

# READING CORNER

HISTORY | LITERATURE | ART | CULTURE | HERITAGE | BIOGRAPHY | TRAVEL | WILDLIFE | RELIGION | SELF-HELP | FICTION | TRANSLATION

## CELEBRATIONS

# Spring is in the Air

*April's air stirs in  
Willow-leaves ... a butterfly  
Floats and balances*

Thus goes a Japanese Haiku. Spring is actually a time for celebration around the world. While the Hindus are enjoying Holi, the Pagans celebrating Ostara and the Christians observing Easter, it is important to remember that the dawning of spring has been commemorated for a long time in many other cultures as well. For example, the Festival of Isis was held in ancient Egypt as a celebration of spring and rebirth. Isis features prominently in the story of the resurrection of her lover, Osiris. In Iran, the festival of No Ruz begins shortly before the vernal equinox. The phrase 'No Ruz' actually means 'new day', and this is a time of hope and rebirth. Typically, a lot of cleaning is done, old broken items are repaired, homes are repainted and fresh spring flowers are gathered and displayed indoors. We also have St. Patrick's Day in Ireland, the Feast of Cybele in ancient Rome, Passover festival of Judaism and the celebration of Maslenitsa in Russia—all of which are observed as a time of the return of light and warmth.

Spring is a fine season, perhaps the most popular of the four seasons, when it comes to poets and their choice of subject. Monsoon has its devotees, but there is something to be said for spring with its new life, warmer weather and flowers and trees coming into leaf. It is that season, Hopkins reminds us, 'When weeds, in wheels, shoot long, and lovely and lush' (few poets could use assonance and alliteration as vibrantly as Hopkins). Emily Dickinson, in 'A Light Exists in Spring', beautifully captures the way that spring slowly appears in our consciousness, like a light in the distance. Closer home, Rabindranath Tagore gives a clarion call to everyone to join the celebration because, '*Basanta jagrato dwarey*'

(Spring stands at the door); or, for the simple reason, '*Orey bhai fagun legeche boney boney*' (O mate, spring is ablaze in all the forests). Tagore's name reminds me that, in modern times, one of the most engaging celebrations of spring, popularly known as Basanta Utsav, was started in Santiniketan by Tagore. It is an occasion that draws thousands from outside to the Visva-Bharati campus to witness and participate in the colourful festivities, including several cultural functions. On that day, the students of the university clad themselves in yellow clothes and put a crown of flowers and leaves on their heads. They sing lovely songs and dance to the tune of great music, while smearing each other in coloured powder (*abeer*). All the visitors are invited to join in the merry-making and, in the evening, Tagore's dance dramas and other programmes are staged.

Well, now that the daffs are out, sap is rising in every corner and blossom is rioting across town, it is high time to check how fertile your knowledge of this season in literature is. Let me, therefore, sign off with a spring quiz:

Whom is Shakespeare missing in *Sonnet 98*? 'From you have I been absent in the spring/When proud-pied April dress'd in all his trim/Hath put a spirit of youth in everything'.

a. Anne Hathaway?  
b. Christopher Marlowe?  
c. A dark lady?  
d. A fair youth?

**Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee**

Send in your answers to [niyogibooks@gmail.com](mailto:niyogibooks@gmail.com) with subject line as "Spring Answers" for a good way to begin the new year.

## Applauding Life

Festivities that spread cheer; huge gatherings of people coming together to mark a special occasion; rites and rituals that commemorate happy times. Indeed, life is a celebration and these books—*Festivals at the Jaipur Court*, *Kumbh Mela: Mapping the Ephemeral Megacity* and *Hindu Joy of Life*—give the reader an opportunity to discover the vitality and vibrancy that exists in our country.

## Heritage Matters!

'History repeats itself'. But our youth hates history. Or do they just hate the way it is taught? We have made the discussion of our past so boring, that the next generation avoids the mere mention of it. The only solution, perhaps, is to connect them to Heritage instead of plain historic stories. Heritage is a widely-misinterpreted term. People often think that we are going to talk about some tombs or forts when we mention Heritage. We have branches like Natural Heritage and Cultural Heritage, which are far bigger than Built Heritage (Monuments).

Humans started documenting their surroundings around 40,000 years ago, in the form of cave paintings. Since then, we have evolved beyond our own imagination. At every stage, our evolution was recorded in some form or the other. This evolution is the journey of mankind, which we call our 'Heritage'. During this journey, our ancestors had countless falls and rises. If our next generation

