

haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



Milind Mulick

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haikuKATHA is the official monthly publication brought out by Triveni Haikai India. Its primary function is to publish the best in contemporary English-language haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun, tanka-prose, tanka-art, and haiga.

Each month's issue is put together by a team of editors who select poems from the previous month's prompts posted on the Triveni Haikai India website. The magazine is copyrighted by Triveni Haikai India.

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haiku, tanka, haibun, gembun, tanka-prose,
gembun with tanka, haiga and tanka-art

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haiku, tanka, haibun, gembun, tanka-prose,
gembun with tanka, haiga and tanka-art

Our heartfelt thanks to:

Neena Singh, Ken Slaughter, Prakash Thombre,
Muskaan Ahuja, and Lev Hart,

for providing the weekly challenges
for the month of November 2024,

Milind Mulick
for his brilliant watercolour painting,

our contributors
for sharing their poems.

Tejasvat Award

Triveni Haikai India

Tejasvat in Samskrit means shining bright
with strength and excellence just like the sun.

The tanka editors,
Kala Ramesh, Firdaus Parvez,
Ptiti Aisola and Suraja Menon Roychowdhury,

are pleased to present
the

Tejasvat Award

to a poet
who has a set number of poems
which hold the essence of Japanese short-form poetry
in any one issue.

In this issue, we'll be honouring
Kanjini Devi
for her five impressive tanka.

Tejasvat
KANJINI DEVI

Triveni Haikai India

only blue sky
as far as I can see
flying solo
it's never too late
to spread one's wings

a pile
of dead possums
on Pet Day
who are we to decide
what lives and what dies

a blackbird
limps across the lawn
gathering twigs
oh, but some days all I want
is to write poetry

Tejasvat
KANJINI DEVI

Triveni Haikai India

first day
of primary school
I arrive late
in an old yellow car
with no passenger seat

feasting
at the farmers' market
spray-free fruit
from local orchards
in plastic bags

Triveni Awards 2024

The Triveni Awards were inaugurated in 2024 and organised by the Triveni Haikai India.

This annual contest is open to all poets and invites submissions from them of one or two original and unpublished haiku on any theme, without any specifications as to format. There is no submission fee.

Three winning haiku and several honourable mentions are selected. Cash prizes of 10,000, 5,000, and 2,000 rupees are awarded to the winners, and e-certificates, are presented for each winning haiku and honourable mention.

Contest Coordinators 2024:

Sangita Kalarickal and Teji Sethi gathered all the entries and sent them to the judges after anonymising them. Once the judges selected the winners, the coordinators finalised the order of the winning entries.

The certificates were designed by Teji Sethi.

On 1st December 2024, Triveni Haikai India organised a virtual Triveni Utsav to celebrate their third anniversary as well as announce the contest results.

Triveni Awards 2024

Introductory Comments from the Judges:

Huge thanks to the coordinators, Sangita Kalarickal and Teji Sethi, for all of their help behind the scenes, and to every poet who sent in their haiku to the contest. I am especially grateful for the opportunity and honour to co-judge the contest with one of the poets I most admire, not only for the high quality of her own poems and her sound judgement in evaluating others' work, but also for the way she approaches every task, with sincerity, enthusiasm, and kindness.

It was no surprise to read through the six hundred entries and find so many well-crafted and moving haiku. While we, as judges, do not know where the poets who entered the contest reside, I imagine that likely a majority of the poems are by poets in India. Over the past two decades, India has become a globally recognized force in English-language haiku, with poets from India appearing regularly in all of the top journals and contests. True to the spirit of haiku, these poems do not imitate a Japanese sensibility but rather elevate genuine observations and authentic, imaginative ways of perceiving the everyday world each poet inhabits.

Among the winners are poems capturing quintessentially Indian themes. With the benefit of technology, those of us who need to look up new vocabulary for a flower or a goddess can easily do so and thereby share in the richness of these haiku.

— Susan Antolin

Triveni Awards 2024

Introductory Comments from the Judges:

Thanks to Susan Antolin for agreeing to co-judge the first Triveni Awards 2024 along with me. I stepped into it with great trepidation, for I'm a fan of her works and the journal, Acorn, and realised that as the co-judge I had to match up to her skills. I thank her for the kind words about me and my abilities. I'm deeply touched and even more motivated now.

We received 600 poems from 300+ poets from 37 countries and the break-up of number of participants is as follows:

India – 119, USA – 61, UK – 22, Romania – 13, Croatia – 12, New Zealand – 10, Australia – 9, Canada – 8, Italy – 8. Poland – 5, Philippines – 4, Ireland – 3, France – 2, Germany – 2, Nepal – 2, Singapore – 2, Sri Lanka – 2, Switzerland – 2, The Netherlands – 2, Algeria – 1, Belgium – 1, Bosnia and Herzegovina – 1, Bulgaria – 1, Hungary – 1, Indonesia – 1, Iran – 1, Japan – 1, Lithuania – 1, Mongolia – 1, Nigeria – 1, Portugal – 1, Serbia – 1, South Africa – 1, Spain – 1, Trinidad – 1, Turkey – 1, Ukraine – 1.

Triveni Haikai India is extremely pleased with this overwhelming response and the high quality of poems received.

The Cash prizes awarded were:

First Place with prize money of Rs 10,000

Second Place tie with prize money of Rs 5000 each.

The certificates for all the award winners, i.e., the first 2 places and the 8 honourable mentions, were most exquisitely designed by our in-house art editor, Teji Sethi.

— Kala Ramesh

A PPT presentation of the Triveni Awards designed by Sangita Kalarickal and Teji Sethi was shown at the Virtual Triveni Utsav 2024.

Triveni Awards 2024

First Place: Triveni Awards 2024, with a cash prize of Rs 10,000.

(The winner generously donated the prize money back to Triveni Haikai India.)

refugee train
small hands starfished
against the glass

— Debbie Strange
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

The verb “starfished” is brilliant in this poem. It feels essential that the verb is in the passive rather than active form. The word “starfished” accurately describes the shape of children’s hands spread wide against a window and also evokes the sense that both starfish and refugee children are at the mercy of forces larger than themselves. The refugee children are themselves like starfish, carried by the ocean and deposited on the shore. Here they are on a train, looking out at the world they have been thrown into. The reader cannot but hope these small hands will be carried to safety.

