



# Inking Ideas

One of the most frustrating parts of being human is that we're constantly trying to protect ourselves – whether it's through masks, by staying clear of the angry dog on the street, or by keeping securely within us, all our insecurities. It's a part of our natural instinct, of keeping vulnerabilities at bay through action (as with the mask and the dog) or inaction (as with the insecurities). When we think of the coronavirus, it is clear to us that the pandemic can only be battled over with us working collectively, as a unit. It is a global tragedy and all of us are faced with it, sure, in different capacities.

Our insecurities and anxieties are not very different. Especially today, all of us are at a unanimous low. Our challenges may be different, but the nature of our interaction with the challenge, its covertness, its struggle remain the same.

All of us suffer individually, of issues that plague us all collectively. One of the reasons we love literature is because it lets us be seen in the closed comfort of our anonymity. It vocalizes our fears, our anxieties, our confusions, our trepidations, validating them, validating us, and in turn, giving us courage.

Great writers change lives not because they cook up stories no one else can. They change lives because they give words to feelings we neglect, are too afraid to face. They open us up, take the confused mess of our lives, and present that in an orderly fashion, capable of love and more.

At a time like this, where each of us is at our lowest low, it is even more important to create and consume literature. To invite vulnerability, suffer collectively, sharingly, and transform ourselves to transform each other.

- **Simar Malhotra**  
Founder and Curator



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## Inkpot Capsule — Our Endeavours

Alongside our efforts to promote Indian art forms, Inkpot has also been dedicated to demystification of Indian cultural history and practices. Our recent podcasts have delved into topics ranging from the mythical history behind narratives like that of the Alakshmi to the developmental trajectory of Awadhi cuisine. The practice of hanging a combination of lemon and green chillies outside the entrance of one's house, also known as nazar battu, is believed to keep evil at bay. We look at how this legend evolved from the myth of Goddess Alakshmi, who is again believed to be the elder sister of the Goddess Lakshmi - the former is believed to bring misfortune while the latter is a harbinger of prosperity. The legend states that during the churning of the ocean of milk, or Samudra Manthan, both goddesses thus emerged - the younger with the nectar of amrit and the elder with the poison halahal.

However, it isn't solely the figure of Alakshmi that has been a source of much intrigue in the context of Indian mythology. The mythical figure of Kali has subverted the traditional suppositions of Indian, and specifically Hindu femininity.

The multi limbed goddess, also the embodiment of Shakti or female power, has given birth to legends such as that of how she vanquished the army of Asuras or stomped on the body of Shiva.

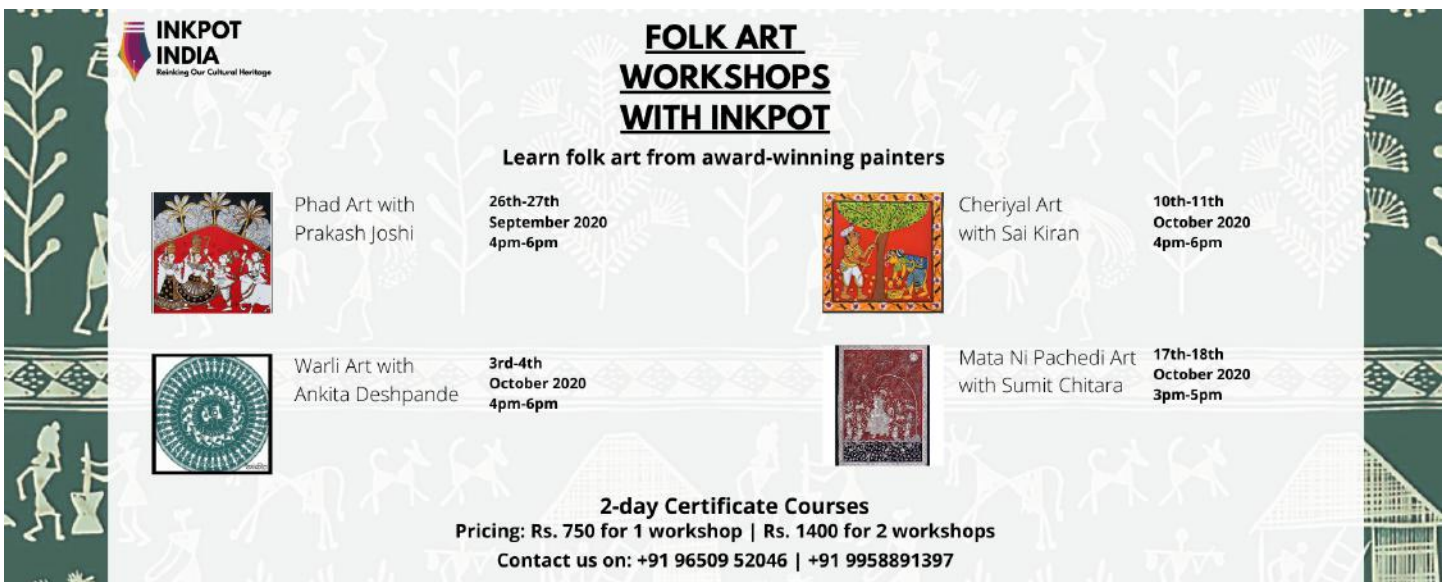
Our podcasts delve into the ways in which the mythical constructions of these two aforementioned figures have subverted and deviated from norms within the Hindu mythical mainstream.

