

Ashvamegh

and the journey thrives...

In This Issue

**Popular USA poet
Wally Swist hosted
by Ashvamegh as
featured poet**

**Poet from Ireland,
Michael Mulvihill**

**Review of The Last
Lecture by
Naisargi Bhatt**

Ashvamegh

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The 25th issue of Ashvamegh International Magazine

"What can we do together?"

Alok Mishra asks all the literary enthusiasts in his editorial.

NEW FEATURE!

Now you can directly comment on any poem or short story on our website. Go ahead and post your comments to encourage the authors and poets.

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Ashvamegh is an online international journal of literary and creative writing. Publishing monthly, Ashvamegh has successfully launched its 25th issue in February 2017 (this issue). Submission is open every day of the year. Please visit <http://ashvamegh.net> for more details.

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Alok Mishra: Editorial Message

The best possible way to lead the life, to me at least, is to ensure three things - never repeating the past mistakes, not worrying too much about the future and living the present wisely. And this lesson, to be frank, I have learnt from the books of literary fiction, non-fiction and some intellectual authors' book that I have studied. Time and again, it has been evident to us that we can learn only static things from the books of science. Force will always be the mass multiplied by acceleration, and that's all! The rules of life, the philosophy, ethics, and moral values can only be gained if we study good books of literature (except what we learn in society & the family). Without any hint of disrespect towards technology, I would like to make a simple proposition. Supposing that scientific innovation is a horse, we do need the rein of morality to ride it. And to me, good literary volumes supply this need! If you are wondering why all this comes to my mind all of a sudden, let me tell you that it's not about 'at once'. I have been in the public life with my literary credentials for many years now. However, what I sadly witness is that due to some books, 'literature' has separated itself from 'fiction' and people fail to realize the real value of studying a literary piece. Not only that, even the students of literature in universities don't take interest in literature other than the examination requirements but they do dream of being in a position to teach the coming generation of students! Although it has become the compulsion of the times, still, I do believe there are the people out there who want to observe literature for what it is - the force that it possesses. To all those out there, friends, my question is - what can we do together?

I will leave my worry in the box for the time and congratulate all those who have been published this month in Ashvamegh. I am very happy to let you all know that Ashvamegh has hosted Wally Swist, the renowned US poet as the featured poet for Issue.XXV, February 2017. I also welcome and congratulate Elisabetta Marion of the University of Rome who has joined us in the editorial board. Welcome, Elisa!

Also, let me have the pleasure to announce that upon the recommendation of some of our distinguished contributors, we have added the feature of comments on poems and short stories. Anyone who has a facebook id can easily comment on the poems and short stories. It will encourage the authors and poets to do more. Happy reading friends!

With wishes & love,

Alok Mishra

February 15, 2016

(connect directly with Alok on [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Website](#))

Poets selected and the featured Poet

- Wally Swist (Featured Poet)
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Wally Swist: Featured Poet

Introduction to the Poet:



Wally Swist is a noted poet and writer from MA, USA. His books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012); *The Daodejing: A New Interpretation*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder (Lamar University Literary Press, 2015); *Invocation* (Lamar University Literary Press, 2015), and *The Windbreak Pine* (Snapshot Press, 2016). Many of his books are to come, including *The View of the River* (Kelsay Books, 2017), *Candling the Eggs* (Shanti Arts, LLC, 2017), and *Singing for Nothing: Selected Nonfiction as Literary Memoir* (The Operating System, 2018). Wally Swist is a multi-talented person who has also been writing, editing and teaching for several magazines and institutions.

Ashvamegh has hosted Wally Swist as the featured poet for February 2017, Vol.III, Issue.XXV. Below, you can read four of his poems.

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

The Enchanted Tailor

for Fikriye King

You mend my old khakis; tear out
the shredded lining of black silk
in my Yale Genton frock coat,

replace it with a new one,
quoting what price it would
normally cost, and what you

will charge me, which is half
off. You ask me if there is
an extra for the one missing

button that fell off below
the collar of a favorite green
summer shirt, and after looking

along the front tail, where
some are often sewn, I am
embarrassed to say there isn't;

and you lightly reprimand me
as if I were a relative, of which
I am honored to be if I could,

but you suggest that you will
find two black emerald buttons
of for replacements, snip off

the single lonesome one, and sew
them both on, so I can then affix
them to my button-down collar.

When I pick up the shirt
later in the week, you ask me,
How you like, and I answer you

with an appreciative nod
and my smile, asking, *How much*.
You answer, *Two dollars*, and

we bask in the glow of what is
good company, your Radio Free
Europe/Radio Liberty station

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

broadcasting news in Turkish;
a friend of yours from your
Muslim prayer group, laughing

delightedly over the decorative
embellishments you have woven
into what may be a festivity of

wedding dresses assembled
together on a line in your shop,
beside a poster for an event in

town to raise funds for
the refugees from the war in Syria.
I pay you for making my old

shirt new again, and in what is
only a passing moment another
business transaction of ours is

over again, until I find another
tear in yet one more seam,
or discover wear in my paisley

comforter which has warmed me
for many winters, that you find
a way to tuck up, to stitch over,

to renew any wear or frays with
needle and thread, unwinding from
what appears to be your magical

spool, from which you are able to
repair what are endless imperfections
in the clothes we wear and what

we might keep bundled
around us to stem the unremitting
bitterness of being underdressed

in the cold, which has no
borders, knowing that, as you do,
the fabric of lovingkindness fits all.

