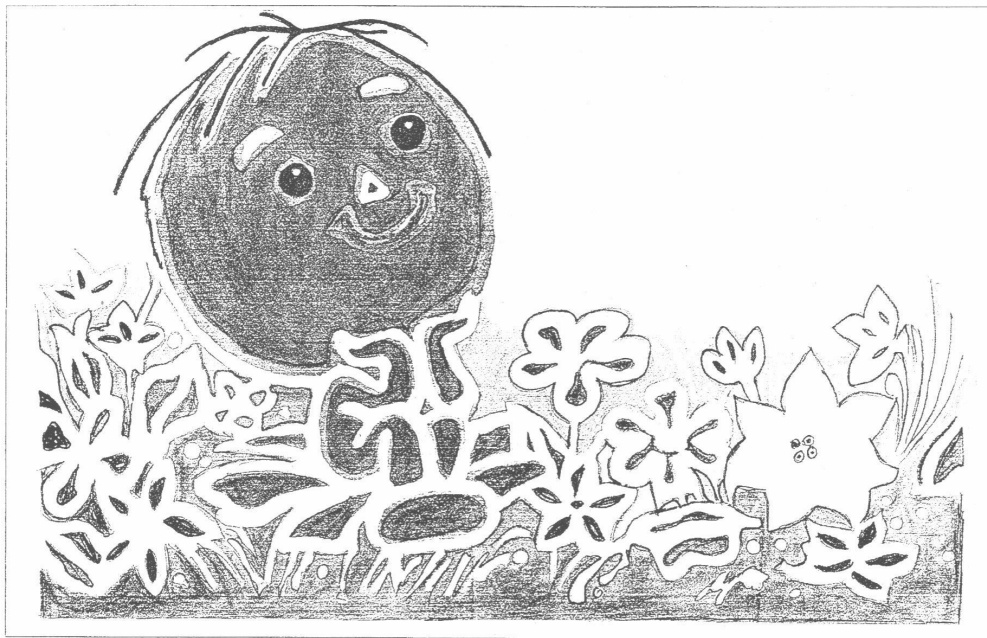


THE BOOK REVIEW

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We may be specks of dust on a soap-bubble universe, but the speck of dust contained something that was the spirit and mind of man. . . More wonderful than the earth and the heavens is this mind and spirit of man which grows even mightier and seeks fresh worlds to conquer.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

A.K. DAMODARAN

Incredible Contemporaneity . . . 3

R. SUDARSHAN

Indian Secularism: No Answers in Analytical Philosophy . . . 4

MAJID SIDDIQI

Thus Speaks A Modern Prometheus . . . 7

GITA WOLF

The Scope of Children's Publishing in India. . . 11

K.P. FABIAN

Through Sophia to Philosophia . . . 12

FEISAL ALKAZI

Adapting Children's Literature to the Small Screen . . . 15

VIJAYA GHOSH

The World of Premchand . . . 16

D.L. SHETH

Politics of Recognition and Representation . . . 32

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A.K. DAMODARAN <i>Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Second Series: Volume 14, Part II; Volume 15, Part I & II; Volume 16, Part I</i>	3
R. SUDARSHAN <i>Secular Values For Secular India</i> by P.C. Chatterji	4
MAJID SIDDIQI <i>Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century</i> by Eric Hobsbawm	7
PRASHANT KIDAMBI <i>The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and the Working Classes In Bombay</i> by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar	8
K.R. MENON <i>Contemporary West Asia</i> by M.S. Agwani	9
Children's Section	
GITA WOLF <i>The Scope of Children's Publishing in India</i>	11
SWAPNA DUTTA <i>Rani of Jhansi</i> by P.J.O. Taylor	
<i>Sufi Stories from Around the World</i> by Debjani Chatterji	11
K.P. FABIAN <i>Sophie's World</i> by Jostein Gaarder	12
MUKUL PRIYADARSHINI <i>A Crisis of Concern</i>	13
PARO ANAND <i>A Unique Odyssey: The Story of the United Nations</i> by Geeta Dharmarajan	14
INDIRA MENON <i>Landscapes: Children's Voices</i>	
<i>Landscapes: Children's Voices—An Educator's Guide</i> by Gita Wolf	15
FEISAL ALKAZI <i>Adapting Children's Literature to the Small Screen</i>	15
VIJAYA GHOSH <i>Premchand: Selected Stories I & II</i> Translated and adapted by Anupa Lal	16
MADHAV RAGHAVAN <i>Dog Detective Ranjha and Top Dog Ranjha</i> by Partap Sharma	17
DEEPA AGARWAL <i>Signature</i>	18
UDAY BHASKAR <i>Madhuban Educational Books and Anukool Books</i>	20
RISHI IYENGAR <i>Quiz</i>	20
SHOBHIT MAHAJAN <i>Chemical Elements in the New Age</i> by D.V. Jahagirdar	
<i>Narcotic Drugs</i> by Anil Agarwal; <i>It Happened Tomorrow</i> edited by Bal Phondke	
<i>Space Today</i> by Mohan Sundar Rajan; <i>You and Your Health</i> edited by V.N. Bhawe,	
N.S. Deodhar and S.V. Bhawe	21
MOHAN RAO <i>The Danger Within</i> by Feisal Alkazi, Martha Farell and Shveta Kalyanwala	21
ARVIND GUPTA <i>Creative Science</i>	22
MONISHA MUKUNDAN <i>Hunt for the Miracle Herb</i> by Deepa Agarwal	22
MANORAMA JAJA <i>The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children</i>	23
CHANDRA CHARI <i>The Magic Touch</i>	23
S.G. HAIDER <i>Humour in Urdu Literature for Children</i>	24
SUBHADRA SENGUPTA <i>The Ruskin Bond Children's Omnibus</i>	25
RITU SINGH <i>AAA,EE; Sachitra Hindi Bal Shabdakosh</i>	25
SWAPNA DUTTA <i>Something Green Something Blue</i>	26
ANUPA LAL <i>Watch Your Language</i>	28
<i>Teacher Plus a Profile</i>	28
POONAM BEVLI SAHI <i>The Guest Who Came to Dinner</i> by Luis M. Fernandes	
<i>The Mystery of the Zamorin's Treasure</i> by Margaret Bhatti	
<i>The Folk Tale Reader Vols 1, 2 & 3</i> edited and compiled by Uma Raman	29
BULBUL SHARMA <i>The Green Book</i> edited by Ruskin Bond	29
JAYA BHATTACHARJI <i>Indian Folk Tales and Legends</i> by Pratibha Nath	30
Book Track	30
N.S. SIDDARTHAN <i>Indian Industry: Policies and Performance</i> edited by Dilip Mookherjee	31
D.L. SHETH <i>From Concessions to Confrontation: The Politics of an Indian Untouchable Community</i> by Jayashree Gokhale	
<i>India's Unequal Citizens: A Study of Other Backward Classes</i> by K.C. Yadav in association with Rajbir Singh	32
AJAY K. MEHRA <i>Community Participation and Slum Housing: A Study of Bombay</i> by Vandana Desai	33
VANDNA KHARE <i>Harvest of Devastation</i> by E.G. Vallianatos, <i>Environmental Ethics</i> by O.P. Dwivedi	34
YAMUNA KACHRU <i>New Horizons In Functional Linguistics</i> edited by S.K. Verma and V. Prakasham	35
GURPREET MAHAJAN <i>Postmodern Desire: Learning From India</i> by Paul McCarthy	
<i>Postmodernism and Feminism: Canadian Contexts</i> edited by Shirin Kudchedkar	36
ARUNDHATI DEVASTHALE <i>The Diary of Balasahab Shastri</i> by Ramakant Kulkarni	36
PUSHPA SUNDAR <i>Single Woman</i> by Urmila Jethani	37
Pulp Fiction	38
Book News	38
Cover: Arya Viky	

Incredible Contemporaneity

A.K. Damodaran

SELECTED WORKS OF JAWAHARLAL NEHRU SECOND SERIES: VOLUME 14, PART II; VOLUME 15 PART I & II; VOLUME 16, PART I

Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993 & 1994 Rs. 200.00 each



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

"The word 'neutrality', of course, is not a correct word to describe our policy. Normally, neutrality can only be used as opposed to belligerence in time of war. . . . Our policy is simply this: We wish to judge every issue on its merits and the circumstances then prevailing, then decide what we consider best in terms of world peace of our other objectives."

Jawaharlal Nehru

These four volumes of the second series in Jawaharlal Nehru's *Selected Works* cover a brief period of about 15 months from 18th April 1950 to 30th June 1951. Reading them today more than four decades after the events is an extraordinary experience. We watch the great man at work in his several identities: Head of the Government, Foreign Minister, Congress Leader and all the time behind these masks his own irrepresible private self, comfortable enough in public places. From the point of view of Indian history this short interlude is a rich transitional phase where many future problems which are still with us first manifested themselves, both in the domestic situation and in foreign policy. There is an almost incredible feeling of contemporaneity to the modern reader. History is always exciting and interesting; recent history like this is vital in the still incomplete tasks of nation-building.

There are four or five interesting developments during this period in the domestic scene. The earliest of these is the resignation of Dr. John Mathai, the Finance Minister, who could not reconcile himself to the establishment of a National Planning Commission. That problem is still with us in another form with the present Planning Commission reaching some negative conclusions about the record of liberalisation. Throughout this time the problems of incipient Hindu communalism within the Congress bothered Nehru. In institutional terms there are difficulties with the Congress President, Purshottam Dass Tandon. Then there was the consecration of the Som Nath Temple from which Nehru distanced himself. There was polite disagreement with the President, Rajen Babu, who decided to be present at the function. There are some comic overtones here. The organisers asked all the embassies to collect the waters from all the "Holy" rivers in their countries of accreditation, not excluding the Yellow River and Yang

Tse Kiang in China. Nehru was furious. No permanent damage seems to have been done. We have no record here of the actual transportation of riparian resources! More seriously this was a period of comparative relaxation in communal matters because of the recent memories of the Nehru-Liaquat Agreement and the institutional arrangements which followed; there were, however, small clouds on the horizon then, like the U.P. Government's policy, negligence or tolerance on the Ayodhya problem.

The most important event during this interregnum was, of course, the sudden and unexpected death of Sardar Patel on December 15, 1950. There is very little additional information here. Nehru and Patel had, by then, become reasonably friendly colleagues even though there were points of difference as on Tibet. They exchanged affectionate greetings on their birthdays. The changes in the Cabinet after Sardar Patel's passing away are not even discussed here in detail, the most important of which were the appointment of C. Rajagopalachari as Home Minister and Gopalaswamy Iyengar as States Minister. In situations like this, which are crucial in the development of the country, such a selection of official documents and personal statements by one individual, however eminent, gives only an inadequate picture. The footnoting, however, is elaborate and the ordinary reader is able to form his own impressions of the totality of the situation.

A major development by any standard in these years was the first Constitutional Amendment brought forward by the Prime Minister to tackle two major problems. There was the tendency of the Judiciary to attach too much importance to the Fundamental Rights clauses in the constitution and to question the validity of the Zamindari Abolition Legislation. The Government was also upset by the emergence of several small news-

papers without any responsibility for accuracy or seriousness. This part of the new amendment provoked strong resentment both in the Opposition parties and in the newspaper world. There was also a minor procedural amendment laying down that the President would be summoning the Central Legislature only once a year. This episode is important by itself and also in the evolution of the democratic process. These were the first faint beginnings of the turbulent competition and confrontation between the three Constitutional wings of the Government which has become a familiar part of our public life today.

The food crisis was important throughout this period; in retrospect it was even more traumatic than the mid-sixties. Bihar and Madras were most affected and frantic attempts were made to import food. Here we come to an important convergence of external and domestic policies. This is most revealing in the case of the United States. The Congress in Washington was unhappy with Nehru's foreign policy positions on China and Korea. This made legislation difficult for the supply of food aid to India. It was, however, a temporary difficulty and by the middle of 1951 the food aid programme by the United States to India was in place. A few months later would come the elaborate Truman agenda on the conversion of the loan amount for domestic utilisation

within the country. Food also had its other external implications. Both China and the Soviet Union were approached for purchases. There was no diplomatic difficulty but shipping was a problem.

The most important single international development during this period was, of course, the war in Korea which broke out in June 1950. India's diplomatic effort to contain the damage is brought out in great detail in these pages. Our embassies in Beijing, Moscow, Washington and London played an important role. There were high profile ambassadors in all these capitals, Panikkar, Radhakrishnan, Vijaylaxmi Pandit and Krishna Menon. But the decisions were made and original diplomacy conducted by Nehru himself both in Delhi with comparatively junior U.S. diplomats, and in London where he had a continuing dialogue with the Ministers in the Labour Government. By the end of the fourth volume in this bunch, some of the major problems were over; a confrontation between China and the United States had been avoided and MacArthur was dismissed by Truman. A new phase of detailed diplomacy was about to begin in which also India would play a certain role.

Nearer home there were major developments in Nepal. What could have been

Jawaharlal Nehru by R.K. Laxman in *The Electric Brush* (TOI).

a bloody revolt was contained and the transition from the Rana Regime to the new government with popular representation under King Tribhuvan and with a Rana Prime Minister was established. There was very little interference in this episode from other countries. It was a near-domestic crisis. Kashmir in the United Nations was inevitably a major preoccupation. This was the time when the Constituent Assembly was summoned. India stated clearly that a plebiscite could be thought of only after the vacation of the aggression by Pakistan—a position which is valid till today. From the point of view of general foreign policy there was increasing disillusion in Nehru's mind about the Anglo-Saxon powers. This was a thorn which India would have to learn to live with down the decades.

The Japanese Peace Treaty was another issue on which Nehru had clear and independent views. He would not accept the American position and held out for an agreement uninfluenced by Japan's military defeat. These and other demonstrations of independence made Nehru unpopular in Washington towards the end of the period under review. The earlier euphoria after the 1949 visit was a distant memory.

Perhaps the most important single development in India's foreign policy at this time was China's decision to incorporate Tibet and Nehru's carefully moderate reaction. While making his country's position clear on the autonomy of Tibet and also on the border between India and Tibet, Nehru refused to be diverted by this unfortunate development into giving up his advocacy of China's membership of the United Nations and control over Formosa, as Taiwan was known in those days. These are major developments already known to historians and very little additional information is available in these papers. Here we come across one of the basic problems of Indian historiography today, the refusal of the government to fully implement the rule by which archives over 30 years old are thrown open for public scrutiny. As the editorial notes make clear in all the volumes, there are many documents kept back because of confidentiality. In this important episode, we have here nothing new at all about Sardar Patel's well-known letter to Nehru warning about the developments in Tibet. Obviously, as Dr. Gopal has made clear in his biography, there was no direct reply on this subject from the Prime Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister. There are also some letters to other people like Bevin in London and our representative in Lhasa which are mentioned by Dr. Gopal but not included here because of the ban on sensitive correspondence.

No discussion on Nehru's foreign policy can avoid nonalignment. Even during these early years Nehru's philosophy of independent action after judging every issue on merits without bringing

in extraneous loyalties to powerful countries is clear. The following passage from his interview with Norman Cousins, Editor, *Saturday Evening Post* is as clear a definition of nonalignment as a policy valid even today in the post-Cold War scenario.

"The word 'neutrality', of course, is not a correct word to describe our policy. Normally, *neutrality* can only be used as opposed to *belligerence* in time of war... Our policy is simply this: We wish to judge every issue on its merits and the circumstances then prevailing, then decide what we consider best in terms of world peace or our other objectives." It is a great pleasure going through these civilized pages. Even when there are mistakes and prejudices in Nehru's mind, there is always a willingness to look at it from other points of view. Another delightful aspect is the attention to detail, a quality Nehru shared with his great master, Mahatma Gandhi. There are, here for example, interesting instructions to Missions abroad about reports, telegrams etc. Krishna Menon is gently chided for not sending periodic reports. He obviously thought his personal communications to the Prime Minister would be adequate. He is told that there are some institutional requirements like monthly reports, annual surveys etc. There is an interesting note on visas being denied to important foreigners because they were suspected to have links with dubious organisations. Nehru wants a more generous policy. Here, however, he makes an understandable mistake of confusing between passports and visas. Our embassies abroad do not issue passports to the nationals of other countries; only visas, that is, documents authorising entry into our national territory. This is the only example I have seen in all these several volumes of Homer nodding.

An interesting note to his officers stresses the need for ability in preference to seniority in matters of promotion in the foreign service. He wants the same norms as obtains in the Army. Fortunately or unfortunately these instructions were forgotten down the years. In my time the saying in South Block was that the only functioning escalator in the subcontinent was the Indian Foreign Service. As a beneficiary of this system I have nothing to complain. Recent years, however, have seen Nehru's original instructions being followed. Some bright middle level officers have been posted to very important missions. This creates its own problems but in doing so, we are obeying the example of countries more experienced in foreign policy administration like Britain and the United States.

A.K. Damodaran, a former diplomat and a Senior Fellow at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi (1980-81) is a well-known commentator on International Affairs.

Indian Secularism: No Answers in Analytical Philosophy

R. Sudarshan

SECULAR VALUES FOR SECULAR INDIA

By P.C. Chatterji

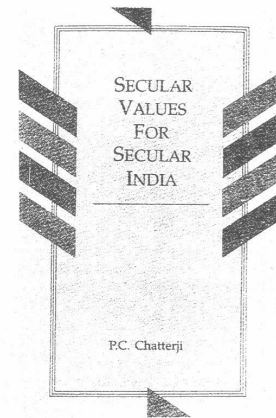
Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 345, Rs. 500.00

The Constitution in the Preamble describes India as a "Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic". The terms "secular" and "socialist" were added to the description of the Republic by the Forty-Second Amendment Act (1976). Since this act was passed by Parliament when a state of "internal emergency" was in force, and most members of the Opposition were under detention, this rechristening of the Republic must be deemed an act of bad faith!

Although on Independence Day 1947 the Republic had not formally come into existence, Vasco Miranda, a key character in Rushdie's novel, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, sums up the crisis of Indian secularism in this declamation:

This isn't your night. Bleddy Macaulay's minutemen! Don't you get it? Bunch of English-medium misfits, the lot of you. Minority group members. Square-peg freaks. *You don't belong here...* You read the wrong books, get on the wrong side in every argument, think the wrong thoughts. Even your bleddy dreams grow from foreign roots... Circular sexualist India my foot. No. Bleddy tongue twister came out wrong. Secular-socialist. That's it. Bleddy *bunk*... You think India'll just roll over, all those blood-thirsty bloodsoaked gods'll just roll over and die... Only one power in this damn country is strong enough to stand up against those gods and it isn't blankety blank sockular specialism. It isn't blankety blank Pandit Nehru and his blankety blank protection-of-minorities Congress watch-wallahs. You know what it is? I'll tell you what it is. Corruption. You get me? Bribery, and. (p. 165-66).

A very different perspective on the problem of secularism in India is offered by Mr. P.C. Chatterji:



I want to emphasise that the interpretation of Indian secularism as 'Equal respect for all religions' is meaningless. But if any tangible meaning can be put on the phrase, then it runs contrary to the spirit of humanism, sweet reasonableness and reform which is at the heart of the secularism propounded in the Constitution (p. 109).

In the preface to the first edition of this book (1984) Mr. Chatterji admits to being more than one of "Macaulay's minutemen":

My training in philosophy has been of the analytical variety popular at one time in Cambridge and Oxford. But linguistic analysis, which developed from earlier procedures, seemed to trivialize philosophy and urged me to turn to problems which are relevant. So it was that I got involved in the limitless ramifications of secularism and religion in India (p. xi).

In the preface to the second edition (1995), Mr. Chatterji is sad that hopes of rousing "the conscience of the leaders of public opinion", in the tragic aftermath of Operation Bluestar, have been belied. India has failed until now to find an answer to the problem of establishing "a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines" (John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 133).

In contests of rationality versus religion, Mr. Chatterji votes against religion. "One important reason why secularism has made such a poor showing in the past forty years", he says, "is that we have not made a clear-cut break with religion as required under the Constitution" (p. 298). Mr. Chatterji certainly does not trivialize the problem, and the solution that he offers ("what we need is a new morality") is as neat and tidy as can be found in the best of analytical philosophy. But it is a solution that does not seem compelling or realistic in the context of "real life" in India.

It is not easy to find realistic and workable solutions to a problem that is as "essentially contestable" as the proper form of secularism for a deeply divided polity. It is to the credit of Mr. Chatterji that his analysis does provoke one to wonder why it is that his solution is unworkable.

Mr. Chatterji devotes an entire chapter to providing a very valuable and informative catalogue of the real life of major communal riots in India since 1960, leading up to the destruction of the Babri Masjid by Hindu fanatics. He notes that since 1984 two important developments in Indian society are the propagation of "Hindutva" by the BJP and, related to it, a secular trend increase in incidents of violence and brutality. The most recent manifestation of "Hindutva" is the phenomenon of imbibing idols drawing upon the milk of human gullibility.

Another cause of recent violence has been opposition to the Government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report on reservations for Other Backward Classes. Incidentally, a very lucid defense of the policy of reservations is provided by Mr. Chatterji in a section of chapter VII dealing with equality. He provides persuasive arguments for holding that the policy of favouring persons gifted with certain intellectual qualities could itself be unjust; that 'objective' tests are generally faulty because they conceal class bias and are often 'facially innocent'; and the costs of the policy tend to be exaggerated by dominant castes which stand to lose. Apart from the justification of egalitarianism, Mr. Chatterji stresses the importance of role models to enable members of groups that have been discriminated against for centuries to form a conception of the future in which they

will have self-respect.

Another way of making this point would be to say that these groups have "learned helplessness" through repeated knocks and failures, and it takes more than mere availability of opportunities for them to overcome this condition. In this respect, Mr. Chatterji makes a telling indictment of the neglect of primary education and learning achievements in schools, especially those in rural areas to which children from SC/ST/OBC communities could have access. He is thus at his best when dealing with issues related to, but not directly focussed, on the main theme of secularism.

On the main theme of secularism, however, Chatterji fails to give adequate attention to the problems of identity and citizenship in modern democracies. This is apparent in his treatment of the attack on secularism advanced by Professors T.K. Madan and A. Nandy, to which I shall make further reference ("Secularism in its Place" in *Religion in India*, ed. T.N. Madan, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1991, and A. Nandy in the same volume).

There is a great deal that can be learned from Chatterji's book about the metaphysics, tenets, and practices of particular religions (especially Vedantic Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and in very admiring terms, Sikhism), the proper use of the term "transcendent", the difference between "cumulative tradition" and "faith" (a la Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Mentor Books, 1962), when it is arbitrary and when not to demarcate any two spheres, including the sacred and the secular (illustrated with examples of Karl Popper's distinction between science and non-science based on falsifiability of hypotheses, and Sworin's treatment of judicial discretion in *Taking Rights Seriously*), what it means to "believe in" and to "believe that", and finally what falls within the sphere of individual autonomy (faith, the essence of religion, and quest for knowledge) and what can come under the purview of state control (public rituals associated with religion).

In his treatment of these issues, Mr. Chatterji shows himself to be a master of analytical philosophy, capable of writing with scintillating clarity. I particularly enjoyed his discussion of the Devlin-Hart debate on the enforcement of morals, and wish I had written half as well the mandatory essay on this theme set for students of moral philosophy at Oxford! Similarly, his treatment of J.S. Mill's "harm principle" would earn Mr. Chatterji an A+, and ensure the coveted "congratulatory First" at Schools. Moreover, Mr. Chatterji's confession that thirty-six years of service in All India Radio has made him a loner, an outsider to academia, and not privileged to have many discussions with others working in related fields, are not really serious limitations in his case. His range of reading would be the envy of

any Oxbridge don.

Mr. Chatterji makes competent use of analytical methods of philosophy, shows clarity in thought and expression, and has the courage to offer expositions of difficult ontological and epistemological themes (Marx, Cassirer, Sartre, Camus, McTaggart on love, Plato and Aristotle on friendship, Thomas Kuhn on scientific revolutions, Russell on scientific method in philosophy, and even Keynes!).

Despite this impressive intellectual arsenal he fails to persuade that the crisis of Indian secularism is the result of deliberate misunderstanding of our Constitution and its secular values. Vasco Miranda in Rushdie's novel could say what he did even before the Constitution had been drafted and adopted. There is a shrill ring of truth in his outburst. What could be the problem with the sober and meticulous reasoning of Mr. Chatterji that makes him miss that which Vasco Miranda can grasp between alcoholic gasps?

One clue is the uncharacteristic impatience and annoyance in the tone of his discussion of Professor Madan's views. It reminds me of William Hazlitt who reports a conversation with S.T. Coleridge (in "My First Acquaintance with Poets") on dangers of the habit of continually asking, "what do you mean?". Hazlitt warns that this is a sure way of erecting "barricades on the path to truth". It is true that Professor Madan has said that fundamentalism and fanaticism are often provoked by the insensitivity of secularists to the "totalizing" character of Asia's major religions. It is also the case that he believes that "these things do not exist in a traditional society". Chatterji's response to Professor Madan is to say:

Here, as ever, he does not tell us what he means by a traditional society. The ordinary meaning of a traditional society is one which follows the rules laid down in the scriptures, or at least deviates from them only in minor ways. So how can there be revivalism or fundamentalism in such a society? There cannot be *revivalism* or *fundamentalism*, since by definition, the society exists in its pristine purity. Dr. Madan's statement is a simple tautology (p. 112).

Instead of this kind of response, Mr. Chatterji should have noted that both Professors Madan and Nandy are connecting the crisis of secularism with the crisis of modernity. In different degrees both of them display greater faith in the capacity of "critical insiders" with respect to the major religions in the region to tap sources of tolerance among the faithful than they do in the capacity of the modern nation-state to avoid recourse to violence and govern with sweet reasonableness.

What Professors Madan and Nandy point out is that it is not easy to police the

INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT and MANAGERIAL ECONOMICS

P.K. Gupta
P.B. Sharma

The success of any future economy will largely depend upon the calibre and competence of the people and the sound support of computers and computer-assisted systems. A visible shift from a 'capital-based' industrial society to a 'knowledge-based' society is currently evident.

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boundary between the alternative ideal, an ethic independent of religion, and the religious ethic. The very attempt to police it is likely to result in violence. One man's meat, as they say, is another man's poison. It is a mark of modernity that citizens relate directly with the state, and this relationship is not mediated by class or status. Participation in collective, democratic decision-making processes is the basis of legitimacy in modern democratic states.

Mr. Chatterji has an entire chapter (chapter VI), drawing upon Marx and others that I have mentioned, to provide what he calls "An Alternative Ideal" nurtured by "the spirit of rational enquiry". He set this ideal against the ideal of religious morality which he discusses in the previous chapter. He then notes that some values of humanism, equality, distributive justice, the evil of poverty—are not advocated by any religion. He exhorts philosophers and jurists "to discuss in some detail the new humanistic morality required by the emerging secular society in India" (p. 298). He concludes that an "important reason why secularism has made such a poor showing in the past forty years is that we have not made a clear-cut break with religion as required under the Constitution. . . . Religions must be kept in their place and political and secular activities associated with religion must be severely curbed in the interests of common welfare."

When Mr. Chatterji closes his book with a discussion of the possibility of an "Indian mainstream", and need for the development of a "synthetic culture", he recognises an important requirement of legitimacy in a modern democracy. Mr. Chatterji should have begun his book discussing the implications of the sentences with which he closes it:

In the ultimate analysis, the future of secularism in India will depend on the majority community, the Hindus, who constitute eighty per cent of the population. We have had frequent occasion to criticise obscurantist and communal trends in the community. But it is good to remember that it is the only community which has accepted far-reaching changes in its personal law since Independence, which even the generally progressive communities such as the Christians and Parsis have not done. Moreover, it is the Hindu community which has provided leadership in progressive and leftist movements in India. It is on this group of 'Hindus' and forward-looking representatives of other communities that the hope for a secular society rests (p. 314).

These sentences privilege the Hindu community. It is not surprising that the "nationalism" of the BJP requires non-Hindus to accept the predominance of Hinduism in India. When communal identity combines with majoritarian

decision-making it can leave non-Hindus in an anomalous position. Emigration and ethnic cleansing are inherent in the demands of modern democracy. The North-East of India has been a Bosnia for a long time. It is no good in the face of this order of crisis to appeal to an "alternative ideal" to provide the basis of secularism. A common ground for co-existence must nevertheless be found because the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

In order to pose the problem of secularism, I borrowed the language of John Rawls. But I am not sure that India can just as easily borrow the solution offered by him—the idea of an overlapping consensus—because it requires prior commitment to justice as fairness (discussed with characteristic clarity by Mr. Chatterji at p. 258–59) which is based on a doctrine of political constructivism, reasonable mutual expectations, and just terms of cooperation. In other words, Rawls' solution is too much like an independent ethic in its own right, whereas the real problem is that such an ethic is not acceptable to pious believers.

How then can a common ground for consensus be identified and maintained? Right now we will not be very wrong in believing that a widespread worship of Mammon, through diverse forms of corruption, is about the only "independent ethic" with adherents in all groups and communities. This is the crux of the problem. Unfortunately, analytical philosophy, "spirit of rational enquiry", "scientific temper", and even learned exegesis on the major faiths of India, do not offer realistic solutions.

Protracted negotiations, compromises, sincere efforts at persuasion of believers by "critical insiders", finding different, yet morally compelling, reasons for different groups, all providing different bases for agreeing to collective decisions, these seem to be the messy ingredients which offer the hope of salvaging secularism in India. We cannot hope for a "proper form of secularism" which can take the place of politics, properly so-called. Impatience with the wheeling and dealing that makes up day-to-day politics could easily lead to authoritarian personalities taking hold of the polity, and doing irreparable damage to the fragile yet precious and indispensable secularism that we seek.

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In *Thoroughfares and Cul-de-sacs*, The Book Review Vol. XIX, No. 10, p. 34 Column 2 para 2, last sentence should read "In Bengal, Kerala, Maharashtra and Gujarat the publishing world is vibrant not only in creative writing but on every conceivable subject." The error is regretted.

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Thus Speaks A Modern Prometheus

Majid Siddiqi

AGE OF EXTREMES: THE SHORT TWENTIETH CENTURY

By Eric Hobsbawm

Michael Joseph, UK 1994, pp. 640, Hardback £ 20.00

This is a book about this world as much as it is about world history. It is, if anything, judgemental in nature. The author* in finely honed prose such as is only possible at the very apogee of a long and meaningful career of scholastic activism, passes unequivocal judgement on very nearly every dimension of human existence in these last eighty years. It is a huge portmanteau of a book, its two part (though divided into three) covering the years before and after the end of the Second World War. Before anything may be said about the axial underpinning of Hobsbawm's historical argument and his rather bleak prognoses, I must do my duty as reviewer by describing the terms of its exposition.

The book falls into three main chronological divisions: "The Age of Catastrophe 1914-1950", an era of wars, crises, revolutions, fascism and, in general, cataclysm; "The Golden Age 1950-1973", a period which has seen the most rapid and spectacular transformation in world history; and "The Landslide 1973-1991", a period in which both communism and old certainties collapsed. The book is global in scope, including in its ambit the geopolitical shifts in wealth, power and cultural influences and the rise and fortunes of the non-European North American world.

