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Secularism in India: Ideal or Illusion?

Brian Barry

SECULARISM AND ITS CRITICS
Edited by Rajeev Bhargava
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. 550, Rs. 695.00

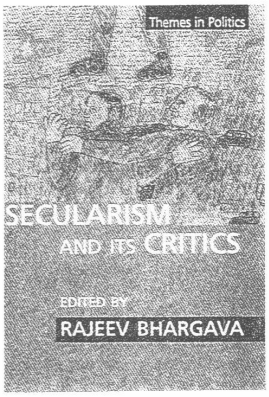
In *Through the Looking Glass*, Humpty Dumpty told Alice that when he made a word do a lot of work he always paid it extra. On that basis, the word 'secularism' would be able to present a very large bill to the publishers of this book. One might not unreasonably pick up a book entitled *Secularism and Its Critics* in the expectation that there was something called 'secularism' which was going to be defended by some people and attacked by others. Such a belief would make it impossible to make sense of what is going on in the book. In fact, the 'secularism' attacked by some contributors has only a fairly tenuous connection with the 'secularism' defended by others. More surprisingly, perhaps, the precise set of arrangements advocated by one contributor as a departure from secularism would count as secularist on the definition of at least one other.

In a secular society, arguments for or against public policies will rarely be made on the basis of religious beliefs, simply because such appeals will have little impact. But must a secular state be one in which public policies are not advocated on religious grounds?

It is important to distinguish between a secular state and a secular society. A secular state is one that is detached from religion. A secular society is one in which religious beliefs are weakly held by most people and play little part in their lives. Some countries whose states come close to the secular model, such as the United States and Turkey, are far from being secular societies. Conversely a relatively secular society does not have a completely secular state: England and Sweden, for example, both have an established church and most western European countries subsidize religious schools. Nehru (quoted on pp. 311–12) drew this distinction in 1961, saying that, although the Indian Constitution made India a secular state, India functioned as a less secular society than England. This could be taken as setting the terms for the debate about alternative futures for India carried out in the book by a number of (resident and non-resident) Indian scholars.

In a secular society, arguments for or against public policies will rarely be made on the basis of religious beliefs, simply because such appeals will have little impact. But must a secular state be one in which public policies are not advocated on religious grounds? This question has arisen in an acute form in the United States, where politicians and other public figures frequently claim religious support for their positions. Some scholars claim that it is a violation of the 'wall of separation' between church and state for this to occur. This would mean that it was illegitimate for Martin Luther King to invoke the Christian gospel in support of the civil rights movement or for the Roman Catholic bishops to plead for more generous welfare provision on the basis of the Church's social doctrines. It is easier to see how a secular state can be maintained in a non-secular society, if we define a secular state in purely institutional terms.

None of the chapters focussed on the Indian situation seems to me to get quite clear the distinction between a secular society and a secular state. Stanley Tambiah offers a valuable analysis of 'secularism', but even he confuses the issue by equating "the establishment of religion" clause in Art. 1 of the U.S. Constitution, which declares that government shall neither prescribe nor proscribe religion with secularism as defined by the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*: 'the doctrine that morality should be based on regard for the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state' (p. 420). The definition is clearly of an entire philosophy of life, sometimes called 'secular humanism'. But the separation of church and state is (as the American example demonstrates) entirely compatible with a society in which secular humanists form only a small minority.



Other authors mix things up much more systematically. Thus, T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy (who are ably criticized by Tambiah, Akeel Bilgrami and Rajeev Bhargava) say that 'secularism' is inappropriate to Indian conditions. But while it is clear that India is not a secular society, this leaves it open whether or not the state should be a secular state. According to Madan, the notion that religion can be 'privatized', as a secular state requires, is one that makes sense only to 'Protestant Christians' and not to 'Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs' (p. 298). This leaves Roman Catholics in limbo (appropriately enough, since only they believe in it), but Madan later endorses the claim that 'secularization is the gift of Christianity to mankind' (p. 307), so perhaps non-Protestant Christians get in too.

There is a certain irony in Madan's eager embrace, on behalf of the East, of an 'orientalist' idea originally developed to show the superiority of the West. In any case, it is plain that non-Christian religions can flourish in (more or less) secular states. Thus, the Sikh, Hindu and Muslim religious communities thrive in Britain. Moreover, societies with an overwhelming preponderance of non-Christian believers can also be secular, as Turkey illustrates most dramatically. (It is interesting in this context that 'Jawaharlal Nehru's first mention of the secular state in writings (1933) was in connection with the Turkish republic' (p. 192). Those who wish to question the political relevance of this example will no doubt point out that secularization in Turkey took place in the aftermath of a revolution and even then has needed the army to underwrite it. But that does impugn its relevance in showing that a secular state in a non-Christian country is not only intelligible but feasible.

Most of the contributors are concerned with the prospects for a secular state in India, taking it as given that India is not and is not likely to be in the foreseeable future a secular society. A number of the authors are in favour of a secular state, but it seems to me that none of them actually wishes to endorse a secular state as I have defined it. Instead, they tend to identify a secular state with the set of institutional arrangements that they wish to advocate. Thus, Bhargava and Bilgrami both argue for some kind of negotiated settlement among religions in which the state plays an active part. This may be a perfectly reasonable proposal in the Indian context, but I question the applicability of the term 'secularism' to it. Bhargava calls it 'contextual secularism', but perhaps it would be more perspicuous to say that it is a proposal designed to be applied in a context in which secularism is not a politically feasible option. Bilgrami rejects the idea of an 'Archimedean' argument for a secular state. (An example of such an argument would be that it is the only way of realizing the values of equal liberty and fair treatment.) Instead, he hopes that it will be possible to persuade each religion's adherents of the virtues of eventual state disengagements by appealing to their own beliefs. But this idea, which parallels the American John Rawls's recent notion of an 'overlapping consensus', runs into the same objection as has been made to that: if there is no independent reason for being in favour of a secular state, what motive is there for trying to persuade religious believers that they are (even if they do not realize it) committed to one?

Moreover, it seems a rather desperate hope that a secular state is bound to be the locus of an 'overlapping consensus'. Partha Chatterjee thinks that there is a far better chance of agreement on an arrangement in which the different religious organizations carve up political authority in such a way that each religious community controls its own members according to its own rules. This would be a modernized version of the *millet* system that proved highly durable within the Ottoman empire. Some western political theo-

rists call this 'pluralism' and contrast it with 'liberalism'. I believe that they are quite right to draw attention to the incompatibility between the two. By the same token, a pluralistic society of this kind, in which political power is handed over to religious authorities, cannot properly be described as any form of secularism. Rather, it is the institutionalization of religion. Chatterjee makes it clear that he himself sees his proposal as incompatible with secularism, which he defines as the idea 'that the state not involve itself in religious affairs or organizations' (p. 358).

'Toleration', Chatterjee says, 'would require one to accept that there will be political contexts where a group could insist on its right not to give reasons for doing things differently, provided it explains itself in its own chosen forum' (p. 375). His approach 'would start from the historically given reality of separate religion-based personal laws and the intricate involvement of state agencies in the affairs of religious institutions' (p. 375). State involvement will be accepted as fair, he suggests, when it accords with the self-understanding of groups. He shares this premise with Bilgrami but draws sharply different implications from it, and Bilgrami offers a spirited critique of Chatterjee (pp. 402–17).

Undeniably, Chatterjee's proposal for a state presiding over a set of politically organized religious communities would treat all religions symmetrically. This would make it an example of secularism on Amartya Sen's definition (p. 456), according to which symmetry is all that is required: the state can support religion or not, so long as it does on the same terms for all. Bhargava's 'contextualist' secularism seems to me to have some of the same properties.

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What could it mean to claim to be abolishing caste distinctions officially without insisting that all Hindus must be able to worship in any temple? Where some practice is at the core of the discrimination that the state has pledged itself to eliminate, the state must surely step in to ban it. But is this contrary to even the strictest interpretation of secularism as the separation of the state from religion?

This conception of secularism as symmetry is apparently quite deep-rooted. Thus, in a hostile review of D.E. Smith's *India as a Secular State*, Marc Galanter quotes him as complaining of 'the persistent tendency in present-day [i.e. 1963] India to define secularism simply in terms of non-discrimination in the promotion of religion... For most (Indians), the basis of the secular state is not a "wall of separation" between state and religion, but the "no-preference doctrine" which requires only that no special privileges be granted to any one religion' (p. 264 n. 63). Galanter himself says that 'Indian secularism does not conform to either of these patterns' (p. 264), but this way of putting it implicitly accepts that 'secularism' is going to be simply the name attached to whatever 'compromises and accommodations' (p. 264) among religions occur in India.

I have so far focussed on the fourth part of the book: 'Secularism in India: The Recent Debate'. This is also considerably the longest, amounting to seven of the fifteen chapters. The first part consists of a subtle and penetrating essay by T.M. Scanlon on 'Tolerance' which is tangentially related to secularism, and one by Charles Taylor on 'Modes of Secularism' which advocates the 'overlapping consensus' mode that I have already queried. Part two is entitled 'Secularism in the West', but I think its three items would leave any reader who knew nothing else about the subject with a rather odd notion of the ways in which predominantly Christian countries (which is what 'western' means here) have dealt with religion. Thus, the notion of a 'separation of church and state' has been most explicitly stated and worked out in the United States. But instead of an exposition of the Supreme Court's interpretation, we get a tendentious attack on it by Michael Sandel. The piece by Joseph Carens and Melissa Williams is also misleading as a guide to 'western' ideas and practices. Their recommendation that polygamy should be legalized and their claim that French *haute couture* is more limiting to women than the *hijab* (pp. 156 and 161) are best seen as rather desperate attempts to ride the bandwagon of Political Correctness that currently appears to be careering out of control in Canada. There is also a historically rich account by Jean Bauberot of the role played by the notion of laicité in France since the Revolution. While this is a first rate essay, it illustrates how peculiar France is within western Europe in the polarization of lay and religious (i.e. Roman Catholic) forces.

I have already mentioned D.E. Smith, and a substantial extract from his *India as a Secular State* leads off part three, entitled 'Secularism in India: The Early Debate'. The review of that book by Mark Galanter, from which I quoted earlier, follows this. The remaining piece is also by Galanter. Entitled 'Hinduism, Secularism, and the Indian Judiciary', its flavour is adequately captured in his description of 'the legal system' as 'provid[ing] a forum in which the aspirations of India's governing élite confront the ambitions and hopes of the component groups in Indian society' (p. 269). This way of putting the issue makes it impossible to imagine that there might be élites exploiting the ambitions and hopes of component groups as a means to furthering their own political ambitions or that the ideal of a secular state might have some resonance among those oppressed by their own religious community or fearful that the only alternative to a secular state is one riven by religious conflict.

This gets me back to part four, and I have already mentioned all the authors represented there. Rather than say more about them individually, I should like to conclude by pursuing a question that almost all of them bring up in one way or another. This is the question of the way in which the phenomenon of caste impinges on the idea of a secular state in the Indian context. Smith, for whom the United States is the model, not surprisingly finds a 'major problem for the secular state' in 'the extensive state interference in Hindu religious institutions' (p. 226). Among the examples which Smith gives is 'the admission of Harijans into Hindu temples' (p. 213). But could a state whose constitution commits it to the abolition of untouchability do any less?

Let us look at the attempt to eliminate by law another system of inequality ascribed at birth, that of racism in the United States. Obviously, policies adopted by public authorities that discriminated on a basis of race had to be barred. But that still left an equally important form of racism: discrimination by private employers, sellers and renters of property, and so on. The abolition of racism by law would have been a travesty without strong measures to attack such private discrimination.

In America, the 'separation of church and state' has inhibited legal measures that might have interfered with racially exclusive religious congregations. But in the great religious supermarket (as it has been described) of the USA, everybody can find something to suit them. 'Separate but equal' is not the cruel hoax in religion that it undeniably was in education, so racially exclusionary churches are not as obnoxiously discriminatory as might appear. Indeed, compulsory integration might well be resented by many all-black congregations.

Contrast with this the Indian case. What could it mean to claim to be abolishing caste distinctions officially without insisting that all Hindus must be able to worship in any temple? Where some practice is at the core of the discrimination that the state has pledged itself to eliminate, the state must surely step in to ban it. But is this contrary to even the strictest interpretation of secularism as the separation of the state from religion? A number of writers (quoted by Galanter in nn. 6 and 7, p. 271) regard it as axiomatic that it must be. But is this necessarily so?

Smith quotes the Supreme Court as saying in 1954: 'Suppose that one believed that human sacrifices were a necessary part of religious worship, would it be seriously contended that the civil government under which he lived could not interfere to prevent a sacrifice?' (p. 195). This would seem to cover *sati*. But since 1954, the Supreme Court has moved further to a position (to the chagrin of Sandel) such that religion does not count as an excuse for individuals or churches to behave in ways that there are sound public policy for prohibiting. In the context of a religion adhered to by eighty-five per cent of the population, would not the Supreme Court's reasoning lead to the conclusion that the elimination of untouchability is a sufficiently compelling objective of public policy to legitimate prohibiting the exclusion of a Hindu from worship in a temple? The point is that a secular state is not necessarily one that maximizes the freedom of religious organizations.

The issues raised by this book are of great moment: their urgency is if anything even greater than when the chapters were written. As an outsider, I have found this collection enormously enlightening and provocative. I am sure that those who are living nearer to the problems will not find it any less so. I hope, however, that if (as it deserves) the book goes into a second printing, the publisher will ensure that the profuse typographical errors are fixed. Most are no more than distracting (though when they get to half a dozen per page that is quite a distraction), but some are more serious: for example, Madan wrote that secularism is 'impotent' as a blueprint for India (p. 298), but is quoted later as saying that it is 'important' (p. 438)—rather a different proposition. The book also needs an index.

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The Fall and Rise of Brahminical Order

Harish Khare

QUEST FOR POWER: OPPOSITIONAL MOVEMENTS AND POST-CONGRESS POLITICS IN UTTAR PRADESH

By Zoya Hasan

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, pp. 280, Rs. 445.00

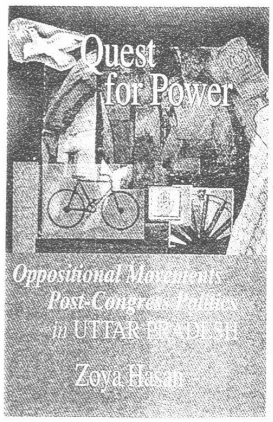
Two initiatives of the Vajpayee government attest to the correctness of the basic contentions in Zoya Hasan's book, a veritable *tour de force* of political change in Uttar Pradesh in the last two decades. First, the Atal Behari Vajpayee government's decision to reward K.C. Pant, everybody's favourite mediocre, with the chairmanship of the Task Force of the proposed National Security Council. The second was the Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee's entirely unprovoked statement on the eve of Ambedkar Jayanti that his government had no intention of changing the existing reservation regime. If the first development brings home the tenacious ability of UP's upper caste-upper class combine to stay on top of the pile, the second underscores the clout the backward classes have come to wield. The BJP's ability to cater simultaneously to the demands from two contradictory sources is the story of the Sangh Parivar's rise to commanding heights in UP, and Zoya Hasan tells the story incisively.

Like the rest of the country, Uttar Pradesh too has witnessed changes—political, economic and social—which have variously expressed themselves in the idiom of class, caste and community; but, because of a number of characteristics peculiar to the State it is only in Uttar Pradesh that context over policies and power has resulted in so decisive a victory for majoritarian ideas and strategies. And given the very size of Uttar Pradesh and its centrality to national politics, the outcome of the contest has a definite bearing on the all-India equations.

The most fascinating part of the Uttar Pradesh story, as told by Zoya Hasan, is the continuing experimentation in strategic political choices made in order to maintain the upper caste-upper class (UCUC) combine's domination—that too in the face of the relentless logic of participatory democracy. As long as the Congress served the interests of the upper caste-upper class combine, it could not be challenged politically; and, the very dominance of this combine in the Congress leadership structure enfeebled the party in meeting the challenges posed by new forces, unleashed by structural changes (like half-hearted land reforms, zamindari abolition, etc.), by technological changes (green revolution), and by parliamentary democracy (like mobilization of backward castes). And what makes the UP story so fascinating is that the challenge to the UCUC combine invariably degenerated into a struggle over political power rather than any attempt to transform radically the State structure.

In fact, the UCUC combine controlled access to politics and policies, with the result that "zamindari abolition altered agrarian relations only to the extent of shifting the location of rural power from feudal to cultivating landowners." The first serious challenge to the Congress hegemony came from the new landed elite. When the green revolution brought prosperity to the backward caste cultivators, they began aspiring for social equality with the upper caste landlords. But the UCUC combine managed to tame the class potential of the farmers' movement and diverted its energies into a pure contest over political power, demanding a shift in the urban-rural balance in the allocation of resources. "Its ideologies distinguished the farmers' movement from peasant movements in the past on the grounds that earlier movements were class-based and thus divisive, whereas the farmers' movement stressed that the main conflict was between countryside and city."

The story of UP is also the story of the status quoist, reactionary, and Brahminical nature of Congress hegemony, the debilitating effect that hegemony had on the Congress capacity to accommodate new forces and voices as it had done for decades before and after 1947. Four converging features of the breakdown of the Congress control become discernible in Zoya Hasan's account. First, the developmental model had failed by the mid-1960s. The new "opportunity structures" simply could not satisfy new claimants to the piece.



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The UCUC combine could see to it that the land reforms did not take off, opposed rural taxation; and, therefore, when the food shortages, rising prices and increasing income disparities took hold of people's imagination, the Congress found itself limping. The middle class became alienated, and remained alienated. Second, the predominance the Brahmins enjoyed in the Congress prevented the party from acquiring sensitivity to the new aspirations. Zoya Hasan talks of "tremendous resilience and resourcefulness" of the upper caste-class coalition "whereas in Bihar, the intra-elite rivalries between Bhumihar and Rajput led subcoalitions had already become so bitter that by the early 1960s, the Congress Chief Minister was forced to turn to leaders of the upper backward castes, who commanded a substantial following. Rivalries within the ruling coalition in UP did not create similar opportunities for backward castes." Third, the central-oriented party control model, practised assiduously first by Indira Gandhi and later by Rajiv Gandhi, exhausted the Uttar Pradesh Congress leaders politically, psychologically and intellectually. The central leadership made demands of loyalty, obedience and conformity on the state leaders, compelling the UP Congress leaders to be more mindful of the mood in New Delhi rather than of the urges in Behariach or Gorakhpur or Kanpur. The inevitable result was that "state politics was no longer a decisive factor in determining leadership structures, whereas in the past leadership and policies had been the outcome of competition between factions at the state level." And, fourth, the governing model, sought to be put in place in the 1980s by the Congress, was obviously flawed. With all their presumed sagacity and wisdom and innovativeness. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi simply failed to anticipate, leave alone come up with effective counter-strategies, the challenge of the farmers' movement, the backward caste mobilization, and the Ayodhya/communalism project. The Congress system lost its legitimacy, efficacy and bite.

The strength of Zoya Hasan's analytical narrative is that she keeps coming back to the overarching theme of the debilitating toll the Brahmins took of the UP Congress, and it was this factor alone that opened up space for casteist and communal politics. She paints a damning picture of the Brahmins' total domination: "While nationally Indira Gandhi succeeded in identifying the Congress with the interests of the poor and the low castes, the state and district leadership of the Congress in UP became more of a Brahmin affair than ever before. In 1964, Sripat Misra's ministry was dominated by Brahmins and Thakurs. Of the 112 district magistrates and police chiefs in the state's fifty-four districts, the number of Brahmins was 44 compared to 30 before Mishra took over. Similarly, the number of Brahmins who were chairmen and managing directors of the forty public sector undertakings in the state had risen to 25 from 18. Nearly 70 per cent of the Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service officers in 1980 were members of upper castes, while 52 per cent of the Provincial Civil Service were drawn from the same castes. The upper echelons of the bureaucracy were even more noticeably dominated by Brahmins who had been actively promoted by successive Brahmin chief ministers of the ruling Congress party." No wonder the party was found lacking in credibility when it pretended to be an advocate of an "all-inclusive", non-sectarian model; its very heavy Brahmanical baggage simply did not allow it the necessary flexibility to

challenge the ideology of casteist appeal and communal discourse.

The Congress failure in Uttar Pradesh is all the more glaring because, as Zoya Hasan points out, there was not much of a political space for the BJP till the end of the 1980s. Except for making some inroads among the Ahirs and Kurmis in eastern and central UP, the BJP had yet to carve out a viable political constituency for itself. Unlike in Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan, the BJP was not the principal challenger to the Congress dominance; it was the Janata Dal which had cobbled a powerful coalition of the OBCs and the Muslims. "The important point is that the 1989 election did not reveal strong evidence of a Hindu vote in UP, despite the attempts of leading political parties to marshal support along those lines," writes Hasan.

The space for communal politics got created by the shoddy practices in statecraft in Delhi and Lucknow. While at the national level the Rajiv Gandhi regime took recourse to "pragmatic communalism", as Zoya Hasan describes it, the Janata Dal at the national and state levels simply could not summon the Administrative adroitness and political imagination to deal with the middle classes' violent disquiet over the Mandal initiative. "Mandal made more obvious the divisions and tensions within UP society. It was designed as an instrument of mobilization for the recognition of competing claims to power. Not surprisingly, it invited the most serious opposition from the advocates of political Hinduism." But it was the inept handling of violence that contributed "enormously to the delegitimization of the social justice platform", especially among the middle classes—the teacher-trader-lawyer-provincial civil servant nexus perfected by the BJP.

Compared to the uncertain tactics of the Congress and the Janata Dal, the BJP displayed considerable political innovativeness in diverting the anti-Mandal anxieties into the pro-Ramjanmabhoomi movement. For example, the BJP did not "openly condemn reservations for fear of losing its OBC base which was quite strong in UP. This mobilization was overtly anti-Mandal in western UP, but not so in eastern UP where reservations were a popular issue among the OBCs. The BJP weaned away from the Janata Dal the Kurmis and the Lodhs in central UP through the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation. In addition, it increased their representation in party leadership. As part of this strategy, it gave greater prominent to Kurmis and Lodh leaders—Vinay Katiyar from Faizabad and Kalyan Singh from Aligarh. The vertical divisions between Yadavs and Kurmis and Lodhs helped the BJP to stave off the challenge posed by the apparent cohesion of backward (sic) under the Mandal platform."

To its traditional appeal on the Hindi-Urdu controversy among the urban middle classes in the new medium towns, the BJP grafted the Ayodhya sentiment. Taking full advantage of the VHP mobilizational efforts, the BJP instigated the "political Hindu" sentiment, leading to the elaborate Hindu-Muslim violence. Attributing to the BJP leadership a deliberate policy of communal violence, Zoya Hasan notes perceptively that "riots created a deep wedge between communities and invented a political constituency for the BJP in towns such as Khurja and Bijnor where it had very little support before the riots of 1990... Communal violence enlarged the BJP's political base." The Hindi press played the role of a cheerleader as the BJP propagated "the ideology of exclusion" as well as actively and joyfully participated in the "demonization of Mulalaym Singh Yadav."

Like a master story teller, Zoya Hasan comes back to the original argument: the response of the upper caste-class coalition to the exacting demands of participatory democracy. "These classes, located in moffusil towns across the state, are themselves the product of economic change, but they are uncertain and apprehensive of further social transformation and fearful of the upsurge from below which could upset the status quo. It is uncertainties of this class that have been manipulated by the BJP in its pursuit of political power." And she makes a convincing case that while "there is no doubt the BJP reaped rich electoral dividends from the Ayodhya movement, its main appeal was to the insecurities of the upper castes who were willing to switch support after the decline of the Congress dominance to the BJP."

The story of the Congress decline, the failure of the backward castes to retain the upper hand, and the triumph of the BJP's communal project is a fascinating tale; Zoya Hasan has told the tale with analytical clarity and without the mandatory jargon. The only deficiency in the book is the rather perfunctory treatment of the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party. Still it is a book that ought to be read by every serious student of Indian politics, especially by those in the Congress who think that the restoration of the Dynasty would restore the party to the centre-stage of national politics.

Harish Khare is Deputy Editor, The Hindu, New Delhi.

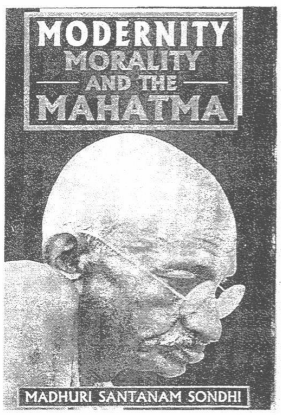
For A Better Civilizational Model

Rohini Mokashi Punekar

MODERNITY, MORALITY AND THE MAHATMA

By Madhuri Santanam Sondhi

Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 244, Rs. 395.00



Madhuri Santanam Sondhi's Modernity, Morality and the Mahatma is a deeply interesting study of the interface between western modernity and the modern Indian nation-state on the one hand and the Gandhian model of traditional decentralized local bodies of governance based on dharma on the other. The book is an impassioned plea for rethinking the paradigm that has governed Indian society and politics since independence, particularly since it seems to have failed in creating a shared discourse of ethical norms. The scope of the work is huge, straddling as it does, several kind of ethos contained in the East-West encounter over the past couple of centuries.

Beginning with an examination of modernity in the West the first chapter proceeds to look at the problematic of modernity in the Indian context: the impact of science and technology, the problems of democracy, nationalization and the nation-state and the loss of cultural and moral authority. Modernity assumes the centrality of the individual and it is with colonization that modernity seeped into Indian society, mainly through education and technology. The Indian middle classes 'who were both its creation and its apologists used their education to lead the national movement against the Raj and carried over the principles of individualism into the Constitution of independent India'. While modernization was welcomed by all parties, Left or Right, it was only Gandhi who mistrusted it and advocated a decentralized model based on traditional bodies of local governance, such as the panchayats and a primarily agrarian economy. This well researched chapter sees how 'Indian modernization has failed to take deep root since it has no basis in received culture unlike modernization in Europe which evolved out of religious questioning. As a result of the unsuitability of climate or the arbitrary way of transferring a part of the package, modernization in India has resulted in 'instrumentalism in interpersonal relations and casteism', corruption, inefficiency and apathy, the old order broken and no new order in sight.

The second chapter 'The Gandhian Point of Departure' is an exhaustive discussion of Gandhi's political philosophy. Morality is the fulcrum on which it rests and Sondhi points out its relation to knowledge: in the Gandhian sense knowledge would mean a change in perception, an illumination. There is an excellent discussion on Gandhi and Socrates, usefully counterpointing the philosophical traditions of the East and the West. Both see the equation between knowledge and virtue, but with

> "Independent India has suspended Gandhi, like Trishanku, midway between heaven and earth: he is debarred from serving as a role model since he is assessed as a super-normal human being (*generations to come will scarcely believe that such a man walked the earth—Albert Einstein*); at the same time he is not a proper deity, an *avatar*, and so has become for most a sterile icon. Returned to earth in his full humanity, however, he can become a creative dialogue partner. New political and social circumstances warrant new experiments, bearing in mind the Gandhian lesson that to be successful, politics needs to be normatively structured within the overall civilizational framework."
>
> From *Modernity, Morality and the Mahatma*

entirely different emphases: Gandhi as a step to right political action, Socrates content to prod change at the level of thought. While the examination of Gandhi's political concepts such as ahimsa, dharma, satyagraha, swadeshi and sarvodaya are deeply interesting, the recognition of some of the contradictions/areas of dissent emerging from them is equally thought-provoking. For instance, the challenge of finding the balance between the morally responsible (dharmic) individual with the space required for his conscience and the demands of cooperative community life. But by far the greater problem is Gandhi's perception of caste. To retain varna but reject jati is to invite difficulties of praxis, even assuming the acceptance of the basic premise of varna. Gandhi approved of the cohesion in village communities which came as a result of varna, but deeply disapproved of the hierarchy and ritual that jati enjoined. If it is the acceptance of structural inequality that holds communities together can the solution lie only in altering the perception and practice of inequality (as Gandhi believed) without structural changes? Such radical changes endanger community cohesiveness—as is happening today. There is no easy solution. But the examination of western modernity, concludes Sondhi, does bring home the urgent importance of building communities.

