



MATHRUBHUMI INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL OF LETTERS 2023



A century of thinking ahead

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The federal formula

Is federalism as a concept static? Is there any real strategy for striking a balance between national and sub-national needs?

A discussion on 'Federalism' at MBIFL on Saturday, featuring Shashi Tharoor, MP, and Palanivel Thiagarajan explored how federal political systems faced new political challenges.

Thiagarajan asserted that centralized power allocation was destabilizing the federal structure of the country. "Even though the preamble of the Constitution says that India is a union of states, the majority of the power was allocated to the Union, which is very rare in large countries. We claim to be a federal state but in reality, we are not," he said.

He questioned the role of the Finance Commission's recommendations on the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and the States. "What happens if all funds go to the poorest states? More roads, hospitals and job creation will come up. Then why it is not happening in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh?"

Talking about the 2021 census that was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Tharoor said that when it was done, Kerala would record negative population growth, a first in India.



Palanivel Thiagarajan

"Current census figures indicate that the fertility rate of southern states is going down while that of northern states is going up," he said.

Referring to the Centre's plan to increase the strength of Lok Sabha, Tharoor said, "We have 543 MPs at present, but no meaningful debates

are happening in the lower house of Parliament. Democracy will be reduced when the number of MPs increases."

Talking about the Goods and Services Tax Council, Thiagarajan said, "Every State has equal voting rights in the GST Council. But it is destructive to the quality of decision-making in the body. For example, North Eastern states and Bihar get two-thirds of their budget from the Centre while Tamil Nadu and other Southern states get a quarter of the budget from the Centre. In this scenario, if the Council decides to raise taxes then one may suspect a conflict of interest."

On the aggressive stand of Tamil Nadu on federal issues,

Shashi Tharoor

especially the imposition of Hindi, he said, "Mother tongue is the core of Tamil identity. We are ready to accept Tamil as our first language and English as a second language given its global acceptance but why should we learn Hindi? The fact is that English can't be taught in the Hindi heartland and that's why Hindi is being forced on South India. Moreover, States were recognized on a linguistic basis." ▶

▶ In federal political systems, the boundaries between different layers of identities keep shifting owing to a wide variety of pulls and pressures. Shashi Tharoor and Palanivel Thiagarajan speak



Programme
schedule



‘India has to find its own idea of nationhood’

Notions of nationalism advanced by Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru have not made waves



Academic Makarand Paranjape has said that a divided polity and civil society constitute a domain more congenial to fomenting extremism.

Addressing a session at MBIFL on Saturday, he said that ideology in politics increased polarization in society.

“Democracy is more polarized today. There’s no way of understanding debates or ongoing tension within the country,” he added.

He hailed Mathrubhumi’s contribution to shaping national consciousness.

He said that print capitalism created an imagined community. “Somebody living in Kerala can read and feel what’s happening in West Bengal. Imagination can bring something into being. Imagination is romantic but capitalism is not. There’s tension inside the imagination of India,” he said.

He said that, initially, two types of nationalism existed in India – Tagore’s nationalism and Gandhiji’s nationalism. “Tagore was

vocal against Japanese imperialism and criticized Japan when it invaded the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the Second World War. He was a proponent of civilized nationalism and his nationalism had a linguistic identity. Tagore was heckled by Ghadar Party members in San Francisco for his anti-revolutionary stand. On the other hand, Gandhiji’s nationalism revolved around ‘Swaraj, Hindu-Muslim unity, freedom without violent appraisal against the British,” he added.

He said that after the failure of nationalism put forward by Tagore and Gandhi, Nehruvian nationalism came into existence but it failed to make an impact. “Nehru died in 1964 as a broken man because of the Chinese invasion. He refused the United Nations Security Council membership and refused the merger offer from Nepal citing the communist regime in that country. He made blunders on Kashmir,” he added.

“Indira Gandhi’s nationalism tilted India towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War but the leftist, statist, secularist nationalism collapsed with the Emergency while the Sonia Gandhi-Manmohan Singh regime witnessed scam after scam,” he pointed out.

He urged the people to be vigilant against any move to curb freedom of expression. 

‘Right-wing forces kill scientific thinking’

Democracy is in real danger when politics marries religion

CP(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury has said that we are living in an age where myths and beliefs are presented as history.

He was speaking on ‘Reimagining India – how Left politics shapes India’s democracy’ at MBIFL on Saturday.

“It creates a false impression and the only remedy is to improve scientific thinking. Prime Minister Narendra Modi refers to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in the context of history. Test tube babies are referred to when talking about Gandhari in the Mahabharata,” he said.