The part leading up to the Second World War reads very much like a standard text-book account and not very much more is said there than one would find in any set of economic and social history narratives about the inter-war period. The story has been told and retold so many times that to expect a new story is to be unfair perhaps to any writer on the subject. More properly, it might be said that Hobsbawm uses this account to serve as a base-line for his reading of the post-war period: the problems of socialism in one country leading to the cold war; Europe's depression exposing the ugly face of Right-wing authoritarianism so that post-war regimes proved to be so much more liberal and accommodating of the require-



ments of a welfare state than would have been possible otherwise; and decolonization making for the end of empires in such a way as to create a very large number of new nation-states in Asia, Africa and Latin America that the world saw for the first time. Against this backdrop, what it means to be a democracy, a people's democracy, a dictatorship of the left and of the right, acquired a new significance, one that could not possibly have arisen in the dominated world-space between imperialist empires and the fascist juggernaut. Yet, even in this re-sensitizing of the author's readers to this necessary

The strength of Hobsbawm's account is that it has a single mutually comparative focus, lucid prose and, as mentioned before, always that seemingly by-the-way but devastating remark that in fact is so very crucial in its implications.

perspective on the contemporary world, Hobsbawm throws in, every now and then, observations and insights that make us think even about these larger monoliths that he discusses in his grand sweep quite differently. In a casual aside he will tell you that "it should be said in honour of Mussolini's countrymen that during the war the Italian army flatly refused to deliver Jews for extermination to the Germans or anyone else in the areas it occupied... and the Italian administration also showed a conspicuous lack of zeal in the matter..."; and a few pages later that anti-semitism existed very much as a matter-of-course sentiment among the British intellectuals of the Bloomsbury Group but that did not make them sympathisers of the "political anti-semites of the radical Right". Such observations make us both realize and further think about the relation between culture and ideology on the one hand and the importance of political conjunctures on the other. No necessary connections may be presumed, Hobsbawm seems to be saying, but one must be aware of structural contexts that transform ideological groupings into purveyors (and/of saviours, as the case may be) of war and/or peace.

It is in the final two sections of the book, The Golden Age and The Landslide, that Hobsbawm moves to the heart of his generalisation. This may be summarized, with some over-simplification, thus: Europe never had it so good as after the war and in fact better than America, if relative rates of growth are to be considered. Truly a golden age. So while the empires may have divested themselves of their colonial possessions, their metropolitan countries, organised in several social, economic and military treaty pacts as "the West", did well. So did their respective societies. Phenomena such as student radicalism did matter of course but more as epiphenomena than as moments of world-historical significance and, if anything, served to keep the capitalist social conscience (there is such a thing) alive. This helped welfare and ideological fine-tuning.

In these very years, 1950 to 1973, the countries of the West were locked in eye-ball to eye-ball cold war, a "war" that led the Soviet Union and her bloc to invest as a percentage much more of their gross domestic product in the armaments industry than what was true for the West. The Soviets had indeed "managed to build the best economy of the 1890s vintage anywhere in the world". However their inability to survive the international demonstration effect of a buoyant and—despite all their troubles—happy consumerism in the West when the latter combined with the inequitous and meaningless "poverty-in-Super power" strength of the Soviet bloc, showed up eventually, and ironically, in the very decades (after 1973) when the capitalist economies with US hegemony were, in the Kondratiev cycle, on the down-turn. In the strangest irony of the paradox, the "decline of the

And the future, what of that? Hobsbawm is a modest historian and does not pretend to answer questions about it. The demographic and ecological portents of a clearly pending doom, the erosion of accountability in the management of governmental power and the endemic littering of arms in fractional contexts of weak states and strong societies frightens even this most Promethean of historians to whom the world at large and the micro-universe of professional historians owes so much:

West" was a winner compared to the collapse of the Soviet Union and her satellite economies.

"Both superpowers overstretched and distorted their economies by a massive and expensive competitive arms race, but the world capitalist system could absorb the three trillion dollars of debt—essentially for military spending—into which the 1980s plunged the USA, till then the world's greatest creditor-state. ... by a combination of historical luck and policy the USA had seen its dependencies turn into economies so flourishing that they outweighed its own. By the end of the 1970s the European community and Japan together were 60 per cent larger than the US economy."

The Soviet Union's crash Hobsbawm attributes to the contrary effects produced by a combination of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. You cannot restructure a command economy of rigid state and social controls and have openness at the same time. The USSR fell into a "widening chasm between *glasnost* and *perestroika*".

Quite a lot of what this reviewer has just written is well-known stuff. But the strength of Hobsbawm's account is that it has a single mutually comparative focus, lucid prose and, as mentioned before, always that seemingly by-the-way but devastating remark that in fact is so very crucial in its implications. This reviewer's favourite is the author's characterization of Reagan's role and personality in the summit talks on nuclear de-escalation.⁸ Hobsbawm gives Gorbachev that pat on the back that he so richly deserves, who, "succeeded, singlehanded, in convincing the US government and others in the West that he meant what he said." And Reagan, that baddie, that father of Reaganomics, macho actor from Hollywood,

* Eric Hobsbawm is Emeritus Professor of History, Birkbeck College, London.

and President of the USA at the time of the Reykjavik (1986) and Washington (1987) summits—how is he described? Hobsbawm must be quoted: "...let us not underestimate the contribution of President Reagan whose simple-minded idealism broke through the unusually dense screen of ideologists, fanatics, careerists, desperados and professional warriors around him to let himself be convinced" a top flight example of the importance of the individual in world history through a re-evaluation of a person already (pre-) condemned by presumed rather than demonstrated ideological judgement. One in the nose for ideological reductionists, a blow for the spirit of human freedom in *really existing* society, whatever its credo.

There is plenty else in the book that I have not even touched upon: sober but always sympathetic accounts of what it means to be a nationalist revolutionary in a Third World country; that there really is no Third World any longer, it having got divided into three worlds of the oil-rich, the fast-developed, and the still poor and yet barely developing. Every chapter that concerns the economic and social history of such societies is edifying reading as it helps those of us who live in post-colonial contexts to view ourselves from, as it were, far away and recognize better our own (im)possibilities. There is also a side-effect that one can hope for: lately, under the impact of a number of recent trends in world historiography, we, Indian historians seem to be fast forgetting how to ask significant (for this please do not necessarily read Marxist and/or nationalist) questions. Hobsbawm's book is instructive in this regard. He asks big questions, gives big answers, but is attentive to the smallest detail: e.g. Stalin was 'tiny' (aside from being cruel), only five-three against his tall world image.

And the future, what of that? Hobsbawm is a modest historian and does not pretend to answer questions about it. The demographic and ecological portents of a clearly pending doom, the erosion of accountability in the management of governmental power and the endemic littering of arms in fractional contexts of weak states and strong societies frightens even this most Promethean of historians to whom the world at large and the micro-universe of professional historians owes so much:

We do not know where we are going.... [but] one thing is plain. If humanity is to have a recognizable future it cannot be by prolonging the past or the present. If we try to build the third millennium on that basis, we shall fail. And the price of failure, that is to say, the alternative to a changed society, is darkness.

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Processes of Industrialization And Labour Movements

Prashant Kidambi

THE ORIGINS OF INDUSTRIAL CAPITALISM IN INDIA: BUSINESS STRATEGIES AND THE WORKING CLASSES IN BOMBAY, 1900-1940

By Rajnarayan Chandavarkar

Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. xviii+468, Rs. 495.00

The existing historiography on Indian industrialization, class and labour movements has tended to either stress the essential particularity of the Indian context or see it as part of a broader evolutionary movement having its origins in western Europe. Writers emphasizing the former have focussed on aspects which are argued to be culture-specific to the Indian situation. Thus, Indian entrepreneurs displayed an essential propensity to avoid risks and resist technological improvements, the 'jobber system' was a replica of the authority exercised by the village headmen in rural India, viable trade unions could not develop because of the 'rural' nature of the workforce and so on. On the other hand, some historians have sought to make the European experience the frame of reference for studying Indian developments. Within this framework Indian industrialization and its attendant consequences is viewed as an extension of trends already presaged elsewhere. For example the formation of the Indian work force and its attitude towards factory discipline is analyzed in terms of the European experience at what is assumed to be a similar stage of development. Raj Chandavarkar's work attempts to critique some of these approaches as part of a larger attempt at studying the social formation of the working classes and its inter-relationship with the development of industrial capitalism in India.

The focus of the book is the social processes underlying the economy of labour in Bombay City in the early twentieth century and their interaction with the strategies of capital. Chandavarkar examines how the social formation of the working classes was shaped by the nature and forms of industrial capitalism and in turn constrained and conditioned the latter's development. In doing so, he critiques both the dualism characterizing studies of the industrial labour market, as well as the cultural essentialism built into the frameworks of historians of working class politics and culture. Similarly, he is also sceptical of conceptualizations of class which posit that "exploiters and resisters

were characterized by simply adversarial or consistently oppositional relationships." Instead, Chandavarkar views class and class-consciousness in more conjunctural terms. In other words, "Perceptions of mutuality and indeed their notations, the language for their description, were produced by the specificities of a particular political and intellectual context. Moreover, the interests of social groups were themselves constantly in flux. In turn, changing circumstances could serve to redefine the interests of the diverse elements which made up the working classes and reconstitute social identities".

The book can be divided into two parts. In the first part, Chandavarkar examines the development of Bombay as an industrial city, the operation of the city's labour market and its structural features, the patterns of migration into the city and the social organization of the working class neighbourhoods. Bombay's phenomenal growth from being a sleepy hamlet in the mid-sixteenth century to a burgeoning metropolis two centuries later, he suggests, was not merely a result of it being a typical 'colonial port-city'. One also needs to examine the ways in which it was interlocked into the economy of the surrounding regional hinterland. By the end of the nineteenth century, Bombay's commodity markets were linked to wider relations of production and exchange in the hinterland. The city's cotton mills drew their raw materials from the surrounding regions, and came increasingly to depend on the penetration of the domestic markets. Conversely, labour in the city not only came from distant regions but also retained such rural ties in the form of cash remittances which helped to oil the wheels of the rural economy. The British may have facilitated the growth of the city, but once set in motion the process gained a logic of its own.

Bombay city developed a distinctive labour market over time, but not for the reasons studies of the labour market in the Third World have usually proffered. Conventional wisdom regarding the labour market, notes Chandavarkar, sees it

in terms of a series of distinctions: industrial workers, poor, permanent workers, casual workers, organized sector-unorganized sector, or the formal sector-informal sector. Thus, to take one example, the formal sector is usually associated with large-scale factory production and supposed to be predominantly capital-intensive. Its labour process is supposed to be more sophisticated and its labour force to enjoy a greater degree of unionization. The informal sector, on the other hand, is characterized by small-scale production and labour intensive methods. Workers in this sector are assumed to be of a predominantly casual sort. Such distinctions with all their attendant stereotypes, according to Chandavarkar, not only obscure more than they reveal but also tend to be rather difficult to sustain in practice. The Bombay case suggests that there was a great deal of overlap between such categories. There was 'little that was modern about the organized sector and very much that was traditional about the unorganized' (p.72). Moreover, activities in both organized and unorganized sectors showed similarities in their business strategies as well as regards technological inputs and mechanization. The labour market in Bombay, dominated from the mid-nineteenth century by the cotton-textile industry, was influenced by the nature of production strategies. These strategies—geared to fluctuating patterns of demand—ensured that the experience of casual labour: was shared in common by workers both in the so-called 'formal' and 'informal' sectors. In order to cope with such flexible production strategies, engendered, in part, by the need to maintain a rapid turnover with low ratios of fixed-capital and on narrow margins labour had to be prepared to maintain a degree of occupational mobility. It was here that the social connections of the workers became crucial. Such connections helped workers to tide over the pressures of urban life. Caste, kinship and village connections helped workers secure jobs, credit, housing and facilitated their survival in the city. The chapters on migration and the neighbourhood examine the

nature of such connections, both at their source in the rural hinterland as well as in the city. Chandavarkar critiques both 'modernization' theories which posit the disappearance of such ties with progressive industrial development, as well as culturalist explanations which see in these connections the evidence of a homogeneous, rural 'community', out of which the Indian labouring classes are seen to have emerged and which is assumed to have shaped their collective mentality. The evidence on Bombay suggests that ties of caste, kinship and village were crucial to the social organization and reproduction of the city's workers. "While their rural base served as an important bulwark against the depredations of the urban environment, their cash earnings and their access to credit in Bombay enabled migrant workers to contribute to rural subsistence".

Once in the city, the neighbourhood became an important arena for the social and political organization of Bombay's workforce. The city's mill districts came over time to acquire the name Girangaon and became the center of working-class culture. Workers in search of jobs utilized their social connections and became involved in networks of patronage in the urban neighbourhoods. These neighbourhood connections also gave workers access to credit and housing and helped them in times of distress or unemployment. According to the author, "If the nature of the rural connections of Bombay's workers made this pattern of social organization possible, the uncertainties of the labour market made it necessary." Chandavarkar is, however, critical of frameworks which see urban neighbourhoods as villages transplanted into an urban environment. He cautions against accepting theories which attribute the cohesion of these neighbourhoods to the inherited rural values of the workers. Rather, one needs to be sensitive to the ways in which a complex matrix of social, political and economic forces operating in the urban context shaped the social organization of the neighbourhood. At the same time, the tensions generated within these neighbourhoods could often divide workers and lead to conflicts. In other words, life within these neighbourhoods could both forge as well as fragment solidarities.

The second part of the book focuses on the cotton-textile industry in Bombay. Specifically, the analysis is concerned with the organization of production and the patterns of labour deployment in the city's premier industry. The basic proposition Chandavarkar advances is that the process of industrialization need not always be seen as a process of continuous technological improvements and rationalization. The case study of the Bombay cotton-textile industry suggests that what really influenced the strategies of the Bombay cotton mill-owners was a desire to maximize returns in the short run, in the face of

a constant uncertainty of demand. Production, in the cotton-textile industry geared itself to face the fluctuations in demand by maintaining flexible strategies. It was the nature of demand, rather than any short-sightedness on the part of the city's entrepreneurs or some innate propensity to display 'pre-industrial' attitudes of traders and merchants, which accounted for the specific nature of the production strategies adopted by the Bombay mill-owners. According to Chandavarkar, the growth and subsequent development of the cotton-textile industry cannot be adequately understood without taking note of the structural constraints which shaped it. It was these constraints which initially forced the move of Indian merchants from a subordinate position in the export trade in raw cotton to investing in the mill-industry. It was again the intervention of structural constraints which prompted the diversification from spinning to weaving, as a safeguard against fluctuations in demand. The need to spread risks and hedge their bets against the uncertainties were to be a constant factor in the calculations of Bombay's industrialists.

Chandavarkar also suggests that there is a need to guard against the tendency to set up the capital-labour relationship in binary opposition seeing both in monolithic terms. The labour-intensive production strategies of the Bombay mill-owners often exacerbated the differences between them. The differences that developed limited their options in facing the crises that the industry underwent in the 1920s and 1930s. Nowhere were these tendencies more manifest than in the moves to introduce standardization and rationalization from the late 1920s onwards. Labour similarly was fragmented along sectional lines. Such sectionalism was often heightened by the need to compete in the labour market. Hence that ubiquitous phenomenon of a massive general strike followed by bitter communal conflict. One cannot therefore assume any inherent solidarities. If at all there were any solidarities, these need to be located within the conjunctures thrown up by politics.

Chandavarkar's work is an important contribution to comparative discussions of both the processes of industrialization as well as labour movements. The strength of this book lies in the meticulousness of the research and the conceptual clarity of the author. However, it is rather surprising that the chapter on workers' politics dealt with in a somewhat cursory fashion. While this is consistent with the author's own position on the schematic nature of the book, one feels that the structural nature of the analysis might have benefited from the nuances thrown up by a few specific instances of working class politics.

Prashant Kidambi is working for a Ph.D. at Wadham College, Oxford.

Scene Of Endemic Crises

K.R. Menon

CONTEMPORARY WEST ASIA

By M.S. Agwani

Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 262.00, Rs. 350.00

The problems of West Asia have been so endemic and so well-known that other crisis areas of the globe succeed only temporarily in putting it out of the headlines in world news. Not surprisingly it is a fairly well researched subject. Professor Agwani's book is nevertheless a welcome addition to the shelves in the library dealing with this problem-ridden area. Although the book is entitled 'Contemporary West Asia', the author traces the historical background to Arabism at some length and never loses the reader's interest while doing so. Perhaps some of the strongest parts of the book are in this area where Agwani traces the intellectual background to what he calls the Arab renaissance. Just as western educated Indians formed the backbone of the Indian National Congress at the turn of the nineteenth century and thereby led a political renaissance, so also did exposure to western education in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Palestine rekindle the idea of progressive nationalism. Initially it would appear that between the three loyalties to the nation, religion and the Arab community, the first elicited the most continuous response from the Arab people. When conflicts arose in their minds, as it did on many occasions, the Arabs always seemed to opt for national loyalty at the expense of Arabism and commonality of religion. Agwani recognizes the number of occasions when this

occurred and early on in the book quotes Nehru's autobiographical remarks to the effect that nationalism cannot really be divorced from social and economic realities.

If Arabism occurred earlier in a geographical sense, Agwani rightly attributes this to the disenchantment of the Arab people with Ottoman rule. Therefore Arab renaissance was international or transnational in character, with the earliest intellectuals stressing Arab nationalism as apart from patriotism to a constitutional state. That came later. The current loyalties of Arabs to the Governments and territories of Iraq, Kuwait, and the UAE would obviously not have arisen in the nineteenth century since these states were set up only after the First World War. Therefore, while the author has explained the concept of Arabism as arising mostly from the language, an explanation on what more could have been described as high cultural affinities would have been useful. Considering that many unsuccessful attempts were made to incorporate the Arab people into some kind of pan-Arab organization starting with the failed Arab League in 1945, it is interesting to conjecture on why a people who pride themselves on a common ancestry and culture were unable to exert any cohesive force until the years of oil diplomacy in 1973.

The history of the rise of Khomeini is

"... Having underscored Khomeini's role, it must also be noted that the emergence of clergy as the ruling group in Iran was neither a logical outcome of the Shi'i political doctrine nor the original goal of the Revolution. The Shi'i doctrine in fact assigns its clergy the limited rule of moral guidance during the absence of the last of the Twelve Imams, Muhammad at-Muntazar, who had disappeared around 783 AD. In his Wilayat-e-Faqih or the "Rule of the Jurisprudent"—a work he had completed during his long exile in Iraq—Khomeini made a departure from the Shi'i tradition in giving a new meaning to the term 'wilayat' (guidance) and a new role to the faqih (jurisprudent)."

discussed in some detail, but perhaps Agwani's important contribution in this well-trodden area is his emphasis on Khomeini's theoretical basis for founding an Islamic state in Iran and his justification for combining the clergy and the executive in his new Iran. Perhaps less clear is the ruling clergy's views on Iranian culture—poetry, painting, architecture, sufism and the liberal thinking of the great Iranian monarchs. While admitting that Iranians were proud of their separate cultural identity which had enabled them to withstand Pan-Arabism and the surrounding sea of Sunnis, it is not apparent to an observer of modern Iran, that the Iranian state or the ruling clergy is at ease with the historic and liberal cultural traditions of pre-revolutionary Iran, and its pre-Islamic history. Agwani however makes a few astute observations about the Iranian revolution having been hijacked by Khomeini from the growing middle class, whose disaffection with the Shah's regime was the chief cause of the public support for the Shah's removal. The role of the great powers who were essentially playing a game of proxy in every West Asian conflict is also brought out lucidly.

The Iran-Iraq war perhaps receives less attention than it deserves. The causes of the war certainly included an American desire that Iraq might attack Iran, but it would be difficult to describe this as the major cause for the start of the conflict. Saddam's own demand was for the restoration of the international boundary to the middle of the Shatt-al-Arab and this demand has a longer history behind it. The international boundary was in fact along the centre of the navigable channel as agreed to at the treaty of Erzerum in 1937, but was inexplicably reversed at the Algiers Accord in 1975 by Saddam Hussein himself. It is conjectured that Saddam did the unthinkable in 1975 to win Iranian support against the Kurds who were in revolt. If Saddam was pressurized by anyone to go back on the Algiers Accord, it was by the Arab lobby who felt that Arab interests had been sold out to the Iranians who had complained about the treaty of Erzerum for forty years and had it reversed. The effect of this reversal on

Iraq's coastline was disastrous. The Shah of Iran, with ambitions of becoming the premier power of West Asia and the maritime power of the Indian Ocean, (which he wanted renamed the Iranian Ocean) had confined Iraq to a meager coastline of 50 kms with a port only far up the Shatt, and a minor naval base at Umm Qasr, on the coast.

Saddam's own desire to be seen as the leader of the Arab world was perhaps the most important single cause for the attack on Iran. The invasion of Iran, when it actually came, was directed at Khuzestan, which has the resident Arab minority in Iran, in the hope that the Iranian Arabs would welcome the invading Iraqis. This failed to happen and, as Agwani rightly postulates, throughout the war, nationalism overcame ethnicity and religion. The Iranian counter-threat aimed at Kirkuk was planned with an eye on winning over the dissident Iraqi Kurds to the Iranian cause. This also failed to materialize.

Another valuable contribution of the author is the discussion on the secular credentials of the Baath party and the intellectual background behind this stance. In an area where religion has been grossly misused to keep the people in a backward state of mind so as to perpetuate the position of the rulers, the Baath party has taken a humanist and liberal stand on religion that is decades ahead of the rest of the governments on the Arabian peninsula in liberalism and modernity. This fact needs to be reiterated, as Saddam's personal actions in invading Kuwait, in seeking clandestine nuclear capability and repressing dissent brutally, much of the world may tend to tar the people and intellectuals of Iraq with the Saddam brush. The fact is that Iraq is one of the few countries which has been able to make an easy transition into an Islamic world, retain its Arab heritage, while not being at ease with its great cultural heritage of Babylon and Sumeria.

There are two chapters in the book where Agwani makes some original contributions. They are "The Palestine Conflict in Asian Perspective" and "India and the Arab World". The same cannot be said of three other chapters dealing with Palestine, Israel and the United States.

The author's contention that India overestimated the importance of Pan-Islamism in its dealings with the nations of West Asia are well taken. What one would have liked was a more specific recommendation on the kind of foreign policy initiative India could have taken with respect to the recognition of Israel and the exchange of diplomatic missions, if in fact the author felt that India had been unnecessarily overawed by the possibilities of a pan-Islamic condemnation of India's vulnerabilities in, say, Kashmir. The author feels that New Delhi would have had greater success if it had realized that the OIC was not a monolith and that the members are as often at each other's throats as they are with outside powers. This is all very well, but the fact of the matter is that the powers exporting the largest amount of capital for fundamentalist organizations abroad are also the governments sitting on the largest oil reserves of the world. The geo-economic angle has perhaps not been sufficiently estimated. It is here that we come across one of the weaknesses in the book—the economic pulls, pressures and compulsions that made governments act in the way they did.

The summary of the book on the jacket quite rightly says that the turmoil in the region is due to the growth of education and economic modernization running well ahead of the institutions of governance. A greater amplification of this idea would have balanced the book better with an adequate economic background. If one looks at the narratives of the various Arab-Israeli wars, what one is most struck with is the fact that the Jewish minority, which was invariably outnumbered performed so much better than its Arab enemies on each front, except when it came to fighting Jordan's Arab Legion. What was the difference that made the Arab Legion the sole institution capable of withstanding the Israeli Army? Most of the relative weaknesses on the two sides are visible while analyzing this one episode. Similarly the specific economic causes leading to the removal of the Shah and for terminating the Iran-Iraq war needs a little more elaboration.

On the whole, the book is a valuable addition to any library dealing with history, strategic issues or foreign policy, although at the price of Rs. 350 there will probably be few individual buyers. Professor Agwani is an authority on West Asia and what comes out in the book is his urbane maturity on issues which often raise bitter memories and arguments.

Rear Admiral K.R. Menon retired recently as the Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) and is a senior research fellow at the IDSA. Admiral Menon writes frequently in the national newspapers on strategic issues and has reviewed a number of books on maritime strategy, military history and national security.

".....India's political, economic, and cultural contacts with the Arab world, which lies next door to it, go back to very ancient times. The intrusion of European Powers into the Arab world and India during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries practically cut off these direct contacts. The nationalist resurgence in the two areas during the inter-war years, however, served to forge new bonds of fellowship. While the nationalist movement in India sympathized with the political aspirations of the Arabs the latter realized that their own emancipation was tied up with the outcome of the Indian struggle."



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The Scope of Children's Publishing in India

Gita Wolf

There is a great need for intelligent and imaginative children's literature in India appears to be the general consensus. Why then do we have so few independent publishers producing such literature?

The reasons are many and complex. Firstly, it has to do with the lack of an appropriate idiom for children's writing. We have always drawn our stories for children from an oral tradition, which did not really conceive of child's world as different from that of an adult. Each tale was adapted, on the spot, for the child listener by the teller. With the idea of children's books, of an impersonal telling of a tale or experience, comes the need for stories told from an appropriate, child-centered point of view. This is not a watered down version of adult fiction. The element of play, of delight in a well-crafted story and aesthetically designed books, is an area Indian publishing still needs to look at seriously.

A second stumbling block is our insistence on didacticism. Children tend to resist fare which is stodgy with facts and morals. We do need issue-based books which communicate a perspective. But there is a thin line which divides a book which upholds certain values from a sledgehammer kind of didacticism.

While there are no final answers, good issue-based books grip the intrinsic interest of the reader. A good narrative tells itself, and the information in it is almost always concerned with a process.

The third problem the Indian publishing industry faces is serious. It has to do with a basic devaluing of children's books, and their role in the development of a child. The key word is price. Every publisher would tell you that the Indian children's book market is possibly the most price-sensitive in the world. Parents who would not hesitate to buy expensive toys, clothes or junk food for their child, deprecate the cost of well-produced books.

The economics of publishing illustrated books today, with escalating costs of paper and printing, appear to be non-issues. At a deep-seated level, the publishing of children's literature is associated, in the public mind, with a form of social service. The reasons for this are complex historical ones. The fact remains that an independent publisher is expected to produce good books which compare in price with subsidized government ones. Clearly, it cannot be done. The publisher therefore is forced to make a



choice: high quality or low price.

Unless the book buyer in India is prepared to value and pay for quality, the future of the children's publishing industry is bleak. The vicious cycle of publishers hesitant to innovate, and of parents and educators bemoaning the lack of good literature based in our own context, is likely to continue.

There are ways for committed publishers to make books more affordable: one of the most obvious ones is to increase print runs. Again, this requires that

more and more parents and educators buy books, so that greater numbers of each book can be printed, to bring down the price of each book.

Another way is for publishers to join together across regions, and increase print runs by publishing the same book in different languages.

A dual pricing system of printing a small number of more expensive hardcover editions of a book—say for libraries—would help to subsidize cheaper paperback editions.

Government agencies could buy rights for select books, which could then be disseminated cheaply to rural and underprivileged children. At the same time, corporate houses—which are now sponsoring all kinds of sporting and cultural events—could well subsidize good children's literature. A good way for independent publishers to survive is through selling foreign rights. While this appears promising, there are problems in mainly targeting a foreign market. The limitations the Indian publisher faces—in terms of paper, printing and a binding quality—tend to work against him or her. At another level, Indian children's books risk being stereotyped into the folk tale slot. Contemporary literature tends to get rejected as too specific to the Indian context.

Gita Wolf is the proprietor of Tara Publishing, Madras.
Drawing by Sharad Raghavan.

Of Bravery and Adventure

Swapna Dutta

RANI OF JHANSI by P.J.O. Taylor

SUFISTORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD by Debjani Chatterji
Harper Collins, 1995 & 1994, pp.63 & pp.101, Rs 40.00 & Rs. 30.00

Children love stories of bravery and adventure. Specially if it is about a person whose name they are familiar with. P.J.O. Taylor recreates in this book the story of Lakshmbai, the brave Queen of Jhansi, who rode through the battlefield brandishing her sword, crushing her enemies like a fiery knight and finally became a martyr defending her fort at Jhansi from the British forces. It is a story every Indian child admires and knows about, though perhaps not in such great detail. Which is precisely why it is likely to appeal to readers, both young and old.

Taylor starts the story on a contemporary note, telling the readers where exactly Jhansi is situated, what it looks like now and how the place got its name. "A visiting prince in the palace at Orcha seven miles away asked if he could see the new fort on the skyline, to the west. There was a haze that day and he is said to have replied, 'Jhain si' (like a shadow) and that is how Jhansi got its name."

The story moves back to the past as the author tells us about the birth of Lakshmbai, known then as 'Manu', her family and childhood at Bithoor, her marriage to Gangadhar Rao, the Maharaja of Jhansi in 1842. We learn how the young bride had shocked and stunned some people by asking the priest to "make the knot tight" during the wedding ceremony, thereby making it obvious right from the outset that she was not going to be a timid and docile puppet of a queen! We subsequently learn about the death of her infant son, born ten years after the wedding, the adoption of Anand Rao as heir; how, when the British Government tried to take over Jhansi because Anand was merely an adopted son, Lakshmbai proclaimed—"Main Jhansi nahin doongi" (I shall not give up Jhansi), continuing her crusade till her last breath.

There are graphic descriptions of the Battle of Betwa which was to be the last battle

of her life. There was a fierce encounter with General Rose. "She herself went everywhere around the walls, riding her white charger and was clearly visible to the British who admired her courage and called her "the ubiquitous Queen", i.e., "The queen who is everywhere". And later, "...the walls were stormed at 3 a.m. that morning... the Rani herself led a counter attack and is said to have personally demolished many of the Britishers. But slowly she was driven back towards the fort. Here exhausted, she at last gave way to tears, not for herself but for her beloved Jhansi which the Britishers had set on fire."

She is said to have fought with the horse's reins between her teeth and with a sword in each hand. She fell quite suddenly, hit by a bullet from a carbine fired by a British soldier. Her last order was that her jewels should be given to her soldiers.

A great story, well told. A must for young readers. Tapas Guha's beautiful cover illustration deserves special mention. Unfortunately the quality of printing does not live up to the text and has several blank portions with chunks of text missing.

While folk tales and fairy tales from various regions is a common sight among children's books, a collection of Sufi stories is certainly a novelty in the Indian market. A Sufi is a Muslim mystic. The term is derived from the Arabic word "suf" which means wool. They got this name because the early Sufis often wore coarse woollen clothes.

The book has an interesting collection of stories taken from the lives of great Sufi men and women from Asia, Africa and Europe. They include Rabia of Basra, Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi, Dhun Nun of Egypt, Jalaluddin Rumi of Turkey, Ibn El Arabi of Spain and Hakim Sanai of Persia, among others.

The stories are simple and thought-provoking like the moral fables and parables in every religion. They deal with basic human values. A short summary about their life and some of their sayings have also been included along with the stories. This gives the tales an added dimension, reminding the readers that they were real people.

Despite their strong religious overtone, the morals are not dealt out with a heavy hand. In short, they are not didactic although each story has a definite message, thereby making it possible for young readers to enjoy them. Chandra Mohan Salvi's cover design and stylised illustrations give the book an interesting look.

Swapna Dutta has been writing and translating books for children for two decades.

Through Sophia to Philosophia

K.P. Fabian

SOPHIE'S WORLD

By Jostein Gaarder. Translated by Paulette Moller
Phoenix Paperbacks, London, 1995, pp. 403, £6.99

Sophie Amundsen, a Norwegian school-girl about to be fifteen, receives an intriguing one-line letter 'Who are you?' in an unstamped envelope without the sender's name found in the family's letter-box. Even before recovering from the impact of that letter, she receives another one-liner 'From where does the world come?' sending her on an introspective and speculative spree and thus preparing her for the thick envelope which comes days later with a warning note on its back 'Course of Philosophy. To handle with extreme caution.' The first lesson is on 'What is Philosophy?' and Sophie reads it with breathless enthusiasm only to discover that the second lesson which establishes human curiosity, not an accidental but an essential part of human nature, as the *raison d'être* of philosophy was already waiting for her in the letter box.

