’s all over there all this time?”

“I wonder do we have psychologists here..., let’s start from him then. Let’s get the guys bring him first”

We set up our first camp quickly next to the military camp, as guided by them and brought him immediately inside. A captain doctor followed us in.

“Sir, I examined him two hours ago. In fact three of us did. He’s not fatally injured somewhere, only mild injuries that we treated immediately. But, he hasn’t spoken a word. We aren’t even sure if he can speak”

“So a matter of psychologist you say...captain. Probably he is in trauma”

“Exactly sir. Seems the case”

I had the guy in green shirt seated in front of me. His lips were cracked and the dust had collected all over his face so I made him drink water by my own hands after he refused the bottle offered twice. I couldn’t wait for the psychologists to arrive and while my team was taking in more victims and treating them, I was unable to focus

anywhere but him. My forbidden intuition was time and again poking my brain that he probably witnessed some accident of a family member and hence I needed him to blurt all out. It was indeed that way, only more twisted, more grim.

“My son...” He finally began to talk.

“You can confide in me sir. Tell me. We can still save him. Tell us everything”

“My son, he...” He kept staring at the same spot on my chair as when he spoke the first word with no apparent emotions or fear.

“Okay, tell me about the rest of your family, your wife, any other children? Do you know their whereabouts?”

“My wife and daughters were dead when I came rushing back to my home”

I realized I slowly grew to become as numb as him. So I proceeded...

“And the son you were mentioning earlier...?”

“He...he was killed”

“Killed? Killed by whom??”

“When I rushed to my house...everything had turned into debris. I knew my whole family was buried beneath...” He

stopped, then resumed. “When, I lost all hopes and turned around, I heard him say “Baba, Baba”...All I could see was half head of my son buried under the rocks that only a truck could lift...he said “Baba, I’m thirsty”

I moved aside my head. My heart was racing now. The face of my own son Mujtaba was constantly visiting my mind, further disturbing me. I quickly gulped some sips of water until I felt like no more drinking so requested him to continue.

“What happened to your son, sir? Who killed him, as you said? Are you sure about that?”

“For two long hours...I looked for someone to hand me some water. No one did. No one was willing to help me get a glass of water...

I needed one glass” Finally he looked at his hands dissipating his frozen eyes from the spot on chair. “Everybody was worried for himself, no one to aid, no team, no doctor was there... when I returned with nothing in hand, I sat down next to him” He stopped speaking for nearly two minutes so I had to push him again.

“Continue brother, please”

“I couldn’t do anything. Neither pull him out, nor bandage his hurt head, nor fetch him water. His

“Baba, Baba” was drilling deep into my brain, constantly... I thought my head would explode. I firmly stuffed my head in my hands but his constant call kept torturing me. I...”

“And?”

“So I picked up a large stone and hit his head with all my force. I killed my son. The “Baba, Baba”... stopped finally”

*Is everything okay?

**May God do good.

***All destroyed

****Quranic Verse

“When I rushed to
my house...
everything had
turned into debris.
I knew my whole
family was buried
beneath...”

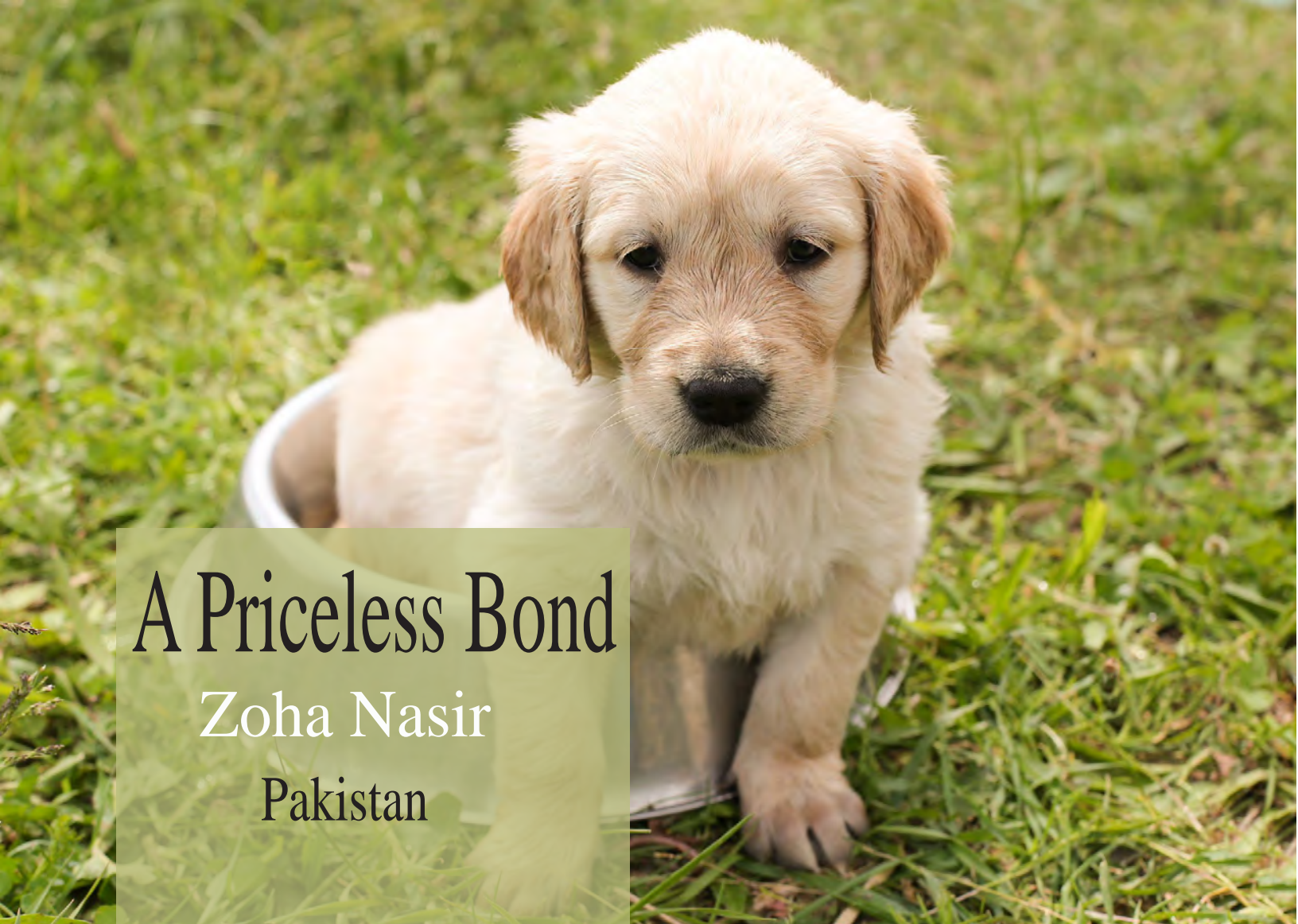
About the Writer

Dirha Qazi is an emerging writer who aspires to express her insightful experiences and thoughts through the medium of poetry and short fiction.



Pet Stories





A Priceless Bond


Zoha Nasir
Pakistan

I have always been a person who loved keeping pets. Chester was the dog I got on my sixth birthday. My love for dogs has always been passionate and when I got one, it was like a wish come true. I still remember when I held him for the first time, I was a little afraid to hold him in my arms but soon it was all gone. I touched his fluffy hair and his cute little paws with my fingers. Giving him a shower, brushing his hair, getting him cute collars and sweaters for winters, taking him to the vet and crying whenever he used to get an injection, we grew up together. He was the only one who heard my long stories and never judged me.

After three years, I got six colorful birds. I loved to feed them and hear them chirping the whole day. Chester and I used to look at them in their cage every evening. One day, when I was gone to

college my mother opened the cage to feed the birds and three of them flew away. Chester ran to chase them but got hit by a car. My mother rushed him to the hospital but he was in a miserable condition and couldn't make it.

When I got the news, I cried my heart out. It was like losing my best friend. My father bought me another dog, the next week but no dog could take his place in my heart. I still have the unforgettable memories of Chester, running behind my college bus and protecting me when my mother used to scold me. We had a priceless bond, unforgettable cuddle times and tons of memories together. I have cried, laughed and spent my worst times with Chester. I will never be able to forget him.



Maseera and Her Kittens

Khadija Nasir

Pakistan

Maseera scored first position in her class. She was the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Rahman. She was an intelligent student and scored well in her studies as well as extracurricular activities. Her parents and teachers were proud of her performance. When she returned home from school that day, her parents welcomed her with balloons and a cake with congratulations on your success written on it. They planned to hold a party for her. Maseera's friends, her teachers and cousins were invited. Arrangements began for the party.

On the day of party, Maseera's parents told her to stay in her room and get ready. She was told not to get out till they called her. When it was around 5 o' clock in the evening, there was a knock on her door. She opened the door and her servant told her it was time to meet everyone in the party. She left her room but when she reached the venue, there was no one there. The decoration was breathtaking. The table which was decorated with flowers, had a big cake and gifts arranged on it. But there was a big box placed on the right side wrapped in a black paper with golden ribbon on it. Maseera noticed the movement in the box, but she



ignored it. Suddenly her parents and all the guests appeared holding balloons and party poppers and singing congratulatory songs. When she was about to cut the cake, she noticed that something jumped in the box and the cake cutting knife fell from her hand. Her parents asked her if everything was all right. She remained silent and began to cut the cake.

After the party was over, her parents asked her to open the gifts but they wanted her to open the big black box first because it was from them. She hesitated because she was frightened due to the movements in the box. But due to the request of her parents, Maseera began to open the box secretly hoping that everything went well. When the box was finally opened, two kittens with the red bows around their necks jumped out. Maseera screamed so loud because she was not expecting this. When she finally saw the kittens running in the room, she laughed so hard because she thought there was a monster in the box. She always wanted to have kittens, so her parents planned to gift her these two kittens. She hugged her parents and thanked for this cute gift. Then she held her kittens and went to her room.

The kittens were so fluffy and white as snow. Maseera had her vacations, so she spent most of her time playing with her kittens. She named them Kitty and Snowy. She bought cute little beds and a small kitten house for them which was filled with toys. She took really good care of them and trained them well. Soon, both kittens became the essential members of the Rahman family and without them, the house seemed empty.

After her vacations, Maseera got busy in her studies. She didn't give as much attention to the kittens as she used to give. Kitty and Snowy played around her, licked her hands and feet but she was so busy in her studies that she hardly noticed them. Due to this lack of care, Kitty and Snowy went weak and felt themselves alone. They stopped eating and playing. One day, when there was no one at home, they both escaped through the opened window. On returning home, the servant told Maseera that kittens were nowhere to be found. He searched for them in every corner of the house, but they were not there. Maseera began to weep. She blamed herself for this situation because

she was so careless and neglected her kittens. It was her duty to take care of her pets but she completely ignored them. She searched for them in her neighborhood and nearby streets but kittens were nowhere. She lost interest in everything, even in her studies. One day, she requested her parents to print posters with the pictures of kittens on it. The posters had her mobile number and address as well so if anyone found them, he could easily contact her. Weeks went by and there was still no clue of them.

Almost a month later, one sunny day the main door knocked in the afternoon. When no one opened, the door knocked again. Maseera went out of her room and was about to ask who is on the door when she heard meow sound. She recognized the sound and immediately opened the door. There stood a gentleman holding Kitty and Snowy. Upon seeing them, she jumped with excitement. She held them and hugged them so tight. The gentleman told her that he found them injured in a nearby park, so took them to the vet. There he saw the poster on the wall which Maseera posted. After the kittens got treated, he brought them here. Maseera and her parents thanked him. After he left, Maseera brought Kitty and Snowy to her room. She fed and cleaned them. They jumped here and there and played with the toys. After a few days, they were again fluffy and healthy. Maseera felt so happy on seeing them in the house. Her parents advised her to take care of them because it was her responsibility. From that day onwards, she and her kittens became best friends. She took her kittens on a walk every day. They played and slept together. She gave proper attention to her kittens and took really good care of them.



Easy and difficult are relative terms. We all know how difficult some relatives can be.

(Witticism by Amina Obaid Khawaja)

Featured Poet



Rizwan Akhtar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of the Punjab
Lahore, Pakistan

Rizwan Akhtar is an Assistant Professor at the University of the Punjab in Pakistan, a PhD from the University of Essex whose central focus of research entails South Asian Literature, and an equally passionate erudite of gender studies, feminism, and modernism. He has presented numerous research papers at international conferences held in Scotland, Ireland, England and Sweden covering diverse fields like crime fiction, adaptation studies and modernist aesthetics.

Rizwan Akhtar's contribution to Pakistani literature is unequivocal and is a source of pride for the country. He is the author of the masterpiece *Lahore, I Am Coming* which has received tremendous acclaim on both National and International forums.

'Behind word, there is a world'

-Rizwan Akhtar

Blossoming with prowess and passion, rewarded with the gift of scribbling paragons, and entitled to an extensive creation of remarkable poetry, Rizwan Akhtar is a man within whom a culture strives. Conventional and contemporary in his approach, he has built new foundations with his distinctive style of penning down poems. Akhtar is a poet of English language, and language is a substratum of his life. His keen and conceptual understanding of art, culture, language, and literature makes Akhtar a man full of compassion and wisdom. His thoughts are influential, pure, and infused with flavors of love, nostalgia, experience, and aesthetics. Rizwan Akhtar is a poet always on the qui vive, always an inspiration and forever a statement of refinement induced with rawrity.

In the later months of the last year, we had the pleasure to meet, and converse with Rizwan Akhtar at his own workplace. The self-effacing poet sat solely in his area of comfort -in his office at the University of Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Upon entering the room, we were hit with a subtle scent of new and old papers, books, and bundles of undefined reading material. A rawness of his soul was treasured in the room, and pleasing setting of a writer's abode decorated his table. The simplicity of the scattered material, the pins and notes of the probable afflatus, and the consciously pinned wall of pictures welcomed us inside the room.

I recall him saying 'It is very important to be truthful to your experiences.', and rightly so, the man had experience all over his entirety.

Rizwan Akhtar is a sterling admirer of language. He is one of the kind when it comes to language. In the interview with The Bridge, he said

'You are not supposed to take liberties with language, you are supposed to economize it.'

'You are not supposed to take liberties with language, you are supposed to economize it.', and he believes that 'language is something that sparks experience; behind word, there is a world.' Akhtar, in his interview talked about his knowledge of Persian, and Arabic; he said about the two languages that, 'they have merely seeped into my consciousness.' It is beyond all doubt that Akhtar's love for writing generates through his sacred sense of language, and his profound love for it.

During the interview, the poet very humbly claimed that writing was something which he 'discovered' overtime. He initially did not plan on writing. He declared, 'Writing has not been a passion from the beginning, I would use the word 'discover'.' On being asked about the young writers, he focused on the emphasis upon reading, reading, and reading. He said, 'if you think that there is a fraction of creativity in you, it must come out no matter how difficult it is', he also said while discussing the same topic that, 'Writing is like a spring. It will burst out. You just need that epiphanic moment.'

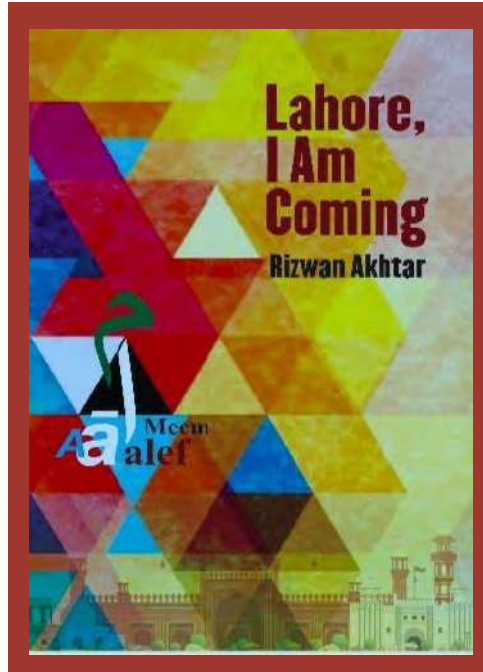
Despite being an empowered and passionate poet to whom writing comes like magic, Akhtar still understands that creativity isn't something familiar to everyone. He agrees that the writers have to struggle, and that the societal notions discourage the creative souls. Hence, he dives into the realm of the emerging talent, and says, 'every young person who wants to write, must not get eclipsed by the falsifying notions.'. Rizwan Akhtar is a beautifully formulated poet, and his words empower, and encourage the young talent that is otherwise discouraged by most litterateurs.

