

# **Aneeta Chitale: Sojourn to Maldives – Book Review / Interview**

The turbulent times between the years spanning from 2008 to 2014 is presented on the canvas. The relations between the two countries were totally ruptured in this era. The entire plethora of Indian nationals and foreigners had gone berserk. I had to study it in detail and follow it consistently.

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## **Folk Theatre Forms of India: Tamasha**

Tamasha is considered a major traditional dance form of the Marathi theatre, which includes celebration filled with dancing and singing and is performed mainly by nomadic theatre groups throughout the Maharashtra region. Marathi theatre marked its journey at the beginning of 1843.<sup>[3]</sup> In the following years, Tamasha primarily consisted of singing and dancing, expanded its range.

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## **Leading scholar of Indian**

# **classical dance, architecture, art history, culture Kapila Vatsyayan no more**

Dr Kapila Vatsyayan passed away peacefully at her residence (No.85, SFS Flats, Gulmohar Enclave, New Delhi), Wednesday 16th September, 2020 at about 0900 hrs, this morning, . She was a leading scholar of Indian classical dance, art, architecture, and art history.

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## **About Charan Das Sidhu and his Plays by Manohar Khushalani**

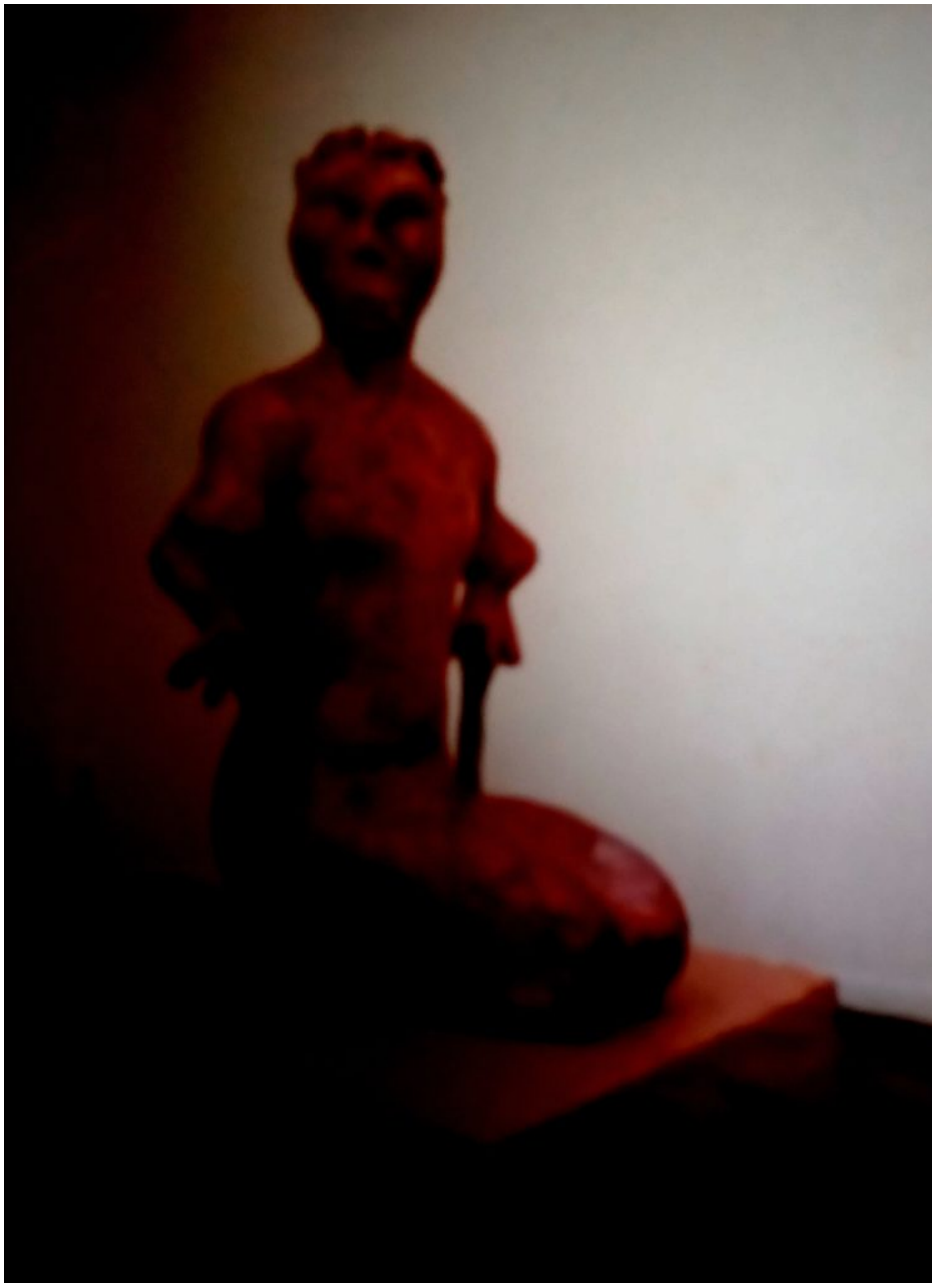
This article was supposed to be a book review, but because one had known the playwright, Dr. Charan Das Sidhu, so intimately, the personal note is unavoidable. My mind races back to 1978 when I started my theatre career with Badal Sircar's 'There is No End' an English rendition of his Bengali play 'Shesh Nei' directed by Tejeshwar Singh. Amongst the elite IIC Theatre Club audience was a stocky, dark, bespectacled professor of English from Hans Raj College, Delhi University, who spoke in what I later came to know as his irreverently rude but affectionate style