The third chapter looks at two of Gandhi's contemporaries and their perhaps more philosophic attitudes to modernity, namely Aurobindo and B.K. Mallik, in an attempt to place Gandhi in the context of his times. Parts of this chapter are fascinating; the analysis of Mallik's ethics of abstention is particularly good. If Gandhi's non-articulated basic assumption in the concept of Satyagraha is the inevitability of conflict, Mallik advocates abstention from conflict, since there can be no absolutist position. 'No absolute value is self-justifying and its adoption is the result of necessity—the practical necessity of finding a workable thesis for organizing society. Mallik, in a way, looks forward to post-modernism, specifically the recent theories on dialogue as a way of resolving conflict and enabling complete communication. His philosophic-evolutionary theory of history, moving through large circular macro-schemes too forsees the post-modernist breakdown of meta-narratives.

The last chapter, where Sondhi considers Gandhian alternatives in ethical dynamism for a future society seems to rework considerable areas from the previous chapters—a sense of weariness is inevitable. Modernity, one may be excused in feeling, cannot, in all rationality, be everlastingly the villain of the piece. Had the chapter attempted to examine the creative encounters between Gandhian thought and modernity (after all Gandhi did appreciate the space available to him as an individual to negotiate with authority) it might have done more in the way of establishing meaningful connections for the help of the present and future societies.

The book could have been organized more ruthlessly: the depth of research and the writer's obvious commitment to the cause have perhaps lengthened the study and made repetitions inevitable. The production could definitely have been better—the proof-reading has been lax to say the least. These are, of course minor charges. What really matters is the significant connections the book has managed to make for all of us in this last decade of the twentieth century and its timely reminder of the importance of Gandhi for a better civilizational model.

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It is because Gandhi's understanding of religion was so deeply embedded in notions of universal truth and morality that he confidently reversed the modern separation of religion from politics. Modernity treats religion as conventional sectarianism, and substitutes for it a humanistic ethics in the public sphere. This is not least the result of the European experience with its peculiar history of Christian governance and schismatic wars. Despite the fact that modernity's secular philosophy has failed to definitively establish ethics, this traumatic past is a constant barrier to recovery of religion in the public sphere. As a born Hindu, on the other hand, Gandhi was heir to the civilizational complexity of Hinduism, in which individual, caste, social and conventionally religious norms all interpenetrate and reflect one another through the prism of *dharma*. It is extremely difficult in such a society to search for hard and fast divisions between the religious and the social. One may quote the common truism that Hinduism is a way of life, rather than a religion reserved for weekends.

From *Modernity, Morality and the Mahatma*

Terrorism:

Strategy of the Weak Or a Calculated Option

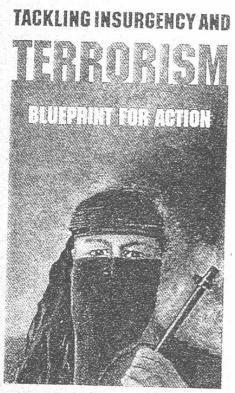
Ved Marwah

TACKLING INSURGENCY AND TERRORISM: BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

By Col. Bhaskar Sarkar VSM

Vision Books, 1998, pp. 156, Rs. 280.00

The book under review covers too large an agenda to adequately discuss the main issues raised by the author. Sarkar makes a number of controversial statements, but neither substantiates nor discusses them. They are not based on any study or research, but on his personal convictions. Nor does he draw from his own experience in handling problems of terrorism and insurgency. Sarkar was a military engineer by profession. The book has been written more in the style of a handbook for training army officers than for general reading. The author tends to oversimplify complex problems. A book on a subject like this from a retired army officer raises high expectations, but this one is likely to disappoint both the army officers and lay readers. The author has nevertheless done a service by publishing this book and focussing attention on this important subject, which is not getting as much attention as it should, either from the government or from the informed sections of society.



Col. Bhaskar Sarkar, VSM (Retd)

Sarkar has rightly emphasized the fact that terrorism and insurgency cannot survive without the support of the people. Terrorists need public support "to obtain supplies, money, shelter, recruits and intelligence". It is this support which has to be neutralized if counter-terrorism strategy is to succeed. And this objective cannot be achieved, as Sarkar rightly points out, if the security forces by their overzealous actions themselves alienate the people and thus generate sympathy and support for the terrorists. But the statement that "terrorism is the strategy of the weak" is debatable. Terrorism can, and often is, a deliberate and calculated option exercised even by a strong enemy. It offers many advantages over the other options. It is not only cost effective as compared to conventional wars, but also gives the sponsors the advantage of denying their involvement, and thus warding off the hostile reactions of the international community. Another advantage is that unlike conventional wars, low-intensity surrogate terrorist wars are always fought in the enemy's territory without any apparent risk to their own people.

Sarkar's point that state terror never pays is a valid one. The use of such methods by the state cannot be justified. They should never form part of a counter-terrorism strategy. They can be counter-productive in the long run. "Torturing suspects for information, harassment through detention without sufficient cause, destructions of food stocks, imposition of collective fines and reprisals in the form of looting, burning or raping for attacks on the security forces" cannot be justified on practical, legal or moral grounds. Apart from giving the country a bad name, the use of such methods can alienate a large section of the population and destroy the morale and discipline of the armed forces. But the author appears to be ambivalent in his thinking. At more than one place in the book he is very complimentary to the former Punjab Police Chief, K.P.S. Gill. He gives him all the credit for controlling the situation in Punjab, but does not discuss Gill's strategy and methods to combat terrorism.

No one can disagree with Sarkar's suggestion that "action against organized crime and their illegal private armies must be the first step in containing and crushing insurgency and terrorism", but the only step that he suggests, that is to raise the penalty for possession of illicit arms to life imprisonment, is not likely to achieve the desired objective. This commonly-held view is based on misperception and betrays ignorance of the way the criminal justice system operates in our country. In criminal cases where the penalty is very high, the general tendency of the courts is to grant acquittals, because they demand in such cases a much higher quality of evidence. The result is that they tend to give the benefit of doubt to the accused and acquit him. Enhancement of the penalty seldom acts as a deterrent. This fact has been amply demonstrated in the case of drug-traffic cases. The enhancement of punishment in the amended Act has had little or no effect on the use of traffic in drugs. What acts as a deterrent is the certainty of punishment, and not the enhancement of punishment.

The author has devised a novel scorecard method to analyze various ongoing insurgencies and terrorist movements in India. The score card contains marks for factors like popular support, quality of leadership, military efficiency, internal unity, equipment, terrain, and availability of sanctuaries. These factors are, no doubt, relevant, but the manner of allotment of marks under each head lacks objective basis. A subjective assessment, as done by the author, can be more misleading than helpful in analyzing the situation. His analysis of the problem in different parts of the country, particularly in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir is not very convincing and, apparently, not based on practical experience or study and research.

Sarkar makes a rather sweeping statement when he says that "if civil administration is unable to handle the task it should be handed over to the army". He does not appreciate the complexity of the task and the difficulties the army would face if it were to take over all the responsibility of the civil administration, even if it is for a short period. His suggestion that the army commander should directly function under the Chief Minister is not a practical one. Again, he has not thought through his suggestion that "when the army is deployed, it will have to control over state police and paramilitary forces". He does not discuss the practical problems of such a unified command, like the army is at present facing in Assam. The work-culture of the police and the army is so different. The problem of coordination will not be solved by the so-called unified command.

While discussing the surrender policy for the terrorists, Sarkar makes a suggestion which no civilized government can accept. The hardcore terrorists "can be forced to commit suicide or killed in fake encounters". He does not discuss the pros and cons of such a policy, and calls it an "effective though hardly civilized" policy. His definition of the hard core: "those who join the organization on ideological or personal considerations", is inadequate and unacceptable. But the author has rightly emphasized that there is no quick-fix solution to terrorism and insurgency. "Excessive emphasis on quantitative and quick results are generally counter-productive as it alienates the population".

One of the weaknesses of the book is that even though some data has been given, at no place is the source cited. One hopes that the data is based on reliable sources and not on the subjective assessment of the author. His suggestion of establishing a "college for counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism warfare" is a sound one, but one cannot understand why he insists on its establishment only in Madhya Pradesh. Maybe Sarkar has sound reasons for choosing Madhya Pradesh, but he does not take the reader into confidence about his reasons.

One of his many controversial suggestions is the regrouping of villages to tackle terrorism and insurgency. According to the author, "the measure is extremely unpopular, but it is perhaps the only effective way of denying support to militants in the sensitive border area of Jammu and Kashmir". He acknowledges the fact that the measure failed to achieve its objective and had to be abandoned in Mizoram, but he does not discuss how it is going to succeed in Jammu and Kashmir, where resistance from the local population will be even stronger.

The book ends with yet another controversial suggestion. He makes a rather well-meaning suggestion that special courts should be constituted to try those accused of terrorist and secessionist act. But he goes further and makes the suggestion that the judges for these courts should be hired from abroad so that their impartiality cannot be questioned. He does not discuss the negative implications of his suggestion.

The book is overpriced and hastily written. It leaves the reader dissatisfied. Moreover, the many repetitions in the slim volume could have been avoided with better editing.

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Addressing Discrepancies Between Empiricism and Theory

R. Gopinath

MEANINGS OF AGRICULTURE

Edited by Peter Robb

Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996, pp. 389, Rs. 495.00

Social science has perceived its subjects through a set of methodological conventions and stereotypes. The resultant lack of fit between theory and empirical reality and between the terminology of our disciplines and that of its subjects has led to a continuous process of methodological revisions. This collection of twelve essays edited by Peter Robb on meanings of agriculture in South Asia addresses this very conundrum—the discrepancies between empirical descriptions of South Asian agriculture and generalized theoretical assumptions about agrarian change and policy.

The three issues around which the volume is organized are the kinds of knowledge relating to agriculture, the 'kinds of agriculture' or to use less fashionable terms the organization and relations of production and finally the different purposes of agriculture. After providing a critical summary of each of the contributions, Robb returns to the vexed problem of relating the wealth of micro-details with that of general theory. He is careful not to discount the significance of either for both historical reconstruction and policy formulation. Robb once again repeats the dictum of modern historical scholarship that local empirical circumstances must continually modify the larger theories of change. One common point which emerges from the present collection written from the vantage points of large generalizing formulations and those emphasizing detail, according to Robb, is that prescriptions of market economics do not relate to the actual experience of most Indian cultivators; "...to apply them is to run the risk of, at best, serious dislocation and suffering, whether or not they improve the Indian economy" (p. 33).

The first article on archaic forms of agricultural knowledge in South India by David Ludden tries to show how the terminologies of agriculture changed in the course of the classical, medieval and colonial periods. The general axis of movement being from heterogeneity and multivocality to a universalizing 'scientific' discourse with the growth of commodity production and the increased intrusion of the State in the countryside in the colonial period. This a theme which has been dealt with earlier, particularly by Nicholas Dirks' discussion of changing terminologies and early colonial 'scientific' mappings of the Tamil country. Ludden assumes that the differences in the incidence of presently available agricultural proverbs are positively correlated with actual variations in agricultural knowledge in different regions. This assumption seems to be a bit hasty and rash, given the large gaps in our access to locally generated historical artefacts.

Benedicte Hjejle takes up a theme somewhat related to Ludden's concerns in her discussion of Indian and British conceptions of agrarian Vishakhapatnam and the changes that occurred in agricultural production during the period of transition to Company rule. Based on very rich empirical information she first argues for a variety of land use patterns in Vishakhapatnam, focussing on the historical significance of local agrarian controllers in the wider agrarian economy. She highlights the role of marginal land in the region's agriculture, the ecological determination of land use, the role of local land controllers, and the susceptibility of early official statistics to manipulation. Her main point is that the intervention of Company rule led to the displacement of traditional land controllers by new groups—non-agricultural groups of merchants and officials resulting in a social fragmentation and declining agricultural productivity.

On the question of commercialization in Indian agriculture, Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri provides a carefully nuanced criticism of the models of

The three issues around which the volume is organized are the kinds of knowledge relating to agriculture, the 'kinds of agriculture' or to use less fashionable terms the organization and relations of production and finally the different purposes of agriculture. After providing a critical summary of each of the contributions, Robb returns to the vexed problem of relating the wealth of micro-details with that of general theory. He is careful not to discount the significance of either for both historical reconstruction and policy formulation.

'forced' commercialization and price driven change based on the experience of indigo and in eastern India. Chaudhuri argues that the different trends within the agricultural historiography of Indian agricultural commercialization have inadequately stressed the distinctive peasant perceptions in this context. Highlighting peasants' perceptions according to him serves as a check to the biases of explanations based on relative price movements and 'forced' change. He is critical of these explanations as they have misrepresented the process of change in some crops and have erred in taking peasant dependence on dominant groups as an immutable fact. On the question of 'advances' Chaudhuri makes the important point that their role varied for different crops. He also points to the fact that in this discussion, consumption loans and production loans of peasants tend to get confounded and the existence of multiple sources of credit made forcing of advances on a dependent peasantry more problematic. The emphasis on peasant manoeuvres to increase their share in a context marked by subordination permits introducing of variations and movements in connection between conjunctions of market forces and possibilities for changing configurations of agrarian power, a theme not examined by theories of 'forced' commercialization.

Another contribution on a similar theme is Rajat Dutta's examination of the 'dynamics of peasant production and agrarian commercialism in eighteenth-century Bengal'. Dutta emphasizes the point that agrarian commercialism in Bengal can be understood only from the standpoint of regionally integrated market. He sees the Bengal rice cultivators' behaviour to be in tune with the attributes of a rational profit-maximizing peasant. Peasants responded positively to relative prices and so did tenurial relations move in tune with agricultural output and price changes. The limits to peasants' choices and the varied role of intermediaries and sharecroppers in responding to prices could have been elaborated profitably.

Eric Meyer's discussion of varied cultivation regimes and peasant strategies raises the central question of how the Kandyan peasant negotiated dramatic changes in the region's agriculture with the opening up of plantations. Meyer highlights the various purposes which different lands within a village were put to and how this pattern was disrupted under colonial rule. Both the colonial state and later nationalist discourse privileged paddy cultivation over *chena* or 'slash and burn' agriculture. It is argued that this misunderstanding of the role of *chena* and settled cultivation led to a number of tensions including the ethnic conflict in the north and east Sri Lanka. Meyer provides a good discussion of how different strategies pursued by the various groups and their outcomes were premised upon their respective understanding of agriculture.

Another paper that focuses on the disruptive effects of colonial intervention on the village economy is the Sivakumars' study of long term change in the agrarian society of Tondaimandalam. Embellished with the terminology of recent institutional economics the paper argues that colonial rule forced a disjuncture between local and external production contexts. The site of transaction costs and power were removed from the village to the State. This process initiated under colonialism continued into the post-independence period. The Sivakumars' assert that with the growth of centralization, external forces broke down communal arrangements for village level production leading to the impoverishment of agricultural labour and slow economic growth. The authors describe in detail the ties of interdependence between employer and employee, the close connection of this system of economic production with the caste and belief systems and the available resources. However, in of pre-colonial struct dence, for instance, aged employer-wor their reconciliation, pression that structu and exploitation ter less attention than

Three other Srivastava, Karin Guha deal with agricultural labou agrarian transition from the vantage point of systematic changes in the labour process in two villages in western and south-eastern Uttar Pradesh. The case study brings out clear contrasts in the landlord-labour relations in the more and less developed villages. In the faster changing village, landlords have resorted to switching to piece-rates and letting land seasonally to poor families. Closer landlord control over production and the mechanism of debt have been used here replacing older forms of employer-employee relations. In the more traditional and less dynamic village dominance, subordination and extra-economic coercion continue to play an important role in labour dynamics. The main point made in the paper is that 'surplus appropriators may make use of existing modes of surplus appropriation in very different ways, leading to different outcomes' (p. 249).

Sumit Guha's paper on the meaning and measurement of labour in Indian agriculture sharply disputes analyses of Indian agriculture based on homogenous notions of labour-time. Guha deconstructs agricultural work distinguishing between those involved in the different operations and the varied nature of work itself. His main point is that 'labour-time would be a very imperfect measure of work done in Indian agriculture. . .' (p. 260). Instead, he proposes that labour inputs be measured in terms of units based on actual or imputed cost for different kinds of labourers. Despite the limitations of this method, Guha considers this vastly superior to attempts to measure labour time.

Karin Kapadia studies labour contracts and female labour in a village in Tiruchi district of Tamilnadu. She observes a shift from time rates to piece rates. This shift is associated with greater exploitation, lower supervisory costs and a tendency towards an apparent self-disciplining among piece-rate workers.

The last two articles are very different from the rest of the contributions. Written by economists they look at the significance of international ramifications and hegemonic external linkages for Indian agriculture. Utsa Patnaik's switch from food to exp... mercial crops), high revenue demand in cash, unilateral transfers of wealth from India and extreme food insecurity are some of the features offered to explain colonial Indian agriculture. Finally, it is argued that 'structural adjustment policies' under World Bank-IMF supervision that insist on increased agro-exports have actually led to falling per capita food production in poor countries. Patnaik's discussion of the colonial economy could have paid more attention to historical variations and detail. On page 302 she writes that the long run shift from staples to exportables and a declining trend in per capita food availability aggravated by the deteriorating international terms of trade in the inter-war period provided for a 'pre-famine conjuncture', i.e., 'increased vulnerability with larger numbers of rural classes in poverty. . . 'If this indeed was the case, then how does one explain the trend decline in mortality after 1921 (or slightly earlier if we disregard the excess mortality caused by the influenza epidemic) in India?

In a well-argued paper on agriculture and liberalization, Abhijit Sen critically evaluates the prescriptions of the World Bank for agricultural growth in India. Like Patnaik, Sen also sees gloomy prospects ahead for Indian agriculture. Increased prices, slower output growth and greater income disparities are foreseen if India continues on its World Bank dictated path of structural adjustment.

In the 1950s and 1960s, economic and social historians were attracted by more or less determinist models of historical explanation. Today, however, it has been replaced by models which emphasize the freedom of choice of ordinary people, their perceptions, their strategies, their capacity to exploit the inconsistencies of social and political systems. The majority of articles in this collection make an important advance in this direction.

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ying for Milk

I. Qadeer

ONEY AND MADNESS: THE CULTURE AND POLITICS OF BREAST FEEDING

By Naomi Baumslag and Dia L. Michels

The Other India Press, Goa, 1995, pp. 256, Rs. 175.00

The Other India Press has done a commendable job in bringing out this 256 page, neat, well-illustrated and equally well-argued book entitled, *Milk, Money and Madness: The Culture and Politics of Breast Feeding*. The authors, Naomi Baumslag and Dia L. Michels, have chosen to deal with a very peculiar type of madness. Madness that spurts thoughtless destruction and callous disregard for innocent lives through market forces that measure value only as money.

In an atmosphere of uncritical acceptance of any and all medical advice, this book is a reminder that human history helps us to locate technology and professionalism in their proper context; that often destruction of traditional practices is not the result of their lack of value for human survival, but because they hinder the forward march of capitalism. Divided into three main parts, the book deals with some critical issues related to breast-feeding. The importance of these is pointed out by Richard Jolly, who commends the authors' efforts in his Foreword. The first part of the book, "Breast-feeding: Beliefs and Practices", reviews people's perceptions and practices, both at present and in the past. It unravels the variations in child rearing and feeding practices in traditional societies and

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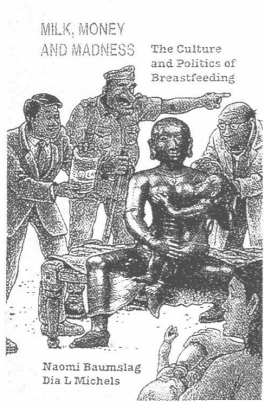
Even for those who are familiar with the debate, the book has some surprises. It is interesting, informative, and thought-provoking. Its use of rare paintings and photographs from museums and libraries not only provides lucid illustrations but also substantive evidence. It should be read by all, specially those involved with caring for babies, personally or professionally.



their common concern with breast-feeding. It also deals with the nature of transition in this singularly critical practice that contributed to human survival and the ensuing problems in the contemporary West. The authors contribute at two levels. Firstly, by showing the social significance given to breast-feeding till the 18th century, they forcefully bring forth the fact that it was the most natural, effective, valuable and simple way of caring for babies for a very long time; that distortions and doubts regarding its feasibility and effectivity are not even a century old. Secondly, the practice of artificial feeding evolved not for babies who had mothers but for those who had lost them.

Phenomenally high infant mortality of the 17th and 18th century was not simply due to poor public health. The young mothers from the poor classes abandoned, neglected, or handed over their own babies to foundling hospitals to be able to seek out jobs as wet nurses. The women from the elite classes, on the other hand, gave up breast-feeding in order to fulfil their social and wifely duties. The notions of beauty and sexuality got interlinked with virgin breasts and the advantages of feeding their own babies were ignored, as wet nurse became easily available. The 18th century foundling hospitals, meant to take care of the poor and abandoned babies, thus became the infernos where recorded mortality was as high as 80-90 per cent. It was this that became the inspiration for manufacturing formula food for babies. The book shows that though social and technological evolution of the 18th and 19th century expanded the scope of "possibilities" for women, the choices given to them did not include work along with nurturing their infants.

The second part, "Breast Milk: The Miracle Food and Medicines", is a collection of evidence that shows the superiority of breast milk and sets it apart from all other artificially prepared or "humanized" milks. The most important feature that the authors emphasize is the specificity and the live nature of breast milk. Its variation with time of the day, maturity and need of the baby, its immunologically protective nature, its richness in cellular content, easy assimilability of fats and proteins makes breast milk unique. The authors rightly point out that the fear generated by the possibility of transfer of toxins or infections through breast-feeding may be real but it is a part of the general risk that we generate for ourselves by destroying our environment, and not the process of breast-feeding itself. The authors also discuss the value of breast-feeding for maternal health: an extremely valuable dimension that is mostly neglected and distorted into "a negative nutritional impact", which again, is more a creation of poverty rather than breast-feeding.

The process of commercialization of infant feeding is then reviewed. Starting with companies producing formula food for foundling hospitals in the 18th century, it soon became obvious to the entrepreneurs that they could push the markets further. Thus, first the elite and then the newly emerging middle classes, became their targets. The milk industry not only became a lucrative business, it also expanded into providing alternative containers. The evolution of a feeding bottle and the rubber nipple has an equally revealing history.

The first two parts of the book, though useful, leave some space for avoiding repetitions and further consolidating evidence. At times the line between perspective and evidence becomes thin. Also lacking is a consistent analysis of the past and present of specific regions and the linkages over time, as the text moves from one part of the globe to another.

Part three, "Breast Milk Economies: Shaping Corporate and Governmental Policies", highlights the industry's relentless search for markets and profits. When the markets in the West were

In an atmosphere of uncritical acceptance of any and all medical advice, this book is a reminder that human history helps us to locate technology and professionalism in their proper context; that often destruction of traditional practices is not the result of their lack of value for human survival, but because they hinder the forward march of capitalism.

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won or the users began questioning the formulae, attention was turned to the weak and more gullible countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America where banned and unpopular products were easily dumped and sold. A major boost to their sales in the West was the public health revolution which brought down infant mortality and provided a cover-up for the harm that artificial feeding did. Evidence is presented that in France, in just one region, infant mortality could be brought down to zero between 1893 to 1903 by strictly banning all propaganda and promotion of artificial feeding.

In this process of commercialization of infant survival, a key role was played by medical professionals. They converted exceptions into rules, used their authority and power to manipulate and consistently refused to look at evidence or initiate research in desirable directions. This great partnership between the industry and the "learned men to protect babies from foolish, unlearned women" performed two functions. It shifted responsibility away from single practitioners involved in preparing artificial feeds for babies under their care. When a baby on formula food died the physician could no more be held responsible, as now the mother prepared the formula. Secondly, the formula sold carried no labels or directions for use except for advising its use under medical supervision. Hence, infant feeding was medicalized without the medical profession being responsible. With the invention of refrigeration, means of transport, storage, better handling and finally pasteurization, the hold of this partnership became stronger. The most obvious common sense knowledge was subordinated to the interests of a few. Sufficient evidence is produced by the authors of this link between doctors who ran Milk Stations of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and the companies

that produced formula feeds and supplementary foods.

There were, no doubt, exceptions among the medical professionals who practised differently and promoted breast-feeding. They had to struggle against arguments of "liberation of women" and their "modernization", free samples provided by the companies, and liberal aid of food supplements in the name of child care! By 1970 however these activists were able to consolidate themselves to fight the famous case against Nestle's and start working towards the WHO code for baby food. The book offers a fascinating account of the arguments and counter-arguments, the politics behind the scenes, and the mechanisms of manipulation adopted by the all-powerful industry. The fact that the saner voices won and the WHO adopted a code in 1981 is certainly not the final step and the struggle must continue to translate this guideline into legislation and widespread practice. The authors focus on the prevailing conflict between the social necessity of breast-feeding and the dilemma of a nursing, working woman who is given no social support or security to pursue this practice. The Scandinavian countries have taken the lead in this matter but the others are far, far behind.

In the Third World, the penetration of market forces—into all regions and all domains of social and personal life—only increases the dangers. The urban areas are the first to succumb but, with increasing urbanization, migration, the expansion of communications, and a class of medical professionals bred on the supremacy of technological knowledge, the rural populations are also becoming vulnerable. The authors argue that, when in the West 25–40 per cent of the GDP is contributed by the labour of women involved in households (as assessed by market cost methods), this proportion will be higher for women in the Third World. Offering them work security during pregnancy and lactation, therefore, should be part of the employer's responsibility.

Even for those who are familiar with the debate, the book has some surprises. It is interesting, informative, and thought-provoking. Its use of rare paintings and photographs from museums and libraries not only provides lucid illustrations but also substantive evidence. It should be read by all, specially those involved with caring for babies, personally or professionally.

I. Qadeer is Professor, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is a pediatrician who shifted to Public Health and has been teaching and researching in this area for the past 25 years.

The Unmaking of Genocide

Niranjan S. Karnik

THE RWANDA CRISIS: HISTORY OF A GENOCIDE
By Girard Prunier
Hurst & Company, 1995, pp. 389, (PB), $ 13.50

During his recent tour through Africa, US President Bill Clinton officially apologized on behalf of Americans and the international community for failing to recognize the genocide that was occurring in Rwanda during 1994. As an observer of this region and a critic of US policy, I must confess to some degree of shock and anger with the President. During his March 25th speech in Kigali, Clinton claimed that "we did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide. We cannot change the past. But we can and must do everything in our power to help you build a future without fear, and full of hope."[1] Nice words but lacking in some degree of sincerity given the tour's intent and the Administration's past decisions regarding Africa. First, one of the purposes of Clinton's trip to Africa was to build new trade links with a region of the world where the US has little or no economic contact. France and the European colonial powers have historically had strong trade connections with Africa especially Francophone Africa.

