

# ALSPHERE

LITERARY & ART MAGAZINE

APRIL, 2022

## ALS CARAVAN UAE



**SPECIAL FEATURE**

**INTERVIEW WITH  
ERUM SAEED**

**FOUNDER,  
MOMS OF INDIA (MOI)**

# **ALSPHERE**

**Literary & Art Magazine**

**April 2022**

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## From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers

With great pride and excitement, I would like to present the April issue of ALSphere Magazine! We are grateful for the overwhelming response from our contributors.

The issue has a lot of interesting read.

From a poignant tale of an old age home to a story narrated from POV of a Phulkari drape, and from poems inspiring women, to the ones elucidating the charm of nature, we have it all in our pages.

Our special feature this time is the ALS Caravan UAE, a three-day event organized by ALS in the month of April.

We have featured the interview of the Founder of one of the biggest mummies' platform, Moms of India, Ms. Erum Saeed. The journey of Erum is not only interesting but also awe-inspiring. You must read how she grew from being a small Whatsapp group to a 500K+ FB community!

The vibrant artworks and intriguing photographs have made our issue more exciting.

And last but not the least, a detailed article on managing the behavioral issues of people of determination is also a part of the magazine.

Do read and share with your friends and family!

Congratulations to all the participants.

Cheers!

Vandana Bhasin

## Poetry

The new age 'Shakti' in bold new 'avatar'  
I refuse to be intimidated, barred or scarred

Manpreet Chadha

### The New Age Woman

Yes, I am a woman, a phenomenal benediction  
Rising from ashes, I am born out of conviction  
The new age 'Shakti' in bold new 'avatar'  
I refuse to be intimidated, barred or scarred

Housewife to homemaker metamorphosed  
Reckon me now a multifaceted force  
Manager, planner, advisor, rolled into one  
The new definition of new age woman

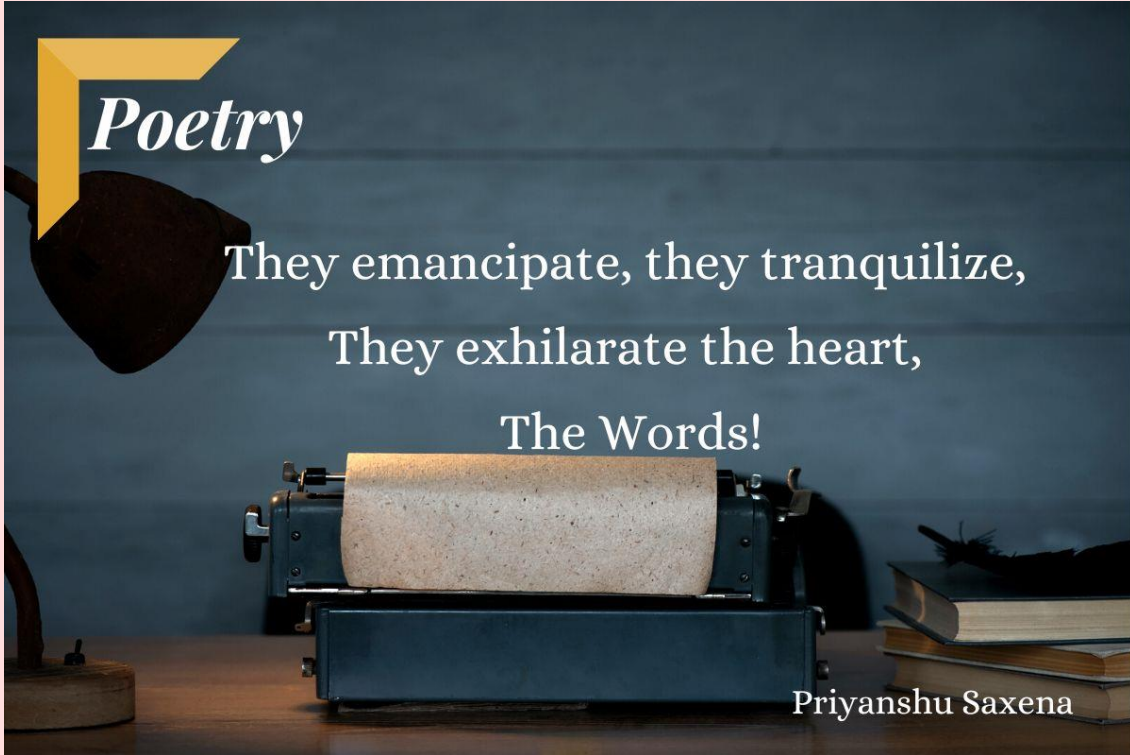
Gone are the times I was commoditized  
At my new address, I am not vandalized  
'No domestic violence' proclaims my house plate  
'No tolerance for teasers' shrieks my office space

With spring in my feet and spark in my gut  
I refuse to remain shut in the rut

Oh!' She is just a woman' I refuse to buy  
I stride on with my head held high

No more a weakling at the mercy of men  
Shattering stereotypes, I have come out of den  
Sole male preserves are crumbling one by one  
In the face of a striding phenomenal woman

**Manpreet Chadha**



*Poetry*

They emancipate, they tranquilize,  
They exhilarate the heart,  
The Words!

Priyanshu Saxena

## The Words

They shatter!  
They twiddle!  
They perforate the heart!  
The Words.

They catenate!  
They resolve!  
They appease the heart!  
The Words.

They prickle!  
They twinge!  
They exasperate the heart!  
The Words.

They emancipate!  
They tranquilize!  
They exhilarate the heart!  
The Words.

They perturb!

They bamboozle!  
They downcast the heart!  
The Words.

