

haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



prati

Priti Aisola

Issue 49 November 2025

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

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

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Issue 49
November 2025

haiku, tanka, tanka-prose,
haiga and tanka-art

Founder/Managing Editor:

Kala Ramesh

Associate Editors:

Ashish Narain

Firdaus Parvez

Priti Aisola

Sanjuktaa Asopa

Shalini Pattabiraman

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

Vandana Parashar

Vidya Shankar

Web Editor: Ravi Kiran

Proofreader: Sushama Kapur

Cover Art: Priti Aisola

Design: Kala Ramesh

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Triveni Haikai India: www.trivenihaikai.in

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Our heartfelt thanks to:

Lakshmi Iyer, Joanna Ashwell,
Marilyn Shoemaker Hazelton,
and Mohua Maulik,

,
for providing the weekly challenges
for the month of October 2025,

Priti Aisola
for her brilliant ink sketch of the damselfly,

our contributors
for sharing their poems.

Tejasvat Award

Triveni Haikai India

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

The tanka editors,
Firdaus Parvez, Kala Ramesh,
Priti Aisola and Suraja Menon Roychowdhury
are pleased to present
the

Tejasvat Award

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

In this issue, we honour

Lakshmi Iyer

for her five outstanding and poignant tanka.

Tejasvat Lakshmi Iyer

Triveni Haikai India

growing old
the frozen silence between
mother and me
she points at tiny puddles
I show the moon in there

father's black and white
picture with a Japanese tie
the quiet gestural bow
of a gentleman
to the rising sun

new moon night
a million sky-shots light up
the Diwali sky
I pray for the tender hands
that rolled the firecrackers

Tejasvat Lakshmi Iyer

Triveni Haikai India

our maid plucks
the weeds by their roots
her advice
to clear deep within
to erase what's not good

I allow myself
to listen to my inner voice
sometimes
silence is noisy,
the mountains echo the wind

Editors' Choice Commentary: by Kala Ramesh
Editor's Choice: *Fact & Fancy* a haibun by Jenny Ward Angyal

Jenny Ward Angyal

Fact & Fancy

a rainbow
of snapdragons
listening to bees

The haiku is rejected, of course — too whimsical, too anthropomorphic. Everybody knows that plants can't hear and don't listen ... or do they? If you play a recording of buzzing bees to a snapdragon, the plant steps up its nectar production, inviting more pollinators to the feast.

finding our way
toward the light
pea vines and me

In this haibun, Jenny adopts a clear and straightforward style from the outset. In the title, the ampersand sits between two contrasts — *Fact & Fancy*. The title greatly captured my interest, and I was eager to discover more about what this piece would reveal.

In just three sentences, an entirely different world comes to life, prompting us with questions to answer within ourselves. The first sentence introduces the haiku police — ever watchful and unwavering. When I entered the haikai realm years ago, the word anthropomorphism haunted my mind.

In the second sentence, that question ... *or do they?* reminded me of an essay I read about Jagadish Chandra Bose decades ago, where Bose, if you don't know him, was the scientist who managed to convince a largely sceptical world that plants are living beings.

“Is there any possible relation between our own life and that of the plant world?” This question, which recurs throughout Jagadish Chandra Bose’s work, inspired much of his research.

The third sentence: *If you play a recording of buzzing bees to a snapdragon, the plant steps up its nectar production, inviting more pollinators to the feast.*

This led me to the timeless Indian Advaitic philosophy, which asserts that all life is interconnected. There is only one vital energy – call it by any name you like.

With a striking haiku that concludes this little haibun, Jenny convincingly wins her argument.

finding our way
toward the light
pea vines and me

This poem examines the theme of living and the interconnectedness of lives. Jenny has skillfully utilised the white space on the page. The seamless weaving of deep thoughts between the title, prose, and two haiku in a minimalist style makes this haibun memorable to me.

More about Bose:

<https://www.sciencehistory.org/stories/magazine/the-thinking-plants-man/>

haiku

bonfire
shadows receding
into the chill

Alfred Booth

morning mist
waiting for the first geese
to cross the mountains

Alfred Booth

mother's typewriter
the gradual rusting
of i

Arvinder Kaur

evening light
grandma takes longer
in her prayer room

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

haiku

consolation prize
of a season gone by ...
blueberry jam

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

pumpkin latte ...
the dizzying swirl
of fresh froth

Barrie Levine

apple skins
curl on the counter
no birds today

C.X. Turner,

blood twilight -
these bruised apples
still taste of apple

David Cox

haiku

first rain
the promise of rising
water levels

Dinah Power

I wait for her
in the matinee queue
long night

Dipankar Dasgupta

frost on autumn leaves —
the delicate patterns
of dying

Fatma Zohra Habis

i learn
to be a bystander ...
autumn rain

Kala Ramesh

haiku

uninvited guests
a few yellow leaves
at my doorstep

Kalyanee Arandhara

a shapeshifter
shimmies in the wind
halloween moon

Kanjini Dev

dark October sky —
a lone egret flapping
amidst parrots' chatter

Lakshmi Iyer

open gate
the scent of sheep
on a warm wind

Lorraine Haig

haiku

forest floor
the fox's nose
tests the rain

Marilyn Ashbaugh

grape harvest
the dusk
in dad's hands

Marilyn Ashbaugh

late for work
this time I blame
the red squirrel

Marion Clarke

by the light store
a woman with her
clay diyas

Milan Rajkumar

haiga



marilyn ashbaugh

quilting bee
the sting
of autumn gossip

image and ku: Marylyn Ashbaugh

haiku

wind-bent reeds
the part of me
that won't stop swaying

Nalini Shetty

braid undone
the scent of wild ginger
at her nape

Nalini Shetty

small chittering birds
all morning a pine needle
in my hair

paul m.

puffball mushrooms
the rare sighting
of a neighbor

paul m.

