

haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



Issue 4 February 2022

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 and haiga.

Each month's issue will be put together by a team of editors who will 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 4

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haiku, tanka,
haibun, tanka-prose and shahai (photo-haiku)

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haiku, senryu, haibun, tanka-prose and shahai

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for sharing their poems.

Editors' Choice Commentary

Editors' Choice:

Ripples of Memory

The engine of the train slows down and the gun-metal sound of wheels against the tracks comes to a screeching halt over the bridge. I grab the window seat. My family and I are travelling from Surat to our native village in Palakkad. We will cross five states and thereby many rivers. There will be quite a few nameless tributaries too.

The most enchanting part is the customary throw of the money into the river. The view from the train remains interesting. At one point, on one bank, I see pundits busy in their prayers to the Sun God. On the other side, children are busy hopping on small rocks. Women are either filling water or busy washing clothes. In the distance, I see a tiny pyre that is just halfway down.

twilight hour
the crows fly their way
to the west

— Lakshmi Iyer

Editors' Choice Commentary

Editors' Choice Commentary by Shalini Pattabiraman:

Lakshmi captures something very simple, an image from her train journey and builds it so carefully, linking it subtly to the various stages of life-childhood, adulthood and death. Life is indeed in the living until death arrives. The journey in the train becomes a metaphor for life itself and the train coming to a halt midway on the bridge highlights how sudden and unprepared we might be for when it does arrive. At the same time, the bridge gives me the hope that life continues even after death in different ways.

The reference to crows in the haiku that follows is manifold. As part of our customs, Indians offer food to the crows who are revered as embodiments of our ancestors or those who have passed on. Among the Kashmiri pandits for example, every member of the family leaves a little bit of food out for the dog called 'hoon myuth' and before food is served, a bit of food is laid outside for the birds. My aunt tells me, in the olden days when rice was cooked on wood fire in Kashmir, a bit of rice was offered to agni before the cooking was initiated. All these offerings are symbolic ways of reaching out to the ancestors and paving a connection between those who are living and those who have passed on.

In the daily act of living, for those who observe such customs, life is connected and the living continue to have conversations, share food and hold the dead close in memory. For this reason, the crows going westwards, in the haibun, suggests that they are retiring for the day after their shared moments with the living.

On another level, the haiku also highlights the intersections where humans and nature interact between living and dying and how both are connected to each other, feeding each other's existence.

haiku

winter dusk watching my shadow disappear

— Agus Maulana Sunjaya

first light
sound of adhan
in my dream

— Agus Maulana Sunjaya

wood knots
running my finger
over each scar

— Alan Peat

wind thunders
a cardinal clings
to its convex web

— Alan Peat

haiku

coastal ruin
time opens a door
through a tree

— Alice Wanderer

shadows return
to the old haveli
sound of hooves

— Arvinder Kaur

doorstep
shafts of fading light
under her feet

— Arvinder Kaur

twittering passengers
on the commute home ...
the sun settles down

— Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

haiku

overcast sky ...
a leaf floats back
to the burning pile

— Kavitha Sreeraj

moving clouds ...
shadows cling
to the edge of the day

— Kavitha Sreeraj

chasing all day
shadows
of my burnt dreams

— Kavya Janani

down the street the last leaves leaving

— Lev Hart

haiku

winter wind
from the eastern hills –
a charred leaf

— Milan Rajkumar

long night ...
feeding the campfire
more stories

— Milan Rajkumar

chapel ruins
an offering of fresh ferns
from the altar

— MLJ Morrissey

forest walk
I play hopscotch
in the dappled shade

— Mona Bedi

haiku

forest shadows
... the scurry
of small lives

— Muskaan Ahuja

i wonder
if trees can still hide
the sorrow

— Nani Mariani

sinking sun ...
the grey of the rocks
deepens again

— Priti Aisola

tree's shadow ...
time for her pet dog's
long snooze

— Radhamani Sarma

haiku

a small insect
in search of its corner –
dried leaf

— Radhamani Sarma

how quietly
they fall to the ground ...
yesterday's dreams

— Ravi Kiran

wall shadows still in leaf light

— Richa Sharma

hush hour —
the sun wrapped
in mountains

— Samir Satam

haiku

sore throat —
the stone grinder fragrant
with tulsi

— Samir Satam

sleepless night shadows alone for company

— Srinivas S.

