

INSCAPE

Annual Digital Wall Magazine





INSCAPE

Inspire Inclusion

International Women's Day, 2024

an initiative of

Department of English
Durgapur Government College

Content



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Well Wishers



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Foreward

To Forge an Inclusive World

‘বহু দিন ধ’রে বহু ফ্রোশ দূরে
বহু ব্যয় করি বহু দেশ ঘুরে
দেখিতে গিয়েছি পর্বতমালা,
দেখিতে গিয়েছি সিন্ধু।
দেখা হয় নাই চক্ষু মেলিয়া
ঘর হতে শুধু দুই পা ফেলিয়া
একটি ধানের শিষের উপরে
একটি শিশিরবিন্দু।’

The oft-quoted poem of Rabindranath Tagore encapsulates not just the ethos of travel but also of human nature – we are eternally attracted by the glamorous distant rather than the pleasure of nearby simplicity. Negligence of the near is a sort of exclusion by which we take for granted what we possess as ours, and so destined to receive no special treatment. This attitude of overlooking the home for the world is also reflected in the format of our curriculum which includes acclaimed women poets from all over the world but, sadly enough, excludes gems from our State, West Bengal. Even amidst a galaxy of male poets, we have a handful of Bengali women poets writing in English or translated into English. Since the theme of International Women’s Day, 2024, is ‘Inspire Inclusion’, we, Department of English, Durgapur Govt. College, decided to work upon such exclusion and include our own poets in our Digital Wall Magazine. This agenda of looking inward, is our attempt to forge an inclusive poetic world. Focussing on some of the esteemed Bengali women poets writing in English or translated into English, we intend to weave a poetic garland with their poems on gender issues. As one glosses over the pages of the Digital Wall Magazine, stories of admiration, neglect, isolation, marginalisation, desires, assertions, resistance, and identity surface. We wonder at our own abilities and feel inspired at myriad possibilities that lay ahead of us.

The acclaimed British journalist and activist Gloria Steinem once remarked that the story of women’s struggle for equality belongs not to any single feminist or to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights. True, it is the collectivist mindset that can inspire women to include ‘Me, You, Them, All’, for ‘Inclusion debars Fall’. To understand the value of including each other is seminal to generate a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment. Hence the Digital Wall Magazine sought to include women poets yet to be included by syllabus-framing bodies in the State. Incidentally, the endeavour of looking within started in March 2023 wherein Dr. Jayanti Saha, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Bengali, Durgapur Government College, as well as a writer of an edited book on Durgapur’s women writers, inaugurated Departmental Wall Magazine and delivered a talk on the women writers of Durgapur. She also displayed the literary magazines conceived and sustained by certain eminent and not-so-eminent women editors and contributors of Durgapur. This year, we move a step further in developing the Wall Magazine digitally so that we may provide a scope for our students, to display their illustrative and graphical talents. Finally, in choosing poets the department has openly embraced diversity of age, profession, faith, and ethnicity to ‘Inspire inclusion’. We are truly indebted to esteemed poets like Dr. Sanjukta Dasgupta, Dr. Bashabi Fraser, Dr. Ketaki Datta, Dr. Sutanuka Ghosh Ray, Dr. Jhila Chattaraj, Ms. Sufia Khatoon and Smt. Kalyani Thakur Charal for their co-operation in our venture. We humbly accept their poetic musings with pride and feel privileged in doing so.

Dr Antara Mukherjee
Translator & Editor



‘on the viewless wings of Poesy...’





Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta

Sanjukta Dasgupta, a distinguished Professor and former Head of the English Department, currently serves as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calcutta. She is a prominent critic, translator, and poet with contributions spanning various publications in India and internationally. Her accolades include prestigious awards and grants such as the British Council Charles Wallace Scholar grant, Fulbright Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, and a role as an Associate Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla. Notably, she participated in the inaugural Writers' and Literary Translators' International Congress (WALTIC) in Stockholm and chaired the Commonwealth Writers Prize (Eurasia region) under the Commonwealth Foundation, UK. Professor Dasgupta also serves as the Managing Editor for *FAMILIES: A Journal of Representations* and as the Assistant Editor of the *Journal of Women's Studies* at Calcutta University. Among her notable works include *The Novels of Huxley and Hemingway: A Study in Two Planes of Reality* (1996), *The Indian Family in Transition* (co-edited, 2007)



Trapped

"Don't" is a wrought-iron gate
That I cannot open;
Within my mother holds me in a fierce embrace
For I am carrion to the slit-eyed hyenas.