Lahore, I am Coming, is Akhtar's first collection of poems filled with beauty and a compassionate demeanor of Lahore. Akhtar was born in Lahore and he believes that his poetry reflects his 'nostalgia' of the city. In conversation with Akhtar, The Bridge team found that the roots of his heart are deeply embedded in the soils of Lahore. He confirms, 'I have lived in 'androon Lahore' (inner city), and my ancestors have lived here for more than four-hundred years.' Akhtar speaks about Lahore in such a profound manner that his mere vocalization of his thoughts lets you fall in love with the mystic city of Lahore. In the interview, he appreciated the shrines, and mysticism that is swooning in the air of the city. He assured that, 'Lahore never goes out of the mental lens.'. While speaking about his book, he said that

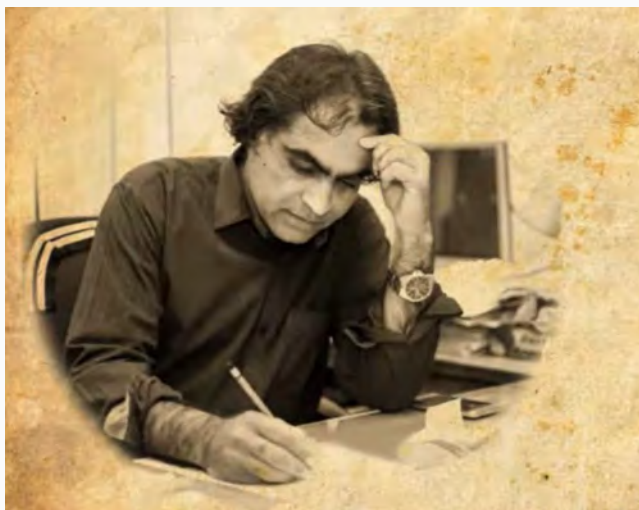
'*Lahore I am Coming*, is about deep association with the place.'. He said that the book in itself is a reflection of his life, and the title gives the impression of someone who is 'coming back', perhaps homesick, and yearning for home i.e Lahore; while explaining the title, he further said, 'it is important to see what motivates you to leave, and what motivates you to come back.'. At the same time, he believes that 'Writers do not belong to one place, they belong to all places' and certainly, the idea is astoundingly true. He slightly discriminates between the insiders, and outsiders living in Lahore, and says that everyone 'owns' the city, or 'pretend to' but he quickly disintegrates from the thought and says, 'even when you are not from Lahore, you build a love for this city.'

Akhtar is often believed to be an 'obscure poet'. He addresses the allegation and before his response, he quotes Picasso, 'if there is no sanity around me, I cannot paint sanity', hence, subtly calling the surroundings obscure. 'Obscurity for the modern writer is a kind of self-conscious posturing' he argues. It is inspiring to see how Akhtar responds to criticism with sheer integrity and subtle satire towards society and surroundings. Interestingly, he comments about the concept further, 'clarity is a myth, that we have carried with us', and, 'when you want everything to be clear, you are asking for closure.

Closure, too, is a kind of a myth.'



'Writing is like a spring. It will burst out. You just need that epiphanic moment.'



Akhtar has followed some trends, and he has set some trends. In either way, his poetry stands out as a profound expression of emotions and feelings. Rizwan laid keen focus on mystical poetry having a strong spiritual and religious insight. He has 'English Ghazal' to his credit which is a rather new approach in today's literature. He speaks about the shrines and the mystic nature of his poetry, and says that it could've only been translated into a ghazal. He says, 'the connection between ghazal, and shrines is perhaps the most enchanting connection.' Akhtar has not only added a new dimension to the existing trend of poetry, he has also responded to the Pandemic in a very sensitive way; 'I think, I have reason -I mean, like many other writers, I have also felt to dwell on the connection between poetry, and pandemic, and how in times of suffering, in times of crisis, how the cultures, and individuals respond.'

Rizwan Akhtar is a phenomenal poet and a true ambassador of language. His appreciation of art, culture, language, and literature is admirable. He is a man that holds a culture within his walking body, and his poetry is filled with love and aesthetic appeal. Akhtar inhabits compassion and wisdom within himself, and his mind is an abode to mystical and magical poetry, some of which has been floating on the surface, and a lot of which is thriving within him !

Written by: Ayesha Abid
Ambassador (The Bridge)



My Languages

I dream about my ancestors in Arabic,
who planted stories in sands and pearls
wrote love tales on fronds of fig trees
danced in Oasis and left me wondering.
I talk in my father's language
chewed with betel leafs
and sung with tapering candles
before and after the Mutiny—
people were hanged in words
expressions were concealed in letters
streets were lonely and long like the Urdu dirge.

Now I struggle with another one
one with which I swam all the oceans,
has double-edge teeth
it bites out of loyalty and betrayal
and makes me claim
the bastardised foreword of a vanity book
so sometimes I mesh it
with my personal pronouns
sprinkle some home-grind spices
then words bob out of my grip
like a little child on a remote platform
while haggard goes the mother
so I am often
prisoner and custodian
straddles with its fortunes
falling and running
across the English Channel.

Lahore, I am Coming

Winter's Specks



Now there is a sun-stripped evening
for a fresh silence clouds hatch clouds

want me to pursue the nameless weight
of a somnambulant conference outside

of dark trees craving attention humbly
solitary they argue absence of words

those still rows of muddled sentences
winter wishes them a crisis over and over

like that woman leaning on black trunks
an only audience to wind's soliloquies

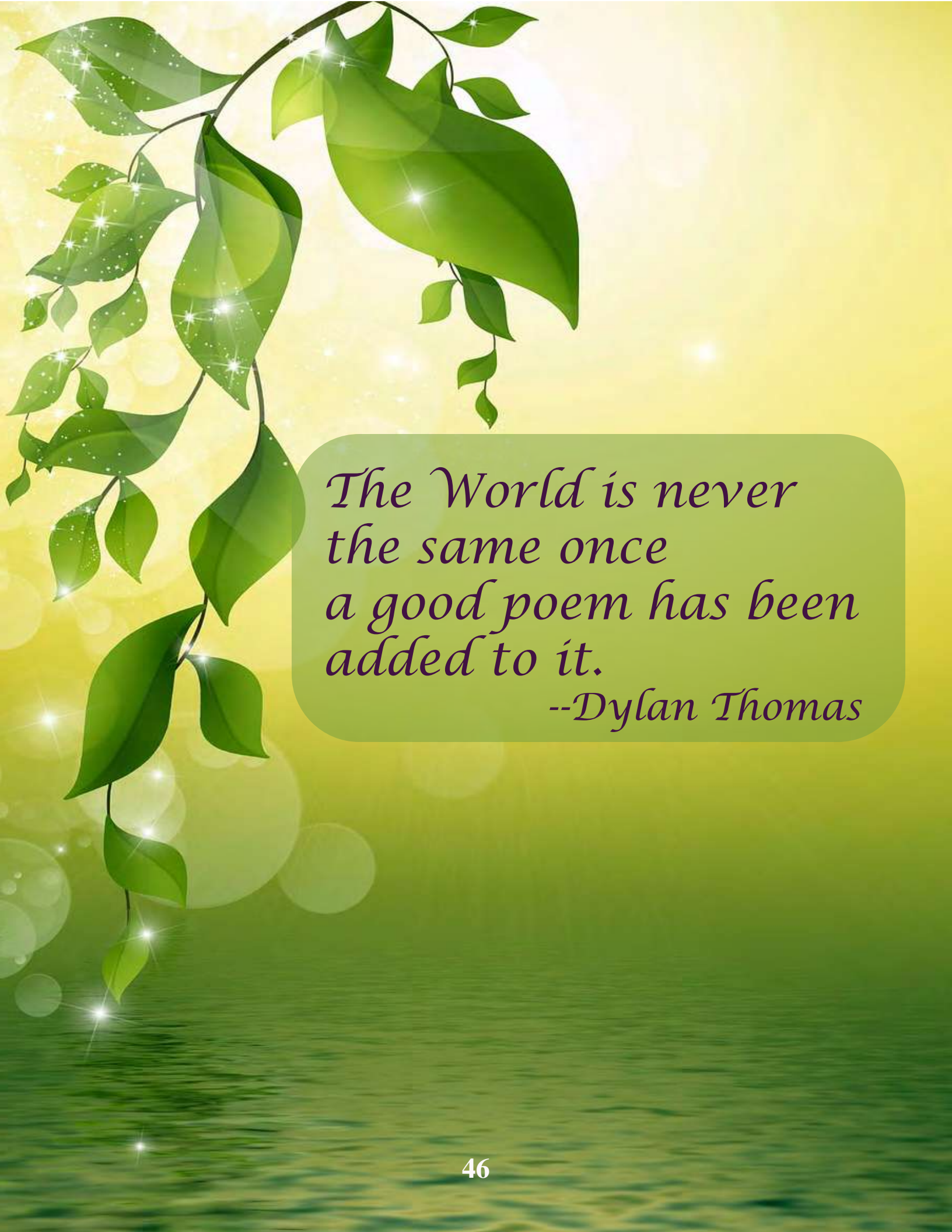
we who used to rhyme the fall piecemeal
now conducting our stories randomly.

-- Rizwan Akhtar

Outside Iqbal's Tomb in Lahore

standing outside the tomb of Iqbal
I watch a bird preening in a pool
of chocolate black water the sky in
its regular dusty veneer unmoved
everything obsessed with cleaning
from the people going for prayers to
street vendors spiting peeking
a massive abstraction enters
the heart asking why this poet
complained to his Creator for whom
the gates of Cordoba Mosque were
opened to prostrate once the artist
inside him came with the anxiety
of leaving Gabriel's revelation on the
pages of poetry but the religious body
of the country prohibits the love of
man for a woman charter of sacred
what else is their fate of nations and
the pandemonium of colonial history
our MacDonalds and Kentuckys now
localized sadly the eponymous Eagle
munches on burgers and French fries
now the poet does not raise his hand
his heart is mellowed by Rumi's verse
Neckar River where the young soul
tested sensual passion for the German
bond and called himself a faithful
from the land of infidels ever since
we parrot his verse without reflections.

-- Rizwan Akhtar



*The World is never
the same once
a good poem has been
added to it.*

--Dylan Thomas



Poetry

Dieter Bruhn



Dieter Bruhn is an international leader, educator, entrepreneur, and cultural ambassador who has conducted dynamic and engaging training programs all over the world. He is President and Founder of One World Training, a global training organization based in Boulder, Colorado in the United States. With Master's degrees in both TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) and Language & International Trade, he has a strong background in both teaching and business. He is an accomplished poet and songwriter who is passionate about helping teachers and students across the globe develop a love for creative writing. He is currently doing a long-term educational project in Vietnam through the U.S. Department of State, and in addition many other countries, he has also conducted six teacher training workshops in Pakistan.



RAIN

By Dieter Bruhn

Some people find it bothersome
When drops of rain, they fall,
As if their life gets put on hold,
Before them stands a wall.

Some of them lose energy,
Saddened, they feel down.
The smiles that shone on sunny days
Transformed into a frown.

But something that they cannot see,
That life, the rain does bring.
Without it flowers cannot bloom
As winter turns to spring.

For drops that fall from high above,
They help the trees to grow,
Filling streams across the land
So that the rivers flow.

The pitter patter on the ground
To nourish Mother Earth.
All creatures do rely on it,
As new life comes to birth.

And we ourselves could not survive
Without the rain and snow,
For if it ceased to fall one day,
All life could no more grow.

So each time when you hear the sound
Of raindrops from above,
Instead of getting down on life,
Just fill your heart with love.

For all things are connected
By the growth the rain does bring.
So smile next time the thunder roars;
Your soul will start to sing.

The Park Bench

By Dieter Bruhn

There are many things I cannot see,
But the world, in pieces, comes to me.
The lovers whose lips each other touch,
The tourists from Holland, speaking Dutch,
The old gray man, who feeds the birds,
And with computers, all the nerds,
The homeless man, who sleeps at night,
But leaves me 'fore the morning light,
Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers,
All of them, and many others.
Each one I hold within my arms
And protect them from the world's harms.



Hair Worth a Ghazal

By Rizwan Akhtar

Pakistan

times of distress! and no impetuous but your hair worth a ghazal
unable to reach I began fiddling with your hair worth a ghazal

in my English days I saw dark clouds running berserk over North Sea
in this new climate of love winds disheveling your hair worth a ghazal

distraught our Qias could not hide his passion yoking all efforts
only by worshipping Lalia's sable face and hair worth a ghazal

In old Luknow moonlit turrets reverberate with courtesans' anklets
Spilling goblets jilted a lover keeps yearning hair worth a ghazal

The poet from Hampstead has 'poetical hair' and the brooch made
in Rome is strung with locks; so poesy needs hair worth a ghazal !

Outside mosque men congregate mocking a patched skinny beggar
His bones crack with passion, swirling braids of hair worth a ghazal

bombs cleaned up temples and limbs flew as if a rain of flesh, ghazals
cleansed the Beloved's blood spluttered her hair worth a ghazal

now you have left Lahore is invaded by bridges and meandering roads
Yar! the days I rode on the linear cascades of your hair worth a ghazal

On the shrine I arched hands, lips murmured, eyes moistened in prayer—
waiting for reunion straightening combing your hair worth a ghazal

In London tube station a homeless played Roy Oribson's "Pretty Woman"
his notes stopped tired commenters; I sheltered your hair worth a ghazal.

In The Royal Mosque we iterated our creed holding hands in front of relics
smiling and shying out of reverence you covered your hair worth a ghazal

Let's have Rekhta, sonnets, and serenades brewing in one container now
pariahs and dervishes drink adulterated wine; your hair worth a ghazal

Let me come close to wipe your pouting lips and pits on your cheeks
Let it be ! sensual self is appointed by soul denoting hair worth a ghazal.

' We, You , Mir, all her prisoners of Beloved's curling locks' is a confession
Rizwan! custodian of Paradise exempts lovers keeping hair worth a ghazal.

SOULFUL COUTURIER



To the rip on my tailored soul
That leaves me to my dreams at night
But opens up to the curious morning
Like the ipomea in my backyard,
I have mastered the art of sewing;
Stitching every epileptic yarn
Patching up the pain
And weaving strands off my dismay.
Amidst the tangled threads of my courage
And skipped stitches that threaten to widen the rip,
I have mastered the art of sewing.
To the rip on my tailored soul,
You have left my soul an embodiment of style.

By Balogun Nafisat Teniola
Nigeria





IF THERE IS ANYTHING TO BE UNDERSTOOD

By Harris Khalique
Pakistan

When they ask me, laughingly,
Where did I get this permanent sun tan?
I do not say as others would,
With a feigned grin on my face,
That I was born in it.
I rather tell them, defiantly,
I was born in the sun.
That's where the tan comes from
And the fire within.

“Can’t you hear
The continuous cracking of my heart?
Can’t you see
The tips of the flames waving in my eyes?
Can’t you feel the scorching heat
Raging from my lips?
I was born in the sun.”

And when they ask me about the friend
I hold too dear,
I tell them,

“She was born in the moon.
It was the fourteenth night on the earth,
High tides in the oceans.

“Can’t you see the moonlight
Beaming through her eyes,
Albeit small but fathoms deep?
Can’t you feel the warmth of coolness
She emits?
She was born in the moon.”

Then I tell them, condescendingly,
“You cannot understand.
There is nothing to be understood.”

About the Poet

Harris Khalique is a critically acclaimed Pakistani poet writing in both Urdu and English with eight collections to his credit. His work is anthologized by Oxford University Press, SAARC Writers Forum, University of Georgia Press and W.W. Norton and Co. among others and on the internet by the prestigious German poetry website www.lyrikline.org. Besides occasionally writing articles for other newspapers and magazines, he writes a weekly column in The News International.



What It's Like To Be A Woman!

By Komal Naeem
Pakistan

Burying desires in your heart,
Silencing over injustices.
Feeling caged wherever you roam.
That's what it's like to be a woman.

Striving for freedom to live,
Making others believe in your suffering.
Trying to rid of their judgments.
That's what it's like to be a woman.

When imperfections are not accepted,
When scars do not melt their hearts,
When fear rules you all your life,
That's what it's like to be a woman.

A body and heart with wounds.
Eyes dropping tears of fright.
Mind experiencing agony throughout.
That's what it's like to be a woman.

To you it might be yet,
Another woman playing an emotional card.
How can you after all know,
What it's like to be a woman!

I am to walk straight.
I am to think straight.
Unable to question
Just because I am a woman.

I may die inside.
But must wear a smile outside.
Unable to cry
Just because I am a woman

But I may fall every time.
Don't I fall only to rise?
I'll rise and show the world.
What it's like to be a woman!

With all the flaws that I have,
I can make them define,
Who I Am.
I can show the world,
What it's like to be a woman!

STRIKE

**By Dr. Umma Abubakar
Nigeria**

S -tudents, quality fade education
T -eachers, Nigeria awfully deprived
R -eal means of no-frills.
I -n a decade, over a dozen outbreak
K -eeping all stakeholders at bay
E -ventually falling out with a

Monstrous Government:

Insolent, Indolent,

Lazy and Crazy.

It is but a bunch of horrendous lot,

Insatiable powermongers

Whose scorched-earth policy

Has our peace of mind betrayed.



I Am A Woman



Dr. Saima Eman
Pakistan

I am a woman,
With a mother-in-law,
Who owns my husband,

I am a woman,
With a daughter-in-law,
Who owns my son,

I am a woman,
With nothing but sorrow,
Serenity there is none!