tonga ride
dusk gathers under
the horse's hooves

— Vandana Parashar

halved apple
he refuses to take
his share of blame

— Vandana Parashar

haiku

clickety hooves —
the rhythmic nodding
of heads in the tonga

— Vidya Shankar

coriander sprigs
the gravy comes
to a boil

— Vidya Shankar

the first storm
colours up my porch ...
scattered leaves

— Vani Sathyanarayan

flames pirouette
into the charcoal sky
bonfire nights

— Vibha Srivastava

tanka

morning rush —
a robin's song drifts
through the fog
carrying away the whispers
of my shattered mind

— Agus Maulana Sunjaya

ash at the tip
of an incense stick
we sit
by her bed
for a third night

— Alan Peat

not that alone
to call myself a lonely bird
and yet
this solitude follows me
like a shadow

— Lakshmi Iyer

tanka

waxing moon
in the quiet stream
one after another
 the ripples
of my silent raga

— Mallika Chari

this winter
of looming loneliness
not a day passes
when I don't miss
the warmth of your touch

— Mona Bedi

from sealed lips
not a word escapes
for days ...
I do not wish to know
if my silence irks too

— Priti Aisola

tanka

is it the poet in me
that still waits ...
you left
a black road and today
it fills with snow

— Richa Sharma

sometimes
the urge to put on
that lipstick colour
he doesn't like
but i do

— Richa Sharma

tiny flowers
across the field
so many stars
wink at me
this dark soulful night

— Subir Ningthouja

tanka

nippy air,
and my legs
feel heavy
yet the moon looks much
like the cheese ma made

— Subir Ningthouja

hymns
from a temple trickle
into the evening
my thoughts take flight to you
like birds to their nests

— Teji Sethi

no moon
only a little bulb
in the baby's room
whispering to my grandson
the surviving twin

— Tish Davis

tanka

what is it
about the grief...
the same wave
that buried me,
now uncovers me

— Vandana Parashar

haibun

Oneness

The mighty Parvathi roars across the valley in a rage fit to petrify even the gods. Her tempestuous spirit is ice-cold. Yet, only a few feet away, local residents cook rice in hot springs. I tread gingerly on steaming wooden planks that lead up to the small Shiva temple. After performing aarthi by myself, I gather the heat and fragrance of camphor flame to my eyes. I am allowed to touch the cold lingam and say a prayer.

snow in summer
my suitcase struggles
with dualities

— Anju Kishore

Cream Cheese Stuffing

Stepping stones. Mountains. Islands. These were the stuff from which every adventure was made.

craters of the moon
a shortage
of cushions

— Diana Webb

Could Heaven be Green?

I have watched the sun sink lower in the sky all afternoon, and now as the last of the light is filtering through the winter trees to make its final sparkles on the water, I contemplate how maybe space and time are just illusions.

held in the span
of criss-crossed trunks
illuminated grass

— Diana Webb

Flying Seeds

By the time I realise that the shade is perfect, I have already added a drop or two of another colour. Different shades of blue live their ephemeral lives on my palette and die.

I have finally decided grey should be the colour of the day.

caught
in the spider's web
a tiny leaf flutters

— Gauri Dixit

Reaching Out

A small central courtyard of a house in Lucknow. There are rooms on three sides of the courtyard and a door in the wall of the fourth side – a door leading to the backyard, which has guava and mango trees. At ten, on a summer morning, it is already quite warm. A seven-year old girl with dark eyes and an earnest face is mixing clayey soil with water in a shallow plastic basin. Her eyes follow a trail of black ants and she starts to speak to them in a voice full of loving care, ‘I am going to make a house for you in one corner of this courtyard. I will leave you food every day. And see that no one steps on you by mistake.’

She shapes the wet clayey soil into low walls and starts creating a house for the ants. After the roofless house is partitioned into rooms, she places sugar in one, tiny pieces of jaggery in another, small cubes of sugar candy in the third one, a teaspoon of wheat flour in the fourth room. Then she goes closer to the ants and says endearingly, ‘Your house is ready. Please come. You will be safe there. Can eat your food in peace. I will leave more food tomorrow ... I am waiting to see you enter your home. Won’t you come?’

sudden draught ...
a mother draws her child
closer

— Priti Aisola

A Bridge

A Maori baby's placenta is returned to the land. The placenta is returned to the whenua with the pito creating the link between the newborn and papatuanuku. Thus each individual fulfils the role of curator for papatuanuku, which remains lifelong.

