

**Sanskar Bharti Kala Sankul
Once Again became the Witness
of a Mesmerizing Journey of
Art, Devotion, and Dialogue**



The monthly symposium began with a heartfelt tribute to the innocent civilians martyred in the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam. All present members observed two minutes of silence, expressing their emotions in an unspeakable way. The entire atmosphere seemed to be immersed in a silent prayer.

On the auspicious occasion of the lighting of the lamp, all distinguished guests performed the lamp lighting ceremony, illuminating the stage.

Following this, a melodious stream of music began. The soulful singing by Mr. Vijay Rawal and Mr. Veer Mani Trivedi touched the hearts of everyone present. Their mastery of voice filled the atmosphere with unseen compassion and hope.

The main attraction of the symposium was the analytical discussion on the theatrical presentation '**Arey Gadbadi Ho Gayi**', inspired by the Sanskrit play '**Bhagavadjukkam**' by Bodhayan, directed by Raj Upadhyay, and performed by Navras Group.

In this discussion, the depth of the story, authenticity of the acting, the liveliness of the stage arrangement, and the artistic features of the entire presentation were examined in detail. Critics appreciated the dedication and effort of the Navras Group artists, stating that the presentation not only entertained but also sparked deep contemplation.

The Navras Group artists were deeply moved after hearing such a heartfelt and in-depth review of their performance. They expressed that such analytical discussions inspired them to further deepen their theatrical practice. They also expressed their gratitude to Sanskar Bharti for providing such a valuable platform.

To elevate the dignity of the event, the presence of several distinguished guests was noteworthy. Dr. Prashant Upadhyay, Delhi Province Minister, Senior NSD theater artist Mr. Pradeep Mohanty, Mrs. Shashi Prabha Tiwari, educationist Dr. Ruchika,

and Mr. Manish Jha honored the event with their esteemed presence.

The success of the program was greatly aided by the contributions of Delhi Province's stage art coordinator Mr. Raj Upadhyay, senior theater artist Shyam Kumar, Shraboni Saha, Garima Rani, Vishwadeep, Sneha Mukherjee, Raman Kumar, Saurav Tripathi, Pradeep Pathak, Mrityunjay, Brijesh, Shivam, Sushank, and Sakshi.

The event was skillfully and warmly conducted by Bharti Dag, and Mrs. Shruti Sinha concluded the art-filled evening with a heartfelt vote of thanks.

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Jha □□□□ □□□□



Vagish K. Jha

Obituary by Neelesh Deepak

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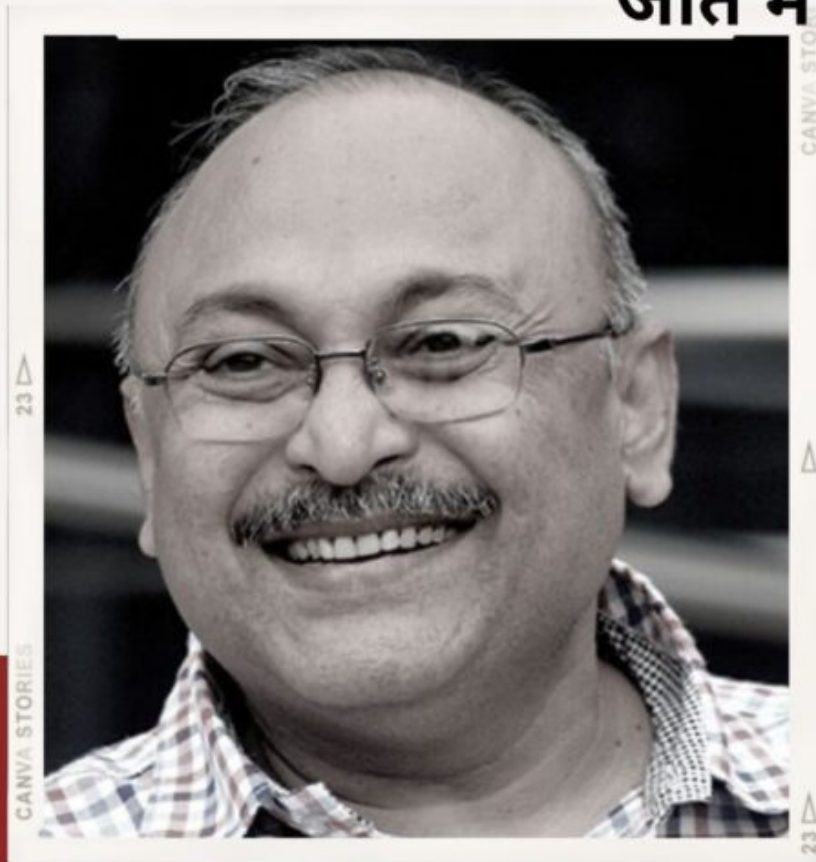
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Memorial service Saturday

तू ज़िंदा है तो ज़िंदगी की
जीत में यक़ीन कर...



