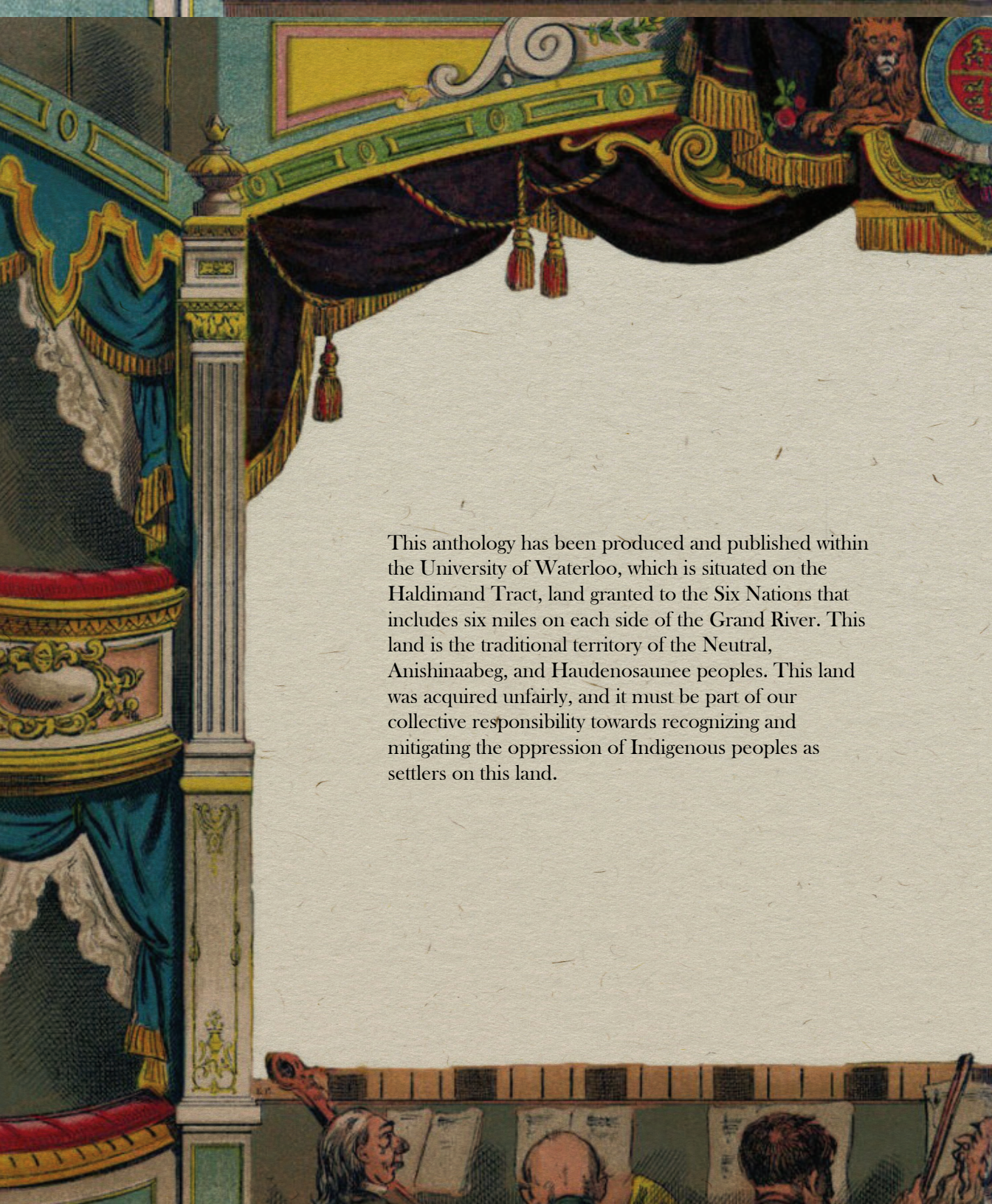


The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a theater stage. It features ornate columns, heavy curtains with tassels, and decorative moldings. At the bottom, there are three small inset illustrations of men in period clothing, possibly actors or musicians, looking towards the stage.

