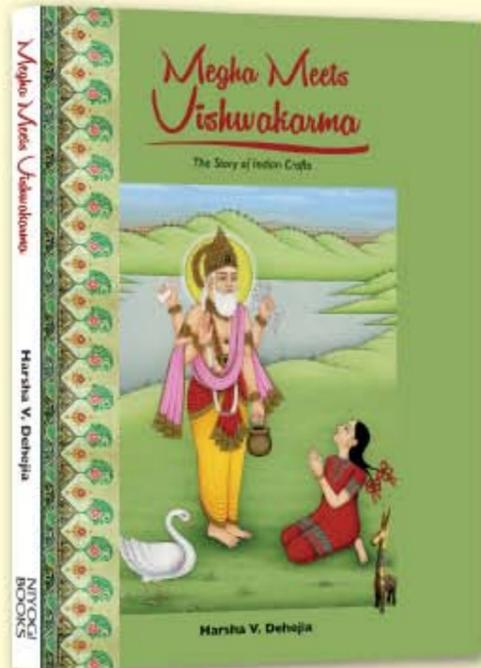


The crafts that belong to a living cultural tradition



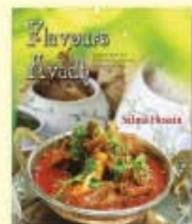
Megha is a young girl who goes to Dilli Haat with her mother on a languid May morning. While enjoying the various crafts there, she meets a sadhu who introduces himself as Vishwakarma, the divine architect and God of the craftspeople. He takes Megha on a pan-India tour in his magic chariot to meet the craftspeople of the various states and regions, Megha interacts with these people, mingles with their families and learns about the various crafts, their history and method of making. She is fascinated by the colours and the shapes, the textures and the techniques of the various craft objects. Megha realises the importance of human creativity. She is captivated by the beauty of these crafts and the important part that they play in our lives. Vishwakarma tells her that these crafts belong to a living cultural tradition that goes beyond region and religion, caste and creed. The book was awarded the first prize in General Books Category (English) by the Federation of Indian Publishers this year.

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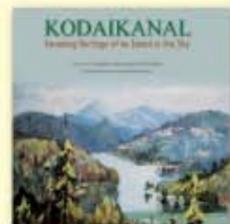
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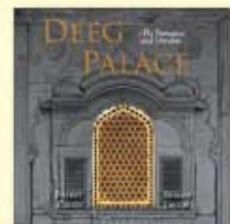
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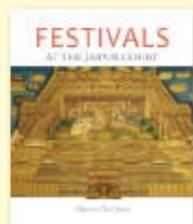
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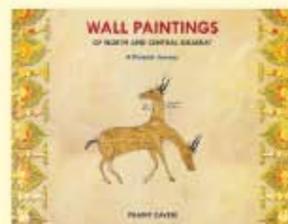
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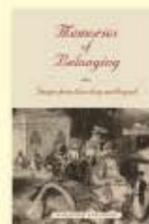
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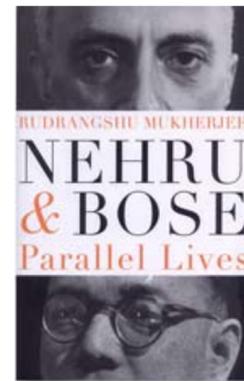


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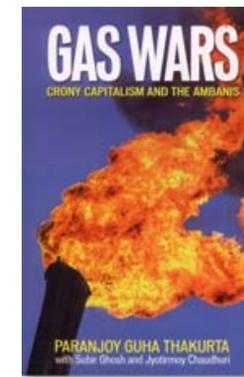
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IN THE chronicling of India's freedom struggle, scholarship has often been sacrificed at the altar of ideology. Stalwarts of the struggle have been idolised, demonised or co-opted to promote this or the other ideological stream of thought and, in the bargain, to further the ambitions of this or the other political party. The relationship between two such stalwarts – Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose – exemplified this divide though no one has evoked its ambivalences with the scholar's detachment, sensitivity and unflinching lucidity than Rudrangshu Mukherjee in his book *Nehru & Bose: Two Parallel Lives* (Penguin/Viking). To the author goes the singular credit of reflecting anew the pulls and pressures to define our identity as citizens of the republic.

