



THE (GREAT) INDIAN POETRY COLLECTIVE

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New Poetry Press Launches First Book, *Geography of Tongues*

A lyrical journey traversing continents and personal histories

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BANGALORE— The (Great) Indian Poetry Collective, a new publishing house based in India, is pleased to announce the release of its first book, *Geography of Tongues* by Shikha Malaviya. The debut collection of poems will launch at independent bookstore Atta Galatta in Koramangala, Bangalore, on December 8, 2013.

The poems in *Geography of Tongues* traverse terrains of continents, cultures, histories and languages through a range of poetic forms, from prose to the lyric. A fusion of East and West, Malaviya's verse travels through England, India and the United States.

"On reading *Geography of Tongues*, I felt I was looking at a new world, rain-washed and young, yet bi-focal," says prominent Indian poet Keki N. Daruwalla, winner of India's top literary honor, the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award. "This is quicksilver, effervescent poetry, borne headlong on a strong impulse."

Malaviya is a founding member of the collective press, a not-for-profit literary publisher specializing in poetry books from India, along with poets Minal Hajratwala and Ellen Kombiyil. Under a peer mentorship model, the poets will publish several books by a range of poets each year, discovering and bringing forth new voices that are innovative and diverse.

Below: Advance praise, author bio, sample poem

Attached: Author photo, cover image, logo

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Advance Praise for *Geography of Tongues*

“On reading *Geography of Tongues*, I felt I was looking at a new world, rain-washed and young, yet bi-focal. Shikha Malaviya's lines ricochet from the suddenness of the reality that seems to encounter her. This is **quicksilver, effervescent poetry**, borne headlong on a strong impulse.”

— KEKI N. DARUWALLA, poet & writer, Sahitya Akademi award winner

“Shikha Malaviya's poetry initiates a dialogue between countries and cultures and raises many flags—of freedom and love, of prayer and protest. Her morphologist, tracing the curve of continents, and the peacock dancing against the setting sun are metaphors for the poets' own self in its bewildering search for a less complex and more humane world, where identities are spaces of creativity rather than of contest. Shikha's poems are fresh and intimate, **talking to each one of us in our own different tongues.**”

— K. SATCHIDANANDAN, poet & writer, Sahitya Akademi award winner

“In *Geography of Tongues*, Shikha Malaviya relies on the shape-shifting terrain of personalized narratives, myths, histories, and the crossing of various linguist tenors in free verse and prose poetry. This collection is **a whole-heartedly enthusiastic debut.**”

— SUDEEP SEN, editor, *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry*

“Shikha Malaviya's country is composed of rough silk the color of dusk and the resonant aroma of camphor mixed with gun-smoke. Her clever and inventive poems inhabit the contested space where Western culture collides with Hindu mythology, in a resplendent crash of forms that range from prose poems to lyrical litanies, all of them **deeply felt and elegantly crafted.** Spending time in the company of her distinctive voice, we come to realize with great certainty and even greater delight, that Malaviya's country is none other than our very own.”

— RAVI SHANKAR, Executive Director, *Drunken Boat*

“This is **a lambent, heart-wrenching debut** collection. Shikha Malaviya plunges through memories as child, lover, wandering bard and witness, in poems intensely alive. Passionately attentive and formally audacious, Malaviya swings between the horrific, the humorous and the humane: she delights with the play of languages. Afloat in her black silver country, on water red-tinted by communal carnage and family festivities, Malaviya never stops searching for the shared canopy of stars that blanket us in tenderness.”

— PRIYA SARRUKAI CHABRIA, author, *Not Springtime Yet*

About the Author

Shikha Malaviya considers herself a morpher, having been born in the U.K. and raised in the U.S. and India. She is founder of The (Great) Indian Poetry Project, an initiative to document, preserve and promote the legacy of modern Indian poetry. Shikha is deeply involved in the poetry community through events/initiatives such as organizing '100 Thousand Poets for Change—Bangalore', in 2012 and 2013; co-founding 'Poetry in Public India,' a movement to bring powerful verse by Indian women to public places across India; giving a TEDx talk on 'Poetry in Daily Life' at TEDx Golf Links Park, Bangalore, 2013. Shikha's poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. She also founded Monsoon Magazine, the first South Asian literary magazine on the web. Shikha graduated from the University of Minnesota with degrees in creative writing and mass communications. She lives in Bangalore, India, with her husband and two children.



photo credit: Dipali Bajaj
(High-resolution photo available upon request)

An Interview with Shikha Malaviya

What are the influences in your background that led you to write *Geography of Tongues*?

I consider myself a citizen of the world, having been born in England and raised in the U.S. and India. I grew up in a very nurturing house full of music, books, animated discussions and delicious food. Family meant everything and it was a multiplication of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. My parents made sure that I embraced my cultural heritage, while respecting the other cultures I came across. I am a product of both the East and West, and this gives my work a broad yet deep perspective. It also allows me to appreciate the sheer variety of languages, geographies and cultures that coexist in our world.

