

# MINDFUL MUSINGS MELBOURNE JOURNAL

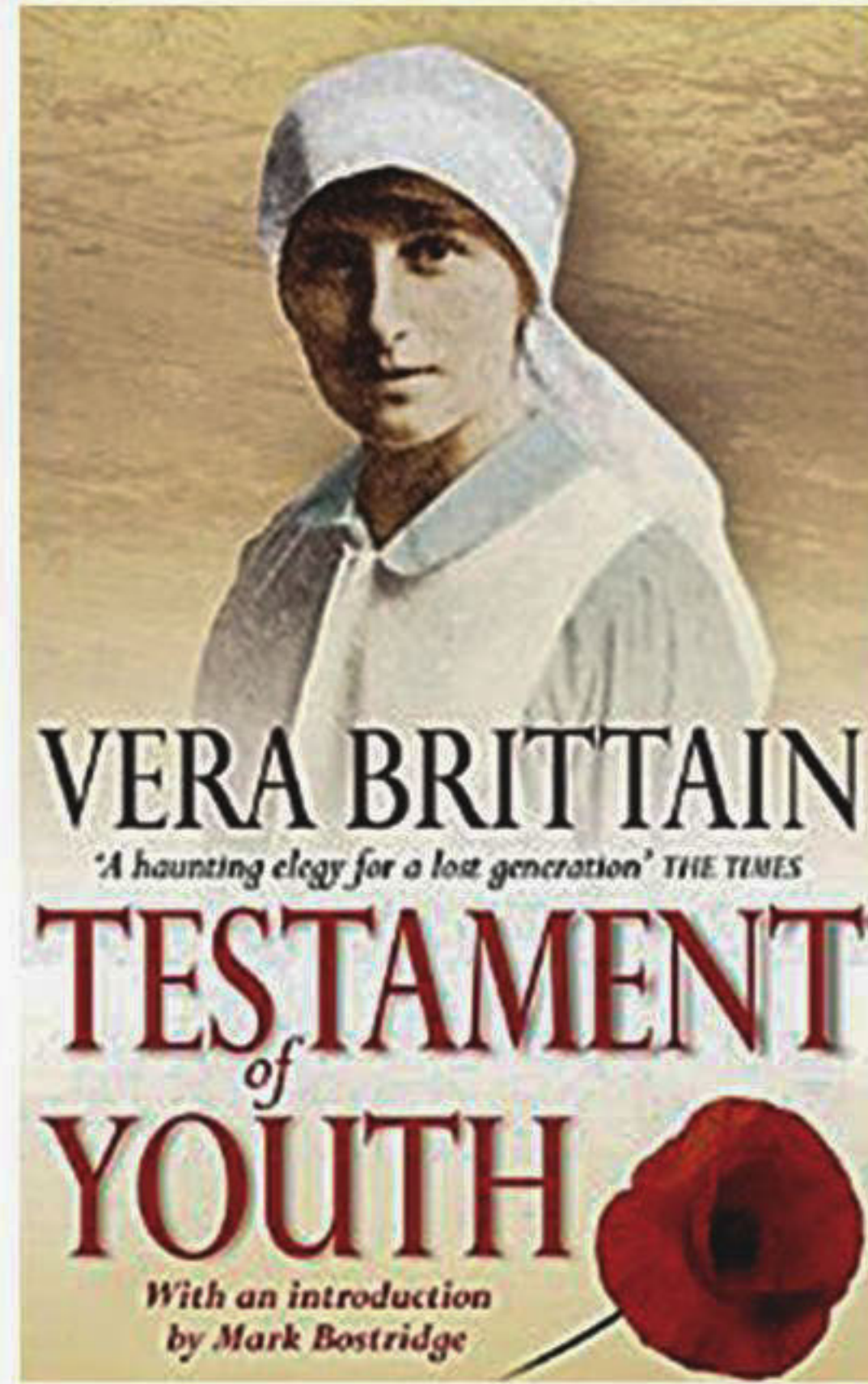
REBECCA HAQUE

For the new grandma, mornings in Melbourne are magical. The large picture window of her bedroom faces east. She wakes up with the twittering of songbirds, with the red-blue hue of dawn filtering in through the open slats of the Venetian blind. She looks out at the green rolling hills, and trees as far as the eye can see. The new babe sleeps in his cot in his parent's room, with the window on the west facing the small rectangular landscaped garden at the front. The sun's slanted rays keep his room snug and warm in the late afternoon when the breeze crosses the ocean and cools the earth.