They pacify!  
They trailblaze!  
They gratify the heart!  
The Words.

**Priyanshu Saxena**





Poetry

I flaunt fake smiles for those  
Who can't infer the unsaid words

Arshi Alvi

## Somewhere, Some Emotions

Somewhere, some emotions die inside me  
And that's the moment, I fear the most

I sob, I whine, I internalize the grief  
I detach & embrace the solitude  
Then silently bury it, deep down my soul

There's something that chokes my breath  
That's when I feel half-dead, while I'm still alive

I struggle to cover up the dead emotion inside me gracefully  
I settle the ashes of broken heart pieces over it  
And consciously sprinkle on top of it, the smiles

There are some valuable emotions that wither inside me  
And that's the moment I worry the most

I flaunt fake smiles for those who can't infer the unsaid words  
Who believe in mythical smiles & ignore eyes telling fables  
Naked eyes, which hide not, behind any veil to drape genuine notions

Somewhere, some sensations vanquish inside me  
That's the exact moment when I bleed inside

There's something that blurs out inside me  
There's something difficult to heal  
Something, that stings me beyond repair

**Arshi Alvi**

## Poetry

The realization that I am a poetess,  
makes me feel strong & complete about myself

Ruchika Rastogi

### Am I a Poetess?

I am a poetess; I can imagine the unimaginable  
I want to imbibe nature  
I desire to love endlessly  
And I love to dream with my dreamy eyes and dreamy mind  
The harsh realities of today can't camouflage my desires  
As I wish to burn the world's hatred with my 'mighty pen'

The goal to overcome those passionate struggles  
The fearlessness to move ahead in stressful times  
The 'wanted' company, which I long for  
The guilty pleasures of childhood, youth and adulthood  
Are all provided to me by this loveable, tiny and seemingly unimportant "ink" of mine

My poetess' mind never lets me sleep until I pour my heart out on my "Little Journal"  
The realization that I am a poetess makes me feel strong and complete about myself  
It ignites my soul which probably can illuminate other souls  
The satisfaction I derive is inexplicable

Thus, gradually, hesitatingly, unconsciously as well as consciously,  
I agree and I am glad to accept

That I am a poetess who is breathing, smelling, speaking and munching poetry

**Ruchika Rastogi**



*Poetry*

Silently the clock of my eyes watches  
autumnal hues of my life merging with  
ocean

Ritu Kamra Kumar

## **The Clock of My Eyes**

The clock of my eyes moves independent of mechanical clock of time,  
That adorns my wall and rings every hour unlike clock of my mind

Clock of my eyes visits places near & far on dizzy aircraft of life,  
Peeps into my heart, shares my despair & delight

There is rosy & resonant dusk in the horizon of my eyes,  
Partake I with them, wine of my desires so wild

Knitted brow of my eyes glows in vivacious & vivid vibrance,  
When elated emotions surge in enlivening exuberance

The clock of my eyes penetrates into tunnels of my frost beaten dreams,  
Inner recesses of my mind they precisely read

The tick-tick of my vacant eyes with horrifying nightmares hears in swanky city  
Simmering sobs of downtrodden yearning for compassion & pity

Metaphor of love & lure, piety & pity, empathy & elation,  
Silently the clock of my eyes watches autumnal hues of my life merging with ocean

I pray,  
May golden slumber kiss everyone's eyes,  
Smile awaken you as the mechanical clock rings in the morning when you rise!

**Ritu Kamra Kumar**



*Poetry*

Setting was the sun brushing sepia over the  
indigo sky  
Oozing serenity from nature's robust canopy

Sampurna Ganguly

## **When We First Met at Twilight**

Sheeny are the memories as the majestic splendor of the drowning sun,  
Calm and quite as a limpid faucet runs,  
Down the memory aisle oft I retreat to the past,  
To see the astounding twilight tickling my mind fast

In murmuring of the river reverberated paeon of love,  
Eyes to eyes, bathed in warmth of the two entwined hearts,  
We floated and rejoiced with the revelry of the ripples,  
Passion of our love as the fiery ringlets of waves made our souls dribble

Setting was the sun brushing sepia over the indigo sky  
Oozing serenity from nature's robust canopy,  
Melting was I in his ineffable embrace,  
The boat was going forth like a penumbra with an ethereal grace

The calming breeze, the prow, and the illuminated world around,  
I quaffed the elixir of his love, and his words like music to my ears did sound,

Gasping in passion and comfort, I sat beside  
Still cherish the moment when we rode first together in that ambrosial twilight.

**Sampurna Ganguly**





## Trans-Autumn

I tread plaintively through the parachuting leaves  
the stripped-bare tree- dark, vulnerable, exposed  
mourns the loss of its accustomed cloak,  
I quiver in the winter chill.

The rays of dawn filter through the mist  
and kiss the spine of the trunk,  
the aged collars whirl in the unseen fire.

The tree gives away to the all-powerful source,  
all consumed; it no longer holds itself and  
breaks open into singular greens and purples.

I bask in the spires of spring,  
inception under the blue umbrella.

**Alka Balain**

**Poet's Note:** *The above poem depicts human ascension. When the Divine light graces us, we blossom under the blue welkin and become one with it.*



## ALS Caravan UAE

The growth of an organization is determined by its consistent efforts aimed at providing opportunities of development for its members.

We, at ALSphere Foundation, took our efforts beyond the physical boundaries to highlight the importance of literature and art of Asian countries by organizing a series of events in ALS Caravan UAE.

With the aim of enhancing cross-cultural understanding of people from the continent, Asian Literary Society organized a program to promote and celebrate the rich heritage of UAE's literature, art, and culture.