What is *Geography of Tongues* all about?

Geography of Tongues is an exploration of family, cultures and the idea of home/identity. My hope is that the poems in it have touched on the universal, through a narration of the personal. They are a fusion of East and West, from the years I've lived in England, India and the United States. I like to experiment with style and so it contains prose poems as well as lyric ones. I am very excited to see how it will be received.

Why poetry? How did you choose to become a poet?

Poetry is a distillation of all other genres. It has flecks of the fantastical and the autobiographical, of image, emotion and rhythm, but most of all, it packs a punch within the framework of stanzas. Epiphanies, resolutions or musings are communicated in a brief yet powerful manner. I feel poets are literary photographers, taking snapshots with their words. For me, it feels natural and instinctive, and I am drawn to this mode of expression that is a meditation of sorts. I believe poetry chose me instead of me choosing it. I also think it might be genetic. My grandfather was a poet too, except that he wrote in Hindi.

Tell us about your process. How do you start a poem, and how long does it take you to finish?

It is a very organic process and often, the decision isn't up to me. The subjects, events, and emotions often show up like a friend at my doorstep that I have to let in, not knowing or able to ask how long they'll stay. My poems are mostly autobiographical and inspired by family, history and mythology. All of these are intertwined in one's day-to-day living.

Typically, each poem goes through a few drafts—mostly tweaking in the form of changing a word, fixing a line break or clarifying an image. I ruminate over most poems/themes in my mind for a few weeks before I commit them to paper. Revision is every writer's not-so-secret

weapon that turns a piece of coal into a diamond. I have a few poems that I have held on to for ten years, because one word doesn't sound right or the rhythm is off. It's a very intuitive process. If and when a poem flows out without needing any changes, it feels like a gift from the divine.

What do you like to read? Which poets or artists that have influenced you?

I love reading all sorts of poets and poetry—modern, post-modern, translations, prose poetry, traditional verse—you name it! One can learn so much from reading and studying every form. I love the imagery and passion of Pablo Neruda, the emotion and spirituality of T.S. Eliot, the wit and philosophy of Arun Kolatkar, the quiet fire in the verse of Gwendolyn Brooks and the clear, vivid images in William Carlos Williams' work. Michael Ondaatje is one poet who is also a superb novelist. There are too many writers to name and honor here. I love art too and each time I discover a new artist or poet, it's like falling in love. The art of S.H. Raza and his focus on the bindu (circle) has me mesmerized. I've started wearing bigger bindis after seeing Raza's work!

Why did you choose to publish your first collection through The (Great) Indian Poetry Collective? Why did the Collective come about?

The idea of a collective really appeals to me for so many reasons. I've always loved collaboration in the creative process, and to work with other poets who share a powerful vision for advancing Indian poetry has been a dream of mine. I'm also fascinated with the process of publishing and design. By publishing collectively, we don't have to deal with the bureaucracy of a traditional publisher; the poets have control over how their own work appears. The fact that I can be part of the entire process, beyond just the writing aspect, feels very empowering. I'm excited to empower other poets and to discover and publish new voices. There are very few serious outlets for publishing high-quality books of poetry in India, and the Collective was created to bridge this gap.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

No fear! I would advise any upcoming poet/writer to read as much as possible, to write and experiment with as many different forms and to not be afraid to take risks. Anthologies are a great way to explore many voices in one place. I also believe it is very important to understand one's literary/poetic history and legacy. Who were our literary forebears? Why did they write the way they did? What can we learn from them? I also believe that revision is the most powerful tool a writer can have. Revise your manuscript once, twice, fifty times! Poetry, particularly, is like sculpture, which you have to chip away at until you see its true form come through. Most great poems/stories have been written many times over. But all the audience sees is the final product. I think it is very important for all to understand that writing is hard work and that it isn't simply about stringing together a bunch of words. Also, I would like to add to the infamous writer's advice phrase, 'Write what you know.' Write what you know, write what you don't know and would like to know, or write what you think no one knows. It's all about creating worlds, real and imagined, that touch us somehow.

**Sample poem from *Geography of Tongues*
by Shikha Malaviya**

This poem has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, 2015.

LIKE ANY GOOD INDIAN

After Brynn Saito's 'Like Any Good American'

I turn my face with acute awareness not giving them
even an eyelash I give my phone unwanted attention
scanning numbers friends who don't matter
I count down the traffic light 59-58-57 seconds then feign sleep
knuckles wrap against tinted glass sometimes they call out
mother sometimes sister hair matted mussed up on purpose
at intersections if I should look they'll pull out my corneas
with a grimace push their scent on my tinted car window
make me clutch my purse tighter half opened palm
the size of my heart beating like a silver coin
that I won't give because it spoils them