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THE LITERATURE TODAY

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 3

Celebrating Stories That Matter
Highlighting the authors and
ideas shaping the future of
literature.

Cover Feature: Manoj Kumar
Sharma — A compelling
storyteller blending conscience
and creativity

Meet trailblazing authors,
explore thought-provoking
reads, and uncover powerful
interviews

Exclusive Interviews: Featuring
Zafar Masud, Visionary Insights of
Devangana Mishra & Many
Celebrated Authors

In-depth book reviews of
celebrated and emerging authors

A soulful collection of poems
from Local Emotions



ISSN 2583-2263

An award-winning author, pens
powerful fiction rooted in social reality.
From thrillers to women-centric
narratives, his works are a reflection of
courage, conscience, and
transformation.

MANOJ KUMAR
SHARMA

FROM THE *Editor-in-chief*

As the monsoon season graces us with its rhythmic charm, there's no better time to curl up with a good read and let the written word nourish the soul. When we began our journey with The Literature Today, we couldn't have imagined the remarkable heights this creative venture would reach. Each edition has been a stepping stone—shaping our vision and expanding our reach. Today, we proudly stand as a dynamic platform that connects the timeless beauty of literature with the evolving power of modern technology.

Volume 5, Issue 3 arrives like a refreshing monsoon breeze, bringing with it a rich blend of content crafted to engage, enlighten, and inspire. From insightful book reviews to in-depth author interviews, this edition explores themes that resonate with the changing moods and reflections this season often stirs in our readers. We are delighted to present exclusive interviews with prominent voices, including Zafar Masud, visionary Insights of Devangana Mishra & many celebrated authors, offering fresh perspectives on contemporary issues and creative journeys.

At The Literature Today, our dedication remains unchanged—to deliver content that not only informs but also inspires thoughtful discourse. Each issue is thoughtfully put together with care, passion, and a deep respect for our diverse readership. This monsoon, we invite you to be part of a literary community where stories bloom, ideas flow, and readers and authors connect meaningfully. Your feedback continues to guide and motivate us—feel free to share your thoughts at theliteraturetoday@gmail.com. Thank you for being a cherished part of our journey. Let's continue to celebrate the magic of literature, one rainy day at a time.

Happy Reading!



