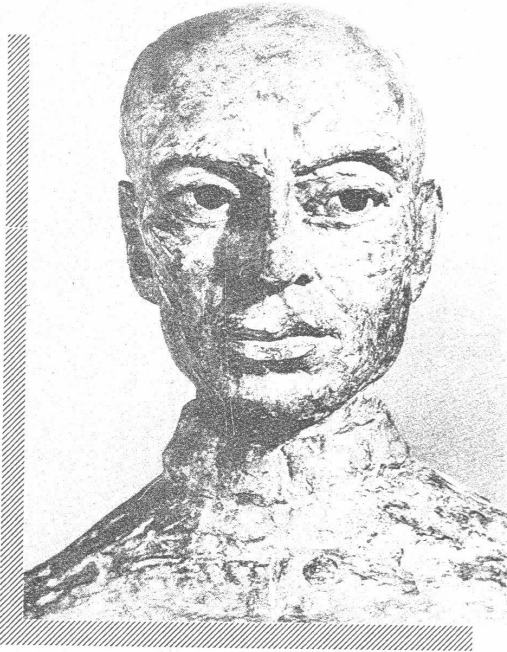


THE BOOK REVIEW

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With this, the November–December issue, *The Book Review* completes three years in its tabloid incarnation and enters into the seventeenth year of publication. Our determination to focus on the regional languages scene has acquired a fillip through our experiment of inviting writers in various languages to guest edit a part of our issue. The special sections on Kannada, Malayalam and now in this issue Tamil, have succeeded in highlighting specific trends which have been discernible over the last two decades in these languages. Malayalam and to some extent Kannada, by being rooted in the tradition and cultural ethos of their regions and moulding themselves in the language of modernity from that strong emotional base will be seen to demonstrate freshness, vibrancy and meaningful creativity. Tamil, on the other hand, as a result of the conscious efforts of the political elite of the region to disown a socio-cultural past with a rich heritage, seems to be floundering, and for want of sustenance with past moorings complacently spearheading mediocrity. Literature, the true mirror of any society, will reflect the interactions, beliefs and psychoses—political, economic and social—of its people. Focusing on what a literature of a region reflects, we hope will aid scholars and writers to undertake a serious study of the same. In addition to a special focus on a regional language, this issue of the journal also highlights, through the reviews in the general section, the short story in India, written by Indian writers in English and the regional languages in original and translation. The reader would notice that as many as six reviews of anthologies and collections of short stories by individual writers clearly mark out this form to be the preferred medium of Indian writers by and large, much more so than the longer more arduous novel form. A short story by virtue of its shorter length, grips the reader's attention almost instantly and in the hands of a master wordcraftsman/woman, becomes a powerful medium of communication. The reviewers in this issue present a wide range of short stories and by their critical, objective comments offer a panoramic overview of the state-of-the-art of this literary form in India, warts and all. We aim by this exercise in this and forthcoming issues at generating a dialogue and evolving a sizeable critical base which will enable us to hold a seminar on the subject next year.

As has been our practice in the past we are carrying a special section on books for children, though lack of space has precluded our publishing as elaborate a section as we had last year.

The growing popularity of the journal, the fact that more and more reviewers want to write for it, and most important, a large number of publishers are sending in their latest publications for review, have made the advisory board of *The Book Review* conscious of the need to make it a monthly as of January 1993. We propose to review books in regional languages and those written for the young in every issue in addition to in-depth reviews of books on the social sciences, humanities, arts and culture. We request our readers to make a note of the revised subscription rates for renewal.

If yesterday's letters are to escape the stale stench of dead prose, either the writers have to be of current interest or the literary style has to be captivating. Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi have no problem with the first test. Their prime ministerships covered over two-thirds of free India's existence; and the fact that they were father and daughter renders comparison of their contrasting personalities irresistible. Do these letters that passed between them in the years before and after Nehru became Prime Minister throw light on his ways of functioning; and do they enable us to comprehend a little better why Mrs. Gandhi conducted herself as she did when she, in her turn, became head of the Indian government? The first volume of these letters, *Freedom's Daughter*, dealing with the pivotal years of Mrs. Gandhi's life from 1922 to 1939, showed Nehru seeking to give his only child the best possible education within the constraints imposed by his frequent sojourns in jail and Indira not responding very well. But this second, larger, volume is more useful for assessing these two figures so prominent in our national history, for it starts with Indira, as a mature adult, planning to return to India after long years in Europe.

Her letters are published here for the first time and give us some idea of the kind of private person she was. Writing from a sanatorium in Switzerland she appears sensitive and genuine, quoting bits of English and French poetry—even Chaucer. She is more extrovert than her father, and does not have his elegant distinction in writing; but she comes through as a decent and, despite her illness, cheerful person. Above all, there is a deep attachment to the father. "It is little enough" she tells him at one point, "that I can do for you, but if my mere presence can be of any comfort to you, it is only right that I should be with you. And I do so want to be. Here we are, miles away from each other, both so lonely, and needing each other so. It would help both of us tremendously if we could see each other even occasionally."

What strange and mysterious things are words! The spoken word is powerful enough but even more so is the written word, for it has more of permanence. Image of thoughts and impulses, of the treasures of memory and stored fancies, the prelude and foundation of action, an idol with clear outlines or shapeliness, and yet full of the breath of life! . . . But words have become too common coin today, debased and often counterfeit, fit emblems of many of the human beings who use them.

Father and Daughter

S. Gopal

TWO ALONE, TWO TOGETHER.

LETTERS BETWEEN INDIRA GANDHI AND JAWAHARLAL NEHRU, 1940-1964

Edited by Sonia Gandhi

Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1992, 676 pages + index, £ 30.00



By the time Indira returned to India Nehru was back in Dehra Dun jail and she saw him there towards the end of April 1941. To breathe life into the letters in this volume for the years 1941 to 1945, they have to be read alongside Nehru's prison diaries published in the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, First Series, Volumes 11 and 13. The first interview was not a success. Indira confirmed to her father what she had hinted to him in 1939, that she wished to marry Feroze Gandhi. Nehru clearly was not enthusiastic. He asked her to think over it with an integrated mind and to consult her senior aunt and other close relatives. She seemed to him, with all her determination and self-reliance, immature and perhaps tending to take things superficially. But Indira declined to act on his advice and a film of tension developed over the close emotionalities between father and daughter. "We are" as Nehru philosophized earlier in the year, "each one of us a group of different individuals, all tied up together with no hope of release, and sometimes they quarrel amongst themselves and we feel the tension and the pain."

Nehru had, of course, no intention of pressing his views. He accepted that the period when it was his function to guide her as a father had ended, that he himself was not equipped to advise others, and that each person must take individual decisions on his or her own. The subsequent interviews in jail confirmed the failure in communication. Neither father nor daughter could unlock the doors of their minds and hearts, and Nehru

doubted the usefulness of the spoken word. Indira also, we gather from Nehru's diary, wrote him an angry, agitated letter, which unfortunately has not been published in this volume. But Indira, determined to have her way, was blissfully happy. As the father sat in his cell, aging visibly and raging within himself as to what he had done wrong and why he could not gain the confidence even of his daughter, she assured him that she managed to keep the right side up. "I have a serene happiness surging up from within, that no one and nothing can mar or take away from me." As for her failure to grasp how much she had hurt him by her stubbornness and seeming indifference, her broad explanation was that one felt so inferior in his presence that perhaps unconsciously one resented it.

To improve relations, Nehru proposed that they shun argument and debate, and he thought that as a result they were coming nearer each other. But it was not really so. It is a pity that Nehru's letter of 9 July 1941 (*Selected Works* Vol. 11, pp. 643-648) has not been included in this volume, for in this letter Nehru analyzed in detail and with honesty his whole approach as a father. He would not, he assured Indira again, obstruct her in following her own decisions about herself. What he had sought to do was to build her up as an integrated human being, with her body, mind and emotions developing in harmony. Then, after her education abroad, he had hoped that she would work with him in public life. But things had not shaped that way. Even worse, he

got the feeling "that you were very far away from me, from my thoughts, my fancies and ideas, my hopes and dreams. . . some things that meant a great deal to me had little significance for you. Our sense of values seemed to differ vastly. That hurt. . . What pained and surprised me was the casual way in which you were prepared, and even eager, to discard very precious traditions and heritage, some things that were part of my being and which I hoped would be yours." There seems to have been no reply to this letter, and at their interviews she sometimes paid little attention to what he was saying. "She makes me" he recorded sadly in his diary, "feel so lonely. She is so far."

After his release in December 1941 and Indira's marriage in March 1942 one cause of strain was removed and father and daughter were in greater concord. The first years of the marriage were also unclouded and in one telegram from Srinagar in June 1942 Indira sends her father, for the only time in this correspondence, "happy love". In August Nehru was back in prison, this time for nearly three years. There being no interviews, the contacts between father and daughter were now dependent entirely on letters. Indira herself took well to prison in 1942-1943, and was later content in marriage and motherhood. This was reflected in the long letters she wrote to her father. Though occasionally she retired into her shell, she was, on the whole, a regular correspondent; and Nehru was pleased because her letters seemed to be full of a desire to come psychologically near him. Childish prejudices and immaturity were, he thought, fading away, and she was looking out more and more from the closed house that was herself and finding a new interest and excitement in the world. The two of them had never been so drawn to each other as they were now, more friends rather than father and child. But he was clear-sighted enough to realize that this might well be because they were not physically together.

All of Nehru's letters before 1947 have already been published in the *Selected Works*, but they are always worth reading again. It is not just that he still lives on in the Indian psyche with enormous power, a constant nagging thought of what might have been and still could be. These letters still reflect the vividness of his personality. Though writing when only in the mood, he took much trouble over them. Believing that the only way to keep normal and sane in prison was, apart from engaging in some manual work, to live in the mind, he spent the enforced leisure in reading widely, keeping a detailed diary, and writing books and letters. Whatever his reservations about the spoken word, he took almost a sensual pleasure in prose-writing. "What strange and mysterious things are words! The spoken word is powerful enough but even more so is the written word, for it has more of permanence. Image of thoughts and impulses, of the treasures of memory and stored

fancies, the prelude and foundation of action, an idol with clear outlines or shapeless, and yet full of the breath of life!... But words have become too common coin today, debased and often counterfeit, fit emblems of many of the human beings who use them." In his letters, with the shadow of the censor ever haunting his mind, he eschewed politics; but otherwise he ranged far and wide, in history, literature, science, philosophy and much else, and always with a strong tinge of introspection. A sense of verbal rhythm and an ear open to the sound of words ensured that he never wrote an ill-balanced sentence, and the thought conveyed gives his letters depth and nobility.

The correspondence for the years after 1947, when Nehru became Prime Minister, is skimpy. This is to be expected, for father and daughter spent most of these years together. But such letters as we have suggest that Indira saw herself as the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister and was forthright in expressing her views. She reported that Pant in Uttar Pradesh liked to surround himself with yes-men and that Kher was a dismal failure as high commissioner in London. While she had little use for Deshmukh as a person, she believed that there was much to be said for his stand in favour of a separate province of Maharashtra. A letter of June 1959 lends support to the allegation frequently made that Indira, as President of the Congress, nudged her father to take action against the Communist government in Kerala. But one wonders whether Nehru, fond as he was of her, took very seriously her views on political issues. When he once replied that there was probably as much exaggeration as truth in the reports she was forwarding, her retort was scathing: "please stop in future talking about democracy and the freedom of the press in India. With all our other ills let us not also have hypocrisy." She also passed on to him what she said she heard everyone saying, that there was no use bringing anything to Nehru's notice because he took no action to put things right. There was even, she wrote a few years later, a growing feeling in Congress circles that Nehru was tending more and more to accept, almost without question, the opinions of certain persons—Morarji Desai, Bidhan Roy, Kamaraj—and closing his mind to other viewpoints. Such criticisms Nehru gently and disarmingly brushed aside. Perhaps, he replied, everyone who was criticizing him was right; one could only function according to one's own capacity. But curiously, when Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister, the criticisms of her father which she had aired slipped out of her sight when she was developing her own attitudes and policies. Power, unless you are Jawaharlal Nehru, darkens the mind.

S. Gopal is Emeritus Professor of History, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Federal Concept—The Indian Experience

T.N. Chaturvedi

FEDERALISM IN INDIA: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Edited by Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora

Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 297, Rs. 395.00

FEDERAL INDIA: A DESIGN FOR CHANGE

Edited by Rasheeduddin Khan

Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 146, Rs. 150.00

The quest for a smooth working relationship among the constituent parts and the centre and the different units is the subject of continuing debate in political literature.

During the British rule in India, at different stages of the transfer of power to the people, this question was often discussed. The different constitutional schemes and proposals adumbrated in official circles and those put forth by public men and political leaders always had this problem in mind. The oft-repeated question was whether a unitary or a federal system was suited to India. During the last three decades prior to advent of freedom and in the Constituent Assembly busy with the drafting of the Constitution for India, this aspect assumed paramount importance. The pluralities of various kinds in the midst of the age-old consciousness of civilizational unity were recognised. At the same time the events leading to the partition and its aftermath had created a psychological urge for a strong centre which could not be ignored. The freedom movement had all along pleaded for the unification of the country, the strengthening of the process of nation-building and the development of various regions of the country and fulfilment of the aspirations of their people. The founding fathers of the Constitution, with their vision and insight, worked out for us a constitutional and political system which was expected to take care imaginatively and sympathetically, not only of the existing situation but also the emerging problems in an accommodative framework.

While there were muted misgivings and even limited articulate protest at times, by and large the Indian political and constitutional system had a hopeful beginning. But during the last two decades or so tensions of various kinds in different parts of the country began to appear. Relations between the Centre and the States came under strain. The matter was examined by the high-powered Administrative Reforms Commission. The Government of Tamil Nadu set up the Rajamannar Committee to look into this vexed problem. Some State Governments and many experts and public men put forth their own solutions. As it be-

came evident that India was entering into a phase where one political party would not necessarily be in power both at the Centre and the States, there were conclaves of Chief Ministers to thrash out inter-governmental issues. Many other serious developments in certain parts of the country underlined the need to have an in-depth enquiry. The Union Government established the Sarkaria Commission which went into the entire gamut of the centre-states relationships. It is neither necessary nor possible to go into this background in any detail. An important development has been the setting up of the Inter-State Council envisaged by the Constitution. Somehow many basic issues remain unresolved. The debate about the nature and future of Indian federalism continues.

The above two volumes attempt to make serious contributions to this ongoing debate. The first one, *Federalism in India: Origin and Development* edited by Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora comprises the papers presented at a National Seminar on Federalism held at the Centre for Policy Research a few years back. The other book, *Federal India: A Design for Change* by Rasheeduddin Khan adds to the exploration of the same area, particularly from the angle of the need for reorganisation or formation of smaller states so as to make the system genuinely participatory in nature for the people.

In the foreword to *Federalism in India*, V.A. Pai Panandiker observes, "the central issue before the Indian polity and indeed Indian democracy is how to organise a system of governance which enables effective participation in a highly diverse and plural society". Again, Nirmal Mukarji and Balveer Arora opine, "there is growing awareness that excessive centralisation and concentration of powers in governmental structures and political parties have distorted the democratic process, leading to the marginalisation and alienation of substantial segments of the people. This is where federalism with its inherent capacity for greater responsiveness to local requirements become relevant". These observations in a way provide the perspective to the volume which purports to present "a status report on federalism in India". This

purpose has been achieved to a certain degree through the cooperative effort of various distinguished contributors who have discussed the different facets and documented their viewpoints.

The editors in their introductory piece have tried to outline the basic issues, their range and dimensions. They pointedly draw attention to many of the deviations and distortions which have cropped up over the years in the working of our political system leading to the present unfortunate situation of strains and tensions. They make an observation which bears quotation at length as it goes to the heart of the problem, though there may be differences in approach. As the editors state, "the commitment to the maintenance of a pluralist or composite culture-based society is the core to the endeavour to build a united federal nation. The dialectical interaction between this commitment and the will to forge or reinforce a distinctive national identity provides the vital force in federal nation-building. A federal polity is thus not merely certain types of institutional structures and arrangements relating to the organisation of state power. It implies also and perhaps more importantly, a certain process having as objective the exploration of the same area, particularly from the angle of the need for reorganisation or formation of smaller states so as to make the system genuinely participatory in nature for the people. The limits of centralist micro-management, political, financial and developmental, have been emphasised. An important aspect which needs greater thought is that "there is nothing in the federal idea, or in the various theories of federalism, which limits its application to two levels of government only". It was rather unfortunate that not only the experiments at local government, both urban and rural, did not succeed over the years for many reasons and even the recent move by the Union Government to introduce the third tier of government through constitutional amendment was vitiated not only by bad timing but due to the lack of genuine motivation where effort was more to reduce the powers of the states rather than enshrine true local democracy.

In the first part, the articles relating to "historical and socio-cultural roots of federalism in India" have been grouped together. Ashis Nandy explores the nature of Indian pluralism and the chang-

ing conceptualisation of the state in India and makes five theoretical proposals about his relationship for consideration. While Ashis Banerjee provides the necessary historical background to the growth of the ideas of federalism and nationalism, Mohit Bhattacharya attempts to broadly analyse the thinking of the framers of the Constitution. The linguistic panorama and how it impinges on the working of the constitutional system has been brought out by Sumi Krishna. K.A. Ramasubramaniam gives a penetrating though brief survey of the essential features of our federal system in a historical background.

The second part consisting of five contributions is devoted to the discussion of institutions and processes of federal democracy. T.C.A. Srinivasavardan, with his administrative experience and insight gives a thoughtful survey of the pluralistic problems which even today confront the nation and which merit attention of administrators and policymakers. Alice Jacob discusses the institutional dimensions of inter-governmental cooperation and their possibilities. There is informative presentation of the economic aspects of federalism in the country which have agitated the mind of the people almost from the very inception and continue to be the bone of contention between the Centre and the States. K. Saigal discusses the relevance of federal approach in the context of the North East—an area beset with problems and about which much more is yet to be known. George Mathew explores the much debated question of the extension of the federal principle in local government which has now become a matter of great concern because of the growing indifference or alienation of the people from the political and developmental processes at the grassroots level of the federal democracy.

Besides furnishing a historical narra-

tive about the emergence of federal issues till 1990, the editors provide a succinct and thought-provoking summing up in the light of the contributions as well as their perceptions about what they have termed "restructuring federal democracy", wherein they stress the strong roots of federalism amidst many vicissitudes and its flexibility and resilience. The volume will be welcome to policymakers and public men interested in resolving the pending issues of "the management of diversities" without perpetuating them as antagonistic forces but in recognising their identity and possibilities for the development of the federal polity.

Rasheeduddin Khan's slim volume carries the debate further. As the author in the prologue of the book puts it: *Federal India: A Design for Change* is a manifesto to build public opinion for a basic transformation of the polity in the world's largest participatory democracy, which is also one of the most ancient traditional societies. But one should not get away with the idea that it is only an attempt at political pamphleteering. It is an exceedingly well-documented presentation in a historical and comparative perspective and merits consideration though one may not find oneself in agreement always with his diagnosis or prescriptions. His enthusiasm throughout is matched with painstaking presentation of factual and statistical analysis. After a brief reference to the global context of federalism, he analyses the socio-cultural dimensions and diversities and points out that India's plural-federal personality can be perceived and analysed through a multidisciplinary survey. In fact some of the appendices serve this purpose. "In global terms", as the author says, "it is instructive to remember that almost half, i.e., 12 of the States in India are bigger in population and larger in territory compared to about 100 sovereign states of the world". He lists certain "contradictions and para-

doxes" e.g. "a communal society and a secular state" or "a decolonised state with strong segments exhibiting colonial situations". Again, after indicating briefly the characteristics of political federalism in India, he refers to tensions, conflicts and violence.

Rasheeduddin Khan goes on to mention the pattern of federal national-building and in our context emphasises the need for clarity of political intention, policy direction and requisite constructive action. According to him, India is a *multi-regional federation*, as the United States is a multi-ethnic federation or Soviet Union was a multi-nationality federation. After listing about fifteen positive features of our political system, he suggests four measures as "vital for changing the present centralised federation into a cooperative and constructive federal polity in India". They are (i) territorial reorganisation of states on the criterion of providing to the states "maximum homogeneity within and maximum identity", (ii) greater autonomy to states through constitutional amendment, (iii) activation of panchayati raj and nagar palika system, and, (iv) building a new federal-national consensus to achieve the first three. The subsequent chapters are devoted to elaborating the same.

In the epilogue, he categorically asserts, "India is not a nation, in the conventional sense. India is a Federal-Nation. This distinction is vital, and the very essence of our plural existence. The implications of being a Federal-Nation should be clearly understood in theory and worked out in policy thrust in practice". This is rather a controversial generalisation which may not find wider acceptance. While there may not be many differences with his suggestions about recasting of centre-states relations or activation of local democracy, his approach and analysis and advocacy of radical territorial reorganisation are apt to generate a host

of other issues as his basic assumptions are not commonly accepted, besides the question of overloading tiny states with needless political and administrative infrastructure. His plea for a fresh reorganisation of states is not disputed. Many shades of political opinion have veered round to the need for small but viable states. But his logic of sub-cultural groups and the need for their political expression through states may not be always possible. It is not that in India no national consciousness of any kind unifying the people existed prior to the emergence of the modern state. In our exuberance for rightful recognition of diversities and pluralities, it will be dangerous to promote the psychology of separatism and the concept of nationalism as a mechanistic one.

A new look at the reorganisation of states and the need to restore the requisite balance between the centre and the states is certainly called for. Unfortunately the national consensus has yet to evolve on these issues and they have to be looked at as a national imperative transcending party and political considerations. This is not so because of what happened in the Soviet Union or what is happening in Yugoslavia but because we have our specific problems which have to be resolved urgently in the light of our historical experience and the ideals and aspirations of our freedom struggle. The recent National Seminar at the India International Centre sponsored by a number of institutions and organisations was a commendable venture with a view to evolve a broad consensus about the need and areas as well as alternatives for constitutional reforms.

T.N. Chaturvedi is the former Auditor and Comptroller General of India and is presently a Member of the Lok Sabha.

The first of the two books under review is a publication in book form of a special issue of the *Indian Bar Review*. It contains 18 articles covering more than half of the 455 pages of the book, the rest being accounted for largely by extensive extracts from the Mandal Commission's Report. It appears from the acknowledgements that the collection includes some new material and some reproduction of material already published, but there is no clear indication of source and date in each case. The tone of the 'Editorial' and the 'Chairman's Page' detracts somewhat from the objectivity of the publication but in fairness it must be stated that both supporters and opponents of reservation are to be found among the contributors. However, the claim made in the subtitle of the book that it is a 'legal and sociological study of the Man-

Justice, Affirmative Action and Caste

Ramaswamy R. Iyer

RESERVATION CRISIS IN INDIA: LEGAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE MANDAL COMMISSION REPORT

Edited by Vinay Chandra Misra

The Bar Council of India Trust, 1991, pp xix + 205-660, Rs 150.00

IN THE MIRROR OF MANDAL: SOCIAL JUSTICE, CASTE, CLASS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

By Hiranmay Karlekar

Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1992, pp. x + 194, Rs. 150.00

dal Commission Report' cannot really be sustained. What we have here is not a book, much less a study, but an unorganized and unstructured collection of pieces; indeed, it is a motley collection.

Quite a few of the 'articles' are fugitive pieces which did not deserve permanence; they should have been allowed to lie buried in the old newspapers in which they had appeared. The contributions of Nani Palkhiwala, Ram Jethmalani and Swapan Das Gupta fall into this category. One should perhaps add Arun Shourie's article to that list, but despite its characteristic abrasiveness and shrillness of tone, it is not without force in its persistent questioning. The Indian Medical Association's point of view, as put forward by Dr N.K. Grover, has no special claim on our attention and need not have been included. Even Justice Khanna, for whom

one has some respect, disappoints. By using expressions such as 'sub-standard', 'merit', 'mediocrity' and 'second-rate', he begs the important questions involved. This is the kind of 'meritarian' argument which lends itself readily to summary dismissal, or invites heavy sarcasm from some supporters of reservations. However, one must take note of the concern and distress that comes through in his article.

B.N. Sharma and R.K. Mahajan, in a splash paper, make some fairly familiar criticisms of the Mandal Report, advocate "reasonable moderate benefits on rational economic criteria" rather than "extreme reservations" (whatever those expressions mean); and recommend the appointment of another Backward Classes Commission for identifying OBCs.

There are three contributions by Parmanand Singh whose name figures on the cover of the book (as 'expert adviser') along with that of the editor. The first, a general historical and thematic overview, is not without value. The brief résumé of judicial pronouncements is particularly useful; the discussion of different criteria for determining backwardness can also serve as a convenient checklist. His two other papers are historical; one deals with the question of who the backward classes are, traces the history of the term and refers to the discussions in the Constituent Assembly on the subject; the other narrates the history of the Kalelkar Commission at the Centre and gives a brief account of the Commissions set up by the State Governments. There is much useful material in Parmanand Singh's contributions, but it cannot be said that they contain any profound conceptual analysis. Moreover, some of the ground covered in his articles is also partly covered in other papers, such as the two useful articles on the history of policies towards backward classes in Karnataka by Thimmaiah and Jai Govind.

L.P. Singh's article, for all its quiet tone and preference for understatement, is pretty damaging to the Mandal Commission. It raises grave doubts about the nature of the data used and the kind of calculations made by the Commission, makes wry comments about the logic of some of the observations and arguments of the Commission and questions the proposition that the composition of the bureaucracy must reflect the political power-structure. After those unanswerable criticisms, the article somewhat unexpectedly recommends the resumption of caste-enumeration on the ground that since caste is in any case likely to continue to dominate public affairs and important policies are being framed with reference to caste, the necessary data should be available. One can see the point of the argument but it seems to be a counsel of despair.

The contributions by three distinguished sociologists, Beteille, Roy Burman and Srinivas are articles reproduced from newspapers and not scholarly pa-

pers, but they deserve careful reading. Srinivas draws attention to the danger of emergence of a vested interest in backwardness, suggests the adoption of objective criteria applicable to individuals and not castes or other hereditary groups and points out that caste is terribly divisive. Roy Burman seems somewhat ambivalent. Some preliminaries of a doctrinal nature lead to criticisms of the Mandal Commission for exceeding its terms of reference, relying on dubious data and deviating from the framework given by the Expert Team (of which Roy Burman and Srinivas were members). The sociological issues are listed, and the problematic nature of these issues is pointed out. The article concludes with a reference to Gandhi, and to "real democratic decentralisation". The thought is not entirely clear and one is not quite sure precisely where the article leads us, but what comes through is a troubled mind which is groping for answers. Beteille's brief piece is a very valuable contribution. The important ideas in this article are: a distinction between schemes directed towards social and economic equality and schemes directed towards maintaining a balance of power and the categorisation of reservations for OBCs as being of the latter kind; a distinction between SC/ST and OBCs; and a caution against the introduction of the principle of balanced representation of castes in public institutions.

It is difficult to know what to make of the brief article by Upendra Baxi. He begins by asking why the Mandal Commission's Report was cold-stored for so long; he deplores that the Union of India decided not to adopt any policy measures for backward classes for four decades after Independence. At the same time he makes what appears to be a sympathetic reference to 'youth protests', cautions against reservations based entirely on caste and the tendencies of political power to use backwardness for narrow political ends, and calls for a recognition that state policy should combat rather than celebrate caste. He draws attention to the several recommendations of the Mandal Commission other than those relating to job reservations, and stresses the need to attack backwardness at the roots. However, it is not entirely clear whether he approves or disapproves of the reservation orders which led to all the trouble. In the end, what we are left with is a call for 'a lot of thinking' and 'a national dialogue'.

Professor M.P. Singh's article on the jurisprudential foundation of reservations (the second in the book) is one of the longer papers in the collection and is clearly offered as an important theoretical and scholarly contribution. Unfortunately it is marred by evident prejudice and bias from the start. In the very first paragraph Singh says that "advanced and privileged sections of the society precluded from the benefit of reservations . . . under the garb of challenging

the implementational aspects started questioning the constitutional policy itself, as a result of which the country had to face violent and widespread demonstrations"; and again that "momentum against the constitutional policy appears to be gathering strength day by day under different pretexts." Naturally advanced sections are by definition precluded from reservations meant for backward classes; and naturally too, opposition to reservations will come only from those who are precluded from their scope. Does it follow that such opposition is unsound and *mala fide*? Secondly, is it obvious that reservations for OBCs (as distinguished from Scheduled Castes and Tribes) is in pursuance of a constitutional policy? There is surely some difference of opinion on this question. Thirdly, what basis does Singh have for attributing dishonesty to the opponents of reservations for OBCs through the use of words such as 'garb' and 'pretexts'? Lastly was the widespread violence a response (however deplorable) to the government's order announcing reservations for OBCs, or was it the result of some people questioning constitutional policy?

After that kind of preamble, one does not expect any objective examination or analysis; and one does not find any. For instance, Singh refers to the meritarian principle of distribution according to which social goods should be allotted on the basis of merit and proceeds to challenge this; but are jobs in the government and in public enterprises 'social goods' to be 'allotted' or functions to be performed? If they are functional positions, should not the selection of persons be based primarily on the criterion of ability to perform those functions well? Does not the application of any other criterion (such as caste) necessarily imply a departure from the primary criterion of functional suitability? One may well argue that such a departure is warranted in the interest of social justice; but to deny that there is any problem here at all or to imply that the merit argument is a bogus one is to show that one is blinded by prejudice. (An attempt at a careful disentangling of the issues involved in this merit/efficiency debate was made by the present reviewer in an article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* of 2-9 March 1991).

Singh argues that what constitutes 'merit' in a given case depends on the social needs that are to be met. No one will question that general proposition, but the arguments through which he arrives at that proposition and the illustrations that he uses are extraordinarily muddled. Without going into those confusions in detail let us merely note that if merit varies with the variance in social needs, what we have to do in a given case is to define the kind of merit that is needed in that case; a reservation of posts for particular castes is not a redefinition of needs in this sense. Similarly, if the present tests and procedures for selection do not ensure merit and efficiency, then they

must be improved or drastically overhauled; the reservation of posts for some groups will in no way improve those tests and procedures.

Singh's article is not really about the Mandal Commission's Report; it is a labour defence of 'affirmative action' and of what it calls 'constitutional policy'. It is not possible within the compass of this review to enter into a detailed discussion of Singh's paper. What has been said above should be adequate to give an indication of its quality.

Thus, despite some valuable historical information, a résumé of judicial pronouncements and a few perceptive articles, this bulky compilation does not leave us much wiser on the crucial issues. Many of these were in fact discussed in some detail in several articles in *The Hindu*, *The Economic Times*, *Economic and Political Weekly* and elsewhere in 1990 and 1991. It is surprising that the editor and his expert adviser chose to ignore all those and to include quite a few indifferent pieces.

It is a relief to turn to Hiranmay Karlekar's book. It is a sustained effort at careful thought about the issues involved. As a preliminary to an evaluation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, Karlekar undertakes an examination of the concept of social justice. His brief account of the thought of several thinkers culminates in an exposition of John Rawls's theories, followed by a reference to Amartya Sen's ideas on entitlements. He argues that Rawls's principles (modified by elements from Sen) have an application to this country, and that they can be used to judge the Mandal Commission's recommendations. He comes to the conclusion that those recommendations will in no way further social justice. He undertakes a lengthy examination of the political motives behind the V.P. Singh government's announcement of reservations for OBCs. He fears that reservations will have a serious adverse effect on the economy and that the social tensions resulting from this will be all the more violent and divisive as job reservations on caste basis will further sharpen caste antagonisms, and heighten the awareness of caste. He examines at length whether caste can be equated with class, and in this process goes into theories of classes, the genesis of caste, the relationship between caste and race, and so on. That examination leads him to the conclusion that any attempts to deliver social justice must be based on the individual and not collectivities like caste or class. He feels that a new Commission will have to be appointed to draw up a new list of OBCs and poor upper caste elements, keeping out all rich and dominant OBCs and upper castes from the scope of affirmative action. He observes that there is much more to social justice than job reservations whose value is subject to debate, and that the percentage of reservations must be kept to the absolute minimum compatible with the requirement of social justice.

This is an immensely useful book, an important contribution to the study of a difficult subject. That judgement is independent of the fact that the present reviewer is in substantial agreement with many of the operative conclusions and recommendations in the book.

Nevertheless some dissatisfactions remain. Having criticised the first book for lack of analysis one does not want to appear to find fault with the second for too much of it; but it does seem rather strange that in a book of 183 pages on the Mandal Commission's Report the author gets to that Report only on p. 72. The examination of the concept of social justice which takes up most of the first 71 pages is well written and makes interesting reading, but it falls between two stools. As an account of theories of social justice it is (and is bound to be) sketchy; a proper treatment of such an important and complex subject would require a separate book. On the other hand, as a theoretical preparation for an examination of the Mandal Commission's Report it seems a bit excessive. Besides, affirmative action or compensatory discrimination (whatever we wish to call it) in favour of the disadvantaged sections of our society is not such a strange proposition that it requires quite so elaborate a theoretical justification. That preferential treatment for some may be necessary in order to ensure equality in a larger sense is fairly

evident; what is not evident is the form that compensatory discrimination should take. Similarly, the points which a critic of the Mandal Commission's recommendations and the V.P. Singh government's reservation orders based on them would like to make are fairly clear; they need not be recapitulated here as they will be found scattered throughout the two books under review. Those points can be made quite independently of the Rawlsian principles. One is not arguing against a theoretical framework; one is merely saying that a longish essay on social justice (and yet not long enough to do full justice to the subject) seems rather disproportionate as a preliminary to an examination of the Mandal Commission's Report. The sections on the theory of classes (pp. 135-143) the genesis of caste (pp. 147-154) and some comparable arrangements in other civilisations (pp. 154-159) are also open to a similar comment.

As regards the chapter on the motives of the V.P. Singh government in making a sudden announcement regarding reservations for OBCs, it could well have been omitted; it really has no place in such a serious study. Quite regardless of what led V.P. Singh to do what he did, the question is whether the reservation order is justifiable as a measure of social justice, and whether it has any adverse implications for society; and the book does in any case address that question. A pruning of

the lines suggested would have enabled the author to devote more space to a comprehensive examination of the diverse issues involved in this difficult and contentious subject. Most of the issues do find a mention in the book, but quite a few of them are important and complex enough to warrant being dealt with *in extenso* in separate chapters.