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

Sundarbans

Where four rivers
empty into a confluence of freshwater
forests of mangrove swamps:
Bramaputra, Ganges, Meghna, Padma.

Where four rivers resonate with
a chatter of macaques, and the blade of
the sawfish gleams; where you can hear
the splash of the saltwater crocodile.

Where four rivers
provide sustenance for itinerant fisher-
man and honeygatherers
who range deep into the Sundari groves.

Where four rivers
offer sanctuary for the Bengal tiger, who
is a formidable swimmer, to roam
the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and India.

Where four rivers gather
fisherman have fashioned masks to wear
on the back of their heads to try to thwart
fierce attacks by the Bengal tiger.

Where four rivers flow
it is said that a fisherman fought off such
an attack by using his fishing pole
in his defense of a tiger's teeth and claws.

Where four rivers stream
together in a rush, a fisherman on a bank
hears a crackle of sticks, and turns to see
what is about to spring upon him is a tiger.

Where four rivers sweep
toward the sea, honeygatherers walk through
the dark forest carrying the combs
of bees amid the Bengal tiger's echoing roar.

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

Where four rivers meet,
the mangrove forests are named Sundarbans,
which in Bengali means
beautiful forest, flickering in light and shade.

Where four rivers course
through green mangroves, it is said that only
an infirmed Bengal tiger, one who has lost
some teeth, will attack a boat of fisherman.

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

Heart's Essence

*The heart is not human that does not love. There is no use
in denying the fact that happiness or misery is, somehow,
strangely connected with the connections of the heart.*

—an underlined passage in *The Romance of Abelard and Heloise*
by O. W. Wight, page 13 (New York: Appleton, 1853), a book
found in Emily Dickinson's bedroom

What connections of the heart draw us together, Emily,
on this day that will too soon be forgotten,
the rhododendron hedge flowering pink between your
lawn and your brother, Austin's; a festival of buttercups
beneath oak and shagbark hickory.

What a buzz of silence there is behind
these ivory-colored lace curtains; your white linen dress
on display next to your chair and writing table;
a lamp you might have used on the second floor looking
west on Main Street in Amherst.

What sadness there is in each moment
in its passing and what hope this fresh wallpaper offers
with green stems and leaves, whose arbors support such
a rich color of the rose, alembic of the heart's essence,
that it pacifies the mind and invites repose—

constancy being no simple thing,
as your devotion to poetry exemplifies.
However, is this not how we are connected through such
diligent practice that we plough through our own beds
of sorrow to till the soil of our discontent

until we may nourish ourselves on the crops
of our soil's largesse? Both flower and fruit indicative of
the harvest of our own expansiveness and transcendence;
our own poetic alchemy converting boons from loss,
grace from malcontent;

psychic free radicals to ascetic sobriety; our dryness
whetted by the intoxicating elixir
of the lubricant of the auspiciously written word,
the ones that defy gravity and lift
off the page in their own light; and hover there,

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

igniting a deeper resonance of our experience of what
it is to live our lives, that provides us
with the stalwart guidance that what mere words
in their apparent insubstantiality could
only affirm when they are infused with such intrinsic

subtlety and depth they exhibit how everyone
is connected to each other as through
the thread in the needle's eye, in sewing together
of your language in such harmony. Especially when
we find the tree in the smallest stick, a guiding light

in each puddle beneath the stars, the first words
of a verse, and the melody of its refrain;
so that we might begin to sing, as we walk in the rain
from street to street in the coat that we wear,
which you have woven with such expert care.

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

The White Stag

for Linda Jones

The box you painted
with the white stag bounding through
autumn swale, descending the ridge

below nearly defoliated birch, maple,
and oak, augurs the otherworldly
dimension which informs our daily

lives on this plane, from which
the Celts believed this animal
was both a herald and messenger.

Although it is also a sign of taboo,
as in the transgression of Pwyll,
Prince of Dyfed, and his hounds,

trespassing King Anwan's hunting
grounds. Arthurian legend honed
its reliance on the white stag's

ability to evade capture and that
when seen the sighting proved
to be an indication to begin a quest,

also denoting the incipience of the hero's
journey. Saint Eustace, Christian
martyr, saw a vision of a crucifix

between the antlers of a white stag
while hunting in ancient Tivoli,
which precipitated his perseverance

in his faith, despite a litany of afflictions
which rivaled the tribulations of Job.
Even Robert Baden-Powell, founder

of world scouting, lectured about
the white stag, and didn't espouse
it being hunted, but taught that it was

Wally Swist: Featured Poet

a symbol of moving onward, not
without joy, and was emblematic of
woodswalking itself. Hungarian myth

relays that the brothers Hunor and
Magor were visited by a white stag,
and that it led them to Scythia, where-

upon they founded the Magyar tribe.
C. S. Lewis anointed a white stag to
steer the sleigh of Jadis, the white witch,

but was responsible for also leading
the children out of Narnia, which
intimates the duality of both good and evil.