I am a woman,
With wishes Abundant,
And works undone,

I am a woman,
With dreams redundant,
Reaching out for sun!

I am a woman,
With desires afire,
That set me into motion,

I am a woman,
Degraded till the end,
Gluing my heart into one!

I am a woman,
Struggling to the peak,
Alive with strong emotion!

I am a woman,
As powerful as a thorn,
Leaving the humanity stunned!



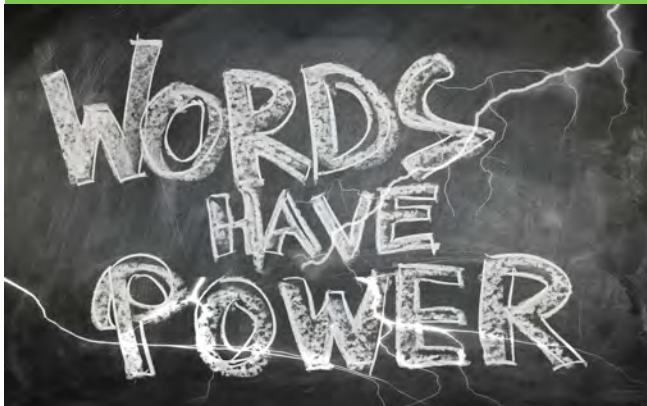
The Storm Within

You sit there
Like a sunny day
And it's
raining torrentially inside you~

Amina Obaid Khawaja
Pakistan

Can Words Express?

Dirha Qazi
Pakistan



Can words express
What often goes through my heart
Before I completely doze off
Finally at late nights, and depart
Into another day with the same mess
And chaos ruling my heart
The prayers no more heal
The poems do not seal
Any of the wounds sustained by my heart
Suddenly, and irreversibly...

Can words express
That harrowing state of intense pain
And lingering pangs...
That are felt by this befuddled heart
That still keeps beating, all in vain...
And no wishes
Or soothing words ever drain
The culminating despair
The light seems dark
And the day is only a set of hours
That passes staggering...
Until the night takes over
All the aches of my day
And all remains the same
The heart keeps sinking under the burden
The time keeps staring my face
Refusing to leave or to pass
The thoughts puncturing the walls
On all four chambers,
Hence never abandon
The shelter of my heart.
So can words still express
All that visits this heart
And continues to stay...



A world of the dark, A world of the white
They just can't see as if it's night

Something so sacred, so hard to replace
Colour of the person and colour of the face

Some want them in dark and some want in white
Don't know the difference between wrong and right

Colour of their body must be their fate
Beliefs must be corrected, it's not that late

Aliha Tauseef
Pakistan



Joker

Examining his painted face, they call him a 'JOKER'.
Negated he's a human too, with dreams jailed in a locker.
People often explicate him as mentally ill.
He still makes them laugh with his sly skill.
Disregarded in mob, posing as a part of society,
hiding his grievous self, an unending anxiety.
He laughs around them, with cloaking angst inside,
still being bullied, remains enshrouded in disguise.
Drained by incessant evilness, their unending sickliness,
at last, turns him into a criminal, infused with madness.

Arooba Iman
Pakistan



Do I live in this world?
The world that seems so unreal
The world where my heart can't rest
The world where my agony rises
The world which restricts my passions
Is it wrong to cry when you can't feel alive?
Is it wrong to shiver when despair's your friend?
What do you do when you long for authenticity;
Of self and others
I feel so cathartic, I am so melancholic
I dwell in pity, I am so aloof
This sadness... it doesn't end; it doesn't go
Don't know from where does this pain arise
It's always there, it's a part of me, it's my soul
I hallucinate, my rational mind has long died
My soul bleeds and bleeds heavily
This narcissism that dwells in me
It tells me how rejected I am
It says I'm scared and I'm weak
It says suck the blood of sapiens
It kills my empathy and makes me evil
The evil that I deserve to become
Because I was abused once?
Or because I faced rejection?
I screamed to be accepted
But who was there to accept me,
To love me, to admire me for who I am?
I lived the life of someone else,
It pained and it still pains.



The Last Butterfly in my Stomach

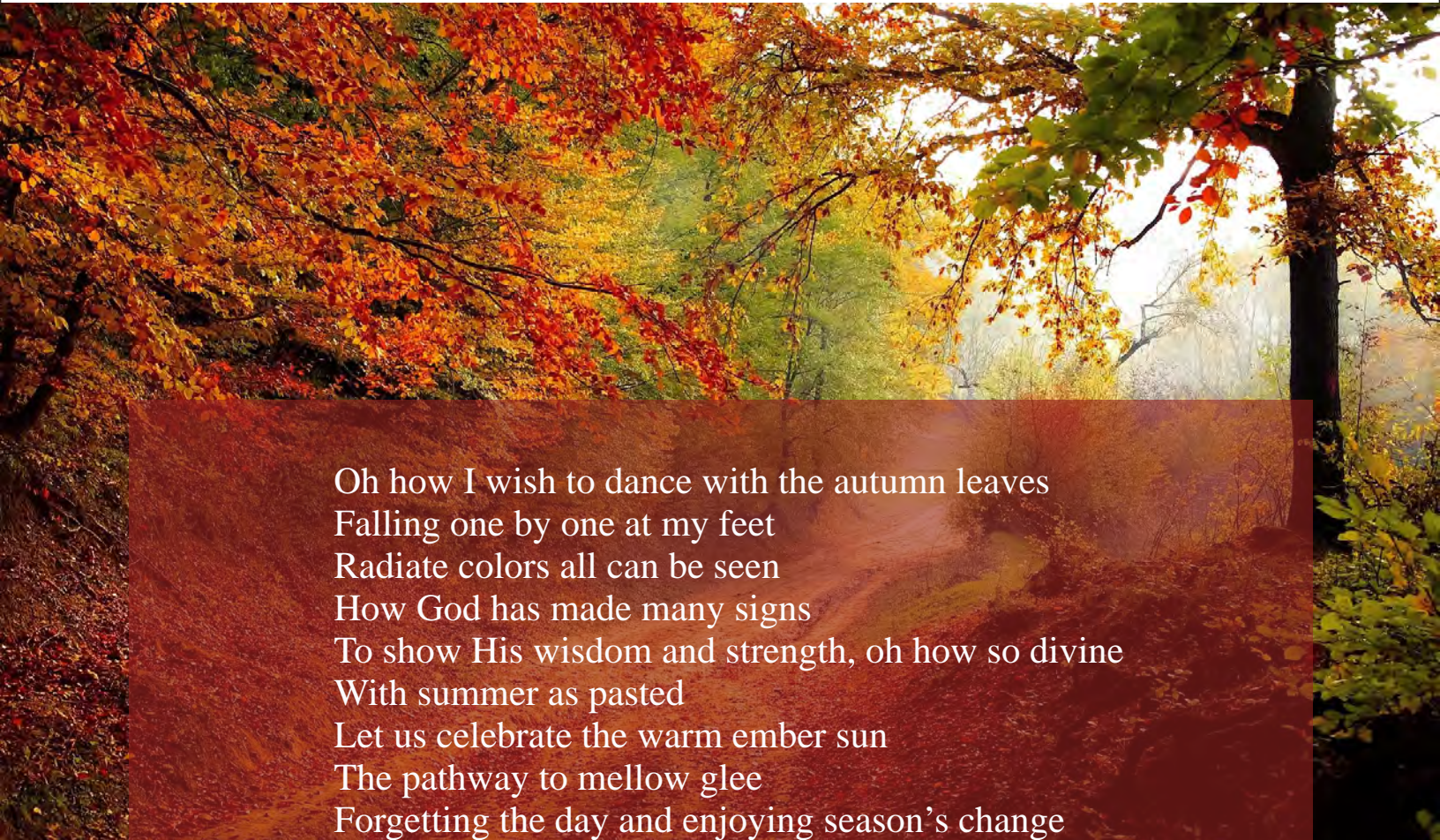
Areesha Khan

Pakistan

Perhaps you killed all the butterflies in my stomach
but this last one survived
and its still lying here
As it fills with life
Every time that i hear your voice.
Perhaps I kissed a lot of lips to wipe off the marks
that yours left
But a few faded imprints remain
I revisited graveyards again and again
To tell myself people die everyday
And so do memories and feelings and attachments
I still wake up from nightmares
of you holding my face
like it really meant something
And I call them nightmares not because I wake up
But because even in the dream, I know it's not real
For it's too good to be true

I reminisce
Your goodness was real
So your wrong actions are too
I listen
How the melody we sang
Turned into bawling discord
And now I write a lot.
I write
Till the two angels on my shoulders gasp
I write
Till that scraped part of my soul makes home on
the paper
I write to tell
I loved him
And he loved me too
-for some time
I write
Aiming to write the pain away
Unfazed by the fact that it keeps growing inces-
santly
I write because I know there are always good
words left to describe my destruction in a better
way
I write because as soon as I write it
I know it could've been better
I did not portray the truth well
Feeling it was much worse-
-reading it isn't
It needs to be more honest and descriptive
My shelves start running out of metaphors and
patterns
But I write
in the hope of more.
To this day
I have written countless elegies to you
and stated your obituaries everywhere
but you're still not dead to me.
How to kill thee?

Autumn



Oh how I wish to dance with the autumn leaves
Falling one by one at my feet
Radiate colors all can be seen
How God has made many signs
To show His wisdom and strength, oh how so divine
With summer as pasted
Let us celebrate the warm ember sun
The pathway to mellow glee
Forgetting the day and enjoying season's change
Promising our visit the same chance
The swirl and the gentle whisper of wind
Free us from this pain
Let us not dwell
But fly as the autumn spell
Come little leaves end your song
As it is time to ride back home
To bid farewell to the setting sun
Savor the sweet smell of autumn
Rejoice the silent crisp of fall
A dance of pure ecstasy!

Maria Munir
Pakistan

The background of the page is a dark blue field filled with a variety of colorful geometric shapes. These shapes include circles, squares, triangles, rectangles, and lines in shades of teal, yellow, orange, red, and grey. Some shapes are solid, while others are outlines. They are scattered across the page, with a higher concentration of shapes in the lower right quadrant, creating a dynamic and abstract visual texture.

Articles

Creativity and Catharsis!

By Aisha Umt Ur Rashid
Pakistan

Aisha Umt Ur Rashid is a poet, fiction writer, translator and editor from Pakistan. She is the founder of *The Bridge*.

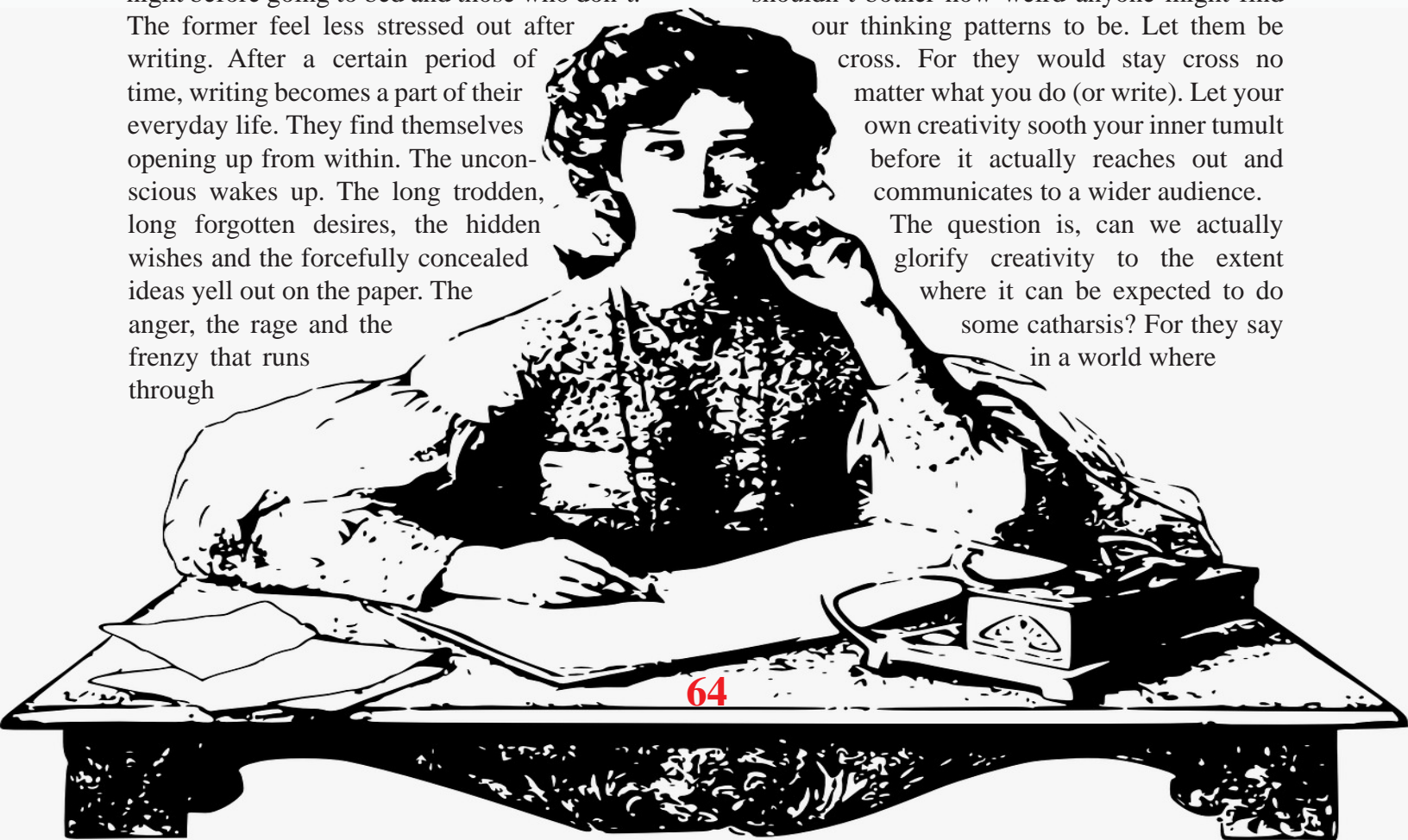
“Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man”, says Francis Bacon and I totally agree to the notion. For those who have great flair for reading ought to take to their hearts, all the stress the world can offer. But if they choose to pen down their own thoughts, feelings, aspirations and longings, there is no doubting that the lighter would be their state of mind as soon as the words jump out of the tips of their pens.

A research says that there is a notable difference between the state of mind of the people who jot down whatever they do in a diary every night before going to bed and those who don't. The former feel less stressed out after writing. After a certain period of time, writing becomes a part of their everyday life. They find themselves opening up from within. The unconscious wakes up. The long trodden, long forgotten desires, the hidden wishes and the forcefully concealed ideas yell out on the paper. The anger, the rage and the frenzy that runs through

every single artery of their bodies is set at large. The diary then takes care of it.

But then, what if someone gets hold of that diary? Most of us do not write because of the fear of getting our thoughts revealed to the people around us. What would ‘he’ think of it? How would ‘she’ perceive it? The point is, we need to decide for whom we are writing. If it is to meet the expectations of the world, I am afraid we should drop this idea of writing altogether and start some social well-fare business or something. If, however, we are writing merely to sooth our inner selves (which in deed is a much needed practice these days), we shouldn't bother how weird anyone might find our thinking patterns to be. Let them be cross. For they would stay cross no matter what you do (or write). Let your own creativity sooth your inner tumult before it actually reaches out and communicates to a wider audience.

The question is, can we actually glorify creativity to the extent where it can be expected to do some catharsis? For they say in a world where



'Foul is Fair and Fair is Foul', the writers suffer the most. Amidst the interminable crowd of irresistible and yet forged attractions, from where on earth would the right kind of inspiration emerge? Being thrown in a pit called society where blood thirsty dragons and power-sucking demons dressed up as humans pounce on you the moment you grip the ground with your feet, wouldn't there be more bewilderment than creativity?, they ask. I say that is exactly from where a writer emerges. Through his writings, he not only heals his own wounds, but helps others on their way to catharsis too.

The agony of creation is not easy, I agree. The pangs of time hit you hard before you turn ripe enough to call something that you write your own. You are not always lucky enough to walk somewhere near the Lake District looking at Daffodils with your sister, nor is life always as smooth as to give you a chance to look at the Loveliest Cherry tree for years. Life can be Apartheid-stricken too. You can certainly be short on words while writing a fairy tale under that circumstance. And yet this whole idea of inspiration is tremendously mysterious. So don't worry about that. Inspiration can poke you anytime, anywhere, in the most unexpected ways possible. Sometimes a single word uttered by someone can inspire the hell out of you, or even heaven. The point is, you need to be ready to catch it. And I strongly affirm that it is no use waiting for specific inspirations to create something. They come uninformed. Like the silent Thought-Foxes. Like creepy crawly creatures. And they strongly dislike being ignored.