A brief conversation with her mother on the question why there should be a world at all convinces Sophie that adults in general have lost their sense of wonder engulfed and preoccupied as they are in the day-to-day world. As a matter of fact Sophie's mother wonders for a moment whether she is getting involved with drugs. Sophie decides at least for the time being not to tell her mother about the mysterious philosophy professor with whom she has started a correspondence course in the history of philosophy.

Interwoven with the history of philosophy course is an intriguing fictional story in which apart from Sophie and her professor (Alberto Knox), figure Hilde, another girl of the same age as Sophie and her father who is an army major (Albert Knag) working with the Norwegian contingent of the United Nations based in Lebanon. The interface between Sophie and Hilde is an enigma wrapped in a riddle. After receiving the second one-liner letter Sophie gets a letter addressed to Hilde from the major which promises her a present 'that will help you grow' with an unconvincing apology for sending the card C/o Sophie. Many more letters to Hilde will reach Sophie though they do not know each other. Once Sophie discovers in her room a red scarf with the name of Hilde written on it and another time Sophie who looks into a mirror which she had practically stolen from the chalet of Alberto sees for a fleeting second the girl in the mirror closing both her eyes; earlier Sophie had thought that she was looking at herself, but the philosopher in her had told her that one cannot see oneself in a mirror with both eyes closed.

By the time the course advances to the Middle Ages, the correspondence method is replaced by personal tuition which begins in a setting charged with high drama at 4 a.m. in a church dating back to the Middle Ages where Alberto dressed as a monk of the period declaims sonorously: *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.*

The Major has supernatural powers which he exercises from time to time to the annoyance of Alberto and the consternation of Sophie. For example, the Major gets even into the computer of the professor. Sophie finds a birthday greeting to Hilde from her father written on a banana she is about to eat at her professor's. More than once the professor addresses her as Hilde.

It is while expounding Berkeley's philosophy and expanding on the concept of God as the cause of 'everything in everything' and which 'all things consist in' that Alberto shares the horrible truth with Sophie that the two of them were but characters in a book being written by the Major in order to teach the history of philosophy to his daughter and that as the book was about to be completed there was reason to worry over their continued existential status. Alberto goes on to say that the major was a spirit, a kind of God to them and that Hilde was an angel to whom the spirit 'turns'. Suddenly the

room is filled with a bluish light and a few seconds later there is a crack of thunder and the whole house shakes and Sophie returns to her mother through a heavy downpour.

From this point onwards the setting changes. Hilde has received her birthday present from her dad, a large ring binder filled with typewritten pages on history of philosophy which she starts to read almost non-stop and it is through her reading that we are able to follow the fate of Alberto and Sophie even as they are covering the French Renaissance, the Baroque, Enlightenment, Kant, Romanticism, Hegel, Sartre, Existentialism, etc. There is a discussion between Alberto and Sophie on whether they can escape from the Major's control over them, a discussion which mirrors the fate and free will of man in the face of God's omnipotence.

In the last chapter in Hilde's book, Sophie and her mother organize a philosophical garden party to celebrate Sophie's birthday and the Midsummer Eve at which the professor announces to a confused gathering the truth about the existential status of himself and Sophie; without Sophie's mother's permission, the two of them leave the party and head for the chalet where Alberto opens a trap-door and pushes Sophie into it and 'then everything goes black.' By the time they re-emerge into the narration it is no longer part of Hilde's book—they have entered the immortal realm of mermaids, nymphs, fairies, elves, angels, imps, Cinderella, Peter Pan, Sherlock Holmes, Mary Poppins, etc. The ending of the narration comes as the Major is giving an account of the Big Bang beginning of the cosmos to his daughter, both sitting on a glider by midnight,

looking into the bay where, unseen by them Sophie and Alberto have untied the rowboat which earlier Hilde had securely tied. The Major had earlier told her daughter that nature was full of enigmas and Hilde is almost certain that Sophie and Alberto were somewhere close by.

The philosophy lessons are a study in simplicity and felicity, superior to Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy* and not inferior to Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*. Of course, the subject matter is Western philosophy and not philosophy in general; the leading philosophers, their theories and ideas are located in their historical setting and to have done all this in about four hundred pages shows a rare mastery of substance and style.

The *Daily Telegraph* has called the book 'An Alice in Wonderland' for the 90's. The plot and the narrative style can stand favourable comparison to Lewis Carroll. The story begins with Sophie and Alberto under the spell of the Major about whose existence Sophie at least did not know and it ends with Sophie and Alberto, rendered immortal, invisible, unaging and able to interfere with impunity in the lives of the Major and his daughter. But there is nostalgia for the ordinary human condition as Sophie contemplates that unlike Hilde she won't have children.

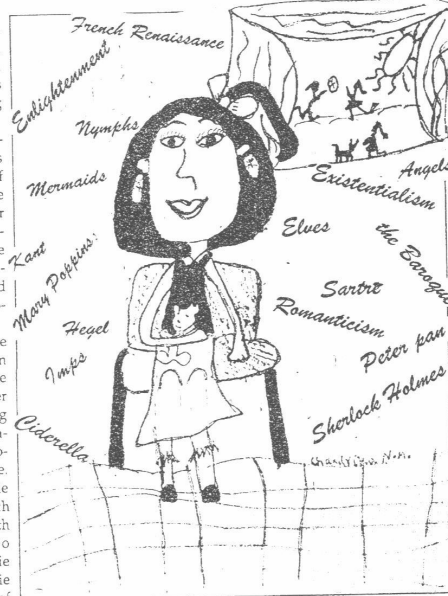
There is an engaging play with words, with rich historical allusions. Sophie takes us through Sophia to philosophia; Sophia, Alberto explains, was the name in Greek of the female principle of godhead in which according to an ancient Jewish and Christian belief which later got forgotten coexisted a male principle as well as a female principle. Hildegard of

Bingen was a medieval nun (1098 to 1179) who was also an author, physician, botanist and naturalist. Albert the Great was the teacher of Thomas Aquinas. The house of the Major in Norway where Hilde stays with her mother is called Bjerkely because there are bjerketreer (birch trees) all around the garden.

Jostein Gaarder, 43, is professor of philosophy and of history of ideas who lives in Oslo. *Sophie's World* is his first book to be translated into English from Norwegian. So far it has sold over three million copies in over thirty languages.

Recently the *Time* magazine carried an article on brain and consciousness (July 31, 1995) where it was stated that after looking for consciousness in the brain for almost a century the scientists have abandoned the search. If one cannot see oneself with both eyes closed as Sophie found out, and therefore one cannot see one's own eyes, were not the scientists looking for something which by its very nature they could not have found? Have we pushed ourselves too far in the direction of narrow specialisation enabling us only to know 'more and more about the less and less'? Does society in general and our education in particular encourage that spirit of curiosity and wonder, which as Gaarder says is an essential characteristic of man? Should we not teach philosophy and logic to our children? These are some of the questions raised by the book which should be compulsory reading for anyone above fifteen. Despite the immense popularity of the book let us hope that its majesty will not be violated by being made into a film.

Fabian, a member of the Indian Foreign Service, is India's Ambassador to Qatar.
Drawing by Chandrika N. Mohan.



A Crisis of Concern

Mukul Priyadarshini

Writing for children is often considered a child's play, but the reality is contrary to this misconception. Due to insensitivity towards children's intellectual and psychological needs for entertainment and knowledge, there is a dearth of quality literature for children. Dearth of literature may be attributed not only to writing, but to publication and distribution as well. In comparison to English, the state of published children's literature in Indian languages is all the more lamentable.

If we analyse the scenario in the past decade or so, we find a decline in reading habits of children. On the other hand, it is also true that the number of books and magazines being sold at shops and at railway station stalls has increased. This seems contradictory. What is actually selling well is comics and other mediocre fiction. Majority of the children in cities watch television or like to read comics in their leisure time. A couple of years back, with the help of some neighbours, I had tried to run a library in a colony of Delhi. Most of the children coming to the library would be engrossed in reading comics and its kind; they did not even notice other literature available. Why is it the case that the world of books we create for children fails to hold their interest, whereas they find the world of comics and television enchanting and alluring? What kind of children's literature is being written and published? What does it lack from the point of view of content, style and presentation?

Children naturally love stories and tales but healthy elements of humour and adventure are rarely seen in the present day children's fiction. As a consequence, children turn to crude and poor quality comedy and adventure. Eventually, they become addicted to reading such literature.

Fiction, if written thoughtfully, not only narrates interesting stories, but also gives a glimpse of a child's surroundings, society and world. The field of science fiction is all the more barren in this respect. Six to ten years of age is a phase when children start becoming inquisitive and conscious of their surroundings. Books telling children about a variety of things are not available to them during this period. On the other hand, in English, there is an abundance of books containing information about everything ranging from fishes, utensils and trains to architecture simplified, sounds surrounding us and many more things. And this is explained with a scientific approach and in an interesting manner. Information books being written for slightly older children are largely based on the literature available in English. However, such information is presented in Hindi in a boring and pedantic style, relying heavily on bizarre technical terms. The end result is an information book written in Devanagari script with the help of Hindi words. In the process it misses out on natural Hindi idiom and soul. Consequently, a child who is an avid reader, also does not like to read such books.

No work of fiction can strike a chord among readers until a rapport, a point of identification is established between the characters, their surroundings and reader. This applies both to adults and to children. It is unfortunate that in the past ten years some of the best produced children's literature has had fiction carrying an affluent metropolitan background. This is further reinforced by accompanying illustrations. These urban characters and urban backdrop are alien to children from small towns and villages.

Rapid and mindless urbanization has increased the cultural gap between the urban and the rural areas. Due to this, rural society and surroundings are becoming increasingly unknown to younger urban society. Let me give an example endorsing this fact. My friend's five-year-old son on hearing, "In a village there lives a 'kisan' (farmer), retorted, "stupid! Kisan is a jam and a

sausage, how can it 'live' in a village!". To bridge this alienation gap it is necessary that urban children be familiar with and sensitive towards rural society and its problems. Through the right kind of literature this gap can be lessened to a large extent.

India is going through a period of industrial and scientific 'development' based on modern concepts of science and technology which have evolved in the western context. Given our zeal to emulate the 'developed' West and given the limitations of our present education system, our knowledge of and faith in the glorious past and existent Indian systems has blurred over the generations. In this situation fiction and non-fiction for children should be such that it puts forth positive and negative aspects of the past and present of India in an interesting and balanced way. Children's magazines in this respect can and should play a crucial role because they are more easily available in comparison to books. Magazines like *Chakmak* and *Tamasha* are noteworthy, though they are exceptions.

So much for the writing part. Publishers are no less responsible for the quality and quantity of children's literature. Unfortunately very few publishers come up with reasonably priced, good and attractive productions.

Illustrations inside the books and on the cover are often dull, ridiculous and unimaginative. Unless the cover attracts children they will not be eager to read a book and a book needs to be in four colours to be attractive. Careful selection of point size and typeface according to children's age is essential but in our country, extreme insensitivity prevails regarding this. We often come across good books printed in very small point size with dull illustrations. It is sad that big Hindi publishers who possess modern means of printing and have a large network of distribution are not making significant efforts in this direction. These publishers argue that children's literature in Hindi does not sell and better printing and quality paper only increase the cost of books.

This vicious circle of writing, printing and selling has to be broken. However, doling out money to government organizations like the Publication Division is not enough. The government should also ensure good printing and sale of books at low costs. But the reality is that books purchased in bulk by education departments usually remain confined to government godowns. In this context, National Book Trust's recent move to hold exhibitions of books in small colonies is praiseworthy.

Apart from the purchase and sale of books, libraries and institutions can be of great help in making books accessible. However, to run these institutions, availability of government funds is not enough. Parents and the rest of the society can and should play an important role in taking a child to the wonderful world of books. Existence of good books alone is not of much help if people around a child do not encourage her to read.

The prevalent state of children's literature is a part of the general indifference and insensitivity towards children in our society. The general belief is that films or Doordarshan programmes meant to entertain adults, are appropriate and sufficient for children as well. Authors, publishers, government machinery and parents need to be more perceptive and alert towards children's needs and sensibility so that good books are written, printed attractively and are made available at low cost. This would help children in developing their reading habits and pondering over what they read.

Mukul Priyadarshini is a Research Associate in the Department of Linguistics, University of Delhi. She has been writing for children and has compiled a Hindi-Hindi dictionary for children.

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Let us be citizens of the commonwealth or empire of youth. This is the only empire to which we can own allegiance, for that is the forerunner of the future federation of the world.

—Jawaharlal Nehru

Celebrating A Half Century

Paro Anand

A UNIQUE ODYSSEY: THE STORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

By Geeta Dharmarajan. Illustrated by Atanu Roy

The Rajiv Gandhi Foundation & Katha, 1995, pp. 112, Rs. 120.00

A most important book with important themes. World Peace, Disarmament, World Hunger, Education, Environment, Gender Rights, Human Rights, Children's Rights.

All this in one book? Yes! An all-important, all-encompassing book. Just like the subject it deals with—the United Nations. A book about the United Nations for children? Yes! And that's what makes it all the more significant and important, and, of course, unique, as the title rightly suggests. There must be hundreds, if not thousands of books for adults, discussing, in boring detail, all the various facets of the UN. But here, at last, is a book which takes a good, hard, honest look at a subject which should be the concern of every one of us.

It explains every facet of the organisation to children. Straight, direct, to the point. Yet, not a text-book. Far from it. Told through the experience of young Bharat, who is struggling to write up his debate on the topic of the UN on the eve of the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary.

While working on his computer, Bharat suddenly finds that the words seem to be dancing and floating on the screen. Thinking it is a virus, Bharat panics, but, before he can do anything about it, the words "Stop! Await Yukta" mysteriously appear. This is followed by "Tortoises in Trouble, Help!" Then the instruction to press enter on the keyboard if you want to help, appear. Of course Bharat does and thus zaps us into a giddy adventure around the globe, with a globe-like creature called Yukta who is a trouble-shooter for the UN. Together, they travel on journeys to troubled lands.

Through them we experience, first hand, the troubled tortoises of the Galapagos, the black city of Soweto in South Africa, howling typhoons of Bangladesh etc. More exciting and, of course, more real than any adventure story that Enid Blyton ever wrote. And it isn't just story upon story either. The author has decided not to sugar the pill at all and quite rightly too. The subject is a serious one and is given the seriousness it deserves. As well as truthfulness and frankness. The failures of the United Nations are discussed as fully as its successes. World Peace has been a long and not yet wholly successful battle. The fact that apartheid took a grossly long time to be overcome, in spite of every effort in the way of sanctions being imposed against the South African regime. We learn about the difficulties faced by an organisation which sets about trying to achieve so much on a global level. We also understand that there are no miracles. That the hard work must continue in spite of adverse conditions and seemingly impossible odds. An important message for any child to learn, no doubt!

And then, of course, there are the exhilarating success stories. "The world's last case of small-pox was found in Somalia on October 26th 1977. On 8th May 1980, at the thirty-third World Health Assembly, the global conquest of the disease was announced. But the Rumour Register was kept open till December 1986. (when any reported case of smallpox was heard of, a doctor was dispatched to ensure that it was not smallpox.) A great feather in the UN cap, no doubt.

Fact packed, fast paced, yet very easy to read, with the help of easy reference tables and fact sheets. Photographs too, lend authenticity and immediacy of interest to the text. This is a book which will be a boon to teachers and parents, and, of course, all children who need to write projects and debates on subject of world importance. A book which should be found on every library shelf in schools as well as in the home of thinking individuals below 16 years.

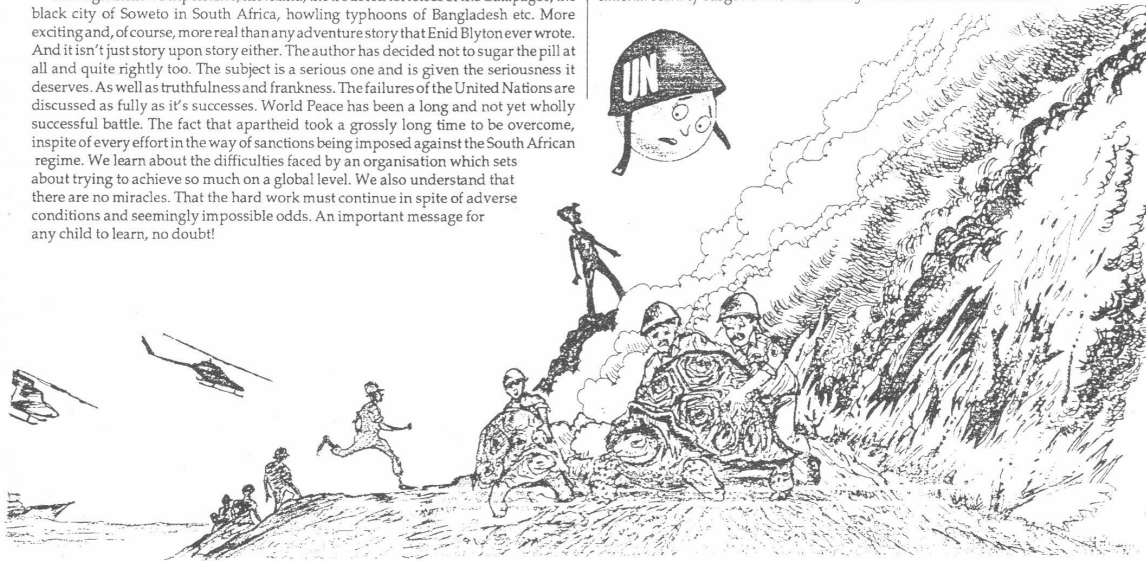
A poem by the author sums up the thoughts and ideals of the UN charter very beautifully, and I quote:

*Home to creatures big and small
To the wind and waterfall
To the trees and all things green
To the worm that works unseen
To elephants that roam the wild
To cows and draft animals mild
To men and women; children, too
Our Earth's a gift in green and blue,
So, let's enjoy this planet rare
Let's remember to care and share.*

A message to each one of us, stressing on the fact that each of us needs to do his or her own bit to save the planet and the universe. That no task should appear too vast or too remote, or too insignificant, for that matter. That each of us, in our own tiny way is an important cog in the entire wheel of time and space that keeps the world turning.

Well done Gita Dharmarajan for a wonderful book and Atanu Roy who has so painstakingly combined fact and fun with his most dexterous pen.

Paro Anand has been writing stories and plays for the last 13 years and has served on the editorial board of Target. She is also actively involved in Children's theatre.



Footsteps Into The Future

Indira Menon

LANDSCAPES: CHILDREN'S VOICES & LANDSCAPES: CHILDREN'S VOICES—
AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE
Edited by Gita Wolf
Tara Publishing, 1995, pp. 64 and pp. 32, price not stated.

Geeta, my dhobi's daughter, who was the first victim of my each-one-teach-one drive, had an allergy to the lesson on Thomas Edison in her *Bal Bharati* book. I wondered why and later realised that none of Edison's inventions had any relevance to her life in a jhuggi. The mindless choice of lessons in school text-books must seem frustrating to serious

and committed teachers. *Landscapes* edited by Gita Wolf is an innovative attempt at linking up a child's environment to the school curriculum. In this marvellous book we hear the voices of children from different "landscapes" telling us about their life styles and culture. With their keen eye, acute sense of observation and disarming frankness, children can, given a chance, articulate and convey a wealth of information about their habitat. It just goes to show that education need not be a one-way process where the teacher gives and the student receives.

The idea of compiling a book of "children's voices" emerged from a programme organised by the Madras Craft Foundation where a thousand children participated. The theme of the programme was "the celebration of nature's landscapes and human interaction with it". The editor has used the ancient Tamil Sangam classification of the geographical regions as the framework. The idea is exciting as it opens up new vistas for designing books on social studies.

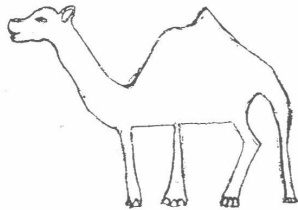
The Sangam poetical works are redolent of the sights and smells of different geographical regions as nature in all its splendour acts as a magnificent backdrop to those earthy poems of love and war. The same ambience permeates the tales told by the children in this book and at times, can almost hear echoes of the ancient poems. The five landscapes used by the Sangam poets, known as *thinai*s, comprised the mountains, pastoral lands, paddy lands, seaside and desert. The children give vivid descriptions, with illustrations, of the customs, folklore, and myths of each region.

Time has stood still for some. "There are still some people who live in the old way", says the mountain child. "At night they draw a circle around themselves, light a fire and chant some magic verses. No animal would harm them within that circle." The fisherfolk still go out to sea in the sturdy catamarans as did their forefathers. Yet, the disturbing trends of contemporary life have begun to intrude upon their consciousness. "Trawlers catch a lot of fish, but they often cut our nets. Some of the drivers are nice and offer us money... but some don't." The mountain child (whose knowledge of plants and animals would put a naturalist to shame) is aware of "the greedy people who cut down sandalwood trees" and adds, "Some nights we hear them sawing".

Living so close to nature, the children have learnt the art of survival and their lives are in complete harmony with their environment. "If we cut ourselves we crush the leaves of a certain plant and smear it on the cut. When we fall ill our parents mostly cure us with herbs. The pill doctors don't come to our village." The only discordant note is struck by the urban child who describes large cities like Madras, with their acute water shortage, as deserts. That deserts are the result of human neglect comes across clearly, as the child says, "It is things that humans do which are turning cities into deserts—cutting trees, for instance".

The original essays, written in the regional languages have been translated into simple English. The delightful illustrations by the children, a few photographs, colourful maps, puzzles and games add fun and zest to the learning process. Alongside the main text are boxes with tips on conservation, irrigation and crafts and notes on ancient civilisations and festivals given by the editor. There is a beautifully designed educator's guide that goes with the book with instructions on how to further explore, through activities, the main theme of the book, which is, "to develop respect for different ways of life and to reflect seriously on environmental issues".

Indira Menon, a former lecturer in the Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi, is a writer and critic.



Adapting Children's Literature to the Small Screen

Feisal Alkazi

Before the year is out, a TV serial entitled 'Ek Tha Rusty' based on short stories by Ruskin Bond, should be on the small screen for DD I. I was lucky enough to have the pleasure of directing the first four episodes of this serial. A pleasure because Ruskin's writing is so tender and poetic, his observation of childhood and 'What happened on the way to growing up' is so sensitive, and also because working with him has been a sheer delight.

There were many challenges we faced on the way to translating this very 'literary' work to the screen. For instance, the very first two episodes were based on Ruskin's famous story 'The Room of Many Colours', and for those of you familiar with it, the story is full of literary allusions to *Alice in Wonderland*, and the entire story is narrated from the viewpoint of an adult thinking back on his childhood. The first literary device unfortunately, we had to lose—as the allusions to *Alice* just didn't work in Hindi! (Try putting the famous line of the March Hare's 'I'm late, I'm late for dinner' into Hindi and you will know what I mean!) The second demanded a style in which past and present could 'happen' simultaneously. Of course the easiest solution would have been to have had a soft focus dissolve from Ruskin today, to the fine child actor Zaru! Ahuja who plays Rusty as a child. But I felt that by using such an often seen device, we would be losing some of the magic of Ruskin's writing.

Our solution has been to have the adult Rusty (Ruskin himself) walk down a road, and observe (in the present tense) himself as a child! Voice-overs have been sparingly used in this and the other episodes, to allow many of the very wry and adult views of Ruskin to colour our perceptions of him as a child.

Yet another formidable challenge was that of place and character. Ruskin for us today is synonymous with the hills—the charmed Anglo-Indian world of Mussoorie and Dehradun. How does one recreate this serene, green past in the concrete jungle of today's Mussoorie? After considerable location scouting, we found the answer—a beautiful house belonging to the Skinner family in Barlowganj, a tiny township perched on the hill just below Mussoorie. Many of the other exteriors and interiors that would capture hillstation India 1939–42 were to be found in that huge, rambling, exquisite fossil—the Savoy Hotel! And for the moody, brooding graveyard that had to be a character by itself in 'The Funeral' (Episode 3 of the serial), the small graveyard in Landour was just the answer.

When we arrived for the first day's shooting, heavy rain and rolling mist delayed the schedule tremendously, but I decided to shoot in any case, and with cameraman Devlin Bose's quick work, we have captured the very magic of a Mussoorie monsoon in Episodes 1 & 2. The images are green, moist and dripping—as 'wet' as Ruskin's words.

Ruskin's characters are refreshing because they are not stereotyped images of Anglo-India, but real living human beings full of contradictions. The grandmother of his 'Adventures of Rusty' series of stories (Episode 4) is not only all rosy cheeks, cooking and good humour, but also a lonely woman battling to make ends meet, with a quirky almost Buddhist philosophy of life, and a fierce love for the orphaned Rusty, and an instinctive dislike for his Uncle Ken (Uncle Vikie in the serial). Outstanding Bombay actress and director Pearl Padamsee was our first choice, and she just loved the part.

When she arrived for the shooting in Mussoorie, I played her one of the songs I had selected from the 30's that she listens to on the radio. 'Oh, but I know the words, Feisal', she cried out, and there and then, she sang the song. I knew we just had to include it somehow, and I made this into the end of her long scene with Rusty in 'The Photograph', we were all ready to shoot, when Ruskin himself dropped in on the set. I was a bit nervous, the addition of the song was an artistic license I had taken with the episode—how to explain this to Ruskin? I whipped out a stool and placed it off camera for him, and whispered, "Ruskin, please sit here." He watched the shot in quiet concentration.

The shot was a beauty—nostalgic, charming, an old woman recapturing something of her lost youth, the discovery of an old photograph releasing a flood of memories... but how did Ruskin react? 'How did you know that was my grandmother's favourite song, Feisal?' That was all he said, but my day was made!

The Rani of 'The Room of Many Colours' was another character, rich and strange. She brought to mind memories of the unmarried spinster—Miss Havesham from Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. And I had shared this perception of mine with Ruskin when we met to work on the script. Ruskin agreed. The search was on, for a woman—aristocratic, and haughty, childlike and naughty, and sad and mad and yes... Zohra Sehgal fitted the bill exactly. To introduce her I had planned with Devlin that we would copy the opening tracking shot that introduces Miss Havesham from David Lean's *Great Expectations* and that is another moment of sheer magic in the serial. Working with this other fine artist who had probed every inch of her part was an artistic

experience the highest order. Trapped and alone in an ivory tower, the aged princess yearns for the love of the gardener. Her only friend and accomplice is the lonely, motherless child Rusty....

Another fabulous performance is that of Raj Zutshi as Ruskin's father. Dashing and handsome, emotional and insecure were the qualities I was searching for. I had only seen Raj many years earlier in 'Yugaantar' and he seemed to fit the part. Four or five days before the shooting, a sudden panic attack hit me. How will father and son communicate on screen and play such emotionally intimate scenes together, if they only meet at the shooting? Raj called up the same day from Bombay, a bolt from the blue! He would be in Delhi, the next day. Could he meet his son 'Zaru'?... And the chemistry of the two ignited the screen with emotion.

Doing a serial is, at its best, a creative enriching process in which a team of professionals come together to create a memorable experience for a wide audience. For me, directing the first four episodes of 'Ek tha Rusty' has been just that. With this valuable experience behind me I moved on to working with Subhadra Sengupta on her novel *The Mystery of the House of Pigeons* adapting it into a six part musical TV serial.

Subhadra's world is a different world to Ruskin's. Her stories are peopled by children set against a back-drop of the onrush of history. Subhadra unlike Ruskin, chose to actively work with me on the script and the experience has been a learning one. Subhadra has recognised the very different demands that TV or cinema have to a novel. And therefore we have written in new scenes and developed many of the characters even further. Subhadra's work is rich in historical detail deftly woven in and she has a fine sense of what will captivate the child's mind. To bring this material to the screen, I have called on many of my talented colleagues from 'Ek tha Rusty', and to this have added several other formidable talents, most notably the composer/writer Madhulika Saran. For 'Pigeons' we are creating a musical score that will bring to the child the richness of life in Delhi in the 1860's, when it was a bustling metropolis with cultural life at an all time high.

The world of Subhadra's novel is as different as Ruskin's is, as chalk is from cheese. The challenge lies in bringing it to throbbing life on the screen.

Faisal Alkazi has Master's Training in social work. He works in the areas of education and media.

The World of Premchand

Vijaya Ghose

PREMCHAND: SELECTED STORIES I & II

Translated and adapted by Anupa Lal

Ratna Sagar, 1995, pp. 80 each, Rs. 28.90 each

I spent my school and college years in Patna and Allahabad and though Hindi was neither my mother tongue nor the preferred language of reading or expression, the one exception I made was Premchand's stories. For one, his language was extremely simple and lucid. For another, the stories he wrote did not seem fanciful or far-fetched but were a faithful espousal of most of what I was familiar with. Though many of his stories dealt with the hardships and travails of poverty-stricken people like Rehman in "The Price of Freedom" he made me empathise with the compassionate farmer. When Rehman says with perfect resignation that "Starvation was a grim reality that every poor farmer lived with", it didn't seem unreal. Ever matter-of-fact, stark statements like these brought home to me the condition of the under-privileged and the deprived.

The superb introduction to these two volumes by Anupa Lal immediately puts Premchand in perspective. The times were different. It was the British Raj and every self-respecting Indian had only one thing in mind—freedom from a yoke that was oppressive and unjust.

Premchand who was born Dhanpat Rai Srivastava later chose the pen name Premchand. His life, in fact reads like one of his stories and indeed it was the canvas that he drew upon. Son of a clerk, Premchand lost his mother when he was only eight years old and typically he was neglected by his step mother. When Premchand was only 15, his father got him married to a girl with whom he had nothing in common and who left him soon after. His father died when he was in class nine, leaving the adolescent Premchand to fend for a wife, stepmother and her two children.

With these added responsibilities, it was goodbye to his dreams of getting a Master's degree and becoming a lawyer. He had to get down to the job of earning for his family and took up a job as a teacher and for the next 22 years he remained a teacher.

It was his second wife, Shivani Devi who was a pillar of strength to him, supporting him solidly when he wanted to quit the teaching profession to follow Gandhiji's call to join the freedom movement. His writings sustained him through his days of penury. He was best when he was writing about the villages of UP and the poor peasant eking out a threadbare living.

The short stories in this collection highlight Premchand's concern not just about the poor peasant but also the plight of women who were as oppressed as the farmers. He writes with a rare understanding of the woman's mind, her generosity, her cupidity, her possessiveness, her loyalty and sacrifice.

Premchand's women are as varied as they are multi-faceted. Women like Ram Piyari of "The Mistress of the Household" are shown as responsible, hard working, totally self-sacrificing. What is also remarkable about this story is the confidence the father-in-law places in his newly widowed daughter-in-law, a confidence that she never betrays. She rises above her plight to be the leader of the household, the hub of the family. Kaki, the hungry old woman who has given her property and wealth to her nephew in return for food and shelter but is totally neglected and nearly starved to death is poignant not only for her helplessness and her obsession with food but also for the sudden realisation of his nephew's wife that she had been cruel to this old woman. And Kaki, we feel, is not hungry any more.