"Don't" is my lodestar,
My passport, my credit card, my social security.
Because I don't,
I am so charming, simple, full of grace.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci?

Harridan, hag, witch, Circe, Medusa,
Medea, Helen, Cleopatra, Ophelia,
Kali, Durga, Draupadi, Menaka—
I have them all in me—

Yet I am lost and trapped
Myths and masks suffocate
I long for air and life.

Am I so formidable *mon semblable, mon frère?*

"Don't," "Don't" jangles the gate
As I shake its bars,
The inscrutable without
Echoes "Don't," "Don't," alas.

Cloistered, claustrophobic
I cohabit with "Don't"
For I cannot say
"I won't."

Again

When did it begin
When Draupadi was disrobed
When Sita buried herself alive
When thousands of *Satis*
Were burnt alive on their
Dead husbands' funeral pyres
When twelve thousand honourable women
Led by their honourable Queen
Dived into the raging flames
To save their honour and purity

When even sometime ago
A 18 year old "pure" woman
Was tied to the blazing funeral pyre
Of her dead husband
Sati? Self-immolation?
All the accused were acquitted.

Park Street, Kamduni, Hyderabad
Hattras, Unnao, Katwa, Hanskhali
Suzette Jordan, Nirbhaya, Bilkis Bano
Rape and gang-rape of female bodies
No caste, religion or class exempt
A timeless unabashed national sport!

Draupadi, Sita : Female protagonist of the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana respectively.

18 year old : Roop Kanwar was burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her dead husband on September 4, 1987.

Bilkis Bano : Rape survivor of the Gujarat riot in 2002.



Dr Bashabi Fraser

Dr Bashabi Fraser, CBE, HonFASL is an award winning poet, children's writer, editor and academic. She is the recipient of a CBE (2021 The Queen's New Year Honours) for Education (her academic work), culture (poetry) and cultural integration (her bridge building projects linking Scotland and India) and was made Honorary Fellow of the Association of Scottish Studies in 2022. She has been declared Outstanding Woman of Scotland by Saltire Society in 2015. Her work traverses continents in transnational literary projects. She has authored and edited 25 books, published several articles and chapters in academic and creative books/journals and has been widely anthologized as a poet. Her recent publications include *Habitat* (2023), *Lakshmi's Footprints and Paisely Patterns: Perspectives on Scoto-Indian Literary and Cultural Interrelations* (2023), *The Patient Dignity* (2021) and *Rabindranath Tagore* (2019). Bashabi is Professor Emerita of English and Creative Writing, Edinburgh Napier University and Founder Director of Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies (ScoTs). She is also an Honorary Fellow, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Edinburgh, Honorary Fellow of the Association of Scottish Literary Studies (ASLS), Scotland and a Royal Literary Fund Fellow. She is the Chief Editor of the academic and creative peer-reviewed international e-journal, *Gitanjali and Beyond* and on the Editorial Board of several international peer-reviewed journals and is on the Editorial Board of *WritetrsMosaic*, a *Royal Literary Fund division*. She lives in Edinburgh.



The WRVS¹ Volunteer

- to Rita Kharbanda -

The precautionary volunteers who gathered
Together to evacuate, assuage and nurture
At a time when air raids drove fear into a populace
Became the natural providers of sustenance and care
In post-War days, the 'Royal' touch recognising their
Intrepid service, but not letting a hierarchy interrupt
This continuous, undemanding band of peace warriors.

The lassies have driven vans with savouries and desserts
To the housebound, served steaming café lattes to flustered
Visitors at hospital cafes and opened the till at the end of the day
To return the tingling coins and crisp notes to the hospitals' coffer.
It is here that my friend has come, a calm poised presence
Wrapped in a beautiful silk sari, brisk, bright and benign -
She glimpses the surprise in a customer's glance with a little smile.