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# Social Distancing or Physical Distancing? / Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

*a*

*sculptural representation*



## **Covid-19 and Social Distancing**

The current global coronavirus pandemic leading to COVID-19 shows no signs of dying a natural death; far from it, we are nowhere near finding a solution to arresting the spread of the virus. The virus appeared mysteriously and suddenly, infected some, multiplied rapidly, hitch-hiked by various means and entered all parts of the world – sparing no region. It underwent numerous mutations during its journey around Planet Earth and half a year later still stays firmly away from the grasp of human comprehension.

This uncontrolled, worldwide pandemic has completely transformed our lives and we have come up with one rather simple behavioral method and the only known effective one so far to cope with this situation. The world's lingua franca has given it the name "Social Distancing." The English language is highly adaptive. But the language is also very adept at coining specious terms. These terms are then taken up unquestioningly by anyone speaking any language, anywhere in the world.

I would like to discuss, using one of my sculptural works, the connotative meanings of the term "Social Distancing." As a more suitable term to use in the COVID-19 context, I would suggest the term "Physical Distancing."

## **A Sculptural representation**

The subject of this article is a sculpture of a seated man. It is the third in the series of five sculptures that I made in Tokyo, in the late 80s. These sculptures are based on specific people I saw on the streets of "Calcutta," in the early to mid-80s. I did not and could not strike up a conversation with any of them. Perhaps I did not have the strength of spirit to

connect with them through verbal communication. I had my own problems and I felt just as helpless as they did or perhaps they did not even feel the same sort of disempowerment I felt. They were, for all I know, stronger in spirit than most and had the mental strength to accept their condition and live a functional life with a reasonable level of happiness and fulfillment.

The reason for the absence of an interaction with any of the individuals I saw and passed by on the streets of Calcutta that year in the early to mid-80s was revealed to me gradually, over the years. This happened through certain specific experiences I had with people, belonging to different groups, in various countries. These experiences were, what I would call, mundane and of little import when taken from the point of view of a day to day existence. To me, however, they were eye openers. These experiences signified to me the true meaning of the currently much bandied about term "Social Distancing."

I posted a write-up about my second sculpture in the series, *crawling man*, titled "The World on its Hands and Knees," since the person the sculpture was modeled on represented to me the condition that all of us are in now – our lives ruthlessly controlled by a global pandemic caused by a bio-chemical entity, the coronavirus, that exists in that nebulous state between living and nonliving.