How this animal furthermore portends
compassion, is seen in the tale by Kate
Seredy, *The White Stag*, in which even

Atilla the Hun, known historically as
the *Scourge of God*, followed this white
hart on a mythological journey which

brought his people to a new country
in which they could settle, live in peace.
It is also said that anyone who is enough

of an adept hunter to snare the white
stag is then granted three wishes,
upon which, at this time, I might open

the lid of this painted wooden box,
which you gave me so generously
and graciously as a gift, and prudently

lift my eyes up to meet those
of the white stag and ask for grace
to abound in my heart and in my home.

Aanchal Munjal

Introduction to the Poet:

Aanchal Munjal is an assistant professor, department of English, Chandigarh University. She has been teaching almost for five years. Aanchal is an MA in English from Kurukshetra University and M. Phil from Madurai Kamaraj University, TN. The poems below are originally in Hindi, written by Dr. Manish Goswami, univ. of Chandigarh.

Certainty in University

In the uncertainty
of things if anything
is certain – It's you.

Job, land, house,
place and city
nothing is long-lasting
certain is – God.

Not certain for the river
where to go
where to flow swift
where slow
only thing certain
to forge ahead.

Education makes – Literate
not gives the certainty of job
decency – is certain for a literate
not certain to become – a millionaire.

Righteousness – is certain of a righteous
yet does not certain anything
not money, not even

Aanchal Munjal

body and mind
even if
that remains barely fine
but the mind of
a righteous – never waves.
Certain for an honest
not to be encircled by
the troubles which
encircle – the dishonest
in uncertainty.

The certainty to
have a baby boy
has made the life
of innumerable daughters – uncertain
yet the joys were not
certain associated with
the birth of a baby boy.

Killed the rights of
many poor by brooding
over our own poverty
yet uncertain
for a merchant and politician
in which country and condition
will be fostered their
grandson and the great grandson
and
to bring you in this world

Aanchal Munjal

my own existence became
uncertain.

The House Speaks

My brother!
even after many years
I failed to become your home
the house regrets and speaks.

Fool! Don't sale it
house speaks
my father poured
blood instead of water
in its mud mortar.

You Shameless!
you made in it STD-PCO
house speaks
mother reiterated
father to make it
for our comfort.

In dignity you speak
my brother is pleased
to pay huge money for the house
but, Is the reason to be happy?

You don't have a
heart of stone that ever sale me
and by the way

Aanchal Munjal

sleep on footpath
with a bag of money
after selling me.

How foolish this man is!
speak the houses among themselves
the onion potatoes will
not get costly
if he overlaid us.

The house speaks
how clever this contractor is
who calls me a house
but considers me a shop.

Roof

One__
Sky – A roof
God bestowed upon every man
still a man wished for another one.

Two__
Almost, everyone should have
a roof either his own or on rent.

Three__
didn't matter
the roof belonged to us
or to others but

Aanchal Munjal

remained glorious
till father was there.

Four__

Flats in lakhs
bungalows in million
in rented house or in hut
the roof remains over head
but these days
very less we stand
on our own roof.

Five__

In the word of wafers
will not forget to make
potato chips on roof.

Six__

On roof we will meet
the moon
with moon we will meet
the stars...
life will exist on a star
where we will meet the
parted souls.

Robin Goodfellow

Introduction to the Poet:

Robin Goodfellow is a student at the University of North Texas. She first became interested in writing when she was three, scribbling all over her parents' walls and imagining herself in old fairytales while walking in her father's garden. Since then, she has published poems in the online magazine, Nature Writing, as well as the Haiku Journal, the Healing Poems, and others.

Troubadour

You sailed to the ends of the
earth, the tides drawing you
in, the ocean breeze washing
over you, like
memories.

Your hand against the railing,
you look out at the twilight
surrounding you, the midnight
blue reflected across the mirrors
in your
eyes.

And all the while, you hum
your tunes, singing loudly into
the evening skies, without any
sadness, or any fear. You do
so, though the darkness surrounds
you, the clock winding faster and
faster.

Beyond the sights, and beyond
the sounds, you dance on the
ocean waves. You laugh and cry
and sigh, calling upon the wonders
of your own, endless
heart.

Family and friends all call for
you, the distant scent of home
within the salt gales. You call
their names and you say you
miss them. They smile and run to
you, arms wide.

Like a troubadour, traveling the midst of time,
you sing your majestic hymnals and rhymes.

Michael Mulvihill

Introduction to the Poet:

Michael Mulvihill hails from Dublin, Ireland. He is a widely published poet in various magazines across the world. He has also published two poetry books – Searching for Love Central and The Genesis and Anatomy of Love. Michael has also written the horror novels – Diabolis of Dublin and Siberian Hellhole.