haiku

misty dawn
the mellow tone
in hidden tweets

Raji Vijayaraghavan

neighbour's window
the alternating rhythm of
two rocking chairs

Ranu Jain

clifftop cemetery
stone angels reach towards
the sea

Ron C. Moss

old oak
a faded yellow ribbon
frayed at the edges

Robert Kingston

haiku

bamboo forest
not every leaf
touches the wind

Sandip Chauhan

grandpa puts
his hearing aid to rest ...
diwali

Sathya Venkatesh

Kailash Kora
backpack so much lighter
on the down slope

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

early dusk
an incessant rain
of colored leaves

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

haiku

bare branches
stretching the silence
of an autumn walk

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

same blue map —
her hand in mine
under the hospital light

Vidya Premkumar

one-line haiku

still beyond myself what fingers remember about music

Alfred Booth

where my pain was drifting damselfly

Kala Ramesh

raking in a worker's wage fallen leaves

Raji Vijayaraghavan

gathering gossip in the air ginger tea

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

haiga



vacant lot
my old shortcut
filled with light

nalini

image and ku: Nalini Shetty

tanka

gold dust
springs from an old turntable
yet my hands conjure
the sound poems
from a page of Chopin

Alfred Booth

whiffs of jasmine
linger in the breeze
on our walk trails
not a trace
of yesterday's footprints

Arvinder Kaur

those schoolyard taunts ...
even after all these years
when I look
in the mirror
I still see what they saw

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

tanka

late at night
my son plays the piano
I break down
wondering how pain
can be so beautiful

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

standing on tip toe
I reach for the top shelf
of my daily blahs;
just for a moment,
I am a ballerina

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

our traditions
pasta with potatoes
and provolone
I look for home
in every day

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni

tanka

don't they know
this fear of falling
autumn leaves
paragliding
one by one

Barbara Olmtak

each morning
I do the Sudoku
embracing logic
before I face a world
where it won't help me

Cynthia Bale

when the bulldozer
arrives at the vacant lot
I take pictures
so the four trees there
know I'll remember them

Cynthia Bale

tanka

my dream
to walk the world
so gently
the shyest neighbour bird
won't take flight as I pass

Cynthia Bale

over stone
sunlight streams
across water —
a glimpse
of what endures

C.X. Turner

between drafts
I touch the one word
that hurts —
still this fragile way
of staying alive

C.X. Turner

tanka

end of war
a lonely child returns
to his forgotten self
alive again
in a ruined world

Fatma Zohra Habis

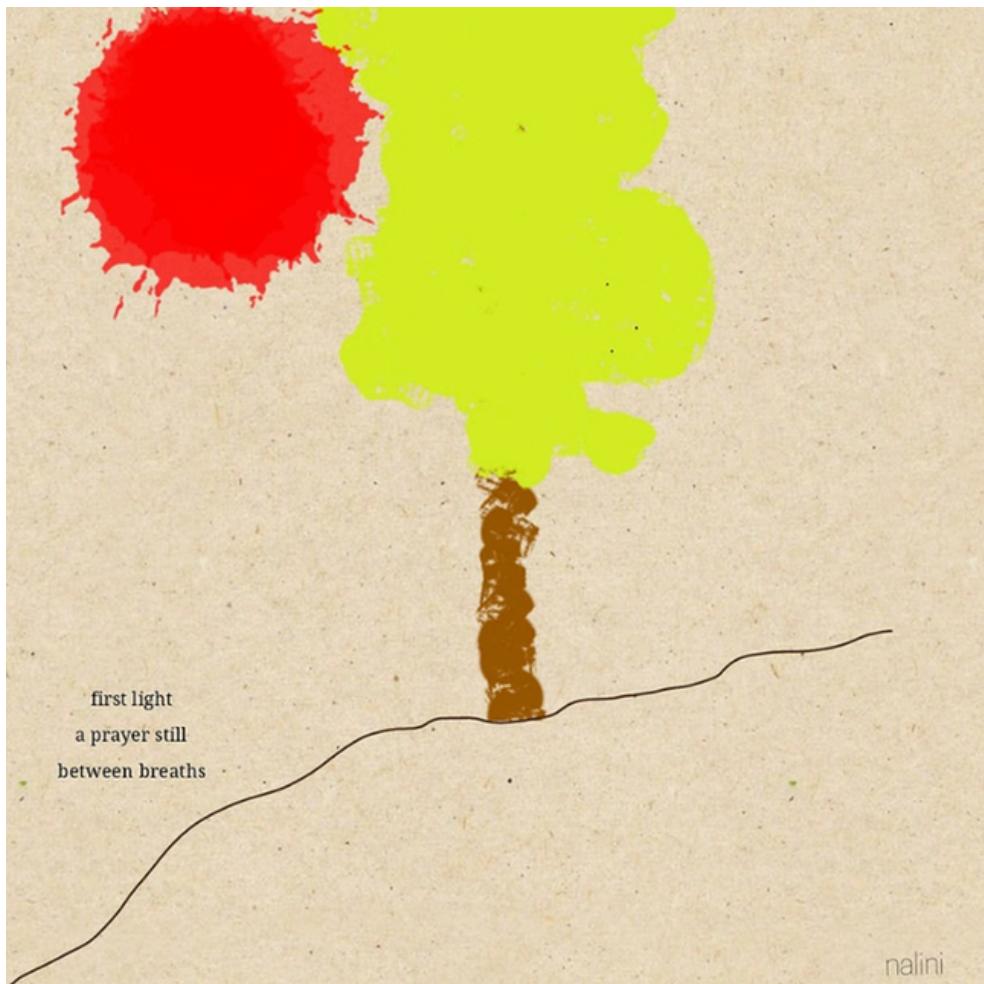
the slight dip
of a neem's bough
as an eagle lands
I finish typing another poem
for my dead best friend

Firdaus Parvez

i rearrange
the furniture in my house
yet again —
that phase when
things give you company

Gowri Bhargav

haiga



first light
a prayer still
between breaths

nalini

image and ku: Nalini Shetty

tanka

walking home alone
as another streetlamp
sketches rain ...
the slow gild
of winter nights

Joanna Ashwell

I slip away
into the night's inky glow
between worlds
like an owl hollowing
a bowl of dreams