The city centre lies to the south. Standing on her toes on the freshly mowed grass in the large back lawn, grandma can look beyond the wood fence and see the faint outline of the skyline of the business district. On clear, starry nights, the city lights sparkle, and the din of bustling activity is carried intermittently through the ether all the way to this quiet northern suburb of Craigieburn. This is her fourth visit to Melbourne. On her first visit to attend her daughter's graduation ceremony three years ago, she had stayed in a cozy, old English-style rented brick-cottage near La Trobe

University in Bundoora. The house she is living in now is new, all wood and open Bauhaus form and function, comfortably sleek and spacious. She finds this supremely relaxing, and is grateful to her daughter and son-in-law for hunting for months before buying such a lovely home in a pastoral setting—ideal to raise a child. Grandma is grateful for a more personal, selfish reason, too—she suffers from acute claustrophobia and needs the visual dimensions of open landscape and the arching sky to maintain her mental equilibrium.

During her three previous trips to Melbourne, grandma (she had not yet become 'grandma') had strategically foraged for the mind's food in two well-stocked used-books shops at Flinders St and Swanston St. She had carried in her luggage as many books as she urgently needed for her work in Dhaka. But, like squirrels storing nuts for the winter, she had stored a few in her daughter's home for this much anticipated longer visit for the birthing period. Now, grandma's bedside table drawer holds enough books to keep her happy. There is a hardcover edition of Patrick French's biography of VS Naipaul in mint condition, bought at a bargain



invasion and native subjugation overtly present in the artistically meaningful juxtaposition.

Below the book's title, the second half of the cover illustration is a picturesque scene of Polynesian islanders paddling in dug-out canoes on the sea, with large sailing ships near the coast. Above and behind them, the painterly perspective takes in the high, thickly-foliaged mountains near the shore and the towering, distant, sun-drenched golden volcanic peaks of the islands of Hawaii. Poring over this panorama, grandma is transported back to her adolescent years, when, at the age of fifteen she had found and devoured a second-hand copy of James Michener's *Hawaii*. She can still recall Michener's vivid narrative of the history of Hawaii, especially (being a voracious fruit-eater herself) the description of pineapple farms and the cultivation and harvesting of the fruit by Japanese immigrant workers.

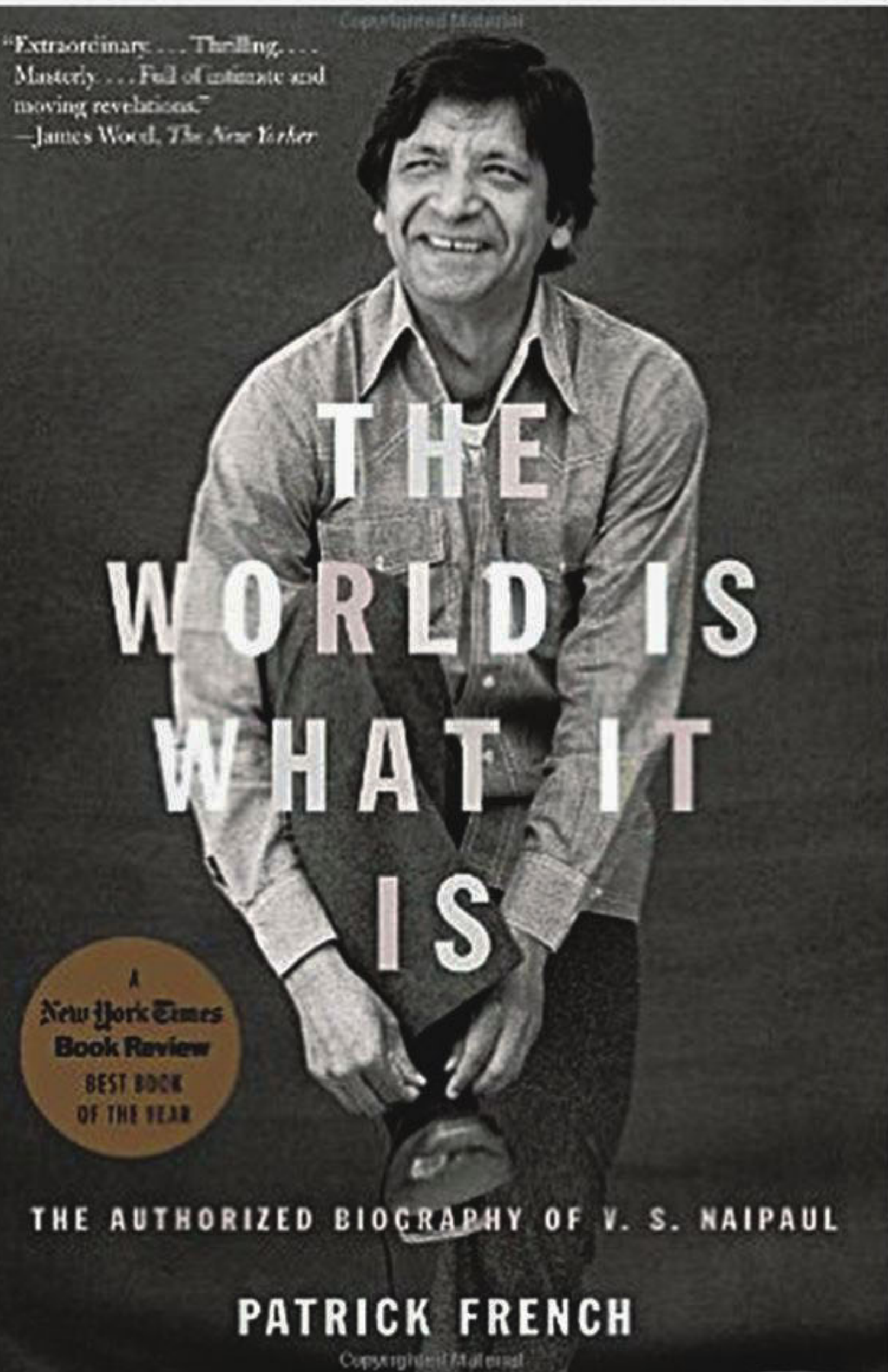
Work and hope: the salt and sugar of life. Our future is built on the foundation of these two elements. Grandma is reminded of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem, from which Kamala Markandaya has borrowed the title for her famous novel about the harsh condition of the lives of the indigent labourers of the Indian sub-continent. Coleridge writes, *Work without hope is like Nectar in a Sieve*. We all need a worthwhile vocation, a meaningful purpose and direction towards progress and fulfillment. Mathew Arnold used the apt metaphor of the busy hive in his essay *Culture and Anarchy*: bees, beeswax, and honey. They give us both sweetness and light.