Fill Flowers with Blooms

Fill flowers with blooms,
Wash the soul completely,
Present a new feeling,
Dream not of pleasures,
Dream of paradises.

Love Grew All the Summer Long

In my front garden,
The best things grow,
A single rose appeared,
Beside the place where I grew my love,
So I stayed patiently beside it,
And slept outside it, in the heat,
Time progressed,
Beside the one rose in bloom where 3 bulbs stayed,
The bulbs were asking like prisoners to be released,
As small birds rested on a phone line,
Five in total,
Singing, as if this was a summer of elation,
The other bulbs kept protesting for their release,
The summer breeze blew gently upon my face,
And at the time when the bulbs of the rose bush bloomed I kissed her lips most tenderly,
I held her like I would never say goodbye.

Goutami DasNayak

Introduction to the Poet:

Goutami DasNayak is a senior resident in the department of Pathology, SCB Medical College, Cuttack, Odisha. She likes listening to music, reading and writing poetry.

GOODBYE

Looking at the last things lovely,
When time draws near,
It's your touch that I feel
And your voice that I hear.

A sweet pain invades my heart
And numbness for a while,
I seize those pearls from my eyes
And gather them to a smile.

We look far from here, together,
Time has come and gone
But the sweetest words are left unsaid
And the sweetest deeds undone.

FREEDOM

I was a caged bird
With quivering pains,
Silent screams,
Nipped in bud were all my dreams.

Then one fine day,
Hope shone on my way
Unleashing my soul,
Carried me in full sway

And I soared high,
Weighing this limitless sky
Spreading across my little wings,
I found the joy that Freedom brings.

Shalini Mund

Introduction to the Poet:

Shalini Mund hails from Sambalpur, Odisha. She has completed her B.E in Electrical Engineering from Gandhi Institute of Engineering & Technology. She is working in Pinnacle Infotech Ltd. She began writing when she was 15 and she mostly writes about feministic perspectives.

GOLDEN FUR

Dew dried up to become pearls,
the grasses were stained pale yellow,
and the field grew old age farm,
as the spring was gone and summer had come,
a wind had blown away my golden fur,
it was lost among the galaxy of corn...

I took a halt,
sprayed my sight all over,
searched for a drop of water in the sea,
but all i found was
essence of my fur
felt everywhere...
Suddenly a strong force pulled me aside,
and i was down in no time,
threatened by the volcanic eyes and
thundering voices crowding me...

They were jeweled with anaconda long rods,
having few microns, round tips,
and kilometers long.
the buzz was abruptly covered
with mourn silence,
when they tied my limbs with chained,
and fixed, the pin-top rod under the chin...

As i closed my eyes,
sensing the end nearer,
dreamed of being carried away on time's wagon,
it took me to a corn field nearby,
where dew were water and
field was greener. I
saw me playing with my fur,

Shalini Mund

that was sparkling among the background...

Aah!! it was painful,
it clinched into my body,
and tore my chest apart.

It started flowing, the blood,
yes its yellow but not red.
When it swamped on the ground,
sun rays were making it more dazzling,
and it was making their
lofty job more struggling...

Cutting the bone cage,
that was fueling their rage,
finally they got the core, my heart,
which was still beating,
in the memory of that fairy tale...

My lips widened a little,
when i saw the fur again,
my heart stopped beating in their hands,
as if it was waiting for the golden fur,
for a final good bye
that evening!

Sanjay Thakur

Introduction to the Poet:

Sanjay Thakur has almost nine years of teaching experience at college and university level. He takes care of the linguistic and literary dimensions of the studies. He has academic memberships of GERA and ASIA TEFL. His areas of interest are Indian English Literature, British Literature, Feminist Writings, Translation Studies and communication skills. Besides this, he is actively participating in various International/national conferences, seminars and delivered guest lectures. His current assignment is with Department of English of S.S Sujanpur Tira. He is an M.A. M. Phil. P.G.D.T.E(Eng) M.Ed. Ph.D (Pur)

AFTER DEATH...?

A question pierces like arrow, what that uncanny realm?
What unsorted query beyond all human contemplations?
Away from worldly reach & sensibility, ethereal by nature
What space, where all bound to depart some day
Will new benign journey or old deeds appositely adjudged?
A mystery hovering all minds....

Few declared prolonged sleep, few perceived His will
Few terror struck, route to heavenly abode, said others
For some, a mild transition into vacuum, 'Nirankaar'
Unfettering the shackles of mundane world wholly
Gateway to ferry us in vicious worldly sea solely
A mystery since ages keeps thoughts in cages

Is there other realm or perceived notion only?
Is place of tranquil joy, or untold sorrow?
After it, soothing or perennial ache all around
Vicious cycle on earth or much awaited emancipation
Where do we lead and what account for?
Oh! Only mundane justification!

Sanjay Thakur

Since ages, riddle unresolved, though, debated most
References from divinity to eternity to define nature
Even thought blows, Aghast! One day to relinquish all
But, believe or not, beauty lies in its complexity itself.
Better human to be human only, focus mending actions
Let divinity be at its play without transcending its limit.