Voices 2025

ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY



This anthology has been produced and published within the University of Waterloo, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. This land is the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. This land was acquired unfairly, and it must be part of our collective responsibility towards recognizing and mitigating the oppression of Indigenous peoples as settlers on this land.



The background of the page is a detailed illustration of a theater stage. At the top, there's a dark red velvet curtain with gold fringe and tassels. Above the curtain is a decorative valance with green and gold patterns. To the right, a white classical column with gold accents is visible. Further right, a blue curtain with gold fringe is partially drawn, revealing a red upholstered seat. At the bottom of the page, there's a row of three men's heads in profile, looking towards the right. The man on the left has a beard and is wearing a dark coat. The man in the middle has curly hair and a beard. The man on the right has a mustache and is wearing a dark coat. They appear to be part of a theatrical production.

Welcome to Voices

On behalf of the WUSA Women's Centre, we want to thank you for picking up this anthology and taking the time to engage with the voices within. A special thank you also goes to the students who submitted their artwork and writing for this year's edition of Voices.

Voices is an annual anthology dedicated to amplifying the experiences, creativity, and perspectives of Waterloo undergraduate students. Within these pages, you'll find a diverse range of thoughts, emotions, and artistic expressions—each a reflection of the unique stories and lived experiences that shape our community.

We hope this collection resonates with you, sparks conversation, and inspires you to share your own voice.

PRITHVI NAIR, EMMA SOOKOO, AND SAMANTHA BENETEAU



In This Fog

YASHIKA VAHI

I am a slave to the addiction,
Breathing through cold eyes,
Where are the tears that come to the sorrowful?
I am a slave to the addiction,
Don't ask for me in this fog,
What is the addiction?
To whom does it belong?
Breathe through tears,
Where are the tears,
That to the resilient come?



bubble gum mint

JULIA COSMA

i left a piece in your arms that night

stuck like glitter

sweet and fresh

sugar burns

sugar burns

bubble gum mint tooth ache

i found a piece in your arms that night

(you see clearly)

i find safety in abstraction

i hope you melt on the way home





HOME SWEET HOME

Prithvi Nair

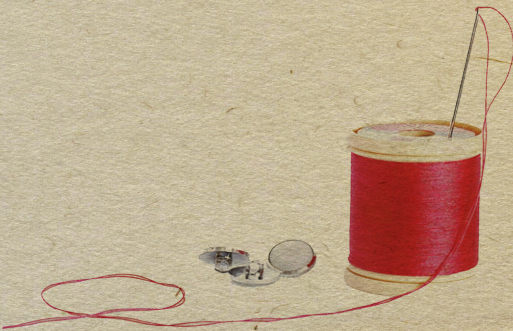
The living room is the only place that masked the disarray of that apartment.
Smell of old birthday cakes, the singing songs of the lovebirds, where have you been?
The coffee table being the only sane soul amongst the colourful Turkish garments.
Rough patchets of the old carpets weren't the only thing that burned my skin.
The balcony invited a new opportunities, all that was granted with Allah's blessings.
Racks of fresh laundry, teasing the cracked marbled tiles, I am distressing.
Yet, the doors are always kept close. I guess, it has always been the norm.
One. Just one. Bedroom.
A place reserved for the couple, but, in fact, was filled with 4 occupants.
A bed, abused, ripped, but gave life and embraced love at night.
Truly. Oh, truly, what a monument!
A place that was described as hell in the country, but it took away my pain.
I guess looking back at it, now, there wasn't much to gain.