Celebrating

...life
...hope
...dream

WITH MEMORIES OF

VAGISH KUMAR JHA

15.08.1962 – 22.02.2025

Join us as we celebrate Vagish's life together.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1, 2025
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM



Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC)
5, Windsor Place, Ashoka Road,
New Delhi, Delhi 110001
Near Le Meridien

RAJESH KUMAR JHA
+91 9810216943

Brief Biodata

Vagish K Jha held a Master degree in Philosophy and Masters in

History from J.N.U, New Delhi. In the field of communication, he had ventured into journalism, theatre, television and has also written articles in national dailies and magazines

The Intersection of Art and Constitution: A Republic Day Symposium at Kala Sankul



New Delhi, January 26: A special monthly symposium was organized at Sanskar Bharati's central office, 'Kala Sankul,' on the eve of Republic Day. The theme of the symposium was "The Artist's Vision of the Soul of the Indian Constitution," with Shri Lakshmi Narayan Bhala Ji, a senior pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and an expert on the Indian Constitution, as the keynote speaker.

The event began with floral tributes to the portrait of Bharat Mata and a ceremonial worship. During the session, Shri Bhala Ji shed light on the historical and cultural significance of the illustrations created by Nandalal Bose in the original manuscript of the Indian Constitution. He emphasized that these illustrations are not merely decorative but serve as a vivid reflection of Indian civilization, culture, and the soul of the Constitution. Through these artworks, the traditions, glorious history, and values of India's freedom struggle have been effectively conveyed.

Shri Bhala Ji elaborated on the role of these illustrations in each chapter of the Constitution. He highlighted that great artist like Nandalal Bose dedicated their artistic expertise to give each page of the Constitution a unique identity. These illustrations incorporate significant elements from the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Buddhism, and key events of India's freedom struggle, portraying the Indian Constitution as a living and inspiring document.

The symposium witnessed participation from a large number of art enthusiasts and thinkers, who regarded it as an inspiring opportunity to understand Indian art traditions. The officials of Sanskar Bharati expressed gratitude to everyone involved and resolved to continue organizing such motivational events in the future.

All India Organization Minister Shri Abhijit Gokhale and Area Organization Minister Shri Vijay Kumar were specially present on the occasion. The symposium was skillfully conducted by Garima Rani, while the vote of thanks was delivered by Shri Kuldeep Sharma, the convenor of the drama symposium. The success of the event was supported by significant contributions from Shri Vishwadeep, Pradeep Pathak, Ms. Anchal, Sushank, Shivam Mrityunjay, Saurabh, Harshit, Raman, and Kala Sankul's administration head, Shri Digvijay Pandey.

This symposium was a commendable effort to unveil the depth of

the Indian Constitution, and the unique aspects of Indian culture embedded within it. The illustrations by Nandalal Bose not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the Constitution but also symbolize India's soul and its rich historical heritage. Such events provide an opportunity to connect with Indian traditions and culture while deepening respect for the Constitution.

“Kavi Saptak: A Celebration of Poetry and Creativity at Vanmali Srujan Kendra, Bhopal”



Bhopal. Vanmali Srujan Kendra, Bhopal unit organized a special poetry recitation series called ‘Kavi Saptak’ in the Muktdhara Auditorium of Rabindranath Tagore University on 23 December 2024. In which talented poets of Rabindranath Tagore University and Scope Global Skill University mesmerized the audience with their creations.