Secondly, for the purpose of dealing with the problems and sicknesses of this society, do we really need to trace the evolution of the nation-state in Europe, the emergence of the ideas of liberty, equality and distributive justice and the history of western thinking on these themes from Aristotle onwards, finally arrive at John Rawls, argue that Rawls's principles have an application to India and then proceed to apply those ideas to the issues relating to the Mandal Commission? At the risk of sounding chauvinistic one has to ask whether the unstated implication is that justice, in particular social justice, is a western concept, and that Indian thought (and the concept of dharma) is not concerned with it. If that implication was not intended, one would have expected some inquiry into Indian ideas on the subject of social justice, even if the author finds it necessary to repudiate some of them (such as parts of *Manusmriti*). In any case, in our own time there have been extensive discussions on equality and on special measures for

socially and educationally backward classes during the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. The book cites several articles of the Constitution but makes no reference to the Constituent Assembly debates. Ambedkar is not mentioned in the book and there are only three incidental references to Nehru none of which relates to his views on reservations. Even more surprising is the absence of any reference to Gandhi who agonised over untouchability, sorrowed with the poor, and provided to the world his famous 'talisman'; and who nevertheless supported the varnashrama system and opposed Ambedkar on separate electorates. (The author has answered a somewhat similar point made by another and less sympathetic reviewer; but the point remains). The author should also surely have specifically taken note of at least some of the numerous writings on 'the subject which appeared in the newspapers and journals following the widespread occurrence of disturbances in 1990.

Having said that, the reviewer would like to close by observing once again that this book represents an earnest, passionate and scholarly attempt to grapple with the issues posed by reservations for OBCs, and is a most valuable addition to the literature on the subject.

Ramaswamy R. Iyer, is a visiting Professor at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.

NEW FROM OXFORD

Themes in Development Economics

by S. SUBRAMANIAN

This collection of essays is heterogeneous in theme, orientation, and treatment. Some of the papers have a pronouncedly 'theoretical' perspective. These include one on formulating a freedom-based notion of rights that could be of some immediate relevance in the context of a resource-constrained developing economy; two papers on issues relating to the implementation of poverty-alleviation programmes; and one on mechanisms for dealing with the phenomenon of urban employment in a dual economy.

S. SUBRAMANIAN is a Fellow at the Madras Institute of Development Studies.

Economic Strategies for Growth in Developing Countries

S.S. KOTHARI

This study analyses recent changes in India's economic policy and performance, and their implications for economic growth in the nineties, focusing on economic liberalization and the transition from a command to market economy. The author believes that the recent liberalization and rationalization in economic policies in general and fiscal policies in particular have boosted the performance of the Indian economy and further liberalization will enable it to perform significantly better as the decade proceeds. Although a major part of the discussion revolves around India, the principles and strategies discussed are largely applicable to most developing countries of South and South-East Asia.

S.S. KOTHARI is a Senior Chartered Accountant, Taxation Adviser, and a well-known financial expert.

New Essays on T.S. Eliot

by VINOD SENA AND RAJIVA VERMA

The birth centenary of T.S. Eliot provided an excellent opportunity to scholars for a reassessment of the life and work of the pioneer of modernism in literature. The essays collected here derive from a seminar held at the University of Delhi in December 1988 at which leading Eliot specialists from West and East joined hands in order to appreciate the complex nature of the achievement of the great poet-critic of our century.

VINOD SENA holds doctorates from Delhi and Cambridge for his work on T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, respectively. He teaches English at the University of Delhi and is currently a National Fellow of UGC.

RAJIVA VERMA is Professor of English at the University of Delhi.

On Living in a Revolution and Other Essays

by M.N. SRINIVAS

On Living in a Revolution and Other Essays contains ten essays written by Professor M.N. Srinivas over a period of twenty-nine years. They focus on various contemporary issues which are a part of modern Indian society but nevertheless elude comprehension.

The main strength of this book lies in its ability to provide clarity to what is confusing and a pattern to what would otherwise remain unconnected.

PROFESSOR M.N. SRINIVAS is now Chairman, Institute of Social and Economic Change, Bangalore. He was recently elected a Fellow of the British Academy.

Nissim Ezekiel

by ADIL JUSAWALLA

Nissim Ezekiel is best known as one of India's foremost, most influential, and widely read poets writing in English. It is less well-known that he is also a writer of prose of considerable stature, although he has written extensively with great sensitivity, style, and distinction on literature, art, television programmes, books, and a range of other subjects for well over three decades. This gap in perception stems primarily from the fact that his prose writing has been scattered, in newspapers, journals, introductions to other books... giving readers and critics little opportunity of seeing them as an intellectually and stylistically distinctive body of work.

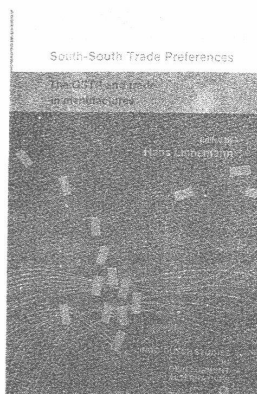
This selection remedies the lacuna by bringing together for the first time some of Ezekiel's best prose, thematically arranged in five sections: 'On Poetry', 'On Philosophy', 'On Art and Culture', 'On Life and Thought', 'On Books', representing his major interests.

NISSIM EZEKIEL now edits *The Indian P.E.N.*, and in the past edited *Quest* and *Poetry India*. He has been Head of Department and Professor of English at the University of Bombay and visiting Professor at the University of Leeds, England.



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Trade Preferences of Developing Countries

Charan Wadhva

SOUTH-SOUTH TRADE PREFERENCES—THE GSTP AND TRADE IN MANUFACTURES (INDO-DUTCH STUDIES ON DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES NO. 9)

Edited by Hans Linnemann

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.,
New Delhi, 1992, pp. 236, Rs. 240.00

By embarking on industrialisation strategies since the fifties, many developing countries, which were mainly exporters of primary commodities, have succeeded in significantly changing the pattern of their exports in favour of manufactures over the years. Whereas the traditional destination of the exports of primary commodities from the developing countries (earlier called the Less Developed Countries or the LDCs), for obvious reasons, was the markets of the developed countries, the developing countries now export manufactured products not only to the developed countries but also increasingly to the other developing countries. Intra-developing countries trade in manufactures, being a relatively new phenomenon, has of late attracted the attention of trade theorists and the analysts of development economics as well as the experts at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) which serves the cause of its principal members, namely the group of developing countries.

The importance of expanding South-South Trade, especially in manufactures has recently been recognised as being mutually beneficial particularly when the continuing recession in the developed countries has constrained the growth of exports from the developing countries to the developed countries. The developing countries took a major initiative in 1988 under the auspices of UNCTAD by successfully concluding an Agreement on a Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP) among themselves. Even though the GSTP is still in the process of ratification by the minimum 15 participating countries to become fully

operational, this agreement is heralded as a major hopeful sign of the increased determination on the part of the developing countries to strengthen economic co-operation among themselves so as to cope with the dynamic changes in the world trading environment of the 80's (and now even more radical changes of the 90's). The present study by Hans Linnemann and his co-contributors, edited by the former, reports the findings of a prestigious research project at the Free University, Amsterdam. This project was undertaken under the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD) sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi and the Dutch Institute of Social Science Research in Developing Countries (IMWOO) at the Hague.

The volume contains eight chapters. In his introduction, pointing to the slower pace of economists in theorizing and empirically analysing the costs and benefits of increasing South-South (intra-developing countries) trade in manufactures, the editor notes that the "Third World politicians" (and their bureaucrats) have "made a step forward" (p.14) in April 1988 by agreeing on GSTP, which the UNCTAD has labelled a historic event for the third world. According to the editor, the book comprising seven contributions, analyses the economic and non-economic case for preferential lowering of trade barriers among the developing countries so as to stimulate South-South trade in manufactures. These contributions focus on the empirical measurement of the existing and planned reduction in Trade Control Measures especially

The importance of expanding South-South Trade, especially in manufactures has recently been recognised as being mutually beneficial particularly when the continuing recession in the developed countries has constrained the growth of exports from the developing countries to the developed countries.

by the reduction of tariffs on trade in manufactures among the developing countries as envisaged under the GSTP.

Chapter two by Pitou van Dijk is entitled 'Preferential Trade Among Developing Countries: Objectives and feasibility'. The author candidly admits that the "GSTP is presently still in its infancy. . . In fact, it is not quite clear yet what the coverage and extent of the concessions will be. . . For that reason, it is not possible to make a detailed and realistic assessment of its viability".

He surveys the theoretical literature on the rationale of protectionism and the case for and against regional preferential trade among the developing countries. He concludes that the "creation of a new trading system among developing countries such as the GSTP is not to be hailed without reservations".

In the chapter entitled 'Towards a Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries', Pitou van Dijk examines the institutional problems involved in the establishment of a global preferential trade system among the developing countries in some detail so as to be consistent with the framework set up by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). He concludes that the 1980s are "not very propitious for most developing countries to engage themselves in a worldwide mutual co-operation scheme" (p. 72). UNCTAD clearly does not agree with this view. Despite the difficult international economic environment of the 1980s due to continuing recession in the developed world and the weaker bargaining position of the economic crisis-ridden developing countries, the case for

GSTP is even stronger in the 1990s when world trade is being increasingly conducted through regional trading blocs.

Chapter four by Pitou van Dijk and Ms Els Hoogteijling provides an in-depth analysis of what the authors call the "Syndrome of Protectionism". They trace the efforts of vested interests in perpetuating this syndrome in the developing countries. They study this phenomenon by using sophisticated methodology of factor analysis. They base their analysis on eleven influencing variables and finally choose the three most influential variables based on 1980 data for 46 developing countries. By using varimax rotated factor mix, they classify these countries by factor scores on three preferred influencing variables. The authors are conscious of the limitations of their sophisticated analysis for inferring the determinants of a country's capacity to liberalise. They correctly point out that the "process of policy making is complex and decisions are not based solely on macro-economic criteria . . . yet, (economic) factors are likely to remain quite relevant for the understanding of the negotiation process surrounding the GSTP implementation". (p. 109).

Harmen Verbruggen analyses the 'Patterns of South-South Trade in Manufactures'. This includes a study of the composition as well as direction of such trade for six selected years covering the period 1970 to 1987. Special attention is paid to the trade in capital goods (ma-

The authors make a distinctive contribution by estimating the effects on bilateral trade in manufactures for a sample of sixty Developed Country and Developing Country exporters and thirty-nine Developing Country importers using a gravity model with varying degrees of import tariff reductions as a special explanatory variable.

chinery and transport equipment) which is seen as the potentially most dynamic and beneficial sector promoting the economic growth of the developing countries. The author discovers the concentration of production and exports of capital goods by developing countries among the few New Industrializing Countries to other developing countries.

Chapter six, also by Harmen Verbruggen provides detailed examination of the 'Structure of Protection and South-South Trade in Manufactures' with special reference to the capital goods sector. He shows up his bias by classifying the import-substitution strategy adopted by the developing countries as "principally offensive by nature, in the sense that it is directed towards the creation of an industrial sector" (p. 147). Despite his qualifying remarks that this "is not to say that no defensive forces are present in the protected import-substitution sectors in developing countries today" (p. 147), there will be few takers for his above cited view in the developing countries.

Cees van Beers and Hans Linnemann

LIVING ON BORROWED TIME

Narayani Gupta

THIS FISSURED LAND : AN ECOLOGICAL HISTORY OF INDIA

By Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, pp xiv + 274, (Tables Illustrations, Bibliography, Index), Rs. 290.00

provide further empirical examination of the 'Commodity Composition of Trade in Manufactures and South-South Trade Potential'. The authors measure the degree of commodity correspondence between exports of a country and the imports of another country. They employ two technical measures labelled 'COS' measure (originally developed by Linne-man in 1966) and the 'EIS' measure patterned after the work by Finger and Kreinin (1979). They also use gravity model and develop and measure an 'Index of Relative Trade Potential' (IRTP) in manufactured products among 34 selected developing countries (including India) based on 1980 data. They caution the readers regarding limitations of their methodology for drawing policy inferences.

The last chapter by Hans Linnemann and Harmen Verbruggen provides their estimates of "GSTP Tariff Reduction and Its Effects on South-South Trade Flows". The authors assume (which is a big assumption) that the tariff levels are "representative of the total level of protection through Trade Control Measures" (p. 201). The authors make a distinctive contribution by estimating the effects on bilateral trade in manufactures for a sample of sixty Developed Country and Developing Country exporters and thirty-nine Developing Country importers using a gravity model with varying degrees of import tariff reductions as a special explanatory variable. The authors conclude that the short term effects of a GSTP lowering import tariff are modest: a "20 per cent linear tariff cut leading to an expansion of 5.5 per cent in trade in manufactures between the LDCs, and a substantial tariff cut of 50 per cent leading to a trade expansion of 15 per cent" (p. 213). The long term effects are comparatively better in this respect "with expected increases in intra-LDC trade in manufactures of 14 per cent (20 per cent tariff cut) and 42 per cent (50 per cent tariff cut) respectively" (p. 213). The authors add due words of caution regarding the use of these numerical findings for reliable forecasts and emphasize the need for more research particularly for estimating the "dynamic" effects of the GSTP on intra-country exports of manufactures among the developing countries.

Despite the limitations of the research exercises undertaken by the researchers pointed out by the authors themselves and despite the use of old data (1980 as the reference year) in major calculations and other weaknesses pointed out earlier in this review, this book stands out as a pioneering analytical and empirical work on the subject of the GSTP and its implications for the expansion of intra-developing country exports of manufactures including capital goods. Future researchers and policy makers will benefit from this useful addition to the scanty literature on the subject of GSTP.

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Hundreds of people marched up to the Rio Summit, and all of them marched down again, with portfolios bulging with plans and platitudes... back to where the Rio Yamuna is flowing, carrying along with it the effluents from countless factories. And in Madhya Pradesh and in many other pradeshes, countless trees are cut down daily. The greed of the few continues to trample on the needs of the many.

One of the ways in which the state of things can be corrected, and 'modernism' tempered with equity, is simply by disseminating more information in language which can be easily understood. This book is a breath of fresh air in Delhi's polluted atmosphere—easy, engrossing reading, which will appeal to a wide range of anglophone readers (translation into Indian languages is recommended). It should be particularly useful for students of history whose courses are flawed by the mechanical persistence of "periodised" study, and simplistic stereotypes (Hindus/Muslims, upper classes/the masses) and who concentrate on the Great Traditions and the high points of history and not on the marginalised groups. This book, by highlighting some of our enduring traditions, shows that concern for the environment is not a fad of the 1980s but something with a long history. It is our privilege that the groups who are the bearers of this have not been steamrollered flat by rampant industrialisation. Their skills and their belief systems can be understood not only from old ethnographic studies, museums and cultural 'festivals', but from actual observation. The dedication—to Verrier Elvin, anthropologist, Iravati Karve, sociologist, D.D. Kosambi, scientist and historian, and Radhakamal Mukherjee, economic historian, reminds us of our debt to these remarkable scholars of an earlier generation who were able to observe, empathise with and communicate some of the finest traditions of our peoples. The study of human ecology in India began with them.

The *Vishnu Purana* has a story about the earth looking on with wry amusement while people fight over her surface. Ecology has to do with the earth, our home. The beautiful word 'oikos' meant 'home' as well as 'the world' to the Greeks.

'Oekologie'/'ecology' was used in the 1960s by the German zoologist Haeckel to describe the study of living organisms and their environment, and the interrelationships between organisms. It has come to be realised that natural ecosystems have been modified and exploited by man, and replaced by fragile, simplified monocultures. Nearly 100 years ago, Theodore Roosevelt began a characteristically strident policy for conserving America's forests, which earlier generations had so happily depleted. Similar warning bells have been heard in India, and ignored by those guilty of crime. Reserving large areas for natural parks, setting up a Department of the Environment, publicity campaigns, are the positive measures of the last 25 years. Too much cannot be done, and this book should generate a sense of respect for the traditions where 'resource-use' is carried out sensitively. Such a sense of respect is vitally needed in India, where different modes of resource-use coexist, and cannot be seen as stages of history, with a temporal shift from stage one to stage four (One—gathering, Two—nomadic, Three—settled cultivation, Four—industrial). In Europe the enclosure movement, the Luddite riots, and serf revolts are things of the past; in Andhra and Bihar they are only too real.

Gadgil and Guha are writing on the foundations of earlier work, their own as well as that of British and Indian ethnographers and recent ecologists. The partnership gives us the distilled essence of much detailed scholarship, laced with a strong sense of commitment. 70 pages are given to 'a theory of ecological history', and 120 to colonial and independent India. The section on 'theory' is necessary because most writers, including Marxists, have assumed that the industrial mode of production is an inevitable and desirable stage for all countries. In understanding the colonial impact, 'ecological imperialism' (A. Crosby, 1986) is as important as the link between capitalism and imperialism. It is vitally important to appreciate the difference between the 'neo-Europes' created in some colonies, and the control of natural resources achieved in colonies like India.

The brief and absorbing section on pre-colonial India tells us how the rever-

ence of the early Aryans for fire and water, the two life giving (and life-destroying) forces was dovetailed with localised beliefs and knowledge, where woods, water bodies, trees and animals were treated with the reverence due to what they could give. Designating areas as 'sacred' was a way of ensuring regulated use, designating animals as 'sacred' a way to ensure the survival of the species. Occupation ('caste') differentiations safeguarded the natural resources by creating non-competing relationships between groups of people. Even powerful rulers had to give in when there were protests against taxes on forests and orchards. Examples are drawn from all over the country and the mosaic painted is much richer than the earlier sparse index would suggest. The chronological style (B.P.—Before Present) can create problems when it comes to specific dates for the recent past, but it is a welcome change from the scissors-style of dating events B.C./A.D.

The last 200 years (1/200 of the time since the artists of Altamira painted in their caves!) has a disproportionately long section, justified by the fact that in these two centuries there has occurred "a quantum jump in energy consumption". Britain, having used up most of her own timber resources, proceeded to use frighteningly large quantities of timber to construct ships and, later, railway sleepers. Guha's earlier *The Unquiet Woods* (1989) had surveyed forest-based protest movements; the present book fills out the picture. Since 1865 one-fifth of the country's land is owned by the Forest Department; in the department, the diffusion of responsibility and the transfers of officials means that there is no deep sense of commitment or of clarity in policy; on the other hand, the temptations are many. Individual and collective protests achieve little beyond delay (p. 221). (Contrast an earlier time—"When the Mughal governor in Kashmir attempted to tax sheep-rearing and fishery, there were strong protests, leading to the removal of the governor. The emperor Shah Jahan then promulgated an edict stating that the tax... was cancelled, as being against the custom. One can see... this edict carved upon a mosque in Srinagar"—p. 107). The book's warning comes across hard and clear—that our country "is living on borrowed time."

Many other aspects of recent policies can also be examined—mining, dams (and floods), industrial waste, and the small and beautiful but lethal 'Lady Morgon's flower' (water hyacinth). Examples of corrective or regenerative action, like that of Anna Hazare, might have softened the gloom. These are minor points, which do not detract from the utility of a book which simply and clearly poses present-day problems against not just historical but geological time.

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The chronicling of the history of Indian art and architecture has suffered a chequered past. Even while British administrators, many Indian and foreign scholars and individual researchers have developed a body of literature pertaining to this vast subject, there was, and still is, always too much apathy and consequent neglect of documentation of many of the most profound architectural wonders set in the context of the societies in which they were born. Now, with the recent publication of Dr. Settar's *The Hoysala Temples* (in two volumes), the lacunae have been eradicated in regard to one of the most important periods of Indian art history. This prodigious scholar, Head of the Department of Art History at Karnataka University at Dharwad, has woven an intricate tapestry, bringing the Hoysala world to life. Most of the book is based on two interacting factors. Unlike many of his predecessors, the author is a son of the Hoysala soil, and thus his intuitive responses carry the weight of authenticity. But he has grounded his prolific imagination into the firmest of foundations, having literally buried himself seriously in thousands of original inscriptions, thus absorbing both manifest and hidden meanings, while reviewing former scholarship as well. In this labour of love, one that has not previously been attempted, the text presents a persistent interplay between general observations and profuse concrete examples, with the result that Volume I is in itself an original and creative endeavour. What makes this even more true is an innovative, many-sided approach. The historical context is presented first; attention is then directed to patronage, and finally artists and their productions are given ample scrutiny. This methodology is in contrast to previous works, which were primarily descriptive, or the historian and sociologist regarded the temples as further data to enhance their own approaches. Now, a virtual cornucopia, a multi-dimensional perspective—encourages those laymen and scholars interested in history or in art history, in architecture or religion and mythology, in the drama of the lives of medieval Indians and especially in the fascinating facts about the people who created the monuments, to plumb Dr. Settar's well of knowledge, the harvest of his involvement for over a quarter of a century. There is seemingly no aspect of the life and times of the Hoysalas which he has not, in his extraordinary breadth of vision, systematized into a structured order. Each chapter sheds light on a single sphere, but the chapters are conceived as interacting, revealing the complexities of a society rent by extreme contradictions. The Hoysalas loved god and beauty at the same time that they were cunning and predatory, ravening and lustful.

Who were they? As patrons, they accomplished miracles by supporting the building programmes of villages, tanks, dwellings and over 125 intricately carved temples, many of which are still extant. A

number rival any of the great architectural masterpieces of the world. The first chapter describes the emergence of the Hoysalas from tribal obscurity in the latter half of the 10th century and their rise to prominence in the present Chickamagalur/Hassan district of Karnataka by means of conquest, absorption of formerly powerful dynasties and the gifting of

millions of youthful soldiers left dead on the fields of battle, as, in tribal fury, the expanding dynasty raped and plundered ruthlessly, subjugating former allies, collecting spoils, women and even the queens of the enemy. The Pandyas, Cholas, Kadambas, Nolambas, Kalachuris and their feudatories all, at one time or another, fell before the barbaric sword of the

that it depends fundamentally upon the artist and the architect, as sources of creative transformations. Their lives are here finally accorded proper attention and the respect they deserve. The artist in his milieu is imaginatively portrayed, and his personal traits investigated. Individual sculptors are brought to life and questions, so long puzzling, are answered with convincing logic.

For example, it is interesting to note that many greatly talented artists were also warriors and loyal to all the concerns of the particular chieftain or ruler whom they served. Some were even brought as slaves, won in wars, but their status changed as they adapted to their new conditions. Some travelled in many directions at the invitation, request or command of various patrons, while others stayed in the villages in which they were born. This accounts for the provincial, lower standard of some of the artistic productions. The artists, even the scribes who carved the inscriptions, were mostly illiterate. They had therefore to rely on Brahmins to chalk the message on to the stone slab prior to initiating the carving of inscriptions or hero-stones. Scribes often were also sculptors and even architects. Most of these were non-sectarian, working for various sects, even though each might have had personal preferences. Dr. Settar gives a fine account of those sculptors who had affixed their names to the carvings: Dasoja of the 12th and Mallitamma of the 13th century and others, even though most remained anonymous. Tools, which were of high quality steel, well suited for carving the plentiful chloritic schist, soft when excavated and hardening with time, and methods of carving are examined as are structural techniques, guilds and domiciles.

The infinite variables and the underlying unifying features and the slow evolution of temple architectural styles, primarily as a result of growth from the already standardized methods and designs of the Chalukya heritage are given attention in great detail in Chapters VI and VII. Copious graphic and photographic illustrations reveal transitions which led up to the highly developed circular stellate shape of the outer wall of the Hoysala sanctum with its alternately recessed and projected members; the multiple shrines, profuse carving on wall and frieze; transformations in the temple tower, columns, hall and ceiling carvings. For anyone willing to follow these detailed analyses, there is a world of fascinating information now readily available here.

For the most part, Dr. Settar describes, albeit in great detail, only the external features of the statues. Dare I make some suggestions to the author of such a profound text? As a sculptor who was initially drawn to the Hoysala idiom, especially at Halebid, primarily in regard to the richness and dynamic qualities of the multifarious panels of sculptures arranged in closely packed contiguity all around the temple, I must argue with Dr.

An Intricate Tapestry

Carmel Berkson

THE HOYSALA TEMPLES

By S. Settar

Karnataka University and Kala Yatra Publications, 1992,
Volumes I and II, pp 424 and 430, Rs 2,500.00

lands and villages to brahmins, who, in turn, rewarded the rulers by establishing ties with the divinities and thereby insuring acceptance and respectability. From local victories, they progressed rapidly to imperialist expansion, as they swept through vast land tracts. With anecdotal reports which enliven the text, the careers of the major rulers are traced in detail. By the first quarter of the 13th century, Narasimha II had conquered territory as far south as Ramesvaram and east to the Tungabhadra. The decline came only

when a number of weaker rulers succumbed to the Muslim invaders after 1311 A.D. For history as realpolitik, the saga of the Hoysalas is nothing less than exceedingly edifying. Even though their monuments are the epitome of beauty and a cohesive religious achievement, the story is by no means pretty. A macabre dialectic between architectural and artistic excellence and profuse and rapacious conquests is the tragic reality, as the aesthetic successes issued out from the remains of

Hoysalas, long before foreign invaders ravaged India, proving that the law-of-the-jungle mentality is not confined to 'others'.

And yet, the time came for celebration of victories by building temples, donating land and villages to brahmins and other power sources and inventing a legend which combined military might with divine sanction. We learn from inscriptions about patronage in Chapter II. Aside from the chiefs or kings and their nobility, merchants, members of the bureaucracy, priests, craft and caste groups and, finally, individuals, believed that it was imperative to make contributions to the building programmes.

In a radical shift from the conventional art historian's focus on the study of the monuments for establishment of historical sequences, almost two thirds of the text is devoted to the artists and their productions, their environment and working conditions. Dr. Settar recognizes that art history is ultimately rooted, not in ruler or patron, but

For history as realpolitik, the saga of the Hoysalas is nothing less than exceedingly edifying. Even though their monuments are the epitome of beauty and a cohesive religious achievement, the story is by no means pretty. A macabre dialectic between architectural and artistic excellence and profuse and rapacious conquests is the tragic reality, as the aesthetic successes issued out from the remains of millions of youthful soldiers left dead on the fields of battle, as, in tribal fury, the expanding dynasty raped and plundered ruthlessly, subjugating former allies, collecting spoils, women and even the queens of the enemy.

Settar's rather apologetic, yes, even defensive analysis of Hoysala sculpture as a whole and his assertion that in style, there are no great innovations. While it may very well be true that some of the works are 'pompous', 'methodically banal' or 'over-ornamented', one must be wary not to attribute guilt by association to many remarkable works of art. Those that immediately come to mind are the *Brahma Seated on Hamsa*, the *Gajendramardana (Shiva)*, *Garuda Carrying Vishnu and Lakshmi*, *Gajendramoksha* at Halebid and *Bhagadatta on the Elephant* at Belur and many, many more. So many panels flood the mind that I shall only with difficulty refrain from plunging into a paean of praise, but one misses seeing these enduring sculptures in the Volume II photographs, only a few of which show the best statues in detail, and those that do are hampered by the overcrowded design. As for the Hoysalas, art is the pinnacle of their achievements, and this seems to be an area which calls for further analysis by a discriminating observer of style differentiations in sculpture who will examine and write about the dynamism, the excruciatingly compressed energies, the interaction of massive volumes with delicate linear rhythmic form, the complex heretofore unimagined configurations and the movement back and forth from abstract to representational expressions. And there is also the writhing, entwining, twisted dissonances, reflecting the contortions and undulations of nature, not to mention the exquisitely carved reminders of vegetative abundance. The miracle here is that no one element is repeated mechanically. Even though the art of the friezes is not classic, which seems to be Dr. Settar's preference, each element has its own emphasis and unique characteristic, retaining the vigour and elementality of the people to whom these mythological lessons were directed. We have here the passionate and deeply moving display of all human emotional states, projected on to the multiple lithic symbols. Let us not become too urbanized to feel the energies thus gifted to us by our more forcefully alive ancestors. The need remains to educate a public still evidently unable, in the main, to identify with the subtleties of Indian sculpture and its various phases of development.

Finally, congratulations to the University of Karnataka for subsidizing this important contribution and to Mytec Press for serving as a model for other Indian publishers and cultural sponsors. It proves that technically fine volumes can be printed here without the necessity of relying on foreign presses.

Carmel Berkson, sculptor and photographer, has lived and worked in India since 1977 on historical Hindu and Buddhist monuments of India, and has held exhibitions at the Beth Hatefulsoth, Tel Aviv and the Jewish Museum. She has 2000 photographs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

A CONCERT OF THUMRIS AND GHAZALS

H.Y. Sharada Prasad

FROM CAUVERY TO GODAVARI: MODERN KANNADA SHORT STORIES

Edited by Ramachandra Sharma

Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 190, Rs. 75.00

A normal reader of a book of short stories does not begin at the beginning and go on till the end, as he does a novel. He looks at the table of contents and decides which stories to read first, and the decision is guided by the attractiveness of the title and the length of the story. (Who for example would care to begin with stories that are called 'Cruelty' or 'Orphans?') If the book is a compilation of the work of more than one hand, the reader is apt to start with a familiar name.

The short story is treated by literary historians and critics as a minor art form. But there is a large demand for short stories owing to the growth of periodicals. Editors want them, so writers provide them. No form is so suitable to readers who have to fill time as they travel by plane or train or wait in bus stands and ante-rooms. Compactness and intensity are said to mark the good short story but there is a market for many casual artists.

Short stories are also translators' favourites. They do not make prolonged demand on their energy but give them the satisfaction of having done some service to their language. But the little ivory icon, however lovely, does not test the carver the same way as stone tests the sculptor. To change the simile, a collection of short stories is like a concert of thumris and ghazals—at best 'light classical'. The great singer proves himself rendering khayals or kritis in the grand ragas. A literature is judged by its poetry, its novels, its plays.

The experience of reading a dozen collections of short stories from the sub-continent in the last five or six weeks confirms me in my view that in this genre many are chosen but few are called to high merit. This particular anthology is one of the better of the lot. At least three of its sixteen stories are outstanding examples of the art—A.K. Ramanujan's 'Annayya's Anthropology', U.R. Anantha Murthy's 'Stallion of the Sun', and Devanuru Mahadeva's 'Tar Arrives'. All three, as they say in cinema, have a strong story line, they are evocative in the matter of place and character, and they are subtly and superbly crafted.

Ramanujan's story is a little masterpiece which deals with the rites of life and death and with the passage between two cultures. We have a young man from an orthodox brahmin family of Mysore who has quickly found his feet in Chicago and

is all admiration for the American way of life and American scholarship. Why, these westerners know more about India than born Indians! And Annayya is drawn to anthropology with the enthusiasm of "a lecher pursuing the object of his desire". He comes across a brand-new American book on Hindu rituals. Something about the illustrations of funerals looks familiar. Annayya peers closer, only to discover that they are photographs of his own father's death. The family had kept the news back from him out of consideration for his studies. The ingenious build-up with the help of seemingly irrelevant details, the delineation of naivete and the sharp twist at the end—all make for a story that will linger in memory.

Anantha Murthy is Faulknerian at bringing alive the whole Malnad region which teems with vegetation and idiosyncratic characters. His 'Stallion of the Sun' provides a striking account of a man who is incantatory and lyrical in his ineptness. It would have been a great story if it had a convincing end. Having gone grandly along, the author seems to have lost his way.

Most stories and novels in our languages are about the upper castes and the educated crust. That is the grievance of Dalit writers and Dalit literature sets out to correct this imbalance. Frank O'Connor once described the short story as pre-eminently a means for submerged population groups to address the dominant community. But Dalit writers tend to be pamphleteers, just as Progressive Writers were in their day. In Devanuru Mahadeva, however, social purpose is wrapped in authentic story-telling talent. He has a strong hold on irony, that most effective quality in a short story. 'Tar Arrives' is a crisp little parable that mocks at the reality of economic development. A road comes to a village, and little good it does. It enables the village headman to become a contractor, old trees are cut down, the villagers find that tar can be used not only for roads but for roofs, and a child is dragged to its death in a tar pit. The story is told with wryness and a wonderful economy of words. The only regret is that Mahadeva's dialect cannot be captured in English.

Yeshwant Chittal's 'The Girl Who Became a Story' and Poorna Chandra Tejaswi's 'Tabara's Story' made a strong impact in Kannada when they first appeared, but somehow they do not im-

press in these translations. The tolerance level for sentimentality is probably much lower in English than in our languages. It is tautness that scores.

From Cauvery to Godavari is an old description of the Karnataka country. The phrase was coined by the Rashtrakuta King Nripatunga 1000 years ago. It would have been more appropriate to a book of cultural history or travel than to an anthology of short stories. But it is catchy and that's a plus point with publishers.

And how does one describe and identify "modern" Kannada short stories? Modern Kannada literature is generally regarded as dating from B.M. Srikantia's path-breaking book of poems and is some seventy-five years old. The stories here are all post-1950. They are arranged in the order of the year of birth of the authors. The first story is by the editor, Ramachandra Sharma, and the inference is that the truly "modern" Kannada short story began with him and with what the chroniclers of Kannada literature call the *Navya* (Modernist) phase, as opposed to the *Navodaya* (Renaissance) phase. The greatest of short story writers in the language was Masti Venkatesa Iyengar. The best work of this giant is ageless. There is nothing the Moderns know about human nature that Masti did not know better. The editor's reasons for omitting Masti and other master story-tellers like Gorur and Shivarama Karanth are not wholly convincing.

I shall refrain from indulging in the customary reviewer's pastime of pointing out Indianisms and inadequacies of translation. It would be good if publishers of the standing of Penguin demanded that all the stories in any such collection be translated by the same person. That would ensure that the authors are not invidiously served. There is another shortcoming—a major one: the absence of humour. (In fact humour was rarely to be encountered in the dozen Indian anthologies I recently read). Do not Kannada people—and people in our part of the world—laugh at all? Or make fun of others?

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suddenly find myself awash in a welcome spate of Urdu short stories translated into English. Before me are five anthologies, two of which are listed above.