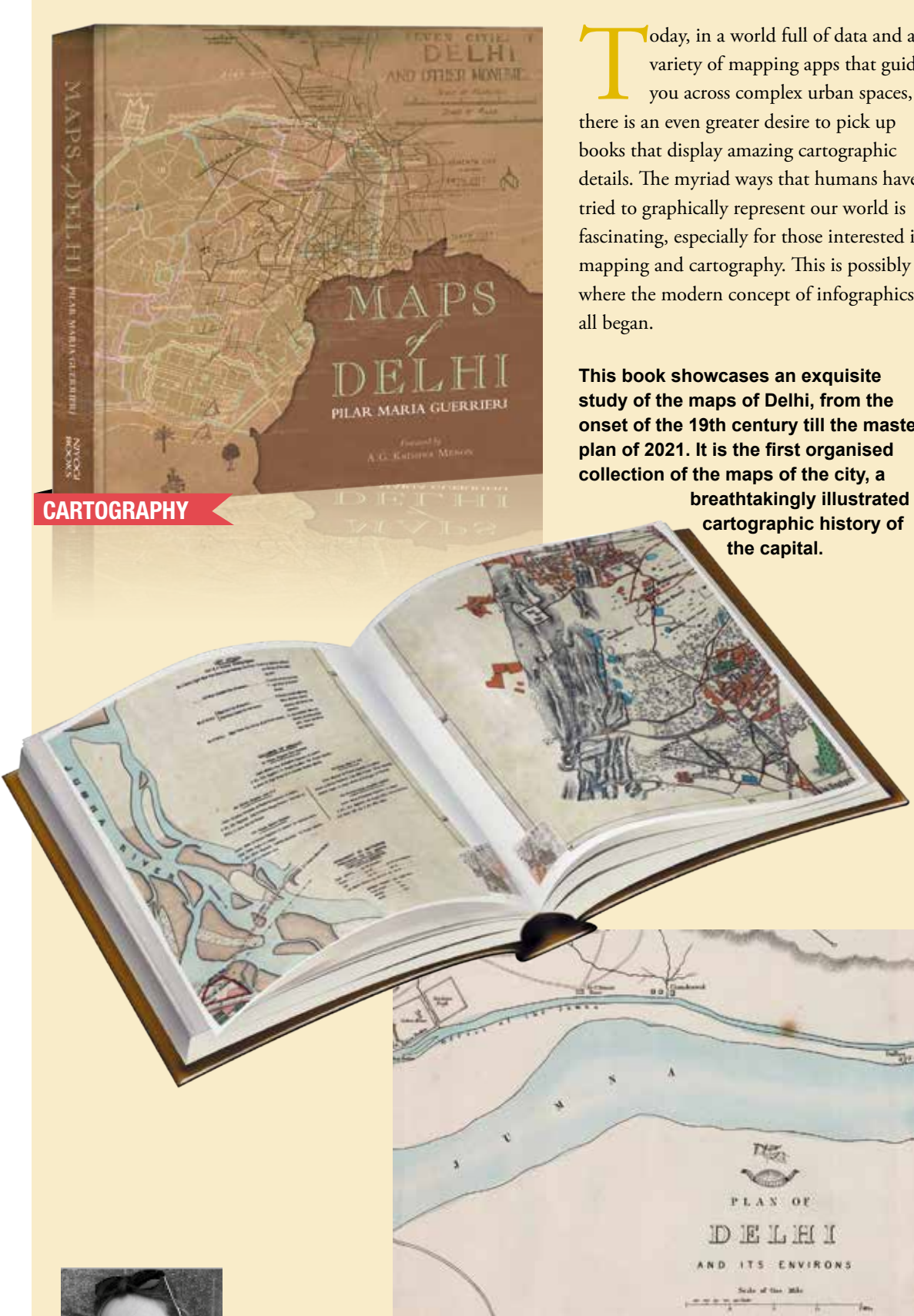
can study and learn from these moments, they can avoid repeating the mistakes that have shattered our past.

Furthermore, if we start analysing our language, food, lifestyle and practices, we will realize that there is a mix of different cultures from around the globe. This shows how our ancestors mixed with other cultures and learned from them. This can also be a good way to end communal disharmony and re-establish our common brotherhood.

Learning about our heritage is not an option. We have been gifted one. It is only a matter of time before we understand its importance and start respecting it.

**Vikramjit Singh Rooprai**  
Heritage Activist, Educationist, Founder  
Youth for Heritage Foundation, Founder Heritageshaala.





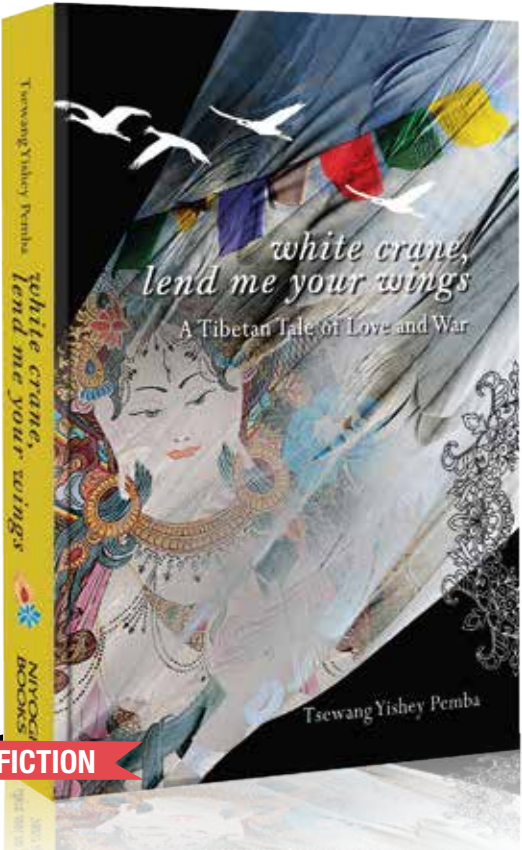
CARTOGRAPHY

Today, in a world full of data and a variety of mapping apps that guide you across complex urban spaces, there is an even greater desire to pick up books that display amazing cartographic details. The myriad ways that humans have tried to graphically represent our world is fascinating, especially for those interested in mapping and cartography. This is possibly where the modern concept of infographics all began.

This book showcases an exquisite study of the maps of Delhi, from the onset of the 19th century till the master plan of 2021. It is the first organised collection of the maps of the city, a breathtakingly illustrated cartographic history of the capital.



**PILAR MARIA GUERRIERI**  
A PhD scholar in Architectural Design, Architectural Composition, Criticism and Theory from Politecnico di Milano, in collaboration with the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, Delhi, and Westminster University, London.