Dr. Mayurkumar Mukundbhai Solanki

Editor, *The Literature Today*, India

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Best Regards,

M. M. Solanki

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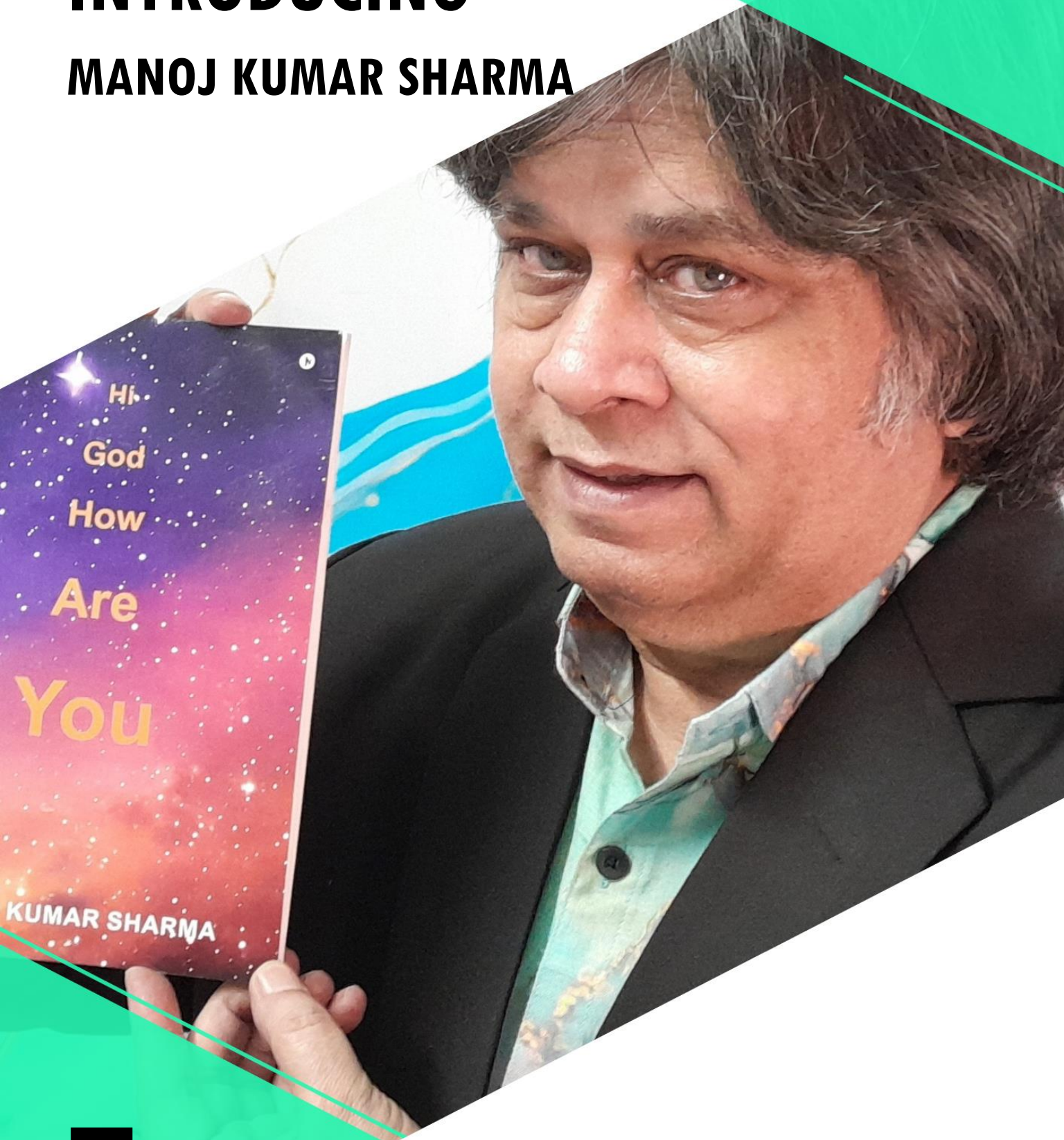
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INTRODUCING MANOJ KUMAR SHARMA



Manoj Kumar Sharma has spent 31 long years working in MNCs. He belongs to Thane, Maharashtra and over the course of years he experienced the various shades of life as his journey of life has been somewhat like snakes & ladder. Well, his journey from a corporate person to an author is indeed inspiring and is something that makes him a true achiever. It is interesting to note that Author Manoj has a natural taste for fiction writings and he has always looked for out-of-the-box solutions for the perennial social problems.

Today, Manoj Kumar Sharma is a Best-Selling Author with multiple blockbuster titles under his name. He is a self-styled author, whose stories attract much, which fearlessly break the unwanted laws & customs in order to give rise to a new set of more approachable laws & customs. Well, his writings are based upon this very philosophy only, which the readers can witness in all of his books — from his debut title, ‘MIRRRO: At The Weird Wayward’ to ‘Me No Pause, Me Play’ and now his latest release, ‘Hi God, How Are You’. Through these titles, one can easily experience the depth & variety in the author’s writing!