The Tale of the Old Fisherman and other Contemporary Urdu Short Stories published by Vanguard in Pakistan, and *The Colour of Nothingness*, published by Penguin in India, are both edited by M.U. Memon, Professor of Urdu at the University of Wisconsin. Memon has done a remarkable amount of work on Urdu fiction, and he certainly qualifies as an authority on the subject. He has also translated a few of the stories himself. Each collection offers excellent fare by some of Pakistan's master story-tellers.

In addition, the two books also provide illuminating introductions to the Urdu language. Urdu and its twin in India, Hindustani, are, I imagine, important linguistic phenomena of comparatively recent times.

The word Urdu is derived from the Turkish "Ordu" meaning "military camp". Towards the later part of the Mughal rule, the language spoken by the imperial army, a hybrid of old Punjabi and Persian, came to be known as Urdu.

The British in their turn gave a major impetus to the language in 1800 by setting up the Fort William College at Calcutta. They gathered the best exponents of Urdu they could find and commissioned them to write textbooks to meet the communication requirements of young Englishmen. The British preferred to call the language Hindustani.

Thus Urdu is a young language (I didn't realize quite how young), and yet its poetry has exploded with a creative and metaphysical energy that many hoary languages might envy. I am referring to Urdu verse as exemplified by Ghalib and the galaxy of his contemporaries, and later by Allama Iqbal. But here Urdu could draw upon the *Sufi* and Persian poetic traditions.

We cannot talk of Urdu without eulogizing its verse. Few other languages lend themselves to poetry—its idiom, rhythm, compression—so well, or yield that elusive poetic essence that transcends the limits of human comprehension.

But when it comes to prose, Urdu has had less encouragement. Fiction is very recent to Urdu. The first short story was written in the early 1920s. Considering this, its muscle, sophistication and scope have evolved at an astonishing pace.

While there are no tall claims being made for Urdu in this refreshingly factual account of the language, I have a slight difficulty with Memon's comment that "Fiction as we know it in the West is a recent and entirely derivative phenomenon in Urdu."

The italics are mine. What follows this statement is the implication that since fiction was not known to the Muslim world, Urdu's narrative forms were adopted from the West. This smacks of Orientalism—the obeisance the Eastern scholar, for whatever reason, feels com-

pelled to pay to Western scholarship. What about the 1001 *Arabian Nights*, the *dastaans* he dismisses as mythical and magical narratives?

Everything is derivative of something—in the arts as much as in thought—and to single Urdu out in this manner is to do it a disservice. It also discounts the influ-

ence of the oral and written story-telling traditions of the robust languages native to the soil in which Urdu was nurtured: Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi, Sariki, Hindko, Gujarati and, God (and probably the linguist) alone knows, what other languages.

ence of the oral and written story-telling traditions of the robust languages native to the soil in which Urdu was nurtured: Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi, Sariki, Hindko, Gujarati and, God (and probably the linguist) alone knows, what other languages.

The other implication that Urdu is a language of the Muslims is again to limit and diminish its reality. In fact the acknowledged "father" of the Urdu short story was Munshi Premchand, a Hindu. (His short story 'Kafan', is a haunting indictment of the dehumanizing effects of poverty.)

However, many among the Pakistani and Indian Muslim elite do feel an emotional attachment to Urdu and perceive their identity defined by it. After all, Persian, which forms the basis of Urdu, was the language of the Moghul courts—the language of the Muslim Emperors in India.

For Urdu, like English, is a legacy bequeathed by conquerors, and Urdu owed as much to the "Raj" as it does to the Moghul courts. Urdu is indeed becoming the major "link" language that allows communication between the various provinces and linguistic divisions of Pakistan. It is perhaps more successful in this regard than Hindustani is in India, where English tenaciously remains the major "link" language.

The fact remains that a very tiny percentage of the Pakistani population speaks Urdu, let alone reads and writes it. Making a case for Punjabi (and by allusion the other provincial languages) Dr. Manzur Ejaz in a recent article in the *Nation*, states: "In today's Pakistan, there are 60 per cent Punjabi-speaking and about 3-4 per cent Urdu-speaking inhabitants. A very small segment of the population has succeeded in imposing its language on millions of others."

It might be appropriate to mention

here that Manto, the greatest Urdu short story writer, spoke only Punjabi. He broke several taboos prevailing in Urdu fiction and introduced new material. He moved away from the highly stylized diction favoured by the "Progressives" at the time and spoke to the common man—or rather to the common man or woman in

us all—as is attested by the enduring popularity and impact of his stories.

There can be little doubt that Punjabi, which is perhaps the most exuberant and earthy language in the subcontinent, influenced Manto's literary sensibility. It brought to his prose the down-to-earth quality that gives his narratives their colour, strength and originality.

The Lord forbid that I should get embroiled in the controversy over Punjabi and Urdu; I'd be on much surer ground were we debating the merits of Gujarati, the language we Parsees speak at home.

But the merits or demerits of Gujarati are inconsequential in Pakistan. The majority of Gujarati speaking Pakistanis (mostly Muslims from Africa and the Bombay area) reside in Karachi, and three or four Gujarati newspapers are enough to meet their needs.

And finally, after these digressions, a consideration of the two books under review.

They are of equal merit, though I feel that the introduction of the book published by Vanguard has a slight edge; it contains more information about Urdu and less critical posturing on its prose.

Since it is not possible to comment on all the stories, I will give a brief account of those I liked best in each collection.

The story by Abdullah Hussein that provides the title for the book, "The Tale of the Old Fisherman" is an excerpt from his award-winning novel *Udas Naslen*. Hussein's easy, assured pace and his ability to weave incident into a sustained narrative, make him a compelling novelist.

The massacre of the Indian nationalists by General Dyer at Jallianwala Bagh provides the setting for the story. The massacre, which took place in Amritsar in 1919, was in retaliation to the murder of four Europeans by the *natives*. What

raises the story above the level of mere polemic is the author's sympathetic portrayal of the murdered Europeans—particularly a woman who was raped—and then the brutality of the punishment meted out by the British that gradually overwhelms our initial compassion for the European victims, and manifests the magnitude of British savagery.

The *Seventh Door* by Intizar Hussein could be an all-time favourite of mine in any language. The translation by Javaid Qazi is excellent. The writing, the story's contents, its sentiments, the description of the pigeon, the protagonist's innocence, are all imbued with a veracity and lyricism that stir the reader's tenderest emotions.

The pigeon has built a nest in the corner of the room the young narrator shares with his mother:

'In the winter this soft cooing served to wake me up and I would glance up at the skylight and see the paleness of dawn through the dusty panes of glass. Then the walls seemed to melt away before the rising waves of the musical murmur and light flooded into the room... This had a magical effect on the pigeon. She would stretch out her neck, do a little pirouette and then fly out of the door...'

'I believed what mother had told me. Perhaps (the pigeon) was a holy spirit.'

And then appears the little antagonist in pigtailed, in the person of his cousin, Munni:

'"A holy spirit!" Munni burst into laughter.'

Munni persuades the boy to capture the pigeon. They beat the walls with poles until the exhausted bird, who 'hangs to the wall with her tail feathers spread,' begins to fall. The boy catches her:

'Something warm quivered in my hands—bright, terrified eyes, a heaving chest, and soft feathers charged with a current of fear. I don't know why, but my heart was so agitated that I relaxed my hold.'

The bird flies away and doesn't return to her nest. A few days—and a few pages—later the boy quarrels with the furious little Munni. They grapple:

'All of a sudden, my heart began to pound and a tremor ran through my body... Once again, it seemed as though I had something warm and quivering in my hands, a heaving chest, feathers charged with current... I relaxed my hold. She shook me off and went and stood a few feet away. Stray locks hung to her cheeks. She was all dishevelled.'

There is a rhythm to the narrative, a shape to its structure, which folds Intizar Hussein's story as if in a beautiful poem set to music.

'Siberia' by Salimur Rehman, is another memorable work. The narrative

Contemporary Urdu Short Stories

Bapsi Sidhwa

THE TALE OF THE OLD FISHERMAN

Edited by M.U. Memon

Vanguard, Lahore, 1992, pp. 195, Rs 200.00 (Hardback)

THE COLOUR OF NOTHINGNESS

Edited by M.U. Memon

Penguin, India, 1992, pp. 191, Rs. 75.00

evolves from the thoughts of a bunch of clerks in the civil service. The images presented are so vivid that one can almost smell the dusty files stacked forever in their office, see the stained, warped tables, and hear the metallic clack of an ancient typewriter:

Four bricks had been lying around in the room for a long time. Perhaps someone, sometime, had brought them in to prop a table with. They had never been used; but once in that room there was no possibility of their ever leaving it again.

Nor, one feels, will the trapped drudges who share the room. The bricks are used to block a hole in the window:

'With the draft stopped, the men in the room felt a little more comfortable, but some went on warming their hands over the two coal braziers with such concentration that it seemed as though that was their whole purpose in being there.'

The cold sets them to talking about the bitter Siberian winter, and between them the clerks manage to haul the swirling chill of Siberia into their office in Lahore. Then the peon brings them the news that the old street-corner fakir has died of the cold. They argue about the death:

'Haider Ali waved his hands. "How do we know he was crazy? May be he was pretending... He might very well have been an Indian spy."
'Arguing away they went into the building.
They had managed, Sharafuddin thought, to turn this death, this utterly insignificant death unrelated to anything at all, into a mystery, which they would go on wrangling over for weeks.'

This gem of a story, exquisitely translated by Wayne Husted, Memon and Ursula LeGuin, creates an intense atmosphere of Dostoyevskian pre-ordination and futility.

'The Wagon', by Khalida Asghar, establishes an equally haunting ambience. It is a tale of the evil stalking our world—and to my mind the red glow on the horizon and the evilsmell in the wagon summon the specters of nuclear explosions. She is a wonderfully evocative story-teller.

Now to the collection, *The Colour of Nothingness*.

Enver Sajjad's 'The Bird' is as chilling as it is savage. There is a lot of symbolism going on here, most of which evades me. The obvious elements are WT (the White

Tourist), the obsequious guard at the tomb who is prepared to give WT what he wants, and the grotesque bird WT so dearly wants.

To me it is immaterial what the bird symbolizes—its creation, its existence as it bites (this bird doesn't merely peck), scratches and flaps its way off the pages, are enchantment enough. This masterly

Enver Sajjad's 'The Bird' is as chilling as it is savage. There is a lot of symbolism going on here, most of which evades me. The obvious elements are WT (the White Tourist), the obsequious guard at the tomb who is prepared to give WT what he wants, and the grotesque bird WT so dearly wants.

To me it is immaterial what the bird symbolizes—its creation, its existence as it bites (this bird doesn't merely peck), scratches and flaps its way off the pages, are enchantment enough. This masterly creation is right out of a nightmare, and quite capable of inducing nightmares. And yet the bird's personification as an all but human character is never false.

creation is right out of a nightmare, and quite capable of inducing nightmares. And yet the bird's personification as an all but human character is never false. Here is how the creature makes its entrance:

'Something strange, resembling a bird, hopped out of the flock and moved forward, sniffing the ground. Featherless, if anything, bristly, the bare stubs of its wings hung from both sides of its crooked body. The colours of the setting sun seemed to slip off it and bounce back to the sun. A shroud of onion skin clung to its body, a pair of chariot-wheel eyes... a saw tooth in place of a beak... The bare stubs of its wings kept coming in the way and in its effort to grab the grain with its beak, the bird almost wound up spinning like a top on its claws.'

Even if the story feels a trifle contrived, one can forgive an author who writes as well as this a lot of sins.

Qurratulain Hyder's 'Confessions of St Flora of Georgia' takes off at the speed of light, hurtles along in a zany style and the wonder is she maintains this exuberance right into the sixth page of the narrative before losing steam. It is an unusual story, vivaciously told. Here is an example of some of its dash:

'O Lord my God, Thou knowest well that I was reawakened unawares. I know not what time, day, week, month, year or century it was. I lay dead in my open coffin when a silvery wing of one of Thine angels brushed past my dusty bones and I got up. My skull was lying at my feet. I picked it up, shook the dust off it and fitted it on my neck... I grew scared and trembled

with Thy fear when suddenly the small window of the underground cell lit up with a heavenly light and the angel appeared again. Breezily he uttered, "I forgot my rosary here. And pray, who are you?"

"Saint Flora Sabina of Georgia," I replied gravely.

In 'The Rose' Abdullah Hussein proves himself as adept at the short story as he is at the novel. There is a rare beauty and wisdom to his writing.

'When passion has run its course, and the blood has chilled, love is what remains behind—like the memory of a good time, a memory more enduring and pleasant than the time itself. Or like the fugitive scent of a rose: no matter how intangible, it is still more real than its bloom...'

When I read book reviews I often yearn to hear the author's voice—and in most cases I would rather read a direct quotation than the reviewer's analysis. In the passages quoted above we are hearing the author's voice once removed—in translation into an entirely different idiom. That the stories read so well attest to the various translators' skills, and the creativity they have brought to their labours—obviously a labour of love.

Bapsi Sidhwa, a Pakistani writer, is the author of three novels, Ice Candy Man, The Bride and The Crow Eaters. She received the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, Pakistan's highest national honour in the arts, in 1991. She has taught in several prestigious American Universities.

Translating India

Hiten Bhaya

CLIMPS: THE MODERN INDIAN SHORT STORY

Edited by Aruna Sitiesh

Affiliated East-West Press, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 358, Rs. 95.00

'What is a review? Just words!' Priya, a writer, assures herself even as she waits anxiously for the expected approbation. She is a character in one of the 32 short stories in 15 Indian languages now presented in translation in this volume. But a review of a collection of such diversity calls for appreciation at different levels. There are at least three layers of consideration. The editor's own stated purpose, the stories *qua* stories, and the effectiveness of the translations.

The range of characters, emotions and situations is as wide as our country. We meet a cavalcade of people from all walks of life: elephant-catcher, schoolmaster, city clerk, poor photographer, maid-servant, taxi-driver, retired stationmaster, poor vegetable-seller by day and hooker by night, young idealist accountant, sacrificing parent, woman in love, loyal wife and struggling mother. They may be called the protagonists pitted against a range of desensitised products of changing social values such as the smugglers, the unfeeling young professionals who wish to distance themselves from their poor families, the rich socialites, the profligate intellectuals or the cowardly males always letting down their women. Even when they are stereotypes they are convincing in the context of the story and their profile and responses unmistakably Indian, across regions. Many of these stories are tinged with sadness *sans de-*

spair, there is comment without condemnation and resistance without rebellion.

But the course of events which determine the nature and outcome of the conflict between the two sets of characters is shaped by powerful forces ambient in Indian society and culture, the most pervasive of them being poverty. Much of the tensions and the tragic transformation of values leading to the denouement arise from this prime cause; the obverse of which is the pursuit of money and its brutalising consequence. The other strong presence is that of the family and tradition, constantly being eroded, again by compulsions of job and career.

In the midst of the pathos of poverty there is dignity, as in the case of the schoolmasters in 'The Potion' and 'All for Happiness', or a spirited revenge as by the servant girl in 'Used Clothes'. In the midst of brutality there is also strange human kindness as in the 'Three-walled House', 'Smoke' and 'The Assaulted'. Money runs as a corrosive element through the 'Little Carved Box', 'This is my Cow Sir', 'The Touchstone', 'The Beasts', 'Lust' and 'Sacrifice'.

The world of women is chosen for special illumination. The Green Flag', 'The Little Carved Box' and 'The Last Chapter' all have the familiar motif of the abandoned wife who comes out strong and loyal, and the erring male realising her worth in the end. Poverty and the lure of the city are the real villains in the first two while in the last one, Vijaya Rajadhyaksha exposes the irresponsibility of male vanity. All three stories tend to uphold the image of the long-suffering *adarsha bhartiya nari*. However, in 'Homecoming', by Usha Priyambada, it is the wife and the daughter who really cast out the retired stationmaster, who has come home.

A more modern trend of the role reversal of the Indian woman is seen in 'A Toast to Herself', 'My Daughter

Shobhana', and 'Identity'. Two women sacrifice marriage and home to look after aged parents. One decides to give up her waiting suitor and the other accepts hers as a lover and the third, still very young, decides not to give up her new found identity in a job, even as it threatens her engagement. The new woman is portrayed by Hiranandani and Tulsi, both women, in their stories. 'The Coward' and 'AshTray'. In both the stories cowardly men let down their women who courageously rebuild their lives, one of them bravely choosing to remain a single mother. Social tyranny takes its toll on the minds of the women victims in 'Life and Death', 'The Black Smoke' and 'The Spell'.

A successful short story usually climaxes in a moment of truth when reality in a flash shatters many a fond illusion. Most stories bear this signature. From Katherine Mansfield to Nadine Gordimer, it has been acknowledged that the perceptions of women writers of short stories have a rare excellence. This is true perhaps of Indian women writers too. Not lacking in innovation, Mamoni Goswami in tune with elephants who "know everything", and Amrita Pritam expose human disloyalty through the feelings of a dying creature. The stories which stand out, both for theme and treatment, are 'The Beasts', raw and unusual, 'Shingidi Mungar' wryly ironic and 'The Spell', a powerful fantasy.

Translations are a wave now. But it is yet to turn into a flood, considering the fact that these 32 stories have been chosen from a few authors who together have published over 2000 stories. Such ventures have to clear the horns of a di-

lemma. One is that of targeting the audience. For instance, if the present volume is primarily intended for an Indian readership then there was no need for editorial intervention to explain *roti* ('a baked pancake-like preparation made out of kneaded flour') or *yuri* and *parantha* (a fried ditto ditto). On the other hand, a foreigner is more likely to be familiar with *roti* than with HRA which remains unexplained. The other is the question of the Englishness of the translated text, given the recognised hazards of translating metaphor-rich Indian languages. One need not be fussy; but if an Indian is to be presented in foreign attire even to another Indian it may as well be carefully tailored. Most stories in this volume are adequately translated; but a coinage like 'foremothers' borders on the facetious.

The publication has several interesting features. It is pleasantly free of 'typos'. The jacket design with a man and a woman, both unsmiling, ranged on either side of a hydra-headed pen, is provocatively modern. The inclusion of English, Dogri and Kashmiri is uncommon, although the last two are set outside Kashmir and translated from Hindi renderings. The addition of the authors' pictures and life-sketches is a welcome feature. One learns that most of the authors are in the 50-60 age group, teachers of language and literature and recipients of awards. Many of the translators and authors are residents of Delhi like the editor and the publisher, which makes it indeed a capital effort.

Hitendra Bhaya is a former Member of the Planning Commission.

From the Cauldron of Time

Sukrita Paul Kumar

HASAN SHAH'S 'THE NAUTCH GIRL'
Translated by Qurratulain Hyder
Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1992,
pp. 104, Rs. 45.00

That Hasan Shah's autobiographical novel *Nashtar*, published in 1790 and written in "Hindi-ised Farsi", should reach the contemporary reader as *The Nautch Girl*, speaks for the creative dynamics of the original text. In 1893 *Nashtar* was rendered into Urdu by Sajjad Hussain Kasmandavi. Since the Persian text is extinct, Qurratulain Hyder has done an English translation of the 1893 Urdu edition brought out by Kasmandavi. Hyder regards the Urdu text to be "extremely faithful" to the original: it even "retains many passages and ghazals". What is added is an intermittent, humorous commentary on Hasan Shah's views and ac-

tions. Such a device may cause a subtle psychological manipulation of the reader's approach and create a distance from the 'true personal narrative'.

What, one may ask, could have affected the shift of emphasis in the story, from being the tale of *nashtar* meaning the excruciating pain of love and separation from one's beloved, to becoming the story of the beloved herself, in this case the nautch girl. The change of title by Hyder implies also an inevitable shift in the thematic emphasis. Hasan Shah had called it 'The Story of Beauty and Love'. A century later, Kasmandavi chose to stress on the then socially more appealing and romantic aspect of love, that of the pangs of separation in love. Still a century later, Hyder's contemporary sensibility registers more, the extraordinariness of the female protagonist of Hasan Shah's tale.

Ironically, the narrative is professed to chronicle the life of the narrator in a "wondrous, many-hued tale". Indeed, the tale is wondrous and the depth of the hues revealed in the personality of Khanum Jan points to the clearly emphatic understanding of the narrator (or, is it the translator's) of the strong female character. In fact, it should make an interesting and useful diachronic study to compare

the three texts of the same tale produced in three different centuries in the same society. Even the choice exercised regarding the target language for its translation at historically different moments would be indicative of the changing social reality. From "Hindi-ised Farsi" to Urdu in the 19th century and to English in the late 20th century, the texts acquire different linguistic and thematic variations and patterns conforming to the historical context.

However, there is one basic stance common to all the three texts, a fact which vouches for the vitality of the original—the powerful and sensitive delineation of Khanum Jan. The Urdu translator, as Hyder remarks in the Afterword, makes funny comments about the hero who is weak, dithering and at times even comical. Kasmandavi's recorded reaction to the hero within his text indirectly suggests the seriousness and greater significance accorded to the heroine, Khanum Jan, in the original text as well. In the English translation, though Hyder retains some of the sarcastic commentary in the footnotes and her portrayal of both hero and female protagonist remains in conformity with the earlier texts, there is a welcome difference of emphasis with a greater force in Khanum Jan's personality. The hero remains ineffectual.

After all, the text of *The Nautch Girl* is an abridged version having passed through the process of sifting and editing of the original narrative material. Such a process would inevitably involve the translator's creative as well as critical and interpretative talents. In that, Hyder has excelled in presenting a convincing story of Khanum Jan. Omitting the "ornate passages" and most of the ghazals of Hafiz, as the editor/translator/writer of *The Nautch Girl*, she has skilfully woven the story in a fresh and simple language, owning the experience of the narrative as the original writer would. So, while the context of the novel is historical, the content indicates its filtration through a modern sensibility. One would be curious to know whether Hasan Shah's text makes Khanum Jan declare "No one is free" in his very first encounter with her. Her boldness and courage combine with an acute sense of honour and self-respect which the male protagonist is capable of perceiving in her. Khanum Jan makes sure of this by probing him incisively and as he says, heartlessly.

The backdrop of the social context along with the historical perspective gets appropriately organized in the Foreword and the Afterword of the book. Hyder takes care that their length is restrained and the story is not overshadowed by its context. There is obviously a lot of research and scholarship that has gone into the re-creation of this narrative. The reader gets access to just the right measure of information required to place the story in a specific milieu without damaging its appeal as an all-time human document. The well-known story of Umrao Jan,

another courtesan of Lucknow, was published a century after Hasan Shah's story of 'Beauty and Love'; the changed socio-political conditions get reflected in it and the hero can no longer be a mere lamenting tragic hero.

What is of particular interest to a literary historian is Hasan Shah's use of the realistic mode of narration of a love story which would traditionally be written in verse or dialogues, or in the old 'dastan' style. In the Foreword, Hyder points out how her research reveals the rather astounding fact of Hasan Shah's ignorance of the English novel. As claimed by Hyder then, Hasan Shah's novel could very well be the first modern Indian novel. It is now the job of the researchers of various Indian literatures to take a serious notice of this novel, ascertaining the claim and acknowledging its due place in the history of the Indian novel.

The detailed and informative notes at the end of the English text authenticate the historical allusions within the narrative which may otherwise be dismissed or ignored. Qurratulain Hyder, well-known for her alert and rich sense of the past, injects fresh life into the story of a time-period when the British had already gained political supremacy in India; they maintained garrisons at Cawnpore, Farrukhabad and Chunargarh and individually, the British had become prosperous enough to adopt the life-style of the Indian aristocracy. By the late eighteenth century they were called "nabobs" in England and they began to have their own harems. Nautch became a regular mode of entertainment. Khanum Jan was a dancing girl who with her intelligence, wit and self-respect manages to safeguard herself from becoming part of a harem. Resisting all pressure on herself to join the 'oldest profession', she demonstrates her inner courage and dignity by marrying the man of her choice and love.

The striking simplicity of the narrative and the spontaneity of expression pull the reader smoothly into the folds of the experience of love and the working of the lovers' minds towards the realization of their love. What registers very effectively is the feminist thrust in Khanum Jan's self-perception, gradually and gently identified in direct and clear terms. One wonders to what extent the power of Hyder's pen may have accentuated such an aspect of the story. The linguistic reconstruction of a potent female psyche after a gap of two centuries is bound to yield newer shades of meanings and connotations. In fact the different cultural baggage of the English language itself would normally modify the quality of the experience of the story.

The Nautch Girl then is not a mere translation, it is a re-creation of an old text into a new one with a new title and a fresh thematic thrust.

Sukrita Paul Kumar teaches modern English and American fiction in Zakir Hussain College, Delhi University.

The cover looks like a Rajasthani miniature at first, making one groan at the thought of yet another book with an 'Orientalist' packaging. But a close scrutiny reveals the comic-subversive intention of the picture, aptly prefiguring the mood of this delightfully witty novel. In the miniature, while the princess languishes in *viraha* on the terrace of her palace, flanked by women with veena, the Sydney Harbour bridge and the Opera House loom on the horizon. At the ground level, the blue-god sits in splendour similarly attended, while a valiant Rajput princetends to the barbecue by the swimming pool, amidst beach balls and beer bottles.

"To beer, or not to beer" was the real predicament of the Prince of Denmark, once an Australian academic had explained to me, adding that his people down under do not agonize over such dilemmas. Yasmine Gooneratne, in narrating the story of a Sri Lankan couple transplanted in Sydney makes the hearty and extrovert culture of the southern continent intersect with an ancient Asian civilization whose ethnic and religious history is far too subtly nuanced to be easily comprehensible to foreigners. It is a novel about leaving and arriving, about adventure and nostalgia, about preservation and metamorphosis. Migration is one of the most distinctive cultural experiences of the second half of our century, which Gooneratne handles in this remarkable novel with humour, and sympathetic understanding of both cultures, backed up by accurate and minute historical research.

Before Bharat Mangala-Devasinha left Colombo with his wife Navaranjini to take up a job in the Linguistics Department of the South Cross University at Sydney, he had very little knowledge of Australia. Like other products of colonial education, he knew all about London and its Dickensian fog and the colour of Wordsworth's daffodils. But Australia was to him "a blank pink space shaped like the head of a Scotch terrier with its ears pricked up and its square nose permanently pointed westwards, towards Britain". Gradually, this blank space gets peopled with friendly neighbours, quirky colleagues, drunken editors and shapely women. His wife begins to notice with interest that the men were not uniformly red-faced and yellow-haired, and far from being as unappetising as they had collectively seemed at first.

How Bharat became Barry, and demure Navranjini emerged as the spunky Jean is one of the funniest episodes in the novel. I remember reading this chapter—or an earlier version of it—as a hilarious short story in *Meanjin* some years ago, and it stayed in my memory not for its comic qualities alone, but also for the subtly bicultural satiric barbs. That story may have been a nucleus for the present book, but the completed novel goes beyond irony to serious introspection about memory, history and identity, and baffles

CULTURAL CROSS CURRENTS

Meenakshi Mukherjee

A CHANGE OF SKIES

By Yasmine Gooneratne

Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 329, Rs. 75.00
(First published by Picador, Australia)

The novel as a dialogic genre is perhaps best suited to the representation of the multiple pressures of migration, its contesting states of mind and shifting paradigms of loyalty. All pre-determined views about expatriates turn out to be inadequate when confronted with the complexities of individual lives. In the epilogue we know that after the death of Bharat and Jean it is their daughter who is left with a double legacy and has to make a final choice of home. The ambiguity of her option is beautifully brought out through the parable of the merchant's daughter who had to choose between playing veena for the gods and for the mortals she loved. As she makes her first journey to Sri Lanka alone, she has to keep reminding herself—"This journey's only a short-term visit, a fact-finding field trip"—that she has to return home to Australia.

ment at the political violence that is wrenching cultures out of their moorings. This is poignantly true of Sri Lanka which has experienced a major exodus of population in the last decade or two, but other Asian countries are not unfamiliar with the situation.

Bharat goes through several phases in Australia. After his academic success he becomes a popular media personality, confidently interpreting Asia to Australians. But as the novel progresses the mood darkens, ethnic violence rages in Sri Lanka, that Barry is Sinhala and his wife is Tamil becomes an issue to reckon with, and the definition of cultures becomes increasingly problematic. An assignment accepted casually—to write a Guide for Asian immigrants to Australia—gradually grows into an enormous and unending project. The notes pile up, Bharat gets more and more involved, but the book never gets written.

Jean's book, on the other hand not only gets completed and published, it launches her on a career of her own. It is a cookbook that blends her memory of Sri Lankan cuisine with the abundant ingredients of the new world. The culinary motif runs through the book at various levels. Surrounded by servants, back home Navaranjini had never done any cooking until she came to Australia, and she realises: "my thoughts about living here do tend to get mixed up, sometimes,

with my herbs and spices." She looks for a recipe tasted long ago "One in which you put everything in at once, and then the ingredients separate into layers when the pudding is baked." By the end of the novel we know that she has been able to perfect this dessert "which combines the cream of Sri Lankan coconuts with the tangy tartness of Aussie citrus. . . each layer separate, yet contributing to a delicious whole." Food thus becomes a trope for culture.

While Bharat is busy theorising about culture on his lap-top computer, his wife with her spontaneous vivacity enters into the real world with gusto and ends up being the owner of a successful restaurant in Queensland, a venture in which her husband also joins her, agreeing that "good cooks are like good writers, they create works of art. Feasting the senses, firing the imagination, exercising the intellect, civilising the mind."

Alternating with the story of Barry and Jean is the chronicle of Barry's grandfather Edward, who one hundred years before them had made the same journey to Australia on a steamboat bound for Mackay. Barry edits his journal and enters his life vicariously, recognising parallels. Edward went back home after his adventures "to the duties and responsibilities of an inherited tradition", but when Bharat tries to go back for a short spell, every experience underlines his

alienness.

The novel as a dialogic genre is perhaps best suited to the representation of the multiple pressures of migration, its contesting states of mind and shifting paradigms of loyalty. All pre-determined views about expatriates turn out to be inadequate when confronted with the complexities of individual lives. In the epilogue we know that after the death of Bharat and Jean it is their daughter who is left with a double legacy and has to make a final choice of home. The ambiguity of her option is beautifully brought out through the parable of the merchant's daughter who had to choose between playing veena for the gods and for the mortals she loved. As she makes her first journey to Sri Lanka alone, she has to keep reminding herself—"This journey's only a short-term visit, a fact-finding field trip"—that she has to return home to Australia.

Although this is her first novel Yasmine Gooneratne is well-known as a critic and a poet. Educated first in Sri Lanka, then in Cambridge, she has been teaching Literature in Macquarie University, Sydney, for nearly two decades now. Her personal penchant for irony is evident in the choice of authors for her three full length critical studies—Alexander Pope, Jane Austen and Ruth Praver Jhabvala—all wielders of the ironic pen. She is also the author of a delightful and well-researched family history—*Relative Merits*—where she talks with warmth, amusement and detachment about her Bandar-nayake ancestors. *A Change of Skies*, her first novel, while sparkling with sophisticated wit and amused perception of racial prejudices, also ruminates sadly on varieties of homelessness. It is a novel of the nineties, when language and loyalties tend to spill over national boundaries, when histories and identities do not always remain contained within tidy geographic frontiers.

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please note

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The Exquisite Artistry of Gordimer

Anna Sujata Mathai

WHY HAVEN'T YOU WRITTEN? SELECTED STORIES 1950-1970

By Nadine Gordimer

Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 231, Rs. 85.00

These selected stories offer only a very slight view of the exquisite artistry of Gordimer as a short story writer. The hall-mark of a Gordimer short story is the seemingly casual surface, suddenly shot through with light as we look into the hidden heart of human motivation, and gain a sudden insight, as with a flash of lightning. Gordimer's stories, like Tagore's, or of any other truly great writer, give you the whole of Africa, with all its confused beauty and pain and terror, but do it without a single statistic, by letting you know its people and look into their souls.

Gordimer's rich and vital love of life animates even the slightest of these stories, so that one is eager to share it with her. "The quickening of glamour" surrounds even the most seemingly bleak landscapes, as in her story 'The Defeated'. A little white girl is fascinated and pulled towards the Concession stores where the black people live. "The signs of life that I craved were very soon evident: rich and careless of its vitality, it overflowed from the crowded pavement of the stores, and the surrounding veld was littered with sucked-out oranges and tatters of dirty paper. A fat one-legged native (sold mealies or corn) and . . . other vendors making their small way in lucky beans, herbs, bracelets beaten from copper wire, knitted caps in wonderful colours—blooming like great hairy petunias, or bursting suns from the needles of old, old native women and, of course oranges. Everywhere there were oranges. . . ." But it's not just the local colour and detail that Gordimer so vividly communicates. She is able also to grasp and share, the essence and inner quality of life lived in South Africa. Not only blacks, but Jewish Settlers, cosmopolitans who move between Europe and Africa with ease and élan; the Afrikaans—all find a place in her stories.

Stories around black servants and work people have a familiar ring for us Indian readers. The insensitivity, the condescension, the cruelty—reserved for servants, echoed in such stories as 'Monday is Better Than Sunday'. Elizabeth, the maid, exhausted by the endless demands made upon her throughout the day, climbs up to her lonely room (somewhat like our barsati servant's room)—worn out and lonely.

In the story 'In The Beginning' there is the unforgettable portrait of Sister Dingwall, of Scottish birth, a midwife for 27 years, old, ugly, comical, wonderful at delivering babies. The young medical interns, who despise her are forced to feel

some respect. Gordimer's account of the delivery of a black baby is memorable: "in a newly made creature, not two minutes old, the scrolled, wide native nostrils were marvels of intricate craftsmanship, so much more skilful than the smudgy nub of a white baby's nose, and the half inch long black curls, sudsy with vernix casiosa, made the baby look as if it had been interrupted in the midst of a shampoo." To each his own beauty! Gordimer knows, too, that the external image is often misleading. The young intern is led to see Sister Dingwall with compassion and respect: "Why, I look different from what I am, he thought suddenly, that is me, but I don't know it. And also that is not me, and other people don't know it."