And then there's Anandi who marries into a less wealthy family than hers. Used to luxurious living, she uses up the week's supply of ghee in making one dish! The

sequence of events that follow is so finely delineated that we forget that it is fiction. Anandi's brother-in-law's remarks on her extravagance, her furious reaction, her husband's anger with his younger brother, the brother's anguish and finally Anandi's remorse at the course of events which she felt she had engineered. The reconciliation is touching. The story shows Anandi as a soft-hearted and sensitive person whose better education and culture helped her to understand her rustic-in-laws. She could get no better compliment than the one given by her father-in-law: "This is the greatness of girls from good families. They know how to mend matters and establish harmony."

Equally perceptive is Premchand's understanding of mute animals. Who can forget the story of the bullocks Moti and Hira in "A Tale of Two Bullocks"? It is as if they were human beings and proud ones at that. The camaraderie between the two bullocks, their loyalty to each other where neither will abandon the other even to save its life, their fellow feeling for other creatures...

And Mir Dilwar Ali's proud horse who is beaten black and blue but would not break his rule of not working on Sundays, earning him the respect of Munshiji who had borrowed him for his son's wedding. Grudgingly but with admiration, Munshiji tells the horse, "Thank your good fortune you do not belong to me. I would have broken every bone in your body by now! What a strange creature you are! Who would have thought an animal would guard its rights so zealously? Come, you stubborn fellow, let me return you to your master".

How can we dismiss these animals as dumb creatures?

However, the most outstanding impression left with the reader is a sense of such perfect communal harmony that it seems an alien and dream world compared to today's riots and feelings of alienation of what we euphemistically term 'minority' communities. A writer's work is made up many things—his personality, influences, environment. If Premchand's is a true reflection of his times, it is indeed a sad commentary on the state of things that exist today.

There is no suspicion on the part of either communities. In fact, in "The Price of Freedom", Lala Daudayal is portrayed as an honest moneylender (if such a thing is possible), who would take people to court only if they failed to pay up their dues. His 'testing' of Rehman is incredible. He lends him money whenever he wants warning him always of the accumulating interest but finally writes off the entire debt and gives him two calves as a gift. And what of the impecunious Rehman? He whose only lot has been starvation will not sell his beloved cow to the Muslim butchers but foregoes a full precious five rupees to sell it to Daudayal. He says, "Huzoor, being a Hindu, you will surely take care of this cow. All the others were butchers. I did not want to sell it to them even if they offered fifty rupees..."

And in "The Voice of Conscience" we have Jumman and Algu Chaudhury who though very good friends would not compromise when it came to passing a verdict against each other. Yet they remained good friends!

"Idgah" is the story of a poor Muslim boy who goes off to a mela with his friends with just three pice in his pocket. He spends it all on buying a pair of tongs for his grandmother whose hands were blistered with picking hot roti off the flame with her fingers! It is the subtle understanding of a child's mind that leaves one amazed at Premchand's incisive intuition.

And there are other well-known stories—"The Chess Players", "The Feast", "The Lottery", "Truth's Reward", all of which are memorable. Simple story lines a la Sarat Chandra, these short stories will linger long in the mind and make us nostalgic for an era of values that seems to have simply vanished without a trace from our world.

The publishers must be congratulated on the selection of the translator. It is difficult to get the spirit of a story but Anupa Lal has done it admirably.

It is to be hoped that all parents would find the time to buy these two slim volumes and see that the children read them. There is no better way of inculcating true values.

Vijaya Ghose has worked with Children's Book Division, Living Media. She is now Consultant Editor for the Limca Book of Records.

Its a Dog's Life

Madhav Raghavan

DOG DETECTIVE RANJHA AND TOP DOG RANJHA

By Partap Sharma

Rupa, 1995, pp. 132 & 172, Rs. 60.00 & Rs. 90.00

Ranjha, the detective dog who was invented by Partap Sharma in 1985 became a big hit. His book *Dog Detective Ranjha* about a German Shepherd who turns detective and solves mysteries in the neighbourhood, became a public favourite. And what's more, it was written from the perspective of a dog which added a whole new look to the story. It starts with a young man who comes to this dog shop and asks the owner for a German shepherd. Ranjha and his sister are brought and the man selects Ranjha. Ranjha calls him Woof—"Woof is not his real name, of course, but that is what I called my master when I first saw him."—and goes on to talk about his training and the commands he is taught. He makes friends with a dog called Tughlak from whom he learns about the ways of humans.

Ranjha's first case is about a strange killer who stones dogs to death. Ranjha describes how he followed the scent of the man and finally caught him. He gets recognised in public and people start coming to 'Woof' to ask for help.

Then comes his first visit to a vet. He describes all the dogs he meets there and their owners. He also tells us about how the vet pokes the injection into the dog and how he felt. Soon after this, Ranjha is given a strange case about a champion show labrador who gets lost. The following trail that ensues is fascinatingly told. When at last he solves this case he becomes a widely known dog. He gets a flurry of cases which include "The case of the Caddie's Ring", The case of the Washerman's Sheets, The Case of The Dancing Ghost and many more.

In the end Ranjha mentions Tughlak again. Tughlak calls pups "boy", young bitches "biddo" and adult dogs "Old toot", Ranjha is "boy" to Tughlak till one day he calls him "old toot". Ranjha is so happy he can almost sing and dance.

This book was so successful Partap Sharma has decided to write another one called *Top Dog Ranjha*. The first chapter is about how to catch a crook and all about his commands and signs. When he does something right he gets a treat like a biscuit or a cone.

Woof's servant comes and tells him about this rich woman who wants her ill-behaved dogs to be trained. Danny (the dog) would never listen to his mistress and did what he liked. Woof agrees very reluctantly to take on his training. But obviously the rich woman is more interested in her looks and comes wearing high heels. She is worried that Danny would splash mud all over her. But Woof insists on her holding Danny. With a sigh she comes towards the dog. With that, Danny's training starts. After a while, she gets fed up and decides to give up.

Next comes the case of a man whose wife is murdered. The man worships a godman called Swami Raghav and is torn between the fact that he is the Swami's follower and that his wife was killed him. His wife had laughed at the Swami who declares she is under an evil spell and kills her. This is a baffling case which Ranjha manages to solve with a lot of difficulty. The book has other cases like The Case of The Over Eager Servant and The Case of The Concealed Message.

Woof has to go on business and leaves Ranjha with Tamhanes—the people from whom he had bought him. Ranjha is full of grief and tries to withstand it by trying to find Tamhane's daughter who is kidnapped.

The book ends with the return of Woof and Ranjha's joy. He is cuddled by the whole family and they settle down to a life of happiness.

Very enthralling books—they are given good reviews at the back. I thoroughly enjoyed reading them and hope to find others like these in the future.

Madhav Raghavan is a eleven-year-old student.



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Deepa Agarwal

Illustration by Atanu Roy

The moment they saw him, Swati and Amar had to ask, "Who's he, Ma?" He had a chunky wrestler's body. A round red face to match. And a smile that split his face in two, made his eyes vanish inside his cheeks.

"Jhusiyal Singh," Ma said. "He's come to work for us. He's going to do all the running around, all the odd jobs."

Amar's large eyes turned even rounder. He muttered under his breath, "Swati, isn't he just like a bear?"

Swati frowned. "Don't be rude," she hissed. But as she glanced surreptitiously at him, she couldn't help thinking, Amar's right. And she suppressed a giggle. Then she jumped—Jhusiyal Singh's laugh exploded so loud in her ear.

He'd overheard Amar! "Ye, Bhaiya," he said, thumping his chest. It was an awesome sound, like a huge drum being beaten. "But I'm not just 'like a bear'. I'm Mr. Great-grandfather Bear himself!"

Swati and Amar really cracked up then. He proved it the very next minute by hoisting up one of their heavy school trunks as comfortably as if it were a cardboard carton full of feathers.

It was winter and they'd just got home from boarding school for the long vacation, thirteen year old Swati, tall and leggy with thoughtful, dreamy eyes and curly topped Amar, a restless, inquisitive eleven.

"It's great to be home, isn't it?" Swati asked. She closed her eyes to concentrate on the sound of the pines. It was as soothing as the liquid murmur of a distant stream. Just in front of her, brilliant red poinsettias lifted their heads against the deep blue sky. Inside, Ma was laying out a special tea, she knew. Yes, it was great to be home, to be fussed over and to be free of the strict school routine.

But Amar was watching Jhusiyal Singh. He was bringing in the rest of their stuff. Lifting it up with comic, pantomime gestures and groans of exaggerated effort which set them off on a fresh bout of giggles.

"He's a real character! Isn't he?" Swati breathed.

"I think we're going to have a lot of fun together," Amar said, his eyes sparkling. "Come on," Swati protested. "He's a great big grown up man."

"So what?" replied Amar. "That doesn't mean he can't be good company."

Swati looked again at Jhusiyal Singh, who had set off at a mincing run and smiled. He did seem to be someone full of fun.

Since their home was in the midst of a pine forest, miles from anywhere, they were always a bit hard up for company in the holidays. There were no neighbours so there was no chance to make friends.

It was great to be home, to be with their parents. But Amar, sociable and gregarious missed the noise and laughter only a gang of friends could provide. Swati was generally quite content to laze around and read. The long treks into the forest nearby or down to the river bed in the valley filled in time, too. Still, there were moments when she did feel a bit marooned. And she didn't like being forced to entertain Amar when she would rather read. So, the thought of having someone as jolly as Jhusiyal Singh around seemed a wonderful start to the holidays.

They began with one of those absolutely perfect winter days, with the brightest blue sky overhead and the cleanest, most golden sunshine toasting them gently. As soon as breakfast was over, Swati and Amar ran out to play cricket on the grassy patch behind the house. Swati had just swung out at the ball, when Jhusiyal Singh passed. He was carrying two canteens of water on a pole balanced over his shoulder. There wasn't any piped water in the forest. It had to be fetched from the nearest spring. This was one of the chores he performed.

As the ball curved through the air, Jhusiyal Singh held out a hand, almost playfully. To their utter surprise, it just flew into his fist.

"Wow!" Amar gasped. He looked awestruck. "Jhusiyal Singh, you'll have to come and play. You'll just have to!"

Jhusiyal Singh grinned and nodded vigorously in reply. "Just coming," he said. "In a minute."

And before they knew it, he was back. Though he said he'd never played cricket before, he took to it like a fish to water. Diving, swooping, charging all over the field, cracking ferociously at the ball with the bat—he added a new dimension to a game of cricket being played by just three people!

"What a guy!" Amar exclaimed, as they went in for lunch. "He's too much." His face glowed as if he'd made a marvellous discovery.

After that Jhusiyal Singh became a regular playmate. He played cricket, *gullidanda*, hide and seek and any other game they could think of. God knows how he managed it—there was plenty for him to do. Not only water to be fetched from the spring but groceries from the town nearby and numerous little jobs around the house. But Jhusiyal, as they called him now, managed to finish all his work and still find time for a game. Sometimes Swati felt that he was just a great big grown up child—he was so eager to join in all their games.

Soon Amar began to tag after him wherever he went. On his trips to the spring, to the market, even to the water mill by the river, where wheat was ground into flour.

"Jhusiya's little lamb," Swati teased him. She was really surprised when Amar didn't retaliate with a rude comment—he couldn't stand being teased at all.

"Thank God," Ma said the next day, as they sat on the verandah gazing at Amar and Jhusiya's retreating backs. They were happily trotting off to the spring to fetch water together. "Amar isn't complaining of boredom this time."

"I know," Swati said promptly. "He really used to get on my nerves at times." She paused, then said, "You really should thank Jhusiya. He's quite a find, isn't he? We've never had anyone like him before."

"No, never," Ma agreed.

When they returned half an hour later, Amar was flushed and breathless. He burst out excitedly at once, "Did you know," he said, his voice husky. "Jhusiya once killed a man-eating leopard with an axe. Just with an axe, nothing else."

"A leopard with an axe?" Ma asked. "Well, I'm not surprised. The men from his village are known for such feats."

"Wow!" Swati exclaimed. "But you're right, Ma. He looks as if he could tackle a leopard."

Actually, by now Swati and Amar had begun to think that Jhusiya was some kind of a superman, able to achieve anything.

"You know what he said," Amar went on breathlessly. "He'd gone to the forest to chop wood. All of a sudden the leopard darted out of a bush, snarling. 'It was just about to charge at me, when I struck out with my axe', he said. 'There was no time to be afraid.' Can you beat

that?"

Swati made Jhusiya repeat that story when they sat around the fire that evening. That had become part of their routine too—the evening story sessions. The winter days were golden, but the evenings were cold—bone chilling, teeth chattering cold. Not only cold but long. The dark came early, shutting them in with a dense black wall that seemed to stretch on forever, at times.

And that's when Jhusiya's stories really helped. They were full of thrills, unbelievable at times but always gripping and entertaining. Best was he seemed to have an unlimited fund of them. And the way he told them was half the fun—rolling his eyes, bringing his voice to a whisper or letting it boom out suddenly.

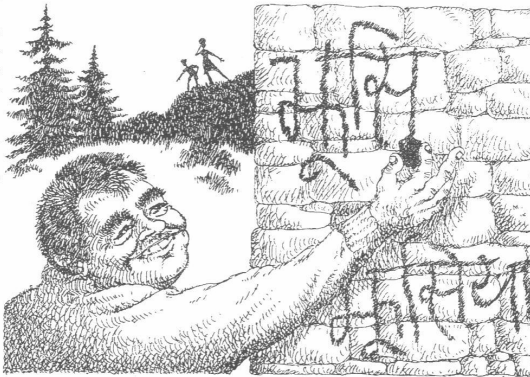
"Shall I tell you about the old woman who married her daughter to a tiger?" he'd ask.

"A tiger!" Amar would laugh, but he'd be intrigued and curious. And even Swati, who considered herself too grown up for such kiddish stuff, would feel a spark of interest flare up in spite of herself. This particular story was a folk tale, a humorous one which soon had them in splits. But for sheer spine chilling shiveriness there was nothing to beat his ghost stories and of course, his accounts of his encounters with wild animals. "Jhusiya, you're better than a story book," Amar would say.

"No, bhaiya," he'd reply. "I'm a stupid fellow, I've never been to school, I can't read books like you all."

"You know more than anyone of us," Amar would insist. "If I could trick a bear like you did! Wow! Wouldn't I be the talk of the whole school?"

The holidays sped on merrily. Then one day Swati got a great idea.



"Ma," she said. "I've noticed that the chowkidar's kids don't go to school."
 "Well, there isn't any closeby," Ma said. "And they're too young to walk all the way to town." She paused and stared hard at Swati. "Were you—"

"Yes!" Swati burst in excitedly. "Why don't I teach them? Remember how I played school-school with these kids when I was younger? But I'll be serious this time."
 "I think it's a wonderful idea," Ma said. "We'll go to town tomorrow and get all the stuff you need—blackboard, slates, chalk—whatever."

The school turned out to be a huge success and soon the trickle of kids from the village nearby became a downpour. Swati got so involved that she barely noticed Jhusiya walking past, swinging his canisters. (Her classes were held out in the open). So she didn't realise how often he stopped to watch and listen.

So when he said, one evening, "Didi, can I join your school?" she was taken by surprise.

Amar burst out laughing. "Join the school! Come on, Jhusiya. You're too big. Grown ups don't go to school."

Jhusiya's face shrank. "Shut up, Amar," Swati said quickly. She didn't like the way he had laughed. It seemed to belittle Jhusiya. "I'll teach you, but in the evening. Separately." Somehow she couldn't see his bulky frame looming up among those little kids.

Jhusiya brightened at once. "That's right, Didi," he said. "Evening will be the best time. I'm busy with my work in the morning."

Swati prepared an exercise book for Jhusiya. Full of wonderful intentions, she wrote his name in neat letters on top—Jhusiyal Singh. She felt great doing it. He'd made their holidays so enjoyable. She could do something for him now.

She felt a little silly in the beginning, making him parrot the alphabets after her, like the little kids. And writing them in big letters across the page for him to copy.

But Jhusiya attacked this matter of learning to read and write with the same zest that he brought to every task he performed. "Soon I'll be able to sign my name," he said enthusiastically, bending over the exercise book. Swati wanted to smile, the pencil looked like a match stick, clutched in his huge paw.

"Yes, Jhusiya," she said. "And read too." But when she looked at the squiggles he'd produced, she frowned. "Only—" she said gently, she didn't want to hurt his feelings, "You'll have to try a little harder."

"I am, Didi, I am," he looked up, perplexed. "I don't know why it doesn't come out all right." And his huge fist moved across the page—slowly, laboriously.

But as the days went by, Jhusiya didn't improve. No matter how hard he tried and no matter how earnestly Swati tried to teach him. It was as though the letters of the alphabet were a cipher he couldn't break. A task more formidable than dealing with a ferocious leopard. It was the same with his reading. Whatever he picked up the first day, seemed to vanish the very next. Then the day came when Swati lost patience. "Why can't you learn, Jhusiya?" she cried out frustrated. "Why can't you remember?" She just couldn't understand why he couldn't pick up something even the smallest child managed to, with all the amazing abilities he possessed.

"Because I'm stupid," he said calmly. "But you're going to make me clever. Aren't you?"

Swati just didn't know what to say then. His faith was so touching, yet such a burden. Because by now she was convinced that it was impossible to teach Jhusiya. But he had to learn to sign his name at least. She couldn't abandon him before she had accomplished that.

So when Amar muttered later, "You might as well give up. I don't think he's ever going to learn anything," she felt furious.

"No," she replied stubbornly. "He will—wait and see. He'll learn to sign his name." He has to, she thought. Amar resents the story sessions being cut short. That's why he's saying all this. She had to cling to this belief, because she was beginning to feel that she'd failed as a teacher. And what was worse, Jhusiya's superhero image was slipping away from her. That was even more unnerving.

The next evening, she picked up his exercise book again. It'll be better today, she promised herself. We'll make progress. But as she flipped through the smudged, dog-eared pages, full of those unreadable scrawls, she got a shock. They'd reached the last page—and Jhusiya showed no signs of improvement.

Something hit her hard then. "Oh give it up, Jhusiya!" she cried out in despair. "It's no use."

His face sagged. "Really, Didi," he asked softly. "Will I never learn to read? Not even to sign my name?" His expression held so much hope still, that Swati had to look away.

Perhaps it was her lack of success that made her cry out like that. Or did she really believe that Jhusiya couldn't do it? Whatever it was, it still had her in its grip. Because she said brusquely, "Haven't I been trying to teach you all these days? Have you managed to learn anything, anything at all?"

Jhusiya's tall frame seemed to shivel. He didn't say a word. He just got up and went away. Swati stood staring after him, she wanted to say something to make him feel better. But the words wouldn't come out. Finally, she just flung down the copy book and stomped off to gaze out of the window, even though there was nothing to look at but the foggy dark. Not even the slightest glimmer of light. Even the stars were blotted out by the clouds.

The next evening Jhusiya stayed away. He did come in, but just to throw a couple of logs onto the fire. He didn't joke and clown as he used to, just did his work with mechanical efficiency. It was as though he felt that he was not really a fit companion for them any more.

Worse, Amar stopped tagging after him. He had managed to make up a cricket team from among the village boys. Swati was busy with her school. It seemed that they did not need Jhusiya any longer.

But in the evening, when they sat by the fire they felt something missing. Even though, for some reason Swati felt let down. Perhaps Amar did too. It was as if Jhusiya had deceived them, led them to think that he was a superhero. When in fact he was dumber than a nursery school kid. But something else gnawed at Swati. The frustration of a task left half complete, perhaps. I tried hard enough, she tried to tell herself. It's not my fault that he couldn't learn. But the emptiness remained.

She could sense it in Amar too—a dry dissatisfaction, an incompleteness. Jhusiya had become so much a part of their lives that his absence left a definite gap. He was not really absent, of course, but the distance that had formed between them gaped so wide that it seemed impossible to bridge.

The holidays slipped by. It was almost time to return to school. With a kind of relief Swati began to think of the orderly routine, the measured doling out of time that school meant. Each hour, each minute packed with some preplanned activity. No vacant spaces to fill.

It was a day in the month of March. There was only a week left for the holidays to end. The sky which had been overcast for several days, opened up to admit dazzling sunlight. The mimosa trees, sprinkled with the bright yellow flowers of spring were a lovely sight.

As Swati came out of the house, buttoning up her cardigan, something caught her eye. Something on the stone slab below the deodar tree. For a moment she stood still—dumbfounded. Was it possible?

Then she yelled, as loud as she could, "Amar! Amar! Come quick!"

Amar came out running. "Look!" Swati pointed. Her hands shook and her eyes shone. Someone had scribbled, with a piece of charcoal, in huge clumsy letters in Hindi—"Jhusiyal Singh!"

And—"Look!" Amar cried. He pointed, too.

She saw it again, on the stone slabs that paved the walk in front of the house—the same black charcoal, the same big writing, the same 'Jhusiyal Singh'!

Doubling up with delighted laughter, they ran off on a treasure hunt. On the door of the coal store, on the cowdung plastered kitchen wall, on the silvery trunk of the jacaranda tree—everywhere the same signature. Huge, larger than life, just like Jhusiya! Everywhere—evidence of his victory.

"He's done it!" Swati yelled. "He's actually learnt to sign his name!"

And Amar and she hugged each other and laughed like lunatics. It was as if they'd achieved something great. I wonder what it took him, Swati thought, to achieve it. What kind of a struggle, what effort.

Then Amar cried out, "He's here! Jhusiya's here."

Swati turned. His face was a tomato red, bursting with delight. His eyes had crinkled up, vanished inside his cheeks. "Jhusiya, you did it!" she cried. Her eyes welled over.

"Yes, didi yes," he chortled like a gleeful child.

Amar grabbed his hand. "Congratulations!" he cried and shook it so hard that it looked as if his own would come off, get left behind in that bear's paw!

"But how?" Swati asked softly, feeling a little awkward now.

Jhusiya's face grew serious. "First . . . I gave up. For a few days I thought it was useless, I would never learn." He paused to clear his throat. "Then one day in the town, I was drinking water from the tap and I realised it was like a 'र'. I got quite excited then and went home and tried to write it in my copy and was able to, remembering the tap. Then I tried to think of other objects which were like letters to help me to remember. But then I got stuck—because I didn't know which were which. So I asked those little children you teach—it became a game for us, finding objects that looked like letters. And I learned that 'र' was like a man standing with his hands on his hips, 'र' like the hooks on the verandah from which the flower pots hang. The 'र' ki matra was like my chutia, 'र' like an animal's tail!"

"Wow!" Amar exclaimed. "Jhusiya, you're a genius, you taught yourself."

Jhusiya broke into a wide grin, shook his head. "And when I was able to remember a few letters, by magic it all became easier. . . . After that I practised and practised, because the letters still didn't look so nice and clear. . . ." He signed, as if recalling the struggle, then beamed again. "So now I can write, thanks to you, Didi."

"No, Jhusiya it was your own hard work. I lost patience with you, I gave up—but you didn't!"

Swati's eyes suddenly felt wet and it occurred to her that Jhusiya had grown much, much taller than he ever was before.

Deepa Agarwal has written several books for children and has won many awards for her work.

Delectable Fare from Madhuban

C. Uday Bhaskar

- SNIP, SNIP, SNIP AND OTHER STORIES. Illustrations by Tapas Guha
 TALES FROM FAR AND NEAR. Illustrations by Tapas Guha, 1995, pp. 62, Rs. 20.00
 THE GHOSTLY TALES AND OTHER STORIES. Illustrations by Jagdish Joshi, 1995, pp. 89, Rs. 24.00
 CAUGHT RED HANDED By Kamlesh Mohinder. Illustrations by Vishwajyoti Ghosh 1995, pp. 54, Rs. 20.00
 THE JUNGLE ADVENTURE By Shobha Sharma. Illustrations by Ankan Design Studio, 1995, pp. 80, Rs. 20.00
 YAMUNOTRI YATRA By Sheela Sharma, Illustrations by Raj Shekhar Bose, 1995, pp. 68, Rs. 20.00
 NAMAN: MY BOOK OF PRAYERS, 1995 pp. 56, Rs. 18.00
 All Published by Madhuban Educational Books a division of Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
 THE RAMAYANA RETOLD FOR CHILDREN By Bilkiz Alladin. Illustrations by P. Khemraj, 1995, pp. 92, Rs. 40.00
 THE GREEDY GREEN PARROT AND OTHER STORIES By Anita Nahal Arya Illustrations by Poonam Bevi Sahi, 1995, pp. 24, Rs. 20.00
 CHEEKY MEEKY GO UP IN THE AIR AND OTHER STORIES By Manorama Jafa, Illustrations by Reboti Bhusan, 1995, pp. 24, Rs. 20.00
 All Published by Anukool/Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.

Children's books seem to be gaining some degree of sustained institutional support and it is heartening to note that this clutch of ten books have all been brought out by Vikas Publishing House under two separate banners—Madhuban and Anukool. A few of these books—two to be precise have been written under the aegis of the AWIC—the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children—founded in 1981 by the late Shankar Pillai. This is a welcome trend and one hopes that this effort will be nurtured in a meaningful manner in the years ahead—when the child will be exposed even more than he/she currently is, to the seduction of the audio-visual medium. The price tags are reasonable and one hopes that this level will be maintained in the future.

Broadly these books may be divided into three sections: the full length stories—*Jungle Adventure*, *Caught Red Handed* and *Yamunotri Yatra*—written by authors whom I do not recollect having read before. The story lines and themes are perennial favourites with children—jungles, mountains and mysteries. Both Shobha Sharma and Sheela Sharma write with that sure touch of an author who is familiar with the terrain and I was personally glad that the Palamau/Hazaribagh forests are getting their due in children's books in India, though some of the Enid Blyton/Famous Five overtones cannot be overlooked. That may be inescapable in a way, for Ms. Blyton covered a very wide canvas when it comes to children's books and themes and the secret is to adapt her to Indian conditions in a manner that would be credible to our little friends.

The *Yamunotri Yatra* is a skillful blend of Hindu mythology with the mountains and the blending of Sanskrit slokas is effective. It was in the illustrations that I was a bit disappointed and while Ankan was attractive in the visuals, the other two books were indifferently illustrated and Ghosh was noticeably awkward. There may be a case for having illustrations for children's books edited/referred in the same manner that the text is—as some of the other books suggest.

The three books of short stories are a mixed bag and two of them were put together by the AWIC. The quality of the stories is consequently uneven and while some were really good—like Jaya Paramasivan's "The Skillful Hunter", others such as "Name and Fame" and "You too!" were tame to say the least. This is where greater rigour is required in stringing the stories together. Some themes recur in any collection of children's stories and for instance "Kunti" by Nilima Jha deals with a little girl who is mistaken for a beggar-thief and personally I was reminded of Sigrun Srivastav's vignette of beggars as pests. Jha introduces an unintended (?) ambivalence in her story and I am not certain if a child can comprehend this complexity. This is an issue that the next AWIC session can examine. Again coming back to illustrations—Tapas Guha is one of our better-known illustrators and some of the visuals in *Snip, Snip...* are very evocative but should a greedy boy look like a giant—see page 92. These are the kind of wrinkles that need to be ironed out. *Ghostly Tales* is a delightful collection and the illustrator, Jagdish Joshi embellishes the stories very well—and this is a good example of what quality control can do to a children's book. *Tales From Far and Near* is a reprint and includes "Robin Hood" and "Ulysses" among other well known tales.

The Book of Prayers is the surprise of the lot and was a big hit with my children. It includes prayers from all the major religions with the emphasis no doubt on Hindu slokas as rendered in Hindi with English meanings. Frankly a greater mix from the other religions including the Islamic faith with all its variants would be welcome for the urban child in India who is constantly buffeted by many under currents. This book may have an audience among adults as well.

The Ramayana Retold for Children is a taut version with a suitable introduction. Khemraj has illustrated Alladin's text with flair but a couple of minor points—the visuals are few and are all double page spreads. Character consistency is lacking and for instance Hanuman and Ravana look different on different pages. *Cheeky/Meeky and The Green Parrot* are for the 3-5 age group and the latter is the more attractive with its sumptuous visuals.

At the risk of repeating myself, let it be said that children's books in India need all the support and encouragement that they can get. Publishing houses, authors and illustrators need to be encouraged and there are many issues that merit reflection. The perennially curious constituency of children is unrelenting in its criticism and yet spontaneous in its praise. India is a treasure trove as far as raw material for children is concerned and current trends would suggest that there is cause for cautious hope.

C. Uday Bhaskar is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. He is keenly interested in children's literature.

QUIZ



- This term was first used by Norbert Wiener in 1948. Literally translated from Greek, it means Helmsman. What are we talking about?
- The idea for this novel came to the author in a nightmare, in 1885. His cries of terror frightened his wife so much that she woke him up. He went back to sleep saying "Why did you wake me up? I was dreaming such a fine bogey tale." He started work on it the next day, and completed it in three days. His wife took such a violent dislike to it that he threw it in the fire. Later on, he changed his mind and rewrote it. It is now a classic. Which novel are we talking about?
- Which way dis time? Me killem die finish body b'long me.
or me no do 'im? Me no savvy
Might 'e better 'long you me catchem dis fella string for throw 'im this fella arrow. Altogether b'long number one bad fella, name b'long 'im futune? Me no savvy
Might 'e better b'long you me, For fightem 'long altogether where 'im 'e makem you me sorry too much. Bimeby 'im fall down die finish? Me no savvy.
This is the translation, in Pidgin English of very famous lines in the history of literature. What are they?
- Bertie Wooster's club is the Drones. Jeeves belongs to the Junior Granymede. But which club does Lord Emsworth patronize?
- What is the origin of the phrase 'use your loaf'?
- Jack Worrall, a former Australian Test cricketer, coined a term in an article in the *Australasian Post*. What is this term?
- A current music group claims that that their name is derived from a term in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*. Name the group.
- Alexandra Ripley's sequel to *Gone with the Wind* is *Scarlett*. However, what did Margaret Mitchell say when she was asked what the sequel should be called?
- P.D. James' *Original Sin* is supposed to have been plagiarized from another novel. Name the novel and the author.
- Edward L. Stratemeyer occupies a unique place in the history of children's books. What is his claim to fame?
- Which book is subtitled *The Pursuit of Progress*?
- The Librarian for the Count Von Waldstein in the chateau of Dux wrote poetry, translated the *Illiad*, and wrote a satirical pamphlet on the Grimani family. His most important work is a history of his life. Who was he?
- The First Man* is an autobiographical novel recently discovered in the wreckage of a car. Whose life does it deal with?
- Which is the odd one out of the following countries: Kent, Surrey, Essex, Middlesex, Wessex, Derbyshire and Lancashire?
- "Amerigo Bonasera sat in New York Criminal Court Number 1 and waited for justice." These are the opening words of which novel?
- Paul Austin Delagardie is the official biographer of which member of the peerage?
- James Wight is linked with a footballer who played for Birmingham. How?
- Why can't Superman be married in the United States?
- The gossip centre of ancient Rome gave rise to the term in the English language. What is this word?
- Sailor on Horseback* is a novel by Irving Stone. Whom does it portray?
(Answers on Page 23)

Compiled by Rishi Iyengar

Popularising Science

Shobhit Mahajan

- CHEMICAL ELEMENTS IN THE NEW AGE By D.V. Jagirdar, 1994, Rs. 31.00
 NARCOTIC DRUGS By Anil Aggrawal, 1995, Rs. 46.00
 IT HAPPENED TOMORROW Edited by Bal Phondke, 1993, Rs. 55.00
 SPACE TODAY By Mohan Sundara Rajan, 1987, Rs. 40.00
 YOU AND YOUR HEALTH Edited by V.N. Bhawe, N.S. Deodhar and S.V. Bhawe, 1993, Rs. 67.00
 All from the National Book Trust, India

Popular science has never been a very popular subject with Indian authors or publishers. This despite the fact that we claim to have the second largest scientific person-power. The bleak scenario changed with the publishing of many popular science titles by the National Book Trust. These titles, written by Indians, are by and large well produced and very affordable though the quality of writing has been somewhat uneven. The books under review are all part of their popular science series.