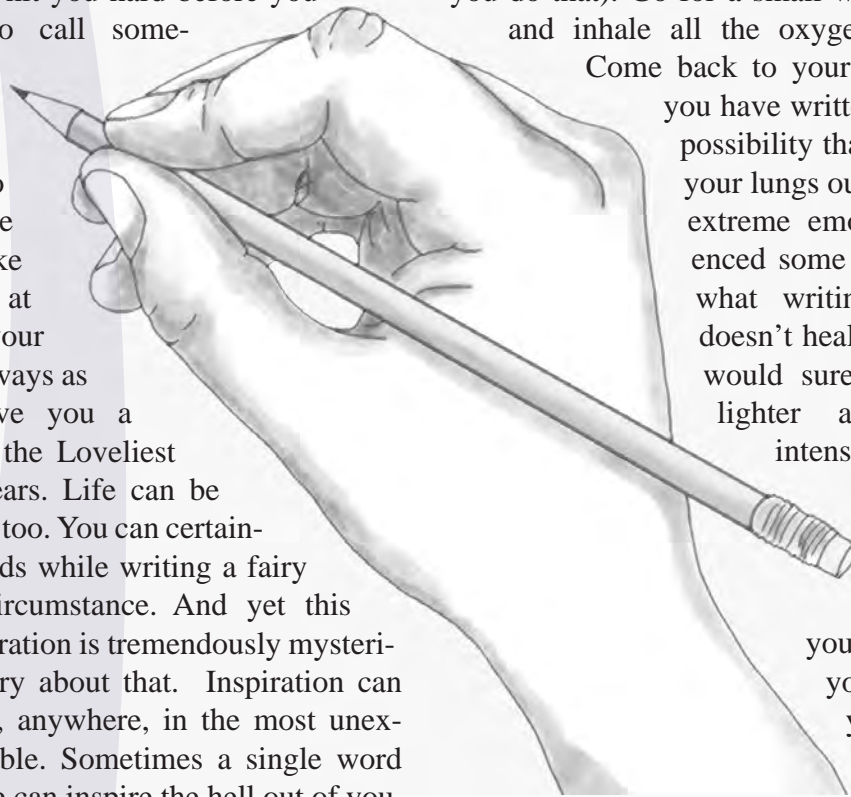
But then again, what about those who are not inclined to be, or have never been, creative writers? Is there any way of soothing the turmoil

of their disturbances? I say yes. Writing can help them too. Just try it for yourself. Pick up a pen when you are awfully stressed. Get hold of a piece of paper. Start writing whatever comes to your mind, even if it initially doesn't make much sense. Don't struggle with words, just write about your state of mind and how you feel about it. The real thing. Yes, the original feeling without any external fear of being abhorred or disliked because of a certain view point. Write till you feel out of words. When you are done doing that, take a deep breath and do not read what you have just finished writing (for there is a fear of falling into a deeper stress if you do that). Go for a small walk in your garden and inhale all the oxygen available there.

Come back to your room. Read what you have written. There is a great possibility that you would laugh your lungs out while reading the extreme emotions you experienced some time back. This is what writing can do. If it doesn't heal you completely, it would surely make you feel lighter about your own intense feelings.

So use the might of your pen to move storms out of you. Let the paper be your confidant and yet don't get intimidated by its exposure. Experience the power of

words. Delve into the deep recesses of your unconscious, ransack the dusty shelves of hidden ideas there, shake them and bring them out. Enjoy the mirth, the satisfaction and the peace they leave behind when they fly out of your unconscious and land on the paper!



Romance in an Old Bookshop

Javaria Farooqui
Pakistan

Growing up in Lahore in the mid-1980s, I became accustomed to the sight of young women buying Anglophone romance novels from Old Bookshops and street book vendors. Surprisingly, there is no extant scholarship on the importation and circulation of Anglophone fiction in the country, which indicates gaps in understanding about the transnational retail of genre fiction. This essay consists of my survey of the venues and conventions of the retail of popular Anglophone novels to picture the socioeconomic environment that shapes the reading communities in Pakistan. Mapping the retail landscape of Anglophone romance novels is necessary for studying the culture of reading English fiction in Pakistan because in the absence of a developed library system, buying a book is almost the only option available to the readers. Although, some elite private colleges have a few copies of Anglophone genre romance, there is no concept of lending books from a public or community library because they are usually not functional. The readers of Anglophone romance fiction in Pakistan mostly buy the books or borrow them from the Old Book Shops in their neighbourhoods.

In the Western context, Ken Gelder argues that the way in which popular fiction is “processed” should be examined as a “para-academic

activity,” because the venues of commercial sale facilitate an in-depth understanding of the field (75). He identifies three types of bookshop venues: supermarkets and drugstores, chain bookshops like Barnes & Noble, and “specialist genre bookshops” that concentrate on romance, crime, fantasy and so on. Globally, bookselling has changed dramatically since the publication of Gelder’s book in 2004, but it remains useful in providing a starting point for my research. I extrapolate the categorization used in his study to the local nomenclature, to draw a broad picture of the Anglophone popular genre retail landscape of Pakistan to better understand the genre preferences of the readers. The materiality of the book plays a major role in the Pakistani retail of Anglophone genre romance novels. According to their organizational and physical structure, bricks-and-mortar bookstores in Pakistani cities have two main types: Old Book Shops and Big Book Shops. Used books are sold through the Old Book Shops, which I further divide into the two categories, those specializing in Anglophone romance and regular ones. Big Book Shops are loose equivalents of the chain bookstores in the Anglosphere, and the Stationery Stores can be understood as a hybrid form of mini-supermarket and a drugstore.

Old Book Shops

“Old Book Shop” is the Pakistani term for an independent bookstore that sells used and pirated copies of books in English, usually located in the basement or passage of a prestigious shopping plaza in an upscale neighbourhood. There are two types of Old Book Shops in the urban centres: specialty popular romance bookstores with large Anglophone romance collections, and what I call regular Old Book Shops, which offer a varied Anglophone fiction collection that may or may not include genre romance. The nomenclature of Old Book is used almost as an adjective, with slight variations, albeit for business registration purposes (Fig. 1-2). The presence of speciality Anglophone romance bookstores coincides with the socio-economic division of neighbourhoods in Pakistan. The areas adjacent to the Walled City of Lahore are

usually inhabited by citizens belonging to the lower and lower-middle classes, and the bookshops there do not have Anglophone genre romance collections. Sometimes, I found a random Georgette Heyer novel or a stray category romance in the stacks of books on basic English language teaching that are included in the syllabi of government or non-elite private schools. Similarly, there are random copies of Anglophone genre romance in the bookstores of newly built housing societies, on the outskirts of the main city, inhabited mostly by nouveau-riche citizens.



Fig. 1. (left). Old Book Shop, Commercial Plaza, Islamabad.



Fig. 2. (right). Old Book Shops, Main Market, Gulberg, Lahore.

As one moves farther away from the consumer spaces of the influential, or what Rosita Armytage calls the “Established Elite”, the availability of romances, particularly Regency historicals, lessens considerably. The speciality popular romance Old Bookshops are in Gulberg, Shadman, and the Defence Housing Society of Lahore, areas characterised by the old residences of khandani inhabitants with old money and elite social connections. These shops have larger collections of Anglophone romance, and lending services, which is an arrangement for readers to borrow books for an annual or monthly fee. Two genre speciality Old Book Shops in Lahore, one of which does not even bear a signboard, have enormous ledgers that contain readers’ lending histories, going back to the early 1980s (fig.3-4). The strong personal relationship between the readers and romance fiction sellers refines the sense of socio-cultural distinction, which is often implied and seldom expressed verbally.



Fig.3. Anglophone genre romance collection in the Old Book Shop, Gulberg, Lahore.



Fig. 4. Ledgers containing data (names, phone numbers, and residential addresses) of romance readers, roughly thirty to forty years old. Old Book Shops, Gulberg, Lahore (Exact names withheld for confidentiality).

The retail pattern of the regular Old Bookshops is very close to what are labelled as the Stationery Shops. The Stationery Shops sell art supplies, school bags, lunch boxes, books in the school curricula, and sometimes have a small shelf or pile of Anglophone fiction. Like Old Book Shop, the term Stationery Shop is uniquely Pakistani, used with slight variations all over the country. Finding Anglophone genre romance in such shops is rare, but not entirely unknown. This hybrid variety of bookstore is primarily known for school supplies and monthly Urdu magazines favoured by female readers.

“Big” Bookstores and Book Cafes

New, and legally imported editions of romance novels, particularly Regency historicals, are available throughout the country in what the people call “bari dukan,” which translates as “big bookstore.” I use the term Big Bookstores, as opposed to Old Bookshops, for both large independent bookstores and quasi-chain bookstores. Some Big Bookstores have multistorey modern structures, with separate floors for books and study/office supplies, and some are established as single-storey units. Notable among the big bookstores are Readings, Liberty Books, Variety Books, Vanguard Books, The Last Word (Lahore), Saeed Book Bank, and Mr Books (Rawalpindi/Islamabad). Out of these,

Liberty Books and Readings can be considered loose equivalents of what is known as a chain bookstore in the Anglosphere, but they have different infrastructures. The emergence of book cafes has added another dimension to the genre-based sociality in the urban centres. The cafes are sometimes part of Big Bookstores, such as those in Readings and Variety Books (Lahore). Also, there are cafes like the Readers’ Den (Islamabad), which build on their reputation as venues for, to use the term from their promotional data, “book lovers” (Fig. 5-6).



Fig. 5. New Regency Historical romance novels. Shelving genre romance under “Fiction,” with author’s first name. Variety Books, Liberty Market, Lahore.



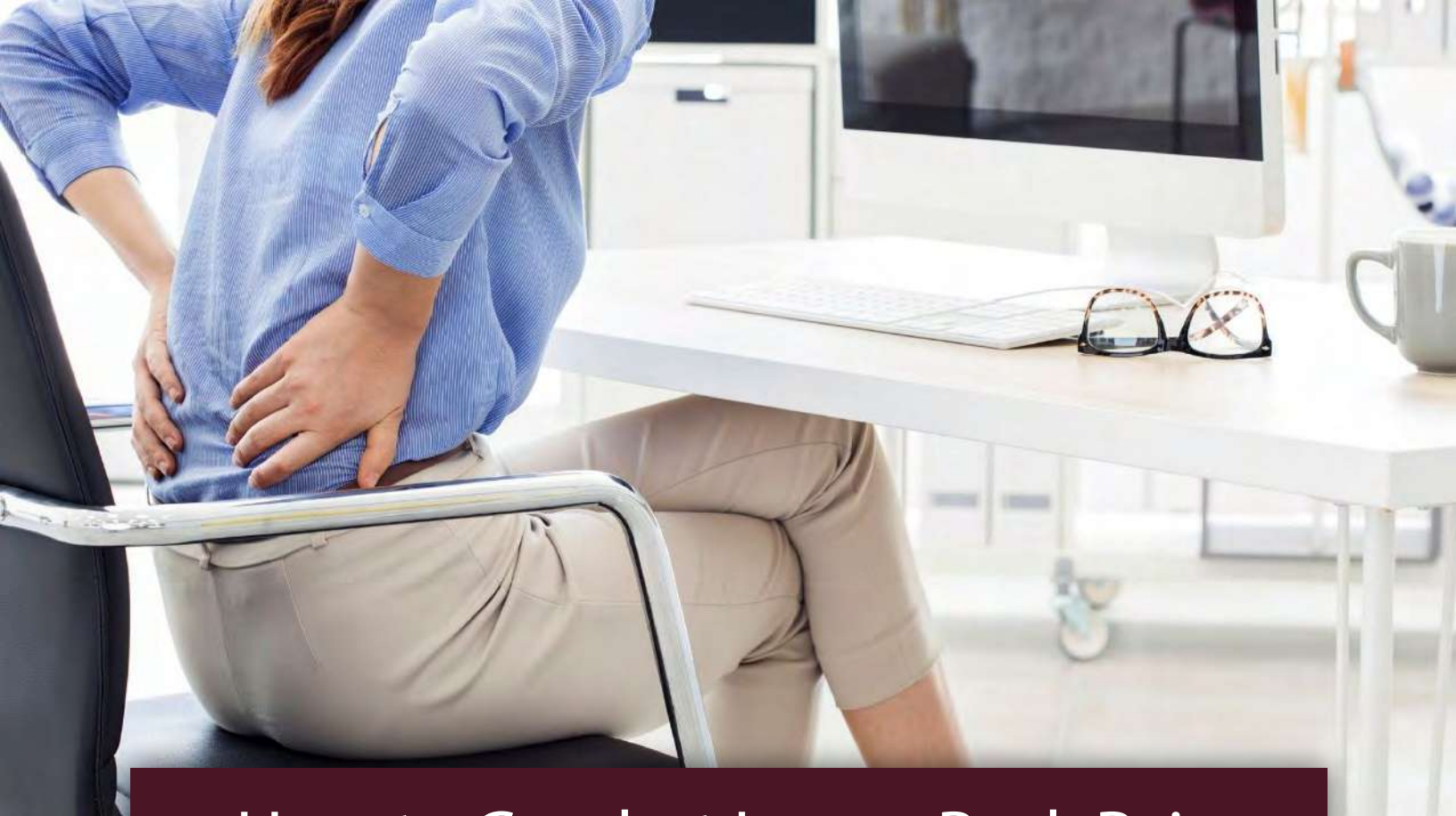
Fig. 6. Readers' Den Bookcafe. Bahria Town, Islamabad.

Concentration of Anglophone romance novels in high-class localities, and their relative invisibility in the book shops in middle-class neighbourhoods, accords them the status of a valuable cultural commodity. Speciality Old Book Shops have been a fixture in Pakistani urban social landscapes for nearly forty years and with their dilapidated exteriors, and questionable methods of sourcing

books, they communicate socio-economic superiority through their vast collections of Anglophone romances. To conclude, this brief survey may help us in further investigating the nuances of romance retail spaces, especially those that are formed outside the Anglosphere, to analyse the practice of reading romance in countries like Pakistan, which are not the target market of Anglophone genre fiction.

About the Writer

Javaria Farooqui is an Assistant Professor at the University of COMSATS, Lahore. She has recently submitted her thesis, titled “Reading Regency Historical Romance in Twenty First Century Pakistan,” to the University of Tasmania, Australia. She has taught a popular fiction module at UTAS, presented her research on Pakistani popular genre, romance at MacQuarie University, Sydney, and participated in international seminars on developing graduate profiles and time management. Her recent publications include an article on Khawateen, Shuja, and Kiran digests, and a book chapter on Romance and English Medium Schooling in Pakistan.



How to Combat Lower Back Pain

Dr. Faryal Arshad
Pakistan

They say back pain is actually youth leaving the body and to some extent, it sounds true. With age, our bones turn weak, leading to multiple issues causing pain. Here is a peep into the causes and symptoms of lower back pain and Do's and Don'ts for those experiencing it.

Lower back pain is pain, muscle tension, or stiffness localized below the costal margin and above the inferior gluteal folds, with or without sciatica, and is defined as chronic when it persists for 12 weeks or more. It is very important to know the causes of this pain before taking any steps for its cure.

Causes of lower back pain:-

Most commonly, mechanical issues and soft-tissue injuries are the causes of lower back pain.

These injuries can include damage to the inter-vertebral discs, compression of nerve roots, and improper movement of the spinal joints.

Common symptoms of Lower back pain:-

- Dull, aching pain
- Pain that travels to the buttocks, legs, feet
- Pain that is worse after prolonged sitting
- Pain that feels better when changing positions
- Pain that is worse after waking up and better after moving around



Here is a list of what you should do and what to avoid if you have back pain.

Do's

Sitting

- Sit as little as possible and only for short periods.
- Place a supportive towel roll at the belt line of the back especially when sitting in a car.
- When getting up, keep the normal curves in your back. Move to the front of the seat and stand up by straightening your legs. Avoid bending forward at the waist.
- Try to keep the normal curves in your back

Don'ts

Sitting

- Do not sit on a low soft couch with a deep seat. It will force you to sit with your hips lower than your knees and will twist your back. You will lose the normal curve which is not good.
- Do not place your legs straight out in front of you while sitting (e.g. sitting in the bath tub).

Standing

- If you must stand for a long period of time, keep one leg up on a foot stool.
- Adapt work heights.

Standing

- Avoid half bent positions.

Lifting

- Use the correct lifting technique. Keep your back straight when lifting. Never stoop or bend forward. Stand close to the load, have a firm footing and wide stance. Kneel on one knee, keeping the back straight. Have a secure grip on the load and lift by straightening your knees. Do a steady lift. Shift your feet to turn and do not twist your back.

Lifting

- Do not jerk when you lift.
- Do not bend over the object you are lifting.



Lying

- Sleep on a good firm surface.
- If your bed sags, use slats or plywood supports between the mattress and base to firm it. You can also place the mattress on the floor, a simple temporary solution.
- You may be more comfortable at night when you use a pillow for support.

Lying

- Do not sleep on your stomach unless advised to do so by your doctor or physical therapist.

