

haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



Milind Mulick

Issue 21, July 2023

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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 21
July 2023

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

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Triveni Haikai India: www.trivenihaikai.in

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

Our heartfelt thanks to:

Surashree Ulhas Joshi, Sangita Kalarickal, Sonam Chhoki,
and Ray Rasmussen,

for providing the weekly challenges
for the month of June 2023,

Artist Milind Mulick
for his brilliant watercolour painting,

our contributors
for sharing their poems.

Editors' Choice Commentary: Priti Aisola
together they walk by Srini

together they walk
through the temple town
knowing
but seldom speaking
of each other's grief

— Srini

The moment I read Srini's sentence tanka I was drawn to it — by its simplicity of expression, which masterfully veils deeply felt emotions. There is something restrained, almost austere, about the style and mood of this tanka.

What also drew me to this poem was its inclusion of a 'temple town'. Having visited several temple towns in South India over the past few years, the atmosphere of a temple town is very familiar to me. And if the temple is an ancient one, the town that grows around its sacred centre has a unique energy to it. The presence of pilgrims or devotees, especially on religious or festive occasions, makes a temple town come alive with 'spiritual', ceremonial, and commercial activity.

The poem opens like this: 'together they walk'; immediately, the reader wonders about the two people. Are they husband and wife, two relatives, siblings, two friends, lovers? The opening line creates an interesting or mystifying context for a story that may unfold only partially. And then the reader wonders: where are they walking together? By the riverside? In a park? Along the beach? And, at this moment, the second line comes as a mild surprise: 'through the temple town'. One feels that this is not their first visit to the temple town. That both of them, perhaps, cherish the town for certain personal reasons.

L 3 has an unusual single word, 'knowing', which kindles the interest of the reader even more to have a glimmer of insight into the relationship that the two people share. Read together, Ls 3, 4 and 5 complete the skeletal story for the reader. The two people walking through the temple town are very aware 'of each other's grief', but do not dwell on it or discuss their feelings. They do not share a common cause for grief, is what the reader understands or surmises. However, they share a deep bond and sympathetic understanding 'of each other's grief'. And the cause for grief could be anything: the loss of a loved one, loss of a relationship, personal illness, serious financial loss, and so on. To alleviate their suffering, why do they choose a temple town instead of a more serene and less crowded place? Perhaps, they have precious memories of previous visits to that particular temple town. And the temple, as a sacred heart of the town, offers them spiritual solace. Also, surrounded by people, the faith of the devotees, all the bustling temple activity and other sights and sounds, they forget the acuteness of their grief for some time.

In this poignant tanka, Srini gently invites the reader to empathize with the two people there and weave their own story around them. This tanka will stay with me for a long time.