For Indians, who have not yet managed to put caste and social inequalities behind them, Gordimer may offer a disturbing mirror. In 'Inkalamu's Place' (Inkalamu is a whiteman with a degraded social situation because of his black wives) when money is given to one of Inkalamu's servants, "he went on his knees, clapped once, and made a bowl of his hands to receive the money." We are no strangers to such human degradation. Gordimer points out too, the hypocrisy of the white African Christian, who will not worship God side by side with his black brother. And these were the same people who created ghettos for the Jews in Europe.

Gordimer's stories, seemingly slight, are highly perceptive and intensely sensitive. They move, with a great sense of physical detail to a burst of spiritual illumination. Gordimer knows, like one of her characters that "what finally mattered was not the graph of an event or human relationship in its progress but the casual or insignificant sign or moment you secretly took away from it." It is that secret vision which sparks all the stories making them vibrant with life. Gordimer, in love with life, a seeker after truth and wisdom, asks us: "The novelty of a new, strange feeling was a touch from life; who would refuse it? I, who have always played with my feelings, like fireworks, wanting them to sparkle and burst into coloured light even if it is only for a moment—I, certainly, would never refuse the same old beckon of fascination." This quick-silver quality, along with her deep sensitivity and vision make Gordimer someone we all wish to know and read.

Anna Sujata Mathai is a Delhi-based freelance writer. She has published three collections of poetry.

Fourteen Stories in Search of Answers

Mrinal Pande

IN OTHER WORDS: NEW WRITING BY INDIAN WOMEN

Selected by Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon

Kali for Women, 1992, pp. 196, Rs. 80.00

The fictional microcosm by and large has its own natural laws and one may be praised or criticized for obeying or flouting these. But we do not leave behind our world entirely when we enter the world of fiction. Nor is language merely a tool that the writer uses and puts away as a painter would his/her brushes. Language is also the body of the work, and leaps continuously from the world of senses into the world of history.

If the language used by a writer has a definite historical past as a tool of colonial dominance and cultural subjugation, and if its mastery is seen to lend certain privileges and advantages to the users, the sensitive writer may soon discover that no personal bonds of loyalty, friendship or even love may waive off a heritage of guilt. For this reason the Indian writer of English requires enormous reservoirs of emotional and intellectual strength to confront the fact of his or her own privilege and the sharp questions it throws up. Questions such as:

- When a language like English segregates people more firmly than colour or class and creates radically dissimilar social and existential circumstances for the privileged and the out-groups, can any vantage point be termed objective?

- Doesn't each observation then reflect equally upon the observed as also the observer?

- What new dimensions enter into the native patterns of cultural dominance when it is cross-fertilized by the culture of the new colonizers? Do the new dominant powers share a spiritual turf with

the old ones?

- Where do women, the arch-oppressed fit into this whole scheme? Both as victims and perpetrators of oppression? How does an English speaking caste-woman stand vis-a-vis a non-English speaking low-caste man?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Not for those at least who think almost too much about the business of

writing without a maudlin self-pity for themselves or a sentimental love for the others.

In their bleakest moments these stories seem tinged with a deep sense of guilt and impending doom.

The fourteen stories compiled by

Kali in its lat-

est anthology of English short stories by Indian women writers are attempts by sensitive writers to explore these questions. In their bleakest moments these stories seem tinged with a deep sense of guilt and impending doom.

"I resolutely prepared to enjoy myself to the full. But somehow the enjoyment had become very elusive."

'Portrait of a Childhood'—Shama Futehally

"I leaned against him, a familiar tiredness seeping through my body. The kind that hits you when all the junk gives out and you know the MPs wait for you at daylight. . . ."

'Dooz, Charu and The Establishment'—Subhadra Sen Gupta

But in the better moments the stories also have a certain toughness of spirit and a wry and refreshing humour.

"In a family like mine, however, the past is almost as real as the present, and the dead and gone never truly depart because they are always being recalled; more usually as exemplars of all that was good, but also. . . as a warning."

'Sara'—Manorama Mathai

The colonial past of all Indians looms behind most stories, spreading its tentacles in the present as habit, custom, or

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

The colonial past of all Indians looms behind most stories, spreading its tentacles in the present as habit, custom, or even as impossible dreams for the young. Dreams, to chase which one must leave India and go west, only to find that the "dreaming spires of Oxford are dipped in the blood of . . . Indians."

even as impossible dreams for the young. Dreams, to chase which one must leave India and go west, only to find that the "dreaming spires of Oxford are dipped in the blood of . . . Indians."

Like many of the reefer-smoking, establishment baiters of the 70s, Charu ('Dooz, Charu and the Establishment') breaks down under the weight of this situation. Dooz and Charu buried under the false patterns and borrowed formulae of campus and family life in upper-class Delhi, echo each other's despair, each advising the other on how to shore up, knowing well the ultimate impossibility of it all. Their depression may be self-regarding and solipsistic but it is not uncommon or unreal. It is one part loneliness, one part aftermath of an uneager participation in the bourgeois life of the capital city, mixed with a liberal dose of fright and self-pity.

The same diaspora of the upper middle-class Indian youth in the post-Independence years, (and its psychological, familial aftermath) is the theme of 'The Smothering'—Ritu Bhatia and 'Thanks, Anyway'—Achala Bansal. For the small community of young Indians brought up in Indian public schools that are still run like little reproductions of Victorian Britain 'No Letter From Mother', or in homes which are trying to hang on to the British legacy of peons, PAs, ayahs and dusty T-say-old-chap-clubs' leaving India of chaotic governance, of teeming hungry millions is increasingly becoming a rather attractive option. Here, even those of them that want to be egalitarian, they feel, will end up becoming apologetic and weak or bossy, such is the Karma of their class. Once the young ones leave to escape this Karma, the remaining families (as in 'Thanks, Anyway'), dwindle to small, socially isolated communities, caring for and weeping over its frail ones, but still keeping a stiff upper lip in front of the natives. Even in their grief, they somehow feel superior to those that have known no better.

Manjula Padmanabhan's 'A Government of India Undertaking' reacts to the absence of rationality and realism in Indian middle-class life somewhat surreally. The story stands this entire macabre world of clerks, queues and petty bureaucrats on its head, turning the ex-

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There are explorations, not only of a certain time and certain relationships, but ultimately of the self. If occasionally they seem to take leave of moderation, sobriety and right reason, relinquishing 'the tone and spirit of the centre' (Arnold) they are entitled to it. Writers, like critics, respond to a situation, they do not create it.

traordinary one-sidedness of Indian middle-class citizens into a sort of a grotesque and morbid fairy tale that rejects any attempt to confer meaning upon a meaningless world. The Bureau of Reincarnation and Transmigration of Souls

that the narrator discovers in a narrow gully, highlights the ultimate impossibility of change:

" . . . You see, I am tired of my life and want to change it. But the thing is I want to change it now. I do not want to commit suicide or go through all the mess of cat-ching a disease or being murdered. . . ."

The clerk continues to be unimpressed. " . . . Madam, as you have stated, this is an illegal request."

Ruchira Mukherjee's 'Dying Like Flies' on the other hand, searches for the psychological motivation behind a bureaucrat's suicide by reconstructing the minutiae of an Indian Sahib's daily life. The story ultimately disappoints because somewhere it fails to reconstruct the links between the past and the present, in whose web the astonishing answers to an act of supreme self-destruction may be held. Perhaps Mukherjee and Vishwarpriya Iyengar 'No Letter From Mother' take a somewhat moral stand where they should have allowed the creative instinct to insulate their stories against the demagoguery of a precise psycho-social, ethnic identity, and the glorious (or otherwise) sense of historical destiny that it brings in its wake.

Urmila Banerjee's 'Tamarind Tree Murder' (a tale about the death of an aristocratic matriarch), Manorama Mathai's hauntingly beautiful story about great Grandmother 'Sara', and Bulbul Sharma's tale of a girl who was married off to a Peepul tree to ward off evil,—'Rights of Passage', are three brilliant gems in this anthology. All three are evocations of the past that refuses to die, and continues to haunt the present, and all three writers display the incisive instinct of a creative artist in allowing their characters to be seen mostly as receivers rather than initiators of events. There are, the stories seem to say, men and women, surrounded by other people and capable of handling life. But somehow they all get lost amid a big world that is constantly rushing towards them mostly to sweep them closer to a supreme catastrophe, without ever bothering to consult them.

" . . . More than half a century has

passed and times have changed. Man has walked on the moon and women have babies without husbands and there is talk of women's rights. . . . But some things never change. The tragedy of a woman caught between her duty to her society

and family and her own deeper longings remains unchanged, in my world, at any rate, as in Sara's."

'Sara'—Manorama Mathai

" . . . They cared too much for perfection. I did too once. But then I grew to learn that we were all guilty of crimes. Little ones, some witting, some unwitting. That absolute innocence is a myth . . . and so I forgave myself. Do you understand?"

The Tamarind Tree Murder—Urmila Banerjee

It is not as if these stories have renounced philosophical introspection, but their reasoning is strictly defined by the authoritarian and tyrannical social situation in which their women protagonists are completely absorbed. Sometimes, as in 'The Tamarind Tree Murder' and 'Sara,' these tragic situations develop from the claustrophobically close families that would not let go of family members because they somehow could not, and thereby create little hells all around, for men as well as for women, mostly for women. In such families, when a member interacts with the world of the colonial masters, the world of "higher" learning he (usually it is a he), ends up even more pompous and humorless (as in 'Sara'), or mean and acquisitive ('Thanks Anyway') or plain confused and lost ('Dooz, Charu and the Establishment').

What these stories reveal, with the startling candour of Indian women, is the fact that the implicit messages and signals that are transmitted through the societies may not have been itemized and analysed by linguists and educationists, but they are unequivocally heard and understood by women, who have usually stood around the margins of the areas of learning and knowledge.

If a story is just content poured into a frame, then it would ultimately become nothing except an ideological interpretation of reality. Perhaps this is where organic simplicity of structure not only matters, but matters a great deal. These true stories are brilliant because they have the same organic fulfilment of an age-old artistic tradition of female narrative. The

same tradition also becomes visible in other media as Madhubani paintings or Kantha embroidery. To read these is to understand again the richness of human life and the magic of the imagination, not as an 'ersatz' version of Life but as an intoxication with the dazzling multiplicity of this living world. To read of Sara, Ratnabali and the little Manglik girl in 'The Rites of Passage' is to recognise the incomprehensible nature of the world as seen and experienced by generations. It is a rich world teeming with dozens of happy or unhappy children, whispering maids, renege drunks, secretive relatives and scoundrels of all varieties spilling in and out amid a cacophony of sounds. However, even in their bitterest moments, all that is put-on, or hypocritical, maybe debunked and ridiculed in these stories but never human life. There is an innate respect for the human being and great compassion for its frailties. Shalini Saran's 'Malika Farida,' puts this age-old wisdom in Farida's mouth. When reprimanded for fornicating around with a goonda she looks steadily at the Mirza. . . . "Mirza Sahib, . . . there is no shrine as sacred as one's body."

The only story which strikes one as being somewhat pretentious and laboured in an otherwise flawlessly edited anthology, is Deep Bedi's, 'The manuscript.' With its laboured arguments about 'the meaning of life' and 'the concept of humanity' it falls into very predictable traps of ethnic Indian writing for 'their' eyes only.

Of course some of these stories tell us what it is like to be a woman, to have an imagination and ambition beyond the narrow confines of the times, to be a victim. But the book is ultimately not a trumpet for women's cause. It creates good fiction out of much of what women have been confiding to other women over the centuries, while gossiping in their backyards, while reprimanding noble daughters or condemning recalcitrant daughters-in-law. These stories also give shape to much that most Indian men and women have been reluctant to condemn aloud in public: things such as man's beastliness to woman at the same time as he longs for her love and approval, of women's icy passivity and the fires and fears that rage underneath, of the grace and misery of old age and the helpless anger of the very young.

Women protagonists tell stories within these stories about what they saw, did or happened to them, what they remember, feel and think. There are explorations, not only of a certain time and certain relationships, but ultimately of the self. If occasionally they seem to take leave of moderation, sobriety and right reason, relinquishing 'the tone and spirit of the centre' (Arnold) they are entitled to it. Writers, like critics, respond to a situation, they do not create it.

Mrinal Pande, a well known writer, is the Editor of Saptahik Hindustan.

Group Portrait, Saleem Peeradina's latest collection of poems, has his inimitable, unmistakable signature. In his first collection of poems, *First Offence*, published by Newground, in 1980, the themes were mostly to do with the city (Bombay), its lures and disillusionments, though there are some poems dealing with relationships (including familial ones), suffering, separation... in fact, there is a poem entitled 'Separation'. In the present collection, the central theme is the family, with the "message" that the home is a sanctuary from the tensions and pressures of the world, despite the "emotional squeeze" that domestic routine can impose on a family man. The territory charted in *Group Portrait* is that of inter-personal relationships, both within the poet's immediate family, as well as in his extended family, as contrasted with the Bombay landscape in *First Offence*.

The book is divided into three sections:

- (1) Family Mirror; (2) Transition; and (3) Beginnings.

The first section has some excellent poems. The opening poem: 'Family Man' starts with a clinical objectivity: "Someone is making a game out of us." It goes on to describe the construction of a house, and the first part concludes with the master craftsman painting "a row of cheap plastic figures with fixed smiles... /one in the kitchen, one on a tricycle / Another hunched over home-work and in the verandah, one / Whose face is buried in a newspaper."

Parts of the poem read like prose, in keeping with the prosaic process of waiting in queues, applying for loans, and the endless, nitzy-gritty procedure of buying "a hole in the anthill." But the poem ends with the poet's characteristic, elliptical touch:

*cramped for space, the inmates
train the eye on the window grill
Through which the horizons come
Flooding in. On shafts of light
compose the text of a remembered place
to set against the reality of this
passing one. Line the walls
.....
With snapshots of a world missing
from view, so that the footprints
it left behind could lead their children
back to its hiding place.*

Alliteration seems to come naturally to Saleem Peeradina, and adds to the rich poetic texture of the poem:

*He would live on the farm
in the company of goats and fowl,
(keeping at bay the monkeys), who filch
fruit
from the fig tree.*

The title poem 'Group Portrait', is about a tight ropedance "of a two-wheeler ride" for a "clutch of kindred souls / poised in flight / from the city's snares."

It is a heart-warming picture of a family who rise

A Taut Network

Indu K. Mallah

GROUP PORTRAIT

By Saleem Peeradina

Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 61, Rs. 70.00

"for the city dark to reclaim us.
Replenished, we ride home
escorted by invisible hands."

Perhaps the best poems in this section, and indeed the whole book, are: 'Strange Meeting I', and 'Strange Meeting II', about the birth of his first child. These poems have a strange, mystical quality about them, redolent of Khalil Gibran. In 'Strange Meeting II' the central metaphor is that of a horse:

*... unborn, her heart
Pounded, clear as hoofbeats.*

The horse metaphor is continued:

*Yearning
to ride the air. ...*

and in perhaps the best lines in the poem:

*Time collapsed: the child's galloping years
diminished
His own, until a full-grown woman
Sat by his bed-side, stroking his hand,
chilling him
To the bone.*

This poem too, is richly alliterative:

*Drinking deep from the dark pool
Of the child's eyes which held his own in a
spell—*

and the end,

*the earth glided on. God stood watching
which ties up neatly to the beginning:*

*With the visible signs
of his first child
God loomed into view.*

In 'Strange Meeting II', one sees the poet's craft at its best. His deep feelings are held back by the leash of his discipline, finely-honed by his craftsmanship, and filtered through his aesthetic sensibility. The last line:

"it is your face, dredged from the deep, that has survived", is the acme of the poet's art.

'Michigan Basement I' is about the creative process, and is reminiscent of 'Thought Fox', by Ted Hughes. One identifies more readily with Peeradina's analogy of the seed of creativity sprouting through the fertile soil of his mind, than with Hughes' analogy of the fox leaving foot-prints in the snow of consciousness. This poem has some very graphic imagery:

"A cut-in glass pane pulls / the sky in. Sensing a barrier, the roots tap / Their white canes along the wall", while the phrase "a ripple of light falls", with its 'son et lumiere' effect, coruscates bril-

liantly.

In 'Michigan Basement II', the conflict between Peeradina the poet, and Peeradina, the father, is expressed in a series of brilliant images and metaphors, which form an "ambivalent and complex web of emotions and perceptions."

*Children barge in and out
Of my mind's swivel door.
To them, he is a "country without borders."*

The poem ends with the lines:

*Remaining whole is no longer the point.
It's staying divided, attaining equipoise."
One wonders! Is this part of the poet's credo?*

In 'Long Shot', in Section II, the metaphor of the screen, and cine-photography is used very skilfully, and played to the fullest, with its 'unpaged script' it's 'wash of light', 'lip-synching', it's 'rushes'. Among other notable poems in this section are 'The Divide', 'Secrets', and 'Mirage'. To continue the analogy of painting suggested by the title poem, 'Mirage' is like a stark, spare, Zen painting, "etched in eternity." The last two lines: "Only the lazy movement of sheep grazing, moves the still landscape into Time," lends an elliptical dimension to the poem.

Intensely autobiographical, the mood of 'Beginnings' is different from the other sections, and the reader is introduced to another kind of landscape, inhabited by the past, by memories, some pleasant, some painful, but all searingly honest. The metaphor used here is that of the stage, and the diction used is consistent right from the beginning.

*Onstage, the first act is born; his entry
as observed from the wings."*

*.....
"As the curtain rises.
..... he steps back, stage rear*

To witness a play within a play.

*At another point,
He looks in vain for the old familiar props,
The backdrop is rolled up, a new one
installed. He has forgotten his cue."*

Is the mentor mentioned in 'Beginnings', Nissim Ezekiel? The awakening of his poetic impulses is a 'flash' / produced by rubbing the flint of imagination / to the hard edge of the universe." And

*Stalking the mysterious rhythm of foot
falls
Lands him into print.
He has heard the call: an agitation of the
spirit
in the act of finding a resolution in words.*

And so, one comes full circle—"In the end is my beginning."

Bruce King, well-known literary critic, considers Saleem Peeradina one of the leading Indo-Anglian poets, and what he says about Peeradina's mentor, Nissim Ezekiel, could well be true of Peeradina himself:

STRANGE MEETING II

Ah, love, whose tongue has revealed me to you?
From a thousand million orbits-fee

Fetching us from home to the world outside,
Eyes surfacing from the dark.

Words mirroring, bouncing,

Breath curling it's spine, ear-echoing-
From this long-familiar fall, what sight
Brought your dreaming to a halt?

A room awakened, and a face stood, formed.
Distance became flesh.

Ah, Child, whose hand has led you here
To the far end where I move in the passages
Of my sleep? The current swirls, ebbs,
Rnews itself around you. It streams forward
Lapping my sides, slicing open my dream.
When light pulls my eyelids back, it is
Your face, dredged from the deep, that has survived.

His traits include a personal voice, direct communication with the reader, economy and precision of language and image, the poem as feeling, expressed through and filtered by thought, concluding with recollection or observation. ...Images, symbols, allusions, references, etc., form a taut poetic net-work."

Peeradina's use of language is spare, even laconic, and his style very often tangential. That he is a master of alliteration is richly abundant in *Group Portrait*. Perhaps he is able to play about with images, sounds and textures so easily, because of his multifaceted personality. In addition to being a sensitive, highly-gifted poet/writer, he is an artist, musician, photographer. ... He recently held two exhibitions of his photographs in

Michigan, where he is currently teaching, and he is working towards an exhibition of his pen-and-ink sketches, in addition to preparing to publish a compilation of his prose-pieces, reviews, etc., which will be accompanied by his own sketches. In *Group Portrait*, then, the different personae of the poet merge and emerge to form a complex, composite mosaic.

In a collection like this one, all the poems cannot be equally good. Some are bound to be mediocre. But the ultimate impression one is left with, after reading this book, is that Peeradina's poems are 'meeting-places', where the poet and the reader meet. This meeting is at once, rich, rewarding, and horizon-widening.

Indu K. Mallah is a writer and critic.

can say, "she's a very nice person", and all is instantly clear with no more words needed, but a reviewer, perforce, must fill his stipulated 1,000-word space.

Jug Suraiya's book of short stories, *A Chap Called Peter Pan*, just published by Penguin India, falls into this category. It is an enjoyable enough read, but fails to raise one's pulse rate. I read it on a train journey and it pleasantly beguiled the intervals between the *chai*, the non-veg *thaal*, the snoozes and the stations. His characters complemented the usual chiaroscuro of oddities and nonentities that the Indian Railways reservation charts fling together—neither more nor less memorable. At one point (the train being, inevitably, stranded on a siding for "technical reasons"), I played a game, matching fictional characters to physically present faces. With a little cheating, (Parsi for Anglo-Indian; college sports team for string quintet), it worked. Jug Suraiya's protagonists are familiar enough, and though he writes often of the alienated and alone, their loneliness is in spite of, or perhaps because of, their being part of the crowd.

Peter Fleming once commented that "with the possible exception of the equator, everything begins somewhere", and someone even more famous and more frequently quoted, said "In my Beginning is my End",—a parable seemingly designed for short story writers. As a genre, they seem compelled, far more than their novelist kith and kin, to follow a narrative line, and end with a moral, a metaphor or a twist to the tale. Jug Suraiya does this quite well. His experience in writing newspaper 'middles' prevents him from going on too long and his stories, even when they do not end with a bang, have a pleasant touch of the unexpected, or the expected unexpectedly presented. I particularly enjoyed the last line of "The Badger".

What took me aback was the predictability of the prose—bland, often clichéd: blades are slim, dexterity fiendish, frowns heavy, claps frantic; one reads without delight or discovery, of "hulking louts", "neat parcels", "shocking clarity", and "unhappy compromise". In 'Mi Casa, Su Casa' a drop-out from society with a "gentle smile", "foot-loose and fancy-free" recounts a "rambling narrative" that makes the listener "catch his breath", condemning the narrator, ("What about visas, papers, things like that?" I asked hoarsely") to a night of "fitful sleep" "tossing and turning". Not so the reader. This was so trite, one's only possible response was a gentle snore. Similarly, the only thing to do with a predictable adjective is to omit it. The resulting prose is both tauter and more effective.

Occasionally, Suraiya gets more adventurous, "elliptical winds blow through the orbiting seasons," or, as in 'Clap Trap':

"The great golden cage of sound held him, racked his spine in a curve following the soaring note till he was on

Humbug, snobbery, alienation, self-deception are some of the recurring motifs, but always treated gently and perceptively. Refreshingly free of the bathos and sanctimony that often afflicts Indian writers on social themes.

tip-toe, head flung back and arm out-reached, and through the sweat drop at the corner of his right eye he was dazzled by the scintillant nova of the spotlight above. Higher and faster the sonic crest thrust him towards the reef of lights till in the final moment of precipitous suspense it seemed his frail body must be wrecked against them".

I found this equally unsatisfying. What I've always enjoyed in Jug Suraiya's previous work was the ease and humour of his writing; the unexpected use of ordinary words. In these stories he seems strained and inhibited; as if by the effort of writing prose to endure, rather than the more ephemeral 'middle'. Paradoxically and appropriately, one of the most satisfying stories in the book is 'The Word', where he takes a much coined cliché, "the writing on the wall", and turns it into a powerful and evocative contemporary fable for our time.

Whom is this book intended for? In 'The Word', the intrepid but unlucky night-watchman utters "the equivalent of gorbliney," suggesting an Anglo-Saxon readership, but in 'The Talisman' people smoke *chillums* and eat *rotis* with *gur*, without any explanations in parentheses. Suraiya's characters, whether Goan or Anglo-Indian, babu, box-wallah or peasant, are both Indian and Everyman. We will all recognise ourselves (and some of our least pleasing characteristics and responses) in these stories. Humbug, snobbery, alienation, self-deception are some of the recurring motifs, but always treated gently and perceptively. Refreshingly free of the bathos and sanctimony that often afflicts Indian writers on social themes.

So—to return to my beginning—this is a book to read, rather than read about. It is not great news or great literature, nor is it shopping mall pulp. Equally importantly, Penguin India, as always, makes it a pleasure to hold, look at and read. Gone are the days when Indian paperbacks were a slab of smeary, grey print with a lurid cover that had to be masked in brown paper, and disintegrated into fragments as you turned the pages.

Laila Tyabji is a free-lance designer and Chairperson, DASTKAR, a Society for Crafts and Craftspeople. She works with textiles and handicrafts, travels extensively, and reads, cooks and embroiders in the intervals.

A Book To Read

Laila Tyabji

A CHAP CALLED PETER PAN

By Jug Suraiya

Penguin Books, Delhi 1991, pp. 158, Rs 75.00

It is a topsy-turvy world, nowhere more so than the literary scene. Fewer and fewer people seem to buy books, but a surprising number become millionaires writing them. Aspiring authors now write 'the book of the film' rather than dream of the 'film of the book'. Books are sold in supermarkets, side by side with condoms, cornflakes and cans of beans, stamped with the same consumer codes, and the authors of "sex and shopping" sagas, exhausted by hyping their product on breakfast T.V., no longer even bother to think of new titles, characters and plots—they simply write *Laee 2* or *Scruples 2* and everyone, (including the best-seller lists) knows exactly where they are. Tom Clancy is the world's best selling author and he's just made 14 million dollars on his latest book

but the really amazing bit is that he hasn't yet sold a single copy! The book has not even been printed.

Yet nobody would put Tom Clancy on a list of a hundred best writers and *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Book Review* tend not to review him. So, if people buy and read books that reviewers don't review, should reviewers only review books that people want to know about but not read and buy? And what happens to a reviewer when faced with a book that's readable but not reviewable—

neither so terrible that he can tear it apart, spluttering pleasantly with indignantly acerbic adjectives, or so brilliant that he can irradiate his column with fireworks of vicariously incandescent prose. Summing up a friend, one

Peter Fleming once commented that "with the possible exception of the equator, everything begins somewhere", and someone even more famous and more frequently quoted, said "In my Beginning is my End",—a parable seemingly designed for short story writers. As a genre, they seem compelled, far more than their novelist kith and kin, to follow a narrative line, and end with a moral, a metaphor or a twist to the tale. Jug Suraiya does this quite well. His experience in writing newspaper 'middles' prevents him from going on too long and his stories, even when they do not end with a bang, have a pleasant touch of the unexpected, or the expected unexpectedly presented.

Bologna Naciones Symposium

Urvashi Butalia

When a University becomes nine hundred years old, there is cause to celebrate. The University of Bologna in Italy, said to be the oldest University in Europe, chose to mark this historic occasion in its own particular way: vice chancellors of all major European and American Universities were invited to a ceremony full of splendour and solemnity, to sign what was called a Magna Carta of European Universities, a document that called for increasing academic cooperation in all fields, in an attempt to begin the process of 'overcoming barriers and conflicts among people.'

The ceremony, held in Bologna's spectacular Piazza Maggiore, was accompanied by a series of seminars, mainly on science, called Bologna-Nationes, whose purpose was to further extend areas of cooperation in specific fields. Within Italy, Bologna was the point from which such discussions and their results would extend to Universities in the country.

Four years later, in 1992 September, the continuing celebrations of the University's ninth centenary (the University was founded in 1088) saw a similar, and different event. This time a Magna Carta was signed with Indian Universities, and the Bologna Naciones Symposium centred around India. Sixteen vice-chancellors

from different Indian Universities were invited to sign the charter and participate in the ceremonial event (and this must have been the first time the University's main hall, originally a church, saw vice chancellors with tussar *achkans* and *angwastrams* in place of the ceremonial robes!). Two Indian academics and researchers, M.S. Swaminathan and U.R. Rao were honoured with the Honoris Causa Laurae, and several others were

of India in Italian and European culture, contemporary Indian writing in English, the situation of Indian women and so on. Some 45-50 academics (which included the vice chancellors) were invited to present papers in these discussions along with their Italian counterparts and, at the end of the Bologna events, more or less the entire lot of academics was taken to Rome to participate in further events organized by Rome University and the Centre for Research in Developing Societies, as well as a smaller symposium organized by the Institute for the Study of Middle and Far Eastern Societies (ISMEO).

But why India, and what kind of cooperation can there be with our system? 'Well, that remains to be seen,' said one of the organizers, 'but we were particularly interested in India for many reasons. Both our countries have long histories of ancient and important civilizations behind us, both combine a mix of things, tradition, modernity, rural, urban... and, really we ought to know much more about each other, but we know so little. Here, in Italy, while there is some academic knowledge and interest in ancient India and in your scriptures and history, we know practically nothing about contemporary India. I don't know what things are like with regard to Italy in India, but I imagine not much is known over there about us.'

invited to participate in the seminars and symposia that accompanied the event.

Discussions were held on a wide range of themes: from Indian archaeology, to ethnic conflict in contemporary India, interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Indian economy, agrarian sciences and forestry, physics and mathematics, the origins of Indian civilization, the image

both combine a mix of things, tradition, modernity, rural, urban... and, really we ought to know much more about each other, but we know so little. Here, in Italy, for example, while there is some academic knowledge and interest in ancient India and in your scriptures and history, we know practically nothing about contemporary India. And I don't know what

things are like with regard to Italy in India, but I would imagine not much is known over there about us.' In keeping with this spirit a conscious attempt was made in the discussions to focus on the specifics of how universities could possibly work together, perhaps set up exchanges of scholars, research facilities. And although no fixed dates have been set, further meetings are planned to work things out in more detail.

Although not as visible as the academic discussions, the focus on India in Italy had another agenda too, one which was very much in evidence in the areas focussed on by three Indian journalists who were invited to the host country as well. Their visits were mainly to factories for both small and large scale industry to see what kind of trade and exchange already existed with India and what more could be done. Indeed, time and again the academics were reminded, by the more 'political' of officials in the host country, that the focus on India had as much, if not more, of a political significance, as it did of a cultural. 'Just as Europe is today becoming one world,' said one official, 'so also it is time to extend ties with other parts of the world to overcome not only cultural barriers but also trade barriers.'

Indeed, as one of the Indian journalists pointed out, India and Italy are already in a trading relationship, which has enormous scope for expansion. Leather, for example, is one area of collaboration: already Italian technology is being imported into India for use in Indian factories on raw materials which can then be taken into Italy and processed/designed. And this is only the beginning. Perhaps it is a measure of the realism of Italian academia that commerce and academics are seen as being quite closely intertwined. For, as one of the Italian participants pointed out: 'so, while we talk about the academic stuff, they will get on with the real business out there, and at the end, we'll have collaboration in both areas.'

Urvashi Butalia, publisher, editor and writer, was a participant at the Bologna Naciones Symposium.

A Slice of Real Life

Anupama Chandra

THE WOMAN AND OTHER STORIES

By Gangadhar Gadgil

Sterling Pub., 1992, pp 183, Rs 50.00

This selection of Professor Gangadhar Gadgil's short stories must belong to the small but growing group of fine translations. It has avoided the horrible mutilations regional litera-

ture often suffers in slipshod translations that drive one mad, with gharas becoming "earthen pitchers used to fill water" and every nuance of emotion and idiom succumbing to the strangeness of another language. Perhaps it is because Professor Gadgil has translated these stories himself from the Marathi, that they read with such lucidity and ease—it never seems as though they might be missing something of the original.

Of course, a fine translation gives pleasure, but this selection makes good reading because the stories themselves are excellent. An essential quality of good writing, as Marianne Moore put it, exists within these stories: "...one discovers in/it after all, a place for the genuine. Hands

that can grasp, eyes/that can dilate, hair that can rise/if it must...". It is the sort of writing that can tell a story, create a place for the genuine. All the characters in these stories are so real in their familiarity—the youngest daughter-in-law at the receiving end of a large joint family (The Rough and the Smooth); the tyrannical husband who sexually exploits his wife (Gopal Padhye: A Kind of Man) or the cramped but gregarious passengers of a third class railway carriage (The Third Class Coach). They are familiar not because they are necessarily a part of our experience but because Professor Gadgil knows them intimately, and makes us share this intimacy in his delicate observations of the minute details of their

lives. A small incident in 'The Wan Moon', when a run-down housewife covets the ice-candy her daughters are eating but refuses it when it is offered to her, reveals that her entire existence has been based on this denial of herself:

"The man looked at his wife and asked, "How about it? Do you want one?"

"Oh, no! What would I want ice-candy for?" she protested.

"Don't you listen to her. She would like to have one, I know", said the girl.

"Why then don't you say so?" growled the man and bought a bar of candy for her too.

"The woman accepted it guiltily and sucked at it..."

It is with this simplicity that Professor

THE WOMAN AND OTHER STORIES

GANGADHAR GADGIL



Gadgil tells the stories of everyday lives. As we discover in these tales, the great events and calamities we wait for never happen, and life goes by in the smaller, everyday disasters: the smashed tea-cup, or a husband's petty cruelty over the evening meal. It is to these everyday crises that attention is paid. Within this one frame, however, the variations in both the tone and the theme are extreme. They move from the poignancy of the title story ('The Woman'), about an old woman who faces rejection and defeat with her dominant will to live; to the dark, brooding horror of 'The Hollow Men' in which the apathetic residents of a chawl join in the looting of a small store during communal riots in the city, to a work of absurd fantasy ('The Truth of the Matter'). Perhaps the story which stands out the most as being different—another world, another place, and almost another era—is one about the downfall of the old jagirdari aristocracy ('A Dying World') in 1948. As with any feudal system in decline, its representatives have degenerated into various corruptions except for the wife of the head of the family, Baisaheb. Her stern, mysterious character is brought to life as she silently performs her duties, and holds her collapsing world together by a deep understanding of what it originally stood for; she understands that its end is inevitable and yet makes a heroic last stand against a revolutionary mob after her family has left, on her orders! "Do you think I am telling you to go to save your miserable skins?" she says "All of us here may be destroyed, but my line must go on. It must never happen that the family is wiped out in a single storm. For generations we have survived these things, by courage or by craft. What I am doing now is what we have always done". This is one of the finest stories in the collection, showing us as it does the other side: the great house tradition that must inevitably disappear with its oppression. Many of the stories in this volume are

centred around female characters all of whom are not as powerful as Baisaheb. Writes Professor Gadgil: "The Indian woman and her predicament have been subjects of deep concern for me... I have been deeply moved by the humiliations, privations and denials which she suffers in our society". The 'Wan Moon' and 'Gopal Padhye: A Kind of Man' are about the middle class woman who is often destroyed by the unreasonable social standards she must conform to. With great sensitivity, Professor Gadgil brings out the trauma of a tormented wife who has to submit to being raped by her husband ('Gopal Padhye'); and the woman who, in the process of getting married and having children, loses her identity as a human being: she becomes a shadow of herself, a wan moon, that only vaguely remembers a brighter self. The stories are powerful because Professor Gadgil recognises the reality of these situations: there are no morals, no lights at the end of the tunnel—just the endless situation itself.