Grandma understands that this is exactly what we all hope to gain from our life's work. A melancholy mood momentarily overcomes her, as she thinks of the new generation settling in the vast fledgling townships in Australia. She thinks of how she and so many of her friends are quietly moving into the well-earned realm of comfortable middle-age, with the children, in the natural progression of the order of things, leaving the crowded homeland, and finding fulfilling work and success in foreign ground. A new homeland where their own children will be born. New roots put down deep into fresh, healthy earth to nurture strong, bright shoots.

In Melbourne, as evening slowly descends and shadows fall across the garden, grandma rubs her eyes and looks out through the clear pane of the western window at the fading, orange-purple twilight horizon. She lingers at this heavenly vision and quietly thinks of days passing, of meetings and partings, of places and distance, of age and decay. For a moment, she falters, the pulse races. Quickly, she turns to caress the infant's soft, silky forehead. She lovingly holds her grandson in her heart's tight embrace, and her heartbeat regains its regular rhythm. She takes a long deep breath, looks up, sees the first twinkling stars in the darkening sky, and soon a serene feeling of permanence, of continuity, suffuses her entire being.

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This essay is a substantially revised and enlarged version, with a new title, of an essay previously published in March 2012 in the STAR Magazine.



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basement store for a mere AU\$5. Probably not many fans of Sir Vidyadhar Surajprasad, here Down Under, grandma thinks sardonically.

Another great find is Vera Brittain's classic memoir *Testament of Youth*. Written in 1933, it is a lyrical portrait of a young woman's life in pre-1914 England, with a heartbreaking account of the carnage in Europe that followed. But most of all, it is a love story. Actually autobiographical, it records the agonizing years preceding the Great War. *Testament of Youth* is a loving memorial to a lost generation, and it has been compared to *All Quiet on the Western Front* as a classic novel of World War I. At the moment, grandma is reading *Colette*, a biography by Joanna Richardson. In excellent condition, the book jacket reproduces a black and white photograph of the extravagantly stylish Colette with her mesmerizing eyes and painted lips. Richardson's book includes Colette's letters now available at the Bibliotheque Nationale in France, as well as Rosamund Lehmann's recollection of this extraordinary modern French writer. Richardson also quotes passages from James Lees-Milne's account of Colette and Somerset Maugham together in Monte Carlo.