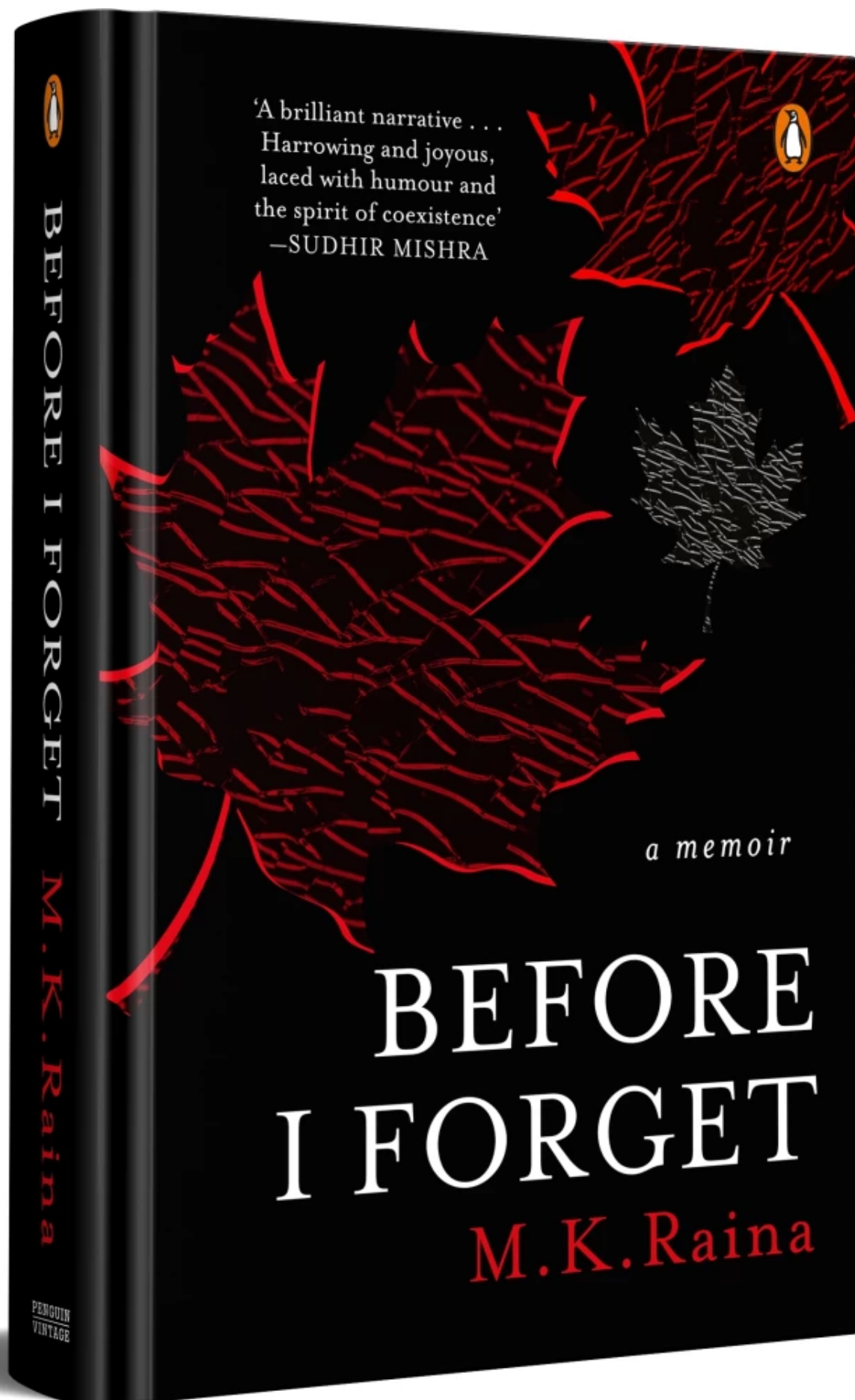
In this program, Shashwat Verma, Ashi Dixit, Vikrant Bhatt, Vishakha Rajurkar Raj, Mudit Srivastava and Mausami Parihar recited their poems, which immersed the auditorium in literary essence. Shashwat was seen communicating with his inner self in his poems, while the freshness of language was seen in Ashi's poems. Vikrant presented his curiosities in poetry. Vishakha scattered the rainbow colors of love in her poems. Mudit worked to bind the events of life and the fine lines of nature in language. Mausami expressed her tender restlessness through poems.

The program was presided over by Dr. Veena Sinha ji, President of Vanmali Srujan Kendra, Bhopal unit. Who congratulated the poets and shared her views on their poems. Shri Vinay Upadhyay ji also praised the poets and the new experiments done in their creations. At the end of the program, Dr. Savitri Singh Parihar, Coordinator of Sanskrit Oriental Language and Indian Knowledge Tradition Center, expressed her gratitude to everyone. Student Pushpendra, Chairman of Virasat Samiti, conducted the program efficiently, and on this occasion teachers of the Faculty of Humanities and Liberal Arts and students of Natya Vidyalaya were also present as spectators. Due to which the program got a wide and enthusiastic audience. 'Kavi Saptak' not only provided a platform to poetry lovers but also promoted literary dialogue and creativity.

An Unforgettable Book Discussion Conducted by Sujata and Oroon

Conversations: Before I Forget

Reviewed by Manohar Khushalani



M.K. Raina's memoir, "Before I Forget," is a deeply moving chronicle of his multifaceted life as a theatre actor, director, and cultural activist. The memoir weaves through various stages of his life, from his serene childhood in Kashmir to his influential role in Delhi's theatre scene, and his poignant experiences during the turbulent periods of Kashmir's history. At IIC,



Sujata Prasad and Oroon Das, conducted an extremely engaging and memorable conversation with the author.

His narrative began with memories of his early years in Kashmir, painting a picture of harmony and cultural richness. He describes the idyllic days in the Sheetal Nath Sathu Mohalla, where Hindus and Muslims lived together in peace, and his nurturing education at Lal Ded Primary School. This nostalgic recounting provides a stark contrast to the later chapters, which detail the descent of Kashmir into violence and chaos in the 1990s.