haiku

sickle moon
cradling a star
second trimester

Anju Kishore

idle schoolgirl
a drizzle plucking
p u d d l e s

Anju Kishore

left with
what we couldn't divide
day moon

Aparna Pathak

moonwinked --
the voices in my head
have faces

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

haiku

a scattering
of crescent moons ...
clipped toenails

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

splinter moon ...
another night
without you

Billie Dee

deep twilight
the mockingbird sings
my ringtone

Billie Dee

rice-field rain
two girls walk their bicycles
home

Daipayan Nair

haiku

toothless giggle
grandma wipes the paste
off her sil batta

Daipayan Nair

red blouse
a safety pin between
her lips

Daipayan Nair

May evening —
the sky breaks down
in my arms

Debarati Sen

last leaves
a tangle of her hair
in the bird's nest

John Pappas

haiku

fireworks display
we exchange old stories
of one-night affairs

Keiko Izawa

deserted street
a spray-painted tiger
roars on the shutter

Keiko Izawa

deep in the canyon
a spear of sunlight
on swirling waters

Keith Evetts

beach daiquiris
the deepening blues
further out

Keith Evetts

haiku

a rose falls apart
without a breath of wind
evening calm

Keith Evetts

rainbow bridge
the far shore
veiled in cloud

Linda Papanicolaou

monsoon clouds
the fruit vendor mends
his blue tarpaulin

Neena Singh

avoiding traffic
the back alleys of a self
I've never explored

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan

haiku

orchard
at the dark's far end
swelling moon

Ranice Tara

valley swing
we each take turns to push
away the clouds

Robert Kingston

grey dawn
the night scatters
into crows

Sebastien Revon

ebb tide
this feeling
you're done with me

Susan Burch

haiku

fresh laundry...
the scent
of summer sun

Vidya Shankar

one-line haiku

mosh pit sunflowers carry their star across the sky

Lev Hart

two-line haiku

St John's Wort
the church rewilding itself

Alan Summers

breaking through old-growth pine
the quaver of morning sunrise

Bonnie J Scherer

Rubik's Cube —
the owls bob their heads

Lakshmi Iyer

whisky tasting
the warming of conversation

Lorraine Haig

two-line haiku

a dog spread-eagled on grass
evening cool

Keiko Izawa

reciting Issa
a cockroach pauses

Marilyn Ashbaugh

forcing a smile
the mortician

Ron Russell

all day I've done nothing
the buck moon rises

Sebastien Revon

four-line haiku

boys on a park bench
wait for the moon
no longer children
not yet men

Linda Papanicolaou

concrete haiku

nowhere
to
walk
except
on
them
cassia blossoms

Rupa Anand

zip haiku

warm night the windows open
a restless moon dives in the pool

Marilyn Ashbaugh

the chiffchaffs of a leaf warbler
alone i chat to myself

Meera Rehm

walking my new widowhood
the scent of blue through lilac fields

Meera Rehm

tanka

reading
news of tragedy ...
my eyes
quietly climb the wall
to an empty space

AJ Anwar

above the hills
a summer noon
wrapped in clouds ...
I picture ma shielding
me from the harsh sun

Arvinder Kaur

chinar leaves
whisper with the breeze
the burden I carry
in my heart
of tales untold

Arvinder Kaur

tanka

my painting begins
as a shadowy still life
then takes a turn
when the French canary sings
in bright yellow tones

Billie Dee

coyote song
piercing the depths of night
in this parched valley
the naked desert mountains
offer only echoes

Billie Dee

class reunion
wearing my old prom dress
a slinky
turquoise strapless number
just to show I can

Billie Dee

tanka

a butterfly
dancing through
our procession
how light her body
in this child's coffin

Bryan Rickert

a streak
of black
on my canvas
how full the moon
filling this winter night

Gauri Dixit

sitting
on a heap of old newspapers
in the attic
you say you would move
mountains for me

Gauri Dixit

tanka

school picnic
the bus full of children
singing
their voices rise and fall
at the speed bumps

Hassane Zemmouri

a grimy mug
used as a prop
for my phone
traces of my life
in layers of tea stains

Jackie Chou

in the shade
of trellised grapevines
coiled tendrils
just yesterday we lay
soaking up sunshine

Kanjini Devi

tanka

on my back
in a meadow
where daydreams arise
I enter the clouds
as a skylark

Keith Evetts

green is gone
from the valley
dusted with stars
even the light
is getting old

Keith Evetts

the dark tide
creeping closer
still
it brings a glimmer
of the moon

Keith Evetts

tanka

red and orange flame
at the sunset point on Mt. Abu
hundreds of eyes
interweave a web of silence
never felt before

Lakshmi Iyer

growing up
in the Western Ghats
I woke up
to the pied cuckoo's song
the scent of ayani in the rain

Lakshmi Iyer

museum
on a rainy afternoon
do I hear
the koto in its showcase
softly playing itself

Linda Papanicolaou

tanka

scent of the sea
in a darkened bedroom
a married son
still keeps his surfboards
at the parents' home

Linda Papanicolaou

our old lab settles
for an afternoon nap
my life richer
when the words flow
from an unhurried pen

Lorraine Haig

she stands
staring out to sea
her anguish
for all those lives lost
is cast in bronze

Lorraine Haig

tanka

moss and lichen
cushion the old tree
what will you say
when friends ask
about the bruising

Lorraine Haig

global warming
the poles are weeping too ...
on the tables
of civilised countries
loud debates of diplomats

Milan Rajkumar

still ponds
the only things left
after burning villages ...
a refugee in my own land,
all I could do was cry

Milan Rajkumar

tanka

windswept courtyard
the faint memory
 of your face
now marred
by mental decay

Mona Bedi

an old pen
still lies in my drawer —
I fondly remember
the love letters it wrote
the poems it penned

Mona Bedi

living through
the pains of chemo
how this mountain
holds so much of me
ahead of the climb

Robert Kingston

tanka

to the top
along the narrow ridge
with a stent in my heart
i scale
a new height in life

Sreenath G

on the newspaper
grandfather's glasses
still sit
skimming the world
as he was wont to do

Srini

together they walk
through the temple town
knowing
but seldom speaking
of each other's grief

Srini

tanka

at the end
of a long road
stars
reminding me how long
their light has travelled

Srini

will reading ...
who knew
a string of pearls
could weigh
so much

Surashree Ulhas Joshi

ice jam
on the river
the day we bury you
how long will the sun hide
its face from me

Susan Beth Furth

tanka

the holes
in Swiss cheese
the days I feel like
the worst mother
in the world

Susan Burch

jubjub birds
in a tumtum tree
why do we
love people
who don't love us back

Susan Burch

lying with you
in the paddock
soaking up sun
and the glow
of buttercups

Wanda Amos

haibun

Billie Dee



Meteorology

Mommy, why is the sky blue?
The sky is mostly nitrogen.

