

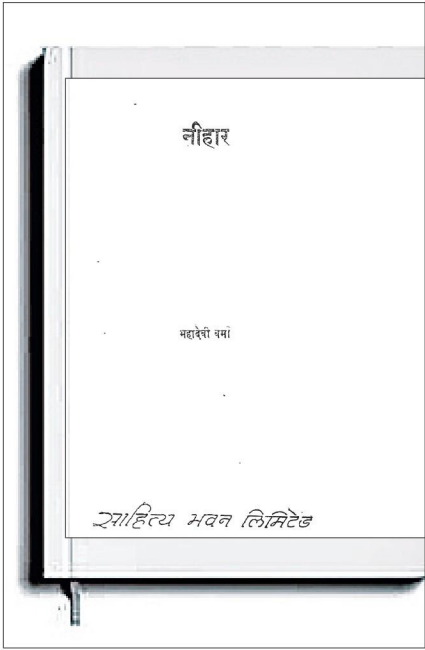
The Poet Who Turned Solitude into Song



Mahadevi Varma at work — a glimpse of the poet and writer in her quiet, contemplative world



One of the defining voices of modern Hindi poetry, whose verses transformed solitude and longing into enduring literature



Nihar — Mahadevi Varma's first major poetry collection, published in 1930, marking the beginning of her distinctive poetic journey of longing, solitude and introspection



Mahadevi Varma presenting a painting to Margaret Thatcher — a rare glimpse of the celebrated Hindi poet and writer at an international cultural occasion

Mahadevi Varma occupies a singular place in modern Hindi literature. One of the four major poets of the Chhayavad movement, she transformed loneliness, longing, separation and spiritual yearning into some of the most evocative poetry in Hindi. Her life, however, should not be reduced to the familiar image of the “lonely poet.” Her solitude was intertwined with her choices, her intellectual independence, her work for women’s education and her search for a life beyond conventional social expectations.

Born in 1907, Mahadevi was married in childhood, as was customary in many families of her time. She subsequently chose to live independently rather than establish a conventional married household. This unusual personal circumstance has often been read alongside her poetry, although it would be too simplistic to assume that every poem was a direct expression of her marital life. Her poetic world was more complex: the absent beloved in her poems is often deliberately elusive, sometimes read as a spiritual or metaphysical presence rather than a literal romantic figure.

Yet the emotional atmosphere of her poetry undeniably contains a persistent sense of separation. In *Nihar* (1930), her first major collection, the poet’s inner world emerges through mist, darkness, dawn, tears and nature. The

Mahadevi Varma: Mahadevi Varma: Between Loneliness, Longing and Light

poems search for something distant and unnamed. Rashmi (1932) and Neerja (1933) continue this movement, while Sandhyageet deepens the mood of twilight, longing and introspection. Her poetry repeatedly turns outward to nature but ultimately returns inward—to the self, its loneliness and its desire for communion.

This is particularly visible in *Yama*, the work most closely associated with her literary legacy. It brought together four of her earlier poetic collections and became the central expression of her mature poetic voice. The recurring themes of absence, pain, longing, death and spiritual searching give the collection an emotional intensity that can certainly be read in relation to the solitude of her life, although her poetry cannot be treated

simply as autobiography.

Her later poetry, including *Deepshikha*, *Pratham Ayam*, *Saptaparna* and *Agni Rekha*, continued to explore the relationship between suffering, illumination, desire and the human spirit. Her language remained intensely lyrical, but beneath its delicacy was a remarkably strong and self-aware voice.

The connection between her life and writing becomes even more revealing in her prose. In *Shrinkhala Ki Kadiyan*, she examined the condition and social limitations of Indian women. *Smriti Ki Rekhaiyan*, *Ateet Ke Chalchitra*, *Path Ke Sathi* and *Mera Parivar* reveal her extraordinary sensitivity toward people, animals, memory and lives lived on the margins.

Thus, Mahadevi Varma’s solitude was not simply a story of deprivation. She turned an unconventional personal life into intellectual freedom and creative discipline. Her poetry did not merely record loneliness; it transformed loneliness into an aesthetic and spiritual experience. That is perhaps why her work continues to resonate: the pain in her poems is deeply personal, yet the longing is universal.

