

A literary legacy

Journalist With An Eye For India's Writing Talent

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Vinita Dawra Nangia is a powerhouse in Indian media and literature, with over three decades of shaping cultural narratives. Director of the Times Literature Festival, and creator of Write India and the AutHer Awards, she has championed writers and built vibrant literary communities; her voice resonates with insight, bridging contemporary dilemmas with timeless values. In an interview with GT, she discusses shaping some of India's most influential literary conversations.

Evolving with each role

I began my journey with the news section as a sub-editor. From there, I moved to Saturday Times, a lifestyle and entertainment supplement of The Times of India. Later, I became India's first fashion writer, which eventually led to the creation of TOI's page 3. I've realised that when you develop something, after a point you tend to get bored – at least, I do. So, at every stage of my career, whatever I am doing becomes my favourite thing at that moment. Today, the role I enjoy is promoting reading and writing in India, and launching initiatives that encourage people to engage in both.

Creating across genres

In the beginning, I was deeply attached



Vinita Dawra Nangia with GT reporters

to everything I created. Over time, I realised that it is far more interesting - and far more productive - to keep creating and then handing your work over to others so that you can grow. People who stay stuck in one place often remain stuck in life. Because I kept developing, and letting go, I moved across eras of journalism - from working in print when there were no computers or mobile phones, to moving into internet journalism and then social media. I created websites and started social media accounts. Very few journalists have worked across all these platforms. It happened only because I kept learning and moving on.

Retaining the human touch

It's a good thing that the number of book writers have increased significantly over the years, particularly in the space of commercial writing. But there is also a widespread myth that writing will make you rich or famous – unless, of course,

you become extraordinarily popular. In fact, in recent times, AI has created a certain upheaval. It's now difficult to distinguish between an authentic writer and someone passing off AI-generated work as their own. Thankfully, there are tools that detect AI-written content. I believe the best use of AI is for research or feedback - after you've created your own plot. I tested it by asking AI to rewrite one of my short stories, and it stripped away all emotion. The human touch remains irreplaceable.

Leading Write India

Write India is very close to my heart. It was born out of countless interactions where people from the audience would come up to me and say they wished to write. I recall Chetan Bhagat once telling me, "Vinita, mujhe angrezi nahi aati. People make fun of me, but I want the boy or girl in a slum to read my book." He writes in simple English for that reason, and it worked. I want to create a bridge between such writers, and that's how Write India was born.

Message for Amitians

My most important advice is to read a lot... in a way that helps you truly absorb what you're reading. I always read with a pencil, using a scale as a bookmark; I underline and annotate. This helps retention and builds instinct. Often, I know the meaning of a new word simply because I've encountered it earlier. So, read widely, actively, and with intention.

INTERVIEW



Vinita Dawra Nangia, journalist

Book Review

Entangled lives

Synopsis: A beautifully written novella, Ghachar Ghochar brings out the raw and innate nature of mankind as its characters go through a sudden transformation from absolute poverty to unexpected opulence. The unnamed narrator walks us through his invisible existence while sitting in a coffee house - the nucleus of his refuge. He reflects on the unsettling changes that wealth brings in the members of his once close-knit family - struggles of mundane are taken over by the urge to dominate, allegiances realign and conflicts crack the household's foundation. Negative thoughts and traits that one would normally suppress come to the fore in this realistic plot, as Anita, the nar-

rator's wife, confronts the repressive dynamics that are prevalent in society. Shanbhag neatly builds the prose to demonstrate how wealth can build as well as dissolve relationships, leaving them irrevocably and irreparably muddled. Originally written in Kannada, the title prophesies a hopeless entanglement that is yet to come - a knot that cannot possibly be untied, no matter what.

Why is it worth reading?: The precise observations, accumulation of detail, and a relatable narrative progression make the novella a carefully curated mirror of society. It is the truth we all wish to turn a blind eye to but will one day have to encounter as it is the way of life. The author has captured how relation-

Book: Ghachar Ghochar
Author: Vivek Shanbhag
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Genre: Psychological fiction

ships may become painfully coiled and suffocating due to unexpected circumstances of life. The complex, yet simple psychological richness of the narrative lingers long after the last page. The human intellect in this work is bound to leave you speechless, but with traces of undisputed introspection that gets under your skin like a whisper and stays.

Iconic quote: "And who's to say the gods cannot take form of a restaurant waiter when they choose to visit us?"

Rating: 5/5

Review by: Yoshita Chug
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