A VIEW FROM THE HILLS

A panoramic view extends from high hills
Gust of air, echoing vale, joy it fills
Twitter & chirps amidst dense wood
Gushing torrent cascading down from hills
A sweet music begets & spells every heart
A life song, that goes & goes interminably

Down there in the vale, a sailor faring in the
Placid water and tranquil surrounding amidst
Momentary squeals and squeak across the river
Appears just started his journey and resolute
To get destination, By and by disappears
Leaving vague signs on the waves

At far distance in the middle of shrubby hills
Flute notes enthrall & sadden every heart
Love lorn pain with rising & falling tone
Expressing the sorrow of bleeding heart
Must be a Shepherd, missing his beloved one
People feel the prick of his conscience, standstill

Sanjay Thakur

Small Villages there, like beads of rosary
Though still sleepy, sunshine in the morning rays
People start rushing out of their home
To move in groups for the wood on their way
Ladies back at home, ignites the fire in the kitchen
Smoke comes out the roof as a sign of hay day

Children start their play, boisterous it become
Amused grandparents enjoying the delicacies
Childhood being blessed stage, wish to relive
Now, Sun being at the centre of sky, all come
To relish the food inside. Even grazing sheep
Gather to rest on the hills, now, all silence it fills

Authors selected and their stories

- Kitchen Knife by Aishwarya Chaurasia
- MisCalculation by Sithara P. M.
- Rose is Red and so is the Blood by Rumi Sharma

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Aishwarya Chaurasia

Introduction to the Author:

An aspiring writer and unfortunate corporate slave, Aishwarya Chaurasia wants to take up writing as a career. She holds a B Com honours from SRCC, Delhi University and works in Samsung. Passionate about writing, she finds a kind of pleasure in it. Active in participating in literary happenings, Aishwarya is committed to pursue writing as a long-term goal.

Kitchen Knife

I woke up with a start in the dark room, sweating profusely. My body heavy and throat dry. Sitting up, I stared at the fan moving slowly before coming to halt. Something must be wrong with the generator, I thought. I tried to reach out to my phone in the dark, I had left it on the table beside my bed before sleeping. It was 3 AM.

I decided to open a few windows to let the breeze come in. Using the faint light my phone was emitting I made my way towards it, tripping on my way on a cup, I didn't remember I owned. Getting up and directing the light towards the window, I froze. There on the window was a reflection of a figure, blurred but definite, scorching at the extreme end of the room. I was suddenly aware of every sound and every movement in the room. Closing my eyes tightly shut, I wished it all to be a dream. I opened my eyes only to look at the figure closely. I saw it now, it had a knife. I could see it gleaming in the dark.

It was not a dream. There was someone in my room. I considered darting out of the house, but how long will the figure take to catch me? No. It will be best if I pretend I don't know its existence. I opened the window, trying my best to keep my hands from shaking. I had my phone with me, I can alert my flatmate. But how can I alert her without alerting the figure? I realised I was sweating like a faucet even in the cool breeze. The only sound in the dark night was that of my thumping heart. The figure was listening. My body tensed, I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins as I clinged to my dear life. I had to pretend everything was normal! But how and for how long?! And then it hit me, what better way to pretend everything is normal than calling out to someone and making normal conversation?

I called out to my flatmate. "Archu, I feel very hot! I think my fan stopped working, can I sleep with you?" No answer. God, she is fast asleep. I called out again, this time loudly and more clearly.

"Archana, wakey wakey! Can I sleep in your room, please?!"

"I guess." She whispered in my ear.

A chill ran down my spine, my eyes aghast and breathing erratic. I turned to look straight in her dead eyes. There she was, in her night suit, her hair all over her face and in her hand, a kitchen knife. I felt my body go cold. My legs gave in and I fell on the floor, consciousness slipping away from me.

Aishwarya Chaurasia

I woke up next morning in the drawing room. It took me about a minute to recall the events of last night and the familiar sense of foreboding crept over me. I got up and found Archana standing over me, her hands on her hips. She had a weird expression on her face. I just stared at her.

“Were you drinking again last night?” she snapped.

What?

“God, you were, weren’t you! You look so pale. Go get fresh, I’ll get you some lemon juice.”

Nothing made sense. Was I in hell already? I got up to go to my room when she stopped me.

“I woke up on the sofa you know, Aishu? Did you put me in the sofa?”

I gulped. “No”, I could hardly get words out of my mouth.

“Hmm. Anyway, I can’t find the only kitchen knife we had. God knows how we keep losing knives every now and then.”

I gulped harder, “No idea”, I said.

M(i)s.CALCULATION

Introduction to the Author:

Sithara P.M is an Asst.Professor, working in the PG Department of English, Nehru Arts and Science College, Kanhangad in Kasargod District. She was a gold medallist for both her UG and PG degrees from Kannur University and Pondicherry Central University respectively. She hails from Kannur and is currently pursuing PhD at Kannur University. Her area of expertise is Trauma Theory. She has to her credit a number of publications in both online and print journals.