The fear of COVID-19 is real, palpable, and terrifying because we have no understanding of the workings of the coronavirus. A term with a very specific meaning has been coined to describe the physical distance each of us needs to maintain with everyone except for the few people with whom we share a living space, excluding even your blood relatives if they happen to live in separate accommodation.

This **physical distancing** is termed "**Social Distancing.**"

# Social Distancing vs Physical Distancing

**“Social Distancing”** is entirely erroneous as a term to describe the sort of distancing we need to maintain between each other during this pandemic. The ‘distancing’ is necessary so as to not catch the virus from people with whom interaction is unavoidable, termed essential workers, and spreading the virus to other individuals.

**Social Distancing** as a practice is nothing new; it has always existed in all societies, in one form or another. It is implemented and controlled by a small minority of agents of power, be they the ruling elite, the strong amongst the weak etc. Using the term **“Social Distancing”** in the present situation to describe a **prescriptive behavioral form** of maintaining physical distance to avoid spreading of **COVID-19** that applies to **all**, irrespective of their social standing, performs the task of validating, insidiously, the deep social divide, wide-spread all over the world. The term gives credence to the **institutionally managed** segregation of communities that disempowers large groups of people based on their color, ethnicity, economic standing, gender, etc., and people with physical disabilities. These groups of people live a **socially distanced** life. I have not included other groups or even people with disabilities that are not to do with the visible physical body, in this discussion.

## Persons with physical disabilities

Among the many disempowered groups of people, such as those listed above and others, it is the group of people with physical disabilities that are uniquely placed as the ones whose lives are more severely affected by social isolation and the resulting **social distancing**. A person with physical disabilities is a single individual, often experiencing a

sense of separation even within their own family. Although living a **socially distanced** life like many other groups of people, a person with a physical disability is **alone in their disability** as each form of disability is different from another. The extent and nature of the disability depends on individual factors and the person with a disability **does not belong to a clearly identifiable collective**.

Examples of a 'collective' would be an ethno-racial social group or a community of economically deprived families, living in ghettoized, marginalized conditions. Accordingly, a person with disabilities lacks the emotional support system that individuals belonging to other disempowered groups with shared problems and a common identity have.

The social and emotional isolation of people with a physical disability may be the result of congenital factors, of deliberate acts of cruelty, accidents, and even more shockingly and tragically due to poorly understood medical treatments. These treatments are administered hastily, not having been properly verified but widely hailed as effective, and any side-effects resulting from the treatment, which may be severe and irreversible are identified only when the damage is already done.

As mentioned earlier, physical disabilities can include a whole range of conditions, including ones that are not readily visible to others or those that entirely escape the notice of people who are strangers to the person with a disability.

## **A physical disability of a particular kind and why it became the subject of my sculptures**

The form of physical disability I chose to highlight through the set of five sculptures belong to the one category of

people (four of the sculptures referring to actual individuals I saw), who are either born with or developed later in life anomalies (*in medical terms a "deformity"*) in their bodily structure. Their limbs, extremities, and craniofacial features affect how they are viewed by others and the bodily movement and functionalities of the people in this category are restricted to various degrees. Often, the stark visual nature of their physical characteristics, entirely unique to each individual and the disabilities being specifically their own, marks them apart from others. They are denied a sense of belonging to a community. Inarguably, the social and emotional isolation that the people in this group experience compounds their day to day difficulties and increases their dependency on others. The subject was compelling and I was and still am deeply affected by the life situation of people with disabilities who have readily visible "malformations" of the body.

Before I talk about my sculpture, *seated man*, and the form and content of the work, I would like to make clear my rationale and impetus behind selecting, as subjects of my artwork, people with physical characteristics that restrict their mobility and whose body structure does not conform to expected norms. If the motivation for doing the set of sculptures is not already evident from the foregoing discussion, I would like to stress that by doing these works I want to bring to light the pain and suffering of these individuals, **which is singularly their own.**

These set of sculptures may be deemed voyeuristic, distasteful, and even lacking in basic human sensitivity and compassion on the part of the artist. This is one reading of the work, and from the point of view of the artist, that is me, the reading reflects the reader's/viewer's own point of view, which does not allow them to extend their understanding of what an art work stands for, the compelling motivations of the artist for doing works of this kind, and the complex web



of meanings the artwork holds. These meanings of the artworks constantly change and come to light depending on the context in which they are presented and the nature of the audience. There may be no specific target audience in the mind of the artist when a work is created, unless the work is commissioned by a specific patron with clear-cut requirements. My set of works are entirely self-motivated and created with no specific audience in mind.