Compulsion of Love

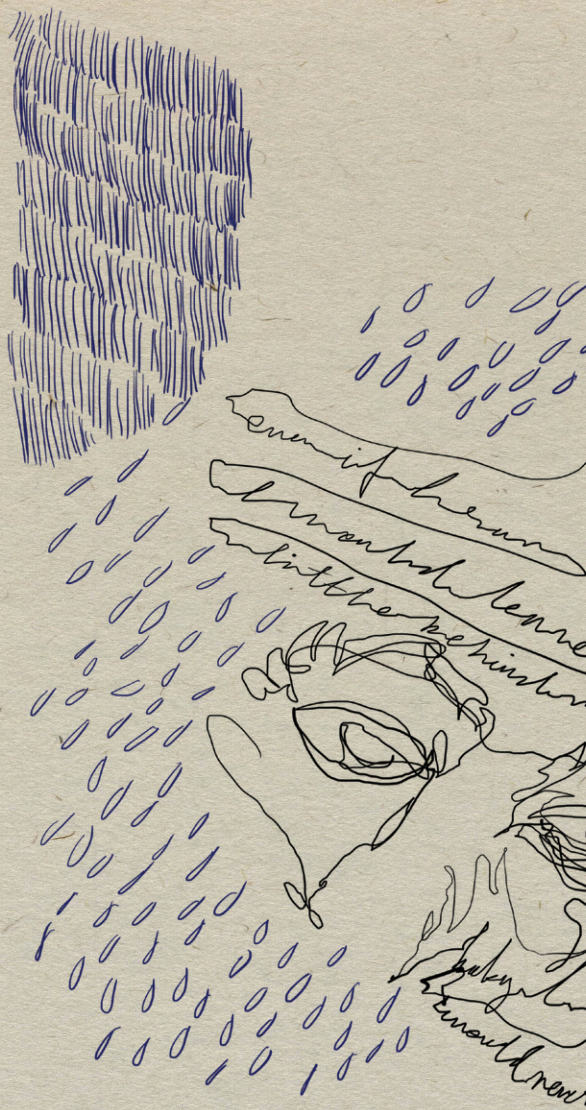
YASHIKA VAHI

I got this mini sewing machine to work on a business idea but I haven't used it. I tried to use it and figure it out a lot when it first came. That part only lasted two days but I wonder if this was compulsive. Am I compulsive? I buy things I have no idea how to use. I love people who I have no idea how to love.



Come Down

JULIA COSMA



Canopy

JULIA COSMA



UNCERTAINTY

Prithvi Nair

This feeling right here, is it worry?

Something insanely sharp.

I can't breathe—

This furiosity— my body is killing me.

Something insanely sharp.

Is it anxiety? I should talk to someone . . .

No.

It will be over soon.

Is it anxiety? I should talk to someone . . .

My vision is getting blurry— maybe I should . . . close my . . . eyes for a few minutes—

Get it together. Please— Not right now.

Vulnerability. I will feel so exposed — **DON'T LOOK AT ME!**

My vision is getting blurry— maybe I should . . . close my . . . eyes for a few minutes—

I am curling up, my head is stuck to ground. Stubborn.

My knees tucked, throat choked up—

I am fine.

backyard

Julia Cosma

like a working dog mind unoccupied
destroys the house and runs off
with a slipper

backwards and inside out
shouting with no sound
a gentle hum becomes quite loud

(quietly defiant)
existential acrobatics

the joy of a rain drop

(woof)

(unconcerned by getting wet)
sees a cat and jumps the fence



Passage of Time (New Year's Day)

Zanae Kendall

Delicate snow diseased with streetlights. My great love and other strangers all smile in our silent flirtation with the wind. Time won't cut us up tonight, but instead ties us together, yet to define our bodies. The bitter drinks swimming warm, a good wound on my memory. Forgetting the person I am, my past lay over the dance floor and marched into the wasteland. I'm holding the tips of her fingers, slipping in and out of mine. Prolonged words stay inside my lips which have gone slack. Instead, I hold your waist, and my hips and palm communicate the rest. Rings from the future don't matter, let the other be silenced. In the wasteland there was a building ocean between my legs, quenching the drought. I let you pass with ease. When the warm drink in my chest turns to poison it dries up again. I've woken up to remember the troubles. The snow is now rain and it's hitting the ground. No wind and no lust in the air. The water flowing down the streets and water pipes on the roof offer an alternate, smoother noise. One that reminds me of a peaceful lake in the middle of a storm. We're smaller when it rains, strangers meeting in the morning.



The Art of Noticing

Sruti Amalan

The softness that washes over my town on a freshly rained morning.

The sun lighting me up from within on a summer's day.

The clouds morphing and re-morphing into animals in the sky.

The entwining of my voice with the water as I shower.

The first mouth-watering bite into a loaf of bread.

The songs whose notes have taken root within me.