The students had nicknamed her *Ammayi* which meant aunt, perhaps more than just an aunt-someone who was capable of bossing you, a domineering aunt, an aunt who was never liked. Of course there are lovable *Ammayis* but this *Ammayi* belonged to the former clan of most feared terrible matriarchs. She was our Maths teacher who sincerely taught us to hate Maths. Even those of us who loved numbers developed a frown at her brand of Mathematics and those like me who could only nibble with numbers started looking at Maths as if it were a horrific monster that could devour you alive. It seemed like she had counted it as her supreme duty to make us suffer and regret our decision of choosing Maths group.

She would take special classes daily as if with some kind of vengeance. She would give a hundred sums for home work every day to make sure Maths choked us to death. She would make us study by heart the theorems at gun point. If at all, someone asked a doubt regarding any problem he would be made to do that on the board to expose his ignorance before the class and get humiliated. Which guy in his senses would ask a doubt for the second time in his life!

Ammayi went about her task of tormenting us, torturing us with mathematical precision. If she was on leave on a day that became sufficient reason for celebration among students. A year went by this way. My life assumed the proportion of a wicked sum that refused all solutions. It was then, we learnt from someone that she had applied for transfer and like never before we all became religious. Mandir, Masjid and Church echoed with our prayers for her-for her transfer. God could not refuse so many petitioners and so that day dawned when we ecstatically received the news of her transfer.

It was a dream cherished by all to tell her someday, may be years after, what a terrible teacher she was and how she had literally killed the subject she taught and murdered our appetite to learn it further.

The teacher who came after her was her opposite in every sense. She was a balm for our broken senses. She had a hard task of reviving our ailing Mathematical sensibilities. With all patience, she differentiated our problems and integrated us back to the system. *Ammayi* was pushed to oblivion but only to re-emerge in my nightmares.

Years went by. Most of my friends landed in diverse professions and as fate would have it I became a teacher But not definitely a Mathematics teacher but an English teacher. Life was smooth. I was tremendously pleased to keep Maths as away from me as possible but the nightmares about Maths classes never really died down.

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One fine day on my way to college, at the Railway station I happened to meet *Ammayi* . Though it was years since I met her last it felt like yesterday. I could hear my own heart beat like a drum. This was the moment I was waiting for, wasn't it? So now I was to go to her introduce myself and tell her how she had failed as a teacher. With these thoughts occupying my mind my steps might have slowed down. It was then she sighted me and I could see recognition dawn on her face. She had greyed a little, except for that there was hardly any change but the smile I saw on her was definitely new. My heart was in my mouth when she rushed to me and held my hands. After so many years... she remembered me! I who was never a remarkably good student ...someone who had just managed to scrape through. I was tongue tied. The dialogue I had rehearsed all my life was crushed under the superfast train that passed by. Instead I heard myself utter all profanities...all sugar coated words in the world landed on my tongue. I saw myself responding to her warm smile.

What had happened to my long cherished revenge? What happened to the words I had sharpened with my tears? Could a smile just erase all the past memories? I couldn't locate my own feelings. But all of a sudden revenged seemed so insignificant...the pleasure of seeing a look of hurt meant nothing. Teachers are teachers after all, I philosophised .The teacher in me had conquered the student.

Rumi Sharma

Introduction to the Author:

Rumi Sharma works as an Assistant Professor in Department of English, Furkating College, Assam. She writes poems, articles and short stories in the popular newspaper of North-East “The Assam Tribune” and other Magazines. Rumi loves to read books and magazines.

Rose is red, so is the blood

“No, no, it should not have happened. Today things are repeating once again in my life. It has been a long time since flowers have bloomed in my yellow garden, and had any bees and butterflies flit over the daisies. Why is it so? Is it an indication of that crucial time, approaching my door? Someone please stop this for God sake.”

Lina could not sleep the night before. She only thought of Bidyut’s marriage proposal for her. She knew it very well that the staff’s provocation had resulted in this. She was aware of this result much before Bidyut actually proposed her. But she paid less attention to all those unnecessary gossips. Now she thought, had she not talked with Bidyut much; had she not gone to the office canteen together for lunch; had she avoided Bidyut after noticing his love for her in his eyes; she would not have faced this situation today. As they worked in the same department, so it was rather difficult to avoid such person that too knowingly. Lina then decided to call Bidyut once and meet him and explain all the circumstances rather than avoiding it. She dialed his number, but immediately touched the “end” button on the mobile screen. Something stopped her. She then left a message in his phone, “Can U meet me today’s evening in Uzan Park?” After a few seconds her mobile screen flashed with a message. It was none other than Bidyut’s reply, “ok I will reach there by 4pm. Eagerly waiting to see u in the evening.” After reading that message, Lina was quite clear about his feeling. So she did not continue with the message chatting.