He said that the present situation in the country was alarming, “Critics

of the government are put behind bars. The imprisonment of journalist Siddique Kappan is an example. The Directorate of Enforcement has filed around 6,000 cases since the BJP-led government came into power at the Centre. Details of the cases are not available. In these cases, the conviction rate is less than one per cent.”

Attacking the Narendra Modi government, he said, “Right to freedom is at stake. They are trying to destroy the social fabric. Secular democracy, social equity, national sovereignty and federalism are under threat.”

He added that democracy was in danger when politics mingled with religion.

“Secular democracy is the need of the hour.”

He said that the attempt to make India a Hindu nation was destroying the basic values of the Constitution. Referring to the role of Left parties in Indian politics, he said, “Left parties participated in the freedom struggle, played a crucial role in the creation of Kerala, united Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The struggle against the Union government’s policies is going strong.”

He said that the media could play a key role in reshaping India into a secular republic. “In North India, the media is spitting venom. Let’s hope that the role played by media in Kerala will make them rethink.” 



Reimagining India

‘Reintroduce women’s reservation bill in Parliament’

Gender equality is still a distant dream for India



Mahua Moitra, MP, has demanded the enactment of the long-pending Women’s Reservation Bill that seeks the reservation of one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies for women.

She was speaking on ‘Reimagining India – women in power politics’ at MBIFL on Saturday.

“According to the U.N. women parliament leadership report, only 26 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women. Five countries have 50 per cent or more women in Parliament while 27 countries have 40 per cent representation of women. Only 28 countries have women serving as Heads of State/ Government. Although India is headed by a women President, the representation of women in Parliament is just 12 per cent. The most worrying part is that it would take another 130 years to achieve gender equality,” she said.

She said that after the implementation of the Panchayati Raj, 50 per cent reservation for women had been guaranteed in local bodies but the question was, “Do we need a law to teach about gender equality in a civilized society?”

Asked about her fierce arguments in Parliament, she said, “I neither carry any political legacy nor have any business interest, so I am not scared of central agencies. I will continue to raise relevant issues in the House.” 

Nandy's verse: a handy ready-reckoner



DIALOGUE

Here's an imaginary conversation at MBIFL

Ahem! Let me clear my throat before I begin. Did you hear that Pritish Nandy is dropping by?" asked a literature lover to another, bouncing with excitement.

"Really?" replied the other, eyes as wide as saucers. "That's fantastic news. He's not just a multi-talented maven but also a renaissance man: journalist, editor, politician and a celebrated poet!"

"I'm feeling creative, mind if I try my hand at a limerick for the occasion:

*There's a man named Nandy, with talent so grand
His pen writes with flair, a sight to stand
A poet, editor and a politician too
In every field, he shines like the morning dew
His words bring joy, and light up the land.*

"I'm not sure if he'll appreciate the quality of your rhyme scheme. Anyway, tell me about his literary works?"

"Well, Nandy has a literary legacy as rich as a treasure trove. He's the author of 40 books of poetry, including translations of poems from Bengali, Urdu, Punjabi and even Sanskrit. And did you know he put his spin on the classic Isha Upanishad in 2014? That's like reinventing the wheel!"

"Impressive," said the first, nodding appreciatively. "But I heard he took a break from poetry for a while?"

"Yes, he took a 20-year hiatus, but then returned with a vengeance in 2010 with 'Again' and 2012 with 'Stuck on 1/Forty'. It's like he never left!"

"Wow. And now he's speaking at MBIFL on 'Hard News vs Infotainment'? I can't wait to hear what he has to say. It's like a superhero origin story!"

"Me neither. And speaking of Nandy the poet, did you know that his first book of poems 'Of Gods and Olives' was published back in 1967? That's older than some of the trees in this room!"

"No way! What was his poetry like back then?"

"Well, it was ahead of its time, like a time traveller. It was characterized by its modernity, urbanity and cultural diversity. His poems often explored complex themes like love, loss, longing and political and social commentary. He was known for his innovative use of language, blending Indian imagery and references with a contemporary sensibility. It's like a fusion dance of words!"

"That sounds amazing. And what did others have to say about his poetry?"

"Shubhoranjan Dasgupta wrote, 'Let alone the

medium, no critic asked the more crucial question: Can we label this poetry? And faced with no opposition our predecessors continued rolling out their imbecile lines which either celebrated the beauty of buttercups or the profundity of the idea of reincarnation. Indeed it was considered a social grace in those days of pre-independence to refer to the fragile euphony of Toru Dutt, the monotonous onomatopoeia of Manmohan Ghosh and the resounding ludicrousness of Sri Aurobindo's bugle blasts.' It's like a critique of a critique!"