We, the Meiteis, also place the newborn's placenta with a cord in an earthen pot below the earth, though it is highly debatable as to whether we perform the role of curators.

siesta ...
i climb trees
long gone

— Subir Ningthouja

Almost Empty

The city bus is not crowded. Two young girls, with headphones covering their ears, stare unblinkingly at the screens of their smartphones. In front of them, a middle-aged woman is engrossed in reading a pocket edition of a book. In the section for the disabled, an overweight young boy sits, looking mindlessly out of the window. A smartly dressed elderly gentleman stands alertly next to an old lady with a shopping trolley as she prepares to get off at the next stop.

for generations
these random encounters ...
without attention
only sadness in the hazy
eyes of the aged

— Amin Jack Pedziwiate

tanka-prose

Aliens

There is a whoosh and a thud. New country, new office, new culture and now this. Someone letting their steam out in an office, no less! What have I gotten myself into?

Again, the noise! Distracted, I bump into someone. Some very warm liquid gets spilt on my very new beige formal jacket. The unmistakable aroma of freshly brewed coffee hits my nose. And there it is. In the distance, a monster of a machine, whooshing and thudding! My first-ever encounter with a coffee machine.

thousands
of photoshop filters
dance on my phone
and I believed that a rainbow
only had seven colours

— Gauri Dixit

tanka-prose

Summer Class

Children file slowly into the classroom. The air is heavy with sultry summer heat. The teacher in front of the room, watches them. They are drowsy after lunch break. The teacher sighs, and begins the lesson.

the drone
of the teacher's voice
never-ending
 about my head
a fly's lazy circles

— Marilyn Humbert

Crossing a Threshold

No domestic help for a few days now, so I have had to clean the house every day – sweep and mop the floors. At a quarter to seven on a January morning, the sky is just beginning to brighten a little.

I step out of the kitchen and into the front yard. I am about to fill a bucket with water when I notice something sticking to its inner surface, closer to the bottom. It is a snail. How did it manage to find its way into a bucket that stood upright the whole night? I tilt the bucket and try to nudge the snail out onto the soil. Glued to the surface, it won't budge. Using a small plastic spatula I try to make it release its tenacious hold, but it stays stuck to its spot. Fearful of hurting it, I rest the bucket on its side against the flowerbed and hope that it will creep out at its own tedious pace.

Half an hour later, I peep inside the bucket. Nothing inside and no trace of the snail on the flowerbed either.

pen sketches
and watercolours
of many doors ...
to think your words can clip
his dreams of faraway lands

— Priti Aisola

Where Once Young Love

the fragrance
a nod to follow
an overgrown trail
the stillness
still keeping our secrets

Hiking it one last time, before these brittle bones break, before my spine
completes the curl ...

Hiking the trail without your hand to hold.

barefoot
at the river's bend
new moss on old stone
a teenager telling me
to be careful