The core of Raina's memoir focuses on his efforts to use theatre as a tool for social change and healing. Despite the insurgency and violence in regions like Kashmir and the North-East, Raina set up theatre workshops aimed at reviving folk traditions and fostering community spirit. His work often put him in danger, yet he persisted, driven by a cause greater than activism—a belief in mending the fabric of society. One of his significant achievements was the successful theatre workshop in Kashmir in 2000, where he taught young locals not just theatre, but values of rationality and responsibility.

Raina's reflections on the political and cultural history of India are profound. He recounts witnessing turbulent times, the Emergency period, Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Delhi riots, and the death of playwright Safdar Hashmi. These events are narrated with a historian's precision and a poet's sensitivity, capturing both the joy and sorrow of living through India's tumultuous times.

The memoir delves deeply into the traumatic period of the 1990s in Kashmir. Raina's mother's illness during the violence-ridden winter. Amidst curfews and security checks, he navigated the challenges of getting medical care for his mother, only to face the heartbreak of her passing. The exodus of Kashmiri Pandits during this period is another painful memory, highlighting the erosion of centuries-old communal bonds.

Raina's narrative does not shy away from the complexities and mistrust that grew among communities: How even brothers became strangers, emphasizing the profound impact of fear. His return to Kashmir in the 2000s to conduct theatre workshops marked a significant effort to rebuild trust and revive cultural practices like the traditional folk theatre, Bhand Pather.

Raina balances personal anecdotes with broader socio-political observations. His encounters with cultural luminaries in Delhi, such as Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, and Om Puri,

are interspersed with reflections on the decline of the city's once-vibrant theatre scene

“Before I Forget” is a testament to M.K. Raina’s unwavering dedication to his craft and his cause. It is a poignant reminder of the importance of cultural heritage in fostering understanding and unity in times of conflict. His declaration, “We should never forget but always forgive”

First Published in IIC Diary April-May 2024

A Rich Tapestry of Events and Anecdotes

TITLE: Before I Forget
CONVERSATION BETWEEN: M.K. Raina, Sujata Phansil and Deepan Das
COLLABORATION: Akshat Arshad
29 May 2024

M.K. Raina's memoir *Before I Forget* is a deeply moving chronicle of his multifaceted life as a theatre actor, director and cultural activist. The memoir weaves through various stages of his life, from his serene childhood in Kashmir to his influential role in Delhi's theatre scene, and his poignant experiences during the turbulent periods of Kashmir's history.

His narrative begins with memories of his early years in Kashmir, painting a picture of harmony and cultural richness. He describes the idyllic days in the Shadal Buth Sattu markets, where Hindus and Muslims lived together in peace, and his nurturing education at Lal Dool Primary School. This nostalgic recollection provides a stark contrast to the later chapters, which detail the descent of Kashmir into violence and chaos in the 1990s.

The core of Raina's memoir is his efforts to use theatre as a tool for social change and healing. Despite the insurgency and violence in regions like Kashmir and the northeast, Raina set up theatre workshops to revive folk traditions and foster community spirit. One of his significant achievements was the successful theatre workshop in Kashmir in 2002, where he taught young locals not just theatre, but values of empathy and responsibility.



Raina's reflections on the political and cultural history of India are profound. He recounts witnessing turbulent times, the Emergency, Indira Gandhi's assassination, the Gulf crisis of 1994, and the death of playwright Sahitya Akshaya. These events are narrated with a historian's precision and a poet's sensitivity, capturing both the joy and sorrow of living through India's tumultuous times.