"Ebbing Echoes- An Anthology of Articles on Lesser-Known Languages & Art Forms of Indigenous Communities of Asia" compiled and edited by Mr. Manoj Krishnan was also launched.

A panel discussion about "Challenges and Opportunities in the UAE Book Publishing Industry" was organized at this event.

ALS Women's Alliance also organized an event aimed at highlighting the remarkable achievements of UAE-based women entrepreneurs. We also stressed upon the need for stronger participation by aspiring women entrepreneurs from all Asian countries to inspire millions of women in Asia.

Ms. Nisha Tandon (Chapter Head, ALS UAE) revealed that female entrepreneurship had seen massive growth in the UAE. While figures tend to focus primarily on Emirati women (whose business ownership has increased

by a factor of 14 from 2006 and 2013) there is an increase in female Small & Medium Enterprise ownership across the board, including expats.

ALS Parwaaz Forum (an initiative by ALSphere Foundation) organized an art workshop with UAE based artists to encourage the creative endeavors of the people of determination.

ALSphere Foundation has always focused on the need to hone the skills of people of determination from all over Asia and to help them work towards a sustainable source of income.

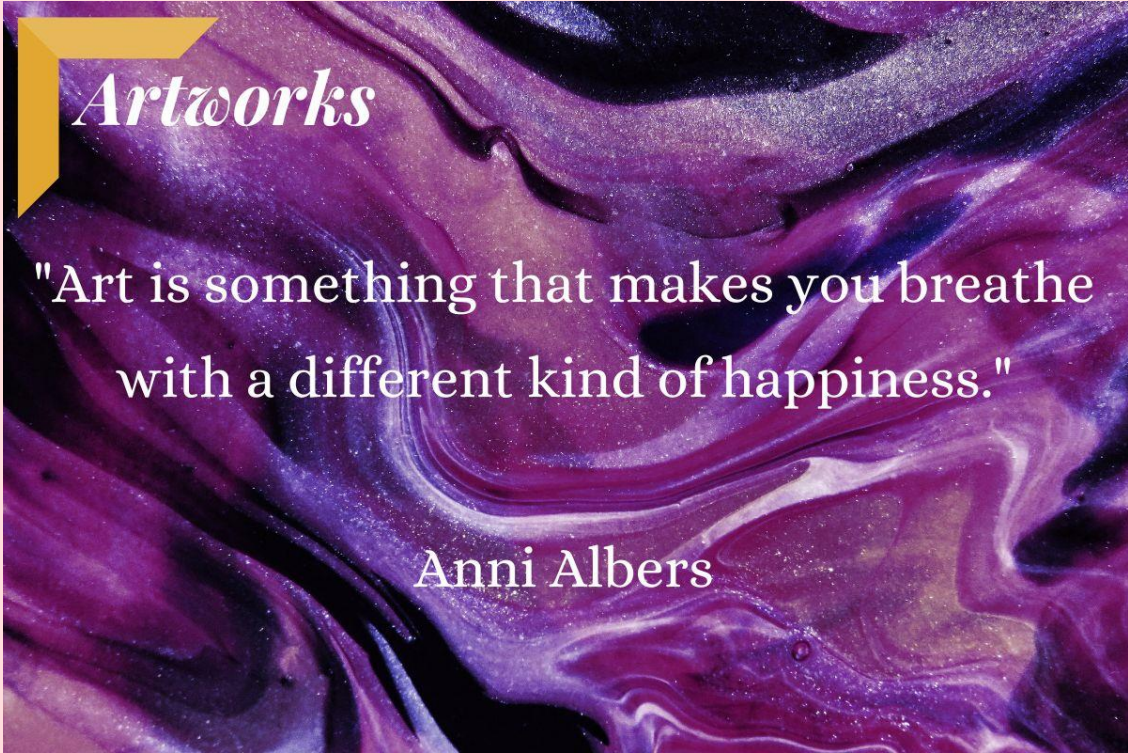
We highlighted the commendable work done for the people of determination in UAE and also shared the glimpses of programs done by ALS Parwaaz Forum with the special needs community in the past.

Ms. Wemmy de Maaker (Founder & Managing Director at Mawaheb from Beautiful People) stated that young adults with special needs should be seen as artists and people, not to be pitied.

Spread over three days and a variety of engaging events, we brought together notable people from different fields to celebrate the spirit of oneness despite physical and cultural boundaries.

ALSphere Foundation showcased its true purpose of being an Asian NGO, with the ultimate objective of serving the society through its efforts aimed at not only promoting literature, art and culture but also tending to the needs of special needs children and acknowledging the efforts of women across different countries.

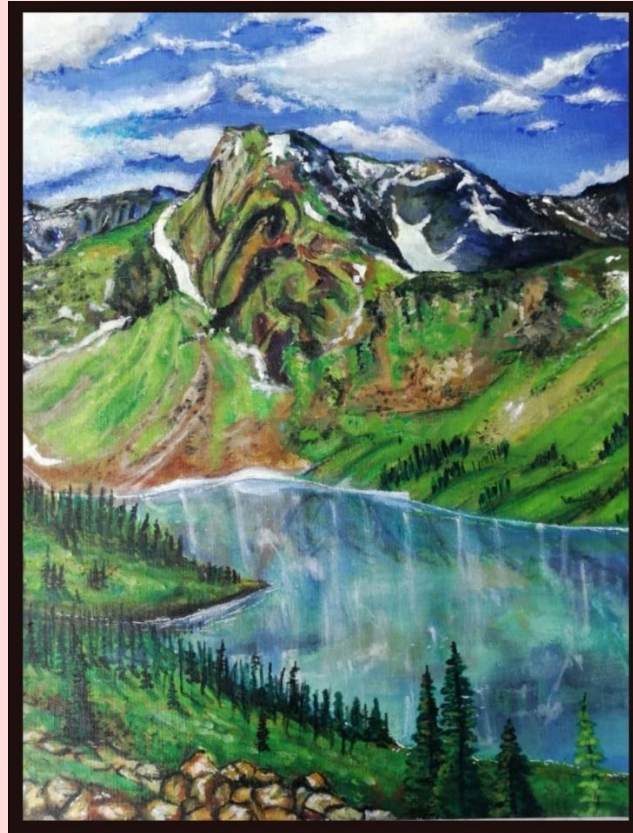
## **Vandana Bhasin**



**"Save me"- Acrylic on Canvas by Dr. Aparna Pradhan**

In the words of the artist:

Tigers are an endangered species and are on the brink of extinction. There is a real threat of losing this magnificent animal forever. This painting was made to create awareness and raise funds to Save Tigers. It will be sent for raising funds for the SAVE Tiger campaign.



**"An Offbeat Vista"- An Acrylic Painting by Maalyaa Sethia**



**"Beauty of Nature"- An Oil Painting by Staffy Bhateja**

In the words of the artist:

This painting depicts the abundance that nature offers us. The hut on the bank of the river, the orangish-yellow trees, the boat, the white flowers, the ducks in the water, all depict the serenity of nature. On seeing the scenery, one wishes to escape from the hustle-bustle of daily life and settle down here.

## *Artworks*

"Creativity is nothing but a mind set free."

Torrie T. Asai



**"Siddhidata", a Painting by Adhyayan Trehan, a Nine-year Old Autistic Boy Who Loves to Play with Colours.**





**Mandala on Circular Canvas by Anisha Annee**



**African Folk Art in Acrylic by Nidhi Mathur**



The word “Mom” evokes a multitude of emotions in everyone.

We are privileged to be in conversation with Ms. Erum Saeed who is the Founder of a platform that connects lakhs of moms across India.

### **About Erum Saeed**

Erum Saeed is a dynamic and multifaceted woman. She is a renowned social media influencer, lecturer turned entrepreneur, a humanitarian, Meta certified community manager and a Community Builder.

A young and loving mom of twin girls, Erum is the winner of Facebook Accelerator Program. She is also the winner of XIOMI Women Achievers Award, Karnataka Women Achievers Award & various such recognitions.

### **About MOI**

Her innovative Facebook community “Moms of India” is India’s one of the top most groups to be followed that she founded in 2016 to inspire mothers with new age parenting and for dispelling the myths of motherhood in a positive manner.

Her networking community, Moms of India, is also known as Mom’s Google. MOI works for the all round support & growth of the mothers focussing on the 5Cs – Compassion, Communication, Connection, Counselling and Career. MOI is an organic, inclusive, collaborative, positive digital medium for mothers to network both offline and online. Due to its unmatched content and support ‘MOI–The MommyVerse’ is now

half-a-million (500K) member strong community!

**Vandana: How has MOI contributed to your growth as a person, as a woman and as a mother?**

**Erum Saeed:** MOI has been a kind of revolution for all. Personally, it has helped me grow as an individual. While working with MOI, I come across hundreds of stories every day about what women face, what women want, and what women have to go through. Their struggles, challenges, sacrifices and success teach me a lot. I learn a lot through these real-life stories and experiences which have contributed to my personal growth. These nuggets of wisdom have made me more mindful, considerate, empathetic, aware and intellectual.

As a mother, I have become more patient and as a woman, I have realized my worth to inspire and influence others for good.

It's still an ongoing process as the motivation I get from MOI is helping me both in my personal as well as professional journey. It has also turned me from being a carefree person to a humanitarian.

**Vandana: MOI page mentions that its primary motive is to give some "Me" time to women; what kind of support, discussions, events or activities does MOI undertake to ensure that its members gain valuable insights or feel accompanied while traversing the challenging journey of motherhood?**

**Erum Saeed:** Well, being a mother is the most hardworking and time-consuming job in the world. We have to be on duty 24x7 for family and eventually we forget that we, as individuals, have an identity of our own.

MOI gives you that much-needed 'Me' time, in the comfort of your home. We promise you complete support. We make sure that anything & everything a woman needs, is available at a single click on MOI.

Whenever a member needs help or puts up a query on our group, hundreds of experienced moms come up with suggestions and ideas. Also, the local moms from the neighborhood physically go and support the person in need, in whatever way possible.

We discuss everything from books to business, from Children to Czechoslovakia, from kitchen to Krypto, from romance to recession ;)

Jokes apart, we have days dedicated to various topics, like Monday is for Jobs and Matrimony, Tuesday is for Health & Wellness, Sunday is for Mental Health & Anonymous postings and so on.

Also, I would like to add, that through our charity wing "MOI Cares – Hope in Motion," we work for the underprivileged and less fortunate people of the society and try our best to help the needy.

**Vandana: Every woman, whether she is married or single, whether a mom or not, whether working or homemaker, has her own social group/support system of friends and relatives, then how does an online community assist a woman in guiding her or helping her to take significant decisions? How easy or difficult it is to open up or share with virtual identities?**

**Erum Saeed:** I understand it's not easy to open up with unknown people or virtual identities but here at MOI, the first thing is that we check the authenticity of these virtual people before letting them in, and make sure about the safety of the community.

Secondly, we are all mothers here, women who have similar experience with life. So, it's safe to share things here. When women share their issues with their friends or families, there is always a fear of being judged or to be misunderstood and that's the reason they don't open up in their own circle, but at MOI this hindrance disappears as here everyone can share and open up.