— Susan Antolin

We went through the first, second and third selection lists and in each list, this poem scored full marks. In our final Zoom meeting, this poem surfaced to the first position. I echo Susan’s sentiments, which she has voiced extremely well.

— Kala Ramesh

Triveni Awards 2024

Second Place Tie: Triveni Awards 2024 with a cash prize of Rs 5,000.

too small
for her laugh
sister's urn

— paul m.
Inlet Beach, Florida, USA

A laugh is one of the many things apart from the human body that is an essential part of a person and cannot be contained in an urn. Where in the physical world does the sister's laughter reside once her body has been reduced to ash inside the urn? A genuine moment of loss and wonder.

— Susan Antolin

The poet has shown us the middle of the story, leaving the reader to fill in the rest of the narrative arc, in just seven words. The images and words are extremely well chosen.

— Kala Ramesh

Triveni Awards 2024

Second Place Tie: Triveni Awards 2024, with a cash prize of Rs 5,000.

sacred grove
even the rain
tiptoes on leaves

— Sonali Rasal
Pune, Maharashtra, India

This poet breaks with haiku convention by personifying the rain, and in so doing has created a delightful poem with an image that is both playful and accurately descriptive. The verb “tiptoes” evokes the image of a light rain hitting the foliage in the grove gently, even reverently. It is as if the rain knows to show respect to the sacred grove itself.

— Susan Antolin

Sacred Grove is what captivated me. I had recently visited a desert resort, and we walked through a sacred grove. It was a beautiful, never-to-be-forgotten experience. The host spoke to us about how the sacred groves are forest fragments in varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a residing deity, the guardian of that area. What impressed me most was that hunting and logging are strictly prohibited within these areas. The tribals knew how to respect and nurture Mother Earth, which we, the city dwellers, have lost dismally. With this in mind, now view Ls 2 & 3. A deep thought expressed beautifully in simple language.

— Kala Ramesh

Triveni Awards 2024

Honourable Mentions – Triveni Awards 2024

In alphabetical order by first names.

autumn leaves a palette for loss

— Alfred Booth
Lyon, France

This one-line haiku offers multiple readings. When autumn departs, it leaves behind a palette without vibrant colours. The leaves have fallen, leaving the world in hues of winter, the colours one might associate with loss. Or, in an alternate reading, do the autumn leaves (now a noun rather than a verb) offer a palette (more vibrant with bright reds, oranges, and yellows) for loss? Readers can interpret the poem to suit their sensibility and to match their individual experience of loss.

sunrise
my cat checks
if I am alive

— Christina Sng
Singapore

This haiku charmed us immediately. We can imagine a cat checking on its human in the morning, perhaps staring down at their face or placing a paw gently on their shoulder. Is the cat simply asking for breakfast or checking to see if their human has survived another night? The gentle humour in this is delightful.

Triveni Awards 2024

rehearsal
for my cremation
MRI scan

— Jenny Shepherd
London, UK

This haiku is darkly funny. Of all the thoughts that might go through one's head while holding absolutely still for an MRI scan, that it is a rehearsal for cremation is surprising and yet completely understandable. The sort of person who has such thoughts would be an interesting (and entertaining!) person to know.

yoga mat
the imprint of my foot
dissolves

— Owen Bullock
Canberra, ACT, Australia

We enjoyed the implied parallel between the release of stress in the body achieved through yoga and the dissolving of the footprint on the yoga mat. A playful noticing of a detail in an everyday moment.

Triveni Awards 2024

war games
played as a child
everyone goes home

— Rehn Kovacic
Mesa, Arizona, USA

It is a universal truth that children imitate the adult world in their play. Unfortunately, war is all too often the situation children internalize and imitate. This haiku implicitly reminds us of the stark reality that while everyone goes home after a children's game of war, the same is not the case in actual war.

landslide —
digging out bodies
to bury them

— Sreenath
Mysuru, Karnataka, India

The irony presented in this spare haiku carries the weight of a devastating truth, that rescuers have dug out bodies after a landslide only to bury them again. Surely this situation has occurred as often as there have been deadly landslides. This haiku is well-crafted with an economy of words. Its sparseness accentuates the gravity of what the poem conveys.

Triveni Awards 2024

winter nights
the child sleeps in white noise
of fists and whimpers

— Swagata Soumyanarayan
Mumbai, India

The sound qualities in this haiku are appealing. The repeated “w” and “n” sounds in “winter nights” and “white noise” create a sense of cohesion. Breaking with tradition, the moment captured in this haiku is not one moment at all but a series of repeated moments, as the implied situation of domestic violence has become such a constant in this child’s life that it is perceived as white noise. A heartbreaking haiku.

crescent moon
mahakali's sickle
dripping red

— Yesha Shah
Surat, India

A crescent moon, likened to a sickle dripping red, is an evocative image. Add to that the richness of a Hindu goddess who uses her tongue as a weapon, and this haiku grows exponentially in meaning and delight. Mahakali has innumerable followers and a mass appeal in India. She is worshipped in every village and city. She wields ten arms, each symbolically fortified with a weapon to protect her people.

A PPT presentation of the Triveni Awards designed by Sangita Kalarickal and Teji Sethi was shown at the Virtual Triveni Utsav 2024.

Triveni Awards 2024

The Judges' profile:

Susan Antolin fell in love with modern Japanese poetry while living in Japan in the late 1980s. She has authored two books (Artichoke Season and The Years That Went Missing), edits the journal Acorn (acornhaiku.com), is an active member of the Haiku Poets of Northern California, and can also be found at susanantolinpoet.com. She is a co-editor together with Garry Gay and Carolyn Hall of The San Francisco Haiku Anthology: Volume Two (2024). She lives in Walnut Creek, CA with her family and is currently working toward an MFA in poetry at NYU.

Kala Ramesh is the Founder and Director of Triveni Haikai India and the Founder and Managing Editor of haikuKATHA Journal. A seasoned poet and educator, she is the visionary behind the Triveni Gurukulam Mentorship Program and has authored numerous acclaimed works, including The Forest I Know (HarperCollins, 2021). Kala has taught the 60-hour haikai course at Symbiosis International University from 2012 to 2021, organized multiple haiku conferences, and conducted workshops for nearly two decades, making significant contributions to the haiku community in India and globally.