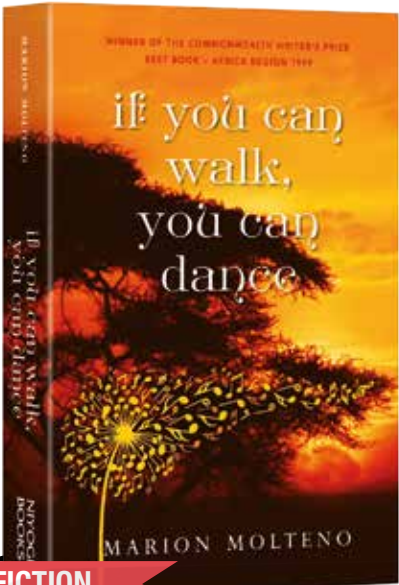
FICTION

“The novel, set in between post-WWI and post-WWII, works through a complex tapestry of symbols, and in that it is reminiscent of the old modernist novel”  
—New Indian Express

A skillfully woven dazzling tapestry of individual lives and sweeping events that create an epic vision of a country and people during a time of tremendous upheaval. This historical fiction, set in the breathtakingly beautiful Nyarong Valley of the Kham province of Eastern Tibet in the first half of the twentieth century, begins with a story of a failed Christian mission in Tibet and takes one into the heartland of Eastern Tibet by capturing the zeitgeist of the fierce warrior tribe of the Khampas ruled by chieftains. This coming-of-age narrative is a riveting tale of vengeance, warfare and love unfolded through the life story of two young boys and their families and friends.

The personal drama gets embroiled in a national catastrophe as China invades Tibet, forcing it out of its isolation. Ultimately, the novel delves into themes such as tradition versus modernity, individual choice and freedom, the nature of governance, the role of religion in people’s lives, the inevitability of change, and the importance of human values such as loyalty and compassion.

**TSEWANG YISHEY PEMBA**  
Founding father of Tibetan-English fiction was also the first Tibetan to become a doctor and surgeon in Western medical science from the University of London in 1955. He was awarded the prestigious Hallet Prize by the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh, in 1966.



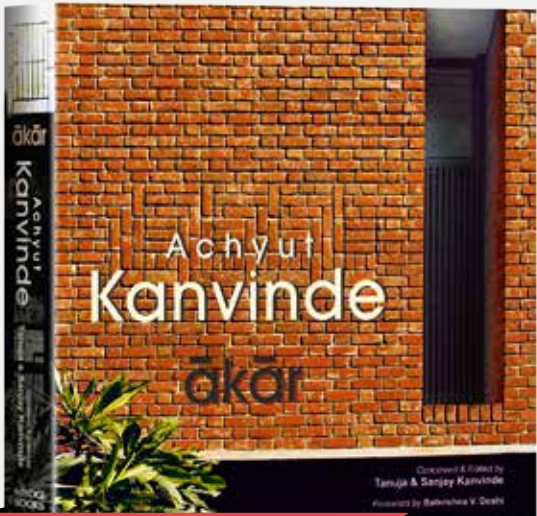
FICTION

Jennie de Villiers, an idealistic and politically engaged student, suddenly has to flee her native South Africa with a boyfriend whom she no longer loves—only to be stranded as an exile in neighbouring Swaziland. Fending for herself in a new culture, she discovers different ways of living and a kind of music that touches her deeply. As the story moves between Africa and 1970s London, the music of different cultures is woven through the narrative. Lyrically written, extremely engrossing and deeply moving, this book exemplifies the thought—‘the personal is political’. Its depiction of a young woman’s life as she travels across frontiers and cultures reaffirms the healing power of music and the redemptive nature of human connections.

\* Winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the best book from the Africa region.



**Marion Molteno**  
She has had a long association with India and Pakistan through her work with South Asian communities in UK, and with Save the Children, with whom she travelled extensively in Asia and Africa.

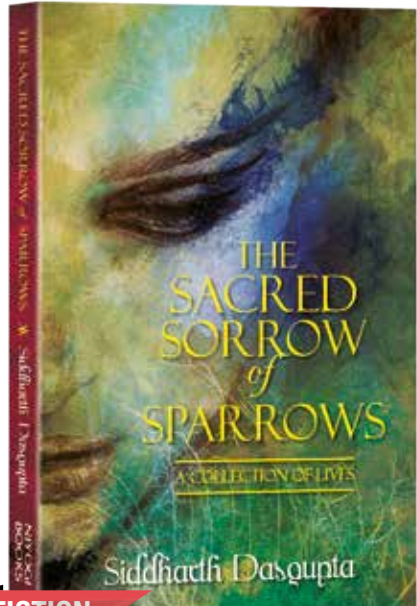


BIOGRAPHY/ARCHITECTURE



**Achyut Kanvinde**  
A pioneer of modern architecture in India with a professional career spanning five decades, he is celebrated as the father of campus planning in the country.

Of the large number of projects designed under the aegis of Kanvinde Rai & Chowdhury, this book presents 45 selected works that the authors felt best represent the firm’s oeuvre. It is a compilation of unrealised projects, research studies, competitions, working drawings and an exhaustive chronology that is primarily aimed as a resource for students, research scholars and the architectural fraternity. Aside from the several articles written by Kanvinde, there are essays by professionals and academicians—Ashok Lall, Narendra Dengle, Miki Desai and Sanjay Kanvinde.