Joanna Ashwell

not even a breeze
to disturb the tranquillity
the moment holds
a firefly
circling a pine tree

Kala Ramesh

tanka

intensely dark
after a wolf's lament
I sense
this depth of stillness
in the air around us

Kala Ramesh

home hospice
this summer
the flower bed
blooms with dahlias
of yesteryear

Kanjini Devi

a cuckoo chick
bigger than both parents
chirping for more
how often do we take
more than we need

Kanjini Devi

tanka

growing old
the frozen silence between
mother and me
she points at tiny puddles
I show the moon in there

Lakshmi Iyer

father's black and white
picture with a Japanese tie
the quiet gestural bow
of a gentleman
to the rising sun

Lakshmi Iyer

new moon night
a million sky-shots light up
the Diwali sky
I pray for the tender hands
that rolled the firecrackers

Lakshmi Iyer

tanka

our maid plucks
the weeds by their roots
her advice
to clear deep within
to erase what's not good

Lakshmi Iyer

I allow myself
to listen to my inner voice
sometimes
silence is noisy,
the mountains echo the wind

Lakshmi Iyer

without the worry
of a sudden end
balloons drift away
how i wish
i could say 'i can'

Lalitha Vadrevu

tanka

board riders
drift with the swell
I too
ride the silence
till a poem breaks free

Lorraine Haig

the palm cockatoo
drums a stick against
a tree hollow
to attract a mate —
my suitor beats his chest

Marilyn Humbert

with care I scribe
poems on parchment
my memories
for family left behind
and family not yet born

Marilyn Humbert

haiga



image and ku: Ron C. Moss

tanka

snowy crystals
on the blooming hibiscus
spread ...
mourning another one
that i failed to protect

Mohua Maulik

each day I wake
to less of the hurt
morning light
touches the wall
then moves on

Nalini Shetty

rickshaw rattles past
I pause mid-step
to watch dust rise
and scatter like thoughts
I never knew I held

Nalini Shetty

tanka

wrapping palms
around the hot teacup
she wonders
when the warmth
between them vanished

Padma Priya

on my balcony
two weaver birds
gathering twigs —
oh, this longing
for a home in Mumbai

Padma Rajeswari

the murky waters
of anxiety swishing
this way and that ...
pinwheel blooms
surrender to the breeze

Priti Aisola

tanka

thinning birch
along the riverside path
our reflections turn
to a distant egret
poised for flight

Robert Kingston

nomads pass
with painted wagons
and bells of the oxen —
I wish to be a song
that carries home within

Sandip Chauhan

under the banyan
every word you spoke
was sheer poetry ...
when you're in love
you love the whole world

Sreenath

tanka

reading the Stoics
late into the night
I long
to be like them
but curse a power cut

Srini

windy day ...
the driftwood
still
teaches me the value
of slowing down

Srini

a restlessness
keeps me awake ...
our chat
over the coffee we drank
so long ago

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

tanka

only
within the bounds
of poetry
can I speak freely ...
a tethered kite, soaring

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

how he runs to me
with a limp and a wag
despite my raised hand ...
a gesture of kindness
somewhere long ago

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

autumn walk ...
commotionless
she parts as a leaf
from the weight
of a diagnosis

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

tanka

soaking in the softness
of the setting sun
how softly
my cat's eyes exude
love in slow blinks

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

haiga



ravens in flight
the scent of charcoal
on kozo paper

Ron C. Moss

image and ku: Ron C. Moss

Adelaide B. Shaw

Survival

My “To Do” list. It grows. It shrinks. Grows again. Perhaps I should retire the practice of keeping lists. No plans. No must do. Be spontaneous. Go with my instinct.

late dusk
frozen in place
deer and I

alaka y

Mistaken Identity

Now if only the Davos conference would ... It took half a minute of teeth brushing to realise the error I had made. No, not about understanding the world economic policy; the taste. It was different. None of the usual sweetness. Not quite the clove smell of Closeup toothpaste; more like the lemongrass of Odomos mosquito repellent. But then one had to put up with such minor inconveniences while mulling over weighty problems of the world.

plein air painting
the artist loads his brush
with tea

Alan Pizzarelli

Tales of Morpheus

I am lost in an underground city — all the stores are closed, and there are no people anywhere — I come to an escalator that takes me up to a gloomy empty street — turning around, I notice the subway entrance has gone and in its place, a small grave — I realize I am standing in the middle of a cemetery with rows of countless white tombstones stretching across the distant hills as far as the eye can see — walking on for what seems an eternity, I arrive at a small village where an elderly woman stands silently holding a bunch of white roses.

the sculptor
chisels another name
into stone

Anju Kishore

Scheme of Things

A leaf, light green with a dash of burgundy on one side, is floating gently down the river.

first cry
a universe unfolding
before my eyes

Soon, the leaf hits the rocks. It gets wedged in their nooks and is rescued only by the way the water flows.

birth chart
finding the path
on a starry sky

The leaf now appears bent on one side, but makes progress along with other floating leaves and twigs. Slowly, it is pushed towards the bank until it gets tangled in a clump of reeds. A sandpiper pecks at the water. After what seems like a long time, the bird's beak happens to prick the leaf, and the leaf is released.

last rites
a transit point marked
in the blueprint

Aparna Pathak

Delusion

The world looks drenched in spiritualism these days. But is it real, or just a mask that everyone wears? Is it faith or the fear of the unknown that is drawing people towards God?

Everyone follows a different guru, hoping theirs will be the bridge to God. They are meditating and chanting mantras with sacred beads, promoting peace. Yet the world roars with wars.

But, as it is believed, if God waits beyond this life, are we truly ready to embrace death? I wonder, are we really seeking the divine, or simply the comfort that the ritual of seeking brings?

daybreak
the pitcher plant's lid
closes on the fly

haibun

Billie Dee



Jhator

nothing wasted —
even this wait
for flight

Packing for Tibet. Just the essentials: woolen socks,
prayer beads, my Last Will and Testament — signed
but undated.

if I fall
from this mountain
sacred vultures

Bob Lucky

My Parents Got Some Things Right

On Sunday mornings, my parents plopped us kids in front of the TV and let us watch old Tarzan movies while eating donuts. Later, we would go outside to play, climb trees to escape lions, and swing on a rope over a river of crocodiles because we believed we had the whole world in our hands.

barefoot
the imagination
running wild

C.X. Turner

Hawthorn Light

It was no larger than a curled leaf, whiskers twitching against my palm. The grass still bent from the sudden scatter, rain-slick stems glinting in the early light. I cupped it close, feeling the tremor of its heart in mine.