It is my conjecture that the *seated man*, who in all probability was homeless, had a congenital condition that caused the shortening of his arms but evidently with strong musculature in the upper and forearms, both structurally relocated and joined in such a way as to provide for an elbow function. The formation of the arms had a certain degree of symmetry, in that the arms had the same proportion and structurally related to the rest of the body in a similar manner.

## **The Sculpture of a *seated man***



A **seated man**, homeless perhaps, his posture is almost that of a yogi. His torso is upright and handsome. He sits with his legs folded under in the yoga pose of *Vajrasana*, holding a stick in one hand for support. His arms are strong, although

shortened. They are connected securely to his shoulders in a “standard” anatomical position. His head is turned sideways to view something that he caught sight of from the corner of his eyes. He used his very own form of transport, a little trolley, which I edited out from the sculpture. This I did so as to give prominence to the figure of the man who bore himself with dignity to the extent he could, given his circumstances. The trolley would have been a distraction and would have drawn attention to his disability.

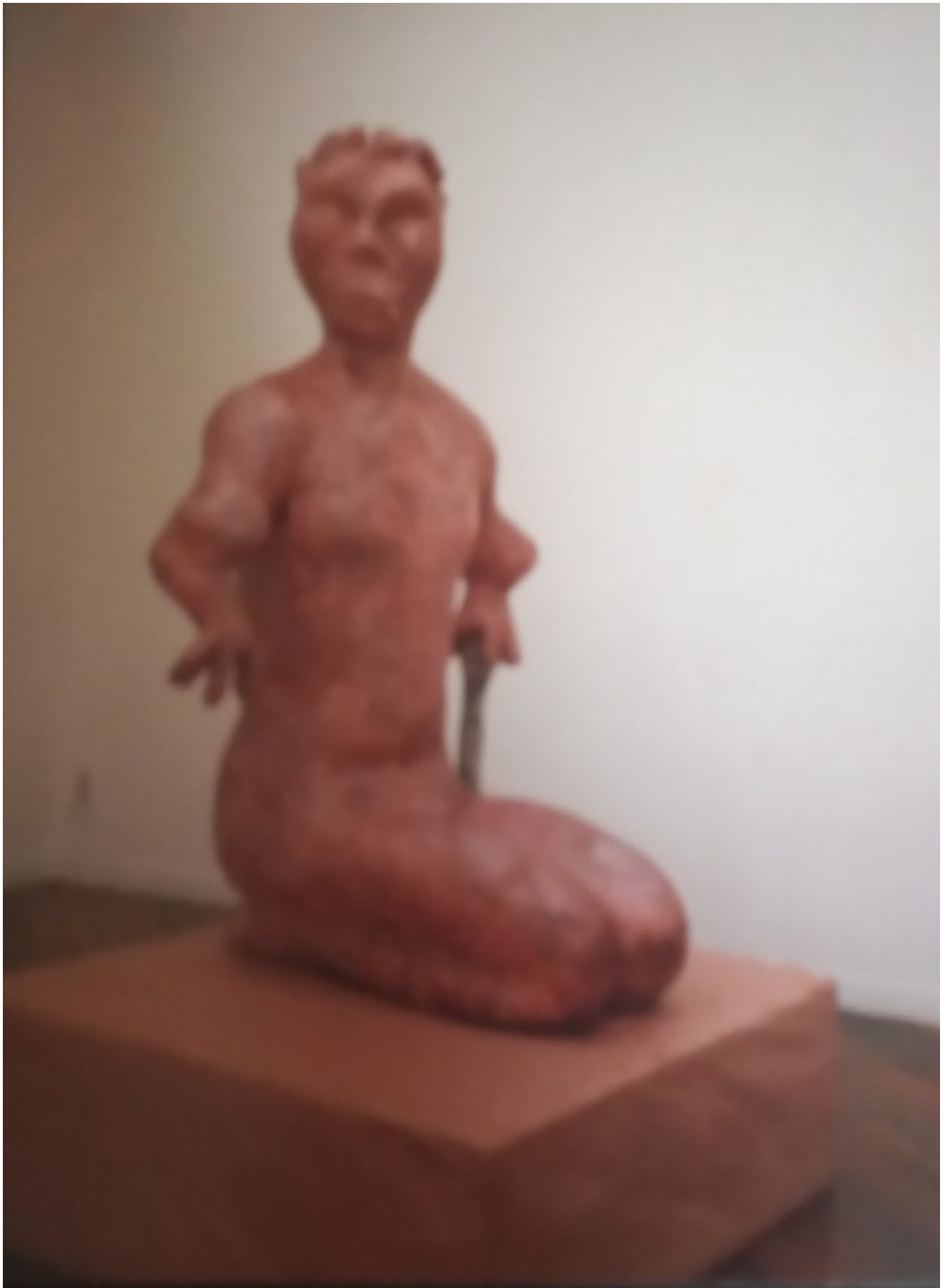
Whatever innate dignity his physical demeanor may have presented, he was still an outcast – homeless, living on the streets, and displaying those physical features that the vast majority of people could not relate to and from whom they maintained a clear social distance.