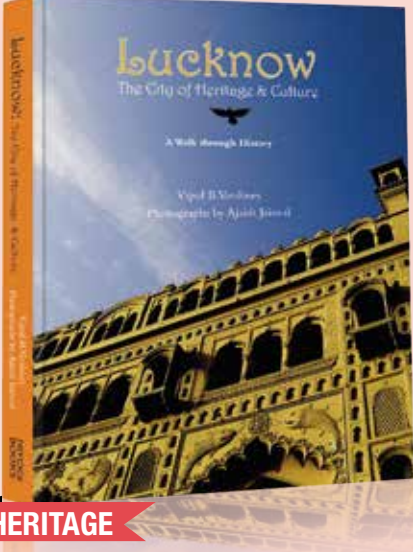
FICTION

Through 10 stories and 10 main protagonists, this book paints a portrait of the universal emotion that strikes the deepest and lingers the longest—sorrow. A nuanced narrative of the eternal human existence, this collection embraces light, laughter, hope, and that silently pulsating craving called love, delivering a communal meditation on mortal failings and human persistence. The stories traverse the length and breadth of the world.

**Siddharth Dasgupta**  
Combining travel with cultural immersion, he contributes regularly to aesthetic magazines and travel journals.








**HERITAGE**

Splendid buildings in brick that have witnessed centuries of history, the chime of temple bells, the call of the muezzin, the magical strains of thumri, the soulful lyrics of ghazals, the expressive grace of Kathak dance, the exquisite crafts, the delicate flavours of cuisine—all these are part of the fascinating city of Lucknow.

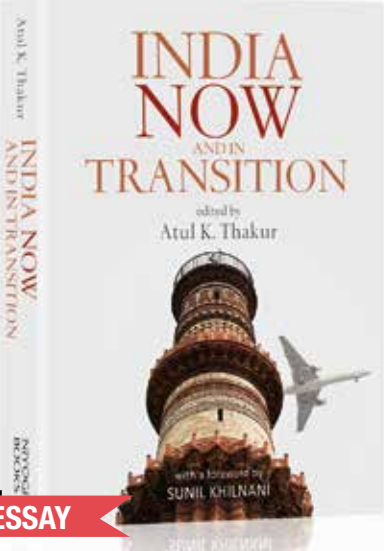
**Vipul B. Varshney**  
She is Convenor-INTACH, Lucknow Chapter and Adviser, National Scientific Committee ICOMOS, India.

**Ajaish Jaiswal**  
A hotelier by profession and a photographer by passion, he has held four solo exhibitions.

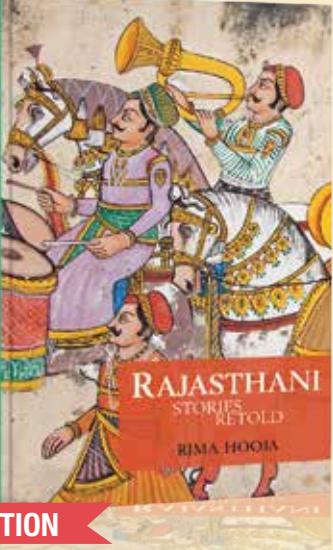
Featuring contributions from leading thinkers and scholars including Sunil Khilnani, Ramachandra Guha and Shashi Tharoor, each essay in this volume critically analyses a major theme of India’s present, to propose the likely way ahead for our emergent nation. Covering politics and governance, economics and development, security and foreign policy, society and culture, and language and literature, the book shows that—while beset with both internal and external challenges on many fronts—India is not waiting for its moment, it is making its moment happen.



**Atul K. Thakur**  
He is a public policy professional, management consultant, journalist, and writer who specialises in the interface of politics and economics.



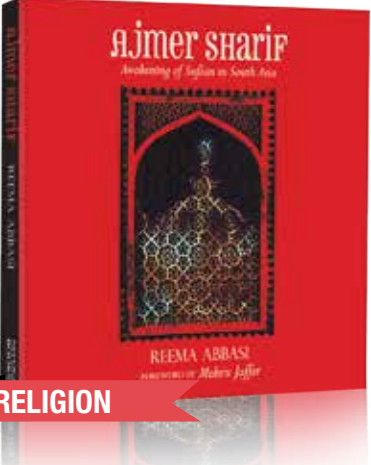
**ESSAY**



**FICTION**

Rajasthan continues to fascinate the world for many reasons. Some of the more obvious ones include its colours, music and dance, venerable history, forts, fortifications, palaces, step-wells and old towns, as well as its rich textile tradition. This colourful state of India also brings to mind the vast tracts of golden desert to its north-west and west, juxtaposed by the scattered green and dust-mantle clad valleys, plains and hills of its south-east and east, with their rivers and lakes. The nine stories in this book are just a fraction of the amazing legacy of Rajasthan.

**Rima Hooja**  
She is the Consultant Director (Library & Archives), Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur and Managing Trustee, Jaipur Virasat Foundation.



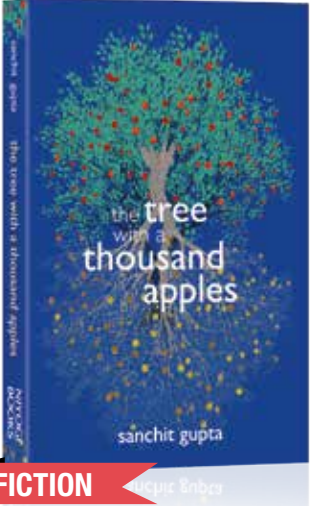
**RELIGION**

This book is an in-depth researched work on the history and spiritual journey of the Sufi saint’ (Millennium Post), which showcases the absolute necessity of Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti in our conflicted times. Today, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti is a signpost of unity; a reminder of the relevance of Sufism as a conduit of harmony and justice. In this book Pakistani journalist and writer Reema Abbasi has chronicled the legacy of one of the foremost saints and founders of the Chisti order in India.