Chemical Elements in the New Age is a short discussion on some of the chemical elements which are finding increasing use in many applications. It starts with a brief history of the study of chemical elements followed by a description of the properties of many of the common elements. The discussion is very sketchy and basically lists the properties and the uses of the natural elements. The same is repeated for many of the rarer elements and also the man-made elements. Historical anecdotes and interesting trivia are interspersed throughout. There is however a very serious lacuna; very little attempt is made to get across the excitement of the field to the curious reader. The beauty and elegance of the periodic table and the predictive power of the classification is one of the major achievements of modern chemistry. None of that is found here, instead what one gets is a condensation of facts which can be looked up in any good encyclopaedia.

Drug abuse counts as one of the most serious problems facing our society today. What was once thought to be a "curse of affluence" is striking us with a vengeance. *Narcotic Drugs* is a very useful and informative book about the many drugs of abuse; from the old favourite opium to the recent synthetic hallucinogenic chemicals. Of interest are also the miscellany of hallucinogenic drugs from various parts of the world and their role in various ancient cultures. Written by an expert in forensic medicine, the book discusses in detail the chemistry of all the major drugs, their effects on the body and many other facts related to them. The style is very readable with many interesting stories from history thrown in. (For instance, Stevenson wrote his famous "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" while undergoing cocaine therapy for his tuberculosis in a sanatorium!) The book has a very helpful bibliography for the interested reader to follow up.

Though the first science fiction story in India was written by J.C. Bose in 1897, science fiction as a genre never really developed in our country. Apart from isolated attempts in Marathi and Bengali, science fiction never really caught the imagination of the writers or even the readers. The situation changed in the seventies when many Marathi authors, including J.V. Narlikar started writing in periodicals and newspapers. There was a similar proliferation in Bengali though on a smaller scale than Marathi. *It Happened Tomorrow* is a collection of 19 science fiction stories from various Indian languages. The book has an excellent preface by the editor, Bal Phondke, himself a good science fiction writer and well known popularizer. He traces the evolution of the genre from the time of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells and its growth in India. An interesting point made by the editor is that paradoxically, Kerala with its high literacy and bibliophile tradition, did not see a development of Malayalam science fiction.

Expectedly, the majority of the stories are from Marathi, though there are contributions from Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, Oriya, Hindi and even English. The stories themselves are quite enjoyable and creative and the authors display an amazing degree of originality in their ideas. I particularly liked the contributions of Narlikar, Phondke, Mukul Sharma and D. Mewari.

Space Today is an attempt to introduce the multifarious aspects of space technology to the lay reader. The genesis of the idea that human beings could free themselves from the attractive pull of the earth has a long history. There is a brief discussion of the various scientific ideas that ultimately made possible the flight of human beings into space. This discussion, though interesting is far too sketchy to be of any use to the lay reader, though there are interesting bits of information. For instance, Tipu Sultan used rockets against the British in the battle of Srirangapatna in 1792! Most of the book is a compendium of facts on satellites and their uses in remote sensing, communications, weather forecasting and even military applications. There is a reasonably detailed, though uncritical discussion of the Indian space programme. The last section is devoted to some of the outstanding problems in astrophysics and cosmology. Again, the author falters by being too brief to be useful to anyone but the expert. There is a useful glossary but no bibliography.

For a country which produces more doctors than nurses, the state of our health care system is dismal. The growing tendency towards specialisation and curative rather than preventive health care, has not helped matters. A beginning can be made to counter this tendency by educating the people on basic issues relating to their bodies and their health. *You and Your Health* is an attempt to reach the lay reader with information about physical and mental health. Edited by a team of practising doctors and teachers, the book contains articles by many health professionals on a variety of topics. From the basis of modern medicine to basic anatomy and physiology, from common ailments to the role of community health programmes, a diverse range of topics are covered. Unfortunately, the style is sometimes pedantic and not very reader friendly. There are many typographical errors and the illustrations somewhat overdone (surely an illustration on the "use of a handkerchief" is a trifle superfluous). Comparing it with a similar book *Where There is No Doctor* (published by VHAI) this book is certainly below standard.

Reading these and other books published by NBT on popular science, one is struck by the lack of a new and novel approach to the subject. Most of the books (these titles included) are basically a bunch of facts put together in an abysmally unimaginative way. How are these then going to excite the young curious minds (assuming that the young students are the primary target audience) about the mysteries and wonders of science? NBT is certainly doing pioneering work in making Indian popular science available at affordable prices. The challenge is now open to our scientists and popularisers.

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The Horror Without. . . .

Mohan Rao

THE DANGER WITHIN By Feisal Alkazi, Martha Farell and Shveta Kalyanwala
 Illustrated by Reenie. PRA, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 109, price unstated.

"I carry 6000 frames (for match sticks) every day. This makes me dizzy and faint because of the heaviness of the fumes. If my reflexes are not sharp all the time I might set fire to myself."

—Shrini, 10 year old worker at Sivakasi

"I am sick of working in the factory. I don't sleep well at night, keep getting fever, cough and cold. They give me an aspirin at the factory every day. Please any other work but this factory is killing me."

—Devraj, 8 year old worker at Sivakasi.

These are some of the poignant voices that are heard in this book which seeks to provide children a peep into the horrors of occupational health hazards. To children immured in a world of boring EVS text books and titillating MTV, Alkazi *et al* have done a truly arresting job of bringing alive the real world of blood, sweat, tears and exploitation.

Profusely illustrated and coruscating with some excellent biting cartoons, this book provides a wealth of information on a diverse range of occupations. From coal mining, weaving, carpet-making, rag picking to pesticides and the Bhopal gas disaster, *The Danger Within* briefly and succinctly conveys the message it seeks to. What it also seeks to do is to invite the participation of children through project activities, word games, crossword puzzles and so on.

There are heart-rending case studies here in areas that have seldom before been documented.

"My name is Pandu Rao Bhanji Kamble. I am 14-years-old and work in the Municipal Corporation. Young boys like me are used to clean small-sized sewers as the entry point is too small for a grown up man to enter. These sewers carry a mixture of urine, filth, effluent water, acid and oils from mills and other places. . . .

When we come out, our bodies are covered with filth, but there is no provision to wash it off. . . . All I can say is that once inside, the child looks like a rat in the gutter and in my experience feels like one."

What is worse is that a child like this is often told that he does not mind the dirt or smells since he is so un bathed and smelly himself.

One of the most heartening inclusions is a section on the occupational health hazards for a house spouse. What is not mentioned here is the stupefying, mind-numbing boredom of cleaning others' messes and picking up after children day after dreary day. This afflicts both mothers and fathers and not just the former as the book—falling into the familiar sexist stereotype—would have us believe.

Future editions—and I am confident there will be many more—will benefit with a slim chapter on what is called "garbage imperialism". As occupational health and safety laws turn more stringent in the West, multinational companies often turn to the developing world not just to locate their hazardous industries but also to dump toxic wastes generated in the West.

The Danger Within is highly recommended by this physician for all students and teachers. And for a good many parents too.

Mohan Rao is at the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Creative Science

Arvind Gupta

Science could either be learnt by rote through textbooks, or else, it could be learnt creatively through a practical project. I remember a village school teacher who got hold of a torn mosquito net and used it to make several butterfly nets. Each child was given a net and allotted a patch of rice field. Every day on the way to school, children had to sweep the net through their particular field patch. All the insects thus collected were sorted and counted in the classroom. The children kept doing this for two whole months. At the end of the project they had a pile of primary data. They could identify the various insects and pests which afflicted paddy. They also learnt a great deal about the life-cycle of insects. The graphs they drew told them when a particular pest species reached its peak. They also learnt when to spray the field to keep the pest menace under control. Here science activities were related to real life. Children learnt good science and the community benefitted by getting a better harvest.

Wooden Cubes

If only we look around then we will find many ways in which societal wastes could be converted into societal assets. This ecofriendly process of making wooden cubes illustrates it well. In a saw-mill, first the tree trunks are sliced into planks. In the second stage the plank ends are squared. While squaring the planks a uniform section of wood is cut off. These end pieces are sold by weight, as firewood. One school regularly bought these uniform sections and cut them into unit cubes and blocks, to make construction kits. There is a whole world based on the cube. Using these wooden cubes the children were able to make dice and other teaching aids like pentaminoes and Soma's cubes.

Copper Reuse

When an electric motor gets burnt it has to be rewound. The burnt copper wire is usually sent for remelting which is a highly energy intensive process. One school would buy the burnt copper wire from the Kabariwala at throwaway prices. The children would then straighten and stretch out the wire. After scrubbing it clean they would apply insulating varnish to it. The copper wire would become almost new. The children happily used it to wind electromagnets, relays and coils of working electric motors.

Fused Bulbs and Tubelights

The filament of a fused electric bulb can be easily knocked off. If you half fill the bulb with water it makes a plano-convex lens which magnifies almost five times. I have also seen fused tubelights being used to great advantage. Dr. Apparao and his team at the Gandhigram University, have used old tubelights to make a host of laboratory equipment like burettes, pipettes, funnels and test-tubes. They get their tubelights almost for free. Once they remove the endcaps and the white selenium coating then they have a good transparent glass tube which is 120 cms long and 1mm thick. By using rudimentary glass blowing equipment they have fashioned over 50 laboratory equipment using fused tubelights.

Papaya Pump

As an innovative science model there could be nothing simpler than using a papaya stem for an actual pump. There is no assembly, no construction required. Take a one foot long papaya stem which, by the way is like a hollow tube. Hold it with your left hand and move it up or down in a bucket of water. Keep the palm of your right hand on top of the tube and open and close it with each up and down reciprocation. Soon water will squirt out from the top. In this case the up and down motion of the stem does the pumping while the right palm acts like a valve. The pump costs nothing but gives an immense thrill to children.

Recycle-Reuse

Most schools spend a great deal of money on elaborate and expensive science equipment which they seldom use. Visit any school

laboratory and you'll be confronted with a host of fossilised science equipment, laden with dust and stacked in glass cupboards. On the other hand, a whole lot of primary and middle level science experiments can be performed with ordinary materials found at home. Today's consumerist culture forces us to buy more and throw more. A lot of throw away things like soda-water caps, soda-straws, matchboxes, cigarette foil, film-roll bottles, tetrapacks, ball-pen refills, old rubber slippers, used postcard can be recycled to make extremely interesting science toys and teaching aids at virtually no cost. A book titled *The Joy of Making Indian Toys* by Sudarshan Khanna (NBT Rs. 90.00) does just that. Through simple toys it makes the learning of science very joyous and interesting. *The UNESCO Source Book for Science Teachers* has remained a bible for science teachers for over 40 years. It is full of low-cost and improvised techniques.

Most of the science textbooks in use are bad. They should not have been printed in the first place. Some books, however should not be allowed to die. Recently two brilliant popular science classics *Soap Bubbles* by C.V. Boys (Rs. 30.00) and *Chemical History of a Candle* by Michael Faraday (Rs. 35.00) have been reprinted by *Vigyan Prasar* (Department of Science & Technology, New Delhi). These books have brought a gleam into the eyes of millions of children for over a century. They passionately explore science possibilities using the most rudimentary of equipment.

Arvind Gupta is a tinkerer and toy-maker.

Kumaon Adventure

Monisha Mukundan

HUNT FOR THE MIRACLE HERB By Deepa Agarwal
Puffin Books, India, Paperback, 1995, pp. 136, Rs. 50.00

Deepa Agarwal has succeeded admirably in bringing alive the landscapes of the Kumaon in her story *Hunt of the Miracle Herb*. When 14-year-old Ajay, 12-year-old Rina and 9-year-old Ceeti go to spend a holiday with their Uncle Raj in the Kumaon Hills, they are entranced by the surroundings in which they find themselves. Uncle Raj is a botanist who has opted to live in a remote village in this region of the Himalayas, where he farms and grows medicinal herbs for research and commercial use.

Ajay, in the course of collecting and pressing plants for a school project, comes across a plant which Uncle Raj declares is a rare herb which might be a cure for one type of cancer. The children go looking for the herb and finally Uncle Raj decides to undertake a journey to his servant—Harku's remote village where Harku says the herb is to be found. However, someone else has heard of the herb and is determined to reach Harku's village and the herb before Uncle Raj and the three children do. He makes every effort to prevent the children and their uncle from reaching the village, including threats and kidnapping. How the children and their uncle overcome the dangers and the difficulties in their way makes a gripping and enjoyable story.

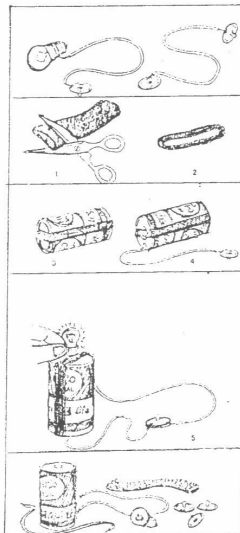
As the action unfolds, the author's love of the area and her skill as a storyteller come together to create memorable images of the Kumaon. Landscapes, people, plants and animals are presented in a vivid and readable manner, through the eyes of three urban children, who squabble, chatter, and enjoy their discovery of an unfamiliar environment.

Without preaching, or inserting indigestible lumps of boring facts, Deepa Agarwal has managed not only to share with her readers a sense of the Himalayan environment but also to gently make one aware of the dangers that haunt the fragile ecosystems of the region. The information and the author's obviously deep concern for these issues is woven seamlessly into an exciting mystery story that absorbs one from the beginning with its twists and turns of action and mystery, of suspense and drama.

Each of the characters in the book has been drawn with thought and care, so that each one is well rounded and real, rather than a one-dimensional figure as so often happens in adventure stories for children. Even the villain is painted in tones of grey despite his villainy. The characters, their interaction with their surroundings and with each other and the thread of the adventure they share come together to make an enjoyable and exciting book.

It is a great pity that the publishers were unable to back up the quality of Deepa Agarwal's story with competent illustrations and a little care about the cover design. The sheer inaccuracy of the illustrations and their substandard quality acts as a deterrent to the potential reader. It would be a great deal better not to have any illustrations at all than to have shoddy work such as this. In a market where books by Indian authors have to compete with slicker, well established publications from abroad, it becomes particularly important to make a special effort to design covers that attract the child reader and his or her parent.

Monisha Mukundan is an editor and a writer. She has been writing for over twenty years.



The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children

By Manorama Jafa

The Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children (AWIC) is a unique organization. The late Mr. K. Shankar Pillai, the then Executive Trustee of Children's Book Trust (CBT) New Delhi, founded the AWIC on 7 March 1981 with the objective of promoting quality books for children's reading pleasure. The seed was sown, slowly it sprouted, and now the AWIC is recognized as a pioneer organization for the promotion of better literature for children and also promoting its creators. Over the years, AWIC has expanded its activities in the national as well as in the international fora. AWIC has also set up the Indian Section of International Board on Books for Young People (Ind BBY) since 1990. Today, AWIC is regarded as one of the most successful voluntary organizations in the world, in the field of children's literature.

The AWIC holds monthly get togethers, seminars and conferences where different aspects of children's literature are discussed. Eminent authors, illustrators and publishers are invited to its meetings from time to time. It also arranges regular display of outstanding books and original art work of children's books published in India and other countries. In 1992, the AWIC organized the first ever exhibition of original art work in Indian children's books at the International Children's Book Fair at Bologna in Italy. In the same year, it also published a colourful catalogue titled *Indian Illustrators 1960-1992*, presenting the work of 42 Indian illustrators for children. This is the only catalogue in the country containing the work of Indian illustrators.

The AWIC organizes achievement oriented workshops on creative writing. Since 1981, about one thousand participants have benefited and new talent has been developed and encouraged. Selected workshop stories and prize winning stories have been compiled and published by several publishers.

In 1983, AWIC launched its Library Project with the objective of reaching the books to the children. To begin with, several members of AWIC brought children's books lying in their homes. Some books were obtained as donation and many more titles were bought. Presently, more than 60 children's libraries have been set up in different cities, towns and villages. These libraries are run on voluntary basis by the members of the AWIC. This project was awarded the international *Ibby-Asahi Reading Promotion Award* in 1991. To sustain the interest of librarians and the young readers, the AWIC gives the *Librarian of the Year Award* every year. It also gives *Reader of the Year Award* to one reader selected from every branch of AWIC library.

To promote quality books, AWIC has introduced several other awards. *Children's Choice Award* in English and *Bal Priya Puraskar* in Hindi were launched in 1989. These awards are given to authors, illustrators and publishers and the winners are selected

Quiz Answers

1. Cybernetics.
2. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson.
3. To be or not to be; that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing, end them.—Hamlet.
4. The Senior Conservatives.
5. This has its origin in Cockney slang—from loaf of bread for head.
6. Bodyline.
7. Collective Soul.
8. *Back with the Breeze*.
9. *End of Chapter* by Nicholas Blake (Cecil Day-Lewis).
10. He founded the syndicate which employs writers to produce the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew novels, as well as several other popular characters.
11. *Parkinson's Law*.
12. Giovanni Giacomo Casanova.
13. There was a clue in the question—Albert Camus (he died in a car crash).
14. Wessex—it does not exist. It is the setting for Thomas Hardy's novels.
15. *The Godfather*.
16. Lord Peter Wimsey.
17. The footballer's name was James Herriot. James Alfred Wight derived his pseudonym from the name of the footballer.
18. He has to have a blood test to be married in the US—which is not possible for obvious reasons.
19. The gossip centre was the meeting of three (*tri*) roads (*via*) and therefore—Trivia.
20. Jack London.

by a jury comprising children only. A member of AWIC has sponsored *AWIC—Sonia Memorial Awards* in 1993. Ever year, one writer, an illustrator and a researcher are selected for the award.

Writer and Illustrator, a quarterly journal of AWIC is being published since 1981. It contains research based articles, profiles of writers, illustrators, researchers and story tellers. Besides, it publishes book reviews, stories that have won either an AWIC prize or have been prepared at the book activities in India and other countries. Over the years *Writer and Illustrator* has grown into a standard reference journal on children's literature published from the developing world.

In 1998, AWIC will organize the world congress on children's books—26th 'Congress of International Board on Books for Young People', for the first time in India and second time in Asia, after Japan. The theme of the Congress is Peace Through Children's Books. The Congress will provide opportunity for Indian professionals to interact with about one thousand authors, illustrators, scholars, publishers and all those interested in children's books, coming from all over the world for this historic event.

Most of AWIC's finances come from annual subscriptions, sale of its publications and donations. Children's Book Trust has given office space and other facilities to AWIC. AWIC does not receive any grant from the government. The credit for its success goes to its members who work as a team and with great dedication.

Manorama Jafa is the founder Secretary General of AWIC and Indian BBY. She has been nominated as the Chairperson of 26th IBBY Congress on children's books to be held in New Delhi in September 1998. She is a well-known writer of children's books. She has encouraged and developed new talent and pioneered a movement for better books for children.



The Magic Touch

Long years ago when the joy of the printed word was just beginning to unfold before me, I remember treasuring a little booklet in Hindi of whose title I cannot recall today brought out by the government of C.P. and Berar. It was the tale of a little boy setting forth with his family to visit a mela and how he falls ill because he eats/drinks something which causes gastro-enteritis. It was only much later that it dawned on me that it was a publicity brochure to warn the rural public about the evils of eating food exposed to flies and drinking contaminated water. The material was so cleverly designed and presented that a little girl found an enchanting story experiencing all the thrills of visiting a fairground.

The point I am trying to make is that writing for children needs a special, intuitively light touch, which seemed to imbue that governmental brochure of the fifties. Which is why I could not resist picking up several little booklets published by Sahmat following a workshop organised by the Trust in association with Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti: *Kitaben* (unpriced) by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Surendran Nayar and calligraphy by Manmohan Bawa, *Champa* (Rs. 20.00) written and illustrated by Haku Shah and *Bapu Ka Aitihāsik Mukādmā : Gori Adalat Katghare Mein* (Rs. 20.00) by Mulik Raj Anand and illustrated by Shamshad. The first two are for toddlers to be read aloud, to sing out and to sing with. Mulik Raj Anand's handling of the famous trial of Mahatma Gandhi and Shankarlal Banker for sedition in 1922 in Ahmedabad is masterly. History is presented with the clever touch of a master story-teller which would grip the attention of the young. At the same time, the inclusion of excerpts from the articles in *Young India* and statements by Gandhiji and Banker lends the narration an authenticity which cannot but teach the young adult how history *must* be read. It goes to show that we need the best minds in the country to write for the young, whether it is just fun filled adventure stories, sci-fi or history and geography.

Two collections of short stories for the young in Hindi, *Ek Mein Anek* (Vols. 1 & 2) published by Ratnasagar vouch for the effort being made by the publisher to lend a touch of class to their publications. The sixteen stories in the two volumes give the flavour of Hindi in Khari as well as all its dialects. Many of these writers have published in English as well like Subhadra Sengupta, Swapna Dutta, Deepa Aggarwal. "Mhare Sundari" by Girija Rani Asthana is enough to illustrate the highly readable quality of these collections. A young lad Jaipal loves his buffalo to distraction and wants to put a black bindi on him to ward off the evil eye of the beholder, in particular, the local rich man and his son. Needless to say, they come to grief trying to wrest the buffalo from Jaipal. The themes are all handled with sensitivity and no jarring note mars the telling. If more stories are not being highlighted, it is only to leave the young reader to savour them for him/herself. A gift pack of collections of short stories in different languages in the original and in translation might be an idea worth exploring.

Chandra Chari

Humour in Urdu Literature for Children

S.G. Haider

I personally feel that a flavour of humour is a prerequisite for writing for children. Without a tinge of humour, the writing smacks of the thoughts of a melancholy soul—reader or writer—and not of an active child bubbling with life. A well-known Urdu critic and writer the Late Zoe Ansari wrote:

“... for writing for children one has to become a child—but what kind of a child? The one who could narrate the most difficult things with a touch of fun. . . Writing for children is, no doubt, an old man's job. But what kind of an old man? The one who does not hem and cough much; who talks smilingly and jovially; who could take them along where the children, nay, their imaginations wander; who could become a child and is not ashamed of being a butt himself. Leave aside the old persons, children can outwit and confuse the devil himself”.

The tradition of humour has been very strong in Urdu juvenile literature. In fact, the seeds of fun and humour are sown from the earliest days of a child through oral traditions— anecdotes, short stories, riddles, poems etc. The earliest stories which I can still recollect were all full of humour. For instance a boy narrates a glorious incident about how he is discarded in a jungle for his habit of telling lies. To save himself from a charging lion, he climbs a tree. The lion starts climbing up to reach him with the help of his waistband hanging down. At last when the lion was about to catch hold of him he cuts his waistband, the lion falls and dies instantly.

Thus “Sheikh Chilli” (the schemer), “Tees Mar Khan” (the pretender), “Mulla Dupiaza” (the court-jester), “Chacha Chhakan” (the busy idle), “Ajeemchi and Khoji” (the opium eater), “Boojelal Bujhakkhar” (the foolish hypocrite) and many others are the immortal characters of children's Urdu culture. The wit of Mulla Nasruddin, Bahlot Dana—the wise and the world famous Persian scholar, Shaikh Saidi further added to the appreciation of humour in Urdu.

In the very early stage of his education the Urdu reading child is fed with small humorous anecdotes through his primary readers. One of the best sets of such books prepared by Ismail Marathi, in the early years of this century, are a valuable treasure of wit and humour.

The fact that children's literature has a good content of humour may perhaps be attributed to the very structure of the language. In its formative stage it has been enriched by many languages and cultures. Besides the rich indigenous sources it has also acquired humour and wit from Persian, Arabic, Turkish etc. Further although Urdu literature has more than a fair share of moral counselling it has in a way enriched it as far as wit and humour are concerned. In contrast to mythological or purely religious literature, moral literature has a much wider scope for humorous flavour. For instance, a blind man carrying an earthen pitcher on his head in the night places a burning lamp over it and replies to a sarcastic enquirer: “Oh it has been lit for those who have eyes but do not bother to see”. Or when an urchin asks a very old man bent like a ‘C’ carrying a stick in his hand: “Grandpa! for how much did you purchase such a fine bow”, the old man replied: “Don't worry my dear, you will get it free if you happen to reach my age!” It is also a matter of great satisfaction that even the classical poets of Urdu—like Mir, Nazeer, Ghalib and others composed something humorous for children. A serious poet like Ghalib wrote many poems for children:

*Kya Kaheen Khaai Hai Haafiz Ji Ki Maar
Aaj Hanste Aap Jo Khil Khil Naheen*
(Oh, you might have received a good thrashing from ‘Hafizji’—the teacher of the Holy Qur-an, that's why you are not giggling away today)

Thus the tradition of writing pure humour flourished with the development of children's literature both in prose and poetry. Most of the humorous tales were later transferred from the oral to written literature and published in book form. Some litterateurs of national stature like Pirus Bukhari, Mirza Azeem Beg Chughtai, Kanahya Lal Kapoor, Ismat Chughtai, Shaukat Tanvi, Professor Ahmad Siddiqui, Zoe Ansari, Dr. Abid Husain have also contributed stories, essays, drama etc.

Perhaps, for the reason that the development of poetry in Urdu has preceded that of prose the humour content in poetry for children is not only more in quantity; it is also purer and sharper in quality. Besides composing a humorous poem on any imaginable theme on earth one of the most ingenious methods of producing pure humour for children has been composing parodies of popular film songs, mystic Qawwalis and serious poems of stalwarts. For instance imagine the following version of a morbid but

most enchanting melody of Sehgal:

*Kaat Lee Meri Dum, Kitni Naazuk Thi Dum Ye Na Jaana
Hai Hai Ye Zaalim Zamana*
(Oh! they've cut off my tail, how delicate was the tail, they didn't know—Oh what a cruel world it is).

or in the serene style of Mohammad Rafi, an urchin lamenting thus:

*Main Wo Bachcha Hoon Jise Pyar ki Tofee Na Mili
Jab Bhi Koi Shararat ki to Maafi Na Mili
Main Ne Amman ke Pyaaron ki Tamanna Ki Thi
Par Mujhhe Abba ke Chaanton ke Siwa Kuchh Na Mila*
(I am a child who could not get a toffee with love; whenever I played any mischief I was pardoned not, I desired kisses from my mother but got nothing beyond slaps from my father).

Since singing a film song was taboo in my childhood days there was hardly any good song in vogue for which a beautiful parody was not prepared or taken out from some children's magazines.

A very popular activity among the Urdu-reading children was (and still is to some extent) a humorous Mushaira (poetic concert). A few verses which I can still recall are:

*Main Jee Bhar Ke Aaloo Kachaloo To Khha Loon
Ilahi Too Mujhko Governor Banade*
(Let me eat the Aaloo-Kachaloo chaat to my fill
Oh God Almighty! Make me a Governor)

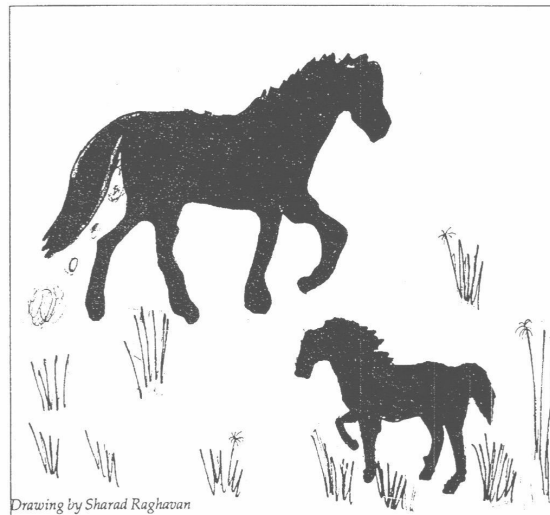
Or a parody of one of the most serious ghazals of Urdu Classical Poetry:

*Kitaben Baandh Kar Chalne Ko Ham Tayyar Baithe Hain
Magar Chutti Naheen Milti Bare Lachar Baithe Hain
Too Baja ja Tan-Tana-Tan-Tan' Nna ab Ham Ko Sata Chanti
Ke Khali Pet Hai Parhne Se Ham Bezaar Baithe Hain*
(Having packed our books we are just ready to shoot out. But alas! We are not getting off but sitting out here helpless.

Oh school-bell, ring Tan-Tana-Tan-Tan, don't torture us any more. On empty stomachs we are getting tired of studies).

To conclude this brief note on humour in children's literature, there is ample material for the enjoyment of a child and for creating and nurturing a sense of humour within him and an aesthetic sense. It is possible to prepare an anthology of humorous literature in Urdu from numerous books and children's magazines published during this century.

S.G. Haider is a writer and critic.



Drawing by Sharad Raghavan

The Eternal World of Bond

Subhadra Sengupta

THE RUSKIN BOND CHILDREN'S OMNIBUS
Rupa, 1995, pp. 327, Rs. 95.00

During summer vacations, the coolest and most peaceful spot in our Old Delhi house was under my grandmother's high, zamindari ebony bed. There, next to a couple of brass pots, a tin trunk and a family of friendly spiders, I used to slide in carrying my books and a handful of biscuits for some well deserved peace and quiet. Lying there on the cool, mosaic floor with an interesting view of feet going past and the soothing drone of distant conversation I could forget about report cards, holiday homework, adults in general and my Hindi tutor in particular.

Reading this collection of Ruskin Bond's old favourites felt like I was ten again and back under that bed. All the familiar friends were back, Biniya and the blue umbrella, Ram Bharosa the chai shop man, grandfather and the benign ghost, the cricket ball eating crocodile. And I even felt an odd urge to grab a handful of monaco biscuits. It felt good going back.

This is Bond's eternal world, now just as familiar as Malgudi. Hill villages, pine forests, streams going past apple orchards and a daily life that possesses a core of eternal serenity. And looking at it with my grown up eyes, it is also oddly innocent and a bit remote from the realities of the present day. I wonder how much the young reader relates to it all today.

The familiarity of the stories is actually the real problem. They are too familiar. These stories have popped up in innumerable collections in the past years and as there isn't even a single new story here, somehow you feel a bit cheated. Ruskin Bond is being recycled by publishers to the point of incipient boredom and I think he deserves better. Also I wonder why he has not written any new stories for children. I haven't seen any in years.

Still re-reading Bond is a pleasure, an old fashioned storyteller-by-the-hurricane light kind of pleasure. He is such a patently non yuppy, pre-Manmohan Singh sort of writer. His characters talk of saving trees but there isn't an NGO in sight, no one hums the Pepsi jingle and best of all there are no holy politicians who promise to build temples instead of schools. Bond's world offers the perfect escape from a world that is spinning out of our control.

My favourite Bond is still "The Blue Umbrella" where the whole village envies the little girl's prize possession and her battle of wits with crafty old Ram Bharosa who wants that status symbol for himself. Even though it is small, feminine and blue. As always the social comment comes with subtle gentleness, "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."

Grandfather is back with two tales. In "Ghost Trouble" there is the mischievous pret—a ghost on a peepul tree who loses his leafy home to the PWD hatchet men. "That peepul tree has been there for hundreds of years," he said. "Who are we to cut it down?" "We", said the Chief Engineer, are the P.W.D."