— Tish Davis

crossing borders ...
I carry the weight
of a throbbing silence

~ teji sethi

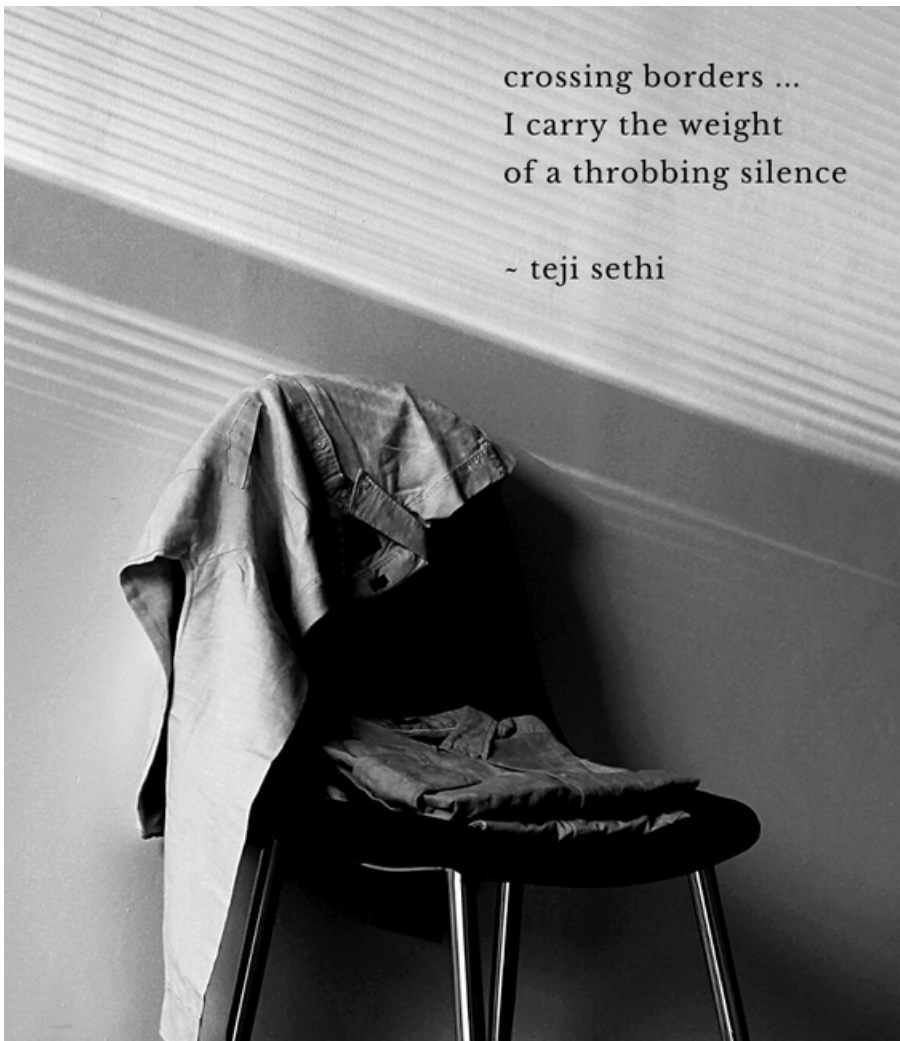


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shahai

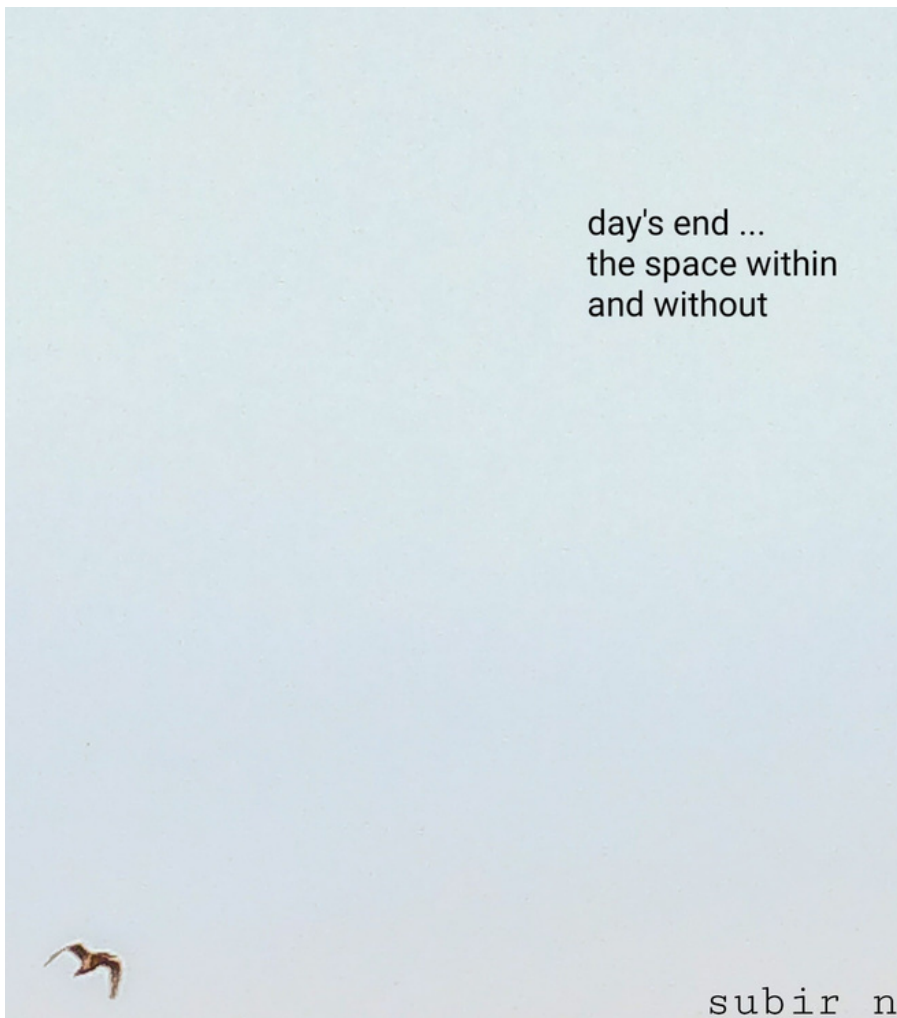


photo: subir n

Dear readers,
thank you for being with us.

See you once again on 22 March 2022
with many more fine poems
from our contributors.

Team haikuKATHA