*‘Perennial legacy that withstood the test of time’ —Hindustan Times*

This book narrates the story of three children shattered during an insurgent night in war-torn Kashmir and twenty years later, when they meet again, one appears as an innocent civilian fighting for justice, another one as an exiled Pandit pining for his belongingness, while the third one is a ruthless rebel who aches for redemption. Stylized layered format and seamless, fast-paced narration make this book a powerful read.

*‘A haunting tale of a community set in tumultuous times in the valley’ —DNA*





**FICTION**



**CRAFT**

Clearly a favourite with men and women, especially for a hot summer’s day, chikankari, an elegant, painstaking and fine traditional embroidery on muslin, has been revived by famous designers to make it couture and occasion wear for the Indian and international elite.

**This beautifully illustrated book brings to life the history of this unique craft tradition. It showcases unknown gems from personal and public collections and describes the mysterious origins of the craft, the range of costumes, the inspirations behind its motifs and the bewildering array of stitches that have made it a truly exceptional art form.**



**PAOLA MANFREDI**  
With a background in ethnology, she is passionate about textiles and deeply interested in the history of textile exchanges between the East and the West. She has worked with craftspeople and their traditional skills to promote the excellence of South Asian craftsmanship.



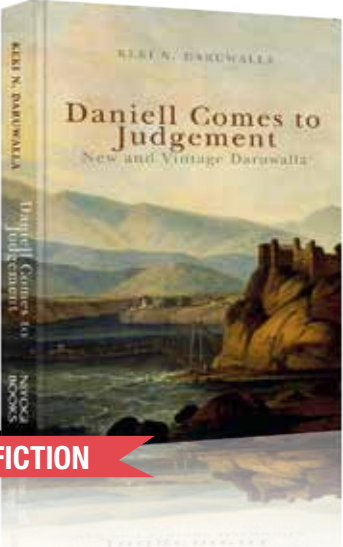
**TRAVEL**

This book celebrates the ethereal beauty and the cultural diversity of the land (The Hindu). The authors ‘tell’ human stories against an awe-inspiring, natural backdrop. Their compelling & magical pictorial journey with the reader through the Valley celebrates the sublime beauty & the cultural diversity of this land as well as marks the shades of change & transition.

*‘This travelogue finds a route to enter the reader’s mind through interesting descriptions of the local aesthetics’ —The Pioneer*

This is a collection of short stories where myth and reality intertwine with ease and transport the reader to the pre-language, pre-script era; to amphibious trains and an island of birds. The collection aptly showcases the author’s enduring range and the master-storyteller, Keki N. Daruwalla weaves his magic yet again.

*‘The book provides a panoramic view of Life’ —The Telegraph*



**FICTION**



With the aid of rare archival and contemporary textual and visual materials, many seen here for the first time, this book is a comprehensive picture of the fascinating history of the present Indian border region towards Tibet. It describes the customs of its various inhabitants, many of whom still follow their age-old traditions, which at present are being stimulated and revived by the exiled Tibetans that have found a new home in the region, thus designating it as ‘Tibetan India.’ In secluded and remote high-altitude valleys, the author documented some of the last refugees of Tibetan and early Indian culture and photographed people and the unique testimonies of their art, religion and architecture, culturally influenced by both of the region’s great neighbours—India and Tibet.

**Peter van Ham**  
He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic and the Royal Geographical Societies, London, as well as of the Explorers Club, New York. His work has been supported by the Indian Government, the Archaeological Survey of India, the UNESCO and his holiness Dalai Lama

**TRAVEL**

In conversation with **Atul K. Thakur**, the author of *India Now and in Transition*.

**Q What inspired you to bring out this collection of essays?**  
**A** The beauty of India is that there are many kinds of Indias. Understanding the fundamentals that have given birth to such multiplicity across various segments is especially imperative in the present day, when the 'Idea of India' is keenly contested. *India Now and in Transition* is thus an enquiry into possible futures, which is based on current happenings.

**Q How did you select the experts and scholars whose work is featured in this volume?**  
**A** I set a mandate of the book and ensured the writers follow it. This was applicable to all, including the senior writers who happen to be the earth's most demanding public intellectuals.

**Q Your book analyses the many complex issues facing India. In general, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of our nation and why?**  
**A** Our nation has the world's largest youth population and is undergoing tectonic social and political changes at present. Therefore, understanding what directions India may take in the future is essential for every thinking individual. Notwithstanding the challenges, I am optimistic about the future of our nation. Its fundamentals are strong.

**Q How do you see India's role globally in the years ahead?**  
**A** We are growing significantly in economic and strategic terms, but lack of greater socio-economic inclusion remains a big concern.

To read the full interview, please visit [Ink & Papyrus](#), the *Niyogi Books'* blog.

**Dr Syed Zahoor Qasim**  
Known as the 'Ocean Man of India', he led India's first expedition to Antarctica in 1981.

**Dr Dinabandhu Sahoo**  
He was the first Indian student to visit Antarctica and is the recipient of several awards.

**TRAVEL**

This book is about a journey, a mission, an initiative, a challenge, an adventure, a dream and, finally, about establishing the scientific capability of India in the world. It describes the beauty of this enigmatic continent and the origin of India’s Antarctic venture. It also gives us an account of the first-hand experiences of two different persons: one, a leader and the founder of India’s Antarctic programme and, the other, a research scholar who undertook his maiden journey to this continent.

**Willem Marx**  
He has worked as a television journalist at ABC News, Al Jazeera English and CBS News.

**Marc Wattrélot**  
His photographic work in Balochistan won the Anthropographia Honorary Mention and has been exhibited at several international forums.