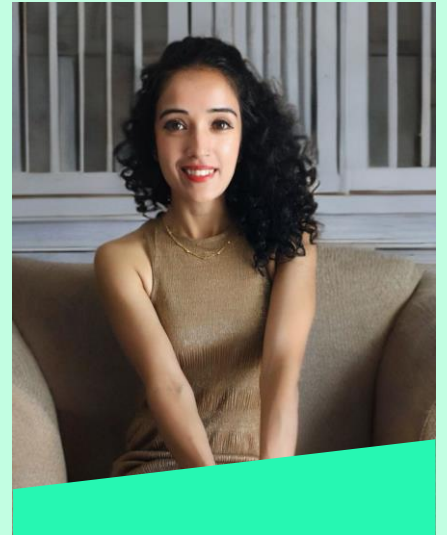
Another noteworthy fact about Author Manoj Kumar Sharma is that he has been acknowledged with several prestigious awards from renowned Literary Houses over the years. Some of his prominent recognition includes – Best Debut Author Award from ICMDR, Best Debut Novel Award among Top 100 Debut Novels from CRITICSPACE, Best Fiction (Thriller) Award from The Indian Awaz Foundation, Best Thriller Book of the Year by Literary Mirror, Best Fiction Book of the Year by AIY AGHAAZ, Best Writer Award by Yashassvi Awards. As an overview, the author believes that ‘Writing is a Soulful Act’ blessed by Maa Sarasvati & inspired by Muse, not by the author.



AUTHOR SPOTLIGHTS



An Exclusive Interview with Devangana Mishra



Devangana Mishra is a writer & the author of a book of poetry, *Desierto Florido*, and a verse novel, *26, Kamala Nehru Ridge*, Civil Lines, Delhi. Her next book of prose and poetry, set in Mumbai, *'May I Bombay You?'*, should be out by fall 2025. Devangana also runs a foundation for autism out of low-income schools of Mumbai, called Brain Bristle. She was awarded the Elise Todden Scholarship for academic excellence at Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York, and was a Fellow at the Outcomes and Opportunities Department & helped run the Teachers College Reading and Writing program for the University. Ever since then, she has led teams and written mindfulness curricula and alternative curricula for autism, inclusion & team manifestos for some of the biggest schools and organizations. For example, the School at Columbia, New York; The Jakarta Intercultural School, Indonesia; the Harbour School, Hong Kong; and then, with her move to India, Teach for India. Devangana was a representative at the World Economic Forum, 2020, and she now spends her day running her foundation for autism, Brain Bristle, and writes prose, poetry, and art for causes that affect her in her everyday life.

About **Brain Bristle**:

Brain Bristle as a Foundation works on empowering students on the spectrum of autism admitted in Mumbai's low-income schools to their maximal ability through building inclusivity in education via trained social workers and then in after-school work. Brain Bristle's work.

Questionnaire:

TLT: Devangana, your journey is beautifully interwoven across multiple disciplines like poetry, prose, visual arts, and meaningful social work through Brain Bristle. Could you take us through how these diverse streams complement each other in your life and whether they converge naturally, or do you compartmentalize them as separate creative and professional spaces?

Devangana: I love that question; most of it does converge naturally. art, talent, the human imagination is eternal, there's no end to it, so once I'm done putting most of myself into my nonprofit across all parameters of progress, I then take it from that end and begin building on my work across the arts.

TLT: Your debut poetry collection, Desierto Florido, was written during the isolating and uncertain days of the pandemic. That period was an emotional turning point for many around the world. How did the solitude and global crisis shape your creative voice, your choice of themes, and the emotional depth you were able to access during that time?

Devangana: I think the solitude was eerie; it made me want to find ways to emerge, and in figuring those out, I found myself. What's important to note is when any artist/ writer/ think begins they don't know what to do as first steps, our artistic intelligence is usually frozen like a block of ice, chipped and used where necessary- so Desierto Florido was the demolishing of that block of ice across all forms of creativity and the arts, from sweet chipping at corners to collapse, and then once that was messy and out, it came time to collect it all and build. So, while I'd always been an artist, writer in the fields of autism, it was always chipping at it- but after COVID, I went full-fledged and emerged with my independent practice in the arts across domains and building my non-profit from scratch, Brain Bristle.

TLT: In 26, Kamala Nehru Ridge, Civil Lines, Delhi, you bring to life pre-independence India through the intimate, personal story of Zara, a young Muslim girl. What compelled you to explore this particular slice of history through such a personal lens? Was it a conscious decision to focus on the human cost of political shifts rather than the larger historical events themselves?