Our networking meets in various cities and virtual discussions and activities help moms to create a strong bond with each other.

**Vandana: Erum, you have been associated with numerous women since the inception of your group MOI and you must have encountered countless stories of joy, pain, grief, loss, hurt, challenges, exhilaration and success. How do you deal with your emotions in such situations? Does it not overwhelm you?**

**Erum Saeed:** It does. It certainly affects me a lot; their pain, joys, sorrows, achievements, everything matters to me. When our members share with me, I can relate to their emotions as I am so much connected to them.

Not only me, the whole community celebrates each milestone of every woman, whether personal or professional. MOI is one huge family of women and here we love to support, uplift, and empower each one.

We come across women with first hand experiences on gender discrimination or domestic violence or infidelity, more closely. And with all kind of intellects, lawyers, motivational speakers, counselors, teachers etc present on the group, we get the right answer to all such queries/ issues.

There are numerous instances where MOI has come as a savior and support for its members. There was one incident where a young mother lost her husband and she was unable to support her children's convent education at that moment because she had spent her savings on her husband's medical bills. MOI members not only supported her emotionally but financially too. We collected funds and deposited school fee for her kids.

Once there was a member who delivered and went into critical state and her newborn was in need of breast milk. Through our Whatsapp groups, our members came to know about her condition and another mom went to nurse & feed her baby as milk donor.

**Vandana:** What is the biggest learning you've had in your role as a mom entrepreneur and what advice would you like to give to other women who aspire to assert their identity as an individual in addition to being a mother?

**Erum Saeed: I want everyone to know that motherhood should not be a comma & never a full stop to any woman's life & career.**

Hey girl, don't let your dreams or your personality take a back seat. Realize your worth, "You" are important.

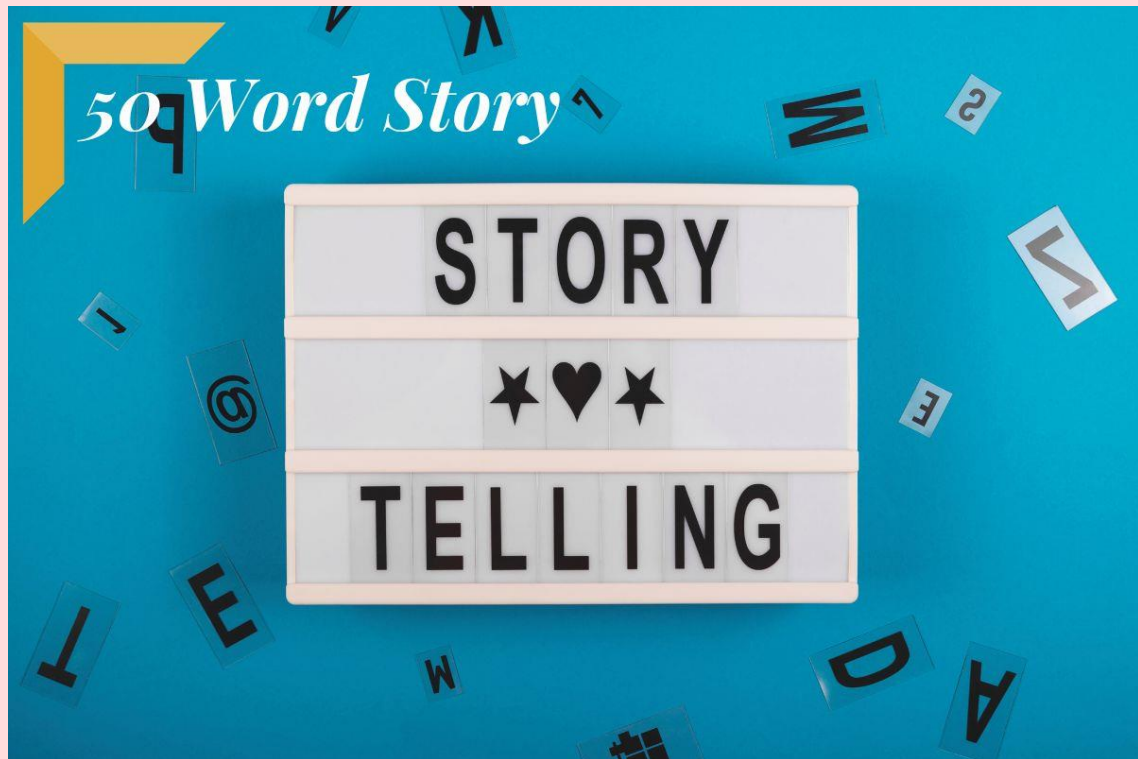
Believe in yourself. If "You" believe in yourself and your ideas, only then others will do the same.

God has given us the power to create and nurture lives, so nothing is impossible for us.

Also, would like to add, do make a tribe of supportive women around you as great things happen when women support each other.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/MOI.momsfindia>

<https://www.facebook.com/MomsOfIndia>



## The Chief Guest

While proffering the bouquet and the badge of honour, Prof. Dr. Sunder Lal Tripathi remained thunderstruck to see that the chief guest Ms. Arunima, the renowned and award-winning novelist is none other than his son Arun, who at the age of sixteen was renounced from the family tree of Tripathis.

**Pausali Mukherjee**

# Progressive India

Standing at the grand Rashtrapati Bhawan, Medha looked around inquisitively as this was the first time ever that a village-girl was called by the President's office to be the recipient of the prestigious Padma Award for increasing green cover of the country by a humongous twenty-three percent. India had progressed!

**Lakshmi Ajoy**

# Defeat of Demons

Diya is chanting the Durga mantra.