**TRAVEL**

A fascinating account of British reporter Willem Marx’s travels in Balochistan; a forbidding, forbidden and largely forgotten province of Pakistan. Through his lens, French photojournalist Marc Wattrélot has captured some spectacular images during his weeks spent in this little-known corner of the world. Given the recent uproar in the media, this book remains pertinent as the authors explore the backcountry of Balochistan to conduct some exclusive interviews, including one of Iran’s most wanted terrorists.

This book takes the reader on a fascinating adventure, following Major Ahluwalia and his team members through the exciting expedition of 1994. *Tracing Marco Polo’s Journey* is a vivid description of an adventurous trip through cities as exotic as Bukhara, Samarkand, Andhijan, Xian, Yarkand, Kashgar and Lhasa; lush oases such as Hotan and Turfan; the grand Gobi and Taklamakan Deserts; ancient monuments and mosques; winding up finally at the monasteries in the magnificent Himalayas. It is a first-hand account of a two-month trip marked with both, challenges and fun. The accompanying photographs bring the story alive.

**Major H.P.S. Ahluwalia**  
He has made immense contribution in the fields of adventure, sports, environment, disability and social work. He is also the author of a memoir *Higher than Everest*.

**TRAVEL**

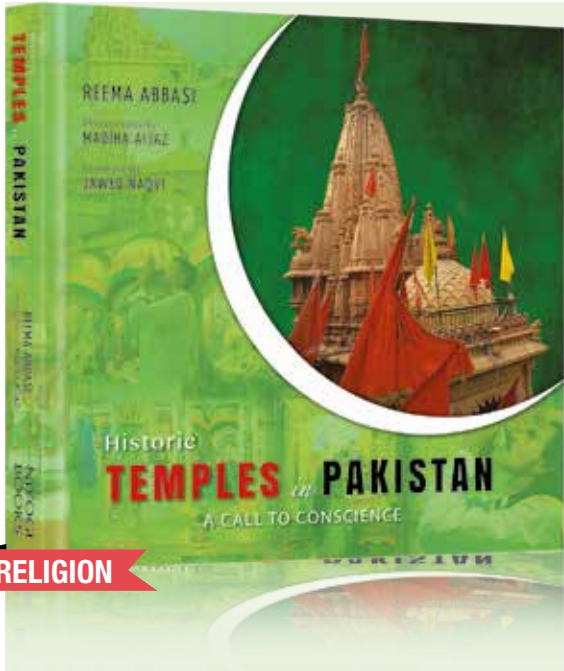
A ce photographer Raghu Rai documented the plight of the refugees, the action during the war and the jubilant scenes of victory when the independent nation of Bangladesh was born. The stories are perhaps not unknown, but have been retold by a master storyteller—the refugee camps, the exodus, the never-ending journey, a whirlwind of poignant, tormented history. And, finally, a new nation, a new tomorrow. This book presents rare photographs, which comprise a significant body of work documenting a turning point in the history of South Asia.

**PHOTOGRAPHY**

**NATURE & WILD LIFE**

This book takes the reader through a visually delightful voyage across the length and breadth of India, showcasing the wealth of flora and fauna of the country. For the uninitiated yet inclined, *Wild Wonders of India* is almost akin to a familiarisation tour through the country’s many-splendoured forests, their wildlife specialities and precious wildlife reserves—its national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and tiger reserves. It also brings to the fore how rapidly the list of India’s endangered wildlife species is growing.





RELIGION

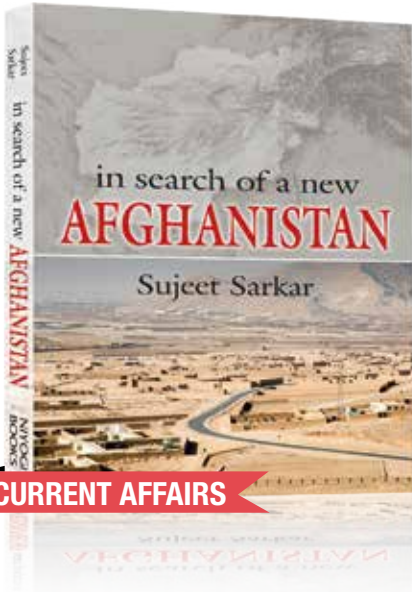
**E**laborately embellished with evocative photographs of antiquated and exquisite Hindu shrines, opulent rituals and festivals and regional populace, this book has been extensively researched. It presents some exceptional pilgrimage sites—Hinglaj, Katas Raj, Kalka Cave Temple, Panchmukhi Hanuman Mandir and Shivala Mandir, to name a few. The book makes a case for keeping the ancient emblems of faith alive and for pluralism in a land of irony that has been home to multiple ancient faiths yet stands besieged by unpalatable extremism. It also aspires to enshrine the ideal of liberty. By framing an all-inclusive piety, it sets out to ignite a discourse and awaken the collective conscience of a nation numbed into silence, fear or the false conviction of the supremacy of a singular religion.



**Reema Abbasi**  
A reputed journalist, she has been awarded by UNESCO for her gender-sensitive reportage. Her latest book published is *Ajmer Sharif* (pg 3)



**Madiha Aijaz**  
A Fulbright scholar, her photographs have been exhibited in Pakistan, the USA and South Africa.



CURRENT AFFAIRS

**A** well-researched account of the crisis in Afghanistan and a refreshing look at the challenges faced by the country, post 9/11. The pertinent success stories in this book show to the reader that all is not lost in Afghanistan.