Grandfather who was fond of peepul tree *prets* and thought a tail would add to anyone's good looks, often battled with the world of humourless officialdom. As in "Grandfather's Zoo" which sketches his many pets, who are each animals with character and attitude. While travelling on a train with his monkey, "Toto was classified a dog by the ticket collector, and three rupees was the sum handed over as his fare. Then Grandfather just to get his own back, took from his pocket our pet tortoise, and said, "What must I pay for this, since you charge for all animals?"

The ticket collector looked closely at the tortoise, prodded it with his forefinger, gave Grandfather a pleased and triumphant look, and said, "No charge. It is not a dog."

That effortless, crystalline prose, understated humour, power of observation, vivid characterisation; these are the props of Bond's legerdemain.

No morals, no lectures, no pedantry, instead there is this gentle seduction that makes you read on even though you know how it ends. If any writer thinks this elegant simplicity is easy to create, let them try doing a Ruskin Bond on the mountain for us. Finally I'm going to get on to a familiar complaint. The cover of this book is simply awful, as most covers for children's books are. I keep protesting in reviews to no effect of course. Funnily, the inside illustrations are quite good and both are credited to the same artist. Maybe one of the pencil sketches from inside used on the cover would have been a much better idea. The cover illustration has the sloppiness of a school drawing and totally spoils the style of the collection.

Ruskin Bond's mountain villages must have changed in the last decades. A new Ranji is waiting with new adventures, another crocodile may be watching cable TV with the kids. I wish Ruskin Bond would settle at his typewriter and tell us about them.

Subhadra Sen Gupta is a prolific writer for children.

A, AA, EE

Association of Writers and Illustrators
for Children (AWIC), 1995, Rs. 20.00

SACHITRA HINDI BAL SHABDAKOSH
AWIC, 1989, pp. 318, Rs. 175.00

Illustrated by Jagdish Joshi

At last! Two much-needed, well produced books for all learners of Hindi. The books under review, on the Hindi alphabet and the dictionary, are a refreshing change. The paper, large print, colours and illustrations tempt the reader to take a closer look and stay engrossed.

Adhering to its objective of widening literacy and sustaining reader interest in books, AWIC has done a good job of presenting age-old information in an easy-to-understand fashion, giving enough space to the reader to see and 'feel' the words and to develop an enthusiasm for learning the language further.

A, Aa, Ee introduces the alphabets in colourful frames with pictures of familiar objects along with a smaller illustration of an action related to the object. Most pages depict two alphabets each, avoiding overcrowding and confusion. This is followed by a clear list of consonants and vowels in sequence and random order for recognition and revision. Emphasis is on activity-oriented learning. The *baarah khaadi* list of alphabets with *matras* is a handy reference.

This is one of the few books that uses and clearly emphasizes through dots, the correct spelling and pronunciation of letters of common Hindustani words such as 'kh' in *Khubsoorat* and 'z' in *zameen*. Most books omit these essential dots. Though one area where alphabets depicting words with half letters like 'u' through *ulloo* and 'bh' through *bhatti*, could have been touched. This could confuse the early learner. Barring this, the book should delight young and old alike.

Equally good is the dictionary targeted at 6-9 year olds or any new learner. The words have been carefully selected from children's magazines, NCERT sources, other dictionaries and the day-to-day usage of children.

Alphabetically arranged, it begins with a list of consonants and vowels followed by a word-guide with corresponding page numbers. Every page carries beautiful illustrations highlighting the meaning. Alternative spellings for words such as *kulfi* and *kursi* (using half and full letters) are given. Many languages incorporate words from others to maximise utility and relevance, and here too we find words of English such as 'teacher', 'card', 'ice-cream' and the like. The last few pages contain general illustrations like animals, birds, fishes and flowers.

Some may argue that the price is too high, although many of us would not think twice before paying more for a similar book in English! Although too large to be taken places, this book is ideal for libraries, classrooms and homes.

Ritu Singh is a freelance critic.

GEM'S SCHOOL ATLAS

The GEM'S SCHOOL ATLAS has a multi-purpose format, with a special focus on India. It has reference material on historical facts, and physical, political, cultural and economic features of the world.

The maps show different attributes of the same area, which makes comparison easy. Thus on comparing, say, the climatic and the vegetation maps of an area, the relationship between temperature, precipitation and the flora of that area can be identified. It is also possible to understand the inter-relationship between human aspects, such as the population distribution and economic activity.

Special features of the Gem's School Atlas are its colour scheme and easy reading without extra aid. Attractive maps focus on important environmental issues and highlight the cultural and historical tradition of our country. This atlas will lead to an appreciation of cartography — an art and science that merges together beauty and utility.



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Something Green, Something Blue

Swapna Datta

Illustration by Atanu Roy

Miss Veena Kapoor, the class teacher of class III B, looked carefully at the group seated in neat and orderly rows. "Where is Munnu Lal?" she asked. Some of the children seated at the last row looked at each other and smiled significantly. Harish grinned and nudged Mukul. Kitnu nodded meaningfully at Rani. All of them knew where Munnu was. But they weren't telling tales! "Come on!" she said in an impatient voice. "I asked a question. Where is Munnu Lal? He disappears every day around this time and scuttles back just before the bell rings after school. Some of you must know where he goes. You must tell me and NOW."

Veena shifted her gaze along the row of faces. They looked irritatingly blank. All of them! Mithu, another backbencher, opened his mouth to say something. But Sonu gave him such a poke in the ribs that he promptly shut it again. All of them came from the same jhuggi just behind the school. They might quarrel and fight pretty fiercely when on their own but they were bound by a common loyalty. Which meant that sneaking was out.

The same loyalty prompted them to hold their tongues back home. Which is why Shambhu, Munnu's father, had no idea that Munnu missed the last few classes every day. In any case he was far too busy working as a day labourer in the huge new construction. He had to work real hard to feed so many of them—Munnu, Guddu, Nidhi, Moti and little Laddo. And keep a roof of sorts over their heads. Kamla, their mother, worked in a few houses nearby and was very busy too. She was thankful that she was able to send some of them to school. Both she and Shambhu were illiterate. But at least their children were not going to be like them!

"Come on!" said Veena looking really angry. "Tell me or I'll go to the Principal. Munnu Lal is in my class and I am responsible for what he does. If he plays truant he must be punished for it." The children looked aghast. Going to the Principal was serious! Quite apart from the punishment, it was more than likely that he would send for Munnu's father. And Shambhu, tired and irritated after a day's back-breaking work, might beat poor Munnu black and blue. Or he might decide to take him out of school altogether and take him along to the site every day. There was work enough there, even for small boys like Munnu.

It was Pammi who stood up eventually, his lips trembling.

"Well?" asked Veena, "Do you know anything?"

"Please don't go to Principal sir, Madam" said Pammi. "I will... we will all tell Munnu not to go away again. He thinks no one notices it."

"Do you take us for fools?" asked Veena, "Of course everyone would notice a thing like this ... if it happened every day!"

"Yes, but everyone may not... not... care" said Mithu. "At least no one did before."

"Munnu has been doing it every day. No one said anything before you came, Madam" added Rani.

Veena bit her lip. It was true that she was very new. New and fresh from the university. She had refused several tempting offers and selected this particular school because she wanted to do something positive for the poor, neglected children of this overcrowded locality. She recalled the comments of her colleagues during the first week of her joining. "It's no use losing your sleep over these kids—they're just no good!" said one. "They'll drop out after failing three or four times in succession and end up turning into pick-pockets, drug peddlers and what have you." "Living where they do, they can't help it!" said another.

Veena felt shocked at their cool way of accepting it.

"It's all the more reason why we should try our level best to see that they don't become any of these things" she had said. "Otherwise what's the point of our educating them?"

"Just something on paper, something the Government chooses to spend money on" said one of her colleagues.

"We teach them because we have to. It's just a job. Not something to get wrapped up in" said another.

"I don't agree" said Veena.

"No? Well, have it your way. You'll change your tune before long. See if you don't!" And they had all laughed together!

But Veena had made up her mind. She was having none of it, such crass callousness and aloofness. If one from her fold chose to go astray with such regularity she had to find out why. And do something about it. She had mentioned sending the culprit to the Principal because she thought it would scare him. But she knew in her heart of hearts that that wasn't the solution. Not by a long chalk. She'd have to do something about it herself. Convince Munnu that it wasn't the right thing to do. That running away from

things never helped anybody.

Munnu at this moment was heading for his secret haven—a big, wide park which had an artificially constructed river flowing by its side. The bottom of the river was painted blue. So it looked like a real river. And the banks were green with well kept soft, velvety grass that was watered regularly to keep it that way. Munnu thought it the most beautiful place in the world. Specially because there was no one here this time of mid-day.

Munnu threw his satchel of books on the grass and lay down beside it with a contented sigh. If only he could stay here instead of the dirty, overcrowded, smelly and shoddy jhuggi! One could really breathe here, under the wide blue sky and the soft green grass beneath his feet. It was so wonderful to gaze at the row of tall laburnums with their sheets of gold and the gulmohurs red with blossom. So soothing to listen to the twitter of the birds and watch the squirrels running swiftly from one tree to another. It made him think of home. Not the overcrowded room in the jhuggi but their real home in the village far away where only his old grandparents lived now.

Munnu closed his eyes and tried to remember those days. They seemed strangely distant and unreal. Those wide green fields of wheat, chana, bajra and corn. His father, uncles and grandfather—all working in the fields. The low roofed house which had flowering creepers falling all over it, the heady fragrance hanging thick in the air. The crystal stream flowing past the fields and how they splashed in the water sailing paper boats. The blue sky above, the green fields below—how could one live without something green and something blue to add colour to life?

That's what drew Munnu to this place. It seemed to call and beckon him all the time. He had discovered it one day by chance when he, Pammi, Mukul, and Bhola lost their way trying to look for black berries.

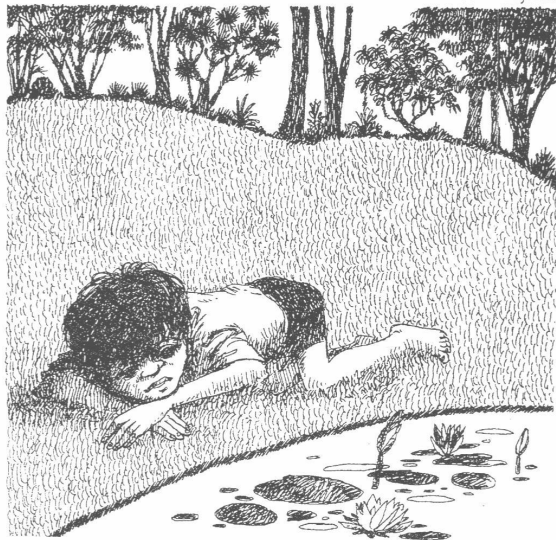
"What's this beautiful place?" he had asked.

"It's the riverside park" said Pammi.

"I wish I lived here and not in the horribly crowded jhuggi," said Munnu with a sigh, "it's so nice to be surrounded by something green and something blue, just like the village." "But we have the sky too" Pammi had said laughing, "it's there everywhere".

"But it's not the same" Munnu said with a sigh, "there's no green. Just roads and alleys, shops and garbage heaps."

Munnu took to running away to the riverside park soon after half time in school. No one noticed it when he quietly crept out pretending to buy channa from the street vendor. The classrooms were all so crowded. No one noticed it if there was one boy less.



And the 'madams' didn't care, anyway! Half of them sat and knitted in the classroom, giving them some work they never bothered to correct! The park with its shady trees was like a bit of paradise.

What was even more important, a paradise within his grasp. "Why did you leave the village and come here if you loved it so much?" his friends asked Munnu.

"Because of the terrible drought that year" said Munnu sadly. "There was no money and there were debts my father had to settle. He had to find work because they had to sell off most of the fields. Because my taoji wanted the money to get his daughter married. And dadaji sold the rest for my bua's wedding."

"Well, why couldn't your father leave the rest of you in the village and come to town by himself?"

"Amma couldn't let him come all alone. She must look after him and us too. So..." His friends nodded. It was a common enough story!

But Munnu's friends did not mind being in town. They loved it! The shops, TV and films, the hustle and bustle of the big city where things happened all the time. They didn't care about green fields or the blue sky. In any case, the sky in the city, specially where they lived, looked grey! Grey and dusty and tired. As tired as his father looked when he returned from work each night.

Back in class, Veena looked at Pammi. "You tell me where he is. I may not complain to the Principal just this once but I must speak to Munnu." It was Chitku who piped up from the front bench. "I know where he is, Madam. He is lying on the grass in the riverside park."

Munnu's friends hissed, one of them poking Chitku with his pencil. "The riverside park!" cried Veena amazed, "Whatever for? Whom has he gone to meet?" "Nobody" said Pammi, now that the secret was out, "He sits there all by himself... Because he says he longs for something green and something blue" said Chitku with a giggle. "He is quite batty."

"What does that mean?" asked Veena amazed.

"The sky and the river water are blue and the grass is green there" said Pammi.

Veena frowned. This was something she needed to see for herself. The bell rang for the next class. The maths teacher came in. Veena made for the school gate. She knew where the riverside park was. It was quite a short walk from the school. And she had brought her own car today. She was by the park in a few minutes. There was a small figure huddled by the river gazing listlessly at the artificially flowing water, a grimy sachel full of books by his side. Yes, it was indeed Munnu.

"Munnu Lal! Munnu!" Veena called out stepping inside the park. Munnu jumped up, staring at her incredulously.

"Don't be afraid. I haven't come to scold you" said Veena smiling at his scared face. "I want you to tell me why you keep running away from school every day. And why you come here."

Munnu stood mute, looking undecided. He did not know where to begin or what to say. Spelt out, it sounded incredibly foolish! "Tell me" said Veena gently, "I shall try to understand."

Munnu's lips quivered. No one had spoken to him like this for years. "Go on" said Veena. And suddenly it all came out in a torrent. His longing for the open fields and the clear blue sky in his village; the trees, birds, squirrels and mongooses who had all been a part of his life; the stream where he splashed; the banyan tree on which he had his swing; Dadaji's stories; the wholesome, tasty fare cooked by his Dadji; the festivals where the entire village took part; moonlight gleaming on the haystacks and all the friends and cousins left behind. Something green and something blue symbolised all this—something he could partially feel when he came here.

"But why miss class?" asked Veena, "Why not come here after school was over?"

"How could I come after school?" asked Munnu amazed, "I have so much work to do—helping amma, looking after the little ones, run errands, do homework, press papa's feet when he comes home tired from the construction site and..."

"I understand" said Veena. "But you can't miss school, all the same. Remember your parents spend hard earned money to send you there just so that you many learn something and make a better life for yourself when you grow up."

Munnu hung down his head. "I hadn't thought," he said, "I won't do it any more."

"What would you like to do when you grow up?" asked Veena

"Go back to the village" said Munnu promptly.

"Of course. But what would you do for a living?"

"Work in the fields like Dadaji and Papa did..." began Munnu and stopped short. "I forgot" he said after a pause. "We no longer have any fields."

"Perhaps you'd like to work in a garden?" asked Veena gently, "Or a big farm right outside the city? Where there are big fields and tall green trees and birds singing all day long?"

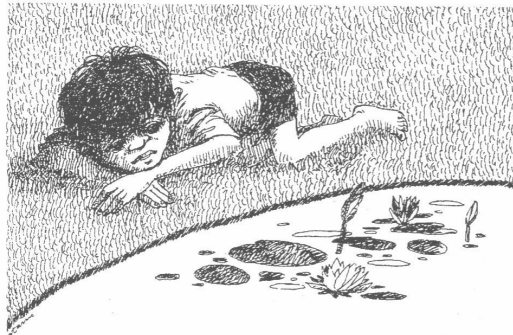
"I'd love it" said Munnu with shining eyes.

"I'll tell you what we'll do" said Veena, "Don't miss classes any more. My uncle owns a big farm just outside the city. I'll take you to see it some weekend. See if you like the place and the kind of work they do. If you do you can spend some time during your summer holidays, watching how things are done and learning all you can. You can find something similar once you are through school and I'll help you find it. But you must have your education."

"Thank you Madam" cried Munnu, "it sounds quite wonderful."

They stood up to go, Munnu wrapped in happy dreams. Veena smiled wryly. She knew just what her colleagues would say. "Life isn't so simplistic! You may help one Munnu but what about the thousand other Munnus like him all over the city? Can you help them all? This isn't any solution—not by a long chalk!" Perhaps it wasn't, thought Veena. But every vocation had to begin somewhere. And this certainly was a beginning!

Swapna Dutta has been writing and translating books for children for two decades and has around twenty-four titles to her credit. Her Juneli and the Teddy series are published by HarperCollins, India.



THE MAHABHARATA

The Mahabharata deals not only with the power struggle between the princes of two houses but also with various branches of learning. Woven into the main theme are lengthy dissertations and treatises on philosophy, ethics, morality, statecraft and metaphysics. The sages who wrote the epic had an almost uncanny understanding of human nature and have depicted it with unemotional clarity. The text in fact states that "what is in the Bharata is everywhere and what is not is nowhere".

The story has been told in lucid English, using the modern idiom, yet wherever possible the metaphors, similes and allegories of the original have been retained.

This abridgement by Meera Uberoi is based on Kisari Mohan Ganguli's translation of the Mahabharata.

Jacket: Manjit Bawa



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Watch Your Language

Anupa Lal

Recently published picture books from the Children's Book Trust include: *An Old Friend*, *Wally Grows Up*, *Saved*, *Chumki Posts a Letter* and *The Railway Train*.

In *An Old Friend*, written and illustrated by Harinder Singh (Rs. 10.00) two little children are scared at the sight of a big-nosed man at their front door. They hide, thinking he is a thief until the mystery is solved. I thought the reaction of the children rather unrealistic and exaggerated. Do young children consider every big-nosed man a thief? I doubt it. If this particular stranger resembled a thief whose picture the children had seen somewhere, then this fact could have been mentioned in the text to lend the story more conviction.

While the illustrations in the book are good the text could have been both livelier and shorter. Simple language alone is not enough in a story for children. The language has to be both simple and alive! Here for example is a sentence from the text: "The thief will come in and harm us." The verb "harm" is too vague, too lifeless for a child. Almost anything else—the thief will hit us, smell us with his big nose and then eat us up—would have been better! Children always respond to vivid language, even if it conjures up images of violence. Any anxiety created in their minds as a result can always be skilfully allayed by a sensitive writer.

Wally Grows Up by Santhini Govindan (Rs. 10.00) is a pleasant variation on the Ugly Duckling theme, attractively illustrated by Chaitali Chatterjee. But where is Wally—who is a tadpole—growing up? With a name like Wally and expressions like "Gee whiz," "phooey" and "you sure are pretty," Wally "sure" seems to be growing up somewhere in the United States! Or has he just been watching too much cable television?

Beautifully illustrated by B.G. Varma, *Saved!* by R.K. Murthi (Rs. 10.00) is the story of a group of enterprising birds and animals who save their home—a teakwood tree—from being cut down by poachers. While the story is cleverly developed, the language, as in the first book reviewed here, could have been more imaginatively tailored to the needs of its young readers.

Chumki Posts a Letter is a delightful and true-to-life story by Mitra Phukan, vividly illustrated by Tapas Guha (Rs. 10.00).

The Railway Train by Navkala Roy is part of a series of information books for children (Rs. 9.00). Crisply written, the book is a good read despite the odd grammatical or is it printing error. Several illustrations by T. Karthikeyan could have been sharper and clearer.

Also from the C.B.T. are three novels of adventure for older children.

Malana by A.K. Srikumar, illustrated by Deepak Harichandan (Rs. 20.00) is the most ambitious in scope. It begins with a glimpse of ancient Greek history, moves to modern Britain and then to contemporary India. Unfortunately, despite its potential, the story lacks depth as well as conviction. Characterization and language are both lacklustre, in fact sometimes rather peculiar. You have a so-called very British butler trekking through Himachal Pradesh saying "This is what I call a gripping good adventure!"

After an exciting and relatively well-written Prologue, the rest of the novel disappears, as do the illustrations. Nothing really comes alive to grip the reader, which is a shame considering the potential of the story.

The Twins' Holiday Adventure by Priti Banerjee, illustrated by Debendra Nath Laha (Rs. 16.00) is a racy, reasonably well illustrated, neatly developed, if-not-very-original mystery. It has all the ingredients that Enid Blyton made so popular—enterprising children, suspicious adults, friendly policemen, a haunted house, a disguise and a hidden treasure! The novel is better rooted in the Indian environment than many others of its kind, though I did find providing immediate explanations in English of Indian words a little jarring—"They were looking forward eagerly to crisp, crunchy dosas (fried rice pancake) accompanied with coconut chutney and piping hot sambar (a curry of pulse, vegetables and spices). The same explanations provided at the bottom of the page might not interfere with the flow of the narrative as these tend to do.

The Musk Poachers by Simren Kaur (Rs. 15.00) is the story of two young children from a village high up in the Himalayas, doing more than their bit to save the musk deer of the region from extinction. The story is absorbing, the location well delineated, the illustrations by Neeta Gangopadhyaya adequate. There are a few patches of stilted conversation which could have been avoided: "Keep behind me then lest we encounter an irate mother bear." Would a child or anyone for that matter, speak like this?

Two recent publications in Hindi, again from the C.B.T. are *Rahul Ki Yatraen* and *Andaman Nicobar Dweep Samooh*.

Rahul Ki Yatraen by Ratnavali Mitra, illustrated by Gautam Rai (Rs. 13.00) is an attempt to present the natural history and geography of different parts of India in the shape of the travels of a youngster Rahul and his family. More illustrations perhaps some quirky ones as well as maps of the places visited would definitely help the already-homework-burdened child reader to absorb the large amounts of informa-

tion provided in the text.

Andaman Nicobar Dweep Samooh by Acharya Paramhans Pramod, illustrated by Deepak Harichandan (Rs. 10.00) is a straightforward account of these fascinating, relatively unknown and unexplored islands. Surprisingly there are hardly any illustrations and once again no maps at all to augment and enliven the text. How come?

Most of the books reviewed here have won prizes in the annual competitions organized by the C.B.T. The C.B.T. was the brain-child of that "grand old man" of children's literature in India—Shankar Pillai—himself the author of several delightful books, including that little gem "Mahagiri the Elephant".

Shankar's puckish sense of humour, his irrepressible imagination and his sensitivity to the mind of a child are qualities which present writers for children should strive harder to imbibe. They should remember that it is not a question of simple arithmetic. Simple language plus a topic-likely-to-interest children do not automatically add up to a good children's story.

Anupa Lal, herself an author of several children's books, has been reviewing books for children for the last two decades.

Teacher Plus—A Profile



Started in 1989, *Teacher Plus* (Editor, Deepa Chattopadhyay) is a bimonthly magazine for teachers promoted by the Orient Longman group—a group known for its commitment to helping teachers with quality textbooks, resource materials, workshops and teaching aids. The magazine came into existence to fill a very obvious vacuum: there is no other magazine/journal in the country exclusively addressed to school teachers. *Teacher Plus*, therefore, aims to provide a nationwide forum through which teachers could interact and communicate with each other—sharing ideas, teaching tips, activities and opinions. The magazine has a very clear focus: the practising teacher in an actual, real-life Indian classroom. Avoiding the rising of every kind, *Teacher Plus*, addresses itself to issues and problems which are real and practical, and which will be of relevance in an Indian classroom of sixty plus students.

With this in mind, several columns were planned for the magazine, all of them useful to the teacher. There is a *News* page which presents and analyses various news-items from India and abroad related to teaching, teachers and education. There are a series of *Classroom Updates* in the different subjects (English, Science, History, Geography, Maths) which present a 'hand-on' exploration of any one topic, with useful teaching ideas and tips about how to present the topic in the classroom. There is a *Primary Pack* section, which gives a range of strategies, projects and teaching ideas for the primary-class teacher. Besides, each issue of the magazine carries a *Focus*—a discussion, with interviews and varying points-of-view, on any one topic (e.g.: boarding schools, discipline, homework, co-education schools, pay grades for teachers, etc.). For those looking for humour, *Sideline* takes a droll look at the humorous, light-hearted side of teaching. Book reviews and extracts of books which are of relevance to the teacher (books for children, resource books for teachers; teaching aids, etc.). The *Outreach* page presents strategies to help teachers add a new dimension to their work. *Timeout* is devoted to activities and craft ideas that can be tried out in the co-curricular and extra-curricular fields. *Resources* gives information on models, books and teaching aids that are of practical applicability in the classroom, while *Last Word* provides matter of interest to the teacher, but outside the regular curriculum—quizzes, interesting information updates, reports of activities and projects from different schools, etc.

Though these are some general headings under which the articles are carried, the categorisation is by no means rigid and allows inclusion of any material which is seen as being of value to the practising school teacher.

Apart from these sections, the central attraction of every issue of *Teacher Plus* is a *Project Pack*—a host of interdisciplinary teaching ideas (usually accompanied by a colourful poster) built around a central theme (for eg. *Rivers, Colour, Clothes, Tea, Money, flowers*, etc.). These interdisciplinary themes are carefully chosen, and well-researched, and integrate a number of concepts that are dealt within the school curriculum.

All the sections mentioned above are packaged in a lively, easy-to-read, well-illustrated, sixteen-page tabloid. The articles are written by practising teachers, teacher trainers and educationists from all over the country. The teaching aids and project ideas framed with the realities of an Indian classroom in mind do not turn out to be unworkable, or exorbitantly expensive, or unsuited to Indian conditions (problems which are endemic when one refers to journals and magazine from abroad).

Teacher Plus is published six times a year (in February, April, June, August, October, December) and is priced at Rs. 40/- for an annual subscription. The magazine is thus easily within the reach of both individual teachers and schools.

A Potpourri of Reading Champions of Nature

Poonam Bevli Sahi

Bulbul Sharma

THE GUEST WHO CAME TO DINNER By Luis M. Fernandes, 1994, pp. Rs.

THE MYSTERY OF THE ZAMORIN'S TREASURE By Margaret Bhatti, 1995, pp. 87, Rs. 23.90

THE FOLK TALE READER VOLS. 1, 2 & 3: SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN FOLKLORE Edited and compiled by Uma Raman

THE GREEN BOOK

Edited by Ruskin Bond

Roli Books, 1995, pp. 192, Rs. 225.00

A hamper of five Ratna Sagar books. I have decided to regress to my childhood. I get myself a bowl of chips, shoo the children off—lie in bed and do eenee meanee minna mo to decide which book to start off with.

With a little help from me—'mo' lands up on a series of three books—with an intriguing title *The Folk Tale Reader*. Why reader? Is it a storybook or is it a reader—to be prescribed in schools? Or is it both? I flip through the pages and I spy at the end of the book some questions relating to the stories. Ah na! This is one sharp publisher. If you can kill two birds with one stone, why not?

Anyway, the stories are fascinating. Indian folklore at its most interesting, full of kings and queens, gods and demons. Some of them wise, some funny and some ordinary. "The Tale of the Wise Minister" teaches us to use our powers of observation which we all have—but only some use. "For the greater good" teaches us that most of what happens, happens for our good.

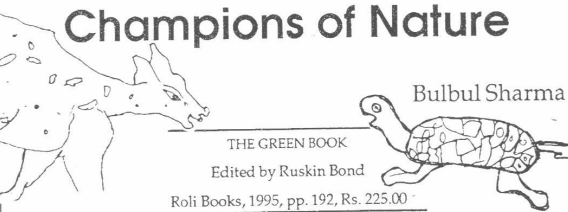
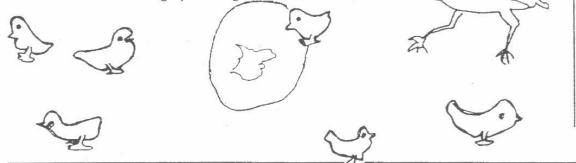
Some stories in this series were narrated in a manner that made for more involved reading. Like the story of Bhasmasura where the author explains to the reader the meaning of the word 'Bhasma' by writing "The first part of the word sounds as if you were breathing out a cloud of dust. Say it loudly a couple of times—Bhasma Bhasma—and you will see what I mean." I did it and I am sure every reader will too. The name of the game is to involve the reader. In some stories the author has used this very well. In the same story Poile Sengupta compares the era in which the story was related to our modern times—and tell us that Bhasmasura went to the forest to study some more and then goes on to ask—why into the forest you might ask. Because Bhasmasura could not enrol in any university to become a doctor, engineer or a teacher. This story was one of the nicest in this series because it succeeded in explaining situations that readers could identify with.

Another story that I enjoyed was "Bidhata Purush". Again the same technique has been used. Poile Sengupta is rather a good children's story writer. Uma Raman who has edited this series and written some of the stories would have done better if she had given an introduction to each story, where it originated, what period it was set in etc.

The Guest Who Came to Dinner is not written for the discerning reader. It seems to be a mish mash of the Indian and the western and quite wearisome to read. The fantasy is often forced and not convincing. A little more interaction with children and a little less western influence and a good editor could have made something worthwhile of this book. We would like books that can stand on their own in any part of the world and not appear as a poor copy of the western books.

I saw the cover of *The Mystery of the Zamorin's Treasure* by Margaret Bhatti. Then I read the same and said to myself—"Oh no! another Enid Blyton copy". With great reservations, I started to read this book. I must confess I had already decided to write it off. There were too many originals already. But to my very pleasant surprise despite the name I enjoyed the book. The author writes exceedingly well and has the reader in the story's grip throughout. The setting of the story is unusual—but educative. The adventure and the mystery—both believable with a bit of history thrown in, rich in description—first in its pace. A mature author with complete identification and understanding of the reader.

Poonam Bevli Sahi is a graphic designer and illustrator.



India with its stunning and immensely rich green treasure-trove of natural wonders has never had any great nature writers. Though poets like Kalidas and Jaidev wrote lyrical verses praising her virtues, Kangra miniature painting tried to capture her ever changing colours and forms, folksongs from every corner of India sang about her great beauty, endless bounty and sudden flashes of temper, nature was always a metaphor and never the main theme. Emperor Jehangir was a rare nature enthusiast and probably the first 'green' person in India who wanted to learn about the amazing flora and fauna of his vast empire. Besides this royal record of natural history, there are no surviving written works on nature in the Indian languages which deal specifically with natural history and not just mention various animals and plants in the course of descriptive accounts of kings and countries like in Tamil Sangam literature, or in folk literature like the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka Tales*. But despite the lack of written matter, the people in the villages are often very knowledgeable about their surrounding flora and fauna. Nature had to wait patiently for many centuries to be written about and we have to thank the British for an invaluable record of our natural history heritage. Soldiers posted in remote areas, civil servants stuck in a dusty outpost, busy revenue officials, memsahibs with huge gardens and time on their hands all became dedicated amateur naturalists. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds and they collected, wrote and painted about every little natural wonder which caught their eye. Their writing was not meant for scientific journals and learned gatherings. It was to satisfy their own curiosity and share their love and enthusiasm for nature with other like-minded people. But these records made by amateur naturalists were so accurate and full of interesting details that many of them now form a base for present day scientific studies.

A collection of some of these wonderful articles on nature have been included in Ruskin Bond's *Green Book* published by Roli Books. This is not a book full of dull facts and tongue twisting Latin names but a personal tribute to the wonders of nature by both celebrated British writers like Rudyard Kipling, E.H. Aitken, Douglas Dewar, Stanley Prater and C.H. Donald and Indian writers like Ruskin Bond, the best known writer on nature, Maneka Gandhi best known champion of nature and M. Krishnan, one of the most respected writers on nature in India. "These are not papers to be read out at environmental seminars. These are stories about real experiences, written to be read and enjoyed" explains Ruskin Bond in the introduction.