"Interesting. And what did Nandy have to say about his own poetry?"

"In 'Again', he wrote,

*Poetry always starts with words
When words start to hurt,
we pause
regain our innocence and start again
But this time it's not poetry
Its life writing itself out
in a strange unfinished way
What you may choose to call"
an autobiography of sorts.*

*"That makes me feel creative again. -
I want to rewrite my limerick.*

*There's a poet named Nandy
Whose words make readers quite handy
With themes so diverse
And verse that immerse
He leaves all his critics in a trance, so dandy."*

BY BRITISH NANDY

About Kolkata

Years ago, I left you
Kolkata and came away:
no, not to another city
nor another home.

About his father

Baba left
to the beating of drums
Strapped to a hospital bed
frail gaunt eyes closed: the noisy cymbals
drowning out my anger, my restlessness
For a week I had waited
for him to die, knowing all the while
that every lie I had lived with
(God,
love,
hope,
faith,
trust)
will go with him and cleanse me
once and for all.
No. I have never believed since.

About his mother

How is it ma
that I remember you only on your wheelchair
fighting a failing body
and memories that had long escaped?
I know how strong you once were
as you gripped my hand
and picked me up in the bus to school.
Why am I still so angry
to see you gone?

The Wales Wordsmith

WELL, WELL, WALES

Megan Angharad Hunter weaves stories of dystopian futures, fantastical worlds and sci-fi adventures

Megan Angharad Hunter has emerged as a fierce advocate and author, exploring the complexities of mental health, disability, and sexuality in her works aimed at young adults.

Her appearance at the MBIFL celebrated youthful ideas and new voices.

Her pen weaves stories of dystopian futures, fantastical worlds and sci-fi adventures, capturing the imagination of audiences everywhere.

Her debut novel, 'Tu ôl i'r Awyr', takes readers on an emotional journey, following the lives of Deian and Anest, two unforgettable teenagers whose stories are told with a poignant and masterly touch. Her writing, which seamlessly blends tears and laughter, leaves a

lasting impact, etched in the memories of those who have been touched by her words.

Hailing from Dyffryn Nantlle, in North Wales, Megan holds a Bachelor's degree in Welsh and Philosophy from Cardiff University and is not afraid to experiment and push the boundaries of writing, inspired by her father's fearless approach to artistic creation.

"Every story I fall in love with, every script that I listen to, has an impact on my writing, urging me to constantly improve and take bold choices," she says. Currently, she is co-organizing a creative writing retreat for disabled writers, hoping to shed light on the numerous challenges faced by the growing youth in a capitalist society. ▶



‘Ignite your inner fire to fly high’

DARE TO FLY

▶ G. R. Gopinath says that the first step to success is dreaming big

Vision is the art of seeing the invisible.

Captain G. R.

Gopinath's magnetic vision paved the way for his roles as an Indian army officer, an organic farmer, a pioneer of low-cost airlines and a writer.

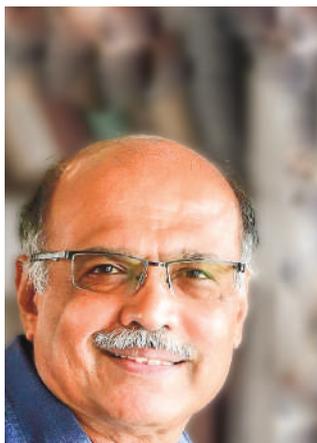
“In all of us, there is a power that is bottled up deep inside. You will not know it till you attempt it,” he said, at a session at MBIFL on Saturday.

He joined the army, served in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and retired at the age of 28.

“You need to have an idea, you need to have people to buy your dream and you need to be obsessed with the dream to the point of madness.

Somebody will give you the money because they have the money and you have the brains,” he has said.

In 1997, he founded a helicopter service as India's first private charter company. The tagline, he recalls, was:



‘If you show us a spot on the map, we will get you there.’

“There were pilots and engineers here without jobs and I realized there wasn't a single helicopter company in South India,” he added.

In 2003, he founded Air Deccan, India's first low-cost airline.

He said that he sold Air Deccan to Kingfisher though it was a success, owing to the pressure from the investors.

“Kingfisher Airlines should

not have closed. It's not just about Vijay Malya. It was also about the employees,” he observed.

About the fictionalization of his life story in the movie ‘Soorai Potru’, he said, “When a biopic is made, the director would take a lot of liberties. Otherwise, it would become a documentary.”