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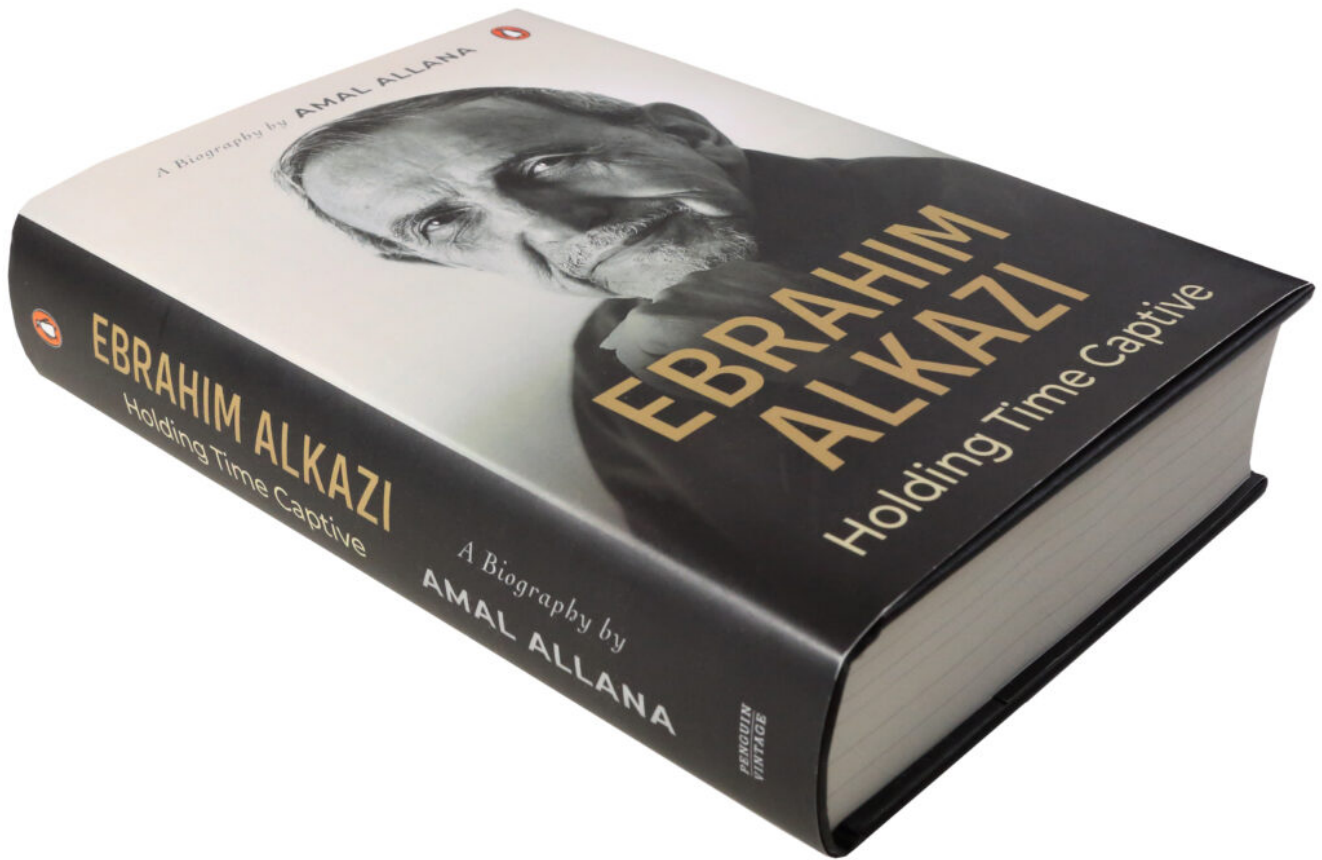
Before I Forget is a testament to Raina's dedication to his craft and cause. It is a poignant reminder of the importance of cultural heritage in fostering understanding and unity in times of conflict.

— PRADEEP KHURANA

Ebrahim Alkazi: An uninhibited scholarly Tale of

a Towering Thespian

Review by **By Manohar Khushalani**



The launch and discussion at the India International Centre (IIC) of a multilayered narrative, “Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive,” shed light on the life and legacy of Ebrahim Alkazi, a towering figure in twentieth-century Indian theater and visual arts. Amal Allana, Alkazi’s daughter, presents a meticulously researched account of her father’s life, offering insights into his role in shaping the cultural landscapes of Mumbai and Delhi from the 1940s to the 2000s.

Ebrahim Alkazi, renowned as a theater doyen and pedagogue, passed away at the age of 94, leaving behind a monumental legacy in Indian theater. His career spanned an impressive 74 years, during which he directed iconic plays such as Girish Karnad’s “Tughlaq” and mentored generations of actors, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. Alkazi’s upbringing, education, and early associations with the Bombay Progressive

Artists' Group laid the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions to Indian theater.

As the longest-serving director of the National School of Drama, Alkazi revolutionized Hindi theater with his visionary approach and technical precision. His establishment of the Repertory Company and the School of Dramatic Arts showcased his commitment to nurturing talent and promoting theatrical excellence. Beyond theater, Alkazi's influence extended to the visual arts, as evidenced by his founding of the Art Heritage Gallery in Delhi with his wife, Roshan Alkazi.

Allana's biography not only celebrates her father's professional achievements, but also delves uninhibitedly into his personal life, providing a nuanced portrait of a multifaceted individual. Through interviews, archival research, and personal recollections, Allana, herself a renowned and celebrated theatre director, offers readers a glimpse into Alkazi's emotional journey and his profound impact on modern Indian cultural history.

The discussion at the IIC, moderated by Naman Ahuja, further enriched the narrative, with Allana engaging in conversation about her father's legacy and the process of writing his biography. Dramatic readings by two actors, Sonam Kalra and Rehaan Engineer, added depth and resonance to the event, underscoring the theatricality inherent in Alkazi's life and work.

Overall, "Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive" stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of a cultural icon. Allana's narrative, both enthralling and critically astute, pays homage to Alkazi's monumental contributions while situating him within the broader context of modern Indian cultural history.

