

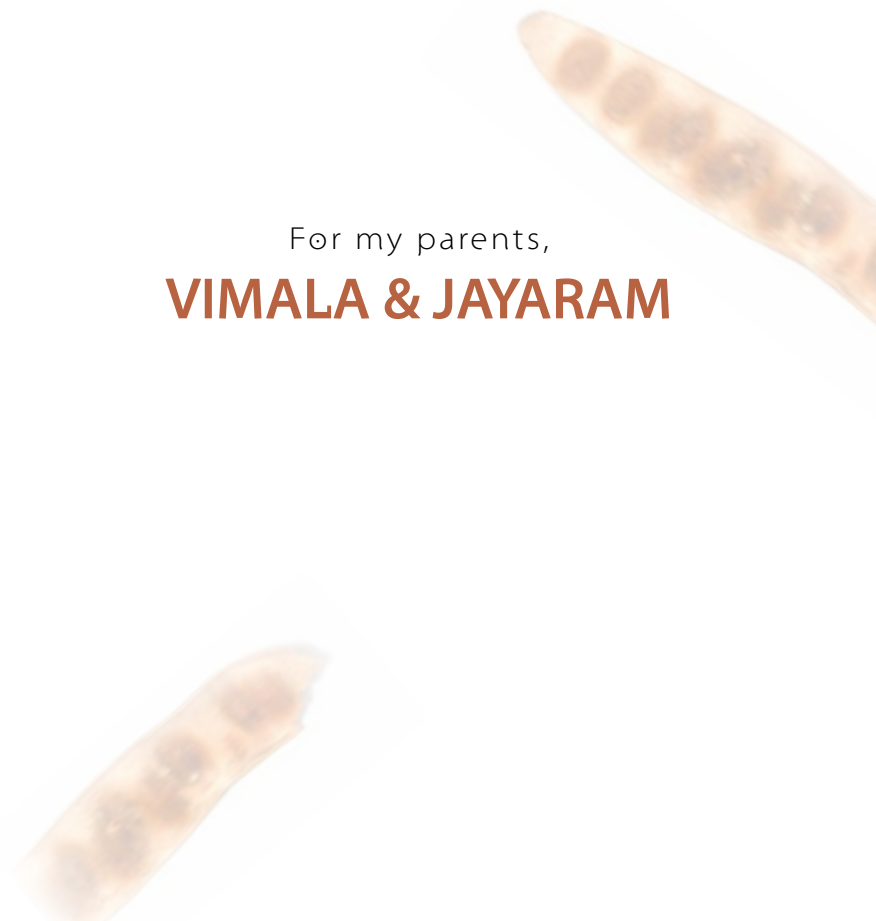
Peacock ginger

Whimsical stanzas
Chitra Gopalakrishnan

Peacock ginger



Whimsical stanzas
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For my parents,
VIMALA & JAYARAM

First impression 2009

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Design Gitumoni Talukdar

Special thanks Sunanda Vaid

The doll in this book is very special

Dolls -- of all sizes and shapes -- permeated my childhood and its memories. This is because it was my mother's hobby and she diligently created dolls of all kinds with love and fussy attention to detail. Some were tall, some stuffed and rotund and get others were as small as the one in the book. They were clothed in different costumes and each doll had a character and distinct identity. My father actively helped her create them and would ready with many insights - always.

In my spare childhood moments, I would gather all of them into a cluster and would weave stories around them. I would determine their fate and life path. Some would be good students. Others would strive

but not succeed. I let a few girls play truant from school. A few more I would set aside to pursue their wanderlust and travel far and wide in the world. And, for some I appointed quiet, private lives. Their lives varied, depending on how life appeared in my childhood lens. I saw my joys, my disappointments and the contradictions in life in them. They were my toys and my friends. They fuelled my imagination and my conscience.

My mother no longer makes these dolls. These are few that remain and I use them as a tribute to the effort it took to create them. They will live on in my consciousness and that of our entire family. I hope the doll serves to bring alive the little's girl voice in the book.





contents

To the contrary

Seen, unseen

Known, unknown

Peacock ginger

Saið, unsaið

Equal, unequal

Beginnings, ends

Skin, soul

Finite, infinite

To the contrary



Peacock ginger: peacock and ginger are an unlikely combination. Yet there is an unusual ginger plant that grows in tropical counties in early summer that has foliage like peacock feathers with shimmering patterns of silver green and maroon. It is aptly called Peacock Ginger. It has another lovely surprise – small, lavender coloured flowers.