Second, White House spokespersons in May 1994 "were instructed not to use the word 'genocide' in referring to Rwanda."[2] Both through the threat of Security Council vetoes and strategic denial, the Clinton Administration avoided getting involved in Rwanda and even prevented the label of 'genocide' from being used at several levels.

The natural inclination might be to look to international statute for definitions of genocide and see if and how Rwanda's case might or might not fit the definitions.[3] Such a course, while potentially useful and productive, is unlikely to resolve the issue. The Clinton Administration's power to deny a genocide by fiat demands another approach—one which recognizes the dynamics of power and the role of history. In looking for a good history of the Rwandan tragedy perhaps the best and most complete source can be found in Girard Prunier's *The Rwanda Crisis: History of A Genocide*. Prunier, originally a specialist on Uganda, was driven to this work by witnessing the tragedies that befell his friends in the region and the need for a comprehensive history of events in the region.

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Beginning with a brief discussion of the precolonial period and continuing forward through the events of 1994, Prunier expertly teases out the major factors which brought about the conditions which enabled the genocide. Early in this book he shows how Belgian colonial authorities transformed Rwanda's governance and social structures to favour certain groups. Throughout his discussion the terms Hutu and Tutsi continually appear as important tribal, ethnic, and political divisions. While the American media became fixated on the tribal aspect of the conflict, Prunier depicts events more complexly by showing how political motivations turned some members of a tribe against their own members. In reading this far more nuanced portrait of events it becomes clear that these tribal labels do not represent some "pure" ethnic demarcations and instead are group terms which have been mediated by generations of colonialism and political influence. These terms still have a great deal of veracity and power but this does not mean that they contain some essential explanatory value in and of themselves.

Prunier also traces the complicity of countries like France and Uganda. Moving against the academic and nationalist grain of his home country, France, Prunier details the ways that the French armed and supported the Hutu regime. He shows how the Hutu government leaders appealed to France's fears of Anglo-American cultural and economic domination of Africa. Members of the French government came to see the Uganda-supported Tutsi exiles as drifting toward the Anglophone world and thus threatening French interests in the region. Clinton's trip seen in this light may be either a victory tour for the Anglophone world and / or a new threat to France. In the wake of the Cold War, will these new regional economic rivalries between allies be the cause of civil unrest? Only time will tell.

On 6 April 1994 a plane carrying the Presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down on its return journey from a peace meeting. This event marked the beginning of the most recent cycle of violence in Rwanda that resulted in nearly 1 million dead and in excess of 2 million fleeing into asylum. One of the lessons we learn from Prunier is the key role that refugees and diasporas play in the events of Rwanda. He shows how civil wars in the 1960s and 70s, and unrest in the 1980s and 1990s caused successive waves of migration which scattered Rwandans across the globe. Later these diasporas funded, armed, and in many cases returned to directly participate in military actions against the reigning regimes in attempts to reclaim the country or at least parts of it.

This is not to excuse the governments which led Rwanda. In their own way they discriminated against certain groups and fed dangerously volatile sentiments into the populace. Senior government officials misused international development and humanitarian aid to line their own pockets and further impoverished the country. In addition, the government actively jailed political dissidents, and ordered executions in defiance of international human rights standards which further marginalized the groups they feared.

As comprehensive as Prunier's book is, there are still some stories which get

1 Clinton, William, "Clinton's Painful Words of Sorrow and Chagrin," *The New York Times*, March 26 1998: A12.

2 Weiner, Tim, "Critics Say U.S. Ignored C.I.A. Warnings of Genocide in Rwanda," *The New York Times*, March 26 1998: A12.

3 Desthexe, Alain, *Rwanda and Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

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only scant attention. For example, the Canadian economist Michel Chossudovsky[4] has shown how the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), working in concert, removed all the economic safety net programme in Rwanda's agricultural sector. A 1980s downturn in the coffee market then plunged much of the country into famine and terrible desperation. These events while not directly leading to genocide did lay a basis for it to thrive.

Prunier's history is thus a history of major actors—individuals, political parties, and governments. These are perhaps the most salient actors to examine in this genocide but they are hardly the only actors. Many other forces play into the activities of Rwanda, some from quite far. The increasingly globalized world has a dark side in which the mild mannered economic decisions in Washington and policy positions in Paris can affect a small country in central Africa. As one looks more closely at the aftermath of Rwanda it is clear that these actors sitting in distant offices can produce these effects due to their relative power. They even have the ability to deny that a genocide is occurring as a million people die.

[4]Chossudovsky, Michel, "Economic Genocide in Rwanda," *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 13 (1996): pp. 938–41.

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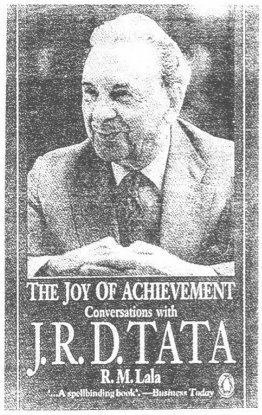
Two Colossi of Indian Industry

Sanjaya Baru

THE JOY OF ACHIEVEMENT: CONVERSATIONS WITH J.R.D. TATA
By R.M. Lala
Viking Penguin India, 1995, pp. 190, Rs. 190.00

GODREJ: A HUNDRED YEARS, 1897–1997: VOLUME 1
By B.K. Karanjia
Viking Penguin India, 1997, pp. 264, Rs. 295.00



All great personalities in Hindu mythology and Indian history have been depicted as complex characters—men of virtue and vice, wisdom and pettiness, gracious and jealous, sacred and profane, spiritual and materialistic. Even Maryada Purushottam Ram is shown to have human frailties, sometimes wimpish and given to self-righteousness. Bhagwan Krishna is an altogether human person, wise and cunning, generous and mischievous, just and libidinous. When great sages, poets and historians have never worried about portraying our Gods and Kings as morally complex beings, why do mere biographers of businessmen insist on hagiography?

Whether in Gita Piramal's *Business Maharajahs*, or in R.M. Lala's biography of J.R.D. Tata (*Beyond the Last Blue Mountain, 1992*), or the biographies of Lala Shriram, Seth Walchand Hirachand, G.D. Birla and so on, we are always offered one-dimensional perspectives of patriotic businessmen, talented entrepreneurs, hard-working corporate citizens, creating wealth, doing their nation proud, building business empires, living civilized lives and concerned about humanity and the future of man. What about all the corporate wars, the clash of tycoons, the cutting of corners, the No. 2 accounts, the unions bashed, the politicians bribed, and the women seduced? Businessmen are human beings. They work while they work—sometimes hard, sometimes not—and play while they play—sometimes with the boys, sometimes with the girls—and that's the way they stay healthy, wealthy and gay.

Give us a break, Mr Lala and Mr Karanjia. We are sure the Godrejs and the Tatas, like the Birlas and the Ambanis, are extraordinary people and have done a lot of good for their businesses, for the nation and for mankind. But biographies become interesting when they give the smooth with the rough, the sweet with the bitter, the hurrahs with the punches. Neither book under review does justice to their undoubtedly great personalities.

We now know from Mr. Lala's latest offering (*Conversations with J.R.D. Tata*) that the late J.R.D. Tata did not want his biography published in his lifetime. JRD was ostensibly being modest, but presumably he also felt an honest account would stir controversy. Biographies of eminent people should be expected to for they would have lived a complex life and taken many a difficult decision, becoming heroes to many but found wanting by some. No one lives a life which when revealed to all will not embarass someone or the other, apart from the person concerned. The best biographies have always been the most controversial ones.

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There is no doubt that India has been home this century to some of the most dynamic, enterprising, and forward-looking businessmen in the world. This may sound odd in the current "Bombay Club" siege atmosphere in which even the tallest business leader is worried about foreign takeovers and competition. But the era of the "Bombay Plan" was a distant cry from the present phase of the "Bombay Plea". Indian businessmen walked tall, battled adversity and played on distinctly non-level playing fields.

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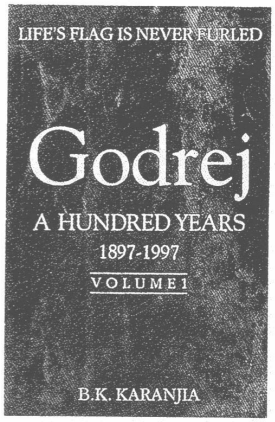
Mr. Karanjia's story of the Godrej family begins on a personal note. He informs us that his acquaintance with Godrej dates back to his father's friendship with Pirojsha Godrej. He and Sohrab Godrej became friends when they 'jointly' brought out a twelve-page supplement in *The Times of India* (September 1955), "recording for the first time the early struggles of Godrej against the entrenched British interests and Godrej achievements in diverse



fields. "Mr Karanjia is honest in informing us that this effort won him a job with the Godrej's as a Publicity Manager, a job he retained for six years till he joined the Times group as editor of *Filmfare*. Four decades later, it is not 'editor-journalist' Karanjia who has written this book, but the old 'publicity manager' who has done so.

Karanjia offers adequate flavour of the pre-Independence days and of the entrepreneurial skills of the Godrejs as well as their links with the leadership of the national movement. The swadeshi angle is an important element of Karanjia's first volume since it deals with the first and second generation of the Godrejs. Ardeshir Godrej's friendship with Gandhi, Tagore and Tilak is mentioned in passing but nothing of substance or political news-value is mentioned about these friendships.

Leafing through the private papers of Seth Walchand Hirachand, now accessible in the archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, I came across a letter written by Karamchand Thapar to Babu Rajendra Prasad (later India's first President), in September 1940, which stated: "In May 1940 under instructions from B.M. Birla I had sent you a cheque for Rs. 5,000 to enable you to help the sugar industry in whatever manner you might think best. I have advised the Indian Sugar Syndicate office to send you another cheque for Rs 5000 which I hope you will be receiving very soon." Indian businessmen of that period, like subsequent generations, extended financial support to politicians in the name of swadeshi and national interest. At one level the friendship between business leaders and political leaders was an elevated relationship which strengthened the national movement. At another, it was a mutually beneficial relationship which neither really liked. The flavour of this contradiction doesn't come out in Karanjia's book though in Lala's book we get more than a glimpse of JRD's dislike for politicians.

Karanjia is entirely correct in emphasizing at the outset the power of the Godrej brandname. For generations of Indians the Godrej steel almirahs, the locks, the soaps and the typewriters are household names. So is the Tata name. The market for a book on these business groups, like any of the other big names should be substantial but these sugary accounts devoid of all spice are unlikely to enthuse too many readers.

It is easy to see from these two volumes that JRD is a very much more colourful and entertaining personality, compared to the Godrejs, and his life can be the subject of a racy novel. But Mr. Lala's politeness prevents him from giving us more than a mere glimpse of the private life and inner thoughts of 'Jeh'.

Consider just one telling example. In the Preface itself Mr Lala tells us that JRD was "no saint". "He had a glad eye for the ladies." Later he quotes JRD saying (p. 94), in response to complaints about his smoking, "All right, I don't gamble, I don't drink, I smoke, but *I don't womanize more than others*. So the easiest thing is to give up smoking." (Emphasis ours) Lala also tells us JRD's favourite joke about Lord and Lady Linlithgow (p. 39). On a visit to a stud farm, Lady Linlithgow was impressed by a bull which had 'performed all 365 days of the year'. "Go tell His Excellency" says Lady Linlithgow. When informed of the bull's prowess, Lord Linlithgow asks "What! With the same cow?" "No, sir" he is reassured. "Go and tell that to Her Excellency". Together, these anecdotes add up to offering us a rather colourful portrait of the handsome 'Jeh'. A ladies' man, who only complained (p. 94) that he has an "exaggerated reputation of a Casanova", ought to have got a better deal from his biographer than the bland statement, "But he did say to me that although his reputation as a playboy was an exaggeration, he had not lived as the Bible wanted him to live." Biographies and accounts of private conversations need more masala.

The mellowing of JRD comes through very clearly from the various anecdotes he recalls. In Darjeeling for his honeymoon in 1930, JRD was annoyed about being made to wait on the road for an hour to enable the Bengal Governor's motorcade to pass. When the motorcade arrived JRD jumped onto the road and shouted: "Who the hell do you think you are, keeping five hundred people, women and children, in the cold for an hour? You damn fool!"

In July 1993, months before he died, he went to Hyderabad at the invitation of his 'oldest living' friend, Kira, to inaugurate her Montessori Research and Training Centre. He was made to wait for 45 minutes at the venue because the state's minister for education, P.V. Ranga Rao (the wayward son of the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao) arrived late. Lala, who accompanied JRD, felt JRD may be annoyed by this affront but was struck by the graciousness with which he received Ranga Rao.

Moving from the private to the corporate, we get a good account of JRD's impatience with the politics of Nehru and Gandhi, his dislike for Morarji and his admiration for Sardar Patel and Jayaprakash Narayan. But not a word about what JRD thought of fellow businessmen or other members of the Tata family. We know that he appreciated Ratan Tata's "integrity, memory and energy" ("Ratan has everything I want for the firm"), but we know little of what he felt about the rivals and how they fared against Ratan on these scales. We get nuggets of interesting information but nothing more. We are told that Ratan was "somewhat annoyed" when JRD said he wanted to consult Ajit Kerkar about naming Ratan his successor and was relieved to discover that what JRD wanted to find out from Kerkar was the "auscpicious date"! A Parsi corporate tycoon consulting a Hindu about an 'auspicious date' for anointing his successor! Kerkar advised Monday, 25 March (1991). Which calendar did he consult?

JRD was a great Indian and richly deserved the Bharat Ratna that the Narasimha Rao government finally conferred on him in 1992. JRD himself valued the Dadabhai Naoroji Award more than the Bharat Ratna (p. 128) because of Naoroji's commitment to women's education, a cause dear to him. JRD was a modernist, an institution builder and a true Indian. Agonizing over the destruction of the Babri Masjid, JRD reportedly asked Lala: "I cannot understand how erecting a temple is more important than building a great literature or making India into a prosperous and peaceful country."

One or two biographies cannot capture the full flavour of the life of men like JRD. Hopefully more will be written and of more such corporate leaders, and they will tell us all—the pains and pleasures, the virtues and vices and the fulfillments and failures of big businessmen who are, after all, mere mortals.

Sanjaya Baru, is an economic journalist who currently hosts Crossfire *on Doordarshan Metro.*

An Unbonded Explorer of Frontiers

Tulsi Patel

SEEMANTON KE ANVEKSHAK SHYAMACHARAN DUBE
Compiled and edited by Leela Dube and Sudheesh Pachauri
Vani Prakashan, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 255, Rs. 250.00

In this montage comprising thirty-one contributions and a candid but intensely personal introduction by Leela Dube, S.C. Dube (SC now on) emerges as a pioneering anthropologist/sociologist, a lover of literature, a critic with an insatiable appetite for inquiry and knowledge, an effective communicator and an imaginative and fearless academic and administrator of outstanding courage of conviction. This tribute released on his first death anniversary is a collection of memoirs, assessment and evaluation of the multidimensional personality and work of SC spanning over five decades. The book is divided into three parts: memoirs, lectures and articles by SC and a few of his interviews published in Hindi newspapers and journals. It is through the lenses of the contributors, based on parts of their lives spent with SC (and his writings) that an alive, socially responsible and rich life presents itself to the readers. Amidst these varying personal memories are reflections about SC's roles as a scholar, teacher, intellectual, writer, administrator, friend, guide, neighbour and relative except for a couple of personal biographical pieces (one of them by Sumati Mutatkar, the noted musician) the contributors are senior social scientists, litterateurs, critics, journalists, philosophers, bureaucrats with social commitment and a few upcoming scholars. The book begins with a brief biographical sketch of SC, whose life began in 1922 in Madhya Pradesh. Early loss of his mother and his subsequent dialogue and friendship with books carved him as an adolescent writer in Hindi magazines, an interest which continued throughout his life. It was perhaps his preoccupation with folklore and tribal social life in the *adivasi* surroundings of Chattisgarh that made him turn to anthropology after a brilliant career in political science. *The Kamar*, the monograph on shifting cultivators and food gatherers brought him international acclaim. Followed by *Indian Village*, his work paved the way for a two decade long period of village studies in Indian sociology.

SC's pathbreaking work, *Indian Village* was followed by his foray into the study of planned change. The anguish of community development in its various dimensions remained throughout his life. Over a dozen books from him were rooted in contemporary Indian social issues. From the tribal soil and sensibility of Chattisgarh, SC moved on to understanding and writing on *India's Changing Villages*, to *Modernization and Development: The Search for Alternative Paradigms*, penetrating thoughts on *Tradition and Development*, and *Indian Society*. SC's concern for tribal society, especially of Madhya Pradesh (MP), his home state, his teaching, research and administrative experiences brought him closer to the grassroots as well as bureaucracy and the higher echelons of society and their functioning. His love for Hindi literature—which engaged him since early childhood continued all along. Namvar Singh's recall of SC's confession of the emotional attachment with literature is revealing and picturesque: 'Literature entered my life stealthily and stayed put there. This all-weather friend never separated from me'. He openly admitted the superior strength of a few insights in literature over a large scale survey report. His deep interest in literature coloured his intense grip over sociological issues. Many including the litterateurs in this volume have admired him for his courage in turning full time to writing in Hindi after retirement. In B.R. Chauhan's words, SC's shift from S.C. Dube to Shyamacharan Dube towards the latter part of his life was the result of a conscious decision and conviction. He was concerned about communicating with a much wider audience in India which is not Anglophone, a disability of sorts in the present times. He advised his colleagues in social sciences both young and not so young to write in their own languages so that standard literature in the discipline is made available in these languages, and to a larger community of sociologists. His *Indian Society* publi-shed by the National Book Trust and translated in various Indian languages was written with this specific purpose in mind.

From memories of some of his colleagues at the University of Sagar, Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and in Delhi, his entrenchment in some of the traditional Indian values he cherished, woven with western ways and values comes across in an appreciative tone. With his effortless and sculpted use of exclusive Hindi and English, both in oration and writing, he did not restrict himself to sociology. He interacted actively with colleagues in other departments in universities, recall his students and colleagues. The title of the volume is perhaps based not only on his going across disciplinary boundaries, but also for neither being overwhelmed by traditional nor overawed by western thought (Girish Mishra: 132). He was not nostalgic about tradition. His committed intellectual personality is viewed as having a multidimensional contemporaneity. He stood on his cultural ground and rose up to an alert, interesting and analytical view of a broad international picture. His was the intellectual refusal of an imposed reality and a critical and objective look for indigenous thought, method and practice. His views on development alternatives insisted on a decolonized and yet not an untangled approach to understanding and policy intervention, particularly in the spheres of modernization, change and quality of life.

For him good theory depended on the possibility of its use and utility. In this light he preferred an uninterrupted contextualized research that was rooted and yet not parochial or traditional essentialist. Perhaps it is a composite view of all this that Mrinal Pande's very informed and incisive commentary portrays the pitiable plight of today's intellectual, removed from the common man, who writes and publishes in English, more prestigiously abroad. She is eloquent in expressing her surprise that some sociologists instead of bothering about altering this worrisome situation are advocating a distance from real life, its experiences and aspirations. They advocate saving sociology from moral solutions, in their efforts at making sociology rise above time and space. Mrinal Pande believes SC to be a spokesperson of complex social problems and their easy administrative solutions. We at Jamia had this experience: Once faced with the great unease of teachers in the Department of Sociology at Jamia in teaching some classes through Hindi and Urdu medium, he related his rewarding experiments of teaching, learning and writing in Hindi. The manner in which he related his experiences and disclosed his late resolve to reach more people by writing in Hindi inspired us to make sincere efforts in following suit. Shobhita Jain's piece reiterates these qualities.

The inadequate permeability of development of tribals brought him close to B.D. Sharma whose piece is the best illustration to negate the well-known and deeply entrenched chasm between academics and bureaucrats. P.C. Joshi's piece reveals his relationship with many of his contemporary sociologists. Without broadcasting his theoretical knowledge, SC could give incisive directions to set people towards serious questioning. Suresh Shukla's is a very balanced and close frame view of SC in the sociological world of Delhi, a sort of centre removed from the periphery. Shukla laments the insufficient use of SC's valuable and exclusive talent by the system in India, notwithstanding his administrative spells.

Both in his conduct and ideas, SC was free from regional, communal and caste prejudices. Nandu Ram's piece is eloquent on this. He had sympathy for the under-privileged and came forward with help at crucial times. Accessible to the younger generation, he was dear to several of the younger sociologists who have contributed to the volume. To Atal, Anand Kumar, Nandu Ram and Soumendra Patnaik, he was a father figure. He is known to seek out bright minds. What touched many was his interest in people's academic work.

Despite a near absence of neighbourhood culture in the metropolis, he had close and warm relations with neighbours (Pachauri). His sense of humour, love for and capacity to communicate with children was endearing. He greatly admired his literary friends. A great deal of exchange of reading material took place and resulted in interesting conversations around it. His understanding and evaluation of literature was so sharp that he was on the board of literary awards such as Jnan Peeth and Vyas Samman.

Sachidanand's lament is apt: The world listened with a lot of attention, alas, you left in the midst.

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Home of Man's Being

Some Observations on Language, Culture and Identity*

Nirmal Verma

To say anything about language is like trying to catch one's own shadow. Or to be more precise, we *are* its shadow, in which we embody the shifting identities of our self. It is an unending exploration, for man *qua* man can never define himself completely, once and for all. Not merely because there is something unknown or unknowable about 'man' but also because he is constantly making, remaking, unmaking himself, and for that reason cannot be treated as a 'finished product'. What shall be the stages and stations of his journey into the future (if he has any future at all) remains as mysterious and unchartered as ever despite the philosophical speculations made about it from Nietzsche to Sri Aurobindo and the predictions of the modern-day futurists.

This is not the place to discuss the veracity or otherwise of these speculations but one thing seems to be clear that these speculations—such as they are—arise out of deep dissatisfaction with the 'partial images' of man as they have been provided to us by history. We as human beings are perpetually tormented by a sense of incompleteness within us, which is further aggravated by a feeling that this incompleteness is more apparent than real, that in *reality* we were totally self-contained, a reality, which is deeply buried in us waiting to be excavated. Like a sentence half written on a page, we try to decipher the erased part to 'complete' its meaning.

Language is perhaps the most effective tool for such a task of 'self-excavation'. In it is reflected man's image not in its fragmented parts, but in its *totality*, not what he *is* but what he *could be*; it uncovers the potentiality inherent in his being. This act of 'self-uncovering' gives him a unique status, distinguishing him from the rest of the living beings. The uniqueness of a culture lies not in its historical reality which is bound to be distorted by external pressures, but in what it dreams out to be, in its *ideality*.

If language plays such a crucial role in the self-identification (Atma-bodh) of a culture, it is because it makes man aware of the dark roots of memory or a chain of memories, which constitute his *tradition*, his special way of looking at the world—and also at himself—his self in the world. If by some catastrophic act of collective amnesia we forget everything about our past, but our language survives then not much is lost, because through language, the past would still be flowing within our present, resonant with all the racial memories, *samskaras* and mythical associations. Language is the most hopeful guarantee against *forgetting*. No wonder, the totalitarian regimes of our times were so eager to suppress the voices of its writers and poets, for their writings were the surest safeguard to preserve the memory, which they, the tyrants, were so eager to destroy. In this sense, language is a double-edged weapon; it is not only an instrument of communication, but also the bearer of truth, which is an integral part of its cultural heritage.

A culture seeks and discovers its truth, its 'essence' in the particular *order* of meanings inherent in the structure of its language. It is through this order we interpret the 'reality' of the world. The extent to which the members of a cultural group get disinherited from their linguistic moorings, either by some external intervention or inner displacement (in colonized India, both were inter-related) their perceptions of reality get dim and distorted. Man depends upon the perceptions of things as language presents them to him. It is this which among other things distinguish the human languages from the mere 'sounds of communication' found in the animal world. The 'animal language' is chiefly governed by the immediate impulses of fear, hunger, sex and once they are satiated, they die away leaving no trace behind. Human speech, on the other hand, constitutes an order of sounds, which in the course of time, transcends the physical immediacy of the moment, acquiring a stability and solidity of words, which arranged in a certain order, unfold a whole world of meanings related to the human condition. As primitive man builds an image of god at a site where some miraculous event occured and the image continues to be worshipped by the succeeding generations, even after the memory of the miracle is lost, so also words are the bearers of archetypal memory. The 'momentary gods', whose meanings outlast their immediate context. Myths are to the language what gods were to the primitive man, both transform the ephemeral event into an everlasting symbol.

Here we come in contact with the twin aspects of language—one which we speak with one another, its functional aspects, the other which lies beneath its surface, its *essential* spirit, which is constantly echoed in the subtlest forms in the spoken words of everyday speech. What we speak, in different ways, reflects the essential, the invisible 'messages' of the underground world. In the insightful words of Heidegger, "Speaking is a kind of inner listening; it is listening to the language we speak. We speak by listening to what language tells us. And we are able to hear what language says only in so far as we are in our very essence taken up into the essence of language belonging to it." Perhaps this is most manifestly true in a poem, for we hear *that* in the words of a poem which the language unfolds in its essence. "Language in its essence is the still stream that writes, while itself generating them, its two banks, what it *says* and our speech echoing that."

It is precisely this inner 'essence' of a language which determines the directive gaze of a people, a distinctive mode of apprehending reality. Each language happens to be the 'home of man's being', from which different communities, cultural groups, religious sects seek and derive their basic source of nourishment. Thus there is no such thing as one language, but many languages, each different from one another not only in their sound patterns and grammatical structures, but in their *world-view*, in their basic perceptions of reality, in their conception of man, nature and gods. As the eminent philologist, philosopher W. Von Humboldt says, "Each language draws a magic circle round the people to which it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape save by stepping out of it into another."

As it is difficult to visualize the European civilization without the Greek and Latin languages and the classical mythology related to them—both are so intimately interwoven with each other—so also Indian civilizational identity is indelibly stamped by the ancient *puranas* and epics created in Sanskrit which left such a profound ever-lasting imprint on the Indian psyche. Apart from its familiar historically documented past, so manifestly ascertainable, a people also has its 'inner past' which like an invisible stream flows beneath its consciousness. Language, as it is reflected in the myths and epics, provide the clue to unlock its secret universe. The words denoted for sun, fire, water and sky in *Rgveda* evoke a kind of response from a Hindu mind, which is very different from the associative memories which these words have in Greek and Latin languages. Human languages are born in the same world, but each language has a world uniquely its own. When we translate from one language to another, then we not only translate the words, but through words, the entire cultural baggage of the language has to be 'transported' to another language. "Thus when we set out to learn a new language, we have the impression of approaching a new world... it is like a voyage of discovery in an alien land and the greatest gain from such a voyage lies in having learnt to look upon our mother tongue in a new light". As Goethe so perceptively said "So long as we know no foreign language, we are in a sense ignorant of our own, for we fail to see its specific structure and distinctive features".