The wind as it runs its fingers through my hair.

The tacky dresses, necklaces, and earrings.

The windows rolled down while driving past the golden fields.

The daily errands soundtracked by phone calls with friends.

The shared pasts spilled over spilled bottles.

The returning to a dog-eared page of a tender novel.

The poems that I have yet to write.

The aimless wandering as the evening settles into the night.

The streetlights glimmering like fireflies against a black-blue backdrop.

The comfort of a childhood teddy bear as I sleep.

The feeling of falling in love with life again, and again, and again



THE BEACH

Laura Lewis

Sometimes I don't want to run this track, this life,
Around in circles along its decided paved path
In some emotionless industry manufactured destiny.

Sometimes I want to wander to the nearest beach
To feel the rough sand shyly bury its pebbles between my toes
And poke at me as if it is the first time feeling anything at all.

Sometimes I want to wade in deep, with the seaweed tangling around my ankles,
Its slime slick up my legs and holding me to the wet gushing sandbed
As it keeps me there, traps me there, wants me there.

Sometimes I want to go further into the water until it reaches my neck
Until I feel its harsh cool embrace surround me gently
And its cold waves as it whispers gentle nudges into my ears.

Sometimes I want to be in too deep where the waves eat me whole,
Under the water where everything is nothing and nothing is everything;
Letting me drown, letting me go from this limbo, this routine, this lifeless life.

But everyday, I don't change a thing.



અજાણ'

Radha Vyas

Bloody Moon

Jennifer Chung

bloody moon cries her tears
teeth bared, screaming in silence
forced separation from her lover
since the beginning of time
cursed with solitude
and endless chase after her sun
she will never learn
to say goodbye
to find a new sun
to new beginnings
but the moon,
ever so bloody
patiently waits for the end of time
for one last warm embrace

મનનાં અનેક સવાલ છે
સમય રહેતા જરાક સાંભળી લેજે
જવાબ એ ઘડીએ ન દેવાય
તો બસ સાથ થામી દેજે;
જાણ તો બધીય છે તને
નાહક અજાણ બને છે!
વેરાન આંખોને તું
અમથી
રસધાર કરે છે





FACES

Diya Renjan

The Art of Noticing

Pt. 2

Samantha Beneteau

The heavy aroma of my Nonna's house while she's cooking,
The smell of an old book at a used bookstore,
The warm sensation of the sun hitting my face through the kitchen window,
The soft cushion of the grass as I sprawl atop it on a hot summer's day,
Finding refuge under my comforter in a cold late morning,
Watching someone enjoy a meal that you made for them,
The excitement of having a loved one report back positively on a book you recommended,
The ache in my stomach and cheeks caused by too much laughter shared,
The satisfaction of finding a new song to play on repeat for the next few weeks,
The feel of my black gel pen scratching this page as I finish writing.



Sorrow

SANJANA ANANTH KRISHNAN

When I first cried
my parent replied.
“Why cry over this?”
Their smile wide.

Silently,
My tears ceased
Shedding childish skin
Into an adult coat I keep

I vowed to place
Sorrow in a box
With the key thrown away
It remains locked

I am thankful for it,
The hand they dealt
Their words stinging in that moment
Make me stronger than I felt

Until now, where before me
Stands one I love, and that coldness creeps
I almost speak so, until the rays of the morrow
Reveals another figure bathed in light

The child I'd been
Weak after hate
Yet I stand where they'd stood
Ready to berate

For they never meant
To soothe my heart
But their own
Wounded ones filled with fear

So, with my phantom sobbing
I merely pull her close
Whispering what I'd wish I heard
"Its okay, you're not alone"

Memory of You

**Sanjana Ananth
Krishnan**



“You aren’t wisdomless for failing,” Constance whispers.

“But I never wished to fail you,” I mutter.

“That’s impossible,” her lipless mouth forms into a smile. “Every mortal fails.”

“You don’t,” my tone harsher.

“Well,” she looks towards the gradation of dawn, “I am not mortal.”

“And you never will be,” my voice breaks as I continue. “Because of me.”

“My love,” they place a teal palm on my back. “We knew the trial is something few can conquer.”

“I just thought I’d work, because- “

I cannot lose you.

