



# *Kaleidoscope*

*An Asian Journey of Colors*

*Sweta Srivastava Vikram*

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**from the World Voices Series**

**Modern History Press**

Kaleidoscope: An Asian Journey of Colors  
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For my nieces,  
Diya and Sana

“Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form,  
can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways.”

Oscar Wilde

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# Foreword

Sweta Srivastava Vikram's chapbook *Kaleidoscope: An Asian Journey of Colors* is so aptly named it makes one wish no one had ever named a club, magazine, or store after a kaleidoscope before. In her hands, the kaleidoscope is not a vague metaphor. One can almost hear the clicking of colored crystals as they fall into different arrangements, each poem dazzling, reshaped, and full of jagged ambiguities.

Consciousness of sound is one of Sweta's poetic strengths, along with her clear eye, and her emotional range. Quick slants of humor are typical of her work: the impishness of the little girl who says "my limbs feel all grown up. / My tonsils are ready to be evicted from their home" and the sauciness of a woman who is aging in body if not in spirit: "I am sixty, not dead; not beige, color me red." Sweta examines each stage in a South Asian woman's life with clarity and rich ambivalences, as revealed by the bride to be in "Wedding of an Emotional Virgin": "black kohl, a perfect disguise / for the cavities under my eyes---a permanent resident...to betray me."

I first met Sweta at a writer's residency. It may have seemed that we had little in common: She is suspicious of the country, I am suspicious of New York City; she grew up in India, I grew up in the American South. But that first night of our residency we stayed up late drinking wine (of course she drank white, I drank red) and talking about what we wanted out of poetry, and life. We talked about the places we had been and we found that although some of the features of our landscapes diverged, many of the emotional landmarks were the same.

Maybe, as a reader, you are holding this book in your hand. Maybe you've never been a bride, or an old woman, or a little girl; maybe you are not South Asian; maybe you are not a poet. The triumph of *Kaleidoscope: An Asian Journey of Colors* is that you, too, will find that you have surprising things in common with the poems—you will want to stay up late and listen to Sweta's voice.

Ellen Goldstein, MFA, has published poems in journals such as the *Mid-American Review*, *The Formalist*, *Subtropics*, and *you are here*, among others.

## Acknowledgement

I wish to thank all the people who have helped and supported me in conceptualizing and writing this book.

I'd like to express my gratitude to my classmates at Gotham Writers' Workshop for their feedback.

As always, I want to thank my husband, Anudit, for supporting me through my unfathomable schedule and unpredictable artistic moments. I want to acknowledge my family's encouragement and the enthusiasm of all my friends.

A special thanks to Gene Cioffi and Nidhi Sinha.

And finally, I thank Victor Volkman at Modern History Press for his dedication to publishing literature that goes beyond geographic boundaries and connects readers on a deeper level.

## Introduction

I have experienced people's obsession with color first-hand. I am not referring to skin color but to the shades in an Indian woman's wardrobe. On seeing my wedding pictures, my non-South Asian friends expressed their curiosity over the significance of "red." The reason I gave them was from a societal perspective, inscribed by history, but my explanation did not acknowledge the emotional state and thoughts represented by each color.

*Kaleidoscope: An Asian Journey of Colors* delves into the implication and philosophy of colors from a Hindu woman's point of view, from birth until death. The color she adorns herself with almost depicts the story of her life. (For instance, widowhood cries white and green conveys conception.) Expressed through different poetic and verbal forms, each color in the book has its own tone and is specific to different age groups. The book will introduce the world to colors from a unique voice via a literary journey.



## Epoch

Few suns ago, Latin, the goblet of romantic lexis created  
a recipe for *color* and poured it into verbal-moulds  
so the echo could traverse the human orifice, the Ganges

through the Himalayas, and pave its way to the house of sounds,  
meander via the valley of perception, and reach its final destination.

But did color come from the womb of conceit? Meaning conceal  
or cover, it has defined history, tasted culture, inscribed life,  
become the slogan for global fervor, stirred emotions, raised questions.

Was color orphaned at birth and left as a feast for the vultures  
of the world so they could abuse it, a whore at the corner store,  
and take home an essence of the flavor that suits the tip of their tongue??

## Genesis

Today I am born.

I see beating hearts  
dressed in hope.  
I hear excitement  
undress cacophony.

The doctor, nurses, and my family,  
with their hands entwined,  
share the same plea --  
that I am not biased like *Ares*.  
I come into this multi-colored world  
with a soul effusive like the Ganges  
and wisdom like *Athena* so I cherish  
the rainbow for what its meant to be.

# Kaleidoscope

## An Asian Journey of Colors

Sweta Srivastava Vikram is a multi-genre writer and marketing professional living in New York City. She is the author of *Because All Is Not Lost* from Modern History Press and the co-author of *Whispering Woes of Ganges & Zambezi* (Cyberwit 2010). Her work has appeared in six countries across three continents. Sweta has held recent artist residencies and workshops in Portugal, Ireland, and several within USA. She is a graduate of Columbia University.

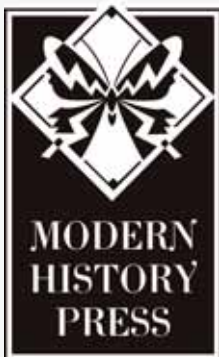


“In this innovative series, Sweta Srivastava Vikram re-appropriates color. Cultures and mythologies collide along the way, and the result is a chapbook that feels like a quest. In the end, the colors are a map to identity. The child's pink tonsils or the bride's red sari are not symbols, but rather mile markers. Like Vikram's poems, they lead toward understanding”

– Erica Wright, Senior Poetry Editor, *Guernica*

### About the Chapbook

The book delves into the implication and philosophy of colors from a Hindu woman's point of view, from birth until death. The color she adorns herself with almost depicts the story of her life. Expressed through different poetic and verbal forms, each color in the book has its own tone and is specific to different age groups.



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