A comparison of different languages shows us that there are no exact synonyms; corresponding terms from two languages seldom refers to the same objects or actions. As the eminent Sanskrit scholar of Harvard University, Dr. Witzal points out "Many words in Sanskrit as well as in other languages cannot be rendered by a single good translation of the term e.g. the concept encompassed by the term '*Rt*' is in fact quite similar to the equally untranslatable term 'dharm'. Modern usage of the word 'truth' does not envisage all aspects of the term *Rt*... English or German have no word expressing the combination of concepts carried by the term '*Rt*.' which *is an active realization of truth, a vital force which can underline human or divine action* (Emphasis added).

What Dr. Witzel says about the Rgvedic term '*Rt*' equally applies tó concepts like *Atm, Brahma, Sat*, etc.—the list is endless—which don't have any satisfactory equivalents in other languages. In order to make these seminal concepts of Indian philosophical and

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religious tracts accessible in languages other than Sanskrit, it is necessary to illuminate the entire traditional context, from which they acquire specific meanings, their *world-view*. Failure to do this may lead not merely to the serious misreadings of the ancient texts, but total misrepresentation of the essential *philosophical vision* and cultural ethos embedded in the seminal terms of these texts, as was regrettably done by many European orientalists and philologists. The well-known art historian Anand Coomaraswami has drawn our attention to the deplorable consequences of such mistranslations. In the introduction to his book on *Hinduism and Buddhism*, he writes:

> "Brahmanism or Hinduism is not only the oldest mystery religion or rather metaphysical discipline. . . but also perhaps one of those that has survived with an unbroken tradition that is lived and understood at the present day by millions of men. Nevertheless. . . it would be hardly an exaggeration to say that a faithful account of Hinduism might well be given in the form of categorical denial of most of the statements that have been made about it, alike by European scholars and by Indians trained in our modern sceptical and evolutionary modes of thought."

Arguing against all the popular, platitudinous notions of the western scholars, Anand Coomaraswami further points out that Vedic doctrine is neither "pantheistic nor polytheistic" that *Karma* is not fate except in the sense of character and destiny that inhere in created things themselves which determine their vocation. He further illustrates his point by referring to the populist misconceptions about the term 'Maya' which is not 'illusion' but rather the world of appearances by which we may either by enlightened or deluded according to the degree of our maturity". Such examples of misreading and mistranslations can be multiplied, which only goes to show what types of distorted images of Indian culture and tradition were made available to the West during the last two hundred years. All Indo-European languages belong to one family, but each language, over the centuries, has acquired its own specific cultural intonation. As Humboldt points out, "Even in languages closely akin and agreeing in the general structure, we do not find identical names. The Greek and Latin terms for the moon, although they refer to the same object, do not express the same intention or concept".

In recent years the term 'secularism' has become a subject of passionate controversy in India, precisely because, torn from its European context, its application to Indian polity seriously upsets the age-old relation between *'dharma'* and *'Rajya'* (State). The literal translation of the term as *'dharmnirpekshta'* has little relevance in a society where *'dharma'*—as distinguished from the Semitic term religion—is inextricably interwoven with the entire fabric of life embracing both its secular and non-secular spheres. In sharp contrast to the post-renaissance Europe, there was no clear-cut demarcation between the 'religious' and 'secular' in the Indian tradition, dharma being the sole arbiter of man's actions on the earth. This is one among many instances, how the imposition of an alien concept can lead to artificial divisions in a society where in actual reality no such divisions exist. One can well imagine how in a colonial context, such gross misunderstanding of linguistic concepts, leads to something more than mere intellectual confusion, it creates an unbridgeable gulf, between what people traditionally believe in and what they are forcibly required to practise. It creates a schism within the consciousness alienating the people from their understanding of 'self'—a malaise from which India is suffering even after fifty years of Independence.

It is interesting to note that what Coomaraswami had said earlier about the colonial distortions of the East, was later more than corroborated by the German philosopher, Heidegger, who calls it an ongoing process of the "Europeanization of the Earth". It is this, according to Heidegger, which causes numerous misunderstandings of the Eastern cultures. The Indian philosopher, J.L. Mehta, who was also a close associate of Heidegger quotes him. Dr. Mehta writes:

> "After returning from Europe, a Japanese philosopher gave a series of lectures on the aesthetics of art and poetry, in which he had tried to explain Japanese art with the help of European theories of aesthetics. Heidegger is reported to have objected to this. "Is it right to depend on European principles of aesthetics to explain Japanese art?" He said, "Both the name and concept (of aesthetics) originated from the Greek concept of 'philosophia'; consequently its basic conceptual structure would remain alien and unfamiliar to East Asian modes of perception. Why do you have to take guidance from Europe for this?" The Japanese scholar said in answer, "It is because from European philosophy, we get those concepts in the light of which we could understand the essential features of our poetry". "Do you need 'concepts' for this?" Yes the Japanese scholar replied. "After coming in contact with the western modes of thought, we find a certain deficiency in our language, a lack of capacity to delimit material phenomena, so that by putting them in a 'former' and 'latter' order it could visualise them in a monoscemic synthesis". In reply, Heidegger said, "Do you really regard this 'deficiency' as a shortcoming of your language? Is it at all necessary for you to run after western concepts? If you do that then will it not result in your failure to make a distinction between your view of reality and that of the western world, each having a distinctive form of its own and thus closing the doors of any authentic dialogue between them?"

At the end the Japanese scholar had to admit that the infatuation with western concepts would necessarily lead to the devaluation of the richness of the linguistic concepts which the Japanese have inherited from their own tradition.

One could add to this another interesting incident about a German, who was translating Lao-tze, who once asked his Chinese friend "I don't understand, why Chinese speak in this way?" to which the Chinese scholar answered "because the Chinese hadn't read Aristotles' Logic at that time". At which Heidegger exclaimed "Thank God they hadn't read it!"

It seems to be a matter of common experience that when we express our thoughts in a language other than our own, then the thoughts themselves start getting governed by the conceptual apparatus of that language. Language, in that case, does not remain merely a passive medium, but tends to acquire an autonomous power, an effective instrument of force. We of course express our thoughts in that language, but *only in the manner, in which it would permit them to be expressed*. In the words of Dr. Mehta, "it is the question of the domineering power of that language that what we want to say, we cannot express, or express in the manner, in which that language would like us to say".

This is an important statement to which Indian writers, scholars and translators should give serious thought, for it is they, the ruling westernized intelligentsia over whom the English language had such a "domineering" influence and who have been, as the Japanese scholars, blindly infatuated by European concepts. Do we not find ourselves in an unenviable situation, when we express ourselves in a foreign language, whose conceptual structure pulls us in one direction, while our own cultural experience pulls us in the opposite direction? In such a situation of 'linguistic displacement', the national identity of a people itself comes under a shadow—a shadow, which is not merely confined to the elitist classes, but since Independence, has enveloped a large mass of people.

It, however, seems to be too simplistic a thesis to put the entire blame on western scholars, as Edward Said does in his book *Orientalism*. It is of course true that they arrived at very wrong conclusions by their occidental bias, but was it also not the fault of the eastern thinkers and scholars, who in their intellectual sensibility accepted their 'evidence' as conclusive, without questioning the validity of their conceptual categories? Profound thinkers like Sri Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswami, who advanced such a critique, radical and illuminating as it was, were almost totally ignored and marginalized by the 'mainstream secularist' institutions of their own academic world. Even Edward Said preferred not to mention them (if he knew of them at all) even though his famous book was written almost half a century after their work was already available in print.

But let me return for a moment to the reference of Aristotle's 'Logic' in context with the native of oriental languages. It is a matter of common knowledge that

the formal structure of these languages where reason or rationality play an important part is very different from those languages which are more deeply oriented to the metaphorical view of the world. Here philosophy and poetry are not divided in separate compartments, but more or less tread the same ground borrowing their 'images' from a symbolic reality which in its multi-layered richness, is far more *inclusive* than the one guided by logical categories. In Indian tradition particularly, the terms like *'atm'*, *'Chitt'*, *'manas'*, *'sat' 'drishti' 'darshan'*—just to mention a few—have a rich 'ambiguity' about them (As Empson uses the term) for they carry within them an invisible (not abstract) universality of concepts as well as the poetic potentiality of the metaphor—a heady mixture—which was so effectively exploited no less by the Rgvedic seers than by their worthy successors, the anonymous authors of the epics and later by the medieval saint-poets.

There could be several factors responsible for the difference between the logical and metaphorical structure of languages, into which I will not go here. I would only like to draw attention to two important facts; firstly, the approach to 'time' which a tradition has, its time consciousness, seems to play a very significant role in determining the 'inner form and rhythm' of a language. The myth-oriented languages, carrying a metaphorical view of reality are usually rooted in a tradition which believes in the cyclic motion of time, with the eternal recurrence of events in its circular movement. It is not the same 'time' which moves in unilinear direction, determining the historical progression of events—the western notion of time—which came to be accepted in Europe after Augustine. Time which sanctifies 'history' is not the same time which is sanctified by myth. The distinguished Hindi poet and essayist 'Agyeya', made some fine observations in regard to the relation of specific notions of time with the modulations of language in a literary work: He writes:

> "By accepting the (western) notion of historical time we have brought in a certain rigidity in the construction of our sentences. So long as we retained our awareness to the circular movement of time, we preserved a kind of flexibility in our language which we were forced to abandon. We began to accept certain sentence-structures as unalterable, which would resist any kind of deviation or disruption. If the linguistic structure of 'New Poetry' (Nayi Kavita) seems to be less elastic and more stultified, is it not because its awareness of time is very strongly tied up with its unilinear movement?"

Man's awareness of time and—his specific mode of apprehending its movement, is intimately linked with his relation to nature. It is often seen that in those traditions where nature is not regarded as a hostile force, eternally the 'other', an object of conquest and subjugation but something which is a part of 'extended self' a reflection of what is innate in man—his 'human nature' as it were, then the role of the language also undergoes a radical change. More than a mere means of communication, it acquires a magical aura in-charged with its own inner light. By becoming 'symbolic' in its essence, it demolishes the duality, which history has imposed upon it, it becomes identifiable with the totality of man. In such traditions as Northrop Fry so illuminatingly says, "Man and nature share equally in a common energy constituting an indivisible unit. But in societies where man and nature are divided into hostile categories, *there the metaphorical unity of the language begins to disintegrate.* Instead of the metaphor, now reason begins to dominate the language. In place of images, man now begins to create a language of intellectual concepts. *Categories of thought and imagination separating one from another, lose their metaphorical quality*, as it has happened with the languages of the western world, where under the aggressive domination of science and reason, man's relation to nature has been completely ruptured" (Emphasis added).

If in the Indian tradition, languages were able to preserve their "metaphorical unity", it is because man's relation to nature was always regarded as sacrosanct. As a traveller is able to find his way in the dark night by tracing the movement of the stars, so also Indians were able to identify their 'place' in the world in the light of their age-old myths and symbols. As Auden so aptly said, "Symbols are like a stick in the hands of a blind man, by which he gropes his way on this earth". In Indian languages one witnesses the rare synthesis of stillness and movement, where myths and metaphors remain the same through the ages but their meaning changes as time passes.

However, 'meanings' do not develop in a vacuum; they need a geographical space to constantly interpenetrate with the lives of the people who share the same 'home'. We cannot separate the symbolic character of a language from its 'natural' habitat. If in Indian language the symbols of trees, mountains, rivers are so potently metaphorical—it is because they are something much more than 'natural objects'—names like Ganga, Saraswati, Himalaya—carry within themselves the mythical allusions, the sacred memories of their ancestors. They bear the imprint of divine power. Ecological forces of nature are informed with iconic significance. The name *Bharat* is more than a country, it is literally what the word signifies, a "place infused with light", it was revered as *'deva-bhoomi* (land of the gods) and its language Sanskrit as *'deva-bhasha'*, the language divine. Names became the manifestation of the *'numan'*.

It is precisely these mythical memories embedded in Sanskrit and Indian languages which contributed so profoundly in enabling the Indians to retrive their self-hood—their awareness of belonging to a 'nation' with a common cultural heritage in the late 19th and 20th centuries. No one was more aware than the European Indologists and philosophers including Hegel and Max Mueller of this 'danger'. While on the one hand they discarded the Indian 'present' as nothing but the remnant of its glorious past, on the other hand they were also aware that so long as Sanskrit continues to be the medium of intellectual discourse, the civilizational identity of India could not be easily erased by Europe. Indian civilization, despite all the colonial depredations and cultural onslaughts of the West was still able to preserve its distinctive cultural identity; it could not be treated as a precious ruin of the past, like its Egyptian and Greek counterparts, beautiful and glorious but only as archaeological "treasures" fit to be locked within the museum walls. The national awakening of the Indian people, popularly known as the 'Cultural Renaissance' in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries was an act of 'rejuvenation of its tradition through its languages. Not only did they make Indians recover the memory of their past, but opened channels to let the past flow in their present. The imperial official Macaulay was not wrong when he said, "we shall never be able to establish the domination of European culture in India unless we succeed in completely banishing the Sanskrit language from the Indian educational system". When in 1928, the Indian philosopher, K.C. Bhattacharya pointed out the significance of 'swaraj in ideas' as part of a self-liberating process, it was closely linked with the freedom to think and conceptualize in its language.

The idea of the 'nation state' is therefore not an 'artificial construct' as some of our more fashionable 'secularist' historians would like us to believe. (In their subaltern enthusiasm they are no different than their imperial predecessors who saw India as no more than a motley conglomeration of disparate religions, linguistic groups of communities). The underlying idea of the 'nation state' as it was made clear in the early writings of Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo was to recover the civilization unity of India which had been so badly ruptured and distorted by two hundred years of European domination. India becoming a nation was a natural flowering of an idea into a reality which involved neither violence nor destruction. In this it was very different from the aggressive intolerance of the European and American nation-states which came into existence only after uprooting millions of people from their native settlements. Today even the memory of their existence has disappeared. The Indian nationalism, in its origins had the spiritual foundations of a culture, where the various creeds and faiths could co-exist without ever becoming an obstacle to the idea of national unity.

***Nirmal Verma** is a Hindi writer who has published several collections of short stories and novels. His latest publication is a collection of essays,* Doosre Shabdon Mein *(Bharatiya Jnana Peeth, 1997).*

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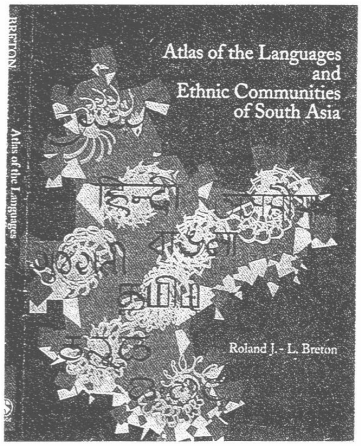
Lovers of Diversity, Enjoy

N.H. Itagi

ATLAS OF THE LANGUAGES AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES OF SOUTH ASIA

By Roland J.L. Breton

Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 230 (including 60 plates, 5 tables, 1 language classification chart, select bibliography and subject and author index), Rs. 795.00 (cloth)



South Asia, a well defined geographical area with presently 1/5th of the human kind, and a cradle of one of the most ancient civilizations in the world with a common history was mapped excellently by Joseph Swartzberg (1978) in his *Historical Atlas of South Asia*. The present atlas under review—*Atlas of the Languages and Ethnic Communities of South Asia* (revised and enlarged edition of the one published first in French in 1976 with bilingual French-English maps) by Roland J.L. Breton provides a geolinguistic view—synchronic and dichronic—of the linguistically diversified South Asia based on the Census data, available for over a hundred years since 1881.

The atlas has two parts. "The first part introduces, on a discursive mode, the general relationship between language and ethno-cultural structure of the subcontinent. The second part aims at analyzing the regional distribution of language and ethnic communities through graphic exploration". The author claims that the plates (part - ii) do not merely illustrate the discourse (part - i) but are used as information processing figurative tools. But one also sees that the maps, especially the thematic maps of the type here are constructs of one's understanding or perception or imaginations of situation or phenomena i.e. maps are also the result of and just not result in understanding a phenomenon. Breton's understanding of 'Hindustani linguistic complex' as consisting of Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi (p. 18) is reflected in plates on the Hindi belt which includes Punjabi. It is generally understood by laymen as well as scholars that 'Hindustani' refers to the broad spectrum of a linguistic continuum with 'high' Hindi (Sanskritized) and 'high' Urdu (Persianized) at its two ends and the use of which as a lingua-franca was advocated by Mahatma Gandhi. 'Hindustani' included Hindi, and Urdu but not Punjabi.

In the first discursive part related to the general relationship between language and ethnocultural structure of the subcontinent, Breton observes that there is no strict one to one correspondence between language and other markers of ethnic identity such as race, tribe, caste and religion in the subcontinent and many a geopolitical problem arose as a result of the colonial and postcolonial search for regional conscience. He opines that a country like India has survived as a result of its ability to reorganize itself, further strengthening its democratic set up.

What undermines these observations is however the discursive nature of the text, at places very naive in interpretation especially of census data on mothertongue and bilingualism with reference to language maintenance and loss, non-technical use of phrases like 'linguistic area', 'language use', etc. which have come to have specific meaning in linguistic/sociolinguistic discourse, use of new and vague phrases like "parallel communities" at times odd sounding like "registered believers" and misunderstandings such as "cultural languages" as opposed to tribal languages and Persian as the literary language of Iqbal and Tagore, etc.

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A unique feature of the atlas is the depiction of languages both in terms of their geographical extent as well in terms of their number of speakers, either on a single map or several maps and graphs with common hatching patterns, mostly on a single plate, enabling easy comparison of the two.

"The second part of the atlas is made up of 60 plates including maps and graphs along with description and commentaries. The numerical data is also accommodated in the text and in case where it cannot be, it appears at the end of the plate series." "The first three plates cover the subcontinent: the following 33 plates display regional situations; 14 others deal with non-regional phenomena extending all over the subcontinent." These plates are largely based on 1961 census data but also make use of data from other censuses starting from 1881. The last 10 plates are based on the 1991 census.

The small scale of the maps, including those of the regional ones, coupled with district as the unit of data aggregation and depiction in case of regional maps, ensures greater generalization. The regional maps show languages within its physical environment to drive home the correlation between the two as for example the extent of Marathas and the Deccan Trap in plate 25 or the distribution of tribal languages in the hilly jungle tracks (plate 26). A unique feature of the atlas is the depiction of languages both in terms of their geographical extent as well in terms of their number of speakers, either on a single map or several maps and graphs with common hatching patterns, mostly on a single plate, enabling easy comparison of the two. The graphs employed are anamorphed maps, ethnograms designed to show—synchronically or dichronically—the size of a speech community both in absolute numbers as well as percentage of given population in a region and simple cartesian graphs. The atlas also has some other interesting and innovative techniques of cartographic presentation such as topological depiction of smaller languages outside of their geographical area or location (plate 58).

However, in some maps such as the one on Hindi mothertongue speakers on plate 11, two different and incomparable methods of representation—one as proportion of Hindi MT speakers in the districts outside of the Hindi states are employed, giving a split image of one phenomenon. In some cases two different scales are employed to depict one phenomenon on a map (plate 29) or in a histogram (plate 44). Therefore the maps and graphs need to be read carefully.

The plates, with the exception of a few, are based largely on mothertongue data ignoring the data on bilingualism and subsidiary languages. But multilingualism or plurilingualism is not the same as linguistic heterogeneity or linguistic diversity as implied in plate 50. No wonder Breton concludes his introduction to the atlas evocatively declaring, "May everyone who loves diversity enjoy this atlas." The atlas, though in black and white in this era of colour cartography, contains a wealth of information on language demography and excellent maps and charts based on it. It remains a pioneering contribution towards a geolinguistics of South Asia.

N.H. Itagi is Assistant Cartographer at the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore.

In Conversation with Nirupama Borgohain

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Nirupama Borgohain is one of the best known women writers of Assam and one of the five women who have received the Sahitya Akademi Award for her novel *Abhiyatri* in 1996. She has published twenty-four novels and ten short story collections. Her autobiography *Through Belief and Doubt* written in the Assamese is presently in its third edition and has been critically acclaimed. She was awarded the Saraswati Award for her novel *Anyajiban* in 1987 and the Assam Sahitya Sabha Award for the same novel in 1990. Her award winning novel *Abhiyatri* is being translated and published by the Sahitya Akademi. Preeti Gill met her in Guwahati in April and the following are the excerpts of that conversation.

—

Preeti Gill: When did you first start writing and what attracted you to fiction?

Nirupama Borgohain: I contributed stories and articles to the high school magazine which I also edited. The stories and novels which I started to read from a young age expanded the horizon of imagination which inspired me to write my own fiction.

PG: What are the issues and themes you have explored in your own writing?

NB: The theme of my first published short story (which I wrote at the age of 13) was a kind of social rebellion. In the first story which was published by what you might call a standard magazine I focussed on the patriarchal, tyrannical subjugation of women in villages. Then I drifted to problems and concerns of middle-class life, something that invited the wrath of socially conscious critics! However, that was only a transitory phase and I did revert to the predicament of women and the downtrodden in my writing.

PG: What is the literary tradition that has influenced you and your work?

NB: Rabindra Nath Tagore has always been a profound influence and my earlier writing is dotted with quotations from his corpus. I think I belong to the liberal humanistic tradition, and have been influenced by writers such as Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, and Thomas Hardy. Dostoyevsky has also been an influence. But in my 'feminist' writings I have trodden the radical path too.

PG: Tell me about your awards—you are among the five Assamese women recipients of the Sahitya Akademi award. Please tell me about the novels that have won these accolades.

NB: The very first award I got was the Saraswati National Award from Bangalore. My novel *Anyajiban* was adjudged the best among works by women writers of the north-east states, Bengal and Orissa in 1987 by the jury for this award. Then I got the Basanti Devi award for the same novel in 1990, conferred by the Asom Sahitya Sabha. The Sabha presented me with the Hem Barua award in 1995 for my novel *Abhiyatri*. For the same novel I received the Sahitya Academy award in 1996.

The narrative in *Anyajiban* revolves round a young woman's quest for the truth behind the death of a village woman. It's revealed that the woman was dragged to her death over hard, stubbly ground by her husband. This novel is based on a true incident that occurred in my husband's village in upper Assam.

Abhiyatri is a biographical novel, based on the remarkable life of Chandraprabha Saikiani, who was born in a very backward village of Assam. Her untameable desire for education propelled her to the American Missionary School at Nowgong. Her firebrand nature was revealed there when she protested against the derogatory remarks of the American Sisters about the 'natives' and she made them withdraw those remarks. Then she taught in a school at Tezpur and also fell in love with Dandinath Kalita, a writer. However Dandinath Kalita did not marry her because Chandraprabha was a low-caste woman. As she became pregnant she had to leave Tezpur. She decided to bring her child up on her own. Later this child, a son, became a successful trade union leader and a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Assam. Afterwards she threw herself into the freedom struggle and also established the Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, the pioneer women's organization of Assam. A true Gandhian, she roamed the whole state, establishing a destitute home, child and mother welfare institutions and working in the Harijan Colony. She is also a versatile writer, although a great deal of her writing remains unpublished.

PG: You said you are the only Leftist woman writer of your generation. What this has meant to your writing in terms of recognition you have achieved.

NB: I don't think I have received any formal recognition for this, rather I was deprived of many laurels by the establishment. However, many young intellectuals have given special attention to my writing because of its Leftist slant.

PG: Why is it that there are no English translations of your novels barring a few short stories published in some anthologies? Why is there a dearth of good translations of the literature emanating from Assam since you have such a rich and ancient tradition and a vast body of work available that the non-Assamese reader should be exposed to. Oriya literature is much better known, writers and poets have been translated into English, Hindi and other languages. Why does Assamese literature suffer from this lacuna?

NB: First of all, we must blame ourselves for not being enterprising in trying to focus our literature outside Assam. We also have the perception that people outside the north-east do not care to know about us. So what's the use of trying to project our concerns beyond our borders? There is also a dearth of good and willing translators. But the main cause is the lack of publishers in the language. Who would take interest in the output from this region? I had *Abhiyatri* translated but Penguin refused it. We also sounded *Kali for Women*, thinking that they might be the appropriate people for publishing this work about an extraordinary woman. But they did not even bother to respond to our queries in this regard, even after a reminder. You must admit that all this is rather disheartening.

PG: Since we cannot ignore the importance of the quality of translations if your literature (Assamese I mean) is to reach the outside reader, how can this lack be overcome? Do you see a way out?

NB: Professional translators will emerge when they know that there will be proper remuneration for them. If a writer knows that some reputed publishing concern outside the state is interested in her work, she can take the initiative for getting her work translated.

PG: What would be your reaction to the idea of setting up a publishing house to cater to this region i.e. the N.E. to publish good works in different subject areas working with good translators and to expose the local regional literature to a wider audience? Is there scope for this sort of venture?

NB: It's a good idea and there is a fair amount of scope for this kind of work. But once again the translators have to be motivated.

PG: What is the literary scene like here now and in your growing years? And how has this helped in your own writing?

NB: The scene has never been very bright for Assamese writers. Assamese writers can take to writing only as a hobby, not embrace it as a profession. Novels sell the most, but it takes a long time to sell a few thousand copies of a novel—sometimes 5–6 years. Assamese books are also quite cheap, which means that the royalty for writers is on a beggarly scale. The Assamese do not really have a penchant for reading. Recently there has been an explosion in newspaper and magazine

publication in Assam, which means that the few readers are diverted to these instead of substantial creative works.

PG: What do you think the present generation of writers is achieving and how are their writings different from those of an earlier generation? What are the new trends in Assamese writing? Who are the outstanding young writers today?

NB: One doesn't see too many bright new stars on the literary firmament. Of course, there are some very talented young people, but it's the older writers who are still more acceptable to the reading public. The newer writers must display a greater earnestness and diligence. Many of the newer writers are busy experimenting with form; they display a dalliance with aspects of post-modernism such as 'magic realism.' Outstanding among the newer writers are Debabrata Das, Phanindra Deb Chaudhuri, Jyotish Sikder, Nabanita Gogoi and Mausumi Kandali among fiction writers, and Samir Tanti, Sananta Tanti, Jiban Narah, Ishmael Hussain, Anupama Basumatary, and Bipuljyoti Saikia among poets.

PG: Is there a reflection of the crisis and violence in Assam in its literature or is a length of time needed before a perspective is achieved and it can be portrayed with and dealt with? Is the work prolific or scanty like literature from Partition that is now gaining in importance 50 years later?

NB: Some writers have tried to grapple with the crisis and violence in Assam, but there has been no truly memorable effort. None of them approach a work such as *Peshawar Express* written about the Partition. Thus these works will leave no real imprint on the pages of literary history, although they may have a certain documentary worth.

PG: Who are your favourite writers in Assam and in other Indian writing?

NB: I have several favourites among Assamese authors. To name a few: Saurabh Kumar Chaliha, Bhaben Saikia, Naba Kanta Barua, Atulananda Goswami, Hiren Bhattacharya, etc. Among the pre-war writers one has to name Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Ambikagiri Roychaudhuri, Bishnu Rabha, Laxmi Nath Bezboruah and Birinchi Barua. I like Rabindra Nath Tagore and Prem Chand among other Indian writers.

Awarded

The Saraswati Samman, instituted by the K.K. Birla Foundation a few years ago, is recognized as the most prestigious and the highest literary honour in the country. It is given every year to an outstanding literary work written in any Indian language. *Kurukshetra* (Gujarati) a novel by Shri Manubhai Rajaram Pancholi 'Darshak' has been awarded the Saraswati Samman for 1997.