Perhaps it is this honesty as a writer that lets Professor Gadgil enter the secret world of children. 'The Coin', 'The Fledglings' and 'The Lost Children' are memorable stories about children' are memorable stories about children who inherit a world ruled by adults. These children feel with all the intensity of children: feelings of rebellion, of hatred, of deep sorrow, of love—feelings that sentimental literature denies them. Professor Gadgil, however, does not disguise the furious rage and all the bitterness of defeat of a young boy rebelling against his dominating father; when a young girl learns her first lessons of rejection and isolation in 'The Lost Children', we feel her pained withdrawal keenly, not least because we remember our own psychological wounding as we grew up.

And yet there are three stories—'The Rough and the Smooth', 'A Contented Soul' and 'This Way and That'—that are

all extremely funny, often ironical ways of looking at the world's absolute absurdity. 'The Rough and the Smooth' is about one chaotic morning in a joint family, when the entire family might have a serious fight about the heating of the bath water, and turn a minor theft (five rupees) into the perfect occasion for mud-slinging. There is a huge comic talent in Professor Gadgil that is delightful.

It is not possible to really discuss all the stories here—this review is only an indication of the sort of excellent writing to be found in this selection of sixteen stories from what Professor Gadgil estimates are the two hundred he has written so far. It has obviously been a long creative process for him but he has, as he says in his introduction, "immensely enjoyed writing them". This is the work of a per-

son who is, above all, interested in life. To draw meaning from its chaotic multitudinousness, to give form to the "mute shapes that paused on the brink of life and meaning"—this has been his literary effort, which he alludes to in 'The Dog That Ran in Circles'. The mute shapes may seem incoherent, "spreading blots of ink, shapeless and dead", but what is the process of writing, if not to give them—as Professor Gadgil has done—voice; a way, as Frank Kermode once indicated, of making sense of the world?

Beyond this, you are free to find fault with the sense, but you cannot fault the aesthetics. Professor Gadgil can, quite definitely, write.

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Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil Tamil-Tamil-English

Important features of the Dictionary

- ✦ This is the first dictionary focusing attention exclusively on modern Tamil, the variety of Tamil in use in *education, administration, mass media and entertainment*.
- ✦ The Tamil language has undergone a sea change in the last five decades. This Dictionary is the first systematic and scientific attempt to document the trends and to offer a useful tool to the *learner, teacher* and a wide range of *users*.
- ✦ This is the first *defining dictionary* of its kind which uses modern Tamil to define words in contemporary Tamil.
- ✦ This is the first corpus based dictionary in Tamil since 1926 when the *Tamil Lexicon* was published. For the purposes of this dictionary 40,000 printed pages of varieties of Tamil have been scanned to create a base.
- ✦ This is the first dictionary in any Indian language to use computer facilities extensively. Special bilingual software was developed for the massive editorial operation from the complex analysis, sorting and classification tasks to interfacing with the typesetter.
- ✦ The dictionary has taken six calendar years and 90 person-years to complete.
- ✦ The Dictionary has partly been supported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. The Ford Foundation has provided the computer facilities.
- ✦ The development of the Dictionary from the conceptual stage has been closely guided by a team of leading linguists and language specialists each of whom has done considerable work on various aspects of modern Tamil. This process has also been aided by special advisors drawn from various disciplines.

SPLINTERED SENSIBILITY

N.S. Jagannathan

I should like to enter at the outset a *caveat emptor*, "Let the reader beware"! What follows is an expatriate's—and a non-creative writer's—view of his native literature's current manifestations. As one who has lived the greater part of his adult life away from Tamil Nadu, contemporary Tamil literature has been for me a chronic long-distance love affair with all the hazards of the predicament, rather than cosy matrimony and its tepid intimacy. It is basically a situation of moments of intense engagement punctuating tedious long hours of separation and memories, of frenzied purchases of books on short visits, to be savoured greedily. The selection itself of these books being hurried, unsystematic and idiosyncratic, what follows is a personal and impressionistic assessment without any pretensions to being considered judgement.

A brief socio-historical discussion on Tamil writing in the twentieth century before attempting an overview of the last decade would be in order. Modern Tamil creativity has been enfeebled by two cultural predicaments: one of these it shares with other Indian literatures and the other is its own unique curse. The first is the snapping of the vital links with an unbroken cultural and literary tradition that occurred roughly about the time of British consolidation in India. In literature, access to the mainsprings of sensibility was closed mainly because of the modern Indian's illiteracy in Sanskrit and in the case of the Tamils, of ancient Tamil, which is to a modern Tamil what Anglo-Saxon is to a modern Englishman. Indeed, many classics of the Sangam period were lost for centuries and were rediscovered only in the second half of the 19th century. But the linguistic barrier was still there even after this discovery. The second and specific disability of the modern Tamil is what I would capsule as a splintered sensibility which has denied its creative writers the fulness and amplitude their talents are capable of.

First, the cultural discontinuity: It might be argued with some plausibility that I am making rather heavy weather of the atrophy of the cultural continuity in India and more particularly in Tamil Nadu on the ground that cultural mainsprings have dried up all over the world with bastardised popular and pop culture taking over in all its weird forms. But this would be factually incorrect besides being appallingly complacent about our own specific impoverishment. T.S. Eliot's classical paradigm of great literature being an immemorial tradition constantly renewed in every age by new, authentic individual talents—however subversive

and rebellious—and themselves becoming part of the tradition is still operative in the western world. Contemporary European literature has a common living intellectual heritage, even when its practitioners are increasingly illiterate in Greek and Latin. Even when the consciousness of this heritage is not apparent in particular writings, it is part of the intellectual map of every mind creatively engaged even today. The Bible and Shakespeare are embedded in the unconscious of a contemporary English writer of any consequence even today. Indeed, even a humorist like Wodehouse produces a rich and complex set of resonances by his casual allusiveness to the classics to serve his comic purposes. Of few Tamil writers of today can a similar claim of subterranean wells of tradition nourishing them

is coloured today by the historic "Brahmin, Non-brahmin divide", firmly established in the twenties and thirties. The undoubtedly inequitable brahmin dominance till the end of the second decade of the century in the intellectual scene, public life, and political and bureaucratic power structure in Tamil Nadu has had a potent backlash in the subsequent decades. This has profoundly altered, among other things, the intellectual and artistic self-expression of the Tamils.

The twenties, thirties and even the forties were dominated by brahmin influence in journalism, literature and the arts. Thereafter, the intellectual climate underwent a slow transformation, not only in terms of writers practising literature but also in terms of themes. Major writers during the earlier decades upto

also repudiating the historical continuity, which was overwhelmingly brahminical, in literature and in the world of ideas. Ramasamy Naicker, who was a philosophical radical in some ways, transformed the earlier anti-brahminism articulated mostly in bread-and-butter contexts of jobs and educational opportunities into a social revolution against the inherited superstructure of ideas in religion and even secular intellection. A disastrous consequence of this thrust was the conscious erasure of a good deal of the Tamil heritage from the cultural continuum of the modern Tamil.

Poets like Kamban were repudiated, not in Marxist terms of class analysis, but in the naivest terms of anti-religion and even spurious prudery. Annadurai, for example, wrote a book called *Kamban Kanirasam* in which he lambasted Kamba Ramayanam on the preposterous ground that it was obscene, on no stronger evidence than that female breasts were not euphemistically referred to in Kamban. Lasting damage was done to Tamil sensibility by this thoughtless expunction of a vital part of the Tamil heritage. The movement's latter day rejection—often hypocritical—of religious faith denied it some of the vital civilisational assets of people's movement by denying them their racial memories. Combined with the "anti-Aryan" bias in its ideology, this led to a perverse assertion of an unhistorical identity. Instead of claiming, as it legitimately could, that little of Pan-Indian philosophical traditions would survive if the Southern—read "Dravidian"—contribution to it were to be subtracted from it, the Dravidian movement disowned it and diminished itself in the process. The three great Acharyas, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa and the Vaishnavite Alvars and Saivite Nayanmars who were the precursors of the Bhakti movement were path-breakers in Indian philosophical and religious traditions. By gratuitously jettisoning them, the Dravidian movement narrowed the base of Tamil culture in self-destructive ways.

All this may seem somewhat remote from the theme of contemporary Tamil literature. It is not so. As already mentioned, one of the reasons why English and other European literatures are vibrant today is the common intellectual heritage that all the languages of Europe share and constantly renew. One does not have to go as far as Europe to get a measure of the pauperisation of Tamil sensibility. Across the Western ghats in Kerala, practitioners of literature and the arts have a profound sense of a shared past, whether they are Hindu, Christian

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be made. For all practical purposes, creative writing in Tamil today has a tradition of not more than a hundred years to hark back to.

The second disability of a fragmented sensibility is a great deal more complex than the deprivation of a literary tradition just mentioned. It has three dimensions. The first is the cultural consequence of the growth of "Dravidian" self-consciousness that, after the tentative beginnings of the first decade of the century, acquired the stridency of a radical ideology in the next three decades, and political power from the late sixties. It is a complex story that cannot be told here. But in the field of letters, this has had disastrous consequences. It has splintered the Tamil sensibility and thus denied it the full amplitude of a unified sensibility's self-expression.

It is an unfortunate fact that almost everything that happens in Tamil Nadu

the forties were brahmins like Subrahmanya Bharathi, the father figure of modern Tamil poetry, V.V.S. Iyer, Kalki and a host of others. It is not that there were not non-brahmin writers of talent and distinction. For example, Pudumaipithan, something of a cult figure and a member of the *Manikodi* group that is universally acknowledged as having initiated the "new writing" in Tamil in the thirties, was not a brahmin. But his themes and approaches were in the brahminical mould of the time (he has written a memorable short story on Ahalya). It is only later that writers like Bharathidasan and others (who were also politically influenced by E.V. Ramasamy Naicker) initiated a self-conscious revolt against brahminical traditions in contemporary literature.

The Dravidian movement was not only self-consciously rejecting the brahmin dominance in the power structure but

or Muslim. They have a truly assimilated past rich in resonances. Their language is not sought to be ethnically cleansed as is sought to be done in Tamil Nadu where even dictionaries are expurgated of words of Sanskrit origin. All great literature is full of resonances. The absence of such reverberation makes a modern Tamil writer, however talented, uni-dimensional and anaemic.

The second splinter factor in Tamil Nadu is the deep cultural fissure created by English education. Nowhere in India is the chasm between the English-educated intelligentsia and native self-expression, whether in poetry, fiction, criticism, or even in general intellectual discourse, so deep as in Tamil Nadu. Tamil enters upper middle-class households in Tamil Nadu as a concession to the needs of the womenfolk and this entry is allowed only to popular magazines and religious journals. Unlike in Kerala or Bengal where a local language daily newspaper is a must, sometimes as the first paper for middle-class homes, in innumerable middle-class households in Tamil Nadu a Tamil paper is not even a second paper, let alone being the sole paper. This is a pleasure left to the "lower orders". Market surveys of readership of Tamil journals seeking to assess the effectiveness of consumer goods advertisements in Tamil journals that claim the contrary can be misleading; the fact that these journals enter higher income households does not wholly fix the readership of these journals. The sad fact is that the intellectual and imaginative needs of the upper middle-class in Tamil Nadu are almost entirely met by English. And the growing number of "convent-educated" children are even illiterate in Tamil. Such a cultural predicament is hardly conducive to a healthy, vibrant, widespread, dispersed readership that will sustain serious Tamil literature.

The third splinter factor in Tamil sensibility is the chasm between the popular and serious literature. Tamil writing today is dominated by the popular magazines, derisively referred by the highbrows as "pulp" magazines, like *Ananda Vikatan*, *Kumudam*, *Kalki* and innumerable other surrogates with the same objectives. Time was when these magazines were valuable aids to political education, especially during pre-independence days. In recent decades, compulsions of survival have imposed on them competitive triviality and banality. These journals are run these days on the assumption that the attention span of a Tamil reader does not exceed ten seconds and that anything that requires some effort on the part of the reader should be carefully eliminated. These journals have worked out a formula in which their basic triviality of cinematic and political title-tattle is varied by pseudo-historic novels, short stories and serials that mostly do not call for serious intellectual or imaginative engagement.

However, in fairness, it must be added that from time to time these journals do accommodate serious writers who have

It is an unfortunate fact that almost everything that happens in Tamil Nadu is coloured today by the historic "Brahmin, Non-brahmin divide", firmly established in the twenties and thirties. The undoubtedly inequitable brahmin dominance till the end of the second decade of the century in the intellectual scene, public life, and political and bureaucratic power structure in Tamil Nadu has had a potent backlash in the subsequent decades. This has profoundly altered, among other things, the intellectual and artistic self-expression of the Tamils.

already made their names elsewhere and lend distinction to them by their very presence. Some good writing in modern Tamil has appeared in these journals, especially in their bumper Deepavali numbers. Jayakanthan, one of the most rewarding writers in Tamil, has done some of his best works in the pages of these magazines. It is an uneasy relationship, but one that has been symbiotic and synergic.

It is against this historical background of a fractured sensibility and a narrow readership base that the achievement of serious creative writers of the last decade has to be judged. In the articles that follow, perceptive observers with more intimate knowledge of the Tamil literary scene have given their assessments, both general and particular. Here I shall be setting down some broad impressions of a distant observer.

There is a good deal of poetry, calling itself self-consciously "new poetry", being written. But little of it rises above the level of declamatory indignation, gnomic utterances, crystallisation of passing—often interesting—moods and quasi-philosophical reflections on life and its ironies. There is hardly any work of sustained imagination of even the moderate length of, say, Bharati's longer poems. Some of the younger poets like Vairamuthu, Abdul Rahuman, Mu. Metha, Gnana Koothan, Vaideheswaran, N. Kamarasan, etc. have a certain gift for, often unexpected, turn of phrase and freshness of imagery but none of them rises to a level higher than that of a minor poet.

By far the most notable achievement in modern Tamil letters has been in the field of fiction. Short stories are the staple of the Tamil reading public and there have been some outstanding writers in this genre in recent years. Novels are also being increasingly written, mostly as serials in the magazines. But lately, quite a few are written for straight publication. The little magazines—on which there is a

piece in this section—have been a great nursery of fledgling talent. Many of the critically acclaimed writers of today—Sujatha, Balakumaran, Indira Parthasarathi, the late Aadhavan et al—have had their literary baptism in the pages of these magazines, notably in the once Delhi-based *Kanaiyazhi*, a middlebrow monthly, which even now carries regularly significant works, especially in the form of novelles, of aspiring young talents as well established writers, some of whom have since moved to the green pastures of the popular magazines. New talents have also been nurtured in the eighties by literary awards (monetarily modest compared to Jnanpith, etc., but nonetheless highly regarded) by organisations like Ilaiyikiya Chintanai.

Elsewhere in this section, the works of some of these writers have been discussed in some detail. I shall confine myself to mentioning some outstanding names and some neglected ones. La. Sa. Ramamritam, Jayakanthan, Sundara Ramaswami, Indira Parthasarathy, Sujata, Ashoka Mitran, K. Rajanarayanan, Neela Padmanabhan, Aadhavan, Sa. Kandasami are among the established writers that have continued to be active during the decade. A writer of considerable stature who has made his mark in the last ten years is Prapanchan. He is currently writing an extremely interesting novel on the times of Duplex in India, based on the famous diaries of Ananda Rangam Pillai, Dubash and adviser to. Totally, authentic in tone and details, it is in marked contrast to the pseudo-historical, Tamil-chauvinistic outpourings in the pages of the pulp magazines.

Women writers who are more than women writers like Rajam Krishnan, Vaasanti, Ambai, Sivasankari, R. Chudamani have written some extremely interesting novels and short stories during the same period. Gender oppression in all its myriad manifestations has been portrayed sensitively with controlled—barely—passion and extraordinary intellectual sophistication by Ambai in her meagre crop of short stories. The theme emerges rather than gets didactically stated in these stories and that is what sets her apart even among extremely gifted women talents. R. Chudamani has writing for a very long time and has been one of my favourite writers. Her tone of voice never rises above a gentle whisper. Her "feminism" does not stun but nevertheless alters permanently your perspective. In a brilliant story in a recent supplement on women writers in Tamil in the Tamil edition of *India Today*, she presents a piquant chance encounter between a divorced wife and her sister-in-law. The wife had assumed that her sister-in-law would be on her brother's side, but discovers in the course of a chat over a cup of coffee that blood is not thicker than water and that as women they share a common space in which oppressive men, even if one's own flesh and blood, are excluded.

Among writers who deserve to be

better known, I would list Vittal Rao whose authentic evocation of the network of emerging relationships in a changing social map of a small town (Salem) bespeaks an authentic talent. Younger writers such as Jayamohan (whose novel *Rubber*, is remarkable for its generational insights and deft use of dialectal Tamil)—a gift that seems to be shared noticeably by writers belonging to the Kerala-Tirunelveli belt are just emerging from obscurity. Among other writers that have made a mark are Nanji Nadan, Jayanthan, Chinnappa Bharati, Mettamai Ponnuchami and innumerable others. Among the novels that have received considerable critical acclaim recently are *Kadalorathu Gramam* (A Seaside Village) and *Thuraiyugam* (Harbour) by Toppil Mohammad Miran about life among a close-knit Muslim community. And I have no space for innumerable other writers of Sri Lankan origin and the transformations brought in their writings by the ethnic imbroglio in the island.

And finally, criticism. The critical space in Tamil Nadu, such as it is, is narrow and shared broadly by Marxists and lapsed Marxists on the one hand and those cast in the liberal-aesthetic mould (of Bradley, Walter Raleigh, Quiller-Couch and, occasionally, F.R. Leavis) like Ka.Na. Subramaniam, C.S. Chellappa and Venkat Swaminathan. An earlier generation of orthodox Marxists like Vanamamali and Kailasapati has been succeeded by maverick Marxists like Gnani, Nagarajan and Rajadurai. At the fringes there are the quasi-academic theoreticians dabbling in structuralism and deconstructionism and other modish cults from abroad. Those are long on theory, expressed in turgid Tamil, and short in its application to contemporary Tamil writing. There has been a tremendous expansion of Tamil departments in the Universities and new institutions like the Tamil University at Tanjore and the International Institute of Tamil Studies have been set up. Ph.D theses of varying quality on modern Tamil writing continue to be mechanically produced but according to competent academicians I have spoken to, their impact on the critical climate is negligible. Far more influential are the efforts of writers in the pages of journals like *Kalachuvadu* (now defunct) who, despite a certain derivative streak in their scholarship, seem to be seriously grappling with the aesthetic and moral issues thrown up by contemporary Tamil literature.

So, on the whole, an inhospitable ambience to the emergence of a thoughtful readership; a fractured sensibility handicapped further by the drying up of vital historical memories and cultural continuities. And a bunch of authentic talents struggling to find their voice. This is the contemporary Tamil literary scene as seen by a distant observer.

N.S. Jagannathan was the Editor of the Indian Express.

The Taming of the Angry Young Men

Maalan

Will treadles roll
For Vaasan's son only?
Will they defy the commands
Of Muthusamy and others?

Gnanakoothan, October, 1970

The ragespatout in Gnanakoothan's poem above, appeared in the inaugural issue of *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra*, reflected the spirit of the "little magazines" that mushroomed in the seventies. These self-consciously "literary journals" were contemptuous of the "popular magazines" that were dominating the Tamil writing scene, thriving on the appetite of the middle class for undemanding escapist entertainment and facile moralising (Vaasan in the poem quoted above is S.S. Vaasan, the founder of *Ananda Vikatan*, the archetype of popular magazine, now being run by his son Balasubramanian. Muthusamy referred to in the same poem is the well-known "intellectual writer", the prototype of the contributors to little magazines). There is some irony in the fact that during the eighties the dispised treadles (rotaries and web-offsets in reality) of the popular magazines are rolling out the works of the very angry men of the seventies that lambasted them in the pages of the little magazines.

The seventies were the decade of protests: protest against the blatant commercialism of popular magazines till then the pabulum of the Tamil urban middle class, protest against the politicization of literary awards and recognitions, particularly after the Dravidian parties came to power; protest against the insensitivity of the academics to the emerging trends in literature; protest against the pathetic craving for the limelight of Tamil writers.

The vehicles for all these protests were the little magazines that had limited circulation but intense readership. Their proliferation during the seventies was on an unprecedented scale. Even when listed from memory, it is a long scroll: *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra* (Alphabets), *Vasagan* (Reader), *Sadangai* (Small bells), *Neela Kuyil* (Blue Bird), *Therigal* (Splashes), *Vaanambadi* (Cuckoo), *Pragnai* (Consciousness), *Vaigai* (River), *Paalam* (Bridge), *Kolliapaavai* (The deity), *Suvadu* (Footprints), *Vizhigal* (Eyes), *Yaatra* (Voyage), *Sigaram* (Peak), *Inru* (Today), *Darsanam* (Darshan), *Kaaitru* (Wind), *Ilakkuya Velvaattam* (Literary outer circle), *Padigal* (Steps), *Vivegachithan* (The

prudent), *Velvi* (Yagna), *Vannangal* (Colours), *Udayam* (The dawn) and so on.

The comparison of the names of the popular magazines (*Ananda Vikatan*—The joyous Jester, *Kumudam*—Lily) with those of the little magazines tells it all. The former were generally flippant and banal in tone and all too obviously anxious to please. The little magazines were tough and demanding of their readers. Said *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra* in its manifesto: "We care a damn about those who barter literature for a living. We care two hoots for those who are keenly in search of the buttered side of the literary loaf."

But by the end of the seventies, the steam had gone out of the protest. The little magazines were crippled by the personality clashes of their sponsors and contributors. When they were not immobilised by their own internal rivalries, they became encrusted with their own brands of narrow dogmatism. Some of them died a natural death, for lack of finance to sustain themselves. The few that survived became esoteric and "elitist". *Padigal*, a little magazine published from Bangalore, reflected ruefully at the end of the seventies: "this elitism is an ugly phenomenon. Little magazines must guard themselves against it. They should not, in the name of fighting populism, become anti-people."

However, the eighties were the years of a reconciliation of sorts between the two poles of contemporary Tamil writers. The popular magazines realised that their earlier stock-in-trade of triviality was played out and that their future lay with those articulate men, who might be critical but were readable and challenging. The writers for their part realised that wider readership which these magazines provided and the fame and name that went with association with them was nothing to be sniffed at.

Thus it is that Sa. Kandasamy, one of the founders of *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra* is contributing to *Kunkumam* and *Junior Vikatan*, two popular weeklies. Balakumaran, a poet and short story writer who emerged from the pages of *Kanaiyazhi* (A middle brow monthly originally published from Delhi and now from Madras) and *Pragnai* (definitely high brow in tone) stole the limelight with his serials in almost all the large circulation magazines. At one point last year, he was writing five serials at the same time. From a minor poet he was transformed into a cult figure with a fan following.

Prapanjan, another product of a left oriented little magazine, *Tamarai*, became the favourite of the large circulation magazines. He has written at least five serials and any number of short stories during this decade in magazines like *Ananda Vikatan* and *Kalki*. In addition, he writes regular political columns.

It is not only angry young men but old veterans who have found their way into the popular magazines. Ki. Rajanarayanan, one time communist and a self-conscious "regional" writer, found himself a niche in the pages of *Junior Vikatan* and *Ananda Vikatan*. Rajam Krishnan, who had for long stayed away from the popular magazines, abhorring their blatant commercialism, now writes for *Dinamani Kadir*, the publication of the Indian Express Group. La. Sa. Ramamurtham, a unique writer employing a lyrical stream of consciousness technique, wrote serials in *Thai* and *Dinamani Kadir*. The serial that appeared in *Dinamani Kadir* won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1988. Asoka Mithran, a revered name in little magazine circles of the seventies and editor for over two decades of *Kanaiyazhi*, is now a household name to addicts of the popular magazines.

There is no question that this development brought a certain freshness to the formula-ridden commercial magazines and made them far healthier in terms of content. The earlier infantile romanticism and pseudo-modernism gave way to realism and social awareness. Historical and sociological perceptions displaced naive political rhetoric. *Ananda Vikatan* carried a serial "Gopallagramathu Makkal" (People of Gopallagramam) by Ki. Rajanarayanan, which concluded with a poignant portrayal of the betrayal of the Naval Mutiny. Maalan wrote a serial in *Dinamani Kadir* on the complex web of motivation behind Gandhi's assassination. Sujata wrote a Brave New World kind of science fiction in the manner of Aldous Huxley with overtones of George Orwell's "Animal Farm" in *Ananda Vikatan*.

Calf-love excitements and coy romanticism yielded place to angry young men arguing for the concept of single parent. Gayathri, the heroine of Balakumaran's novel *Irumbu Kudiraigal* (Steel Horses), featured for 30 weeks in *Kalki*, argues:

"I do not want to get married, Viswanathan ..."

"The usual glib talk of women"

"But I desire to give birth to a child. What is wrong in giving birth to a child without getting married?"

In the sixties, one could not dream of asking such questions in the pages of a conventional magazine like *Kalki*. In the seventies, it might have got in but would have been frowned upon as obscene. Today, it has not caused even a ripple.

Balakumaran, who emerged as something of a trend-setter in serious popular writing in the eighties, has turned into a writing machine or a juke-box that writes

at the drop of a coin in the slot. So has Sujata, though he has an incredible range of interests.

Women writers, once models of propriety and staunch upholders of the sanctity of the family and womanly patience, have turned into socially conscious critics of society. Sivasankari, who was once accused of indulging in erotic fiction by Cho. Ramasamy, produced her best work during this period. Her novel *Oru Manidhanin Kadhai* (Story of a man) is about an alcoholic, his weakness presented not as a vice but as a disease. The novel is said to have weaned many away from the habit of drinking. It has also given a new perspective to women about the complex psychological background of a man becoming an alcoholic. Sivasankari also wrote *Aavan* (He), a novel on drug addicts. This too is said to have saved many a young man drifting into disaster and brought him back to the secure core of the family. Vaasanti, also a noted woman writer who was earlier producing family dramas and feminist fiction, has lately started writing quasi-political novels like *Mouna Puyal* (Silent Storm) on the Punjab crisis and followed it up with another novel on the Sri Lankan ethnic problem.

These changes that sought the middle ground between popular and serious fiction were not welcomed by all. The purists saw these as base compromise on the part of serious writers. Thundered the leftist scholar-critic, N. Vanamamalai in a preface to a short story collection of S. Yoganathan, published in 1983:

"Those who were writing in the little magazines, the vanguards of literature, after attracting the attention of the large circulation magazines, have moved in there to make money and 'fame'. They write what the press barons want them to write. A trend to sell one's conscience in exchange for popularity is seen among Tamil writers."

Not everybody got on to the popular magazine bandwagon or gravy train. Sundara Ramasamy, whose perspective on story writings seems to have changed with his "*Pallakku Thooikigal*" (Palanquin Bearers) written in the late seventies after hibernation for almost a decade, continued to write in his new found style. His masterpiece "*J.J.: Sila Kurippugal*" (A Few Notes on J.J.) appeared in 1981 and created a sensation. The form of the novel was debated more than its content. By the late eighties—around 1988—Sundara Ramasamy founded his little magazine *Kala Chuvadu* (Imprints of Time). It is more a journal of literary criticism than a popular magazine. It discussed craft, semantics, (nonlinear writing, structuralism et al) and socio-literary issues. It also opened its doors to new creative talents. Some sharp poems from young writers like Jayamohan, Raja Sundararajan, Yuvan appeared in *Kalachuvadu*. Though not aggressive and boisterous like *Ka Cha*

Da Tha Pa Ra of the Seventies, *Kalachuvadu* was the serious magazine that would have become the nursemaid of the creativity of a new generation, had it survived. Ambai is a major writer, who also opted to keep herself away from the mainstream publications. She wrote her best short stories in *Kalachuvadu* during the fag end of the eighties. Though short stories were not the regular feature of *Kalachuvadu*, its pages carried short stories of distinction that will endure.

Looking back, for all its perversiveness and prolificity, the short story during the eighties had only a few examples of lasting quality. Most of them were from seasoned hands like Asokamitrán, Sundara Ramasamy, Ambai, Vannadasan, et al. There were a few new talents that seem likely to endure. Among them are Ma. Ve. Sivakumar, Pavannan, Subrabharathi Manian.

Poetry had better luck mainly because of Sri Lankan Tamils. Va. Se. Jayabalan's *Soorryanodu Pesudhal* (Talking to the Sun) and Cheran's *Cheran Kavithaigal* (Cheran's poems) promised a new lease to poetry which otherwise had turned into cacophony. Sri Lankan women poets spoke in amplified tones, not just for the freedom of their land but for their own identity as persons and not just women.

*I don't have
A face,
A heart,
A soul
I haven't their view
Two breasts,
Long hair,
A narrow hip
And a plump thigh.
Cooking,
Spreading out the bed,
Delivering child,
Obeying orders are my duties.*

*Always they
who profess
their theories on chastity
stare at my body.
From the husband
To the shopkeeper in the corner
It is the custom*

(Sankar) in "Sollaiha Seithigal" (The Untold Messages).

The spirit of the eighties may be summarised in the lines of Vannanilavan's poem:

*We have stared enough at the skies
We have relished enough the fruits of freedom.
Let us become children.*

Maalan is the copy editor of *India Today*, Tamil Edition.

The Young in Recent Tamil Literature: The Changing Mores

V. Narayanan

Looking back on nearly a hundred years of Tamil writing from the vantage point of the last decade of the century, one can discern clearly two trends. On the one hand, there was what may be called the idealistic and escapist streak. On the other, there was, fitfully in the beginning and increasingly in the later decades, writing with an acute social awareness and a realistic manner of narration. This was particularly true in the handling of the problems of the young.

Even as recently as the seventies, fiction was fictitious and poetry an exaggeration in popular writing. Ma. Rajaram, a writer in the little magazines, has a dig at this trend in his short story 'Marakappal' (Wooden boat) in an anthology of short stories entitled *Konalgai* (Angularities). The whole story is a listing of recipes for making up a romantic short story.

Even during the seventies and eighties, the lines were clearly demarcated in Tamil writing. There were the magazines that depended upon 'popular support' which meant selling dreams rather than present reality. Heros were romantic, heroines beautiful and themes idealistic. In contrast, there was another group of young writers, heavily under European influence—particularly English and American literatures—who were trying to build a parallel—often derivative—literature in Tamil. They had a vehicle in a little magazine by name *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra*. Portrayals of the young in these writings were thematically serious and experimental in form and structure. They were heavily overlaid with anti-culture, anti-conservative brahmin life in which they grew, anti-old world values, anti-hero and anti-what not.

Poems of Gnanakoothan and stories of Ramakrishnan, Rajaram Iravatham are good examples of this trend. Gnanakoothan's poem 'Ammavin Poigal' (Lies of Mother) has a young man questioning in mocking tones the moral myths that his mother imprinted into his psyche in his infancy. In one of his short stories, 'Avalidam Solla Pogiren' (I am going to tell her), S. Ramakrishnan portrays a young man drawn towards his teacher, much older than him. He loves her and dreams about her, and when he proposes to her his dreams come crashing down.

From antagonism to traditional attitudes to hostility to traditional forms was but a step. From anti-hero to anti-short story of the conventional kind itself was a natural transition. N.A. Muthusamy's stories belong to this genre. His short stories 'Mazhai Koattum Kandal

Kudaiyum' (The Raincoat and the Tattered Umbrella), 'Yar Thunai' (Whose protection) are good examples. There is not much of a story line but there is a good deal of vague cerebration.

It is not all avant garde and experimentation. Indeed, many of the writers were solidly in the tradition in form, though innovative in themes. Remarkable among these writers is Sa. Kandasamy. Kandasamy stands out from the rest of the *Ka Cha Da Tha Pa Ra* group in his preoccupation with rural youth. His novel *Chaya Vanam* (The Shady Forest) is a vivid description of a young man struggling to destroy a wild forest, dense with bushes and creepers and large, tall trees with firm roots. The objective of the struggle is to erect a factory to sweeten the lives of the people by producing sugar. The novel has enough hints suggesting the forest as a symbol of tradition and the young man as a modern assaulter on it.

Another young writer is Nanjil Nandan. His portrayal of this struggle against tradition takes the form of a revolt against parental authority in the short story 'Marunthu' (The Medicine). Meenakshi Sundaram, affectionately nicknamed Dappu Sundaram, is an illiterate. He lacks

education but has native intelligence and a certain original bent of mind. Though brought up under strict regimentation, his thinking is not conditioned. He grows up into a robust youngman and gets married—it is an arranged marriage—to Ponnammal. Even after eight years of married life, Sundaram is not blessed with a child. His parents decide to bring in a new daughter-in-law in the hope of a grandson. Sundaram hates the idea but is too tradition-conditioned to make any effective protest. But when his feeble objections are rejected by his parents and he is forced into a second marriage, he takes his revenge on his parents by getting himself vasectomised on the eve of the wedding.

Urban middle-class youth was the preoccupation of Adhavan. He has written extensively about the inner world of the young men of his times, confused and bewildered between the two worlds of tradition and half-modernity they occupy. The young were not only in conflict with the society around but also within themselves. Adhavan's novel *En Peyar Ramaseshan* (My name is Ramaseshan) is an acute portrayal of this predicament. Adhavan's young men are torn between mind and body, between their environment and their imagination. Unable to resolve these conflicts, they opt for many masks that they use differently for different occasions. But they are later tormented by guilt about these subterfuges. This is not just a phenomenon of metropolitan cities like Delhi which is Adhavan's milieu but also of other small towns. Jayabhaskaran, a poet from Madurai, steeped in the traditions of Saiva Siddhantha, provides testimony to this in his poem 'Naan'.

These struggles, rebellions, revolts, compromise and guilt naturally raise existential questions. Two memorable novels deal with this predicament written during the eighties. These are Jayakanthan's *Oru Manithan Oru Vazdu Oru Ulagam* (A Man, A Home, A World) and Sundara Ramasamy's *J.J.: Sila Kurippukal* (J.J. some notes). It is a surprising fact that these two extraordinarily brilliant portrayals of the existential agonies of the young were written by two middle-aged Tamil writers wedded to marxism in their youth.