As it was a Sunday morning, she was rather working lazily that day. Because for every working person Sunday means a lazy day, where there is no time machine, no Boss, no workloads. Rather it is an individual independence day. She made a coffee for herself and sat in the verandah with the morning newspaper. But she could not concentrate on the newspaper. She gave a cursory look over the headlines and kept it aside. That day she was totally absent minded. She could not concentrate in any of her household work. By the time it was 2pm. She watched the clock and remembered that Bidyut promised her to meet at 4pm. She hurried up, had her lunch and got ready to see him in that park by the side of the mighty Brahmaputra. She always preferred to go to that park as the natural beauty of the ambience enhanced the Park’s beauty. She dressed herself in a black *kurta* with a combination of light blue leggings matching with the small embroiders in her *kurta*. She wore small earrings; put a *bindi* on her forehead leaving her hairs half clutched. She had reached the park by 3.50 and waited for Bidyut outside the entrance.

Meanwhile she remembered the day when she had seen Bidyut in their office for the first time. It was month of April. Just after the *Bohag Bihu*, Bidyut was newly appointed in their office. He was

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distributing sweets among the staff as it was his first day in that office. Lina's eyes caught sight of a boy wearing deep blue shirt with black formal pants standing at the doorstep of her cabin with something in his hands. He came in and introduced himself as Bidyut Saikia, joining newly as a superintendant cum accountant in their office. He offered the packet of sweets to her. Lina took one piece from it and thanked him. She then introduced herself to him saying her name and offered him a chair. He sat down and took notice of the cabin. Everywhere files and files and in the middle a girl sitting on her chair with a table full of papers and files. He immediately asked her, "Are you not bored working here?" She did not reply to his question. She only passed a sigh, which was enough for Bidyut to find his answer. Lina then said to Bidyut, "welcome to our boring file loaded life." Bidyut- "Thank You". After a few minutes of talk Bidyut left her cabin. His cabin was just opposite to her.

Gradually there grew a friendship between the two. As they were the youngest among the staff, everybody loved them. They often went to the canteen together. Both teased each other. Bidyut sometimes accompanied her for shopping. So there grew a strong bonding between them. As such the senior women staff began to tease them. But both avoided to their comments with a smile.

But it was really shocking for Lina, when Bidyut actually proposed her for marriage. He said, "If you wish, I am ready to carry those shopping bags for you forever. Rather I would be happy to grow old with you by carrying a stick in one hand and shopping bags on the other." Lina was completely silent for a few minutes. She did not know how to react to that proposal. She sat on her chair without uttering a word. Bidyut broke the silence by saying, "you need not give your answer now. Take your time. I am not in a hurry. In fact I can wait for your answer till my last breath. Because you are the one with whom I would like to spend my life. I love you." He then left the room. Lina was still numb. After a few minutes she took her hand bag and walked out of the office. Everybody was surprised to see Lina leaving the office so early that day. When Bidyut came to know about that, he tried to contact her over phone. But he failed, as Lina's phone was switched off. He was then worried about her. He could not understand this reaction of her to his proposal. He thought maybe she had the same feeling for him but felt shy of admitting it, so left early. But if so, why would she switch off her cell phone. He again dialed her number, but failed to contact her.

On her way to her home, Lina was only thinking of that proposal. She could not tell anyone why she was reacting in that way. She did not want things to repeat the same. She did not want that crucial time to wash away her happiness for the next time.

Meantime Bidyut reached there and called her near her ears. She got frightened, as she was in another dreaming world thinking of Bidyut. He got two entry tickets from the counter. They then entered the park and sat on a bench, viewing the flow of the Brahmaputra. Both were silent for a few minutes. Lina then broke the silence by saying, "I am sorry for yesterday's behavior. I have something to say, in fact share a bitter truth of my life. This is very important for you to know. And no one in the office knew about this thing of mine."

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“Six years ago, I met him.” Bidyut immediately asked, “He?” Lina continued, “yes, he. He was a teacher, name Akash; Akash Baruah. I met him in a drama competition held in the district library of Jorhat. Both of us were participant in that competition. 1st prize Rs10000. Luckily in that competition I won the ‘best actress’ and he the ‘best actor’. As such we talked with each other. There I came to know that he was two years senior to me in studies. I was in BA 1st year at that time and he was a third year student. His house was in Dhemaji and I belonged to Baihata chariali. It seems as if destiny had called us to that drama competition. That day as it was too late to return to our homes, so both our teams with a few other teams stayed in Jorhat that night. We had our dinner together. Both of our teams stayed in the same hotel. Next day, as we were getting ready to go home, he came in front of my room to bid me goodbye. By the by he asked me for my contact number. I also exchanged my number without giving a second thought to it. That was the beginning.

That night he text messages to me. I also replied to his messages. Gradually there grew a friendship between us. He once called me and said that he wanted to meet me. I invited him to my place. Surprisingly he was there after two days of that phone call. He was just standing outside my college gate. At first I could not believe my own eyes. I went near him, talked with him, and later I arranged his stay for that night in one of my friends’ house. That night I also stayed in my friend’s house. We introduced him to her parents as our classmate; and we convinced them by saying that we had a project to complete; as such we met. That day he proposed me in front of my friend. I felt so shy that I eloped from that place to the kitchen. Next day he returned to his home. While I went to see off him in the bus stop, he asked me for my answer to his proposal. I could not say anything at that moment. I kept bidding him goodbye, till the bus was invisible. After two days I accepted his proposal. Because I had a soft corner for him though I could not say so.