Devangana: The idea of 26, Kamala Nehru Ridge, Civil Lines, Delhi, came to me when talk of school history books in India deleting important parts of our Mughal history, histories of communal riots, Gujarat riots, mentions of Dalit writers being removed, and talks of Hindu nationalism were growing loud in intellectual circles...So, I decided to put into verses, art, and poetry the story of a Muslim girl, born in Kamala Nagar, Delhi, journeying through the decade of the 1930s-40s India, when news and work of the India-Pakistan division and Muslim erasure took hold. People relate more to people, to voices, to daily lives, and to chit-chat. It was a conscious decision to bring to observation the decade of the divide through the eyes of a young Muslim girl to build her more empathy and give her more thought. It's what books do: they build empathy and belonging with one another. Also, I do know that if we are granted the privilege to create, to write, to imagine, to advance, we must do our best to support voice. To remain an active participant in the important voice is the job of artists, scientists, historians, teachers, poets, writers, and you & I. And, to do it in the best way we understand, to use it well and soundly, becomes an important task.

TLT: Writing a verse novel is a bold and unconventional narrative choice. How did you navigate the delicate balance between poetic lyricism and storytelling structure while crafting 26, Kamala Nehru Ridge, Civil Lines, Delhi? Were there moments when you felt the story demanded to break out of verse, or did the form remain an essential vehicle throughout?



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Devangana: As an artist, I always do what pleases me visually, artistically, emotionally, intellectually, and creatively. I thoroughly enjoyed the use of verse to craft this verse novel. You know that saying creativity comes from constraints, I was so energized in the reading and writing because I knew I had to think of how to frame it poetically, in verses, keeping the history intact, but using the poetry and purity of verses, art, and poetry to do the telling. And I think your audience enjoys what you do well from your heart- this was my heart's work put to paper in the most honest, artistically giving way I could.

TLT: Your forthcoming work, *May I Bombay?* promises to capture the electric pulse of Mumbai between 1980 and 1993—a city in flux, a city that hisses, a city that burns, as you describe it. What inspired you to tell this story, and how did you immerse yourself in the political, cultural, and emotional landscape of that era to breathe life into your protagonist, Savitri Dhavale?

Devangana: I'm only six years old in Mumbai now, the best way to know a city is to write it, just like the best way to know a man is to love him :) I imagined there must be so many girls like Savitri Dhavale making their way through town, giving up hope, imagining their skies too low their figures too bleak, their feet too slow, their gullies too dirty and their mothers too low- it's a book of again prose, poetry and art to give belonging to the millions of Savitri Dhavale's I find myself as, surrounded by- it's the story of an average small suburban Bombay girl through the social, political and economic turmoil's that all decades bring and face. Breathing life into the ordinary is always fun and creatively expansive and rewarding- that's it, this work has been joyful, the watching, reading, listening, studying, and creating for it as well. I hope the audience finds it as well.

TLT: You have spent years working closely with children on the autism spectrum through your foundation, Brain Bristle. How has this work, particularly in low-income schools, deepened your understanding of empathy, inclusion, and human potential, and how have these insights found their way, consciously or unconsciously, into your literary creations?

Devangana: Just the roundedness and presence it brings/ you can't be anything but yourself when you're working with a student on the autism spectrum, anywhere, in low-income schools or large schools or wherever else- you become you, because these children bring you to the ground, 'Come help me!' 'Come teach me!' And you're yourself again- I owe all my life's art, writing, truth, and false to them.

TLT: You've designed alternative curricula and mindfulness programs for schools around the world, focusing on inclusion and social-emotional learning. Do you see a parallel between storytelling and education, particularly in their power to build bridges, shift mindsets, and offer safe spaces for voices that often go unheard?

Devangana: Absolutely, one is another- we learn because some of our best teachers teach us through stories, history and geography, and Marathas and Mughals and Roman history and mathematics, it's all a story, we learn because we want to get to somewhere, something, open our minds to something new, something that we haven't known before, something that will weave new threads in our brain connecting us to something else. We don't want students to go to school because they have to; we want to see them learn because it's fun, it's rewarding, it promises returns, it promises healing and rising and hard work, yes, but towards new mornings and brighter days. Storytelling is education's theme song; one wouldn't be so good without the other.