She asks, "Mom, can we be courageous like the Devi?"

"Yes, we all can defeat demons." Her mother replies instantly.

The next day, a school security guard is hit hard by Diya when she catches him pulling a girl forcibly inside a vacant bus.

**Aaradhana Agarwal**



## Managing Behavioral Issues

"Let's understand a person's background, before we condemn their behavior."

This quote by Eric M. Watterson easily points at a world that is extremely judgmental.

All children can be naughty, defiant, and impulsive from time to time, which is perfectly normal. However, some children have extremely difficult and challenging behaviors that are outside the norm for their age, due to the fact that they have special needs.

"Disability" can include behavioral and other mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, aggression, peer problems, emotional symptoms, phobias, or conduct disorder, to the extent that it interferes with the child's ability to thrive. For many children with disabilities, tantrums are a sign of frustration with their world. Maybe because they can't communicate the way they want to or process all the information directed at them by the so-called normal world.

Anoushka has been diagnosed with Down Syndrome, and stubbornness & tantrums are natural traits of this diagnosis. It has been a challenging task dealing with behavioral issues on numerous occasions and at such times, I recall the words of Sr. Gaitonde, who headed SPJ Sadhana School, an institution for people of determination, in Mumbai. I quote her, "There will be times when you will be embarrassed as your child lies on the floor in public places and throws a tantrum, but DON'T give in. Stand your ground. Don't bother about what the people around think of you, this is the ONLY way to modify the behavior of your child." And I have



been in such situations many times and partially abided to her advice and have been successful.

So, there is no RIGHT way to handle a situation. As a parent all of us need to develop our own strategies and modify them as per the situation and the specific needs of our children.

Having said that, there are some common and practically viable changes one can make at home, to help lessen the chaos and empower your child.

**Structure:** Create a daily schedule for your child, including school, meals, and bedtime. If they know what is coming next, they'll be less anxious and thereby less likely to throw a tantrum when changing from one activity to another. Keeping the child engaged surely helps.

**Recognition and rewards:** A child with special needs is often despised or ridiculed and they might often hear what went wrong. Acknowledging & rewarding good behavior gives better results than punishing unwanted behavior; punishment only teaches your child that a tantrum gets attention. Be creative about celebrating successes and small victories. Remember, no success or victory is small.

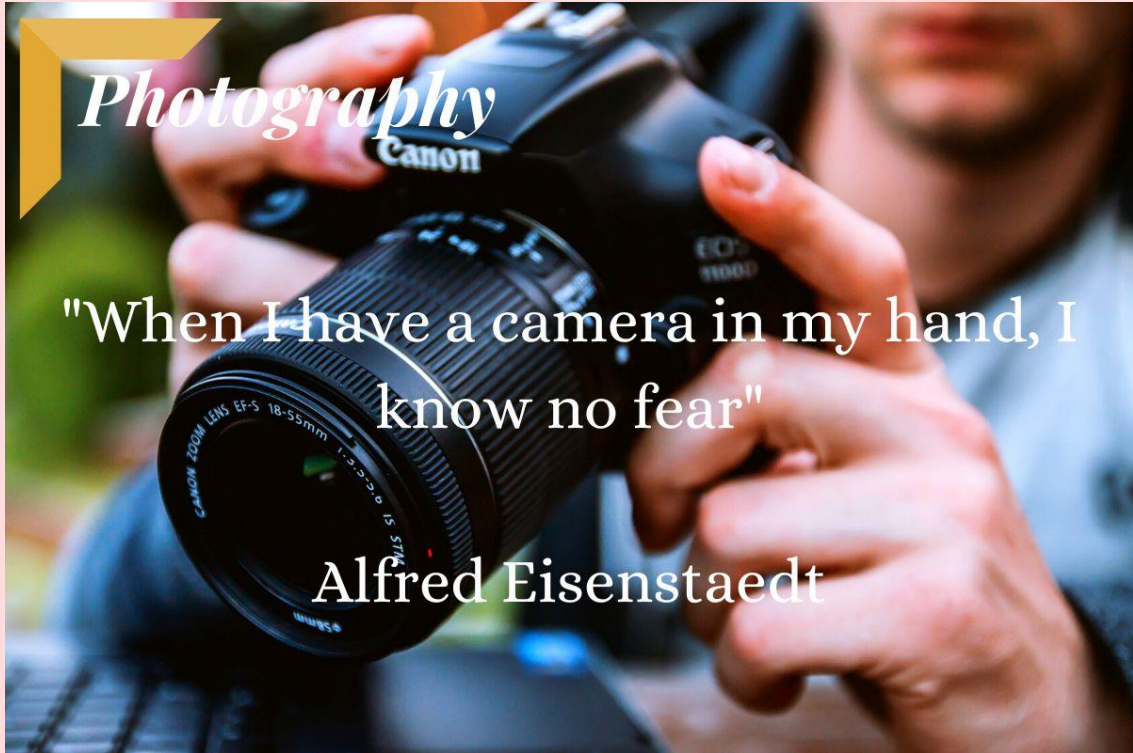
**Redirection:** You can point your child's behavior in a new direction. For example, if they are screaming, you can encourage them to do a task or focus on something else. This acts like creating a ripple.

**Siblings:** They play a defining role in your child's life, so it's important that siblings know why their brother or sister needs a different approach to daily tasks. Give them some time together & trust me, it works wonders.