Triveni Awards 2024

Certificates



Triveni Awards 2024

Certificates



haiku

how it shimmers
like the night you died
cold moon

Alfred Booth

autumn gusts
a few seconds of sunlight
at a time

Alfred Booth

many branches ...
a peepal leaf finds its way
to the ground

Ashish Narain

new haircut
and suddenly everyone
mentions my ears

C.X. Turner

haiku

stream of chirps —
a pitcher rolling
down the ghat

Daipayan Nair

shimmering dusk —
the boatman wrings out
his gamcha

Daipayan Nair

swarm of bargains —
the fishmonger picks up
his hand fan

Daipayan Nair

not yet dark ...
the monitor beeps
with mom's heartbeat

Devoshruti Mandal

haiku

cold winter
the veteran's wound
reopens

Fatma Zohra Habis

this autumn evening
how long
my talk to the moon

Fatma Zohra Habis

yellowing pothos
looking for reasons
to talk to ma

Jahnvi Gogoi

meadow adventure
the poppies taller
than our dreams

Joanna Ashwell

haiku

hometown ...
waking up to the thud
of the pail again

K. Ramesh

forest route ...
a gurgle of stream while
I wait for the bus

K. Ramesh

windblown leaves
a toddler holds on fast
to her dog

Kala Ramesh

pink aurora
strains of raag bhairav
on All India Radio

Kala Ramesh

haiku

the deck half-built
a goanna
already sunbathing

Kanjini Devi

the cloudburst
peters out
patter of acorns

Keith Evetts

in the ears
of priest and atheist
rumble of thunder

Keith Evetts

bonsai banyan
grandpa's village tales
cut short

Lakshmi Iyer

haiku

café catchup
a sparrow searches
for the exit

Lorraine Haig

a python slips
into the hen house
morning fog

Lorraine Haig

winter night ...
the howling wind becomes
women and children

Milan Rajkumar

carpet of leaves ...
how the mighty go back
to their roots

Mohua Maulik

haiku

sound of footsteps ...
the deer disappears
into the woods

Padma Priya

deepening shadows
the three of us
on different devices

paul m.

prescription refilled
the moon quietly
new again

paul m.

the dreamy whisk
of a street sweeper's broom
shard of sky

Ranu Jain

haiku

birdlings flight
a sky full
of tomorrows

Rashmi VeSa

orange peels
soaking in a vat of rum
almost Christmas

Rupa Anand

one by one
the streetlights
tuning the dusk

sanjuktaa asopa

ringing alarm —
i wake up
a thousand dust motes

Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta

haiku

a bullock cart
creaking its way homewards
harvest moon

Sreenath

summer afternoon
a fisherman filters
the sound of ripples

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

green signal
a child beggar takes out
his toy car

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

morning raga
my voice still husky
with night shadows

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

one-line haiku

tideline the shimmer of silver fin

C.X. Turner

undisturbed night fog over the airport

Keith Evetts

moving with the breeze the kite stuck on a tree

Saumya Bansal

smog everywhere prisoners

Srini

pockmarking the dusky lake spring rain

Vandana Parashar

concrete haiku

peach
sangria
an early
autumn
in her
s
t
e
m
m
e
d
glass

Barrie Levine

tanka

D-flat major
the swell of calm
after a storm
when sunlight reflects
in your eyes

Alfred Booth

a flock of birds
each chirping
above another ...
when did we stop
listening to each other

Anjali Warhadpande

this wide expanse of sky
has clouds today
I peep out
and catch silver linings
without trying

Anjali Warhadpande

tanka

evening walk
between our words
the quiet
of coral jasmines
from many autumns

Anju Kishore

scarlet streaks
across the skyline —
the last train
fades into the echo
of an empty tunnel

C.X. Turner

salt marsh reeds
weaving in the wind
I leave behind
a secret pressed
in the mud

C.X. Turner

tanka

a tired gull
rises once more
into the dusk ...
how much of me too
is held up by habit

C.X. Turner

the silverfish
crawling on the wall
makes a U-turn ...
this winter between us
is spreading everywhere

Daipayan Nair

a cracked mirror
reflects everything —
my heart
feels the pain of others
neglecting its own beat

Fatma Zohra Habis

tanka

the beauty
of autumn leaves
trodden to sludge
God forgive
the things we do

Florence Heyhoe

nothing's sweeter
than water from a creek
says the trekker
his jacket proudly sporting
a Coke-stained Everest logo

Gauri Dixit

mildly perfumed
mysore sandal soap
that hardly lathers ...
clinging to mother's sari
the loyalty of decades

Geetha Ravichandran

tanka

the sun
pushing past
scalloped clouds
mother waits daily
at the school gate

Geetha Ravichandran

sunset
above the clouds
endless orange
all around me
suspends the night

Jennifer Gurney

netted neatly
a twist of lavender
beneath my pillow
if only my nightmares
vanished as promised

Joanna Ashwell

tanka

an empty alley
not even the sound
of my heart
just a harp string
away from breaking

Joanna Ashwell

the old carpenter
forgets himself while
building the chair ...
the hours it takes
to straighten his back

Kala Ramesh

I turn my failings into
actions that empower me
like grandpa
 who couldn't wink
but would blink with both eyes

Kala Ramesh

tanka

evening haze
a young woman rows past
with easy strokes
the bankside rushes sway
becoming still again

Keith Evetts

poetry workshop ...
at intervals a breeze
blows in
the scent of wild jasmine
through the window

K. Ramesh

one more time
I help mother clear
the old vessels and clothes
a bundle of memories
half forgotten, half intact

Lakshmi Iyer

tanka

knowing very well
mother's fast asleep
yet the fear of death
in the silence around her,
I hear her breathe

Lakshmi Iyer

cat and I
in our fireside chair
the languor
of a small bright flame
licking the embers

Linda Papanicolaou

soft mauve
coats the winter hills
as I age
contentment colours
each day of my life

Lorraine Haig

tanka

fish and chips
scent the sea breeze
a time
when the next wave
was all that mattered