These two novels are cast in altogether different moulds from each other. Jayakanthan's sticks to a cogent and consistent story line, partly because of his own inclination and partly because of the compulsions arising from writing for popular magazines. Sundara

Ramaswamy on the other hand is severely intellectual in tone and adopts a stream of consciousness style and an anti-hero thematic approach. Younger writers with leftist sympathies also dealt with existential questions. Poomani's *Alagiri* in *Piragu* (Then) is an example.

But generally speaking, leftists writers dealt mostly with unemployment and urban misery. In the seventies and the early eighties, this was their favourite theme for elaboration in interviews. It is no exaggeration to say that there is not a single serious young writer who has not dealt with this problem. Unemployment and an uncertain future were a magnificent obsession of those times. The psychological turmoil of the unemployed young men is sensitively portrayed in the stories of Vannanilavan, Prapanchan, Aadhavan and Maalan. In Vannanilavan's short story, 'Karaium Uruvungal' (Dissolving Figures), Sankaran returns home after fruitlessly roaming the city in search of a job. Weary in body and spirit he peevishly refuses to eat, when his solicitous sister asks him to sit down for dinner. He is curt and rude to her importunities, though he and she know that she is the only soul in the world that understands and sympathises with him. Next morning, when he sets out once again on his journey in search of a job, the sister gives him some money without any trace of bitterness about the previous evening's incident. Sankaran literally breaks down at such uselessness.

Prapanchan's 'Pagal Nera Naadagan-gal' (Day Time Drama) is an effective portrayal of the callousness of our employment exchanges. Aadhavan's 'Interview' and Maalan's 'Twenty Three' present how relationships sour when one is unemployed. Balakumaran and Subramanya Raju have also written on the problems of young men. Balakumaran's 'Trumbu Kudhiraigal' (Steel Horses) and many of his short stories are lucid portrayals of the plight of precariously employed youth. Another of his short stories 'Chinna Chinna Vattangal' (Small Circles) describes the insecurities that quite a few of young men are entrapped in an imperfectly performing industrial economy. Sankaran is a worker in a factory which is suddenly pushed into inactivity because of a power cut. His family life, already miserable, is made more unbearable as a consequence. His child has been ill with boils all over its body for months. He is unable to give proper medical attention and the closure of the factory aggravates his helplessness. All these days, even when he was earning, his last pie was spent on the family and he has had to deny himself his earlier simple pleasures of smoking and seeing the cinema. Now he finds he is unable to buy a saree that his wife badly needs. The child dies and its death brings money. This sudden enrichment is presented with bitter irony by Balakumaran.

It is not all young men. Young women also figure prominently in contemporary

Tamil fiction. Gayathri in 'Trumbu Kudiraigal' is a young girl, intelligent but immature. Her questions are brilliant but her answers are impractical. If Balakumaran sees Gayathri as the future woman, Ambai presents the woman of the present in all her vulnerability and rebellious moods. The apprehensions of the young girl when she attains puberty and her desperate longing for her mother at that hour are brilliantly portrayed in 'Amma Oru Kolai Seithal' (Mother Committed a Murder) by Ambai. Her women represent the entire spectrum of the reality of woman in a man's world. In her 'Karuppu Kudirai Chadhukkam' (Black Horse Square), Ambai presents a woman of indomitable spirit, cast in the mould of Rosa Luxemburg. Saaya of 'Siragugal Muriyum' (Wings would be Clipped) is a woman who abhors men, for constantly imposing their superiority on women. There is yet another facet of women. In 'Veetu Moolaiyil Oru Samayal Arai' (A Kitchen in the Corner of the house). The protagonist is a woman who pleads with the more conventional women in the story that the kitchen is not the whole world of women. Older writers like Thi. Janakiraman had a profound understanding and compassion for women seeking to liberate themselves from the constraints of tradition and custom. His Ammani in 'Marapasu' (Wooden Cow) is a symbol of a liberated woman presented with a fineness rarely encountered in Tamil writing. Thus youth in recent Tamil fiction has been a symbol of heroism for many, a break from the past for a quite few, a hope for the future for all of us. They are at once intelligent but helpless and vulnerable. They are apathetic as well as revolutionary. They are inheritors of traditions as well as precursors of modernity. Tamil writing of the recent past has innumerable examples not only in the writings of writers discussed above but also in those of Sujata, Asoka Mitran, Indra Parthasarathy, Rajam Krishnan, Sivasankari and many others whose works have not been discussed here for lack of space.

The picture will not be complete without at least a reference to the portrayal of youth in Sri Lankan Tamil writings. It is a large theme for which there is no space here. When S. Ponnuthurai wrote his novel *Thee* (Fire) in the sixties, he depicted sex as a major crisis among the youth. If that was anywhere near the truth in that era, recent poetry shows that Sri Lankan Tamil youth have come a long way indeed from their major preoccupations of the sixties. Four lines from Ch-eran, a contemporary Sri Lankan Tamil poet shows the death-defying mood of the young Tamil in Sri Lanka:

*Death is not the end of life,
Your death is more powerful
than your words
and deeds.*

V. Narayanan is a writer and critic.

From the Eighties to the Present

Venkat Swaminathan

Let me confine myself to the eighties. Significantly and conveniently for me, by a rare coincidence, this happens to be the period in which Tamil creative writing has witnessed some new departures, breaking out into directions uncharted hitherto. Uncharted they were, since, the directions were either unthought of or unknown because the writer was ill-equipped. It could even be, in certain areas, he felt the directions were inconvenient and inexpedient.

The writers who were thus responsible for venturing out in such new directions have to be celebrated for their imagination, courage and sincerity. I shall, therefore, not talk of those writers of known name and fame, who have produced their 'yet anothers' during this period. Some might argue that some of these 'yet anothers' are better crafted and hence more successful in realisation than some works of these adventurous spirits. Maybe. But they don't interest me, nor would they alter, I believe, the future of Tamil creative writing.

Let the oldest angry young man be the first in my consideration and let this be my homage to him: Ka.Naa. Subramaniam, who passed away in the closing year of the decade. Like the earthen lamp that glows its brightest and sends up its flame higher when it is about to burn itself out, Ka.Naa was at his prolific best, when he returned in the middle of eighties to Tamil Nadu from his 'exile', as it were, in Delhi for over two decades. He was then welcomed to the pages of mass circulation magazines, which he hated and reviled against all his life. He also won a literary award from the Sahitya Akademi, one of his *betes noires* of long standing. Many of his works that were out of print for decades came out in reprint. Many of his stray articles were collected and published. That was a virtual avalanche.

No, the old war horse was not tamed. It was not a tragedy or compromise. I would rather see a parallel in a character of his novel, *Avadhootar*, which was for decades in half finished manuscript form and published before his death, his swan song, as it were. The *Avadhootar* in the novel was once a family man. He renounces his family, becomes an *Avadhoota* (naked saint), lives in the same village but away from the family, and yet cares for the well-being of the village folk. After a time, he resumes family life once again. His relationship with society even as an *Avadhoota* is one of deep involvement and concerned detachment at the same time.

His other novel, published before his death was *Thomas*, dealing with the imagi-

nary encounter between Tiruvalluvar and St. Thomas, the apostle who spent his last years in a suburb of Madras. This gives Ka.Naa an occasion to dwell on the speculative influence of Christian ethics on Tiruvalluvar and his celebrated work, *Kural*. Both Thomas and Valluvar are believed to have lived in near proximity in the two suburbs of Madras. One cannot vouch for the historical authenticity of the encounter of these two sages but the religious ferment witnessed during this time is history.

This talk about history and its authenticity in fiction takes us to Prapanchan's *Maanudam Vellum* (Humanity will Prevail) and Sujatha's *Karuppu, Sivappu, Veluppu* (Black, Red and White). Unlike their forebears in historical fiction (the immensely popular Kalki and his lesser ilk from the forties onwards for whom historical fiction was just the same market-friendly love-story but for the costumes and names, or a matter of saleable packaging in appealing chauvinistic colours), Sujatha (a writer of raging popularity no doubt) and Prapanchan (an emerging short story writer of literary merit) have cared both for the authenticity of history and for novel as a literary form. In his planned trilogy Prapanchan intends to trace the history of Pondicherry, his native town, from the times the French colonised it down to the enclave's merger with the Indian Union. His *Maanudam Vellum* is the first part in which he has made copious use of the famed Ananda Rangam Pillai's voluminous diaries in Tamil (later half of the eighteenth century) to give flesh to historic personages and authenticity to his narrative. Sujatha's novel unfolds the odyssey of a Tamil lad from a martial community in hot pursuit of a British officer all the way to Kanpur to avenge the killing of his father, in the backdrop of the momentous events leading to the 1857 War of Independence. Materials are not lacking to provide authenticity to this backdrop. Both have cared for it.

Ki. Rajanarayanan's 1991 Akademi award winning work, *Gopallagramathu Makkal* (The People of Gopallagramam), the second volume of his intended trilogy, is a stringing together of tales, told in the manner of oral tradition, tracing, in a loose and disjointed fashion, the history of the Telugu migrant community to which the author belongs, from their original hearth in Andhra sometime after the fall of the Vijayanagar Empire. The second volume picks up the thread of that history from an unspecified time after that community settled itself in a corner of the southern tip down to the forties when India won freedom. It has all the

peasant naivete, folksy humour, innocence and a mischievous salacity of the dead oral tradition. The narrative follows a thin line of history flowing invisibly.

An important event is the reappearance of E. Balakrishna Naidu's novel, *Tanaikkan Kottai* (The Tanaikkan Fort) set in Mysore or Tippu's turbulent times amidst his battles for survival with the Marathas and the British, the only genuine work of historical fiction in Tamil. It was unfortunately consigned to oblivion by the then raging popularity of Kalki and his ilk with their pseudo-history and pseudo-literature. Its reissue in the 80s, after a gap of over three decades lends some meaning and significance to the above-mentioned works that followed it. With the appearance of these works, the mountainous heap of earlier popular historical fiction should rightly be consigned to the dustbin.

From the past to the present: Vaasanti's *Nirka Nizhal Vendum* (roughly, 'A Roof to Live Under') is a novel on the still burning issue of Ceylon Tamils' struggle for a life of dignity and freedom. It deserves notice for its non-partisan human concern. Her sympathies are with the suffering human community and she does not fail to see the cynical political games of all the governments concerned and the fascist face of the feuding Tamil extremist leaderships amongst themselves. A large part of it is a commendable effort. Unfortunately the sincerity and seriousness have not been taken notice of because it has come from the pen of a popular writer.

Stepping in a new direction of fiction that verges on social documentation, the works of Vittal Rao, *Nadi Moolam* (The River, its source) and *Kaala Veli* (Temporal expanse) arrests attention. For reasons inexplicable, Vittal Rao is not much talked about, but he does deserve a lot more critical and appreciative attention than he has got. In *Nadi Moolam* he unfolds the life and times of three generations of a family of Madhva brahmins, interweaving into it the definite happenings and movements outside in the larger society in general, and in theatre and films in particular. This is not just a backdrop as the family history and social happenings have an inter-relationship and a mutual impact. It would be difficult for the older generation who came of age in the twenties and thirties to read *Nadi Moolam* without some nostalgic memories of the times past. In *Kaala Veli*, which again is a very remarkable work, Vittal Rao, (a student of an art school himself) captures beautifully, authentically and knowledgeably, the mood and atmosphere of the post-academic life of the artists circa late 60s and early 70s, to bring out their aspirations, frustrations, mutual jealousies, and struggles to earn a living. With an undertone of Bohemianism it is a struggle to make oneself felt in a city, not exactly friendly to modern trends in art. Vittal Rao has a remarkable eye for detail, a remarkable memory to recount a wealth of detail and an admirable and

abiding catholicity of interests, a singular trait in the contemporary Tamil milieu. His canvas is wide, taking in literature, music, painting, theatre and cinema. His perceptive eye ranges from Tamil literary little magazine group meeting taking place in one dingy corner of a house in the bylanes of Triplicane to another dingy corner of a house in one of the lanes of Anglo-Indian quarters in another far-out suburb of Madras where you hear the records of the 60s Rock Group played. He does all that just by narrating the day-to-day happenings in the lives of four painters in their struggle to make a living, with no pretensions or obvious efforts at grandiose results.

From here it is a smooth transition to Thoppil Mohammed Meeran's *Oru Kadalarathu Grammathin Kathai* (The Tale of a Coastal Village) which is a contemporary classic, that has won unprecedented literary acclaim, academic recognition and commercial success as well, all at the same time, as if in a package. This is a unique achievement. Such a thing was never known to have happened in recent Tamil literary history. In a remarkable expression of courage, Thoppil has dared to reflect on the life of the Muslim community (to which he belongs) in the early decades of this century with all its religious obscurantism, pride in its Arab lineage and its cloistered existence with stubborn resistance to the opportunities of English education. It is an uninhibited portrayal with a defensive plea that these were the values they cherished and that it is not for us to ridicule them, since the contemporary values we cherish could as well invite ridicule from succeeding generations. Be that as it may, it is an explosive portrayal and no one who knows what happened to Salman Rushdie would believe that this novel first appeared as a serial in a Muslim periodical, the community's in-house forum of sorts. And again, this contemporary classic has come from one who had his education in Malayalam, does his Tamil writing in Malayalam script and has then to get it transcribed in Tamil script.

When we talk of sincerity, truth and self-reflection, we have to turn our attention to the works of a young writer, C.M. Muthu who came on the scene in the 80s, whose exclusive concern is the caste animosities in both his novels *Nenjina Naduvu* (The Heart in its Core) and *Karichoru* (Rice with Meat), he gives us an uncompromising, uninhibited picture of the bitter caste conflicts within the numerous sub-castes of his own backward community of Thevars and the air of superiority they affect towards the untouchables and the hypocrisy of it all. If Meeran adopts a defensive posture in dealing with the past even while being truthful, Muthu is explosively volatile and aggressive in being equally truthful in dealing with contemporary ugliness. While the truth Muthu unfolds of his community is equally true of every community in the caste-Hindu hierarchy, only the dosage of hypocrisy

increases in potency with every step upwards on the ladder. (The Brahmins are the frightened mice in the glassed cage of snakes). One has therefore to single out Muthu for his sincerity and courage as no writer or public figure in any field in Tamil society would ever acknowledge this ugly hypocritical face of his own community. He would much rather choose to single out the Brahmin community to launch his vituperative tirades on casteism which he does quite often to proclaim his liberal pretensions.

It is left to Nanjil Nadan to expose the hypocrisies of the public figures and politicians in his short stories and novels. His volume of short stories, *Vakku Porakkithal* is an instance. (It is difficult to translate this expression which roughly means 'vote pickers' with the pejorative sense as in 'rag pickers'). In his novel, *Midavai*, he narrates that part of his life which took him to Bombay in search of a job from his native town in Kanyakumari district. All these are occasions for him to expose the caste hypocrisies and the wheeling and dealing of politicians.

Gopi Krishnan's efforts (call them short-stories, sketches, tales—the form of his short pieces defies categorization) are memorable. In *Otvada Unarvugal* (Disagreeable Feelings) he is at his devastating best. His style, form, humour, mock self-deprecation are in fact a masked but merciless attack on current social values and mores. Gopi Krishnan has evolved a unique language and style that pokes fun at society by poking fun at himself. The likes of him and of his language, perception, style and manner of writing have not been seen in Tamil writing so far.

We must now turn to Ambai, the angry young woman. Ambai does not clothe her anger in anything else. It is plain, unadorned anger which likes to see its victim squirm and suffer. Ambai is a feminist pure and simple in all her avenging fury. Feminism is not a fashionable current fad for her. She has been through many phases, from a goody goody sentimental traditionalist, leftist and so on and has finally ended up as a feminist. She can see through the masquerading hypocrisy of all of them. She once lashed out at one middle-level mass circulation magazine when it reprinted one of her short-stories with a laudatory note. "How dare you publish me without my consent," she wrote spitting fire, "while I would not have given you my consent in any event, as I have nothing to do with either your published, pretentious appreciation of my writings, nor with your unpublished private intentions in running the magazine?" Ambai is very sparing in her writing. After a decade long interval, a collection of her short stories, *Veetu Moolayil Oru Samayalarai* (A Kitchen in a Corner of the House) appeared. The collection speaks volumes of her versatility in forms and themes; fables, plain narratives and so on, locales ranging from the Latin quarters of an American city to a remote village in the southern tip of Tamil Nadu,

and a variety of characters and situations. Ambai is the only genuine feminist in Tamil whose wrath does not just spill out of her lips but flows in her veins and the only one who is able to transform that wrath into art.

From an explosive outburst of wrath, we turn to a soft, quiet determination and unwavering firmness of convictions expressed in soft and mellowed tones. Poomani has brought the suppressed world of untouchables into the domain of current Tamil writing. Untouchables have so far been untouchables even in literature. But in the 80s, Poomani changed all this. In his novel, *Veikai* (Heat) there is a graphic delineation of the struggles for survival in a jungle hideout by a fugitive from the law, a very gripping narrative of unrelieved tension, bearing testimony to Poomani's mastery over language and his narrative abilities.

The fictional part of this essay would exhaust itself with a final reference to three works; one, *J.J. Sila Kurippupal* (J.J. Some Notes) by Sundara Ramaswami, two, *Idai Veli* (Interregnum) by S. Sampath and the third, *Paarkadal* (the mythical Sea of Milk, the abode of Vishnu) by La.Saa. Ramamirtham. Each is an extreme in many respects right from the character of writing to the responses it has evoked. All the three are in a sense and in varying degrees autobiographical reflections of the respective authors. Sundara Ramaswami in his *J.J. Some Notes* talks of a fictitious writer who is, in part, a reflection of himself and in another, what he would aspire to be, though he would deny this. And further, it is a masked reflection on the writers' world that he sees around himself. Needless to say, no other book had given rise to so much heated controversy, both for and against, in recent times. Sundara Ramaswami has once again proved, if proof were needed, that he is a stylist *par excellence* and that he likes to experiment with form all the time.

S. Sampath in his *Idai Veli* seems to have unconsciously written of his own impending death. Even while he was giving expression to the apprehensions of death that were haunting him for many years in the form of hallucinations, he was also airing his own intellectual reflections on it. This theme and Dosztoevsky were his constant obsessions. He was conscious that he was being ridiculed, but he took the ridicule in his stride. *Idai Veli* is a record of both his hallucinations and intellectual reflections in fictional recreation. He died of cerebral haemorrhage soon after he sent the final proofs of his novel to the press. That was the first and last of his published work.

Ramamirtham is a writer of a rare breed, who usually writes of the cloistered world of his orthodox Hindu family, deeply religious and given to extremes of emotions, living in unredeemed tension all the time, inflicting pain on themselves and on others. His characters were men of passion, wrath and love, all of which know only one form of expres-

sion—violent explosion. One can't be sure whether Ramamirthan is a writer or a creator of myths. *Paarkadal*, which is an episodic collection of sketches and narration of incidents largely centring round his family members stretched over three generations, can be read as his autobiography, another collection of his short pieces, or a companion volume to his work in fictional form. We can trace the source of the incidents and characters that inspired each of his stories, in these autobiographical reflections.

Now the other areas.

In drama, some worthwhile efforts are on. These are only a continuation of what was begun in the 70s. But, unfortunately, these efforts have thrown up only performance scripts, but no dramatic literature as such. Though Na. Muthuswami's *Natrunaiappan* (or *Kadavul*) has taken a few strides ahead, we are yet to have a complete literary text which could exist by itself, independent of its realisation on stage, to communicate an experience.

In poetry, a lot is being written. This prolificity is a bit unnerving. A large part of it is hardly poetry, in what it says and how that is said. If saffron robes could make one a saint, these clipped sentences, broken lines and staircase-like arrangements could also make poetry. It means that the creative outburst of the 60s has largely fizzled out in the 70s and 80s.

In criticism, the 80s are dominated by the current fad of structuralism, post-structuralism, etc. Literary criticism in the 80s has been lost, by abduction, to the academicians. There was a virtual invasion by hordes from the academics who were all students/lecturers in linguistics. The next stage of self-promotion after a short period of probation, seems to be an elevation to structuralism and post-structuralism. Now the whole Tamil literary world is choked by a thick fog of structuralism. It is a truly intimidating spectacle.

The old-world orthodox aestheticians have been more or less thrown overboard. The 80s have seen a few theoretical expositions coming out in text-book fashion in this category. But a decade-long loud approbation of this conversion to structuralist faith has not brought forth a single new perspective to the literary worth of an already acknowledged work, nor has it dethroned a single acknowledged literary work. Nor has it helped in the evaluation of a new work of art. The print-out coming after an analysis by a structuralist, computer-programmed for deconstruction, does not say anything about aesthetic values of a work. One is at a loss to know what all this hullabaloo is about.

Vexed as we are, let us shift to a more productive side. Two important books must be taken note of. These are Gnani's *Marxianum Tamil Ilakiumum* (Marxism and Tamil literature) and S.V. Rajadurai's *Russia Puratchi: Ilakiya Satchiyam* (Russian Revolution—a Literary Testimonial). Both have traversed a long distance during the past decade and a half from their rigidly held ideological positions. Gnani began his literary career swearing by orthodox

communism of the party-baked model, but has now become one who swears by a Marxism of his own home-baked variety which has no sanction anywhere outside him. He is inclined to embrace within his fold early Bhakti literature as well as the whole corpus of Indian thought from Vedic times down to J. Krishnamoorthi. I am not deriding him while saying this. Not at all. One cannot avoid such contradictions and vague formulations in a volume of critical articles written over a period. I respect him for his liberal inclinations, his Marxist label notwithstanding.

On the other side, S.V. Rajadurai was a party activist but always standing outside the party office, while proclaiming his solidarity with the party line. Even as the party fortress walls crumble, he would still maintain his differences with the party line by a further advance of his liberal view-point and yet swear in public by the official credo. So both have a shifting die-hard position to stick to at any given point of time. Now that their Pope himself has abdicated and the Vatican lies in ruins, Rajadurai takes the line that Marxism is still the eternal truth and that only its practitioners have betrayed it. His successive works mark the stages of his transition. The latest is *Russia Puratchi: Ilakiya Satchiyam*. It is a study of the work, life and times of writers of Communist Russia, the dissidents who were exiled, sent to labour camps in Siberia, incarcerated, or exterminated. His undoubted incisive intellectual acumen and immense reading have failed to make him see that Marx marks only a stage in the march of ideas and human history. Secondly, the aesthetic component of his personality does not quite match his intellectual equipment even as it stands amputated by a crippling faith in an outworn 19th century ideology. Both Gnani and Rajadurai are sincere men, true to themselves and the ideas they profess, unlike the structuralists wearing regimental attire in order to overawe others.

I should end this essay by making a mention of a "middle level" magazine *Subha Mangala*—an insipid *Woman and Home* variety in its birth. But after Komal Swaminathan took over, it has been transformed into a successful magazine of arts and letters, with a giant leap in circulation which no literary magazine ever dreamt of, proving that a serious literary magazine can be popular and a viable commercial proposition. Serious writing in Tamil which had, at no point of time till the 70s, commanded a readership of more than a few hundreds at best, reaches now a readership in multiples of ten thousands. Nobody ever dreamt that Komal Swaminathan had in him such a messianic zeal for a literary cause and an equally gifted commercial acumen. It is a breakthrough of the eighties deserving to be spelt out in bold letters.

Venkat Swaminathan is a well-known critic of contemporary Tamil writing based in New Delhi.

A Telescopic Arousal of Time

Raji Narasimhan

A PURPLE SEA

By Ambai. Translated with an introduction by Lakshmi Holmström
Affiliated East-West Press, 1992, pp. 223, Rs. 75.00

In her stories we see Ambai as both woman and writer. It is a potent combination, one that comprises the basic requirements of feminist writing. Moving between these two selves of woman and writer in tense, close steps—so close that the space between them seems shorn—Ambai, like any feminist writer of worth, telescopes the past, the present and the future vistas of time in her stories. She evokes, first of all, the antiquity of the gesture of visiting degradation upon woman. Then, she evokes entrenched time, time condensed and become inert, in the events of the story. And thirdly, she evokes the faint outlines of a coming time, the dawn of a new consciousness, just visible through the freeze, and promising once again animation and fluidity.

The importance of language in this telescopic arousal of time cannot be overstated. It is the whip for lashing the past, as well as the lute denoting the harbinger of better times. The many-sided, simultaneous and symphonic voicings of the emotions it has to achieve, can be accomplished only in the writer's mother tongue. This might sound like a truism. But the depressing translation of Ambai's stories done by Lakshmi Holmstrom forces one not only to utter this truism, but to explore it for understanding the extent of the damage and to determine what exactly is at stake in a translation.

Let us take the following passage, chosen at random, from the story, 'Gifts'. The Tamil title is 'Velippadu'. The change of title is, probably, allowable.

She walked about with ease in the world of her own backyard. She tamed the buffalo. She fed it. She showed the visitor the bathhouse that was used during menstrual pollution, dark as a cave. Whenever one peeped in, she was found by the kitchen hearth. Shall I cook the dosais now? Would you like me to pour the idli batter? At night she folded her legs modestly and quietly fell asleep, her sari neatly tucked about her. At the slightest sound of a cough she was up, as if she were switched on, to make a soothing drink of pepper and jeera in hot water. When she put her hands to her face they smelt of food. The smell of food which had been cooked for generations".

In Tamil, this passage has an economy of language. It has a level of suggestion which imparts to it that special tonal

quality which is a summing up, in itself, of Ambai's fiction in general. Sound, colour, light, and other such forces that help convey the pulse of life, are part and parcel of her fictional tools. Such refuges in the intangible, that are beyond touch, but are filled with the power to cause epiphanic agitation, are natural to the leashed sensibility unleashing itself.

That these finer elements get lost in the English rendering is something that one cannot lament beyond a point. But what one can reasonably expect the translator to see in Ambai's writing is the intense, more than ordinary connection of the narrative voice to the unwritten text behind the narrative. Bereft of the powerful emotive capacities of the mother tongue, which can filter, through their overtones and aftersounds, the wracked quality of this connection, the translator has to work out some other means of establishing it. This effort is what is missing in the passage quoted above, disarming one by its utter blandness.

Phrases are packaged. A phrase such as "padiyappadiya nadandaal" is rendered as "walked about with ease". This is a catch-phrase that kills the pictorial quality of the Tamil. The onomatopoeia in the Tamil is important. It reveals character. Literally, it means walking with firm, deeply implanted steps. But over and above this, it means the kind of steps that come to one in one's habit: the earth yielding, the feet sinking in, the yielding and the sinking miming a secret, privately exercised autonomy. This charged, multi-faceted quality can result only from an intimate, sensuous relationship with language. And again, one admits, that barring exceptions, such a relationship is possible only in the mother tongue. But the point is that but for this feature, the creative complex of Ambai's writing falls apart. The translator's job, therefore, is to contrive it by some means or the other. This means, that he has to have a sensitive plus critical appreciation of the work. He has to understand its anatomy, its inter-spacings, and the special effects produced by these inter-spacings.

One way out, perhaps, is through mirroring, through assonance, through producing an alliteration of inner sense, rather than going through the conventional method of putting in the corresponding words. The key phrase in the original is transmuted through diction to become a recall of the original, in a kind of re-incarnation with memory intact. An

illustration of this can be cited from David Rubin's translation of Premchand's "Nirmala".

Take this one line from a long passage: *Mujhme aisi kaunsi baat hai jo inki aankhon mey khataki hai?* The translation is: "What was there about her which made him mistrust her?"

The key phrase in that line is "Aankhon mey khataki hai". It is difficult, if not impossible, to translate that phrase into English, with the particular subjectival connection it has with the first person pronoun with which the sentence begins. "What is there in me which hurts his eye?" the literal translation, makes it too physical, altering the weightage towards the non-physical in the original. And it does not connect with the first person pronoun in the peculiar, private, inward-moving way it does in the Hindi. Indeed, the pronouns undergo a sea change in the translation. "In-ki" which is a subtle, middle form of address between the second and the third persons, is untranslatable in English, and can come out only as a straight, third person. Rubin, therefore, forgets about the whole trait of deflected pronouns present in the Hindi (a trait, possibly, present in all the Indian languages) and confines his rendering to the third person. Secondly, the phrase in question has been paraphrased by him into "made him mistrust her". What he highlights and reiterates in thus freeing himself from pedantic exactitudes of phraseology, is the overall condition of Nirmala, the pervading spirit of the work.

It is a method in which the blood relationship between the writer and the lan-

guage present in the original has been deliberately and studiously overlooked thereby re-focussing attention through the overlooking to the original.

In Ambai's case, the blood relationship gets intensified and heightened into a sole, exclusive condition of creativity. The consequence of this extreme and total pre-conditioning is that the writing gains and sustains significance only in the language of its birth. The translator, thus, has to have well thought-out strategies, comparable to Rubin's, to relay the significance in another language.

Here is one more sample where the excitement and the ecstatic sense of discovery are viable sentiments only in the linguo-cultural context in which they were written.

People like your mother have their own special language. It seems to possess the kind of structure, the height and depths of the language of words. Yet it is wordless. It is a language embedded in the swaying of arms, in the glance of the eye, in the pressing of a hand against the back, in laughter, in lamentation, in the silence that does away with all words. And it is this language that separates us and them. Even if we speak to each other in a language which we mutually understand, we only communicate facts. Our language is a mere bridge. It strikes me that we are seeking a different language, one that does not enforce division, but links and bonds together. The language one understands as soon as a child lifts her outspread hands".

(Black Horse Square)

As prose, that passage passes muster. It is lucid, flows easily, and engages the heart and the head, or the intelligence and the emotions, in equal measure, as good prose does. But these very qualities when seen in the light of the original prove to be its undoing. The thrust is outward, making for an externalism not there in Ambai's state of mental make-up. Phrases are brought in live from the outside, like fish from the sea. A note of wisdom speaks in it, wisdom that is pre-existent, and comes from the aftermath of experience: experience too well read, and conveyed through the standard, craft requirement of the detachment of the writing voice from the writing matter.

A proposition emerges from this competent management of words, namely, the magnetism of gesture language. Like all propositions it resolves into an objectified truth. And like all objectifications it invites scrutiny, elaboration, and a whole range of mental exercises belonging to the participatory stimulus. It incurs, in short, a reader involvement, a reader-writer polarity, not even remotely present in the original.

The magnetism of gesture language comes to Ambai as revealed truth, breaking into her consciousness in the momentum of writing. She is not sharing her findings with anyone, even though technically, in the format of the story, she speaks them to her man. Essentially she is speaking them to herself, in something just a little beyond a soliloquy, moving out in the space afforded her by the for-

mat of the story. And since there is just no room for the incursion of the reader in this prayer-like self-orator, the substance of her observations does not invite any probe by other minds. There is a self-containment about the writing, and as a result, the rather commonplace nature of her waking to the power of gesture language, does not get thrown open to comment from outsiders. The bind of emotions remains bound, safe. Desperation, yearning, hopelessness, hopefulness, search—all the quarter tones and semi tones of the emotions—remain insulated, beyond the reach of busy, critical antennae.

Where is this coiled, self-contained quality in the translation? This quality is the heart and lungs of creativity in Ambai's writing. Where is it in the translation?

A translation has to be bi-tonal in quality. It calls for a minute scouring of the text of the original for its seams of untranslatability. These are the tests and the opportunities for the translator's art. These are the times when the spirit of the two languages—one in text, and the other untexted, but waiting to be texted—can be wound together and made a composite but bisective piece of writing.

Lakshmi Holmström has not availed herself of these possibilities.

Raji Narasimhan is a writer. The Sky Changes published in June 1991 is her latest novel.

◆

An established and popular name in contemporary Tamil writing, Vaasanti has published over 50 books. *Kadai Bommaigal* (Shop Dolls) is her latest novel.

The heroine of the novel Manju, beautiful but dark, is an adopted daughter of German parents who had dedicated themselves to the cause of destitute women and orphans in a small town in South India. Though growing up in an atmosphere of tireless and selfless activity under the efficient management and guidance of her German mother, Manju is unable to accept her present existence, which she feels is a handout from her mother devoid of the excitement of real choices or decisions by her. Her own unknown origin upsets her to the extent of developing an amorphous antipathy to her parent. She dreams of escaping from her environs as well as from the burden of being her mother's daughter.

When Peter, a handsome Swiss-German visits them, the woman in Manju cannot help responding to his very overt and articulate attention and she decides to accept his marriage proposal. "Mother" disapproves but gives her consent subject to a six month wait.

Indian Feminism—Vaasanti Style

M. Vijayalakshmi

KADAI BOMMAIGAL

By Vaasanti

Narmada Pathipagam, Madras, 1992, pp. 282, Rs. 36.00

In the meanwhile two events occur which change Manju's life-perspective. With Padma, a dedicated medical worker, she witnesses a cruel instance of female infanticide. Subsequently, the death of the destitute woman, Ponnuttayi who for some inexplicable reasons, Manju considers is her actual mother, and the spirit displayed by her young daughter Karuppayi against oppressive social customs, induce Manju once and for all to opt for the path adopted by her foster mother. The dedication and zeal displayed by persons like Padma which had earlier never touched the core of her heart now

acquire a fresh meaning.

The novel is written in the usual style of the author in a clear and direct language. The narrative is in the form of a detailed monologue by Manju which alternates between bouts of uncontrolled sentiment and strict and self-denying ratiocination.

As in a number of Vaasanti's novels, male characters get reduced to a minimal existence in this work. In a theme specifically linked to a blatantly adverse male-female equation, the two male characters Natarajan whose marriage proposal Manju rejects and Peter who is allowed to

sway her for some time are allowed ignominious existences. Practically all of Vaasanti's writings include a male character who impels the heroine to self-assertion owing mainly to his inability to rise above the conventional or by lack of sensitivity. Natarajan makes it clear to Manju that he proposes to her out of magnanimity despite her status as an adopted daughter. Manju is only too quick to react. Peter reveals his basic non-compatibility to the Indian Manju with her overt and explicit commitment to the importance of physical relationship in matters of the heart. When rejected, characteristically he wastes no time in finding for himself a Spanish girl-friend close on the heels of parting from Manju!