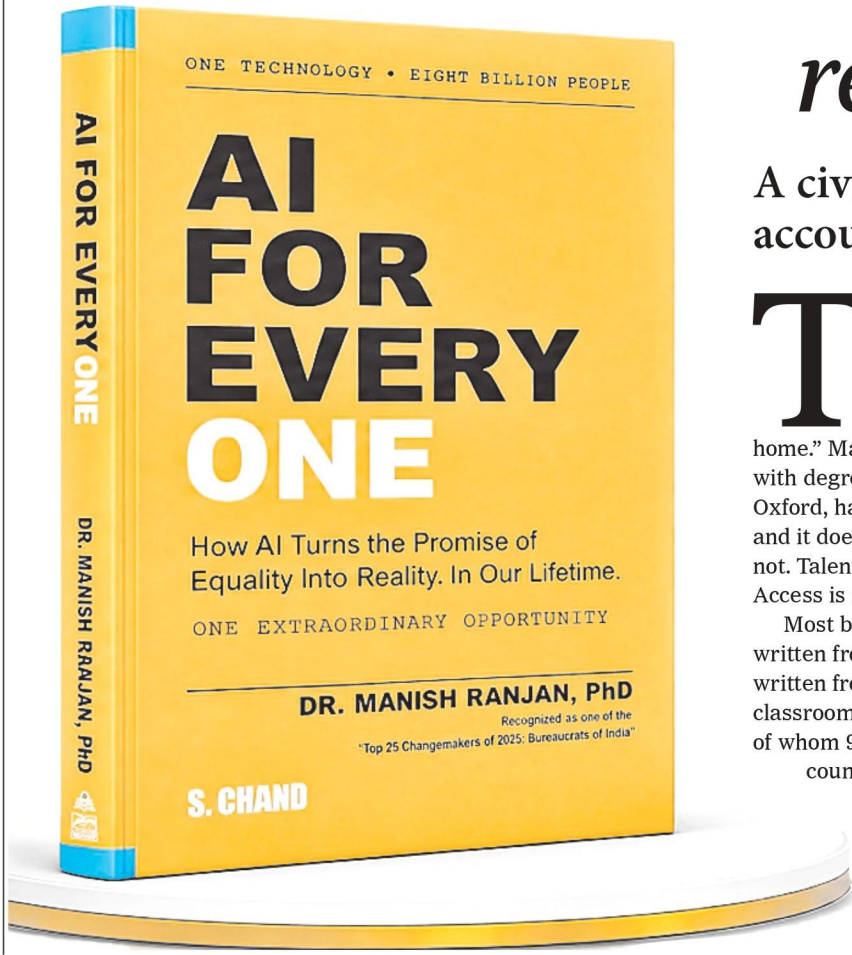
Her life and literature suggest that solitude can have many meanings. For Mahadevi Varma, it became not an absence of life, but a space from which she could observe, question, create and speak—in a voice that remains one of the most distinctive in Hindi literature.

Mahadevi Varma in her later years — a contemplative portrait of the celebrated poet and writer, whose work gave enduring expression to solitude, longing and inner reflection



AI for Everyone by Manish Ranjan review – the algorithm at the village gate

A civil servant’s field notes meet a moral argument in this insistently hopeful account of what artificial intelligence could do for the world’s excluded – if we let it



The book begins not with a machine but with a notebook: a ten-year-old girl in a village school in Jharkhand has drawn the solar system, and beside the Earth she has written, “This is our home.” Manish Ranjan, an Indian civil servant with degrees from Berkeley and a fellowship at Oxford, has carried that page around for years, and it does the work a hundred TED talks could not. Talent, he keeps insisting, is everywhere. Access is not.

Most books about artificial intelligence are written from the places that build it. This one is written from the places waiting for it – the last classroom, the last clinic, the offline 2.2 billion, of whom 96% live in low- and middle-income countries. Across six sections and 22 chapters, Ranjan tours AI’s possible lives among the poor: the tutor that never sleeps, the doctor in your pocket, the weather warning that reaches a farmer before the rain falls, the translation engine that lets

a language of forty million speakers finally talk to the internet. Each chapter closes with stories “from the front lines” and a “Thinking Corner” – a schoolteacher’s device, deployed without embarrassment, and rather winning for it.

What keeps the book from evangelism is its refusal to let the technology take the credit. “The Great Equalizer is the human decision to make AI serve everyone,” Ranjan writes, and the italics are essentially audible. He is alert to the counter-evidence: of the 80-odd countries with national AI strategies, he notes, fewer than 20 have funded plans for reaching their poorest citizens. The rest, one gathers, are strategies for winning, not including.

The most unexpected chapter reaches back a millennium, to the philosopher Ramanuja throwing open the temple gates, and borrows his creed – Sarvajana Hitaya, for the benefit of all – as a design principle for the algorithmic age. It is a genuinely striking move: the ethics of AI argued not from Brussels or San Francisco but from Sridherambudur. Whether Silicon Valley is listening

is another matter.

Sceptics will find the optimism strenuous in places; a book this determined to hope can skate over how often “digital public goods” become digital public surveillance, and the case studies arrive at a pace that occasionally outruns scrutiny. But cynicism is cheap, and Ranjan has done something harder: he has written about AI as if the girl with the notebook were the intended user, not the collateral. Readers may come for the technology. They will stay for her.

The technology in these pages will be obsolete within the decade; the argument will not. Somewhere tonight a girl is drawing the solar system in a notebook that no algorithm knows exists – and Ranjan has written the rare book that treats her, not the machine, as the main event. If AI is to have a conscience, it will have to borrow one from books like this.

AI for Everyone: How AI Turns the Promise of Equality Into Reality – In Our Lifetime by Dr. Manish Ranjan is published by S Chand and Company Ltd.