Sri Pancholi is an ardent follower of Gandhian philosophy, a keen scholar of history, a known thinker, a revered teacher, an eminent educationist and above all a dedicated worker in the cause of social welfare. Born on 2 November, 1914, Sri Pancholi had no formal education because he gave up his school to participate in the freedom struggle in 1930. Sri Pancholi began his literary career in 1935. He has to his credit 4 dramas, 5 works of character-centred writing, 5 books on literary criticism including 2 reflecting the process of the development of his own sensibility by reading great master-pieces, 3 books of letters and a number of books on his thinking regarding social concerns. Essentially a novelist, he has so far written 8 novels in the great tradition of Goverdhanram, the father of modern Gujrati literature, K.M. Munshi and Ramanlal Desai.

The Saraswati Samman winning novel *Kurukshetra* was published in 1991 is basically a mythological story, not a restatement of it. It has been reinterpreted with the emphasis on the present day class and caste clashes, redressal of the injustice caused to people and thereby bringing about a unity between them and establishment of justice.

Nativism:
Emerging Consciousness

Sanjoy Dutta-Roy

NATIVISM: ESSAYS IN CRITICISM
Edited by Makarand Paranjape
Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 270, Rs. 100.00

Today, there is a lot of talk going on in academic circles about post-colonialism and decolonisation. The seminar on "Nativism" or "Desivad" (Sponsored by the Sahitya Academy and the Centre for Creative Writing and Publication, IIT Kanpur), out of which this book has emerged, is actually a part of that larger discussion. The focus is sharper here in the sense that the agenda is understanding India and its multicultural, multilingual ethos and literature in its own terms. The problem, as I understand it from the book, seems to arrange itself at three levels: (1) There is the question of decolonization of our literary studies, of freeing our mind from the artificial hierarchy that dominates our educational system and its influence. The spectre of the British, and now the Euro-American ghost, dominates the scenario at various levels in the urban and educational centres in India. English studies and the importance of the English language and its smart baggage of accessories is perhaps the most apparent cause and case-study. The artificial hierarchy might be detrimental to our confidence, but the opening up of our cultures with their exposure to the West has also had its salutary effect. The essential debate centres around these two aspects—the positive and the negative. (2) There is the problem of trying to discover some basis for understanding the unifying principle in terms of a national character or identity that could be free of both the urban English modern elitism or the Brahmanical Sanskrit Classical elitism. Whether such a principle exists, or whether it would simply be a fictional creation (for political, cultural or religious purposes) becomes a subject of discussion. (3) There is the stark uncharted reality of the multilingual, multicultural India. Illiteracy here has in a unique way, been the preserver of the rich linguistic, literary and cultural traditions of the past. U.R. Ananthmurthy has been quoted by Sudhir Kumar in his essay in this book; "Many of our regional languages, despite their rich literary traditions, were actually preserved by illiteracy; for the literate of our country have always acquired the language of the ruling elites; whether it was Sanskrit, Persian or English". When the question of the recovery of these texts (lost and yet existing in popular memory in the oral, unwritten or unclassified traditions) comes, we are confronted by the fact of their relevance in the modern world. Before moving into an analysis of the essays in this book, I would like to record a few observations about the book.

Of the sixteen essays included in this book, eight are by teachers of English in various institutes, departments and Universities in India, including the editor's essay. I belong to the same category and can fully empathize with the soul-searching that our professional situation induces. After all, none of us created this system of education, nor did we frame the original models of the syllabi. We are by-products of historical forces (colonial in this case) and might feel at times that fifty years of independence from British rule is just the right time to look back, think and recover our memory of things that connect much further back in time and space (After Devy's diagnosis of Amnesia). I fully agree with Rajeev Seth (though professionally he does not belong to this category) when he says: "the crises of being alienated from history and culture affects the anglicised/Westernised elites more". With Debjani Ganguli, I too would like to applaud "the spurt of introspective sojourns undertaken by a few English Literature teachers, in order to relate their hitherto hidebound, insular discipline to the multilingual, multicultural ethos they inhabit". Rather than unquestioningly saluting the canons introduced by the British and still being subtly imported from Europe and America, seething pent-up feelings and ideas are surfacing in well-defined forms. The editor proclaims in his introduction: "Nativism, a line of thinking, is being given a voice and shape, however feeble and blurred".

The eight other essays are from writers and critics within the multilingual, multicultural ethos that Ganguli talks of. None of these eight are involved with the English language and its literary studies. Here the concern is not so much with the colonial impact or with decolonisation. Srimannarayana Murti's essay, for example, is not in the least concerned with the West and its influence on our literary studies. He is concentrating more on trying to understand the words "marga" and "desi" and the relationship between Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsas. His essay reveals how we can stay well within our own traditions of languages and literatures and indulge unself-consciously in a discourse that has contemporary relevance. Similarly Prasanna's attack on Desi Theatre is steeped in a discussion of theatre experiments born in the Indian soil, with only passing and cursory reference to theatre in the West, China and Japan. There is no reference to British theatre. Interestingly, the essay by Wagish Shukla, a mathematician, refers to a vast cross-cultural fertilization without "negative feelings". Mind and culture here appear essentially migratory, needing the native land only for "burial". These essays do not depend on the binary oppositions (East-West, Orient-Occident, India-England, Colonies-Imperial powers) that dominate most post-colonial discourses. And lying beyond both these categories are the vast uneducated rural masses who enter these discourses but cannot participate in them using their own voices.

The book gives a lot of importance to Devy and Nemade. Devy's *After Amnesia* is considered the base book in many of the discussions. Nemade's well known essay in Marathi is appended in its first English translation. Such an exercise might be good for critical focus but the debate has been in existence long before Devy or Nemade. The book and the Seminar should have been placed within the framework of the larger areas of discussion all over the world. In fact the editor has apologetically done so when he writes: "Nativism, far from being a totally unique or distinct cultural trend, is very much a part of the ongoing intellectual movements and debates of our times" (modernism, nationalism, post modernism—the so called cultural historical grand narratives). He knows, even as he says this, that this will be resented by Nemade "as another attempt to appropriate and subvert a nativistic project". Moreover, I think that the book's concern goes further back to the question of identity and selfhood in the individual, communal, national, international and universal sense. The problem of rootedness, tradition, modernity, exile, migrancy, conquest and influence, as many of the essays here have recognized are as old as time. It is an autobiographical concern and act where the memory goes back in time and space from the contemporary scenario to recover the past and come back to the present. Only Debjani Ganguli has mentioned Autobiography and Devy's text.

The book is divided into four sections with essays a) introducing the scope and span of the subject, b) giving the background of the discourse, c) charting the debates on various issues, d) revealing ways of practical application of the lines of thinking that emerge. This is a neat division but it entails and promises a far more detailed study than what is ultimately achieved.

In the introductory section Indranath Choudhury talks of grand forces in a state of conflict and tension: a) Past and Present b) Tradition and Modernity c) East and West. He brings in the Indian context through the concept of "Kula" (heredity, inheritance and tradition) and "Shila" (the making of man conditioned by "Kula" and the existing environment). His is a liberal picture. He thinks of modernity in terms of the presence of traditional values as well as openness to new innovations. He gives the interesting example of the presence of Lord Ganesh in a modern Indian hospital foyer. Instead of the tendency of comparing every Indian literary text with some Euro-American product he advocates the introduction of *our* response to the West on *our* terms and thus gain cultural confidence. He points out

K. Satchchidanandan in his essay, seems to be more concerned with "the threat from the market forces to serious Literature". This threat, which is in the form of "invasion of values" is fast swamping the Indian way of life and thinking. It is surely harmful to our confidence and can destroy or commercialize whatever beauty there exists in our culture and literature. It is indeed cause for concern at every level, cutting across regional and cultural boundaries within India. He hopes that a pan-Indian sensibility, born out of this concern, can unite sensitive writers.

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the double-edged equality of the term "Desi" where "Desi Sharab" is considered inferior to its western counterpart whereas "Desi Ghee" is considered better and more wholesome than its technologically prepared counterpart. Such an introduction places "nativism" or its opposite as attitudes of mind that permeate every sphere of life in modern India. Literary texts and the distribution and consumption of knowledge are peripheral to this central concern. They follow like corollaries. Devy's Keynote address, in contrast, though he does talk of the vaster cultural parameters, focusses on the problem of the literary critic working in the contemporary Indian intellectual climate. His model does seem to be a product of an anglicised educational system when he uses the metaphor of Karnad's *Hayavadana*: "Where these blood cells in this body of mine standing before you are made out of the Indian soil, air and water, the stock of knowledge stored in the brain seems to have come from elsewhere". One cannot wish away colonial history. But surely, he feels, one can resist the artificial hierarchy of knowledge imposed on us. Our education and our historiography should be devoted to the recovery of our lost cultural memory. We must introspect and see within ourselves as Krishna advised Arjuna on the battlefield. We must not forget that by "We" and "Our" Devy does not mean the rustic Indian. He means the urban, educated Indian, influenced by the western models. His use of the terms "naive" and "picaro" is interesting. "Native", he tells us, goes back to "naive"—meaning people who are landlocked, bound to their village and soil. They do not travel much and produce something of practical use to their community. In contrast are the "picaros" who are widely travelled men of the world. They were morally flexible and their knowledge is not derived from their understanding of the soil of their village, but is derived from their knowledge of human nature. It was only natural that during colonial expansion the "picaros" became Europe's cultural models. Rather than use these two categories to interpret history, it might be more fruitful if we applied it to the contemporary scenario (literary or otherwise) in India. We have the globe trotters and we have the landlocked and interesting literary works born right here in India today out of the blending of the two sensibilities.

K. Satchchidanandan in his essay, seems to be more concerned with "the threat from the market forces to serious Literature". This threat, which is in the form of "invasion of values" is fast swamping the Indian way of life and thinking. It is surely harmful to our confidence and can destroy or commercialize whatever beauty there exists in our culture and literature. It is indeed cause for concern at every level, cutting across regional and cultural boundaries within India. He hopes that a pan-Indian sensibility, born out of this concern, can unite sensitive writers. He gives examples in Indian history where similar pan-Indian phenomena occured: "the Bhakti poets rejected priesthood, turned from Sanskrit to the people's tongues. The movement brought together peoples, religions, languages and literatures laying a solid multilingual foundation for Indian Literature. The unity was further strengthened by the anti-colonial and reform oriented literary movements... the Bhakti movement was basically a subaltern pan-Indian phenomenon". The "intertextuality within culture", the "heteroglossia", the "cultural plurality" realized at a more realistic conceptual level is the future project of which the nativist deconstruction of the existing concepts shall be a part. The only problem that I have with this theory is to conceive it as a project for the future. Again, we are making it an academic exercise. The Bhakti movement, I am sure, was never conceived as a project but evolved out of the necessity that cut across regional and religious boundaries.

The second section deals with the background of nativistic consciousness. Three different ways of looking at this background are explored. Patankar concentrates on the historical background of the Indo-British encounter, traces the rise of the middle-class in Bengal, the acquaintance with British systems (business contracts/law), areas of knowledge (natural and human sciences), methodology (rational prose), literature. The point that he makes about "assimilation" and "subjection" is of course nothing unique. We know that to be culturally suppressed without comparison or competition is bad and selective assimilation from another culture is good. Even his formula for having a native criterion for evaluating native traditions sounds good and so does his formula for having a universal criterion for the multinational. But somehow I cannot see these formulae and equations in as simple a manner as he does. There has been so much of blending and cross-cultural fertilization over this same period of history that he has covered that I am left quite confused. But his historical survey is praiseworthy. In fact Wagish Shukla's essay coming just after it does away entirely with the compartmentalising (even for conveniences sake) of the native and the other. The very conceptualizing of a pure native source unsullied by other cultural influences is seen as ridiculous. It never existed anywhere in the world, nor did it ever exist in India. Maybe Shukla has a point here. But the point could be read inversely too. We have to return to replenish the native consciousness, vitalize our soil, after all our journeys. Otherwise we are lost.

In direct contrast to both the essays discussed in Srimannarayana Murti's essay. The multinational or global consciousness does not even enter into the discussion, neither does the Indo-British or East West encounter. He goes into the linguistic roots of the terms "marga" and "desi" to dwell well within the cultural boundary of India. He comes out with certain observations which could have a lot of significance to-day. "Marga" in its root form has connotations of "to chase" (a wild forest animal), "to cleanse", "to purify". The path of the hunter is "marga". Marga by its derivation presupposes for its motif the existence of something wild, savage, fierce, passionate, growing in a state of nature, uncivilized, uncultivated. This has to be domesticated, cultivated, civilized, tamed, controlled. Thus the relationship between "marga" and "desi" is established. The emergence of the "marga" from the "desi" is a natural process by contraction and convergence of ideas, so as to yield uniformity and universal acceptability, assimilation and system in communication as well as in society (even the concept of a nation). But interestingly, systematization and codes of rules produce monotony. It leads to divergence, expansion into the "Desi" for vitality and fresh life. Such cyclicity has been conceived differently in different cultures. I am reminded of Blake's "negation" (close to the civilizing contraction here) and "contraries" (the wild expansive consciousness), the Appollonian and the Dionysiac, Bakhtin's Carnivalistic multiplicity of voices and the singular narrative voice. Murti has given the example of the influence of the Sanskrit pundits on the use of language. Grammarians like Patanjali and Bhratrihari took exception to the recognizing of the full value of the Prakrits and Apabhramsas, which are branded as corrupt forms. These languages could be used for social communication. But for the higher religious activities the "marga" Sanskrit was right. Bharata, interestingly, recognizes Prakrit in all its dialects as accepted language in drama. After all drama as a form is based on multiplicity of voices and thus has to be close to the people. Murti's essay convinces me that when a contemporary mind applies itself to the understanding of our linguistic and cultural roots, what can be discovered in our native sources are bound to have relevance in the modern or post modern times. After all human thinking everywhere has been on shared concerns, and evolution essentially has common origins and patterns.

The third Section—"Debates"—tries to pit varying viewpoints against each other. But the structuring is not clear enough. I have tried to read a structure that might or might not exist in the editor's plan.

Gurbhagat Singh's essay argues against the "uninationalist paradigm of Gandhi, Nehru, Kabir" that followed the enlightenment circumscribed nationalist framework. He feels that such paradigms were good as liberationist tactic, but were imaginary rather than real. They have "played their historic and contributory role". To extend them further would be to block the growth and interpretation of India. He calls this paradigm "the great betrayal of polyphony". He advocates the pushing for a confederate political set-up which would recognize the dialogic presence

of various voices in the Bhasha literatures that do not adopt the Western or Indian mainstream models. His essay has both political and literary implications when it puts its voice against the counter-confederative totalitarian nationalist framework and its literary manifestations. Sudhir Kumar's essay says the same thing differently. He shows that the term "rashtra" focusses more on the political nation than on the people or "jana". The Sanskrit term "rashtra" appears to be more hegemonic as it expressly valorizes the rule or governance over "the people or jana". The motive behind his argument is to provoke a retrieval of the original meaning of nation or "rashtra" as the people or "jana" in order to oppose or subvert any authoritarian structure imposed on our democracy. Both the essays speak theoretically for the people, the jana, in India's case, the voices of its illiterate majority. Sudhir Kumar realizes the tragedy of our western education that has alienated "us" utterly from the peasant—the seventy percent illiterate Indian mass. So does Rajee Seth when she talks of two separate levels—the level of the circles of academic (she means the anglicised western elites more here) and the "common people".

Prasanna short-circuits these theoretical concerns when he speaks as a practitioner in theatre and reveals the hidden realities of an overdose of Desivad in theatre (where the biggest attempts at introducing Desivad had really happened). Singh's idealization of "polyphony", Kumar's "jana" or Seth's "common people" could create chaos and problems in contemporary or modern theatre. Prasanna says that he is a contemporary person and he need not use the masks of Kathakali or the headgear or the Chhende of Yakshagana. All he needs is the narrative—and that is really rich—even from the contemporary point of view: "The narrative as we find it in Indian tradition is so fabulous that it would probably take me five generations to understand it". As for the rest, it is better and more wholesome for the contemporary person to challenge and fight tradition and thus comprehend it. He gives the example of what Tagore did in his dance-dramas, what Vallathol did in Kathakali and what Shivaram Karanth did to Yakshagana. By fighting tradition one can make it richer.

The two other essays in this section—Debajani Ganguli's and Makarand Paranjape's (who is also the editor of this volume)—are critiques of Devy's text (*After Amnesia*). They bring out some interesting angles that have not been properly explored in any of the other essays in the volume. For example Ganguli criticizes Devy for his self and the other, his East-West reductionism. It makes Devy overlook i) the effects of the Islamic invasions, ii) the more complex interface of gender, class, caste and religion within the native culture itself: "Amnesia is brought on not merely by the colonial rule, but by the systematic repression by the patriarchal set up within the native culture itself". Paranjape, both in his introduction and his essay, becomes the lone voice defending the use of the English language for literary expression in India, giving it a respectability in native culture that is equal to any of the regional languages. He is very right when he says: "A native writer may actually be indulging in non native cultural practices, while a so-called non-native writer in English actually aiding and strengthening native traditions". Is not this book itself in its use of English a good example of the second case? Against Devy's and Nemade's rejection of Indian English Literature he advocates a more open view of nativism that is able to gracefully accept the English language within its folds. However, he admits that no pidgin or Creole English has emerged in which the common people in India can express themselves, I would like to state here that varied local versions have recognizably emerged. These versions have, over these many years, been slowly finding effective expression in drama, fiction and poetry.

I find the final section—"Practice"—quite inadequate. The span of the Introduction, Background and Debate is interdisciplinary. The three essays by Anand Patil, Ajit Thakor and Jaidev are a very thin representation of the kind of practice that could emerge from such a discourse. They are good examples of literary criticism born in our soil—but is that all? All of them are on fiction. There is nothing on poetry or drama. I feel that this section should have included essays that look deep into our education system (it its various stages), essays which were examples of the writing of Subaltern history, essays discussing our indigenous thinking on politics and economics, to give just a few examples.

Despite these shortcomings, the book is a praiseworthy effort to give momentum to a dialogue and a discourse that should go a long way. The book is open ended. It is part of an ongoing process of thinking that has the multifaceted and multilingual India at its very centre.

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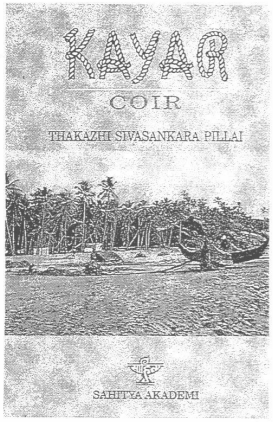
A Quest for Land in History

P. Krishnanunni

COIR (*KAYAR*)

By Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai.
Translated from the Malayalam by N. Sreekantan Nair

Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 736, Rs. 275.00



"Any one who steps into this river will not get out of it completely wet and drenched with mud", says an old adage about Kerala history. But, this adage does not fit with Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, the *Karanavar* (Head of the family) of Malayalam literature. Thakazhi's *Coir* (Kayar), perhaps, is the only historical novel in Malayalam which portrays graphically the end of different eras and the beginning of modern societies, which in turn, mark what Malayalis call *Nava Kerala* (Modern Kerala). In his macabre project of depicting Kerala history, Thakazhi's imagination goes back to the situation of Kerala in the mid-nineteenth century. The author is least bothered about the historical documents available at that time, and makes use of his imagination run superior to the documents. A fiction, thus constructed, raises certain questions: What is the relation of history with truth? Can history written from pure imagination counter all edicts and documents? Can such a history serve as a tool for posterity, and how far does the historian/narrator function as a source of authenticity?

Thakazhi begins his novel by describing the gradual change seeping into the feudal Brahminical class of Kerala in the nineteenth century. The Nair community, which had always thrived under the tutelage of Namboodiris, gets a chance to acquire some portion of land, which later helps them to question several norms associated with the feudal matriarchal set up of both these communities. As the sambandhams (marriages) between the Namboodiris and Nairs were regarded as a permissible social custom, the author implies that this social cohesion played a major role in the disintegration of the hegemonic Nair class. The Classifiers, the King's appointed people to measure the land and to decide what has to be done on them, were capable of establishing well-knit connections and engaging in sexual trafficking wherever they went. With the depiction of Kochu Pillai, the Classifier, Thakazhi describes the degenerated morals of the Nair community. The disintegration of the Brahmins is marked by their excessive greed and extravagance in administration. By giving the example of a Brahmin called Sesnayyan, who was forced to marry Kochupennu Kunjamma, the author sacrastically portrays the Brahmin class. Both Sesnayyan and Kunjamma are not chaste, and the latter has an affair with the Classifier, Seshayyan's counterpart from the Nair Community. The quest for land, therefore, is a metaphor of sexual promiscuity in Thakazhi, and all classes of people in the social hierarchy are subjected to it. It is into such a society the author introduces the Christians and Muslims.

The novel is shut to the beginnings of Christianity in Kerala. Outha, the first Christian we come across in the text, is an upset man because he cannot enter the temple compounds of Hindus. The Paruthikattil Christians of which Outha is a member, supply various offs required by the people of that area. This strange relationship of a Christian family associated with the Namboodiri *madhoms* and Nair *tharavads* is a re-writing of the history of Christianity in Kerala. The popular belief that Christians were detested by Namboodiris and Nairs is negated by the author. On the other hand, the laziness of Nairs

and Namboodiris, the author ironically suggests, gave rise to the Christian community. The author's praise of the Christians for their remarkable business skills and shrewd tactics, to a great extent, is deserved and is not previously recorded in any official history of Kerala.

One would sometimes wonder whether the author has seriously examined the history of untouchables (Parayas and Pulayas) in Kerala in the last century. The abrupt twists and turns the author creates can be questioned. A lot of Parayas and Pulayas who were given only half a day's wages as a gift after their hard labour in the paddy fields from the Nair families, the author suggests, turned to Christianity when the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) started converting the coastal people. The tensions which prevailed among the untouchables and the other members of Hindu society at the time of the conversion are not seriously analyzed by the author. His assumption that Christianity offered the untouchables in Kerala an Edenic paradise is not entirely true, while a good number of untouchables found it difficult to break away from their Brahmin masters. For them, the Gospel remained as something unidentifiable, yet can be wished for. Further, we read about a Pulaya boy called Vattathan changing his religion and becoming a Muslim. Before Tipu's invasion, it is hard to believe that such conversions into Islam took place in Kerala. This deliberate play of the novelist with his imagination perplexes several historical view points. It should be noted that Thakazhi's narrative never changes a bit from its unilinear stream of flow. Later, when the author describes Tipu's invasion, he provides a detailed description of how several Namboodiris were converted into Islam. Thus, a conglomeration of different races has sowed the first seeds of modernity on the soil of Kerala.

The transition of Kerala societies from tradition to modernity is marked by a series of ups and downs. The early twentieth century Kerala witnessed a lot of clashes between tradition and modernity. By giving the example of Kesavan Pillai of Seelanthipillil, Thakazhi describes how the backlash of tradition acted upon those people who wanted a change in their society. The school run by Kesavan Pillai for the untouchables was burned to ashes by the conservative Hindu community. Further, the author portrays in detail the social reform movements initiated by Sri Narayana Guru and Chattambi Swamikal and shows how these movements coloured the perception of Keralites about the national uprisings against the British Raj. Much of man's potentialities are called into question when he/she confronts the national issue. By relating various social movements of Kerala to several other political uprisings all over the country, Thakazhi succeeds in showing that the history of any place can never be condensed. The individual traumas are juxtaposed with a society's concerns, and the attitudes of several revolutionaries, traitors, conservatives and pseudomodernists are well brought out.

The thought-provoking section of the novel is the final part in which the novelist returns to the question of land and gives it a new political dimension. Surendran, the freedom fighter and the most derided Communist leader, is a classic example of Thakazhi's question: Is there an end to human desire? Like the Classifier, this character also indulges in immoral sexual trafficking. Later, when the Naxalites brand him as their class enemy, the author gently touches upon the rise of the early Naxalite movement in Kerala without getting into the core of the matter.

Man's struggle for land and freedom is an everlasting one. Since the land reforms of Kerala has only served to enrich the capitalist class, the clash between the haves and have nots will not end ever. The question of land and man's unending desire for it, as the novelist depicts them, invites a comparison with some novels of the historical genre written by Latin American writers like Jorge Amado and Miguel Angel Austurias. But unlike these Latin American authors, Thakazhi's narrative transcends the limits of history. In its vast scope, *Coir* challenges all the notions of Lyotardian 'meta-narratives' of constructing a postmodern text. The different mythical tales, rituals and festivals interwoven in his narrative, in their entirety, constructs a realistic text. One can question Thakazhi's imagination, but not the problems he raises.

The late Shri N. Sreekantan Nair's English translation, sad to say, suffers from a lot of pitfalls. A text deeply rooted in a culture can only be trans-*created*, not translated. Nair, in his hasty translation has retained a number of vernacular terms, which he has forgotten to give in the glossary. At some places, Nair has condensed some incidents into a single sentence. Several pages require good proof reading and worst of all, some typographical errors are unpardonable. In his Herculean task, had Nair ever thought of the readers (especially, non-Keralites) reading his translation?

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Doleful, Dolorous, Malodorous

Keki N. Daruwalla

SET MY HEART IN ASPIC
By Nisha da Cunha
Harper Collins India, 1997, pp. 186, Rs. 145.00

Halfway through Nisha da Cunha's second short story book I thought of Keats's *Ode to Melancholy*, and looked up the poem after forty years or so. No, I did not find an emotional equivalent in the poem for the kind of pensive sadness that pervades her book. And the poem was all about Lethe and wolf's bane and nightshade and Proserpine and one couldn't relate to it anymore. (It is not just language that gets dated. The images, myths, concerns which the language voiced once also become dated. Today we would react to cyanide, not nightshade. And our Proserpines would be the likes of the venerable Mayawati or that other well built lady from the south—both Hitler and Eva Braun in one.) Keats's melancoly "dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die/ and joy whose hand is ever at his lips". No such aesthetic binds Ms. da Cunha's stories.

Moreover the melancholy of Keats is transient and sudden:

> *But when the melancholy fit shall fall*
> *Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud. .*

Nisha de Cunha is herself the weeping cloud. To carry this tiresome analogy a little further, I must say that the Ode did not ring true. (Keats wrote less than a dozen good poems in his short lifetime). Quite a few of Nisha's stories sound authentic.

There is a rhythm and a flow about Nisha da Cunha's writing. Through mood, texture and narrative her personal stamp gets embossed upon the story almost imperceptibly. A sharp reader would easily be able to spot a story by her, even if it went under an anonymous byline. The writing is crystal clear and smooth like a mountain stream flowing over rounded pebbles.