However, India is defined as much by its rich cuisine as its variegated mythology. One of the most unique cosmopolitan centres in the country, from the time of Mughal rule, has been the region of Awadh. Our podcast explores the myriad ways in which Awadhi cuisine has drawn upon influences from Persia to British culture, and then gone on to influence culinary practices across the subcontinent.

While our podcasts have been an attempt to initiate dialogue on the many things that constitute the Indian cultural identity, our workshops are aimed at providing a platform to practitioners and enthusiasts of various art forms, to share their love for, and knowledge of the same.

— Puja Bose





### *Inkpot Workshops: A Deep-Dive into Folk Culture*



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## An insight into the mind of Anurag Chauhan



Anurag Chauhan, at only 26, is an Indian social worker and founder of Humans For Humanity, headquartered in Dehradun, India. He is also the founder and festival director of Dehradun Literature Festival. He is widely known for social work, particularly with regards to menstrual hygiene.

He was awarded the Karmaveer Chakra Award by the United Nations in 2016 and is the second ever male-recipient of the International Women Empowerment Award in 2019, presented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

### On coronavirus and lit fests and going virtual

The Dehradun Lit Fest came about from a will to do something for the city. During the lockdown, I came up with the idea of doing a virtual literature festival. It was new, and everyone welcomed the thought. Over 30 speakers from different spheres of the arts joined hands to make it happen. What's cool about virtual events is that we can get people from any part of the world. Of course, it can't replace the physical experience of a festival, but in these times, this is the best thing we can do because conversations should not stop. We always knew the power of the internet but this pandemic has allowed us to experience it.

### On literacy and literature

India is a country with a lot of social issues that are inter-connected. Despite the provision of free education by the government, students are reluctant to attend. Through Humans of Humanity we have found three reasons for this:

1. Transportation
2. The short-term benefits of little money are prioritized over long-term benefits of an education
3. The burden of taking care of the younger sibling

## **On field work in social work**

During the pandemic, the challenge is not just to help those in need but also to ensure the safety of all the volunteers who step up to help. The internal teams in the slums that we work with became active during this time. The schools we run had to shut but the kitchens which offered mid-day meals remained open, proving two meals a day not just to the students but also their families. At WASH, an organization to raise awareness about menstruation, our aim has always been to empower, not to do charity. Over the years, we've trained women to make their own sanitary napkins. So, during the pandemic, when sanitary napkins were not a part of the essentials list, these women were stress-free, making their own sanitary napkins and for others around them who didn't have this skill-set.

## **On finding Buddha**

Each time you are the reason for someone's smile, in that moment you are buddha.

## **On art and feeding your soul**

I started listening to classical music at a very young age, which was weird for a teenager. For me, that was feeding my soul. I would get goosebumps listening to this kind of music and all my pores would open up and all the negativity of my body would get sucked by the air.

## **On asking Pandit Birju Maharaj "Why do you perform when you're so old?"**

He said to me, 'All that we, as a country, had was either robbed or pilfered. What remains is our art and culture. That's all we have and if we lose this, we will be lost. I am dancing because I need to protect it.'



## Q & A with Nishi Misra, Principal of Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya



### **How do literacy and literature interact?**

Literacy may not go beyond just getting by and signing your name. Literacy should be such that there is an awakening of the mind, such that one is able to open and unlock the world of literature which can shape the mind, personality, the individual.

