

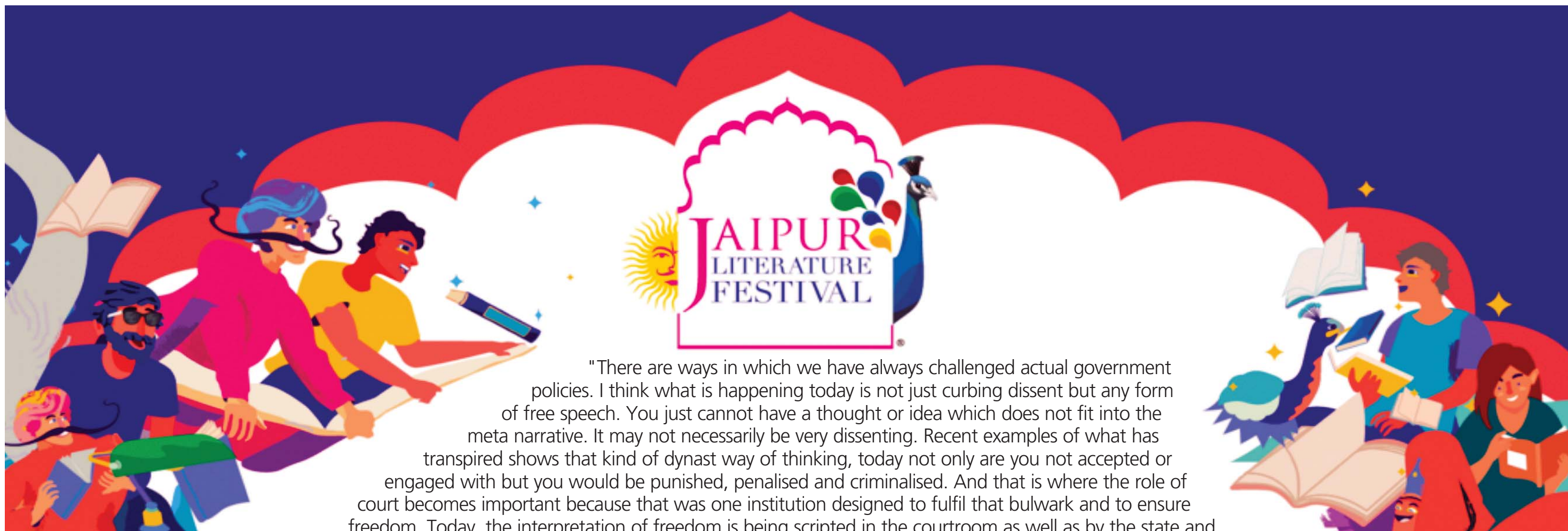
#SNIPPETS

The Important, Beautiful And Handsome All Here

A large number of soirees sport local writers, as one sees the calendar, one can yelp with delight at the rise of the Jaipur intelligentsia



larks looked alive! The never ending long path to the portico, or even the side slip to the marriage venues, one skipped quickly through. The organizers took great pains to NOT change the entry décor of the tried and found successful in the previous venue, Diggi Palace. The same streamers, pretty, ethnic, colourful, set the mood, as also the memory of past festival. The lack of actual history in the venue was pasted over by the lovely panels encasing the various soiree points. The first discussion did get washed away by the entry of the C.M. They had to exchange time with the 'opening'. Hope this session gets another slot? In the coming session days. People were well



"There are ways in which we have always challenged actual government policies. I think what is happening today is not just curbing dissent but any form of free speech. You just cannot have a thought or idea which does not fit into the meta narrative. It may not necessarily be very dissenting. Recent examples of what has transpired shows that kind of dynast way of thinking, today not only are you not accepted or engaged with but you would be punished, penalised and criminalised. And that is where the role of court becomes important because that was one institution designed to fulfil that bulwark and to ensure freedom. Today, the interpretation of freedom is being scripted in the courtroom as well as by the state and the emerging truth is that freedom will be secondary to duty, liberty will be subservient to the state. But that is not how any freedom of liberty has ever existed in any society."

And Why Not Dissent!

● Rakhee Roytalukedar

"Dissent was much easier way back in time. Now, you simply cannot have a thought or a new idea that does not fit into the meta narrative," this was the thought that emerged today at an interesting session on 'Threads of Dissent' at the literature extravaganza, Jaipur Literature Festival, which began here today.