Even though most of the stories are in the third person, the author identifies closely with the characters. Normally that is easier done in first person narratives. She conjures up a sort of an ecology of the spirit and the reader finds herself/himself in a hothouse of feeling. Though the stories are tragic—if that's the word—the atmosphere is not heavy with foreboding. These are not, after all, stories fashioned after the gothic novel. The melancholy is matter-

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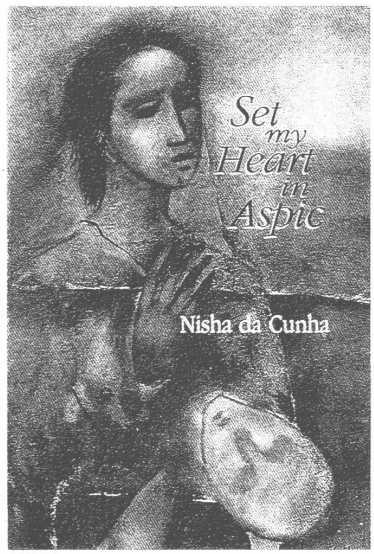

of-fact. Take the story "Go Down to Kew in Lilac Time." The story starts thus: "The day they pulled out all the tubes on the baby was the day Aneek went to Kew gardens; it was also the day she enrolled for two weeks at a summer school in the Cotswolds. She went to Kew Gardens because the mother of the baby asked her to, and she enrolled for summer school because she needed to. That was quite a day."

"The tubes had been crisscrossed over the baby's small body, mouth, nose and the tiny veins in her feet for six weeks. Just the night before the experts and the parents met and decided, 'that's it—no more.' And signed papers. The mother had come to her baby in the glass case for all of those six weeks and stayed with the baby gazing at her through the glass."

Now that's a fine start. It sets the mood and also grips the reader's attention. And this has been achieved with a minimum of detail. The mother has brought the baby to the gardens because she wants this special baby to know some place other than the ICU in her life of six weeks which is about to end. "The mother slept for two whole hours without moving and the leaves of the copper beech moved above them and around them like a benediction." With the baby's death a chapter closes and another starts. The nurse, Aneek Setalvad goes to Stroud to attend summer school, meets Kim, who is an instructor, the two visit his aunt Meg, fall in love, return to London. Later he dies in an accident. And at the end of it all she returns to Aunt Meg to have Kim's baby in the house he had grown up in. But this skeleton of a plot does no justice to the story, which reads like a poem.

"Set my Heart in Aspic" starts with a funeral for two. The story unfolds through a monologue of sorts regarding the events that led to the deaths. The story unfolds through these narratives. But where this cinematic technique (popularized by Khorosawa) is used something more is expected by the reader than just the unveiling of the plot. With each narrative the core of events should itself be subjected to protean changes. Otherwise where is the fun in five narratives in one story? This is not to take away from the merit of the piece. It has a flow and a fluency about it despite the funerary atmosphere. Among the sub-plots (if that's the word) is the one about two sisters loving the same rotter. "It was Mama who said 'Yes, go to your faraway place, I'll miss you very much but he's a bad one that Rui and Tessa will rue the day she married him and I am sorry he had to be your first way of finding out about loving someone. First love is the worst in terms of suffering but strangely it does stop one day and you wonder how you could have agonized so desperately over someone.' How simply and beautifully put.

The class room lurks in the wings. Every now and then a situation reminds her of some university text or other. And there is one first person account "The Girl in Burka, Riding a cycle" where two of her bright students, a Catholic and a Muslim, marry after the January riots in Bombay and move to Karjat where they live an almost ascetic life.

There are a few careless misprints, but none worse than on the last page (acknowledgements). Here Cavafy is spelled as "Canafy", Hopkins as "Gerard Marley (instead of Manley) Hopkins and Auden as "Anden" if you please. But they got Golding right. So can one really complain?

Nisha da Cunha is one of our best short story writers. But really Miss, at least once in a while, can't some *bhoola, bhakta* smile, light up your lips?

Keki N. Daruwalla is a poet and writer.

Letter from London

Stephen Moss

A book editor has to walk a tightrope: between news values and literary values; between the book as event and the book as book; between journalism and, at the risk of sounding pompous, art. Anthony Curtis, who was literary editor of the *Financial Times* in the sixties and of the *Sunday Telegraph* for two decades until 1990, recently produced a book of memoirs, called *LitEd*, in which he said the job could only be done successfully if you were equally interested in the books and journalism. Be unduly arcane and you will (rightly) irritate your colleagues; be "just" a journalist and the book becomes nothing more than a here-today-gone-tomorrow occurrence, ephemeral, forgettable.

In UK literary journalism in the past decade or so the balance has swung away from the book as artifact and towards the book as event, and it becomes increasingly hard to isolate the substance of the book from the surrounding sensationalism. Two recent examples have underlined the point—Gitta Sereny's book on the life of child murderer Mary Bell, published by Macmillan UK in May, and Hanif Kureishi's new novel *Intimacy*, published by Faber in the same month.

The Bell book, which had been cloaked in secrecy because of the subject matter, generated extraordinary comment and anger when it was revealed that Bell—who is now free and has been furnished with a new identity to protect her daughter—had been paid to cooperate with Sereny, who is famous for her great biography of the Nazi war criminal Albert Speer.

The book was serialized in the *Times*, questions were raised in the House of Commons, Bell and her daughter (who now for the first time learned of her mother's past) had to flee from packs of newshounds. The book was delivered to shops on the day of publication, which meant in effect that the whole debate about the book took place without the book having been read by anyone. It was the principle of the book that was debated, rather than the book itself.

Similarly, the Kureishi novel—a thinly veiled treatment of the acrimonious breakdown of his marriage—generated features, interviews, angry letters from his sister, endless debate, but little discussion of the book itself. Perhaps in this case it was impossible to read the book as anything other than a *roman-à-clef*; few even tried.

These examples reflect a growing trend for the book to be forgotten in the journalistic pursuit of the story. In our culturally aware age, books are likely to crop up everywhere—on news pages, feature pages, interview pages. There is a real appetite—certainly among newspaper editors, presumably among their readers—for what Gore Vidal christened "book chat". That is all to the good—books can now inform every section of a newspaper. The disadvantage is that the review—and this applies right across the arts—can be downgraded. The role of the critic is everywhere under threat—the taste now is for celebrity interviewers, solipsistic columnists, feature-led theme pieces.

When Anthony Curtis and his equally resilient contemporaries Terence Kilmartin of the *Observer* and W.L. Webb of the *Guardian* began their lengthy stints in the late fifties, the critic ruled—Kenneth Tynan and Harold Hobson in theatre, Dilys Powell and C.A. Lejeune in cinema, Cyril Connolly and Philip Toynbee, and later Anthony Burgess, in books. It would be foolish to argue for a return to a sort of tweedy critical hegemony, to a gentlemen's club of critics upholding timeless literary values, but we should be aware of the dangers of letting hype replace judgement, of swapping Connolly's 10-year test for five minutes of newsy fun. What does Sereny's book tell us about child abuse, evil, the possibilities of recovery? Is Kureishi's book effective as a novel, a memoir, a polemic? When the dust has settled, let the thinking begin.

Stephen Moss is literary editor of the Guardian.

Sweeping Away Cobwebs

Dhananjay Kapse

THE LACKADAISICAL SWEEPER: COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES IN ENGLISH

By Gauri Deshpande

East West Books, Madras, 1997, pp. 213, Rs. 135.00

Who or what is a "Lackadaisical Sweeper"? If you think the title of this book (or the story within) slightly strange, what then will you think of "Vervain", or "Insy Winsy Spider", titles of two other stories? Or maybe you should try this, "Hookworm, Lamprey, Tick, Fluke and Flea", which opens this volume. It certainly had me scurrying for my dictionary. But I suppose I should have been prepared. Gauri Deshpande delights in being teasingly difficult and different. Having read all her work in Marathi—eight novels, a book of short stories, a collection of anecdotal essays apart from a monumental translation of Richard Burton's *A Thousand and One Nights* as well as poetry in English. I had been looking forward to reading her long awaited collection of short stories in English. The wait has been worthwhile.

R. Raj Rao in a largely perceptive "Afterword", comments, "Gauri Deshpande's life and writings are an extension of each other, a part of an ongoing process; separate the two and you have an incomplete understanding of both." However one is disappointed not to find any elaboration of this by Rao, perhaps due to lack of adequate knowledge about the details of her life. But I can't help reading these stories biographically. Some background information may be in order.

Daughter of Principal G.D. Karve and Professor Iravati Karve, the famous anthropologist, essayist, and author of *Yuganta*, the celebrated study of the *Mahabharata*, Gauri Deshpande has erudition and independent thinking flowing in her veins from birth. Her maternal grandmother (Aai) lived in Burma at the beginning of the century when few women were exposed to outside influences, and her paternal grandmother (baya) a remarried child-widow, lived a fulfilling if at times turbulent married life with Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, the pioneer of women's emancipation in Maharashtra. Gauri Deshpande's uncle Raghunath Dhondo Karve started the movement about family planning and education about sexuality in India in the face of virulent opposition and helping him was her aunt the essayist Shakuntala Paranjpe, daughter of 'Rangler' Paranjpe and mother of the renowned film-maker Sai Paranjpe. You can't ask for a more illustrious family.

The reader's appreciation of the story "Rose Jam" is immensely enriched by a knowledge of these facts. It is in fact a fictional reworking of the essays she has written about her family. But even if one doesn't know these details, the story still works on its own. Any perceptive reader will figure out the numerous swipes at the—by now—cliched and stereotyped magic and exoticism of Indo-Anglian writing, that the story takes *en passant*. Her recent caustic comments about *The God of Small Things* and *The Moor's Last Sigh* take issue with such books catering to and feeding into the West's image of India. In "Rose Jam" as the narrator points out again and again, her family was "unusual enough in that place at that time" but hardly magical or interestingly oriental. "They may have taken the small steps that led India into the modern age, but that is because they did not know that no one else in the world wanted India to be anything but a quaint outpost of the Raj."

Like the narrator of "Rose Jam", Gauri Deshpande in her writing has always resisted being labelled, or categorized, or being forced to put on a disguise. From the beginning she has prized her unfettered imagination, refusing to write in a way that is expected of her as a woman or as an Indian. That's why she writes a story like "Vervain" set entirely in the West and peopled by western characters. The narrator, curiously nicknamed Li-Ta (Li for Elizabeth, Ta for Carlotta), grows up in World War Two Germany, in hardship, deprivation, flight and fight for survival. Her mother dies early and at the age of ten she becomes "mother, companion, chatelaine, cook-housekeeper, confidante and advisor to three men"—her father and two brothers. In marriage, in her late thirtees, to a sailor twelve years older than her, she finds some stability and happiness in Luxemburg, away from memories of the War. With two children, unteutonically named Paul and Mark, she is everything to three men again. But her happiness or "false consciousness" as a feminist might say, is shattered when she discovers her husband's infidelity. If Gauri Deshpande's stories were tracts as R. Raj Rao opines, because "her narrators seem too cocksure (sic) of their opinions" then this story would have ended with Li-Ta finding a feminist freedom—as offered by her visitor D.T. But what in fact happens is that she can't fight her way out and is sucked back into her fifty-year long comforting—and deadening—routine of caring for her "men".

If Gauri Deshpande writes against the repressive traditions of patriarchy, she also uncompromisingly depicts the internalization of these norms by women themselves, in stories like "Hookworm, Lamprey, Tick, Fluke and Flea"—which incidentally are names of various fish used as baits and thus symbolically stand for the five women friends who find themselves being 'Stupid Samaritans', compelled to help their friend Jenny who as it turns out, does not want a job, nor Liberation but only being an "unpaid slave to her boys, those worthless penniless drunkards and wastrels." In "Insy Winsy Spider" she shows a feminist, achieving mother being stumped by her own daughter who, though brought up politically correctly—or perhaps because of that—refuses college education and wants to get married and set up house at the age of eighteen. Instead of analyzing how a child grasps the difference between itself and its mother, the story asks, "when does a mother begin to differentiate between herself and her baby?. . . What are 'we', when we are 'we'?" It is not a one track feminist agenda that dominates Gauri Deshpande's writings, but a near obsessive search for freedom, not just freedom from external restrictions but also freedom from oneself whenever there is the slightest danger of that 'self' ossifying.

And her quirky imagination and sharp sense of humour enable her to portray her characters from within, ferretting out their inconsistencies and self-contradictions but always in an involved, sympathetic manner, as in the stories "Morgan in Disguise" and "A Harmless Girl".

Interaction between different cultures has always been a major theme of Gauri Deshpande's work in Marathi. Almost all her novels feature Indian-Maharashtrian-heroines who for a spell live abroad, not in familiar U.K. or U.S.A. but in unfamiliar Japan and Greece, reflecting the globe-trotting, peripatetic life of the author herself. If the Tokyo setting is used as a mere backdrop in "Whatever Happened To" (clearly the least satisfying story in this volume), it assumes enormous importance in "Smile and Smile and. . .", when the smug Indian narrator—a woman—is brought up short against the reality that her Japanese subordinate Mayuri, whom she has been trying to force into her mould, is irreconcilably different from her, as a *hibakusha*, a child of the Bomb.

In both "Brand New Pink Nikes" and "Dmitri in the Afternoon" the middle aged Indian protagonists are transformed by a causal *non-sexual* encounter with foreign men (American and Greek) and their jaded marriages get a new lease of life, a theme very common in her Marathi works. It's not just the foreignness of these men which is attractive (though one wonders why they are invariably tall, large and white-skinned) but they seem to represent a different, fresher way of looking at life. There are no gushing emotions or purple prose here *a la* Mills and Boon romances—in any case these are transient, fleeting encounters—but they seem to enable the protagonists to perceive themselves in a different way, to break out of a habituated prison of society's—and their own—making.

Which leads us nicely into the anti-romantic story "Habits", where the narrator is "thoroughly alarmed at the prospect of forming a habit. Any habit and has become a "rather peculiar and unreliable sort of person." And when her new office colleague determines that someone must look after her and her children, to give her an 'identity', a sense of pride in herself, and when she learns with horror that he lives the most regular, time-bound, routine life imaginable, her first action is to run away from him to continue her messy, shabby but 'independent' life.

With all the different cultural interactions, an inter-racial marriage had to figure in this book, and in "Hello Stranger" and "The Debt" we have two very different, but equally sensitive treatments of this theme. The Indian protagonist of "Hello Stranger", married to an American and "grafted onto her culture after he was all grown-up", has left most of his past behind, so much so, that when memories come flooding back when he is awaiting the birth of his child, it makes him acutely uncomfortable. And when he holds the new-born baby, "This was it, he knew. This was the final irrevocable step. . .

This was goodbye."

"The Debt" provides a counterpoint. The Indian protagonist, married to an American, is dead in an accident soon after the story begins, and in the ensuing bustle Anita is unable to terminate her pregnancy, which he was so happy about and she was not. The story follows her impulsive journey to India, to meet his old and dying father, to learn the lesson from him that everything is interconnected, nothing and no one is isolated, we all have our debts to pay.

A lesson also learnt by Seeta, in "The Lackadaisical Sweeper", who inspite of her parents' and society's conditioning that after marriage a woman's first duty is to her husband, is desperately unhappy at his betrayal of her friendship with the happy, generous and trusting Shiela, for his own pecuniary benefit. She keeps searching for that "something quite abstract, as yet obscure, but demanding nevertheless, to which she owed her duty first," and that search brings her to establish contact with the shadowy, eponymous seemingly misanthropic 'lackadaisical sweeper' of a street in Hong Kong, at the end of the story.

Exploitation and betrayal runs through most of these stories, sometimes comically sometimes tragically, and the *piece de resistance* is a story without any plot, characters, events or dialogue. It is a meditation by an unnamed first person narrator weaving the metaphysical conceit of Donne and Marvell which wittily and painstakingly compares a woman's body with a map. Ingeniously teasing out the connection between cartographical exploration and imperial exploitation, the story provides a compressed, complex, poetic evocation of colonialism and its aftermath and it is only near the end that the reader learns that the narrator-woman who is going to "draw this map all over again. Get to know myself in a way I choose, redefine myself, re-imagine myself", is India. Edward Said it was who elaborated Foucault's theory of power knowledge into a study of 'culture and imperialism'. No wonder then that this story "The Map", is "A tribute to Edward Said".

These fifteen stories, allegorical, ironic, quirky and unpredictable, playing with language and point of view, probingly subversive, sceptical yet never cynical, moral without being moralistic, "self-centric" and not necessarily "gynocentric", are a significant addition and an astringent corrective to Indian literature in English.

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Probing the Human Condition

M. Vijayalakshmi

VISIONS REVISIONS 2: KATHA REGIONAL FICTION
Edited by Keerti Ramachandra
Katha, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 169, Rs. 150.00

The book under review, second in the Katha series and the outcome of an all-India translation workshop organized in collaboration with the British Council, contains twelve short stories by well-known writers. As a genre the short story presents a wide variety of forms in its subcontinental avatar. The short story gained prominence and reader-following mainly in the earlier decades of this century due in large measure to the growth of popular language journals. Unlike the novel the short story does not probe every aspect of the totality of life. To paraphrase a Tamil critic, K. Sivattambi, the short story probes an underlying human condition or emotion. Its characters are delineated, not 'evolved'. The truth or predicament which the characters confront in the course of their actions forms the nucleus of the short story. The short story must lead the reader to a mental or emotional state which should be created not by recourse to verbiage but without it i.e. the reader should arrive at it unawares. The length of a story does not necessarily define a short story. Operating within this philosophical framework the Indian short story tradition has employed a variety of story telling techniques including the traditional oral forms of the fable, fantasy, allegory and the parable. It will be an interesting exercise to explore as to which language draws most from which of these traditions.

Coming to the present collection the short stories present an engaging variety of themes and styles. The Assamese and Oriya stories ("Rainmaker" by Harendra Kumar Bhuyan translated by Apratim Barua and "The Other God" by Pratibha Ray translated by Monalisa Dani) concern societal aspects and are narrated like an allegory and a parable respectively. The Bengali, Gujarati and Hindi stories ("Nandita" by Bani Basu, translated by Jaya Banerji, "Congratulations by Bindu Bhatt translated by Kamal Sanyal, and "Crows" by Mrinal Pande, translated by Prasenjit Ranjan Gupta) explore failed or failing marriages. The Kannada and Malayalam stories ("A Scoundrel" by Shantinath Desai, translated by Padma C. Rao and "Sherlock" by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, translated by Sachi Madhavan) study alienated psyches, in entirely differing predicaments. The Marathi, Punjabi and Tamil stories ("Burden" by Prakash Sant, translated by Kamal Sanyal, "Pabi Maina" by Gurbaksh Singh, translated by Githa Sagar and "Our Teacher" by Sundara Ramaswamy, translated by Malati Mathur) focus on childhood and on a sense of loss but from completely differing perspectives. While the Telugu story ("The Flute Player" by K.N.Y. Patanjali, translated by K.P. Sharma) is a fantasy on fear, the Urdu story, ("The Will" by Ahmad Yusuf, translated by Nadeem Ahmad), tells the story of change in a traditional family in the manner of a *kissa*. Most of the stories are good reading and they ought to be so since Katha is meticulous about story-selection. But my personal favourite is the Gujarati story. Tautly wrought, well-compressed, full of 'mood' this is a story of the eternal triangle, of a woman in love with a married man. It is beautifully underwritten, from the point of view of the other woman whose mature age impels her to sad and inconclusive reflections about the predicament of human relationships. The story has been well-translated, as are the rest. The Bengali story is somewhat cliched and too distanced in its exploration of a failing middle-class marriage. The Tamil story meticulously written according to the grammar of the short story smacks of a deliberateness that robs one of the pleasure of reading. The Oriya and Urdu stories written in piquant and tongue-in-cheek styles make interesting reading. The Malayalam story deals with the predicament of a young man from Kerala in the Land of Plenty with no desire to strike it rich despite the concerned promptings of a sibling and surrenders himself to the admonishments delivered by his sole companion, a feline. The Marathi story which is full of local colour is about a boy living with grandparents, away from his mother, who yearns for his mother's touch.

Much hard work has evidently gone into the editing of the translations. Katha appears to prefer the usage of kinship terms in the languages, which doesn't present insurmountable problems to the readers—the course of the story explains the kinship and more often than not the terms relate to similar terms in other languages. But there are many other terms which do not have transparent meanings—like *Chehna* or *gur* which are not necessarily understood across the length and breadth of the country and which admit of simple English language equivalents. It is understandable when a translator is unwilling to substitute an awe-striking expression like 'Kaal baisakhi' as with 'Nor wester' but the explanatory terms that follow such expressions must be clear and bring out the intended effect. While I liked the typically Bengali 'Ish' spelled out as 'Isshhh' I was sore that 'Saappattu Raman' became 'Sapat Raman'.

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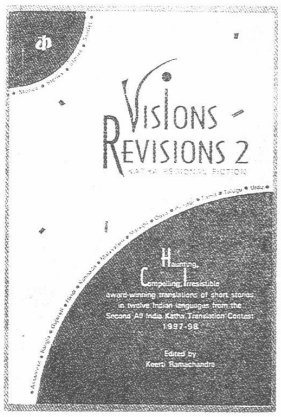

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Interface
A Dialogue

The Book Review Literary Trust and the United States Information Services jointly hosted a dialogue on the Interface between Publishing and Reviewing on 24 November 1997. "The Event", Ritu Menon who was in the Chair said, "heralded the activities of the winter session at the India International Centre."

The speakers were a mix of editors, authors, academics, reviewers and publishers. They were Ravi Dayal, Urvashi Butalia, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Indira Chandrasekhar, Geetha Dharmarajan, Rajiv Bhargava, Shobhana Bhattacharji and the guest speakers from the United States, Robert Silvers, Editor *The The New York Review of Books* and Rea Hederman publisher of Granta and *New York Review of Books*.

The discussions began with Henry Mendelsohn, Director Libraries, American Centre, introducing the American visitors.

THE FOUNDING OF THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS

Robert Silvers began by saying that he seldom talked about their paper and recounted the story of how it was founded thirty years ago. He had worked as an editor most of his life, first in Paris where he was editor of the *Paris Review*. For him the work of an editor is essentially that of a critical admirer who dreams of bringing together writers of freshness and even geniuses, with the audience they deserve. In the early 1960s he asked one of the critics he admired most—Elizabeth Hartwick to write for him in *Harpers* on the state of book-reviewing in America and she wrote that reviewing, particularly in the dominant *New York Times* had become listless, perfunctory, mediocre and lacking in spirit. Silvers made enquires about the state of book-reviews, he was laughed at, told by people that unless he could find a millionaire who was willing to lose a lot of money, there would never be a large enough audience for serious book-reviewing. His life changed in 1963 when there was a long and bitter strike at *The New York Times*, his friend Jason Epstein, publisher of Pan-House rang him up and told him that this was the only time when he could start a book-review journal without capital, without a penny, because the publishers were going mad, they were going crazy, they were desperate, they didn't care, they were publishing books which were coming out without reviews, so any publication that could present itself as publishing reviews would immediately receive advertisements. So Jason and his wife Barbara, Elizabeth Hartwick and Robert Lowe took leave of absence, set to work to create their own paper. They asked themselves which of the writers in the English speaking world they admired the most and would like to read on the books just being published even if they had never or hardly ever written a book-review. As it happened some of the most prominent writers in America were willing to drop whatever they were doing and write reviews for no payment in a very short time as they all felt a new paper was needed and that critical consideration of books was a high and neglected cause. So, within weeks they received reviews by writers like W.H. Auden, MacCarthy, Norman Mailer and Susan Sontag and historians, economists, scientists and poets. While editing these articles Barbara Epstein and Silvers went around to publishers with their growing list of contributors and practically every publisher took an advertisement. They then found a printer and a sympathetic Bank that agreed to back the printing of the first issue of 50,000 copies which sold out. They had over a thousand letters asking them to go on and after that beginning they had very little trouble selling stock to a very small group of willing well-to-do people, while keeping control to themselves. As long as they could keep going and make a small profit, made enough to live on, they could do literally what they wanted, no owner, no foundation, no government, no one could fire them or pressure them as long as they paid the bills. Miraculously 25 years later, Rea Hederman, acquired ownership of the paper promising the same freedom they always had.

EDITORIAL CONTENT

Rea Hederman had this to say about editorial content: "I think it is a rather precious thing. But too often, it is subjugated to the whims of the business department, which I represent, the editorial expenditure being discretionary rather than necessary often because the tendency is as soon as a magazine begins to have problems financially, to go in and begin to cut the expenditure of the editorial department and say we need to pay contributors less, we need to do other things. It is an easy place to make cuts but I believe that it is the last place that any budget cuts should be placed. It takes years to develop the editorial quality of a publication and to develop a publication to the point where it has a wide, discerning audience that understands, appreciates and wants regularly to read the magazine. Again, I think that is the key point, that it is much easier to keep a subscriber than to go and find a new one and it is the quality that attracts readers to publications. I believe this reading audience is smarter and more perceptive than they are given credit for. And, I further believe that this audience can ensure and abandon rapidly any publication that begins to act dishonestly by reducing the quality of the editorial content for the sole reason of turning a higher profit."

Silvers had earlier opined that in publishing cultural criticism, whatever the form of legal situation, defacto control by editors who conceive the aims and the intellectual textures of the journal is an immeasurably precious asset, central to the work itself. Some of the most interesting writers in the world had been willing to collaborate with them. For one thing, they found that the *Review* was being read and talked about by the people they knew, that they are reaching an audience or constellation of audiences which was characterized by willingness to consider writing that was probing and challenging a conventional language, a conventional opinion and was willing to examine critically a wide variety of ideas. And, secondly, some of these readers were made to feel that the form of the book-review itself had opened up in the paper.

Barbara and he started from the premise that writing and the review itself should not be merely competent, informative and informed, but felt that in its texture, its imaginativeness the writing they published should have its own bit of quality. They believed that literary sensibility could contribute perceptions that were often lacking in the prose of conventional academics and journalists, and that is why over the years had some of the novelists and poets whom they admired the most, not only to review books about literature, but to go out and observe the world, discuss central and social issues. A poet who is now the Oxford Professor of Poetry, went to Ethiopia to write about the famine there and to the Philippines, he has become a regular columnist, and writes on everything from Rwanda to the history of Berlin to the marketing of the British monarchy. And, something comparable takes place when brilliant students of society and history are asked to consider the work of writers and poets. For example in 1997 the economist Amartya Sen wrote a long, controversial reflection for *The New York Review of Books* (NYRB henceforth) under 'life and ideas' about Rabindra Nath Tagore, so it was when the anthropologist Professor Gibbs, one of the great experts on Islam, wrote from Lebanon.

In any case, they soon realized the extraordinary possibilities that they had opened up by starting a book-review journal. Of the 15,000 odd books that they receive every year for reviews, there are only a small number of outstanding books. Most are highly technical or arkane on almost everything from bicycling to bio-degradation. But these subjects could be of intense, intellectual interest when considered with clarity by an original mind. Some years ago, when the fiction best-seller list seemed at its bleakest, its most sketchy, its most boring and dreary with its gothic novels, sagas of pioneer families and super rich Texan Valley, just at that moment Gore Vidal undertook to write on the entire list of these books and on each and every book he analysed the different and recurrent paradigms—social paradigm and sexual paradigm and sentimentality and suspense on which these books depended. In much the same way a Harvard biologist wrote with great instructiveness on historical and scientific forces and super-popular novels such as Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park*.

So whether it was physics, biology, history, anthropology, the books they were considering were often locked apart from one another, kept themselves in compartments by their special language written by experts for experts or for overlapping fields experts as in the current controversy between neurologists and philosophers with the question of consciousness or about geneticism evolutionary psychology. Silvers and Epstein saw their work as breaking down the walls between these compartments by insisting on clarity of language.