In this novel the heroine is in better command of herself and is happy to overcome any desire to form a dependence on the male. The message of the contemporary woman-writer has come a very long way from what had been professed by most of them in the past: to be patient and the perfect complement, suffer in silence till "he" comes around. Almost all the rebellious women painted by Vaasanti chart out their own independent tracks but at the same time remain

blithely free of any rancour towards men. In other words, the path of intelligent, silent and aloof resistance seems to be Vaasanti's version of Indian feminism. It is of interest to note that though Vaasanti is well known and respected for her explanation of fairly non-conventional themes, she is not included in the select pantheon which every literary scene creates for itself periodically. Without taking up cudgels with this pantheon which is almost always pulsating with controversies, major or peevish, one can quickly count the 'charges' laid by them on women writers in general including Vaasanti:

Women writers are almost always narcissistic and they don't understand men but men do understand women. Their approach is mainly escapist. Their work lacks bold experiment of style or form.

One may say both 'yes' and 'no' to these charges, all the while bearing in mind that a minority—here, women—has generally to bend backwards to prove its worth!

Without entering into this controversy, the perceptive reader will readily concede that Vaasanti's writing is several cuts above what is regularly being churned out in the booming serialisation industry. The author has never lacked the courage to stir the *Karpu* (chastity) hornet's nest exposing herself to the opprobrium of a tradition-bound society. The attending polemic has always enlisted for the author the admiration of younger readers.

Vis-a-vis *Kadai Bommaigal*, this reviewer finds one question popping up: has the author actually managed to focus attention on the inhuman practice of female infanticide through her novel to the extent that she should? The answer would have to be in the negative, probably because the importance of the issue has been subsumed in the larger theme of the story, which will justify the description of a young woman's desire and dream for love and utopia.

One is also inclined to quarrel with the author's propensity to turn out a 'neatly finished' product which clashes so obviously with life's complex contours. To that extent the sustained stimulation that a written text should give is not present in this book in any remarkable degree. One reads through the book, cover to cover, feels moved to the point of a tear or two, is very upset at what is happening but is also relieved that the protagonists' fight is over. The last mentioned state leaves the reader complacent, a state of mind which he relinquishes only under the worst provocation!

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Little Magazines in Tamil

Amshan Kumar

Putumai Pithan, the great Tamil short-story writer who had had a long association with little magazines, once declared that if ever he started a little magazine that would set high standards it would be titled 'Sothanai'. 'Sothanai' in Tamil means 'experiment' and it also means 'trouble'. He explained with his characteristic sarcasm why that title would fit a little magazine like a glove. A little magazine would experiment and it would by its very nature also be a source of trouble to the magazine editor. Little magazines have all along been heir to this Janus-faced legacy.

Little magazines as the name suggests have many 'little' things about them. Low cost of production (though for an individual it is too big to fork out periodically), fewer pages (unless the magazine concerned comes out with a special issue) and above all—little circulation. They scarcely resemble magazines in the popular sense as they are devoid of illustrations, colour blow-ups, flashy wrappers, tidbits and the like.

It may be specially mentioned that readership for a book—any book that is, barring 'pocket novels'—irrespective of the fact that its author is a celebrity in popular magazines, is limited to below 1000. The ubiquitous Tamil reader sets aside the little magazine too with the same diffidence. Does not, after all, the little magazine resemble the format of a book and its contents those of a book—an anthology to be precise?

What do the little magazines of Tamil Nadu have in common? They publish original fiction, new efforts in poetry, analytical articles, translations that are purposeful and strongly opinionated editorials. But the most singular trait that characterises and unites them all is their 'arrogant' dislike of the stuff churned out by popular magazines. Though that trait runs like a common thread, the little magazines during the eighties nearly stopped getting nourishment by mounting tirades against large circulation magazines. Until the late sixties large circulation magazines, identified as the common foe, were the target of many an attack by a group of critics led by the formidable Ka. Naa. Subramanyam. They believed that popular magazines stood in the way of their attaining mass readership.

But, in the seventies, it was most unfortunate that little magazines were used as the battle-ground of warring literary cliques. In the eighties, by and large, a sober attitude replaced the earlier belligerent mentality. By this time little maga-

zines got reconciled to their fate of limited circulation. The early steps in that direction were taken during the seventies itself. Venkat Saminathan advanced his theory of inner and outer circles of society. He argued in a fatalistic fashion that in any society a select band of people forming the inner circle would be responsible with a visionary approach and the outer circle which comprised society at large might get the benefit of its radiance.

However *Padigal*, which started in the late seventies and became influential by the mid-eighties, took a radical stand point. It refused to buy the theory of an elite inner core. Instead, it declared that commercialisation and elitism should be viewed from a cultural point of view. To assess and not merely to criticise the sway popular magazines had over vast number of readers, it interviewed Sujatha. Sujatha, a writer with a protean writing talent, is like the proverbial eel and slips in and out of magazines both big and little, delighting everyone in the process. Sujatha opened up by saying that he was writing in big commercial magazines to enlarge the reading habit of the common man.

Padigal is also responsible for the dominant emergence of the structuralist approach to literature in Tamil. Sundara Ramaswamy's *J. J. Sila Kurippugal* was the finest literary work that was available for structural scrutiny. Thamizhavan is a major force in this approach. He authored a book *Structuralism* in the early eighties. Along with Nagarjunan, M.D. Muthukumarasamy, K. Poornachandran and a few others, he vigorously set about using structuralist tools to deconstruct the literary texts.

After *Padigal*, *Melum* provides the forum for practitioners of structuralism. Though not every structuralist in town is a fundamentalist, the general impression is that their writings smacked excessively of partisan attitudes and that they disapproved of every school of literary criticism other than their own. The general reader who has no linguistic moorings is also appalled at the arcane language of the structuralists. It seemed to him that such pedantic pursuits are more suitable for the academia. Indeed many of the structuralists are from university faculties.

With structuralism followed by readings of Marxism dominating the slender pages of little magazines, the approach that has taken a beating is the aesthetic one. Writings on aesthetics *per se* have become non-existent over the years.

Parimanam a magazine from Coimbatore too set out to study Tamil writings from a neo-marxist approach. Not satisfied with traditional marxian ideas, it periodically published translations of western writers who threw fresh light on marxism through their original interpretations. Indeed, without exception all the little magazines published translations of western writers that include Sartre, Althusser, Fromm and Levi Strauss. There

also appeared translations of various articles on important thinkers and styles of thinking. The translation activities were going on in the eighties at a tremendous pace.

There were several reasons for this. The magazine editors and writers had the informing attitude. They wanted to inform readers of various trends in world literature and thought. So they came out with translations and original writings in Tamil of western thinkers. Some of the writers also displayed an egotistical air in letting the readers know of their erudition. Whatever the inner compulsions of writers who wrote them, the readers benefited by them in so far as the writings had discipline. Besides, they provided the little magazines with ready-made material. Chronically short of matter with not many of their own writers meeting the deadline set by magazines, these translations came in handy.

While essays ruled the roost, stories and poems were also translated and published. Latin American stories got special attention and magical realism became the literary credo of many who eschewed psychological realism. Thamizhavan's novel *Erkanave Sollappatta Manithargal*, (Persons Already Noticed), a retelling of Tamil epic *Silappathikaram* wrought with magical realism, however met with lukewarm reception, though some critics lauded the new effort.

There were no exclusive magazines for stories even though almost all little magazines published them, many periodically and some occasionally. But there were exclusive magazines for poetry and one for plays: *ZHA* (a Tamil vowel consonant) was a magazine that devoted its pages to poetry. It was run by a promising young poet Santanam who ended his life in 1984. Another notable magazine *Meetchi* was started for poetry. It published the translation of T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* among others. Seldom are little magazines published with care, what with meagre resources and the part-time engagement of enthusiasts. But *Meetchi* is a rare exception. It is well-produced with laminated covers and its back numbers are available only at a premium.

Katru, a magazine devoted to drama and the theatre was the first of its kind but it lasted only a few issues. Readers had to wait until the dawn of the nineties for a drama bi-monthly which they found in *Veli*. *Veli* is a consummate little magazine of the theatre. It publishes a complete play in each of its issues. Like *Veli*, *Salanam*, the first Tamil magazine for cinema, was also born in the nineties. It runs a prestigious serial on the pioneers of Indian cinema which is specially commissioned from the foremost authority on that subject, Mr. P.K. Nair, former Director of National Film Archives, Pune.

Naa. Parthasarathy who edited *Deepam* for over two decades died in the eighties and the magazine also stopped publication soon after. *Deepam* never gave itself to extreme views and its readers respected

its old-fashioned approach. High-brow readers were rather superciliously off-hand about *Deepam*. But in its time, it had good writing in the form of short novels and stories which appeared in its pages. Magazines like *Yathra* and *Kollippucci* gave emphasis to the writings and approaches of critics Venkat Swaminathan and Tharmu Aroop Sivaram respectively. *Sathangai* was non-controversial throughout its long stint and represented well writers lodged in the deep south.

Kanaiyayhi is a magazine which is in a category by itself. Started initially in 1965 for the Delhi-based Tamils it soon broadened its base. It publishes regularly stories, poems, book reviews, articles and also a 'Last Page' column by Sujatha. Along with *Semmlar* and *Thamarai* the left-oriented little magazines, *Kanaiyayhi* has gone beyond one thousand copies in circulation. It had serialised many novels including those of noted writers like T. Janakiraman, Asokamithran and Indira Parthasarathy. It has introduced a large number of writers to the Tamil literary

world and on account of this trait, it has perhaps compromised with quality. Its political articles are methodical but conservative. All these considerable achievements have been possible because of its long innings in publications, miraculous for a little magazine.

A highly disconcerting feature about little magazines is their irregular periodicity and sudden demise. But strangely, those who bring out such magazines do not seem to be aware when the curtain would be drawn in front of them. The magazines let off their full steam in their very first issue. *Vannamayil*, a little fortnightly printed on its first issue's front cover that it was the only standard Tamil magazine! But its second issue was its swansong. Nevertheless, it published in its two issues, within the space of a month, hitherto unpublished stories of Pudumaipithan and Ku. Alagiriasamy, a feat many big magazines would not have performed in several years.

The magazine that came out with the most humble declaration was '*Kala-*

chuvadu', a quarterly. It came from Nagarcoil with writer Sundara Ramasamy as editor giving the hope to everyone that it would have smooth sailing. But after a few issues it brought forth a bumper number and bounced out of the scene gracefully.

Eni, Manudam, Solaikayil, Murril palam and many many more were born and died during this period. That they are mentioned only in passing does not mean in the least that they deserve only scant attention. Far from it. Given the present milieu which gives not even a dim sign of a cultural awakening in Tamil Nadu and a political ambience that hardly gives any hope for the future, only the little magazines have given some solace to young people. The little magazine movement is the only parallel culture without heavy political overtones to be found in Tamil Nadu since Independence.

Little magazines are run with tremendous energy which can never be slighted. But for their sustenance, energy alone is not enough. Vallikumran who has as-

siduously chronicled the genesis, ups and anti-climax of little magazines lists the many pre-conditions for their long term viability. Chief among them are ready availability of finance, writers without "ego problems", reasonable circulation and maintenance of uncompromising standards on quality.

It is heartening to note that little magazines have imbibed some of these golden principles in the last few years. Dropouts are now only a small percentage of the total. The bright hope of all is *Subha Mangala*, a monthly under the editorial stewardship of Komal Swaminathan, a well known playwright. With many of the concerns of a little magazine, it has flowered into a middle-brow magazine with a circulation of thirty thousand copies. It has shown the way for all the other little magazines to realise their own potential.

Amshan Kumar is a young writer and a frequent contributor to little magazines.

Here is a random list of titles drawn from memory that struck me as important works among Tamil books written in recent years. The list is by no means exhaustive. The omission of those not listed is not deliberate but due more to my ignorance.

1. *Gopalla Gramam* by Ki. Rajanarayanan—Originally published in 1976, the book came to the notice of the public only in the 80s, as the author grew popular for his quaint handling of his native 'Karisal' dialect. A very charming and remarkably well written novel about simple village folk of pre-independence times. *Gopalla Gramathu Makkal* which won the Sahitya Akademi award for 1990, is a sequel to this, but cannot be said to be as satisfactory.

2. *Ahalya* by Balakumaran—A powerful novel with a strong and memorable heroine that instantly endeared the author to the middle class Tamil women. Balakumaran shows great promise in this novel, handling the language with confidence and style.

3. *Sangam* by Chinnappa Bharati—was chosen by Ilakkiya Chinthana as the best book of 1985. Chinnappa Bharati is a committed writer and like his earlier novel *Dugam*, *Sangam* is a fictional account of the oppressed rising against oppressors, in the rural regions of Tamil Nadu, through an awareness of social ideology and strength coming out of organisation.

4. *Viradangal Vimarisanangal, Oru Vignana Paarvaiyilirundu*—Two non-fictional books by the racy narrator of fast-paced stories, Sujatha. Ranging from metaphysics to Malayalam movies the books are strong evidence of his profound concerns and also of his delightful sense of humour.

5. *Midavai* by Nanjil Nadan—Bombay based Tamil writer Nanjil Nadan has a keen sense of observation and a gentle irony pervades through the novel.

6. *Sooriyanai Thediyavan* by the Sri Lankan Tamil writer Se. Yoganathan, a very significant book of fables for children delightfully illustrated and well produced.

7. *Appavum Rickshawkarargalum/Naayanakan* by Ma. Ve. Sivakumar—Two collections of short stories by a talented young writer that have won the appreciation of discriminating readers.

A RANDOM BIBLIOGRAPHY

Vaasanti

8. *Kaalaveli* by Vittal Rao—A very significant book by a very gifted writer, who has unfortunately not received the attention he deserves. An extremely interesting story of young aspirants, that also debates on the relevance of art in the life of man in contemporary India.

9. *Karisal Kaathu Kaduthasi* by Ki. Rajanarayanan—A delightful collection of pen-sketches and anecdotes pertaining to a region of Tamil Nadu written with great élan and love of life.

10. *Chintanadi* by La. Sa. Ramamritham—As the title (Stream of Reveries) suggests, it is a remarkable book tracing the history of Ramamritham's ancestors not in chronological order but in bits and pieces as reminiscences. The book received the Sahitya Akademi award for its "sensitive portrayal of life and skilfully mastered style."

11. *Kalanthorum Pen*—A very major work of compilation of essays on women's issues, rights and status through the ages by Rajam Krishnan. A significant contribution to feminist literature in Tamil—probably the first of its kind in the language.

12. *Veethumoolayil Oru Samaiyalarai*—A very commendable collection of feminist short stories by Ambai which has won the appreciation of discerning critics.

13. *Yesuvin Sahodarargal* by Indra Parthasarathy—The writer has made

good use in the novel the experience of his stay in Poland. The novel is a sensitive portrayal of a silent turmoil and glitters with sparkling wit in dialogue.

14. *Maanudam Vellum* by Prapanchan—Probably the first significant historical fiction in Tamil. Based on Anandarangam Pillai's diary-notes from 1736 to 1761, the novel depicts the life style of the aristocracy, labour class, officers and prostitutes of eighteenth century Pondicherry, with remarkable skill and researched erudition. A very readable book too. Won the Ilakkiya Chinthana award for 1990.

15. *Oru Kadalorathu Gramathin Kadai* by Topil Muhammed Meeran—A very charming and candid portrayal of the Muslim community in a sea shore village—Meeran shot to fame with this very first book, followed by a more profound second book—*Thurai mukam*—which won him the Ilakkiya Chinthana award

for 1991. One of the best books written in recent times.

16. *Rubber* by Jayamohan—A book that brought instant recognition to the author as one of the most promising writers of today. The novel spins round a plantation backdrop in Kerala with which the writer is so familiar, echoing the changing times.

17. *Manasarovar* by Asahokamithran—A fine novel on human relations, revolving round the friendship of two persons from the world of black and white Cinema twenty five years ago. A commendable work enhanced by the deceptively simple style of the writer.

18. *Vazhkai Vicharanai* by Pavannan—An impressive novel marked by concern by a very promising young writer.

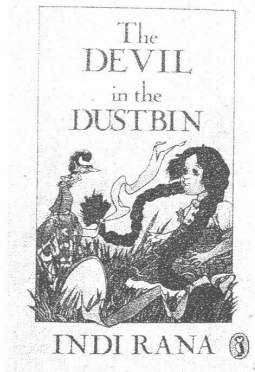
19. *Veedu Peru* by M. Aranganathan—A collection of different short stories with one central character. A consummate modern writing by a mature writer.

20. *Madinimargal Kathai* by Konangiand Appa by Suprabharathimani—Are both very promising first collections of two young writers.

21. *Chuttu Viral* by Abdal Rahuman—A notable book of poems by the high priest of the modern literary movement. The images are strikingly sharp, furious and satirical.

22. *Oonjal* a play by Sujatha—A remarkably well written play on the changing value systems and materialism that touches the innermost cords in the reader's mind. The play is an evidence of Sujatha's versatile skill as a writer.

Vaasanti is a well-known Tamil writer and Editorial Consultant, India Today, Tamil edition.



Puffin Offerings

Vijaya Ghosh

THE DEVIL IN THE DUSTBIN

By Indira Rana
Puffin Books, 1992, pp. 107, Rs. 50.00

THE EVIL EMPIRE

By Margaret Bhaty
Puffin Books, 1992, pp. 99, Rs. 50.00

HEROES NEVER DIE

By Sigrun Srivastav
Puffin Books, 1992, pp. 116, Rs. 50.00

The three latest offerings from Puffin confirm one's belief that children's writing has finally come of age. Each book, in a different genre of writing by authors who have become synonymous with children's writing, is bound to grip the attention of the most critical reader.

Indira Rana brings to *Devil in the Dustbin* her vast and varied experience as a writer for children who has lived both in India and abroad. This book in fact is not a first time publication of Penguin (India) as it has been published abroad by Hamish Hamilton. It deals with the complexities of the immigrant problem, particularly children who often find it difficult to adjust to radically different situations when they leave the familiar surroundings back home.

The Devil in the Dustbin is a charming story of a *pulliyamchedi brahmarakshasa* or a tamarind tree devil whose home for several centuries had been a tamarind tree in Nungambakkam in Madras and who by some quirk of fate finds himself in the backyard of a house at 32 Crescent Street, Wimbledon. He had been sitting on the window-sill exhausted after a fight with a young tamarind tree when... The next thing he knew, he was in the midst of clothes and an awful smell of pickles assailed his nostrils. He had fallen into a suitcase that was winging its way to London! At 32 Crescent Street, Ranjana finds him peeking out of the dustbin. Immediately she makes friends with him but her brother Ajoy can't see the little devil at all. The *brahmarakshasa* explains that only special people who have certain qualities can see them. And from there on it is a saga of settling down for both the *brahmarakshasa* and for Ranjana and Ajoy, particularly Ajoy who is extremely unhappy in an alien land.

Like all tree devils, the *brahmarakshasa* has to find his own tree to occupy. He would rather be a tamarind tree devil but since there were no tamarind

trees in England, he settles for an elm tree. But getting to like the place takes much longer. He is helped in his voyage of discovery by Ching-An the river fairy from China who lives in the pond on the Common behind the house, Zielinski the gnome who lives under the oak tree next door; Tumble the soukoyan who didn't know where he lived and wise Miss Pennyworth who lives in the castle beyond.

Between him and Tumble they bring about better relations between Ajoy and the English boy Alex next door. Each one is subtly made to realise that they both had good qualities that could be respected and emulated and that colour of the skin made no difference at all. Or where they came from.

But through their stay both the *brahmarakshasa* and Ajoy remain unhappy. They still long for the land of their ancestors, for their customs and traditions. It is a return trip to India that makes both of them realise they were happier back in Blighty despite the weather, despite the loneliness. The devil's tamarind tree has another *brahmarakshasa* and refuses entry to his old tenant. Rajappa his friend refuses to let our *brahmarakshasa* put his arm around him because he has been defiled while he lived overseas. He had lost his caste and would have to 'purify' himself.

There's a beautiful passage about the little *brahmarakshasa's* realisation that he no longer belonged.

"And suddenly all my happiness at having come home was gone like a bit of dry breeze. Rajappa's way of thinking was not mine any more. Something in me had changed and it would never come back. And it wasn't just my tamarind tree cells or my tamarind tree blood. It was more than that. It was as though my eyes saw further left and right and up and down than they had ever seen before and I would never blinker my eyes again." It was the same realisation for Ranjana and

Ajoy. Ranjana tells the little devil who asks about Ajoy, "Ajoy's coming back to London with us. Our cousins think us pretty strange too. We talk different, we dress different, we think different. About the only thing that's the same is the food and then too we eat many more different kinds of food than they do. Ajoy doesn't fit here any more than he does in England. But he thinks if he stays here now, he'll become somehow smaller."

Indian audiences may have a bone to pick with Indira on that last sentence but it must be kept in mind that the book was meant for young Indians who were feeling lost abroad but had to make a go of it.

The Devil in the Dustbin uses beautiful fantasy to provide the most practical solutions to contemporary situations. There's humour, there's laughter, and there's problem solving all blended together with great sensitivity and understanding. There's never a dull moment as the reader joins the *pulliyamchedi brahmarakshasa*, Ranjana and Ajoy in their attempts to make themselves happier in their environment.

THE EVIL EMPIRE

Margaret Bhaty is a born spinner of tales. Her stories have a strong flavour of nature and very subtly but very consciously she drives her messages home. You have only one earth. Care for it. While *The Evil Empire* may seem to the casual reader a gripping story of alien aspirations and nuclear devastation, the underlying theme is concern for Planet Earth.

A riveting sci-fi tale of modern times, Margaret's racy narration adds to the excitement and tension as the story rapidly unfolds. The story is set in the Earth Year 3190. Planet Earth had been ravaged in the 21st and 22nd centuries by human greed, wars and lack of foresight. "... overpopulation, pollution and the shrinking of the continents from global warming forced them to search for other worlds to colonise. The cutting out of the lungs of Planet Earth, the Rain Forest caused drastic climate changes, of small regional conflicts exploding into another nuclear holocaust, for though the Super Powers scaled down their arsenal, other nations still maintained theirs."

That led to the inevitable, near-extinction of the Planet. But fortunately a Global Peace movement captured power. Peace came to Earth at last and helped the leaders to harvest resources naturally through bionic men. Space Operating Centre (SOCs) mine precious minerals, refine them and send them back to Earth.

Surveyor 549 of Planet Beta, one of the colonised Earth-like planets, sets off on a routine flight to these SOC's. It is captained by Ebro and the crew was made up of Arun, his children Yash and Niti and Flight Engineers Ra and Shane.

When they finally reach SOC 3, they find, instead of the peace-loving Earth people, an alien soldier brandishing his gun at them. Looking around they find many more soldiers in his split image. Clones! But the soldier clones cannot hear or speak. They can only communicate in sign language. They force Ebro to fly his plane to Tyrannus ruled by a megalomaniac President who has dreams of conquering Earth and all its satellite colonised planets. Tyrannus is a city beneath a mountain, the top of which is highly radioactive after a nuclear holocaust. The President and all his people are also clones but they have the power of speech. Having never seen children, they make much of Yash and Niti.

The President tells Captain Ebro that he must go back with a message to the Global government to surrender all power to him. With only one condition. They must leave the children behind! It is Niti and Yash who persuade their anguished elders to return to Planet Earth without them. Once Surveyor leaves Tyrannus, Yash and Niti set about unravelling the mysteries of Tyrannus. How they hoodwink the President and all other intelli-

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One of the most sensitive stories is 'The Wall' which has shades of O. Henry's 'The Last Leaf'. Two boys, Abhay with a broken leg and Bipen with a broken mind are neighbours in a hospital room. Abhay tries to reach out to Bipen who just wants to die. With great imagination, superb play acting and a very clever ruse, Abhay manages to break down Bipen's resistance. Walls, he says, are not meant to be kept as barriers. They are there to leap over and discover the beauty on the other side.

gent creatures with the help of Jay, the only slave clone who had the ability to speak and feel and cry like human beings is ingenious.

Finally they leave Tyrannus in nail-biting suspense just a second before the entire planet goes up in flames!

The story once begun, is impossible to put down.

HEROES NEVER DIE

Sigrun Srivastav is no stranger to children's fiction. A German who has made India her home for several years, her art of writing has been honed to near perfection over the years. And in the genre of the short story in English perhaps Sigrun ranks among the top five writers. Any collection of short stories in English for children is sure to include a Sigrun Srivastav story.

This selection of stories deals with the theme of heroes as the title suggests but not heroes in the conventional sense. One doesn't have to fight battles to be brave, even a small victory over one's personal fears and hesitations has all the makings of heroism. So these cameo situations deal with situations that all of us, especially as children, have faced. Fear of the graveyard, of the unknown, of the bully, of natural disasters, of strangers... fears born in the mind but also overcome by the power of the mind.

Some of these stories have been published before. Ten have appeared in *Taraget*, three in *Apna Express* and one in *Hindustan Times*. It is amazing how Sigrun enters into the mind of the child character and manages to display a range of emotions ranging from anger, envy, jealousy to love, bravado and joy. No story of Sigrun's repeats a theme. If it does, it is not obvious to the reader.

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manages to break down Bipen's resistance. Walls, he says, are not meant to be kept as barriers. They are there to leap over and discover the beauty on the other side.

'The Ten Medals Holder' is a funny story about a group of young girls in boarding school who discover a hoard of trophies which they steal (temporarily) to show off to their brothers who used to rag them constantly about their non-performance. Until one of the brothers reads the inscription on one of the trophies...

One could run through the entire lot but we'll leave it to the reader to discover the twists and the denouement in the stories. These are stories for everyone, not just children.

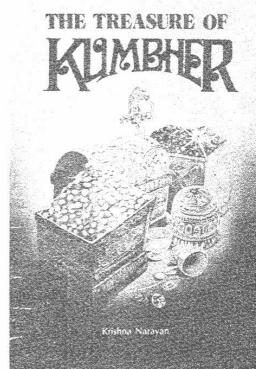
A word about the illustrations. All three books have been illustrated by talented young people—Manjula Padmanabhan, Tapas Guha and Subba Ghosh—who have made their mark as children's illustrators. But only *The Devil in the Dustbin* makes clever and attractive use of line drawings. The other two have the standard full page drawings interspersed through the text. While it is considered a privilege to be published by Puffin, it would be good if the publishers made the books more attractive. One gets the idea that there is a space constraint. The margins are small, the top running head is too close to the print area and very little imagination has been used in layout and design.

The covers too are very ordinary except in the case of *The Devil in the Dustbin*. But that has been done before by Hamish Hamilton and therefore the layout, the use of pictures, the size of type is very pleasing. Is it a lack of funds or just a general Penguin arrogance that we can give what they want and the reader better like it? We expect Puffins to be market leaders.

Vijaya Ghosh worked with the children's books division, *Living Media*. She is now Consultant Editor for the *Limca Book of Records*.

History, Science and Fiction

Pratibha Nath



THE TREASURE OF KUMBHER
By Krishna Narayan
CBT, 1992, pp. 140, Rs. 20.00

WHEN THE FISH BEGAN TO FLY
By Lavlin Thadani
CBT, 1992, pp. 16, Rs 9.00

HOW STONES LOST THEIR HEARTS
By Vishaka Chanchani
CBT, 1992, pp. 24, Rs. 9.00

DOORWAY TO SCIENCE
By Dipak Kumar Barkakati
CBT, 1992, pp. 46, Rs 12.00

The Treasure of Kumbher belongs to the somewhat rare genre of successful historical fiction in India. A superbly crafted book, that grips your attention from start to finish. Even the cover is highly imaginative and intriguing.

The plot unfolds against the backdrop of a little known period of Indian history—the turbulent latter half of the 18th century. The Mughal empire was crumbling. The scions of the house of Jalaluddin Akbar had been reduced to paper potentates. In 1787 Shah Alam II ruled over an empire that extended no further than the outskirts of Delhi. There was virtually no system of local administration. Every petty chieftain had set up as an overlord. Foreign adventurers poured into the land while Afghans, Rajputs, Sikhs, Marathas and other warring castes turned Central India into a theatre of destruction.

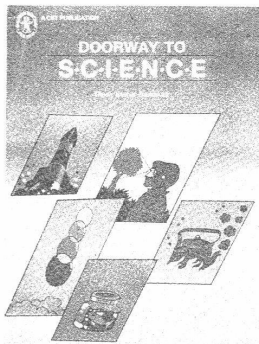
Native to this theatre is the ruling family of the small but rich kingdom of Kumbher—Raja Balwant Singh, his son Jai Singh and daughter Chandravati. Native too are the king's sister Janki Devi and her son Kunwar Singh. Poised on the brink are plunderers like Ismail Beg and Senor Noronha. And the noble Prithviraj Chandola stumbles upon the scene purely by accident.

All the elements of a thumping good tale are here and the writer proceeds to tell it with relish. The heart of the matter is the treasure, cleverly secreted away in the most unlikely of places, the secret

being carefully guarded till the very end of the book. The events leading up to the climax are deftly handled, be it the doomed wanderings of young Chandola over the pitiless desert, Ismail Beg's progress through the secret tunnel, the flight of the king and princess or the mowing down of a faithful retainer. Emotions and characters come through ringing true. Janki Devi's treachery is never in doubt. Neither is the loyalty of Duler Singh. Each incident, each bit of conversation serves to strengthen the whole and every part of the narrative falls naturally into place.

The language runs smoothly over the events, painting vivid pictures. Peaceful, romantic scenes are as convincing as tense accounts of daredevilry and fights to the finish. A delightful book, deeply satisfying. One can't help asking for more.

Lavlin Thadani's book builds on an old folk tale that says birds have risen from fish. The two share the same jewel colours, the same light, swift movements, only fish live in water and birds skim the air. For this reason fins have turned into wings and birds' bodies have grown as light as clouds. This little book comprises a highly imaginative interplay of the elements. Wind and ocean, each tremendously powerful in its own right. Moon and stars, clouds and sky, each struggling to hold its own in the general scheme of things. So far so good. But the theme, being simple, called for simpler treatment. The story could have been more directly told, to suit a younger age group



for which it is obviously meant. The language is too flowery and here and there expressions border on the awkward. The illustrations, however, are in harmony with the narrative.

How Stones Lost Their Hearts is a story centred around a land of stones and a witch who is determined to steal one of these to replace the lucky stone that has disappeared from her magic kit. Two of these stones, Kallu and Kankad, are about to be married and are terribly upset by the witch's plan. They resist but the witch has the last word. Unfortunately the story does not go on to say if the witch finally took away Kallu or not and the end is depressing. The concept of a witch riding a broom and brewing a concoction of evil things is too English to fit into a setting that is Indian, with Indian names. The illustrations are average.

The basic idea of *Doorway to Science* is laudable, i.e., to create an awareness of

different branches of science. The name seems to imply that it is an introduction to the subject, meant for children who have not had much previous exposure to it. In the space of 46 pages, the book takes the reader rapidly from topics like 'What is Science', 'Knowing Our Senses', 'Biological Science' and 'Physical Science', through different branches of mathematics like arithmetic, algebra, the binary system and its application in computers, trigonometry, differential and integral calculus.

The range of subjects touched and their treatment makes it difficult to figure out what age group the book is meant for. For example, it says (p. 30) 'There was a time when primary school students were asked oral arithmetic questions. . . One of the questions was 'Add 1 to 9 consecutively and write the answer'. The book then proceeds to derive a general algebraic formula to deal with such problems and goes on to say, 'This is the general formula that we learn in higher classes and in college level algebra.' In many other places the treatment of the subject would require an exceptionally gifted beginner to grasp it.

Some of the experiments suggested appear to be impracticable. For example (pp 17-18) 'To locate the centre of gravity, balance a cardboard at the tip of a pencil!'. A difficult juggling act. Some of the explanations are inaccurate. For example (pp 18-19) 'Fuel is burnt inside the rocket. The air within expands and rushes out from the back.' Perhaps 'air' the writer means 'gases'. The illustrations are, by and large, suitable.

Pratibha Nath is a well known author of books for children.

Each story casts its own spell. Creates its own mood. Its own special atmosphere. Some are tender and touching. Others are witty and humorous. But they all share something in common—they are very very readable.

dark, cobbled lanes; the swish of swords and silken garments, and music wafting down to busy streets from the windows of splendid mansions.

Each story casts its own spell. Creates its own mood. Its own special atmosphere. Some are tender and touching. Others are witty and humorous. But they all share something in common—they are very very readable. As you enter Subhadra Sen Gupta's magical but completely believable world of make-believe you'll encounter people as real as you or I. All recreated before your very eyes by Tapas Guha's imaginative, very authentic and true-to-life illustrations.

The first story, 'A Rose For The Princess', is set in the reign of the Mughal emperor, Shahjahan. It tells of the whimsical charade played by the wilful young princess, Jahanara, on an innocent and unsuspecting old gardener. The escapade leads to good fortune for him and a happy memory to cherish for her.

In the title story, 'The Sword of Dara Shikoh', two boys solve a mysterious riddle hidden in a miniature painting. They ride off on a dangerous mission to Agra and after many exciting adventures, return with the fabulous, lost sword of Dara Shikoh, the slain brother of Aurangzeb.

'Painting The Breeze', is a charming story about kindness in high places. The unusual pots being sold by the young son and daughter of a poor potter, catch the eye of no less than Ashokavardana's queen who is passing by on her way to the palace. So taken is she by the enchanting pots that she appoints the children potters to the royal household.

Set around the same time is the fourth story 'The Pataliputra Mystery'. As the story unfolds, you are witness to the intrigues and conspiracies of King Ashoka's court. Three bright children and a wise Buddhist lama, help to avert an attempt at assassination of the king.

The legendary singer, Mia Tansen, recognises the talent of the young son of a food-shop owner in the next story, 'Salim's Song'. This chance encounter transports the boy beyond the realms of fantasy to a reality beyond his wildest dreams, as the great singer befriends him and offers to teach him music.

Adventure calls again in 'The Scent Of Jasmine', whose lyrical title is at odds with this tale of robbery, intrigue and derring-do.