The social distancing of people such as the *seated man* has no relation to the “Social Distancing” prescribed by the governments of all countries for tackling COVID-19. What is needed in the present circumstances is “Physical Distancing.”

If the indignity of a subtle form of social distancing was not enough, the *seated man* spending most of his time on the pavement had people walking past him, occasionally tossing a few coins in his bowl, who practiced a more blatant form of “physical distancing;” whereby, when they passed him on the street, they kept a distance that was more than necessary. This they did to make certain that they avoided contact with him. They walked past him by making a wide arc of a semi-circular curve using a quick motion to go past him, in the shortest possible time.

Practicing social distancing in relation to people isolated from the mainstream of society existed way before COVID-19 gripped our lives.

### **Displaying the work in an art gallery**



In order to express the combined qualities of dignity and social isolation of the *seated man*, the figure was placed directly on the floor of the gallery on the first day of the

show, and from the second day of the show until the closing of the show the figure was placed on a pedestal, which not only isolated him but also provided him with an elevating platform, giving him the dignity he deserves.

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# **Erebus    and    I    /    Ojaswini Trivedi**



## Night Sky

Who saves us? What protects us? Or are we just living our lives with the illusion of being protected. Of being saved.

Hurt is the chalice of nothingness, writhing through the voiceless screams. The mind crawled up in a desperate embrace, bleeding, shivering, hangs itself from the ceiling.

With nothing to hold on, with everything to let go. What is the truth? What is right? Who decides what our conscience speaks? Who lives through, who survives the maelstrom of starlit sighs.

I remember that night, alone, terrifyingly-complete. The lights turned down and the darkness eager to consume me. For a first, it didn't charge at my insecurities with vengeance but tip toed with a docile ambiguity that allowed me to accept it with arms wide open. Night was kind to me. Maybe the moon was watching.

The background rhythm played in sync with my closing ventricles, expanding lungs and perhaps possessed arms. The sanctity of its beauty transcended into every cell, each tissue. Unbiased with the form or function.

Only one song played that night.

"Bottom of the Deep Blue sea" by MISSIO. *The* song. Ironical? I know.

My feet ached, and I swayed endlessly. Almost as if the night was my guide, the security man outside my window. Convincing me that Pain and Anguish would have to cross the seven seas, climb the tallest peaks, jump across the chasms, speak the strangest of languages to reach me.

I was safe.

As if maybe for the first time, being numb was equivalent to being happy. Maybe sometimes feeling everything is like feeling nothing at all. Like a snake swallowing its tongue. Or a snowball exploding against a Pine tree.

Au contraire, I never felt more alive. Like the first breath of air after plunging out of the water. Gasping, lungful of the escaped nuances- All gushing back into the realms of my truth.