The panelists say the new emerging idea may not be dissenting enough but one is mostly likely to be penalised for it in present times, rather than that the idea be debated or truly engaged with, which is deeply concerning. Today, the interpretation of freedom is being scripted both in the courtroom and by the state and what finally comes out as a result is that freedom is secondary to duty, liberty is subservient to the state. Vrinda Grover, Supreme Court advocate and human rights activist, while reflecting on dissent and freedom at the session, talked about the present dispensation's attempts to silence dissent in response to sharp criticisms over its policies. She took the most recent example of student activist Umar Khalid, whom the Supreme Court denied bail in the 2020 Delhi riots conspiracy case and in the process legitimised the use of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act to criminalise political dissent, having put the organisers of mass protests behind bars for years without trial, setting forth a deeply troubling precedent.

The session had three more women authors and activists, Deepthi Priya Mehrotra, a political scientist, bureaucrat Swati Pandey and Booker-prize winner and lawyer Banu Mustaq, who is part of Bandaya Sahitya movement, which is a kind of protest literature tradition.

Vrinda, while speaking about Umar Khalid and his incarceration without trial, expressed concern, saying "any society which is not willing to engage, instead puts people behind bars, is instilling fear in society, which is actually going to stunt and stultify our society".

Talking about the present times, she said, "Today's script is not necessarily the one written in law in the Constitution, the script is changing. But this change of script is sometimes very concerning. Part of the script must change as time moves forward but part of the script can't be subverted altogether. I think in earlier times, raising new ideas in this country and in our society was easier. Back then, there was not necessarily such a strong reaction or condemnation from the state or from the society to any new thinking. This is concerning especially in terms of minorities' perspective. You may disagree with what somebody holds true."

Talking about the ongoing debate on Aadhar, SIR, Vrinda said, "There are ways in which we have always challenged actual government policies. I think what is happening today is not just curbing dissent but any form of free speech. You just cannot have a thought or idea which does not fit into

#JLF



Puneeta Roy.

the meta narrative. It may not necessarily be very dissenting. Recent examples of what has transpired shows that kind of dynast way of thinking, today not only are you not accepted or engaged with but you would be punished, penalised and criminalised. And that is where the role of court becomes important because that was one institution designed to fulfil that bulwark and to ensure freedom. Today, the interpretation of freedom is being scripted in the courtroom as well as by the state and the emerging truth is that freedom will be secondary to duty, liberty will be subservient to the state. But that is not how any freedom of liberty has ever existed in any society. So, I would rather see it as a passing phase, it is a very challenging time globally, not just domestically."

Dwelling upon the case of Umar Khalid, Vrinda said, "A young intellectual, Muslim leader, Khalid, whose speech is now under scrutiny is languishing behind bars without trial. Any society which is not willing to engage, you may not agree to everything but to put people behind bars, to put fear is actually going to stunt and stultify our society. And if institutions are not able to wake up to this travesty, it is for all of us and for forums like these for engagements, conversations and dialogues."

Political scientist Deepthi Priya Mehrotra, who has authored the book on feminist street theatres in India, "Walking out, Speaking Up, concurred saying the earlier times were magical and that as a group, they could come out on the streets, resisting

and fighting. There was pain, anger and energy against the horrifying dowry deaths, all of which were brought poignantly out in the street plays. The women's feminist movement was important that time because they profiled how women protested. But violence has not stopped, especially against women and the marginalised. When the plays were performed in residential colonies, there was an immediate connection and empathy. It touched the hearts and many people reacted as the play was presenting their reality. The street plays were also open-ended, aimed to raise awareness and consciousness. Like at the end of play, there was the question like should a woman walk out or keep suffering."

Booker prize winner for Heart Lamp, Banu Mustaq, recollected how rebellion was her in-built nature and how she could not be tied down to her house and that she literally walked out of her house because her in-laws could not come to terms with her rebellious nature. She has been writing even before her marriage but there was a long gap. She was inspired by a group of Dalit youths who were singing rebel songs. She contacted these youths and joined them. She made it clear that she cannot stay home but would join the Bandaya Sahitya movement in the 1970s. This movement allowed a bunch of Dalit writers to change the Kannada literary landscape by introducing protest and rebel writing into an otherwise restricted but toned up literature. Activist and lawyer Mustaq said hers is confrontational writing and she writes from her heart, and her book Heart Lamp focuses on lives of Muslim women, who live restricted lives, whether poor or moneyed and feel threatened by money, power and prejudice.