In conversation with **Siddharth Dasgupta**, the author of *The Sacred Sorrow of Sparrows*



**Q** How has travelling embellished your writing or helped you grow as a writer?

**A** The more I travel, the more those emotions and assets that contribute to the making of a believable character or a story tinged with poignancy—empathy, humanity, passion, persistence, beauty—get honed. All travel, in a sense, is a window into another life, a touch alien from ours. I always try and keep myself open to new thoughts; I throw myself into newer immersions. It naturally gets filtered into how I think, feel and write.

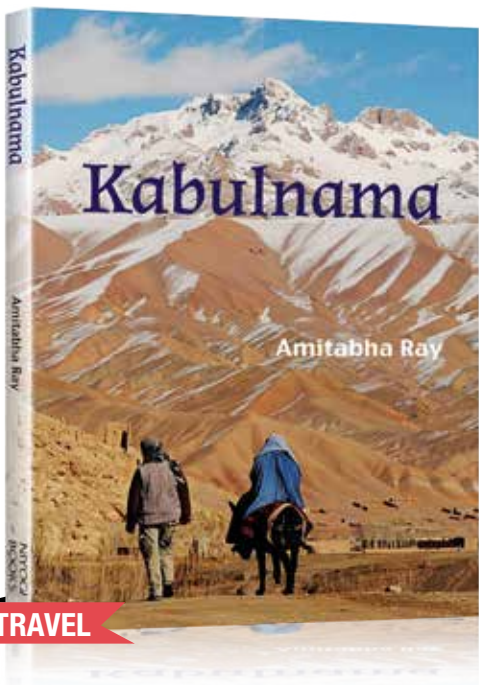
**Q** How has it impacted your worldview and how do you see India in comparison?

**A** Much of travel is a confirmation of things you already know to be true. The other half is this phenomenon to be surprised and, often, confounded. I think a mixture of these two halves makes for much discovery and wonder. One way to look at it is that constant interaction with different cultures and peoples and ancestral roots bring a wholesome understanding of life. I also enjoy the fact that a life tethered to discovery and movement is a discovery unto oneself, something that can't really be scoured through mere degrees. Strangely, the more you go out into this world, the closer you're drawn to your own country. Travels chip away at your concept of 'us' and 'them', convincing you of a more laidback definition of nation, nationality, and loyalty. I don't really have to 'see India in comparison', I can simply enjoy my land for what it is, this enchanting intertwining of religions, cultures, tastes, aromas, and resonances.

**Q** What has been most inspiring about this journey?

**A** This journey thus far has thrown up an endless ocean of treasures. Wanderlust and its individual tributaries feed my imagination, nourish my literature, enhance my understanding of myself, and, ultimately, bring me closer to my understanding of life and human beings. At the very least, it does away with notions of monotony and profitability. Often, that is inspiration enough.

To read the full interview, please visit [Ink & Papyrus](#), the Niyogi Books' blog.

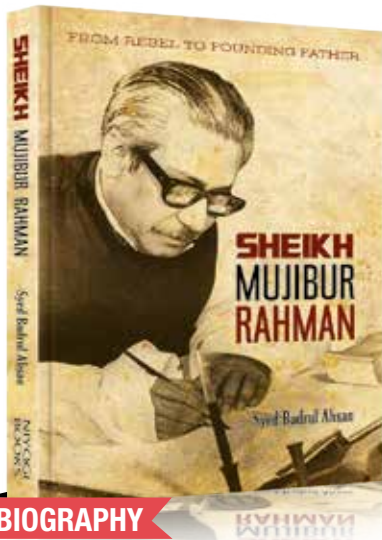


TRAVEL

**A** rare journey along the highs and lows of the land and the times. There is camaraderie amid chaos in this story of a battle-worn nation in a rugged land, lending a ringside view of its natural beauty, history, culture, travel, food and people. The author spent time in Kabul between 2007 and 2008. This book is a tribute to those years, sharing personal moments of anxiety and lending a glimpse into the life of the common Afghan.