Lorraine Haig

hard winds
blow for weeks
I'm just a husk
left withered
without your smile

Lorraine Haig

rainforest trek
in thickening mist
we lose our way
trudging on in silence
I unfold the map

Marilyn Humbert

tanka

white flowers
of the Rangoon creeper
turn red
how was i so blind
to the warning signs

Mohua Maulik

this winter
only dusty leaves remain
on the amaltas
... like the flowers
the laughter too has gone

Mohua Maulik

a raindrop
clinging to the tip
of a leaf ...
my heart
ever since you left

Muskaan Ahuja

tanka

the magnolia blooms
its fragrance pulls me back
to her laughter
spilling over the veranda
on spring evenings

Nalini Shetty

after a long winter
first apple blossom ...
from Grandpa's old room
the tun-tun-tun
of my daughter's anklets

Namratha Varadharajan

he tells me
I'm naturally beautiful ...
all day long
a soft pink blush
over my face

Nitu Yumnam

tanka

a light green leaf
on our black gate
moving closer
i see a chameleon's eye
dart from side to side

Priti Aisola

the stormwater
drain reeks
this evening
parijat fragrance
loses the contest

Priti Aisola

hopping in and out
of tree shadows —
how far
have i left behind
the child i used to know

Priti Aisola

tanka

red thread
twined around
the sacred peepal
 someone's prayer
holding onto the wind

Sandip Chauhan

crossing the wake
of a speed boat
crossing our route
 the crest and trough
 you left behind

Sangita Kalarickal

on night walks
the scent of the fallen
tree jasmine ...
those days when I would
pluck them from your tresses

Sreenath

tanka

counting votes
late into the night
I hear
the call of two owls
whoo...whoo

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

we never needed
for her to say how much
she loved us ...
a pie in the oven
filling the whole house

Susan Yavaniski

coaxing a paperwhite
out of dormancy
winter's onset
breaks me once more
into flower

Susan Yavaniski

Alfred Booth

The Last Questions

I have wandered further east, crossing the ocean. I have found myself in the dense forests of capital cities tethered by anonymity which, after decades, has finally led me to these mountain paths. I am still learning how to breathe. Here I almost sense the end of this quest, for my identity, for stability, the sense of finally belonging. Below is a lake filled with algae and fish. The plunge downward still frightens me. As a child I learned to swim in the frigid waters of a similar lake. Does its far-awayness call to me now?

the forest path
is now covered with brambles
migrating geese

Anju Kishore

What Goes Around

“I would have liked a softer and brighter saree from you for Diwali,” pouts my maid as she scrubs the black off my pots and kettles. How dare she, this chit of a girl! Was it for this that I made the effort to venture into the market with my arthritis?

I stomp as hard as my legs can into the puja room. While my husband proceeds with the aarthi, I pray aloud for an increase in our pension, for a favourable solution to the family's property dispute, and for better sense to prevail in our apartment committee. The husband chuckles. “How about a nod for the food we are able to eat, the medicines in the pillbox, our leak-free roof?”

temple bell
the dong as loud
as the desire

Aparna Pathak

Acid Rain

I kept on staring at the TV that he had already switched off. It's not that I didn't have the energy to get up and switch it on. But I had no courage left to fight back. My feet were numb.

Time spent in fear is certainly more scary than the fear itself. A woman doesn't become minuscule in a day.

intermittent rain
the blackened crust
of the marble

C.X. Turner

Edge of Morning

In my pocket is an orange stitch marker, a smooth blue feather the colour of a summer sky that I don't remember collecting, and a single shoelace, each a piece of a puzzle I haven't solved. A small boat crosses the shimmering horizon. I wave, though no one waves back. Below me, the shingle shoreline gleams with the tide's offerings — tangled seaweed and shards of glass smoothed to frosted jewels. The air tastes of sea fennel and bright lime, like the memory of knitted warmth, half-forgotten. I question why I never started days this way before.

drifting clouds –
the weight of his wool scarf
around my shoulders

C.X. Turner

Winter's End

Ice glints along the path, a fleeting trace of light. A sudden flash, the muntjac bounds into shadow, hooves scraping the frozen ground. Holly leaves catch the thin sun, their red berries like drops of blood on glass. In the clearing, the village bonfire lies cold. Ash streaks the air, its faint tendrils rising as if searching for the warmth that's already gone.

"It'll burn again next year," she says, her voice soft as smoke.

empty lane —
a fading echo drifts
through the mist

haibun

Joanna Ashwell
~

Props

The background is important, not too large or too small. Just the right perspective for waiting. The painting begins with small sketches at first. The smoother brush glides over the sky, a trunk, then slender branches, a few blossoms waiting to open. The sky for now is cream — the final shade has not been chosen. Our heads are bowed in unison over the paper. The class all paints as one, there is an occasional nod to another, but no words are exchanged. The process matters. What we create here will be the launch pad.

a chick
already testing noise
the first raindrop

The place for footsteps. I pause and listen to a distant chime. The earth pulls me closer to hear the whispers of the rocks, the sand, the fire below. Will it be a dusty track circling the trees or a lush carpet of green, scattered with toadstools capped in starlight?

The hour must be decided, daylight has passed by and night has ushered itself into the scene. The musings we make are a construct for our mind to hang upon the first strand of lace.

snow geese
carrying the water
a dip of wings

What to make of all these threads: the artist, the musician, the singer, the writer, the individual — all aspects of us wrapped in wonder? I paint one final piece for the scene — did my brush shape a key beneath the moss, leave a window ajar to be imagined, or place a door to be stepped through?

soul tools
a misshapen arrow
flexed to my heart

Kala Ramesh
~

The Pull

As I get older, my first preference is for the sea. I admire mountains from a distance but know I can no longer climb them. Growing up in Chennai, we went to the beach every Thursday, Father's day off from his clinic. The memories draw me back.

Frothy waves rise on the horizon. Seagulls dot the evening sky. Vendors call out "manga, thenga, pattani, sundal" as they walk about, hawking roasted peanuts and green mangoes cut into thin oblong pieces sprinkled generously with salt and chilli powder. Wishing you a good day, the vendor scoops these mouthwatering delicacies onto a square of newspaper and hands them to you.

twilight hues
 the raga
of crashing waves

This reminds me of life — desires that arise one after another. Even the calmness of each wild wave as it returns to the sea.