He praised Sudha Kongara, the director of the biopic, for creating Bommi, inspired by his wife, a strong character.

“In movies, the hero doesn't want the heroine to shine. But what Sudha did was fantastic. To support your husband's dream, you don't have to erase your dreams,” he said.

He also spoke about the hardships faced by his wife as an entrepreneur in the bakery business. Today, at MBIFL, Aparna Balamurali, who enacted Bommi in the movie, will take part in a session with Gopinath. ▶

- “The power of the metaphor is that in a single flash, the entire idea is revealed.”
- “When you start something you cannot give yourself a time frame for success. You can't say: if it doesn't work out in six months I will give up. Your only task is to keep doing whatever it takes to achieve the goal.”
- “Successful business people became successful because they took risks. The biggest risk is that once successful, they stop taking risks.”

- “Where others saw gloom, I saw light or lit a candle.”
- “Courage is the counterpoint of fear. Courage appears when in war or business, one is indeed scared.”
- “Sorrow and self-pity consume enormous quantities of energy. If you only can desist from feeling victimized by fate and look for a new solution instead, not only would you conserve old energies but at the same time also feel the surge of the new. New hope is kindled in the process.”

- G. R. Gopinath

‘Gender has no place in military’



▶ Lt Col Dr Sonia Cheria, the author of ‘Indian Rainbow’, speaks to Tiffany Maria Brar, social activist and trainer for visually challenged people



What inspired you to join the military?

From childhood, I yearned to be different. Reading authors such as Kovilan, I wanted to join the military. While doing my house surgency, I applied for an army job. But I could not pursue it due to my marriage. Later, my husband, who is an army officer, encouraged me and made me realize my dream of being a part of the army.

What took you into writing despite having a busy schedule as a military doctor?

I have always been a voracious reader. I began to write at the age of seven. While working in the army, I used to jot down my impressions about people and situations I came across.

What were the challenges you encountered as a woman while working in the military?

I count my blessings. They came in the form of my family. Usually, women officers are given special consideration and are allowed to take along their breastfeeding infants. Of course, not during operations. There were other challenges. Toilets were not women-friendly, especially

in desert areas. However, our colleagues were cooperative. An army is a place where gender equality is a must. You are first and foremost a soldier. Your gender only comes next.

Which is the most touching experience of your military career?

The saddest experience I can recall is when we were all getting ready to celebrate the famous festival Karwachauth, a festival where a woman fasts and prays for her husband's welfare and long life. The wife of an officer asked me to join the festivities. I was adorning her with jewels. Her husband had gone on an air expedition. I then received a phone call that her husband had been killed in a helicopter crash. Breaking the news to her was not easy.

As a brave officer, what is your message to women in society?

There are many brave women in the Indian army. Nothing should stop women from chasing their dreams. We have had women pilots who fly to the most challenging zones, including the Siachen Glacier. Gender has no place in the military. ▶

Women in new fictional narrative

Featuring Futhi Ntghingla, Khadija Bajaber and Anandita Ghose

@ Bamboo Groove

🕒 1 p.m.

South African journalist-turned-fiction writer Futhi Ntghingla has made a mark with stories focussing on women and marginalised sections of society while Kenyan poet Khadija Bajaber's writings are rooted in her identity and culture. The debut novel of Anandita Ghose, 'The Illuminated', is an interesting take on the universality of feminism from a uniquely Indian perspective.



BuZZ



The Future of Indian Economy
Palanivel

Thiagarajan

@ Nishagandhi

🕒 10 a.m.

Indian politician and Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Palanivel Thiagarajan shares his views on the challenges faced by the Indian economy.



Saundarya Lahari

Mani Rao talks to Alka Pande

@ Under the tree

🕒 4 p.m.

Mani Rao has authored three poetry collections and three books in translation from Sanskrit including 'Saundarya Lahari', a lyrical translation of the popular Sanskrit hymn, 'Saundarya Lahari', celebrating the power and beauty of Shakti.

A dancer's musings

Mallika Sarabhai, Preeti Das

@ Under the Tree

🕒 2 p.m.

Mallika Sarabhai, renowned classical dancer, used her work for social change. She has created numerous stage productions that have raised awareness, highlighted crucial issues, and advocated change, several of which have toured internationally and throughout India.



Gained in translation

Mini Krishnan, J. Devika and Gopika Jadeja

@ Festival Hall

🕒 3 p.m.