Bending Forward

- Keep the natural curves of your back when doing these and other activities: making a bed, vacuuming, sweeping or mopping the floor, weeding the garden or raking leaves.

Coughing and Sneezing

- Bend backwards to increase the curve of your back while you cough or sneeze.

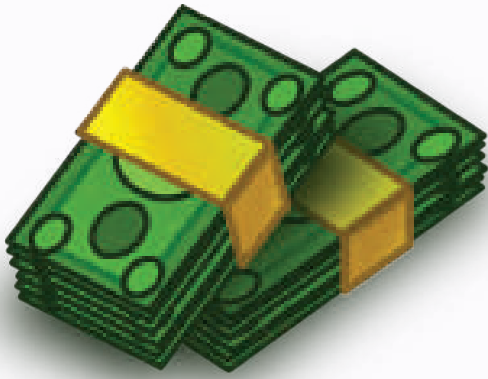
Driving a car

- Drive the car as little as possible. It is better to be a passenger than to drive yourself.
- Move the seat forward to the steering wheel. Your seat must be close enough to the wheel to keep the natural curves of your back. If your hips are lower than your knees in this position, raise yourself by sitting on a pillow.



About the Writer

Dr. Faryal Arshad is a Consultant Physiotherapist from Pakistan who is also working as a senior lecturer at a prestigious institute in Lahore. She is certified in acupuncture and kinesio taping techniques and intra-articular injection therapy. Currently she is specializing in her field and aspires to become a women health specialist.



Time to Get your Money Back!

Dr. Saima Eman
Pakistan

As Shaista gets ready for the wedding function, the preparations of lists begin. Who invited us, whose valima we attended, how much money we gifted to whom, who owes us how much and so on...the endless list.

Wedding functions seem more like an event for money minting and social exchange where both hosts and guests are concerned with giving and receiving gifts. People in the guest list are those whose function the hosts attended in the past apart from relatives and important personalities, which cannot be ignored. In case of guests old notes are consulted and the mother of the bride or bridegroom tries to remember what the exact amount was given to the son or daughter; whereas the current parent hosts make new lists of people and jot down the name and money given by a certain person/guest so that they might return the exact amount when the time arrives. It appears to be a debt cycle.

One wonders what rubbish this money game is. Where are the feelings of sincerity, love, charity, trust buried? Why we all are engrossed in this pathetic materialism? Money is spent on expensive clothes, jewellery, makeup, furniture, upholstery, kitchen items, transportation as well as lavish food arrangements, professional photography and decorations on wedding function. Even the lower-middle income groups are caught in this net. Bride's friends, relatives, in fact the whole biradari of bridegroom have to be remembered! Weddings have been made complicated to the

extent that nowadays almost everyone who can afford it, prefers to hire an event manager.

In this whole episode, does anyone consider, how this money is earned? Coming back to Shaista, I had an interview with her mother. I wanted to know why she is giving a heavy dowry to her daughter. "We can afford it and I want to give the best" was her reply. It made me sad. How about those who look at this dowry and wish they could afford to give as much to their daughters but cannot. The formality of dowry has become a headache indeed for those less endowed.

How are customs formed and maintained? Why people compete or recede? Psychologists say human beings want attention. Religion has not set these traditions. In fact the tendency to copy others irrespective of one's own means is the society's choice where people compare themselves with those better than them and try to come at par with them or supersede them. On the contrary, Islam encourages one to spend according to one's own affordability but it eradicates intensive competitive motives, which can be disastrous and could form the basis of jealousy, corruption, and bankruptcy.

Is a one-day event so important that people are ready to destroy their lives for it? And they are ready to accept loans that they may not be able to pay in their lifetime? What I see is indifference towards genuine happiness, lack of insight, ostentatious show-off, fake appearances, and strong urge to display social status, false ego boost and finally gradual relinquishment of purity, authenticity, and real beauty.

Why do we compare and look contemptuously at those who cannot meet these expenses? Why cannot we live within our own means, the way we like? Why people accept social pressures and then exert social pressure on others? Can we not set a norm where both the individual as well as collective interests and benefits are taken into account? Shaista's mother shrugged off when I raised these questions.

Traditions have been made but unless and until we change our own attitudes, I fail to see any solution to this problem.



Beat Procrastination: Now or Never

Eman Ayub
Pakistan

Are you still thinking to delay reading this piece of writing? If yes, then I reckon "Putting off your things till the last moment" seems a fascinating idea for you. But this idea may promote the thought of failure.

Procrastination means delaying your work that needs immediate attention. You procrastinate when you pull off things that you should be focusing on beforehand.

"Procrastination is the enemy of success."

At times, you procrastinate your tasks for good reasons, and it is okay. The problem occurs when you procrastinate just for your own guilty pleasure.

I struggled in the journey of beating procrastination. I know it is hard but not impossible.

When I wake up, Thoughts on how I can make my day productive start swirling in my mind. Then as if the bubble pops, indecisiveness enters uninvited. Making me think "why today?", "What if I do it tomorrow?" Or "who cares if I do not even do it." I am sure these types of questions have crossed your mind too.

Well, it is YOU who should care as it is your life, and you are responsible for it. We often learn some shortcuts or productivity tips to solve our problems. Not a bad thing to learn if it will help you in any way. But That may lead us to blame external things for our lack of productivity. For instance, "No, it's not my fault. It's just the alarm clock that should have rung a little bit louder".

Beat Procrastination in Daily Life

You procrastinate in your daily life tasks especially if your task is related to your academics.

Studies show that Academic procrastination is of particular concern. There are 80-95% of all college students who procrastinate, and 50% do so consistently and problematically. (Steel 2007) (Onwuegbuzie and Jiao 2000)

Beating procrastination from your daily life is an ongoing battle with the inner self.

I have many examples of my personal life: Last year, at the start of the pandemic, coping with the online lectures and assignment work was distressing. Procrastinating my work became a usual thing. I started procrastinating on my work every day, resulting in poor grades. I started

blaming the poor virus for my idleness and neglectful behavior. That was the time when I realized it was actually ME escaping from the responsibilities.

"The great escape of our time is the escape from personal responsibility for consequences of one's behavior" — Thomas Sowell.

Simple Ways to Beat Procrastination

Do it today because if you live Now, act Now. There should be no room for "tomorrow" in this. You know procrastination is in our human nature. We, humans, love to delay our simple tasks. And if the tasks are the challenging ones, then why not?

Over the last one year, I have learned not to escape from time. A year back, I had no clue how I could beat procrastination to get things done beforehand. I always gave up and got frustrated easily.

Yes, I stumbled back in this journey, but the fruit of my hard work was the sweetest.

Here are some ways I followed to overcome the challenges.

1. Keeping track of my time

Start doing your work before the deadline so you can be safe from the constant stress. You can do this by keeping track of your time. Irresponsible behavior in this matter would not work.

2. Get rid of distractions.

I lose my focus and concentration from the work which becomes one of the reasons for my procrastination. You should put your mind away from any distractions while doing your tasks.

3. Get an accountability partner.

Having an accountability partner or group of friends in your life is a blessing. It not only acts like the one who helps you to keep track but also motivates you. My accountability partner helps me in staying on track and also in moving forward. As the saying goes, "Surround yourself with the people that force you to do better".

4. Complete small tasks straight away.

The tasks we know we can do effortlessly are delayed the most. However, those are the small tasks that should be done immediately. That is the thing you will realize over time.

5. Have a positive mindset.

While doing your work, have a firm belief in your abilities. Keep your mind away from negative thoughts and stay focused on your goals.

*The tasks we
know we can do
effortlessly
are delayed
the most.*

About the Writer

Eman Ayub is interested in writing articles based on her keen observation of human nature. She wishes to bring reforms in the society through her writings.





Kumrat Valley at its Best

Zoha Nasir
Pakistan

“To walk in nature is to witness a thousand miracles.”

My visit to the northern areas was an escape from the depression and fear of covid. The whole journey was therapeutic for me. I have never been to such a pure atmosphere that's far from the dust and materialistic city life. It felt so calm and refreshing. There was a smell of freshness, sense of calmness between the mountains. The sky was full of the glittering stars which I had never seen while living in a city. The roads to Kumrat valley were not easy, the rocky path and the cold had my back hurting after reaching there but as soon as I looked around myself the pleasing view got into my head and I forgot about myself. I was mesmerized to see the clean rivers with small ice jams flowing over them. The simplicity of the people, their appealing eyes and the red cheeks of the children became my center of attention for quite a time. The hotel we took was just beside the waterfall and I could hear the splashes of water falling till I went to sleep. The next day, I was very excited because I was going to the waterfall which I had been hearing and imagining the night before in my head. The sun was shining at its fullest but still it was freezing in Kumrat. We walked towards the waterfall hearing the same splashes and it had a similar delightful view which I had seen in the photographs on internet. I stepped in to the water to click some memorable pictures of this place and I felt the rocks under my feet and soon my feet got numb because of the icy cold water but still it was the best feeling ever being in such an amazing place. I clicked many pictures on the trip for the memories but the trip had already occupied a place of my mind. The feelings, experiences and scenes are captured forever in my heart and mind.

QUOTABLE QUOTES

The colonial mentality says, "White is right".

-- Amina Obaid Khawaja - Pakistan

"Honesty is the worst policy if perfection is the best policy"

--Dr. Saima Eman - Pakistan

"Never regret anything that made you smile".

-- Maseerah Jahan - Pakistan

'Knowing the art of killing emotions, she calls herself an 'artist'.

-- Arooba Iman
- Pakistan

You are not a failure just because you failed, you become one when you fail to try again..

Henrietta Okafor
- Nigeria

'Expecting someone to love you selflessly is one of the biggest acts of selfishness.'

-- Arooba Iman - Pakistan

I wish I was still one of your ribs that God made me from, I would've been closer to your heart than I am now.

-- Areesha Khan - Pakistan





Taha Kehar Pakistan

First International
Writing Competition Winner
(Flash Fiction)

The 'Jaws of Death' was steered by a desire to reclaim the forgotten art of letter-writing. Through this piece, the letter -- which is now considered an outdated means of communication -- becomes a doorway to the human mind and a window into the past. The flash piece explores the lingering effects of anticipatory grief on our psyche. I must admit that I was surprised when I discovered that the story was selected as the grand winner of the Bridge's international flash fiction competition. As a novelist, I have often felt that flash pieces are somewhat fragmentary. That the judges believed my piece was worthy of appreciation proved to be a tremendous source of encouragement. A few months later, I wrote 'Pardon', another flash piece that served as a missive to Karachi's blood-soaked past.



Maham Naveed Pakistan

Second International
Writing Competition Winner
(ONE ACT PLAY)

My experience of winning the International writing competition on The Bridge was one of the exhilarating, exciting and inspiring events of my life. Every aspiring writer writes for validation and praise and what could be the best validation than winning the prestigious International writing competition on The Bridge. It was an honour for me to participate and eventually win the prize on a platform as engaging, stimulating and supportive as The Bridge. I wish all the best to Team The Bridge for their future endeavours and wish that they would conduct more competitions for aspiring writers in future.

BOOK REVIEWS



Review



Musings

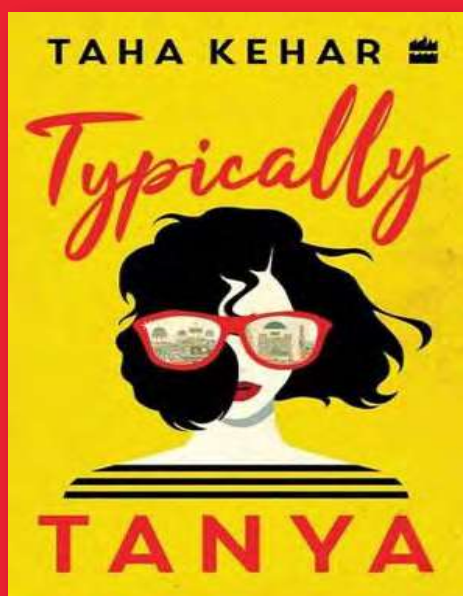
Review by Dr. Shahid Imtiaz
Pakistan

Shahid Imtiaz is a PhD in English Literature from the Department of English Language and Literature, University of the Punjab Lahore Pakistan. He regularly contributes articles to International Research Journals abroad and English Newspapers in Pakistan. Dr. Imtiaz is a poet in English language also. Currently, he is chairman Department of English Language and Literature at Govt. Islamia College Railway Road Lahore.

Zakia Nasir's collection *Musings* is a distinctive poetic voice amongst the Pakistani poets writing in English language. Her subject matter is delightfully diverse and poetic language shows that she is an experimentalist poet. Both, her theme and language are the hallmarks of her poetic art. From romantic tradition to modernist and postmodernist traditions, her poems showcase development of thought and poetic diction. Her poetry captures specific moments which take her away from contemporary realities, either back to her past, evoking memories, rich and beautiful, or at the same time, provides a contrast with the painful and agonizing present. Her poetry is an endeavor to see beyond the visible realities into the realm of mystery unveiling the hidden and the veiled, beyond the world of deception, into the world of human soul. Her poetry empowers us to see the world anew, to make that which has become familiar strange again. It creates interest in us to once again look at things around us with interest. We discover the sensation of life through her elegantly written poems. Zakia's collection is an effort to examine language's ability and potential to translate poetic experience into the art of poetry. Like the postmodernists, Zakia has little faith in human language as a tool of communication of human experience. She therefore, emphasizes the significance of silence to convey the unsaid more effectively: 'And then we said too much/Sullen silences grew longer/Unsaid words hover around/suppressing outbursts in frustration.'

She uses metaphors and symbols as effectively as the modernists do to make a comment on the contemporary situation, and the nature of human relationship, 'Often I muse why can't we be like crows? /Why can't we show compassion to our fellow beings? /Why does human nature betray humanity?'

Some of her poems create what we call topophilia, a strong emotional association with places she visited or lives as a child. Such memories are locked up in her mind and at times make her melancholic and create a great sense of loss. But at the same time Zakia has the strength to rise above the bitter realities of life and 'to be at peace with my world.'



Review by Huma Sheikh Pakistan

Huma Sheikh is a teacher,
writer and a book blogger
based in Karachi.

Review

1st Publication: Harper Collins, India. 2018
2nd Publication: Liberty Publishing, Pakistan.
2021

When I first picked up a copy of the book 'Typically Tanya' in 2019, I was drawn in by the brightly-coloured cover with a female's profile. She views the famous landmarks of Karachi and has a nonchalant air about her. What really struck me was the author's name: Taha Kehar. A male writer with a female protagonist and the story is based in Pakistan. Really? I wondered to myself. Do we have male writers in Pakistan writing about such vivid, colourful Pakistani females at the centre stage of their stories? I wasn't too impressed by the blurb which labeled the main protagonist as partying and drinking her way through life and attributed various love affairs to her credit. Out of sheer curiosity I opened the book and read the first

page... and that's where you are pulled into a vortex of the world of a young Pakistani woman's world with all its ups and downs and challenges, the quiet moments and the thrills that mark all of our lives.

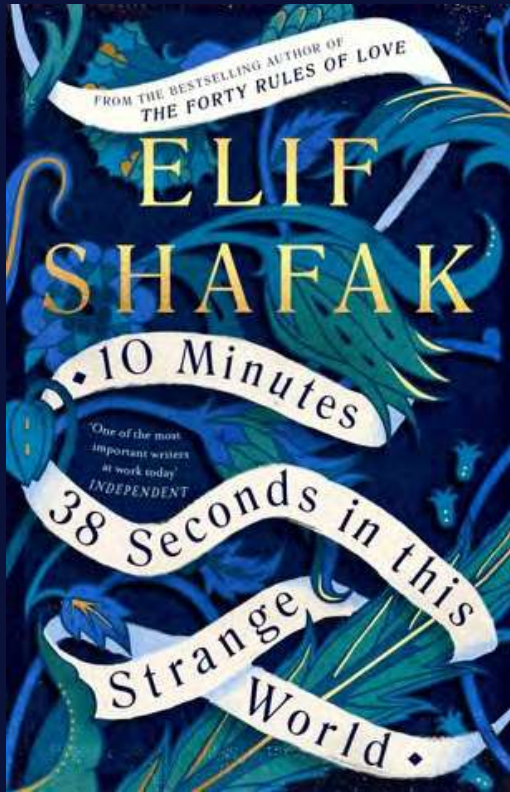
Set in modern day Karachi, Typically Tanya is the portrait of Tanya Shaukat, a firebrand female, who deals with work, family, friendships and love interests with a level of assuredness and confidence that many Pakistani females can relate to in the urban world. The story explores her relationship with her mother and though steeped in humour, there's a strong undercurrent of a power struggle between the parent and the off-spring throughout the book. The novel is fast paced and is interspersed with drama that make it a page turner. Strong social and political backdrop makes one pause to think about the times we live in and the issues prevalent around us and which invariably get brushed aside in the humdrum of day to day lives. The way Tanya manages her friendships and navigates through life is admirable, since many of the people around her are not as strong willed as she is and have to deal with their own limitations.