In the same way, the sex workers of Kamathipura, the red light district of Mumbai, lead lives in penury where they earn around Rs. 200 after servicing around 12 clients per day, and they have kids, whom they want to protect and give education, which is nearly impossible, said Swati Pandey, a bureaucrat, who has worked with India Post, and has authored the book, 'Invisible in Plain Sight, Voices from the By-Lanes of Kamathipura'. She emphasised that these sex workers are often intrigued by why people want to take them out of this place, which they call their own as they have made a world there.

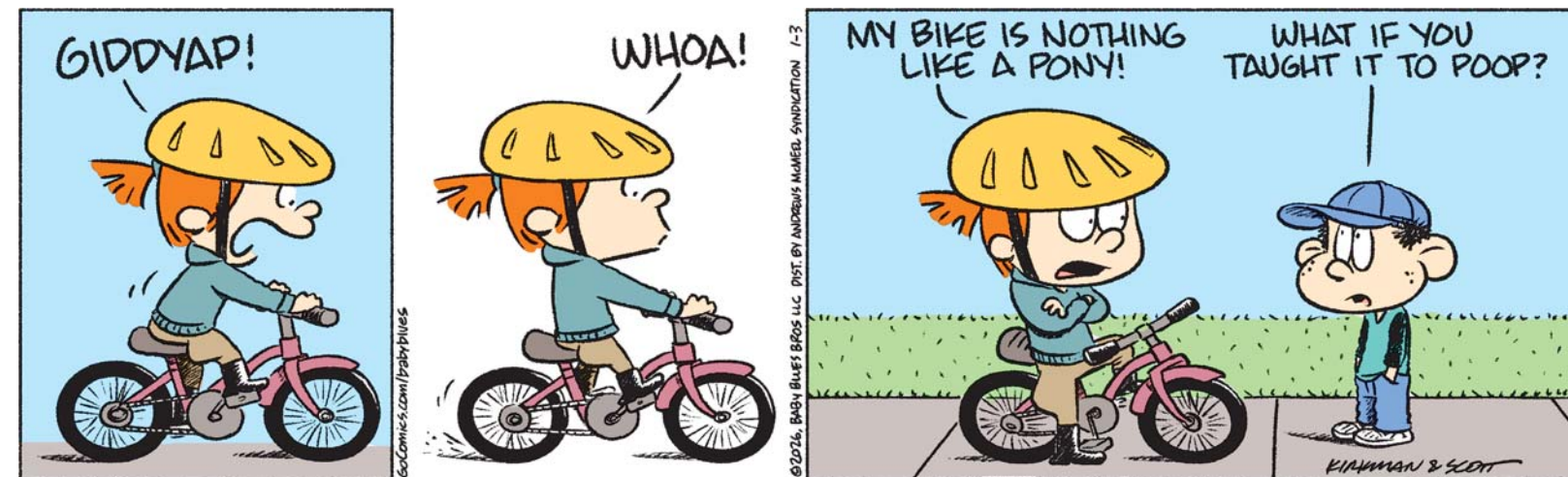
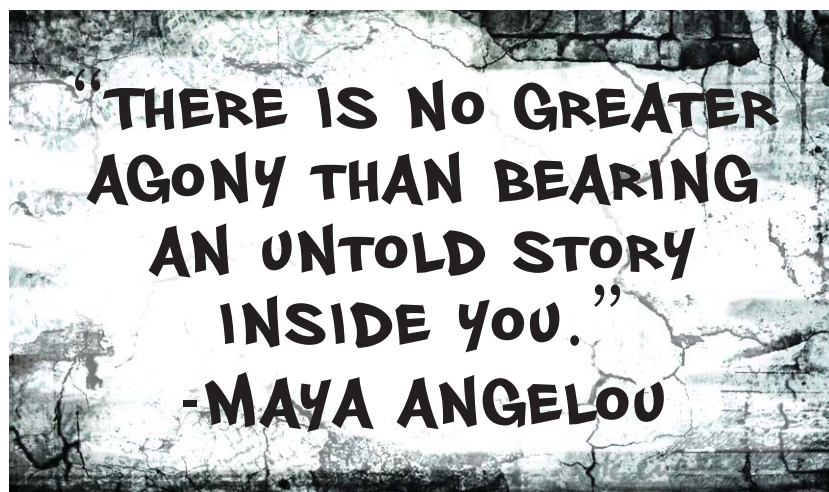
As she writes in her book that there is dissent and anger there too, "All was not fair game in her world. While it was true that they were sex workers, Kajol (a sex worker) believed that they should have the dignity of a human existence. Kajol had dethroned Maya and had freed the women and herself. No one owned them now. They were free. They traded as per their own convenience and stood by each other. Whenever they were not in the mood for work, physically or psychologically, they sat back in their pockets and relaxed." And perhaps, this dissent against the set system, which is imperative in a democracy, would ensure accountability, drive social progress and keep hope afloat.

