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**The Aleph that Unveils the Reality of Our Times:
A Curation of Thought Provoking Narratives
from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia**

*Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance
from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia*
edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle,
Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2019

Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle is a carefully selected, exquisite bouquet of stories that are cathartic, masterfully told and very relevant to our times. This collection makes a genuine attempt to demystify violence that has become an undeniable part of our “everydayness” that more often than not goes unheard or unsaid.

Violence that was perceived an “event” *extraordinaire* not long ago has now become the “new normal.” The world is witnessing a steady rise in the narratives of hate, distrust, othering that enable repetitive performance of violence and oppression. Social scientists across disciplines have argued that these actions and reactions are the resultant effects of the sharp rise in inequalities and alienation. Despite staggering material progress in the age of the capital and globalization, humans are angry, distressed, dissatisfied and vengeful like never before. Immediate and structural solutions to these problems are, unfortunately, absent or

not in sight while committed acts of resistance and protests are questioning the issues that haunt our present by employing both old and new means. This volume is one such act that skillfully creates space for both dialogue as well as dissent. The thought provoking stories of *Glass Walls* (a title that reminds of the unsustainable architecture of Zamyatin's dystopic *We*) make an attempt to resist and contest this normalization that has stealthily crept into our everyday life. After all, storytelling is the oldest technique known to humans that has the power to entertain and educate at the same time.

Occurrences from day to day life are employed by the contributing writers to map the ordinary for reflection and consideration of the reader, who, in the rut of the mundane, could be unapologetically unaccommodating, unhesitatingly accepting or experiencing and participating in the everyday without doubt or questioning. By breaking stereotypes and watchfully treading the 'public' as well as 'private' spaces of various characters set in different contexts and parts of the world, these stories unmask hypocrisies and prejudices, and lay bare realities from which we often shy away or tactfully ignore. They also help us realize how small acts of kindness, empathy and love can change our world for the better.

Divided into six sections namely: 'Race', 'Religion', 'Gender and Sexuality', 'Neighbours', 'Family' and 'Over the Brink' this rich and expressive collection touches all aspects of life's dealings. They skillfully unravel how discourses of tolerance and intolerance influence our actions and play a crucial role in shaping our subjectivities by bringing together a polyphony of voices. The collection opens with late Urdu writer, Joginder Paul's story 'Multiracial' translated by Meenakshi Bharat. A short, funny, yet a powerful narrative set in Kenya, this story points out the divisive follies and deeply ingrained prejudices of race and colour. The narrative helps the reader to realize why most ideologies fail when translated into reality. This carefully selected introductory piece sets the tone of the collection that tries to accentuate the gaps that exist between the ideal and the real, perception and reality, the self and the other. The thought provoking, humorous and engagingly penned confession to a little boy by Indigenous Australian author Bruce Pascoe in 'Letter to Marlo' exposes the structural violence of racism. 'The Last Game Drive' by Janhavi Acharekar, set in the Masai Mara, Nairobi breaks the narrow confines of the tourist gaze and de-exoticizes the experience of the Bush Camp. 'She's black' by Trilok Chand

Ghai set in Delhi helps the reader to grasp the difference between a world traveller and a cosmopolitan citizen of the world.

All the three stories of the second section, 'Religion', set in different parts of India offer glimpses of religious intolerance from a land that has had a strong tradition of interculturalism and tolerance. 'Bars' by Keki N. Daruwalla familiarizes the reader with the tale of Father Baptista, a Catholic marred by bizarre accusations and put behind bars in a politically tense climate. Nandini C. Sen's protagonist Gayatri in 'The Religion of Love', on her quest to save her lover, realizes that she is fighting for democracy and freedom of speech. Anu Kumar's 'Preparing for the Riots' charts the hurried and sudden transition of Manik's life from games and kite flying into adulthood in a climate of distrust.

'Gender and Sexuality' opens with David Malouf's 'Closer' that deals with homosexuality and ostracization, followed by Libby Sommer's protagonist's unexpected encounter with a transgendered person on a date in 'Henry'. Mackay-Koelen's epistolary 'Absence' gives voice to the unacknowledged toils of women at the home-front while the men guard the borders.

'Neighbours', 'Family' and 'Over the Brink' offer poignant glimpses of quotidian lives, agreements, differences and hypocrisies. These sections open up some important discussions across cultures on disability, age, depression, trauma, our attitudes towards the elderly and people with special needs. Like Malouf's 'Closer', Meenakshi Bharat's 'The Wedding Gift' and Sharon Rundle's 'A Parcel of Dreams' warn us about the dangers of rigidity and conservatism in families, while 'Wednesdays and Fridays' by Elizabeth Jolley, in a light-hearted manner reacquaints us with the beauty of forgiveness and reconciliations. Sujata Sankranti's 'Thamarapu's Temple' and Julie Simpson's 'Born to Ride' expose our contemptuous attitudes towards those who need care. Stories not discussed in detail are surprise treats waiting to be explored by the readers. They present some absorbing sketches and comparisons of microcommunities from India and Australia.

This collection presents a richly woven critical tapestry of two postcolonial societies that are grappling with majoritarianisms, plagued by alethophobia and awaiting cure. By stringing together narratives from two nations with different histories and pasts this volume offers a unique platform for comparisons of our present condition and to build solidarities. As intended these stories provoke,

compel the reader to think and question the dealings of everyday life. It is a must read for all interested in exploring powerful themes and good writing.