“I’d think the world owes you one,” I say instead.

“But the world does not owe anyone anything,” she echoes my past naïve self.

“Candor I’ve lost,” I scoff.

“Yet something that can return, if you live. And I will stay until you go.”

“But what’ll be there for you? When we’re all gone?”


“I suppose,” her six eyed gaze meets mine. “The memory of you.”



Noteful Life

Yuvika Singh





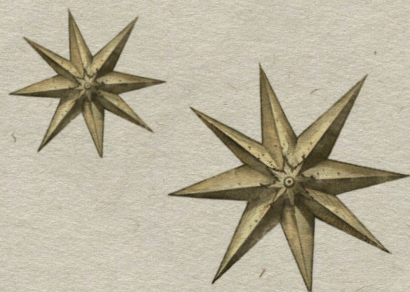
Heavenly Earth

Yashika Vahi

It all leads somewhere,
Some will go towards their destinies,
Cleansed and reborn,
Others will lie decaying on the floor,
Forever and ever,
It is all about what is on the inside,
The sorrow, the grief, the smile, the love,
Until reality cannot be ignored
And you are under the burdens of a world that maddens your mind,
You're lost, you're dumb, you're a damn fool being played around,
It is all about what is on the inside,
Until the outside burdens crush the soul on the inside
And the only healing—
Is in the forests that have been given away for our ambitions,
the oceans that we drown in because of our desires,
the earth that slowly evaporates under our touch,
Silently pleading as it goes down,



Please stop
Please stop
Please stop
I will destroy everything in my rage
I will destroy everything in my rage
Please stop
Please stop
And if you can't
Please forgive me
Please forgive me for the hell
I will reign on this heavenly earth,
Forgive me for the destruction
That will cleanse all of humanity's sins.



THE TWO MACHINES

Sanjana Ananth Krishnan

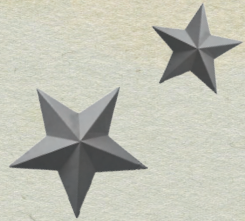
I had known you when you were younger
Freshly built and out of slumber
A ray of light settled when you woke
Illuminating barks of birch and oak

They said you seemed slower then,
A mirage delivered to her when
My creator was debt-ridden, drinking until dusk
Now she cheers at your station, clearing your dust.

I wish I could relish you like them,
But my power grows weaker like the stem
Of the flowers which droop at your feet,
Whirring slower, wondering when I will be bequeathed.

For when you were delivered that summer day
A part of me began to drift away
Into you as the sun illuminates the moon
A ray of light, not stolen, but brought to you

And though you shine now without my light
I see you rise still, every night.
Yet now it is because you know me too,
Smiling softly at my ghost, as if to love me anew.



How much of the sky can be known?

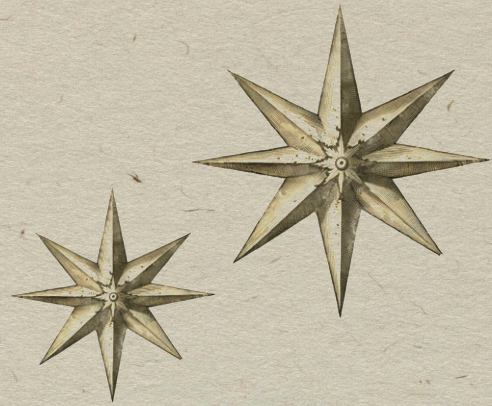
Yashika Vahi

It is raining like a painting by the sky,
The cars move on by,
But there is some anger in these drops,
Something left unsaid,
Something misunderstood,
They fall and they fall
Without mercy,
And they hurt themselves
To make us realise the hurting
of our inner realms,
Where does this road end?
It is raining till afar,
How much of the sky can be known?
In my head, this rain is a chant of all the things I am beginning to know,
Listen, listen to what brings you home,
But run away, run away when it gets too warm,
For these unmercifully vast creatures of the earth have too many important things to say