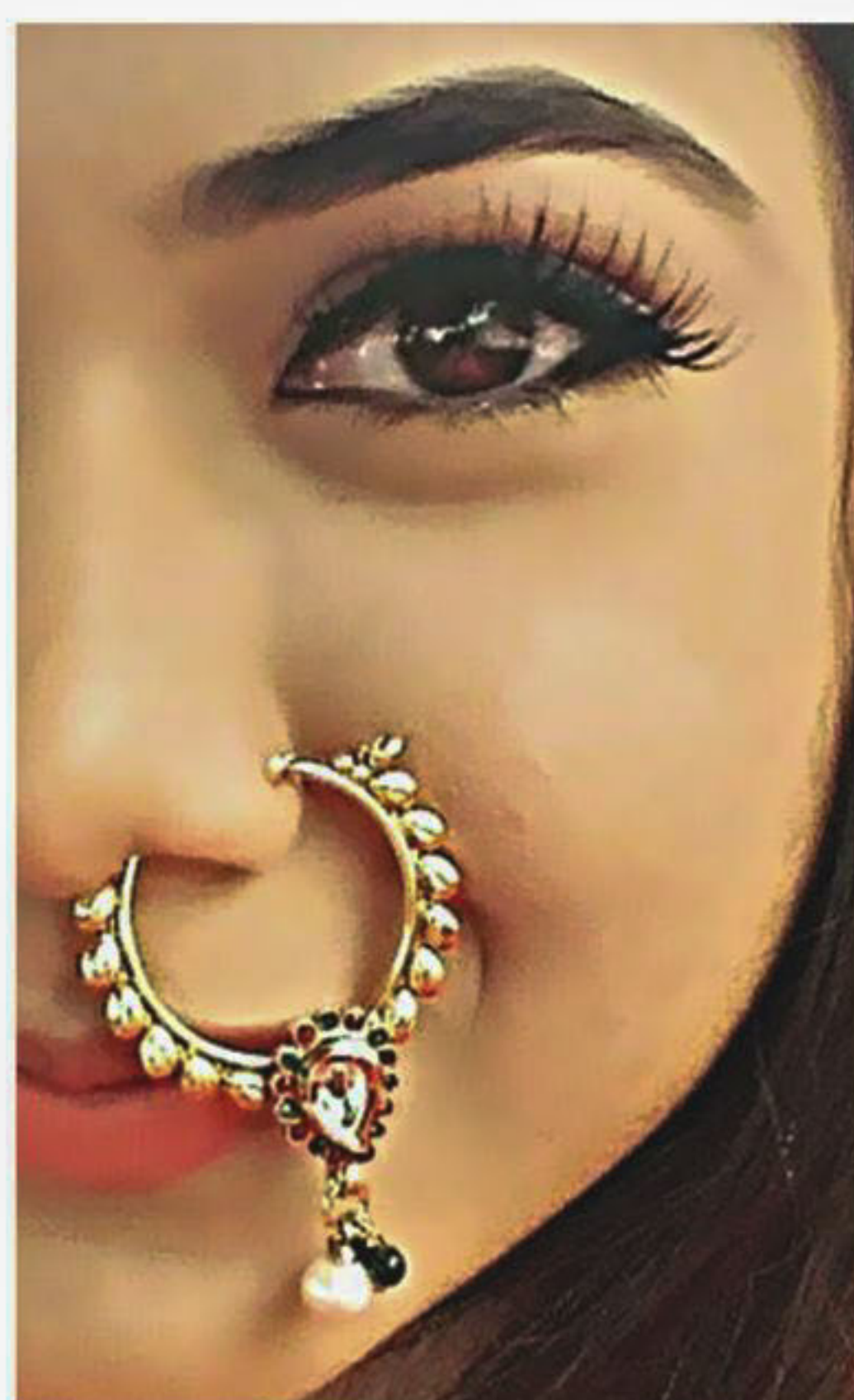
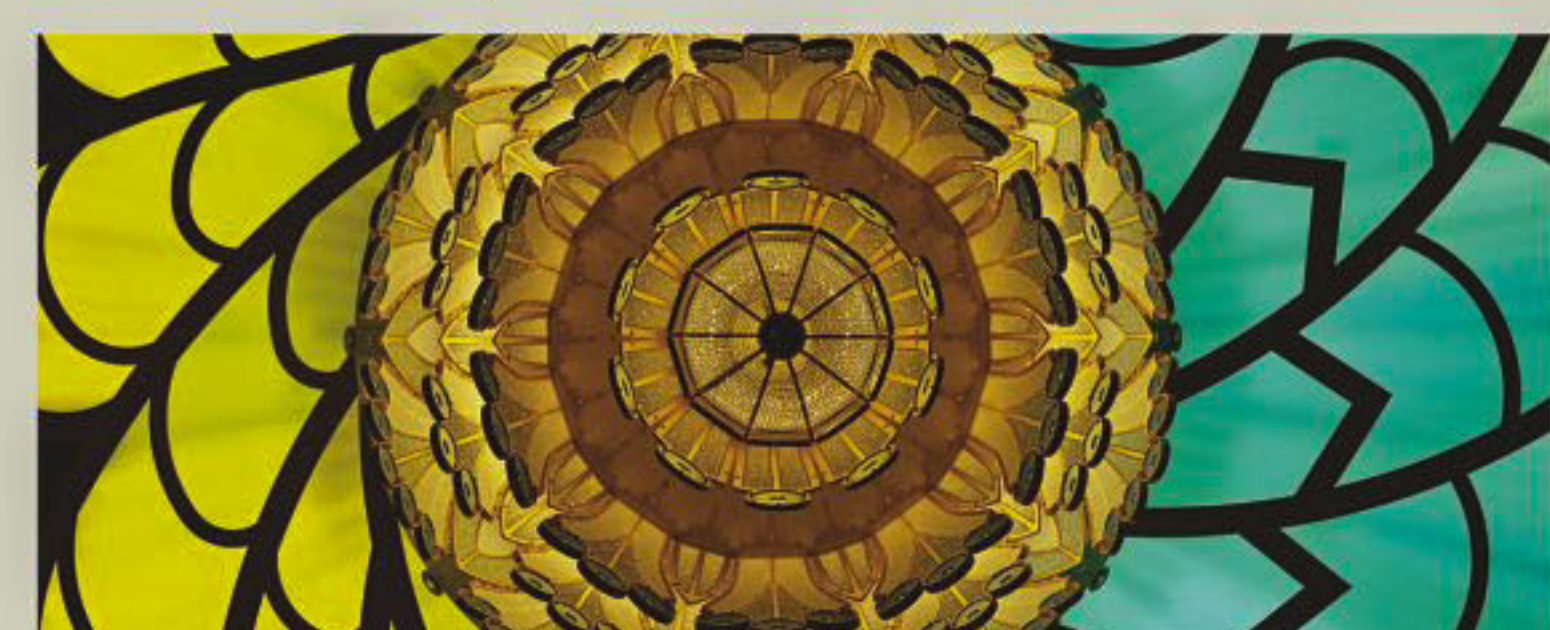
## The Leader