On the last day of my BA 3rd year examination, he called me and said that he wants to meet my parents. A week later he came to my house. My parents met him. They were quite impressed with him. He was a teacher by then in a higher secondary school near his house. Next, came his parents to our home. They talked with my parents regarding our marriage. We had our ring ceremony just after my final result was declared.

It was month of June, admission form were issued by all universities for MA courses. I also wanted to study further. But my father said that he will not be able to bear my expenses to study in the University. At that time Akash supported me and he told my father that if he had no objection than he would like to give my expenses during my University study. My father hesitated before, but Akash convinced him. So on the day of my admission he came along with us. We spent the whole day together. My parents were also there with us. We kept our belongings in a hotel room in Paltan Bazaar and we went out to have lunch together. That night we went back home in the night super. Our classes started from 1st August. As such I came to the hostel two days before. He accompanied me in that journey. After keeping my bag and baggage’s in my hostel room, we went to a restaurant for lunch, as we were very hungry by then. He went back to his home by the night super. As per the rule of the hostel I could not go to the bus stand to see him off. So I bid him goodbye in front

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of my hostel. He took my hand on his and said ‘stay well, I will contact you. Study well and always remember one thing that I love you and will miss you.’ He then suddenly kissed me on my forehead. I felt very comfortable, at the same time tears rolled down my eyes. He then bid me goodbye.

A few months later, there arrived the winter season. Akash came to see me in the hostel along with one of his friends. We went for shopping. As I did not bring any winter clothes from home before so we thought of buying a blanket along with some other winter clothes. First we went to Vishal Megamart, then to Big Bazar and at last to Fancy market. There we bought one thick and also a thin blanket, two sweaters for me and he bought one blazer for himself. We then went to a restaurant to have something. We ordered *butter naan* and *chicken butter masala*. Then we came to the Nehru Park in front of the Cotton College and sat there for a while. He then told me that they will return that very night. I was very upset hearing this. I requested him to stay for another day. But his friend could not stay. I also said that as it is foggy night during that season, so it’s better if they travel the next morning. His friend had certain important work, so they hurried to go that night even. They started their journey at 9.30pm. Akash drove the car. At 1AM Akash called me and said that they had reached Narayanpur and were both feeling sleepy so decided to sleep in the car itself. I too wished him Good Night.

Next day at 5.30 AM he called me, wished me good morning and said that they are about to start the journey again. Both hung up the call then. I too fell asleep.

At 7AM, someone knocked at my door. It was Ananya, one of my hostel mates cum classmate. She was repeatedly knocking at my door. I was annoyed of it and at last opened the door. I asked her what the matter is. Why are you knocking in such a hasty manner? She did not reply me, not a single word. She just pulled me and brought me to the common room of our hostel. There I saw most of the girls were present in that room. The TV was also on. I asked one of them, “What happen?” She also did not answer me. She just pointed her finger towards the TV. There I saw “The Big Breaking”...A road accident took place in Dhokuakhana Charialli; a Santro car collide with a Winger; one is seriously injured and one dead. No one other than the driver was injured of the Winger traveller. As per the local report the person driving the Santro car had been fatally injured on his head and was dead. His name is Akash Baruah...” I was standing still like a trump of a tree. I could not speak nor could I cry. I felt as if someone had pulled the earth beneath my legs. Ananya immediately hugged me and cried aloud. But I still remained silent. Not a single drop of tear rolled down my eyes. I went to my room packed my clothes and left for Dhemaji. Everybody called me that day; my parents, my friends. But I did not attend anybody’s call. My heart was not ready to accept the truth. I felt as if he would call me then and say”Jaan, I reached home safely”. I was waiting for his call all the way to his house. At 7PM that evening I reached his house. I saw from the entrance of his house that many people were gathering outside his house. Still I ignored the truth. As I opened the entrance gate, everybody looked at me. There lied he in the ground; covering his body with a white cloth. His mother came forward and said,” we were waiting for

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you. We alone cannot adieu him without you. Say goodbye to him my child". Hearing these words, I burst into tears. That time I felt that, yes I lost him; lost him forever.

Four years have passed and still I could not forget him; nor can I forever. Because he is within me. I loved him, love him and will love him forever. When sometimes people who are ignorant of the situation ask me about him, I tell them that he is fine. I cannot say to anyone that he is no more in this world. Because I could feel his presence everywhere. He is alive within me. I have a pillow made of his clothes. Whenever I miss him, I talk with that pillow and hug it tightly. I am sorry Bidyut. I could not say it to you before. Please forgive me for hurting you."

After Lina shared this bitter truth of her life with Bidyut, silence surrounded them. No one could speak anything further. Bidyut's eyes were moist. He could not say a single word. He could not even see to the eyes of Lina. An unknown guilt embraced him. Lina then silently walked away from that place. Bidyut followed her.