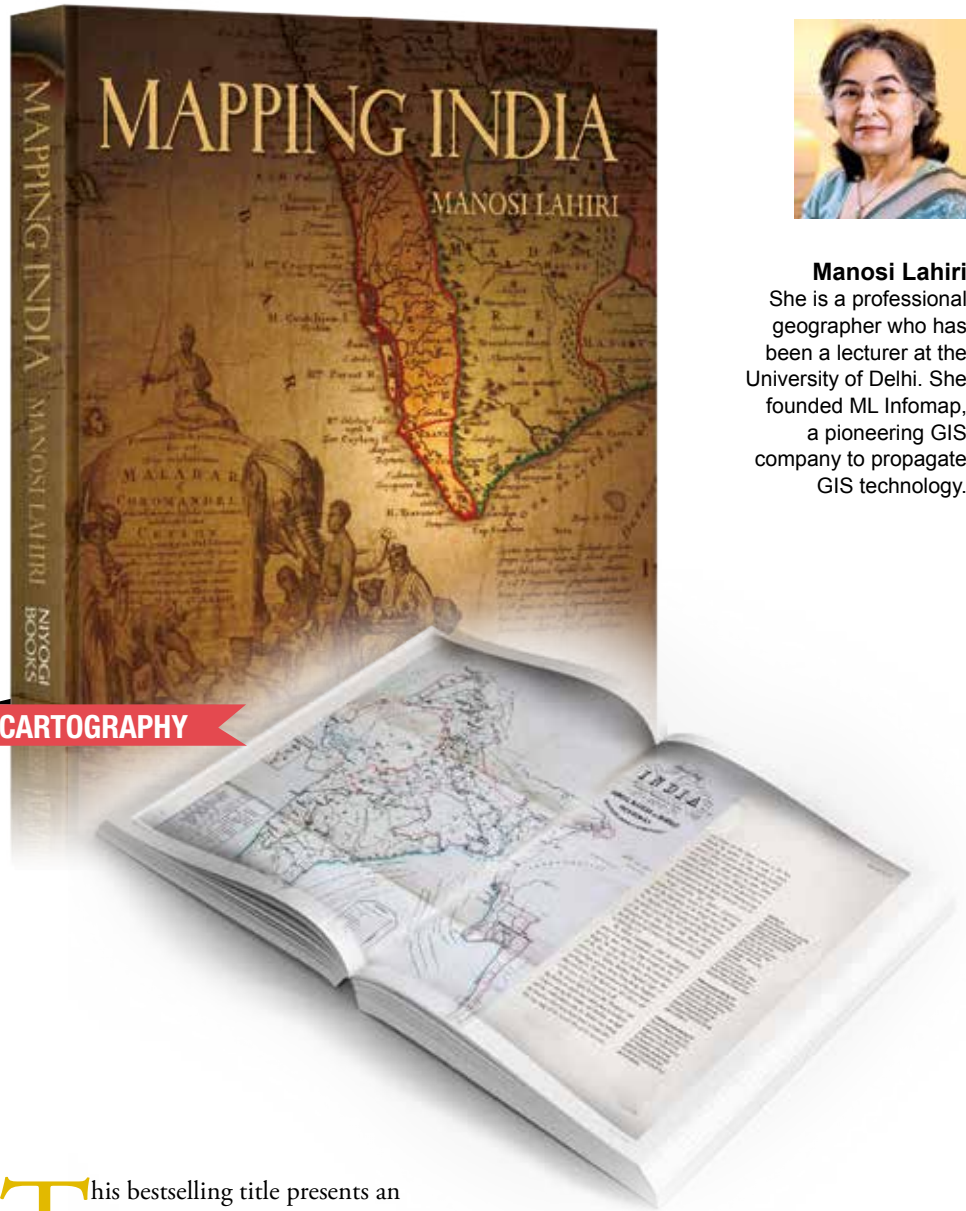


**Amitabha Ray**  
He was in Kabul as a representative of the Government of India on a United Nations mission.



BIOGRAPHY

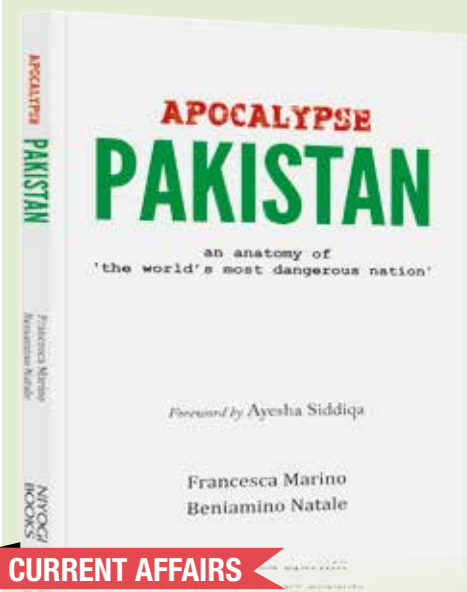
**T**his biography sensitively portrays Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's transformation to Bangabandhu, the friend of Bengal. It traces his meteoric evolution from a young follower of the All India Muslim League to a mature political leader.



CARTOGRAPHY



**Manosi Lahiri**  
She is a professional geographer who has been a lecturer at the University of Delhi. She founded ML Infomap, a pioneering GIS company to propagate GIS technology.



CURRENT AFFAIRS

**A** book that analyses the political and cultural evolution of the Pakistani elite (generals, politicians, and others) from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Pervez Musharraf, on topics such as the relationship with Afghanistan and China, terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

**Francesca Marino**  
An Italian journalist who has covered South Asia extensively. She is also a photographer.



**Beniamino Natale**  
Senior Correspondent in ANSA, the main Italian news agency, in China since 2003.





CLIPPINGS

White Crane, Lend Me Your Wings:  
A Tibetan Tale of Love and War



Left to Right: Shelly Bhoil, Vijay Kranti, Tensing Sonam and Lhamo Pemba at the book launch at Meghdoot Theatre, Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.

Lhamo Pemba with His Holiness The Dalai Lama reminiscing his acquaintance with her father.

Ajmer Sharif: Awakening of Sufism in South Asia



Left to Right: Reema Abbasi (the author), Sharmila Tagore, Manjari Chaturvedi and Vikramjit Rooprai at the book launch at Oxford Bookstore, New Delhi.

Left to Right: Namita Gokhale, Sadia Dehlvi, Reema Abbasi, Syed Salman Chishty, Imtiaz Ali and Sanjoy Roy celebrating the launch of the book at Jaipur Literary Festival, 2017.

Rajasthani Stories Retold



Left to Right: John Keay, Rima Hooja (the author) and Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharya launching the book at the Jaipur Literature Festival.

Discourses & Discussions



Left to Right: Sujata Sen, Radha Chakravarty, Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee, Reba Som and Guillermo Rodriguez during a discourse on 'Mahasweta Devi and Rabindranath in Translation' at Jaipur Book Mark, 2017.

Bikash D. Niyogi along with other participants at an engrossing discussion on 'Algorithm of the Indian Market', at Durbar Hall, Jaipur Book Mark, 2017.

FORTHCOMING TITLES



FICTION

WITHOUT PREJUDICE:  
EPIC TALE OF A  
MUMBAI BAR DANCER

Devasis

The novel follows the life of Pallavi, through her eyes and the eyes of the two men who play pivotal roles in her odyssey. These characters have been lovingly sketched by the author as he takes the reader through a journey in time.



FICTION

THE DRIFTWOOD

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