

# Found in translation

50 poets writing in 20 languages have translated each other's works as part of Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai's big fat poetry project

## POETRY FESTIVAL

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"IT SOUNDS like a miracle but it did work," says Martin Walde, director, Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai, about the project, Poets Translating Poets, a project initiated in October 2014, with an aim to create a platform for poets from South Asia and Germany to translate each other's works.

The miracle, Walde explains, refers the process in which the poets translating a poem from a language often did not know the language. "We had an interpreter who knew both languages well and would do a literal translation. It is from this literal translation that the poet gave life to the poem in his



Celebrated poet and novelist Jeet Thayil is a participant

own language," he says.

Launched in collaboration with the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin / Haus für Poesie and in cooperation with Deutsche UNESCO, the project includes 51 poets including 17 German working with 20 languages and translating took part and translated contemporary poetry from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka into German. German poetry was translated into south Asian languages in return.

### Word's worth

"The poets showed great courage to take the plunge and engage with languages they did not know, with unfamiliar scripts and alien sounds. What often happens in trans-cultural dialogues and in cultural exchanges, namely an exchange of unprecedented monologues, is what did not happen in the encounters between poets in South Asia: they listened to each other intently, did not cling to their language, and allowed themselves to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue," Walde says.

He explains that the initiative was important to build bridges between culturally diverse communities. "We have only known poets of one or two languages of the sub-continent. A vast world of languages remain beyond us. It is through their languages and poetry



(From left) Poets Anja Utler and Yashodhara Ray Chaudhuri have collaborated on the project in Kolkata

that we want to bridge the cultural gap," he says. The poets and translators agree that the project will be an invaluable addition to the cultural space.

Yashodhara Ray Chaudhuri, a Kolkata-based poet who writes in Bengali, says that initiatives like this will finally diversify our reading from being Anglo-centric. German poet, Ulrike Almut Sandig, considers the experience of being paired with Hindi poets Savita Singh and Mangalesh Dabral and Kashmiri poets Naseem Shafale and Shafi Shauq, an enriching one.

Sukirtharani, who writes in Tamil, sums up the importance of translating poetry. She says, "Translating poems into a new language helps transfer the essence of the culture, the land, the people and their life from one part of the

world to another, thereby making them live forever." The translated works of Taslima Nasreen are her favourite, she says.

### Poetic journey

Starting in July 2015, nine poetry encounters in Mumbai, Dhaka, Delhi, Karachi, Colombo, Trivandrum/Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Gangtok, were organised, in which poets came together for a week to understand and translate each other's poetry. From this June, 15 poets from South Asia have travelled to over 13 cities and venues in Germany to meet and present their poetry along with their German counterparts.

The culmination of this project is the Poets Translating Poets festival scheduled for next months at several venues across Mumbai, including and surrounding Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai. The programme will include poetry readings, performances, discussions, film screenings, photo exhibitions and a sound installation.

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### Poets for change

The city will witness a series of poetry events this week with The 100 Thousand Poets For Change Mumbai poetry festival kicking off at Kitab Khana. A global movement, it aims to have an international discussion on issues such as war, global warming, poverty, racism, gender inequality and will enter its sixth year this year. The event will be curated by Menka Shivdasani and Damini Kane and include programmes presented by Poetry at Sangam, the American Consulate, AVITOKO Room Theatre and include a special session for children conducted by Rati Dady Wadia. Natural Streets for Performing Arts Foundation will also join in.

ON September 22-25, 5.30 pm  
AT Kitab Khana, MG Road, Fort.  
CALL 61702276