Literature is the total comprehensiveness of the written word, something that teaches a person to appreciate the world. The world is reflected in literature. And literature isn't just fiction, it isn't just factual biographies. I also feel physics, rocket science has literature. Anything that has to be read, written and comprehended is literature. And if you find a niche, a subject that you like, you can devote your entire life to it.

Literacy does not ensure that one can truly be literate in this manner. Literacy, as we define it, is the very very first step towards engagement with literature.

I think it's time for us to change the definition of literacy. The census does not go beyond writing your name. The new policy of learning in your mother tongue is trying to achieve that higher level of literacy. There's so much literature available in regional languages that it would certainly help literacy go beyond writing your name.

### **How does SKV incorporate the arts in its curriculum?**

SKV as a school was created to promote heritage. We have developed a heritage festival, Dharohar, that we celebrate every year in which we pick up a region of India and curate the festival around dying art forms from the region.

From Kashmir's Bhand Pather to Odissa's Saura paintings, the Mughal time's dastangoi to Maratha's Harikatha, Dharohar is our way of ensuring that research is carried out by our students into the various ways that literature, art, performing arts, food, define the general lives of people in those areas, and us as Indians.

## How has Covid-19 changed the way extra-curriculars occur?

The medium has changed but the character of the school still remains the same. After classes are done in the morning, we have the activity time during which the different extra-curriculars that students have opted for, whether its Indian music or percussion instruments, teachers carry on with their classes. Similarly, with sports, apart from team sports, exercising and training are still happening through the digital medium. We're also doing theory classes for strategic maneuvers in soccer, different kinds of strength training etc.

## Terrific Teen: Kaavya Sharma

"I think I have always been passionate and had an instant liking for artistic things. I remember performing ghoomar as a 5-year old, humming songs with my mother, and buying countless art and craft books and games. I started to pursue my passion towards dancing by joining dance classes as early as in grade 2. Over the years I learnt Kathak, Bharatnatyam, and Contemporary forms of dancing, and participated in many dance competitions and events.



Joining SKV was a major event that not only made me realize the importance of learning and relishing art forms, but also gave me a platform and countless opportunities to enhance the artistic abilities in me. Over the years, the school gave me a chance to explore my musical abilities as a singer. I have been a part of the school's Indian choir, and have constantly sung for various inter-house or entertainment events. I have always enjoyed being on stage and speaking on the podium in both English and Hindi, be it for a debate, speech, elocution, or anchoring. I have also grown to enjoy drama and acting, and the school gave me a chance to explore this talent of mine as well. I have been a part of various inter-house and inter-school drama competitions, both English and Hindi, where I played various roles ranging from Shakuntala and Shoorpanakha to a British housewife and police officer.

## Language and Its Politicization

Language as we know is a powerful tool of communication. The human race considers itself supreme to have mastered oral and written forms of language. A theory states that all languages have developed from a single language. Due to our ancestral nomadic life, languages travelled with us and mixed to form the many languages that we have today. The migration of humans has also given rise to several dialects of the same language. Today we have over 6000 languages and 7000 dialects in the world. The Gestural theory states that the first traced evidence of communication were gestures. What we know as sign language today, has originated from this idea. We have come to a point where certain languages have gained more prominence and usage over others. It is interesting to note that most countries have chosen English as their representative language, India being one. The colonial rule brought with itself the boon of English. The Britishers used it to their convenience to communicate with us. From administration to teaching, this foreign language made its way easily through the by lanes of India. Its impact was such that it was chosen as one of the two official languages of independent India. English became the 'lingua franca'. As much as it is open to change, our country is also home to some of the world's oldest languages like Tamil and Sanskrit. Several tribal tongues and dialects are also said to have developed here, like Bodo and Santhali. Most of these are on the verge of extinction due to attempts of including the tribes into the mainstream. On one hand when English pushes away regional tongues, it also unites our diverse diaspora under one gamut. Though language bias can segregate people sometimes, it should largely be treated only as a means of communication. The world now is moving towards a multilingual approach. It has been proven that learning new languages can boost brain functioning and also preserve it as it ages. So why be limited to just one when you can speak several tongues?