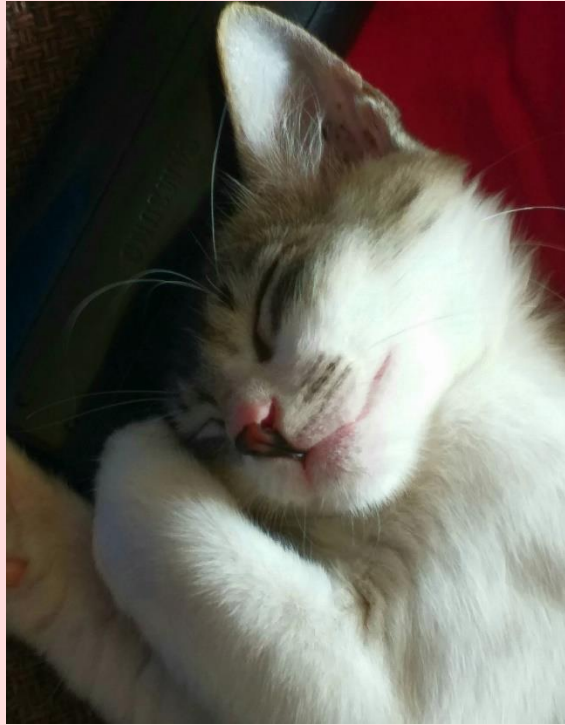
The road to improving behaviors starts with the belief that your child, no matter what his/her behavior looks like now, can change with the right support and knowledge. An important first step for parents of children with disabilities is to understand why behavioral issues are occurring in the first place. Given the importance of the family and home environment for young children's behavioral development, supportive and enriching experiences in the home can help mitigate the growth of behavior problems for young disabled children.

"To change undesirable behaviors, we see in the world, we must change the thinking that leads to those behaviors."- Donald L. Hicks

**Nisha Tandon**



**"An Evening in London"- A Photo by Abhi Da**



**"The Sleeping Cat"- A Photo by Narayani V Manapadam**



**"Reflection"- A Photo by Sumita Bose**



**"Paucities Unfathomed"- A Photo by Upendra Sharma**



## The Visitor

Sneha Sadan was abuzz with activities.

"Here," beamed Yadavji, guiding the cake delivery boy towards the table.

"Where is Srivastavji?" Indira maushi looked anxious. "The birthday boy is taking too long to get ready," she grumbled, only to evoke laughter from her best buddy, Vanita Kaku.

Ganpat, the home-helper for the aged, was busy pasting colorful ribbons.

"Have we ever had a birthday celebration like this in Sneha Sadan?" Ramji wiped his moist eyes, looking at his wife. She sighed. "Our children never come to celebrate our birthdays." She tried hard not to cry.

"Let us not spoil the mood with our sob story. Srivastav's son is coming today, and if I am not mistaken, it is nearly five years since he has paid a visit to his dad. Well, but who are we to pass a judgment? Our children have not been here either," Manpreet Singh's voice trembled with emotions. His son and daughter thought a father with an ailing heart was more of a burden to them. After their mother's demise a couple of years ago, they left him in the Home.

Many others had similar stories to narrate. Those who had no progeny were somewhat better off; they

never had to look forward to a visitor. The disappointment of waiting and not getting a visitor was more agonizing than not having children.

A son visiting his father was such a rare occasion, hence this celebration today. The manager was only too happy to use the fund from the trust for the arrangements.

Srivastavji, a septuagenarian, entered the main hall, dressed in a white dhoti and blue kurta. Everyone ran towards him like a school kid. Some tugged at the new kurta his son had sent by courier last week. "It is made of silk," Bhavji, the oldest member, rolled his eyes. "Must be very costly," Lisa aunty nodded her head in appreciation. Everyone looked pleased except Srivastavji.

"You should be bubbling with excitement, your son is coming, and he has promised you a handset." Ramji hugged his bosom buddy and wished him a happy birthday.

After a while, a blue Mercedes stopped near the entrance, and Srivastavji's son stepped out, a tall man in his forties. He walked in with an elegant bouquet and a gift-wrapped box that every one knew contained a handset.

"Happy birthday Dad," he said, handing over the bouquet and the gift. But Srivastavji held back his hands folded tightly.

"Son, I know why you are here," he smiled. "You have become aware of the family property case culminating in my favor and making me richer by two Crores, isn't it? Otherwise, why would you come all the way to celebrate my birthday only this year?" His son fidgeted uneasily on hearing this.

"You can leave," said Srivastavji. "I have informed my solicitor to give the entire proceeds to Sneha Sadan after my demise."

An eerie silence followed, but Srivastavji's baritone voice broke it.

"Hey, aren't we cutting the cake?"

Many eyes glistened with unshed tears.

**Sudha Viswanath**



## Come, Join us

Its branches rose high above the ground, way beyond the moss-covered forest floor. A majestic tree, old as time, frisky as the children playing in the shade it offered, on hot blustery days.

I would often go into the shady cove just near my Aunt's house in the afternoon during my summer vacations. It was the most prominent fixture, the old mango tree, its crown touching the skies, full of secrets and mystery. I enjoyed my time there, often alone.

It was an ordinary day, as I made my way to the mango tree. It was unusually quiet, the birds seemed to have lost their voices and the crickets were not chirping. As I stood underneath the tree, I noticed a rope hanging from one of the branches. Intrigued, I tried to jump up and catch hold of it. I don't know till this day, how my hand got caught in the loop of the rope. I was swiftly hoisted up the entire length of the tree till the top.

I cried and shouted to no avail.