Is it nitrogen at night?
Yes, but without the sun it's dark.

Where does the sun go at night?
To the other side of the world.

Is it blue over there?
Only during the day.

Are Smurfs nitrogen too?
Shut up and eat your ice cream.

weather balloon. . .
 too soon we drop
 our precious cargo

haibun

Bonnie J Scherer
~

Common Ground

They come to visit for a few days. I am married now and my life seems so different than how it was growing up in their care. We're sitting on the patio and I'm trying to think of what I can share with them.

"You're probably not interested but I can show you some photos I've taken for the black and white photography class I'm enrolled in this summer."

I pull out an album of my class assignments. My dad's face lights up.

"No, I'd love to see them," he starts. "I enjoyed taking photographs, too, at one time."

I recall the b&w photo of a snowstorm on the street where my dad lived in Milwaukee as a young man.

connecting the dots -
a missing link
to make the picture whole

haibun

Diana Webb



Weed-winding Bank

The old wooden bench is the place you are likely to find them, two or three hours nearly every morning. It's almost reserved. She drops things through the slats, he retrieves them. She moves up, gives him lots of space as he lifts his box of seeds from the bag and scatters a few on the ground near the water's edge. Then, they wait. A pigeon arrives, then another, and another. Still they wait. Eventually she turns up. The one who's part feral, part dove. Slightly nervous at first, she pecks around with the others before leaping up on the tall man's knee to have her fill from the plastic container. Occasionally his companion gives him a nudge, whispers, 'I'm jealous.'

When the seeds are all gone they are ready to leave. But not before taking a last look back.

bridge-side gauge
the levels
of buttercups

Note:

The title is extracted from *Binsey Poplars* by Gérard Manley Hopkins

haibun

Lakshmi Iyer


Lingering Thought

She dresses her Indian Barbie doll. The doll's bridal wear is gifted to her on her birthday. She braids Barbie's hair and ties them up with a tiny kunjalam. She looks up at her mother and demands a groom for her barbie. Mother instantly opens the trunk box and picks up the Marapachi doll. She tries to fit a dhoti on the Marapachi with a white handkerchief. The child's next question remains with her mother.

Kanyadaan ...
her parents missing
in the wedding album

haibun

Lorraine Haig



In the Mirror

Sometimes when the light strikes at odd angles you see a younger version of yourself in that place you thought you had forgotten. You're climbing the stone steps of grandma's house where you open the door and step into her kitchen. She smiles and you give her a hug. The kettle is on a slow boil, singing to itself at the back of the range. The day is cold, and the fuel stove has warmed the room. Too hot for the sweater you wear.

"Let's have a cuppa before we start." She busies herself pouring boiling water into the pot.

The wooden table is spread with newspaper and quinces. With a sharp knife in your hand, you begin the yearly ritual, peeling, halving, and slicing the fruit, something she can't do because of arthritis. You watch as she presses the pale pieces into glass jars and tops them up with syrup ready for the water bath.

abandoned cottage
the old pear tree
feeds the parrots

Note: This is the first line from a poem by Lisel Mueller titled 'Sometimes, When the Light' and is from her book 'Alive Together'.

haibun

Mona Bedi



Origins

obituary ...
the lives we leave
behind

It's a rainy Sunday. Packing a few essentials we set out to Haridwar. The knock of the rain on the car roof is strangely soothing. My husband and I are both calm and silent. Upon reaching the ghats, the sanctity of the place overpowers us. Sporadic sounds of temple bells are like music to the ears. Taking a walk along the Ganges we are stopped by a pundit. "Do you want to know about your family tree?" he asks. My husband refuses but I am very keen. We follow him through narrow lanes to a dingy room. Huge cloth-bound registers are lying on shelves. These handwritten scrolls date from the present day to 1194.

The pundit asks for my name and surname; immediately, a young boy is directed to take out one of those red cloth-draped books.