—DILEEP PADGAONKAR
Founder Editor of *Biblio*



MY CHOICE for the most significant book of 2014 is *Gas Wars: Crony Capitalism and the Ambanis* which Paranjay Guha Thakurta self-published in April. For his pains, he was slapped with a Rs 100 crore notice by Ambani, to which his lawyers have responded. Fortunately it has not prevented the book from seeing the light of day. The book uncovers how Reliance Industries has not extracted natural gas from its Krishna-Godavari basin field in the expectation of getting a higher price for it. The UPA government offered to double the price, but the code of conduct for the national elections kicked in. The Modi government has fixed it at \$5.61 a unit, as against the \$8.4 a unit proposed by the UPA.

The book documents in grim detail the machinations of India's topmost industrialists and their complicit political and bureaucratic allies. Mani Shankar Aiyar was unceremoniously

Reviewers' Choice

A selection of the most memorable books of 2014 and the most anticipated titles of 2015 by some of *Biblio's* reviewers

removed as Petroleum Minister when he refused to play ball and was replaced by a pliant Murli Deora. The subsequent incumbent, Veerappa Moily, however, emerges the worst in this sordid saga.

Almost as dismaying as the book's findings is the reluctance of the media to review it. When the author launched it in Delhi and Mumbai, among other cities, the events witnessed packed halls. The next day, not a line appeared about it.

Nevertheless, he has sold 10,000 hard copies and there have been 1,200 downloads.

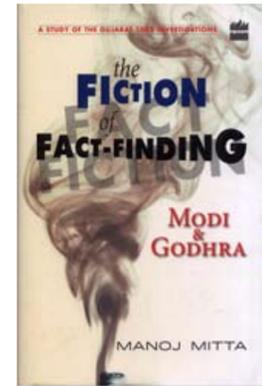
—DARRYL D'MONTE
Chairperson, Forum of Environmental Journalists of India

THOUGH IT IS difficult, partly because I prefer to read older works with time, my choice for the best book of 2014 would be the Brazilian author Michael Laub's *Diary of the Fall* (Harvill Secker, London), translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa. Hinging around a moment of schoolboy cruelty by privileged Jewish boys who gang up on a poor, non-Jewish, scholarship student, the novel moves back to stories of the Jewish narrator's grandfather, a survivor of Auschwitz, who spends his last years filling notebooks with banal descriptions of what he has experienced in Brazil – milk, hospital, etc. – before ending his life in a manner whose implications his son, the narrator's father, cannot face. A precise and sensitive novel about memory, cruelty and humanity.

—TABISH KHAIKHAIR
Writer, poet and *Biblio* Editorial Board member

SOMETIMES, even between two interesting people interested in each other, the conversation runs out, and something goes a bit flat. That's when you must sit the person down, almost in a ritual way, switch off both phones, and read out to him or her, at one go, Anne Carson's *The Albertine Workout* (New Directions, 2014). The spark will be lit again. The publishers call it poetry, but like everything else Carson – classicist, poet, translator, novelist, essayist – has written, it is impossible to label. Fiction, criticism, biography, prose-poem or letter to Proust: it doesn't matter how you describe it. In 59 brief and numbered paragraphs (numbered, because it makes her "feel like Wittgenstein") and a few dense, short appendices, Carson reflects on, and enacts, "the fragility of the adventure of thinking". This wafer-thin, austere stylish book is the most true and delightful thing I have read, and read out, this year.