So, without any particular calculation, they found they are combining into a

larger audience, different kinds of readers from many different specialities, many different interests, all over the world, who seemed to see themselves as somewhat grudging, half-willing members of a contentious family. "In every issue of the *Review* the somewhat helter-skelter combination is represented in some form, you usually see the *Review* having to do with a work of art or music, there is a review of a book of science or economics, at least one review of a novel, a book of poetry, you see clustered together four reviews and a piece on several books sometimes as many as ten books. For example, there might be ten books on Reagan, ten books on Yugoslavia and you may find an analysis of the state, or on an entire field of enquiry, such as Freudian psycho-analysis. There are writers who present ideas of interest to the most advanced thinkers in those fields, and also cater to people in the middle or those who know nothing about the subject—perhaps most visibly of all, critical discussion of contemporary political ideas and political issues whether on the tactics of the administration or the effects of globalisation on American domestic economics."

DEBATES

Silvers said, no serious journal or book can remain aloof from deeply controversial issues. There is no safe, no apolitical place from which to publish a book review. "We published very different views on Vietnam by such experts as Fairbank, or an ardent diplomat as Gorge Kenin, . . . as well as radical critics such as Chomsky, they all were in one way or another apalled by the futility and the destruction and cruelty of the war and were apologetic. But we took no single doctrinnaire political line and as the north Vietnamese took over the south my friend called my attention to a long report published in France setting out in detail the repression of the population that he had observed in Saigon, the way books were burned, people jailed, the reporting to camps, we published it. There was an outcry from our readers who had not only come to think of the *Review* as outspoken about the war, but had come to see the north-Vietnamese as the victims. So, subscriptions were cancelled and if there is no such outcry from time to time, in publishing a paper, we feel that you probably don't have an intellectual journal worth the name."

Their general inclination had been from the first, to try to take the side of people of groups who had been suffering from state power, the people who have been bullied or harassed, censored, jailed, tortured, killed, disappeared for their opinions, affiliations and preferences. From the early 60s when the word humanright was little known, they found themselves trying to publish such views about every sort of regime, Left and Right, centrist, they published accounts of poets torture under the Shah, and of the Bahai philosopher's torture under the Ayatollahs. In both its articles and its letters corner, the *Review* has become a kind of an international billboard of appeals from and on behalf of otherwise silenced voices. They received around a thousand requests a year from people in beleagured countries and positions for some kind of a public examination about their situation.

Academic and political judgements present themselves in highly dogmatic and partisan forms. Now this has been the case with the charged debates in the U.S. over such American culture questions as deconstruction, multi-culturalism and these questions have occupied the NYRB for many years. In the early '60s when NYRB was started, there were no more than 6 per cent of all students who were black; most of them went to less than first rate colleges and some of the best excluded women altogether. During the last nearly thirty-four/five years now, there has been a growth of a college system in which more than twenty per cent were non-white and 55 per cent women, at the same time there have erupted the most bitter controversies about the curriculum and the distribution of academic power. There were intense complaints in the U.S. that the culture of Afro-Americans, the Hispanics, the concerns of women have been neglected for the writings and standards of white males have been dominant. The NYRB published many hundreds of thousands of words. Silvers thought that they involve the often concealed contest of an intellectual power that a book review and any interaction should confront.

For example, the power to have students read texts that reflect a particular ethnic experience or a political or social perspective while some of the new and previously neglected texts have strong claims to be part of the curriculum, have reflected in the desire to find topical work that would interest students brought up on television, who have very little interest in serious literature, or serious thinking. In reviewing these books or on these questions the contributors took a variety of positions, but they all insisted that what was at stake is not simply a given list of books or writings but the way those textswere taught. Contributors disagreed with writers who saw the great works of the tradition as repositories of timeless values. Fredrick Crews forcefully expressed the views that characterised the NYRB pages when he challenged what he called the transfusion model of education, a model by which the stored wisdom of the past classics is considered as a kind of plasma that would drip beneficially into one's veins. Professor Crews wrote that what was wanted was not reverence but clean debates over classics and modern texts that are in fact themselves often quite fiercely opposed to one another—not timeless values but historical consciousness and self-reflection and criticism.

The NYRB published an account of how in the State University of New York an English instructor desperately trying to interest his class in what it means to write with some intensity, compared the writer's involvement with his subject, with the excitement of sexual passion. Some young women decided that this analogy was offensive to them and they lodged a harassment complaint against him. He was told he could avoid a formal hearing before a big group of students and teachers if he signed a confession and was willing to submit to therapy and when he refused was found guilty in a hearing before a board appointed by the women administrators who had encouraged these young women to make the complaints. He was suspended for a year without pay. A *New York Times* reporter who was working on a book on academic practices wrote at length about what happened. Ultimately, the man won his case against the university in the state court. The contributing editor of the NYRB while reviewing the book agreed with the author that the treatment of the Professor was unfair and that the categories of race, ethnicity and gender and sexual orientation can be deeply suspect as accounts of identity, that the self-conception they teach the students when they are presented in a monolithic form can be deeply pernicious, they can be used to sponsor as an interest group politics that is fundamentally inimical to the notion of the common "I". He pointed to the dangers of the speech codes that can lead to the abandonment of the principles of free expression. The censor, Lukeman wrote, always rings twice. At the same time, however, he insisted with much force—something that means a great deal to editors—in defence of these principles of free expression, a minority opinion must be brought about by meticulously collected accounts of violation, which must have an imaginative sense of why people feel offended. He found the book under review wanting in several instances that he explained in detail and concluded that the author accusing multi-culturalists of distortion, exaggeration and suppression of evidence had resorted to some of the same methods himself. Naturally, the indignant author responded with thousands of words in defence. It is, Silvers felt, in the close and inevitably contentious examination of rhetoric and evidence about such questions, an openness to debate over them, openness to criticism about their own reviews, that the responsibility of a book review editor lies and in trying to meet that responsibility there is no way to avoid opinions that are highly critical, irreverent, skeptical, irascible, outspoken, against the grain and hardly correct.

Shobhana Bhattacharji talking about the three Indian review journals in English said that they are essentially liberal. "The English newspapers and journals that carry reviews are also, on the whole, liberal though they tend to shade off into the extreme Right. Unfortunately such liberalism seems to imply scholarly interest in books and ideas cut off from events that surround us. A detached, clinical assessment of a book is especially unwelcome at this time because the political Right and Left and the entire political spectrum seem to be using the same rhetoric but not chasing the same goals. Both lots are trying to tap the thoughtful and persuadable reader and it requires an astute perception to see the difference between them. If the liberal review journals are to be of any use in persuading readers away from Hitler's progeny they need to be less academically austere, less detached and relate the rhetoric of what they review and how they review to its social effects. This is not a time for sweetness and light. In the early 19th century

in England an ideological war was in full spate and the reviewers supportive. Our condition is not very different. So, lets take off those academic gloves or blinkers or whatever and join the fight."

Ritu Menon interjected to say that these comments directed the people in the room to think about some of the very important issues that confronted them, whether they are reviewers or publishers or writers and that was, how does a book-reviewing journal play the role of interlocutor? And if it is going to play the role of an intellectual journal, how was it to be done? It also raised questions about centre and periphery, who was the opinion maker, who were the makers of the ideas and where were these ideas and their responses generated?

HISTORY OF INDIAN PUBLISHING

Ravi Dayal briefly recounted the history of Indian publishing in the past fifty years. He began by saying "no one quite knows how many publishers of books there are in India, but estimates place the number at around twelve thousand, they are a mixed lot, not only because of the languages they publish in and the number of titles produced, but also in the range of activities. Apart from the private publishers there are about a thousand government or semi-government institutions that mushroomed largely in the first two decades of independence. They not only make official reports available and the sort of government material produced anywhere in the world but have made forays into general publishing and over the decades established a near monopoly of text book publishing with a vast network of states and schools. Together, these government institutions consume about 70 per cent of the paper available in India for books and form the largest publishing conglomerate in the country. Their produce is undistinguished and their functioning lazy and they have done little to add to the stature of Indian publishing.

"Such vibrance and variety of literature that exists in Indian publishing today brings it mostly from the exertion of private publishers even though they have been largely excluded from servicing the capacious school-markets which has nourished publishing elsewhere. With the 16 major Indian languages accounting for the rest of the 50 per cent in varying degrees, much of the publishing in the Indian languages has been mostly of poetry and fiction with comparatively little scholarly and reference material coming from them, English language publishing has been primarily educational and scholarly. But over the past fifty years or so the range of general books and creative writing in English language has grown and improved very substantially. Publishers are, of course, habitual grumblers about rising costs and the state of the market, but it seems clear that publishing has come of age in post independence India and should prosper further as literacy spreads further and the national economy grows.

"In 1947, publishers like everyone else in the country were confronted by a dauntingly harsh environment. The country was in turmoil after partition, of its 350 million inhabitants only 17 per cent were literate and they were scattered over a vast area, further fractured into many language groups. The freedom movement generated a good deal of political writing and several distinguished scholars had made pathbreaking contributions. Bengal had garnered a rich crop of creative writers and all the regions of the country had been stirred to various degree by the new intellectual and literary movements that helped by moulding Indian minds. But English language publishing played a seminal and catalytic role in the spread and development of ideas in India since 1947 predominated by three British publishing houses—the OUP founded in 1912 in India, MacMillan founded in 1903, Longman's founded in 1906 who concentrated on importing books from abroad and producing books for the colonial education system but also greatly encouraging Indian scholarship and thought. OUP India, in particular, developed over the years a lively but a small general list and in Masani's *Our India* and Jim Corbett's books it had some best sellers in the 1940s. Generally, however, sales were slow and do not appear to have encouraged major investments in areas other than text books.

"By the mid '60s it was evident that the infrastructure of India's intellectual life, was not only considerably larger, but more active than in 1947. The level of academic writing and publishing witnessed a seachange around then. The intellectual seeding that occurred through the major universities after '47 nourished the general level of debate and performance in innumerable areas, including creative writing. It has also provided a receptive audience for books, particularly for those written by Indians, that has led to a lively interaction between academic disciplines and writers in general. Fifty years ago, most of the ideas discussed, seemed to originate in Britain and sometimes, in America or Europe. What with these democratic institutions and boisterous debate, India remains exuberantly open to ideas and views from everywhere, liberal flow of books from abroad has always been encouraged.

"In the immediate aftermath of independence, most Indians thought, probably that it was right for English to be removed from the country, innumerable strategies were devised to encourage the use of Indian languages and starve out English. Publishing slumped, as a consequence, that year. However, English not only survived, but its use dramatically increased from the '60s onwards. English is the mother tongue of a mere hundred and twenty-five thousand, but the conservative estimate, based on student enrollment and employment statistics indicates that perhaps 80 million Indians know and use functional English. There have been no head counts of English-knowers in India unlike with the Indian languages, 80 millions may perhaps be startling but it is fairly correct.

"Over the past fifty years publishing has been shaped by and reflects all these developments. It has been an exciting time for those connected with the making of books and it has been associated with the spread of new ideas and writing whether it is editors or business people. It must be recognized that despite all the encouraging trends, India's publishers have usually had to function in an exceedingly difficult environment and in the face of heavy odds. The economy may have grown but in our sphere it hasn't grown fast enough and then we have had to live with all manners of scarcities. The English-knowing reader, the backbone of the market, is still scattered over a very wide area and difficult to reach, in the absence of good bookshops in all but the larger cities. If the material condition of life in India improves in the coming decades then forty per cent of the population will surely be drawn into the net of literacy at some stage. Publishers have much to look forward to when this comes to pass.

"Thirty-six years ago when I started off in publishing, most of the books reviewed in our papers were published abroad, neither the reviews nor the books seemed terribly relevant and the review pages generally seemed somewhat haphazard. There were of course, some notable exceptions such as Shyamlal of the *Times of India* and some earnest Indian language journals, but generally for a serious discussion of ideas we looked to journals originating outside India. This, no doubt, reflected the output of ideas here, but the overall scene seemed derivative. With a widening base of the educational system the vast numbers of authors in India over the past few decades, at least, the quality of reviewing too has improved noticeably with papers like *The Book Review* providing a fine forum for an exchange and evaluation of ideas. As a publisher I find reviews essential for the books I publish more useful than a general mailing. Widespread reviewing and wide-spread literary gossip backed by presence in book-shops are the best ways of getting books off the ground."

TEXT BOOKS AND BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Shobhana Bhattacharji felt that children and young adults are the two other groups who should be important to all those who want to sell books. "They are going to be the market and more importantly the repository of ideas." She said they were not only ignored in the seminars, they are generally ignored in the choice of books to be reviewed and in the language of reviews. For instance, why are text books not reviewed when they are probably the largest selling books in India? "Children, in my experience, devour books of all kinds like vaccum cleaners, even classics, when they know about them. From a recent survey of bookshops we learnt that even parents who haven't read them tout the classics and book-shops sell them. I think it would be good to review them as sales strategy as well as to create new readers. I believe young adults are looking for important ideals and direction. Review articles can provide the required direction."

"Good editors allow reviewers to read upon the subject and plenty of words to set out issues. Personally, my favourite reviewers are those who teach me about a subject and give me an academic, political or whatever stand on it. The blind leading the blind approach, this in E.P. Thompson's wonderful phrase—'the bland leading the bland approach' to reviewing is boring and worthless. If I wouldn't buy a book presented in this way why should I presume that the young adult will? ' "Our mission is educational in the broadest sense" is how the U.S. seminarist—Jack Brighton, put it (Seminar on book reviewing organized by Chandra Chari at the University of Urbana-Champaign, Illinois on 31 July 1997—report in *The Book Review*, October 1997). He placed his mission in the context of the economic and political calculus, by which making money is seen as the only legitimate role of publishing houses. Books that sell do not always push past the known and given, but it is these pushers who challenge the world and alter it, and if responsible reviewers promote such books how do publishers react to such promotion? Do they feel reviewers will be reviewers and leave it at that? Wouldn't a dialogue rather than dismissiveness help! However out of date this may sound, I think those of us in the communication business, must take the social results of our writing and publishing seriously, especially in the face of the social and

economic calculus mentioned earlier. As the seminarist already quoted has said, 'books that have ideas, information, education, perspective, enlightenment, revelation require subsidies to publish and buy'. Perhaps we have to resurrect the idea of what is good for the nation and work together to push it through. I have, however, more than a nagging doubt about this notion that comes straight from early 19th century in England, when periodicals turned into review journals which dealt with issues in and around books. At that time, of course, seminars on reviewing were not held, because reviewers never doubted that they were forming opinions. With this ancestry for modern review journals we could ask whether we are simply interested in hanging on to a way of life that has no relevance any longer. But the fact is that we face not so much an informationglut but as a premium on mere information without any equivalent stress on analysing that information or its social purpose. It is a new positivism and far madder than it seemed to be at the end of the 19th century.

"The shrinking of space for reviews in the audio-visual media means that the taken for granted approach, not just to the style but to the contents of reviews won't do any more. The young adult is not the only reader the reviewers can address. The printed word is very valuable for a lot of people who have for the last few years felt butteressed into a corner by the T.V., a packaging rather than a content mode of academic and journalistic writing and a starvation of funds for the humanities in the universities. There is a need for genuine political and cultural insights, in other words public opinion has become an issue and although we could slide into despair by asking which public, we could also resort to some 19th century vigour and consider the role of intellectuals and the liberal middle class in leadership."

One thing Robert Silvers felt very strongly about was that while most books that were produced were text books and were for children, they existed in a kind of limbo and if they were not sufficiently reviewed may affect the lives of millions of children. The NYRB has from time to time reviewed some of these text books but it is never enough. The text books are kept in their own strange pasture and they are somehow unexamined and it is an enormous question because it is often a highly corrupt and a highly rigged quasi-racket—huge procurement by government offices of text books with public money from schools who are often producing work which is, subject to all sorts of pressures. In America, there are terrible pressures from state purchasing agents about political correctness, incorrectness etc. It is time that writers, editors and publishers took it as a central responsibility and asked themselves "what are these text books, who'll write them, how good are they, what kind of language do they use, what kind of picture of the world do they present, is that what we really want children to learn, are they at the level for young children to have their imagination gripped?"

THE ROLE OF THE EDITOR

In response to a query by Professor Desai, Silvers said that he believed that an editor should be intimidated by nothing and should respond as genuinely as he can using all his best intelligence to make the review as clear and as intelligible and as good as it can be within the range of the talents of the writers. Editors should not hesitate to intervene, just use their intelligence and sensibility and think whether this piece of writing is 'as strong, as clear, as interesting as it can possibly be,' realizing that it will never be as strong and as interesting as you would dream of. But trying to convey to the author how it might be improved often involves the most difficult battle or exchange with these writers.

The loneliness of all writing is something that we are all aware of—"The writer alone with a book, trying to make judgements, often going on too long, not knowing where to stop." Silvers said we all know how difficult it is to write any piece of literary work and people are often grateful for some advice. One should intervene as best one can.

ACADEMIC REVIEWING

Rajiv Bhargava asked: "What is it that the writer of an academic book expects from a book review? Now, there is a very simple and obvious answer to that question which is that the author expects that the book review will provide very simple information on what the book is about, will give a very brief summary and thesis of the book and perhaps raise one of these substantive issues which are part of the text. Now, I think that is a job that needs to be done but best left to the publisher. But what the author is not looking for is the worst possible interpretation and arguments about his book, which is then knocked down which happens quite regularly. What the author is looking for is the best possible interpretation perhaps, interpretation that he also only partly recognizes as his own but which he will be very happy to own up as his own. How is that going to happen? The conditions under which that will happen—one is that people must be reasonable, they should be openminded, they should be willing to listen to and respond to evidence, argument and they should be willing to listen to each converse with the other. The second is part of this condition of being reasonable, that they should be able to practice a very simple, familiar principle—enter the conceptual world of the author, feel things from his perspective, to begin with they should be able to grasp what he is trying to do in the book and very often this can be done by simply looking at the introduction. I'm saying this because this is something which an author, a reviewer of my book just didn't do, he probably didn't even look at the introduction, where I had said very clearly this is not a history of ideas, this is a book on methodological individualism, and I said that I'm going to talk about methodological individualism and there are very important links between methodological individualism and political and moral individualism but these links, these very important links maybe a very interesting topic for another book, but these are not going to be discussed in my book. I also said very clearly that although there are some very interesting people who are associated with methodological individualism, I'm not going to discuss them as this is an analytical treatment so I'm not going to discuss each of the authors individually. But it is precisely these I was criticised for. I was told that this book should be ahistorical, the views of each author should be taken more seriously and very important links with moral and political individualism have not been explored and so on and so forth. So, I think it is very important for any book reviewer to just to be able to grasp what exactly the author is about. Well, what can be done to generate this culture? I think that is a much larger question that takes us beyond the world of books and onto very interesting issues about how we must restructure our public culture and public experience."

MARKETING STRATEGIES

Rea Hederman said that "there is no mass market for the readers of the *New York Review*. We cannot send a mailing order the same way as the *Time* and *Newsweek* can and expect any percentage of the total American market to respond. We have to look very carefully at who, we think, might be a potential reader of the *New York Review* and how we can go and find them. The most effective way that we have is through direct mail, with subscribers lists from other American magazines. Our best sales is through good quality bookshops and good news stands. We send them free issues of the *New York Review* and ask them if they would not like to buy a certain number of copies directly from us, rather than go into it through a distributor. The third way that we do it is to exchange advertising—it is a sort of cross-fertilisation.

"In using direct mail for sales we are always looking for new ways to tell readers about our publication and the one effort that has been most successful for us is to basically give a free sample of our publications—like the anthology of selected pieces from the first 30 years of the *New York Review*. By having our own publication we can advertise to our own subscribers and not have to depend on distributors whom we found to be very unreliable.

"Another thing that we have just started using but which is turning out to be extremely effective for us is the internet. We have a website on the internet that is attracting a lot of traffic. We put up five or six pieces on our site, from our current issue of the *New York Review* and then we have a subscription information. We are finding that each month there are 70 people subscribing, just on the basis of the internet and these subscriptions are from all over the world, it totally eliminates distribution. You don't have to find the people, they find you."

AMERICAN PUBLISHER'S ENTRY INTO INDIA

When asked if American publishers are afraid to publish in India because of the pirating of their information Rea Hederman said,"I called a number of publishers before coming to India and talked to several lawyers in detail about intellectual property rights and everyone gave me exactly the same answer and that is that you can have a contract or licence and it is entirely enforceable, it is not a real problem for American publishers in India. "

Urvashi Butalia began with the concern expressed by Henry Mendelsohn that American publishers were reluctant to publish in India because Indian publishers are suspected, by and large of, being pirates. Now, "this", she said, "coming from a country which is behind the World Trade Organization, which is trying to patent neem which has been our property for centuries, and which took the zero from us seems to be extremely strange. There are two kind of barriers or two kinds of problems we come up against when talking about publishing between two Continents and in this case, the Continents are clearly India and the United States. The first of these is an attitudinal barrier and that has to do with things like this—

the perception that by and large, we are pirates. Now, we in Kali, we are a small publishing company, we publish a number of academic books, some of which get picked up in the United States by University presses and get put on courses and we routinely receive requests for photocopying these things for which we cannot be paid and they can be put into text books for students. Now, if that is not pirating, that is not infringing copyrights, I don't know what is. We should acknowledge that this is a world-wide problem, that there isn't really a question of a high moral ground that one country can occupy in relation to another and it is quite true that India is a signatory to the copyright convention and by and large, ethical publishers in India, as anywhere else in the world stick by that, unethical ones in India as anywhere else in the world don't. So, that is one of the attitudinal problems we face in relation to this. The others are some of the things Ravi talked about—he talked about 52 per cent literacy in this country, now, with 52 per cent literacy which is not enough clearly in Indian terms but if you look at it in terms of numbers of aliterate we are talking about 400/450 million people which is not small, so we are not an illiterate country generating an illiterate literature but we are a country which is actually generating several fairly complex, fairly rich literatures. Last week there was a big French publisher here who talked about the conditions that make it interesting and possible for different literatures to enter different countries and one of the things he said was that there has to be a receptivity, there has to be an openness, there has to be an understanding, a desire to know the literature of another country and that I think is very closely connected with things which are non-literary, that is connected with things like economics, things like histories that countries have with politics and so on. It is no surprise, really, that in the United States there is interest in the literatures of Latin America, there is interest in the literature of Vietnam, interest in holocaust literature, there is interest in literature of Taiwan now mainland China as well, I mean, it comes as no surprise either that there is interest in England in the literature of India and so on. But, of course, how can a country know the literature of another country except through a language in common?

"Ian Jack did an issue of *Granta* on India some months ago; several of the writers who figured in that have said often that they have had so much exposure from that one issue which has sold hundred thousand copies all over the world, they are all writers who write in English and this has actually given them an access that they did not earlier have. So, it is frightening the kind of access English has and the kind of influence it has, but there it is. I think because we are a Third World country, the general perception is that perhaps things coming out of here, whether in English or otherwise are not quite upto the mark or not quite good enough. So, that is another sort of attitudinal barrier that we face. In fact, when I was thinking about this, I was thinking that the only thing that travels outside of India, easily without prejudice is Indian food and that is because, (a) it is not attached to a language and (b) it carries with it an immediate adaptibility to the conditions and tastes of any other country. It is not only books that don't get out, it is also all kinds of other products like cars that don't get out and of course, it doesn't happen the other way round."

To Indira Chandrashekhar there was no one publishing scene in India. "There are many many publishers who represent, often different contradictory contexts. I'm not only talking about size here or revenues but even in terms of the focus, the specialisation, the reason for which you are in publishing to begin with, and, partly it has to do with the history of publishing in India.

"Efficiency and inefficiency is not marked by your borders, I mean, Indian publishers are not necessarily more inefficient or tardy or less quality conscious, my experience in co-publishing has been that I have waited for replies for decisions to be made, without interest ever waning, in the project, for, well, more than two years in one instance, in a book that I obviously decided to go ahead and publish because I can't wait for a publisher abroad to respond before I can go go ahead with my plans and after two years there is a response which is positive, which is affirmative, 'Yes, we would like to take so many copies of your book. Please sell us rights, let's get into the thing,' and then, again, there is a lull of a year or so. I don't know whether this is the general case. For small publishers these are experiences which only reinforce one's resolve to continue in whatever manner one can. There are no generalisations in this business or in this industry, if you can call it that and one has to feel one's way forward with instinct very often and possibly with the resolve to just go ahead and something will come of it at some point.

"We find a number of American publishing houses and publishers from other parts of the world entering the Indian market in a very big way. Presently, Scholastic books has entered the Indian market. They are a huge presence just in terms of the number of titles and the subsidised prices that they are able to sell their books in the Indian market. They are good books, they are well produced, why shouldn't an Indian child not buy a Scholastic book rather than a book published by an Indian publisher except in terms of the content or whatever. So, these are big presences that we have to come to terms with,live, with I think, harmoniously find our own little places."

TRANSLATION OF INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

"While everybody knows and has been discussing a very great upsurge of English novels emerging from India, one aspect that has been less often talked about and not talked about at all, today, is another phenomenon that is also acquiring a boom-status within the country and that is translation of Indian fiction in English," Dr. Meenakshi Mukherji said. "What we now witness is the emergence of a systematic and promotional production by institutions and established publishing houses who carefully select the text to be translated, control the quality and texture of the translation, provide a suitable context for each book, introductions, translator's prefaces and notes. The total number of Indian fictional texts available in English is not negligible today although it is only the tip of the iceberg when compared to what remains untranslated, numerically, it is comparable to Indian novels written in English which too used to be a trickle at one time, but in the last two decades have become a virtual flood. Thus, we have two numerically comparable sets—Indian novels written in English and Indian novels translated into English, and what I want to ask you about is the blatant asymmetry in the reception of the two texts. The writers who write in English, at least, the best of them attain worldwide visibility, attract international media attention, get translated into several European languages. Writers like Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Rohinton Mistry and Arundhati Roy, Mukul Keshavan and quite a few others are reviewed and interviewed widely, invited to distant corners of the world to give readings, but at the same time, not many outside the borders of India have heard the names of Ismat Chugtai, Gopinath Mohanty, Shivram Karanth or Shisherendu Mukhopadhyay, whose work is in Urdu, Oriya, Kannada and Bangla respectively. Language cannot be cited as a barrier in this case to accessibility because English translation of at least one novel by each author is available fairly easily for anyone who would care to look for them.

"But who should care to look for them and why? Books do not exist in the abstract realm of aesthetic values. People read books either because the desire to read specific text is created through discussion in the media, which are then seductively marketed like any other consumer product; alternatively they are read if they are put on reading lists in school/college courses. I have personally been involved in many debates and I know there is tremendous resistance to putting translated texts on courses here. Hypothetically, an English translation, say Bhalachandra Nemade's novel *Ghosla* or O.V. Vijayan's *Legend of Khasak* published by Penguin and MacMillan become available not only to Indians who do not know Marathi or Malayalam but also to readers in Australia, Canada, USA or England. How many actually read them is, however, another matter.

For one thing, hardly any of these translated texts are ever reviewed abroad, and reviewing is one way books get known and perhaps the only way when the publishers do not have promotional budgets which is often the case with Indian

publishers and Indian publishers are the ones who bring out these books. The question to ask here, and I do not know whether the publishing professionals here can answer my question—why do the publishing houses in London/New York/San Fransisco never touch these books, but publish and promote Indian novels originally written in English, not always only the best but sometimes second rate ones also? And, the same publishers have no difficulty in publishing and selling translations from Latin America, Czechoslovakia, or from other parts of the world and securing worldwide media coverage for them.