My heart misses a beat as the pundit rattles out the names of my ancestors. Turning the brittle pages he comes to a list of names. I see dad's signature there. It was from when he had come to immerse my grandfather's ashes.

Below his elaborate signature, I add my small sign.

funeral pyre –
we go back where
we came from

haibun

Mona Bedi



Holding on

It is a Sunday. For me it is the best day of the week. Dad is home and there is no school. Playing Chinese checkers with him I happen to spot a few gray hairs in his sideburns. I get distracted and lose the game.

Later in the day I ask him, "Dad, are you getting old?"

He smiles and says, "All of us are, my dear."

At school I ask my teacher, "Ma'am, does death follow old age?"

She replies, "Of course, that is nature."

That night, I cry myself to sleep.

Every night I start praying, "Please God, don't let my father get old."

Dad passes away at the age of 59 after a massive heart attack.

wilting flowers
the chance I missed
to say goodbye

haibun

Raamesh Gowri Raghavan

Compassion

double-decker
the many stories
of childhood

Ma saw this book about growing bonsai trees in suburban homes. She bought it and did everything it said. There were dreams – a set of bonsai trees, exhibitions, suburban fame. Anything to escape suburbia. Next day, a few drops of water. Bonsai has to grow painfully slowly. Then there was the matter of sunlight - only for a couple of hours. This lasted for exactly a month. Ma felt that she was violating the ‘human rights’ of the plant - it had a right to get all the water it needs, all the sunshine and to grow as tall as it can. She removed it from the pot and planted it in the garden. It put out a new leaf every week. Big broad leaves. It gained several feet in height in the next month. The tree is now quite a big fellow.

haibun

Susan Burch



Easter Bunny, What Have You Done?

I never eat the eyes of my hollow chocolate bunnies but today I wasn't paying attention and ate them. Now I wonder if I have someone's soul inside me because eyes are gateways to the soul. And even fake eyes might have souls - or souls that were injected into them because that would be a funny prank to play, to put souls into fake bodies and have people eat them and see what happens. Will the soul take over or not? Breaking news at 11.

night blossoming into a woman

gembun

Anju Kishore
~

every time they ask me how i am, i say i am fine

the flow
of a dammed river
that will not swell

gembun

Lakshmi Iyer

choked skyscrapers till the horizon

a tiny tulsi plant
between the cracks
breathes life

gembun

Lakshmi Iyer


The long wait for dear ones at the border

birthday memories
in the spring album
lost and found

gembun

Lakshmi Iyer


All that I can ask for from my childhood memories.

June rain
father's gumboots
reach my thigh

gembun

Susan Burch
~

I'm just going to go dig a hole, lie in it, and pretend I'm dead.

the future
you never want
to talk about

tanka-prose

Bonnie J Scherer
~

Sleeping Lady

Legend has it that the Giant People lived on the Great Land in peace until word came of a warfaring neighbor to the North.

Nekatla kisses his young lover Susitna goodbye and heads off with the other men in an effort to extend peace. He asks her to lie in wait on this very spot until his return.

The men are killed in a fierce battle. No one tells Susitna so as not to break her heart.

Mt Susitna
in summer wildflowers
in winter deep snow
she lies like a lady
in repose

tanka-prose

Bonnie J Scherer
~

Under the midnight sun

One day you're wallowing in the winter doldrums. It seems that spring will never come. Never mind spring, in the blink of an eye, it's summer! The woods green up overnight and the garden celebrates by busting out all over.

casting a shadow
in the garden
lovage
as tall as my youngest
growing like a weed

tanka-prose

Lakshmi Iyer

Connectivity

It's Saturday, 6 p.m. Mami gets ready to attend a long-distance call.

'There's no medicine for loneliness,' says Mami with a big sigh. The conversations with her son are just an outward show.

Mami keeps herself active from 5 a.m. to 2 p.m. with the daily chores and the chanting of all the mantras she has learned since childhood. She has slowed down tremendously.

Her afternoons begin with sessions for ladies who have known Mami for almost three decades. They practise the Narayaneeyam, Ramayana, Soundarya Lahiri, Srimad Bhagvatham, and much more.

Mami watches two Malayalam tele-serials. She says they keep her company. And once again night falls with the closing of the kitchen.

the cellphone
with no messages
deepening silence
her eyes gather memories
of the years gone by

tanka-prose

Susan Burch
~

It's That Time of Night

when I yell at the TV. People Puzzler, America Says, or whatever is on.

in the eye
of Hurricane Susan -
my husband
in his noise-cancelling
headphones

tanka-prose

Sushama Kapur



More to it than

Ah, there it is!