This is an especially refreshing read as it comes from the pen of a young Pakistani man who has so surprisingly broken the taboos of a male writer writing so empathetically about the trials and tribulations that often befall a young Pakistani woman in today's world. Be it managing friendships gone sour or forming new bonds, or dealing with harassment at the workplace, Kehar has shown an entire range of emotions the protagonist goes through. The ever-prevalent choice of living up to or thwarting the parent's or society's perceptions and expectations is the most challenging dilemma that the protagonist goes through.

This is undoubtedly Taha Kehar's wittiest novel so far. Hopefully this novel will set the tone for Pakistani male writers to come forward with stories with strong females at centre stage and which deal with social, domestic and personal issues. All in all, a good book which leaves the reader wondering what Tanya would do next.

Rating: 5 stars

Review



10 mins 38 sec in this strange world

Review by Hafsa Mubarik
PAKISTAN

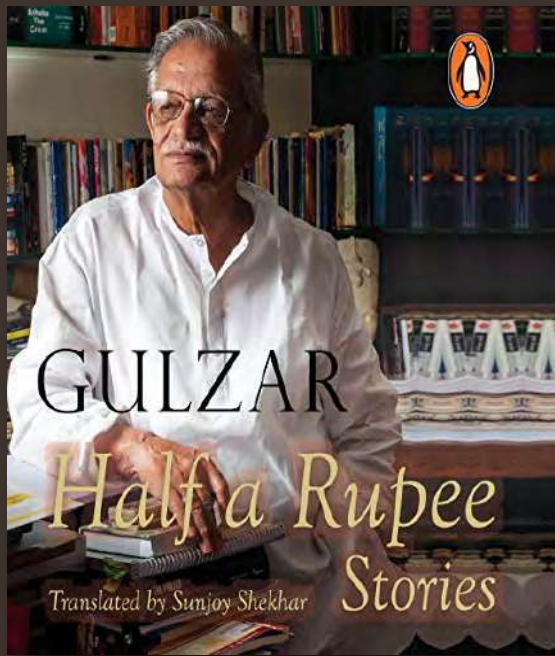
Elif Shafak never fails to cast a spell on her readers with her magical writing. She pens down the bold and grave topics in a way that reader doesn't feel uncomfortable while reading them. Through her novels she takes her readers through the streets of turkey as if they are visiting them in real. City of Istanbul plays an important part in her fiction.

Istanbul is a city of dreams and wonders, home to a splendid mosque and grandbazzars. A city famous for it's unparalleled charm that enchants you. But this time she unveils the ugly side of this city. The horrendous side nobody dares to talk about!

Leila founds herself dead in a dustbin lying in the outskirts of Istanbul. During the last 10 mins functioning of her brain she recalls all the events and memories and the reason why she ended up here. Being born in an oppressed society she had been taught to always surrender. Through all these years of hardships the only reason of her survival is her friends who never leave her.

I have noticed that the main protagonists of her stories are often broken people rejected by their own society. But they are always resilient, fighting for their survival, striving hard to change their destinies. And that's the thing I like most about her characters. They leave behind their marks on you forever.

This book is an ode to those undying friendships that help you to collect the scattered fragments of your soul. Friends who hold your hands when your entire world is collapsing. Leila and her five friends will always have a special place in my heart!



Half a Rupee Stories by Gulzar

Review by Hafsa Mubarik
PAKISTAN

Review

Reading Gulzar is like you are tucked in a cozy blanket and listening to your grandma intently, while she is narrating to you her childhood stories and your eyes are glued on her in amusement. Yes, that's how exactly it feels to read Gulzar.

With his enchanting and compelling stories, he takes you through the slums of Bombay, to the Loc where the soldiers of both sides exchange greetings in a unique way, into the beautiful valleys of Kashmir.

Gulzar had a realistic approach towards the society in this book. And even though some of his stories are fictional, they are the commentary of society. Through his pen, Gulzar digs into the lives of some famous and common people and reveals the unusual hidden elements of their lives. In the form of *Half a Rupee Stories* Gulzar offers us a treasure trove of tales waiting to be opened and devoured.

Whether it's a story of Chandu who had to earn half a Rupee coins in order to survive in the metropolis city of Mumbai or of innocent Gagi who thinks of God as a superman, all these fables of innocence, love, betrayal, conviction and courage are worth reading. Sunjoy has done a great job in translating this book. It was easier to read and enjoy in English. But I know that it would be more fun to read it in its actual language. Because no matter how hard we try, we can't capture the essence of one language into the other!



The Ten Thousand Doors of January by Alix E. Harrow

Review by Khadija Nasir
PAKISTAN

Review

The Ten Thousand Doors of January is a story of a girl named January Scaller who had a magical power of making things happen by writing them and who faced a lot of difficulties during her journey of finding her hometown, The City of Nin. This is a story of betrayal, oppression on weak and hypocrisy of society. It is also a story of love, loyalty, and courage. This book revolves around magical doors, which connect different worlds, which the New England Archeological Society kept closing. January's foster father Mr. Locke was the founder of that society. The author has used the characters like Mr. Locke, Mr. Ilvane and Mr. Havemeyer to reveal the monsters of society who show themselves as respectable part of society but in reality, they play an important part in destroying the world. Mr. Locke, who January thought loved her so much, used January and her father Julian Scaller for his own purposes. He is the villain of the novel. It is shown in the novel that friendship is a strong and an unbreakable bond. Jane, Samuel, and January's dog Bad were there for January through thick and thin and put themselves in danger to help her. Above all else, this novel is a love story. Love story of January's parents, Adelaide Lee Larson, and Yule Ian Scholar (Julian Scaller), and love story of January and her childhood friend Samuel Zappia.

I found first 150 pages of the novel really dragged. Story didn't seem moving and was stuck around long explanations of doors and Mr. Locke's house. Novel began to be interesting when January started reading the story of Yule Ian and Adelaide in the book, she found in the chest in Pharaoh Room. Ten Thousand Doors of January is a book January found. So, author has used the unique technique of writing a book within a book. Character development in the novel is good. All characters and events relate to each other. Author of the novel, Alix E. Harrow, being an ex- historian also added certain historical references in the book. Overall, I liked this book and would rate it 3 out of 5.

WHATS

COOKING

IN THE WORLD



Method

1- In a pan, add finely diced onion, celery, and carrots, and add beef mince, garlic, beef stock, bay leaves, Worcestershire sauce, a little salt, black course pepper, dried thyme, tin of chopped tomatoes, and plain flour. NOTE: (the water from the stock should make a litre of water so don't add more water)

2- Cook on medium heat until all ingredients are incorporated. It should look thick and gravy like when finished. Put aside to cool.

3- Roughly chop your potatoes and boil in some salted water. Once soft, drain and add butter and a little milk, salt, course pepper and mash into a smooth consistency. NOTE: If you like, at this point I add some cheddar cheese for flavour. (Optional)!

4- Finally, using a suitable oven proof dish, pour in the cool beef filling, then top with your mash potato with a spatula. Using a fork drag from one end of the dish to the other until all the mash potato has squiggly lines running through it. This is to create a crunchy topping.

5- Final step is to put in the oven. Add a sprinkling of dry thyme, course black pepper and a pinch of salt and cook until the top is golden brown and crunchy. Usually, depending on ovens, 25-35 minutes is standard. You will note the filling will come out the sides bubbling, don't worry as this is all part of the aesthetics!

SIDE NOTE: I serve this on the side of either a nice leafy salad or minted tender stem broccoli and some ciabatta garlic bread. (Completely Optional)!

Cottage Pie (A savoury dish)

Saima Mahmood
United Kingdom

Ingredients

Beef mince (Keema)
Beef stock or cube
Garlic
Salt
Cracked course black pepper
Plain flour
Onion
Carrots
Celery
Chopped tin tomatoes
Dry Thyme
Bay leaves
Worcestershire sauce
Potatoes for mashing
Butter and a little milk.



Steak & Kidney Pie

Saima Mahmood
United Kingdom

Ingredients

For the filling

200g lamb's kidneys, halved
1 tbsp rapeseed oil
2 medium onions, chopped
2 bay leaves
4 thyme sprigs
600g lean stewing steak, cut into chunks
2 tsp tomato purée
1 tsp English mustard powder
2 tbsp plain flour
1 large carrot, chopped
4 flat or cupped mushrooms, quartered or halved if small
3 tbsp chopped parsley

For the pastry

140g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
1 tsp thyme leaves (optional)
25g very cold (or frozen) butter

Method

STEP 1

Cut out and discard the thin tubes from the kidneys. Rinse the kidneys in cold water until the water runs clear, then chop them into small pieces. Heat the oil in a large saucepan or deep sauté pan. Add the onions, bay and thyme sprigs and fry over a medium heat for 8-10 mins until the onions are really golden, stirring often. Put the kettle on.

STEP 2

Add the steak and kidney to the pan and stir-fry briefly, just until it loses its pink colour. Turn up the heat, pour in the wine, stir to deglaze the bottom of the pan, then let it boil over a high heat

for 2-3 mins until reduced and absorbed into the meat. Stir in the tomato purée and mustard powder. Sift in the flour, stirring, then stir for a couple of mins. Pour in 400ml boiling water and continue stirring until the mixture starts to boil and is thickened. Tip in the carrot and both mushrooms, reduce the heat, cover with a lid, then leave to simmer gently for about 1 hr, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid and simmer another 25-30 mins or until the meat is very tender and the gravy has thickened slightly.

STEP 3

Remove from the heat and remove the bay leaves and thyme sprigs. Stir in the parsley, season to taste, then transfer to a pie or suitable ovenproof dish (the one I use is 22-23cm in diameter, 6cm deep, 1.7-litre capacity or similar), then leave to cool slightly. Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6.

STEP 4

While the meat is cooling, make the pastry. Put the flour, and thyme if using, into a bowl.

Grate in the cold or frozen butter, make a well in the centre, then add the yogurt, olive oil, a pinch of salt and a good grinding of black pepper. Using a round-bladed knife, mix together with 2 tsp cold water, then gently gather together with your hands to form a dough. Remove from the bowl and knead briefly until smooth. (It has to be smooth not lumpy)

STEP 5

Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface so it's slightly bigger than the top of the pie dish. Lay the pastry over the meat and trim the edges with scissors so it slightly overhangs the edge of the dish. Make 2 small slits in the centre.

roll out the trimmings and cut out 6 diamond-shaped leaves. Dampen one side and lay them on top of the pastry lid. Finally bake in the oven for about 25 mins to 35 mins depending on ovens, or until the pastry is golden.





Ilish Pulao

Jackie Kabir - Bangladesh
(Bengali Style Hilsa Fish polao) is an extremely fragrant and delicious polao with Ilish mach. You can follow this easy short recipe to cook your favorite Ilish Pulao now

Ingredients

Fried Ilish / Hilsa fish
Ilish Maach 6 pcs
Plain Yogurt 1/2 cup
Fried Onions / Beresta 1/2 cup
Green chili paste 1 tsp
Garlic paste 1 tsp
Ginger paste 1 tsp
Cumin powder 1/2 tsp
Salt to taste
Sugar 1/2 tsp

Ingredients for Pulao

Oil 4 tbsp
Rice 2 cup
Onion paste 1 tbsp
Onion sliced 1/2 cup
Cinnamon 2 pcs
Clove 4 pcs
Cardamom 4 pcs
Black peppercorns 10-12 pcs
Bay leaf 2 pcs
Ginger paste 1 tsp
Salt to taste
Hot water 4 cup
Ghee 1 tbsp
Green chilli 5 pcs

Preparation

- Wash and clean the rice, soak in water for 30 minutes. Drain water and set aside.
- Clean and descale the fish pieces. Rinse the pieces, let it dry and leave aside.

Directions

Cooking Ilish / Hilsa fish

- In a large flat bowl, add plain yogurt, fried onions / beresta, ginger paste, garlic paste, green chilli paste, cumin powder, sugar and salt to taste.
- Form a thick paste and coat the fish pieces evenly on all sides. Leave it aside to marinate for 5 minutes.
- Fry the marinated fish pieces for 3-5 minutes over medium heat. Fry until each side is golden brown, while turning over the fish be careful to not break the fish pieces.

Cooking Pulao

- Heat oil in a large wok at medium high heat, add sliced onions and saute until translucent.
- Add raw garam masala; cardamom, cinnamon sticks, bay leaves, cloves and black pepper corn. Saute for couple minutes.
- Add soaked rice, be sure to drain all water from rice before adding to the pan. Add onion paste and ginger paste. Stir continuously so the rice does not burn at the bottom. Fry the rice for approximately 5 minutes so it takes in all the flavor of the spices.
- Add hot water, give everything another stir. When water starts to simmer, reduce heat to medium, closed with lid and cook until rice is half done.
- Add fish pieces and all the gravy from the frying pan, add sliced green chilli on top. Close with lid for 15 minutes with low heat.



Walnut Toffee Crunch

Sherry Rehman
-Pakistan

Ingredients

Walnuts	200 grams
Fresh Cream	3 packs (Chilled)
Peaches	1 tin large
Condensed milk	1 tin small
Digestive Biscuits	Quarter Pack
Butter	100 ml

Method

Step 1

First of all, melt the butter in microwave oven. Crush Digestive Biscuits and mix them in the melted butter. Carefully place this mixed material in a glass dish (preferably rectangle in shape) and place it in the freezer for about 15 to 20 minutes.

Step 2

Beat the chilled cream until it gets foamy. Set it aside.

Step 3

Take out the dish from the freezer and pour a layer of condensed milk on top of the crushed biscuits. The sliced peaches are to be placed on top of the condensed milk. Sprinkle half of the walnuts on it (the other half would be used for garnishing). Now place the beaten cream on top of it and decorate with the remaining walnuts before you place it in the fridge. Enjoy this mouth watering dessert after it is chilled !



Bridge the Nations

Despite the diverse differences in culture
What binds us all is the world of literature
Who cares where one has one's roots
Bridging together, even the racial differences it refutes

Syeda Faiza Babar
Pakistan



Young Minds **young minds**

Story

Book Review

Sketches





Reunion

By Fatima Irfan - Pakistan

I always wanted to be a sketch artist when I was young. My mom used to teach me to sketch with different pencils. She was more like a friend to me and so she understood my work very well but I don't know where she suddenly disappeared from my life. Yes, it was very sudden that she left us. Whenever I asked my dad where my mom was, he always told me that she was in the sweetest place in heaven and one day we will all meet her. I never understood that when I was young but when I grew up I knew what this "sweetest place" meant. Soon after my mom left, my dad brought home my step-mother and step-sister. Like most of the typical step-relations, both of them were not nice to me. Whenever I asked my step-sister to sketch with me, she made me feel I was wasting my time on useless things. I gradually stopped asking her.

I often came home late in the evening because I liked sketching with my friends at the academy. All of my friends were very good sketchers, and this sketching distracted me from my

studies. One day, I had a drawing competition in the academy and on the same day my result was to be announced in my school. I was so excited for my competition that I completely forgot my result. I won that competition in the academy and got first position because I had made my mother's sketch. When I grabbed my sketch and went home and showed it to my dad, he frowned and started scolding me.

"Today was your result day. Do you even know that you have secured a D grade? Now I know how you got such a bad result. You keep sketching in the academy all day that is why you have secured such low percentage".

I felt speechless. But I had to muster up some courage if I wanted to reach my goal so I told him that I wanted to be a sketch artist. My dad angrily took my mother's sketch from my hands and tore it off. My heart was broken when my dad tore off a picture of my mother. I went to my room crying and wrote everything in a diary. That was

my way of doing my own catharsis.

A few days later, when I came home from school, I was surprised to know that there was no sketching material in my room. I asked my step mother about it but she pretended to have no idea about it. To my surprise, I was told that I would have to leave my school as I was being sent to a boarding school in another city.

Things were different at this new place. My fellow students used to study all the time. I didn't understand any lecture. I was so lonely in the hostel I didn't talk to anyone. I just wrote down in my diary whatever happened to me during the day. With great difficulty I spent my first term in solitude but now was the time for my result. I had no idea what would happen to me now. All that was going in my mind was that, I had somehow to pass. When I got my result, I was stunned for two minutes. It was as if my heart had stopped beating. I had failed miserably. I had no idea what was going to happen to me.

Anxious and confused, I got out of my school and started walking straight on the road wondering what my father would do to me now. Suddenly I collided with a car and I had an accident. When I opened my eyes I realised I was in a hospital. There were doctors around me but slowly my vision was getting blurred. I just heard the doctors saying to my father "I am sorry Sir, we tried our best but could not save her".

After a few days, when my luggage came to my house from hostel, my diary was also in it. My dad opened its first page...

"Mom I miss you, I always wanted to be a sketch artist, and you see, I will try to be one, one day. You know what mom, ever since my step-mother and step-sister came, my dad has become a little angry with me. I think he wants me to study and leave my sketching. But I will soon convince him that I can become a sketch artist."

Page 2

Mom today I made your sketch but dad tore it because of my result. He broke my heart. But it was ok, I think. After all he is my dad. And definitely my result was not good.