TLT: Looking ahead, what excites you most about the future, whether in your writing, your art, or your work with Brain Bristle? Are there new forms, new geographies, or new themes you're eager to explore? Would you consider diving deeper into global conversations again, or is your heart now firmly anchored in your own city and your own stories?

Devangana: I'm always open to everything, so my next book, *May I Bombay*, lots of work with fun brands, and growing Brain Bristle in impact and size are all on my current plate. I'd be more than happy to jump into any conversations that excite me and feel valuable to me and the audience.

Thank you so much for doing this with me, really grateful!

An Exclusive Interview with Zafar Masud



Mr. Zafar Masud is a renowned development-focused banker, entrepreneur, public sector expert, and author with over 30 years of experience in development finance, energy, governance, and management. He has held senior roles at top global banks, including American Express, Citigroup, Dubai Islamic, and Barclays (as Regional Managing Director in Southern Africa). In 2013, he was appointed to the Board of Directors at the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and served on its Monetary Policy Committee until 2016. As Director General of National Savings (2016–18), he led the organization's digital transformation and introduced welfare-focused financial products with international support.

From 2018–2020, Mr. Masud was the Founding CEO (Interim) of InfraZamin Pakistan, a pioneering credit enhancement firm for social infrastructure, backed by the UK's PIDG. He has served on the boards of several major public and private organizations, including Port Qasim Authority, K-Electric, and the Oil & Gas Development Company Limited (as Chairman). Since April 2020, he has been the President & CEO of The Bank of Punjab, steering it past a PKR 2 trillion balance sheet while promoting inclusive, sustainable banking. He also leads Pakistan's largest wholesale interest-free loan program with IMF and World Bank support.

He currently chairs the Pakistan Banks Association and holds key advisory roles with institutions like IBA Karachi, BNU, and SBP's National Institute of Banking & Finance. He also serves on the PM's Economic Revival Committee and is active in mental health awareness initiatives.

Mr. Masud holds an MBA from IBA Karachi and is an alumnus of INSEAD, France, in Corporate Governance. He was awarded Hungary's highest civil honor in 2021 for promoting cultural ties. A survivor of the PK8303 plane crash, he recently published *Seat 1C: A Survivor's Tale of Hope, Resilience and Renewal*, sharing his story of survival and growth.

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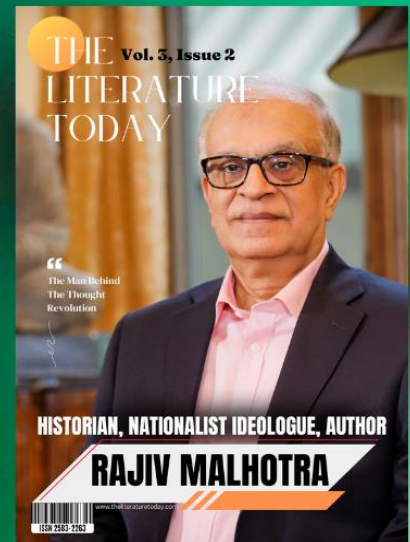
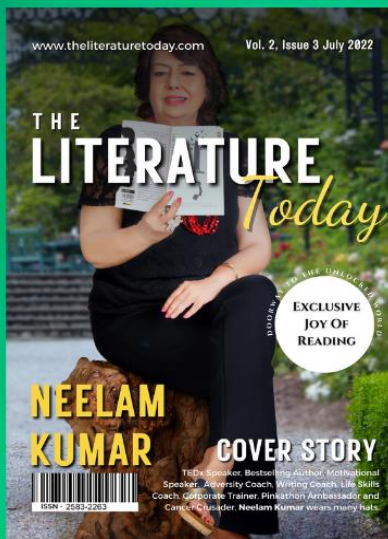
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