Kala Ramesh

The Creation

In the art gallery, a portrait of a woman catches my eye. Her smile spreads from her beautiful kohl-lined eyes to all the creases of her face. Her body is rounded but not fattened by a rich person's diet. Her robust arms look like she has worked out in the gym for decades... but these are farmer's arms. Her muscular frame is the return for working in the rice paddies from morning to night and coming home to a kitchen waiting to be fired up and filled with the aroma of her ragi millet dosa and onion sambar.

Her calloused hands know nothing about luxurious creams, and her plain mulmul cotton sari has never been ironed — but her creased smile looks as if it will never leave her face. It stays with me.

fading lotus
do I have the right
to make a story of you

Kanjini Devi

One Step Ahead

The hairs at the nape of my neck stand on end. I look around the market wondering what has alerted my body to danger. The lighting inside the hall is dim but I don't see anything suspicious. My attention returns to hand-woven baskets, floral print sarongs and fisherman's pants. There's that tingle again, this time I notice a lean man of moderate height weaving through the throng of marketgoers. He seems to stand out, not really browsing or buying. I tighten the straps of my knapsack, staying close to women with children. It is now obvious this man is following me, but I don't let on as he gets nearer. Does he assume I'm easy prey because I don't look like a local? I casually strike a conversation with an elderly vendor near the exit, forcing my stalker to stop abruptly behind me. Standing beside the vendor, I turn around and look him straight in the eyes. He slinks away into the withering wind.

fight or flight the pet wombat plays dead

Kanjini Devi

Freefall

I'm pushed up against the wall and can hardly breathe as his grip tightens around my neck. If all the years of teaching Tai Chi has taught me anything, it's to go with the flow. I stop resisting despite my urge to fight back, kick and scream. Instead, I take soft breaths of what little air is left. I coax my muscles to relax which makes him even angrier. He continues to hurl verbal abuses, his spit in my eye. I rest my awareness on the sound of emptiness, letting his face shift out of focus. There is no flashback, no movie in reverse. Just void, a calm knowing I've done my best. I have lived and I have loved. As I'm about to blank out, he loosens his hold; "Go ... just go".

between shores the wingspan of a wandering albatross

Linda Papanicolaou

Epiphany

Each glass ball returned to its cardboard cradle. I've resolved to be organized and sort them. Into one box the red balls, into another the gold and silver, and in still another all the multicolored painted balls with the star-shaped indentation blown into one side. As a child I loved these best. My father would haul in the tree, string the lights, and it was mine to decorate — but only after Mother had vacuumed the trail of pine litter it dropped from door to living room. I'd wait impatiently, wondering why this had to be done now. Why not just get on with the fun?

We followed a tradition of her childhood, taking the tree down on Mother's birthday in mid-January. The reverse trail of now-dry needles vigorously vacuumed again, the furniture returned to its ordinary place, and the family would move on to other things. Poor Mother! Is that why she was the way she was — the child who was born on the day the tree came down?

household gods —
the faint scent of balsam
in an attic box

Linda Papanicolaou

Chrysanthemum Weather

The backyard squirrels seem to know that the cats have gotten old. They race back and forth, right up to the sliding glass door to peek in at the bowl of unfinished kibble.

home from the vet's
with an empty box —
rain in the headlights

Lorraine Haig

Island Dwellers

They live on an island a few kilometres from the mainland where a block of land doesn't include running water or power. They're loners preferring their dogs for company. A boat is their most important possession. Freedom to fish or travel to the mainland for beer.

a halyard slaps
in the estuary
morning haze

If you ask them why they live here they might tell you how on a full moon night the bay sparkles like gemstones. How they are richer for seeing the stars. They sit outside talking, and gaze somewhere towards the horizon or Fiji. Life makes sense here. A bucket of mangoes and avocados gathered from trees gone wild. They move reassuringly among spiders, snakes and goannas, and read the weather in the wind. They'll move to their verandah to watch the hail sailing in from the west or predict storms when winged ants swarm.

If you ask, they will tell you the story of how a young girl died, or show you the haunted house, but not after dark. Don't ask them why they live here, you'll not get an answer just a faraway look in their eyes.

ghost moon
letters from home
re-addressed

Lorraine Haig

Rosey

I'm entranced when I see her. Envious of those long eyelashes. She is wearing pink roses among her tight curls which sets off her haughty but beautiful face. She has this way of lighting up smiles. People wait, eager for their chance to touch and talk to her.

nursing home
the young alpaca's
bedside manner

Mona Bedi

Parched

As children, we would burst crackers by the dozen. Over the years, our kids carried the tradition forward. Today, a day before Diwali, I am busy collecting gifts for my sister, who is at the hospice. I stuff a few LED diyas, a small packet of mithai, a few of her favourite chocolates, and some pooja items in my big tote bag. As I excitedly display the gifts, with tears in her eyes, she says, “I don’t have anything to give you.”

“Just come home, sis,” I tell her.

morning chill the weight of a dewdrop

Nalini Shetty

An Unlauded Strand

Every morning she arrives just as the first light slips through the balcony. Her anklets jingle softly, a sound almost lost beneath the hum of waking life. Her name is Narsamma, but she carries more than her name — she carries her world. A village left behind, two school fees due, a husband's silence, and an ageing mother whose laughter echoes through phone calls she can't always afford to make.

Narsamma folds our creased shirts with precision, far more care than the wrinkles of her own saree receive. She scrubs dishes, her hands a map of calluses, every line a route to someone else's comfort. She hums sometimes, not film songs but a tune from the fields where she once ran barefoot as a girl. "The city," she once said, "eats your feet first." I wanted to ask what it devours next, but the weight of her words hung heavy in the air.

dawn prayers
the threadbare pallu
sweeps my floor

When she finishes, I watch her leave, the faint red of alta still visible on her heels. She disappears into a blur of traffic and dust, carrying my cluttered life's small order on her slim shoulders. There is no poetry in her story, she might say. But her life stitches invisible threads between us — binding her mornings to mine, her silence to my gratitude.

rickshaw horns
her silhouette dissolves
into the smog

Namratha Varadharajan

Just Another Day in Paradise

I am walking down the bustling market street when a small hand touches me from behind. I turn to see a barefooted child with dry, matted hair. Her face, her brown-black frock, her arms and legs are all covered with a thick layer of road dust. She is selling dolls — with blonde hair and pink cheeks. The dolls wear long, blue dresses with silver stars that sparkle and their plastic blue eyes blink.