In the dim corner of the garage, I lined a box with hay and grass, set a shallow dish of water beside its dark-breathing shape. Through the day, I returned — a stem of clover, a handful of seed heads, the quiet company of breathing. Outside, voices rose and fell, the scuff of boots on stone. Then, the scrape of the box being lifted, carried away from the noise.

early light
something unseen
moves the nettles

Dru Philippou

Consolation

The fragrance from thousands of roses and carnations during Maha Shivaratri festival fills the temple. Devotees open the buds, cut off their stems, and thread them with rattan to create floral strands, garlands, and other designs, then place them on altars and around thresholds. More flowers are added to the garden lingam, bathed in a divine mixture of milk and honey.

Chanting begins after sunset under a waning moon. A pujari ignites the fire with a ghee-soaked cloth. A bright orange flame is maintained throughout the night to dispel negativity and darkness. I toss in sprigs of tulsi, mint, coriander, and a handful of rice.

Shiva's dance
a moth flutters
around a candle

When dawn breaks, and the air is still lingering with devotion, I remove the flowers as part of the ritual and place them into large bowls to share among the community. I take home three small floral hearts, knowing that, for a while, everything will be all right.

peacock feathers
catch the sunlight
whispers in blue

E. L. Blizzard

Empire of Dirt

There was a time we dreamed of a tiny house embraced by ancient trees,
goldfinches on the sunflowers, water bubble in the background. Now I just hurt.

Johnny Cash
and all his reckonings
on repeat

Note:

The title “Empire of Dirt” is borrowed from the song “Hurt” written by Trent Reznor and performed by Johnny Cash.

Firdaus Parvez

Prey

From outside the netted kitchen door I can hear the scuffling of the yard cat. I usually put out a saucer of milk for it in the morning. Warming a cup, I step out of the kitchen. Sure enough, the ginger is busy munching on something with soft-brown feathers. With a sharp crackling of bones, a tiny finch disappears into the cat's bloody mouth.

war news —
reminiscing the sting
of a paper bullet

Ganesh R.

Footloose

On a whim, my cousin pulls into a parking lot near a remote hiking trail. Not even five minutes into the trek, a sudden rustle in the bushes freezes us in our tracks. We exchange uneasy glances, silently questioning our impulsive decisions in life. The thought of encountering a bear — active and foraging before hibernation — without any repellent or protection does little to reassure me.

The trail is deserted, which isn't surprising given that there were no cars in the parking lot. To steady our nerves, we swap stories, letting our voices and footsteps push back the uneasy silence that surrounds us.

One pristine lake leads to another, each more breathtaking than the last. Despite the biting cold, a quiet warmth spreads through me, dissolving the earlier tension. Surrounded by nothing but wilderness and stillness, I realize this detour is exactly what I need.

golden larches
the sky bends low
to kiss the lake

Glenn G. Coats

~

The Blank Page

It is the end of a school day. After the buses leave, I scratch down notes, write tomorrow's date on the blackboard, and call a parent. Clouds are building as I pack spelling tests and paragraphs to correct. I sign out in the office where the secretary has already left. One car stops in front of me as I cross the lot. A window rolls down and the driver starts talking. Asks me about an upcoming convention. I look into her bright eyes and say, "I'm sorry you must be mistaken. You must be thinking of someone else." Halfway home — it dawns on me — Charlotte.

fishtailing a way evening snow

Jackie Chou

Birthdays

An email from classmates dot com says
today is a fellow alumnus's birthday.

I scroll through the message,
remembering something I once heard,
that a writer always writes,
and is never not writing.

I wonder if sending well wishes
to old acquaintances count as writing,
and if I should enthuse over it.

your Aquarius sign ...
old memories spilling
from a water jug

Jenny Ward Angyal

Fact & Fancy

a rainbow
of snapdragons
listening to bees

The haiku is rejected, of course — too whimsical, too anthropomorphic. Everybody knows that plants can't hear and don't listen ... or do they? If you play a recording of buzzing bees to a snapdragon, the plant steps up its nectar production, inviting more pollinators to the feast.

finding our way
toward the light
pea vines and me

Joanna Ashwell

Moon Dive

blue jay feathers this ocean blue of falling

How did we become all of this? More separate than together. Buttons sewn oddly onto a jacket. There is no seam to pull us back to whole.

silver raindrops already gone wishing well

These words that pass through air are already out of tune with what we want to hear. There is no sheet to follow, no map, no instruction manual. Love is broken.

pine needles holding a green we long for

Home. The place we can no longer find within ourselves. Lost in a colour-washed world of parting. The moon blind shine of darkness.

Kala Ramesh

Vital Breath

*until the hunted learn how to write,
every story will glorify the hunter **

this morning
a lioness chooses me,
from all the gazelles in our herd

do i look weak
do i not run as fast

the earth sweeps past me
past us

the other antelopes
watch from the tall grass

i see four lion cubs
from the corner of my eye ...

distant rapids
a sheet of liquid sunlight

a gunshot ...!

the whole forest panting next to me the lioness

* an African proverb

Lew Watts

Feeling Good

Birds flying high her voice a mere whisper rasping to the next sip of water *You know how I feel* she asked when introduced I feel like shit but hell no germy kid of mine's gonna stop this show no sir her sequins brighter than any *Sun in the sky* the mic so close its windscreen grill's already caked with Ruby Woo *You know how I feel* good inside Chicago clubs and this one is the coolest tourists just like *Breeze driftin' on* by never seeing a tinsel stage never hearing a southside girl sing her broken heart out *You know how I feel* her story's not about her sick kid it's about a frayed dress two swollen feet and someone waiting drunk at home it's about her wishing *It's a new dawn* that today after all those times *It's a new day* when the skeins are streaming overhead and she can open her wings and fly *It's a new life* she dreams of sings of and *For me* her choked and trembling voice is one long lament for all she has to leave behind she sees me smiling nods because she knows I know she's leaving And *I'm feeling good* *I'm feeling good* ...

birds in the sky
how you know
it's for good

**Feeling Good* is one of Nina Simone's most famous songs. Words from her first verse are italicized in the prose and feature in the haiku.