Page 3

Mom, you know I am in Islamabad today. Dad sent me to study here. I didn't want to come here but he forcibly sent me to this hostel.

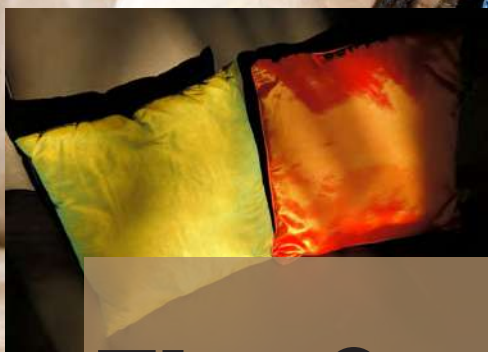
I am very lonely here. You must be lonely too. I can understand. Can you call me to you, please? We will then be together forever.

Page 4

Mom, today is my result. Will you pray that I pass this exam otherwise I don't know what dad will do to me. And I don't want to see him angry. If I fail, would you please save me ?

After reading this my dad had tears in his eyes. My mom had saved me from his wrath, or may be it was fated this way. He closed the diary and got up of his chair. Suddenly, he got a heart attack and fell off on the floor. By the time he was taken to the hospital he was dead. My step-mother and step-sister gained nothing but our family started living happily again, here, in heaven.





The Cushion

By Aleena Rehman
Pakistan

When I was 9 years old, I watched my favorite shows on Cartoon Network at 5 O'Clock. My sister, Dua, who was 6 years old, watched Baby TV an hour later. i.e. 6 O' Clock. This arrangement was settled for us because we both had different choices in TV programs (and in almost everything else) so our timings were fixed. Neither of us could violate the rules and there was no need as we were given opportunity to watch our favorite shows. One day I was sitting on my bean bag enjoying my favorite show, "Invaders from Space" at around 5:30 pm when to my astonishment, I saw one of the red sofa cushions on my right side lifting up in the air. Scared as I obviously was, I stared at it almost like forever. I was so petrified that I turned the TV off,

silently put the remote away and went to my room to take a nap. The next day when I was watching TV, the cushion rose up at another level this time. I got up and leaving the TV and the rest of the world where it was, ran to my room. This incident repeated for a few days and I didn't do anything about it neither did I tell anyone as I feared my TV timings might be reduced due to this.

One day, curious as I happened to be, I decided to find out what was the matter with the cushion. I waited for the cushion to rise up so that I could check it out. And there it rose. With a fast heart beat, I started moving slowly towards the cushion. When I reached near it, to my astonishment, a small face popped up from behind the cushion which scared the life out of me. Oh my God, I am never going to forgive Dua trying to watch TV for some extra time!!!





"Technology is a Boon and Bane."

By Aleena Rehman - Pakistan

Debates regarding this topic arise with some only supporting one side. However, apart from all the disadvantages, we live in a society where it is clear that technology has contributed towards certain beneficial changes in work and employment. Now, it is dependent upon the way that the people in a workplace manage and work with technology, which shows its effects accordingly. To generate a positive result, it is vital to have a proper understanding of technology in relation to the workplace. Where it is true that technology and capital-intensive methods of production have the ability to create convenience for businesses, they are also linked to increases in the levels of unemployment. Using machinery for production may just increase levels of efficiency and productivity for the business itself. On the other hand, it may lead to a decrease in job opportunities and employment overall. Hereby, the question arises, do technological innovations have the effect of replacing labor? Such is the concept regarding this question, that using capital-intensive production methods would mostly result in a fall in the labor force. The 21st century has been a journey of further technological developments and advancements; many steps have

been taken by mankind to discover their potential. Considering the increase in reliance on technology, it is significant to also consider understanding it in a way that does not result in consequences. Apart from production, technology provides convenience in other aspects of business journeys. Better and improved communication, monitoring the environment, ease in controlling the flow of operations and even avoiding disruptions or predicting future possibilities for the business. Though these forms of ease may cost the business a lot financially, they are important for a business to follow the path of success since the world's reliance on technology has evidently risen. With its ability to change the nature of work and employment, it is important that it is actively managed in a way that does not result in negative outcomes.

◆◆◆ About The Writer

Aleena Rehman is a young emerging poet and fiction writer based in Lahore, Pakistan. She has been writing verses, stories and articles since a very young age. Along with being a highly imaginative young poet, Aleena is passionate about her career in Business studies.



Book Review

MR. MEDDLE'S MISCHIEF by Enid Blyton

Review by Shifa Asif
PAKISTAN

There are thirteen stories in this book. Merry Mister Meddle's morning is the best story.

The best thing in Merry Mister Meddle is that it is really funny. I love the part when Mister Meddle threw cold water on Mother Heyho's hair. This part was chucklesome. It made me laugh a lot. The second part I admired was when Mister Meddle covered the chair with glue. Mother Heyho was stuck on the chair. She couldn't move, this part of the story was hilarious.

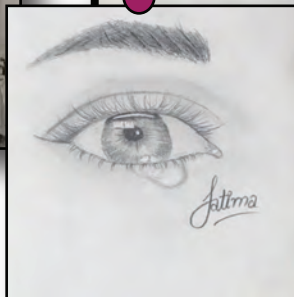
Mister Meddle and the conjurer was the worst story. It was very boring. The thing I dislike in the story is that Mister Meddle fiddled with the conjurer's stuff. He is not suppose to touch other people's stuff without taking permission. The second thing I dislike in the story is that Mister Meddle did not owe his mistake. He regret that he did not touch the wand. He should have admitted his mistake.

My impression on this story was substandard. This book was really boring it only has one thing that Mister Meddle did everything wrong. The book made me laugh in the first and second story but not in all, because only it was a repetition of Mister Meddles mistakes. This is why my overall impression was not good to go.

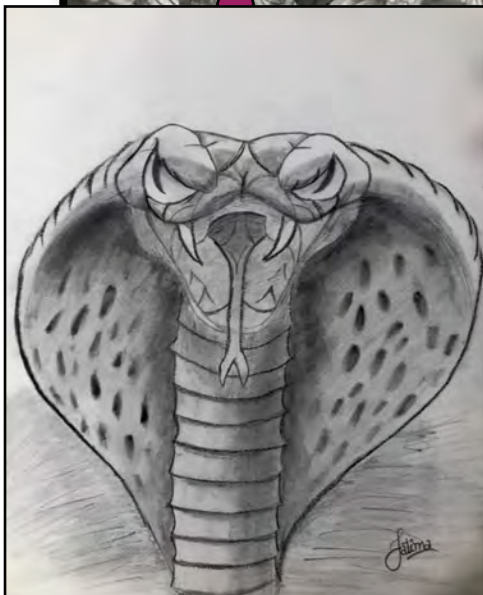
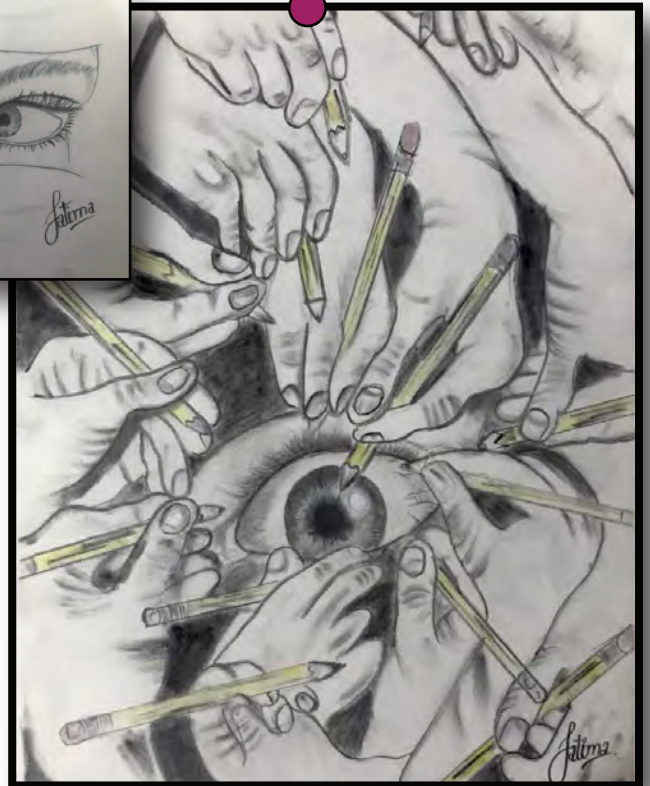
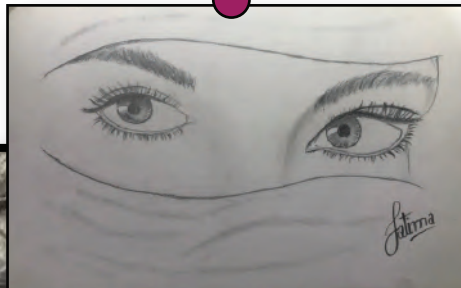
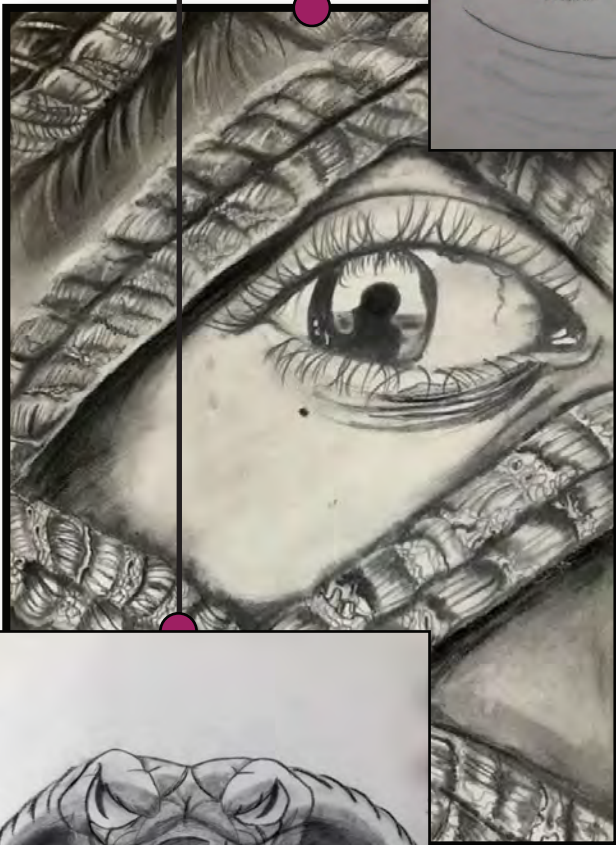
The moral of Merry Mister Meddle's morning is that we should do everything carefully. We should pay attention on what we are doing. We need to learn from our mistakes. The moral of Mister Meddle and the conjurer is to owe our mistake. We need to admit our mistake. Admitting your mistake can prevent it from becoming a huge problem which is difficult to solve. Instead of trying to hide and forget your mistakes, you can use them to your benefit.

About Writer: Shifa Asif is in grade 6, aged 10 years, 11 months, at Lahore Grammar School, Lahore, Pakistan. Amongst her notable achievements, Shifa has won the post card art competition at the Broomhill Festival in Sheffield, Children University Bronze award, and swimming kingfisher award in UK 2014-2016. She also won best dress up for World book favourite character day certificate and WWF-Pakistan's spellathon 2016-2017 certificate at LGS-JT, Lahore, Pakistan and was a runner-up in a poetry competition on poetry zone UK. Shifa has 6 stories published online, 3 self published, 6 unpublished stories, 6 school magazine publications, 27 online published poems and won two poetry competitions in the UK.

FATIMA IRFAN - PAKISTAN



FATIMA IRFAN - PAKISTAN



About the Artist

Fatima Irfan is a young, enthusiastic Sketch Artist based in Pakistan. At a very young age, Fatima has learned how to sketch images that stem directly from her imagination.



WRITERS' REVIEWS ABOUT THE BRIDGE



Dieter Bruhn USA

I think it's an amazing project. I really love the philosophy of trying to provide a platform to really connect writers from all over the world and showcase their work. I think a lot of creative writers don't really know how to get their works out there. But every month The Bridge is coming out with publications and connecting people from different parts of the world. I think it's really really wonderful what you're doing and I think it's a great opportunity and it also provides a way for young writers as well, a way to get started. So congratulations for what you are doing!



Stephanie Barbe Hammer USA

"I am thrilled to be a part of this project, which I think is incredibly important. It is more important than ever because we live

in this miraculous time where you and I can talk although we're thousands and thousands of miles away from each other, but there's something about sharing stories and poems that is very intimate and very deep. And being able to share that kind of word seems to me to be crucial. We need these kind of opportunities to talk to each other, and the story that you all were kind enough to accept in Bridge is actually based on a real experience...I feel a little bit like I've got to go to Pakistan for a little bit and see the world through these writers' eyes."



Rizwan Akhtar Pakistan

In Pakistan specifically, if you talk about poetry, there are no platforms actually, I mean the poetry written in English language. Because there's a lot of people writing fiction, being published, fiction being appreciated and being achieved. But I think The Bridge is a wonderful platform for International poets, a sort of a camaraderie of English poets, so definitely I think this is a much needed initiative.





Taha Kehar PAKISTAN

“At a time like this where creative endeavours are already under threat, such initiatives are welcome. They are always going to be valuable. At the time like this, the pandemic has paralysed the publishing industry pretty much around the world, everybody is suffering, everybody is going through a dry spell creatively, therefore an initiative like The Bridge is really going to open doors for people and offer encouragement. And without that encouragement, you’ll have a lot of people who want to write but they don’t see any space to write, they don’t see any recognition and the Bridge is doing one thing – its providing recognition, and with the recently revamped website, I see a lot of people engaging with one another. Community of writers is building up and I think that is what people need to do. We need to develop communities because writers support each other. The reality is that writers will support each other at all points in time. They will always understand why, when you get a bad review, honestly, the best thing to do, if you ever get a bad review, a terrible terrible critique from anyone, you turn to a writer and say they’ve said this about my work and they will read your work and

they’ll understand. There will be sympathy, there will be empathy. So I think a flourishing community of writers is necessary. And The Bridge is providing that platform.



Sabrina Fatma Bangladesh

I think what is wonderful about Bridge is that you are reaching out to not just writers in your own country but writers across the region internationally. And I think exposure is very important, you know, one hand to expose the young writers in your country, like to just give them a platform for the world to see their work but also to show them a variety of what’s out there because for the longest time we’ve been exposed to one, like let’s say, eurocentric or an american-centric kind of flow of entertainment and literature which has shaped our writings, but things are changing now. We’ve our own way of telling stories and we have our own cultures and being able to connect to that only makes our writing and our literature richer. So kudos to you guys for having this platform, and giving a space to connect, and to share and only by sharing can we, as you say, bridge the gap. So yeah definitely, good job!



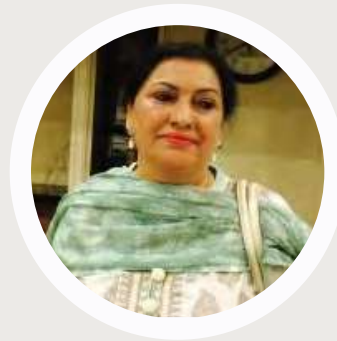
Jackie Kabir Bangladesh

I think Bridge is doing a commendable job by connecting writers from different countries and cultures. We need to have this cultural exchange and we need to know what the other writers are doing. To make this effort, it is a commendable job.



Dr. Saima Eman Pakistan

I think the Bridge team is doing really tremendous, remarkable work. Working with other people across the globe is very important. We get to know how different writers are feeling, and writing. I haven't seen this kind of initiative anywhere else. I have written like a 100 poems, but I think this was the best way to get them published.



Prof. Zakia Nasir Pakistan

It is amazing that The Bridge is building a Bridge between different cultures, different nations, different countries, and I believe one has to have that initiative, that motivation, to get this kind of work done and certainly it is a result of a lot of hard work. I congratulate the Bridge team and wish them all the success!



Zartasha Shah USA

The Bridge is doing an amazing job. I've visited the website, I've watched the episodes. I'm thrilled that this program is exploring the new worlds for the writers and supporting the educational programs by promoting the educators. I am pretty sure that the future for The Bridge will be very bright.



Ambassadors' Messages

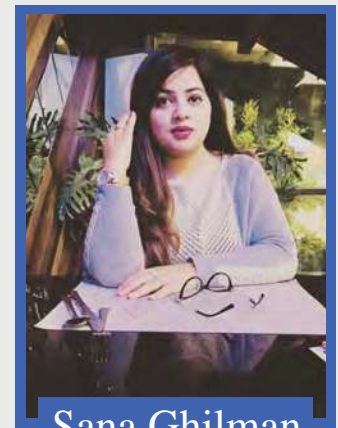


Ayesha Abid

Working with Bridge during its development, and rise has been a very interesting, and quite exciting of a job. The Bridge isn't a name for a website, or a forum – it is a vision, a striving mission, a dedication, and an idea; Bridge is a concept, it is a strategy, and it is the future. Writers around the globe have joined hands, and will continue to do so. A number of individuals have gotten a place to settle, a platform to be published. In this fast paced time, where slangs rule and statements are undermined, writers are seen oftentimes struggling to build their name, let alone find a place to get published. Bridge, is connecting the world of litterateurs, writers, and all enthusiasts. As an ambassador, I've seen closely the sentiments and enthusiasm involved in this project, and I willingly and proudly stand by the team.