She has carried the hospitality of a whole nation's heritage
Across the ocean in her being and every Tuesday, she leaves
Her own thriving business to blend in with this nation's dedicated
Nurturers, the whiff of her spice kitchen a put-aside memory for now.
She flits effortlessly between tables, her apron the only uniform this rank-free
Army dons, as her dimpled cheeks turn to the next wheelchair customer.



1 Women's Royal Voluntary Service

Freedom Inherited

Our grandmother clapped with mischievous glee
Signalling her utter victory
As she willed the confining walls
To crumble in panic and fall
Setting our dancing steps free
To trip with lissom liberty.

Stay outside our vision and call
Don't come with your strictures and veil
Our grandmother holds the warm sun's beams
She has beckoned the wind and urged the streams
She has sung to the buds on outstretched boughs
Where they unfurl with grace and glisten and glow
You have lost control, your will and your power
For her spirit reigns as we challenge and dare.





Dr Ketaki Datta

Dr. Ketaki Datta is an Associate Professor of English, Chandernagore College, Chandernagore, Hooghly. Apart from being an academic, she is also a poet, translator and reviewer. She has written two novels *A Bird Alone* and *One Year for Mourning*. She has also done translational works like *Selected Stories of Rabindranath Tagore*, *The Voyage*, *Dhruvaputra*, *Shesh Namaskar* (Sahitya Akademi), *Somewhere Beyond*, *Someplace Else*, *The Value of Woman*. *Sesh Namaskar* and *Oral Stories of the Totos* have been published by Shahitya Akademi. She has written two books of poems namely *Across the Blue Horizon(UK)* and *The Music of Eternity*. Her academic works include *The Indo-Anglian Literatures (Past to Present)*, *New Literatures in English*, *Black and NonBlack Plays of Tennessee Williams*.



Strength: Thy Name is Woman

She could not cry out,
She lost her voice to shout,
She lay burning, as if
Congo or Amazon stuck out
Thousand lolling tongues,
clapping cymbals, adding
Backdrop blues
To the rapist's limitless inhumanity,
Asking all Draupadi's to spring alive,
Throwing gauntlet to all the playboys
of the world,
To have the last feast on the flesh
Of all un-blest damsels,
Who dare step out of the precincts
Of subjugation, playing second fiddle
To MAN so long, so far!

Come woman, thou hast the whole sky,
Cry not, spread wings, give it a try,
Come woman, say that you can accomplish,
Whatever you begin, you can finish,
Come woman, declare that like a river running in spate,
You can bring a deluge, do anything,
from flying a 'plane to rule a state,
Now you are embodiment of power!

Frailty, thy name is not WOMAN,
Strength, thy name is WOMAN instead!



Changing Roles

All day long she had seen the blouses,
All ordered by rich ladies,
Each of them thrust three pieces
To be stitched by Uma, the seamstress.
Uma earns her living by doing it,
Day in, day out for mother - decrepit,
For her purblind father and a sister,
She loves to be the sole breadwinner.

Uma takes care of everyone's need,
Uma daily neglects her own supper,
Uma loves to have her mom, well-fed,
Uma prays for her father's eyesight, to be better.

Her sister is in school, studying,
Her father needs eye-drop for seeing,
Her mother stays on physiotherapy,
She knows no respite, yet she's happy.

Durgapuja is inching nearer,
All attires are lying ready
For her near ones and hosts of customer,
Only Uma is feeling unsteady.
While earthen Uma arrives with alacrity!
Tuberculosis, untreated,
Plays havoc with her life instead.
And now? Gauri has to play her role.
She is still in school, though runs life's rigmarole!