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By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

BABY BLUES

THE WALL



ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

राष्ट्रदूत

FRIDAY

16 January 2026

A-B

#KHUD SE BAAT

"Wo baat jo dusra koi samajh Nahin sakta

Khud se kah lete hain hum..."

Vicharon ke Dhage uljhte jate hain apne antarman me Khud se baat karne lagte hain hum



The interesting session touched on the horizon of poetic imagination as well. A poet's observation doesn't necessarily differ from others but the courage, the depth, and a distinct perspective to express makes the poet different from other people. That's why goes the old saying "jahan na pahunche Ravi, wahan pahuncha kavi".

● Abha Sharma

Poetry is an exchange with the self, a self-reflection where the poetic expression becomes both the question and the answer, said Anshu Harsh, author, publisher and editor. This gives utmost satisfaction and also mean leaving out your vajud, your legacy when you are no more or around.

In an engrossing conversation with Anshu was Jagdeep Singh, popularly known as Jags, himself a well-known poet and publicist. The writer of much acclaimed My Epitaph and his latest poetic anthology When Gods Don't Matter discussed all facets of Anshu's poetry writing, art of translation and shift from poetry to fiction.

Referring to Anshu's four published volumes of verses covering varied topics from love, struggle in life, nature, religion, spirituality, Singh and Anshu engaged in the poetry of remembrance and shift from poetry to fiction.

Anshu said, the moment a poet starts observing something, the writing process starts within.

Jante ho Vichar kabhi thahrate Nahin hain, chalte rahte hain anvarat

Jeevan me aane ke saath hi shuru ho jata hai ye Silsilah

Vicharon ke Dhage uljhte jate hain apne antarman me Khud se baat karne lagte hain hum

Wo baat jo dusra koi samajh

Nahin sakta Khud se kah lete hain ham...

(Thoughts keep flowing in my mind, get intertwined and they take shape in a poetic form. What a poet talks to his/her own self, no one else can understand.)

No poem can be written without self-reflection, she added. This gives utmost satisfaction and also mean leaving out your vajud, your legacy when you are no more or around.

Singh asked her to elaborate about inclusion of both Hindi and English in her third anthology. "If one wants to cross borders and make one's global presence felt, translation is important. Referring to Ret Samadhi by Geeta Shree, Anshu said the translation helped her reach a wider audience and also a Booker prize. The importance of translation is essential for global outreach and market", she added.

Singh pointed out the challenges of translation. A good translation doesn't mean translating simply words, it means capturing the right expressions in the original language.

Speaking about her simplistic approach in writing poetry, she said she doesn't go by the specific rules of rhyme or poetic meter. "I let the words flow with ease." She doesn't use symbols, metaphors or imagery. "I just keep writing and don't fall for the rules."

She was asked at a JLF session a few years ago, when there is so much strife all around and she still prefers to write on love.

She strongly feels everybody has a purpose, like some work to revolutionize, some like to do something else, she loves to spread love. It is like kindling a flame to spread light.

Anshu's writing career incidentally synchronized with her motherhood. Her initial poems revolved around mother-child relationship, childhood, relationships but ruhaniyat or the spirit of love remains centre to her poetry writing. It helps her unveiling the true purpose of her writing.

The session also had the unveiling of her debut novel Icha Mrityu, which she wrote inspired by the life of Aruna Shaunbag and her quiet suffering. The novel covers the subject of passive euthanasia.

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Singh also raised a poignant question on Catharsis. If poetry is self-reflection, khud se baat, does it help the poet feel relieve of his/her burden/anger/weight? Agreeing with him, Anshu said that writing is like a therapy; it helps you vent your feelings.

Kitne kaante chubhte hain rooh me Tab zindagi ko muskurana aata hai