— **Sriparna Paik**

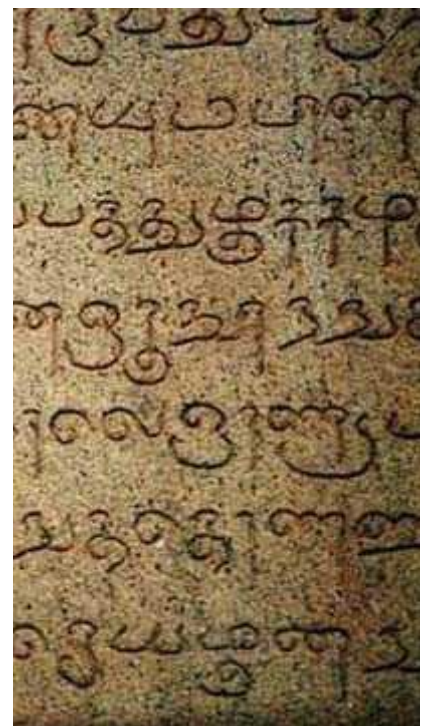
*Final year Geography student and an environment and sustainability enthusiast*

## Tamil: The Oldest Living Language of Today

Tamil is an ancient language that is an embodiment of a rich cultural and intellectual heritage. Tamil is the official language of the Indian state, Tamil Nadu, and also of countries like Sri Lanka and Singapore. This language is spoken by nearly sixty million people across the globe. However, Tamil's claim to be the oldest language of the world is an issue that is eternally fraught with controversy, especially, in the context of its contradistinction with Sanskrit. But there can be hardly any doubt regarding identifying Tamil as the oldest 'living' language in the world. The language has a pre-Aryan history. The first book in Tamil, named Tholkappiam, is believed to have been written in 2500 BC. Tamil is also the language of the most ancient literature. In 2004, it has received the accolade of a classical language from UNESCO. Tamil Thai Kovil is a temple in Tamil Nadu, where Goddess Tamil is worshipped, is the only temple in the world in which a language is worshipped in the form of a deity.

— **Shruti Chakroborty**

*Doctoral Research Scholar, an avid reader, and a food enthusiast!*



## Cave Paintings

Cave paintings, across the world, bear the traces of earliest human civilization. India has a long history and a rich heritage of cave paintings. In 1867-68, the earliest discovery of prehistoric cave arts was made by A.C.L. Carlleyle. In 1957, V. S. Wakankar discovered the site of Bhimbetka rock shelters. Bhimbetka caves, in Madhya Pradesh, have one of the oldest cave paintings of India. Some of the paintings date back to 8000 BC. The Sittanavasal Cave, in Tamil Nadu, have frescos which were made in the 2nd century AD. This site is basically a rock-cut monastery named Arivar Koil made by the Jains. Gudahandi rock caves in Kalahandi, Odisha is another prehistoric site of cave painting. However, in India, the Ajanta caves happen to be the most popular site for cave paintings. Situated in Aurangabad, Maharashtra, these caves' timeline spans between 2nd century BC and 480 AD. The paintings in these caves refer to the Jataka stories depicting Lord Buddha's lives and rebirths. Among the caves mentioned, both Bhimbetka and Ajanta have been identified as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

— Shruti Chakroborty



## Kerala Murals

The Kerala Murals are bright frescos adorning the walls of temples in South India. They date back to the 10th century, gaining prominence during the Bhakti Movement. It owes its roots to Kalamezhuthu, the tradition of drawing on the floor. Tales from the epics and the Puranas find depiction where Hindu mythological characters bedeck in glory. The style is elegant and colourful showing elongated eyebrows and lotus petal shaped eyes. Each bodypart is carefully measured and figures have their own charisma, be it a God or a demon. During the British rule Kerala Murals were battling extinction. In 1970 the Guruvayoor Temple caught fire, destroying the murals. A lack of artisans triggered the people to save their art. This led to setting up of mural painting schools. Today, the art has transcended to canvas and acrylic paints are rendering brighter images. Restoration works continue and artists like Naveen Kumar are conducting workshops to propagate more this art style.