Lorraine Haig

Leaving the Big Sky

When everyone is asleep she packs her backpack. No need to turn on a light. The streetlight, buzzing with insects, is enough to see by. One last look before she tiptoes down the hallway. Her key she leaves on the kitchen table. A message without words. One that will break their hearts.

shadows an old belt hanging from a nail

No breeze, just misty rain. Rain that feels like a conspirator. Soft and light. An invisible cloak. She's leaving her small town for the city's lights and quickens her pace to the riverbank and the cover of trees. On the outskirts of this small town, the river carves deeply through the landscape. She needs to walk to the highway before anyone recognizes her. To flag a lift. To climb into the warmth.

dawn stars the brake lights of a car

Marilyn Ashbaugh

Sylvan

The morning after my brother's funeral, I venture out my back door to fill the bird feeders and notice a mute swan swimming slowly towards me in the nearby river. I place some seed on the ground between us and retreat. After a brief pause, and with great effort, the swan emerges from the water. Nearly as tall as me, his snow-white body contrasts with his bright orange bill and black feet.

winter clouds the wing beats of loss

Matthew Caretti

~

Inheritance

empty nest
after the gales
the picking up

So once again I come to occupy the outside. Find the twisted knot of the hammock, a double helix of humanity set against itself. Unravel the mess we've made of the plastic, sand leaching into us, and understand that the lucid must change and cannot be equal to the slow swell of the sea. That where we've left off is not an option anew or afresh. That the hammock is fraying under my weight. That these threadbare strands too, might soon become an undone flotsam, I, then we, call home.

Mirela Brailean

All That's Left

Since dawn, I've been heading to the nearby beach. The sea is calm. During this time, as the sun rises from the sea, the small waves create a shiny path to the shore.

You've often told me about the beauty of this small Greek island. We had been planning a vacation here, together. But the disease was never patient with you.

You made me promise something to you. Now, I am here by myself to fulfill your final wish. I'm going a little offshore. I feel a salty taste on my lips. After opening the urn, the breeze scatters the ashes over the water.

My dear friend, it's time to say goodbye!

end of summer
a pair of footsteps on the sand
erased by waves

Mohua Maulik

Open Skies

The heavily veiled bride is welcomed with the blowing of conch shells as she overturns a pot of rice. Feet dipped in red, she takes her first steps inside her new home. Her mother-in-law touches honey to her lips and ears so that she may speak and hear only sweet words.

Days slip by, and so does the veil. The edge of her sari is now mostly tucked around her waist as she learns how to cook in their style. After getting a job, she asks for permission to wear a salwar-kameez. The long streak of vermillion in her hair parting becomes shorter and shorter until it is a faint dot, much to her father-in-law's unspoken disapproval. Braving his ire further, she does away with her red and white bangles, yet another sign of her marital status.

“Everyone gives me weird looks when they make a racket at the office,” she says in defence. “I am still wearing the noa.” She holds up the snug gold and iron bangle that her mother-in-law had made her wear after a bit of a tussle, amidst much laughter.

leafless tree
the entwined kite flutters
once again

Neena Singh

The Cartography of Loss

The monsoon came heavier than we remembered. The Sutlej rose, carrying not just water but stories of uprooted homes and ruined fields.

In the village, prayers mingle with the rush of water. A Sikh farmer watches his paddy fields vanish. With folded hands he recites the morning prayer "Japji Sahib".

relief visit —
the farmer offers tea
knee-deep in water

Two siblings cling to their buffalo, tethered to a hilly peepal tree. The animal breathes heavily, eyes rolling, as if it too senses the precariousness of survival.

At the relief camp, the queue gets longer each day. A boy balances his grandfather's turban on his small head — the pride of his lineage.

As the waters recede, resilience is sown again, a woman bends low, pressing mustard seeds into the mud.

muddy waters —
a bride's henna scents
the makeshift shelter

Priti Aisola

~

Spiralling Down

A narrow rectangular space in the basement of a hospital with chairs. Waiting area for physiotherapy. I am there for treatment for cervical spondylitis. Inclining my head back gently while seated, I close my eyes and take deep breaths in order to relax my neck. A man sitting to my right is watching a Telugu movie on his cellphone and I catch snippets of some romantic dialogue. Raucous disco music follows. I wait for him to switch off his cellphone out of respect for two other patients. As the pain in my neck becomes more distressing, I turn to him and request him to turn down the sound. Soon, the hum and drone of a machine from a room in the basement is followed by the drilling sound of another machine. I wince.

wind chimes stir
if only
pain could grow wings

Reid Hepworth

Slights

The bouncer sidles up, demanding to see my ID. It's all in my head, of course, the music stopping, everyone's eyes on me, the walls closing in. The heat in my face, however, is very real.

I already showed the other guy when I came in, I tell him. He checked, go ask him, I add.

Instead of walking away, he holds out his hand, checks me out slowly, head to toe. Like he has all day. Like he can't see me squirming. Like I'm some sort of joke that he can share with his friends later.

letting go all the reasons why not

Rupa Anand

In Continuance

I don't know why I come here. Perhaps it's the twilight hush and the shadows I share with tall trees on the walking path. Maybe it's the sense of calm that pervades the air.

a crow calls out

My feet find their purpose in swift strides. The old tamarind tree that once housed many barbets is gone. During the rains, the fermented scent of fallen tabebuia rises with my breath, and the birds remain silent at this time except for the occasional flutter and flap. An autumnal stillness emanates, seeping into the soil, leaves, roots, and stones.

through dense foliage

The cricket hum is deafening as silver-striped hawk moths circle tall lamp posts. The fruit bats remain silent. The new cell tower stands tall and unlit in the central clearing. An alstonia bends slightly, and I await its divine scent in the coming months.