Dr Sutanuka Ghosh Roy

Dr. Sutanuka Ghosh Roy is an Associate Professor of English at Tarakeswar Degree College, The University of Burdwan. She is currently engaged in active research and her areas of interest include Indian English Literature, Postcolonial Literature, Dalit Literature, Gender Studies, etc. She has published widely and presented papers at National and International Seminars. She is a regular contributor to research articles and papers to anthologies, and national and international journals of repute like *Text, Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, Australia, Kervan International Journal of Afro-Asiatic Studies, University of Turin, Italy, Fiar, University of Bielefeld, Germany, Muse India, Setu, Lapiz Lazuli, The Times of India, The Statesman, Life and Legends, Kitaab*, etc. The titles of her books are *Critical Inquiry :Text, Context, and Perspectives, Commentaries: Elucidating Poetry, Rassundari Dasi's Amar Jiban : A Comprehensive Study, Ashprishya (translated into Bengali, a novel by Sharan Kumar Limbale)*. "Opera" is her debutant collection of poetry. She is also a reviewer, a poet, and a critic.



Alphabets

They warned her not to learn the alphabet
for they might bring knowledge
of ancient civilizations
to her warm womb.
A woman's knowledge
can only be kept in Delphi's museum.
She descended the stairs of the ancient earth
to learn the unknown scripts with trembling lips.
Letters formed life's corridor,
carried her to a drop of moonlight
her bubbling lips spoke half-formed words
to the Lone Star!



Beyond Babel

She helps in building houses
she never had one,
sleeps on the railway platform
body bartered for the dream of knitting a haven.
Each brick on her coiled braid
designs a new fabric in her mind's loom.
Each grain of sand the shovel clears becomes
an anchor in the star.
Each lung stiffening bag of cement on her arched back
echoes her flapping wings.
Each word of abuse that validates her,
immerses in the bubbling lips of the yellow Sun.
The sweat and smut on her skin cajole the crescent moon.
Home is beyond Babel.





Dr Jhilaam Chattaraj

Dr Jhilaam Chattaraj is an academic and poet based in Hyderabad, India. She teaches at the Department of English and Foreign Languages, RVBRR Women's College, Hyderabad. She has authored the books, *Noise Cancellation* (poetry), *Corporate Fiction: Popular Culture and the New Writers* and *When Lovers Leave and Poetry Stays* (poetry). Her works have been published in *Mekong Review*, *Calyx*, *Ariel* (Johns Hopkins University), *Colorado Review*, *World Literature Today* Room, *Porridge*, *Not Very Quiet*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, and *Asian Cha* among others. She won the Readomania 'Woman Swag' Poetry Competition in 2022. Her poem 'Sari' was nominated for the Nina Riggs Poetry Award, 2023. She received the CTI Excellence Award in "Literature and Soft Skills Development," 2019 from the Council for Transforming India and the Department of Language and Culture, Government of Telangana, India. Jhilaam is the coordinator of the Hyderabad-based literary club, The Quills Literary Club. She is an editor for *Khabar*, the newsletter of the Hyderabad Literary Festival. Her poetry has been reviewed at *Rain Taxi*, *Hong Kong Review*, *Café Dissensus*, *The Hindu*, *the Statesman*, and *the News Minute*, among others. She has been invited to several literary festivals, and events as a delegate, judge, and speaker such as The Druryuls Literature Festival, The Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, IIT Hyderabad, Manipal University, MCR HRD Center for Social Security Studies, Valley of Words Literature Festival, Nilgiris Library Ooty, Indialogue Foundation, Turkey and several others. Apart from teaching, writing, and reviewing books, Jhilaam is also interested in the art of interviewing. She studies interviews as sources of literary criticism or craft criticism; interviews are not a mere exchange of ideas between two people over a cup of coffee but a performance, a gateway to enter the secret world of artists, a witness to the process of creation. Jhilaam has interviewed several poets, writers, painters, and actors; such as Meena Alexander, Sudeep Sen, Arundhati Subramaniam, Tishani Doshi, Damodar Mauzo, Kelly Dorji, Sravanthi Juluri, Madhavi Menon among others. Presently, she is working on a book of interviews and a book of poems.

DURGAPUR

"The smoke-serpents were indifferent to who was lost or found, who turned out bad or good"

– Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Chapter XXXIII

A shadow rises towards the sky.
It blackens colonies of iron and steel.

Durgapur – Allen Stein's mother ship
of mineral harmony.

Dust-thick sunlight
breaks on boots.

Factory-furnaced bones
carry the heat of red metals–

they wheel a nation's geography.
Each night, helmet-men return

to square, fenced-houses,
ripening under the red blaze of the Gulmohar.