Our Dorothea, God's Gift

KAYLA RUSSELL

Black brethren protect
Our black Dorothea, God's gift
The pastor's sermon began
I say, due preach to the people
Become their reflector as you do so
When the holy doors close I look up to the sky and see
Sunday morning's sunshine
When the sun dies so will we
When the sun bursts so will we
Black brethren, your lies about us
Are the few trinkets we keep
Mocking us, it is the ornaments for our shiny anklets,
Our thorny chains to dance in
When the sun dies what will it become?
A planet-eating monster
A star enraged, this is the black women
Unforgiving with her art, not malleable in love
A solar system dark



Soul brothers
Mr. Know it all
Who's scared and noble
Black brethren protect
Our black Dorothea, God's gift
You are meant to be warriors, guiding us
Our blockade and shield, yet you leave
Little room for us on your voyage to
Love and success
The suffocation this dissension has caused,
Yawning at the reality of the black women
Sending chills down my grandmother's spine
When she cries out, the veins from her forehead arrive
Sending chills down my spine, a generational outpour
When the sun dies what will it become?
A planet-eating monster
A star enraged, this is the black women

Black women do not lose hope
Hold on to what is true
You are a star, a massive illumination
A celestial body, self-sustaining with
All these internal energies
I say, If you must,

Black sisters protect
Our black Dorothea, God's gift
The pastor's sermon is over and done with
When the holy doors close
I look up to the sky and see
Sunday morning's sunshine
When the sun dies so will we



Sun Flower Boy

SALEHA RANJHA

A woman of the earth, some 5000 years ago, held a clump of soil in her tired and aging hands. She sifted through it, looking for the seed at its centre. Hugged by the soil, the seedling was ready to take part in the world. She blew upon it, a good luck charm for her sun flower. He budded and sprouted and bloomed into a young seedling, and then, into a flower of radiating hope. Sun flowers are like planets; revolving around their stars. That is what he does now, millennia later. He turns his ray florets, loyally and adoringly, towards the stars of his life, when he feels their light on his skin.

It is heliotropism- the centers of his world give him light to photosynthesize, and in return, he gives them unwavering companionship.

He is a sun flower: a Labrador Retriever, an anchor. He is churning water tides along a coast, your harbour every morning and night.

He is a provider, giving his company and seeds for crushing into bread and cake. Five millennia ago, the first woman wore sun flower's oil in her hair and told the family tree his stories. His essence is with us now, in our hair and dishes, on our skin.





He is a doctor, offering us relief from our maladies.

He is a muse. A Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers (1888). Arles, France. An emblem of June and July. Of August.

Helios looks down at sun flower sometimes, and rejoices in memories of Clytie. Water nymph transfigured into sun flower, Clytie still tracks her gaze across Helios' golden chariot whizzing across the sky. Sun flowers are in love with stars twinkling in the sky's expanse. The stars call out to sun flower from beyond the earth's bounds, and he revels in their light.

Some 5000 years after the soil hugged sun flower, coaxing him into blooming, Helios returns. He wears tired and aging hands- an offshoot of gardening all day. His green fingers reach out to touch the florets of the Sun, harbouring their chemicals with compassion.

Helios is humming. Sun flower is humming with him too.



The Impact of the Conflict in Kashmir on Women and Their Role in Peacebuilding

AYMA BUKHARI

The conflict in Kashmir, a region claimed by both India and Pakistan, one of the most militarized regions in the world, has persisted for decades, leading to immense suffering and disruption for people living in the area. Throughout this conflict, Kashmiri women have suffered a significant burden, facing psychological trauma, social disintegration, and gender-based violence. Despite these challenges, they have emerged as inspiring figures in grassroots peace initiatives, conflict resolution, and educational advancement. This essay discusses the impact of the conflict on Kashmiri women and spotlights their roles in creating peace and rebuilding communities.

The continuous state of conflict in Kashmir has affected the mental well-being of its women. The ongoing violence, loss of loved ones, and constant fear of insecurity have taken a heavy toll on their psychological health. Many women in Kashmir have experienced the tragic loss of family members due to the conflict, whether through death or disappearance, leading to grief and trauma. Additionally, the sense of displacement, where families are uprooted from their homes and communities, further brings on feelings of anxiety and distress. This prolonged state of conflict has resulted in a widespread prevalence of mental health issues among Kashmiri women, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The constant threat of violence and uncertainty about the future create a sense of fear and hopelessness, contributing to the decline in their mental well-being. Studies have shown that the prevalence of mental health disorders among Kashmiri women is significantly higher compared to the general population, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support and intervention programs (Kazi, 2020).