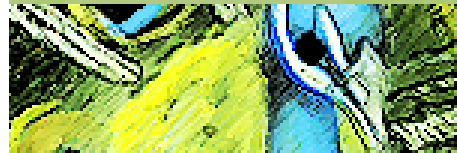
The peacock ginger plant is a manifestation of life's many multi-coloured and multi-flavoured surprises. Very often, what is least expected happens and what is expected does not. The hairpin turns appear without warning.

Also, sadness competes with happiness. Sunsets with sunrises. Boys with girls. Life with death.

How does one resolve sameness and contrariness?

Balancing in the whirlwind is not easy. We hope this little book helps a little in that effort.

Seen unseen



n

Nothing is as should be

Odd sights play hide-and-seek with a girl like me

Real and unreal are mixed up in all I see

All I want now is to be set free



c

Cats shower

Ice cubes glower

Ants tower

And, fruits burst into flower





i
I look straight, I look sideways
Fact and fantasy are mixed both ways,
I am cross-eyed, I am scared for days
I run to mother to find my way

b
Buffaloes fly, birds swim
Butterflies crowd the moon's rim
Bat's backs with bubbles brim
And, tomatoes are grey and grim



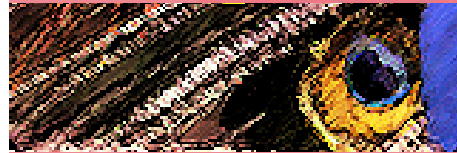


i
In my mind's eye, I see and learn to be me
Everything now is as it should be!!!

She says, "If all you ever see is all you have ever saw
Then all you will ever get is all you ever got."
Now I am not scared to see things other's don't
And, try unknown things that others won't



Known
unknown





a

Am I a doll wound with wool and wire?
Or a real girl filled with hopes and desires?
I don't know; but I do know

m

My dreams are on fire
They are less myth, more truth
Flickering 'n dancing like sapphire

m

My dreams soar light as corn silk

Ariel in energy

Resisting custody, outrunning the mile

Whirling and capering on the ground

Impetuous in their cry

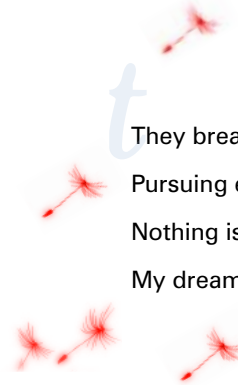
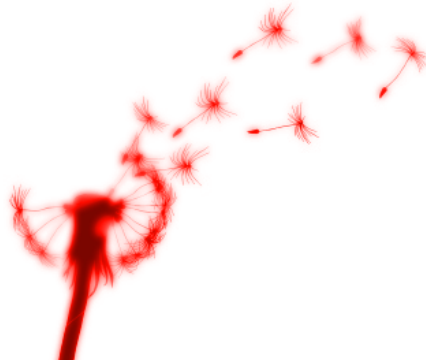
t

They breathe, bubble, foam and crackle

Pursuing everything worth a try

Nothing is impossible or out of reach

My dreams vault - agile and spry



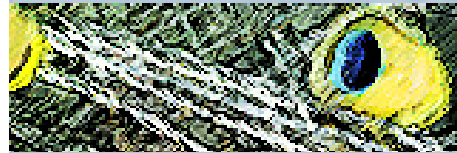


i know all this, but to live out my sinewy dreams
Is the only way to learn, unlearn
It is the only way to unbind fortunes
Known, unknown; to earn and to return

t To seek the lustre of the sun
There is need to endure sunburn
The safety of moonlight vanishes
When the clouds take a turn



Peacock ginger





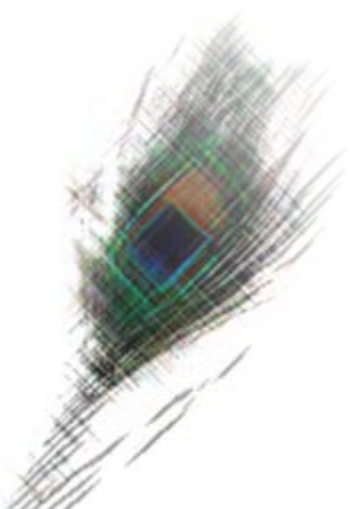
p

Peacock ginger

A wholly unexpected, irregular sight

A ginger plant

With foliage like peacock feathers



e

One of the many peculiar contrary's

That life throws at us

Ending similarities

Encouraging dissimilitude





b

Beyond rhyme
Or reason
It is best to revel
In such unseemly paradoxes

e

Enjoy the jaunty irreverence
And, follow the contours
Of life's
Chalk and cheese conundrums



Saiò
unsaio



w

Words said

Words unsaid

Words spelt

Words withheld



i

In my little girl cosmos

Unchecked astringent words

Long retain sharpness and sting

Their aftershocks ring and echo

Echo and ring





Carmine hot, volatile words are best
As unwritten verse
Reined in, stopped
From becoming an inflamed curse