Parks, alleys, boulevards
bow to a routine – the delight of middle-class decency.

Many have never known,
life beyond carbon-labour.

But once in a while,
an April Wheeler

tears down the ribs of silence,
and screams –

"are artists and writers the only people
entitled to lives of their own?"*

SARI

Six yards of soft wetness
soak the forenoon sun.

Cotton expanse in powder blue,
filigreed edges in faux gold

puff like sails in sea wind –
a voyage into endurance.

My mother's sari is a scripture,
a flag carrying countries of household truths:

she, in bed with children,
she, scrubbing the mossy bathroom walls,

she, in kitchen, smashing
a cockroach to its end.

There's love and violence
that only the pleats of the sari know.

Now, so much depends
on the bee-loud-brilliance of the sari

drifting in fragrant droplets into the air–
claiming its share of radiance

from farmers, weavers and men–
their curious figurines

melting into a fabric – ripe with moisture
and a million perforations.



**Revolutionary Road*, Richard Yates.
First published by the 'Durgapur Review', 2023.

First Published by 'The West Trestle Review', 2020.
Nominated for the Nina Riggs Poetry Award, 2023



Sufia Khatoon

Shortlisted for Yuva Puraskar 2020 and 2022, Sufia Khatoon is a multi-lingual performance poet, artist, literary translator and facilitator. Awarded with Suprabha and Santiranjan Sengupta IPPL Poetry Book Award 2023, She is the Co-Founder of Rhythm Divine Poets community Kolkata and the Editor of EKL Review. She was nominated in 100 Inspiring Indian Muslim Women from West Bengal by RBTC. She has authored "Death in the Holy Month" shortlisted for Yuva Puraskar Sahitya Akademi 2020-22 and Ger-mi-na-tion (Longlisted Ataglata Bangalore Literature Prize 23). She is also the recipient of the Amio Santa Award 2017 for her philanthropic initiatives. She is a PR, Media and Event curator by profession. She is working on the 1 Million Peace Poetry Prayer Flag Installation project aimed to unify the cause of peace through poetry and people. She has presented her poems in The Festival of Letters, Yuva Sahiti (Delhi) and Avishkar Young Writer's Festival 19 (Dibrugarh), Eastern Regional Writer's Meet 22 by Sahitya Akademi, Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 19-24, Bangalore Poetry Festival 22, Chandrabhaga Poetry Festival 22, Newtown Bookfair Poetry Festival 20-24 and Kala Ghoda Arts Festival '23 respectively. Her works have appeared in Indian Literature Journal, The Outlook India, Ainanagar Journal, Bengaluru Review, The Alipore Post, Mad Swirl, Indian Periodical, TMYS Review, Narrow Road Review, Poetry Dialogue, Kolkata Cadence Anthology 21, Shape of a Poem Anthology 21, Witness:Poetry of Dissent Anthology 21, The Best of Mad Swirl 2020 Anthology, 100 Poems are Not Enough and forthcoming anthology like North Indian Language Anthology by Sahitya Akademi, etc.



Exposed Skin

Mother warns me –
the men in my family and the men outside
should never [see]
my breasts, thighs, butt, navel, vagina
and anything of a B O D Y owned by OTHERS.

She has never known
what it feels to have sunlight fall on exposed skin
and water soaking in its hollowed grounds.

Jhang dhik raha hai
tangein dikh rahi hai
seena dhak kar chalo
maan ko mar kar chalo
baajuon ko niche mod kar chalo
awaaz ko apni thodkar chalo

Without the coolness of breeze on skin
inside a home or out in the public
hateful lumps grow on dampened,
worn out, neglected and naked
B O D I E S like me.

I * am = a Body
Body of * plastered mould = woman

Don't dry your washed bras that hold the free fall on the windows.

Don't even think of displaying the panties on the balcony
on sunny afternoons that redden the butt cheeks
and line the inner thighs with rashes and pain.

Suppress your
B O D Y --

Mother never taught me that my B O D Y is meant to be as it is –
loved, desired, changing, aging, withering and degenerating as exposed skin.