There is fantasy and myth here like the fascinating tale "How Fear Came" by Rudyard Kipling as well as charming, garden variety tales like Maneka Gandhi's story of a sparrow called Numm Numm after Peter Seller's famous Birdy Numm Numm act. The *Green Book* begins with the British nature writers and then moves on to the Indians. You can see the change in the style but the quality remains the same as the stories change from fantasy to facts and then back to fiction. C.H. Donald's story "Travels with a Bear Cub" is a witty tale about 'Bhaloo' a bear with "no sense of decency, no conscience worth talking about, no sense of propriety..." while Douglas Dewar, who was a social historian in the 1920s, as well as a keen bird watcher with many books on birds to his credit, including the famous *Birds of the Plains* writes about "The Common Doves of India" in a very readable style. According to him doves should have become extinct ages ago because "they do everything they should not do, they disobey every rule of animal warfare, they fall asleep when sitting exposed on a telegraph wire, they build nests in all manner of foolish places, their nests are about as unsafe as a nursery can possibly be, and they flatly refuse to lay protectively coloured eggs... yet doves flourish like the green bay tree." The best stories in the *Green Book* are four rare gems from E.H. Aitken, a revenue official who wrote about the Indian countryside a century ago. EHA's witty and charming tales are not just about birds and animals but also about antics of amusing people too. These stories will delight every reader however disinterested he or she maybe about nature. EHA's famous books *Naturalist on the Prowl* and *Tribes on My Frontier* are collector's items and very difficult to find. The other stories in the *Green Book* which I liked were "The Flute Player" by Ruskin Bond, who writes as usual in his effortless style and M. Krishnan's informative "The Ratel" but I missed the presence of Salim Ali, the father of Indian Natural History and a great writer who could put across his formidable knowledge in a very readable manner. But the *Green Book* is an excellent collection by Ruskin Bond—a book which will certainly become a must-read for all those who love and respect nature and care about protecting our natural heritage.

Bulbul Sharma, a writer and artist, is the author of a volume of short stories entitled *The Perfect Woman*.

A Good Bargain

Jaya Bhattacharji

INDIAN FOLK-TALES AND LEGENDS, By Pratibha Nath. Illustrations by Asit Bagchi
Puffin Books, India, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 170, Rs. 50.00

It is refreshing to see such a varied anthology of familiar Indian tales and legends. A break-up of the stories gives us two each from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, two Akbar-Birbal stories one from Delhi, and one each from Rajasthan, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Meghalaya. The stories have informative head notes in which there is only one *faur pas* but that is a major one. Ms. Nath says of "The Magic Wrap":

The following is a folk tale popular among the Garo tribe of Assam. (p. 36)

The Garos constitute one of the 3 tribes of Meghalaya. The other two tribes are the Khasis and the Jaintias. Meghalaya was carved out of Assam in 1971, 24 years before this anthology was published. This lovely collection of tales shows much care and thought, so that such a mistake is particularly unfortunate. Another small slip is to say "the Punjab" which is redolent of the Raj but not used anymore (pp. 9, 49 *my emphasis*).

From Punjab we have the marvellous Sher Dil and Gulabo story. Sher Dil, a rich miser, does not like to spend money on his servants so he dismisses them and gets a demon to work for him instead. The demon is a very, very quick worker which exasperates Sher Dil who doesn't get any time to take a nap because the demon keeps coming to him for instructions.

"Why don't you rest a little?" said Sher Dil in despair. The demon laughed a horrible, croaky laugh. "Oh, I never rest", he thundered. "For me it's only work, work and work" (p. 52).

An extremely worried Sher Dil manages to give him more work hoping to rest till daybreak but is unable to do so. He then asks his wife Gulabo for help. She tells the de-

mon to straighten the tail of the stray dog who visits them everyday. Of course, the demon fails and is "thoroughly ashamed of himself."

Another lovely story is "A Trip to Heaven" about the poor farmer who went up to heaven hanging onto the tail of a white elephant and ate halwa. The next night he took the other villagers with him, but the greedy fat man in their group became impatient and they came tumbling down to earth all bruised and battered. They never got another chance to eat halwa in heaven.

The simple but good English of the stories is a genuine pleasure and Asit Bagchi's illustrations add greatly to the pleasure. The demon trying to straighten the dog's tale and the smiling cow standing next to a squabbling Banta Singh and Ghanta Singh make one wish that there had been more illustrations. (pp. 53, 11). Once again the flaw is in "The Magic Wrap." Garo women do not wear saris as the illustration would have one believe.

The legends in the anthology, from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Puranas are equally well written and illustrated. But one would have also liked to have tales from other communities and parts of the country. There is, for instance, a collection of stories from the Buddhists, such as the one from Urgelling, near Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. Tsangyang Gyatso, the sixth Dalai Lama was born in Urgelling, where there is a monastery which was founded by Lama Urgyen Tsampo Terten Pema Lyngpoh. Many miraculous happenings are attributed to Lama Urgyen. He discovered Terma, the hidden scriptures of Lopon Rimpoche and used his powers to miraculously bring up precious things from below the earth. The region was much disturbed by the evil spirit Sinmo, which the Lama destroyed with his magical bow. The arrow then hit a rock, the mark of which is still visible.

Indian Folk-Tales and Legends is a good bargain and despite the excellent but rather terrifying illustration by Tapan Goon makes a pleasant and affordable gift. It has a clear print and a firm binding. One knows the pages will not cascade fluttering around one like the leaves on the sleeping Alice.

Go out and buy it for yourself, your friends, and your children.

Jaya Bhattacharji is working for a Masters' degree from St. Stephens' College, New Delhi.

BOOK TRACK

It is November once again and TBR turns its attention to children's literature focussing on a whole gamut of books published through the year. The Indian scene can do with a great deal of improvement, the number of titles released for children has gone down substantially with most publishers sticking to 'safe' subjects like school texts and supplementaries and avoiding fiction. Puffins from Penguin India and Indus Peacock from Harper Collins Publishers India—the two leading imprints seem to have released very few titles in the past year; and although a great deal of effort is being expended by authors of children's books to promote and market their books in a more professional fashion somehow something seems to have gone wrong, to have retarded this growth which only upto a few months ago looked promising indeed.

The benighted state of publishing for children needs to be looked at from a broader perspective of the blitzkrieg of the visual media which militates against the reading habit. Television and cinema are two powerful media which set out to transform the world and society to change our thinking to free us from ignorance and illiteracy, to work as a public service to create social awareness. A lot of these programmes are aimed at children and a few of them are certainly informative and entertaining. It is only when entertainment becomes the sole criterion and there is a vacant mindless viewing that the insidious harmful effects of addiction to the 'idiot box' become apparent. Young people today are more restless, their attentions span abysmally low and concentration nil, say psychologists and point to too much T.V. watching. Rami Chhabra in her thought-provoking programme 'Aarsee Social Watch' explored some of these issues of influence of T.V. and cinema. The role that visual media plays in households is powerful and extended—there are countless homes both urban and rural that passively view the messages beamed down on multiple channels. She spoke to women of rural and urban backgrounds and each one of them was vocal in protesting against the vulgarity in cinema, the obscene lyrics and songs, *double entendre* dialogues and the constant depiction of women as mere sex objects lacking a definite social role and character. The images that flash on the T.V. screen are the images that stay with us, of gyrating nubile nymphets and eveteasing casanovas, of rape and murder. Who are the creators of these gruesome spectacles and what is it that they seek to tell us? Do they realize what they are doing to the minds of the millions who watch this 'free' entertainment through satellite and cable television? The tender young impressionable minds bombarded with these images until they are immersed to violence and begin to equate 'real' life with

'reel' life. All this reflects on us as a nation, on the disintegrating moral fabric of a society besieged and beleaguered by violence until something like the ghastly 'tandoor murder case' comes along to shake the conscience of a nation dulled and deadened by a constant battering of the senses. But even as we are repelled by the horror of it there is still speculation about the 'morals' of the murdered woman. Women are shown up as easy targets for the moral exploiter and these are the images that condition us and make even an educated intelligent male react to rape with a casual 'She probably asked for it'?

How does society combat this? How can we create an alternative, a better way to live and a healthier lifestyle to show the young? "Aarsee Social Watch" suggests alternatives to this T.V. addiction. Rami spoke to Vibha Parthasarathy, Principal of Sardar Patel Vidyalaya who has definite views to offer on the subject and projects rock climbing, bird watching expeditions and nature walks through Delhi's green areas as healthy substitutes for a Sunday at home. Apart from this teachers at the school have initiated discussions with students to encourage them to the discriminating viewers—to question and gauge the authenticity of what they view.

An organisation dedicated to re-introducing our youth to their rich cultural heritage and to put young people (especially on campus) in touch with the great masters of the performing arts is *Spic Mackay*. Founded by Kiran Seth, Associate Professor at the Delhi IIT, Spic Mackay through lecture-demonstrations, live performances and concerts seeks to expose its vast audiences to the variety and beauty available to them in the Indian tradition of music and dance. They have recently introduced a unique scheme of scholarships whereby students can live in with outstanding and gifted personalities like Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra or Anna Sahib Hazare or in the ashrams of the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa and observe and imbibe the atmosphere and lifestyles of these dedicated persons much in the 'guru-shishya' tradition of the 'gurukulas' of ancient India.

The various efforts being made by concerned adults to provide children and youth to create alternatives to mindless T.V. viewing have been briefly touched upon here. They can be tied up with organisational efforts already in hand to entice the young to the print media, to give them back the enjoyment of the wonderful world of books. One could even hope that some book lovers among the fast proliferating T.V. networks would focus on books as regular themes for some of their programmes for the young. The possibilities are endless. Are there any takers?

Preeti Gill

Past Perspectives And Future Scenarios

N.S. Siddharthan

INDIAN INDUSTRY: POLICIES AND PERFORMANCE
 Edited by Dilip Mookherjee
 Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, pp. 378, Rs. 495.00

This book is part of the *Themes in Economics* series of the Oxford University Press conceived with senior undergraduate and postgraduate students in mind. The introduction of the book states that the "book will also be of use to academics, policy-makers and journalists seeking a perspective on the evolution of Indian industry since independence, and issues which would be paramount in the years ahead". The focus of the book is on industrial performance and the role of government policy. Vital aspects of industrial organisation theory like studies relating to structure and conduct are largely conspicuous by their absence. Even within the confines of industrial performance and government policy, the book mainly focuses on productivity and competitiveness.

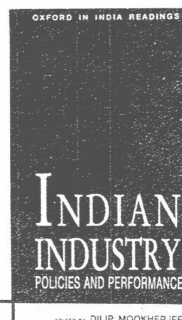
Apart from the customary editor's introduction, the book has chapters on "Industrial Organisation Theory and Development Economics" by Kaushik Basu, "Short-run Behaviour of Prices and Quantities in Indian Industry" by Tulapre Balakrishnan, "Pricing Policies" by U. Shankar, "Competitiveness of Indian Industry" by Sanjay Kathuria, "Technology and Indian Industry" by Sugata Marjit and Nirvikar Singh, "India's Policies Regarding Sick Firms" by T.C.A. Anant and Omkar Goswami, "Performance of Public Enterprises" in India by Atul Sharma, and "Small Firms in India" by Ira N. Garg. In addition the volume also has a classified bibliography and index.

All the authors who have chapters in this volume are established scholars who have made contributions in their respective areas of research. However, in some cases their areas of expertise does not coincide with the topics allotted to them in this volume. This has resulted in heterogeneity in treatment and an uneven quality of papers. Some papers are addressed to professional economists that could be published in academic journals, while others are meant for the general public that are more suited for newspapers. Some of the papers (like the one on public enterprises) do not even concentrate on current issues that are being debated and instead focus on issues that were prominent three or four decades ago. There is no survey of contemporary literature or discussion of problems relating to economic reforms, privatisation and sale of public sector equities, managerial reform, etc. Furthermore, in some papers the treatment of the subject matter varies widely between different sections. While some

sections are technical and are meant for specialists, others are written in the style of government reports. If the publisher's aim is to serve both the technical and popular audience, then their strategy of including some papers mainly addressed to technical audience and others to lay persons in the same volume does not seem to be the best one. An alternative approach, and in my opinion a better one, would have been to request the authors to survey technical literature and present them to the general public in a non-technical language. Such a presentation will facilitate dissemination of research findings to informed but non-technical readers. Nonetheless, some papers are literature-based and bring out valuable information that should be useful for academics and policy makers.

In his paper on competitiveness of Indian Industry, Kathuria argues that there is no single and unambiguous measure of competitiveness. If one assumes that exports are profitable, then export orientation (or market share in the buying country) could serve as a measure of competitiveness. Success in this would reflect both price and non-price advantages. In analysing price competitiveness Kathuria takes into account nominal and effective rates of protection, domestic resource costs and international comparison of total factor productivity. His main conclusion is "that activities that allowed less scope for government interference turned out to be more competitive" (185). Furthermore, in industries where small scale firms enjoyed an advantage the world over, and where sophisticated technology is not critical to success, Indian firms did better.

The chapter by Marjit and Singh deals with technology and industry and has section headings on issues relating to the importance of technology and development, market structure and technological change, and technology transfer. The section headings are on neo-Schumpeterian lines and give an impression that the authors would have surveyed Schumpeterian and neo-Schumpeterian literature as well as works relating to International Business. However, the treatment is mainly neoclassical and concentrates merely on the cost reducing aspect of technological change. It ignores the role of new products and technologies that do not compete with the old ones at the margin but threaten their survival and often result in their elimination. Schumpeter termed this as the process of



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"creative destruction". Neoclassical did not give technology a central place, and they assumed that technology is given and known. It was Schumpeter and later on neo-Schumpeterians who assigned to technology a central or a pivotal role. A survey article that ignores this rich literature, or does not even show an awareness of the current studies, ignores all that is relevant and crucial in this area.

Anant and Goswami have been working in the area of industrial sickness and have also published several useful studies in this field. They have used their experience and insight to produce a comprehensive piece on industrial sickness. The paper stresses the conceptual difference between poor firm performance and industrial sickness. Furthermore, it distinguishes between causes and symptoms of the sickness. Towards the end it examines the possible effects of financial sector reforms on industrial sickness.

Ira Garg's chapter on small firms in India is a thorough survey of issues and literature. It is a meticulous piece of work and attempts a detailed survey of technical literature and presents them in a non-technical language. The study shows that data do not support most of the common notions regarding the behaviour of small firms. There is insufficient evidence to show that small firms are relatively more or less efficient. Evidence is also mixed regarding the relationship between firm size and innovation. Nevertheless, evidence does support the supposition that small firms respond to incentives and react to market forces. The chapter begins with a detailed description of small-scale industries in India. This is followed by identification of main theoretical issues, the role of government, and an evaluation of the performance. Towards the end the author lists issues for future research.

N.S. Siddharthan is Professor and Head, V.K.R.V. Rao Centre for Studies in Globalisation, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi.

DEFENCE/STRATEGIC STUDIES

Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia
 KANTI P. BAJPAL, et. al.
 1995, 206 pp., Rs. 300

This is the first attempt to analyse Indian, Pakistani, and American perceptions of the crisis emanating from the Brasstacks Exercise by scholars from three countries. The book examines the decision making processes in these countries during the crisis and makes suggestions to avoid such confrontations in future.

Weapons of Mass Destruction: Costs Versus Benefits
 KATHLEEN C. BAILEY (Ed)
 1994, 147 pp., Rs. 150

This volume explores the issue of costs versus benefits of having weapons of mass destruction from the perspective of nations which have acquired them, those which have foregone the option, those which have pursued and abandoned such programmes and one (India) that has maintained its options.

Indo-Pak Nuclear Standoff: The Role of the United States
 P. R. CHARI
 1995, 256 pp., Rs. 300

An objective analysis of the nuclear capabilities of India and Pakistan and the role of the United States in retarding their nuclear programme.

Superpower Dominance and Military Aid: A Study of Military Aid to Pakistan
 BALDEV RAJ NAYAR
 1991, 96 pp., Rs. 100

Based on recently declassified documents of the United States the book examines the American decision in 1954 to provide military aid for the modernisation and expansion of Pakistan's armed forces and its ramifications in the context of the emergence of a unipolar world under American hegemony.

Indian Ocean: Issues for Peace
 RAMA S. MELKOTE (Ed)
 1995, 222 pp., Rs. 330

This collection of essays addresses questions like: Does the end of Super-Power rivalry brighten the prospects of peace in the Indian Ocean region? If the Super-Power rivalry provided a balancing factor, does its absence imply surfacing of regional conflicts and hegemonising attempts by regional powers?

Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia
 PARTHA S. GHOSH
 1995, 265 pp., Rs. 350

In South Asia, the forces of cooperation are overshadowed by those of conflict. The central argument of the book is that all regimes respond to challenges—both domestic and external in a fashion not conducive to regionalism.

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Politics of Recognition and Representation

D.L. Sheth

FROM CONCESSIONS TO CONFRONTATION: THE POLITICS OF AN INDIAN UNTOUCHABLE COMMUNITY

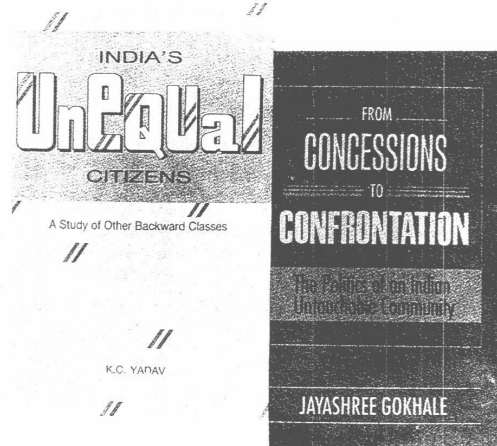
By Jayashree Gokhale

Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1993, pp. xi + 381, Rs. 300.00

INDIA'S UNEQUAL CITIZENS: A STUDY OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

By K.C. Yadav in association with Rajbir Singh

Manohar Publishers, Delhi, 1994, pp. viii + 426, Rs. 500.00



Categorization of populations is an old device which the State, or any political authority, uses for fixing obligations and privileges of its members/subjects. Even the modern liberal state which theoretically recognizes only the individual as a bearer of rights and obligations, has not escaped categorization and recognition of certain sections of its populations as collectivities to whom some special rights and privileges are attached. Recognition is often accorded to categories such as 'minorities', 'economically weaker sections' or to socially or racially discriminated groups in the society. This is considered particularly necessary for administering the social, cultural and welfare policies of the State and even more importantly for ensuring the political representation of these categories in a democratic governance based on the majority principle of representation.

Recognition and non-recognition of population categories by the State is however much more than a simple administrative device. It reflects the State's macro-ideology of its rule in the society. The classificatory system through which the State implements its policies must have a degree of legitimacy in the society. It, therefore, not only remains open to contentions and claims made by different collectivities about their 'official' recognition and nomenclature but, in the process, creates new identities and perceptions of interest among these collectivities. It is in the interstices of the 'official' categorization and recognition devised by the State, and the society's prevalent classificatory system that the politics of identity grew in India, and it has since overwhelmed representational politics in the country.

The origins of what are today regarded as the dalit and 'backward classes' politics, as indeed of 'minority' politics, lie to a great extent in the colonial State's re-categorization of the Indian population,

informed by the alien State's need to build support and legitimation for itself in the society over which it had established its rule. That the colonial State could actually find such support and a degree of legitimation was largely because the ideological base of the society's old classification system of castes had been already eroded. It not only made possible for the socially disadvantaged groups of the old system to use the new political spaces provided by the colonial authorities, but gave them an impetus to revolt against the old system of classification. They could now seek new benefits made available to them because of their 'official' recognition as 'depressed classes' and 'minorities'.

It is not an accident of history that what are today called the dalit and the 'backward classes' movements began almost simultaneously in different parts of the country with the 'categorization' of the Indian population by the 1911 Census. The movements grew phenomenally during the period between the Reform Act of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935. The books under review describe two distinct patterns of social movements and politics which grew during the colonial period, patterns which have since become integral to the institutional politics of representation in our country, i.e., the politics and movements of the dalits and of the backward classes.

Jayashree Gokhale's *From Concessions to Confrontation* is a rigorous and empirically sound study of the social movement of the untouchable caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra. The study, however, has great significance for understanding the wider dalit movement. For, the Mahars are not just another untouchable community, submerged and undifferentiated in wider dalit politics. They were among the very few untouchable communities exposed to modern education and politics as early as in the late 19th century. By the early decades of the present century, a

small but critical mass of educated and politically conscious elite had already grown within the community. It is therefore not surprising that the Mahars were, and have remained in the forefront of the dalit movement in Maharashtra. The political organization, ideology and the leadership, particularly of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, which spawned the Mahar movement, galvanized aspirations and consciousness of dalits not only in Maharashtra but in the rest of the country as well.

The movement of the Mahars is not just one chapter in the dalit movement of Maharashtra. It produced a generic perspective, and a political discourse on the issue of dalits, which had ramifications not only in the dalit movement of Maharashtra, but characterized the movements in the entire country.

Yet, Gokhale has preferred to assiduously stick to a narrative of the Mahar community's historical and social development and the political movement it produced for the community. Her excellent data and materials which can tell a larger story are all straitjacketed into a narrative of the caste movement. The Mahar movement, now adopting strategies of building political alliance with other untouchable castes, now forging a class type of alliance between the un-

touchable castes and other downtrodden castes of Hindus, is then seen to have failed in building a durable political organization either for itself or for the larger dalit movement. Of course the Mahar movement brought significant educational and political gains and even social prestige to the community, and it created a sense of self-respect and intrinsic dignity among its members. But its leadership's dream to evolve a political organization by playing a 'vanguard' role for all untouchable and downtrodden communities and through that to expand and sustain a unified movement of dalits so that these gains would expand and percolate to the larger dalit masses, did not materialize.

The Mahar movement through energising the process of its own political and social development resulted, among other things, in setting apart the community from other untouchable and lower castes, creating within itself significant internal social and economic differentiations. In effect, political activities of the movement remained confined, by and large, to Mahars in urban areas, government employment, white collar and professional jobs and to those active in dalit literary circles. It also expedited the process of 'embourgeoisement' of a section of the community and the loss of its activists

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to organizations and political parties which did not always espouse the dalit cause. Gokhale concludes:

The 'vanguard' of the dalit community has, by and large, acquired its position through the beneficence and tolerance of the Indian state and through cooperation and coalition with other political parties in the Indian political arena. It is obviously unwilling to jeopardise its gains, which it might do, if it were to undertake a genuine strategy of *class alliance* based on rural mobilization (as in 1959). The logic of its position therefore demands the adoption of the *caste alliance* strategy, and the tactics of minority coalition and compromise politics. In this regard the middle-class untouchable political elite becomes an easy target for cooperation or manipulation by a hegemonic party (pp. 347-48). (emphasis mine)

This may be a truthful account of the development and the subsequent narrowing of the political movement of one untouchable community. When seen as a movement of a single community, it can even be said that its organizational dispersal was written into the story of its origin and development. Seen differently, the movement probably succeeded in achieving what it had set out to achieve for the 'community'. But does this mark the end of the Mahar community's role in the dalit movement? On the contrary. It now seems more probable that the Mahar elite after the dispersal of their caste-movement may well find new leadership roles in the wider dalit movement, which is now ideologically more clearly informed by Ambedkarism and is organizationally premised on an autonomous and separate social-political identity of the dalits—an identity which the Mahar movement initially produced for the Mahars, but has since been embraced by almost all untouchable castes. The dalit literary movement, as Gokhale rightly perceives, is one indication in this direction.

If one looks at the Mahar movement from the macro perspective of the dalit movement it would appear that the Mahar movement, particularly the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar, had effected almost a paradigmatic shift in the dalit movement as a whole. It not only changed the nature of political discourse and ideological content of the wider dalit movement, but organizationally it contributed to the creation of a 'political class' of dalits which of course is not 'the class' of the Marxist conception. Premised on a new identity of the people, an identity separate and autonomous from the one that was defined for untouchables in the caste system, it coalesces their interests in politics. Dalit politics, to a considerable extent due to what Gokhale describes as the Mahar movement, increasingly became the politics of ethnicization and minoritization of a political class of dalits.

In any event, dalit politics as it has grown for over a century cannot be conceptually described as 'caste politics'; nor can the political formation of dalits which the movement has given rise to, be seen merely as an alliance of untouchable castes in politics. This is so, firstly, because with its politicization the self-identity and perception of interest of each untouchable caste has changed and expanded horizontally giving rise to a new consciousness and identity of dalits which encompasses them all. Secondly, the long existing politics of social coalition among untouchable castes, despite its ups and downs, has by now created a structural basis for recognition of dalits as an ethnopolitical category, reinforced by their official categorization as Scheduled Castes. Viewed at this level, movements of untouchable castes although they did not create a consciousness among them of belonging to the wider economic class of the proletariat, did produce a consciousness of belonging to a political class, whose members shared common aspirations and goals not only in politics, but with regard to forging a new social identity and cultural equations in the society.

Given the historical and social context within which dalit movements grew, it was inevitable that the issue of identity, rather than of material interest, acquired primacy in their mobilizational politics. Indeed, the perception of their economic and political interests by untouchable castes involved in these movements was determined by the movements' articulation of their identity as the socially oppressed and discriminated minority of the Hindu society, rather than their location in the secular class structure.

Inversely, seen as a whole, the dalit movement changed the nature and character of the organization of individual castes themselves into a people belonging to a new stratum, away from the caste system and sharing an identity independent of caste ideology. Of course, just as the dalit movement did not merge into the wider movement of the proletariat class, it did not abolish the horizontal social entities of castes, involved in the dalit political process.

In contrast to Gokhale, K.C. Yadav's *India's Unequal Citizens* proceeds on the assumption that all the agriculturist and artisan castes, i.e., Shudra castes, in themselves constitute today a 'class', sharing a common social characteristic of 'backwardness' and a history of social discrimination. A wide array of these communities were indeed systematically denied opportunities for social mobility, thanks to the economically disadvantageous and ritually lower locations they were assigned in the antecedent social structure. Nor can it be denied that they are now in need of vigorous social policy measures to correct their historical disadvantage. The relative neglect of their situation by the State in this regard and the opposition by the upper castes to their demand for 'social justice' is attributable

in a great measure to the perpetuation of the caste system in the Indian society. Yadav effectively documents composition of the political power structure at the centre and in different states, showing how a vast majority of the population which occupied the lower rungs of the caste pyramid has been kept out of it. He concludes that, despite ours being a democracy, the 'majority' of India's population, i.e., the Backward Classes, remain its 'unequal' citizens.

The question is, what kind of politics is possible or viable for populations covered by the political-administrative category called the Backward Classes? Unlike the dalit movement, the politics of the OBCs is of 'majoritization' of socially and economically heterogeneous populations, engaged by and large in various agricultural and artisanal occupations. With them, the official category OBC has also become a device for political mobilization. But finding a material interest base for this identity, and an ideology transcending the language of castes for its politics, has remained an elusive search for the leadership of the backward classes movement. Nevertheless, the 'class' as Yadav would have it has acquired a common political interest in terms of using political means for social mobility and power sharing. The politics of 'backward classes' movements for recognition and representation have been at work now for over a century. In the process, the official category of 'OBC's has indeed acquired some social-economic underpinnings, but strong political overtones. If there can be a class for itself, which is not a class in itself, the category 'backward classes' fit the bill. This is not to deny that numerous agricultural, artisanal and nomadic communities have yet not been adequately served by the social and welfare policies of the State and that for them the issue of 'social justice' is of great relevance. The question is to what extent the politics of backward classes can link the political-administrative identity of 'OBCs' to the interests of various internally differentiated and heterogeneous populations comprising this category. It is a social category created by political choice, which is not a 'class' nor an 'aggregate of castes'.

To view new political-social formations of dalits and of 'backward classes' and the movements they have spawned in various parts of the country either in terms of 'caste alliances'—albeit manifesting some 'class-type' elements as they shared common locations in the antecedent social structure of 'division of labour'—or as the 'class' in making, is to yield to set theoretical expectations in the face of radically changed social reality. The now blunted conceptual tools of caste and class analysis are in need of much refinement.

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The Activism of the Urban Poor

Ajay K. Mehra

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SLUM HOUSING: A STUDY OF BOMBAY
By Vandana Desai

Sage Publications, 1995, pp. 347, Rs. 350.00

Slums are an integral part of the urban landscape as well as of the urban system in India, as also in most developing countries. Though they pervade practically all cities and towns in the country, slums in India are not homogenous. Their socio-economic structure varies not only from city to city, but even within a city significant variations can be noticed in the social fabric. Slums in metropolises represent a microcosm of the Indian community structure. The interaction pattern within slums, therefore, could be important for understanding the level and extent of community participation.

The slums figure prominently in the political and power dynamics of a city, especially so in the case of Bombay, the commercial capital of India. Their electoral significance enhances their political importance. While these facts have been brought out by a number of studies, the pattern of community participation, particularly the interaction of the slum communities with structures of political power and the role played by community leadership to harness the socio-political energies of the community given its diverse texture, have yet to be adequately explored.

The body of research in urban demography has already established that rural-urban migration in India gets considerable support from kin-connections. Landless rural labour, mostly illiterate and unskilled, uses kin-connections in migrating to urban centres. It provides necessary shelter at the initial stage, reassurance while hunting for employment and stability thereafter to him and his family when the rustic simplicity is struggling to find its bearings in the urban environs. Vandana Desai's research goes beyond confirming this, it discovers the intricacy of the social fabric and political dynamics in three slums of Bombay.

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In *Community Participation and Slum Housing* Vandana Desai strives to study the impact of community mobilisation upon the slum upgrading process, the extent of the residents' participation and how far this participation significantly affects the likelihood of servicing. The author aims "to understand how the needs of the urban poor with respect to housing and servicing are articulated and satisfied, while examining the needs of the poor, their understanding of the main constraints on slum servicing and improvement, their involvement in community organisations, and the role that the community and its leaders play in influencing state action".

Desai discovers the role, functioning and utility of community organisations, where people come together as residents to carry on some activities of their own, in three slums in Bombay—Worli, Wadala and Kurla—at both social and political levels. While the two kinds of activities are not exactly separable, people exercise choice when it comes to participation and levels of participation vary accordingly. At the social level, therefore, she finds an interplay of local, linguistic, regional and religious forces in functioning these organisations which must be manifesting themselves while celebrating festivals or social functions. This differentiation, however, disappears if a common cause or threat is perceived. It means that the slum communities may appear to be fragmented at the social level, but there is greater solidarity at the political level, particularly, on issues of local importance.

Yet community organisations in slums are seldom stable, wide-based organisations representing the entire community. This is due to a variety of reasons. First, they are potent mechanisms of garnering or mobilising political support. Naturally, while all political outfits are active, government (read the party in power) has a head-start. It can, and does, gain support through the two mechanisms of "cooptation" and "clientelism". The recognition of community organisations by the state is an important prerequisite for the flow of the state patronage, which gives further advantage to the ruling party. Moreover, as Desai rightly observes "... in India, governments have often supported slum movements to gain political support and to contain urban conflict. Since housing and servicing issues directly impinge on the interests of politicians, bureaucrats, landowners, and real-estate developers, as well as on those of the poor, patterns of provision mirror closely the nature of the relationship between the poor and wider urban society and how political and administrative power operates at various levels." And, "needs and abilities of the state" to regulate communities also restricts participation.