"Some of you will recall that in 1989 Timothy Brenen proposed and gave currency to a new category of writers called the Third World Cosmopolitans, who are globally visible, who the *New York Review of Books* and *Times Literary Supplement* hail as the interpreters and authentic voices of the Third World. According to Brenen this group included Garcia Marquez, Dereck Walcott, Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherji and a few others. These writers emerge from and often write about a non-western culture, but their mastery over the current idiom of the metropolitan meta-language of narrative, ensures them a favourable reception in the western world where the centres of publication and evaluation are located. Significantly, even though this list includes Latin American writers who have been translated into English, Indians, in order to belong to this club must write in English, to begin with. There is a tacit erasure of the diversity of India, here the writers in English, consciously or unconsciously present an India which is accessible to even those who have no direct experience of living here. The Hindi or Tamil writer evidently has a much more specific and a focussed audience. This may be one reason for the disinterest in these novels outside the country. But why the same logic would not apply in the case of novels from Argentina, Chile or Columbia is not very clear to me.

"The very few Indian writers who are read abroad, either academically or—I think mostly in academic courses, they get a hearing through the mediation of scholars based in USA. Gayatri Spivak's story about translation of Mahashveta Devi's novel is a case in point. She has been writing for many years, she has been available in Indian translations before, but until somebody with a great academic standing in USA decided to translate and to introduce her, she was not known outside India. Similarly, I think is the case with Ananthamurthi and the translation of his book *Samskara* by A.K. Ramanujan, he has other novels which to me are far more exciting and complex, gets prescribed outside India and because it is prescribed outside India, I think, after a time-lag we are also thinking of doing it here. At the moment, I believe the Feminist Press in the US is publishing a collection of short stories by Lalitambika Antarjanam, a Malayalam writer, but they have to do it with an introduction by Meena Alexander, who is based in New York and has a certain reputation as a poet in the USA, she knows the region from where this writer comes, but she has no literary knowledge of the language from which these are being translated.

"To mark the fiftieth year of independence, several journals outside India have brought out literary issues, judging by the contents of which one would think that in India literature is written only in one language and that is English. How does one explain this ignorance wilful or otherwise, about the ferment of literary activity in a dozen or more vibrant languages in the country? The new generation of English writers who are being exposed to the world, partly because some of them happen to be excellent, but also because they write in English and are published abroad. But they do not always represent the diversity and heterogenity of the writing scene in India. "

Geetha Dharmarajan then said that while "we have always been very happy to take what has come from outside and know the bylanes and pathways of Dickens's England, we don't even know what Chandni Chowk looks like while living in India. So, I think, what is really needed here, is a pride in ourselves, more pride in what we have, what we can translate for ourselves because we have some great literature and fantastic writers."

U.I.

More Promising than Fulfilling

Arundhati Deosthale

KHATUL

Manjul Bhagat

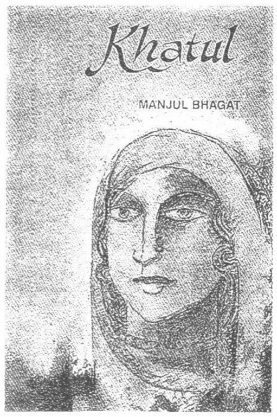
National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 112, Rs. 60.00

When Manjul Bhagat who has earlier given us enjoyable works like *Anaro* and *Toota Hua Indradhanush* takes up a new canvas, that of a beautiful young girl's uprootedness and exile from her strife-torn home state i.e. Afghanistan the expectations are naturally high—Anne Frank like situation? One wonders. But to all those looking for a sensitive probe into wounded psyche, the book comes as a big letdown.

The whole world has witnessed in shock and grief what Afghanistan has been through in the last few years. The brutally rocked socio-political situation, unremitting anarchy caused by change of regimes and Russian intervention, and spurts of gory violence have compelled millions of innocent men and women to flee the country and seek refuge elsewhere. India, the neighbouring country with its accommodative democracy has been the choice of a large influx of Afghani refugees who have heart-rending tales to tell. Against such a backdrop when a creative writer addresses the issue of what it is like for a young girl to be a fugitive in an alien country facing an uncertain future, a whole gamut of possibilities is thrown open.

In fact *Khatul* with is superfluous treatment of the subject trivializes the issue. Khatul, the central character of the novelette despite the harrowing situation that she is placed in, remains a stranger to her readers, failing to evoke their sympathy. The laboured narrative meandering through trivialities and details doesn't pick up and the somewhat abrupt termination comes as though the author herself is bored with the purposeless journey and has decided to call it a day. Some women writers somehow don't seem to do away with their preoccupation with food and festivities, cloths and accessories, relations and pets.

The author's confusion about her approach to the theme becomes evident from the blurb itself. "Aching with memories, yearning for a family and home she (Khatul) empathizes with Zari Khanum's misery feeling stronger of the two and more capable of dealing



with the blows of life as in her own words, she has seen war, whereas poor Zari has gone through the deception and duplicity of a single Khan—her husband. The Tormentor is always faceless, with no nationality, a 'soul less' creature inflicting senseless *pain* upon its victims unaware of himself as its possible next prey".

Is not there a major self-contradiction in the lines quoted here? The "Tormentor" in neither of the cases i.e. Khatul and Zari, is 'faceless' and 'without nationality'. This also leads to another question about Manjul Bhagat's choice of language namely English with which she appears uncomfortable. Examples:

"Her fair face was flushed with happiness and the Sun shone on it in an exquisite blend of silver and gold" (p. 14).

"Auntie, except for death nothing can sunder them apart from their tribe" Khatul once remarked. While pronouncing this verdict the contours of Khatul's visage suddenly wintered like the changing season. Her eyes had become clouded, receding into the past" (p. 19).

Be this original or translated from Hindi, the language is awkward.

The other three stories in the book: 'Steps', 'Nisha' and 'Bebeji' form the better part of the book. When Manjul Bhagat is on her homeground, talking about the typical Indian middle class people the stories come alive despite the hampered style. Both 'Nisha' and 'Bebeji' confront their respective problems in the immediate relationships with sound emotional logic. Bebeji is an old woman who is deserted by her sons to cope with life all by herself. She finds herself a son in Nikka Tandoorwala and at an appropriate moment makes her choice clear to her biological son who has all along been taking her for granted. 'Nisha' too displays exemplary inner strength in fighting against several odds that her typical conservative middle class family tries to stall her with. She breaks free quietly and steadily to be herself, to be different. In all *Khatul* is more promising than fulfilling.

Arundhati Deosthale writes in and translates from Marathi, English and Hindi and is presently working with Scholastic India.

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Joya Banerji

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NUMBER FUN, BOOKS 1 AND 2, By Pearl Scott, Rs. 36.00 and 38.00 respectively

NUMBER FUN, BOOKS 3, 4, 5, By Sheetal Chaudhary and Shanti Dhulia, Rs. 40.00, Rs. 42.00, Rs. 45.00 respectively

MADHU KALASH, BOOKS 2 AND 3, By Prabha Sharma and Vibha Saksena, Rs. 22.00, Rs. 24.00

MADHU KALASH, BOOKS 4 AND 5, By Abha Rai, Rs. 26.00 and Rs. 28.00
Madhuban Educational Books

Learning a new language can be tricky at the best of times. Especially if you are between the ages of three and six and your parents are contemplating sending you to school to learn English. Yet it can be fun. Here's a clutch of books for children to prove how. Textbooks, supplementary readers, educational books. Books to sink milk teeth into. Books that take children on what the publishers, Madhuban Educational Books, a division of Vikas, have chosen to call a "joyous voyage of discovery". A trifle excessive, perhaps—they may not be the entire voyage, but they certainly are the launching pad.

In the early years, when their vocabulary is being formed, children need books that are visually stimulating, primarily to generate and capture interest. The elements that matter in a picture word book are obviously pictures and words, how good the illustrations are and how well the words reflect a child's immediate neighbourhood as well as the changing social scenario. These two books seem adequate enough, although the quality of illustrations could have been better. As well as the quality of printing. Inspite of a few odd inclusions like daffodils and sweetpeas in the flowers section and a fire station that looks like it belongs to a quaint German town instead of an Indian one, it must be said that the vegetable pages have lovely green parwals, tindas, laukis and okra, and the "Things We See in Town" page has a Mother Dairy milk booth and a scooter stand. Although "In the Hospital" we meet male doctors and female nurses, in the "Work people do "there is a dentist who is a 'lady'. The only other women doing any "work" are selling vegetables or books. This may sound like nit-picking, but it is well-known that by the time children are seven or eight, their world-view is well-established. Books like these contribute much to their view of the world and need to be a wee bit more wary of stereotyping.

A lovely set of two colouring books, beautifully drawn by Anita Sen, baby animals and familiar fruit and vegetables that would lighten up any nursery-school-child's life. And good value, too.

Large format activity books for three to five year olds, put together by Veena

Sharma and illustrated admirably by Girija Singh. Designed so that the child can progress from "the simple to the complex", there are pages and pages of alphabet, numbers, colours, shapes, opposites, rhymes (Hindi ones too, nice touch), pre-writing patterns, the family, the body, the home, matching shapes, sizes... whew! Activities guaranteed to hone the observation, visual discrimination, eye-hand coordination, sensory discrimination and environmental awareness of children, as the foreword promises, and to keep the little terrors quiet for a precious five minutes!

A brightly coloured, cheerful book of the alphabet, colours, shapes, numbers and rhymes with lovely illustrations by Girija Singh. This book could do with some Hindi rhymes.

A great hat-trick of activity books that describe a child's immediate environment—her home, school and town. Much the same concepts found here as in other books of this nature, with one difference. The sections aren't serially devoted to animals, then to family, then to school, etc. All the concepts are interleaved. Festivals intermingle with colours, leaves with sizes, birds with alphabets, fruits with shapes, and mazes with a few games and crosswords thrown in for good measure. Illustrations by Girija Singh, liven up the pages.

Book 2, the textbook, is well-balanced and properly thought out. The text is written to emphasize the dignity of labour, helping others, good neighbourliness, courtesy and manners, that all religions ought to be respected and that festivals mean fun and joy. Towards the end of the book the section on the earth and our environment draws the child's attention to the concepts of pollution and ecological balance and introduces the idea of "history". An excellent primer.

And now to the language of mathematics. Illustrated mathematics textbooks! Who'd have thought of it when we were young! But in the age of "learning is fun", illustrations work wonders—Girija Singh added value yet again. Concepts are explained simply via diagrams and pictures and thus are easily grasped. Starting from simple addition and subtraction in Book 1 and progressing to multiplication and division of fractions, decimals, area, volume, simple interest, speed-distance-time, profit and loss and geometry in Book 5, the textbooks cover much ground, as demanded by the new educational policy syllabus in mathematics. A first cursory glance through the books and parents will step back in horror at the amount their children have to learn. But these textbooks make learning relatively painless. My son loves his math textbook (Number Fun 4)—not only does it teach him about factors, HCF, LCM, fractions shapes and angles with very little effort on his part (or so it seems), but he can copy the pictures of grinning octopuses, smirking cats and zooming rockets on to cards and give them to his teachers and friends. Two birds, one stone, happiness all around.

A set of easy-to-read Hindi supplementary readers written for seven to ten year olds, the *Madhu Kalash* series is such a good idea. These honey pots of books are brimful of sweet, simple stories with morals, diary entries, tales of famous people, poems, one act plays, humourous Akbar-Birbal tales, folk tales, tales of courage, the marvels of science, incidents in history as well as stories culled from the *Panchatantra* (luckily not too many). And as if that were not enough to keep our fidgeting children spellbound, there are interesting exercises, *Khel Khel Mein* and *Seekho Aur Sikhao*, at the end of each chapter. All that remains is a gentle nudge from parents to encourage their children's interest in *Madhu Kalash*. Though with all the additional distractions from Cartoon Network, *Sweet Valley*, cricket matches and comics, I wonder at the rate of success.

To coin a mixed metaphor, you can take a child to a honey pot but you must keep your fingers crossed.

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Communication

When a reviewer cursorily leafs through a book, at places misreading it, and then misquotes from it to suit her statements, misinterpretations and misrepresentations, the result is what Radhika Chopra has done in her review of my book *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-east Asia* (TBR, March 1998)). In the process, she has clearly misled the readers of *The Book Review*. Hence this rejoinder.

Chopra faults rights in the beginning by substituting kinship for gender and thus reversing my argument. On page 1, I write: 'My objective is to highlight certain issues that have remained largely neglected. It is my hunch that gender studies (as an interdisciplinary field) often leave out a consideration of kinship (emphasis added), either because it is thought irrelevant or because it is viewed as an immutable given'. Chopra picks up part of the sentence and writes... 'because gender (emphasis added) has been "largely neglected... because it is thought irrelevant or because it is viewed as an immutable given'. She has been able to do this only by misquoting me.

As far as feminist anthropologists' writings on kinship and gender during the last few decades are concerned, she had only to turn to note 1 of chapter 1 and she would have found a number of relevant references which I have given. In the same note, I have also explained what had been lacking in the treatment of women in kinship studies in anthropology.

Unfortunately, Chopra has failed to grasp the import of much of the ethnographic data presented from the two regions and their interconnections. My chapter on 'Bodily Processes and Limitations on Women' deals with menarche, menstruation and consequent vulnerability of women, pregnancy, childbirth, parturition and ethno-reproductive beliefs '... which tells us about notions concerning the roles of the two sexes in procreation and provide the rationale and the justification for rights—or lack of rights—over children and in inheritance and succession' (p. 76). After writing about the implications of the metaphor of the seed and the field and much else, I mention the Philippines saying that, while I could not get much material on this area, the 'Philippines seem to give equal importance to father's and mother's blood; two kinds of fluids have to mingle for conception to occur... the recognition of both parents accords with the bilateral kinship system' (p. 79).

Logically, this chapter should have been read along with the chapters on 'Management of Female Sexuality' and the 'Seclusion of Women'. I do refer the readers to them at appropriate moments, but what Chopra does is to make selective use of the contents of even this chapter and state that I have said all that I had to say on menstruation in south and south-east Asia in the space of two pages. This is clear misrepresentation. In fact, the chapter begins with 'For Muslims the association of napak (impure) for menstrual and parturient blood has a religious basis. Menstruation and parturition are polluted states during which women are forbidden to pray, fast or touch the *Quran*. This basic belief is common throughout south and south-east Asia, but there are distinct differences between the two regions. The acknowledgement of menarche as coming of age, demanding special circumscription is more marked in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan' (p. 70).

This also explains Jeffrey's observation regarding the Pirzada women that they are forbidden during the period of pollution to carry on those activities that connect them with their husband's means of livelihood (as priests of Nizamuddin Dargah). Thus they are forbidden to sew curtains for the saint's tomb or prepare sweets for the pilgrims.

This brings me to the last point. Chopra perceives a contradiction between the symbolism of blossoming and the threatening nature of menstrual blood, which, according to her, has remained unexplored in the book. Obviously she has missed many points made in the chapter and in the book. In Blanchett's words relating to the village of Miyapur in Bangladesh, 'Menstruation is impure but, if properly contained, it is also auspicious as it symbolizes and announces in a positive way a woman's generative potential' (quoted on page 71). This ties up with what I have written about Hindu India, that 'in many Indian languages menstruation is likened to flowering or blossoming—the necessary stage before fruit can appear' (p. 75). One of the meanings of pushpa (flower, blossom) is 'menstrual flux' and pushpakal is 'time of the menses' (Lokbharati Pramanik Kosh). In Tamil, 'a girl is given a bath when she is flowering' (Uma Chakravarthy). One expression I often heard in Chhattisgarh was 'unless a girl flowers, how can she bear fruit?' For this reason, menarche or first menstruation, although associated with pollution, is considered an auspicious event (combining auspicious and impure elements, as in birth. See T.N. Madan 1987:65). It is celebrated in many regions, as I have mentioned in the chapter.

At the same time, since menstrual blood is polluting, it is threatening in as much as it makes a menstruating woman vulnerable to being attacked by spirits and ghosts. She also has to be careful in avoiding deities lest they are angered. There are many other prohibitions, which may have to be followed in order to avoid rendering pure objects impure.

Another major threat which begins at the onset of puberty involves the complex of the awakening of the post-pubertal girl's sexual impulse, her becoming specially attractive to the opposite sex and, most importantly, her biological maturity in as much as she acquires the capacity to become pregnant, a state which is difficult of repudiation. '... [The message is clear: the girl has become a sexual being. This calls for restrained behaviour on her part and for protection and vigilance by others' (p. 75–76) for there is a threat to her purity. As Chanana has mentioned, in many places the age of puberty tends to coincide with the withdrawal of girls from school. I hope this will make clear my statement on page 75 that 'Patriliny and caste combine to create a perception of menstrual blood as particularly threatening, as I discuss on the chapter on women's sexuality'.

Unfortunately, the reviewer has failed to capture the contrast between south and south-east Asia. I would also like to make it clear that within these regions I have chosen specific populations under different kinship systems and also following different religions. The book has its limitations, but they have escaped the reviewer for she got obsessed with what was not my major concern. Opinions and concerns can differ, but what I find objectionable is the unacademic and irresponsible manner in which the review has been written.

Leela Dube

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■ ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The Victoria Memorial Hall Calcutta: Conception, Collections, Conservation
Edited by Philippa Vaughan
This volume presents the Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta, its architecture and the collections—as originally conceived by Lord Curzon who both initiated the project for the Memorial Hall and took a direct hand in its architectural design and the holdings. Besides being an outstanding monument of British India, it is arguably the most important example of colonial architecture, its collections including the finest in the world of paintings by European artists working in India between 1780 and 1830.
MARG Publications, 1998, pp. 160, price not mentioned.

■ BIOGRAPHY

Sabavala: Pilgrim, Exile, Sorcerer
Ranjit Hoskote
This is the definitive biography of Jahangir Sabavala by a leading critic and commentator on contemporary Indian art. Sabavala has had no patience with the fluctuations of fashion, ideology and political necessity. He has always stood apart from schools and movements. Some of the material incorporated here has never been published before.
Eminence Designs Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai, 1998, pp. 184, price not mentioned.

■ ECONOMY

The Reserve Bank of India 1951–1967
G. Balachandran
This is the second volume of the history of the Reserve Bank of India, the first covering the period 1935–1951 having been published in 1970. The book covers the larger part of the first two decades after independence, when pioneering steps were taken to strengthen, develop, and diversify the country's economic and financial structure. This volume narrates not only the history of an important public financial institution in India in the process of change, but also sheds light on the country's economic development during these crucial years.
Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 1190, Rs. 1195.00

When Corporations Rule the World
David C. Korten
This is an alarming exposé of the devastating consequences of economic globalization and a passionate message of hope. A searing indictment of an unjust international economic order, a devastating critique of the tyranny of the global economy with an arsenal of well argued alternatives to offer an empowering agenda for change.
The Other India Press, 1995, pp. 376, Rs. 195.00

■ GENDER STUDIES

The Empowerment of Women in India: Grassroots Women's Networks and the State
Sangeetha Purushotham
Based on a case study of an informal network of NGOs and women's collectives—the Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP-SPARC). This is perhaps the first theoretical and analytical explication of grassroots women's movements in India.

Working Mothers: Role Conflict and Adjustments
Itishree Padhi Acharya
The present work deals with the problems of employed mothers in balancing the roles of career woman and mother. It brings to the fore the growing responsibility of working mothers in Indian society.
Reliance Publishing House, 1997; pp. 149, Rs. 195.00

Secluded Scholars: Women's Education and Muslim Social Reform in Colonial India
Gail Minault
This is a detailed and thoroughly documented account of the individuals, organizations and institutions that were influential in India in the promotion of education for Muslim girls in colonial India.
Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 359, Rs. 575.00

Closing the Sacred Line: Women's Search for Political Power
Abhilasha Kumari and Sabina Kidwai
Few women participate in politics, fewer still make it to any significant position in the party or government and finally only very few are committed to and closely identify with women's issues and the women's movement. This book looks at these issues in the context of the political parties—their history and ideologies, political commitments, organizational structure, mode of functioning and the place of women's organizations within the party.

Women of Midnapore in Indian Freedom Struggle
Rina Pal
Midnapore the land of revolt kept close contact with the Indian National Congress. From the confidential political report of the British Government we know that Midnapore has been the scene of the principal Congress activities.
Ratna Prakashan, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 230, Rs. 350.00

Days and Nights
By Sujata Miri
The story of woman's search for the ideal man from childhood and marriage, through partition and on to Calcutta and Delhi.
National Publishing House, 1996, pp. 147, Rs. 200.00

■ LINGUISTICS

Grammar, Language and Society: Contemporary Indian Contributions
Edited by Rajendra Singh
The central purpose of the collection is to bring together some of the best in contemporary Indian linguistics by grounding them in the other, often conflicting, traditions that the Indian linguist is heir to.
Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 366, Rs. 495.00 (cloth)

■ HISTORICAL STUDIES

Gandhi's Power: Non-violence in Action
By Dennis Dalton
This insightful collection of essays on Gandhi's life and thought focusses on the crucial connection between his theory and practice. Studying Gandhi's ideas of power and freedom as manifested in the Salt March of 1930 and his fast to end Partition-related violence in 1947, the author concludes with comparison of Gandhi's ideas with Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, arguing that his legacy remains relevant to a variety of cultural contexts.
Oxford India Paperbacks, OUP, 1998, pp. 279, Rs. 295.00

The Making of A Nation: India's Road to Independence
By B.R. Nanda
Gandhi once described the freedom struggle as a contest among three mighty forces: British imperialism, Congress nationalism and Muslim separatism. It is on this contest that the book concentrates. A book for the general reader and the scholar.
HarperCollins Publishers India, 1998, pp. 362, Rs. 500.00

Press, Politics and Society: Uttar Pradesh 1885–1914
By Kirti Narain
Covers the socio-political, cultural and economic aspects of a period which witnessed changes of far-reaching significance. The book takes cognizance of the reporting in language newspapers, particularly in Hindi and Urdu, which help us to define and evaluate the historical developments of the period.
Manohar in association with The Book Review Literary Trust, 1998

■ LITERATURE

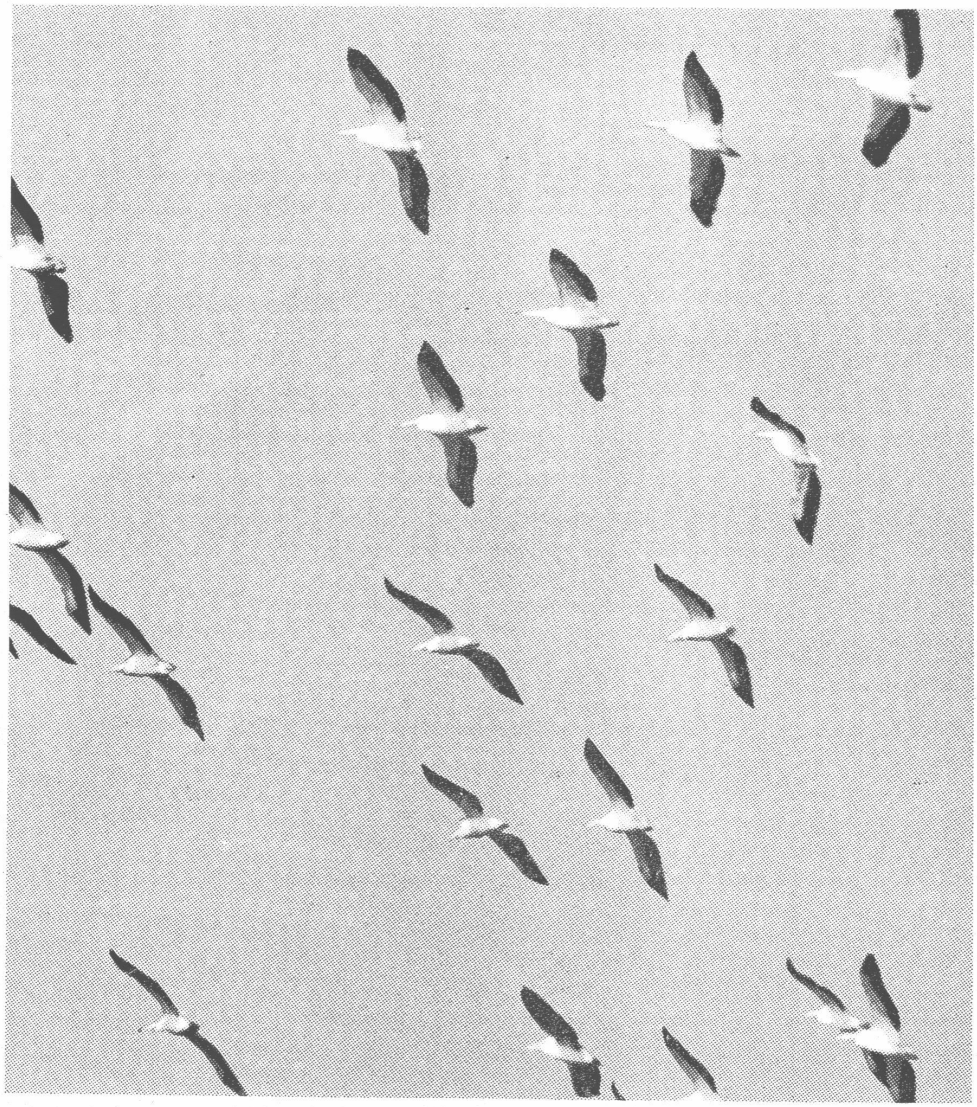
Knit India Through Literature Vol. 1: The South
By Sivasankari
Introduces India to Indians by providing a knowledge of another's literary heritage. By stressing the commonality of concerns for the inequalities besetting the Indian society, Sivasankar seeks to bring together writers to meet the challenges of modernity.
East-West Books, Chennai, 1998, pp. 412, Rs. 750.00, Foreword by Khushwant Singh

The Fiery Quill: Nationalism and Literature in Maharashtra
By Balkrishna Govind Gokhale
This volume explores the dimensions of the contribution of literature to the growth of nationalistic ideas in Maharashtra between the 1870's and 1920's.
Popular Prakashan, 1998, pp. 190, Rs. 275.00

Halodhiya Charaye Baodhan Khay (Assamese)
Homen Borgohain
This is the searing story of a humble farmer's desperate struggle for survival that turns into a quest for justice. The tight narrative never flags or deviates from Raseswar's haunting battle for survival but there are touches of rural humour and an occasional glimpse of the freshness and beauty of the countryside that mitigate the harsh harrowing account of oppression.
Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1997, Rs. 195.00

The Colours of Evil
Translated from the Tamil
By N. Kalyana Raman
Winner of 1996 Sahitya Akademi Award, Asokamitran arrives, in these stories, at a larger sense of the world through the trials and tribulations of ordinary people.
Manas (E.W. Books), Madras, 1998, pp. 201, Rs. 135.00

The Complete Works of Kalidasa: Vol. 1: Poems
Translated by Chandra Rajan
This three volume edition of Kalidasa's works planned by the Sahitya Akademi brings his writing to a much larger audience. Chandra Rajan has given lengthy critical introductions to each volume that helps to place the texts in their wider context and suggests ways to helps place the texts in their wider context and suggests ways of studying them.
Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 388, Rs. 350.00



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