First Published in IIC Diary February-March 2024

An Uninhibited Tale of a Towering Thespian

BOOK LAUNCH: *Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive* by Amal Alkazi (Penguin Random House, 2024)

DISCUSSANTS: Amal Alkazi in conversation with Naman P. Ahuja

READINGS BY: Sonam Kalia and Rehan Engineer

COLLABORATION: Penguin Random House

22 March 2024

The search and discussion of a multilayered narrative, *Ebrahim Alkazi: Holding Time Captive*, also right on the life and legacy of Ebrahim Alkazi, a towering figure in 20th-century Indian theatre and visual arts. Amal Alkazi, Alkazi's daughter, presents a meticulously researched account of her father's life, offering insights into his role in shaping the cultural landscapes of Mumbai and Delhi from the 1940s to the 2000s.

Alkazi, renowned as a theatre dramaturge and pedagogue, passed away at the age of 94, leaving behind a monumental legacy in Indian theatre. His career spanned an impressive 74 years, during which he directed iconic plays such as Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*, and mentored generations of actors, including Naseeruddin Shah and Om Puri. Alkazi's upbringing, education and early associations with the Bombay Progressive Artists' Group laid the foundation for his groundbreaking contributions to Indian theatre.

As the longest-serving director of the National School of Drama (NSD), Alkazi revolutionised Hindi theatre with his visionary approach and technical precision. His establishment of the NSD Repertory Company and the School of Dramatic Arts, Mumbai, showcased his commitment to nurturing talent and promoting theatrical excellence. Beyond theatre, Alkazi's influence extended to the visual arts, as evidenced by his founding of the Art Heritage Gallery in Delhi with his wife, Rehan Alkazi.

Alkazi's biography not only celebrates his father's professional achievements but also delves unreservedly into his personal life, providing a nuanced portrait of the multifaceted individual. Through interviews, archival research and personal recollections, Alkazi, herself a renowned and celebrated theatre director, offers readers a glimpse into Alkazi's emotional journey and his profound impact on modern Indian cultural history.

The discussion, moderated by Naman Ahuja, further enriched the narrative, with Alkazi engaging in conversation about her father's legacy and the process of writing his biography. Generous insights by Sonam Kalia and Rehan Engineer added depth and resonance to the event, underscoring the vibrantly present in Alkazi's life and work.

The book stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of a cultural icon. Alkazi's narrative, both enthralling and critically astute, pays homage to Alkazi's monumental contributions while casting light within the broader context of modern Indian cultural history.

• MADHUR KUNDHALAM

Forget me not | Ojaswini Trivedi

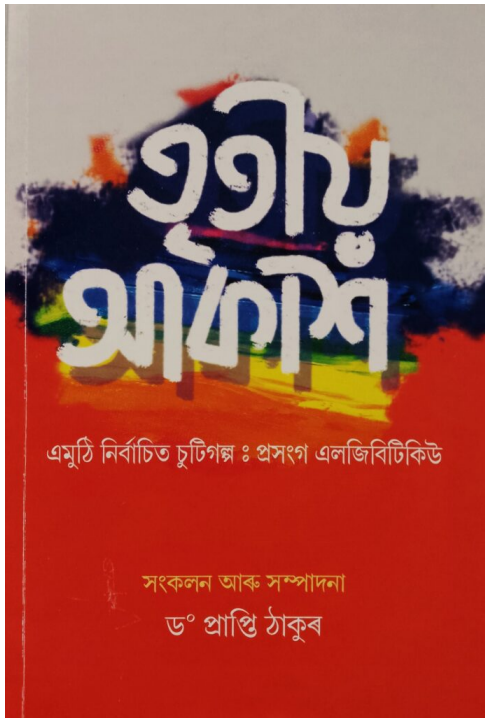


As the rays of your beam
Transcend through our sheets
The creases collapsing with time
One after the other,

He, after him
after you
The blinding intoxicating power
A touch, innocent, eternal
A smile, banished, surrendered
Will you remember that we loved?
That we loved, despite knowing
Knowing it won't last.
So as long as you walk through life
Trying to find me the "Touch-me-nots"
Remember our macadam of broken dreams.
A life we never lived.

A life undone
Unfinished

A Fresh Perspective on Queer Studies in Assamese: 'Tritiya Akash'



“Tritiya Akash,” translating to “the third sky,” is more than just a title; it represents a bold venture into uncharted territories. Dr. Prapti Thakur compiled and edited this anthology of short stories in Assamese, delving deep into the lives, struggles, psychology, and obstacles faced by the queer community. While Queer studies are gaining traction in various writer and researcher communities, this anthology stands out for several reasons. In Assam, Queer studies in the academic field and other creative pursuits are in the infant stage. Unlike most academic institutions that confine their publications to the prescribed syllabus, our educational institution has dared to publish such a book as part of our academic endeavour. Additionally, this anthology challenged the prevailing norms by openly discussing a taboo topic for many.

It’s noteworthy that Sarupathar College isn’t nestled in the bustling city but rather situated in upper Assam, distanced from the state’s intellectual hub. Dr. Prapti Thakur, the college’s principal, deserves commendation for advocating such a radical academic approach.