In unguarded moments, I look for you, then remember, as I pass the corner, you are no longer here.

wilderness holds my hand

Sandip Chauhan

The Long Interval

Even in saltwater, the salmon carry the pattern of their birth stream in their flesh. After crossing thousands of miles, they begin turning toward a memory without form, a map made from silt and time. I wonder if my own return will be like that. Not a homecoming in the traditional sense, but a slow recognition. The brief flare of a streetlamp I once passed beneath. The crackle of cumin seeds in hot oil from a kitchen. The sharp scent of jasmine opening at night. And the sound of my own name spoken without effort. There is no need to be known. There is no need to explain where I have been. I only want to touch the place that shaped me, just once more, before the earth releases me.

first rain
a sparrow shakes itself
from the gutter

on the shelf
a compass locked
north forever

Sangita Kalarickal

Abracadabra

culture clash
different cheeses
in the fondue pot

“Is this turmeric?” you ask, pronouncing it two-meric.

I raise one eyebrow. “Tur-rr-meric. And yes.”

You lean closer to the spice box. The edges of the small stainless containers housed within the cylindrical box catch a sunbeam and glint. The colours of the spices pop, and you raise both eyebrows. “Paprika?”

I shake my head. “Cayenne”

“And these little balls? Mustard?” You laugh, pick up a few, and cradle them in your palm.

“What’s so funny? Never seen mustard before?” I ask, mildly offended. Laugh at my spices and you laugh at me.

“No, not black mustard. And this powder? Cumin?” And when I cock my head, daring you to make more fun of me, you add, voice barely a whisper, “This is incredible, this box. You’re like a witch with powders and potions”

I throw my head back and laugh out loud. Of course it is witchcraft. And I am a witch. I take colors from my box and transform fixings into flavors.

The kitchen has changed now, in a different place and at a different time. You aren’t here anymore. And where you are, you don’t need any food.

Shalini Pattabiraman

Grammar of Love

On a Sunday, before making idlis, my father would break open a coconut and grate the fruit out of its shell using an aruvamanai. As a child, I did not know the implement's Tamizh name. But even then, I knew that its sharp tongue, with serrated edges, would make quick work of a whole coconut. He could easily prise the fruit within minutes — a grated mound of freshness, from which coconut milk would gently ooze if you squeezed it tightly in your hands.

Back then, kitchens were caves of comfort. Less tension on the shoulders and back. More grounded in conversation. With one foot bracing the wooden snake body of the aruvamanai, and the other leg resting on the cool cement floor — my father practiced the flow and movement of its song as he sliced vegetables from the tiniest onions to the largest pumpkin.

Stories filled the gaps until food could fill us.

For years I stayed away, fearing the serrated tongue wielded by a knife that sunk into a wooden base; the knife reminding me of a cobra with its hood up, ready to strike. Yet, yesterday, when I found it wedged behind other forgotten things at the back of my mom's kitchen cupboard, I pulled it out. Washed it with careful hands and without a hint of doubt, picked an onion to slice through its core.

Vengaya sambhar simmered into existence from memory. A soft whistle of the idlis steaming into shape touched the fuzzy corner of my brain where I was lingering, hoping to find my father's warm face, the sound of his laughter ringing to fill our house again.

haibun

At some point, daughters turn into mothers. I became his mother before I became a mother to my son.

forest walk
the bark peeling
from eucalyptus

Subir Ningthouja

Rusty Days

The night shifts at District Hospital Thoubal involved a lot of running around with only one doctor allocated. Of course, the nurses and para staff worked very efficiently. The cases varied from routine aches, fevers, injuries, deliveries, poisonings to hysterical attacks.

I boarded a public bus one late afternoon. My bag, which contained a tiffin carrier, water bottle, some instruments and toiletries, hung on my left shoulder. These buses were filled to capacity at the main station. I joined the crowd jostling near the door.

The bus creaked along but hit a pothole. The jolt caused my bag to roll down to the side of the road. I got down and waited for the next bus. I reached the hospital just in time for a candlelit delivery.

I feel good for the young doctors now. The future looks brighter for them.

sunny morning
the weatherman skips
the dusk downpour

Sumitra Kumar

Roads to Life

It's a loud tap on the car window. I raise my head from the phone, startled. A man, neither young nor old, weak nor strong, stares at me. I am not sure about giving money. Who knows where it goes? For a cigarette, food, or drugs? Or perhaps a mastermind lurks around, waiting to grab it by EOD. He keeps tapping until I shake my head, conveying a firm no. I move on. *Should I have given the money? Is it right to just give blindly? Or maybe keep some biscuits handy to give away. But some want only money ...*

At the next signal, a boy jumps forward to clean my windshield. *This must be a genuine hunger signal. Or perhaps he wants more, and no one would rightfully employ a kid.* A part of me wants to offer money for his services, regardless of my not having requested it. The signal turns green, and the incessant honking forces me to shift my feet before I can get some change. I hope he'll sprint behind to collect his dues, but he doesn't seem to care.