Beautiful words are luminous,
Like diaphanous lilies in a sun dappled pond
A tempered, translucent oasis of peace
Amidst unquiet fronds



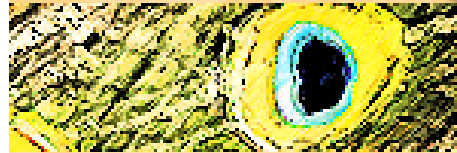
u Unharnessed, unhindered,
They must be freed of seams
Love and quietude
Cannot be bound within reams

t The fission of febrile, serrated uttering
Can only be stilled with
Simple, fragrant, turmeric salve words
Shining with subterranean, yogic calm

i It is best then to let serene phrases
Smooth away the agitation
Of abrasive
Fretful utterances



Equal
unequal



g

Golden corn

A neatly aligned marvel of sun touched bubbles

Evenly manicured in shape and size

As are wheat grains

Impaled to their stalks in an uniform glazed,
golden stubble



i

In an unequal world

Such even certitude is rare

Instead, diversity, difference and discord are rife

It's more about proving worth singly

Through strife

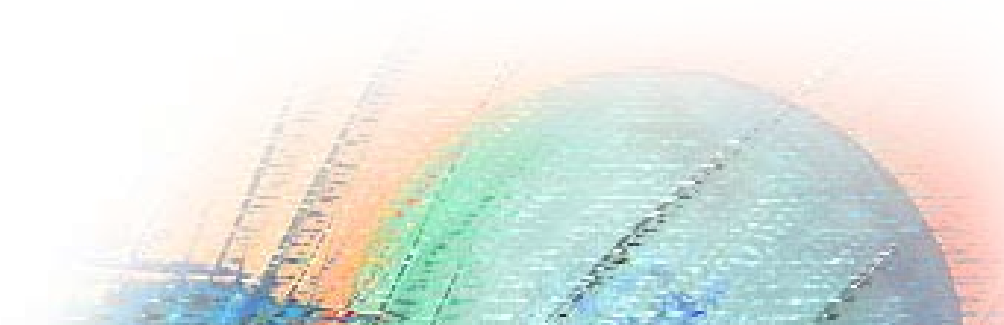




a
Alone, together, equal, unequal
The world moves around this uneasy flux
Seeing equality in inequality
And inequality in equality is crux

a
Accommodate contrariness
Celebrate sameness
Co-conspire with life's inscrutable patterns
To find the geometry of survival

w
With my innate little girl wisdom
I know to handle extremities
There is need to make one's own life maps
Seek one's space
Between the latitudes and longitudes



Beginnings ends





Old bald eagles
On withered leafless trees
Speaking of voids, disaffection
And brittle and decaying ends



Long, lush, looped creepers
Clamped with flamboyant orange flowers
Spinning a high voltage orange yarn
Nurturing varied, skittish, irrepressible yearnings





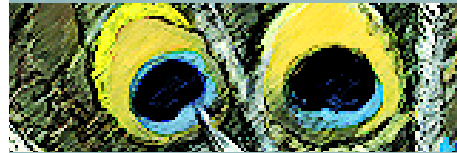
C Competing realities

In my girl world's rear view mirror
Ferris wheels of hope and heartbreak
Sad shutdowns and irrational exuberance

e Ends foster beginnings
As beginnings do ends
Understanding this equipoise,
Convergence and continuity
Is all



Skin
soul





t
There are no sign posts
For they exist one within the other
The skin with the soul
And, the soul within the skin

w
Where does my skin end?
And soul begin?
Where does the world of substance end?
And that of the insubstantial begin?