The last story in this collection is 'Music Magic'. A boy plays a clever trick to gain entry into the mansion of the richest

nawab in town, where his father, had been chief shehnai player until his death. The boy plays chess with the nawab. His prowess at the game is such that it wins him a permanent place on the nawab's staff and also for his talented brother who plays the shehnai as beautifully as his father used to do.

This lively collection of stories are sure to convince you that history isn't a dull subject best buried in textbooks. Once you have read and enjoyed them you'll never be bored by history again. And the best part of it is, the adults in your life will actually like what you like to read! Something that happens all too seldom these days.

In *An Island Of Trees*, Bond takes us back to the enchanted world of his boyhood. An idyllic world where he roamed the countryside free as a bird, wallowed with his friends in a secret pool and enjoyed the lovable idiosyncrasies of his four-legged and two-legged companions.

Who wouldn't have liked to grow up as he did, with Harry the hornbill who chuckled and tumbled and danced like a circus clown, bewitched by the rain? Henry the shy chameleon who didn't like sudden loud noises? A crazy bat, and a grumpy bear who couldn't resist pumpkins? A goat who chased butterflies and only butted people when they bent over? Or to have had a grandfather who wore a petticoat to feed the owls in his garden, because trousers upset them? A granny who liked to live in a tree and a grandmother who told you about a wonderful island of trees that grew and moved right in the middle of the river?

Here are nature stories and poems written from the heart about real people and animals and birds and molluscs, flowers and trees, each with their own and very special personalities and characteristics. And each of them is described with the respect Ruskin Bond shows towards all living things. Sometimes witty and humorous, often simple and moving, the stories make you feel a part of the happiness, sadness, love and fear experienced in each of them.

Many of Ruskin Bond's more touching poems are filled with his sense of wonder at the hidden qualities of bats, owls, snails, trees the wind and the mountains. Others are delightfully light-hearted and entertaining.

Suddhasattwa Basu's sensitively drawn line-illustrations complement the mood and heighten the dreamlike atmosphere Ruskin Bond's words create. This book is sure to make all of you who have never been in love with nature, wildlife, pet monkeys, domestic goats and wonderfully whacky grandparents, fall in love with all of them immediately. This is a book to be bought without a second thought and read with pleasure. Again and again.

Amena Jayal, an illustrator and writer, is the editor of Target, the magazine for young teens.

A MAGICAL WORLD

Amena Jayal

THE SWORD OF DARA SHIKOH AND OTHER STORIES FROM HISTORY

By Subhadra Sen Gupta, illustrated by Tapas Guha
Ratna Sagar, 1992, pp. 94, Rs. 22.90

AN ISLAND OF TREES: NATURE STORIES AND POEMS

By Ruskin Bond, illustrated by Suddhasattwa Basu
Ratna Sagar, 1992, pp. 13, Rs. 20.90

Subhadra Sen Gupta has done it again! She has delved into the dusty annals of history for interesting story material and has come up roses with the *The Sword of Dara Shikoh and Other Stories from History*.

In this collection of seven tales set in Mauryan and Mughal times, Subhadra brings alive dead kings and queens, princes and princesses long since buried

in the pages of history books.

Richly caparisoned elephants, Arab horses streaking across moonlit beaches, masked bandits and mustachioed soldiers weave in an out of fascinating tales of adventure, romance and mystery. You can smell the heady scents of beautiful palace gardens and join the jostling crowds thronging colourful bazaars. Hear the frightened patter of feet running down

The Perfect Choice

Subhadra Sen Gupta

THE BLUE UMBRELLA and ANGRY RIVER
By Ruskin Bond

Both published by Rupa and Co., 1992,
pp. 86 and 88 respectively, Rs. 20.00 each

Through the years Ruskin Bond has taken the craft of writing for children and created an art form uniquely his own. Few Indian writers can communicate with children with the directness and simple appeal as Ruskin can. Without condescension, no preaching and none of the sugary sweet lachrymose silliness that authors think children like. Ruskin, thank god, never writes books that are good for children. He is too busy giving them the pleasure of good reading.

His deceptively simple style comes with superb storytelling skills. The characters are always real and their problems true. His world is not perpetually overflowing with love and kindness. Neither is it a place where only unhappiness reigns. It is a real world full of uncertainties and sudden joys that children identify with.

The two books, *The Blue Umbrella* and *Angry River* were originally published in the 1970's and Rupa, by publishing them again, have given another generation of children the opportunity to fall for their special magic. Also the low price would cheer up parents who quake at taking their children into bookshops nowadays.

In *The Blue Umbrella* we are in the author's favourite haunt—the Garhwal hills, that he has bought to life in so many evocative stories. The tale of Binya and her beautiful umbrella comes with the background music of cowbells and bird

song. The city smart umbrella is the envy of the village. It's so beautiful even as shrewd a man as Ram Bharosa, the tea-stall owner, cannot resist its charms. But Binya refuses to fall for the blandishment of an endless supply of boiled sweets and part with her prize. The battle of wills between the old man and the girl take many unexpected turns and at the end the reader is left smiling.

Angry River is about Sita, who lives on an island in the river with her grandparents. One day during the monsoons when the grandparents are away the water rises and Sita is swept away. A lonely voyager on a floating peepul tree, Sita's adventure illustrates something Ruskin has always understood: the extraordinary resilience children have in facing up to the vicissitudes of life. Little Sita and her gallant rescuer Krishna triumph at the end. Then one day the clouds go away, the water goes down and the river becomes their friend again.

The stories are told simply, perked up with quick observations about people and some gentle digs at adults. As Binya is floating around the village with her blue umbrella, "the school master's wife thought it was quite wrong for a poor cultivator's daughter to have such a fine umbrella, while she, a second class B.A., had to make do with an ordinary black one."

The illustrations in both books by Trevor Stubley capture Ruskin's world beautifully in delicate unfussy lines. Though sadly, they have got a bit dark in the printing.

For parents looking for books for their eight year olds, these two offerings by a master at the business of capturing the attention of children are a perfect choice.

Subhadra Sen Gupta is one of the most prolific writers for children.

THE BLUE UMBRELLA

By Ruskin Bond

Rupa and Co., 1992, pp. 86, Rs. 20.00

This book is about a little girl called Binya. She lives in a small village with her brother Biju (Vijay), her mother and her cows Neelu and Gori. One day while going to find her cows Binya sees a party of picnickers sitting on a mountain and eating delicious food which makes Binya's mouth water. Binya sees them and starts to run away when her eyes fall on a beautiful blue silk umbrella. She at once falls in love with it as it is so beautiful. She then trades her lucky charm 'the tiger's claw' for it. The whole village envies little Binya especially Ram Bharosa. To know how low Ram Bharosa the shop-keeper can stoop to get the blue umbrella find out for yourself in *The Blue Umbrella*.

What I like about Ruskin Bond's books is the simple way in which he writes. It is a story that can be enjoyed by all children. The description of the mountains, the girl Binya and her cows, the life in the village all seem to come alive. It seems so real. His detailed observations of animals and nature are wonderful. *The Blue Umbrella* is an extremely interesting book for young children like me!

Gayatri Gill
11 years

TALES WITH THE RIGHT THRUST

C. Uday Bhaskar

24 SHORT STORIES
CBT, 1991, pp 151, Rs. 20.00

The last two years have witnessed a modest spurt in fiction for Indian children and the Children's Book Trust (CBT) has been nurturing writers in this long neglected genre. As professional reviewers of books and frustrated parents have bemoaned, Enid Blyton seems such an anachronism in the sub-continent and the only silver lining is the perseverance of the indigenous children's book writer. It was heartening to note that finally we have the beginning of an answer to the impregnable Blyton myth and I recently overheard a young Miss Wannabe tell her peers that the Juleni at St Avila's series was *alright* but not like Mallory Towers. Swapna Dutta, the creator of Juleni will no doubt be pilloried by the Blytonophiles of all ages but this is the beginning of the Empire writing back in the nursery, as it were, and full marks (and steam) to CBT and other determined publishers who have picked up the gauntlet.

The current volume has been compiled from a collection made from entries in the competition for writers of Children's Books organised by the CBT last year. A total of 19 authors have contributed the two dozen stories and while I could recognise some of the names, the more pleasant surprise was the fact that many of the writers were totally new—to me at least. A happy augury and one hopes that CBT will be able to maintain this momentum in encouraging fresh talent. Illustrated by Subir Roy, this book has been moderately priced at Rs 20/— and as my daughter noted, this is the equivalent of four campa colas or pepsis and can yet prove to be the 'right choice'—if CBT can get its marketing act together.

Amongst the more familiar names are Pratibha Nath, Kavery Bhatt, Sigrun Srivastava and Saibal Chakravarty and all of them are represented by more than one story (as also Andal Ananthanarayanan). The stories are relatively short, as I dare say they should be for children and in the absence of any recommended age group, I would venture to suggest that maybe 8 to 12 years would be a fair estimate though this threshold would differ from child to child and parent to parent. If there is one thread that emerges, it is the fact that almost all the stories are about children and I am not so sure if all stories for children must be about the little pets—however endearing they are.

In like fashion, pets and animals occupy centre-stage and while stories like Nilima Sinha's 'Two Little Sparrows' are

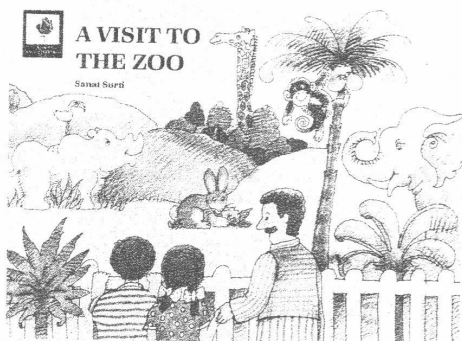
fairly simple and straightforward about little boys being naturally cruel to birds and animals, whereas little girls are 'quite contrary', some of the other entries are delightfully different. E.E.C. David's vignette of Pecky, the woodpecker is a tale that has been handed down over the aeons in different hues and there are gleanings of ecology, ethics and more in the simple narrative of the naughty woodpecker who would not do as others of his tribe did. The transition to seagulls and Jonathan Livingstone can come later but here is a case of launching the target audience with the right thrust.

As Ayn Rand observed in one of her many essays, there is an imperative to delineate right and wrong in fiction in an unambiguous manner and the middle ground of amorality and shifting values can come later when grey is inescapable both in life and as a yardstick. Nowhere is this more crucial than in children's fiction and I was personally very happy to note that almost all the stories had a specific message—however simply laced into the story.

If Kavery Bhatt's 'Blue Bike' is all about motorcycles and integrity/honesty, Sigrun Srivastava introduces a contemporary sheen that is thought-provoking. Her six page 'Neighbour' is a chilling reminder of the dark days of 1984 (amongst others such bloody punctuations in our vitiated communal history) and there is no escaping the fact that children at one point or the other will have to be exposed to such realities. In an otherwise excellently quilted story, the use of adult terminology tends to break the pace for a child and this is something the CBT editors may need to address. For instance, "they are ruthless, misled fanatics driven by frustration and by personal grievances against society or the government, or a community..." Srivastava is one of my favourite authors in this genre and while it is not always as easy to render complex ideas in a vocabulary-range that children can easily comprehend, the publishers may want to pay special attention to this aspect.

Robots, ghosts, grandmothers—there is a bit of everything for everybody and again Saibal Chakravarty's blending of her story with the 1942 Quit India movement is very effective. Both authors and publishers of children's fiction could consider taking some slices of their content from the man in uniform. Whether it is the high Himalayas, the fury of the sea or the freedom of the sky, there are many tales and stories to be told and retold in the Indian context and this appears to be an untapped source. Adequately illustrated by Subir Roy, this is a book that parents should exhort their wards to read even as life for the youngster gets compressed into capsules between Zee TV or Star Plus and videos from the local market.

C. Uday Bhaskar is with the Indian Navy. A regular columnist in many newspapers, he is an art critic and reviewer.



NBT's Latest Fare

Shirley M. Kutty

A VISIT TO THE ZOO

By Sanat Surti

National Book Trust, India, 1991, pp. 16, Rs. 5.50

A book of illustrations, a story develops as the adult helps the child go through the pages. A child's love for animals keeps his interest alive. Children recall their own experiences at the zoo and add numerous interesting and humorous details. There are many opportunities for communication and conversation from the stripes of the Zebra and of the little boys shirt to the almost deafening screeching of the parrots.

This book is very helpful for children who need help to converse and relate in words what is within them.

SEARCH

By Jagdish Joshi

National Book Trust, India, 1991, pp. 16, Rs. 5.50

An interesting concept, the adult and child go through the pages finding animals hidden in the pictures. Once the child grasps the concept of recognizing the outlines of animals and fish, his interest and concentration are rapt. Each page holds something new and the child is triumphant at having recognized all the shapes. For the younger child it is recommended that the adult help him through the book.

The unimaginative colours in this book need to be improved and saving on ink leaving half the picture uncoloured makes one wonder whether the objective is to make the book profitable or beneficial to the child for whom it was intended. These are things on which one should not compromise.

Authors of children's books should avoid the use of the word 'cried' to convey said.

It upsets children as they associate it with tears, something sad.

—Shirley M. Kutty

I AM BETTER THAN YOU

By Sigrun Srivastav

National Book Trust, India, 1992, pp. 24, Rs. 7.00

In the year of the girl child and in India where boys in early childhood, are given so many more privileges this book intends to instil a sense of equality among the young. Micki the boy in the story claims to be able to do everything better whether it is playing cricket, running or eating than his sister who resents his attitude and argues her case. The boy learns his lesson when his fear for the neighbour's dog dismissed with an empty boast is recognised by his sister's sensitivity and she stops to instill her faith in him. Her good will does not go unrecognized and she is allowed to take part in the cricket game.

An interesting lesson which could have

been told with more appeal. Giving the girl a name might have rounded off her character or did she not merit one?

A STORY ABOUT WATER

By Ravi Paranjape

National Book Trust, India, 1992, pp. 17, Rs. 6.50

An exaggerated unrealistic tale for today's intelligent child. He knows that his paper boat will sail in the puddle outside on a monsoon day or in his bath tub when there is no rain.

Even the very young child knows he cannot climb into his paper boat and go for an adventure. Real stories interest children.

TAILS

By Hydrose Aaluwa

Illustrator—Atanu Roy

National Book Trust, India, 1992, pp. 25, Rs. 7.50

The author describes all kinds of tails, useful in some way or other to the animal concerned, except in the case of man, where according to the author, it fell off due to lack of use. Lucid illustrations appeal to the child whose interest is held as the shapes and lengths of tails change with every turn of the page. New details are exciting and informative and the child's eyes light up when the lizards and scorpions appear. Finally the fiery tail of Hanuman which burnt down Lanka opens up another story for the child.

Shirley M. Kutty is the founder Principal of the Magic Years Montessori, a pre-school for children in the age group of 2½-6 years.

Indian Folk Tales

Jayanti Raghavan

SUNO KAHANI

Indian Book Depot., pp. 24, Rs. 7.50

PANCHATANTRA KI KATHAYEN

By Shri Vyathit Hridaya

Indian Book Depot., pp. 56, Rs. 7.50

These two books, which are quite well produced contain stories which children will find amusing and instructive. The first book, which is a collection of stories, is for younger children and the second is for the older age group. The illustrations in the first book, though well printed, are crude and heavy. The stories, however, are a mixture of fantasy and straightforward tales. The stories too short ought to hold the attention of the child. But, unfortunately, there are spelling mistakes in some of the stories which are not printer's devils. They indicate an ignorance of the language.

The second book consists of eleven stories from the *Panchatantra*. There is nothing much to be said about these. There is an absence of illustrations and the few that are there are black and white which makes the pages dull and unattractive. Each story has a moral at the beginning rather than at the end as is the custom. These ought to help children get their values. Unfortunately, however, for some of these the children would require an adult to explain it to them.

Jayanti Raghavan is a Korean translator and a free lance writer.



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Tales of Adventure and Achievement

Vinoo Vohra

ESCAPADES

By R.K. Murthi

RICHES TO RAGS

By Nemi Sharan Mittal

Both published by Pustak Mahal, New Delhi, 1992, Rs. 20.00 each (Paperback)

As part of their 50-volume "World Famous Series", the publishers have brought out two more books, bringing to the children's book world more excitement and knowledge. One can imagine the eyes of the young readers becoming rounder with every episode they read in the collection of true stories titled, *Escapades*, when they perceive impossible things happening and the central figures in the stories successfully wriggling out of impossible situations.

The stories include heroic deeds of popular figures like Subhas Chandra Bose and Rash Behari Bose who challenged the might of the British empire and escaped.

There are historical figures in the book too, such as Shivaji, the Maratha warrior king, wrathfully called the 'mountain rat' by the frustrated Mughal army, who escaped in a fruit basket from the clutches of Aurangzeb.

There are quite a few narratives of daring jailbreaks like that of the Indian socialist leader, Jaya Prakash Narayan.

The book abounds in adventures of the not-so-familiar Western heroes like the escape of Sterbuk and Wetzel from East to West Germany in a huge home-tailored taffeta balloon.

Winston Churchill was once made a captive by the Boers in South Africa—no, not as a combatant, but as a young reporter? His great escape to freedom, and safety makes interesting reading.

A couple of stories revolve around women like Maggie Jourdan who helped her wayward lover escape from prison and the loyal wife of Grotius (a Dutch writer) who 'booked' her husband out of jail in broad daylight under the very noses of the guards in a crate of books.

There is romance in the form of the debonair Casanova, the man who enticed every woman he met, jailed on the absurd charge of practising black magic (!) by jealous husbands, no doubt. He escapes from prison with the help of a co-prisoner, a monk, of all the people.

There are gory, though true, tales too like the 'Fittest Surviveth'—an adventure of four shipwrecked men in the South Atlantic who braved the weather and the dangerous moods of the sea but eventually death seemed to stare them in the face with their food stocks depleting. The first to lose the will to live was the young cabin boy whose throat was slit by the

other 3 and they devoured him like wild beasts and drank his blood to quench their thirst. Gruesome, to say the least.

The second book under scrutiny, *From Riches to Rags*, drives home the point that one mustn't bank too much on Dame Luck, for she has the reputation of being fickle.

The book abounds in the adventures of millionaires, who achieved wealth and fame during their lifetime only to squander it away or in their greed for more met their nemesis and were reduced to rags. The Hunt brothers, Herbert and Bunker, born to a billionaire father, were counted among the 5 richest men in the USA in the early eighties. They aspired to become silver kings but their calculations went awry, their business empire crumbled and in 1985 they were declared bankrupt.

One of the top businessmen in Switzerland, Eli Pinkas indulged in fraudulence, forgery and gross violation of financial norms and regulations. He claimed that his company, Socsil, had a \$ 27 million business with the "Sanitary Division" of the US Army. On the basis of fictitious invoices allegedly countersigned by senior US Army officials he freely borrowed money from prominent banks like the Citibank and the First National Bank of Minneapolis. This hoax Pinkas kept up for 32 years. Eventually a bank clerk suspected foul play and reported the matter to his immediate superior. This set off a chain of investigations and the legal dragnet began to close around Eli Pinkas and ultimately led him and his wife to swallow cyanide capsules.

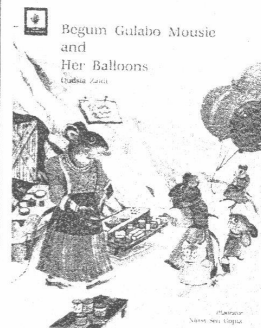
There is a sorry story of the popular Hollywood singing star of the forties, Doris Day, who found to her horror too late that her dead husband had cheated her of her fortune in the seventeen years of their married life.

Then there is the story of Evalyn Walsh McClen (ironically, she was the daughter of a gold-digger, for whom luxury and comfort remained the chief pursuit in life. Pampered by her father and indulged by her husband, Edward Beale McClean (son of a newspaper tycoon) Evalyn brought her husband to the edge of bankruptcy, ruin and drove him to suicide.

The story of Gloria Morgan Vanderbilt, the 'poor-little-rich-girl' is touching. Although an heiress, her father died when she was barely a year old; she was indifferently brought up by a callous mother and later a selfish aunt. In this case, it was her mother who brought herself to a sad and sorry end.

The two books abound in good factual stories. However, the editing and proof-reading leaves much to be desired; proof-reading errors, particularly in 'Poor-Little-Rich-Girl', mar the reading pleasure of an otherwise good theme. Moreover, most of the tales in *Riches to Rags* are written in essay form. For example, 'George Hudson: The Railway King'. There are pages of matter-of-fact information, no dialogue, and this tends to make it rather monotonous.

Vinoo Vohra works for The Mainstream.



BEGUM GULABO MOUSIE AND HER BALLOONS

By Qudsia Zaidi

National Book Trust India, 1992, pp. 24, Rs. 7.00

Illustrated in bright colours by Niren Sen Gupta this is indeed a delightful story for young children. It is translated by Laeeq Futehally in simple English making it easy for a child to read and understand. Even for the very young child the story line is absorbing and the richly coloured pages bring it alive. The story of the kind-hearted Gulabo and how she helped a little elf return home is something out of fantasy land that young children will love to hear about. A big plus point in favour of N.B.T books is of course their price.

—Alka Mathur

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TALES FROM THE PANCHATANTRA
A.N.D. Haksar
N.B.T., 1992, pp. 98, Rs. 26.00

When one thinks of *Panchatantra* stories, one invariably thinks of the stories heard in childhood from parents and grandparents. Here is a brand new version translated from the original sanskrit by A.N.D. Haksar. These stories have animal and human characters and demonstrate how easily everyday situations can be made occasions for learning rules of behaviour. The *Panchatantra* is India's first self-help guide to conduct as it were!

As the translator mentions in the Prologue it is meant for all those who would gain knowledge of the world and learn to conduct themselves in an appropriate fashion in worldly affairs. The three sons of King Amar Shakti who were 'supreme dunderheads' are taught through these very stories told by the brahmin Vishnu Sharma. From that time on 'the treatise known as the *Panchatantra* has been current on the earth for the enlightenment of the young.'

Each of the stories illustrates a moral, some deal with 'sins' like greed, false pride, anger and foolishness, but all praise

commonsense and ready wit and place these qualities above learning and being virtuous. The wise crab in 'The Stork and the Crab', the intelligent and far-seeing frog in the tale of the 'Two Fishes and a Frog', the clever, quick witted jackals, in story after story underline this. Nowhere is this more clear than in the familiar tale of the four Brahmins who bring a lion to life and suffer for it.

One especially enjoyed the tale of the flea and the bedbug recalling its more recent and humorous telling in Vikram Seth's *Beastly Tales!* Seth's tale of "Creep the louse" and "Sir Mosquito" of course reads extremely well, his English being easy on the modern reader. Haksar's very language, seems to take the reader back through time—as if to read these stories one has to read them in archaic English! All the same it is a lively set of stories for the young reader.

The last story ends with a fitting moral for our times.

'Tis the wise not the dull who like
Clever do well:

For self all the gain
To others the pain.'

—Preeti Gill

OUR NAVY
By Commander R.N. Gulati
N.B.T., 1992, pp. 64, Rs. 6.50

This is a revised edition of Commander Gulati's book earlier published in 1976 by N.B.T. Written in simple, straightforward language it is easily comprehensible to children. This informative book is packed with facts about all aspects of our Navy. Kinds of ships, guns, and armour on board various battleships, the men and the rigours of their training, the legends and the traditions associated with the Navy have all been briefly touched upon, the book itself being a mere 64 pages packed with photographs and aimed at children with a fascination for the sea.

It begins with the figure of the legendary Captain Mulla, the commanding officer of the ill-fated *INS Khukri*, who chose to go down with his ship in the time-honoured tradition of the Navy. It ends with an interesting account of the role of the Navy in the last war (1971) with Pakistan.

A book that will excite the young and awaken in them a sense of adventure and also perhaps a possible choice of future careers in the Navy.

THE MAGICIAN
By Vishakha
NBT. India, 1990, pp. 32, Rs. 6.00

The author and illustrator of this little book presents a series of rhymes, first the children come running helter-skelter hearing that a magician is visiting and as they gather together and the Magic One opens his bag there are any number of exciting things that tumble out. The description of the magician's clothes, many-hued and of his moustache are enjoyable and in fact would have been more so if the child could actually see the colours described. The illustrations are all black and white and in a children's book one can't help but feel that colour works magic.

—Alka Mathur



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Transfer of Technology in Indian Agriculture: Experience of Agricultural Universities.

Edited by N.C.B. Nath and L. Misra. The book presents case studies by eminent agricultural scientists on research utilization in sectors of agricultural extension, agricultural production systems, post production systems and human resource development. Indus Publishing Co. in association with International Research Centre, Canada, 1992, pp. 376, Rs 100.00

The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics.

Vandana Shiva. This is a study of the ecological and social costs of the Green Revolution and the links between ecological and ethnic crisis in Punjab. Third World Network, Malaysia, distributed in India by the Other India Bookstore, Goa, 1991, pp. 264, Rs 95.00

■ ARCHITECTURE

Indian Monuments Through the Ages: Indian Society of Engineering Geology.

This book is a study of the monuments of India built through 5000 years of Indian civilization with particular references to the constructional material and geotechnical aspects. Oxford and IBM, 1992, pp. 198, Rs 595.00

■ BANKING

Service Area Approach Lead Bank Scheme.

N.K. Juneja. The objective of this book is to prepare realistic credit plans of Service Areas and their effective implementation with minimum efforts. Manas Publications, 1992, pp. 238, Rs. 290.00

■ CHILDREN'S BOOKS

World Famous Escapades

R.K. Murthi. Presents exploits of famous men who escaped from the most highly secured prisons and camps. Pustak Mahal, 1992, pp. 128, Rs 20.00

World Famous Riches to Rags.

Nemi Sharan Mittal. Descriptive stories of the rich who lost their business empires and riches due to circumstances or personal failures. Pustak Mahal, 1992, pp. 112, Rs 20.00

The Robots Are Coming, Stories of Robots.

Dilip M. Salvi. The present collection of sci-fi stories are all about robots, they are not only instructive but also vastly entertaining. Ratna Sagar P. Ltd., 1989, pp. 93,

Rs. 18.90
Beacon Lights. True Tales for Children.

A.W. Khan. Classic Arts Publishers, Part I—pp. 32, Rs 5.00 Part II—pp. 32, Rs 5.00 Part III—pp. 46, Rs 6.00 Part IV—pp. 47, Rs 6.00

Tales from Qu'ran.

M.D. Zafar. Classic Arts Publishers, Part I—pp. 32, Rs 5.00 Part II—pp. 32, Rs 5.00 Part III—pp. 56, Rs 8.00

24 Short Stories.

CBT, 1991, pp. 151, Rs 20.00

How Stones Lost Their Hearts.

Vishaka Chanchani. CBT, 1992, pp. 25, Rs 9.00

When the Fish Began to Fly.

Lavlin Thadani. CBT, 1992, pp. 16, Rs 9.00

The Story of Rice.

Ramesh Dutt Sharma. Illustrated by Sahana Pal. NBT, 1991, pp. 64, Rs. 7.00

The Magician.

Vishakha. NBT, 1990, pp. 32, Rs. 6.00

Snake Trouble.

Ruskin Bond. Illustrated by Mickey Patel. NBT, 1991, pp. 32, Rs. 6.00

■ DEMOGRAPHIC STUDIES

Census of India 1991 (Historical and World Perspective).

J.C. Aggarwal and N.K. Chowdhury. The book is intended as a reference manual for census operations in India since 1872. S. Chand and Co., 1991, pp. 111, Rs 150.00

■ ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT STUDIES

This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India.

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha. The book represents the first ecological history of India. Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 274, Rs 290.00.

Indigenous Vision, Peoples of India. Attitudes to the Environment.

Edited by Geeti Sen. This volume explores various facets of the environmental practices of the indigenous populace of India. Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 304, Rs. 395.00 (hardback)

Himalayan Wildlife: Habitats and

Conservation.

S.S. Negi. Discusses in brief the animals, birds, reptiles, fishes and amphibians found in the Himalayas. Sanctuaries and parks set up to conserve and monitor these have also been dealt with. Indus Publishing Co., 1992, pp. 207, Rs 250.00

Big Dams Displaced People: Rivers of Sorrow Rivers of Change.

Edited by Enakshi Ganguly Thukral. This pioneering volume presents the experience of those who have been displaced by big dams in the light of the policies and plans which govern their rehabilitation. Sage Publications in association with the Book Review Literary Trust, 1992, pp. 199, Rs. 120.00

■ FINE ARTS

In Search of Aesthetics for the Puppet Theatre.

Michael Meschke and Margarete Sorenson. This book is the first of a series of monographs on different aspects of puppetry sponsored by the IGNCA. The author is one of the most creative contemporary artists of the Puppet theatre. Indira Gandhi Centre for the Arts and Sterling Publishers, 1992, pp. 176, Rs 300.00

Traditional Performing Arts: Potentials for Scientific Temper.

Varsha Das. The author has experimented with the traditional performing art form as a communication medium for inculcating scientific temper in the masses. Wiley Eastern Ltd., 1992, pp. 161, Rs. 150.00

■ GENERAL BOOKS

Gandhian Perspective of Nation Building for World Peace.

Edited by N. Radhakrishnan. This is a compendium of the proceedings when some senior Gandhian academics and activists met under the auspices of the Gandhi Smriti and Dashan Samiti in 1987 to analyse in depth Gandhiji's contribution in nation building for world peace. Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1992, pp. 166, Rs 150.00

Living, Dying.

L. Kothari and Lopa A. Mehta. In this book the authors delve into the biological and medical data on death and come up with a readable, reassuring and personally satisfying account of disease, dying and death. The Other India Press, Goa, 1992, pp. 128, Rs. 60.00

Personal Investment and Tax Planning Year-book 1991-92.

N.J. Yasaswy

A personal finance guide to help you select the profitable investment options that match your criteria of income, capital appreciation, safety. Vision Books, Orient Paperbacks, 1991, pp. 243, Rs. 80.00

The Yellow Lady; Australian Impressions of Asia.

Alison Broinowski. The author traces the history of Australian ideas about Asia and the Pacific from pre-colonial time to the present. Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 260

Animal and Other Animals.

R.P. Noronha. A gripping narrative about the villages and jungles of Madhya Pradesh—the world the author knew intimately and loved. Sanchar Publishing House, 1992, pp. 138, Rs. 160.00

Hotel Guide—Bombay

Travel Books, India, incorporating Pustak Mahal, 1992, pp. 292, Rs 15.00

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■ HISTORY

Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-47 (Vol. II 1934-47).

Bhagwan Joshi. This path breaking study comprising three volumes studies the role of the Communist Party of India during the freedom struggle and the experience of its interaction with others as well as with social and political reality. Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 331, Rs. 325.00

■ LAW

Water Rights and Principles of Water Resources Management

Chhatrapati Singh. In this simply written work the author explores the basic jurisprudential issues of water rights and principles of water management. Published under the auspices of The Indian Law Institute. N.M. Tripathi Pvt. Ltd., 1991, pp. 158, Rs 100.00

Writ Jurisdiction Under the Constitution.

B.L. Hansaria. Second edition takes into account the plethora of decisions of the Supreme Court on various subjects. N.M. Tripathi, 1992, pp. 340, Rs 240.00

An Introduction to Legislative Drafting.

P.M. Bakshi
The fourth edition incorporates considerable new material about drafting devices and gives a detailed exposition of statutory rules and orders which are now as important as the main Act.
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British Parliamentary Papers Relating to India 1662-1947
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B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1992, Rs. 1600 for three volumes.

■ LITERATURE

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This volume comprises 18 original essays by eminent social scientists which highlight the problems involved in planning for India's social and economic develop-

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■ NEHRUANA

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru: Second Series 13
General Editor: S. Gopal
Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Teen Murti House, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 495

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This volume facilitates an exchange of perspective originating in major streams of political philosophy.
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This book compiles autobiographical essays on the scientific lines of often leading Indian statisticians.
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■ WOMENS STUDIES

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This is the fifth and final volume in the series *Women and the Household in Asia* and its purpose is to explore conceptual and methodological issues relating to the household as a unit of data collection.
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The Power to Change, Women in the Third World redefine their environment. Women's Feature Service
This book presents narratives of positive change brought about by women, on the ground, in the face of the often negative impact of development in their lives and on their environment.
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Archana Parashar
While the constitution of India guarantees equality as a fundamental right, various religious laws deny equality to women in personal matters. This inequitous contradiction is analysed by the author.
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Second Freedom for Phool Chand

Phool Chand joined the rest of the country in celebrating the 45th anniversary of freedom of the country last week. He was only 10 when the country was freed from the yoke of colonial rule. Circumstances forced him to work on a dam site as a labourer at Rupee one per day. Though, the dam was being constructed in front of his two acre piece of land, it was not to change the course of his life. His land remained unirrigated and he a labourer. He would have bequeathed a legacy of poverty and deprivation to his son Lakhan and perhaps Lakhan to his progenies too, but for the second freedom he got recently.

Two years ago, he had seen his fellow villagers getting freed from the clutch of debt. He had seen how the state government

had liberated the small farmers from the burden of unproductive debts. He had also seen the forest-dwellers in his neighbouring villages leading an assured life after they got the ownership right of the forest land they had tilled for years together.

The second freedom came to Phool Chand in the shape of an irrigation well on his field under "Jeevandhara" scheme.

When the BDO came to him offering to construct a well on his field, he flatly turned down the offer for fear of getting into the trap of debt which had been the bane of his ancestors for ages. But the BDO told him that the entire cost of the well was to be borne by the government. However, Phool Chand could believe it only when the well was

constructed. Now, he is growing Soybean on his piece of land. Even the weak monsoon this year did not frighten him. Now, he is free from any fear, be it scanty rainfall or deprivation which he had inherited.

Phool Chand is one of such 38,000 small farmers of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes on whose fields wells have been constructed in the last two years at a cost of Rs. 94 crore by the government. This facility is being provided to farmers of the weaker sections also under the Amritdhara scheme in the state.

This is the beginning of economic freedom of the weaker sections of society in Madhya Pradesh.



We are committed to upholding the freedom of the country and to shaping a society where all get equal opportunities and the right to live with self respect and freedom in the true sense.

- Sunderlal Patwa
Chief Minister

FREEDOM MEANS PROSPERITY
Madhya Pradesh Government

M.P. Madhyam/92