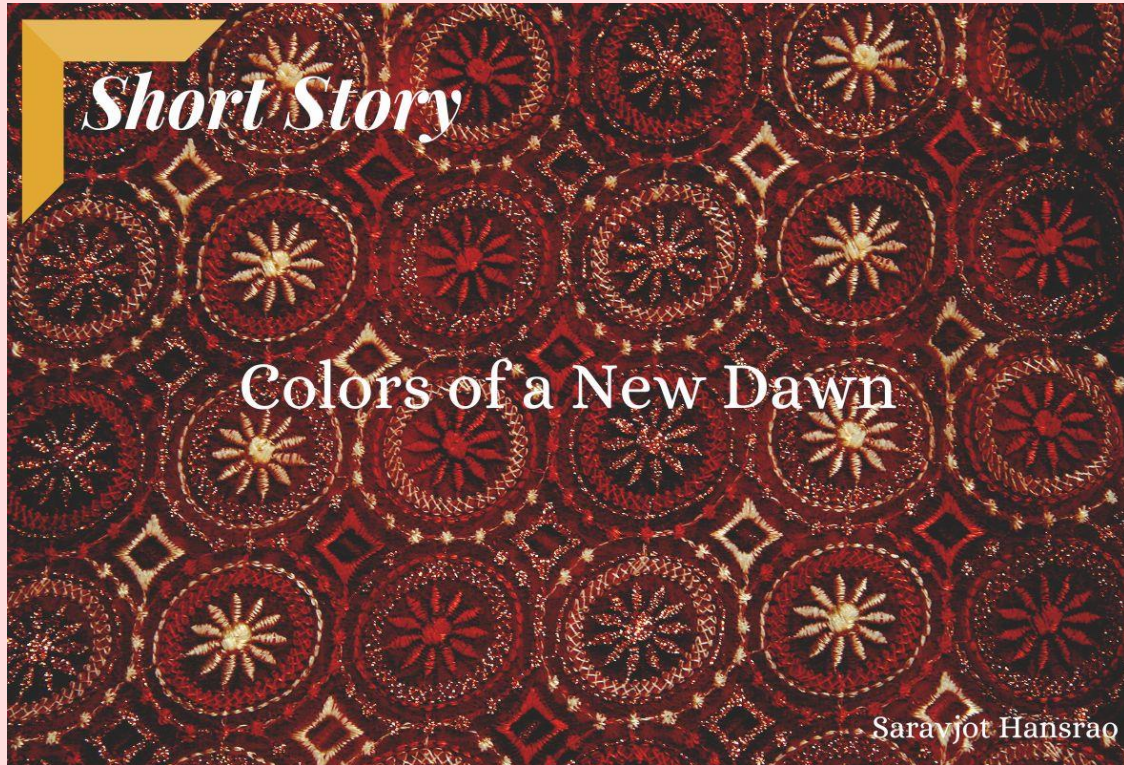
My family searched long and hard for me. I failed to understand how they missed noticing me. I was in plain view.

Anyway, the mango tree talks to me, keeps me company. I am a ghost now, having given up the body in despair and agony. Come and sit in the shade. There are many more like me, so there is no dearth of company. Will you join us? I am sure the mango tree will find a way.

**Komal Gupta**







## Colors of a New Dawn

It's a somber dawn. The widening grey façade resembles a tsunami in the sky. The grayness filters through the lacerated mesh but fails to dim my excitement. Her life moves in sync with the varying shades of gray that seldom seem to lift. Confined to a neglected room in the mansion, nothing breaks the monotony in Drishti's life other than me.

On this particular day, when she unlocks the rusted, crooked trunk of memories. My magnificence hasn't dimmed over the years. Her rough, scaly hands caress the embellished colorful silken threads. She smiles, lays her head on the ravaged wall, reminiscing times when she gleamed, a chirpy, joyful bride whose head I adorned with pride. The vagaries of time engulf us together, shriveling physical strength and diminishing colors. The stifling sobs and I, the crimson Phulkari\* that bedecked her are testimony to the arduous journey.

Married at a tender age with a million dreams and then experiencing the fragile dreams crumble like a house of cards, Drishti was now widowed, struggling for a foothold in the orthodox Zamindari\* household of her husband. His body never found its way home. All that returned for the last rites was the 'olive green'\* with a letter from her beloved- his last letter before leaving for war.

Drishti straightened herself with a jerk, not letting go of me, adjusting the drape neatly. She lunged towards the trunk, desperately. Ruffling and rambling she finally gets hold of the precious last words. She squeezes the letter tightly, a souvenir of remembrance. The twenty long years since colors were swept away is an eternity for her. The last letter reinstates hope that lasts Drishti another year. Today, she decides to read the letter aloud,

"Though time has kept us apart, yet your thoughts stir my soul. Not once do I feel the distance even though it grows. Even if I'm not around, let your life be worthwhile to our name. Fight the drudgery, quit the loneliness, for you are a flower spreading color and fragrance around."

She reads it aloud, again and again till tears take over.

"How can I forget this? How can I be selfishly lost in gloom?"

A soft knock startles her.

"Who is it? No body visits me ever!"

She opens the door to a beaming face, "Namaste! I'm the new principal of the village school. I'm looking for an art teacher and have been knocking at every door searching for you Drishti Ji."

Drishti stands riveted, pulling me away hastily.

"I'm no teacher. Colors and I are long alienated." She snaps.

"An artist is always an artist," the bubbly lady continues. She spreads out a canvas on the floor along with paints and brushes. "Take your time, but know that this is where you belong. I will await your canvas." She walks out, waving back and smiling.

Still clutching the letter tightly, something within her stirs. A soft murmur fills the room as she repeats the last words of the letter. I watch from the messy bed, colors may dim but are never erased.

## **Saravjot Hansrao**

Glossary:

Phulkari: a colorful embroidered drape native to Punjab

Zamindari: rural landlords with large land holding

Olive Green: used to refer to the uniform of the Army

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