t

The mortal coil

Diffuses where the five senses give way

The familiar physical world

Leads to the intangible world



a

A place of light

Perception, clarity

Wisdom and giving

And complete selflessness



a

Shapeless and formless

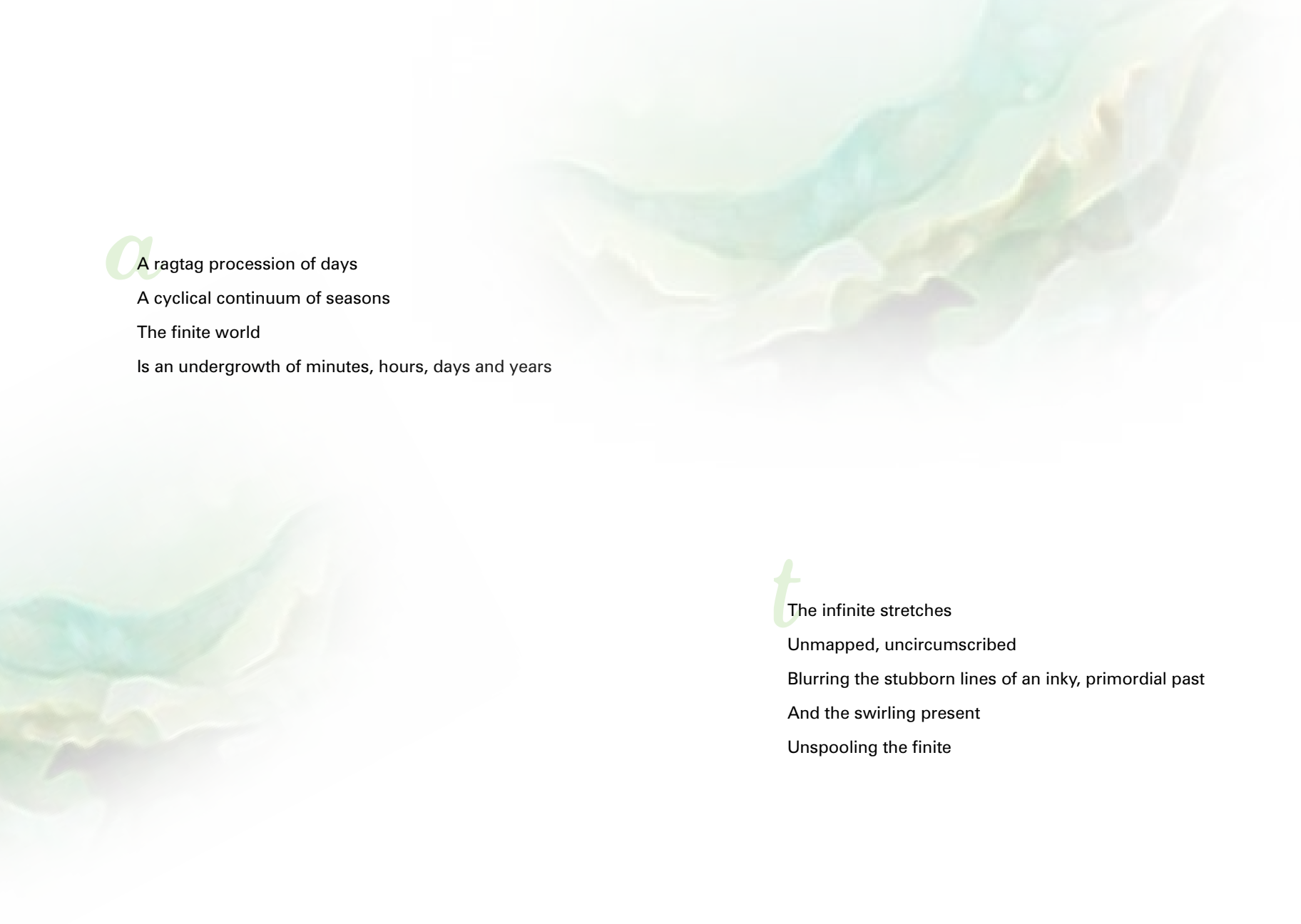
It is serene, without the violent creases

Of hatred and distrust

It is the place of the rising sun

Finite
infinite





a

A ragtag procession of days

A cyclical continuum of seasons

The finite world

Is an undergrowth of minutes, hours, days and years

t

The infinite stretches

Unmapped, uncircumscribed

Blurring the stubborn lines of an inky, primordial past

And the swirling present

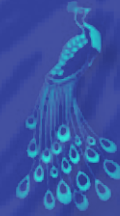
Unspooling the finite



t The fleeting limits of time
Are as real
As the timelines without full stops
Experiencing eternity in time
For a little girl like me
Is to affirm and celebrate the continuity of life

t To be in time
To be out of it
Is to complete the circle of the cosmos
And gather time and timelessness
Within folds





About the author

Chitra Gopalakrishnan is a journalist and an editorial consultant who has worked in New Delhi, Washington DC and Hanoi.

She is an expert on development issues, having researched, written and edited topics on environment, gender, health, poverty and the girl child, among others.

This is her first collection of poems inspired by creative dolls.



Peacock Ginger is a collection of whimsical verses that take a piquant look at life's contrariness through the eyes of a little girl. A unique handcrafted doll that is an intrinsic part of each book brings the voice of the girl alive.

Using the recurring image of peacock ginger, an unusual ginger plant that has foliage like peacock feathers, the stanzas whirl around the oft-overlooked contradictions in life with kinetic energy.

Dealt with a childlike sense of intuition and wisdom, the stanzas have a light, airy feel to them. Yet the subjects are as old as the earth and can be enjoyed by readers of all ages.

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