Two translators and one academician talk. While Mini Krishnan has edited 135 translations from 14 languages, Gopika Jadeja is committed to translating writings from marginalized communities. J. Devika is a social critic, academician and translator from Kerala.



Translation, the bridge

Featuring Megan Angharad Hunter, Beatriz Chivite Ezkieta and Raquel Santanera

@ Festival Hall

🕒 4 p.m.

The trio describes how translation widens the horizons of literature in Welsh, Basque and Catalan languages.

The stories I must tell

Kabir Bedi, Saraswathy Nagarajan

@ Mathrubhumi Hall

🕒 10 a.m.

Internationally acclaimed actor Kabir Bedi talks about his career that spanned three continents, in three media – film, TV and theatre.



The Asian Wave

Featuring Lawrence Ypil, Prof. Lee, Malachi Edwin Vethamani

@ Poetree

🕒 10 a.m.

A discussion on cultural identity.



Can'ya Kenya?

■ HADITHI

Kenyan artiste Mshai Mwongola captivates and entrances us with her spellbinding stories. She weaves tales that enrich our hearts and spark our imagination



Mshai Mwongola is a master of the art of storytelling. From a young age, she, a native of Kenya, has been enamoured with the magic of crafting and retelling tales to anyone who would listen. Her siblings and friends served as her earliest audience and she soon discovered her talent for performance, donning many hats as a teacher, actor, director and storyteller. Mwongola considers herself an oratorist, a practitioner of spoken communication and a performance scholar who uses her expertise in teaching, research and theater to create meaningful conversations through the power of storytelling. For her, stories are the fabric of our world, a way to delve deeper into our understanding of it. They broaden our perspectives.

Her storytelling style is a fusion of improvisation, theatrics and embellishment, influenced by the indigenous performance traditions of Africa. Storytelling, to her, is a way

to reflect her philosophy, engage with ideas and spark collective thinking on important issues. She laments the fact that the arts often take a back seat to the sciences, reflected in the allocation of educational budgets in Kenya. In 2017, she co-founded Orature Collective, a group that combines artistry, activism and analysis to promote intellectual growth in communities, civic organizations and academic institutions.

She holds a doctorate in Performance Studies from Northwestern University in the United States, a Masters in Creative Arts from the University of Melbourne and a Bachelor of Education from Kenyatta University in Kenya. ▶

'Hadithi' means "Stories", in Swahili

Why do youth leave Kerala in droves?

■ ROADBLOCKS TO PROGRESS

Nothing can help Kerala more than a change in the existing political model



Youth seems to have lost faith in Kerala, V. K. Mathews, founder and Executive Director of IBS Software, has said.

Addressing a session at MBIFL on Saturday, he said that Kerala needed to seriously address the talent drain it faced.

"A good number of talented youth are leaving the State. A recent survey quoted them as saying that they lost hope in Kerala. Is there anything more disastrous than losing hope?" he asked.

He said that India was poised to take a major leap in the next 25 years.

"By 2047, India is expected to be the third largest economy. The investment flowing into the country testifies to this. From October 2019 to March 2022, India

received 169 billion dollars of investment. Of this, Kerala's share is just 0.42 percent," he added.

He stated that Kerala still carried the tag of being investor-unfriendly. "This means fewer jobs are created. The burgeoning trade deficit is another concern. We are a major consumer state with very less production. Our imports in inter-state trade stand at Rs 1,55,000 crores for 2021-22 whereas our inter-state exports remain at Rs 55,000 crores. This means, there is a trade deficit of Rs 1 lakh crores," he said.

This seriously affects the socioeconomic prospects of the State.

How do we address these issues? How do we bring hope to thousands of youth? He suggested three major changes.

"The first is a change in the existing political model. Our political leaders should address the realities of the state and keep aside the 'opposing game' model of politics. Then we need a service model change where a public-private partnership can be exercised for better implementation of projects and welfare schemes. A role change in governance is also needed. The government should focus on developing infrastructure, maintaining law and order and creating a seamless system for better governance rather than distracting itself by manufacturing soap and electricity, which could be done by private companies," he said. ▶

Literary leaves of change

ECO-ELOQUENCE



HARMONY WITH NATURE: Green material has been used for constructing temporary sheds and booths for MBIFL

Here, literature meets sustainable practices. The Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters has turned the page to sustainability by strictly following green protocols to minimize its impact on the environment.