— Sriparna Paik

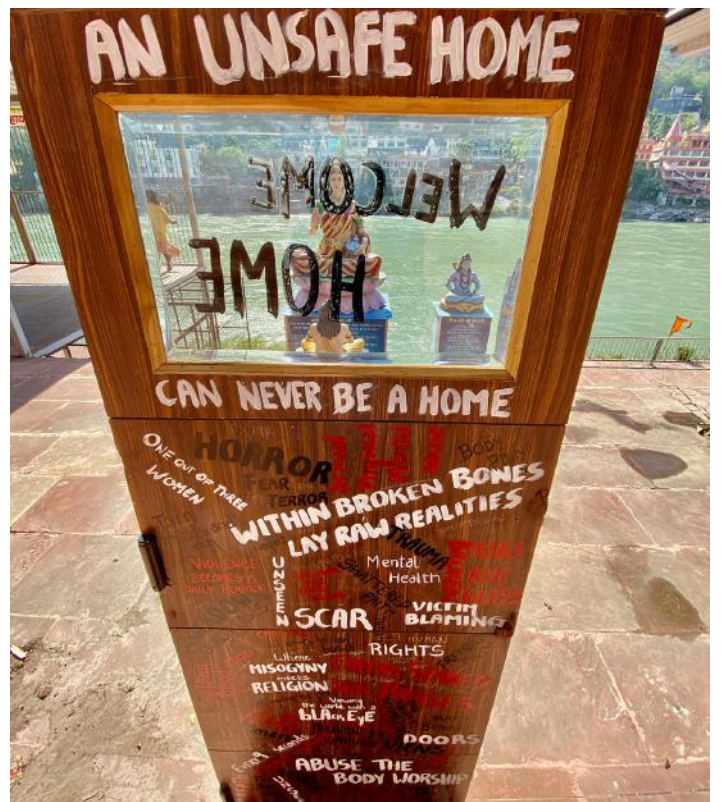


## Feature of the Month: Nishtha Nanda

Nishtha Nanda is an artist currently studying Graphic Design at Rhode Island School of Design in the United States. She was born and brought up in New Delhi, India and feels closely connected to her culture. Nishtha tends to find her inspiration in the intricacies of the society - both positives and negatives. She uses her vision and voice to spark insightful conversations and ideas, whether it's about taboos like menstruation or unresolved issues of domestic violence. Many of her projects stem from her personal experiences, but the others are made after interacting with people around her who's voices are unheard. Moreover, she also used the opportunity of the lockdown to take art classes for children from underprivileged backgrounds in Rishikesh. Nishtha also organizes Women's markets to empower the rural and urban women to bring forth their artistic skills and stand up on their own two feet. Not only does she use her art to shed light upon issues that are often overlooked, but also uses her skills to empower and enlighten those around her.

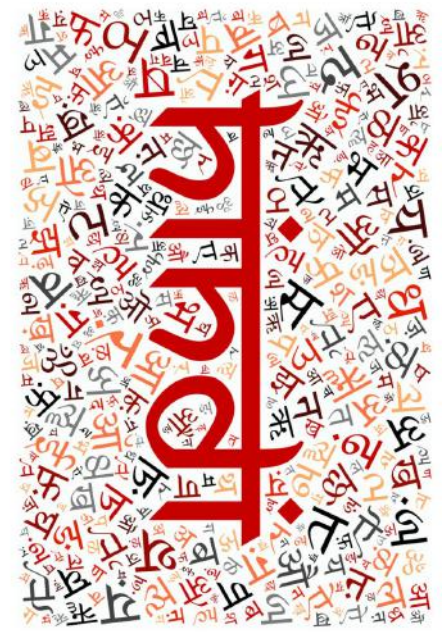


[@nishthananda\\_art](#)



## Hindi Diwas : What is its significance?

As children we have all celebrated this day in school but do you know why? When India freed itself from the British rule in 1947 and had an independent constitution in 1950, it lacked an official language. There were discussions, arguments and rallies regarding this where eminent faces like Beohar Rajendra Simha and Hazari Prasad Dwivedi were seen. After long debates, Hindi written in Devnagri script and English were accepted as the official languages of independent India. To commemorate this day 14th September is celebrated annually as 'Hindi Diwas'. It marks a day of social unification in a diversely linguistic country like ours. Today our schools, colleges and government offices celebrate Hindi writers and their literature in the light of this historical event.



## Hindi Book Recommendations

- 1) Nirmala by Premchand
- 2) Madhushala by Harivansh Rai Bachchan
- 3) Yama by Mahadevi Verma
- 4) Tamas by Bhisham Sahni
- 5) Kamayani by Jaishankar Prasad
- 6) Kashi Ka Assi by Kashi Nath Singh
- 7) Maila Aanchal by Phanishwar Nath Renu
- 8) Chandrakanta Santati by Babu Devakinandan Khatri
- 9) Rashmirathi by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar
- 10) Kitne Pakistan by Kamleshwar
- 11) Gunahon Ka Devta by Dharamveer Bharti
- 12) Apsara by Suryakant Tripathi Nirala



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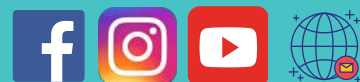
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