She thrusts one in my direction, and I tell her, politely, “Sorry, I have only boys”.

gulmohar flowers
carpet the road ...
we drive over

Namratha Varadharajan

Umbilical Cord

I wish I could still protect him. Now, all I can do is give him ideas on managing his emotions: when he loses something, someone makes fun of him or doesn't invite him to play in their group. And hug him from time to time.

cupped palms ...
drops of water
trickle through

Sandip Chauhan

She Walks the Milky Way

It was on vasant panchami, the festival of spring's first bloom, that my mother left. Prayers for new beginnings filled the air, mingling with marigold and incense smoke, softening the edges of grief. I moved quietly through the rituals and took a deep breath, a peace I hadn't expected, settling in like petals falling. Her prolonged illness had prepared me for this inevitable parting.

autumn dusk
a hearth still glowing
through the night

She returns again and again, in the diwali lamps glowing at dusk, during holi as colors bloom in the air, in the harvest songs of baisakhi. She lingers in the earthy bite of fenugreek on my fingertips, in the warm feel of freshly kneaded dough beneath my hands, and the gentle light spilling through the kitchen window. She is there in the bitter taste of neem leaves she taught me to chew for strength, in the hum of an old lullaby that fills the quiet, and in the way I pull my shawl close against the lingering chill.

distant river
the silence between crows
calling from afar

Shalini Pattabiraman

Raven Girls

It was never clear who accompanied whom, but they were together and quite the pair.

summer's dazzling light

Black shining on bone, sleek movement, a glimpse, a blur. Eyes intent, looking, locking. Feathers ruffling. One preened the other, beaks touching, nuzzling.

gorse and marsh marigold

Their bodies lift at a curve; flight, buoyed by air, by freedom. They fall together with grace, swoop through concrete meadows, to come, join the flock, paired creatures moving into the descending light of dusk.

sing to the wind

susan burch
~

The Thing I Carry

There's no doubt that I have something beyond this world inside me. It's an emptiness in me, a lonely part of me, that haunts me when no one is around. I don't even know how to describe the yawning canyon, but I know it's there, that it's become a part of me, stretching even as I fight it, even as I love with all my heart.

at first
it was delicious
black hole

Joanna Ashwell

artful dodger

every word
in a pocketful
of mirrors

Kala Ramesh
~

shadows overshadowed by darkness

the inward turn
of temple-pond lotuses
in evenfall

Lakshmi Iyer

Wanting to fit into my mother's shoes.

lottery ticket
the value
of zero

Mona Bedi
~

I can look out of the window for hours

under the peepal
a rickshaw puller
catches up on his sleep

Anju Kishore

Creatures of the Dark

Tall, dense trees close in on the serpentine road from both sides. In better light I might have spotted flowers. For now my vision is limited to what my car's headlights provide. And occasionally, to the flash of light from a crossing vehicle.

I turn off the radio and roll down the glass. The night wafts in with its creaks and clicks.

to stop and breathe
or carry on regardless
the blind curves
of our relationship
going downhill

Anju Kishore

What is the Colour of Grief

Blue. That which bears down from above and rushes up from the horizon in waves.

A blank, blinding, unrelenting white that stares down from a bleached sky. Or comes hissing up to scatter around the feet.

Black. Proper. Sedate. Quiet. Yet, that which spills over in pinpricks, hardly able to contain its burden. Or rolls up from the horizon in dark folds.

Colourless, what pours to soak and flood. What leaps to drown.

imagining
the ways in which
you may return
only the moon now
to wax and wane with

C.X. Turner



Murk

In the estuary's brackish waters, green shadows coil and unfurl like smoke. Leaf-shaped elvers, translucent as the tide's edge, slip between river and sea, their paths a mystery. With time, they sharpen— sleek bodies winding into the depths.

The moray hides its phantom jaw, a secret set of teeth that pulls prey into silence. Salt and rust hang heavy in the air, stinging like a forgotten cut. The silt shifts beneath hidden movements, the water holding its breath. I wonder if they feel the pull of home or drift blindly, unmoored, into dissolving light.

mudlarking —
the riverbed clouds rise
my hands return
with fragments of a world
too worn to name

C.X. Turner
~

Unheard

Snow falls without a whisper, each flake vanishing before it lands. The warmth inside feels distant, barely reaching me, like a memory already fading. My thoughts drift like dry leaves in still air. Outside, the world is muted, the light hesitant, as if uncertain of its place. I sit, frozen in the quiet, as everything moves around me; unseen, untouched.

cracked bell tower
a single frayed rope
I pull once
the sound swallowed
by moss and stone

Kala Ramesh
~

The Twisted Trail

King Ravana rants and raves, "You all know the story. The whole of India knows it. Sage Valmiki painted me as an evil man, who abducted Sita, Lord Rama's wife, to Sri Lanka. But wait, Sage Valmiki was a mere storyteller and who wouldn't like an interesting story? The more he painted Rama as a virtuous king, the more I became the villain, and to this day I remain one."

fields
 and fields
 of wild violets
 sprawling ...
fragrance of eternity

Lorraine Haig

The Loquat Tree

This twisted old tree with sprawling limbs grows next to the paling fence. It's where I spend long hours, my legs dangling from its upper branches. The thick furry leaves spread an invisible cloak over me. Up here I'm lifted out of my mundane existence into a world where birds chatter around me. I've learnt to stay silent and listen. I watch my mother carrying laundry to the clothesline and my siblings riding off on their bikes.

a small nest
tattered on the ground
where are they
the children of summer
now winter has come

Mona Bedi



Wishing Moon

Sitting in my hospital chamber, I think about a time when I would envy mom's life. Mother never ever had a job. Day in and day out, she would cook food, get us ready for school, tend to the garden, or wait for Dad. She always looked happy.