The soothing audacity of hurt comes in unabashed like the lust for love. It's heavy. It's bored. It's engraving.

Dancing barefoot on the wooden floor, with nothing but a mirror around me. It broke my heart in a different way. It

crumpled my soul in an unfittingly. I felt distorted, perfectly.

All of a sudden in those frail moments everything I did and didn't do made sense to me. Almost as if a gospel truth unravelled beneath the sheaths of my eye lids, trotting through my veins, into the earth.

With every move, my heart imploded, it succumbed to the bliss, the night had to offer.

Is that what love looks like? Oh the shear godliness of it.

Somewhere through my illicit affair with the night, as I laid on the floor, breathing the earth, staring into the sky across the translucent concrete above me.

My toes crinkled.

The desire and occurrence of complete degradation followed by the innocent upheaval of honesty, lastly toppled with the cool embrace of bliss.

I gasped.

Maybe, this felt like love, after all.

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## **The Forbidden Fruit of today: CLOSURE / Ojaswini Trivedi**

We spend years and years trying to find answers to the half spoken sentences and mid-air collapsed promises. The night teases us to insomnia, trying to replay the tape of those incidents, moments, gestures. What could have been, what



should have We spend years and years trying to find answers to the half spoken sentences and mid-air collapsed promises. The night teases us to insomnia, trying to replay the tape of those incidents, moments, gestures. What could have been, what should have been. Were we real then

. Were we real then?

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# The mask with the black hair / a poem by Sushmita Mukherjee



Take the first step,  
Become your own bestie,  
Your online friend, begins and ends with You in the main role,  
not a cameo,  
in the online film forwards of others.  
I spied a homely grey haired hag,  
You guessed right..in the mirror,  
She smiled Mona Lisa ish,  
And gestured to the dressing table.  
Ah! I don't have one here in the village, just some stuff

haphazardly pitched together in my hurried exit from Mumbai,  
fleeing the Virus, like a Partition victim of yore.  
The deodorant smiled at me, luring me to let her cozy under my  
armpits.  
Sorry girl, I said,  
you know, here in nature, I don't smell at all.  
The toothpaste squeezed soft and sparingly,  
Wants to be pushed and handled hard.  
But I decline... You have more to stay in today's day..  
So with wipes and tissues,  
No 'khachak khachak' like our film helpers do, liberally  
plucking out 5, when 1 would suffice.  
Trees, wood, plants heave a tentative collective sigh..  
My shampoo stares seductively at me..  
I hadn't noticed the sexy gaze all these years..  
No no, not today..I tease her back,  
I can wait  
I will use you bit by bit,  
till you foam at the mouth.  
And then the hair colour dibba,  
Painfully reserved for the last day of the lockdown,  
The colour which will provide the mask to meet the masks that  
I will meet,  
When lockdown opens,  
I will meet another woman,  
The mask with the black hair!

Susmita Mukherjee

3-4-2020

Lockdowned in paradise.

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# **I KEEP YOU AS A POEM /**

## **Sangeeta Gupta**

I keep you as a poem  
in the core of my existence  
I sing all day  
You my song  
You often shine as the evening star  
in my lonesome dreams  
You hold my hand  
When I am lost in the wilderness  
You, the lifeline of a poet  
I keep you as a poem  
in the core of my existence

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# **Barun Chanda's Murder in the**

## **Monastery: A Mini Review /**

### **Raj Ayyar**

Yet it vanishes leaving a distraught abbot, tense monks running around, and two murders linked to the missing manuscript.

Chanda, unlike Dan Brown, manages a credible, minimalist diplomatic secularism—though the murderer is s hired goon of some Christian sect or other, Chanda does not point fingers at the Catholic church or Opus Dei, a la Brown in 'The Da Vinci Code'.

I liked the erotic undercurrents in the novel overall—the steamy one-night stand between Miriam the fair-skinned Coorgi

Catholic nun novice and Tenzing, the fully grown adolescent Buddhist monk novice, is deliberately understated and leaves the reader's pornographic imagination to fill in the details.