Moreover, the lack of security and stability disrupts the daily lives of Kashmiri women, affecting their social roles and responsibilities within their families and communities. Women, often left as sole caretakers due to the disappearance or death of

male family members, face the struggles of both providing for their families while coping with their own trauma. This has led to many women-headed households, which, while showcasing their resilience, also highlights the socio-economic challenges they face in a conflict-ridden environment (Khan & Jabeen, 2019).

In addition to the psychological toll, gender-based violence remains a disturbing issue in Kashmir. Reports of sexual violence by armed forces and militants have been well-documented, intensifying the already precarious situation of Kashmiri women. These acts of violence have long-term impacts on both the physical and psychological health of the victims, often leading to chronic pain, disability, and psychological trauma. The culture of perpetrators being exempted from punishments surrounding these acts further complexes the situation. Many victims refrain from reporting incidents due to fear of punishment or societal shame, which perpetuates a cycle of silence and victimization. Addressing gender based violence in Kashmir requires high level legal reforms and support systems to ensure justice and rehabilitation for the survivors.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Kashmiri women have demonstrated remarkable resilience, transforming from victims to survivors and advocates for peace. Their involvement in grassroots initiatives is a testament to their strength and determination to rebuild their communities. Organizations and community groups led by women have been important in advocating for human rights and justice for the victims of the conflict. One prominent example of a woman making a change in Kashmir is Parveena Ahangar, founder of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). Ahangar's activism began after her son, Javaid Ahmad Ahangar, was taken into custody by security forces in 1990 and never returned (Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons [APDP], n.d.). Since then, she has been tirelessly advocating for the rights of the disappeared and their families.

Through APDP, Ahangar has provided a platform for families to share their stories, document cases of enforced disappearances, and demand accountability from the authorities. Under Ahangar's leadership, APDP has organized protests, hunger strikes, and awareness campaigns to bring attention to the issue of enforced disappearances in Kashmir. Despite facing intimidation and harassment, Ahangar has remained dedicated in her pursuit of justice, earning her the nickname "Iron Lady of Kashmir." Ahangar's advocacy has led to international recognition of the human rights

violations in Kashmir and has put pressure on the government to address the issue. Her efforts have provided a voice to the voiceless and have empowered other women to speak out against injustice.

Through her resilience and determination, Ahangar has inspired a new generation of activists and brought hope to countless families still searching for their loved ones. Women's approaches to conflict resolution often differ from those of men, focusing more on dialogue, community engagement, and non-violence. These approaches highlight the importance of social cohesion and reconciliation, which are both needed for sustainable peace. Including women in peace negotiations and decision-making processes can lead to more comprehensive and lasting solutions to the conflict (Kazi, 2020).

Education is a powerful tool for peacebuilding, and Kashmiri women are at the forefront of educational initiatives. Schools and community centers run by women provide not only academic education but also psychosocial support and vocational training. These initiatives empower women and young girls, giving them the skills and confidence to contribute to their communities' development. One notable initiative is the work of the Haji Public School, founded by Sabbah Haji, which provides quality education to children in a remote village in the Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir. The school focuses on holistic development and encourages critical thinking and community involvement, helping to create a new generation of peace advocates (Haji, 2020).

In conclusion, the conflict in Kashmir has profoundly impacted women, affecting their psychological and social well-being, exposing them to gender-based violence, and challenging their roles within their communities. Despite these challenges, Kashmiri women have emerged as strong leaders in grassroots peace initiatives, conflict resolution, and educational advancement. Their resilience and determination to bring peace and rebuild their communities underscore the importance of including women in all aspects of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Empowering Kashmiri women and supporting their initiatives can pave the way for a more peaceful and just future for the region.

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Thank You

TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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Diya Renjan
Kayla Julia Russell
Yuvika Singh
Yashika Vahi
Radha Vyas

Three 3D silver stars are positioned around the title. One is on the left, and two are on the right, one above the other.

The End

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