This anthology comprises thirty-one short stories penned by

writers from across the state, spanning various age groups. However, it's noticeable that only two senior writers contributed: Sneha Devi (1916-1990) and Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma. Sneha Devi, primarily a homemaker, wasn't extensively involved in literary social circles. Hence, witnessing her empathy toward such a significant topic is surprising and heartbreaking, especially amidst limited discussions. On the other hand, Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma, a former Professor of Guwahati University, known for his scholarly creative works and openness, bravely tackled the social taboo by addressing the theme of lesbians in his story. While the other writers explore diverse themes and social issues, delving into such a topic is not unusual for them. Not all stories have high literary standards, yet they should be applauded for their theme and creative openness.

Dr. Pori Hiloidari contributed a comprehensive critical preface, dissecting the short stories' thematic and structural nuances. This preface serves as a guiding light for writers, enabling them to grasp the theme's essence and craft more impactful narratives from varied social perspectives.



This collection has sparked numerous questions, prompting us to seek insights from the Editor and the college's principal, Dr. Prapti Thakur.

What inspired you to edit and publish this anthology?

The inspiration behind curating this anthology stemmed from the recognition that queer subjects, despite being

incorporated into the English literature curriculum of Delhi University, remain largely unaddressed within the Assamese literary syllabus. Consequently, this project aims to bring these narratives to the forefront, fostering a broader discourse on queer representation within the academic landscape.

Considering that the Queer subject may not be part of your college syllabus, how do you anticipate this collection contributing to academic discourse?

Although the queer subject matter may not currently be a part of the prescribed college syllabus, this collection holds the potential to enlighten our students about the diverse content of Assamese short stories. The content of this anthology is socially significant, and I think our students will become aware of a social issue that is still regarded as taboo. From an academic point of view, it can be said that presenting a diverse array of narratives that explore queer experiences prompts critical engagement and encourages intellectual inquiry into the multifaceted dimensions of gender and sexuality in the Assamese context. This anthology provokes scholarly discussions, challenging existing paradigms and enriching the philosophical landscape.

How have your colleagues and students responded to this anthology?

The reception of this anthology among colleagues and students has been overwhelmingly positive. They were very enthusiastic from its inception as they felt that our college would do something radical. Without the support of my colleagues, it would not have been possible to publish a book on such a topic from an educational institute.

Could you share the reactions of both readers and writers to the collection?

The reactions from both readers and writers have been equally

commendable. During the anthology's release on January 7th, 2023, in the presence of several esteemed writers, noted gender activists, and readers, the project garnered widespread acclaim and appreciation for its significance in amplifying marginalised voices and promoting inclusivity within the literary norm from an academic institution.

Were there any obstacles encountered during the production process?

Remarkably, the production process was devoid of any substantial obstacles. All the writers participated in the project with excellent support for the cause. Dr. Pori Hiloidari, a leading literary critic of the state, wrote the anthology's preface at my request. I am sure this preface will stand as a significant work in Queer studies in the Assamese language.

What are your plans regarding publishing books on this topic and others?

Our Sarupathar College is very excited to publish more books on this queer topic and other important, socially significant, and literary themes. We are committed and determined to work on projects that benefit our students' community and society.

A sensitive attempt to hear the unheard 'third voice'

"I learned about sexuality when I was in high school. I wanted to know if I was such a person or if there were other people like me. I thought I would tell my parents when I mentioned my marriage. I thought I would die if I married a man. After

passing high school, I was angry when my mother told me about marriage. I met 'A' in the first semester of my BA. After talking, I realized that she was probably like me.'



Queer Voices from the Periphery

A Collection of Perspectives from Northeast India



Editors

**Kaustav Padmapati
Prateeti Barman**

In exploring the Assamese language, one inevitably confronts an obvious gap: the absence of a recognized term to encompass individuals beyond the traditional dichotomy of male and female. Within this framework, the term 'third gender', often equated with 'queer', remains an elementary construct, lacking the nuanced depth required for full comprehension. Its acknowledgement in ancient Indian literature and portrayal in artistic depictions of sexual activities serve as examples of historical acceptance, countering prevailing narratives of deviance and abnormality.

Yet, despite this deep-rooted socio-cultural tradition, the contemporary discourse surrounding the third gender has, regrettably, been relegated to the periphery. Social taboos and deeply ingrained prejudices have conspired to throttle open dialogue, relegating the experiences of this marginalized community to the shadows of society's consciousness. However, amidst this prevailing silence, there exists a glimmer of hope – an increasing recognition and acknowledgement of the inherent rights and dignities of third-gender individuals.

Recent shifts in societal attitudes, coupled with governmental initiatives aimed at addressing the needs and concerns of this oft-overlooked demographic, signify a slow departure from the status quo. Concurrently, scholars and researchers are embarking on a journey of discovery, exploring the psychological intricacies and socio-cultural dimensions of third-gender identity. Through their nuanced analyses and empathetic inquiries, they seek to illuminate the lived experiences of this community, thereby amplifying their voices and advocating for their rightful place within the fabric of society.