Lifting the bowl from the back of the shelf, and holding it with my heartstrings, I am struck anew by its fragile beauty, the veins of gold, a fine network among its ocean colours.

There was a time I would use it every day to spoon up food. And then one morning it happened. Over the counter and ... crasshhh! Carefully picking up the six jagged bits of ceramic lying vulnerable on the floor, I place them back on the tabletop and jab the air on an imaginary recall button. How could I have been so careless? The bowl was a gift, the first one made in her own kiln that year. That fatal year when, with bewildering suddenness, she passed on into light ...

kintsugi
i learn the art
of piecing together
to hold on
as i let go

haiga



pic: ahmed akacha, pexels.com

my skin my overwritten biography

[illegible]

Vijay Prasad

haiga



pic: canva

tanka-art



tanka-art





pack mules
carry their weight ...

burdening others
with what
weighs us down

Bonnie J Scherer

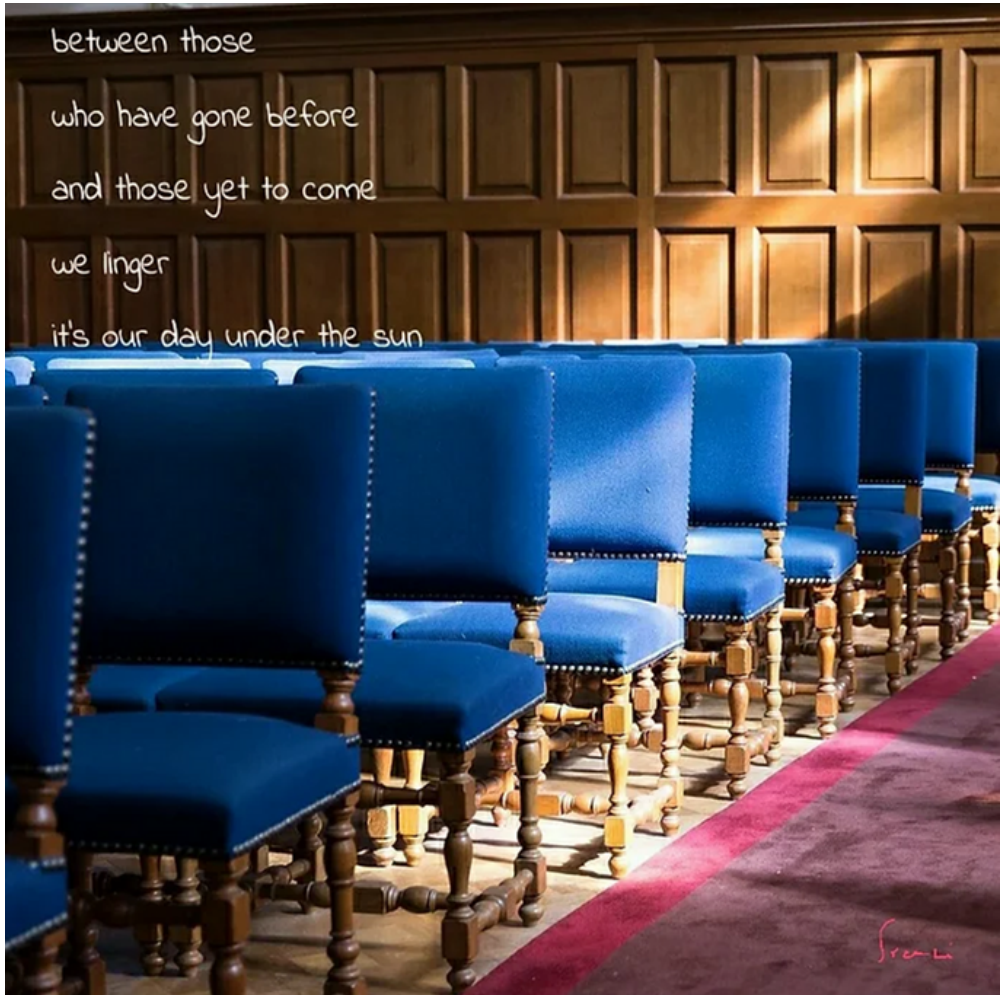
tanka-art

the endless regret
of blaming myself
for others' mistakes
my heart
a pincushion



Photo: Magali Bretou
Tanka: Hassane Zemmouri

tanka-art



Sreenath G.

Dear Readers
thank you for being with us.

See you once again on 22 August 2023!
with many more fine poems
from our contributors.

Team: *haikuKATHA*