The vision behind this astounding platform is highly impressive as it is giving opportunities to the aspiring writers too. It indeed is opening up ways for writing and the feeling of never giving up writing. Because writing is not just a skill but carries a whole life style within it as I believe being creative means being alive.

I am already enjoying and living the venture. You too can be a part of this friendly ride. Let's keep writing and collaborating together on the one and the only visionary platform; The Bridge!



Sana Ghilman



Dirha Qazi

The Bridge is somehow a pioneering project for Creative Writing in Pakistan. It has not only attracted both young and published writers from within the country, but also across the border in a very short time. Seeing its growth and service to our writers certainly makes me astounded and hopeful for many more wonders it's going to do for our writers' community and the top-tier platform that it's going to become!



Dr Aishat Umar
Department of English and Literary Studies,
Bayero University, Kano
Nigeria
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MESSAGE FROM THE BRIDGE PROJECT AMBASSADOR NIGERIA

I am delighted to be part of the Bridge project, a project aimed at bringing together creative writers from every part of the world to showcase their creativity and share ideas. I would like to extend a warm welcome to creative writers, both established and upcoming, to take advantage of this project to reach a great number of audience through their creative works as this will afford them the opportunity to connect easily with a network of creative writers around the globe. The numerous categories of publications initiated by the project, namely; The Bridge Anthology, E-Magazine, Collaborative Writing as well as other on-site publications like the monthly short story, poetry, as well as International writing competitions, are all great ways of encouraging and supporting creativity. The current edition of the E-magazine is, as usual, laden with interesting and diverse topics ranging from creative writing, reviews and articles. Therefore, I invite writers from Nigeria and other parts of the world to share their ideas and thoughts by contributing to the E-magazine.

I look forward to reading your creative pieces and wish everyone a marvellous writing experience.



Action without vision is only passing time,
vision without action is only day dreaming,
but vision with action can change the world.

Nelson Mandela



Let's Connect!



This first issue of The Bridge Magazine is the one that The Bridge Team will long remember. The amount of hard work invested in the compilation of this edition by each member of the team was commendable. The journey was certainly not easy. The road was full of obstacles but I must say that the ride was worth the strife and so is the destination.

Whether your family and friends are under one roof or separated by distances and borders, the team at The Bridge promises to bring to all of you very insightful and motivating writings from around the world by amazing people. We also pledge to broaden your prospect and outlook regarding the world around you. So sit back on your comfortable couch and enjoy the splendid assortment of creativity in The Bridge Magazine.

Lastly, on behalf of The Bridge team, the ambassadors and everyone involved in bringing to you this wonderfully unique reading experience, we all wish you, our readers across the globe, a peaceful and vigorous year ahead.

Qasim

Qasim Nawaz
Art & Project Director
The Bridge
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THE BRIDGE

**Connecting Writers
around the Globe**



www.bridge-the-nations.com



A Unique Creative Writing Venture



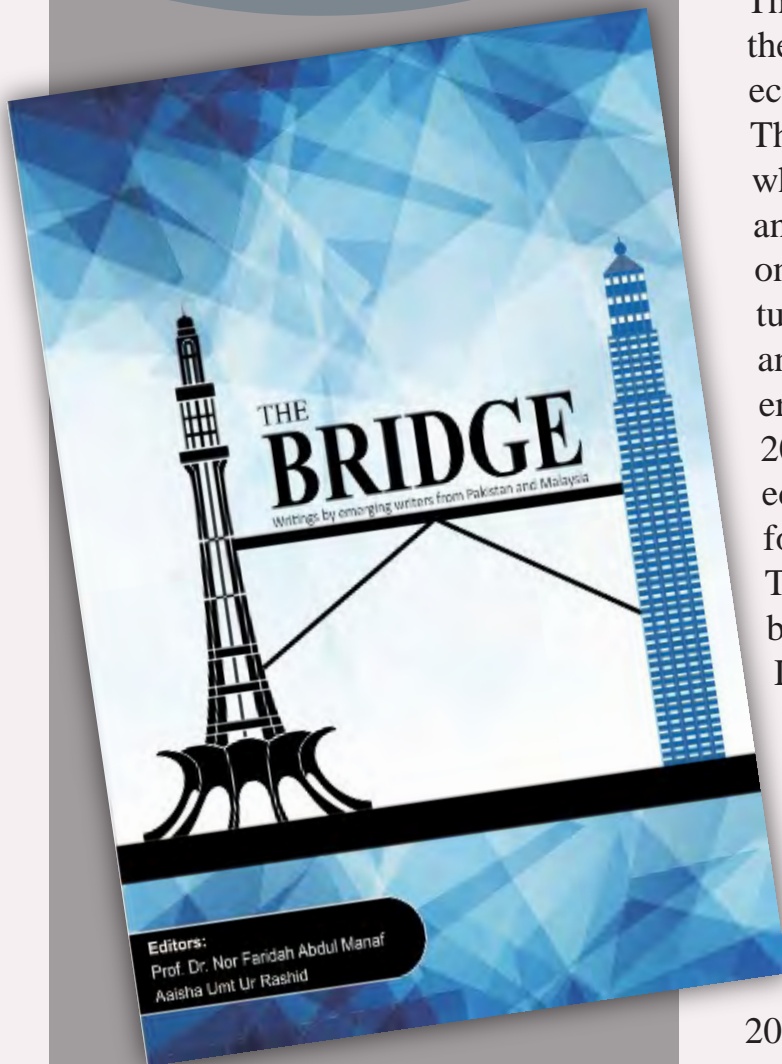
The Bridge is an exceptionally distinctive project initiated in the year 2019 as a publishing platform for emerging, amateur as well as fully established writers from around the world. The project is the brainchild of an emerging poet and fiction writer from Pakistan, Aisha Umt Ur Rashid who is also an academician, translator and editor. Germinating from a single mind, The Bridge has already begun to set up its strong roots as an organization and is being highly acknowledged and appreciated by writers from different parts of the world.

During times like the present, when pandemic has created inescapable distances, there is a dire need of connectivity and linkages of all sorts and The Bridge is doing exactly the same job. The project, as a whole, aims at connecting writers from around the globe and bringing them on one platform where they can exhibit their writings and bridge bridges between people of diverse ethnicities, differing cultures and clashing mind sets. By overlooking all the social, cultural, religious and geographical boundaries, The Bridge is linking up creative minds worldwide. The project is the first one of its nature in the country and its popularity is increasing rapidly ever since its commencement.



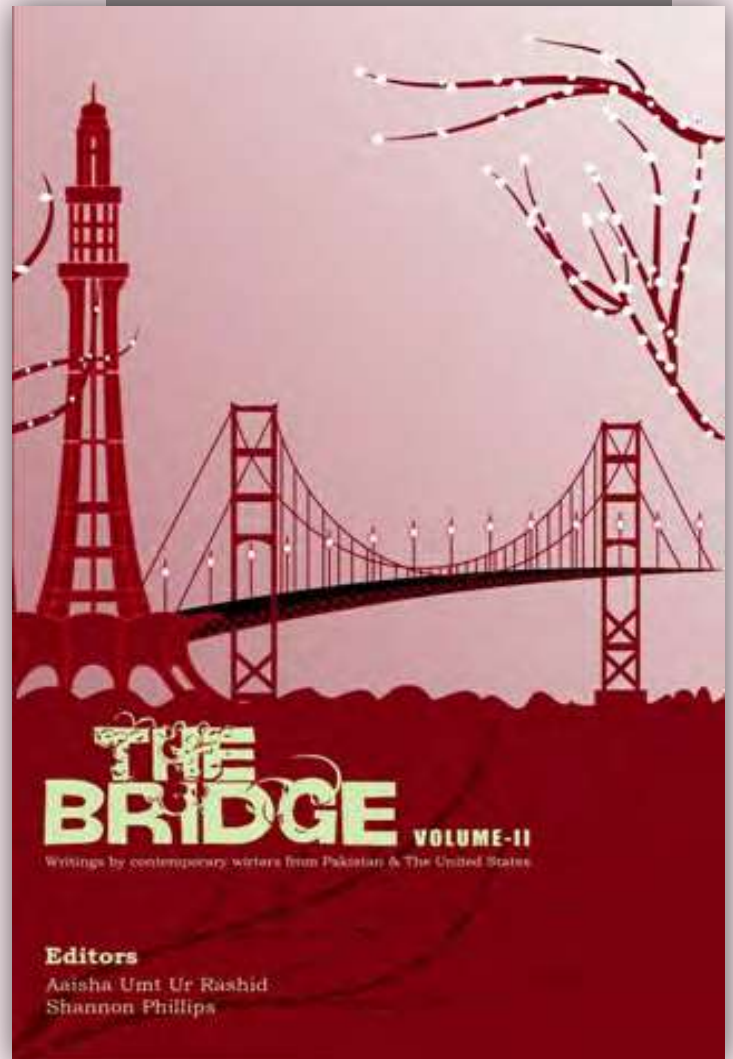
The Bridge Anthology Volume I

The Bridge has achieved multiple goals in the last three years. At the start of the project, the focus was on getting one volume of The Bridge anthology published every year which would contain writings by emerging and published writers from Pakistan and one target country. The first volume featured writers from Malaysia and Pakistan and was published by Silverfish Publishers, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 2019. Contributions from Pakistan were edited by Aaisha Umt Ur Rashid, the founder and CEO of The Bridge project. The Malaysian contributions were edited by Prof. Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf from Department of English, International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. This volume contained poems and short stories concerning themes of identity and landscape, thus highlighting the cultural setting of both the countries. The book had its first official launch in Iqra Auditorium, LCWU in October, 2019. The second launch ceremony of this volume was held in the English Department of International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur. The anthology is currently being used as a reference book in the Creative Writing courses of Malaysian and Pakistani universities.



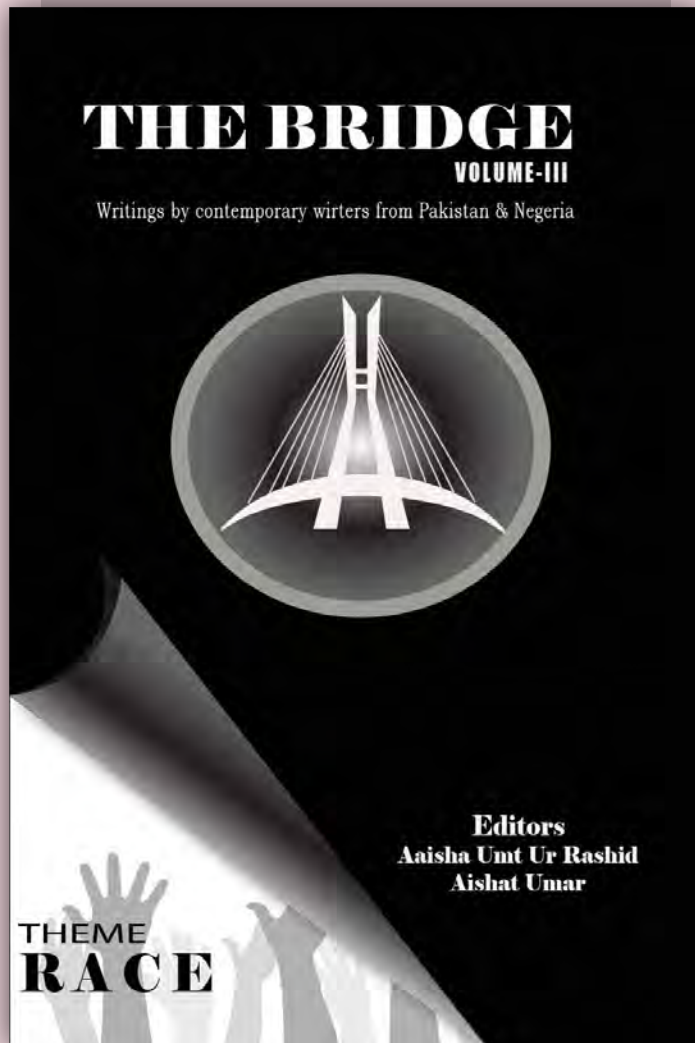
The Bridge Anthology Volume II

In the year 2020, The Bridge expanded its horizon and reached out to the writers of the United States. The Bridge Volume II was published by Picture Show Press, California in October 2020 and was co-edited by Shannon Phillips from the US and Aaisha Umt Ur Rashid from Pakistan. This volume featured published and emerging writers from both the countries and consisted of writings based on themes such as connectivity to one's roots, origin and relations. The highlight of this volume is its availability on Amazon.



Cover Reveal

The Bridge Anthology Volume III



The Bridge Volume III is another step towards building connections and this time we are bringing together writers of Nigeria and Pakistan. The anthology contains poems and short stories based on the sensitive issue of Race as both the countries have experienced it one way or the other. This volume is expected to come out in May 2022 and will be published in Pakistan. The volume is co-edited by Aishat Umar from Nigeria and Aaisha Umt Ur Rashid from Pakistan.

Coming Soon!

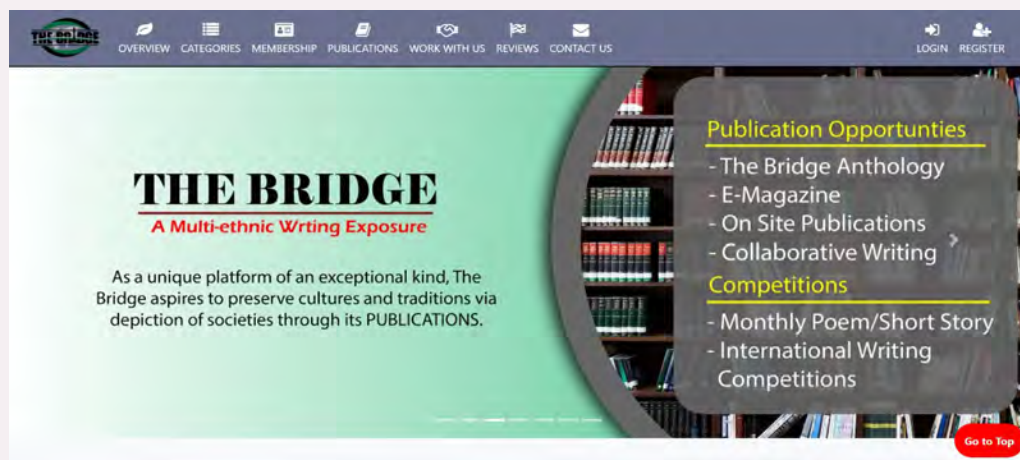




Build your connections
and Share your writing endeavours with
Professional writers



Connecting Writers
From around the globe



The Bridge Website

The Bridge Website is an astounding step towards the main objective of The Bridge Project which is to Connect Writers Across the Globe. The website was launched during the crisis of the Pandemic in January 2021 and turned out to be a very successful expansion of the project.

www.bridge-the-nations.com





Highlights of the Website



The website provides a very friendly and creative set up for the community of writers to develop connections with writers around them as well as from other parts of the world. If you are aspiring to be a writer, The Bridge offers you ample opportunities to receive guidance from established and published writers from various parts of the world. There are several publishing opportunities and discussion forums available on the website such as Collaborative Writing Portal, Online Panel Talks and Group Discussion Wall. Along with that, the website launches monthly, fortnightly, biannual and annual writing competitions.





THE BRIDGE MAGAZINE

The Bridge Magazine

The Bridge Magazine is launched with the same aim of bringing the world of creativity closer. Unlike the anthologies that are country specific, The Bridge Magazine is open to all writers around the globe. With its diverse collection of writings, the magazine gives you a chance to delve into cultures and ethnicities that are completely novel to you.

The Bridge, as a whole, is a remarkably exceptional project that will soon reach out to a bigger community of writers who would revolutionize the world with the power of their pen.





Future Goals

The Bridge Volume IV is expected to come in 2023 which would feature writers from the United Kingdom and Pakistan.

The Bridge **Mobile App** would be launched in 2023. The Bridge Team aspires to broaden its horizon by creating a larger community of writers from around the world.

Collaborative Work: The Bridge aims at working in collaboration with other national and international organizations to enhance its working potential and accessibility.

Join Us

If you are a writer-in-the-making, this is exactly where you should be. The Bridge will provide you countless opportunities to experiment and excel while exhibiting the pinnacle of your potential on national and international levels . And if you happen to be a renowned, published writer, The Bridge needs you even more as you are the one we are trying to connect to.

So Join us for a fabulous experience of CREATIVITY and CONNECTIVITY on a Global level !

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THE BRIDGE MAGAZINE

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2021-2022



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AROUND THE GLOBE**

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