Edited with meticulous care and scholarly acumen by Dr. Kaustubh Padmapani and Dr. Prateeti Barman, the book **'Queer Voices from the Periphery- a collection of perspectives from Northeast India'** serves as a beacon of enlightenment amidst the prevailing darkness of ignorance and indifference.

Centered on the portrayal of 'queer' identities in the vibrant landscape of North East India, its pages offer a comprehensive exploration of the complexities and challenges faced by this marginalized demographic. While awareness of queer issues may be blossoming in the region, the dearth of literature serves as a poignant reminder of the pressing need for greater social engagement and discourse.

Comprising an anthology of contributions from researchers and scholars, each chapter endeavours to navigate the undiscovered alleys of queer identity with sensitivity and shades. From probing examinations of cultural nuances and identity dynamics to insightful critiques of general homophobia within Assamese society, the book offers a rich compilation of insights and perspectives. Through rigorous research and empathetic inquiry, the authors seek to peel back the layers of societal prejudice and misconceptions, offering readers a deeper understanding of the lived realities of queer individuals.

Namami Sharma's compelling discourse on homophobia in small-town Assam serves as a stark reminder of the entrenched biases and systemic inequalities that continue to infuse our social fabric. By shining a light on these injustices and advocating for greater awareness and inclusivity, Sharma underscores society's collective responsibility towards nurturing a more equitable and accepting environment for all its members. It is through such concerted efforts and unwavering commitment that we may begin to dismantle the barriers of prejudice and discrimination that have long hindered the full realization of human dignity and equality.

In intertwining together these diverse narratives and perspectives, the book offers readers a panoramic view of the lives, struggles, and triumphs of queer individuals in the unique context of North East India. From the emergence of queer identities within the cultural landscape to the challenges of navigating societal expectations and prejudices, each chapter serves as a testament to the resilience and

courage of those who dare to defy convention and embrace their true selves. Dr. Bibhuti Patel's commendation of the book as a critical catalyst for encouraging dialogue and understanding among diverse identities speaks to its profound impact and enduring relevance. Grounded in evidence-based research and filled with a deep sense of empathy and compassion, the book stands as a testament to the power of scholarship and advocacy in advancing the cause of equality and justice for all.

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Capturing Assamese Icons and Nature: A Mumbai Transplant's Perspective through Utpal Datta's Lens



Some of the Photographs from the Exhibition

I am new to Guwahati, and I am even newer to its arts scene. I came from Mumbai with a background at NCPA and Jehangir Art Gallery. So, I was pleasantly surprised when I visited a solo photography exhibition by the renowned film critic and author Mr. Utpal Datta of Guwahati. It featured faces and nature combined and intertwined to explore the relationship between humans—some prominent, some iconic, and some unknown—in their natural surroundings.

Utpal Datta, currently a Professor of Practice and Dean of Performing Arts at Assam down town University, Guwahati, has worked for All India Radio for a long time and is a man of many talents. His books '24 Frames' and 'Film Appreciation' are well-known in film studies. He has also received a special jury mention for his writings in the National Film award. Utpal Datta is creative, and his creations do not end with writing books and making films; they also involve photography. He has a keen and observant eye for things, which is well reflected in his photography show.

Seeing Bhupen Hazarika, Deepali Borthakur, Homen Borgohain, and Birendra Nath Datta was a pleasure. Particularly, I liked Birendra Nath Datta's photo in chiaroscuro in his simple yet elegant study. The light falling on the bookshelf reflected his love for studying in depth. Deepali Borthakur, the iconic singer of Assam, looking fondly over a calendar with her own photo, made by Utpal Datta, is another memorable piece. A rare photograph of Bhupen Hazarika with a full open smile accompanied well by his wife in another frame. Utpal Datta, over his illustrious and long career, was privileged to capture the moments of the icons of Assam. So, a Homen Borgohain looking askance and a Jadab Payeng, the forest man of India, looking tenderly over his greenery creation is something to experience at the exhibition.

It was not only with great people he hobnobbed but also, his photos of female vendors in a busy local market and an old photographer suavely dressed and standing to focus his camera exuded a certain amount of energy. Then there were serene beach photographs of the Andamans and the river banks of the mighty Brahmaputra. In the end, the exhibition concluded with the painted scriptures of "Sarva bhabantu Sukhina" from the Upanishads beautifully capturing the theme of nature and humans.

Overall, it was a delightful experience peering into the nature and icons of Assamese culture, coming from Mumbai. I was thrilled to experience some of the unique faces and landscapes inextricably intertwined. (Exhibition venue: Guwahati Artists Guild, dates 8th to 12th march 24).

Tailpiece: Well-known film director Biswajeet Das made a short film 'Fragments in Time' based on the exhibition. The film is available on YouTube.