birthday bash
plates with half a something
in the trash bin

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

~~~~~

Panditji

The audience files in slowly. We find our seats, settling down, a flutter of anticipation in my throat. I'm attending a concert of one of my favorite Indian classical musicians, in his eighties now, but I've never seen him perform live. The lights dim, and a slight man, short, balding, walks on stage slowly, supported by two guys. Introductions (for a man who needs none), housekeeping announcements,

toilets to the back  
and right, turn  
your phones off

and then the resonant drone of the tanpura fills the air. The slight figure slumps into himself and a few moments later, drawing from deep inside somewhere, where music lives and slumbers in each one of us, he sings an Om. This OM, that holds the promise of all the songs that have been sung, and will ever be.

octogenarian  
in his voice  
the songs of my passion

The tabla joins in, the raga unfolds, painting a picture of the dusk, with its pinks and golds and oranges, with its call to come home, with its vague wordless yearnings.

maestro  
every note  
marches to his tune

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

Only Time

It has been seventeen months since the curtains were last drawn open. The rains have tapered into a long drizzle. The curtain slightly flutters in a fresh damp breeze from the window. Gazing down, I see a yellow school bus ...

kindergarten smiles  
a brief sun  
in the rain

Colourful umbrellas. A mother's anxious wait. The schools have reopened. I look at the calendar. Still on the 7th. of September. The day my daughter was born, she decided not to age any further ...

at fifty  
counting her age  
in minutes

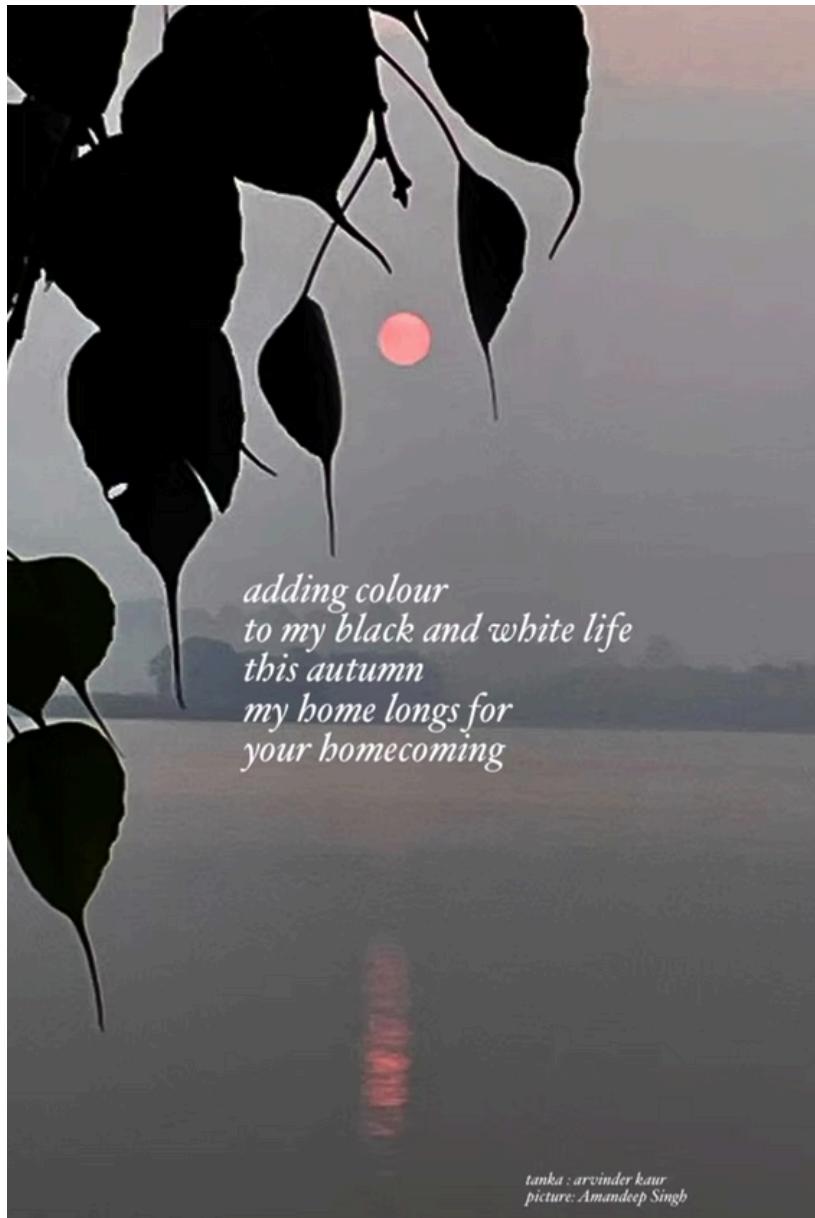


image: Amandeep Singh and ku: Arvinder Kaur

Adelaide B. Shaw



Moonlight and stars.

first date  
ending with  
a handshake

alaka y

The fortune cookie advises me to contact an old friend.

jigsaw puzzle  
fitting together the pieces  
of her face

Billie Dee

three-day vigil

Mama's whisper  
still in my ear ...  
*I'm not ready yet*

Bob Lucky

if the world is out to get me ...

road-side diner  
another slice of pie  
won't kill me

Chen-ou Liu

No more climate alarmist talk.

*flashfloodingweareallinthistogether*

*floodafterfloodweareallinthis to gethere again*

C.X. Turner

crowbar slip

I carry  
the weight of iron  
in my chest

Joanna Ashwell

spring stars

I wrap myself  
deeper into  
our Milky Way

Mirela Brailean

funeral service

we're each  
an urn of someone's  
ashes

Sangita Kalarickal

in Hindi, another word for 'karma' is 'kriya' meaning 'completed action'

the boomerang  
sails back  
into my hands

Sumitra Kumar



neighbourhood streaming into our home ...

US uncle  
ships a colour TV  
in 1980

susan burch



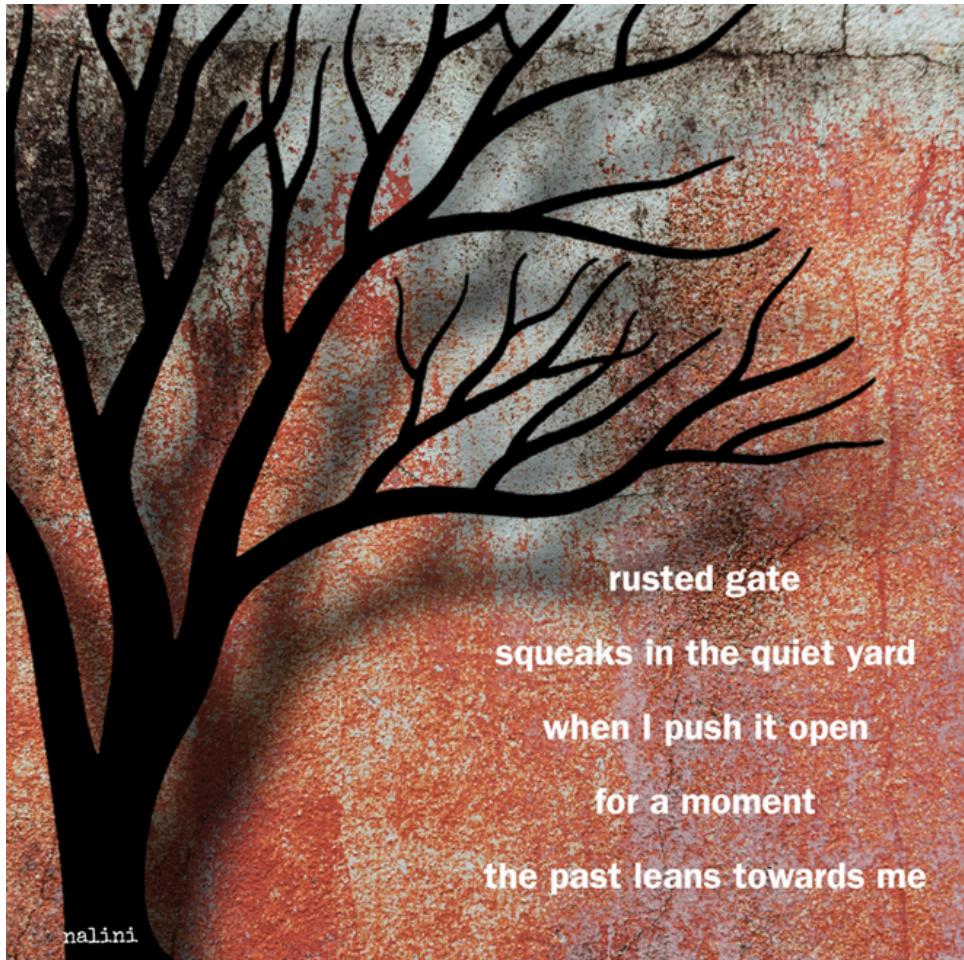
Sometimes the funniest people are the saddest ones

swaying  
with the others  
black-eyed susan

Richa Sharma

who knows  
what I have  
seen and not seen ...

nesting doll



**rusted gate  
squeaks in the quiet yard  
when I push it open  
for a moment  
the past leans towards me**

mage and ku: Nalini Shetty

Alfred Booth

Long Ago

We were travelers through destiny, found each other in a dreamland where everything was a discovery. "Love at first sight" met its match when our eyes crossed paths. Nothing lasts forever, except perhaps regret. We both moved on, death found its way into your liberty. Decades later, my end arrives on tiptoes, slowly, peacefully, like an unending autumn, within layers of joy and a *laissez-faire* that surprises me. Before I die, I will keep my promise and sing a song for you.