All of a sudden, my reverie is broken by a nurse asking me to attend to a pregnant woman. I rush to the labour room, and after a tiring half an hour, I am back, holding a baby girl in my arms. Laying the baby in her lap, I tell the young mother, "Give her the life she chooses."

summer haze
skyscrapers disappear
into nothingness
where and when
did I lose my identity

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

9 to 5

Imagine the sheer boredom of building a pyramid. Five hundred years of breaking down stone and fashioning bricks and mortar, laying them out in line after line. What forces drove them, the generations of builders slogging to build an edifice that's never finished in their lifetime ...

the swish
of a feathered serpent
at Teotihuacan
a child running around
tells me he's seen a ghost

susan burch
~

Panda Express(ions)

On the motorcycle's radio we hear that the pandas are coming back to the US. In preparation, the Smithsonian Conservatory, along with some farmers, are growing bamboo to feed the pandas, which eat about 100 pounds of bamboo a day.

big fat grins -
Hansel and Gretel
eat every witch
out of
house and home

susan burch
~

It's Dust Bunnies

Unfortunately, our conversations are not named after the cute creatures in the sci-fi world, Harmony, but because my mum literally told me, in great length, how she had to clean the dust bunnies out from under her sofa. So now every time my husband and I talk about anything unimportant, or drone on about something no one cares about, that's the joke.

the scent
of lemon pledge
sometimes
there's no escaping
the (mum)bo jumbo

gembun with tanka

Anju Kishore
~

pain in a place the fingers cannot reach

watching
a sharp rain
scatter
all the roses
in my garden

Firdaus Parvez
~

the alarming air quality index

on the yoga mat
I am a lotus
with petal lungs
murky breath in
deep breath out

gembun with tanka

Firdaus Parvez
~

no more love poems for me

but their song
sounds like hello
knocking open
doors of memories
cicada dawn

gembun with tanka

Kala Ramesh
~

sand slips through the hourglass

why worry
about how I'll go ...
fireflies
lighting up the world
die after laying their eggs

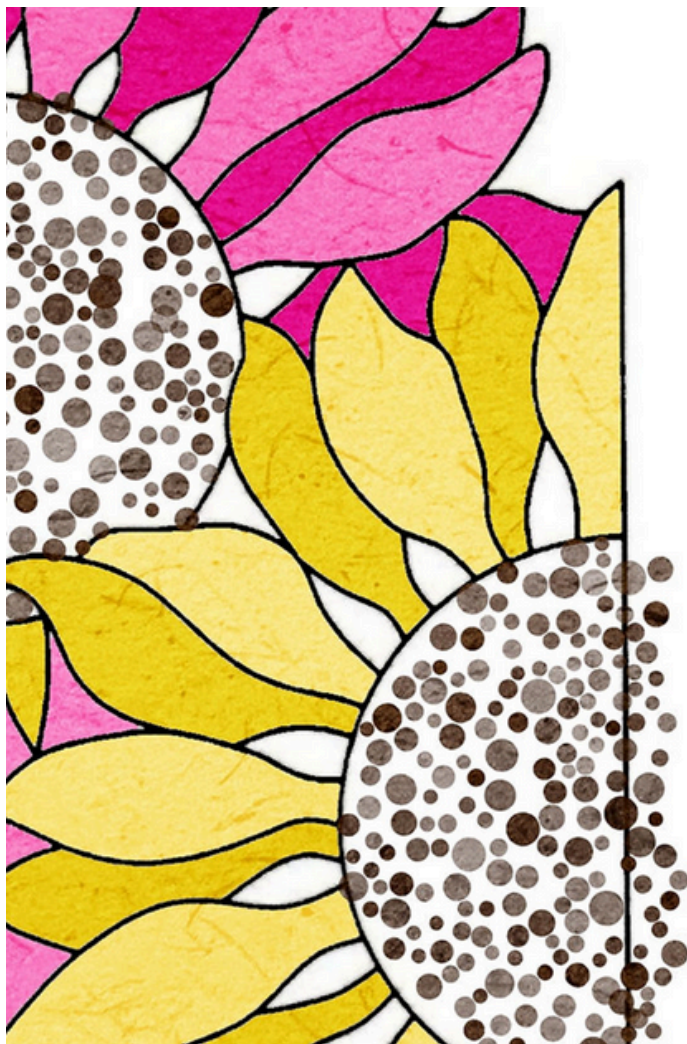
gembun with tanka

Susan Yavaniski
~

winter morning odorless and colorless

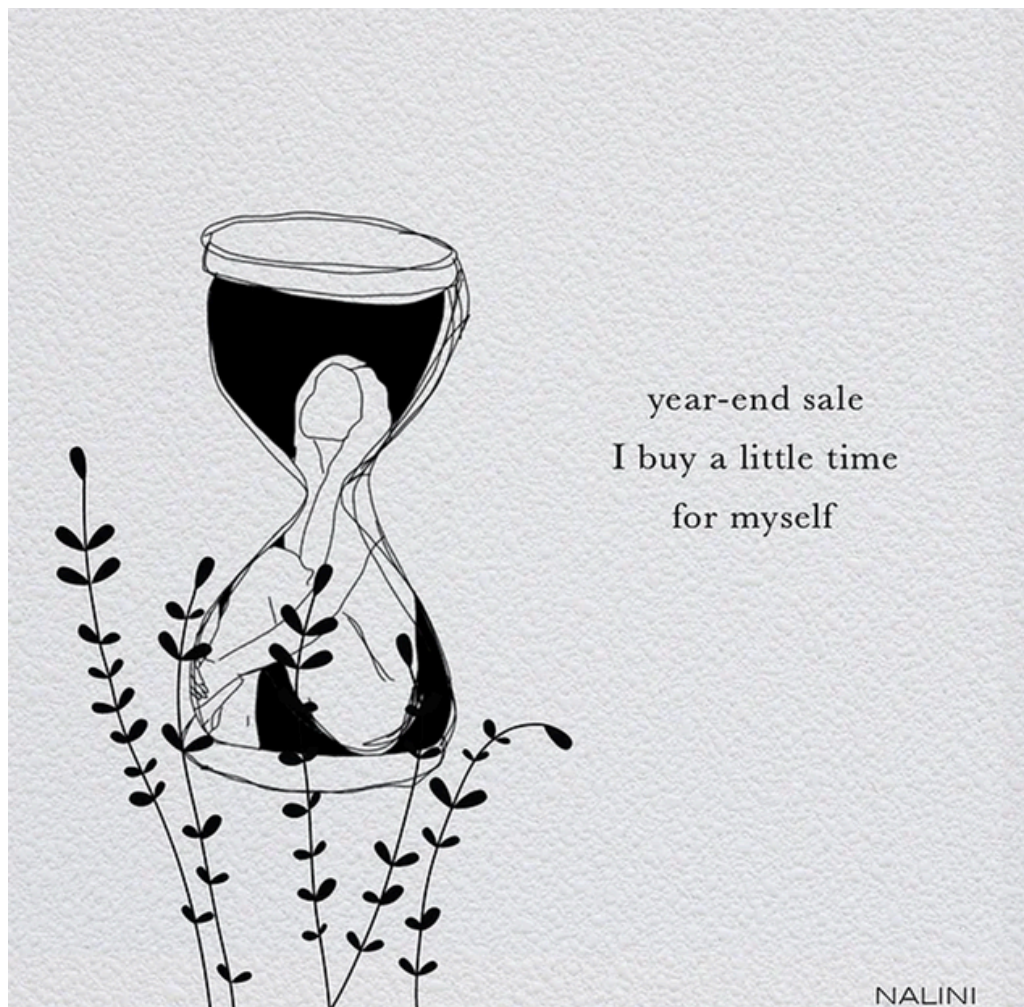
finding no poetry
in yesterday's words
a clump
of old tea leaves
stuck in the pot