A Body in a White Dressing Room

Watching a relative's 22 year old daughter
feeding her infant in a white dressing room
on her naked, bulged and stretched stomach
still shedding the aftershock of carrying a life
inside her body

I was shaken –

Brown stripped, burnt out, slightly bluish skeleton
reflecting the image on the mirror surface
with the hungry wails that glowed a halo
on the sign

//The cycle of sacrificing 'a body'//
in neon colours.

She shares her disgust every time
she looks at the mirror and
sighs and sobs –

"I didn't have a choice

I didn't want to be a mother"

before she tries a loose fitting top to hide her B O D Y.

I kept silent –

feeling the eyes tracing the mouth of the suckling baby
on her titled bosoms to a disfigured body
in a white dressing room.





Kalyani Thakur Charal

Kalyani Thakur Charal (born 1965) is a Dalit feminist poet from India writing in the Bengali language. She adopted the name 'Charal', signifying her membership in the marginalised Matua community, after facing discrimination on the grounds of caste for it. She completed a bachelor's degree in Commerce and began working as a clerk in the Indian Railways after qualifying through an exam, later resigning after experiencing discrimination and harassment based on caste. Kalyani Thakur Charal has published four volumes of poetry: *Dhorlei Juddho Sunischi*, *Je Meye Adhar Gone*, *Chandalinir Kabita*, and *Chandalini Bhone*. In addition to these, she has published a volume of critical essays titled *Chandalinir Bibriti*, and a collection of short stories, and an autobiography, *Ami Keno Charal Likhi (Why I Write Charal)*. Her autobiography, as well as her essay and poetry collections titled *Chandalini* (tr: *The Untouchable Woman*) are widely popular, containing accounts of the discrimination that she faced for reasons of caste, while working in government service. In 2017 she won the Sparrow Literary Award for her autobiography. She edited the volume *Dalit Lekhika : Women's Writing from Bengal*. Her work has been received to critical acclaim, with one essay on Dalit women's writing from Bengal applauding her "strong and powerful voice". Her adoption of the pen-name 'Charal' has also been praised for 'recovering space' for Dalit writers.

জুতো সমাজ

পা যেমন শক্ত চামড়ার নতুন
জুতোর মধ্যে অতি সন্তর্পণে
জায়গা করে নেয়

ও মেয়ে সমাজটাও তেমনি
টাইট জুতোর ভিতরটার মতো
তোমাকে খুব সাবধানে
জায়গা করে নিতে হবে

কপাল ভাল তো ব্যান্ড-এড্
মার্ক বাবা ভাই পেয়ে
যেতে পার

নচেৎ এই হার্ড লেদার
সমাজেই তোমাকে ফোস্কা
কড়া নিয়ে টিকে থেকে
পার হতে হবে আরও
কয়েক শতাব্দী



Shoe Society

As the foot cautiously create
a space inside a new,
hard leather shoe

Hey Girl, soceity has a similar
stiff interior of a tight shoe.
You better build a nest of yours, carefully.

If you are fortunate enough
a father or a brother might protect
you like a band-aid

Else, in this hard leathery society
You'll have to hang on
for centuries
with blisters and brittle skin.

Translated by Dr Antara Mukherjee



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The Department is extremely proud of its final semester students – Utsa Chatterjee, Arunima Das, Sayan Mukherjee and Kanchan Kumar Das – who have been passionate learners, improvisers, and creative constructors of this exquisite piece of art.

Finally, the efforts taken by the Head of Department, Dr Anindita Chatterjee and her team, Dr Nilanjana Chatterjee (Das), Dr Somrita Dey (Mondal), Prof. Sunrita Chakraborty and Prof. Samprikta Pal, in collaborating with Dr Antara Mukherjee, to prepare the Digital Wall Magazine is exemplary for any Department of Higher Education where, despite individualities, all the six faculty members can unite to create 'a miracle of rare device'.

Core Team Members



Kanchan Kumar Das

Sayan Mukherjee

Dr Antara Mukherjee

Utsa Chatterjee

Arunima Das

Me, You, Them, All, Inclusion debars Fall



*Department of English
Durgapur Govt. College*