night valley  
where distant lights nestle  
against the slopes  
my candle will sputter out  
once sleep grips this solitude

C.X. Turner

Artificial Moons

The rides twist and turn into the cold night, their lights dimmed by mist. Paper ghosts sway above the queue lines. I follow fading laughter to the aquarium, where kelp leans like weary thoughts. Three sharks rest in the blue-dark water, motionless, their eyes fixed on nothing. Behind the glass, coral glows in borrowed light. I sip what remains of my warm drink, watching creatures that will never know the open sea.

pale drift of fins  
through the mind's low tide  
what stays  
when the shimmer fades  
beneath the pull below

C.X. Turner

Under the Same Rain

The evening drifts open like a slow breath. An ocean of silence tender enough to lean into. A curl of orange peel rests inside the glass, the faint crack of ice beneath. Beyond the quiet, night softens the beach lights, like water remembering its way home to the sea.

the moth  
at the window  
how long  
it takes  
to find the light

Cynthia Bale

**Making Space**

As a child, I believed no picture was complete until I'd used all eight markers in the box.

underneath  
the rainbow's arch  
I add the ground:  
layers of brown earth  
and black coal

Joanna Ashwell

Preparation

I imagine the space in the air, a tree suddenly without leaves. I imagine an ocean without waves, just the surface glassy and still. I imagine a river without stones, no song spilling to the shore. I imagine the night sky, without the moon or stars.

will this be  
of any assistance ...  
the empty curve  
of a pillow  
without you

Nalini Shetty

Becoming Water

Last night, it rained again.

The cool air brought relief, yet part of me wished it would stop — so much water this year, flooding fields and hearts alike. I stood by the window, thinking how easily water becomes what it touches: leaf, stone, stream. If only I could move through life so unguarded — still myself, yet part of everything.

as the river bends  
around the fallen tree —  
a shimmer  
where sunlight breaks  
and gathers again

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

**Ascent**

Eight hours by train, and a six-hour-long steep winding drive through the Western Ghat roads of Kerala, I feel tired, dizzy, disoriented and severely nauseated. While almost there, I still face an internal struggle between proceeding and a maddening urge to go back home to the comfort of a sea breeze. I almost start hallucinating. Finally fighting with tears from the effects of my extreme altitude sickness, I reach Munnar.

worming its way  
through clogged soil  
an earthworm  
surfaces for a breath  
of fresh air

Vaishvanavi Ramaswamy

**Growing Up**

those little fingers  
curling around  
what was left of her mother  
a half-grown tendril  
on a barren branch

The mother remained unchanged, unmoved. No hurt. No grief. No smile. Each night she would finish cooking dinner, and wait to serve her husband food. He would come back home drunk and beat her up.

a way of life ...  
getting ready  
waiting at the doorstep  
to welcome  
a new scar each night

# Results of IndianKUKAI #51

hosted by Amoolya Kamalnath, Kashinath Karmakar, Neena Singh, & Rohan Kevin Broach. Certificates designed by Teji Sethi



**Results of indianKUKAI #51**  
hosted by Amoolya Kamalnath, Kashinath Karmakar, Neena Singh,  
& Rohan Kevin Broach. Certificates designed by Teji Sethi



Dear Readers  
thank you for being with us.

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

Team: *haikuKATHA*