Secondly, the leadership of the community organisations in slums is not hotly contested. There is hardly any circulation of elites. The same set of leaders are elected

year after year in a routine manner. For most people, too preoccupied with bread and butter question, can hardly afford the luxury of leadership, even active participation. The leadership of the community organisations, largely dominated by "rich slum-dwellers", therefore, develops close links with the established power-structure. No wonder, Desai discovers a patron-client relationship "between politicians, bureaucrats, and community leaders, both in determining the community leaders' power as well as the level of services and physical benefits that a leader could win for the slum community."

Finally, the low return and high cost of participation, resulting in dependence of the slum-dwellers on established norms and channels also weakens the effectiveness of these organisations as instruments of empowerment. It is further weakened by gender bias in community participation in slums. Naturally, the rich slum-dwellers monopolise community organisations, which is the lowest link in the chain of political power.

Community participation in general, but particularly in slums, is a very complex phenomenon. There are various levels and layers of participation and a citizen chooses his or her own level based on convenience and needs. Participation of citizens on the lower levels of economic ladder is determined by the time they can afford and politics they would like to pursue. Vandana Desai has been able to highlight this complex phenomenon in the context of the three Bombay slums. Social, cultural and political dimensions of community participation and the close interaction between the three are the highlights of Desai's research and analysis. The political dynamics of slums within the context of local politics comes out sharply in the study. Without in any way undermining the importance of community organisations she has succinctly underlined their limitations as the institutions of empowerment. The slum populace come out as live and active human beings rather than as inanimate objects polluting cities, or robot-like creatures living mechanically for two square meals a day.

A few dimensions of participation have been ignored in the study. These, however, do not take away the merit from this very competent study of community participation in Bombay slums. The extent of autonomous participation and the implication of unenthusiastic and uninformed mobilised participation, for example do not come out in the study. Similarly, her suggestion regarding failure of the elites or the government to involve the slum communities is erroneous because the mobilised participation is normally at the convenience of the ruling elite and for a limited purpose.

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Living On the Edge

Vandna Khare

HARVEST OF DEVASTATION

By E.G. Vallianatos

The Apex Press, U.S.A., The Other India Press, India, 1994, pp. 124, Rs. 75.00
Distributed in India by The Other Bookstore, Mapusa, Goa.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

By O.P. Dwivedi

Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 138, Rs. 185.00

The *Grapes of Wrath* was perhaps the first book to capture the plight of farmers forced off their land by the industrialization of agriculture. It turned able bodied men and women who loved their land into migrant dispossessed farmers forever in search of work. Not only were they robbed of their land, but also of their dignity. A half century has gone by but the plight of these people, though a forgotten story, still exists.

In an increasingly indifferent world, *Harvest of Devastation* outlines and analyses the pitiable condition of those who grow our food. The book, says the author, is a form of catharsis as it was simply impossible for him to carry alone the conflicts of two cultures—one that loved the earth as its most ancient mother and goddess and the other that idealizes and worships science and scientific technologies, and considers peasants and their farming techniques primitive. The crux of his argument is that if we assume peasants are indeed primitive and their simple technologies equally primitive, then how have peasants succeeded in cultivating the earth for millennia?

Taking the example of the United States, he says that industrialization of agriculture has created more poverty, pockets of poverty that are reminiscent of conditions of dispossessed farmers in the Third World. The pity is that there are few who even know or acknowledge the existence of migrant farmers. Men, women and children who are forced to move from one place to another in search of work—picking oranges, strawberries, grapes—until they are hustled off to another place.

Agribusiness has served, not to alleviate hunger and poverty, but only to create even more hunger and poverty—not only in underdeveloped countries, but even in the United States. Science, the 'queen of illusions' hasn't succeeded in growing all the world's food in a flower pot. It has only served to ensure the dependence of poor nations on the rich nations for food.

A situation created when nations submit to being told how to grow their food, thereby implicitly accepting the superiority of the other's culture and technology—technology that may not be appropriate for the country, the soil, or climatic conditions.

It is a persuasive argument against the industrialization of agriculture by the United States, the heartless mining of the land as it were—where scientific agriculture laid waste over a 100 million acres of land in the 1930's and created the Dust Bowl. This is the price, Vallianatos says, we pay for letting science and progress take over from time tested farming techniques. Science helikens to a global religion, the only ideology that has a common language and politics transcending a multiplicity of languages, races, religions and frontiers. Finally, science is power, hidden and raw power, fueling the engines of war and industrial production, the single ingredient that made it possible for a relatively small number of white people to dominate the much larger black, red, yellow and mulatto populations of the world for the last 500 years'.

A return to technologies that are not in opposition to the environment but place humans within the ecological system are

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appropriate, not technologies that poison the soil and pollute the environment. *Harvest of Devastation* is a powerful argument against the marginalization of those who grow our food, people we rarely see, or meet, or even think about, people who do not have a political lobby to help highlight their plight.

Environmental Ethics too stresses the need for man to realize that he must live in harmony with the ecological system and not be at war with it. The answer, Dwivedi argues, lies in a return to our religious roots. For all religions, he says, teach us that the environment was created for us to protect and not to pillage indiscriminately. Quoting extensively from all the major religions of the world, he concludes that every one of them emphasises protection of the environment, of replenishing the earth's dwindling resources.

So if all religions see man as part of his environment and not superior to it, where did we go wrong? Why did we begin exploiting the earth's resources so mercilessly? His argument is that the situation deteriorated when science influenced men more than religion. Just as organised religion once considered the men who loved Mother Earth primitive, so too did those enamoured by the wonders of science consider an adherence to religious practices primitive and passe. All of a sudden man was considered superior to nature. The link between the two snapped and man began exploiting nature.

The first part deals with the various types of dharma and the role of dharma in sustainable development; the second with world religions and how they view the environment. The last part covers an environmental code of conduct and guiding principles where he proposes certain basic canons that would govern this code. These include taking responsibility for the earth and the planetary system.

Like *Harvest of Devastation*, *Environmental Ethics* assumes in its solutions offered, that they are what everybody will desire. Both argue against subduing and exploiting the earth and remaining indifferent to the suffering caused. The consumerist culture has overtaken the developing nations, was exported to and is eagerly lapped up by the Third World nations. The desire to follow an ideology that is not the result of one's own experience, or the experience of a people, but that of an alien culture that seeks to impose its value systems, supplants indigenous technologies and destroys whatever is left that can fight its powerful tentacles.

In this sense, at a time when both the ideologies of communism and capitalism have failed man, perhaps it is time to listen to the simple wisdom of the peasant, or search for answers among the religious texts that have shaped our lives for millennia.

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Language as Function

Yamuna Kachru

NEW HORIZONS IN FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS

Edited by S.K. Verma and V. Prakasam

Booklinks Corporation, Hyderabad 1993, pp. 337, Rs. 600.00

One broad generalization about contemporary linguistic research may be made in terms of formal and functional approaches. This difference has been clearly articulated since the 1960s. The formal approach looks at language primarily as an object of analysis and focuses on its structural properties; it conceptualizes linguistic structure (grammar) as autonomous. The structure of language is studied at the levels of sound (phonology), vocabulary (lexicon), word formation (morphology), sentence patterns (syntax), and meaning (semantics) with no reference to language use or select features of language users (e.g., the physiology of humans in phonology). Functional linguistics, on the other hand, looks at language as a communication system and studies its structural properties or grammar with reference to its societal and instructional uses. It explores if and to what extent cognitive and social functions, class, ethnicity, gender, age and professional contexts can be shown to determine linguistic structure.

There are a number of different approaches to language within functional linguistics. In Europe, the Prague School (1930s) proposed a functional perspective on sentence structure in terms of how old and new information is organized in sentence. In Britain, functional linguistics developed in the works of J.R. Firth, M.A.K. Halliday and their associates, and in the USA, Dwight Bolinger made a number of significant contributions to

functional grammar. Both in Europe and in the USA, linguists interested in linguistic universals and topology have been active in this field. There continues to be intense debate on the theoretical foundations and methodology of these approaches to language research.

The volume under review claims to answer, for example, the following questions: "What is 'functional linguistic'? What are its distinctive features? Are there different schools of functional orientations? What are the roles assigned to semantics and pragmatics in functional linguistics?" The eight papers collected in the volume include an equal number of Indian and western contributions.

The first paper by K.A. Jayasheelan, "Formal and functional explanations in linguistics" (pp. 1-15), establishes that both formal and functional explanations are needed to account for how human languages work and why they work the way they do. The data are drawn from the grammar of passives and pronominal reference in English, Tamil and Malayalam. Michael O' Toole's "Thinking through critical linguistics" (pp. 17-42) provides a definition and brief history of "critical linguistics" and a demonstration of the techniques of critical linguistic analysis by looking at a newspaper report from the South Asian context in an Australian newspaper. The paper is a good example of how linguistic analysis is useful in uncovering the ideological bias of what appears to be an "objective"

piece to an uncritical reader. In India, such "critical" research is at its beginning and very little has been written on the use of language in the media, textbooks, and in various professional contexts. The paper by Ronald Langacker, "Deixis and subjectivity" (pp. 43-58), is highly technical and introduces the model of Cognitive Grammar by looking at *deixis* and *subjectivity*—defined within the model—in language. Shivendra K. Verma's "Allo-sentence revisited" (pp. 59-68) argues that allo-sentences—sentential and phrasal variants of a sentence—are semantically significant variant forms of a core sentence. Peter H. Fries' "On repetition and interpretation" (pp. 69-102), which is an expanded version of an earlier publication of 1982, demonstrates the application of techniques of syntactic and lexical analyses developed within systemic linguistics to arrive at an interpretation of a piece of text. The paper by Rober D. Van Valin, Jr., "A synopsis of role and reference grammar" (pp. 103-196), which is reprinted here and comprises almost one-third of the volume (or, almost 30 per cent), presents a sketch of the model called Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). RRG, according to the author, is "a structuralist-functional theory of grammar" (p. 103) which is neither at the extreme of formalism, as is Noam Chomsky's Minimalist Theory (the latest incarnation of Chomsky's grammatical theory), nor is it at the other extreme of Paul Hopper's Emergent Grammar. The basic claim of RRG is that "language [is] a system of communicative social action, and accordingly, analyzing the communicative functions of grammatical structures plays a vital role in grammatical description and theory" (p. 103). The paper by V. Prakasam and Anvita Abbi, "Towards natural functional grammar" (pp. 297-312), adopts the theoretical framework of systemic linguistics to demonstrate that syntactic structures can be adequately described only when a functional view of lexical and structural choices is adopted. The central claim is justified by analyzing a set of data comprising Mark Antony's oration in Julius Caesar, Hindi ergative and Telugu dative subject constructions. The last paper by R. Amritavalli, "The pragmatic accessibility of formal systems: a functional view of the development of formal abilities" (pp. 313-324), makes some observations on the interdependence of the formal system to be acquired (the nature of the linguistic system) and environmental factors (including input) that result in children's acquisition of language.

A volume on applied functional linguistics should appeal to Indian professionals interested in language for the following reasons. Functional linguistics provides the tools to analyze the interaction of social and linguistic structures and can be utilized successfully to study the prevailing patterns of language use and their implications for education and other social institutions (administration,

An introduction by the editors would have been useful to contextualize the papers in the Indian context and show the relevance of the papers for language scholars in India and elsewhere. The introduction could also explain in what sense this volume represents new horizons. That has not been done. It is, therefore, not clear who the intended readers of the volume are. The fancy price of Rs. 600 for camera ready 337 pages makes it inaccessible to the Indian students of language sciences.

banking, insurance, law courts, etc.). Additionally, its extension into critical linguistics can be put to use to explore the issues of prejudice, linguistic rights, and other concerns of a democratic society.

This volume, of course, is not meant to serve that purpose. One might ask what purpose the publication of this expensive volume serves. The volume exposes Indian readers to some important theoretical models and their offshoots (papers by Langacker, Van Valin, and O' Toole), and techniques of analysis utilizing the systemic model of linguistic description (O' Toole, Verma, Prakasam and Abbi). It is, however, difficult to discern a purpose behind the collection of papers. Some of them have Indian data (e.g., Jayasheelan, Prakasam and Abbi), but the collection as a whole does not constitute a significant Indian contribution to functional linguistics. A number of papers are reprinted in the volume that cannot be considered classics in functional linguistics.

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The editors of the volume have not been served well by the publisher—a constant complaint about a majority of Indian publishing houses, save a few. The papers, which obviously came to the publisher on disks, have not even been formatted following a consistent style sheet. This has resulted in the use of eight different and often unaesthetic typefaces, and different styles of organization. Each paper seems to have its own style: some papers have footnotes (e.g., O' Toole), and some have end notes (e.g., Langacker). Copy editing and proof reading exhibit the same lack of care; one paper contains the following uninterpretable sentence (p. 304):

iv. The grammatical structure of the sentence reflects the propositional structure of the sentence reflects the propositional units is an important feature.

What the publisher has done is to provide binding for the papers and launched these as a book.

The Verma and Prakasam volume, in spite of its limitations, will serve as a reference work for becoming aware of some issues in functional linguistics—a paradigm vital for understanding language in its social context in the subcontinent.

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Value of isms

Gurpreet Mahajan

POSTMODERN DESIRE: LEARNING FROM INDIA

By Paul McCarthy

Promila & Company, 1994, pp. 352, Rs. 360.00

POSTMODERNISM AND FEMINISM: CANADIAN CONTEXTS

Edited by Shirin Kudchedkar

Pencraft International, Delhi, 1995, pp. 321, Rs. 350.00

The analytical value of isms has always been a subject of dispute, yet, in the case of postmodernism the dispute is even sharper because there is considerable ambiguity still about what postmodernism is all about. Consequently, assessments of its analytical worth vary with particular accounts of it. The two books under review are a good illustration of this difference.

For Paul McCarthy transgression and coexistence of contradictory elements are the two most important attributes of postmodernism. Thus, everyday life of the middle classes in India appears to him to be an ideal type of postmodern text. It represents, on the one hand, transgression of desire and established gender and class distinctions, and on the other, a market linked existence encumbered by caste and religious identity.

Thus, the conflict of modernity and tradition witnessed in the life of the people of India is represented as an archetypal postmodern existence. That this representation in no way enhances our understanding of contemporary India need hardly be said. What, however, needs to be noted is that the author's notion of postmodernism leaves one guessing about the value of this ism. If postmodernism merely draws attention to the coexistence of modernity and tradition then there is nothing special about this ism. Further, if all that India has to offer as corrective to eurocentric postmodernism is the fact that transgression is involved in the modernity-tradition interaction, then scholars can easily skip this subcontinent.

Shirin Kudchedkar's edited volume has little to do with this subcontinent. It examines the link between postmodernism and feminism in the Canadian context. The bias in the articles is towards literary studies, but that is only to be expected for postmodernism excels in that department.

The volume does not present a unified picture of the relationship between postmodernism and feminism and that is just as well. We are, as a consequence, exposed to a variety of perspectives on this subject. The collection also confirms the

general opinion that it is very difficult to define postmodernism or to present it as a coherent school of thought. However, if there is one thing that the authors agree on it is that postmodernism subverts notions of originality (p. 24) and refuses to accept any fixed representations (p. 78).

When we come to the link between postmodernism and feminism, the disparities between the positions is quite well marked. Hutcheon argues that while postmodernism and feminism have a lot in common, yet, feminists should resist postmodernism for the latter has no political agenda (p. 79). For the feminists patriarchy is the biggest problem and the unifying factor of political and ideological stances. But for postmodernism, there is no single factor. Thus, while postmodernists can revel in "connoisseur of chaos" (p. 42), and can mix fact, poem, prose and photo (p. 31), the feminists are more single-minded in their ventures or, at least, that is the way Hutcheon sees it.

The similarity between postmodernism and feminism cannot be overlooked and Hutcheon knows it. If one takes Vevaina's argument that the personal is the political for the feminists, then the link with postmodernism is very obvious. Stressing this point of view, Green and Roy assert that women writers have used postmodern strategies to inscribe a "feminine subject split and fragmented by the alienating images of a patriarchal society" (p. 129). Moreover, both postmodernism and feminism undermine the master narratives and create space for multiple subjectivity. James takes this line of reasoning a little further. The author maintains that writing as a Canadian and as a woman inevitably makes one a postmodernist (p. 109).

The papers put together in this volume make an interesting compilation for all those interested in postmodernism and feminism. It is also quite refreshing and revealing to know how much Canada has contributed to these themes as also to high quality literature.

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'Usual' Stories Of An 'Unusual Cop'

Arundhati Devasthale

THE DIARY OF BALASAHEB SHASTRI

By Ramakant Kulkarni

Focus Books, Popular Prakashan, 1994, pp. 178, Rs. 75.00

Coming from Ramakant Kulkarni *The Diary of Balasaheb Shastri, 'Unusual Stories of an Unusual Cop'* creates high expectations. Kulkarni's long glorious innings in the Indian Police Service paved with challenging assignments including the Manavat murders trial, cases against formidable underworld dons like Walcott and Donze and investigation of Indra Gandhi assassination case have won him wide acclaim as a distinguished criminologist. Against such an interesting backdrop, the level of curiosity about the book he has authored and presented in the form of his alter-ego's diary is naturally pretty high. Qualitatively speaking, these are rather 'usual' stories of an 'unusual cop'. On the downside, this collection of ten short stories opens with a simplistic prologue, "Balasaheb the man and his times" and closes with a proper "farewell", an epilogue equally predictable. The burden of the book perhaps is over-simplification of contents, style and presentation, and hence the stories hold very little for adults.

The stories presumably culled from the notings of Balasaheb Shastri, a high ranking official in the police service, are actually incidents of different hues strung together. The locale is interior of Maharashtra.

The first story "Goonga Havildar" (the havildar named after the noted wrestler Goonga) offers an insightful view of the rural reality i.e. the atmosphere in a typical village, attitudes of the villagers and the advantages and disadvantages of being among them as an archetypal police officer. The narrative seasoned with mild humour announces Balasaheb's entry on the scene. The next story "Godfather" candidly reveals all that goes into the making of a cop: his vulnerability, his trials and errors and finally the sheer stroke of luck which saves him from getting into an awkward situation. With its liberal sprinkling of righteousness and sentimentality the story gets melodramatic towards the end but then all's well that ends well. "Human Sacrifice" is based on the Manavat murders series and is perhaps one of the best stories in this collection. It delves deep into the mechanics of a gruesome chain of murders and perceptively analyses the phenomenon in its effort to trace the logic, however distorted, behind the gore.

"Send it to the Veterinary Surgeon"

is a mild satire of the recalcitrant functioning of the government machinery in which the system shows a marked preference to passing the buck rather than taking on the problem and ensuring effective follow up. This of course, only amounts to the real trouble going undetected and those who have mastered the ingenious use of non-committal officialdom have it all. "The Curious Disappearance of Godawari Rao" deals with a delicate issue wherein a sensitive young girl who has led an emotionally deprived life at home, thanks to her father, walks into the trap set by a godman. Though the truth about him dawns on her eventually she is unable to retrace her steps. The story makes a powerful statement on alarming situations which only come as consequences of family upbringing, lack of emotional security in family ties and clogged channels of communication. These have the potential to lead the adolescents to disasters perfectly avoidable.

"Scientific Investigation" in two parts portrays the complex interaction between different cross-sections of society i.e. the police, politicians, members of judiciary, eyewitnesses to a particular crisis and the common folk and the roles they play in unravelling the mystery of a murder. The portrayal of the situation is authentic and the story shorn of frills makes some hard-hitting comments on the none-too-pleasant reality ending on a cynical note, the truth alone does not always triumph, the law and order problems and crimes of different nature have their roots in the unknowable human psyche and hence, solutions do not come easy. "The Inspection Again" is a social satire on a typical Indian social situation. It highlights the privileges of high-ranking police officers, outside the bureaucratic officialdom and the subordinates outdoing each other in their efforts to please the boss. And this exercise is completely delinked from professional competence. Here the parade inspection turns out to be a little more than a farce. Then there is the boss's wife, Baby Raje who true to her name is a child-woman refusing to grow up. She is condescending enough to step out of her cosy comfortable world and give a much-publicised demonstration of baking a cake to the unsuspecting village-women, to whom of course the whole thing is of very little relevance but for the entertainment offered. "How They Tackled Corruption" describes in great detail how the lonely battles to fight corruption only result in frustration and a sense of inadequacy. The problem appears formidable but Kulkarni doesn't cave in, he keeps hope alive.

"Bricks and Mortar" shows the vested interests of the busybodies at work under the guise of a social cause which in this case happens to be the construction of a school building. And there are the hawk-eyed politicians turning and twisting the situation to their advantage. Sadly enough, the handful of men of integrity involved in the project are as always but a small voice, helpless before the high

and mighty who successfully manipulate both the law and the facts.

The last story in the collection again has some good old romantic idealism at its core. "The Downfall of Cupid" is about a college girl getting infatuated with a good-for-nothing who is her co-actor in the college drama. Her father is a man of prestige. He refers the problem unofficially to the 'friends of the people', the police and they constructively deconstruct the brewing love affair, putting the lovers on their respective right tracks. Simple enough! The boy is fruitfully engaged in vigorous physical exercises, channelizing his physical energy towards a vocation of his choice and the girl is married into a family of her father's social status.

"Farewell" the epilogue comes as Ramakant Kulkarni's opportunity to address his readers through his mouthpiece, Balsaheb. Here he comes across as a transparently honest, vulnerable cop and not the proverbial man of steel. He is also a compulsive do-gooder. His farewell speech sums up all that he has been meaning to share with his colleagues and readers—his philosophy, his experiences bitter and sweet and finally his appeal to them to uphold the dignity of the profession and serve the people with a positive approach.

Kulkarni comes across as a simple, straightforward and humane officer who has given his best to the profession. And despite his larger than life public image, the book is refreshingly free from any attempt at self-aggrandizement. Looking back at his outstanding contribution to the services, his autobiographical writing, irrespective of its form, is of tremendous interest. The book presented in accessible 'Marathi English' gets awkward in places like: "For a man who has risen from ranks and spent years in humdrum government service, Balsaheb had a very fresh mind and really original ideas. Some of his ideas were quixotic, no doubt, but entertaining all the same. His narration of his experiences are absorbing. By itself, all that made a lot of sense, yet I must confess, I frequently found his account of some of the incidents rather quaint". (p. 3) or "He looked cheerful and relaxed in his dark suit the one he had got stitched for himself on the occasion of his silver wedding. The coat was rather baggy and his jesting wife often joked that he had got it deliberately stitched that way, so he could carry his service revolver snugly concealed in his coat pocket. Balsaheb merely smiled at the joke and modestly attributed it all to his tailor's native genius..." (p. 168)

As for the treatment of the contents one could not possibly agree more with the super cop's reluctance to sensationalize crime to create a space between blood-curdling accounts of violence and gore, and self-initiative sermonization.

Arundhati Devasthale is a freelance critic.

A Rare Species!

Pushpa Sundar

SINGLE WOMAN

By Urmila Jethani

Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1994, pp. 187, Rs. 250.00

In a society which places great value on marriage, especially for women, a single woman is supposedly a rare species, and can be expected, therefore, to be an object of curiosity. While this is certainly true at a personal and social level, at the scholarly level surprisingly little attention has been devoted to this subject in India. Therefore it is with great expectation that one turns to the above book, only to be disappointed because of its lack of serious scholarship.

Though a single woman can be a widow, a divorcee or an unmarried woman, the study is confined to the last category, the others not being mentioned even in passing. The study is based on the author's survey of approximately 175 women in Jaipur and Jodhpur cities, (she never makes clear exactly how many were included in the final sample, so that her findings presented as percentages make no sense), though she makes heavier use of others' studies. She looks at the causes of singlehood, values and beliefs of single women themselves and of society towards them, the role of economic factors, and the problems and stresses faced by unmarried women. One of the most encouraging of her conclusions is that social pressures on unmarried women are lessening, though traditional living arrangements and needs for protection and companionship still present practical difficulties. Also it is the women who are well educated, and enjoy social and familial independence because of economic stability who are both, likely to be single out of choice, and experience the least stress or stigma due to singlehood. For the rest, the news is not so good.

Though some of her conclusions and observations are interesting, there are few new insights, and they mostly confirm what is popularly known or believed. Her analysis lacks scientific rigour, and her study consists more of quotations of other studies, with or without relevance, than a thorough-going investigation of the facts of her survey. The small size of the sample precludes generalizations on any large scale. Repetition and poor organization of material do not help. Overall, the impression is that the author has read a lot but digested little.

Pushpa Sundar, a freelance writer is the author of *Patrons and Philistines: Art and the State in British India* (OUP, 1995).

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Jungle Girl by Ginu Kamani, Rs. 125.00
Jungle Girl consists of eleven tales of awakening—intensely sexual yet ambiguous. The female protagonists recklessly pursue their sensual paths through a complex social world that seeks to shut them out. Gaurangi (Ginu) Kamani charts a territory that is both intimate and bizarre.

Compiled by Harminder Singh.

**Book Sellers List
November 1995**

FICTION

Acceptable Risk: Robin Cook
Day After Tomorrow: Allan Folsom
Blood Stones: Evelyn Anthony
Heart of India: Mark Tully
Faith: Len Deighton

NON-FICTION

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen
Colours of Violence: Sudhir Kakar
Garden of Life/Naveen Patnaik

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India Handbook 1996: Robert Bradnock

Courtesy: Crossword—Delhi—Bombay

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■ ART & CULTURE

The Splendour of Mathura Art and Museum
R.C. Sharma

Introducing the socio-cultural background from the pre-historic times this volume provides a valuable account of the archaeological explorations and expeditions in the region since 1836. Besides the analytical assessment of the folk art tradition of early terracottas and the yaksa cult, Dr. Sharma points out the salient features of the evolution and development of Mathura sculptures on various themes including Jain, Buddhist and Brahmanical.

D.K. Printworld, 1995, pp. 211, Rs. 550.00
Vrindavana in Vaishnava Literature
Maura Corcoran

The author explores the essential nature of Vrindavana, critically analysing the representative texts from the immense corpus of vaishnava literature of different genres: mythological, metaphysical, devotional and commentarial. He seeks to identify a notional sequence of ideas connected with Vrindavana: the description of (a) a mythic place (b) a symbolic place (c) the geographical town as a centre of pilgrimage.

D.K. Printworld, 1995, pp. 178, Rs. 350.00
Metatheatre and Sanskrit Drama

Michael Lockwood and A. Vishu Bhat
Metatheatre in one of its senses can be viewed as one make-believe world superimposed upon another make-believe world. The question is what relevance does such a recent topic of literary criticism in the West have to a study of ancient Sanskrit drama. But Part I of this book provides the relevance and Part II provides the text and translation of and commentary on two Sanskrit forces written in the seventh century A.D.

Tambaram Research Associates, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995, pp. 84, Rs. 270.00

■ BIOGRAPHY

Memories of Beethoven

Gerhard Von Breuning
Edited by Maynard Solomon

These are the personal memories of an elderly man who as a child was closely acquainted with Beethoven. His absorbing account gives us a unique glimpse of Beethoven's daily life, his personality, friendships and family. This translation makes it available to English readers for the first time.

Canto, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 154, Rs. 195.00

■ HISTORY

From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal
Sushil Chaudhury

This book is an in-depth study of the eighteenth century Bengal, especially the pre-Plassey period. The author argues that Bengal's prosperity which was so marked during the first half of the eighteenth century came to an end after Plassey and that in the second half of the century there followed an economic impoverishment of the province under the aegis of the English East India Company and its servants.

Manohar, 1995, pp. 377, Rs. 500.00
Railways of the Raj 1850-1900

Ian J. Kerr
The major goal of this book is to explain how the British got the Indian railways built. Some 25000 miles of railway were constructed in India 1850 to 1900. This involved a substantial investment of British capital, the transplantation of Victorian railway technology to the British Indian empire, the presence of a supervisory cadre of British engineers, skilled workman and overseers and the mobilization of millions of Indian workers.

Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 254, Rs. 395.00

Begar and Beth System in Himachal Pradesh
Jaideep Negi

The system of Begar and Beth was widely known in the Himachal hills where it was a social and economic necessity. The best lands belonging to the jagirdars were cultivated by people of the lower strata of society and this was more or less a permanent feature of hill society. The author has used archival records and contemporary accounts in this search.

Reliance Publishing House, 1995, pp. 87, Rs. 125.00

Kusana Coins and History
Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Sarojini Kulashrestha

The author, a numismatist, examines myriad coins of the Kusanas, including some of the very recent finds to convincingly resolves the chronological puzzles of these Indo-scythian kings: from their very rise in mid-2nd century A.D. to their final extinction in circa 370 A.D.

D.K. Printworld, 1994, pp. 209, Rs. 260.00

Competition and Collaboration: Parsi Merchants and the English East India Company in 18th Century India
David L. White

This book traces the Rustom Manock family's rise to mercantile supremacy and its subsequent decline in the first half of the eighteenth century. The saga begins with Rustom Manock, who used his connections with the East India Company to increase his wealth and ends with his grandson Manak who lost the family's leading mercantile role in the face of the company's opposition.

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1995, pp. 194, Rs. 250.00

Athens, Aden, Arikamedu: Essays on the Interrelations Between India, Arabia and the Eastern Mediterranean

Edited by Marie-Francoise Boussac and Jean-Francois Salles
This book is a collection of essays by

several contributors on the general topic of the interrelationship between India, Arabia and the Eastern Mediterranean. Four papers refer to what can be called Graeco-India i.e. the relations between the Greek world and India; two papers deal with the archaeological as well as literary evidence on the trade between Rome and India and two last contributions emphasize that the Arabian peninsula is the natural bridge between India and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Manohar Books, 1995, pp. 272, Rs. 400.00

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Edited by K.S. Mathew

This collection of 27 papers provides a critique of approaches towards maritime history through a variety of related themes. Exchange of commodities through sea routes like spices, textiles, opium, pepper and slaves and the question whether the indigenous pattern of trade survived despite the integration of Asian trade into world economy are all dealt with here.

Manohar Books, 1995, pp. 488, Rs. 425.00

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Tazeer M. Murshid

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Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 492, Rs. 675.00

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KATE TELTSCHER studied at Oxford, and is currently a lecturer in the department of English, Roehampton Institute, London.

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JEAN DREZE AND AMARTYA SEN

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JEAN DREZE is Visiting Professor at the Delhi School of Economics.

AMARTYA SEN is Lamont Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University.

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CARMEL BERKSON is a well-known photographer and writer on Indian sculpture, based in New York, Israel, and Bombay.

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DAVID SHULMAN is Professor of Indian Studies and Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *Tamil Temple Myths* (1980), *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (1985), and *The Hungry God* (1993).

488 pp

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MONICA DAS GUPTA is Associate Director of the National Council of Applied Economic Research, Delhi and Senior Fellow at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, LINCOLN C. CHEN is Taro Takemi Professor of International Health at the Harvard School of Public Health and T.N. KRISHNAN is Honorary Fellow at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.

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SUDIPTA KAVIRAJ

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B.R. NANDA, Chief Editor of the series, formerly Founder-Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, is a leading historian of modern India and has distinguished himself as the definitive biographer of Gandhi, the Nehrus, and other nationalist leaders.

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SUDIPTA KAVIRAJ has taught at the University of Burdwan and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He now works at the Department of Political Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

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RAJ KRISHNA was teaching at the Delhi School of Economics at the time of his death in 1985. He also taught at MIT and the Food Research Institute at Stanford. He was a Member of the Planning Commission and of the Finance Commission to the Government of India in the late seventies.

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FELIX PADEL took his doctorate in social anthropology from Oxford University in 1987, with affiliated status in the Department of Sociology in the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi



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