RUBAB ABDULLAH

You are oblivious of the ache in your own heart  
Pain ceaselessly plagues its innocence  
Yet you let your love adorn all and  
Found their feeling not as overpowering as yours  
You light up souls of millions through  
Offerings till the end, you are the leader.

When an anguished soul nearly yields to  
The hot wind of reality  
Feels scorched and bare, longs for a help  
Like the monsoon you play as a protagonist  
Your emotion rains with little or no break,  
With renewed vigour all living beings wake up,  
You are the leader.  
You seek release from the bondage of any undue will  
You blossom out a fellow feeling  
When many ones are laid up with misery  
On hearing shrieks of starved and meagre folks  
You put yourself in their shoes  
To protect humanity against evil  
A voice always whispers inside you,  
You are the leader.

Rubab Abdullah writes from Ohio, USA



## AN ACROSTIC

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Not to embrace.  
Any guess?  
No, it's nothing the naive wants;  
Date? April 27 still haunts.  
It's our anniversary, Pakhi  
Nope! I'm not crying; does the nose pin still look  
lucky?  
It's me, the burglar, hello!

“ব্যঙ্গ-সৃষ্টিতে অসাধারণ প্রতিভার প্রয়োজন। ... বন্ধু আবুল মনসুরের হাত-সাহায্যে দেখে বিস্মিত হলাম। ভাষার কান মলে রস সৃষ্টির ক্ষমতা আবুল মনসুরের অসাধারণ। এ যেন পাকা গুস্তাদী হাত।”

-কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম



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কাঁটাবন: প্রকৃতি (০১৭২৭৩২৮৭২৩), বেইলি রোড: সাগর পাবলিশার্স (৯৩৫৮৯৪৪)  
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চট্টগ্রাম: বাতিঘর (০১৭১৩০৪০৪৪), প্রথমা (০১৭১১৬৪৯৪২২)