haiga



the stillness
of things unfinished—
a curve of light

nalini



haiga

a day after the funeral breaking dawn



Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta

haiga



haiga



garden blossoms...
as picky as the gods
with my prayers

Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta



haiga

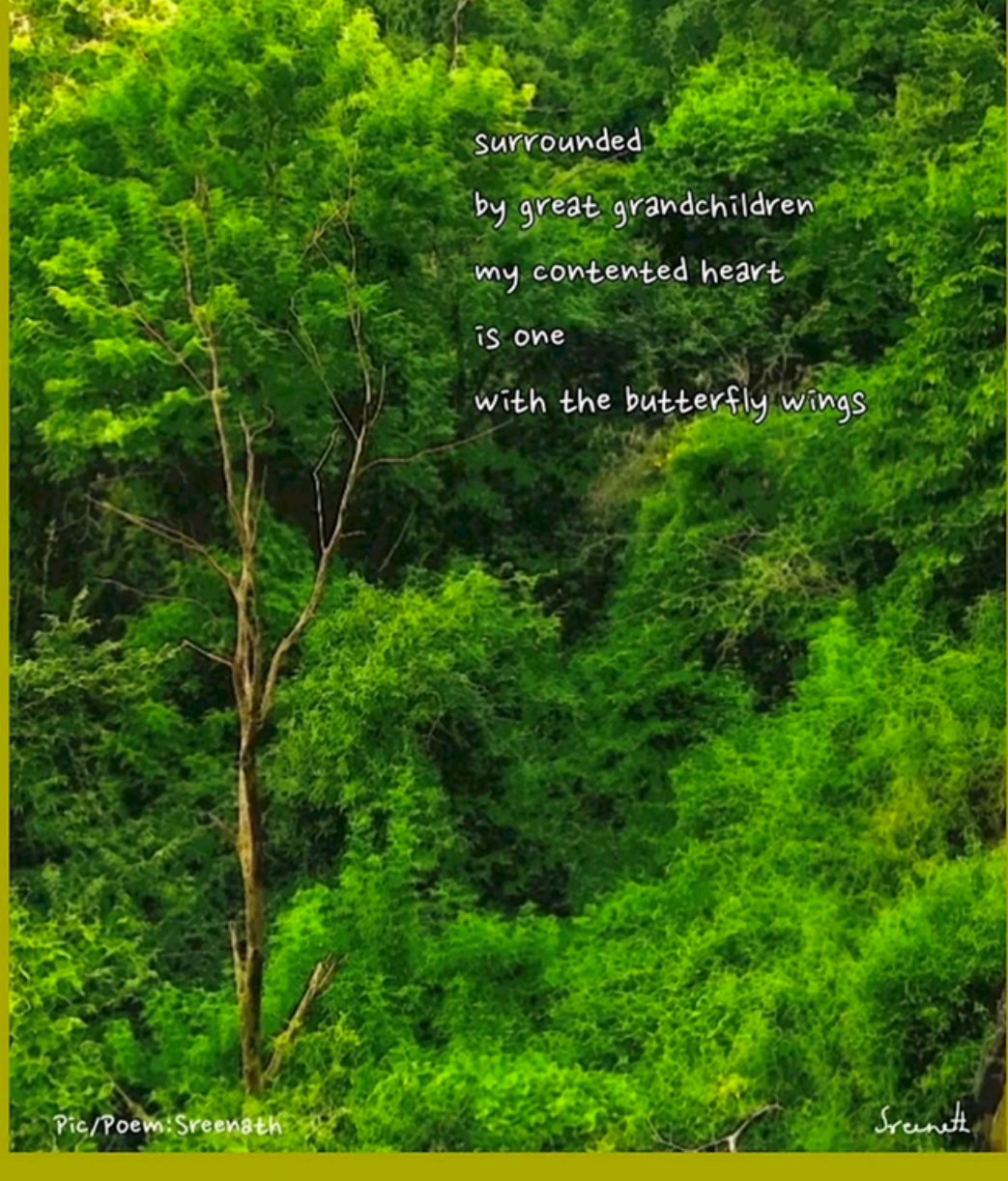


night safari
the spotlight falls
on moving spots

Pic/Poem Sreenath

Sreenath

tanka-art



surrounded
by great grandchildren
my contented heart
is one
with the butterfly wings

Pic/Poem: Sreenath

Sreenath

wind rages
through the dried leaves
of oak and maple
indifferent to my pain
we focus on your dreams

pic and tanka: Swroja

Dear Readers
thank you for being with us.

See you once again on 22 January 2025!
with many more fine poems
from our contributors.

Team: *haikuKATHA*