"We have tried to follow green protocols as much as possible," said M. V. Shreyams Kumar, Managing Director of Mathrubhumi and chairman of MBIFL. "I won't say we've achieved our goals cent per cent. There are limitations, but we do our best. Two editions ago, we initiated our green initiatives. There are thousands of people coming in every day, but you won't see any plastic here. Even the vendors use steel plates, cups and glasses. We took a connection from the Kerala State Electricity Board to ensure that we do not run generators. Generators are only kept as backups. Earlier, we realized that generators drank up to 15,000 litres of fuel over a few days. This emits too much carbon."

The MBIFL's instructions to its participants and workers are clear. Reduce waste by using recyclable materials, such as paper cups and encourage attendees to bring their own water bottles. Use digital resources, such as digital tickets and e-programs, to minimize paper waste. Encourage carpooling, public transportation, or biking to reduce emissions from transportation.

"We try not to bring in single-use plastic here. Of course,

The Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters leads the way with green protocols



M. V. Shreyams Kumar



M. S. Mayura



M. S. Devika

there are plastic chairs and a few other things. But such plastic is used the way it is supposed to be. We give bags to our delegates that are made out of

used sarees and bedsheets. These sarees undergo rigorous cleaning before they are stitched into bags. We provide glass bottles for delegates as soon as they enter the premises. It is available for Rs 50 each. We have stalls that provide water and buttermilk. The bottles may be returned and the cash collected back. Carpooling is done for our guests who come from the same places and I must say that our guests are cooperative," said M. S. Mayura, MBIFL Director.

Efforts have been made to install energy-efficient lighting and air conditioning to reduce energy consumption.

"We are trying our best to avoid non-recyclable plastic here. Even the venues are created in an eco-friendly way...the backdrops of the venues are made of cloth. There is a very efficient housekeeping team that manages and disposes of the waste at timely intervals. The dustbins are made of wood. Doing such things, of course, increases our expenses but we're committed to doing what we believe in," said M. S. Devika, MBIFL Director.

Future editions may include more workshops or panels on environmental sustainability to raise awareness.

"The 'story bags' is the best example I can think of to represent our green protocol. Reducing waste is also an important means to achieve our green goals," said Renjini Menon, Creative Director, MBIFL. ▶

All De

HUNGER FOR LIFE

She was called a national treasure by author Amitav Ghosh. Shobhaa De indeed is.

She attacks cherished beliefs and notions. She has popularised a new fusion of language known as 'Hinglish'.

She arrived at MBIFL in the traditional wear, set-mundu, "as a tribute to the beautiful textile traditions of Kerala". Her memoir, 'Insatiable: My Hunger for Life', came out in book stores in January 2023.

'Searching for Anuradha' was the initial title concept for the book. As it was having philosophical connotations, it was discarded. 'Insatiable', as the title suggests is about her zest for life. It is written as a stream-of-consciousness narrative and it marks her 75th birthday.

While talking about her desi and individualistic style she said, "The Stardust way of expressing, of using colloquialisms, street speak, slang and making it a part of a conversation which is in English, glossy... Ten years of 'Stardust' later, it went mainstream and the advertising



Shobhaa De offers useful lessons on Chutnefying English. Samajh gaya?

people picked it up and the mainstream newspapers too." Most people grew up reading Shobhaa De as she is a best-selling author, a founder of three magazines and a contributor to many newspapers.

She also gives us examples of words in Hindi that has no literal translations because they are an amalgamation of languages, "It is what is called Hinglish because there's a lot of Hindi in it. But I also use a lot of Marathi and a lot of Gujarati. For example, in a word like Jhakaas, there's no equivalence, no translation which captures that Jhakaas," she said. "For

me, language is something very fluid and something that you must be able to play with and make your own. Claim it as your own way of self-expression because language is exactly that," she said.

When talking about language, she used the metaphor of a river, "It's like a river that's flowing through many lands and it picks up from every shore. And it picks up words and picks up nuances and if you can pick those up yourself and use them in your writing, I think it enriches the English we grew up learning, which was very rigid and it's an English that no one ever uses." ▶

BY DE

Worse, I didn't permit myself to think, "No!" My first reaction was to say yes to plans. And then fret. "Why the hell did I put my foot into this?" I would ask myself. Sometimes, it was easy to make an excuse and get out. Sometimes, I was stuck. Today, I first say, "No," and then weigh the options. Earlier, I felt people would judge me and say, "What a bitch! Who does she think she is?" Soon, I figured, those sorts of people would say, "What a bitch," regardless! Even if I did turn up and was at

my charming best. These days I get to the point very quickly. If the venue is too far (any event that requires more than thirty minutes of travel time is out), and the people inviting me are not blood relatives, the answer is "Nyet." Ditto for requests to address various social service organisations. — *Seventy and to hell with it*