—AVEEK SEN
Senior Assistant Editor (editorial pages) at *The Telegraph*, Calcutta and *Biblio* Editorial Board member



AMONG THE most important books to be published this year was Manoj Mitta's *The Fiction of Fact-Finding: Modi & Godhra* (HarperCollins Publishers India). The election of the Bharatiya Janata Party government at the centre may make many feel that what happened in Godhra in 2002, and in its immediate aftermath, is no longer relevant. Supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi point out the report of the Special Investigations Team, appointed by the Supreme Court, which believed that sufficient evidence did not exist for the state to prosecute Modi – a view that many of those supporters deliberately mischaracterise as "a clean chit" from the Supreme Court, when it said no such thing. But Mitta's meticulously researched book, which sifts through enormous data to which SIT had access, as well as other information to demonstrate that the SIT did not do its job well. Regardless of one's view of where the buck should stop concerning those massacres, cool-headed, dispassionate investigation was necessary. SIT gave its view which did not serve the principle of justice or accountability; Mitta's valiant attempt will continue to remind India of that sore wound for a long time to come.

—SALIL TRIPATHI
Contributing Editor at *Mint* and *Caravan*

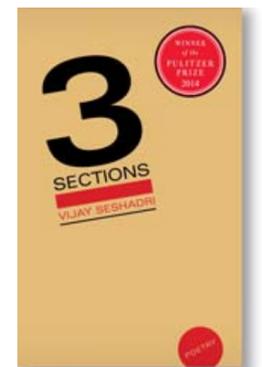
THE MOST outstanding book I read this year was actually a reprint of an old book, and this was my third reading of it, over 20 years. The work is called *Aab-e Gum*, by Mushtaq Ahmed Yusufi (Educational Book Trust, New Delhi), the best humorist I have read in any Hindustani language. It is a series of portraits of people, places and situations in the subcontinent, gently satirising everything that abounds in our cities and villages. Whether it is a Mushaira, a rural school teacher, Mehdi Hasan's elaborate *taan* making, veterinary laws, banking, education or progress, Yusufi unmasks through his humor a new way of seeing our world.

But the best thing about his writing is his language and his range of registers, from Pushto-inflected Urdu to highly Persianised, to Braj, to Hindi to rural speak, he is quite possibly the last word in Hindustani prose in our times. A few years ago when my father was in the ICU, I read portions of his work to gently heal him. And he did turn out to be quite prophylactic.

—MAHMOOD FAROOQUI
Author and actor

THE YEAR 2014 has been an *annus mirabilis* for poetry publishing in India. It has brought us sparkling new volumes and editions of collected poems by individual poets, substantial anthologies and beautiful translations. While many of these books deservedly claim our attention, the book that I would single out for acclaim is Vijay Seshadri's *3 Sections* (HarperCollins Publishers India), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry 2014. Seshadri, whose work I have known for many years, is a master of tonality and detail whose rhythmic cadences carry us into a space of linguistic improvisation crafted between everyday conversational speech and the thrum of music. *3 Sections* distils the variousness of experience into crystal-sharp lyric poems, haunting aphorisms and magnificent prose poems. Seshadri's poetic imagination is capacious: it straddles an intense, visceral engagement with the natural world and the sciences, and is deeply attentive to the mysteries of affect and temperament that render us most vulnerably and memorably human.

—RANJIT HOSKOTE
Poet, cultural theorist and curator



I PICKED up the book *3 Sections*, an anthology of poems, by Vijay Seshadri by chance, having come across a news item that a fellow with an Indian name had won the Pulitzer. Was I glad that I picked up what seemed to be a slim and modest volume! The content of the book is anything but modest. It is in the best traditions of American poetry going back to Whitman.

Being of that group who have been permanently wounded by Eliot, I for one could see a lot of common strands between the 'Four Quartets' and Seshadri's long poem 'Personal Essay'. Eliot was born in Missouri; Seshadri grew up in Ohio. I wonder if their Midwestern roots had anything to do with their visions: personal and universal, immediate and transcending time, physically touchable and yet trance-induced. A memorable and gripping read, in any event.

—JAITHIRTH RAO
Entrepreneur and published poet