Even as I took a long, hard look at some of the obvious downsides (Q: 'What are the three things keeping India

down? A: Corruption, corruption and corruption.'). I still felt the upsides (Q: 'What is so fantastic about the India story? A: People, people and people.'). tilted the scales in our favor." — *Superstar India: From Incredible to Unstoppable*

God had the males of the world neatly divided: the can-dos and the no-can-dos. To that, he'd added a third category: 'the gandus'. Very few men would make it to the can-do category." — *Sultry Days*



Venu Rajamony
Indian diplomat and historian
Nehru was not a perfect man, there are many mistakes that he made and for us, in Kerala, the unforgivable mistake that he made was perhaps the dismissal of the EMS government in 1957, which was one of the first instances of the central government encroaching into State powers and arbitrarily dismissing an elected government.



Meena Kandasamy
Social activist and writer
I think oppression comes in cycles.



Purushottam Agrawal
Indian writer
Had Nehru been a perfect man, he would not be interesting to me...Perfect men do not make history, they make good people, good husbands, good office workers but not historical thinkers.



Madhu Raghavendra
Poet
I think all of us have poetry in us and we always carry it.



Rochelle Potkar
Writer
I never leave my gaze from relationships and love. Somehow love also came into politics.



Saad Bin Jung
Former Indian cricketer
The whole meaning of wildlife conservation is the dialogue where every single living creature has an equal right to speak.



Sneha Shah
Psychologist and author
We feel our highs and lows very intensely. Being a psychologist, the advantage is that I know quickly to go and ask for help. I don't try to sort everything on my own.



Alexandra Buchler
Literary curator, translator and editor
When you talk about Europe colonizing the world, Europe itself is not homogeneous.



A. S. Dulat
Former Special Director of the Indian Intelligence Bureau and former Secretary of the R & AW
Everybody talks and it's best to talk, it's best to keep the engagement going on. Talk more to your enemies than to your friends.



Beatriz Chivite Ezquieta
Poet
I speak and write English, Spanish and Mandarin but my roots are in Basque culture... that's the reason why I started to write.

'I like quietly strong women'

NEW PROMISES

Jaishree Misra's novels provide an insight into the reality of what it means to be a woman

"My marriage ended today," is the opening line of Jaishree Misra's novel, 'Ancient Promises' (2000). It catapulted her to the limelight.

"I wrote it in a period of my life when I was actually very depressed because a number of things had happened," recalled Jaishree, at a session at MBIFL on Saturday.

She had quit her glittering job at the BBC when she conceived the idea of writing the book, "I felt I was the only person in the world who wouldn't have a job".

"The force and velocity with which it ('Ancient Promises') came out, was something that I've never been able to replicate with any other book," she says. The novel was completed in just three months. She has authored eight novels so far, and her major works include 'Rani', 'A Scandalous Secret', 'Secrets and Lies' and 'Secrets and Sins'. Her historical fictional novel, 'Rani', which is based on the life of Rani Lakshmi Bai was banned in various parts of India. Asked about what she felt then, she said she was terrified. "Times have changed. I would have been in a lot



more trouble. I don't think it would have been just an Uttar Pradesh-centric ban, had this book come out more recently. And you know one has to say that we live in a far more censorious sort of climate at the moment. I don't know whether I would have even dared to write it," she added.

"Twenty-three years down the lane, if I still have young women writing to me saying, *I love your book because I can see myself in it*, I stop rejoicing at that point," she said. On the current state of society, she observed, "On one hand, we have the highly educated population, we have women's literacy

at some kind of a crazy high up there and on the other hand we have this continuing conservatism, deep-seated, we can't seem to budge".

She concluded the conversation by talking about her characters. "To a small extent, you become your characters. You kind of inhabit your characters a bit. I get drawn to characters who are stoic, and who sometimes have to wait it out. And who are willing to persist, whatever the difficulties or obstacles are. And women in particular know this. I like these kinds of strong women. And quietly strong is nice." ▶



"I believe some poetry is translatable without much damage. So there are poems that can be translated and not much is lost in translation... The rules are language specific... Sometimes the translation of a poem is better than the actual poem, the one that was written in the original language"

Natalia Malek

PASSAGES

Neha stood at the door to her spacious living room in Delhi, surveying the party that was now in full flow. It hadn't yet reached that free-wheeling stage when people, mellowed by the fine wines and scotches on offer, would start drifting around unreservedly, chatting without embarrassment or restraint to relative strangers. At the moment, most of her guests were gathered in small knots around the room, sticking to the people they knew, but loud bursts of laughter indicated that a good time was already being had. Waiters hired for the night were working the room with trays of drinks and canapés, and some kind of nondescript piano music was tinkling through the eight-speaker Bose system, Sharat's proud new acquisition. It would need to be turned off for the Divakar Brothers' live performance that would take place a little later on in the garden, but experience had taught Neha to keep things subtle at the start.

Virtually everyone invited had already come, even the customary stragglers who made it a point to arrive close to midnight, complaining about receiving three party invites for the same night. Whatever they said, Neha knew with quiet confidence that people did not usually turn down invitations to her famously lavish and elegant soirées but, given the status of any of her guests, she was nevertheless touched when she saw such busy and eminent people turn up at her place so unflinchingly.

Although smaller, more intimate dinner parties were a regular feature of the Chaturvedi household, Sharat and Neha held two large parties every year; one sometime before Diwali and the other a lunch in the garden at the start of spring. The hundred-odd invitations issued were carefully considered affairs, sent – everyone knew – only to the very influential or very well-connected. The very point of them, Sharat sometimes said, was to allow people to relax and meet each other without the fear of journalists or paparazzi lurking around the corner. Yellow journalism had been the bane of many of their famous friends' lives and, horrifyingly, Neha had recently been hearing of parties where – without any warning – the press pack would descend, secretly invited by publicity-hungry hosts who wanted to be mentioned on the party pages of The Times of India.

Excerpts from 'Scandalous Secret'

Das capital

MIND-FLIGHT

Gaur Gopal Das delivers life's amazing secrets

“Hold on tight, turbulence ahead!” declared Gaur Gopal Das, the renowned motivational speaker and author.

He kept the audiences on the edge of their seats at his talk on ‘Battle of the Mind’ at MBIFL on Saturday.

With his electrifying delivery, Das introduced his book ‘Energise Your Mind: A Monk’s Guide to Learn the Art of Mastering Your Thoughts, Feelings and Emotions’ and embarked on a journey to teach the audience the art of mastering their thoughts, feelings and emotions. Comparing life to a flight journey, Das warned that obstacles and problems are inevitable, but with determination and focus, they can be overcome and pave the way for a fulfilling and empowered life.

Das emphasized that “our birth and the take-off of our life are not in our control”. Instead, we should focus on what we

can change, the variables in our lives. He compared life to a journey, with everything being an event. While “earning money is important,” Das emphasized that “living life is even more so”.

Das compared life to a flight, acknowledging that there will be turbulence, or problems, along the way. However, he stressed that it is important to remain calm and focused in order to overcome these obstacles.

Gaur Gopal Das regaled the audience with anecdotes. His charming wit added an extra dose of fun to an already enlightening talk, proving that learning and laughter go hand in hand.

He referred to the problem-solving equation. There are two components. The first component is called the constant, the pi. The more you focus on it the more depressed you feel. “Instead focus on your ‘x’, the variable... work on it,” he said.

We got the point. ▶

7 TIPS

FROM GAUR GOPAL DAS

1. "Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions."
2. "The moment you start seeing life as non-serious, tides are going to turn in your favor."
3. "Don't be pushed around by the fears in your mind. Be led by the dreams in your heart."
4. "You are not defined by your past, but by the choices you make today."
5. "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it's the courage to continue that counts."
6. "Happiness is not something you postpone for the future; it is something you design for the present."
7. "Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence."



Raj risks it all for truth

STAGE OF LIFE

Prakash Raj speaks truth to power, defending freedom of expression and celebrating democracy in art and entertainment as an inspired human being

In a world where people are increasingly afraid to talk, Prakash Raj is an exception. He speaks his mind.

“We are not burying Gauri, we are sowing Gauri,” he said, remembering his friend Gauri Lankesh. He was speaking at MBIFL on Saturday.

He wanted to tell the world that if we are going to silence a voice, a stronger voice will be born. “I am very proud and happy... and really blessed, it's such an inspiration to be in Kerala to see so many voices coming together, celebrating free speech,” he added.

Corruption, religious polarization or freedom of expression. Which is the most important? “Freedom of



expression, freedom to question! The rest will be handled,” he said.

He said that he didn't wish to die as a stranger in the world. “I like the way people hate me, so that they know me not for what I earn or act but for whom I am. You should not die before you die,” he said.

He said he liked OTT platforms for making the world of art and entertainment democratic. “Whoever gives the content, whoever is good, is a star,” he said.

Someone called him an activist. He replied, “Prakash Raj is just a human being! Simple,” he summed up. ▶

